The Relationship between Fathers’ Attachment Style, Parenting Style, Feelings of Parenting Competency and Psychological Wellbeing

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Statement of Originality

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a manuscript submitted for publication, of which I am a joint author. Below is a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication.

Signed: Date: 17th December 2015

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Supervisor:
Dr Tanya Hanstock
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**Reference styles used in this thesis**

This thesis is written with the intention to submit the manuscript contained within for publication in the Journal of Personality and Individual Differences. As such the thesis is written according to the journal’s preferred style: APA 6th ed. This reference style applies to the entire document. Submission guidelines for the relevant journal are included in Appendix A.
Abstract

Adult attachment is the long-term bonds between two people satisfying each other’s needs for intimacy, trust and security. The attachment style of a parent is believed to influence the attachment style they have with their own children. Attachment has been mostly studied between mothers and children. Recent literature indicates that both maternal and paternal parenting are important in relation to positive child development. The current study investigated whether there was a relationship between fathers’ adult attachment style (attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) and authoritative parenting style. We also examined whether fathers’ sense of competency (parental self-efficacy and satisfaction) was predicted by their parenting and attachment style. Participants included 212 fathers (aged 21-70 years, $M = 38$, $SD = 7.47$) with biological children (aged 2-12 years, $M = 4.60$, $SD = 3.22$). Participants completed an online survey involving demographic questions and questionnaires on adult attachment style, parenting style, sense of competency and psychological wellbeing. Fathers who reported being securely attached displayed an authoritative parenting style with their children. Furthermore, fathers who displayed higher levels of secure attachment and authoritative parenting styles were more likely to feel increased competency in their role as a parent. These results highlight the importance of secure attachment in fathers and their parenting style, feelings of parenting competency and psychological wellbeing. It also highlights the importance of assessing fathers’ attachment style when working with them around their parenting practices. Self-report questionnaires and social desirability by participants are important limitations to consider when interpreting the results.
Literature Review

Adult attachment is the long-term bonds between two people satisfying each other’s needs for intimacy, trust and security (Bowlby, 1979). Romantic relationships are an attachment process, seen as translating childhood attachment style to an observable adult attachment style. The attachment style of a parent influences the attachment style they have with their own children. There is growing literature to support the link between self-reported attachment styles and parenting practices (Fonagay, Steele & Steele, 1991). Children who develop strong paternal attachment alongside maternal attachment are most likely to develop a secure attachment style throughout their lifespan (Hawkins & Biller, 1993). Fathers in the caregiving role who develop strong and positive relationships with their children are more likely to demonstrate a secure adult attachment style, higher resilience levels enabling more functional responses in stressful situations, increased levels of confidence in both parenting and employment and healthy social relationships (Burgess, 2009). The aim of the current study was to examine father’s attachment style, parenting style, parental sense of competency, and psychological well-being.

Attachment During Childhood

Bowlby (1980) developed attachment theory, a comprehensive theoretical framework, to understand the close social and emotional bond that develops between a child and their primary caregiver. More often, the caregiver of a child is their parent. The role of the caregiver aligns to meet the needs of their child as they develop. The quality of attachment is based on the interaction between the caregiver and child. Bowlby hypothesised that stronger child-caregiver attachment led to increased feelings of security, improving developmental outcomes in the child. This includes increased self-confidence and resilience (Sroufe et al., 2005), greater ability to manage stress, ability to cope with shame and the development of empathy (Schore,
2011). Conversely, children who failed to experience strong feelings of security were more likely to be fearful, impacting negatively on their development. The availability and responsiveness of the caregiver to the child’s emotional needs are crucial in the organisation and regulation of early emotional experiences for the child (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby (1969) believed that children were born with an innate need to develop an attachment to a primary caregiver. He reported that this attachment led to the development of an internal working model (IWM) of relationships. The main features in relation to this included viewing the self as valued, and viewing others as trustworthy. A child’s experience with their caregiver subsequently forms a foundation in which they view themselves, others and the world (Bowlby, 1980). Despite not being as strong, IWM’s can also be developed from other relationships such as grandparents, siblings, and other influential relationships. IWM’s guide social behaviour and personality into adulthood, influencing thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Pietromocaco & Barrett, 2000). For example, a child who experiences reflective, available and supportive caregiving from their attachment figure will build a model of self as loveable and valued. They further construct a model of others as kind and trustworthy. All of which develops into a secure attachment, allowing them to view the world as a safe place. In contrast, a child that is not supported and experiences rejection from their caregiver develops a model of self as unworthy and unlovable. Such children often view others as unresponsive and discarding (Pietromocaco & Barrett, 2000). This often leads to an insecure attachment and continued instability in relationships. The caregiver-child relationship becomes the model for future adolescent and adult relationships.

