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The Influence of Maternal Parenting Styles on Partner Trust Levels and Their Impact on Attachment Styles

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Abstract:

With the advancement of socio-economic, technological and cultural development, coupled with the continuous improvement in educational standards, society at large has begun to recognize that factors such as the family environment and parenting styles exerting an undeniable influence across all aspects of life. The emergence and development of physiological and psychological traits, cognitive styles, and attribution patterns are all shaped by parenting practices. However, the issue of whether the connection between maternal parenting styles and trust in adult partners influences attachment styles remains without a unified explanation. This study utilized a combination of the questionnaires Swedish Parenting Style Scale—Chinese Version (S-EMBU-C), trust scale and Adult Attachment Scale, via the SoJump platform, therefore extensively collected data from social media and employed mediation analysis using Mplus. Findings indicate that children raised under different maternal parenting styles experience varying degrees of influence on their future levels of trust in partners. This influence subsequently mediates the formation of distinct attachment styles.

Keywords: Maternal parenting styles; partner trust levels; attachment styles.

1. Introduction

Research indicates that maternal parenting deeds exert an additional pronounced influence on preschool infant's behaviour and moods than paternal parenting styles [1-3].

In addition, trust is widely regarded as one of the most crucial qualities in any intimate relationship, frequently cited alongside love and commitment as the cornerstone of an ideal partnership [4].

Psychologist Bowlby primarily recommended the construct of attachment, primarily to comment the emotional link between infants and their carer especially mothers in early life [5]. Attachment persists throughout an individual's entire lifespan, across the lifespan, representing a product of long-term human biological evolution. Attachment theory posits that the attachment styles (AS) formed during early child-

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hood predict adult interpersonal relationships and development. Childhood attachment experiences shape unique psychological schemas throughout an individual's growth. American psychologists Hazan and Shaver subsequently introduced the concept of adult attachment, defining it as the emotional bond within marital and romantic relationships. They contend that adult attachment shares identical patterns and characteristics with infant attachment in aspects such as emotional dependency and security needs. While infants typically form attachments to caregivers (usually the mother), adults shift their attachment focus to intimate partners or lovers.

Extensive research indicates that adult attachment is closely linked to interpersonal trust and attitudes towards love, providing crucial insights for understanding real-world marital and romantic relationships. Based on Bowlby's attachment theory model, Bartholomew categorized adult attachment into Secure, Fearful-Avoidant, Preoccupied, and Dismissing-Avoidant, all of the latter three are unsafe [6]. Individual variations in AS impact patterns of interpersonal conduct and relational attitudes between lovers, and to a certain degree affect an individual's physical and psychological health. For example, Fraley and Shaver found in their research that the internal working models formed in an individual's attachment to their parents can influence other relationships and guide the individual's emotions, cognition, and behaviour [7].

Attachment influences the development of psychological well-being, the manifestation of interpersonal relationships and stress responses, the selection of coping strategies, the exercise of social functioning, the formation of personality traits and variations in disease prevalence [8,9].

2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Chinese scholars Jiang Jiang building upon research by Swiss scholars Perris, categorised parental styles into three types: rejecting, emotional warmth, and overprotection. Rejecting refers to hostile, harsh, and punitive parenting; emotional warmth denotes parental emotional acceptance and support; overprotection signifies excessive interference, strict management, and control [10,11]. Emotional warmth in parenting, in turn, influences individuals' socio-emotional competence [12].

Based on these classifications, the present study hypothesises that children raised under emotionally warm parenting will exhibit higher scores in future partner trust, which will then mediate the formation of their attachment style.

In summary, this research is designed to explore the influence of partner trust levels (PTL), shaped by maternal parenting styles (MPS), on AS.

3. Research Methods and Instruments

Three questionnaires were employed for data collection and analysis.

Questionnaire 1: Revision of the Short-form Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran for Chinese, S-EMBU-C. The questionnaire comprises 21 items across 3 dimensions: maternal rejection(MJ), maternal emotional warmth(MEW), and maternal overprotection(MO). Scoring is on a four-point scale. Questionnaire 2: Trust Scale. This questionnaire comprises 18 items scored on a seven-point scale. Questionnaire 3: Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) Revised Edition. This questionnaire comprises 18 items scored on a five-point scale.

After integrating the three questionnaires into a single form, it was distributed via Questionnaire Star software. A total of 335 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 320 valid responses: 134 males and 186 females. Analysis was conducted using Mplus software for mediation.

