

8th ICEEPSY 2017
**The International Conference on Education and Educational
Psychology**

**FAMILY MEMBERS AS IMPORTANT ROLE MODELS
OF CONTEMPORARY ADOLESCENTS**

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Abstract

The contribution analyses role models of contemporary adolescents coming from their family background. Family patterns and ideals from close family network are perceived as models of identification connected with the process of socialization and therefore represent so called significant others. The text is based on results of a survey implemented in 2015 as a questionnaire among children and adolescents aged 9 – 17 years. Analysis of the research sample of 1010 children is focused on facts concerning the choice of one's parents or other family members for one's model. The survey results showed that almost one third of respondents named as their ideal somebody from the family circle (mainly mother and father). The text focuses primarily on identifying the respondents, who chose their model from their family and how they differ from others, who preferred somebody else. The age of respondents did not play a significant role in the choice of their idol; however gender had a significant impact. Furthermore, the text analyses which characteristics of parents/family members were important to the respondents and where was the choice for father and mother different. Those who focused on persons from family environment significantly more than others preferred character attributes and social skills of their models, they tried to imitate them precisely in this sphere and were convinced, that they were able to achieve it.

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Keywords: Role models, family members, socialization, adolescents.

1. Introduction

The family is the primary socialization environment, which mediates the values, norms, ideals, behaviour patterns, traditions and rules of social behaviour and thus it enables the individual to integrate



himself/herself in the society and find his/her own identity. The family helps the individual to become a social being capable of living in a specific society with a specific culture. Helus (2009, 207) perceives this influence on socialization as "concerning the human being as a whole, i.e. the complex of his/her characteristics and the direction of his life journey". The values, internal norms, interpersonal relationships or ways of communication in the family constitute the family climate, which is reflected in the individual's life as a part of his/her cultural capital. As a primary socialization factor, the family presents to the individual what can be considered usual, normal right or desirable. Family environment leaves a significant trace in the individual, exercising an important influence on him/her. This is why we speak about so-called social inheritance (e. g. Kraus, 2015), which refers to the fact that the influence of the environment transmits to the individual certain modes and models of behaviour, which are customary in the environment concerned. Such intergenerational transmission is perceivable also in families which influence the values, attitudes and aspiration of children and young people in the context of the environment where they live.

This text discusses the issue of young people's models coming from their family and family network. Our conception of a model agrees with Helus' (2009, 216) definition: "a person, whom the child perceives as worthy of being followed, with whom s/he identifies and tries to be like him/her in his/her own life. So, people who become models are exceptional in some way and play an exclusive part in our life (for a limited time at least)..." Having a model and an ideal to identify with is one of the important needs of all children and young people. The choice of the model is connected with the child's experience, values, orientation etc. The choices of idols and role models in which the children project their ideas, norms and values somewhat reflect the level of their family environment but also other formative factors affecting the child. These include the school, various influences of the media or even pressures on the contemporary young generation, peer culture, etc.

Our analysis of models chosen by young people is based on the assumption that the family and family environment affect the values of the individual, which makes them a significant factor guiding the choice. We are convinced that the face of the family is reflected in the choice of one's model. Naturally, we do not suppose that there is a simple equation "like family, like model", still, certain variables such as characteristics of the parents, family relationships, family culture, socio-economic status, parenting style, characteristics of the children and others certainly are reflected in young people's choice of models.

2. Problem Statement

We discuss the issue of the choice of models and their influence mainly in the context of socialization theories. Socialization itself can be understood as a complicated and complex process shaped by biological as well as social variables. As Helus (2009, 132-143) states, the principal processes constituting socialization include interiorization, which is successful in given situations and leads to the goal. The second process is social-cognitive strengthening, which is stimulated by other people's response to the child's actions - thus the child learns not only to associate certain events with emotional reactions closely connected with vegetative phenomena, but also to develop behaviour which is successful in the given situations and leads to the goal. The third process is cognitive-social learning based on cognition. A process which is viewed as highly significant here is so-called observational learning - or learning by

watching other people. All the described processes take place in the family environment, which is typically highly emotive and intimate.

