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Parenting Styles, Attachment Relationship, and Self-Esteem in Adolescent Personality Development

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Abstract. Individuals differ in their responses to relationship conflicts, intimacy, and self-evaluation. The factors underlying these differences warrant further investigation. Psychological research indicates that personality development is jointly influenced by parenting styles, attachment relationships, and self-esteem. However, current studies mostly separately explore individual factors and lack a systematic integration of the influence paths of the three. This paper adopts the literature review method to systematically explore the research on the relationship between parenting styles, attachment relationships, and self-esteem and personality development from three levels: parenting styles, attachment relationships, and self-esteem. The study found that authoritative parenting is associated with better social adaptation and healthy personality, while neglectful parenting is associated with the worst adaptation results, and authoritarian psychological control is linked to covert narcissism and alexithymia; insecure attachment is positively correlated with impaired personality functions, with emotional dysregulation serving as a mediating factor, and attachment anxiety is also related to emotional manipulation behaviors in intimate relationships through dark personality traits; self-esteem has a bidirectional association with each dimension of the Big Five personality traits and plays a mediating role in the influence of personality traits on creativity as well as depression. The research shows that parenting styles, attachment relationships, and self-esteem jointly influence personality development through different paths. Future research can further integrate these three factors and explore protective factors and intervention paths.

Keywords: Parenting styles, attachment relationship, self-esteem, personality development, adolescents

1. Introduction

Personality development occurs within the context of multiple environmental, relational, and individual factors. Adolescence represents a critical developmental period for personality formation. During adolescence, rapid shifts take place in identity construction, emotional regulation and interpersonal interaction, making teenagers particularly susceptible to influences originating from family and close-relationship contexts, where long-term family environments exert persistent

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impacts on personality outcomes. Existing research has conducted extensive empirical exploration around family parenting styles, attachment patterns, and self-esteem. These differences may partly arise from variations in parental warmth, behavioral control, autonomy support, and parent-child communication, which shape differentiated growth trajectories and personality development among adolescents. Insecure attachment can disrupt adaptive personality functioning, triggering emotional disturbances as well as maladaptive interpersonal behaviors. Self-esteem correlates significantly with the Big-Five personality traits and acts as a mediating construct linking family contexts to personality and mental-health outcomes. Accordingly, this review synthesizes previous empirical findings and examines the effects and underlying mechanisms of parenting styles, insecure attachment, and self-esteem on adolescent personality development, thereby laying a foundation for subsequent research and targeted psychological interventions.

2. Family parenting styles and personality development

As the family constitutes one of the most immediate environments for adolescent development, parenting style is closely related to the social adaptation and personality development of adolescents. The parenting style of parents not only affects the social adaptation ability of adolescents, but also continues to participate in the formation of their personality traits and behavioral patterns, which has a long-term impact on individual development. Drawing on Baumrind's well-known four-category framework of parenting theory, parenting is grouped into four types: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful. Numerous studies both domestically and internationally have confirmed that different parenting styles have varying impacts on the development of adolescents, such as environmental adaptation, academic ability, and degree of narcissism.

2.1. The influence of family parenting styles on adolescents' social adaptability

Regarding the relationship between family parenting styles and adolescents' social adaptation, Lamborn et al. conducted experimental research based on the four-category framework of parenting theory, with the core objective of distinguishing the different effects of overindulgence and neglect styles on adolescents' social adaptation abilities under low-control parenting, and testing the differential effects of different parenting styles [1]. Using a sample of 4,100 American adolescents aged 14-18, the study classified families based on two dimensions of adolescents' self-evaluation: acceptance/involvement and strict control, so the resulting categories primarily reflected adolescents' perceptions of parenting characteristics. The research divided families into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful, and compared group differences from four aspects: psychosocial development, academic achievement, internalized emotional distress, and problematic behavior.

