

PARENTING STYLES AND SCRIPT INJUNCTION AS PREDICTORS OF ANXIETY IN STUDENTS¹

Jelisaveta Todorović, Marina Hadži Pešić, & Miljana Nikolić²

Department of Psychology, University of Niš (Serbia)

Abstract

Parents, as the first agent of socialization with whom a child comes into contact, are of great importance for development and growth. Parenting styles, the way in which parents achieve their educational goals, accompanied by acceptance and love, or rejection of the child, as well as script injunctions, verbal and non-verbal messages that parents send to the child, affect the adaptation and autonomous functioning of the child. For this reason, with this research, we wanted to get an answer to the question of whether parenting styles and scripted injunctions are significant predictors of anxiety, which in earlier research was shown to be a dominant feeling among students. The sample was convenient, consisting of 122 respondents ($M = 18.9\%$, $F = 81.1\%$) with an average age of 19.95 ($SD = 1.02$). The following measuring instruments were used to operationalize the mentioned constructs: the Zung Anxiety Scale, the Script Injunctions Scale, and the Parenting Styles Measurement Questionnaire (PSDQ), adapted for the student population. The results show that the model consisting of script injunctions and parenting styles explains 43% of the total variance ($p < .01$). The estimated authoritative style of the mother ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$), as well as the authoritative style of the father ($\beta = .32$, $p < .05$) stood out as individual predictors. When it comes to script injunctions, the following stood out as significant predictors of anxiety: *Don't exist* ($\beta = .58$, $p < .01$), *Don't be a child* ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$), *Don't grow up* ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$), *Don't* ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$) and *Don't think* ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$). It can be concluded that the assessment of parents as authoritative figures leads to an increased feeling of anxiety among students. Also, script injunctions accompanied by feelings of guilt and a sense of bothering others (*Don't exist*), insecurity (*Don't*), lack of concentration, and doubt in your intelligence (*Don't think*), as well as those that led to the prevention of childhood play (*Don't be a child*), lead to more pronounced anxiety. On the other hand, lack of responsibility and frivolity (*Don't grow up*) are associated with less expressed anxiety.

Keywords: Anxiety, parenting styles, script injunctions, students.

1. Introduction

The educational style implies the emotional climate within which the interaction between parents and children takes place. It is formed in early childhood and extends throughout a person's youth (Todorović, 2005). In the literature, there are different models of educational or parenting styles. Diana Baumrind's model, (Baumrind, 1966) which distinguishes three parenting styles, authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive, proved to be very influential.

An authoritarian parenting style implies highly expressed parental control and a low degree of warmth. An authoritarian parent does not encourage a democratic exchange of opinions, believing that the child should unconditionally accept the parent's word as correct (Baumrind, 1966). Children are expected to obey, and in the process of education, parents often use punishment and violent measures (Ross & Hammer, 2002). The main educational goals are the development of self-control and obedience, with a clear set of boundaries and rules of behavior. Children who grow up in an authoritarian environment are irritable and withdrawn and have a changeable mood, which makes their socialization difficult (Todorović, 2005).

¹ This study was supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-68/2022- 14/200165). Prepared as a part of the project Popularization of science and scientific publications in the sphere of psychology and social policy, conducted at the University of Niš – Faculty of Philosophy (No. 300/1-14-6-01).

² Scholarship holder of the Ministry of Education for doctoral studies

The authoritative parenting style implies high demands adapted to the child's age, but also a high degree of emotional warmth and support (Baumrind, 1966). Although they set clear requirements and rules of behavior, authoritative parents explain to children the reasons for applying those rules (Ross & Hammer, 2002). The authority of the parents is respected, there is an emotionally warm atmosphere in the family, and the child retains a sense of belonging and appreciation from the parents. The most important educational goals are the development of independence, curiosity, and creativity in the child (Baumrind, 1966). When they grow up in a democratic environment, children are spontaneous, express their thoughts and feelings freely, are research-oriented, and have greater motivation for achievement (Matejević & Todorović, 2012).

A permissive parenting style implies a high degree of emotional warmth and a low degree of control. A permissive parent does not set clear boundaries and rules of behavior, but accepts the child's impulses, desires, and activities, allowing the child to independently regulate his activities (Baumrind, 1966). They indulge the child excessively and are unable to maintain control over his behavior. Unrestricted freedom in children creates a feeling of insecurity, which encourages aggressive and impulsive behavior of the child. Children of permissive parents have a low degree of social responsibility, often exhibit impulsive behavior, and have low achievements (Baumrind, 1966).

