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**PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLES AND IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT IN PREADOLESCENCE**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between preadolescents' perception of parenting styles and identity development in a Romanian preadolescent sample. Perceived authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby, & Martin, 1983) were correlated with informative, normative and diffuse identity styles (Berzonsky, 1992). 213 secondary school students participated in this study. Participants were between 11 and 15 year-old ( $M=13.25$ ,  $SD=.88$ ), 53.5% were boys, and 77.9% were residents in urban area. Most of them reported authoritative parenting styles and higher scores in normative identity. Significant gender differences were found in diffuse identity style, boys reporting significantly higher scores than girls. Perceived mother control was lower in older students and the decrease of maternal control was found only in boys' sample, not in girls. Correlations indicated significant positive associations between informative and normative identity styles and perceived mother control, father and parental control and responsiveness. The most powerful correlations were found between the informative style and father responsiveness, father control and parental control. Older students and students with authoritative mothers and fathers had higher scores in informative style than younger students and those with neglectful mothers and fathers. In general sample, participants with authoritative and permissive parents had higher scores in normative style than participants with neglectful parents. Students from rural area with authoritarian and with permissive mothers obtained higher score in normative identity than their counterparts from urban areas. Pedagogical implications of the results are discussed.

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**Keywords:** Authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting styles; informative, normative, committed and diffuse identity styles.



## **1. Introduction**

Adolescence is the life stage when the sense of a stable and coherent identity is achieved; however, some adolescents may experience unclear, confuse identity (Erikson, 1968; Berzonsky, Branje, & Meeus, 2006; Pellerone, Tolini, & Polopoli, 2016). Identity is developed through continuing and cyclic processes of exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966) and it have different statuses: achievement (high commitment and high exploration), moratorium (high exploration and low commitment), foreclosure (low exploration, high commitment), and diffusion (low exploration and low commitment). Related to Marcia's model, Berzonsky (1990) described three identity styles: information-oriented, normative and diffuse-avoidant. Information-oriented individuals develop their identity by actively seeking and evaluating relevant information before making commitments, display high levels of self-regulated functioning (Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, & Goosens, 2005). Normative individuals shape their identities based on social norms and on expectations of significant others, organize their behaviour on the basis of external control and constraints (Soenens et al, 2005). Diffuse-avoidant individuals avoid identity issues and procrastinate decisions until life situations dictate their behaviour; they are unable to effectively regulate the behaviour and are confused and uncertain about themselves (Berzonsky, 1990; Soenens et al., 2005).

### **1.1. Parenting Styles**

Perceived parenting styles (PS) are among the most important social factors influencing identity formation processes (Berzonsky, 2004). The main dimensions of parental practices are demandingness (maturity demands, supervision, discipline, and willingness to confront child who disobeys) and responsiveness (the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality self-regulation and self-assertion by being supportive, attuned, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands) (Baumrind, 1991). Combining high and/or low levels of responsiveness and control, four prototypes of PS were conceptualized: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and rejecting-neglecting (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby, & Martin, 1983). The authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive: they give to the child clear standards of conduct, monitor child's behaviour but are not intrusive and restrictive; discipline is rather supportive than punitive. Authoritarian parents are demanding and directive but nonresponsive; they expect obedience from child, without explanations; they provide an orderly environment and a clear set of regulations, and monitor children activities carefully. Permissive or indulgent, nondirective parents are more responsive than demanding, non-traditional, lenient; they don't require mature behaviour, avoid confrontation, and allow self-regulation (Baumrind, 1991). Rejecting-neglecting or uninvolved, disengaged parents are neither responsive nor demanding; they are not supportive, they don't structure and monitor child behaviour, but may actively reject childrearing responsibilities (Maccoby, & Martin, 1983).

