

PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLES AND SCHOOL ANXIETY IN PREADOLESCENTS

Simona Butnaru¹

Abstract: The goal of this study was to test the relationship between perceived authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and school anxiety (anxiety about aggression, about social evaluation and about school failure). A Romanian sample of 182 students (93 girls), enrolled in 5th to 8th grade in two secondary schools from rural areas, completed self-report measures assessing school anxiety and perception of parenting styles. Results indicated a predominance of authoritative parenting style and a moderate level of school anxiety. The highest mean score in school anxiety was in school failure. Gender differences were found in school anxiety, but not in parenting styles. Grade level differences were found in anxiety about school failure and in perceived parenting styles. Preadolescents whose parents expressed prevailing authoritarian and permissive styles had higher levels of school anxiety. Gender differences were found for the relationship between parenting styles and school anxiety. Implications of results in parental education field are discussed.

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Introduction

Parenting style is a critical component of parent–child interaction and has interested a large number of researchers, giving his impact on children's development (Ballash, Leyfer, Buckley, & Woodruff-Borden, 2006; Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007). Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1991) introduced the concept of the parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive) on the bases of commitment and balance of demandingness and responsiveness in the interactions between parents and child. Responsiveness consists of warmth, loving behavior, and receptivity to child needs; demandingness reflects controlling parenting practices oriented to setting limits and respect of rules. Authoritative parents are highly demanding and highly responsive, authoritarian parents are highly demanding, but not responsive, while permissive parents are highly responsive, but not demanding (Baumrind, 1991).

Parents with the authoritative style attempt to direct the child's activities in a rational manner; they encourage conversations, share the reasoning behind the rules with the child, and solicit his objections when he refuses to conform (Baumrind, 1966). Authoritative parents value both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity (Baumrind, 1967); they therefore exert firm control, enforce their own perspective as adults, but also recognize the child's interests. The authoritative parents affirm the child's present qualities, but also set standards for future conduct. They use reason, power and shaping by reinforcement to achieve their objectives, and do not base their decisions on group consensus or the child's desires, but also do not regard themselves as infallible (Baumrind, 1967).

The authoritarian parents shape, control, and evaluate behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a standard set of conduct; they value obedience and favor forceful measures to curb self-will at points where the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what they think is correct conduct; they restrict child autonomy; and they do not encourage conversations, believing that the child should accept their word for what is right (Baumrind, 1966).

The permissive parents behave in a non-punitive, and acceptant manner; they consult with the child and give explanations for family rules; they make few demands for household responsibility and orderly behavior; they present themselves to the child as a resource to use as he wishes, not as active agents responsible for shaping his future behavior; they allow the child to regulate his own activities as much as possible, avoid the exercise of control, and do not encourage him to obey externally defined standards; and they use reason and manipulation, but not overt power to accomplish their ends (Baumrind, 1966).

¹ Simona Butnaru, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, scraciun@uaic.ro

Parenting style and school anxiety

School anxiety can be viewed as a response pattern to school-related stressors, which include physiological, cognitive and behavioral symptoms (Garcia-Fernandez, Ingles, Marzo, & Martinez-Monteagudo, 2014; Puklek Levpuscek, Ingles, Marzo, & Garcia-Fernandez, 2015). These authors suggest that typical stressors in school settings are aggressions, social evaluation and school failure. School anxiety can generate poorer learning results (Chapell & Overton, 1998), poorer performance in evaluative situations (Sideridis & Kafetsios, 2008) and grade retention (King, Ollendick, & Prins, 2000). School anxiety is also associated with psychosomatic symptoms, affecting students' wellbeing and health (King et al., 2000; Von Gontard, Moritz, Thome-Granz, & Equit, 2015). Girls express higher levels of anxiety than boys (Letcher, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2012).

There is a large body of research that associates anxiety with family causes, such as over-control, over-protection, negativity, non-response and rejection (Ballash et al., 2006; Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; Bruggen, Stams, & Bogels, 2008; Letcher et al., 2012; McLeod et al., 2007; Mellon & Moutavelis, 2011; Sagar & Lavalle, 2010). Parents of anxious children are over-controlling, express excessive regulation of children's activities and/or routines, high levels of parental vigilance and intrusion, and discourage independent problem-solving (Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006); parents are also over-protective and concerned (Pereira, Barros, Mendonc, & Muris, 2014). Consistent discipline and parental monitoring is associated with a decrease of anxiety (Jafari, Baharudin, & Archer, 2016).