4. Research Findings

To find the connection between MPS, trust in partners, and AS, Mplus 8.3 software was utilized. MPS is independent variable, trust level is mediating variable, and AS is dependent variable. To maximize information retention, all items from the three dimensions of MPS and trust level were incorporated into the analysis to construct the mediation model. Using secure attachment as the reference group, the study analyzed the mediating effects of PTL on the connection between MPS (rejection, emotional warmth and overprotection) and AS (Fearful-Avoidant, Preoccupied and Dismissing-Avoidant).

The mediation model of PTL in the connection between MJ and AS is illustrated in Figure 1. Model fit indices were satisfactory: c2 = 504.902; df = 228; RMSEA = 0.062 (90% CI = [0.054,0.069]); CFI = 0.946; TLI = 0.916; SRMR = 0.056. Under the influence of PTL, MJ negatively predicted Dismissing-Avoidant attachment ($\beta = -0.15$, $p = 0.009$) compared to secure attachment , but did not significantly predict Preoccupied attachment ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.549$) or Fearful-Avoidant attachment ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = 0.847$). MJ levels positively predicted PTL ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$). Compared to secure attachment types, PTL predicted positive effect in Preoccupied attachment types ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.007$), potentially reflecting individuals' greater propensity to form dependent intimate relationships under high trust conditions; Fearful-Avoidant AS ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.021$), while negatively predicting Dismissing-Avoidant attachment ($\beta = -0.73$, $p < 0.001$). Further Bootstrap mediation effect testing (2000 samples) revealed that (Table 1), compared to secure attachment types, in the dependent

variable being Preoccupied attachment model, the indirect effect value of PTL was β= 0.118, 95% confidence interval CI= [0.019,0.217], where the interval excluding zero, indicating a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value β = 0.034, 95% CI = [-0.078, 0.147], with the interval including 0, rendering the direct effect non-significant. In the Dismissing-Avoidant attachment model, the indirect effect value of PTL was β = -0.403, with a 95% CI of [-0.575, -0.23], where the interval excluding 0, indicating a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value β = -0.154, with a 95% CI of [-0.27, -0.038], where the interval excluding 0, indicating a directly effect. In the Fearful-Avoidant attachment model with the dependent variable, the indirect effect value of PTL was β = 0.082, 95% CI = [0.001, 0.163], the interval excluding 0, pointing a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value is β = 0.01, 95% CI = [-0.093, 0.113], with the interval including 0, indicating a non-significant direct effect. In summary, PTL mediates the relationship between MJ levels and AS, suggesting that enhancing trust levels may yield positive outcomes in intimate relationship interventions. Specifically, compared to its effect on secure AS, rejection levels exert a positive mediating influence via PTL on preoccupied and Fearful-Avoidant AS, whilst exerting a negative mediating effect on Dismissing-Avoidant attachment.

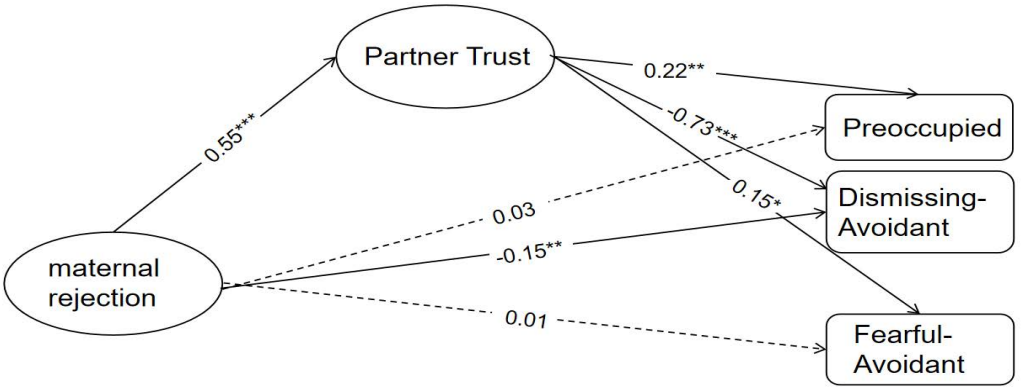

Fig. 1 Latent variable mediation model of partner trust in the relationship between MJ level and AS

Table 1. Mediating effect of partner trust in the relationship between MJ level and AS

Model	Effect Type	β	SE	95% CI
Dependent variable: Preoccupied attachment	Total Effect	0.153	0.062	[0.031, 0.274]
	Direct effect	0.034	0.057	[-0.078, 0.147]
	Indirect effect	0.118	0.050	[0.019, 0.217]
Dependent variable: Dismissing-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	-0.556	0.062	[-0.678, -0.435]
	Direct effect	-0.154	0.088	[-0.27, -0.038]
	Indirect effect	-0.403	0.059	[-0.575, -0.23]
Dependent variable: Fearful-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	0.092	0.045	[0.005, 0.18]
	Direct effect	0.01	0.053	[-0.093, 0.113]
	Indirect effect	0.082	0.041	[0.001, 0.163]