### **1.2. Relationship between Parenting Styles and Identity Formation**

Parenting and identity formation are dynamically interlinked because identity is a result of person-context interactions and transactions (Beyers, & Goosens, 2008; Luyckx, Soenens, Vansteenkiste,

Goossens, & Berzonsky, 2007). Theoretical approaches of family systems and attachment (Grotevant, & Cooper, 1985; Bowlby, 1969) endorse the contribution of parenting rearing styles to differences in identity exploration (see Smits et al. 2008 for review). In early adolescence and even in late adolescence, parents keep being an important source of socialization and social support helping adolescents to recognize and to shape their identity, even if the parenting practices changes in this stage (Beryonskz, 2004; Beyers, & Goossens, 2008; Smetana, & Rote, 2015). The breadth and depth of exploration is conditioned by the quality of parenting; nurturing parenting promotes high quality exploration and subsequent commitment (Smits et al., 2008). Adolescents with authoritative parents tend to develop information-oriented identity style, while those with authoritarian parents develop normative or diffuse-avoidant identity styles because of their fear of disappointing others and of lack of openness to ideas and feelings; diffuse-avoidant identity was related with permissive parenting styles and with lack of expressiveness in family communication (Berzonsky, 2004; Pellerone et al., 2016; see Smits et al., 2008 for review).

## **2. Problem Statement**

As we seen above, many studies explored the impact of individual and social factors on the identity formation in adolescence but, most of studies focused on late adolescence (Berzonsky, 2008; Arslan, & Ari, 2010, Soenens et al., 2005; Pellerone et al., 2016; Reis, & Youniss, 2004). Moreover, the process of identity shaping as individualisation or emancipation from origin family make sense in individualistic, not in collectivistic cultures (Parra, Oliva, & Sanchez-Queija, 2014), as is the case of Romania. This study aims to fill these gaps exploring the relationships between perceived PS and identity styles in a Romanian early adolescent sample, focusing also on gender, environment and age influences.

## **3. Research Questions**

This study aimed to explore the differences related to gender, age, urban/rural residence in adolescents' perception of PS and their identity styles and the relationships between perceived parenting and identity styles.

## **4. Research Methods**

### **4.1. Participants**

In this study participated on voluntary basis 213 students, enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> (40.4%), 7<sup>th</sup> (41.8%) and 8<sup>th</sup> (17.8%) grade in two secondary schools, from a city situated in North–East region of Romania. Participants were aged between 11 and 15 years ( $M=13.27$ ,  $SD=.88$ ); 53.5% of participants were boys and 77.9% were urban residents; 8.92 of respondents declared that their father lives elsewhere and did not reported on father parenting style.

### **4.2. Instruments**

To explore identity style, participants completed a Romanian version of the Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky, 1992, unpublished measure). The inventory required from participants to rate

28 scale items, from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). The ISI was translated into Romanian using a committee approach. Differences in translations were discussed and disagreements were resolved through consensus. Next, a translation–back translation procedure was used. Items were translated into English and an independent person matched the original and the back-translated items. Correct match was achieved for all items. Cronbach’s alpha for the information-oriented scale (11 items, e.g., “When making important decisions, I like to have as much information as possible”) was .61. Cronbach’s alpha for the normative scale (7 items, e.g., “I prefer to deal with situations in which I can rely on social norms and standards”) was .62. Cronbach’s alpha for the diffuse/avoidant scale (10 items, e.g., “When I have to make a decision, I try to wait as long as possible in order to see what will happen”) was .70. A score was calculated for each identity style, as arithmetic mean of the items scores. Although reliability was moderate to low, this is in line with previous psychometric findings (Berzonsky, 1992, 2008).

Parenting Styles Scale (PSS, Gafoor, & Kurukkan, 2014) was administered to measure perceived parental styles. The participants rated mother and father parenting style, responding to 34 items on a five point scale, from 5 to 1 as, “always true”, “almost true”, “sometimes true, sometimes false”, “almost false”, and “always false”. Half of the items measured the responsiveness and half of them explored demandingness/control. The instrument yielded six separate scores (as arithmetic mean of item scores) for each participant, namely mother’s responsiveness, father’s responsiveness, mother’s control, father’s control, parental responsiveness and parental control. Parenting styles were calculated by reference to the median of responsiveness and demandingness/control. If the scores of both responsiveness and control were above mean, the parenting style was considered authoritative; if both responsiveness and control scores were below the median, the style was categorized as neglectful; if the score was high in responsiveness and low in control, the style was considered permissive; and if the score was low in responsiveness and high in control, the style categorized as authoritarian. Medians for parenting dimensions were the following: parental responsiveness (Mdn=3.92, SD=.56), parental control (Mdn=3.32, SD=.54), maternal responsiveness (Mdn=4, SD=.57), maternal control (Mdn=3.47, SD=.53), paternal responsiveness (Mdn=3.82, SD=.73), paternal control (Mdn=3.17, SD=.68). Cronbach’ alpha for mother’ responsiveness scale (17 items) was .80, for father’ responsiveness scale (17 items) was .87. Cronbach’ alpha for mother’ demandingness scale (17 items) was .71; for father’ demandingness scale (17 items) was .80.

