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Parental Authority Styles in Adolescent-Parent Relationships

Metka Kuhar



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Abstract

This study confronts an adapted version of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) (e.g. *Ritchie/Fitzpatrick* 1990) with an adapted version of the Psychological Control Scale (e.g. *Barber* 1996). The analysis is based on a sample of 194 firstborn Slovenian adolescents and their parents. The results from combinations of variables from the two theoretical-empirical contexts indicate the importance of the concept of parental authority and especially the communicative aspects of its assertion. The findings shed light on ways in which parents assert their authority over their adolescent children in the form of more deliberative or coercive parental authority styles.

Keywords: Authority, adolescents, parents, family communication patterns, psychological control

Elterliche Autorität in der Jugendliche-Eltern-Beziehung

Zusammenfassung

Die Studie konfrontiert eine adaptierte Version der Family Communication Patterns (FCP) nach *Ritchie/Fitzpatrick* (1990) mit einer ebenfalls adaptierten Version der Psychological Control Scale nach *Barber* (1996). Die Analyse basiert auf einer Stichprobe von 194 Personen, erstgeborene slowenische Jugendliche und deren Eltern. Die Ergebnisse aus der Kombination von Variablen der beiden theoretisch-empirischen Kontexte verweisen auf die Bedeutung des Konzepts der elterlichen Autorität und insbesondere auf die kommunikativen Aspekte ihrer Geltendmachung. Es wird sichtbar gemacht, wie Eltern ihre Autorität in Form von eher deliberativen oder bestrafenden Erziehungsstilen ihren Kindern gegenüber durchsetzen.

Schlagworte: Autorität, Jugendliche, Eltern, familiäre Kommunikationsmuster, psychologische Kontrolle

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1 Introduction

Patterns of child-rearing and related (positive and negative) developmental outcomes have received considerable attention within the developmental research framework (for a more comprehensive review, see, for example, *Darling/Steinberg* 1993). On the one hand, very diverse theoretical-empirical approaches emphasize the importance and co-existence of instrumental/regulating/controlling and affective/supportive/responsive parental practices for positive youth outcomes. On the other hand, these approaches explicitly or implicitly view parental behaviour along the control-autonomy continuum which theoretically ranges from parents' total control over the child's behaviour to parents ceding complete autonomy to the child. A wide array of studies indicates that these significant changes gradually occur during adolescence with the pattern of unilateral, asymmetrical adolescent-parent relationships developing into more equal, mutual and reciprocal relationships established toward the end of adolescence (e.g. *Youniss/Smollar* 1985; *Smetana* 1995).

Sociologically oriented research findings show that parents and children in general increasingly subscribe to the ideals of democracy and negotiation (e.g. *du Bois-Reymond/Büchner/Krüger* 1993) while highlighting that differences in power between parents and children remain in spite of the tendencies of horizontal ways of communicating (e.g. *Solomon et al* 2002).

A complaint often found in the pedagogically oriented literature is that pupils do not respect the teacher's formal authority, which is seen as a consequence of permissive upbringing at home (e.g. *Pace/Hemmings* 2007). Still, some authors (e.g. *Kroflič* 2007) point out that an 'all-allowing' education only substitutes clear guidelines and authoritarian prohibitions with more subtle forms of control over a child. The most disseminated forms of authority assertion are claimed to be: diplomatic manipulation, punishment by silence or disciplining with silent, unarticulated expectations (e.g. emotional conditioning) which the child, although unable to identify their repressive nature, experiences as an undefined anxiety (e.g. *Kroflič* 2007).

Despite the diversity and variety of the different approaches to parenting/child-rearing or to broader socialisation behaviours the concept of parental authority has only rarely been used in the socialisation literature; it is obvious that literature on child-rearing lacks clarity regarding the concept of parental authority, especially in the developmental literature. Previous research focused either exclusively on parental control and adolescent autonomy dimensions or did not allow for disentangling various dimensions. For example, parental authority frequently tends to be equated with the distribution of decision-making power between parents and adolescents (e.g. *Dornbusch et al.* 1985; *Bosma et al* 1996), or with parental legitimacy to set rules (and adolescent's obligation to obey) in dif-

ferent domains (e.g. *Smetana* 1995; *Smetana/Crean/Campione-Barr* 2005). Put differently, it is equated functionally with “the vehicle” for asserting parental will.