The mediating model of PTL in the connection in MEW and AS is depicted in Figure 2. Model fit indices were favourable: c2 = 710.059; df = 249; RMSEA = 0.076 (90%CI = [0.07,0.083]); CFI = 0.908; TLI = 0.87; SRMR = 0.072. Under the effect of PTL, MEW significantly negatively predicted Dismissing-Avoidant AS (β = -0.23, $p < 0.001$), positively predicted fearful AS (β = 0.08, p = 0.025), and did not significantly predict Preoccupied AS (β = 0.002, p = 0.968); MEW positively predicted PTL (β = 0.47, $p < 0.001$). Compared to secure AS, PTL significantly and positively predicted Preoccupied attachment (β = 0.25, $p < 0.001$) and negatively predicted Dismissing-Avoidant attachment (β = -0.66, $p < 0.001$), while showing no significant prediction for Fearful-Avoidant

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attachment (β = 0.10, p = 0.061). Bootstrap mediation analysis (2000 samples) revealed that (Table 2), relative to secure AS, the indirect effect of PTL on the dependent variable in the Preoccupied attachment model was β=0.116, 95% CI=[0.033,0.199], with the interval not including 0, indicating a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value was β = 0.002, 95% CI = [-0.098, 0.102], with the interval including 0, rendering the direct effect non-significant. In the Dismissing-Avoidant attachment model, the indirect effect value of PTL was β = -0.312, 95% CI = [-0.444, -0.18], the interval excluding 0, indicating a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value β = -0.231, 95% CI = [-0.321, -0.142], the interval excluding 0, indicating a significant direct effect. In the Fearful-Avoidant attachment model with the dependent variable, the indirect effect of PTL was β = 0.082, 95% CI = [-0.006, 0.098], with the interval including 0, indicating a non-significant indirect effect. The direct effect was β = 0.084, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.157], with the interval excluding 0, indicating a significant direct effect. In summary, the degree of trust in partner mediates the connection in MEW and AS, aligning closely with attachment theory's emphasis on early security. Specifically, compared to its influence on secure AS, MEW positively mediates the connection in AS and preoccupied attachment through PTL, negatively mediates it for Dismissing-Avoidant attachment, and exhibits no mediating effect on Fearful-Avoidant attachment.

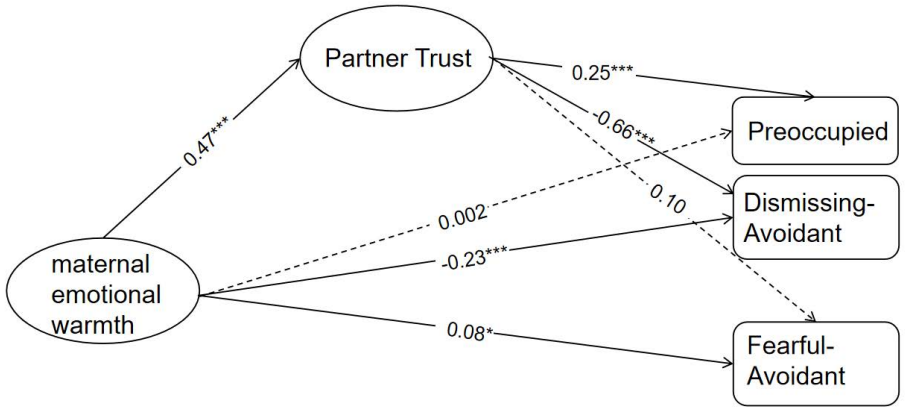

Fig. 2 Latent variable mediation model of partner trust levels in the relationship between MEW and AS

Table 2. Mediating effect of partner trust in the relationship between MEW and AS

Model	Effect Type	β	SE	95% CI
Dependent variable: Preoccupied attachment	Total Effect	0.118	0.065	[-0.01, 0.245]
	Direct effect	0.002	0.051	[-0.098, 0.102]
	Indirect effect	0.116	0.042	[0.033, 0.199]
Dependent variable: Dismissing-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	-0.543	0.064	[-0.669, -0.418]
	Direct effect	-0.231	0.046	[-0.321, -0.142]
	Indirect effect	-0.312	0.067	[-0.444, -0.18]
Dependent variable: Fearful-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	0.13	0.04	[0.052, 0.207]
	Direct effect	0.084	0.037	[0.01, 0.157]
	Indirect effect	0.046	0.027	[-0.006, 0.098]