The research results show that there are significant differences among the four groups of adolescents in all four outcome indicators. In terms of psychosocial development, adolescents raised within authoritative families tend to score highly on self-reliance, work orientation, and social competence; Authoritarian adolescents exhibit high levels of compliance with adult standards, but their perceived social and academic abilities are low; Young people from indulgent families achieve relatively high social-competence scores yet demonstrate limited school engagement; Adolescents from neglectful families have the lowest overall score in this area. In terms of academic achievement, adolescents from authoritative and authoritarian families attain comparatively high grades and school engagement. In this sample, no significant differences were detected in the

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average grades and school engagement of adolescents from authoritative and authoritarian families. This result suggests that a higher degree of family control may be associated with academic engagement, but emotional support in different parenting styles still needs to be distinguished. The academic engagement of adolescents from indulgent and neglectful families is relatively lower. In terms of internalizing emotional distress, the psychological and physical symptoms scores of adolescents from neglectful families are the highest, while the scores of adolescents from authoritative families are relatively lower. There is no significant difference between adolescents from authoritarian families and those from indulgent families. When it comes to problematic behavior, such as drug use, campus discipline violations and deviant conduct, these issues are more prevalent among adolescents brought up in indulgent and neglectful households [1].

Beyond the classic four classification framework, Chinese domestic research further identifies more refined family types based on the actual combination of localized parental parenting characteristics. Liu Sihan et al. used latent profile analysis to classify the parenting styles of 4884 adolescents in 13 provinces and cities across the country, exploring the local classification of parenting styles in the Chinese context, and verifying the corresponding effects using learning engagement and anxiety symptoms as indicators [2]. The study ultimately identified seven potential categories of parenting, namely alienation and neglect type, indifference type, warm acceptance type, warm control type, strict control type, strict-father-loving-mother type, and strict-mother-loving-father type. These categories reflect different combinations of characteristics such as family warmth, strictness, and differences in parenting between parents.

In terms of learning engagement indicators, adolescents in the warm-acceptance and warm-control groups obtained the highest scores without notable inter-group differences. However, adolescents in the warm-acceptance group had lower levels of anxiety, indicating that similar learning engagement may be accompanied by different emotional adaptation states; the scores of adolescents in the strict-control group were the next highest, but they were accompanied by the highest levels of anxiety, indicating that good behavioral engagement is not necessarily accompanied by good emotional adaptation; Both the strict-father/loving-mother and strict-mother/loving-father groups registered moderate scores, showing no statistically significant gaps between the two cohorts; The scores of adolescents in the indifferent group and the alienated-neglect group decrease in order, with adolescents from alienated-neglect households recording the lowest learning engagement. In terms of anxiety symptom indicators, adolescents in the strict-control group scored the highest; There was no significant difference between the strict-father-loving-mother group and the strict-mother-loving-father group; Adolescents from indifferent and alienated-neglect families fell into the moderate-to-low anxiety bracket, while their learning engagement remained low. Therefore, it cannot be judged solely based on anxiety level indicators that adolescents in these two types of families have stronger adaptability; The score of the warm-control group was still lower; Adolescents in the warm-acceptance group had the lowest anxiety-symptom scores. The study also pointed out that in categories where parental upbringing is consistent, different combinations of warmth and control correspond to different adaptation patterns; the adaptation performance of adolescents in families with inconsistent parental upbringing is at an intermediate level, indicating that the degree of consistency in parenting direction between parents may also be an important dimension for understanding the effectiveness of family upbringing. Adolescent adjustment outcomes may instead be shaped by the joint parenting practices of both caregivers, rather than one parent alone [2].

Taken together, the results of the two studies indicate that different combinations of acceptance and control in parenting styles have different effects on adolescent social adaptation. Although the

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sample backgrounds, classification methods, and adaptation indicators of the two studies are different, their results suggest that the combination of acceptance and control is worth using as a clue to understand adolescent adaptation differences. In terms of adaptation level, the authoritative model with both high acceptance and high control showed the most balanced performance in the four categories of research, with advantages in academic engagement, psychological and social abilities, and behavioral norms. At the same time, it had the lowest level of anxiety and was the parenting model with the lowest risk and greatest benefit; In the seven-category study, the warm-acceptance type had the lowest level of anxiety. From the perspective of negative effects, the adverse outcomes stemming from neglectful parenting characterized by low acceptance and low control stand out most prominently, corresponding to the lowest academic engagement and weakest psychological and social abilities [1, 2].