The concept of authority has also been (unclearly) referred to as one of the parenting style practices (besides maturity demands, communication style, nurturance) (e.g. *Baumrind* 1967, 1971) and is often measured on the scale of so called parental authority prototypes (e.g. *Buri* 1999, referring to *Baumrind* 1971). This article draws attention to the absence of consensus on the definitions of authority within the developmental literature by examining two theoretical-empirical constructs of diverse conceptual origins (family communication patterns (FCP) and psychological control) which seem to reflect the concept of parental authority, especially highlighting the communicative aspects of the assertion of parental authority.

The starting point is a concept of authority as a relational, dynamic category that is constantly created in the process of interaction, while at the same time differences in the distribution of power between parents and children (e.g. *Kroflič* 1997; *Bingham* 2008) is presumed. Accordingly, power is a relational property which refers to the (superior) actor’s ability to influence the target person to do or believe something he or she would not have necessarily done or believed otherwise (e.g. *Blood/Wolfe* 1960). Differences in power and, consequently, in relative influence, determine the strategies which parents and children use in concrete situations involving conflict, decisions making and the like (e.g. *Bao* 2001).

In this study it is claimed that the manner of parental authority assertion (in general, not in concrete situations) is a relatively stable and distinctive concept which is worthy of emphasizing particularly in family communication patterns and parental child-rearing practices/styles theory and research. To this aim, both FCP orientations (conversation and conformity orientation) and the scale of psychological control were examined with the help of the factor analysis.

2 Family Communication Patterns and Psychological Control

The two FCP orientations scales items were first compared with the psychological control scale items. In fact, both approaches describe (among other things) the communication behaviours parents employ in regulating their children’s behaviours. Conversation orientation implies egalitarian ethics (spontaneous and unconstrained interactions, open discussion of ideas, a free exchange of ideas and emotions, willingness to accept conflict, supportiveness, fairness, mutuality, joint decision-making etc.) (e.g. *Ritchie* 1991; *Koerner/Cvancara* 2002; *Koerner/Fitzpatrick* 1990, 1997).

In spite of their diverse conceptual origins, conformity orientation and psychological control both reveal the parental tendency to uncompromisingly enforce their own ideas and their irritation if the child’s views differ. More concretely, conformity orientation measures the manifestation of parental exercise of power in the family communication environment, and parental demand for the child’s obedience and conflict avoidance (e.g. *Ritchie* 1991; *Ritchie/Fitzpatrick* 1990).

There is, however, not much agreement theoretically or empirically regarding the conceptualization of psychological control, and the lack of conceptual clarity is also reflected at the measurement level (e.g. *Baumrind* 2005). Nevertheless, in the literature on

parenting dimensions, psychological control is conceptualized as a general style of authority assertion (e.g. *Steinberg* 2005) with emphasis on internal control and manipulative means of parental attempts to pressure the child (e.g. *Barber* 1996). This includes a range of very different parenting practices such as infantilizing the child, possessively restricting their activities, emotional manipulation through the use of love withdrawal, guilt induction and ignoring, unrealistic expectations, and personal attacks (e.g. *Barber/Harmon* 2002).

While the connection between psychological control and power assertion was indirectly suggested by *Steinberg* (2005), *Ritchie* (1991) explicitly showed that the conformity orientation implies parents' unquestionable power to enforce children's conformity. With the conversation style, power is not concentrated in parents but is more evenly distributed (*ibid.*). *Ritchie* (1991) also stated that the (original) FCP instrument measures two closely related dimensions of parental power, i.e. the tendency to apply parental power to compel child's conformity and the tendency to restrain parent's power in order to encourage the child's independence and intellectual autonomy. In the recent theorization of family communication patterns (e.g. *Koerner/Fitzpatrick* 2002; *Fitzpatrick* 2004) neither the concept of power nor the concept of (parental) authority were explicitly exposed. The pioneers of this approach, *Chaffee* and *McLeod*, have already shifted attention from power relations in the family to co-orientation processes (e.g. *Ritchie* 1988).