Ainsworth (1982) extended Bowlby’s work on attachment with her view that individual differences in attachment existed. Ainsworth developed an assessment
technique called ‘the Strange Situation’, which investigated how attachment differs amongst children. Ainsworth’s experiment utilised observational methods to determine the attachment behaviour of children. For 20 minutes a child was exposed to both the caregiver and a stranger leaving and entering the room. Based on the responses of the child (e.g., level of distress when caregiver leaves; weariness around stranger; ability to explore and play and reaction upon return of caregiver) they were categorised into secure, insecure avoidant and insecure ambivalent attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1969). Research showed that 70% of children displayed a secure attachment style (e.g., utilisation of caregiver as a secure base, happy exploring during caregivers presence, upset on their departure, happy upon their return), 15% displayed an insecure ambivalent attachment (e.g., demonstrated difficulty exploring when stranger is present - even when caregiver is in the room, distressed by caregiver leaving and is ambivalent when caregiver returns), and 15% displayed an insecure avoidant attachment (e.g., shows little response to caregiver when present or when leaves; does not explore much, shows little emotion overall). Main and Solmon (1986) added a fourth attachment style, disorganised attachment (e.g., child views the caregiver as source of safety and fear). The Strange Situation and most of Ainsworth’s research was conducted on mothers as the primary caregiver and attachment figure.

Findings suggest that each attachment style influences the way a child will interpret a situation (Belsky, Spritz, & Crnic, 1996; Suess, Grossman, & Sroufe, 1992). Children who display a secure attachment style, viewing models of self and others as positive, are more likely to demonstrate better social skills, have higher self-esteem and subsequently form stronger friendships than those children who display an insecure attachment style (Cassidy et al., 1996). This enables children with a secure attachment to manage and react to situations with more consistency and rationality,
and thus often obtaining better outcomes. Evidence has shown that childhood mental health disorders are associated with insecure attachment styles. These struggles are more likely to continue into adulthood (Milward et al, 2006; Fonagy et al, 1996) and attachment style classifications are more likely to remain stable over time (Main & Cassidy, 1988; Waters et al., 2000). Fraley (2002) conducted a meta-analysis and found that attachment security for the first 19 years of an individual’s life remains moderately stable over the person’s lifetime.

**Attachment During Adulthood**

Attachment during adulthood is defined as the long-term bond between two people satisfying each other’s needs for intimacy, trust and security (Bowlby, 1979). The theory of adult attachment within romantic relationships was founded by Hazan and Shaver (1987). They hypothesised that romantic relationships are an attachment process, seen as translating childhood attachment style to an observable adult attachment style. In fact the adult relationship mirrors the caregiver-child relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Despite IWM’s of relationships being developed throughout childhood, these foundations create a template for later adult romantic relationships. IWM’s continue to be formed within adult relationships based on how available and responsive their respective partner is in times of need. Such beliefs and expectations stem from previous experiences of attachment, often formed in childhood (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) completed a majority of their research on couples and the attachment displayed between them. It was found that attachment played a large role in reactions to stressors and other stimuli. In romantic relationships, adults still sought out a secure base to satisfy their needs of safety and security. Adults who demonstrated weaker attachment were more likely to show lower feelings of self-efficacy and satisfaction within the relationship (Rholes et al., 2006). Those who
displayed too strong an attachment were more likely to be co-dependent on their partner demonstrating difficulties with boundaries and emotional regulation. The relationships that were found to function well were those where reciprocal trust and safety had occurred, alongside a balance between independence and intimacy. This work paralleled that of childhood attachment, whereby child-caregiver relationships functioned best when there was a secure base balanced out by a feeling of confidence to explore the world.

