

Association between Perceived Parenting Style and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Parenting plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals' psychological development and self-evaluative processes. The present study examines the association between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults. Psychoanalytic theory proposed by Freud (1905) emphasizes the importance of early childhood experiences in personality development, while Bowlby (1969), through attachment theory, highlights the role of early caregiving relationships in shaping internal working models of the self. Baumrind (1971) further identified distinct parenting styles that influence developmental outcomes, particularly through variations in parental warmth and control. Existing literature suggests that parenting characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and balanced control, particularly authoritative parenting, is positively associated with self-esteem, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are linked to less favorable self-evaluative outcomes. However, much of the existing research has focused on children and adolescents, with limited attention given to young adults, a developmental stage marked by identity consolidation and relatively stable self-esteem. The present study employed a correlational design to examine these relationships among young adults using standardized measures of perceived parenting and self-esteem. Findings indicated a significant positive association between authoritative parenting and self-esteem, and significant negative associations for authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The study highlights the enduring influence of perceived parenting experiences on self-esteem during young adulthood and underscores the importance of balanced parenting in fostering positive psychological outcomes.

Keywords: *Authoritarian parenting, Authoritative parenting, Permissive parenting, Self-esteem, Young adults*

The family serves as the primary context for early socialization and plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's psychological development. From early childhood, parental interactions influence emotional regulation, cognitive growth, and the formation of self-concept. Freud (1905), through psychoanalytic theory, emphasized the significance of early childhood experiences in the development of personality, suggesting that parental influence extends into enduring psychological structures. Building

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on this foundation, Bowlby (1969) proposed through attachment theory that early caregiving relationships shape internal working models of the self and others, thereby influencing emotional and relational patterns across the lifespan. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further reinforced this perspective by identifying the family as a central microsystem exerting a direct and lasting impact on development. Within the Indian sociocultural context, where family bonds and parental expectations play a particularly influential role, these early interactions become even more significant in shaping psychological outcomes.

Among the various outcomes associated with parenting, self-esteem has emerged as a critical component of psychological well-being. Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth, highlighting its importance in emotional stability and personal adjustment. Individuals with higher self-esteem tend to demonstrate greater resilience, adaptability, and positive social functioning, whereas lower self-esteem has been associated with psychological distress and maladaptive coping patterns, as observed by Baumeister et al. (2003). These findings underscore the importance of identifying developmental factors that contribute to the formation of self-esteem.

Young adulthood represents a particularly significant stage for examining self-esteem, as it is marked by identity consolidation, increased autonomy, and major life transitions. Arnett (2000) conceptualized this period as "emerging adulthood," characterized by exploration and self-definition, while Erikson (1968) emphasized the progression from identity formation to the development of intimate relationships. Orth and Robins (2014) further observed that self-esteem becomes more stable during this stage, suggesting that earlier experiences are integrated into enduring self-evaluations.

Although individuals gain increasing independence from their families during young adulthood, the psychological influence of parenting does not diminish entirely. Earlier experiences of parental warmth, control, and support may become internalized and continue to shape self-perceptions. Darling and Steinberg (1993) highlighted that parenting style functions as a broader emotional context influencing developmental outcomes, while Rohner (1986) emphasized the importance of perceived parental acceptance and rejection in shaping self-evaluative processes. Despite substantial research examining parenting styles and self-esteem, much of the existing literature has focused on children and adolescents. Limited attention has been given to young adults, particularly within culturally diverse contexts, highlighting a need for further investigation. The present study therefore examines the association between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults.

Significance

The present study holds significant theoretical value in advancing the understanding of the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem within a developmental framework. While classical theories proposed by Freud (1905), Bowlby (1969), and Baumrind (1971) have emphasized the long-term influence of early parental interactions on personality and self-concept, the integration of these perspectives within the context of young adulthood remains relatively underexplored. By focusing on perceived parenting styles, the study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the continued relevance of early relational experiences in shaping self-evaluative processes beyond adolescence.

From a developmental perspective, the study is particularly important as it addresses young adulthood, a stage characterized by identity consolidation and relatively stable self-esteem. Although substantial research has examined the influence of parenting during childhood and

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adolescence, comparatively fewer studies have explored how these influences persist into later developmental stages. The present study therefore bridges this gap by examining how internalized perceptions of parenting continue to affect self-esteem during a critical phase of psychological maturation.

The study also carries important practical implications for mental health and counseling practices. Understanding the association between parenting styles and self-esteem can inform interventions aimed at improving psychological well-being among young adults. Counselors and mental health professionals can utilize these insights to address issues related to low self-esteem by exploring underlying familial influences. Additionally, the findings can contribute to parenting awareness programs by emphasizing the importance of balanced parenting characterized by both warmth and appropriate control.