In line with *Ritchie's* (1988, 1991) work emphasizing that these orientations cover a concept that is broader than the beliefs about family communication norms, it was hypothesized that *the concepts of conversation and conformity orientation and the concept of psychological control together build two dimensions both of which address the communicative way of exerting and asserting parental authority: in a more democratic way (conversation orientation) or in a more coercive or intrusive way (conformity orientation and psychological control together).*

This hypothesis is further supported by the differentiation between a more deliberative and a more coercive way of asserting parental rules/demands that is implicitly present in various theories (although they do not use the term authority). Deliberative approaches are associated with bilateral, mutual communication processes between children and parents, and coercive approaches with a more repressive enforcement of parental rules/demands and favouring of unquestioning obedience. Examples include *Baumrind's* (1967, 1971) differentiation between authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles and *Hoffman's* (1970) differentiation between power assertion and reasoning.

Conversation and conformity orientations have even been explicitly compared with *Baumrind's* parental authoritative and authoritarian exhibitions of controlling behaviour (e.g. *Fitzpatrick/Koerner* 2005). Similarly, parallels can also be drawn between psychological control and *Baumrind's* conceptualization of the authoritarian style of control/directive authoritarian control (e.g. *Baumrind* 1991). As regards *Barber's* (1996) conceptualizations of psychological control, *Baumrind* (2005) even states explicitly that psychological control is a marker of an authoritarian parenting style.

3 Methods

Data Gathering and Sample Characteristics

The study was conducted in Slovenia in January 2008. The sample comprised 194 families totalling 558 respondents (194 firstborn adolescents, 191 mothers and 173 fathers). Used for data collection was the non-probability snowball sampling technique. To qualify for participation, the firstborn child had to be between the ages of 11 and 18, this being the age range most often considered the adolescence period. The families were recruited by 22 trained interviewers, and data collection took place in the subjects' homes. The respondents were guided by interviewers who were alone with the individual respondents. Interviews with family members were conducted immediately one after another.

In the adolescent sample, 90 girls and 104 boys were interviewed, with three age groups being represented: early adolescence (24 girls and 26 boys aged 11-13), middle adolescence (31 girls and 35 boys aged 14-15), and late adolescence (35 girls and 43 boys aged 16-18). Twenty-two percent of children were the only child in the family, 60.1 percent the elder of two children and 17.9 percent were the oldest of three children in a family. The parent sample consisted of 191 mothers (mean age 39.8 years and standard deviation 4.2 years) and 173 fathers (mean age 42.7 years and standard deviation 4.5 years).

All variables point to the conclusion that the sample represented a wide range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Most families (87.6 percent) were intact families (with both biological parents), and 12.4 percent were single-parent or reorganized families.¹ 45.4 percent of the interviewed families live in the countryside and 54.6 percent in urban areas.² The standard of living was (indirectly) assessed based on the question about parental education and the individual respondent's estimation of the family's material resources (on a 5-point-scale ranging from "barely make ends meet" to "live very comfortably").³

As regards parental education (reported by the parents themselves), 8.3 percent of mothers and 7.5 percent of fathers had a primary school education, 61.4 percent of mothers and 65.9 percent of fathers had a secondary school education, while 30.2 percent of mothers and 26.6 percent of fathers had a university education. Estimations of the family's material resources differed among family members. Children had a more favourable perception than parents. Only 22.7 percent of adolescents compared to 41.2 percent of mothers and 39 percent of fathers described their standard as low; 60.3 percent of adolescents, 54 percent of mothers and 50.6 percent of fathers assessed it as medium, while 16.5 percent of adolescents and only 4.8 percent of mothers and 10.5 percent of fathers thought that it was high.

Measurement

Family Communication Patterns and Psychological Control Scales. Family communication patterns were measured with an adapted version of the Revised Family Communication Pattern Instrument (RFCP) (e.g. *Ritchie/Fitzpatrick* 1990). The instrument was adapted following personal e-mail communication with the co-author of RFCP, *David Ritchie*, (November 25, 2007), who suggested a pre-study to find out how the individual

items of the RFCP's conversation and conformity scale are understood in the Slovenian context and if the children's version of the RFCP should differentiate between the mother and the father, instead of individual items referring to both parents together.

Ritchie's suggestion is in line with his finding that "differences in scale content from one article to another need not be a serious problem when the researcher examines afresh the face content of scales and asks how members of the subject population interpret the scales" (1991, p. 551). Moreover, *Ritchie* (1991) called for developing new items that would reflect the way members of different types of families think about conformity and supportiveness. He also pointed out the need to question every family member about family communication. In his opinion, the structure of intra-familial communication cannot be fully understood without responses from every family member. The same suggestions were taken into consideration when adapting the psychological control scale, with the Psychological Control Scale – Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR) (e.g. *Barber* 1996) serving as the basis.

