

Impact of Perceived Parenting Styles on Feeling of Loneliness and Identity Formation among Students

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between perceived parenting styles, loneliness, and identity formation among college students. A sample of 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students participated using purposive sampling. Standardized tools, including the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), UCLA Loneliness Scale, and Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS), were used for data collection. The findings indicated that supportive and flexible parenting styles, particularly permissive maternal and authoritative paternal behaviours, were associated with lower levels of loneliness. Maternal parenting styles showed a stronger influence on identity development, with permissive and authoritative mothers positively contributing to educational identity commitment and exploration. However, authoritative maternal behaviour was negatively associated with interpersonal identity development. Paternal influences were comparatively weaker. Overall, identity dimensions were significantly interrelated, suggesting that identity formation is a dynamic and continuous process. The study highlights the importance of supportive family environments in promoting emotional well-being and identity development among young adults.

Keywords: Parenting styles, loneliness, identity formation, college students, parental influence, psychological development

Introduction

Growing up, family helps form who you become emotionally, socially, and personally. Right from the start, mothers and fathers guide kids in handling feelings, connecting with others, creating identity. Those moments stick around, even later on looked at again when young people grow into adults. How someone sees what their parents did that view of parenting style shapes mood, inner beliefs about oneself, psychological state. Not every memory fades. Some stay active, coloring how life feels years after. Growing up between teen years and full adulthood means figuring out who you are, shifting friendships, while slowly gaining more freedom. This stretch brings stress school demands pile up, connections shift shape, what comes next feels unclear. Without strong emotional backing, moments of isolation appear, self-understanding wavers. Spotting patterns behind these emotions matters deeply, especially those guiding youth through inner struggles.

How kids experience their parents matters when it comes to feeling alone or figuring out who they are. Things like how caring, strict, talkative, or attentive caregivers seem play a big role. What counts most isn't just what parents do it's how the child sees those actions. From Baumrind's view, patterns emerge by looking at two sides: how supportive adults feel and how much they expect. Warmth mixed with clear boundaries tends to help kids feel secure and connected. When rules dominate without much kindness, children might struggle to know who they are. Too much affection without guidance can leave some young people adrift when choices arise. Little care plus almost no limits often bring sadness, weak confidence, and a sense of being alone. Early bonds between parents and kids shape how people handle emotions and connections down the line. When care is steady and tuned in, a child often grows into someone who trusts themselves and others easily. On the flip side, shaky or cold parenting can leave marks like trouble leaning on people or feeling shut out too fast. These patterns tend to stick around, coloring adult interactions without notice.

Some people feel cut off, even when around others this sense of separation often shows up during big changes in life. Not having deep bonds hits differently than missing a circle of friends; both counts. When that empty space sticks around, it tends to drag mood down, stir worry, chip away at confidence. Silence where connection should be can shape inner experience more than expected. Now comes who you become that matters deeply in teenage years. Erikson put it like this: figure out yourself or get lost in roles that do not fit. Marcia took his idea further, sorting how people land on their identity through two things trying stuff and sticking to choices calling them achievement, pause, assumption, drift. How parents act plays into this, opening doors or closing them when it comes to testing oneself. A shaky self can make it harder to connect, since gaps in belonging often blur who you become. When bonds stay distant over time, figuring out yourself stumbles. How caregivers respond shapes both the space between people and how inner clarity forms. What grows inside depends partly on what was given early. Looking into how teens see their parents' approach ties to feelings of being alone and shaping who they are. Tools like the Parental Authority Questionnaire, UCLA scale on loneliness, and a commitment tracking method from Utrecht help connect these pieces. Results could guide mental health work shifting focus toward family-based support for stronger self-understanding and fewer lonely moments. What grows from home might shape inner worlds more than we admit.

Review of literature

Ringdal et al. (2020) conducted a study examining how adolescents and young adults perceived their social environment, their experiences of sadness or distress, and their coping strategies. The sample included was 1,814 people who were between 15 and 21 years old.

The study found that when adolescents and young adults perceived strong family support, they were less likely to experience sadness or feelings of loneliness. Ringdal et al. highlighted the crucial role of family in the well-being of teenagers and young adults. It helps them deal with distress and feelings of being isolated from others.

