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Parenting style and its influence on the personal and moral development of the child

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Abstract

The paper deals with the relationships between educational practices of parents and their estimated impact on the structure of the child's personality and his/her moral attitude. The research method: questionnaire. The research sample: students aged 12 to 17 (N=431). The results show that an adolescent examines him/herself intensely and evaluates him/herself from a number of viewpoints, has a highly critical attitude towards the educational approach of his/her parents and its impact on him/herself. The respondents' views of solving dilemmas have brought information about and evidence of the fact that adolescents express themselves quite individually and freely, regardless of the consequences.

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1. Introduction

Parenting style is one of the key factors in the child's socialization process. Parents manage their educational practices both rationally and intuitively, introducing a number of patterns from their own primary families. If they accept their roles, they become subject to cultural stereotypes in which they grew up and those in the world around them. Parents have their own implicit conception of what it is family and parenthood (Havigerová, Haviger, & Truhlářová, 2013). They endeavour to prepare the child for the real life in the world and provide him/her with a

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number of social skills enabling him/her to cope with difficult situations. Many parents transfer their ambitions into the goals of the education. These can be their own fulfilled ambitions worth following but also unfulfilled ones – in this case, parents expect their child to achieve what they failed to achieve themselves. This may distort a realistic view of the child's capabilities and expose him/her to insolvable situations. One of the spheres in which active parents try to influence the life journey of their children is the training in the internalization of social behaviour norms, including the area of moral development. The child should testify to the appropriate educational practices of their parents chiefly in human interaction, observing the rules and thus demonstrating that the educational process was successful. The present paper focuses on parenting styles, the process of moral development and the characteristics of adolescents. In adolescents aged 15-17 we identified very important connections between the parenting style and a range of personality factors. These include factors related to character, but also temperament, social communication, mental (in)stability, activity/passivity with a strong biological basis.

The primary condition of a desirable personality development is a genuine, humane, positive emotional relationship between the parents and the child. Kendler (1996) proposed three factors labelled warmth, protectiveness and authoritarianism. Rohner (1980) formulated the Parental acceptance-rejection theory (PART), which is a theory of socialization, attempting to explain and predict the main consequences of acceptance or rejection on the part of the parents. It works with the cognitive, emotional and behavioural development of the child, describing certain types of adult personalities and trying to account for different means which help some children to cope with the corrosive effects of parental rejection and emotional deprivation better than others. Furthermore, the theory treats the connection between parental rejection-acceptance and expressive behaviour in the society. Acceptance and rejection create a bi-polar dimension in which every child can be placed.

Accepting parents are defined by Rohner as parents who show their love physically (cuddling, kissing, caressing), verbally (telling the child nice things, speaking nicely about him/her, rewarding him/her, showing that they are proud of him/her) or by a combination of the two, the ultimate aim being to make the child feel loved and accepted.

Rejecting parents compare their children with others in the negative sense; they hate them, are often angry with them and regard them as a burden. The rejection usually results in two forms of behaviour: the first is characterized by aggression and hostility, the second by disregard and neglect. The parents either attack the child verbally or physically or they ignore him/her, do not help him/her, do not satisfy his/her emotional needs and are not interested in his/her happiness, well-being and comfort. They often forget their promises and spend minimal amount of time with the child. Both forms raise the feelings of being unloved and rejected.

The consequences of *PART* manifest themselves in behaviour both during childhood and adulthood. Studies have shown that rejection causes the occurrence of a wide range of negative phenomena: mental and behavioural disorders, neurosis, schizophrenia, delinquency, problems with control and studying, deficient physical development and stammering. A rejected and emotionally neglected child is prone to aggressive behaviour, has difficulties with submitting to guidance of others, is defensively independent, emotionally unstable, anxious and incapable of adequate emotional reaction, his/her self-respect is deficient and his/her attitude to the world is negative (Burešová, Steinhäusel, & Havigerová, 2012). Rohner carried out a comparison study in 101 cultures, using the so-called holocultural method and working with two paradigms: firstly with comparative ethnographic and socialization research in the individual communities and secondly with socio-psychological and developmental research among nations. He managed to identify principles of human behaviour in this way. The findings based on the pancultural sample of 101 societies suggest that rejected children are significantly more hostile and passively or actively aggressive than accepted children, they have a more negative self-evaluation and are more dependent. As adults, they are emotionally less stable, more irresponsible and have a more negative attitude to the world than accepted children. We intended to draw attention to the recent views of family, parenting styles and their impact on the development of the child, which is not merely immediate (praise, punishment) but long-term. Parents very often base the education of their children on intuition, relying on the behavioural patterns of their own parents, while teachers should act as professionals in this respect. However, what concerns both is the fact that manifestations of respect for the child, mainly in the case of parents, become an integral part of the child's self-image and determine his/her self-respect to a great extent (Macková, 1999). In the context of self-respect, Deci and Ryan (1996) introduced the term *self-consistency*. It forms the basis of the theory of identity and enables the development

towards experiences of unity, independence, predictability and control, providing a framework for the organization of the self and the ability to sense the possibilities and consequences of the interaction with others.