The child as an independent and active social actor, who relies on his/her originality, distinctiveness and independence in the construction of his/her social world, has been discussed e.g. in James, Prout (1990), Corsaro (2005) and others. Helus (2007) finds one of the fundamental socialization processes in the interiorization based on identification, whereby the individual first finds models among real people close to him/her, relates to them and accepts their attitudes as his/her own. During primary socialization, these models are significant others, who become mediators of reality for the child. Freud (1900) considers identification the earliest and unconscious relationship formed by the child. Identification is accompanied by introjection - the acceptance of an object into one's own self. According to Ego psychology, the child has a natural tendency to idealize his/her parents (Blanck & Blanck, 1994) and Kohout (quoted from Mikota, 1999) further claims this idealization to be a part of regular (preverbal) development.

As was mentioned above, interiorization is conditioned by identification. Identification with significant others makes the individual capable of self-identification - the construction of homogenous identity. According to Berger and Luckman (1999) significant others not only mediate the world to the child but they often become carriers of change. We understand identification in the context of social learning as a comparison with or an acceptance of the chosen model by the individual. Bandura (1986) also points out the central role of the child in the socialization process. He agrees with the above described conceptions in that the children tend to imitate strong adult models (mainly the parents). To support the claim of the child's central role in the socialization process, he further states that the child does not take over all the characteristics of the model and insists that the individual learns from multiple models, all of which contribute to the construction of his/her personality (Bandura & Ross, 1963; Bandura, 1986).

For the purpose of our research, we accepted the definition presented by Sarason, Sarason and Pierce (1990), who speak about a deep identification: "The person who identifies himself/herself with someone acts the same as the object of the identification would in the same situation." (Quoted from Nakonečný, 1999, 273). Výrost and Slaměník (2008) claim that children tend to identify with models which are dominant in their close surroundings or with people whom they perceive as similar to themselves. Therefore, the process is selective.

The crucial part in socialization is played by examples and models from the family environment, the perception of which is based on a complex of various sample stimuli which are encountered (Vrabec&Petranová, 2013). As Hayes (2007) states, the child learns rules for social life through the personal relationships. Social interactions take place in a context which may affect the child in numerous ways. These contexts include culture, environment, social groups or family. Relationships surrounding the child come mostly from a family background and are the most durable and formative. Parents play the role of mediators between the child and society, they teach the child to "learn the world, roles, rituals, responsibility and relations" (Wyness, 2006, 129).

The term "model" may be perceived in several dimensions and explanations:

A –model as any person in the immediate social environment who is a natural model to be imitated by the individual regardless of their specific relation;

B –model as a person whose attributes, behaviour or characteristics the individual appreciates but has no desire to identify with the person;

C –model as a person whose attributes, behaviour or characteristics the individual appreciates, desires to be like the model and follows it in a constructive and critical way;

D - model as an idol, whom the individual desires to imitate, while the relationship has a significant emotive dimension dominated by admiration for the model, excitement and worship; such a model is followed without critical thinking and the important factor is "looking up" the selected person.

Our conception of models relates mostly to the dimension C, i.e. models are represented by persons who are appreciated and the individual wants to identify (or already identifies) with them, but the ability to look at them from a critical perspective remains present. This kind of idol has a prominent pedagogical context, with which we can work.

3. Research Questions

Our research questions were formulated accordingly:

- To what extent respondents aged 9-17 years chose their models among family members?
- What are reasons of their choice?
- To what extent are the family models attainable and what is the declared level of identification with them?
- How differ respondents with family oriented role models and “out of family” models?

4. Purpose of the Study

The goal of our research was to ascertain, who are the models respected by young people aged 9-17 years and what are their appreciated characteristics, i.e. which characteristics and attributes of the model condition the choice. We also focused on the possibility of identification with a model and its attainability (“*I am (not) already like this, I can(not) be like this*”). This article focuses dominantly on the group of respondents who chose family members as their models and analyses a context of their choices. Furthermore, it tries to find variables which significantly distinguish between respondents who chose their models from the family background and those oriented on models “out of family”.