Mastro Theodoros et al. (2021) conducted a study examining how family dynamics influence identity development during adolescence and the transition to adulthood. They found that when parents allow their children the freedom to make their own choices, the children are more likely to have a clearer sense of their goals and are more willing to explore new experiences. Conversely, the study indicated that overly controlling parenting can hinder adolescents' ability to understand themselves and determine their life paths.

Jahan Bakhshi and Shabani conducted a study in 2022. The study explored how parental treatment influenced children's self-perceptions and their feelings of loneliness. They interviewed 250 teenagers who were between 12 and 17 years old. It was revealed that when parents were nice and fair to their kids, they felt less lonely. When parents were really strict the kids felt lonelier. They also noted that boys and girls perceived differently, when it came to how their parents' behavior affected their feelings of loneliness. Jahan Bakhshi and Shabani found out that parenting styles, like the ones they studied can have an impact on teenagers and that is why they are important to consider when we think about parenting styles and feelings of loneliness in teenagers like the ones, in their study.

Sánchez-Queija et al (2024) investigated identity formation, feelings of loneliness, and perceived parental assistance in the context of emerging adulthood. The study sample consisted of university students. The results indicated that increased perceived parental support correlated with greater identity commitment and reduced feelings of loneliness, underscoring the lasting impact of parenting throughout college.

Methodology

Problem statement:

I observed that in many families where both parents are working or place strict emphasis on academic and career success, children often receive limited emotional attention and autonomy. Such parenting practices may affect a child's emotional well-being, leading to feelings of loneliness and confusion about personal identity. Growing up in a strict family myself, I was given the opportunity to choose my own career, which made me reflect on how many young adults from similar families may not receive the same freedom. Often, these individuals may comply with parental expectations to gain approval rather than explore their own interests. This realization motivated me to examine how perceived parenting styles influence loneliness and identity formation among young adults.

Aim

The main goal of this study was to explore how students' views on parenting styles relate to their feelings of loneliness and how they develop their sense of self during their teenage years and early adulthood.

Objectives

- To understand the different ways students, perceive their parents' parenting styles.
- To measure the level of loneliness that students feel.
- To assess how students, form their identity.
- To look at how students' views on parenting styles connect with their feelings of loneliness.
- To find out how students' views on parenting styles influence their identity development.

Hypotheses

H₀1: It is expected that the way students see their parents' parenting styles will not have a strong effect on how lonely they feel.

H₀2: It is expected that the way students see their parents' parenting styles will not have a strong effect on how they develop their sense of self.

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional correlational approach & method helps to look at how different factors

such as parenting styles, loneliness, and identity formation are connected at a single point in time without changing any of the factors.

Sampling Technique

The study used a purposeful sampling method. Participants were university students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, who met the criteria for inclusion and chose to take part voluntarily.

Tools Used & Description

1. Parenting Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), created by Buri in 1991, measures how students see their parents' parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive approaches. Students respond using a Likert-type scale, where higher scores show stronger agreement with a specific parenting style.
2. UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), measures how lonely people feel and how isolated they feel socially. Participants rate statements about their social experiences and feelings of loneliness. Higher scores show a greater sense of loneliness.
3. Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS), assesses identity development through three areas: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitments. It helps to understand how young adults form their identity and make choices about their personal goals and values.

Procedure

Before collecting data, the study got approval from the relevant authority.

Participants were told about the purpose of the study and gave written consent. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. Questionnaires were given either individually or in small groups, and participants completed all the tools in one session.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Summary statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were calculated to describe the data. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to look at the relationships between parenting styles, loneliness, and identity development. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used to determine statistical significance.