**Activation of the Attachment System**

As in children, the attachment system in adulthood becomes activated when a situation is perceived as threatening (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The adult’s attachment system can have an impact on the caregiver-child relationship. This can be positive or negative depending on the ability of the parent to attend to their caregiving responsibilities. When the adult attachment style of a caregiver is secure, the needs of the child are often met with responsiveness and understanding. However, for caregivers who do not have a secure attachment themselves, the activation of a child’s attachment system can trigger insecurity and fear. As such, both adult and child are left experiencing the need for protection. This can prohibit the parent’s caregiving system functioning effectively, reducing the responsiveness and overall care provided by the parent. Subsequently if a caregiver’s attachment system becomes activated, their attention may be on their own needs and less focus will be placed on the needs of the child. Maintaining an activated attachment system is often a difficult task for adults with an insecure attachment system, reducing the ability for the caregiver to be consistent in responding to the needs of their child (Rholes et al., 2006). Specific parental attachment system functioning may predict the type of parenting delivered. Increasing evidence supports attachment related differences in parental caregiving behaviour (Cohn et al., 1992; Edelstein et al., 2004; Rholes et al., 1995).
Assessment of Attachment in Adulthood

Interview methods and self-report measures of adult attachment have been used for differing purposes over a number of decades. Self-report measures explore an adult’s feelings and behaviors in relation to romantic or close relationships. Interview methods, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), have been used to explore an adults state of mind in relation to past childhood relationships/experiences with their own parents.

Interview

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) arose from the Strange Situation experiment developed by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) and has shown to be a good predictor of the experiment. The AAI is the current gold standard measure for assessing attachment in adulthood. Semi-structured interviews are used to investigate child-caregiver relationships and the meaning adults make of their past experiences. Trained clinicians examine and score the resultant transcripts, categorising adults into three different attachment styles (autonomous, preoccupied and dismissing) in line with Ainsworth’s (1978) prior research. The AAI is based on retrospective reports of adult’s experiences, which at times can be unreliable and requires access to an individual’s memory. However, it is important to note that training in the AAI involves interpreting both verbal and nonverbal information, inclusive of the reasoning why poor memory may be present in relation to past experience. One of the main limitations of the AAI is that it can be prohibitive in relation to the cost and time involved in clinical settings.

Self-report

Hazan and Shaver (1987) were the first researchers to develop a self-report questionnaire measuring attachment in adulthood. The questionnaire was designed to classify adults into three attachment styles (secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent).
In 1991, Bartholomew and Horowitz extended the work of Hazan and Shaver (1987) around the patterns of attachment in adult relationships. The interactions and experiences that influence a person’s IWM are influential in the type of attachment displayed within a romantic adult relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Based on the two fundamental dimensions of IWM’s (i.e., model of self and model of others) secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment styles were categorised.

Secure individuals are characterised as sensitive, high in self-esteem, and experience more meaningful adult relationships (Feldman, 2005). They view both themselves and others in a positive way. Preoccupied individuals are characterised as having an inherent feeling of unworthiness and an avid desire to gain others’ approval. They view themselves as negative and others as positive. Adults demonstrating a dismissive pattern of attachment are often self-sufficient, displaying little need for emotional closeness or intimacy; they have a positive view of self and negative view of others. Lastly, adults with a fearful attachment pattern have a negative view of self and other, showing a desire for closeness with others but hold a strong fear of rejection and subsequently avoid depending on others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) (see Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model of Self</th>
<th>Model of Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Secure</td>
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<td>Negative</td>
<td>Dismissing</td>
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*Figure 1: Models of attachment in adulthood as defined by Bartholomew (1991)*
Recent research has found that attachment is best measured on a continuum ranging from attachment avoidance to attachment anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Attachment avoidance is defined as the fear of intimacy and dependency on others, an excessive need for autonomy, and difficulty trusting others. Attachment anxiety is the fear of interpersonal rejection or abandonment, an excessive need for approval and reassurance, and significant difficulty when others are impassive. Adults presenting with high levels of both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety often display insecure attachment. Conversely, adults demonstrating secure attachment style display an absence of, or little attachment related avoidance and anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Lopez & Brennan, 2000; Mallinckrodt, 2000). Similar to the distributions found in childhood attachment, studies have found a majority of adults present with secure attachment (55%), avoidant adult attachment style was found in 25% of adults and a further 20% present with an anxious attachment style (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