A less consistent relationship was found between parental rejection and child anxiety (Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; Hiebert-Murphy et al., 2011; McLeod et al., 2007), although there are studies endorsing the finding that systematic hostility and negative feedback from parents may contribute to a conception that the social environment is threatening (Jafari et al., 2016; Krohne & Hock, 1991). Niditch and Varela (2012) found that rejection from the mother predicts the increase of anxiety in adolescents, while mother control and father rejection and control do not have a significant effect.

There are studies that indicate that the effect on anxiety is more powerful when over-control is associated with negativity in parenting style. Sagar and Lavalle (2010) showed that fear of failure was predicted in adolescent athletes (ages 13–14 years) by parental punitive behavior, controlling behavior, and high expectations for achievement. Also, Mellon and Moutavelis (2011) indicated that in 9 to 12 years old students, the highest scores of generalized anxiety were obtained from adolescents with both aversive controlling and non-responsive parents.

Reduction of anxiety is facilitated by a combination of parental control with warmth and acceptance in the parent-child relationship. Ajilchi, Kargar, and Ghoreishi (2013) found that children enrolled in grades 4 and 5 whose mothers use an authoritative (both demanding and responsive) parenting style would experience less anxiety. Also, Chapell and Overton (1998) showed that adolescents in grades 6, 10, and 12 with authoritative parents demonstrated lower test anxiety than adolescents with non-authoritative parents. Parenting practices are influenced by psychosocial and cultural variables. Moore and colleagues (2004) showed that mothers are prone to express more warmth if their children are anxious.

Anli and Karsli (2010) suggested that parenting style differs by parents' gender: mothers are generally prone to be more controlling and overprotective, whereas fathers are perceived as being more rejecting. Cultural differences between western and non-western societies were documented.

Gungor and Bornstein (2010) indicated that in Belgian students, the controlling parenting style was associated with increasing anxiety, while in a Turkish group, the control and autonomy restriction from parents was viewed as a measure for building group cohesion.

Purpose of the study

Because the relationship between parenting style and school anxiety is culturally specific and in the Romanian population there is a lack of studies relating to these variables, the aim of this research was to explore the relationship between parenting styles and school anxiety in Romanian preadolescents.

Method

Participants

182 students (51.1% girls) enrolled in two secondary schools situated in rural areas voluntarily participated in this research. The mean age was 12.79 years, $SD = 1.44$. There were 51 students enrolled in grade 5 ($M = 11.23$ years), 36 in grade 6 ($M = 12.16$ years), 54 in grade 7 ($M = 13.4$ years); and 41 in grade 8 ($M = 14.46$ years).

Instruments

School anxiety was measured with a 14 items instrument, adapted from the School Anxiety Inventory – Short Version (Garcia-Fernandez et al., 2014). The instrument includes three sub-scales: anxiety about aggression in school (SA) with five items (e.g. “If people treat me with contempt or with an air of superiority”), anxiety about social evaluation (SE) with five items (e.g. “If I read aloud in front of the class”), and anxiety about school failure (SF) with four items (e.g. “If I get bad marks”). Each item was ranked from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very strong). Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale was .64. For the sub-scales, alphas were .68 for anxiety about SA, .77 for SE anxiety and .59 for SF anxiety. The total score for school anxiety was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the three sub-scale scores.

A shortened version of Parenting styles questionnaire (Robinson, Mandleco, Frost Olsen & Hart, 1995), with 33 items, was used to measure parenting styles – authoritative (A) with 13 items; e.g. “Parents are aware of my problems or concerns in school”, „Parents give me reasons why rules should be obeyed”; authoritarian (Au) with 12 items, e.g. “Yell or shout when I misbehave”, „Spank me when I’m disobedient”; and permissive (P) with 8 items, e.g. “Parents state punishments for me and do not actually do them”, „Parents are afraid that if they discipline me for misbehavior, I will do not like them”. The instrument is a four point scale, each item being appreciated from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were: .74 for authoritative parenting scale, .72 for authoritarian parenting scale, and .50 for permissive parenting scale.

