
Sex Differences in Disposition Towards Kin, Security of Adult Attachment, and Sociosexuality as a Function of Parental Divorce

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Parents who are not capable of producing high-quality children tend to invest more in daughters. When parents divorce, the investment per offspring inevitably declines. It was predicted that parental divorce would result in development of more manipulative, less altruistic interpersonal attitudes—except for the relationship between daughters and kin. It also was predicted that parental divorce would produce insecurity in adult relationships, lower academic performance, and increased sexuality. Students ($N = 139$) provided family demographics and personal information including American College Test score and grade-point average (GPA). They completed questionnaires measuring adult security of attachment, helping attitudes, Machiavellianism, and sexual restrictedness (sociosexuality [SOI]). Children of divorce had increased SOI scores, were less helpful, and had lower GPAs. Women whose parents had divorced were more Machiavellian towards people in general but not towards relatives, as predicted. Parental divorce was associated with reduced probability of being securely attached for women but not for men. Results indicate the need for more precise theory making different predictions for men and women. © 1998 Elsevier Science Inc.

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Parental investment was defined by Trivers (1972) as anything done by the parent for the offspring that increases its chances of survival while diminishing the parent's capacity to invest in other offspring (whether actual or potential). Given that parental effort is finite, variation in parental investment per child can be readily operationalized: it will be lower in a large family, in a

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family in which children are closely spaced (because babies require more care and have different requirements than older children), in poor families, and in families in which only one parent resides with the children. Parental effort ranges from time, attention, and emotional support to material resources such as food.

Human reproductive strategies may be influenced systematically by characteristics of the environment (Belsky et al. 1991; Draper and Belsky 1990; Draper and Harpending 1982; Hill et al. 1994). For example, it has been proposed that the high mortality rates of black males in the U.S. have resulted, in part, in a reproductive strategy characterized by early childbearing out of wedlock, with very little male investment in children and reliance on grandparental care (Burton 1990). This is only one example of the general principle that families in difficult economic circumstances tend to invest in daughters at the expense of sons (Irons 1979). A similar phenomenon has been observed in a study of property bequeathal in Vancouver, where larger estates go disproportionately to sons and smaller estates are used to invest mainly in daughters (Smith et al. 1987).

Chisholm (1993) argued that high mortality rates and the stressful early environments with which they are associated predispose individuals to a short-term strategy, although, as Stini (1993) notes, data directly relevant to this hypothesis were not reviewed. Hill et al. (1997) reported that people who expect to live short lives were more likely to engage in risk taking, and they review other evidence that high mortality goes along with low-investment reproduction. Psychological stress and father absence also are associated with lower age of menarche and precocious sexuality in girls, even when mother–daughter correlation in age of menarche and, hence, presumably, its heritability are partly statistically controlled (Surbey 1990). These findings do not fit in with the general mammalian pattern of stressful environments retarding growth and maturation. They suggest that humans may be unusual in the importance of psychological influences on reproductive strategy.

Security of attachment as a mediator: Belsky et al. (1991) hypothesized that children who experience harsh and insensitive parenting not only develop a short-term reproductive strategy, but they are characterized by an exploitative interpersonal orientation, being highly manipulative and low on altruism. This orientation predisposes them (particularly men) toward problem behaviors such as school truancy, lack of academic diligence (Barber, in press), drug use, risk taking, and criminal activity (Ellis 1987; Hill et al. 1997; Rowe et al. 1989). All of these high-risk behaviors can be seen as facets of a short-term (or low-investment) reproductive strategy for men, in the sense that they are characteristic of direct mating competition rather than indirect competition via development of a career and accumulation of resources (Barber in press).

A variant of this theory was proposed by Hill et al. (1994), who see adult security of attachment as having a key mediating role between early family environment and adult relationships (both sexual and nonsexual). Although Belsky et al. (1991) emphasized the causal role of harsh and insensitive parenting (which they see as arising in the context of father absence), Hill et al. (1994) consider a greater range of factors influencing the predictability and amount of parental investment (parental income, relationship with parents, interbirth intervals, parental favoritism, etc.).

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