Hazen and Shaver (1987) found no significant difference in relation to the impact of gender on the style of attachment within an adult romantic relationship. Conversely, Del Giudice (2009) found significant differences, namely that males demonstrated higher levels of avoidant attachment. In addition males were more likely to be dismissing in their attachment style (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Research has indicated that styles of attachment remain stable over time (Main & Cassidy, 1988; Waters, 1978; Waters, Crowell, Treboux, Merrick, & Albersheim, 1995). However, this does not mean that change cannot occur in either childhood or adulthood attachment style. When an attachment pattern change occurs in childhood (i.e., children who have experienced abuse by a caregiving being removed and placed with a secure caregiver) a corresponding change should be noted in the quality of the child-caregiver relationship (Bowlby, 1969/1982). New relationships in adulthood can
create strong emotional bonds; increase security and safety, allowing for increased reflection and reorganisation of past and present experiences (Bowlby, 1980). Attachment in adulthood provides additional purposes that are not found in child-caregiver attachment relationships. This includes companionship, sexual intimacy, a feeling of competency within the relationship, and a shared purpose and experience (Ainsworth, 1985; Weiss, 1974). In addition, research has shown that specific parental attachment system functioning may predict the type of parenting delivered (i.e., secure attachment is more likely to result in a consistent and fair parenting style as opposed to insecure attachment which is more likely to lead to an inconsistent and possibly rejecting parenting style). Increasing evidence supports attachment related differences in parental caregiving behaviour (Cohn et al., 1992; Edelstein et al., 2004; Rholes et al., 1995).

**Parenting Styles**

Parenting styles are parental behaviours and attitudes expressed towards their child (Williams et al., 2009). Baumrind (1966) outlined two key factors in separating and explaining parenting styles; the level of *nurturing* a child receives during an interaction with a caregiver, and the level of *control* a caregiver displays towards their child. Nurturance refers to the level of responsiveness, such as love and affection, shown towards a child. Nurturance can be separated into high and low responsiveness. High responsiveness refers to lots of love and affection displayed in a caregiver-child relationship. Low responsiveness on the extreme end is little to no love or affection shown. Parental control on the other hand is viewed as the level of supervision and limits and demands placed on the child by their primary caregiver (Macoby & Martin, 1983). This can be further divided into low demand and high demand. Low demand sees little parental involvement in the activities and interests of a child allowing increased self-regulation by the child, as opposed to high demand.
High demand sees the parent place disproportionate expectations on the child, with a desire to control the child’s attitude and behavior. Baumrind (1966) introduced her theoretical model of parenting behaviour, which focused on three different styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive). In addition, two subtypes of permissive parenting were distinguished, indulgent and neglectful parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) (see Figure 2).

Authoritative parenting style is characterised by a good balance of parental nurturance and control. Caregivers are often highly responsive to children’s needs, supporting of autonomy and learning whilst setting fair boundaries to ensure safety. Authoritative parents respond in an emotionally responsive way, demonstrating availability and flexibility to the child’s needs promoting self-confidence. They listen to the child, encouraging them to have a voice whilst providing a structured environment with appropriate discipline when needed. Such parenting is deemed optimal with research indicating authoritative parenting results in better-adjusted children, and increased feelings of parental confidence in adults (Baumrind, 1991; Glasgow, et al., 1997; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Caregivers who display an authoritative parenting style are generally more able to manage situations in an effective and efficient way (Glasgow, et al., 1997).

