Personality and parenting style in parents of adolescents

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Abstract

Since parental personality traits are assumed to play a role in parenting behaviors, the current study examined the relation between parental personality and parenting style among 688 Dutch parents of adolescents in the SMILE study. The study assessed Big Five personality traits and derived parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved) from scores on the underlying dimensions of support and strict control. Regression analyses were used to determine which personality traits were associated with parenting dimensions and styles. As regards dimensions, the two aspects of personality reflecting interpersonal interactions (extraversion and agreeableness) were related to supportiveness. Emotional stability was associated with lower strict control. As regards parenting styles, extraverted, agreeable, and less emotionally stable individuals were most likely to be authoritative parents. Conscientiousness and openness did not relate to general parenting, but might be associated with more content-specific acts of parenting.

Introduction

Parenting style has been defined as a global climate in which a family functions and in which childrearing takes place (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Four distinct parenting styles have been distinguished, namely the authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved styles, based on the two underlying dimensions of parental support (often referred to as parental responsiveness) and strict control (often referred to as parental demandingness) (e.g., Baumrind, 1966, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parental support refers to parental affectionate qualities and is associated with characteristics like warmth, acceptance, and involvement. Strict control reflects parental control over their children’s behaviors and as such includes parental knowledge of these activities as well as active monitoring attempts (Stat tin & Kerr, 2000). Authoritative parents offer their children a democratic climate of both high support and strict control. Authoritarian parents provide strict control without being supportive, and are therefore perceived as demanding and power-assertive. Children experiencing support in the absence of strict control are being reared by indulgent parents, who are allowing and permissive. These parents apply few rules to constrain their children. Finally, parents with an uninvolved parenting style are neither supportive nor controlling, and are relatively more indifferent and uninvolved (or even neglectful) with respect to their children.

General parenting styles have been found to relate to children’s development (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000), and authoritative parenting in particular has been found to have beneficial effects on adolescent lifestyles. Adolescents being raised in an authoritative parenting climate eat more fruit, smoke less, drink less alcohol, and are less likely to use marihuana (e.g., Jackson, Henriksen, & Foshee, 1998; Kremers, Brug, De Vries, & Engels, 2003; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996). In addition, adolescents with authoritative parents show better psychosocial development,
greater academic competence, less delinquent behavior, and fewer somatic symptoms (e.g., Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

If parenting influences adolescent development, then individual characteristics affecting parenting may be of indirect relevance to issues related to adolescent development (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Prinzie et al., 2004). One general theoretical model that aims to explain the determinants of parenting was offered by Belsky (1984). Belsky argued that parenting is multiply determined by three general sources of influence: child’s individual characteristics, contextual sources of stress and support, and parent personality. Moreover, he argued that of those three personality is the most important source of influence. Whereas factors such as occupational status and well-being have been studied more intensively, studies that concentrate on parental personality are scarce (e.g., Fox, Platz, & Bentley, 1995). This, however, is surprising since personality aspects are most likely to contribute, as these aspects are also likely to influence other determinants of parenting, such as marital quality, occupational aspects, and social support (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). The present study therefore concentrated on the relation between personality and parenting style.