2.2. The shaping effect of parenting styles on the personality development of adolescents

Family rearing practices can gradually mold the formation of adolescent personality, establishing tight links between distinct parenting patterns and developmental trajectories of personality. In their study, Watson, Little, and Biderman combined Baumrind's parenting-type classification with narcissistic personality development and tested the association between parenting styles and personality traits in a sample of 324 college students [3]. The results can provide clues for understanding the association between early parenting and subsequent personality traits, but the applicability to the adolescent population still needs to be carefully judged.

The study proposed and validated three core hypotheses: firstly, authoritative parenting is associated with lower levels of narcissism, and a balanced pattern of high responsiveness and high demands from parents can provide stable internal and external support for children, helping individuals form healthy self-esteem and stable self-awareness; Secondly, laissez-faire parenting is associated with immature narcissism, and excessive indulgence without rules and constraints may gradually lead to exaggerated self-awareness in children that is detached from reality, thereby forming self-centered personality traits; Thirdly, authoritarian parenting is related to insufficient idealization ability. Excessive parental control and emotional alienation can thwart children's idealization needs, making it difficult for individuals to form a stable sense of inner value and easily leading to feelings of inferiority and meaninglessness. All three hypotheses are empirically supported, and the study also found that high control environments are less likely to generate exaggerated narcissism similar to that produced under laissez-faire parenting, which means that the two may correspond to different forms of personality development paths [3].

Zheng Weijian et al. further focus on the psychological control characteristics in authoritarian parenting, namely the control behavior of parents restricting their children's autonomy through emotional and psychological means. A study was conducted on 430 Chinese university students to investigate the chain-mediating effects of implicit narcissism and affective disorder [4]. The results showed that parental psychological control, including inducing guilt, withdrawing love, and limiting viewpoint expression, operates by undermining children's emotional security and autonomous experience to realize control, which significantly positively predicts their implicit narcissism level. Adolescents who have been in a high control parenting environment for a long time may have their autonomy needs continuously restricted, making it difficult to develop a stable sense of self-worth. In the sample of college students, the restricted autonomous experience may be related to implicit narcissistic characteristics such as unstable self-worth and sensitivity to external evaluations, but this association does not necessarily mean the formation of a fixed personality outcome. This fragile narcissistic tendency may further hinder adolescents' emotional cognition and expression ability,

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giving rise to affective disorders, which mainly manifest as difficulty in recognizing and describing one's own emotions, and also pose certain obstacles to understanding others' emotions. Thus, a relatively complete correlation path can be formed: higher parental psychological control is associated with increased levels of implicit narcissism, which is further accompanied by more obvious difficulties in emotion recognition and expression, and ultimately linked to more severe interpersonal relationship problems. Ultimately, the dual defects of personality and emotional ability jointly lead to the emergence of interpersonal relationship problems [4].

Combining two studies, it can be seen that there is a strong correlation between family upbringing and adolescent personality development. Different parenting styles correspond to differentiated personality shaping, and their differences may not only come from the type labels themselves, but are closely related to the combination of emotional response, behavioral boundaries, and psychological autonomy. Authoritative parenting corresponds to a healthier self-state, benefiting from better support and appropriate behavioral control in family upbringing, with control based on the balance of behavioral boundaries rather than emotional manipulation; Laissez-faire parenting may lack necessary boundaries and be associated with immature exaggeration; Authoritarian parenting can easily damage an individual's stable sense of self-worth, leading to maladaptive personalities such as implicit narcissism, and high control environments are mutually exclusive with exaggerated narcissism. This personality difference will further affect the adaptation level, forming a chain reaction pathway [3, 4].

