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THE QUALITY OF PATERNAL RELATIONSHIP IN MODERN
RUSSIA

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Abstract

The present study shows the difference in qualities of paternal and maternal relationship to children dependently on their gender and family status (single or elder). It is found that there is a correlation between the quality of marital relationships and quality of paternal relationship to the child. A total of 35 one- or two-child families have participated in the study (N =70). The analysis reveals that fathers are less emotionally close to the child in comparison with mothers. Fathers do not differentiate children emotionally depending on their gender and status, while mothers show a greater acceptance of the single child and greater demands to daughters in comparison with sons. It is found that fathers tend to control a single daughter more than elder one. Both in fathers and mothers, emotional closeness between the spouses positively correlates with the child acceptance. For fathers, the marital satisfaction is positively associated with cooperation with the child and satisfaction with the relationships with her/him; for mothers - with emotional closeness to the child, acceptance, cooperation and nurturing consistency. It concludes that paternal relationship is characterized by emotional distancing, and orientation to instrumental functions, such as the manifestation of rigour, control or cooperation, whereas maternal relationship is based on the emotional-sensual sphere.

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Keywords: Paternal relationship, paternity, maternity, an elder child, a single child, marital satisfaction.



1. Introduction

Recent decades in child psychology are marked by an increase in theoretical and empirical work on the problem of paternity (Borissenko & Belogai, 2007; Kalina & Kholmogorova, 2012; Pastuhova, 2011; Savenisheva, 2012; Smyslov & Dotsenko, 2011; Tokareva, 2009; Yavon, 2014, Endendijk, & Groeneveld, 2016, Salmon, & Shackelford, 2012, Lamb, 2004 etc.). First of all, it is connected with two factors, the first of which might be designated as socio-historical, and the second, as psychological.

The first factor is associated with serious social changes concerning the institution of the family and its role in the society structure, as well as with changes in the phenomena of parenthood, maternity and paternity. Traditional ideas about gender roles are blurred. The patriarchal model of paternity, the concept of the father as the breadwinner, power personificator and disciplinator are revised (Smyslov & Dotsenko, 2011). The second, psychological, factor reflects the changes in the archetypal image of the father - as the absent father, who manages everything, but has no specific social and pedagogical functions. Fathers become more accessible in terms of contact with the child, their involvement to the children upbringing is changing not only quantitatively but qualitatively.

These changes in society are greatly facilitated by psychological research documenting the significant influence of the father figure on cognitive and socio-emotional development of the child (Rohner, 1998; Target & Fonagy, 2002; Lamb, 2004; Kalina & Kholmogorova, 2012; Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2014). Nevertheless, methodological approaches and methods to study paternity are still insufficiently developed (Savenisheva, 2012). Part of the problem is due to the design of the majority of studies which focus exclusively on children, their perception of the father and the attitude toward him, which makes the description of the "child-father" communication system highly unilateral. It became obvious over time that it is necessary to shift the focus of research from the child to the father himself (these are the questions of readiness for fatherhood, the father's self-concept, etc.), and what happens between the child and father (educational practices, ways of interaction, reciprocal relationship etc.). This shift has determined the new direction in the field of paternity research.

2. Problem Statement

The analysis of the Russian authors' works (Tokareva, 2009; Savenisheva, 2012; Sevastyanova, 2014; Evtukh & Balandina, 2013; Alekseeva & Rzhanova, 2016) shows that paternity research is rather at the stage of data collection than its systematization and theoretical-methodological comprehension, since most of the studies have a strictly empirical character. In those studies, two approaches are mainly used to study the phenomenon of paternity: fathers (or potential fathers) are compared with each other by different parameters (Tokareva, 2009; Savenisheva, 2012; Sevastyanova, 2014) or compare fathers and mothers by their relationship to the child (Evtukh & Balandina, 2013; Alekseeva and Rzhanov, 2016; Zavyalova, 2013; Alikin & Lukyanchenko, 2014). We view the second approach as more perspective since it allows to reveal the specifics of paternity in the family system of relations "father-child", "mother-child", "spouse-spouse-child".