There is relative consensus on a five-factor structure of personality, based on a bipolar taxonomy of underlying traits (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990; Saucier & Goldberg, 1998), which is supported by factor analyses of extensive lists of trait adjectives (Goldberg, 1990). The five broad personality dimensions are commonly labeled extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness. It should be noted that these dimensions are not types, meaning that personality is made up of scores on the five dimensions. Extraversion reflects the frequency and quality of interpersonal contact, capacity for joy, activity level, and stimulation-seeking behavior. Conscientious persons are best described as dutiful, scrupulous, perseverant, punctual, and organized. Agreeable individuals are compassionate, good-natured, complying, and trusting. Emotional stability is the opposite of neuroticism. As such, emotionally stable individuals are calm, unmotional, and self-satisfied, whereas neurotic persons are nervous, touchy, anxious, depressed, and insecure. Finally, openness comprises characteristics such as curiousness, versatility, creativity, and originality (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Previous research into the relations between parents’ personalities and their parenting styles has revealed certain patterns, and there is empirical evidence for these relations for each of the five dimensions. First, extraversion appears to be associated with a parenting style characterized by high levels of support and control, or authoritative parenting (Belsky & Barends, 2002). Although another study among parents of adult twins failed to find such an association (Kendler, Sham, & MacLean, 1997), a study among parents of children under the age of 8 reported positive correlations between extraversion and positive support (Losoya, Callor, Rowe, & Goldsmith, 1997). Second, Losoya et al. (1997) found that conscientiousness was related to higher levels of supportive parenting and less negative control. Similarly, conscientious mothers of infants have prospectively been found to be more responsive (Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000). Third, although agreeableness has less often been subject of study, one would intuitively expect agreeable persons to be more responsive and supportive parents (Belsky & Barends, 2002). Previous research tentatively supports this idea. Losoya et al. (1997) found agreeableness to be positively associated with positive support and inversely with negative, controlling parenting. Moreover, disagreeableness interfered with adaptive parenting, one aspect of authoritative parenting (Kochanska, Clark, & Goldman, 1997). By contrast, another study (Prinzie et al., 2004) found higher levels of parental agreeableness to be associated with increased coercion, a part of parenting that is known to be ineffective for eliciting lasting positive behavior from children (Strassberg, Dodge, Petitt, & Bates, 1994). Fourth, neuroticism, the opposite of emotional stability, has received most attention, possibly because neuroticism is thought to be more predictive (Belsky, Crnic, & Woodworth, 1995) and neurotic parents are believed to be less competent or capable of exerting authoritative parenting (Downey & Coyne, 1990; Kochanska et al., 1997). Kendler et al. (1997) found neuroticism to be related to less parental warmth. According to Prinzie et al. (2004), reduced emotional stability is associated with more overreacting (e.g., more strict control). Finally, whereas rarely studied, openness and parental support have been reported to coincide (Clark et al., 2000; Losoya et al., 1997).

Whereas a great deal of research has concentrated on the influence of personality on friendships and intimate relationships, fewer studies have focused on how personality might shape the style of parenting (Caspi et al., 2005). Most existing studies on the linkage between personality and parenting focused on mothers of toddlers and young children rather than on adolescents (e.g., Smith et al., 2007). However, it is important to concentrate on adolescence, since this is the period of time that antisocial and health-compromising behaviors develop. In addition, it has been shown that parents are still influential socializing agents, for instance through parenting style. Moreover, most knowledge in this field is based on research into relations between parental psychopathology, such as depression, and parenting (Downey & Coyne, 1990). The main aim of the present study was therefore to examine the relations between personalities and parenting styles, for mothers and fathers of adolescents, with the help of widely used and validated instruments that assess personality and parenting style. Hence, the research question in this study was: Are different aspects of personality differently related to parenting styles? We hypothesized that authoritative parents – parents that score high on support and strict control – would be more extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and open as compared to parents who employed an authoritarian, indulgent or uninvolved parenting style.

Methods

Participants and procedures

In the spring of 2003, 688 inhabitants of the Dutch city of Eindhoven participated in the Study of Medical Information and Lifestyles in Eindhoven (SMILE). The SMILE study is a joint project of Maastricht University and 23 family physicians from
seven practices located in Eindhoven, a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants situated in the south part of the Netherlands. Family physicians provided addresses of approximately 4000 parents, who were then invited to participate. Parents of children in the 12–19 years age bracket filled out self-administered 16-page questionnaires. Pilot tests showed that it took 30–45 min to complete the questionnaire. Telephone help lines were available for questions, as was a website. Anonymity was guaranteed. Participants were eligible to win a CD voucher. A reminder was sent to those who failed to respond two weeks after the questionnaire had been mailed. Of those parents who were approached, 16.7% agreed to participate and fulfilled the criteria (for more information on the procedure see Huver, Engels, Van Breukelen, & De Vries, 2007).

Measures

Demographics included in the present study were age and gender, with answers 0 ‘male’ and 1 ‘female’. In addition, respondents were asked about their marital status (0 ‘not married’, 1 ‘married’). Another question assessed whether respondents were living together with their partners (1) or not (0) and respondents were asked to report the number of children living with them. Respondents were asked to indicate their educational level by choosing one of eight categories ranging from ‘elementary school’ to ‘university education’. Monthly net income was measured on an 11-point scale, with answers ranging from ‘less than €750’ to ‘€3000 or more’. Participants could choose ‘no answer’ as an additional option. Religiousness was coded as 0 ‘not religious’ or 1 ‘religious’. The question ‘How important is religion in your life?’ assessed the significance of religion (1 ‘not important’, 2 ‘slightly important’, 3 ‘somewhat important’, and 4 ‘very important’). Ethnicity was derived from parental origin (0 ‘not of Dutch origin’, 1 ‘of Dutch origin’).