3. Attachment relationships and personality

3.1. Direct correlation between attachment relationships and personality traits

Attachment theory originated from the observation of the interaction patterns between infants and their caregivers. With the continuous deepening of related research. Attachment patterns are believed not to exist only in early childhood. And it may continuously affect an individual's cognition, emotional regulation and interpersonal interaction patterns in adulthood. In recent years, sample-related studies on adolescents and college students have all observed insecure attachment, especially attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, and impaired personality function.

Existing studies consistently show that there is a positive association between insecure attachment and personality impairment. The relevant results showed consistency in samples of different age groups. In the adolescent sample, both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance can predict the degree of impaired personality function, and a similar association is also presented in the college student sample. This indicates that the relationship between insecure attachment and personality function has a certain degree of developmental continuity.

Psychologically, people with high attachment anxiety are very sensitive to rejection. They tend to overthink relationship signals. This causes frequent emotional ups and downs. This ongoing insecurity looks a lot like neuroticism. Over time, these reactions become a fixed pattern in the person. In other words, insecure attachment may not create new problems. Instead, it strengthens existing weaknesses in a person's personality.

3.2. Mediating role of attachment relationships in the impact on personality and other psychological behavioral variables

Although insecure attachment anxiety and insecure attachment avoidance belong to two different forms of insecure attachment, both can independently and significantly positively predict impaired

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personality functioning. This conclusion has been supported in multiple studies. Specific evidence comes from Dong Qi's research on insecure attachment and the research on the mediating relationship of attachment in the International Journal of Psychiatry [5]. Emotional dysregulation may be an important psychological mechanism connecting insecure attachment and impaired personality functioning. As research has found, emotional dysregulation plays a significant mediating role between general insecure attachment anxiety or insecure attachment avoidance and impaired personality functioning, as demonstrated in Zhang zi lan's study. This mediating relationship analysis supports a statistical indirect effect, indicating that emotional regulation difficulties can explain part of the association between insecure attachment and impaired personality functioning, but it does not equate to establishing a temporal causal sequence between variables [6]. Although insecure attachment anxiety and insecure attachment avoidance belong to the same type of insecure attachment, they may form emotional dysregulation through different regulatory strategies: The activation strategy of insecure attachment anxiety is manifested as high vigilance and repeated confirmation of the relationship status; when the interval between responses is long, it is difficult to concentrate attention, and a cold tone suggests that one may be alienated; when feeling uneasy, frequent contact, probing, and even questioning are used to obtain comfort. The deactivation strategy of insecure attachment avoidance is manifested as suppressing emotional needs and avoiding intimacy: using "It is okay" to cover up true feelings, choosing silence or leaving in conflicts, and suddenly becoming cold and finding excuses to avoid meeting when the relationship heats up.

Both of these strategies undermine an individual's ability to flexibly regulate emotions in different situations - the former fails to cool down emotions, and the latter fails to make emotions visible. This is the core of the mediating mechanism. Specifically, anxious individuals tend to over-activate emotions and react strongly to minor changes, thereby amplifying negative feelings; while avoidant individuals de-activate emotions, habitually suppressing, denying or ignoring them. Interestingly, whether it is amplification or suppression, fundamentally it is the loss of control over emotions - individuals are unable to flexibly adjust their emotional responses according to the situation.

This long-term imbalance not only causes suffering to the individual, but is also associated with the decline of personality stability and adaptive functions. The main manifestations include paranoia, impulsiveness or emotional apathy, etc.

Yuan research further indicates that attachment anxiety can predict emotional manipulation behaviors in intimate relationships, and narcissism and Machiavellianism can strengthen this correlation - when an individual has higher levels of these traits, this predictive relationship becomes more pronounced [7]. This suggests that the adaptive risks brought about by high attachment anxiety are twofold: internally, it manifests as continuous worry about rejection and the uncertainty of the relationship; at the interpersonal level, it may manifest as obtaining security through emotional manipulation.