Contrasting this, authoritarian parenting style is characterised by the caregiver setting unrealistically high standards and holding their children accountable with little flexibility (Baumrind, 1966). Such parenting enforces discipline using often punitive and forceful methods with little or no explanation. This style of parenting is characterised by low levels of warmth and high levels of control (Chambers et al., 2001). In comparison to authoritative parenting style, the use of authoritarian parenting is based on rules and discipline, with less affection and nurturance shown towards their child (Baumrind, 1971). Poorer child development outcomes have
resulted from authoritarian parenting, including lowered self-esteem, higher rates of depression and anxiety, social isolation and reduced coping strategies to manage stressful situations (Bogels & Van Melick, 2004; Oldehinkel et al., 2006; Wolfradt, Hempel, & Miles, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Permissive-indulgent</td>
<td>Permissive-indifferent</td>
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Figure 2: Parenting styles and associated level of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Finally, permissive parenting style is characterised by a highly relaxed parenting style, with little to no demands placed on the child. Such parenting allows children to make their own rules and regulate their own emotions regardless of their stage of development. No discipline or structure is in place for children to assist in their development and adjustment to social norms. Maccoby and Martin (1983) further went on to divide permissive parenting into two separate styles, permissive-indulgent and permissive-indifferent parenting. Permissive-indulgent parents are able to demonstrate responsiveness to their child. The child is encouraged to express their feelings, and parental nurturance can be high, although this is not always aligned with the child’s needs at the time. Rules are often not established, with little control exercised over the child’s behaviour. Permissive-indifferent parenting on the other
hand is also referred to as ‘Laissez-Faire Parenting’. This style is reflected by low levels of demandingness and low levels of responsiveness. A child may feel a level of rejection, with parent’s often being uninvolved in the child’s life. Caregivers who display a permissive or authoritarian parenting style experience higher levels of conflict with children. They also have less satisfying roles as a caregiver and children are often left with little support (Cheng & Furnham, 2000).

**Attachment and Parenting**

The development of a secure or insecure attachment style has been linked to the parenting style of the primary caregiver (Fonagay, Steele & Steele, 1991). Securely attached adults show greater warmth, support, responsiveness and engagement with their children (Rholes et al., 1995). Parents who present with insecure attachment styles are more likely to be emotionally and psychologically unavailable to their children (Bartholomew, 1990). Often insecure parents may put their own needs before their child’s, showing low responsivity in times of need (Turney & Tanner, 2001). Bartholomew (1990) hypothesised that insecure adult attachment styles are more likely to result in inconsistent, insensitive and possibly rejecting parenting styles. Jones, Cassidy and Shaver (2013) completed a review that explored previous research addressing the relationship between adult attachment styles and parenting styles. This review looked at approximately 50 studies and the results inferred that insecure adult attachment styles corresponded highly with adverse parenting styles and cognitions.

A strong association in the literature linking self-reported adult attachment style to the type of caregiving provided has been found (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). Strategies employed by insecure parents (i.e., higher anxious and avoidant attachment style) as a means for coping has been found to impact an adult’s functioning and caregiving capacity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Parents identified
as being insecure in their romantic relationships demonstrate more maladaptive responses in the face of stress, hindering their ability to be present and available for others, including their children. Adults who have a higher level of avoidant attachment style are more likely to escape unpleasant situations, through both physical and psychological distancing, as a way to cope (Fraley & Shaver, 1997). This often leads to disrupted adult and parent-child relationships. Those adults who demonstrate higher anxious related attachment are less likely to manage difficult and stressful situations, often ruminating about their own distress. Thus heightening their own distress as opposed to developing effective coping strategies. Responses in their romantic relationship, or in the role of a caregiver, are often interfering and inappropriate and do not meet the needs of the other person or child (Reizer & Mikulincer, 2007). There is growing literature supporting the link between self-reported attachment styles and parenting practices. Insecure attachment styles may interfere with a parent’s ability as a caregiver to provide the required care to their child in a consistent, warm and responsive way (Mills-Koonce et al., 2011). Parenting style differences often occur as a result of differing IWM’s. The way parents make sense of the world has a direct impact on the way they experience parenthood and the relationship that develops with their child.

