

Review

Conceptualization for the construct of parental authority

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The issue of “parental authority” has been the focus of social interest for many generations, however, in recent times, in light of the increasing violence and other abnormal phenomena among children and adolescents, it is gaining greater attention from the public. Due to the opacity around the concept's essence, the goal of this article is to establish detailed and profound conceptualization for the construct of parental authority, while relying on relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Analysis of the concept has shown that it is a bi-dimensional theoretical construct (power and legitimacy), with its dimensions sharing four main aspects: (a) parental power: parental demandingness, and parental potential influence on the child's behavior, (b) legitimate parental authority: the parent's right to demand, and the child's obligation to obey. Parental authority is expressed under parent-child conflict (disagreement), while its extent varies according to child's age and the specific context in which it appears.

Key words: Parental authority, children, power, legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, many professionals and researchers use the term “parental authority”. Although its theoretical definition remains obscure and even controversial, some researchers avoid clarifying this concept explicitly, and tend to refer its significance as obvious. While professionals point the weakening parental authority in the western society as a main factor for increasing pathological phenomena among youths, a review of the relevant literature evokes a surprising difficulty to trace a clear and comprehensive definition of the concept. This is contrary to the fact that the relevant body of knowledge offers solid frames of reference in the field of parenting, which gained an impressive empirical support over the course of time. Accordingly, the main goal of this article is to establish an integrative and profound theoretical conceptualization of parental authority, which provides an extensive description of its essence and characteristics. This article, however, does not attempt to produce a new typology nor a distinctive theoretical framework beyond the parenting styles or practices known in the literature. The following analysis of the concept will distill the relevant bodies of knowledge in the field of parenting, in order to develop a strict frame of reference for the construct of parental authority which is missing in the literature.

A conceptualization of this construct may be profitable for professionals as well as researchers when attempting to define parental authority characteristics in operative and concrete terms. It also might lay the foundations for developing a compatible measurement tool, intended for quantitative assessment of the construct of parental authority.

DEFINITION OF AUTHORITY

When addressing an educated discussion regarding authority in the familial and parental context, it is essential to consider first the concept's original and basic characteristics. These foundations will largely outline the ideological and conceptual framework of which the further discussion on parental authority will be based upon. Authority has been defined as the power which is perceived as legitimate, which allows an individual to achieve desired goals from others, sometimes against their will. Power, which underlies authority, refers to the probability that an “actor” which acts within a certain social relationship will be able to carry out his will in spite of the others' opposition (Weber, 1968). Indeed, there is consent among a long series of theoreticians which studied the concept, regarding the fundamental

assumption in which authority refers to different forms of "legitimate power" (Blau, 1964; French and Raven, 1959).

Yukl (1994) explains that authority is based on the conceptions regarding the rights, commitments and fields of responsibility associated with certain social positions within companies, or in other social systems. It contains the perception regarding the position of holder's right to affect specific aspects of the behavior of others. Furthermore, he defines the authority owner as an "agent" who possesses the right to issue an order or specific request, while the other side obligated to comply with.

Originally, Weber (1968) described three types of pure authority within the social framework, which is based on different kinds of legitimacy sources. The *rational authority* refers to control which legitimized bylaw and rules that give authority owner the right to exercise power within the formal institution. The *traditional authority*, contrasting with rational authority, is predicated on beliefs in ancient traditional patterns, which validate the legitimate authority of its owner. Ultimately, the *charismatic authority* is based upon a line of personality traits attributed with a certain person, which validate and legitimate his dictations, orders and directives.

Accordingly, the classical term of authority reflects one's pragmatic ability to affect another's behavior, while the latter acknowledges his right to do so, even though it may contradict his will or interests. Authority may be derived from different sources, while the central ones relate to tradition, personal charisma and law. It contains two inherent, bilateral, elements: power and its legitimacy. Respectively, an exhaustive and valid definition of authority in the familial context must encompass these two dimensions, which refer to parental power on the one hand and its perceived legitimacy on the other hand.