Script injunctions represent one of the basic concepts of transactional analysis and play a significant role in the formation of a life script, an unconscious life plan that a person follows throughout life, regardless of the pain and suffering that results from it. Script injunctions are messages that parents or significant others sent to the child at an early age, usually up to the age of 3, and can be sent non-verbally (facial expression, tone of voice, body position), or verbally, through sentences such as: "I hope you die", "Don't touch it", "Don't jump", "Mom's darling, I don't know what I would do without you". These pathological messages, derived from parental pain and suffering, are internalized by the child and they become the source of pathological manifestations during life (Gulding & Gulding, 2007).

Gulding and Gulding (2007) singled out the twelve most common injunctions, namely: *Don't exist, Don't, Don't be important, Don't be a child, Don't grow up, Don't be successful, Don't be you, Don't be healthy, Don't belong, Don't be close, Don't think* and *Don't feel*.

Don't exist is the strongest injunction because it implies a ban on life. It can be expressed in a mild form, "If it wasn't for you, I would divorce your father", but also in a more intense form, "I wish you had never been born", "I will kill you for that" (Gulding & Gulding, 2007). *Don't*, it implies that the child does nothing because everything he does is a danger, therefore, complete inactivity is the most adequate. If a person is constantly indecisive and has a feeling of lack of time, without trying to change the position he is in, it is assumed that he has these scripted injunctions expressed (Stjuart & Džoins, 2011). *Do not be close* is an injunction that can refer to both physical and psychological closeness with others. If there is not enough physical contact between parent and child, the child may interpret it as not being right to be close to people. The message *Don't be important* carries with it a feeling of insufficient worth, which manifests itself throughout life. It is often conveyed with the messages "Don't stand out", "The best is the golden middle", and "Children should be seen, but not heard". *Don't be a child* is most often aimed at the oldest children, from whom parents expect to take care of younger siblings, while the injunction *Don't grow up* is mostly reserved for the youngest children and serves as a confirmation of parental infantilism and preventing the child from doing things he is up to. Parents who send this ban are doing things for their children and on an unconscious level they are sending the message "Don't leave me". *Don't be successful* usually implies the hidden jealousy of parents towards their children's success, due to the unconscious desire that the child is not better than them. "*Don't be you*" is an injunction given by parents to children who are the opposite gender to their expectations, which can result in problems with the child's gender identity. *Don't be healthy* is the message that the child adopts because the parents give him the most attention when he is sick, because health would imply a lack of love. *Don't belong* is a message that parents transmit because they themselves don't feel that they belong to their environment, therefore, by learning from a model, the child adopts the presented way of behaving, while *Don't think* is adopted if the parents often belittle the child's way of thinking. *Do not feel* implies the prohibition of all or some feelings, more precisely, the showing feelings. Judging by the opinion of TA therapists, the mentioned message can also be the cause of psychosis (Stjuart & Džoins, 2011).

Scripted injunctions and parenting styles can increase feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

Anxiety is most often defined as the anticipation of a certain danger or as a reaction to stimuli that do not carry real danger (Zdravković, 1985, according to Hadži Pešić, 2009). Thiele (1973) states that anxiety is a characteristic unpleasant emotion caused by the anticipation of danger or frustrations that threaten the safety of the individual. Many speak of it as "free floating", because it is not tied to a specific object or situation (Hadži Pešić, 2009). Anxiety can be seen as general anxiety, the general feeling of an individual, or as situational, the feeling of a person at a given moment. General anxiety is a tendency acquired in childhood, through the relationship with parents.

The aforementioned tendency implies viewing objectively harmless situations as threatening, and the tendency to react to them more intensively than the specific situation dictates. Situational anxiety is a subjectively perceived state of concern that is accompanied by increased activity of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberg, 1972). Anxiety is usually assessed using three components - behavioral, subjective, and physiological (Wenar, 2003). The mental component is manifested through an unpleasant state of worry, apprehension, tension, nervousness, and irritability, while the physical aspect is accompanied by psychomotor restlessness, rapid heart rate, rapid breathing, muscle tension, but also stomach problems, and excessive sweating. Anxiety and dysphoria are common conditions in adolescence and youth. While one part occurs as part of normal developmental changes, the other part can turn into a pathology (Marić, 2010). Research shows that most children and youth have worries and fears that are part of the normal course of development (Bell-Dolan, Last & Strauss, 1990).

Parenting styles accompanied by acceptance and love, or rejection of the child, as well as scripted injunctions, and verbal and non-verbal messages that the child received while growing up, can affect the adaptation and functioning of the child. For this reason, the question arises whether parenting styles and script injunctions are significant predictors of anxiety, which is also the goal of this research.

2. Method

2.1. Objective

The main goal of the research is to examine whether parenting styles and script injunctions are significant predictors of anxiety in students.