Procedure

Secondary school students filled in both instruments in one step, on voluntary base, during school program.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the analyzed variables. The school anxiety scores were generally low, under the half of scale ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .40$), with the highest score being in school failure ($M = 2.88$, $SD = .59$). The predominant parenting style was the authoritative ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .45$), while the authoritarian ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .40$) and the permissive styles ($M = 1.65$, $SD = .35$) were perceived as less expressed by parents. Results indicated gender and grade differences in school anxiety. Girls obtained higher scores than boys in SA ($t(180) = -3.29$, $p = .001$), in SF ($t(180) = -2.86$, $p = .005$), and also in general school anxiety ($t(180) = -3.05$, $p < .005$). The total score for school anxiety was higher in 6th graders ($M = 3.1222$, $SD = .54778$) and in 8th graders ($M = 3.0244$, $SD = .50238$). From all dimensions of school anxiety, SF had significant variations upon grade level ($F(3, 178) = 3.06$, $p < .05$). 6th graders obtained significantly higher scores in SF than 5th graders ($MD = .4007$, $p = .01$) and 7th graders ($MD = .3481$, $p < .05$).

Parenting styles were differently perceived by grade level: ANOVA results were $F(3, 178) = 3.05$, $p < .05$ for A, $F(3, 178) = 4.25$, $p < .01$ for Au, and $F(3, 178) = 3.28$, $p < .05$ for P style. Games-Howell post-hoc tests indicated that 8th graders perceived their parents as more permissive than 5th graders ($MD = .2309$, $p < .05$), more authoritarian than 5th graders ($MD = .2498$, $p < .05$), and 7th graders ($MD = .2509$, $p < .05$) and less authoritative than 7th graders ($MD = -.2589$, $p = .05$).

The relationship between the general score in school anxiety and parenting styles was documented by the data (Table 2). SE, SF and AT positively correlated with Au ($r = .19$, $p < .05$, $r = .18$, $p < .05$, $r = .234$, $p < .01$) and P parenting styles ($r = .173$, $p < .05$, $r = .180$, $p < .05$, $r = .235$, $p < .01$), but not with A style. SE negatively correlated with A style ($r = -.242$, $p < .01$). The relationship between anxiety

and parenting styles was different upon gender: AT correlated positively with Au ($r=.36$, $p<.01$) and with P ($r=.335$, $p<.01$) in boys, but not in girls, and negatively correlated with A style in girls ($r=-.231$, $p<.01$).

Table 1: Means and SD in school anxiety and parenting styles by grade								
Grade		SA	SE	SF	AT	A	Au	P
5	Mean	2.2353	1.7216	2.7216	2.2261	3.3426	1.7157	1.5468
	Std. Deviation	.75228	.68478	.61978	.45000	.40902	.35985	.31019
6	Mean	2.2944	1.6611	3.1222	2.3593	3.2903	1.8565	1.6543
	Std. Deviation	.70344	.68087	.54778	.31321	.45138	.36711	.35712
7	Mean	2.0593	1.8000	2.7741	2.2111	3.3630	1.7145	1.6728
	Std. Deviation	.64502	.58018	.61803	.38259	.43646	.36615	.36592
8	Mean	2.3512	1.8927	3.0244	2.4228	3.1041	1.9654	1.7778
	Std. Deviation	.51726	.58155	.50238	.40431	.50366	.48804	.38249
Total	Mean	2.2209	1.7714	2.8846	2.2923	3.2846	1.7995	1.6575
	Std. Deviation	.66764	.63181	.59879	.40230	.45566	.40589	.35997
5th grade: N=51; 6th grade: N=36; 7th grade: N=54; 8th grade: N=41; total sample: N=182; SA=school aggression, SE=social evaluation; SF=school failure; AT=anxiety total; A= authoritative parenting style; Au=authoritarian parenting style; P= permissive parenting style, N=182 students (93 girls; 89 boys).								
Source: Author								

