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PERSONALITY TRAITS OF PARENTS AND PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

The present study of Moscow siblings shows the influence of parental personality traits on parent-child relationships. The study involves 618 parents from two-child families (N=618). The average age of the fathers is 45.33 years old, and the average age of the mothers is 43.20 years old. All the families live in Moscow or in the Moscow region. We use the following methods to assess the indicators of a parent's personality: the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI), the questionnaire gauging locus of control, and the parent-child interaction questionnaire identifying the features of parent-child relationships. The following parent-child relationship parameters are considered: parental positive relation, parental control, parental connivance, parental consistency and confidence between the parent and the child. Hierarchical regression analysis is carried out to predict which of parents' traits have an effect on parent-child relationships. The main features of personality affecting the nature of relationship with the child are neuroticism and locus of control. Parental neuroticism is associated with positive attitude in the relations with the child, connivance and consistency in parenting. Locus of control is related to positivity in relationships, paternal connivance and maternal control. Extraversion does not reveal any interactions with the nature of parent-child relationships. Paternal and maternal models show similarities in most of the parameters. Differences are observed only for parental control. The child's age is the main predictor in the paternal model whereas in the maternal one, the major influence is exerted by maternal locus of control in addition to age.

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1. Introduction

Parental style of child rearing is associated with the influence of many different factors, which include the child's individual characteristics, socio-demographic parameters of a family (in particular, family history, religiosity, parents' age and education, etc.) and, finally, parents' personality characteristics. The latter factor is decisive in moulding the parental style of child rearing (Belsky, Barends, 2002; Kendler et al., 1997).

There has been an enormous amount of experimental data accumulated with regard to the relationship between parental personality traits and the characteristics of parenting. High extraversion and agreeableness are associated with a more harmonious, emotionally warm and responsible attitude toward a child (Belsky et al, 1995; Clark et al., 2000). Conversely, a high level of neuroticism and emotional instability reveals a relation with parental super-control, authoritarianism and a low level of warmth (Kendler et al., 1997; Belsky et al, 1995; Huver et al., 2010).

Kendler's study shows that parental warmth is especially associated with the personality traits of parents and their children, as well as the specific features of the family environment. (Kendler et al., 1997) whereas authoritarianism tends to be characterized by demographic parameters: parents' age and education, religiosity, etc.

As for the impact of parents' personality traits, neuroticism has proved to be decisive in the formation of a certain parenting style. Its influence is traced in all of the three parameters of the parenting style (all the more so in respect to guardianship and custodianship). Emotionally unstable parents show on average a lower level of warmth and a higher level of control and authoritarianism towards their children.

The age of parents and children is found to have effect on the relationship between personality traits and parental relation. In particular, the older parents and children are, the lower the level of interconnection is between neuroticism and warmth, and agreeableness and warmth (Prinz et al., 2009).

Parents' personality traits may have a different effect on the styles of parental relation depending on the child's individual features (Clark et al., 2000; Coplan et al., 2009). So, in Clark's studies, mothers with a high level of extraversion are inclined to exercise extra control over children with a high level of negative emotions. Combined with a low level of negative emotional reactions in a child, high maternal extraversion is conversely associated with lower control (Clark et al., 2000).

The study of the relationship between parental attitudes, parental personality traits, and the specifics of a child's temperament shows that the domineering parental relation is significantly associated with maternal neuroticism and child shyness (Coplan et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that the above studies convincingly demonstrate the importance of the interaction between the characteristics of parental personality traits and the specific features of the child's temperament in developing a certain style of parental relation towards the child.

One should mention that most of the papers deal with either parental relation on the whole (the analysis uses the assessments of both parents), or only the maternal one.

Purely paternal relation toward children is a relatively rare object of researchers' interest. There is evidence that the nature of the relationship between the parental traits and the nature of the parent relation varies in mothers and fathers (Belsky, 1995).

2. Problem Statement

The present study investigated the influence of parents' personality on specific features of parent-child relationships. We considered extraversion and neuroticism as the main predictors of parental relation with a child. We made an assumption that a high level of neuroticism would be associated with parental control, and negativity in relationships, whereas a high level of extraversion would have much to do with a positive and more trusting relationship.

We used locus of control as an additional variable in the analysis. Locus of control was a bipolar parameter. On the one pole (internality) there were people who were confident of being able to control events that happened to them, that everything that happened to them depended on their personality traits. On the other pole (externality) there were people who believed that their success and failure had to do with external factors, such as fate, luck, influential people, etc.