2.2. Sample

The sample was convenient and consisted of 122 respondents (M=18.9%, F=81.1%), an average age of 19.95 (SD=1.02). The respondents were first and second-year students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, Serbia. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants were informed about the method of data collection and processing, the purpose of the research, as well as about the anonymity of the obtained data. The questionnaires were without time limit.

2.3. Instruments

The following measuring instruments were used to operationalize the mentioned constructs:

The Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (1971) is a one-dimensional scale composed of 20 items. When answering, respondents note the frequency of the mentioned feeling, on a four-point scale. The assessment of the degree of frequency of occurrence of symptoms ranges from 1 to 4 (1 - rarely, 2 - sometimes, 3 - often, 4 - mostly). The reliability of the scale is around $\alpha = 0.82$.

The Scale of script injunctions (Gavrilov-Jerković, Budiša, Lekić Babić & Čolović 2009) is used to register the quality and degree of manifestation of injunctions that people experienced while growing up, and which represent an integral part of their self-image. The scale consists of 71 items answered on a five-point Likert-type scale, which make up twelve subscales. The reliability coefficient of the entire questionnaire is $\alpha = 0.96$, while the reliability of the subscales is - Don't exist ($\alpha = 0.83$), Don't be you ($\alpha = 0.48$), Don't be a child ($\alpha = 0.61$), Don't grow up ($\alpha = 0.55$), Don't be close ($\alpha = 0.68$), Don't ($\alpha = 0.66$), Don't succeed ($\alpha = 0.77$), Don't be healthy ($\alpha = 0.58$), Don't be important ($\alpha = 0.72$), Don't belong ($\alpha = 0.75$), Don't feel ($\alpha = 0.77$), Don't think ($\alpha = 0.72$).

The Parenting Styles Measurement Questionnaire (PSDQ), (Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen & Hart, 2001) consists of 32 items that make up three subscales, authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive style. Due to previously noted poor metric characteristics, the permissive style subscale was not used in this research. Parenting styles were assessed for both parents. Answering is done on a five-point Likert-type scale. The reliability of the authoritarian style was $\alpha = .82$, while the authoritative one was $\alpha = .86$.

3. Results

In the following, the basic descriptive statistical results are presented first.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Min	Max	AS	SD
Anxiety	27.00	56.00	37.05	5.70
Authoritative mother	1.20	4.93	3.13	.94
Authoritarian mother	1.00	6.50	1.98	1.02
Authoritative father	1.53	5.00	3.58	.94
Authoritarian father	1.00	4.33	2.06	.90
Don't exist	10.00	37.00	15.13	5.86
Don't be you	3.00	14.00	5.97	2.48
Don't be a child	2.00	12.00	3.19	1.76
Don't grow up	6.00	26.00	14.91	4.78
Don't be successful	6.00	27.00	11.88	4.22
Don't	7.00	29.00	18.02	4.56
Don't be important	6.00	23.00	10.17	4.47
Don't belong	8.00	33.00	16.47	5.46
Don't be close	5.00	22.00	10.10	3.93
Don't be healthy	3.00	13.00	6.12	2.97
Don't think	8.00	32.00	17.33	4.92
Don't feel it	8.00	31.00	17.64	5.35

Multiple regression analysis was used for data processing. The predictors were parenting styles, as well as scripted injunction, or rather the subscales of the mentioned construct, while the criterion variable was anxiety.

Table 2. Results of multiple regression.

Predictors	β	t	p	
Authoritative mother	.22	1.99	.05	$R = .65$ $R^2 = .43$ $F = 4.05$ $p = .00$
Authoritarian mother	.12	.87	.39	
Authoritative father	.32	2.41	.02	
Authoritarian father	-.16	-1.16	.25	
Don't exist	.58	3.67	.00	
Don't be you	-.03	-.24	.81	
Don't be a child	.23	2.33	.02	
Don't grow up	-.28	-2.37	.02	
Don't be successful	.15	1.17	.25	
Don't	.26	2.35	.02	
Don't be important	-.31	-1.39	.17	
Don't belong	.08	.61	.55	
Don't be close	.04	.26	.80	
Don't be healthy	.06	.45	.65	
Don't think	.29	2.00	.05	
Don't feel it	-.08	-.69	.49	

The results show that the model consisting of script injunctions and parenting styles explains 43% of the total variance. The estimated authoritative style of the mother, as well as the authoritative style of the father, were singled out as individual predictors. When it comes to script injunctions, the following stood out as significant predictors of anxiety: *Don't exist*, *Don't be a child*, *Don't grow up*, *Don't*, and *Don't think*.

4. Discussion

An adult who as a child received the messages "Children can't think", "What do you know", and "Don't talk nonsense", in situations when they need to show their opinion, express their views, say their ideas, answer exams, instead of thinking, they feel insufficiently competent, insecure, and the resulting feeling is anxiety, which on the other hand blocks the flow of thought even more (Stjuart & Džoins, 2011; Gulding & Gulding, 2007).