Personality was assessed by the Quick Big Five (Gerris et al., 1998), a thirty-item Dutch version of the original Big Five questionnaire (Goldberg, 1992). Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which certain qualities such as ‘nervous’ or ‘artistic’ applied to them, to assess extraversion (α = 0.86), conscientiousness (α = 0.87), agreeableness (α = 0.84), emotional stability (α = 0.83), and openness (α = 0.83). Answers were rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Parenting styles were assessed using a Dutch instrument (Beyers & Goossens, 1999) based on work by Steinberg and colleagues, which has shown good external validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). This questionnaire assessed two dimensions of parenting styles, namely support (α = 0.77) and strict control (α = 0.74). Participants could indicate on a 5-point Likert scale whether they agreed or disagreed with 15 statements such as ‘My child can count on me to help him/her out, if he/she has some kind of problem’ and ‘I TRY to keep track of where my child goes at night’. Two additional questions were asked about curfews on weekdays (Monday through Thursday) and weekends (Friday and Saturday), with responses on 7-point scales, ranging from ‘before 9 PM’ to ‘after midnight’ for weekdays and from ‘before 11 PM’ to ‘after 2 AM’ for weekends, including the two additional options of ‘not allowed to go out’ and ‘no curfew’. Answers were transformed to z-values, prior to summing scores on the variables in order to form scales. Parents were classified as authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, or uninvolved, based on median splits; e.g., participants with scores in the upper half of the support and strict control scale were categorized as authoritative (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

Statistical analyses

Contrast analyses were used to compare authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved parents in terms of demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, living together with a partner, number of children, educational level, net income, religiousness, significance of religion, and ethnicity. To identify the demographic differences between parents characterized by the four parenting styles, cross-tabulations were used for nominal variables and ANOVAs were used for continuous variables. Post-hoc comparisons were made according to the Tukey HSD method. To see which personality traits were associated with parenting dimensions and styles, regression analyses were performed, controlling for those demographical variables that significantly distinguished between parents of different styles in the contrast analyses. First, to examine the relation between personality and parenting dimensions, two separate multiple regressions were run of the support and strict control dimensions on Big Five personality traits. In regressing the individual dimensions on the personality variables, the other dimension was corrected for. Correlations were calculated between independent variables and dependent parenting dimension variables. Second, to determine associations between personality and parenting style, a multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted. This is an extension of binary logistic regression analysis, allowing for simultaneous estimations of the odds of being classified as authoritarian, indulgent or uninvolved, compared to being classified as authoritative.

Our sample sometimes included both parents of one family. This might theoretically lead to bias, as parents in the same household tend to converge in parenting style (Baumrind, 1991) and partners tend to have similar personality characteristics (Byrne, 1997). To test whether inclusion of mother–father dyads biased the results, we randomly selected either the mother or the father of these families and reran our analyses only with individuals from unique households (N = 495). This yielded similar associations between personality and parenting dimensions and styles.
Results

Description of the sample

Participants were mostly female (63.8%), with a mean age of 45.98 (SD = 5.34). Of all participants, 82.1% were married and 87.2% lived in the same house as their partner, together with an average of 2.2 children (SD = 0.97), which is comparable to national statistics (Hartgers, 2001). Participants most often indicated that they had a university degree (26.6%), earned a net income of €3000 or more (23.8%), adhered to a religion (67.2%), valued religion as ‘slightly important’ in their lives (33.0%), and were of Dutch origin (82.6%).

Bivariate correlations showed that support was positively correlated with strict control ($r = 0.44, p < 0.01$). Regarding personality dimensions, extraversion was positively related to agreeableness ($r = 0.37, p < 0.001$), emotional stability ($r = 0.36, p < 0.001$) and resourcefulness ($r = 0.15, p < 0.001$). Conscientiousness was positively correlated with agreeableness ($r = 0.20, p < 0.001$). Agreeableness was positively correlated with emotional stability ($r = 0.21, p < 0.001$) and resourcefulness ($r = 0.29, p < 0.001$) and finally, emotional stability was positively related to resourcefulness ($r = 0.10, p < 0.05$).

