

Ashley Yull
PSY-203- Introduction to Child Psychology and Human Development
October 22, 2005
Professor Thompson
Paper #2

Child-rearing styles encompass parenting behaviors that occur in a wide range of settings, creating an enduring climate in which children are raised (Berk, 2005). For the first years of my life, my mother was my primary caregiver and utilized a style of child-rearing most similar to the authoritative style. This approach to child-rearing focuses on parenting with “a high level of acceptance and involvement, adaptive control techniques, and appropriate autonomy granting” (Berk, 2005). My early childhood included little involvement from my father who spent long hours at the office and was uncomfortable taking on a prominent role as a parent.

As I learned how to interact with others, my first friends were my aunts, uncles, grandparents, and a female cousin about my age. Any time I had a play date with friends, my mother was there to supervise as well as provide developmentally appropriate activities. I frequently engaged in socio-dramatic play and had many props to facilitate these activities. My cousin and I would spend countless hours taking turns pretending to be patients with various ailments and doctors in the emergency room. Every night before I went to bed, my mother would read stories with me from a large book that also had fun activities to go along with the stories. We would plan an activity the following day together around the previous night’s story.

I was allowed to watch television, but normally opted for other activities that I found to be more engaging. When I watched television, it was with my parents. They would discuss the actions of the individuals in the show with me, explaining how they went along with or deviated from our family’s value system.

Even the best authoritative parents can fall into permissive or authoritarian parenting at times. I was my parents' first child, and they believed it was their duty to spoil me with attention, presents, dolls, and clothes. They were willing to indulge me with anything I wanted, including live animals which I soon became disengaged with and was unwilling to help take care of. My father's involvement was limited to cutting the check to my mom so that she could go out and buy the things I wanted. My mother learned early on that even with the vast amount of toys I had been given, they had failed to teach me the lesson of sharing. When friends came over for play dates, they were forced to play with specifically designated "friend's toys" or bring their own, as I was very fussy about my toys and did not like to share them with others.

Aside from not wanting to share, I was easy to deal with and caused few problems for my mother. When I misbehaved, she would explain to me what I had done wrong and how that behavior affected those around me. Being that I was an easy child, this approach worked well. (When my brother was a toddler, my mother had to change her approach and more firmly enforce rules using discipline techniques, such as time out, in order to control him.)

When my mom found out that she was pregnant with my baby brother, my parents told me about the pregnancy and how this would affect our family situation. My mom read me stories about new babies, let me feel him kicking in her stomach, and showed me pictures of the baby's developmental stages. I was four-years-old, very excited about the prospect of having a new member of the family, and eager to help out preparing for the birth and decorating the new baby's room. When we went shopping for items for the nursery, my mother let me help her choose baby clothes and decorations, making me feel that I was actively involved.

From the time my brother was born, he received attention from my father as they engaged in male dominated activities. I did not feel the need to have a relationship with my father as a

child because of the love and warmth that my mother and other family members provided. Even with my father playing a larger role in my brother's upbringing, it never eclipsed the amount of attention that my mother shared with both of us. She was the person that woke both of us up in the morning, dressed us, and had breakfast and activities waiting for us when we got downstairs. She showered us with hours of attention. I would include my brother in my socio-dramatic play, often trying to dress him up as a girl so that he could fit better into my elaborate storylines. I loved to dress up and pretend to be a model and have my mother take pictures of me. I would try to include my brother in these activities as well. My mother tried hard to make the transition from being an only child to having a sibling as easy as possible for me and made an effort to keep our daily routines as similar as possible. She also used it as an opportunity to grant autonomy and make me realize that I could do things on my own without her assistance. On some occasions, she would leave my brother at my aunt's house so that the two of us could spend time together on activities only we enjoyed without being hampered by the presence of a younger sibling.

As I grew older and school began to play a larger role in my life, my mother took on the responsibility room mother, and helped me with homework and school projects. She would stay up into the early hours of the morning, gluing popsicle sticks together so that I could have the best-looking diorama in the class. She drove me back and forth endlessly as I took part in a wide variety of extracurricular activities. However, as my hardest subject, math, became more difficult, my father began to play more of a role in my life. He helped me with my math homework and studied for math tests with me. Normally, we would eat dinner together as a family and then after dinner my dad would help me with any math homework I had not yet completed.

The dynamic of our little family worked very well for the first seventeen years of my life. But things changed dramatically the summer after my junior year in high school when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time in her life. She had been diagnosed when I was in elementary school and had undergone a mastectomy, but I was too young and sheltered from the experience to have a good understanding of what it really meant. This time was different. My mother started the first of many rounds chemotherapy and experimental radiation therapies in Boston, and would sometimes be away for extended periods of time. My mother didn't let the diagnosis and treatments get her down and tried hard to remain actively involved in our lives and not change our routines. As my mother became more ill and unable to maintain her daily activities, my father was forced to play a larger role in my and my brother's lives. Not only was this a difficult transition for my father because of his unfamiliarity with my life and the people in it, but it was also a very uncomfortable role for a man that had spent the greater part of the last seventeen years behind a desk staring at a photo of the family that he rarely interacted with.

My mom died of breast cancer in July of 2003. Our family dynamic has changed a lot since then. My father has continued to change his parenting style in an attempt to become more involved in his children's lives, even rearranging his work schedule so that he can spend more time with us. Now that I am in college, my father's role is limited but he frequently calls to talk and see how school is going. He tries hard, but I still miss my mother. I am grateful to her for teaching me to love others, to work hard at everything I do, and never to take the time we spend with the people we love for granted. I know that I am the person I am today because I was lucky enough to have her for the first eighteen years of my life.

Bibliography

Berk, L. E. (2005). *Infants and Children*. (5th ed). United States of America: Pearson Education, Inc.