Stets and Carter (2011) from the University of California in their paper “The Moral Self: Applying Identity Theory” use identity theory to account for the understanding of one’s own moral principles:

Individuals act on the basis of their identity meanings, and they regulate of their behaviour so that those meanings are consistent with their identity meanings. An inconsistency produces negative emotions and motivates individuals to behave differently to produce outcomes that will better match their identity meanings. (Stets and Carter, 2011).

The authors continue the tradition of American psychology, skilfully connecting the theory of the self with moral development and the feeling of identity as the fundamental psychological phenomenon of the self. Thus, they move the traditional understanding of moral development into the deeper layers of the personality and make it possible to study these phenomena with reference to a continuum of the individual’s internalized moral values of a given culture instead of the traditional moral-amoral dichotomy of human behaviour.

Objective

The objective of our research is to study the elements of parental behaviour described by the respondents, their means of dealing with moral dilemmas and the structures of their maturing personalities. The research will be based on questionnaire methods and will examine potential mutual connections and dependencies of the phenomena in question.

Method

The data was collected using the following questionnaire methods: the Neo Big Five personality test, the Moral dilemma questionnaire and the Inventory of parental behaviour.

1.1. Description of the Neo big Five personality test

The questionnaire comprises 60 items answered on the Lickert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” = 0 points “strongly agree” = 5 points. The Czech version of this much approved method originating in the U.S. was created by Hřebíčková and Urbánek (2001, Big Five, NEO). The method examines five personality traits: Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness. It was created on the basis of the theory of the five factor personality structure (Costa, Mc Craee, 1992), which describes the so-called *Alpha factor* (socialization, social adaptation and good relationships) which covers agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism and the *Beta factor* (plasticity and the goal-directed character of personality growth) encompassing extraversion and openness to experience. The development of the Alpha factor elements depends mainly on socialization, while the Beta factor elements are rooted rather in the genes and temperament.

1.2. The Moral dilemma questionnaire

The moral dilemma questionnaire was inspired by Kohlberg’s research in which he presented micro stories about moral dilemmas to the respondents and subsequently used very thorough qualitative methods to identify their attitudes to the problem in the story. We compared the frequencies of different answers to the dilemmas, formulating the statements which are in the questionnaire with the Lickert scale. The reliability of the method is Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0,85$.

Using the orthogonal Varimax rotation (critical value | 0,40 |) we extracted 3 factors, which are implicitly but also significantly connected with Piaget’s ideas and classification (heteronomous and autonomous morality).

F1: Authoritarian father (heteronomous stage)

George should obey his father and give him the money.

The father has the right to require his son to help him with his own expenses.

The father has the right to want his son to give him the money.

The father has the right to change his mind and break the promise to his son.

At this stage, it is the *father* who is in the spotlight. The respondents have little regard for themselves and their own needs and respect authority. They believe that the father is in a position allowing him to change his mind and they should willingly submit to him. It is interesting that they are not egocentric and interested chiefly in their own needs and the injustice – it is the father who is central, not the subject. Clearly, social perspective is at work already, the child is even willing to subject his/her own desires and needs to the other (the father exerts no great pressure on the son to force him to provide the money). There is a manifest conformity to a close but subordinated person, whose will is respected even though it is disadvantageous for the child who is required to give in.

F2: Keeping the promise (transition from the heteronomous to the autonomous stage)

The father set a bad example to his son by breaking his promise.

Keeping of promises is one of the most important bases of good relationships between parents and children.

The father should cancel his fishing trip in order to be able to keep the promise given to his son.

One should always keep his/her promises, even those given to people who s/he does not know well and may never see them again.

At this stage the emphasis is rather on the parent, however, the child also attempts to formulate general principles and roles. S/he desires to express the essence of the norms which would ensure well-functioning social relationships in general. There is a perceptible shift from specific persons to the more general social environment, a sort of social generalization. The child draws attention to the ways of behaviour which s/he believes to be worth observing and whose lack would complicate social interaction. The father gradually loses his privileged position in the eyes of the child and can no longer count on unreserved obedience and conformity. To some extent, he becomes one of the members of the society, who should maybe more than others set a good example and be a model of the right behaviour.