All items were pre-tested on a pilot sample of 24 families with 11- to 18-year-old first-born adolescents living in Slovenia. First, the pilot study respondents answered the RFCP questionnaire and the psychological control scale (with a separate children's version for the mother and for the father and a parental version also prepared so that it referred to the individual parent). Afterwards, cognitive interviews using the techniques of retrospective thinking aloud and definitions of key terms (e.g. *Willis* 2005) were applied to obtain a glimpse of the respondents' understanding of individual items and their feedback on the scales as a whole.

Items from the original instruments that did not work well in the Slovenian context (e.g. "My mother encourages me to challenge their ideas and beliefs" in the conversation orientation RFCP scale) were excluded from the final version. Accordingly, a few items from the original scales were omitted, a few were added and some of the original items were modified (see Table 1 for the final composition of each of the three scales and Table 2 for the statistics of all the scales). For example, joking is included in the conversation orientation RFCP scale because the respondents in the pilot study pointed it out as an important aspect of relaxed and open interpersonal relationships. The item "My mother felt that it was important to be the boss" was omitted from the conformity orientation RFCP scale as the respondents pointed out its redundancy with respect to the item "In my home, my mother usually has the last word." On the other hand, the item "My mother often says things like 'As long as you live at home, you have to obey my rules'" was added to this scale because it seems to represent the typical local situation of expressing pressure to conform.

The adapted psychological control scale underwent the greatest number of changes based on the results of the pilot study. Nevertheless, it reveals the parental tendency towards uncompromising enforcement of parental ideas, and parental irritation if the child's views differ. In comparison with the conformity orientation scale, it gives a more concrete description of the communication behaviours with which parents appeal to child's conformity or try to avoid controversies (e.g. with disrespectful expressions of criticism and disapproval). Here, the psychological control scale specifically highlights the emotional conditioning of children (e.g. 'If you loved me you wouldn't behave like that').

The pilot study justified, or even necessitated, the use of four versions of the questionnaire (adolescents on their mothers/fathers, mothers' self-reporting and fathers' self-reporting). All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Adapted Measurement Scales

Table 1a: Conversation Orientation (Adolescent's Version of Mother)

1. My mother and I often discuss things we have done during the day.
2. My mother often says something like "You should always look at both sides of an issue".
3. My mother and I can openly talk about everything, including my more personal issues.
4. My mother and I often talk about my emotions and feelings.
5. My mother and I often have a long, relaxed conversation about nothing in particular.
6. My mother likes to hear my opinion even when she doesn't agree with me.
7. My mother really listens to me.
8. My mother allows me to influence family decisions with my own opinion.
9. I often discuss my plans and hopes for the near future with my mother.
10. I really enjoy talking with my mother, even when we disagree.
11. I often joke with my mother.

Table 1b: Conformity Orientation (Adolescent's Version of Mother)

1. My mother prefers to avoid conflicts with me than engage in them openly.
2. My mother sometimes becomes irritated with my views if they are different from hers.
3. If my mother doesn't approve of it, she doesn't want to know about it.
4. When anything really important is involved, my mother expects me to obey without question. (*omitted after the first factor analysis*)
5. In our home, my mother usually has the last word. (*omitted after the first factor analysis*)
6. My mother often says things like 'You'll know better when you grow up.'
7. My mother often says things like 'My ideas are right and you should not question them.'
8. My mother often says things like 'A child should not argue with adults.'
9. My mother often says things like 'There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.'
10. My mother often says things like 'You should give in on arguments rather than stick to your own opinion.'
11. My mother often says things like 'As long as you live at home, you have to obey my rules.'