Table 1 presents results of comparisons between authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved parents in terms of dichotomous demographic variables. Results of contrast analyses relating to continuous demographic factors are presented in Table 2. Authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved parents differed significantly in terms of gender. Whereas most men were classified as uninvolved, most women were authoritative. Significant differences were found for age, with authoritative and authoritarian parents being younger than indulgent and uninvolved parents. Additionally, authoritative parents had significantly more children living with them than authoritarian and indulgent parents. No significant differences between parents of different styles were found with regard to marital status, living together with a partner, educational level, income, religiousness, significance attached to religion, or ethnicity. The demographics that were significant in these contrast analyses were included as covariates in the regression analyses.

Personality in relation to the parenting dimensions of support and strict control

The left part of Table 3 presents results of the multiple regression analyses of parental support on the five personality traits, after controlling for the demographical variables of age, gender and number of children, and reported levels of strict control. More extraverted and agreeable parents provided higher levels of support. Whereas the correlational analyses (second column in Table 3) found conscientiousness and openness to be positively related to support, these results became non-significant after accounting for the other variables in the regression analyses. No effects were found for emotional stability. The proportion of variance accounted for by the model (Nagelkerke’s $R^2$) was 30%.

The right part of Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis of parental exertion of strict control on the personality dimensions, accounting for background variables and the parenting dimension of support. The analysis found that more emotionally stable parents exerted lower levels of strict control. While agreeableness correlated positively with strict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dichotomous factors</th>
<th>Parenting style</th>
<th>Authoritative$^a$</th>
<th>Authoritarian$^b$</th>
<th>Indulgent$^c$</th>
<th>Uninvolved$^d$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.34</td>
<td>19.34</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>46.09</td>
<td>32.730***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36.02</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>20.38</td>
<td>27.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>27.68</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>32.14</td>
<td>6.418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30.31</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>16.88</td>
<td>35.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with partner (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29.87</td>
<td>12.99</td>
<td>23.38</td>
<td>33.77</td>
<td>2.068</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30.05</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>34.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30.32</td>
<td>14.03</td>
<td>22.17</td>
<td>33.48</td>
<td>4.812</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29.93</td>
<td>18.82</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>34.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native</td>
<td>27.78</td>
<td>25.93</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>31.48</td>
<td>7.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>29.95</td>
<td>15.61</td>
<td>19.24</td>
<td>35.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < 0.001.

$^a$ Note. N = 199.

$^b$ N = 114.

$^c$ N = 123.

$^d$ N = 229.
control, this pattern was not seen in the multivariate regression analysis. Nor were associations between strict control and extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness. The proportion of explained variance was 26%.

Personality in relation to parenting styles

Results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis of parenting styles on the five personality factors are presented in Table 4. With authoritative parenting style as reference category, and after correcting for background variables such as age, gender, and number of children, personality traits were associated with authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved parenting. The more extraverted parents were, the less likely they were to be classified as authoritarian. More agreeable parents were less likely to be authoritarian and uninvolved. Furthermore, more emotionally stable individuals were more likely to be classified as indulgent and uninvolved parents. Conscientiousness and openness were not significantly associated with the parenting styles. The model accounted for 22% of the explained variance (Pseudo Nagelkerke’s $R^2$).

Discussion

Since authoritative parenting has shown to have beneficial effects on adolescent development (e.g., Jackson et al., 1998), it is important to examine factors relating to this parenting style. Our results showed that two aspects of parent’s personality, namely those reflecting interpersonal interaction (extraversion and agreeableness) were related to levels of supportiveness, whereas emotional stability was associated with the exertion of strict control. Extraverted, agreeable and less emotionally stable individuals were most likely to be authoritative parents.

The findings for extraversion are in line with those of previous research. Extraverted parents were more supportive, and extraverted individuals were less likely to be characterized by authoritarian than authoritative parenting styles. This is in agreement with the findings of previous research, which suggests that extraverted individuals raise their children in a more positive manner (Belsky & Barends, 2002). Moreover, our findings show that the associations between extraversion and supportive parenting are not exclusively restricted to parents of toddlers (Losoya et al., 1997), but also to parents of adolescents. This underlines the robust links between extraversion and parenting. Key to this finding is that this personality feature is mainly associated with the affective aspect of parenting and not with the control aspect.