Studies of the connection between parental locus of control and the parental style of upbringing were few and far between. Thus, it was shown that the parental external locus of control was associated with the aptitude to use violence (in particular, corporal punishment) against children (Bugental et al., 1989). A later study examining the influence of the parental style of child rearing on the emergence of such behavioural problems in pre-school children as a propensity for aggression and bullying, showed that the parental locus of control was associated with parental inconsistency and a predilection for punishing children. Parents with the external locus of control were less consistent in respect to their children and made a greater use of punishments (Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2007).

We proceeded from the assumption that parents with the internal locus of control were likely to show more consideration and responsibility in dealing with their child, to demonstrate less directive behaviour based on an active and open dialogue with the child.

3. Research Questions

- 1) Which of parents' personality traits influence the nature of parent-child relationship?
- 2) Does the nature of interaction between maternal and paternal personality traits differ from the parenting style?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the relationship between the parameters of parental (both paternal and maternal) relations and parents' personality traits.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Subjects

The study involved 309 two-child families. The fathers' age averaged 45,33 years, the standard deviation being 5,20. The age of the mothers averaged 43,20 years with the standard deviation being 4,34. The average age of elder children was 18,03, the standard deviation being 2,31. The average age of younger children was 14,48 years with the standard deviation being 2,46. The age difference between the children did not exceed 7 years, the average difference being 3,58 years.

5.2. Techniques

To assess the indicators of the parents' personality traits, we used the following methods:

The Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) adapted by Rusalov (1992).

The questionnaire gauging locus of control (Bazhin et al., 1993).

To diagnose the specific features of parent-child relationships, we used the Parent-child Interaction Questionnaire (Markovskaya, 2006).

Earlier this questionnaire was factorized on our sample (Alekseeva & Kozlova, 2010). Factorization revealed the following parameters of parental relation: parental positive relation, parental control, parental connivance, parental consistency and confidence between parent and child.

To analyze the data, we used the SPSS 17.0 statistical software package.

6. Findings

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to predict which of the parents' characteristics would influence the nature of parent-child relations. At the first stage, the following social demographic characteristics were used as independent variables: siblings' age, gender and birth order and the age of their parents at the time of the study. At the second stage, these variables were complemented with characteristics of the parents' personality traits: Eysenck inventory on the extraversion and neuroticism scale and the figures on the locus of control scale.

6.1. Parental Positive Relation

Table 1 presents hierarchical regression models in which the paternal and maternal positive relations to the child is used as dependent variables.

The results of the analysis demonstrate similarity between the paternal and maternal regression models. Both the model involving paternal traits and the one that includes maternal traits describe an approximately equal percentage of variation. The influence of socio-demographic factors on the positive relation to a child in both models is immaterial. The significant predictors include parental neuroticism and locus of control.

Table 01. Regression models for the Positive Relation scale

Predictor	Paternal personality traits			Maternal personality traits		
	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Model 1	.03	.319		.012	1.342	
^a Control variables						
Model 2	.64	10.116**		.068	10.807**	
Parental age			.083			-.062
Child age			-.078			.012
Birth order			-.071			-.028
Child gender			.024			.034
Parental extraversion			.064			.052
Parental neuroticism			-.137*			-.118*
Parental locus of control			.173**			.176**
<i>Total R²</i>	.067			.079		

^aControl variables included parental age, child age, child gender, birth order. * p < .05;** p < .01

6.2. Parental Control

The paternal and maternal regression models, in which parental control appears as a dependent variable, differ from one another. The results of regression analysis using the father's traits as predictors reveal the significant importance of the original model. The predictor that greatly influences paternal control is child age. The younger a child is the greater control his father has over it. The model with the addition of characteristics of the father's personality traits does not reach the level of significance.

Regression analysis which included maternal characteristics, revealed the significance of both the first and second models. Maternal control is affected not only by child age, but also by the indicator of maternal internality.

Mothers with an external locus of control are more likely to control their children.