CONCEPTION OF PARENTAL LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY

According to Smith (1971, 1977), parental authority refers to the extent in which offspring accepts the legitimacy of parent to control certain aspects of his/her behavior, and it is distinguished from other parental control bases in two ways: 1) the child's willingness to comply with parent directions, while the last in not present to enforce them, 2) the likelihood that the child would willingly obey parent's rules, although he/she does not find them useful or reasonable. When parents set rule or any kind of demand which the youth is expected to follow in their absence, his decision on whether to obey or disobey depends on his internal standards and his conception of parental authority (Darling et al., 2007). This is relevant in particular when there is low probability for him/her to get punished for breaking the rules, or under circumstances of low parental enforcement.

The above approach (Smith, 1971) well reflects one of

the fundamental elements of authority; however by focusing exclusively on the question of legitimacy, it does not meet the bi-dimensional criterion which the general definition of authority outlined. It lacks any direct information about the other aspects of parent's authority which is related to his/her capability and willingness to control/affect certain aspects of a child's behavior (power).

A long series of studies of parental authority conceptions that has been published (Smetana et al., 2005) also dealt with various aspects of the dimension of 'legitimate authority'. This body of research extensively probed children and parents' judgments about several issues which are connected to parental authority, such as the right of parent to set limits, child's obligation to obey parent's rules, authority's duty to regulate certain actions of the child and the perceived justification of parental authority. The fundamental findings of these studies may illuminate on the essence of the construct of parental authority. The two main questions that concerned the researchers focused on the context in which parental authority is applied and the age effect on its legitimacy conceptions.

The theoretical framework served in these studies was derived from the domain specific model of the social-cognitive development, which claims that there is a conceptual differentiation between social domains in the moral judgment of individuals (Turiel, 1983, 2002; Turiel and Davidson, 1986). This distinction influences the way parents and children construct and perceive parental authority, so their conceptions on parental authority vary across different types of the social domain (Smetana, 1988, 1995). According to the social-cognitive domain theory, moral domain (referring to issues pertaining to others' welfare and rights) is conceptually distinguished from the conventional domain. The latter pertains to social conventions with regard to behavioral uniformities such as a way of speaking, manners, looks, and so on - relativistic norms underlie different kinds of social interactions. Moral and conventional domains considered to be distinguished from the personal domain which refer to issues pertaining to the individual territory solely, therefore conceived as out of social regulation and beyond moral matters. This domain contains issues such as privacy, preferences regarding performance and dominance of the body (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1994; Smetana et al., 2005).

Findings of the aforementioned studies consistently show that parents and children tend to judge legitimacy of parental authority as a function of the issue discussed. Apparently there is a consent that parent should have the right (that is, legitimate authority) to regulate children's actions in moral (for example, lying, stealing) and conventional issues (Smetana, 1988, 1993; Smetana and Asquith, 1994; Tisak, 1986). In a later study, children and parents agreed about parents' legitimate authority regarding the prudential domain, which refers to negative

and harmful actions, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and use of drugs (Smetana, 2000). On the other hand, it was found that with age children consider parental authority, particularly with respect to personal and friendship issues, as less legitimate (Smetana, 1988, 2000; Smetana and Asquith, 1994).

Findings showing persistent reduction in parental authority conceptions among children and youth might be understood due to progression in moral development during the course of early adolescent, which is characterized by autonomic-relativistic reasoning accompanied by the ability to consider meaning, intentions and circumstances with respect to specific action or situation (Piaget, 1932, 1965). Respectively, parent's authority will no longer be considered by child as uniform as it was in former days, but as contingent in the context of parent's demand. Rules become more dynamic in the adolescent's consciousness and are no longer treated equally for every part of his life. Whenever parent's control goes beyond personal domain boundaries, adolescent's ability to discern and object gets better, due to his overall cognitive and emotional developmental progression. Additionally, the child's development involves experiences and social changes with regard to child-parent relationship, which lays the foundations of an expansion in child's demands of autonomy and diminution of parent's control, as far as the balance in parent-child power becomes more symmetrical.