**Australian Household Structures**

In 2012-13, there were 8.9 million households in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2015). Just less than three quarters (74%) were classified as family households, and around 50% of the population over the age of 15 was married. Of the 6.7 million families in Australia in 2012-13, 85% (5.7 million) were couple families, 14% (909,000) were one-parent families. One-parent families were predominately single mother families (16% of all families with children aged 0 to 17 years) with single father families making up 3% of all families with children aged 0 to
17 years. Over the last decade, between 11 and 14 couples in every 1000 marriages were granted a divorce every year (ABS, 2015).

There has been an overall increase for men in Australia in relation to time spent with their child across a variety of activities and caregiving roles (Craig, Mullen, & Blaxland, 2010). Research indicates that mother’s employment status is that of part time or unemployed during a child’s early years, whereas fathers continue to maintain full time employment (Baxter et al., 2007), impacting the time available to spend with their child. Baxter and Smart (2011) found that fathers of children who did not engage in employment or were part time employed demonstrated higher levels of involvement in the care of their children. As the amount of working hours increased, the level of involvement with their child decreased. In a recent survey 80% of father’s reported they were responsible for financially providing for their family. In addition, 80% further reported they were responsible for also caring for their child (Wells, Mitra & Flanagan, 2015).

In a study completed by Weston, Qu, and Baxter (2013) the majority of Australian parents sampled reported being satisfied with their adult relationship. Father’s expressed higher satisfaction within their adult relationship than mothers (75% and 66% respectively). Further to this 70% of father’s were highly satisfied with their parent-child relationship, in comparison to 66% of mothers. Fathers who identified as being married and happy within their relationship demonstrated higher quality parent-child relationships, and further showed more warmth and consistency in their parenting style (Baxter & Smart, 2010).

**Fathers’ Role in Parenting**

The role of fathers has evolved over time. Fathers are showing higher levels of involvement during a child’s early years. Research has also found an increase in the role of fathers as the primary caregiver, staying at home with their child whilst
mothers return to work (Baxter & Smart. 2011). A limitation of the research in the area of attachment and parenting is the high focus on maternal parenting. What literature has begun to show is that both mothers and fathers can develop a secure attachment relationship with their child. In fact in 1967, Ainsworth concluded that infants were able to form attachment relationships with their fathers despite infrequent contact, however notwithstanding growing involvement of fathers with their child, little research has been completed to explore this further.

Historically, mothers have been identified as the primary caregiver and the primary attachment figure, with fathers declared to have a more hand’s off approach to parenting. More recently, a father’s role in relation to caregiving has been outlined as protective and fundamental to behavioural and psychological development in children (Lamb, 2010). Studies have found that fathers who are more involved with their child promote increased health and social wellbeing benefits for both adult and child (Fletcher, 2011; King, 2000). Hawkins and Biller (1993) reported that children who develop strong paternal attachment alongside maternal attachment are more likely to develop a secure attachment style throughout their lifespan. Fathers in the caregiving role who develop strong and positive relationships with their children are more likely to demonstrate a secure adult attachment style, more effective responses in stressful situations, and increased feelings of confidence in parenting (Burgess, 2009). In a study completed by Vasquez (2002), 64% percent of mothers and 47% of fathers identified as securely attached, 16% and 36% identified as dismissing, 9% and 7% as preoccupied and 10% and 11% as fearful, respectively.