F3: The rights of the son (autonomous stage)

The son does not have to give his money to his father because he broke no promise himself.

George has the right to refuse to give the money to his father.

George has the right to be more careful about his father's promises next time

The third factor groups the statements showing the shift of attention to the child itself. The object of interest here are the facts and consequences affecting rather the son than the father. There are hints at the way in which the son should decide and the means of preventing future situations in which he would find himself disadvantaged. The respondents identify rather with the character which is in a subordinated position similar to their own. They are more interested in the consequences affecting the son than those concerning the father. Nevertheless, the stress is on the aspect of free will and independent decision based on one's own judgement. The resolution of the plot itself disappears and it is the autonomy and independent choice of the solution which become prominent.

1.3. The Inventory of Parental Behaviour

All the previous research as well as life itself give convincing evidence that the family has a crucial and indispensable influence on the behaviour of its members as well as their development, which concerns not only the more evident case of children but also the parents, who sometimes (consciously or unconsciously) change the methods of education in reaction to its previous results and the achievement of goals. When constructing the inventory, we tried to rely not only on professional literature but mainly on our practical professional knowledge

(including our experience as (grand) parents) and children's opinion of the parents whom we meet in our teaching or psychological practice. We tried to include in the inventory a number of common situations typical of everyday, but sometimes also slightly more extreme education in families.

The original version of the *Inventory of parental behaviour* comprised 54 items – a number which was reduced based on factor analysis. Reliability of the method is Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,91$ and using the orthogonal Varimax rotation (critical value $| 0,40 |$) we extracted 2 factors: F1: Positive parental behaviour of the mother and the father (items 1-25) and F2: Negative parental behaviour of the mother and the father (items 26-38).

Research sample

The research sample comprised 431 respondents aged 12 to 17 years ($M=14,09$, $SD 2,21$), there were 204 boys and 227 girls. All were students of secondary schools or vocational schools.

Results

Table 1. NEOBIGFIVE results

Factors	M	SD	Percentiles
Neuroticism (N)	36,25	5,89	98.
Extraversion (E)	38,81	4,44	99.
Openness to experience (O)	35,16	4,97	88.
Agreeableness (P)	37,26	5,49	93.
Conscientiousness(S)	38,12	4,91	93.

The table shows that the respondents' results in all the five areas were highly above average. The high score in the case of neuroticism seems surprising as well, however, the respondents were in their adolescence, which is often connected with an increased imbalance mainly in the sphere of emotionality (Kučera, Haviger, 2012).

Table 2. Results of the moral dilemma questionnaire

Factors	M	SD	Attainable minimums and maximums
F1: Authoritarian father	10,94	4,15	Min.4; max.24
F2: Keeping the promise	18,94	4,23	Min.4; max.24
F3: Rights of the son	13,64	3,15	Min. 3; max. 18

The respondents regard their fathers as rather less authoritarian, their requirements about keeping the promise are highly above average and the requirements about the rights of the son (child) are above average. It is pleasing to see that the number of authoritarian fathers' decreases and the democratization of educational practices have already prevailed over the traditional paternalistic model of education.

Table 3. Results of the Inventory of Parental Behaviour

Factors	M	SD	Attainable min and max
Positive behaviour of the mother	46,94	13,96	Min.25; max.125
Positive behaviour of the father	55,25	15,42	Min.25; max.125
Negative behaviour of the mother	44,00	7,62	Min. 13; max. 65
Negative behaviour of the father	43,95	7,32	Min. 13; max. 65
+/- Mother coefficient	1,06	0,48	Limit +: - behaviour 1,93
+/- Father coefficient	1,25	0,70	Limit +: - behaviour 1,93

Positive behaviour of the mother	t-test = 5,84**
vs. positive behaviour of the father	
Positive vs. negative behaviour of the mother	t-test = 2,74**
Positive vs. negative behaviour of the father	t-test = 9,84**

**p<0,01

In the case of both parents the respondents' perception of their behaviour is that negative elements prevail over the positive ones. Positive behaviour of the father is felt as significantly stronger than positive behaviour of the mother. Moreover, the positive behaviour of the father is clearly higher than the negative one, which is also the case of the mother.