Ultimately, while extending their personal domain boundaries, adolescents gradually remove more and more issues from parental authority to their personal jurisdiction, within a process in which parents take part while lagging in content and pace. While both parties agree about limiting parental authority to non-intrusive and non-personal issues during the transition from early to medial adolescence, they disagree on the question: where passes the semantically borderline of personal domain? (Smetana, 2000). Moreover, it was found that adolescents who attribute less legitimacy to their parents' authority over personal issues, and believe their parents to be intruding this domain in their lives, tend to judge them as psychologically over-controlling (a pattern identified with parental authoritarianism) (Smetana, 2002). This suggests that psychological control, whose negative impact on child development is largely discussed in the literature, may be understood in terms of particular behavior (action/issue type) rather than solely on the basis of overall parental practice.

Therefore, the social context directly affects child's perception about legitimacy of parental authority and its underlying control manifestations, as well as his/her grasp of his parent's overall pattern of control. However, issue classification as related to one domain or another depends on one's interpretation. This is especially concerned with different kinds of issues which simultaneously share a few meanings (usually defined as

multifaceted by Smetana and her colleagues), so different individuals, according to their social position (for example, age, sex, family role), may consider the very same issue as pertaining to different domains and ascribe it unequal legitimacy for parental authority (Smetana, 1988, 2005).

Further evidences reveal the moderation effect of behavioral and social adjustment among youth on parental authority conceptions. For instance, it was found that adolescents who use drugs tended to consider this action as part of their personal domain, and hence, as beyond parental authority jurisdiction (Nucci et al., 1991). Consistent with that finding, Darling et al. (2008) found behaviorally disturbed children to be less legitimacy granting to their parents' authority than normative children.

Taken together, the evidences suggest that parental authority should be examined in terms of the context in which it occurs and that various styles of parental authority might exist next to each other (Smetana, 1995). Accordingly, an overall and exhaustive definition of this construct must consider various domains relevant to parent-child authority relationship. So far, it is realized that the domain effect on parental authority conceptions is not exclusively an outcome of an absolute social significance, but also a product of subjective perceptions affected by different attribution variables. Many social issues may be assessed under different criteria and therefore be considered as pertaining to distinguished domains. In this regard, parental authority is a relative concept, in which a significant part of its values is determined by the characteristics of the reference group.

Additional empiric course of studies led by Darling et al. (2008, 2007, 2006, 2005) further illuminate the significance of the legitimacy of parental authority dimension with respect to consequential aspects. In their important study from 2007 that focuses on the aspect of actual obedience to parent among adolescents, the researchers found that general agreement with parent and obligation to obey best predict general obedience. Adolescents who express global agreement with parent and willingness to conform to his authority reported elevated level of actual obedience. Adolescents' tendency to comply with parental demands on the background of specific issues from their everyday lives was additionally examined. Controlling for the general agreement with parent and parental enforcement style, adolescents were found to best obey when they consider the issues in which they were asked about as part of parental authority jurisdiction (legitimate authority), and when they expressed an obligation to obey, in spite of their specific disagreement.

The findings establish the natural linkage between the legitimacy dimension of parental authority and actual obedience among children, and supporting Smith's (1977) stand concerning the authority merit as parental control base. It may be concluded that actual expression of obedience is largely dependent upon the legitimacy in

which adolescent ascribe to parental authority and his obligation to obey, with relation to a variety of issues. Current research also expands the understanding regarding the nature of the discussed construct, which according to the researcher must be conceptually distinguished from agreement with parent. While obedience expressions derived from agreement are based on consent and parent-child values sharing that may reflect a successful socialization, expressions of obedience stem from authority reflect the adolescent's acknowledgment of parent's right to control his behavior as opposed to his will and attitudes (Darling et al., 2007). In that sense, only obedience due to disagreement constitutes a real parental authority manifestation.