The Difference of a Father’s Parenting Style

As discussed, fathers play an important role in the support and development of children. Both parents are equally capable of providing the needed caregiving to a child (Newland & Coyl, 2010). Over the last decades there has been a shift in the
view that fathers are solely there to provide the financial resources for children, now there is a great belief that mothers and fathers are both needed to provide the social, emotional, physical and intellectual well-being of their children. Turner (2011) believed that fathers’ were more likely to engage in less predictable behavior, be more physically active with their child using this as a means to promote development socially, intellectually and emotionally. Fathers’ were more likely to challenge their child more often, promoting problem-solving skills through the use of withholding immediate support. This was further supported by Fletcher (2011) reporting a father’s stimulation of their child’s excitement through physical play remains important in nurturing child development. In exploring paternal parenting styles, there needs to be recognition that there may be differing elements to consider in relation to fathering compared to mothering (Hawkins et al., 2002; Lamb, 1997). And further that whilst paternal and maternal parenting styles may differ they are more likely to be complimentary as opposed to a direct mirroring of each other (Roskham & Meunier, 2009).

Overall, evidence has shown that fathers play an important role in relation to child rearing. There has been a steady shift over the last decade around the expectations of mothers and fathers in relation to parenting. As such, research and clinical services require continued growth around the family system and increased paternal involvement. It is important to encourage fathers to develop strong attachment relationships with their children. This includes providing fathers with education and support around parenting and recognition of their role within the family. In 2015, a survey found that 45% of fathers reported never having sought out support in relation to parenting (Wells, Mitra & Flanagan, 2015).

The Relationship between Parenting and Parenting Competence

Researchers have identified the importance of parental cognitions and beliefs
around their ability to parent, and the impact this has on the caregiver-child relationship (Bugental & Johnston, 2000; Rubin & Chung, 2006). One area of parental cognition that has demonstrated significant importance in the role of parenting is a parent’s perceived sense of competence. Johnson and Marsh (1989) defined parental sense of competence in two distinct components: feelings of self-efficacy in their parenting role and the satisfaction they feel in relation to parenting.

Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their ability to successfully undertake a task and meet goals (Bandura, 1977). Translating this into parenting, parental self-efficacy relates to the felt ability to competently manage one’s responsibilities as a parent (Jones and Prinz, 2005). Johnston and Marsh (1989) referred to parental self-efficacy as an instrumental dimension of parenting, the degree to which a parent feels capable in the role, competent and demonstrates awareness of the demands parenting entails. This often curtails from a parent’s cognitions on how well they can fulfill their duties as a parent and provide a positive impact on their child. Higher levels of parental self-efficacy have been linked to improved parent-child relationships and increased parental warmth and responsiveness (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Attachment in adulthood and the link with parental self-efficacy has had fewer studies completed over recent times. Those studies that have been completed have mostly focused on maternal parenting. For example, an association between attachment anxiety and parenting self-efficacy was mediated by feelings of depression in mothers (Caldwell et al., 2011). Further to this, Kohlhoff and Barnett (2013) found that both attachment anxiety and avoidance were associated with parental self-efficacy, again mediated by maternal depression. They also found there was also a direct link between attachment anxiety and parental self-efficacy in mothers. Howard (2010) focused on paternal parenting and found that fathers with a secure attachment style rated themselves higher in parental self-efficacy.
Parental satisfaction is however more an affective dimension of parenting, inclusive of emotional regulation, motivation and enjoyment as a parent (Johnston & Marsh, 1989). Parental satisfaction is the sense of pleasure and fulfillment received from the role of parenting (Pridham & Chang, 1989). Limited research has been undertaken looking at the link between adult attachment styles and parental satisfaction. In 2005, Cohen and Finzi-Dottan found that attachment avoidance was associated with lower levels of parenting satisfaction. This finding was substantiated by later studies (Rholes et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2011; Vieira et al., 2012). Research findings have been inconsistent in the area of attachment anxiety and parental satisfaction. Cohen and colleagues (2011) found a significant negative relationship between attachment anxiety and parental satisfaction, however no further studies to date have been found to replicate these findings. La Valley and Guerrero (2012) further found that secure attachment was associated with higher parental satisfaction.

Parents with a secure attachment style hold a more positive view of their parenting role and experience less difficulty responding to their children’s needs. Such secure attachment provides higher levels of parenting self-esteem and greater ability to effectively parent (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Conversely, fathers who are found to have an insecure attachment style are less satisfied with their role as a parent (Howard, 2010). Interestingly, parents who rated high on avoidance and anxiety attachment dimensions perceived their children as more apprehensive, easily distressed and highly reactive (Pesonen et al., 2003). Research on attachment and fathers is more limited and requires further exploration.