“Negative” parental behaviour is characterized by severity, enforcement of one's own views, little tendency towards discussion, comparison with more successful peers, friends or siblings, neglect of the child and his/her needs and interests. Our respondents do not deny that there are positive elements in their parents' behaviour but they stress mainly the negative ones. It might be even said that the more severe parents in the eyes of their children, the more severe the children's assessment, which is, moreover, accompanied by increased criticism typical for the period of adolescence. Consequently, the parent is perceived as someone who constantly and repeatedly requires something, lacks sufficient regard for the experiencing and behaviour of the child in many situations, demands the fulfilment of his/her wishes and exposes the child to continuous dependence. In a typical functioning family in our culture, it is the mother who is responsible for the vast majority of everyday tasks, which include not only cooking and housekeeping, but also supervision of the child's activities, including the assigned daily duties. It is typical for children in this period to protest which becomes manifest in the answers of our respondents. This is one of the reasons why mothers are viewed as being more strict, less approachable and requiring more.

Table 4. Differences in answers dependent on sex (all questionnaires)

Factor	F-test	M boys	M girls
Neuroticism	9,67*	35,33	37,08
Conscientiousness	7,23*	37,46	38,72
Negative behaviour of the father	8,34*	42,89	44,91

*p<0,05

Girls have higher scores in neuroticism and conscientiousness and perceive the father's behaviour as more negative. Adolescents in general pay a great deal of attention to themselves, often being highly critical. This concerns not only their physical appearance but also the psyche, or “psychic appearance”. In the case of our respondents, it is the girls who perceive themselves more intensely and with less stability, moreover, they feel less rebellious, more obedient, tidy, self-disciplined and purposeful, which are all qualities determined rather by education than genetically. The higher score in the case of the negative behaviour of the father is presumably connected with the traditional model of the father's view of the girl's future (or the dangers waiting for her, mainly on the part of males of all ages).

Table 5. Correlations between the factors and the age of the respondents

Factor	correlation
Agreeableness	r = 0,13**
Conscientiousness	r = 0,096*
Authoritarian father	r = 0,091*
Positive behaviour of the mother	r = 0,091*

Negative behaviour of the mother	$r = 0,15^{**}$
Negative behaviour of the father	$r = 0,10^*$

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$

The older the respondents are, the more they regard themselves as agreeable and conscientious, regard the father as more authoritarian and perceive the positive behaviour of the mother and the negative behaviour of both parents more. In other words, taking the Alpha factor into account, we may state that older respondents view themselves as more “educated”, socialized and therefore independent, which (as the respondents see it) their parents apparently fail to notice and appreciate, holding the conservative parental attitudes much criticized by the adolescents.

The results of the Moral dilemma questionnaire: no significant correlations between the results of this method and the others were identified, solving of moral dilemmas can be performed separately from the personality structure and the behaviour of parents. We introduced the term global self-value to refer to the child’s self-perception and whether s/he is happy in his/her life as it is – the self-perception should be rather general and independent of the environments in which the child lives. Thus, children with higher values of self-identity are more independent in decision making and the development of his/her moral self is less dependent on the environments (including the family) in which s/he lives.

The fact that the attitudes of the adolescent to moral values are independent of his/her personal profile as well as the behaviour of parents is a typical example of his/her attempt to express his/her personal opinion uninfluenced neither by self-perception, nor by education. The child shows his/her attitudes based on his/her moral self “in effect”. This is very private and individual. Nevertheless, the child’s attitude to the solving of dilemmas is subconsciously a result of the influence of the value system, mainly in the area of the norms enforced so far, as well as the expression of his/her rational and (even more) the emotional element of his/her personality. This is a typical paradox connected with adolescence. The adolescent perceives him/herself as “the only just individual” and stresses the uniqueness and the perfect purity and independence of his/her attitudes.

Conclusion

The present research has brought a number of findings concerning the respondents and their attitudes to their parents, their parenting style, solving of moral dilemmas and the own perception of their personality structure. The results are typical of contemporary psychological research: an experienced professional or a good parent reaches the same conclusions through generalising of a great amount of information obtained mainly through observation, following his/her reason, emotions, intuition and apparently also the talent for observation. Our research provides hard evidence of these intuitive findings. An adolescent examines him/herself intensely and evaluates him/herself from a number of viewpoints, has a highly critical attitude towards the educational approach of his/her parents and its impact on him/herself. Here we encounter a number of close links affecting the personality structure, mainly in the area of social development and the ability to maximize the rewards and minimize the sanctions in one’s life. The approach of our respondents to solving of moral dilemmas brought information about and evidence of the fact that the development of personality in this important area gives the individual the opportunity to express him/herself perfectly individually, freely and independently of the environments and its effects. The adolescent speaks exclusively for him/herself, which enables him to observe the details of his/her moral development with a critical eye and the resultant findings and confrontations gradually form his/her moral identity.

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