Moreover, the quality of parental relationship to children (siblings, daughters or sons) with respect of their age (infant, early age, preschool, adolescent, etc.) is the topic most often studied in the modern research (Evtukh & Balandina, 2013; Zavyalova, 2013; Alikin & Lukyanchenko, 2014; Alekseeva &

Rzhanova, 2016). For modern Russia, a family with children is basically a family with one or two children. Only recently, the state demographic policy has focused on stimulating the birth of the third child. Therefore, for the Russian reality, it is important to study the differences between maternal and paternal relationships with the child, as well as the extent to which the parental attitudes differ when it comes to single or several children in the family.

The focus of the present study is on finding meaningful characteristics of paternal relationship depending on the child's gender and the quality of marital relationships, and also on understanding what could be different in paternal relationship to the single and elder child.

3. Research Questions

The key research questions are the following:

What is the specificity of paternal relationship to a child compared to maternal?

Is there any difference in paternal and maternal relationship to the first and single child?

Does the paternal and maternal relationship vary depending on the child's gender?

How does marital satisfaction affect paternal relationship?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the peculiarities of the father's relationship to the child in comparison with the mother's, taking into account the gender of the child, and her/his status in the family, whether she/he is the single or senior child.

The other purpose of the study was to clarify the assumption that there is a correlation between the quality of marital relationships and the quality of paternal relationship to the child.

5. Research Methods

To achieve these purposes, the following diagnostic tools were selected.

1) The questionnaire "Parent-Child Interaction" (PCI, Markovskaya, 1999) to assess parental relationship quality by the scales of "insistence", "strictness", "control", "emotional intimacy", "child acceptance", "cooperation", "anxiety", "consistency", "educational confrontation".

2) The questionnaire "Understanding, emotional attraction, authoritativeness" (UEA, Volkova & Trapeznikova, 1985) for assessing the quality of marital relations (the degree of understanding of the feelings, intentions and behaviour of the partner; emotional appeal; respect and, in sum, marital satisfaction).

The respondents were also asked to answer 10 questions, which allowed to assess the distribution of educational functions in the family, the time allotted separately by the parent for interaction with the child, the father's involvement in the common affairs of the family.

5.1. Subjects (cases)

The study involved 35 families, 17 of which had one child and 18 families of two children. The average age of fathers was 31.7 years old (standard deviation is 4.38), the average age of mothers was 34.2

years old (standard deviation is 6.37), the average age of elder children was 8.71 (standard deviation is 5.19), the average age of single children was 2.5 years (standard deviation is 2.04).

All the adults and children were residents of St. Petersburg. For all the participants of the study, this was the first marriage, and the children were non-adopted.

5.2. Procedure

The survey procedure included the completion of the questionnaires by the respondents, and statistical data processing.

The questionnaires were filled out by the mothers and fathers separately, at home, firstly about marital relations, and then about the parent-child interaction. In total, the procedure took about 45 minutes. None of the parents refused to participate in the survey during the completion of the questionnaires.

The obtained data were subjected to statistical processing using the comparative (Student t-test) and the correlational (Pearson correlation coefficient - r) analysis.

6. Findings

6.1. Comparative analysis of paternal and maternal relationship to a child

The results of general comparative analysis of mothers' and fathers' relationship to the child using the data from the questionnaire PCR, showed that statistical difference was obtained only for the scale of emotional distance of the child to the parent (M (for mothers) = 16.71, M (for fathers) = 18.86, $p \leq 0.01$).

The value for this scale was higher for fathers than for mothers. That is, fathers showed less emotional affinity towards their children and believe that children with them were not as emotionally close as with mothers. The data might be interpreted in different ways though. In particular, the differences might be due to the subjective opinion of men that mothers were closer to the child or because they were less likely to be at home, they were less likely to talk with the child about shared issues. Partially, our assumptions were consistent with the work of S. Savenisheva (2012), who pointed that fathers of young children were high in avoidance, and with the data of Alikin and Lukyanenko (2014), which suggested that fathers sought contact with the child less than mothers.