5. Research Methods

We used a quantitative methodology and a questionnaire to obtain answers to the formulated questions and hypothesis. The employed questionnaire was of our own design and it included both open

and closed items. Its first part focused on the selection of models and their identification, the second to the reasons behind the choice and the third one to the level of identification with the model and its attainability for the adolescent. The questionnaires were distributed at selected schools in the region of Hradec Králové following previous approval of the headmasters. The selected schools included primary schools and secondary schools, including grammar schools. Specific classes from each school were chosen as sources of data. A member of the research team was present in each class so that s/he could clarify possible problematic points and collect the questionnaires. Procedures employed in data analysis included basic descriptive characteristics of the sample (relative frequencies, mean, standard deviation). Relationships between variables were tested using the chi-square independence test; parametric and nonparametric tests were applied to study differences between groups of respondents.

Our data were collected during the year 2015. The research sample comprised a total of 1010 respondents aged 9-17 years. There were 436 boys and 574 girls in the sample. The respondents were divided into categories based on age more or less in accordance with the categorisation presented by Vágnerová (2000). The first category (see Table 01) corresponds to the stage of middle school age (Vágnerová proposes 8-9 to 11-12 years), the second category covers roughly the late school age (according to Vágnerová, this stage directly follows middle school age and includes pubescence), the third category are adolescents (15-20 years in Vágnerová's categorization).

Table 01. Age structure of the respondents

Age	Males	Females
9-11	64	84
12-14	171	193
15-17	201	297
Total	436	574

The data were obtained using stratified sampling at different types of schools, where selected classes participated at the research. Due to the differing size of the classes at different schools, there is an uneven representation of the individual age groups in the research sample. The highest number of respondents falls into the category 15-17 years.

As for family structures, 74.2 % of our respondents live with both parents, almost 20 % only with the mother, 2.6 % with the father and 3.3 % with someone else (see table 2). We also had access to data concerning the number of siblings: 22.3 % had no sibling, 55.9 % had one, 16 % had two and 5.7 % had three or more.

Table 02. Categories of respondents based on family structure

Living in one household with	%
Both parents	74.2

Only a mother	19.9
Only a father	2.6
Someone else	3.3

6. Findings

The first open question presented to the children was "Who would you like to be like when you grow up?". There was a high number of considerably varied answers to this question. Their categorization revealed that 13.5 % of respondents mentioned their mother, 7.7 % their father and 9.4 % another family member (grandparents, brothers, sisters or other relatives). This means that almost a third (30.6 %) of our respondents mentioned a family member in their answers. Results in the context of other answers are presented in Figure 01.¹

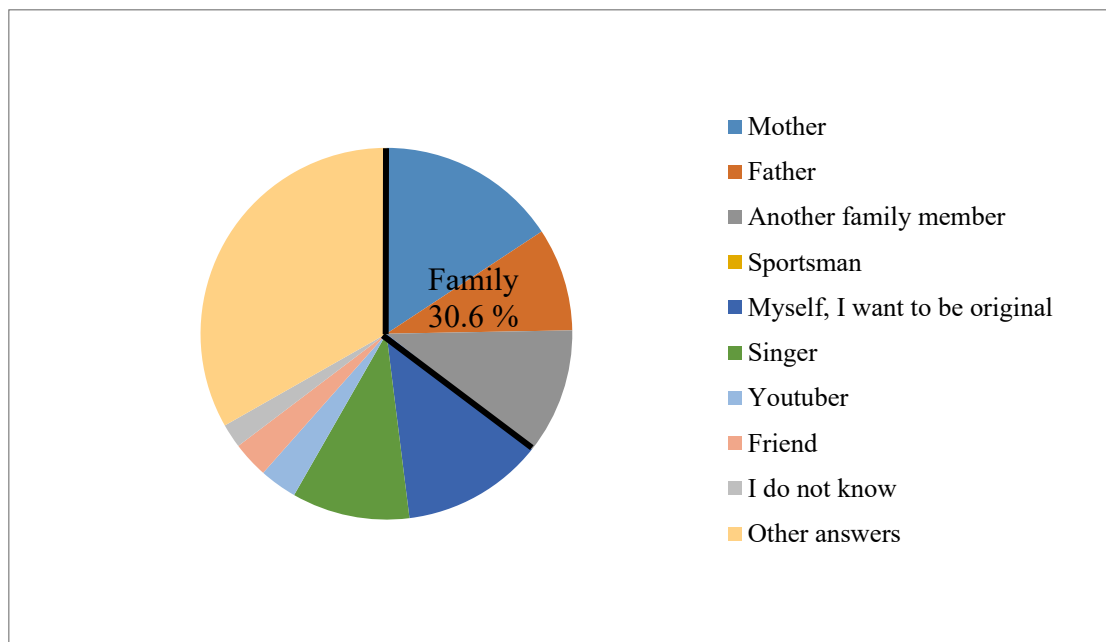


Figure 01. Who would you like to be like when you grow up?