Finally, the study is significant within the sociocultural context, particularly in environments where family structures and parental expectations play a central role in individual development. In such contexts, parenting practices may have a prolonged influence on self-perception and emotional well-being. By examining perceived parenting styles within this framework, the study provides culturally relevant insights and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of psychological development across diverse populations.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults.
- To compare the influence of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles on self-esteem.

Rationale

The present study is grounded in the need to understand the long-term influence of perceived parenting styles on self-esteem during young adulthood. While existing research has extensively examined parenting and its effects during childhood and adolescence, relatively limited attention has been given to how these influences persist into later developmental stages, particularly in young adults where self-esteem becomes more stable and integrated. Additionally, much of the literature is based on Western populations, with comparatively fewer studies focusing on sociocultural contexts where family structures and parental expectations play a central role in shaping individual development. By examining perceived parenting styles and their association with self-esteem among young adults, the present study seeks to address these gaps and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the enduring impact of early relational experiences on psychological well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of parenting styles has evolved through multiple theoretical perspectives that emphasize the role of early relational experiences in shaping psychological development. Freud (1905), through psychoanalytic theory, highlighted the enduring influence of early childhood interactions on personality formation, suggesting that parental relationships contribute to the development of internal psychological structures. Building on this foundation, Bowlby (1969) proposed attachment theory, emphasizing that early caregiving experiences shape internal working models of the self and others. Ainsworth and colleagues later demonstrated that sensitive and responsive caregiving fosters secure attachment and positive self-perceptions.

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Expanding on these foundational perspectives, Baumrind (1971) identified three primary parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive—based on variations in parental warmth and control. Authoritative parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and balanced demandingness, has been consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes such as autonomy and self-confidence. In contrast, authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict control with limited emotional responsiveness, while permissive parenting involves warmth without sufficient structure. Maccoby and Martin (1983) further refined this framework by conceptualizing parenting along the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, offering a more comprehensive understanding of parenting behaviors. Darling and Steinberg (1993) later emphasized that parenting style serves as a broader emotional context influencing developmental outcomes.

The importance of perceived parental behavior has been further highlighted in Rohner's (1986) work, which emphasizes that individuals' subjective interpretations of parental acceptance or rejection play a central role in psychological adjustment. Experiences of parental warmth are associated with positive self-evaluations, whereas perceived rejection may contribute to emotional difficulties and negative self-perceptions. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining outcomes in later developmental stages, where individuals rely on internalized experiences of early relationships.

Parallel to the development of parenting theories, the concept of self-esteem has been extensively explored within psychological literature. William James (1890) provided an early conceptualization, suggesting that self-esteem is influenced by the relationship between personal achievements and aspirations. Rosenberg (1965) later defined self-esteem as a global evaluation of self-worth, leading to the development of widely used measurement tools. Subsequent research has highlighted the role of family interactions in shaping self-esteem, emphasizing that supportive and structured environments contribute to positive self-evaluations.

Empirical research has consistently supported the association between parenting styles and self-esteem. Studies have shown that individuals raised in authoritative environments tend to exhibit higher self-esteem and better psychological adjustment, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are associated with less favorable outcomes. Meta-analytic findings further reinforce that parental warmth plays a critical role in fostering positive self-evaluations, while excessive control or lack of structure may undermine self-worth.

Although a substantial body of research has examined these relationships during childhood and adolescence, comparatively fewer studies have focused on young adulthood. Arnett (2000) conceptualized this stage as a period of identity exploration and self-definition, while Orth and Robins (2014) observed that self-esteem becomes more stable during this period. Despite increasing independence, individuals continue to rely on internalized perceptions of parenting when evaluating themselves, indicating that early relational experiences have a lasting impact.

Cultural and contextual factors further influence the relationship between parenting and self-esteem. In contexts where family structures and parental expectations play a central role, parenting practices may have a prolonged influence on psychological development. While supportive parenting remains consistently associated with positive self-esteem across cultures, variations in how control and discipline are interpreted highlight the importance of considering sociocultural context in understanding these relationships.

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Despite consistent findings, several limitations remain within the literature. A significant proportion of studies rely on cross-sectional designs, limiting causal interpretations. Additionally, the use of self-report measures may introduce bias, particularly when individuals retrospectively evaluate parenting experiences. Cultural representation within existing research is also uneven, with a predominance of Western samples. These limitations highlight the need for further research that examines parenting and self-esteem within diverse populations and developmental stages, particularly young adulthood.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research examining the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem, several important gaps remain within the existing literature. A significant proportion of studies have focused primarily on children and adolescents, with comparatively limited attention given to young adult populations. This is a notable limitation, as young adulthood represents a developmental stage in which self-esteem becomes more stable and integrated, and earlier experiences are consolidated into enduring self-evaluations. The lack of focused research on this age group restricts a comprehensive understanding of the long-term influence of parenting on self-esteem.