Table 3

Multiple regressions of the parenting dimensions of support and strict control on Big Five personality traits, with Pearson correlations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Strict control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$r$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parenting dimension</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.13***</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjusted $R^2$ 0.30 0.26

Note. **$p < 0.01$. ***$p < 0.001$. 

Table 2

Univariate associations between parenting styles and age, number of children, education, income, and significance of religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuous factors</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Indulgent</th>
<th>Uninvolved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>45.21</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>44.70</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of religion</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Note. At = Authoritative, An = Authoritarian, P = Indulgent, N = Uninvolved.

$^a N = 199$. $^b N = 114$. $^c N = 123$. $^d N = 229$. 

Table 4

Multiple regressions of the parenting dimensions of support and strict control on Big Five personality traits, with Pearson correlations.
With respect to conscientiousness, its previously reported association with supportiveness (Losoya et al., 1997) was confirmed, but this association disappeared after controlling for the other variables. As such, conscientiousness did not relate to parenting dimensions or styles in our sample of parents of adolescents. Further, agreeable parents were more supportive and less likely to engage in authoritarian or uninvolved parenting than in authoritative parenting. This supports the idea of agreeable individuals as more pleasant parents (Kochanska et al., 1997; Losoya et al., 1997). Like extraversion, agreeableness was not associated with the control dimension of parenting.

As regards emotional stability, we hypothesized that emotionally stable individuals would be more competent parents (Downey & Coyne, 1990) and therefore would display more supportiveness and strict control as such. However, parental levels of emotional stability were not related to their supportive parenting qualities, contrary to findings by Kendler et al. (1997). Moreover, more emotionally stable parents exerted less strict control. Perhaps, since emotionally unstable individuals are more likely to exhibit maladaptive coping responses (Costa & McCrae, 1992), these parents resort easier to controlling their children. This may explain why emotionally stable parents are more likely to engage in indulgent or uninvolved parenting, as these styles are characterized by low strict control. On the other hand, parents who score high on emotional instability may have very high expectations and may be very anxious to know the whereabouts of their children (knowledge). Along these lines of reasoning, high emotional instability could result in harsh parenting, as reported previously (e.g., Prinzie et al., 2004). In short, different underlying mechanisms may be at work that all can explain the links between emotional instability and strict control. Finally, openness was not related to parenting dimensions or styles accounted for in our study, after correcting for background variables and other personality traits, which is in disagreement with previously reported findings (Clark et al., 2000; Losoya et al., 1997).

In summary, parental support is associated with the two aspects of personality that reflect the extent of interpersonal interaction, namely extraversion and agreeableness (Pervin & John, 2001). Since individuals high on these two traits generally socialize more, they may also be more sociable with respect to their children, and more supportive as a result. People with high scores on agreeableness have more explicit content of schemas for handling relationships in general (Baldwin & Fergusson, 2001), and these people also seem to have parenting schemas, which are generally considered adequate. It should be noted, however, that what is adequate for one child is not necessarily optimal for another. What constitutes adequate parenting is situational and culturally determined and depends on children’s needs. Second, more emotionally unstable individuals are known to exhibit maladaptive coping responses (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Similarly, in our study, these parents more readily exerted harsh control over children. Several reasons are imaginable for these maladaptive coping responses and heightened levels of strict control. One possibility is due to the relation between emotional instability and internal negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1992). As emotionally unstable individuals are prone to subjective distress and overall dissatisfaction, these parents might vent their negative affects on their children, by means of increased strict control. Another possibility is related to the feelings of inadequacy that emotionally unstable persons experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992). If emotionally unstable individuals feel inadequate as parents, exerting strict control over their children could be a means of compensating for this.

This study was subject to certain limitations. First, we agree that the personalities and parenting approach that were chosen treats the dimensions monolithically at a very general level. Moreover, we acknowledge the idea that dimensions are constructed out of different aspects that were not taken into account separately in the present study. For instance, parental support was distinguished as warmth and responsiveness to children’s emotional distress (Davidov & Grusec, 2006), and different facets have been found to underlie strict control (i.e., rules, regulations, and knowledge) (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2006).