The next closed question was more specific, it asked for a specific person chosen as a model and the area from which the students know him/her. The answers enabled us to ascertain whether the person is really a family member or not. The answers showed that the model actually was a family member in 32.9 % of cases. There were mothers who were named most (almost twice as often as fathers).

We expected that it would be girls rather than boys who would opt for a family member. Our guess proved right. Almost 41 % of girls mentioned their relatives as their models but only 22 % of boys did. This means that over two thirds of those who chose a family member for their model were girls. The

¹There was choice of sportmen and singers among other significant responses, stated by the children. An interesting finding was included in the answer "Youtubers" as new children's idols. In our survey in 2009 this category did not appear at all (Stasová, Slaninová, Junová, 2015).

correlation between gender and the choice of the model had a significance level of 0.01 (chi square)². Furthermore, the girls chose their mothers more frequently than their fathers. The identification of gender and role is an important developmental task at the concerned life stage and it can be observed from this perspective (among others).

Table 03. The choice of a model from one's family in dependence on gender of the respondents

	Is he/she from your family?	
	Yes	No
Males	96 22.0%	340 78.0%
Females	235 40.9%	339 59.1%

We further expected that the choice of the model would be connected with family structure and adolescents from two-parent families would choose a family member for their model more often than respondents from a single-parent families. Nevertheless, the data did not bear out our assumption. The opposition between two-parent and single-parent family (a rather simplified variable) is not a characteristics reflected in the choice of the model. Similarly, there is no correlation between the number of siblings and the selection of a model from the family. This suggests that in order to test more correlations it would be necessary to measure in depth more characteristics of family environment which could reflect the level of functionality of the family, its climate or cultural capital.

The first analysis was also focused on what the children like about their models from family background and why they chose them. It was revealed (Table 04) that the most appreciated features were character (almost two thirds of the respondents) and skills and abilities (25.7 %). Girls named character more often than boys. Appearance, skills and abilities as well as helping other people proved to be slightly more important for girls and, conversely, boys more frequently mentioned activities in which their model engages, their success, results and material attributes.

Table 04. What do you like most about your model?

	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
Character	63.5	54.5	67.2	1.37	0.48
Skills and abilities	25.7	25.3	26.0	1.74	0.44
Appearance	12.6	11.1	13.2	1.87	0.33
Helping other people	11.1	9.1	11.9	1.89	0.31
Activities, what s/he does	9.9	13.1	8.5	1.90	0.30
Success and results	7.8	8.1	7.7	1.92	0.27
Material attributes, s/he has something interesting	4.2	5.1	3.8	1.96	0.20

We were further interested in learning whether the respondents believe that they are able to acquire the characteristics of their model which they admire and whether they already possess them. The answers suggest that the majority of children (67.7 %) suppose that they may acquire the same characteristics as

²As well as other researches show this gender binding – e.g.Cheung, C. K., &Yue, X. D. (2000), Xiaozhong, H. (2006), etc.

their model but they do not have them yet. 42.6 % were convinced that they already have abilities comparable with their model and 22.8 % supposed that they cannot acquire them at all. We also asked the respondents about the direction of their efforts. Here it was evident that they primarily try to follow the same objectives as their models. The least frequent answer was visual identification with the model. The use of these results in education and further analysis would certainly provide enough material for an independent study.

Table 05. Possibility to acquire characteristics of the model

	Mean	Standard deviation
I have the same abilities as my model	2.30	0.89
I do not have the same abilities but I can acquire them	1.82	0.79
I do not have the same abilities and I cannot acquire them	3.16	0.87
I try to look like him/her	2.53	0.98
I try to act like him/her	2.07	0.93
I try to be liked like him/her	2.52	0.97
I try to follow the same objective as s/he does.	2.05	0.96

By a deeper insight into the differences between respondents who chose their models from the family background (family oriented group) and the respondents who were oriented on other models (out of family group) we could identify some variables that differentiate both groups. We used parametric and nonparametric tests, specifically T-Test and Mann - Whitney Test.