Table 02. Regression models for the Parental Control scale

Predictor	Paternal personality traits			Maternal personality traits		
	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Model 1	.085	10.378**		.115	14.481**	
^a Control variables						
Model 2	.006	.959		.031	5.308**	
Parental age			.012		-.061	
Child age			-.244**		-.284**	
Birth order			.071		.073	
Child gender			-.043		.020	
Parental extraversion			.054		-.018	
Parental neuroticism			.058		.066	
Parental locus of control			.012		-.137**	
<i>Total R²</i>	.091			.146		

^aControl variables included parental age, child age, child gender, birth order. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

6.3. Parental Connivance

The use of parental connivance in the hierarchical regression models as a dependent variable has revealed multiple impacts on this characteristic by both family parameters (birth order, child age and child gender), and parental personality traits. Significant predictors of the paternal model on the first level include child age, birth order and gender. Those on the level that involves psychological characteristics include paternal neuroticism and locus of control. In the maternal model, fewer significant predictors are revealed: among the socio-demographic characteristics it is child age and birth order. Maternal neuroticism is a significant predictor among the characteristics of the personality sphere.

Table 03. Regression models for the Parental Connivance scale

Predictor	Paternal personality traits			Maternal personality traits		
	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Model 1	.045	5.249**		.042	4.900**	
^a Control variables						
Model 2	.061	10.117**		.024	3.802**	
Parental age			-.089		-.012	
Child age			.204**		.216**	
Birth order			.133*		.195**	
Child gender			.135*		.059	
Parental extraversion			.004		-.006	
Parental neuroticism			.151**		.126*	
Parental locus of control			-.171**		-.054	
<i>Total R²</i>	.106			.066		

^aControl variables include parental age, child age, child gender, birth order. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

6.4. Parental Consistency

The primary paternal and maternal models which include socio-demographic characteristics do not have a significant impact on the indicators of parental consistency in child rearing. The hierarchical models with the inclusion of psychological characteristics are significant and differ considerably from the primary ones. Out of the paternal and maternal personality traits neuroticism exerts the greatest influence on inconsistent parental behaviour. The more neurotic parents are the more inconsistent their attitude towards their child is.

Table 04. Regression models for the Parental Consistency scale

Predictor	Paternal personality traits			Maternal personality traits		
	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Model 1	.007	.822		.008	.856	
^a Control variables						
Model 2	.109	18.123**		.056	8.749**	
Parental age			-.057			.040
Child age			-.011			-.110
Birth order			-.004			-.046
Child gender			.062			.050
Parental extraversion			.017			.075
Parental neuroticism			.338**			.198**
Parental locus of control			.017			-.083
<i>Total R²</i>	.116			0.063		

^aControl variables included parental age, child age, child gender, birth order.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

6.5. Confidence between parent and child

As is in the case of parental consistency a relationship of trust between parent and child, based on the hierarchical regression data, is not related to birth order, child age or gender. The main characteristic that exerts influence is parental locus of control, which is positively related to the level of confidence between parent and child.

Table 05. Regression models for the scale of confidence between the parent and the child

Predictor	Paternal personality traits			Maternal personality traits		
	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Model 1	.004	.4		.015	1.716	
^a Control variables						
Model 2	.075	12.034**		.078	12.610**	
Parental age			.034			-.034
Child age			-.067			-.046
Birth order			-.026			.007
Child gender			.019			.072
Parental extraversion			.044			.007
Parental neuroticism			-.043			-.050
Parental locus of control			.258**			.259**
<i>Total R²</i>	.079			.093		

^aControl variables include parental age, child age, child gender, birth order.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

7. Conclusion

The use of hierarchical regression analysis reveals that parents' personality traits are important predictors of parent-child relationships. The main characteristics of personality affecting the nature of relationship with the child are neuroticism and locus of control. Parental neuroticism is associated with a positive attitude towards the child, connivance and consistency in the child's rearing. Locus of control is associated with positivity in relationships, paternal connivance and maternal control.

A great number of previous studies have shown a positive connection between parental neuroticism and parental control (Kendler et al., 1997; Coplan et al., 2009; Huver et al., 2010). In our study, parental neuroticism reveals no interconnection with parental control.

Extraversion does not reveal any connection with the nature of parent-child relations. Although many studies find extraversion to be associated with positivity in relations (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003, Prinzie et al., 2009); this has not been found in our study. The social-demographic parameters reveal the significance of the child's age for such characteristics as parental control and connivance. Parental connivance also has much to do with the child's gender and birth order.

It is noteworthy that the paternal and maternal models show similarities in most parameters. The only one that is found to differ is parental control. The child's age is the main predictor in the paternal model whereas in the maternal model, apart from age the maternal locus of control is the most influential.

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