Parental self-efficacy and satisfaction are important psychological constructs impacting both the parent’s own well-being and the parent-child relationship. The communication of parents who feel positive and competent in their role as a caregiver is likely to be more effective. Such parents are able to deliver higher levels of care
and demonstrate consistent caregiver-child attachment throughout parenthood (Johnston, 1996; Bugental & Johnston, 2000; Rubin & Chung, 2006). The significance of parents’ beliefs in relation to their parenting style is an important factor that commences prenatally, through to parenthood (Palkovitz, 1992) and into their own child’s adulthood (Schofield et al., 2014).

**Psychological Wellbeing and Parenting**

Attachment style has been seen in both childhood and adulthood to impact the way an individual sees themselves, and others (Bowlby, 1979; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). It shapes close relationships whether it be with a caregiver or romantic partner. It is not surprising that attachment style can also have an impact on a person’s mental health. The display of a secure attachment in adulthood is seen as a protective factor in relation to mental health. Individuals’ with little attachment related anxiety and avoidance are more likely to effectively manage stressors in comparison to those displaying insecure attachment styles (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Given individuals who are securely attached have positive IMW’s (i.e., view themselves and others as positive) during times of hardship it is easier to trust and rely on others for support, to problem solve and use effective coping strategies (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

Conversely, adults with insecure attachment styles are less likely to seek out the support from their partner when distressed, and are more likely to withdraw (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Further to this, adults with an insecure attachment are more likely to demonstrate behaviours that exacerbate conflict as opposed to alleviating it (Simpson et al., 1996). Repeated evidence points to the association between insecure attachment styles, anxiety (Marganska, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2013; Picardi et al., 2013) and depression (Cassidy & Shaver, 2007; Jinyao et al., 2012; Marganska, Gallagher, & Miranda, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Secure caregivers reported lower levels of distress then that of insecure parents. Howard
(2010) identified that fathers who experienced higher levels of stress presented with greater levels of insecure attachment styles and as a result displayed a more negative parent-child relationship.

Mental health and parenting styles have also been found to have an important interaction (Geortzel, et al., 2004). Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have been associated with adults displaying higher levels of depression and anxiety (Alloy, 2001; Barlow, 2002). Excessive control as demonstrated in authoritarian parenting has been suggested to be due to underlying anxiety (Bystritsky, 2000).

Fathers who show interest and engagement with their children have greater mental, physical and sexual health (Ricardo, 2014). Research has found improved adult relationships, increased feelings of satisfaction and happier children when fathers demonstrate meaningful parenting (Burgess, 2009). Fathers who demonstrate greater satisfaction and engagement in their role of a caregiver enhance the wellbeing of their child, themselves and their relationships. Mothers have reported greater sense of satisfaction and wellbeing within their relationship when shared decision-making occurs within the role of caregiving. Positive parenting from both mothers and fathers has demonstrated better outcomes within the family system.

**Aims and Hypotheses**

The impact of a father’s adult attachment on parenting has rarely been the focus of past studies. There is increasing evidence that positive child development is reliant on both maternal and paternal influences. In addition there is limited evidence around the sense of competency (i.e., parental self-efficacy and satisfaction) a father feels as a parent and what contributes to this. The current study aims to explore the role of secure attachment in fathers and whether this is associated with an authoritative parenting style and how competent they feel in their role as a parent. It was hypothesised that:
1. Fathers who report secure adult attachment (i.e., low attachment avoidance and low attachment anxiety) will report higher levels of authoritative parenting.

2. Fathers who report secure adult attachment (i.e., low attachment avoidance and low attachment anxiety) will report higher feelings of competency as a parent (i.e., increased self-efficacy and increased feelings of satisfaction as a parent).

3. A father’s sense of competency will be predicted by authoritative parenting style and secure attachment style.