Fathers' emotional distance might be determined by the fact that in Russia, child rearing was still executed mainly by women (in our sample, 95% of mothers noted their priority in children upbringing), and Russian men relied heavily on the image of the father-breadwinner, the head of the family, considering the care of young children and their upbringing was predominantly a woman's occupation. Preferring to distance themselves from the functions associated with care and nurture, they learned about the needs of the child basically through the mother. According to D. Smyslov and I. Dotsenko (2011), paternal emotional distancing from the child was an attribute of the father's role in the Russian cultural model of paternity.

6.2. Comparative analysis of paternal and maternal relationship quality depending on the family status of the child

The statistically significant difference in paternal relationship to single and elder child was not found. But there were differences in acceptance for a single and elder child in mothers. Mothers, in contrast to fathers, demonstrated a greater acceptance of a single child compared to the older one (M (mothers to

single) = 19.5, M (mother to older) = 17.38, $p \leq 0.01$). As for fathers, the status of the child - the single one or the senior - did not determine an emotional attitude towards him, unlike in mothers, this fact could be also related to paternal emotional distance.

One should note that fathers, after the birth of the second child, tended to increase rigor and showed less satisfaction with the relationships with the elder child ($p \leq 0.05$). As for mothers, they tended to reduce cooperation, educational consistency and control over the first child.

It was likely for the fathers that the birth of the second child meant that the elder "grew up." Consequently, more demands were made to him/her, which entailed the need for austerity and severity, corresponding to the archaic male role of the father. Most often, older children, who were not mature enough, were not ready to take a function of "parental figure", which could lead, on the one hand, to behavioural disturbances in the child and, on the other hand, to disappointment with the child in father.

The data obtained were similar to those revealed by Evtukh and Balandin (2013) who studied the relationship to the siblings in mothers and fathers, and found that fathers and mothers were less satisfied with the relationship with the older child.

6.3. Comparative analysis of paternal and maternal relationship quality depending on the gender and status of the child

We did not find any significant differences in paternal relationship to sons and daughters. This fact contradicted to Karabanova's (2005) data that fathers were more attached to girls and Alekseeva & Rzhanova's data (Alekseeva & Rzhanova, 2016), that fathers showed a higher level of gentleness toward daughters; but it was consistent with the results of meta-study of Endendijk et al. (2016). They examined 126 studies (about 15,000 families), and also found no difference in the quality of paternal relationship towards daughters and sons.

The mothers showed significant differences in demandingness: they are more demanding to daughters comparing to sons (M (to daughters) = 14.89, M (to sons) = 13.66, $p \leq 0.01$).

As for relationship to sons, significant differences for paternal and maternal relationship quality to single and elder sons were not found.

With respect to the specifics of fathers' relationship to daughters, a significant difference in control was found - the fathers of single daughters tended to control them more than the fathers of older daughters (M (single) = 18.31, M (older) = 14.5, $p \leq 0.01$).

In the case of quality of mothers' relationship to single and older daughters, differences were obtained in acceptance (M (single) = 19.55, M (older) = 16.58, $p \leq 0.01$); cooperation (M (single) = 20.22, M (older) = 18.0, $p \leq 0.01$); and satisfaction (M (single) = 20.0, M (older) = 17.16, $p \leq 0.01$) - for single daughters, all these indicators were higher.

6.4. Comparative analysis of paternal and maternal relationship quality depending on the marital satisfaction

It was found that fathers high in marital satisfaction, in comparison with fathers unsatisfied with marital relationships quality, were also significantly higher in cooperation with the child (M (high

satisfaction) = 18.3, M (low satisfaction) = 21.5, $p \leq 0.01$) and satisfaction with relationships with the child (M (high satisfaction) = 17.9, M (low satisfaction) = 22.0, $p \leq 0.01$).

As for mothers, those who were more satisfied with marriage, compared with mothers who experienced less marital satisfaction, experienced also more emotional closeness to the child (M (high satisfaction) = 20.11, M (low satisfaction) = 17.57, $p \leq 0.01$); acceptance (M (high satisfaction) = 19.44, M = 17.07, $p \leq 0.01$); satisfaction (M (high satisfaction) = 19.66, M (low satisfaction) = 17.42, $p \leq 0.01$) and showed lower confrontation with the child (M (high satisfaction) = 8.0, M (low satisfaction) = 10.85, $p \leq 0.01$).