These individuals often fear abandonment and struggle with uncertainty. This inner pain is exhausting. When dark traits are also present, they may use manipulation—like guilt-tripping or hot-and-cold behavior—to feel safe. As time goes by, they might unknowingly damage this relationship. This points to an inevitable vicious cycle: the strategies adopted to alleviate the fear of being abandoned actually trigger more conflicts, thereby intensifying the initial sense of insecurity. In summary, the internal path of emotional imbalance applies to both anxiety and avoidance, but the interpersonal path involving dark traits and manipulation is mainly related to attachment anxiety. Internally, ongoing emotional dysregulation slowly damages personality stability. Externally, dark

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traits and emotional control can hurt intimate relationships. Together they form a painful, destructive cycle. Future studies could look at protective factors. Can they weaken the internal path from insecure attachment to emotional dysregulation to impaired personality? Can they reduce the interpersonal path from attachment anxiety to dark traits to emotional control?

This would show which interventions matter most. Finally, people should note that insecure attachment may seem unchangeable. But it is not all-or-nothing. It is more like a spectrum. Most caregivers are somewhere between "good enough" and "not enough." As a result, people's attachment patterns are often mixed and can change. From this perspective, the impact of attachment on personality is not irreversible - subsequent relationship experiences and self-regulation abilities may change its direction. Precisely because of this possibility, future research can further compare the weakening effects of protective factors on the two paths, thereby providing reference for clinical assessment and intervention design.

4. Self-esteem and personality

4.1. Direct correlation between self-esteem and Big Five personality traits

Previous studies have examined the relationship between self-esteem and Big Five personality traits from three dimensions: correlation direction, correlation intensity and time order. In general, the neuroticism dimension of the Big Five is significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem, while extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness are significantly positively correlated with self-esteem [8]. A questionnaire survey involving 394 college students found that the correlation coefficient between neuroticism and self-esteem was -0.651 ($p<0.01$), and the correlation coefficients of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness with self-esteem were 0.564, 0.215, 0.258 and 0.608 ($p<0.01$), respectively [8]. These results showed that in the sample of college students, lower neuroticism and higher extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness were associated with higher self-esteem, and the associations of neuroticism and conscientiousness with self-esteem were relatively stronger.

The above cross-sectional evidence reveals associations among variables at the same time point, and another long-term longitudinal study further examined the temporal predictive relationship between self-esteem and Big Five personality traits. Data collection in this study spanned 17 years, and the between-person differences and within-person changes were strictly distinguished by the multilevel cross-lagged model [9]. The study found that the Big Five personality traits had significant bidirectional relationships with self-esteem. Among them, emotional stability had the strongest predictive effect on self-esteem ($\beta=0.110$), while self-esteem had a stronger predictive effect on openness than on other traits ($\beta=0.074$) [9]. This longitudinal study further expanded the understanding of the relationship between Big Five personality traits and self-esteem, indicating that they are not only statically related, but may have a continuous two-way prediction process.

Based on the two studies, the cross-sectional study is suitable for comparing the correlation strength at the same time point, but cannot determine the time order; longitudinal studies can test successive predictions, but may still be affected by unmeasured variables. The two types of evidence show stable differences among individuals and changes of the same individual over time, which together expand the understanding of the relationship between self-esteem and personality. The research of Huang et al. showed the correlation direction and intensity between self-esteem and Big Five personality dimensions in the sample of Chinese college students; in contrast, Joshanloo's study further examined the direction and dynamic changes of the predictive relationship between self-esteem and personality traits using long-term longitudinal tracking data and cross-lagged analysis.

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Both studies show that there is a significant correlation between five different personality traits and self-esteem, and this correlation is not a unidirectional causal relationship, but an interactive one. Therefore, self-esteem reflects a relatively stable self-evaluation tendency, which may also change with experience, so it is not only related to stable personality differences, but also may participate in the dynamic process of subsequent personality development.

