

Perceived Parental Behaviour and Psychogenic Needs*

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Summary. A new inventory aimed at the assessment of perceived parental rearing practices (EMBU) and an inventory aimed at assessing psychogenic needs (CMPS) were completed by 152 healthy subjects of both sexes (108 males and 44 females). The series was comprised of 73 conscripts, 57 medical students, 15 vocational therapy students and 7 staff personnel who were 17–46 years old.

Several significant correlations were found between dimensions of parental rearing behaviour and personality characteristics, most of them being consistent with earlier findings by other authors. Although statistically significant, the correlation coefficients were mostly low, leaving a large amount of unexplained variance.

The findings of this study support the general assumption that the perception of parental rearing practices is an important factor in the shaping of personality make-up but that other, still unexplored factors might have an even greater importance in the determination of habitual personality characteristics.

Key words: Parental rearing behaviour – Personality characteristics – Psychogenic needs – Parental discipline and personality – EMBU – Rejection – Aggression – Personality determinants

Introduction

Several decades of intensive research work have yielded evidence which strongly supports the assumption that early environmental influences, especially the emotional dynamics of the parent-child relationship, are factors of paramount importance which contribute to the shaping of personality. In this context

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attention has been focused both problems concerning the impact of parental identification on personality development and the impact on development of various parental behaviour patterns towards their children (see: Newman and Newman, 1975; Murphy and Moriarty, 1976; Albright, 1978; Shaw, 1978).

In particular, there have been several attempts to verify the assumption that particular dimensions of parental rearing behaviour could shape particular personality characteristics in the children. The source for active interest in the consequences of parental discipline can be traced to three main influences in the first decades of this century: the focus on learning processes by the functional and behaviouristic psychologists, the developmental focus of psychoanalytic theory and the repeated observations in clinical practice of a high incidence of atypical disciplinary practices in the background of problem individuals, both children and adults.

Peck (1958) studied the relationships between four dimensions of family interaction ("consistency", "democracy", "mutual trust and approval" and "parental severity") and six dimensions of personality in 34 adolescents and found significant patterns of relationship. "Ego strength" occurred in association with a pattern of family life characterized by stable consistency and warm mutual trust. "Superego strength" was chiefly related to regularity and consistency of family life. "Generalized friendliness" and "spontaneity" were associated with a democratic family atmosphere, whereas the "hostility-guilt" complex tended to occur in a severely autocratic, untrusting and disapproving family. Similar relationships were obtained in a study by Slater (1962), who found a significant correlation between "tolerant" parental behaviour and ego strength and between ego weakness and parental intolerance.

Major issues in the complex of relations between child-rearing practices and personality development have been the relations between parental behaviour and dependency and aggression in the child and the consequences of restrictive or permissive parental discipline upon the child. Sears et al. (1953) found a positive correlation between maternal punitiveness and dependency in boys and a negative correlation with dependency in girls. They also found a positive correlation in boys between severity of maternal punitiveness for aggression and overt aggression as displayed by the boys. In girls, the relationship was slightly negative. Similar results had been reported earlier by Hollenberg and Sperry (1951), although without differences between sexes whereas further confirmation was reported later by Becker et al. (1962). Watson (1957), in a thorough study of 78 children, found support for the hypothesis that greater freedom in the home created greater independence in the children. In this study a permissive parental attitude was also positively correlated with high creativity and achievement orientation, while at the same time producing less hostility in the child. Similar results were obtained by Becker (1964) who found that warmth and restrictiveness in the parents tend to result in a submissive, dependent, obedient and non-creative personality. Warmth and permissiveness result in an active, socially outgoing, creative, independent and friendly personality with a low level of hostility. Parental hostility and restrictiveness favour neurotic problems and a socially withdrawn personality, whereas hostility and permissiveness result in delinquency, non-compliance and maximum aggression.

Different research strategies have been used to gather the results reviewed above, a commonly used approach being studies of parental attitudes toward (or practice of) discipline and the behaviour of the children. An important innovation was introduced by Ausubel (Ausubel et al., 1954; Ausubel, 1958) who stressed the importance of focusing on the child's perception of his home life, thus upon his perception of the situation rather than upon the situation itself. Ausubel introduced the concept of 'satellization' as an important factor in personality organization and ego development. 'Satellization' means a form of identification occurring in early childhood in children who perceive themselves to be accepted and intrinsically valued by their parents; 'non-satellization' is the absence of identification under conditions of perceived rejection. Non-satellization is hypothesized as associated with: a high level of anxiety, rigidity in new learning situations, a high level of aspiration, a strong need for achievement, low self-esteem and as having an egocentric as contrasted with a sociocentric system of values. These assumptions were later confirmed by Willenson (1960) and Serot and Teevan (1961).