Table 2: Correlations between parenting styles and school anxiety (above diagonal are boys/girls coefficients, below diagonal are general coefficients)							
	SA	SE	SF	AT	A	Au	P
SA	1	-.131/- .090	.200/.597* *	.662**/.722**	.048 /-.058	.176/.046	.117/.116
SE	-.100	1	-.164/.153	.404**/.534**	-.133 /- .344**	.244*/.148	.234*/.11 5
SF	.421**	.001	1	.610**/.821**	-.010/-0.059	.188/.230*	.217*/.17 1
AT	.710**	.469**	.729**	1	-.054/- .231*	.360**/.200	.335**/.1 93
A	.002	-.242**	-.026	-.139	1	-.368**/- .461**	-.271*/- .257*
Au	.082	.190*	.180*	.234**	-.415**	1	.513**/.2 30*
P	.099	.173*	.180*	.235**	-.265**	.385**	1
Gender	.239**	.029	.209**	.251**	.031	-.107	-.056
SA=school aggression, SE=social evaluation; SF=school failure; AT=anxiety total; A= authoritative parenting style; Au=authoritarian parenting style; P= permissive parenting style, N=182 students (93 girls; 89 boys), gender: 1= masculine, 2=feminine, **. $P<.01$; *. $p<.05$.							
Source: Author							

SF positively correlated with Au in girls ($r=.23$, $p<.01$), while in boys' SF correlated with P ($r=.217$, $p<.01$). SE correlated positively with Au ($r=.244$, $p<.05$) and P ($r=.217$, $p<.05$) in boys, but negatively with A style in girls ($r=-.344$, $p<.01$).

Correlations between school anxiety and its dimensions indicated a strong positive association with SF for both boys ($r=.610$, $p<.01$) and girls ($r=.821$, $p<.01$). Correlations between parenting styles indicated positive association of Au with P style, stronger in boys ($r=.513$, $p<.01$), and a negative association of A style with Au ($r=-.368$, $p<.01$ for boys, and $r=-.461$, $p<.05$ for girls) and with P style ($r=-.271$, $p<.05$ for boys, and $r=-.257$, $p<.05$ for girls).

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between parenting styles and school anxiety in preadolescents. The most important dimension of school anxiety was anxiety about school failure. Girls showed higher levels of school anxiety than boys, as found in previous research (Letcher, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2012). 6th graders express a higher level of anxiety about school failure than their 5th and 7th grade colleagues. The increase of anxiety in this grade can be explained by increasing subject complexity and of learning struggles, and by the decrease of school achievement (Butnaru & Gherasim, 2014).

Participants declared that their parents express mostly an authoritative parenting style. Unlike other studies that suggest that boys perceive higher control and rejection from their parents (Niditch & Varela, 2012), our results do not indicate gender differences in perception of parenting styles, but indicated grade level differences. 8th graders perceived their parents as more authoritarian and more permissive than the 5th and 7th graders and less authoritative than 7th graders. Although authoritarian and permissive styles are opposite, in boys we founded a strong correlation between these styles, which confirms other results indicating that adolescent boys can experience simultaneously over-control, rejection and overprotection from their parents (Anli & Karsli, 2010).

In our sample, school anxiety was associated with parenting style. Higher anxiety was expressed in students perceiving higher authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. This trend was stronger in boys, which confirms research indicating that over-controlling, rejecting, over-protective, and concerned parenting is associated with higher anxiety (Ballash et al., 2006; Bogels et al., 2006; Gungor & Bornstein, 2010; Mellon & Moutavelis, 2011). The authoritative parenting style correlated only with anxiety about social evaluation in general, but in girls, students perceiving authoritative parenting style also had lower school anxiety in general, which confirm previous results indicating the role of warmth, consistent discipline and monitoring in reducing anxiety (Ajilchi, 2013; Chapell & Overton, 1998; Jafari et al., 2016;).

This study endorses the relevance of parenting styles for school anxiety and the necessity to encourage parents to express less over-controlling, rejecting, over-protecting behavior, and to encourage warm, democratic, and rational parenting practices. The high level of anxiety about school failure, especially in 6th and 8th graders, requires both teachers and parents to give more support to students in their learning efforts when new complex and challenging subjects are introduced in school curriculum or before the exams for admission to high school.

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