Future studies may concentrate on sub-dimensions that underlie the general dimensions. Moreover, a third dimension of parenting style has recently been suggested, besides those of support and strict control, namely psychological control, defined as an intrusive form of control that parents attempt to hold over their children’s psychological world and functioning (Barber, 2002). It is definitely conceivable that personality traits also relate to this additional parenting dimension. As less emotionally stable parents resort more quickly to controlling their children’s behaviors, they might also be easier inclined to control.

### Table 4

Odd ratios (and 95% confidence intervals) in the multinomial logistic regression of parenting style on Big Five personality traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Parenting style</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Indulgent</td>
<td>Uninvolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.5 (0.90–1.00)</td>
<td>1.05 (1.00–1.10)</td>
<td>1.04 (1.00–1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.49 (0.27–0.87)***</td>
<td>0.97 (0.56–1.69)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.30–0.76)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>0.67 (0.50–0.88)***</td>
<td>0.74 (0.57–0.97)***</td>
<td>0.80 (0.64–1.00)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.94 (0.90–0.98)***</td>
<td>1.00 (0.96–1.04)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.95–1.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>0.90 (0.95–1.03)</td>
<td>1.01 (0.97–1.05)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.95–1.01)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>0.87 (0.81–0.94)***</td>
<td>0.95 (0.88–1.04)***</td>
<td>0.85 (0.79–0.91)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>1.04 (0.99–1.08)</td>
<td>1.07 (1.03–1.12)***</td>
<td>1.07 (1.03–1.10)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>0.98 (0.94–1.02)</td>
<td>1.03 (0.99–1.08)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.96–1.03)***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Reference category is the authoritative parenting style. Pseudo Nagelkerke’s $R^2 = 0.22$.

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.
psychological functioning. In contrast to psychological control, autonomy granting has been proposed as a third dimension (e.g., Lamborn et al., 1991), which can be described as the extent to which parents encourage their children to think independently. Research suggests that psychological control and autonomy granting are not the opposite ends of the same continuum, but distinct constructs leading to different behaviors in children (Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003). Further work is needed to improve our understanding of these possible additional dimensions of parenting and the parental factors associated with them.

In a similar vein, the fact that we did not find the expected multivariate relationship between conscientiousness and openness on the one hand, and parenting style or its dimensions on the other, does not imply that these personality traits are unrelated to any facets of parenting per se. These traits may well relate to context-specific acts of parenting. Conscientious parents may be more likely to socialize their children with respect to tidiness and meticulousness, whereas open parents could stimulate creativity and other artistic capacities. Otherwise, the reason why we did not find link between conscientiousness and strict control may be that we did not distinguish between the three components that were earlier distinguished in strict control (i.e., rules, regulation, and knowledge).

Hence, although these are widely used approaches, we underline the idea that parenting and personality are more complex concepts that ideally need to be treated as such. Despite this limitation and for the sake of clarity, the use of dimensions is still informative and offers us insight into parenting and personality on a very basic level.

Second, a more methodological limitation refers to the categorization of parenting styles. The use of parenting styles is very common in parenting literature (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and it allows an easy interpretation more than the use of continuous scores. However, a categorization such as the one used in the present study (i.e., median split) also restricts variance in treating participants as high or low on supportiveness and strict control.

Third, our study had a cross-sectional nature, which means that we have to be cautious in drawing conclusions on causality. However, it is likely that the personality aspects assessed here precede parenting strategies, in view of the stability of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1997) and the relative instability of parenting styles (e.g., Goossens & Bayers, 1999; Juang & Silbereisen, 1999). Moreover, available research findings suggest a biological basis for personality, underlining the stability of personality and thus confirming the idea of personality preceding parenting.

Our study has provided further insight into parental personality characteristics that are related to general parenting dimensions and styles. The main objective was to assess which personality characteristics play a role, in order to add to existing knowledge about parenting. We concluded that extraverted, agreeable, and emotionally unstable parents were most likely to exhibit the favorable, so called authoritative parenting style. Extraversion and agreeableness related to affective qualities of parenting, whereas emotional stability was associated with lower levels of strict control and not with support (in the regression). In general, the results support the idea that parenting styles are partially determined by the personalities of the parents.

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References