The Present Study

We have earlier reported on the development of a new inventory intended to measure the Own Memories of Child-rearing Experiences (EMBU: Perris et al., in press, 1979) primarily aimed to study the possible occurrence of relations between perceived parental child-rearing practices and mental disorders within the framework of a comprehensive research project on depression which is in progress at our department. We felt, however, that we had to investigate the feasibility of our instrument in healthy individuals in a study of the possible relations between perceived parental behaviour and personality make-up before expanding our study to cover mentally disturbed people. In particular, we were interested to find out whether significant relations could be demonstrated between different kinds of parental discipline and such aspects of personality known as psychogenic needs according to Murray's personality theory (Murray, 1938) and measurable by means of a particular inventory: the CMPS constructed in Sweden by Cesarek and Marke (1968) which we have used in previous studies. In this context the findings obtained by Strandman (1978) and Perris and Strandman (1979) by means of the CMPS in depressed patients were of particular interest. The authors found that persons prone to depression were characterized by a lower need for aggression, exhibition and autonomy and a greater need for order and more dependency than healthy individuals. From the present investigation we expected that a finding of significant relationships between memories of parental discipline and psychogenic needs in healthy individuals could contribute to generating hypotheses to be tested later in depressed patients.

Subjects and Methods

Of 152 healthy volunteers, 73 conscripts, 57 medical students, 15 vocational therapy students and 7 personnel of the staff of the department were asked to answer the CMPS and the EMBU,

administered as a self-rating inventory. There were 108 males and 44 females, aged 17–46 years. The same group was used for the original developmental work with EMBU (Perris et al., in press, 1979).

a. Perceived Parental Discipline

EMBU is an inventory based upon ten qualities of child-rearing experiences defined by Jacobsson et al. (1975): abusive, depriving, punitive, shaming, rejecting, favouring siblings over patient, overprotective, overinvolved, tolerant and affectionate. To those aspects have been added the following: performance-oriented, guilt-engendering, stimulating, favouring patient over siblings and a cluster of other aspects which have not yet been further classified, e.g. if the parents used to lie to the person or used to worry about the person's health without reason. Each of these aspects was covered by at least five different questions such as: "Did you feel that your parents loved you?" "Did it happen that your parents punished you more than you had deserved?" There were 81 total questions. These questions could be answered in four different ways according to the following definitions: (1) it never occurred; (2) it could occur, but it was exceptional; (3) it occurred quite frequently; (4) it was always so. In this way 15 subscales were constructed (Table 1). A factor analysis was carried out and three principal components were extracted for the fathers and four for the mothers.

The results of our factor analysis revealed the occurrence of the same principal dimensions of rearing behaviour previously found by other authors: one dimension referring to a controlling, performance-oriented and guilt-engendering behaviour; a second dimension, bipolar referring to tolerant, affectionate and stimulating behaviour at one pole and to rejection and love-deprivation at the other; and another dimension (particularly in the mothers) referring to 'overprotective' behaviour.

b. Psychogenic Needs

The Cesarek Marke Personality Schedule (CMPS) is intended to measure eleven of the psychogenic needs suggested by Murray (1938) and is based upon 165 questions to be answered 'yes' or 'no'. Psychogenic needs according to Murray are possibly secondary to primary viscerogenic needs such as hunger or thirst. They are to be regarded as general reaction systems. The needs might be defined from the actions a person takes which have a satisfying effect or they might be defined as the presence of wishes or decisions to do certain things to obtain certain effects. This inventory might be regarded as one of the most comprehensive multi-dimensional personality inventories and has been used by our group in several other investigations (e.g. Jacobsson et al., 1975; Strandman, 1978; Perris and Strandman, 1979). The measured variables are: (1) achievement: need to accomplish something difficult and to rival and surpass others; (2) affiliation: need to please and win affection of cathected objects and to adhere and remain loyal to friends; (3) aggression: need to revenge an injury, impulsive aggression and irritability; (4) defense of status: need to maintain self-esteem by support and approval from others; (5) guilt feelings: guilt feelings and superego conflicts; (6) dominance: need to dominate and lead others; (7) exhibition: need to expose oneself, to be in the center, to be noticed; (8) autonomy: need for autonomy and independence; (9) nurturance: need to help, nurse and take care of others; (10) order: need for order, cleanliness and planning; (11) succorance: need to be helped, nursed, supported and consoled. Five indexes based on factor analysis have also been described: Index I, Neurotic self-assertion; Index II, Dominance, a non-neurotic need to dominate; Index III, Aggressive non-conformity; Index IV, Passive dependence; Index V, Sociability.