Table 1c: Psychological Control (Adolescent's Version of Mother)

1. My mother often doesn't take me seriously when we talk (changes the subject, finishes my sentences, interrupts me etc.) (*omitted after the first factor analysis*)
2. If I do something my mother disagrees with, I have to listen to her long lectures.
3. My mother often criticizes me.
4. If my mother feels offended, she stops talking to me.
5. My mother would like to be able to tell me how to behave or feel all the time.
6. My mother is always trying to change how I feel or think about things.
7. My mother often says things like 'If you loved me you wouldn't behave like that'.
8. My mother often blames me for her problems or for the problems of other family members.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Measurement Scales – Means and Standard Deviations

	1		2		3		4	
Conversation orientation	3.86	0.76	3.42	0.57	3.82	0.80	3.71	0.55
Conformity orientation	2.53	0.63	2.69	0.59	2.71	0.66	2.64	0.57
Psychological control	2.30	0.76	2.62	0.63	2.65	0.79	2.19	0.63

(Types of Respondents: 1- Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2- Adolescent's Report about Father; 3- Mother's Self-Report; 4- Father's Self-Report)

4 Results

Parental authority styles

It was assumed that conversation and conformity orientation and psychological control scales together build two dimensions that together address two communicative ways of exerting and asserting parental authority: deliberative and coercive. All items from the adapted scales were subjected to two factor analyses. In the first factor analysis, a varimax rotation revealed two factors, with the first factor exactly overlapping the conversation orientation items in all four types of answers (adolescents' answers about mothers; adolescents' answers about fathers; mothers' self-reports; fathers' self-reports), and the second covering the conformity orientation and psychological control scales. Two items were excluded from the conformity orientation scale (number 4 and 5) and one from the psychological control scale (number 1) because their communality value was below 0.2.

Table 3a: Exploratory Factor Analysis for Items within the Adapted RFCP and Psychological Control Scales – First Factor – Deliberative Authority Style

Type of respondent	1	2	3	4
My mother and I often talk about my emotions and feelings.	0.80	0.71	0.69	0.63
My mother and I can openly talk about everything including my more personal issues.	0.75	0.79	0.68	0.59
My mother and I often have a long relaxed conversation about nothing in particular.	0.75	0.76	0.73	0.70
My mother really listens to me.	0.74	0.82	0.63	0.60
I really enjoy talking with my mother even when we disagree.	0.71	0.68	0.64	0.57
I often joke with my mother.	0.66	0.67	0.63	0.59
My mother and I often discuss things we have done during the day.	0.61	0.71	0.64	0.69
My mother allows me to influence family decisions with my own opinion.	0.60	0.67	0.70	0.63
My mother likes to hear my opinion even when she doesn't agree with me.	0.55	0.61	0.63	0.64
I often discuss my plans and hopes for the near future with my mother.	0.51	0.68	0.60	0.52
My mother often says something like "You should always look at both sides of an issue"	0.46	0.43	0.34	0.47

(Types of Respondents: 1 – Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent's Report about Father; 3 – Mother's Self-Report; 4 – Father's Self-Report)

Repeated factor analysis without the three items again revealed two factors as the optimum result (namely, the conversation orientation scale in its entirety and the combination of 16 items of the conformity orientation and psychological control) with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0. Both together account for 39.9 percent (adolescents' answers about mothers); 44.2 percent (adolescents' answers about fathers); 37.4 percent (mothers' self-reports); and 36 percent of the variance (fathers' self-reports) (see Table 3c). Factor loadings of six items are quite low (below 0.40, but only once below 0.30) but only for one or mostly two types of answers (in all six cases at least for mothers' self-reports). Since for other types of answers the loadings were high it was decided to keep these items.

Table 3b: Exploratory Factor Analysis for Items within the Adapted RFCP and Psychological Control Scales – Second Factor – Coercive Authority Style

Type of respondent	1	2	3	4
'My ideas are right and you should not question them.'	0.69	0.71	0.74	0.63
If my mother doesn't approve of it, she doesn't want to know about it.	0.63	0.57	0.58	0.51
My mother is always trying to change how I feel or think about things.	0.63	0.62	0.65	0.74
'A child should not argue with adults.'	0.62	0.77	0.75	0.65
If my mother feels offended, she stops talking to me.	0.61	0.55	0.31	0.31
'If you loved me you, wouldn't behave like that.'	0.61	0.60	0.68	0.72
My mother sometimes becomes irritated with my views if they are different from hers.	0.60	0.59	0.38	0.23
'There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.'	0.60	0.64	0.59	0.61
My mother would like to be able to tell me how to behave or feel all the time.	0.57	0.59	0.49	0.53
My mother often blames me for her problems or for the problems of other family members.	0.52	0.69	0.61	0.73
'As long as you live at home. You have to obey my rules.'	0.47	0.42	0.62	0.66
My mother prefers to avoid conflicts with me than engage in them openly.	0.47	0.34	0.42	0.49
'You should give in on arguments rather than stick to your own opinion.'	0.41	0.54	0.40	0.41
'You'll know better when you grow up.'	0.40	0.48	0.64	0.52
If I do something my mother disagrees with, I have to listen to her long lectures.	0.53	0.61	0.39	0.54
My mother often criticizes me.	0.53	0.61	0.39	0.54