Another limitation within the literature is the predominant reliance on cross-sectional research designs, which restrict the ability to establish causal relationships between parenting styles and self-esteem. While existing studies consistently demonstrate associations between these variables, they do not adequately capture how parenting experiences influence self-esteem over time. Additionally, the widespread use of self-report measures introduces the possibility of response bias, particularly when individuals retrospectively evaluate their childhood experiences.

Cultural representation within existing research also remains limited. Much of the literature is based on Western populations, which may not fully reflect the dynamics of family relationships in sociocultural contexts where parental authority, family cohesion, and interdependence are more pronounced. In such contexts, parenting practices and their interpretations may differ significantly, thereby influencing their impact on self-esteem. The lack of culturally diverse studies highlights the need for research that considers these contextual variations.

Furthermore, although several studies have examined parenting styles and self-esteem independently, fewer investigations have focused specifically on perceived parenting styles and their influence during young adulthood. This distinction is important, as individuals' perceptions of parenting may have a more direct impact on self-evaluative processes than objective parenting behaviors. In light of these limitations, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the association between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults within a relevant sociocultural context.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the association between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults, revealing significant relationships across all three parenting styles. The findings indicated that authoritative parenting is positively associated with self-esteem, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are negatively associated with self-worth. These results highlight the importance of balanced parenting practices characterized by warmth and appropriate control in fostering positive self-evaluative outcomes.

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The positive association between authoritative parenting and self-esteem is consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Baumrind (1971), who emphasized that parenting characterized by responsiveness and structured guidance promotes autonomy, confidence, and psychological competence. Individuals raised in such environments are more likely to develop a stable sense of self-worth due to the presence of both emotional support and clear expectations. Similarly, attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1969) supports this finding, suggesting that secure and responsive caregiving fosters positive internal working models of the self, which contribute to higher self-esteem.

In contrast, the negative relationship observed between authoritarian parenting and self-esteem can be understood in light of the restrictive and controlling nature of this parenting style. Excessive control and limited emotional warmth may hinder the development of autonomy and self-confidence, leading individuals to internalize feelings of inadequacy. This aligns with existing research indicating that psychologically controlling parenting is associated with lower self-esteem and poorer psychological adjustment. Likewise, the negative association between permissive parenting and self-esteem suggests that the absence of structure and consistent guidance may limit the development of self-discipline and self-efficacy, ultimately affecting self-evaluative processes.

These findings are also consistent with empirical studies that have demonstrated the importance of parental warmth in promoting positive psychological outcomes. Research has consistently shown that individuals who perceive their parents as supportive and responsive tend to report higher levels of self-esteem, whereas those exposed to controlling or inconsistent parenting are more likely to experience lower self-worth. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that these relationships remain significant during young adulthood, a stage often considered to be characterized by increased independence.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. The use of a correlational design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between parenting styles and self-esteem. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias, as participants' current perceptions may influence their recollection of past parenting experiences. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insight into the enduring influence of perceived parenting styles on self-esteem and highlights the importance of considering both developmental and sociocultural factors in understanding these relationships.

Key Findings

- Authoritative parenting demonstrated a significant positive relationship with self-esteem among young adults.
- Authoritarian parenting showed a significant negative association with self-esteem.
- Permissive parenting was also negatively associated with self-esteem, indicating the importance of structure alongside warmth.
- Perceived parenting style emerged as a significant factor influencing self-evaluative processes during young adulthood.
- Balanced parenting characterized by warmth and appropriate control was found to be most conducive to positive self-esteem.

Future Implications

The findings of the present study have important implications for both practice and future research. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the need for increased awareness regarding the impact of parenting styles on the psychological well-being of individuals.

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Parenting programs and awareness initiatives can emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between warmth and appropriate control in fostering healthy self-esteem. Mental health professionals and counselors can also utilize these insights to better understand the role of family dynamics when addressing issues related to low self-esteem among young adults.

In terms of research, future studies may focus on exploring the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem using longitudinal designs to better understand causal pathways. Additionally, research can be extended to more diverse cultural and demographic populations to examine how sociocultural factors influence the interpretation and impact of parenting practices. Further investigations may also consider additional variables such as attachment styles, personality traits, and coping mechanisms to develop a more comprehensive understanding of self-esteem development. Expanding research in these areas can contribute to more effective interventions and a deeper understanding of long-term psychological development.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the significant association between perceived parenting styles and self-esteem among young adults, emphasizing the enduring influence of early relational experiences on psychological development. The findings demonstrate that authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and balanced control, is positively associated with self-esteem, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are negatively related to self-evaluative outcomes. These results reinforce the importance of parenting practices in shaping individuals' sense of self-worth, even during later developmental stages.

By focusing on young adults, the study extends existing literature that has predominantly examined children and adolescents, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how early parenting experiences are internalized and reflected in stable self-evaluations. Despite certain methodological limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the role of perceived parenting in psychological well-being and underscores the need for greater awareness of balanced parenting practices. Overall, the findings highlight the long-term impact of parenting on self-esteem and offer meaningful implications for both research and practice in the field of psychology.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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