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the EMBU variables and the CMPS variables have been calculated by using standard programs at the computer centre of the Umeå University.

Since there was only a small number of females ($n = 44$) in the series, no attempt was made at this juncture to analyse the results separately by sex. However, keeping in mind the results obtained by other authors (see above), such a separate analysis will be carried out in future studies when a larger series will be available.

Table 1. Significant correlations between EMBU factors and CMPS indexes (Pearson's correlation coefficient)

EMBU factors	CMPS index				
	I Neurotic self-assertion	II Non-neurotic dominance	III Aggressive non-conformity	IV Passive dependency	V Sociability
<i>Mothers</i>					
Factor 1 (controlling, guilt-engendering, performance-oriented)	0.22**			0.20**	
Factor 2 (tolerant, affectionate, stimulating)	-0.14*	0.20**	-0.21**		0.22**
Factor 3 (favouring siblings or patient)	0.18*		0.15*	0.21**	
Factor 4 (overprotective)					0.23**
<i>Fathers</i>					
Factor 1 (controlling, guilt-engendering, performance-oriented)					
Factor 2 (tolerant, affectionate, stimulating)	-0.17*	0.14*	-0.25***		0.15*
Factor 3 (favouring siblings or patient)				0.19**	

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Table 2. Significant correlations between EMBU subscales and CMPS variables for mothers (Pearson's coefficient)

EMBU	CMPS										
	Achieve- ment	Affilia- tion	Ag- gression	Defense of status	Guilt feelings	Domin- ance	Ex- hibition	Auton- omy	Nurtur- ance	Order	Successance
Abusive	0.20**			0.14*			0.14*	0.14*		0.17*	0.16*
Depriving											0.25***
Punitive			0.14*								0.19**
Shaming			0.16*	0.20**							0.19**
Rejecting			-0.19**						0.17*		0.14*
Overprotective	0.15*						0.16*		0.18*		
Overinvolved	0.20*										
Tolerant											
Affectionate			-0.15*	-0.20**			0.19***	0.15*		0.17*	0.20**
Performance-oriented							0.16*				
Guilt-engendering	0.15*		0.23**	0.20**	0.17*			0.16*			0.14*
Stimulating		0.14*	-0.15*	-0.14*			0.19**		0.17*		0.26***
Favouring siblings				0.16*	0.24***						0.19**
Favouring patient				0.14*	0.16*		0.16*			-0.20**	0.16*

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Table 3. Significant correlations between EMBU variables and CMPS variables for fathers (Pearson's coefficient)

EMBU	CMPS										
	Achieve- ment	Affilia- tion	Ag- gression	Defense of status	Guilt feelings	Domin- ance	Ex- hibition	Auton- omy	Nurtur- ance	Order	Succorance
Abusive	0.15*	0.14*								0.16*	
Depriving											
Punitive							0.15*				
Shaming											
Rejecting			-0.22**		-0.17*	-0.14*				0.15*	
Overprotective										0.14*	
Overinvolved											
Tolerant				-0.17*	-0.14*						
Affectionate				-0.25***	-0.17*			-0.18*		0.20**	
Performance-oriented									-0.14*		
Guilt-engendering	0.16*		0.14*								
Stimulating								-0.14*		0.13*	
Favouring siblings			0.15*								
Favouring patient							0.16*	-0.17*			0.19**

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$

Results

The significant correlations between perceived parental behaviour and CMPS indexes are presented in Table 1. The relationship between punitive behaviour (EMBU factor 1) and dependency (CMPS Index IV) is supported with mothers but not with fathers. In general, the mothers' behaviour shows a higher number of significant relationships with personality characteristics than does the fathers' behaviour. There is no correlation between punitive, controlling parental behaviour (factor 1) and aggressive non-conformity as would have been expected.