For fathers, overall marital satisfaction was positively interrelated with such parameters of the quality of parent-child relationship as "cooperation" and "satisfaction", and negatively linked with "confrontation" (see Table 01).

Table 01. Correlations between marital satisfaction and the indicators of paternal relationship quality.

	Indicators of paternal relationship quality	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance level
Marital satisfaction	Cooperation	0,376	0,05
	Satisfaction	0,451	0,01
	Confrontation	-0,444	0,05

For mothers, marital satisfaction was positively related to such indicators of maternal relationship quality as "emotional closeness", "acceptance", "cooperation", "consistency" and "satisfaction", and negatively related with "confrontation" (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations between marital satisfaction and the indicators of maternal relationship quality.

	Indicators of maternal relationship quality	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance level
Marital satisfaction	Emotional closeness	0,333	0,05
	Acceptance	0,393	0,01
	Consistency	0,339	0,05
	Cooperation	0,334	0,05
	Satisfaction	0,349	0,05
	Confrontation	-0,391	0,01

Father and mother's emotional closeness to each other positively correlated with the acceptance of the child, and negatively correlated with the fathers with confrontation. Mutual respect for each other in parents was positively associated with satisfaction with the relationship with the child (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation of marital relationship qualities and the indicators of parental relationship quality.

Indicators of marital relationship quality	Indicators of parental relation quality	Parent	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance level
Emotional closeness	Acceptance	fathers	0,406	0,05
	Confrontation		-0,449	0,01
	Acceptance	mothers	0,417	0,01
Mutual respect	Satisfaction with relationships with the child	fathers	0,355	0,05
		mothers	0,366	0,05

It could be seen that, both for the fathers and for the mothers, the quality of marital relations, namely, emotional closeness and mutual respect, affected relationship with the child. In both cases, marital satisfaction was associated to the positive aspects of parental relationship. But there was a difference in this respect, between paternal and maternal relationship quality. If for the mother satisfactory, emotionally close relations with the husband were associated with the emotional closeness to the child, his or her acceptance, that is, with an emotional-sensory aspects of parental relationships quality. Meanwhile, for the fathers, the same indicators of marital relationship quality were connected with cooperation and confrontation with the child, that is, with pragmatic aspects of the relationship.

In general, the results of this study demonstrate that fathers, in comparison with mothers, treat children less differentially, that is regardless of gender and status of the child. Their parental relationship is characterized by emotional distancing and orientation to instrumental functions such as rigor, control or cooperation. Mothers, in contrast, differentiate more between children, their relationship to the child is based on the emotional-sensual sphere and depends on the gender and status of the child.

7. Conclusion

Our research has shown that fathers in modern Russia, despite the transformations taking place in society in understanding of male and female gender roles, when men take responsibilities previously considered to be exclusively feminine, including childcare, continue to be in a less emotional proximity for their children, when compared with mothers. Following Smyslov and Dotsenko (2011), we believe that this may be due to a certain Russian cultural model of paternity, where the emotional distancing of the father from the child is a peculiar attribute of the father's role in the Russian mentality. Men perceive their paternal role rather as an instrument, as an expert figure, and not emotionally accepting. And changes in mentality models, such as archetypal constructions, take much longer time than changes in society.

The research hypothesis about the association between the quality of marital relationships and the quality of paternal relationship to the child has been confirmed. Such association is also found for the marital satisfaction of mothers and their relationship towards the child. But there is specificity of this connection for each of the parents – the emotionally-sensual basement for the mother and instrumental basement for the father.

The study presented has also revealed that fathers in modern Russia, as well as fathers in other European countries, unlike mothers, do not differentiate sons and daughters, single and older children in the emotional terms. This result contradicts the traditional beliefs that fathers are more emotionally attached

to girls and more gentle towards them, on the one hand, and that fathers are more fond of and oriented toward sons, on the other. In the existing works on the topic, we do not find a full explanation for our result; therefore, in order to understand it, we see the need to focus in our further research on the subjective meanings of paternity and "fatherly love».

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