The "*Do not*" command is given by parents who are anxious themselves. Due to their anxiety, they do not allow the child to do many things for fear that something bad will happen. When he grows up, a

child who has internalized this prohibition feels anxious in most situations when he has to make a decision, expecting a catastrophic outcome.

Don't grow up and *Don't be a child*, although they seem to carry opposite messages, are fundamentally related to anxiety. An adult with these inhibitions feels insufficiently competent and self-confident to demonstrate his capacities. These are people who had to give up their childhood and do things that older children normally do, and because of that, they felt scared and anxious ("Can I do it?").

On the other hand, people who received the "*Do not grow up*" injunctions, which came from parents who unconsciously sent the message "Don't ever leave me", "Be a little child" and "Stay with me", when they grow up they feel anxiety in response to internal conflict between the desire to become independent and to stay with parents (Stjuart & Džoins, 2011; Gulding & Gulding, 2007).

Do not exist can also be seen as a ban on life. In adulthood, these individuals may have suicidal thoughts, but more often this injunction is manifested through, per person, risky behaviors, such as consuming too much alcohol, drugs, smoking, or eating too much food. As a defense against the possible catastrophic outcome of the Do not exist injunctions, the person becomes worried, and anxious, in order to cancel the power of the injunctions (Gulding & Gulding, 2008).

The authoritative parenting style of the father and mother significantly contributes to the prediction of anxiety in students. A possible explanation is that this parenting style is characterized by high expectations of children, as parents have confidence in their own children's abilities and autonomy, while clearly expressing warmth and support (Baumrind, 1966). We are talking about respondents who are first- and second-year students, who still have a lot of exams ahead of them, so it is possible that they are more often exposed to the situation of checking their own knowledge and abilities, with high expectations of themselves and the fear of letting their parents down.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the research was to examine whether it is possible to predict anxiety in students using parenting styles and scripted injunctions. The results show that significant predictors of anxiety are the authoritative style of the mother, and the authoritative style of the father, as well as the following script prohibitions: Don't exist, Don't be a child, Don't grow up, Don't, and Don't think. However, since certain subscales such as Don't grow up and Don't be a child do not have high reliability, it would be appropriate to be cautious when interpreting the results. Also, in some future research, it would be convenient to use a larger and more balanced sample, but also more diverse in terms of age and faculty department.

References

- Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior. *Child Development*, 37(4), 887-907.
- Bell-Dolan, D. J., Last, C. G. & Strauss, C. C. (1990). Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders in Normal Children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 29 (5), 759-765.
- Gavrilov Jerković, V., Budiša, D., Lekić Babić, N. & Čolović, P. (2009). *Procena skriptnih zabrana. Procena psiholoških i psihopatoloških fenomena*. Beograd: Centar za primenjenu psihologiju.
- Gulding, M. & Gulding, R. L. (2007). *Promeniti život*. Novi Sad: Psihopolis institut.
- Gulding, M. M. & Gulding, R. (2008). *Upravljanje brigama*. Novi Sad: Psihopolis.
- Hadži Pešić, M. (2009). *Psihološki aspekti koronarne bolesti srca*. Niš: Filozofski fakultet.
- Marić, M. (2010). Osobine ličnosti, životni događaji i anksioznost adolescenata. *Primenjena psihologija*, 1, 39-57.
- Matejević, M., Todorović, J. & Jovanović, D. (2014). Patterns of Family Functioning and Dimensions of Parenting Style. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 431 – 437.
- Robinson, C. C., Mandlco, B., Olsen, S. F. & Hart, C. H. (2001). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSQD). In B. F. Perlmutter, J. Touliatos, & G. W. Holden (Eds.), *Handbook of family measurement techniques: Vol. 3. Instruments & index* (pp. 319 - 321). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ross, J. & Hammer, N. (2002). College freshmen: Adjustment and achievement in relation to parenting and identity style. *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 5, 211–218.
- Spielberger, C. D., Gorsuch, R. L. & Lushene, R. E. (1983). *STAI manual for the STAI-TRAIT anxiety inventory*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Stjuart, I. & Džoins, V. (2011). *Savremena transakciona analiza*. Novi Sad: Psihopolis.
- Thiele, W. (1973). The psychovegetative syndrome. In Rees, I. (1973). *Anxiety factors in comprehensive patients care*. London and Amsterdam: Excerpta medica.
- Wenar, C. (2003). *Razvojna psihopatologija i psihijatrija: od dojenačke dobi do adolescencije*. Jastrebarsko: Naklada Slap.
- Zung, W. W. K. (1971). A rating instrument for anxiety disorders. *Psychosomatics*, 12(6), 371- 379.