## 5. Findings

Our empirical data indicated that the most of participants perceived their parents as authoritative, although the distribution of responses among the four styles was quite balanced (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of responses on perceived parenting styles (PS).

		Mother PS (%)	Father PS (%)	Family PS (%)
Parenting styles	neglectful	23.9	23.9	26.3
	authoritarian	22.1	18.3	18.3
	permissive	23.0	20.2	18.8
	authoritative	31.0	28.6	27.7
	Missing		8.9	8.9

The mean scores for the identity styles were: M=3.38, SD=.56 for informative, M=3.55, SD=.72 for normative, and M=3.23, SD=.7 for diffuse.

Gender differences were found in diffuse identity style: t test for independent samples indicated that boys had significantly higher scores than girls ( $t(211)=2.62, p<.01$ ). Age differences were found in perceived maternal demandingness/control. Students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade perceived significant lower maternal control than their colleagues from 6<sup>th</sup> (MD=-.252,  $p<.05$ ) and 7<sup>th</sup> grade (MD=-.263,  $p<.05$ ). In boys' sample, significant differences were found in maternal control between 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders (MD=-.338,  $p<.05$ ), and no differences were found in girls sample. Differences were not found in identity styles and perceived parenting styles depending on rural/urban environment.

Relationships between PS and identity were explored (see Table 2). Pearson correlation indicated significant positive relationships between informative and normative styles and parenting dimensions. The informative and normative styles positively correlated with mother control ( $r=.21, p<.01$ ;  $r=.18, p<.01$ ), paternal control ( $r=.28, p<.01$ ;  $r=.20, p<.01$ ) and responsiveness ( $r=.28, p<.01$ ;  $r=.22, p<.01$ ) and with parental control ( $r=.27, p<.01$ ;  $r=.20, p<.01$ ) and responsiveness ( $r=.23, p<.01$ ;  $r=.19, p<.01$ ).

**Table 2.** Correlations between identity styles and parenting dimensions

		Informative	Normative	Diffuse	M_R	M_C	F_R	F_C	Par_C	Par_R
Informative	Pearson Correlation	1	,549**	,175*	,116	,216**	,288**	,281**	,271**	,237**
Normative	Pearson Correlation	,549**	1	,170*	,112	,186**	,220**	,207**	,208**	,193**
Diffuse	Pearson Correlation	,175*	,170*	1	,015	,073	,052	,019	,041	,034
M_R	Pearson Correlation	,116	,112	,015	1	,270**	,469**	,155*	,214**	,815**
M_C	Pearson Correlation	,216**	,186**	,073	,270**	1	,223**	,618**	,871**	,269**
F_R	Pearson Correlation	,288**	,220**	,052	,469**	,223**	1	,497**	,419**	,894**
F_C	Pearson Correlation	,281**	,207**	,019	,155*	,618**	,497**	1	,924**	,404**
Par_C	Pearson Correlation	,271**	,208**	,041	,214**	,871**	,419**	,924**	1	,383**
Par_R	Pearson Correlation	,237**	,193**	,034	,815**	,269**	,894**	,404**	,383**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

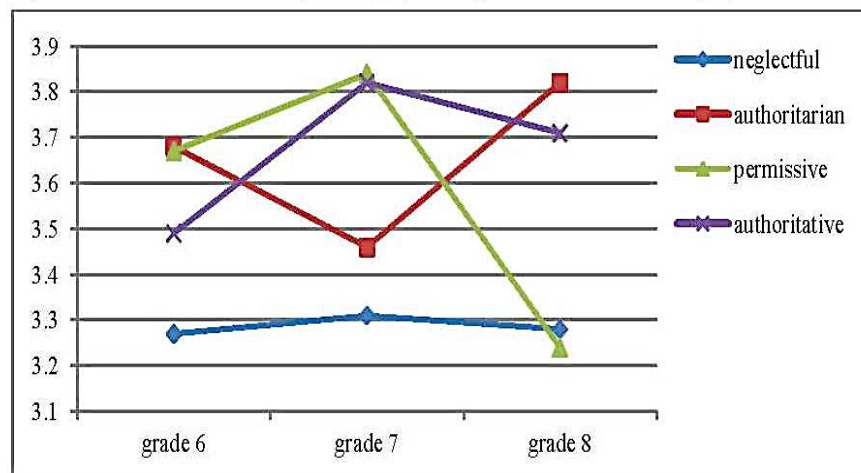
M\_R - mother responsiveness, M\_C - mother control, F\_R - father responsiveness, F\_C - father control Par\_C - parental control, Par\_R - parental responsiveness, participants reporting on mother N=213, participants reporting on father N=194.