4.2. The mediating role of self-esteem between Big Five personality traits and other variables

Existing studies have examined the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationships between personality traits and creativity and between personality traits and depression. One study examined the relationship between Big Five personality traits, self-esteem, psychological capital and creativity [10]. The results showed that self-esteem and psychological capital played a chain mediating role in the process of Big Five personality traits influencing college students' creativity [10]. The core path of the chain mediation model is "personality traits - self-esteem - psychological capital - creativity", that is, different personality tendencies may first correspond to different levels of self-worth evaluation, then relate to the level of positive psychological resources, and finally form a relationship with creative performance. Neuroticism influences creativity through the mediating path of self-esteem and psychological capital; extraversion can not only directly affect creativity, but also indirectly affect creativity through the chain mediation of self-esteem and psychological capital; openness can only affect creativity through the mediating effect of self-esteem and psychological capital; like extraversion, conscientiousness can affect creativity directly and indirectly through mediation. The results support the view that personality traits can form an indirect relationship with creativity through self-esteem and psychological capital, but there are differences in whether each personality dimension retains the direct path. Personality traits affect creativity by changing individuals' self-evaluation (self-esteem) and positive psychological resources (psychological capital).

In addition to creativity, the mediating role of self-esteem is also reflected in the relationship between personality traits and mental health outcomes [11]. The sample consisted of 354 participants with possible depressive symptoms [11]. The results showed that self-esteem played a partial mediating role in the relationship between the Big Five traits and depression, and the respective mediation proportions were 40%, 72%, 64%, 34%, and 73% [11]. It can be seen that each dimension of the Big Five personality traits is not only directly related to depression, but also indirectly related through self-esteem.

Although the samples, outcome variables and analysis models of the two studies are different, they both regard self-esteem as a psychological link connecting personality traits and subsequent adaptation results. Self-esteem is a comprehensive self-worth evaluation. It may be easily affected by stable personality tendencies, and in turn, may affect individuals' motivation, emotion and behavior. For example, highly neurotic people may be more sensitive to failure, so they are more likely to accumulate negative self-evaluations. Self-evaluation can affect whether a person attempts challenging tasks, such as tasks that require creativity; low self-esteem may further affect individuals' depressive tendencies, making them more vulnerable to depression.

5. Conclusion

This paper studies the relationships between personality development and parenting styles, attachment, and self-esteem. The study focuses mainly on teenagers and college students. From the family environment, social relations and self-evaluation, researchers have explored how personality

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is formed and how personality and these factors adapt to each other. Many studies have shown that in parenting styles, different combinations of acceptance and control will lead to different adaptation results of personality: authoritative parenting and warm acceptance are beneficial to academic engagement, psychosocial adjustment and anxiety reduction, while neglect and strict control are associated with greater risks to personality development; at the same time, parents' psychological control over their children may affect interpersonal relationships through covert narcissism and alexithymia. In terms of attachment relationships, insecure attachment can significantly predict impairment in personality functioning, in which emotion dysregulation plays a mediating role. Attachment anxiety may interact with dark personality traits to lead to emotional manipulation in intimate relationships. In terms of self-esteem, self-esteem is significantly correlated with each dimension of the Big Five personality traits. At the same time, reciprocal associations exist between self-esteem and the Big Five personality traits, and self-esteem mediates the relationship between personality traits and creativity as well as depression. This paper argues that a balance is needed between parental warmth and reasonable behavioral boundaries, and adolescents' emotion regulation and secure attachment levels need to be improved. At the same time, self-esteem should be enhanced to promote positive personality adaptation. Interventions should be multifaceted, including family upbringing, emotional ability and relationship interaction, and focus on people with high attachment anxiety and low self-esteem. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the relationships of personality development with parenting style, attachment relationships, and self-esteem, reveal the multiple influence relationships in the process of personality development, and provide a theoretical basis for improving family relations and adolescents' mental health.

Author contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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