

The Influence of Retrospective Parenting on Parenting Styles and a Young Child's Behaviour

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Abstract

In this ever-changing and fast-paced world, parents are under an increasing amount of stress to raise their children. Parents are now able to 'Google' and find information on the 'do's and don'ts' of parenting. Although parents want to use a parenting style fit for the 21st century, they are influenced by the manner in which their parents have raised them. Thus, the impetus of the study was to examine how parents' own experiences of how their parents have raised or parented them determine the parenting style they use with their own children.

A narrative inquiry guided by a case study research design was used for the completion of this study. The participants were asked to reflect retrospectively on their experiences during childhood regarding how their parents had interacted with them. They were then asked to reflect on whether these experiences affected their own parenting style with their young children and, if so, describe the effect.

Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the participants. The data yielded the following results: Parents who were raised by parents using the authoritative parenting style have become authoritative parents themselves. These parents see the benefits of this parenting style as they associate their strengths with being parented by means of this style.

Keywords: Authoritative parenting style; authoritarian parenting style; Baumrind's theoretical framework; employment; parenting styles

1. Introduction

Parental involvement makes a crucial contribution to a child's overall development (EdSource, 2014). While much involvement is categorized as an interest in the child's life, involvement should extend to partaking in activities with the child in order to build a quality parent-child

relationship (Hara & Burke, 1998). Ginsburg (2007) articulates that characteristics such as confidence, competence, and mastery of the environment are often best learnt through downtime, unstructured interactions between the parent and the child such as during meal preparation and eating of the meal together. Young children are more likely to gain new skills within a home where unconditional love and positive support is practiced.

This research sought to gain an understanding of how a parent's personal experiences in childhood affected the way they approach parenting practices with their own young child. The way in which a parent raises a child from the early years has the potential to positively or negatively affect social, emotional and cognitive development (EdSource, 2014). A subsequent aim was to use this information to help parents understand their impact on their child's immediate and future experiences. Specific questions were designed in order to generate information that would support these aims. The primary question being: How do personal parenting experiences influence parents own parenting style? As well as the secondary, question of: How does the authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting style affect a young child's behaviour?

2. Methodology

As this research intended to gain a deeper understanding of personal parental experiences in the relationships between parents and young children, a qualitative research approach was selected. A qualitative research approach can be described as research that relies on linguistic data obtained from interviews. Nieuwenhuis (2016) further describes qualitative research as naturalistic and focused on an environment where interactions occur naturally, as social life is viewed as a process. Information was gathered from parents about how they experienced their childhood as well as how they experience their relationship with their young child.

Data was collected by talking directly to the participants through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in an environment of the participant's choice, thus allowing the participant to feel comfortable and willing to share experiences. Data collected was deductively separated into specific themes and units for which content analysis could take place. The main goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated from the participants and adjust the research, as required, in order to obtain that information (Creswell, 2014).

Within the qualitative research approach, the narrative inquiry strategy was utilized to develop an understanding of the experiences of the participants involved in the research. Clandinin (2007) framed the narrative inquiry as a focus on an individual's social, cultural, and institutional experiences, which are to be studied through listening, observing, and an interpretation of texts. Through the narrative lens, experience is understood as continuous and relational. Relational in this context refers to the understanding that individuals are continuously telling and living their story through daily activities. According to Harnett (2010), narratives help the reader develop a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied through data collection and analysis of the stories told by the participant. Influenced by

15-17 November, 2019

Rotterdam, Netherlands

phenomenology, interpretivism advocates the need to consider an individual's perceptions as they experience them through their life-world. Interpretivism consists of multiple realities, which includes the varying cultural norms of each individual family (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Information for this study was derived from multiple participants through semi-structured interviews. This method allowed the participant to share his/her life-world perspective.

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was utilized for this study. While the participants were conveniently available through the researcher's place of work – a school in Kempton Park, purposive sampling was employed in order to select participants based on specific criteria. The criteria selected for this research was broken up into four separate components where there was one main characteristic and three secondary characteristics. The main characteristic that was used to identify participants included a married couple with a child between birth to four. Secondary characteristics included two sets of parents where both parents are employed in fulltime positions, one set of parents where at least one parent is employed for half-day, and two sets of parents where at least one parent works at the school where the child attends. Parents who were willing to participate in the study and met the characteristics mentioned above were contacted for the interview. During the week of the couple's interview, I observed their child during drop-off, lunchtime and pick-up times. This was completed with the parents' consent at the selected school.

