

PARENTING AND PARENTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

PATRICIA LUCIANA RUNCAN, West University of Timisoara, Romania

REMUS RUNCAN, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania

ABSTRACT: *In this study, parenting styles and parents of yesterday and today are compared from the perspective of eight adults of different age, sex, professional training, and nationality. The aim is to identify the similarities and differences between the parenting style and the parents of yesterday and today to draw the profile of the parent that today's children need. The method used in the study is qualitative, and the tool used is the interview. The parenting style of the interviewees' parents oscillated between adequate (correct, understanding, permissive, etc.) and inadequate (authoritarian, classic, conflictual, etc.); parenting style had an impact on the interviewees, but only one of them stated that he had learned to build a more consistent model of authenticity based on it. The profile of the dream parent should include acceptance, companionship, harmony, etc. to avoid situations where parents are from the past and children are from the future.*

Keywords: *Parenthood; parents; children; model; impact; characteristic features; profile.*

1. Introduction

Today's grandparents are part of the boomer category (born between 1946 and 1960), a generation characterized by kindness, self-direction, career/work focus, competitiveness, demand for improvement, diligence, optimism, strength, achievement, stimulation, traditionalism, and universalism, but also by conformity, hedonism, individualism, weakness to the temptation of immediate reward, and stress; and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980). They have strong ties to family and friends, consider themselves a bridge between generations, and are motivated to volunteer (Phillipson, 2007; Leach et al., 2008; Sandeen, 2008; Leach et al., 2013; Hansen & Slagvold, 2020; Slagvold & Hansen, 2021). Conformism and traditionalism were "inherited" from their parents, the great / pre-war / silent / traditionalist generation (born between 1920 and 1945).

In this study, the parenting styles of the parents of respondents to a questionnaire (Runcan, 2020) and how the respondents' childhoods shaped them as parents are analysed, and answers to two "hard" questions are sought - how parents should be and what today's parents should do to have their dream children - all from the perspective of eight adults of different ages, sexes, professional training, and nationality. The goal is to identify the reasons why today's adults -

boomers and Generation X - see their parents as they see them.

Parenting refers to "the activity of raising a child as a parent" (Oxford Languages), and parenting styles refer to the various strategies (attitudes, behaviours, creating an emotional environment) (Gadsden, Ford & Breiner, 2016; Milnes, 2016) that parents use in raising children: secure (responsive and demanding), authoritarian (demanding but not responsive), indulgent / permissive (responsive but not demanding) and neglectful / uninvolved (neither responsive nor demanding) (Rodrigo, Byrne & Rodríguez, 2013; Arafat et al., 2020, Iosim et al., 2022, Butoi et al., 2025). Duncan, Coatsworth & Greenberg (2009) also introduced the concept of "mindful parenting" (where parents are intentionally moment-to-moment aware of the parent-child relationship).

Parenting style affects the development of risk behaviours in adolescents: behaviours that contribute to unintentional injury and violence, tobacco use; sexual behaviours that contribute to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases; unhealthy eating behaviours and physical inactivity (Newman et al., 2008); suicidal behaviour (Ying, 2013; Berge et al., 2016); alcohol use (Newman et al., 2008; Yap et al., 2017); and drug use (Newman et al., 2008; Yusof, Bakar & Sawai, 2019). It influences adolescents' life satisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2019) and on

students' emotional intelligence (Niradar, 2006; Runcan & Goian, 2014, Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2019).

The parenting style of parents in a certain cultural area (English-speaking countries, the EU and Russia on the one hand, and French-speaking countries, on the other) (Lin et al., 2022) can be influenced by beliefs and religious practices (Horwath et al., 2008), language of the cultural area (Lin et al., 2022) and level of education (Lin et al., 2022, Sârbu et al. 2022, Marici et al., 2023).

2. Method and materials

The method used in the study is qualitative, and the tool used is the interview.

