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Child temperament and mother's personality as a predictors of maternal relation to child

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Abstract

This article investigates the role of child temperament and mother's personality in maternal relation to child. Basing on theoretical ideas and empirical evidences we proposed that parental personality is associated with parenting directly but this association also interacts with child temperament. Mother's (N=110) completed EPI to assess extraversion and neuroticism. Mother's relation to child was assessed with the Parent-child interaction questionnaire on five subscales: Positive relation to child, Control, Mildness, Consistency and Confidence. Child temperament was rated by mothers using the Carey Temperament Questionnaire. According to the results obtained a mother's neuroticism and extraversion don't predict the relation to child. Child temperament plays a more important role: Adaptability and Quality of mood are predictors for most mother's relations to child characteristics. Together Threshold of responsiveness and Distractibility predict mother's Control. Results of this study are generally consistent with those outlining the influence of infant temperament on parent relation to child.

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Keywords: Child temperament; Parent personality; Relation to child.

1. Introduction

The present study aims to evaluate the role of individual child characteristics, namely temperament, which may contribute to the relationship between mother and child. Temperament is defined as inherent individual differences in self-regulation or in attentional, emotional, and motor reactivity [1] and, according to Thomas and Chess [2] expresses itself in behavioral responses across contexts. Researchers have identified a wide range of temperament dimensions, the most attention being given to the construct of "difficult" temperament. Children who withdraw from situations by demonstrate slow adaptability; manifesting high negative affect (e.g., fear, anger), high intensity of response, and dysrhythmicity (i.e., irregularity in biological functions) are characterized as possessing a difficult temperament, whereas children without these characteristics are characterized as having an easy temperament [2, 3]. According to some researchers, difficult temperament is more likely to elicit lower quality parenting from mothers [e.g., 4].

Belsky's [5] process model, along with others [e.g., 6], suggests that child temperament may play an important role in dictating parental behavior. In general, empirical work has found that interactions between temperament

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and aspects of the child or parent's social environment are most predictive of developmental outcomes [3, 7, 8, 9].

Parenting is considered to be determined by three factors, namely parental personality, the child's individual characteristics, and contextual sources of stress and support. Parental personality is the most important determinant of parenting among others [10]. The last three decades have seen many associations found between personality and parenting of children [11, 12, 13, 14]. These studies examined the direct link between parental personality and parenting. So it was established that Neuroticism was negatively associated with parental negative control, whereas openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively correlated with positive control. Besides, extraversion was associated with negative control, on the one hand, [e.g., 4], and in contrast with more warmth and supportive behavior, on the other [e.g., 15].

Based on Belsky's model we can propose that parental personality is associated with parenting directly but this association also interacts with such child characteristics as temperament. While parent's personality predisposes parents to certain behaviors, outcomes are dependent on many factors, including the child's temperament. In other words, certain child temperament moderates the relationship between mother's personality and her relation with her child.

Therefore, in the present study we examined how the personality of the mothers and the temperament of their child contribute to their relationship.

2. Methods

Participants.

The subjects for this study were 170 mothers aged 22-51 ($M = 35.10$; $SD = 6.53$) 82% were married, 55% had higher education. All of them live in the city of Perm. All mothers have one child aged 5- 7 years ($M = 5.41$; $SD = .58$), all of the children attend kindergarten, 51% are boys. The questionnaires were administered at one of the monthly parent meetings. The participants were informed of the nature of the study and completed the questionnaires (in the order indicated below) and provided their demographic details. After completion, the participants were debriefed and thanked.

Measures.

Child temperament. Mothers rated infant temperament using the Carey Temperament Questionnaire [16]. This instrument is based on the conceptualization of temperament developed by Thomas, and Chess [2]. It consists of 95 items that describe specific infant behaviors. Each item is rated by the mother on a 6-point scale ranging from "almost never" (1) to "almost always" (6), describing the frequency with which the particular behavior is exhibited by her child. These items are then summed to obtain a score for the infant on each of the following nine temperamental dimensions: Activity, Rhythmicity, Approach-withdrawal, Adaptability, Intensity of reaction, Quality of mood, Attention span and persistence, Distractibility and Threshold of responsiveness. The internal consistencies of the subscales vary from $\alpha = .60$ for Adaptability to $\alpha = .82$ for Approach-withdrawal. Temperament dimensions scores range from 0 to 6, lower values refer to positive characteristics of temperament (ex. Adaptivity = 2 — means easy adaptation of child to a new situation).

Mother's personality. Mothers completed the Eysenck Personality Inventory [17], which consisted of 24 items designed to measure extraversion and 24 items designed to measure neuroticism. Extraversion encompasses lower order traits such as sociability, assertiveness, liveliness, and optimism. The Neuroticism scale includes characteristics such as anxiety, depression, guilt, shyness, moodiness, and emotionality. Alphas for the Neuroticism and extraversion scales were .71 and .78 respectively.

Relation to child. Mother's relation to child was assessed with the "Parent-child interaction" questionnaire developed by Markovskaya I.M. [18]. The instrument consists of 60 items to be answered on a 5-point scale and are scored on five subscales: Positive relation to child ($\alpha = .60$), Control ($\alpha = .62$), Mildness ($\alpha = .40$), Consistency ($\alpha = .66$) and Confidence ($\alpha = .65$). The subscale scores range from 0 to 5. Positive relation to child is characterized the degree of parental satisfaction with the relationship and the level of child acceptance. Control (as opposed to Autonomy) reflects the view of parents about the extent of their intervention in the child's life, the need to control his actions and deeds. Mildness reflects the parental desire to protect the child from unpleasant moments in life, the ability to forgive the parent of the child. Consistency describes how the behavior of a parent is constant towards the child and the consistency of requirements to the child. Confidence reflects the level of trust that exists between parent and child, the degree of involvement of parents in a child's life, their openness to the problems and needs of the child.

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