Accordingly, parental authority occurs on a conflictual basis of disagreement between both parties. Without a conflict no authority effect is required in order to achieve obedience. The parent-child conflict reflects the growing contradiction during youth - between the normative adolescent attempts to expand his/her psychologically and behaviorally autonomous boundaries versus the parent's efforts to persist with protecting, regulating and socializing the child (Smetana, 2002). Conflict of interests appears, as motioned, with respect to diverse issues containing different significance, according to the social domain they represent in the minds of both parties. The conflict around the network of issues is an instrument in adolescent's hands which enables him to challenge prenatal authority for the purpose of gradual transfer of conventional issues into his personal jurisdiction (Smetana, 1995). Fair aspirations of control over potentially personal issues among adolescents may indicate a healthy development of successful autonomy (Smetana et al., 2005). Moreover, with the exception of differences between children parental authority conceptions according to child's age, Darling et al. (2008, 2006) have identified patterns of individual differences in legitimacy attributions to parental authority as a function of its centrality in the adolescent consciousness. Accordingly, three specific patterns have been identified:

(1) *Parent centered* adolescents who tend to consider their parents' authority as legitimate in most domains, and compared it to that of their friends were also more likely to ascribe legitimacy to their parent's authority over personal domain.

(2) *Adolescent centered* adolescents tend to consider their parents' authority as illegitimate in most domains, especially respecting the personal domain.

(3) *Shared* adolescents who tend to distinguish between domains with regard to their parents' authority. While personal issues are defined as out of parental jurisdiction, issues pertaining to child's safety and security domains (that is, prudential) are more likely to be considered as legitimate for parental authority.

To summarize, a valid parental authority is partly founded

on child's endorsement of his parent legitimacy to control and regulate his behavior, with relation to various social contexts (domains). Two of its main conceptual aspects, the parent's right to control and the child's obligation to obey, were consistently proven to be effective in predicting consequential aspects of parent-child authority-based relationship (actual obedience and information disclosure to parent). Hence, taking the dimension of legitimacy into theoretical consideration, while constructing the properties of authority, seems essential in order to establish an exhaustive conceptual framework of this construct in the familial context of children socialization.

PARENTAL POWER AND ITS BASES

Power in the familial context, is defined as the potential or actual parental ability to influence child's behavior in order to change it (Olson and Cromwell, 1975). The three domains included within that construct are power outcomes, power bases and power processes (Olson and Cromwell, 1975; Henry et al., 1989). The first domain, the consequential, refers to the extent of which parental power processes and bases succeed in achieving child's behavioral change. The second domain, power bases, refers to the repertoire of sources at the disposal of the parent for the purpose of affecting child's behavior (Smith, 1970; McDonald, 1977). These sources also relate to the potential parent abilities, of which the child subjectively perceives himself as effective for generating change in his own behavior.

Several aspects of parental power, mostly derived from natural position of the parent in the family, and the bases of power at his disposal due to that, are discussed in the literature which reveals two central categories of parental power bases (Henry et al., 1989; Peterson et al., 1985). The first, force and rewarding, is a base of power (such as parent preferential natural body size, control of family resources, etc.), which allows parent decisive advantage during a conflict and, particularly in early childhood, and constitute the main basis for legitimate parental authority. The second, parental expertise (as perceived by the child) becomes dominant toward the advanced stages of child's development, as the 'natural' parental bases of influence become gradually replaced by others, and power asymmetry, characterized in early childhood, decreases (Baumrind, 1968). Baumrind (1968) noted that during adolescence, parental authority rises and falls more than once on the parent ability to be the significant figure required by the growing-up child. In this part of his life, the adolescent needs the kind of competent parent who is capable of saying the significant things that are important for him to hear. As far as the moral thinking and justice conception of the adolescent increases, the parental base of power becomes more and more dependent on his ability to anchor his demands on reasonable and acceptable arguments and rely on his best knowledge and experience.

So far, the two aspects of parental power which are profoundly linked with each other, and positively related to authority possessed by parent, were examined. The conflict 'outcomes' which constitute direct indication of the extent of parental power (or authority) lean on natural power bases such as coercive power (that is, force) and rewarding. Additional base, parental expertise, is closely related to legitimate conceptions of parental authority in adolescence.