Two sets of parents within each group, specified above, provided a general basis for that category of parents, as correlation of data collected between the two sets was enough to form a consensus. Due to the increase in both parents working, a second couple where at least one parent works half-day was unable to be contacted at the school where the research took place. Baumrind's (1971) theoretical framework did not consider employment of the parents at its time of development, thus the effects of employment on parenting styles was given attention in this research.

Baumrind's (1971) theoretical framework defined four separate parenting styles, each of which had an effect on the developing child's behaviour. These styles were the authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting styles. The authoritative parent encourages the child to act independently according to guiding rules and limitations. These parents provide the child with reasons for the rules and limitations in place in order to help the child understand why these specific rules have been made. The authoritarian parent is highly punitive towards the child in the manner that they demand full obedience. Children are forced to obey the rules without any explanation as to why the rules exist. The permissive parent wields no control over the child and the children are left to assess their own behaviour and decisions. The parents who utilize the uninvolved parenting style are seen to be emotionally detached from their children either due to the feeling of being overwhelmed or a simple preoccupation with something more important.

3. Results

The study yielded the following results as demonstrated in table 1 below.

Table 1

Colour	Parenting style experienced	Parent the same as experienced	Parent differently than experienced
Purple	Mr: Authoritative and authoritarian Mrs: Uninvolved	Mr Purple	Mrs Purple – Now authoritative
Pink	Mr: Authoritative Mrs: Authoritative (grandparents) and uninvolved (parents)	Mr Pink	Mrs Pink – Now authoritative
Yellow	Both: Uninvolved	Mr Yellow	Mrs Yellow – Now authoritarian
Blue	Mr: Authoritarian Mrs: Uninvolved		Mr Blue – Now permissive Mrs Blue – Now authoritarian
Green	Both: Uninvolved	Mr and Mrs – now authoritative when with their children but due to long work hours, they themselves have become uninvolved parents	

As one can see, a parent who was once parented under the authoritative parenting style has become an authoritative parent. While the parents who experienced a parenting style other than the authoritative parenting style have chosen to parent in a different manner to how they were once parented.

3.1 The authoritative parenting style and the young child

The authoritative parenting style benefits were seen in the young children of the Purple, Pink, and Green couples. These children showed more confidence and security in themselves as they went about their day. These children entered school with a smile and engaged in activities independently. They were more settled than the young children of the Yellow and Blue couples were. They easily integrated with their peers and were observed to be well liked. Through this parenting style, the young child will adjust to society more easily than a child who receives significantly less authoritative parenting. The young child will later be able to affirm his understanding of himself and others. Self-esteem that is developed in the early years will later be the cornerstone of satisfaction, identity development and social, emotional and physical well-being (Yeung, Cheung, Kwok, & Leung, 2016).

3.2 The authoritarian parenting style and the young child

The authoritarian parenting style effects were seen in the young children of the Purple, Yellow and Blue couples. While the effects of Mr Purple's authoritarian parenting are somewhat negated by Mrs Purple's use of the authoritative parenting style, their child did show a difference in settlement into the environment when observed. The Purple couple's child demonstrated dissatisfaction when being left in his class. The young children of the Yellow and Blue couples showed less confidence and willingness to explore on their own. Insecure attachments were observed in these two children. The authoritarian parents influence affects the child's behaviours such as their willingness to speak out and try new things. Children under this style are often too insecure to independently try something new. When the authoritarian parenting is emanating from the mother, the young child is also less likely to develop non-constructive coping skills as the mother fails to teach the child emotional regulation and social problem solving (Chan, 2010). This was especially seen in the Blue couple's young child as he threw tantrums on a regular basis and showed little ability to regulate his emotions.

3.3 The permissive parenting style and the young child

While Mrs Blue was the authoritarian parent, Mr Blue took the role of the permissive parent. Mr Blue does this by not placing demands such as rules on the child. He believes that by not placing rules on the child, and giving the child the freedom to make his own choices that he is aiding his development. A child of a permissive parent is allowed to regulate his own behaviour and activities. This type of parent also encourages the child not to obey externally enforced rules of behaviour (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014). This is evident as Mr Blue questions externally enforced rules himself. This leads the child to be unwilling to follow rules and externalise behaviour when a rule is imposed on him. As such, the Blue couple's young child threw tantrums in the classroom when observed. The child may also grow up with an inflated sense of self-worth as he has been taught to make his own rules and regulate his own behaviours (Uji, et al, 2014).