Eight adults of different age, gender, professional training, and nationality were interviewed about their own parents and about how they see parents today. The adults were, at the time of the interview, over 60 years old, except for one interviewee who was 50 years old. Of the eight interviewees, five were women and three were men. Regarding professional training, two interviewees were doctors (C.C. and I.R.), two were high school teachers (M.B. and F.I.), two were university professors (D.B. and E.J.), one was a pastor (G.S.), and one was a primary school teacher; one of the doctors was also a psychotherapist (I.R.), one of the university professors was also a priest and psychotherapist (E.J.), and the primary school teacher (M. .) was also a school director. Seven interviewees were of Romanian nationality and one was of American nationality.

The eight interviewees were asked the following double questions related to the parenting styles used by their parents (Q7a), the impact of yesterday's childhood on today's parenting (Q7b), how today's parents should be (Q9a) and what should today's parents do to help their own children in a real, authentic way, so that they develop beautifully, be happy in their own lives and, at the same time, become balanced adults (Q9b):

- Q7a: Do you think that the parenting styles that your parents used to educate you were appropriate or inappropriate for your formation as a future adult, parent, and professional?
- Q7b: Does yesterday's childhood have any impact on today's parenting?
- Q9a: From your perspective, what should

today's parents be like to help their own children in a real, authentic way, so that they develop well, be happy and, at the same time, become balanced adults?

- Q9b: From your perspective, what should today's parents do to help their own children in a real, authentic way, so that they develop well, be happy and, at the same time, become balanced adults?

3. Results

Question Q7a, Do you think that the parenting styles that your parents used to educate you were appropriate or inappropriate for your formation as a future adult, parent, and professional?, asked respondents to rate their own parents' parenting styles from a formation perspective as an adult, parent, and professional.

For D.B. and M.B, their parents' parenting styles were not appropriate because of inconsistency. In C.C.'s case, her parents' parenting styles were not entirely appropriate, which seems to be the case with all parents who learn from their mistakes - unfortunately, sometimes, too late! For F.I., the parenting style used by her parents was appropriate - an education based on rules and necessary rigors. E.J. did not answer this question, preferring to review parenting styles. According to I.R., the parenting styles of those who raised her were anchored in their history and life context: full of parental love, discipline, concrete modelling through work and example, love, justice, wisdom, care, freedom, limitations, and trust that she could create a life of her own. In G.S.'s case, his parents' parenting styles were inadequate. M. . did not answer this question.

Question Q7b, Does yesterday's childhood have any impact on today's parenting?, asked the interviewees to say whether the conception according to which "the child is the parent of the adult" is verified.

According to D.B., the clashes of ideas and arguments between his parents contributed to his formation as an adult. For M.B., yesterday's childhood had a strong impact on today's parenthood. C.C. answered that the relationship between childhood and today's parenting is either strictly causal, mechanistic, repetitive, or one that transforms freedom into abuse - undesirable both. According to F.I., "yesterday's childhood flickers

incessantly in the parent I am today.” To this question, E.J. answered in the affirmative, emphasizing that if “education begins in the cradle,” “childhood lays the foundation for adult life.” I.R. did not answer this question. G.S. stated that his parents’ parenting styles made him seek his own path and succeed in life. M. . did not answer this question.

Question Q9a, From your perspective, what should today’s parents be like to help their own children in a real, authentic way, so that they develop well, be happy and, at the same time, become balanced adults?, asked interviewees to say what today’s parents should be like to help their own children in a real, authentic way to stop being uncommunicative, bored, absent, weird, gullible/naive, confused, disoriented, and selfish.

D.B. believes that parents should be genuine. M.B. also believes that parents should be genuine. According to C.C., parents should not be anxious about the future of their children. M.B. did not answer this question. E.J. answered that fathers should be neither authoritarian nor permissive, and that mothers should be good Christians, with an innate spirituality. According to I.R., parents should be balanced. G.S. did not answer this question. For M.Ş., parents should be models of behaviour, attitude, and life for their children.

Question Q9b, From your perspective, what should today’s parents do to help their own children in a real, authentic way, so that they develop well, be happy and, at the same time, become balanced adults?, asked interviewees to say what today’s parents should do to help their own children in a real, authentic way to stop being uncommunicative, bored, absent, weird, gullible/naive, confused, disoriented, and selfish.