In terms of moral developments, this metamorphosis of power bases during adolescence may reflect the ongoing transfer from heteronomic to autonomic moral style, characterized by evolvement of relativistic and equalitarian thinking (Piaget, 1965). These moral characteristics must lead the child to seek reasonable justification for rules or laws, beyond the parent's natural right to set them or control resources. It is most plausible therefore that the reliability of the parent as authorized source of knowledge would affect child's judgment regarding the rule validity and whether or not to comply with it (consequential aspect of power).

The third domain included in the parental power model, *power processes*, refers to parents' actual attempts of affecting and shaping the child's attitudes and behavior (Olson and Cromwell, 1975). These processes of influence, also known in the relevant literature as patterns of parent control in child's socialization and overall parenting style, constitute the mainstream frame of reference within the theoretical and empirical discussion regarding parental authority. The type of parental attempts of affecting child's behavior (both derived from the previously mentioned constructs) are vital for defining parental authority. This is so because they represent the potential conflict surrounding issues in which authority manifestations occur. It can be assumed, for example, that in the absence of consistent parental limit setting and demandingness, there is no actual value to the way the child perceives his parents' authority. That is, while parental authority is being passive (low demandingness), in fact, there is no actual dilemma on the part of the child on whether or not to comply as part of acknowledging his parents' authority. Furthermore, on the background of no parents' attempts to regulate the child's behavior (that is, low limit setting), it is unlikely that conflict will emerge, and under the conditions of no conflict or disagreement between parties, as aforesaid, parental authority is irrelevant.

PATTERNS OF PARENTAL BEHAVIOR AND OVERALL PARENTING STYLE

As previously stated, aspects of parents' behavior and their style of educating children's concern, according to the above-mentioned model, to parental processes of power (Henry et al., 1989), are occasionally discussed under bodies of research and theory of child's socialization. Researchers have concentrated in identifying

patterns of parents' behavior toward children, which are relevant to developmental aspects and adjustment of them. Two of the most fundamental parental elements identified in this context are parental control and parental acceptance (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Steinberg, 2001; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Other parental dimensions described within the literature are, for the most part, stemming from these two, or overlapping them in their meaning (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Steinberg et al., 1992).

Parental control, in its negative form, mainly express patterns of excessive regulation of child's activity and behavior, autocratic decision making, overprotection, tight instruction on how to think and feel, etc (Barber, 1996; Steinberg et al., 1989). The positive edge of this parental element is characterized by granting autonomy to the child, while setting limits and monitoring (Mattanah, 2001; Steinberg et al., 1992). It is essential however to distinguish between psychological and behavioral control, since the latter reflects parental attempts directed at regulating children's behavior according to social norms (Barber et al., 2005), and considered to be functional in forming child's competence (Baumrind, 2005).

The second element represents overall parental attitude also known as warmth and respondingness, which contains aspects such as accepting the child's emotions, listening and encouraging him, and so on. This term also refers to the extent of parents' emotional and behavioral involvement in child's life and activities (Maccoby, 1992).

The various aspects of parental control and acceptance have been organized into three global categories of the overall parenting styles based on parental authority motive: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive (Baumrind, 1971), which has undergone revisions, expansions and updates during the years (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Baumrind, 1991). The major dimension which differentiates between these types of parenthood refers to the extent in which parent sets limits and directions, reasons and justifies demands and expectations, utilizes control and power and provides emotional support.

The *Authoritative* parent combines consistent discipline and limit setting (behavioral control) along with providing warm and emotional support, reasoning and negotiation. Authoritative parent tends to educate his offspring upon rational ground; he would encourage negotiation and collaborate with child in decision making and considerations underlying his policy. He acknowledges his rights as an adult, but would not diminish child's rights, individual characters and autonomous aspirations (Baumrind, 1968, 1971, 1978). During adolescence, a pattern of granting "psychological autonomy" emerges, that is shown by the extent of which parent allows and encourages the development of self-opinions and personality (Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg et al., 1989).