Tolerant and affectionate parental behaviour (factor 2) provided significant correlations, both positive and negative, in the expected directions of neurotic self-assertion (Index I), non-neurotic dominance (Index II), aggressive non-conformity (Index III) and sociability (Index V).

The positive correlation between an 'overprotective' mother's behaviour and "sociability" (Index V) seems rather puzzling at first. However, according to Cesarek and Marke, this index might reflect an anti-aggressive attitude. Moreover, it also has a high loading in nurturance.

The significant correlations between the sub-scales of the EMBU and CMPS variables are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Also, most of the correlations are congruent at this level with earlier findings and hypotheses. As expected, rejecting

Table 4. Correlation coefficients between CMPS variables and level of consistency and level of strictness in parental rearing behaviour. See Table 1 for an explanation of the indexes

CMPS variable	Level of consistency		Level of strictness	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Achievement	-0.08	-0.08	-0.09	-0.09
Affiliation	0.22***	-0.08	0	-0.02
Aggression	-0.06	0.08	0.01	-0.11
Defense of status	-0.08	-0.09	-0.06	0.01
Guilt feelings	-0.15*	-0.09	-0.06	-0.02
Dominance	0	0	-0.06	-0.04
Exhibition	0.07	0.05	-0.05	-0.03
Autonomy	0	0.14*	-0.06	-0.10
Nurturance	+0.01	-0.13	+0.06	-0.02
Order	-0.06	-0.03	-0.07	+0.02
Succorance	+0.08	-0.11	0.04	0.06
Index I	-0.14*	-0.08	-0.09	-0.10
Index II	0.07	0.09	-0.01	-0.03
Index III	0.04	0.14*	0.08	-0.12
Index IV	0.10	-0.12	0	0.02
Index V	0.11	-0.16**	0.02	0.02

* $P < 0.05$

** $P < 0.02$

*** $P < 0.005$

parental behaviour appears to be significantly correlated with aggression. Finally, Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients between the last two questions of the EMBU (concerning consistency and strictness of parental discipline) and the CMPS' variables. Only a few significant correlations occur and only with regard to consistency, whereas strictness seems not to bear any relationship to personality characteristics.

Comments

The results of this investigation should be regarded as preliminary since there was no separate analysis of male and female respondents or close analysis of multiple correlations. Such analyses are necessary before more defined conclusions can be drawn. Despite these limitations, however, the results of this study verify the general assumption that parental rearing practices are an important factor in the shaping of personality make-up in their offspring.

A complex pattern of the relationship between rearing attitudes and psychogenic needs has emerged from our investigation. Although some of the significant relationships might be due to chance, depending upon the large number of correlations which have been calculated, most of our results are quite in line with classical theoretical formulations and bear a close resemblance to the findings of other authors in the literature. One finding in our study which we share with other authors is the significant relationship between rejecting, love-depriving rearing practice and aggression. In the same way, the relationships between tolerant, affectionate and stimulating parental discipline and the indexes of the CMPS make sense and are all in the expected direction.

Although statistically significant, almost all the correlation coefficients are low, leaving a large amount of unexplained variance. This result is not surprising since our respondents were in the age range of 17 to 46 years and already lived almost consistently separated from their parents. This fact implies that they had had the time to be exposed to other influences and other interactions which could have contributed to a fading of parental influences. If such an assumption holds true, we predict that higher levels of correlations are to be expected if younger subjects take part in future studies.

As in previous studies in the literature, it seems that severity of rearing behaviour per se is not an important determinant of personality characteristics, whereas the level of consistency in rearing practices seems to be more important.

Our results show in general that there are more significant correlations between the mothers' rather than the fathers' rearing behaviour and the psychogenic needs of their offspring. Such results can be understood in light of the role of the mother in our society as the person who has closest contact with the child during early childhood when the foundations of personality are established. Some of the less clear-cut correlations in the present investigation might be due to the fact that we have analysed male and female respondents together. Bearing in mind possible differences in rearing attitudes towards boys and girls and a differential identification between boys and girls with fathers or mothers, respectively, it could be predicted that future studies in which sex interactions are taken into account might help to clarify this issue.

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