The mediating model of PTL in the connection between MO and AS is depicted in Figure 3. The model demonstrated favourable fit indices: c2 = 656.326; df = 284; RMSEA = 0.064 (90% CI = [0.058, 0.07]); CFI = 0.934; TLI = 0.905; SRMR = 0.055. Under the influence of PTL, MO significantly and negatively predicted Dismissing-Avoidant AS (β = −0.21, p < 0.001), while failing to significantly predict Preoccupied attachment (β = 0.04, p = 0.453) or Fearful-Avoidant attachment (β = 0.06, p = 0.134). MO positively predicted PTL (β = 0.49, p < 0.001). Compared to secure AS, PTL significantly and positively predicted Preoccupied attachment (β = 0.21, p = 0.008) and Fearful-Avoidant attachment (β = 0.14, p = 0.021), while negatively predicting Dismissing-Avoidant

attachment (β = -0.70, p < 0.001). Bootstrap mediation analysis (2000 samples) revealed that (Table 3), relative to secure AS, in the dependent variable being Preoccupied attachment, the indirect effect of PTL was β = 0.077, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.192], with the interval not including 0, indicating a significant indirect effect. The direct effect value was β = 0.03, 95% CI = [-0.064, 0.143], with the interval including 0, rendering the direct effect non-significant. In the model with Dismissing-Avoidant attachment as the dependent variable, the indirect effect value of PTL was β = -0.136, 95% CI= [-0.516, -0.166], interval excluding 0, indicating a significant indirect effect; the direct effect value β= -0.085, 95% CI= [-0.333, -0.094], interval excluding 0, indicating a significant direct effect; In the model where the dependent variable was Fearful-Avoidant attachment, the indirect effect of PTL was β = 0.039, 95% CI = [-0.019, 0.142], with the interval including 0, indicating a non-significant indirect effect. The direct effect was β = 0.035, 95% CI = [-0.019, 0.142], with the interval including 0, indicating the direct effect was not significant. In summary, the degree of trust in one's partner mediates the relationship between MO levels and AS. Specifically, compared to its effect on secure AS, overprotection levels exert a positive mediating influence on Preoccupied AS and Fearful-Avoidant AS through PTL, a negative mediating influence on Dismissing-Avoidant AS.

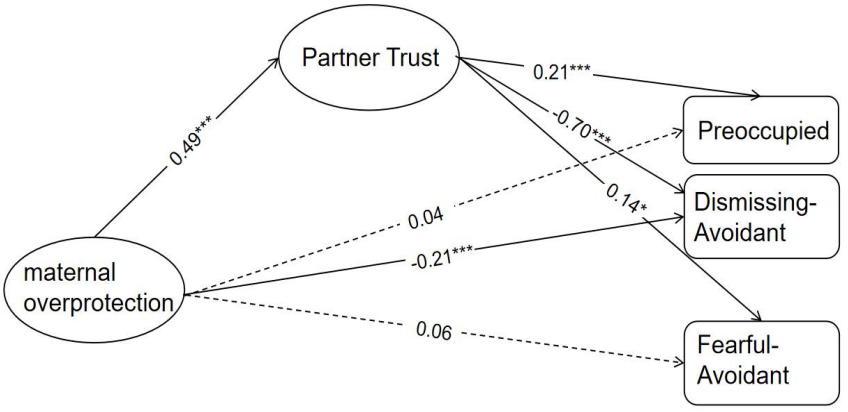

Fig. 3 Latent variable mediation model of partner trust in the relationship between MO and AS

Table 3. Mediating effect of partner trust in the relationship between MO and AS

Model	Effect Type	β	SE	95% CI
Dependent variable: Preoccupied attachment	Total Effect	0.107	0.107	[0.021, 0.26]
	Direct effect	0.030	0.043	[-0.064, 0.143]
	Indirect effect	0.077	0.035	[0.01, 0.192]
Dependent variable: Dismissing-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	-0.221	0.047	[-0.675, -0.434]
	Direct effect	-0.085	0.025	[-0.333, -0.094]
	Indirect effect	-0.136	0.047	[-0.516, -0.166]
Dependent variable: Fearful-Avoidant attachment	Total Effect	0.07	0.02	[0.061, 0.199]
	Direct effect	0.035	0.022	[-0.019, 0.142]
	Indirect effect	0.039	0.022	[-0.019, 0.142]

5. Conclusions

Children raised under different MPS experience varying degrees of influence on their future PTL. This, in turn, mediates the formation of different AS.

However, no negative correlations emerged between MPS and PTL. This study therefore hypothesises that factors influencing trust between partners extend beyond these variables. Future research should explore additional causes and assess their effect in mediating that connection in MPS and deployment of AS.

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