The *Authoritarian* parenting style is characterized with

high level of control along with low degree of support and emotional availability. In order to carry out his doctrine, authoritarian parent will punish and use any coercive means at his disposal, as long as the child contradicts his opinion and beliefs. He tends not to negotiate regarding rules, for he sees himself the supreme authority and believes that the child should obey him. This parent would examine a child's behavior according to absolute standards, he would value respect to authority and preach to obedience and conformity (Baumrind, 1968, 1971, 1978).

The *permissive* parenting style is a pattern consisting of a low level of control along with a high degree of support and warmth. In contrast to the former styles, he would allow the child to control and regulate his own behavior, as much as possible, and would avoid punishment. Permissive parent may clarify rules, yet he encourages negotiation of decisions which are concerned with the child (Baumrind, 1968, 1971, 1978).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) suggested an overlapping model based on two orthogonal parental dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. *Responsiveness* refers to the extent of coherency in parental reinforcement with response to child's behavior, that is, the extent in which parent nurtures child individuality, supports him and respond to his needs and requests. *Demandingness* refers to the quantity and quality of the parent's demands, as well as, to the manner of child monitoring and control by the parent. Its essence is in parental educational claims, which are meant to regulate child's behavior and socialize him according to social norms. Parental demandingness is expressed in behavioral control and monitoring child activities, while confronting with him when the need arises.

Out of these two dimensions, four types of parenting are identified which are behaviorally distinguished: authoritative parent who is high on two dimensions; indulgent parent who is high in responsiveness and low in demandingness; authoritarian which is high in demandingness and low in responsiveness; and the uninvolved parent, who is low on both dimensions. It is possible, therefore, to recognize the conceptual overlapping between the two parental configurations, with the exception of the split of Baumrind's permissive category into two separate sub-categories, which are varied with relation to responsiveness dimension.

The empirical and professional evidences consistently point on the linkage between authoritative parental patterns and positive emotional and social adjustment characteristics among children and adolescents. Steinberg's (2001) work summarizes the empirical findings cumulated in this field and generally concluded that adolescents who were raised in authoritative families enjoy a prominent advantage concerning psychological development, as compared with adolescents who were raised in non-authoritative families. Specifically, adolescents of authoritative parents show better achievements

in school, report lower levels of anxiety and depression, tend to be more independent and self-esteemed, and additionally, they are less likely to develop antisocial behavior and delinquency.

More contemporary findings support this and show a consistent relationship between parental practices and styles, and various developmental and emotional aspects among adolescents (Heaven and Ciarrochi, 2008a, b; Jackson et al., 2005; Laible and Carlo, 2004). A recent study investigated the relationship between parenting styles and several emotional variables during the late adolescence and found additional support for the positive effect on children's development attributed to the authoritative parenting qualities (Mckinney et al., 2008). Specifically, the researchers identified a significant relationship between perceived authoritative parenting (regarding both parents' sex), as well as parental support, and elevated self-esteem and diminished levels of anxiety and depression among girls. Among boys, however, parental support was found to be significantly related to all three emotional variables, while mother's authoritative parenting style was associated in this group with depression and self-esteem (according to the expected directions). Consistent with the aforementioned studies, permissive parenting style was not significantly related to any emotional variable, while the authoritarian parenting style showed typical negative effects on the mentioned emotional variables.

Researchers attribute the positive outcomes identified with authoritative parenting style to the unique configuration of support and warmth, along with behavioral control (that is, demandingness), autonomy granting and minimal psychological control (Baumrind, 2005). Nevertheless, the role that every parental aspect plays with relation to child's developmental outcomes is not yet clear. Although it has been shown that authoritative parenting traits functionally overlap with relation to children's adjustment variables, yet, concerning to behavioral functioning, parental demandingness was found to play extremely vital role (Gray and Steinberg, 1999). It is assumed, wherefore, that in comparison to permissive parenting style, the authoritative parent is more effective in the context of adolescents' behavior functioning, due to his advantage in setting limits, demanding and monitoring child's behavior. In contrast to these authoritative characteristics, it is proven that children who were raised in permissive families tend to have more conduct disorders, including school problems, substance use and antisocial behavior (Lamborn et al., 1991; Dekovic et al., 2003; Parker and Benson, 2004).