Findings and Analysis

The study has 300 samples were involved in this research to analyses their parenting style, loneliness and identity development measured using mean and variability. Authoritative parenting mothers had the highest mean scores ($M = 30.35$, $SD = 8.42$) whilst authoritarian parenting fathered the least ($M = 28.72$, $SD = 8.15$), meaning their views of how children are raised vary significantly from one another. UCLA Loneliness Scale mean was 47.33 ($SD = 8.14$) which indicates experiencing moderate levels of loneliness, but also showed a certain amount of variation among individuals. Based on U-MICS results there was greater mean scores for education ($M = 19.19$) and mean scores for exploration with others ($M = 18.20$) but lower mean scores in terms of reconsideration; this indicates identity development is stable yet at the same time active (no matter what). A higher positive relationship ($r = -.17$) exists between maternal permissive parenting style and lower levels of loneliness as compared with paternal authoritative parenting

style ($r = -.16$) than with either style being authoritarian. There were similar overall perceptions of parenting styles when compared between mothers and fathers. The influence of permissive and authoritative maternal parenting style on educational identity was positively related and both styles of mother negatively affected interpersonal identity (maternal authoritative parenting style) and to a lesser extent (paternal permissive parenting style) negatively impacted Interpersonal Identity. All dimensions of identity development were positively correlated suggesting that identity is created through a continuing and interconnected process with a much stronger maternal impact than paternal.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics showing the mean and standard deviation for Parenting Styles, Loneliness, and Identity Variables (N = 300)

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Skew.	SE (Sk)	Kurt.
Permissive mother	299	10	45	28.29	7.21	-0.37	0.14	0.25
Authoritarian mother	299	10	49	29.73	7.87	-0.11	0.14	-0.09
Authoritative mother	299	10	50	30.35	8.42	-0.62	0.14	0.15
Permissive father	299	10	45	29.28	7.45	-0.63	0.14	0.19
Authoritarian father	299	10	49	28.72	8.15	0.02	0.14	0.05
Authoritative father	299	10	48	28.86	8.35	-0.36	0.14	-0.01
UCLA Total (Loneliness)	299	23	72	47.33	8.14	-0.13	0.14	0.93
U-MICS Edu. Commitment	299	9	25	18.66	4.28	-0.09	0.14	-0.75
U-MICS Edu. Exploration	299	10	25	19.19	3.32	0.09	0.14	-0.67
U-MICS Edu. Reconsideration	299	6	15	10.78	2.65	0.05	0.14	-1
U-MICS Inter. Commitment	299	5	25	18.06	4.43	-0.02	0.14	-0.7
U-MICS Inter. Exploration	299	9	25	18.2	4	0.04	0.14	-0.6
U-MICS Inter. Reconsideration	299	3	15	11.14	3.2	-0.16	0.14	-1.19

Note. N = sample size; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; SE = Standard Error.

The sample exhibited moderate loneliness and greater identity exploration compared to reconsideration, signifying active identity development. Authoritative mothers achieved the highest parenting ratings, indicating greater perceived warmth and support. In general, replies indicate differences in family settings and individual experiences.

Table 2

Correlational analysis showing the relationship between Parenting Styles and Loneliness among college students.

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PM	28.29 (7.21)	—						
AM	29.73 (7.87)	.14*	—					
AUM	30.35 (8.42)	.40	.19	—				
PF	29.28 (7.45)	0.05	0.01	0.07	—			
AF	28.72 (8.15)	0.1	.38	.23	-0.07	—		
AUF	28.86 (8.35)	.35	.16	.37	-0.07	.12*	—	

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
LON	47.33 (8.14)	-.17	0.05	-0.08	-0.09	0.08	-.16	—

Note. PM = Permissive Mother; AM = Authoritarian Mother; AUM = Authoritative Mother; PF = Permissive Father; AF = Authoritarian Father; AUF = Authoritative Father; LON = Loneliness. $p < .05$, * $p < .01$.

Permissive mothers and authoritative fathers correlated with decreased loneliness, indicating that nurturing parenting diminishes feelings of isolation. Authoritarian styles exhibited little to no significant connection with loneliness. In general, adaptable parenting is associated with improved emotional results.

Table 3
Correlational analysis showing the relationship between Parenting Style and Identity Development among college students.