Anova indicated a significant effect of PS ( $F=4.31, p<.01$ ) and grade ( $F=4.02, p<.05$ ) on informative identity. Tukey post-hoc test indicated that higher scores in informative style had 7<sup>th</sup> graders than 6<sup>th</sup> graders (MD=.199,  $p<.05$ ), and students with authoritative parents than students with neglectful parents (MD=.353,  $p<.005$ ). Mother ( $F=2.52, p<.05$ ) and father ( $F=2.77, p<.05$ ) parenting styles also separately influenced informative style: students with authoritative mothers (MD=.303,  $p<.05$ ) and fathers (MD=.417,  $p=0$ ) obtained higher score in informative style than those with neglectful mothers and fathers.

The normative style was influenced by gender ( $F=10.05$ ,  $p<.005$ ) and by interaction between parental style and grade ( $F=2.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Students with authoritarian parents from 7<sup>th</sup> grade obtained lower score in normative style than those from sixth and eighth grade; students with permissive parents, enrolled in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, obtained higher score in normative style than students enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The normative style was higher in 8<sup>th</sup> graders with authoritarian parents and in 7<sup>th</sup> graders with permissive parents (Fig. 1.)

Tukey post-hoc test showed that, in general sample, students with authoritative and permissive parents obtained higher scores in normative style than students with neglectful parents ( $MD=.363$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $MD=.363$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Fig. 1. Interaction effect between parenting style and grade on normative identity style

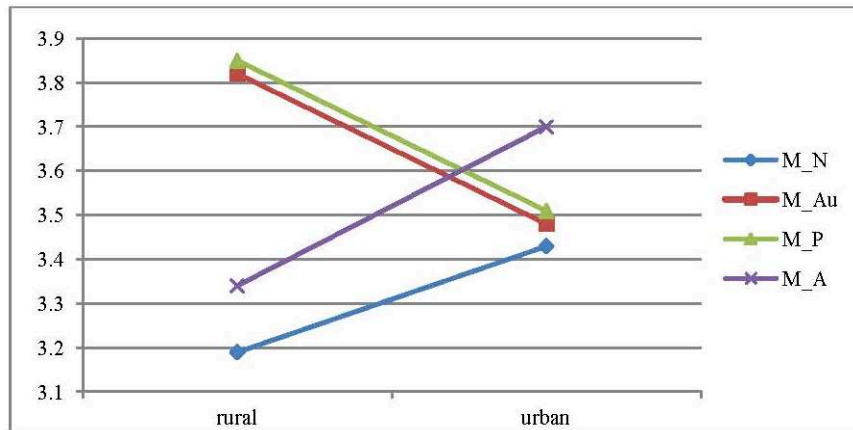


Normative style was influenced by the interaction between environment and maternal PS ( $F=2.88$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and between grade and maternal PS ( $F=2.37$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Students from rural environment with permissive and authoritarian mother PS had higher scores than their counterparts from urban environment in normative style, while students from rural environment with authoritative parents had lower score in normative style than their counterparts from urban environment (Fig. 2.).

Students with authoritarian mothers enrolled in 7<sup>th</sup> grade obtained lower score in normative style than 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, while students from 7<sup>th</sup> grade with authoritative and permissive mothers obtained higher score than students from 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade; in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, higher score obtained students with authoritarian mothers, while in 7<sup>th</sup> grade those with permissive and authoritative mothers (Fig. 3.).