(Types of Respondents: 1 – Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent's Report about Father; 3 – Mother's Self-Report; 4 – Father's Self-Report)

Table 3c: Eigenvalues and Percent of Variance for Both Factors for Four Types of Respondents

Type of respondent	1	2	3	4
Eigenvalue	11.92	4.28	3.46	13.12
Percent of Variance Factor 1	30.11	22.6	26.45	25.04
Percent of Variance Factor 2	9.78	21.6	10.95	10.95
Cumulative percent of Variance	39.89	44.2	37.4	35.99

The result can be most reasonably interpreted as involving two ways of communication enforcement of parental authority. Conformity orientation and psychological control together seem to reflect a coercive way of parental authority enforcement, while conversation orientation reflects a deliberative manner of parental authority enforcement. The rationale for the relabeling undertaken in the case of conversation orientation is supported by the fact that this dimension includes also items that deal with decision-making not just those dealing with affinity and openness of parent-child relationship/communication patterns.

The coercive and the deliberative ways of parental authority enforcement seem to be two separate dimensions which, however, show a negative mutual co-dependence (see Table 4). This interpretation is also corroborated by the strong positive correlation between conformity orientation and psychological control (see also Table 4).

Table 4: Correlations between Deliberative Authority Style and Coercive Authority Style; and between Conformity Orientation and Psychological Control for Four Types of Respondents

	Adolescent about mother	Adolescent about father	Mother's self-report	Father's self-report
Deliberative authority style-coercive authority style	-0.46**	-0.73**	-0.37**	-0.31**
Conformity orientation – psychological control	0.68**	0.78**	0.65**	0.70**

The first factor, conversation orientation, could be referred to as 'deliberative authority style' and the second, conformity orientation and psychological control combined, as 'coercive authority style'. The concept of authority style has been used before, although rarely, to distinguish between authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting practices in a broader sense (e.g. *Klein/O'Bryant/Hopkins* 1996; *Kuusisto* 2003). The results of this study suggest that the concept of authority style should be used in a more specific sense, namely, as a general designation of the communicative enforcement of parental authority. The term style indicates stable, not just specific, parental behaviours, attitudes and treatment of the child.

Both factors were subjected to a reliability analysis. The reliability factors for the respective scales were high, with the alphas ranging from 0.867 to 0.910. The reliability for both scales together was also acceptably high, ranging from 0.737 to 0.982 (see Table 5a for the reliabilities of the scales). The same factor solution was tested in the most relevant sub-populations of the study sample. Reliability analyses were performed for the following sub-

populations: male vs. female adolescent respondents (Table 5b); different age groups of adolescent respondents (11-13, 14-15 and 16-18 years of age, which correspond to different developmental-psychological phases of adolescence) (Table 5c); high-educated parents vs. low-educated parents (the higher education was taken if the education level of mothers and fathers differed)⁴ (Table 5d); intact vs. single/parent and reorganized families (Table 5e). The Cronbach's alphas based on standardized items were high for both factors in all subpopulations. The reliability for both scales together was also calculated in all subpopulations and acceptably high (the lower value was 0.599, but predominantly the values are higher than 0.7). All these findings prove a high stability of the factor solution.

Table 5a: Reliability of Factors for the Total Population – Cronbach's Alphas Based on Standardized Items for Four Types of Respondents

	Deliberative authority style	Coercive authority style	Deliberative and coercive authority style
1	0.90	0.881	0.874
2	0.910	0.898	0.982
3	0.883	0.869	0.737
4	0.867	0.869	0.761

(1 – Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent's Report about Father; 3 – Mother's Self-Report; 4 – Father's Self-Report)

Table 5b: Reliability of Factors – Cronbach's Alphas Based on Standardized Items Calculated for Two Subpopulations: Male (M) and Female (F) Adolescent Respondents