3.4 The uninvolved parenting style and the young child

The parents in this study who showed uninvolved in their actions did not believe that they were in fact uninvolved parents. The Green couple showed uninvolved in their young child's life through their work commitments. Their long hours caused them to give-up parental authority to those who look after their child while they are not there. However, it should be noted that when the parents are with their young child, they both utilize the authoritative parenting style.

3.5 Parental work commitments and the young child

The effects of the uninvolved parenting style are often seen later in the child's life. Children who have been subjected to the uninvolved parenting style are seen to experience difficulty in

their schooling career. In fact, a study by Majumder (2016) found that children under the uninvolved parenting style are more likely to become high-school drop-outs. Young children experience a lack of closeness with their uninvolved parent. Emotional and behavioural outcomes of a child, who was parented with the uninvolved parenting style, are significantly poorer than even a child under the permissive parenting style. As a result, children may engage in externalisation of emotions which include abusing alcohol. An uninvolved mother is seen as more detrimental to the child's development than an uninvolved father (Hoskins, 2014).

An infant's early environment should ideally be free from stress and depression. Early connections from family members who are responsive, nurturing and protective are necessary for the young child to develop the confidence to explore without fear of harm. A mother's employment may affect the initial maternal bond which develops the infant's security and attachment. When the mother is away for long periods of time, this bonding may be impeded. However, research indicates that should a mother return to employment after the child has developed a secure bond this could be more unsettling to the child. The first months of a child's life are most vulnerable in terms of development (Heinrich, 2014).

The amount of time spent by both the mother and father will influence a child's development even after the initial bonding period has been completed. Stress from work may impede a parent's ability and willingness to engage with their young child as they may feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities at home and at work. Furthermore, stress from either parent may affect the other's ability to effectively engage with the young child (Heinrich, 2014).

3.6 The influence of personal parenting experiences on own parenting style

The parent-child relationship seen today is directly influenced by how the parent experienced their early childhood. Parents who experienced warmth, nurturance and receptiveness by their own parents are parenting in a similar manner today. Parents who experienced authoritative parenting in their childhood express a sense of satisfaction with their parents as they see the benefit that this style of parenting has had on them. Parents who experienced authoritative parenting have been found to utilize this parenting style in the raising of their own children.

4. Conclusion

Parents who experienced the authoritarian, permissive or uninvolved parenting styles express dissatisfaction with their parents as they believe that their inadequacies draw from their poor parenting experiences. As a result, these parents have grown up with the intent on becoming parents who are unlike their own. These parents are utilizing different styles however, they are now also experiencing the challenges of maintaining a career and family life.

Thus making their preferred parenting style less likely to be implemented as in the case of the Green couple as they experienced uninvolved parents in their childhood but are now also presenting uninvolved parenting characteristics due to long work hours. Furthermore, while Mr Blue grew up with an authoritarian parent where demands were placed on him from a young age, Mr Blue is not placing any demands on his child with the thought that he cannot be anything

15-17 November, 2019

Rotterdam, Netherlands

like his father. Unfortunately, this is more detrimental to his young child's development than he realizes.

The manner in which a parent was once parented has everlasting effects on the parent. As a result, the parent may choose to become like his parent in the case of an authoritative parenting experience or he may choose to rebel against his parenting experiences if an authoritarian, permissive or uninvolved parenting style was experience.

Of the evidence gathered, a tentative notion can be made that adults who were parented under authoritative characteristics see the value in this parenting practice and thus adopt the same parenting style with their children. However, adults who were raised under the authoritarian, uninvolved and permissive parenting characteristics are more likely to utilize different parenting styles in order to create within their children a different feeling for childhood than they once experienced.

Our personal experiences in our childhood hold a great deal of power over the entirety of our lives. Adults often blame their parents for their inadequacies, especially if they have addictions of any sort. As adults, we look back and criticize our parents for their actions without realizing the difficulties our parents experienced while we give excuses for our behaviours towards our own children. These excuses include, "kids are expensive, of course I work full time", "I want to give to my child what I did not have as a child". These excuses used by parents are often monetary focused and neglect the fact that children require love and support more than material items. But, parents continue this cycle without realizing the effect their choices will have on their own child.

In closing, we need to be mindful of the experiences we provide our children. As it is within those experiences that they will draw strength or weakness in this ever changing, fast-paced world that we live in. As the late Billy Graham once said, "The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith."

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of a Masters dissertation.

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15-17 November, 2019

Rotterdam, Netherlands

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