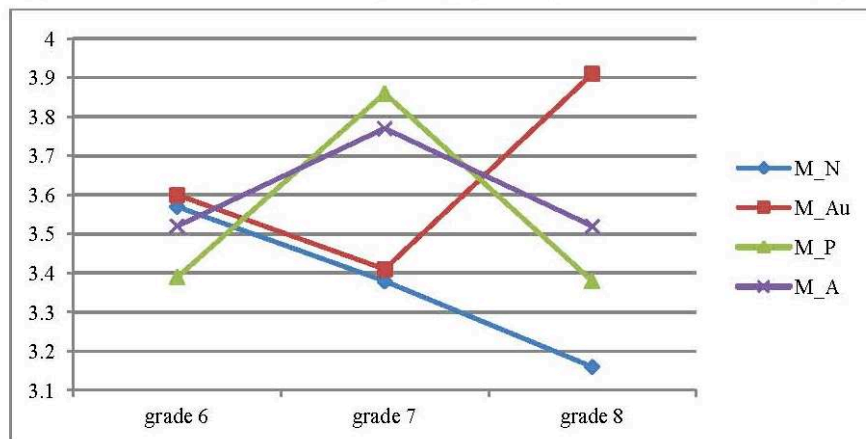
The diffuse identity style was influenced by the interaction between gender, environment and parenting style ( $F=3.1$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and by the interaction between gender, environment and father parenting style ( $F=2.66$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Fig. 2. Interaction effect between maternal parenting style and environment on the normative identity style



M\_N-neglectful mother, M\_Au-authoritarian mother, M\_P-permissive mother, M\_A-authoritative mother

Fig. 3. Interaction effect between maternal parenting style and grade on the normative identity style



M\_N-neglectful mother, M\_Au-authoritarian mother, M\_P-permissive mother, M\_A- authoritative mother

## 6. Discussion

This study explored the relationship between PS and identity styles in a sample of Romanian preadolescents. The distribution of perceptions on the four PS indicated that almost a third of participants view their parents as authoritative, but also that a quarter of them feel neglected by their parents. The relatively high ratio of preadolescents perceiving their parents as neglectful may raise problems in achievement of a positive oriented identity (Luyckx et al, 2007).

In our sample, the highest mean score in identity styles were in normative, which indicated the preference for many of our participants to conform to social rules when making decisions which; this result could be explained through collectivistic cultural background and through participants' developmental stage (Pellerone et al., 2016). The lowest mean score was in diffuse identity; boys obtained significant higher score than girls in this style, which is in line with other earlier findings (Soenens, et al., 2005; Berzonsky, 1992). 7<sup>th</sup> graders had higher scores in informative style than 6<sup>th</sup> graders, which suggests that this style gain greater importance with age, confirming previous findings

(Berzonsky, 2008), but this trend wasn't maintained in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which is a stage where students have to make important choices for their educational and career orientation.

Perception on maternal control was dynamic. In general sample and in boys, older students perceived less maternal control than their younger colleagues. As Smetana & Rote (2015) indicated, the maternal control on the adolescent boys declines more sharply, because of lower willingness to discuss private aspects with their mothers, and because of fear of parental disapproval.

In our sample, higher scores in informative style obtained students with authoritative parents than students with neglectful parents; higher normative style showed students with permissive and authoritarian parents than those with neglectful parents. Respondents from rural area with authoritarian and permissive mothers had higher scores in normative style than respondents from urban settings, which indicate maybe the more restricted access to information of preadolescents from rural and more submissive attitude in their relationships with parents. Early adolescents shape their identity relying both on autonomous processing of information and on social norms imposed by parents; as Parra et al. (2015) highlighted, in high cohesive families where the relationships with parents are very close, the emotional autonomy is not encouraged, and the normative style tend to develop more. Our findings may be explained also by the need of adolescents from collectivistic cultures to meet parental and social expectations (Pellerone et al., 2016). In our sample the obedience to rules was higher when preadolescents perceived higher responsiveness or higher control, and not equilibrium between them.

## 7. Conclusions

Although these results can't be generalized because of relatively small number of participants, however they endorse the importance of authoritative parenting style and the role of fathers in assisting early adolescents to shape information-oriented identities. Also, these findings signal the need of more attentive preoccupation of parents to balance responsiveness and control in conducting socialization processes. The high scores in normative style could depict just a temporary early phase in the identity development, or could signal a persisting tendency, to rely own identity decisions on social norms and expectations rather than on exploring and processing relevant information. Facilitating in school the access to relevant information and autonomous decision making processes can encourage the information identity style development.

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