	1		2		3		4	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Deliberative authority style	0.90	0.88	0.92	0.90	0.87	0.89	0.86	0.87
Coercive authority style	0.90	0.84	0.91	0.89	0.86	0.88	0.89	0.85
Deliberative and coercive authority style	0.77	0.62	0.79	0.78	0.63	0.79	0.65	0.78

(Types of Respondents: 1 – Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent's Report about Father; 3 – Mother's Self-Report; 4 – Father's Self-Report)

Table 5c: Reliability of Factors – Cronbach's Alphas Based on Standardized Items Calculated for Three Subpopulations: Early vs. Middle vs. Late Adolescents

	1			2			3			4		
	11-13	14-15	16-18	11-13	14-15	16-18	11-13	14-15	16-18	11-13	14-15	16-18
Deliberative authority style	0.85	0.89	0.90	0.88	0.92	0.90	0.88	0.87	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.86
Coercive authority style	0.87	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.88	0.91	0.86	0.85	0.87	0.84	0.74	0.86
Deliberative and coercive authority style	0.86	0.73	0.68	0.85	0.79	0.72	0.79	0.75	0.73	0.77	0.82	0.66

(Types of Respondents: 1 – Adolescent's Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent's Report about Father; 3 – Mother's Self-Report; 4 – Father's Self-Report)

Table 5d: Reliability of Factors – Cronbach’s Alphas Based on Standardized Items Calculated for Three Subpopulations: Lower (L) vs. Middle (M) vs. Higher (H) Parental Education

	1			2			3			4		
	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H
Deliberative Authority Style	0.93	0.92	0.87	0.94	0.93	0.88	0.91	0.87	0.90	0.88	0.88	0.87
Coercive Authority Style	0.85	0.89	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.90	0.80	0.91	0.84	0.87	0.87	0.88
Deliberative and Coercive Authority Style	0.88	0.77	0.60	0.87	0.79	0.84	0.81	0.73	0.66	0.70	0.72	0.77

(Types of Respondents: 1 – Adolescent’s Report about Mother; 2 – Adolescent’s Report about Father; 3 – Mother’s Self-Report; 4 – Father’s Self-Report)

Table 5e: Reliability of Factors – Cronbach’s Alphas Based on Standardized Items Calculated for Two Subpopulations: Intact vs. Single-Parent/Reorganized Families (Others)

	1		2		3		4	
	Intact	Others	Intact	Others	Intact	Others	Intact	Others
Deliberative authority style	0.90	0.92	0.91	0.91	0.88	0.92	0.867	0.91
Coercive authority style	0.88	0.91	0.90	0.92	0.87	0.90	0.872	0.80
Deliberative and coercive authority style	0.73	0.70	0.78	0.70	0.73	0.75	0.73	0.81

(Types of Respondents: 1 – the Adolescent’s Report about the Mother; 2 – the Adolescent’s Report about the Father; 3 – the Mother’s Self-Report; 4 – the Father’s Self-Report)

5 Discussion

Parental authority represents an unavoidable and necessary part of parent-adolescent relationships and is critically related to child-rearing, yet few researchers of parent-children communication/relationships or parenting (styles, dimensions etc.) deal with this concept in more detail, and even fewer try to define it. The existing developmental studies have researched changes in parental authority throughout adolescence and in regard to earlier developmental periods, and they have tended to find out which specific domains of the adolescent’s life are still regulated by parental authority, and in which young people make their own decisions (e.g. *Smetana* 1985; *Smetana/Crean/Campione-Barr* 2005; *Bosma et al* 1996). Sociologically and pedagogically oriented studies mostly focus on a historically changed pattern of parent-children relationships, i.e. a change from restrictive parental direction and the corresponding obedience of the child to a pattern of recurrent negotiation between parents and children.

This study presents theoretical and empirical research on the significance of the use of the concept of authority and the need for its conceptualisation together with its different aspects. Rather than trying to offer any final answers it primarily wanted to open up

certain conceptually and specifically contextual questions. It represents a preliminary effort to link family communication patterns with the parenting dimensions approach. The study indicates the need to focus on the communicative way of parent authority enforcement, after the affirmation of the concept of authority and introduction of the concept of authority style, which in turn need to be further elaborated.