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
PM	28.29 (7.21)	—											
AM	29.73 (7.87)	.14*	—										
AUM	30.35 (8.42)	.40	.19	—									
PF	29.28 (7.45)	0.05	0.01	0.07	—								
AF	28.72 (8.15)	0.1	.38	.23	-0.07	—							
AUF	28.86 (8.35)	.35	.16	.37	-0.07	.12*	—						
EIC	18.66 (4.28)	.12*	0.03	.12*	0.04	-0.01	0.06	—					
EIE	19.19 (3.32)	.14*	0.07	0.01	0.02	0.06	-0.02	.25	—				
EIR	10.78 (2.65)	-0.04	0.1	-0.06	-0.08	0.02	-0.03	0.01	.13*	—			
IIC	18.06 (4.43)	-0.1	0.11	-.15*	-.11*	-0.09	0	.18	.12*	.16	—		
IIE	18.20 (4.00)	0	0	-.13*	0.03	0.04	-0.1	.22	.25	.18	.23	—	
IIR	11.14 (3.20)	-0.02	0.02	-0.03	-0.05	0.07	0.02	.12*	0.08	.20	.18	.24	—

Note. PM = Permissive Mother; AM = Authoritarian Mother; AUM = Authoritative Mother; PF = Permissive Father; AF = Authoritarian Father; AUF = Authoritative Father; EIC = Educational Identity Commitment; EIE = Educational Identity Exploration; EIR = Educational Identity Reconsideration; IIC =

Interpersonal Identity Commitment; IIE = Interpersonal Identity Exploration; IIR = Interpersonal Identity Reconsideration. $p < .05$, $*p < .01$.

Maternal parenting styles (permissive and authoritative) had a positive impact on educational identity, whereas authoritative mothers had a negative influence on interpersonal identity. The impact of fathers was generally less significant. Identity variables were closely connected, indicating that identity formation is ongoing and fluid.

Discussion

The study looked at how parenting styles, feeling lonely and finding one's identity are connected. It found that when family life is supportive and flexible people tend to have mental health. The study found that when mothers are permissive ($r = -.17$) and fathers are authoritative ($r = -.16$) people feel less lonely. When parents are authoritarian, it doesn't have a strong link to feeling isolated.

Mothers seem to have an impact on shaping who we are. When mothers are permissive or authoritative people are more likely to be committed to their education and explore their interests. On the hand when mothers are authoritative it can actually hurt relationships. For example, it was negatively linked to identity commitment ($r = -.15$) and exploration ($r = -.13$). This means that having many boundaries can make it hard to develop relationships.

Fathers have an impact on shaping who we are. Only permissive fathers showed a negative link to interpersonal commitment ($r = -.11$). The study also found that different parts of our identity are closely connected. For example, being committed to education and exploring our interests are strongly linked ($r = .25$). This means that finding our identity is a process where we are always growing and changing.

The current study explored the relationship between perceived parenting styles, loneliness and identity formation revealing that supportive and flexible family dynamics generally correlate with more positive psychological outcomes with parenting styles.

Findings indicated that permissive maternal behaviours and authoritative paternal behaviours were negatively linked to loneliness whereas authoritarian styles for both mothers and fathers showed weak minimal connections to social isolation with loneliness. Maternal influences appeared significant in shaping identity with permissive and authoritative maternal styles positively correlating with educational identity commitment and exploration with identity.

Conversely authoritative maternal behaviour showed a negative relationship with interpersonal identity commitment and exploration suggesting that certain boundaries may impede relational development with relationships. Paternal influences on identity were notably weaker with permissive fathering showing a slight negative link to interpersonal commitment. Overall, the strong positive correlations between identity variables highlight that identity formation is an ongoing process of stability and re-evaluation, with identity.

Conclusion

This study shows that the family environment plays a role in shaping a college students' thoughts and feelings. Supportive and flexible parenting styles, from moms are key to helping kids feel less lonely and develop a strong sense of identity. Fathers being more authoritative can help with loneliness. Moms have an impact on their kids sense of identity. The study suggests that identity formation is a process that happens when students feel supported and able to make their own choices.

Limitations

The study only looked at college students' perceptions of their parents, which might not be entirely accurate. The study focused on a group of students and the results might not apply to other age groups or settings. The study only collected data at one point in time so it can't confirm whether parenting styles directly affect loneliness or identity formation.

Recommendations

Campus counselling centres should consider family dynamics when helping students. Programs should encourage relationships between dads and their kids to help with social isolation. Universities should provide workshops that help students explore their interests and paths. Student affairs departments should create peer-support networks for students from controlling or authoritarian backgrounds. Parents should learn about the benefits of being authoritative balancing warmth, with expectations to help their kids develop resilience and a strong sense of identity.

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