According to these findings, it can be assumed that demandingness constitutes a crucial element within the power processes used by authoritative parent, which is extremely relevant for defining parental authority. For it is unreasonable to assume actual parental influence on child behavior (the consequential aspect of parental

power) in the absence of limits and rules available in child's mind (derived from parental consistent demandingness), particularly under circumstances of low parent's presence which is the most common situation during adolescence.

Finally, a hypothetical model was proposed to bridge between the two conceptual frameworks pertaining to parental authority research (that is, authoritative parenting style and conceptions of parental authority), in the context of the positive outcomes described in the literature regarding children's socialization and discipline (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). According to the model, three aspects of legitimate parental authority mediates between authoritative parenting and desirable developmental and behavioral outcomes among children: (1) children of authoritative parents tend to consider their parental authority as legitimate and feel obligated to obey them, (2) as a result, they internalize more intensively their parents' social and educational values and (3) thus, they are more convenient for being socialized by the parent. So for the most part, their autonomic decisions, under no parental supervision, are consistent with their internal values. The cumulative research in this field displays much of supportive evidence for the current model (Darling et al., 2006; Smetana and Daddis, 2002).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS - PARENTAL AUTHORITY AS A BI-DIMENSIONAL AND BI-LITERAL CONSTRUCT

From the theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the authority concept in general, and its unique meanings in the familial contexts, it appears that the current construct of parental authority represents a parent's legitimate effect on child's behavior, whenever it is against the latter's will or attitude. It is about the parent's ability to dictate, determine and change behavior in the child, who acknowledges the parent's legitimate right to do so in spite his opposition. It is a dynamic concept which is beyond parent's style and practices, and its extent and limits depend on child's age and social domain contexts in which it occurs.

For the most part, parental authority constitutes an instrument which is used by parent to facilitate his educational point of view toward his child, and occasionally utilized for promising conformist behavior from him/her. Parental authority is known as an effective control base, which in the current context found expression mainly in child obedience under disagreement with parent, in particular when the latter does not attend to enforce. Parental authority efficacy on top of other parental control bases is enabled due to the legitimacy attributed by a child to parent's control expressions. Generally, legitimacy extent in which child's grants to parent's authority depends on the nature of issue is relevant to parent's demand (domain context). In this regard, any compliance derived from agreement with the

parent would not be considered as authority manifestation, and should be differentiated from child's acceptance of parental legitimate authority. Thus, according to the current conception, parental authority exists only on conflictual background of parent-child disagreement.

The additional dimension of parental authority refers to the extent of parental power. Parental power is recognized in parent's tendency to set limits and rules (demandingness), and his ability to enforce them in order to achieve obedience from the child, by implementing various power sources which he possesses. It should be noted that including the demandingness aspect into parental authority definition stems from the assumption that under no limits condition, the conflictual potential is low and therefore does not require any authoritative means.

Parental authority, in that context, contains two inherent bilateral dimensions of which distinguish it from other forms of parental control. Its bilateral aspect is found in parental power on the one hand (that is, enforcing control in child's behavior) and in the child's willingness to accept parent's authority on the other hand, out of the latter acknowledgment of its legitimacy.

The review of the literature reveals the generality of elements incorporated under the current concept, and provides an organized frame of reference of parental authority characteristics. Beside the theoretical benefits of profoundly understanding the construct, the applied benefits for professionals should be considered, while defining aspects in familial functioning relevant to parental authority. While professionals tend to attribute many pathological phenomena among adolescents to the diminished parental authority, it is considerably important to examine this etiological factor with relation to children's outcomes while distinguishing it from other sides of parenting style which are not directly related to authority. Only then it will be possible to have a better understanding regarding the etiological role this specific trait of parenting style (authority) plays. In this context, this article's products set the challenge of developing a capability of measurement of the actual essence of this construct.

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