The study examines side by side theoretical-empirical constructs from two differently grounded research frameworks – family communication patterns (a conversation and a conformity orientation) and parenting dimensions (psychological control) (all three constructs adapted according to the results of a pilot study). Both approaches describe (among other things) which communication behaviours parents employ in the regulation of behaviours of their children. A conformity orientation and psychological control both emphasize a parental preference for the child's obedience as well as a parental assertion and position of absolute authority, with more emphasis placed on certain communication »approaches« such as paternalist statements, disrespect in conversation, »lecturing«, criticising, the imposition of guilt and threats along with withholding of affection. A conversation orientation is about two-way, mutual, egalitarian child-parent interactions in which the parent really listens to the adolescent, allows their difference of opinion and their influence on family decisions, while also explaining their demands and rules.

The results of the study suggest a latent construct of the communicative way of parental authority assertion behind the scales of family communication patterns and psychological control. The two factors obtained as the optimum result by the factor analyses on four groups of reports (the adolescent about the mother, the adolescent about the father, the mother's self-report and the father's self-report) and legitimated by the high reliability coefficients for different subpopulations were interpreted as deliberative and coercive authority styles. In line with the basis for the conceptualization of parental authority presented in the introductory part, the concept of authority style points to the communicative way in which generally superior parental power is repeatedly asserted or confirmed in the process of interaction with the adolescent.

The closest to come to the two established factors is the distinction made between authoritarian and authoritative parenting (e.g. *Baumrind* 1967, 1971, 1991), which are, however, conceptualized more broadly, also pointing out the parental provision of support, safety, promotion of adolescent's autonomy vs. punishment, even hostility etc. *Baumrind* (1967, 1971) considered authority only as one of the parenting style practices besides maturity demands, communication style and nurturance, but with this approach an attempt will be made to show that parental authority and a communicative way of parental authority assertion are both important (and distinctive) concepts. The established parental authority styles focus on authoritative bilateral communication and authoritarian unilateral assertiveness of parental will. Correlation analysis did not exclude the co-existence of both styles in a specific parent-child relationship.

Based on the results obtained in this study, systematic use of the authority style concept seems to offer a solution to the conceptual quandary formulated by *Steinberg* (2005), if only for psychological control which, however, can undoubtedly also be applied to other parenting dimensions. *Steinberg's* (2005) question concerned whether psychological control presents a manner of (parenting) style or content. Most probably this question should not necessarily be posed in terms of binaries since in a slightly different conceptual setting the answer can turn out to include both. It is undoubtedly important that parents (always in a certain cultural and historical context, and in their own given and their

concrete relationships with their child) both gradually self-limit or withdraw their authority as the child grows up, which is domain-specific, as well as simultaneously offer their child support to cope with its own accountability. However, it is also important how parents communicate their acceptance of and consideration for their adolescent and offer them support and how they set demands, rules, limits and express expectations. The latter could be covered by the concept of authority style which in the present study was not fully elucidated but only discovered indirectly. For further elaboration of this concept as well as for a deeper conceptualisation of authority, further studies are required.

Above all, the study suggests that an explicit and integral conceptualization of parental authority is needed that would take into account the domain- or situation-specificity of asserting authority and encompass at least the key aspects listed below:

- 1) Distribution of power in the family (e.g. as perceived in the relationship between the parental and adolescent's decisional jurisdiction; parents' and children's communication strategies; negotiations of adolescents' rights, freedoms, duties and rules);
- 2) Style of parental enforcement of power (i.e. (communicative) ways of setting demands, rules, limits, sanctions, expression of expectations etc);
- 3) The adolescent's reaction to parental authority claims and measures (the form of adolescent's conformity ranging from external compliance to internalized parental rules).

Further studies should also question the link between the authority styles in particular and authority patterns in general, and certain youth outcomes (e.g. the development of autonomy).

Notes

- 1 According to the 2002 Census (Statistics Office of the Republic of Slovenia) 14.3% of 11- to 18-year-olds live in single-parent families, but there is no official data on reorganized families.
- 2 According to official statistics, approximately half of the two million Slovenian population lives in urban areas and another half in non-urban areas (Statistics Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2008).
- 3 The question on parental employment was not used as a discriminatory variable since Slovenia has a long tradition of female full-time employment and the official unemployment in Slovenia in 2008 was lower than 10 percent (5.5% for men and 8.1% for women) (Statistics Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2008).
- 4 In (post-socialist) Slovenia the difference in education level between men and women has been small; in the recent decade it has been increasing to women's advantage.

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