Table 06. Variables distinguishing “family oriented” and “out of family” group of respondents

	T- Test Sig.	Mann-Whitney Test Sig.
Gender	0.000	0.000
School/study orientation	0.000	0.001
Admiration for a model appearance	0.001	0.001
Admiration for a model character	0.000	0.000
Admiration for a model skills and abilities	0.005	0.005
Admiration for a model ability to help others and his/her relationships	0.000	0.000
Respondent wants to be like him/her because of his behaviour	0.000	0.000
Respondent tries to look like him/her	0.020	0.038
Respondent tries to act like him/her	0.000	0.000
Respondent already has the same abilities as the model	0.000	0.000
Respondent believes he/she can have the same abilities and skills but still does not have them	0.000	0.000

Our analysis showed that differences between both groups of respondents could be found at three levels. The first level included admiration of the model and his/her specific attributes. The second level was related to the motivation for following the model and preparation to do something for being like

him/her. Finally, the third level included a comparison between abilities and skills of respondents and their models and probability to achieve the admired attributes of the model.

Respondents who related to their family members as their models, significantly more preferred character of their model, his/her ability to help to the others and his/her personal relationships. A reason for following the model from family was mainly his/her behaviour. On the contrary, respondents with orientation on models out of the family background significantly more preferred an appearance of their model, his/her abilities and skills. Even though we do not have any additional data about relationships in respondents' families and about their families' cohesion, we suggest that our results could support the idea of influence of a family positive social climate on the model choice. We understand it as an orientation on some "internal qualities" by family oriented respondents, while respondents who chose their models out of the family background focused mostly on some external attributes (i. e. appearance, abilities and skills).

Adolescents who chose their models from their family background, tried significantly more to behave as their models and were convinced about possibility to be like their model in comparison with the second group of respondents (out of family respondents). The respondents from the second group rather tried to look like their models and tended to follow their appearance. The chance to be like their model seemed significantly lower for them than by family oriented respondents. Dimensions of internal or external identification were manifested in this way again. Testing of the links between the choice of the model from a family background and family cultural capital, family climate or interpersonal relationships in the family would be a tempting inspiration for a further research. Summing up, role models from family were perceived as more real in their attainability in life of adolescents than models out of the family background.

7. Conclusion

Our study focused on models, which contemporary children choose among family members. It was revealed that almost one third of the respondents aged 9-17 years chose a family member for their model. Girls chose their models from their family background significantly more often than boys did, representing almost two thirds of respondents who named a family member.

The most appreciated feature affecting the choice was character, which was given as an important factor of the choice almost by two thirds of the respondents. Another significant reason for the choice were skills and abilities, mentioned by one quarter of the respondents. The third most frequent reason was the appearance of the model. Girls put more stress on personal characteristics and appearance, while boys emphasized skills and abilities of the model more than girls. They also showed a higher appreciation for the activities and material attributes of their models in comparison with girls.

The obtained data suggest that roughly two thirds of the children believe that the level of their model's abilities is attainable for them but they did not reach it yet. Slightly less than one half were convinced that they already possess abilities equal to the model and, conversely, less than one fifth believed that they would never become like their model in terms of abilities. It was further showed that our respondent imitate their model mainly by following the same objectives. The least common form of imitation was visual identification with the model.

Based on the results, we assume that the family environment offers models which are dominantly followed because of their pro-social behaviour and character. Identification in this way can positively influence a personality development of the young people. Therefore, the support of education and upbringing in family is required as a crucial condition for a successful socialization and development of a new generation. The importance of the quality of family environment, which may prove more influential than e.g. forces of various media (even in the case of older children), is thus very prominent from the pedagogical perspective. Moreover, work with models has very good possibilities of application in any educational activities. This has been showed also in some activities which may be employed when working with groups of disadvantaged children and youths (e. g. William Gladden Foundation). One more significant fact is that the perception of a family member as the model surely increases family cohesion and generational continuity. The strength of intergenerational relationships in the family is one of the factors which in the present unstable times provide important social support not only to the young generation.

Acknowledgments

This material is based upon work supported by the Faculty of Education at the University of Hradec Králové under project of Specific research with the name “Life idols of contemporary adolescents – comparison of trends in development” in 2015.

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