According to D.B., parents should re-educate themselves if they are not authentic, learn together so that they do not fall behind them, have a common language, common interests in knowledge, and common concerns. According to M.B., parents should have time for children, really listen to them, tell stories, do activities together (because children do what they see rather than what they are told), and be the adults that children need. C.C. is of the opinion that parents should spend time with the nuclear family, the extended family, and the community - in a word, with people of value -, not to tease children, and to ask questions rather than give unsolicited answers.

According to F.I., “the adult should take seriously his role as a parent,” meaning “to look tenderly at his children, to listen to them, to show them the way, to be by their side, to support them.” According to E.J., parents should combine authority with freedom; educate their children in the truth; avoid both punishment and reward; not to defeat, humiliate, or devalue the child; accept their child unconditionally; educate their child in the spirit of autonomy; teach their child to own his own mistakes; not to blackmail their child; educate their child in a Christian spirit. I.R. believes that parents should ensure harmony in the family, accompany love with discipline and structure, supervise their child throughout life, and identify and recognize health problems (especially mental). G.S. answered that parents should seed values deep into their children’s hearts, teach them life-preparatory skills, and project godly expectations on their lives. M.Ş. did not answer this question.

4. Discussion

Question Q7a. Only F.I. responded that her parents’ parenting styles were appropriate. D.B., M.B., and G.S. answered that their parents’ parenting styles were inadequate (in terms of the first two, because of inconsistency, i.e., differences in approach between mother and father). C.C. and I.R. answered that their parents’ parenting styles were neither appropriate nor inappropriate (the latter said they were anchored in the history and context of their upbringing). E.J. and M.Ş. they did not answer this question. Question Q7b. D.B., M.B., F.I., E.J. answered affirmatively to this question. and G.S. C.C. gave a theoretical answer (the relationship between childhood and today’s parenthood can only have two undesirable results). I.R. and M.Ş. did not answer it.

Question Q9a. D.B. and M.B. answered that the parents should be genuine, I.R. that they should be balanced, and M. . that they should be models of behaviour, attitude, and life. C.C. said that parents need not be anxious, and E.J. that they should be neither authoritarian, nor permissive and that mothers should be good Christians. F.I and G.S. did not answer it.

Question Q9b. According to D.B., parents should re-educate if they are not authentic; learn

together with their children so as not to fall behind them; have a common language and common knowledge interests and concerns.

According to M.B., parents should have time for their children, really listen to them, tell stories, do activities together (as children do what they see rather than what they are told to do), and be the adults children need. C.C. said parents should spend time with the nuclear family, with the extended family, and with the community (in a word, with the people of value), not tease them, and ask questions rather than giving unsolicited answers. F.I. considers parents should take seriously their roles as parents (to look tenderly at their children, to listen to them, to show them the way, to be by their side, and to support them).

According to E.J., parents should combine authority with freedom; bring up their children in the truth; avoid both punishment and reward; not to defeat, humiliate, or devalue them; accept them unconditionally; educate them in the spirit of autonomy; teach them to own their own mistakes; not to blackmail them; and to educate them in a Christian spirit. I.R. believed parents should ensure harmony in the family; mix love with discipline and structure; supervise their children throughout their lives; and identify and recognize health problems (especially mental ones). According to G.S., parents should seed values deep in the hearts of their children; teach them life-preparatory skills; and project divine expectations upon their lives. M.Ş. did not answer this question.

5. Conclusion

Only one respondent answered that her parents' parenting styles were appropriate, three answered that they were inappropriate, two that they were neither appropriate nor inappropriate, while two did not answer Q7a. The results are not surprising because they are juxtaposing three different generations - the Great / Pre-War / Silent / Traditionalist Generation (born between 1920 and 1945), conformist and traditionalist, on the one hand, an boomers (born between 1946 and 1960) and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), on the other hand, who inherited conformity and traditionalism from their parents, but they also acquired other qualities along the way (creativity, intelligence, agility, ambition, courage, nonchalance, critical spirit).

Five respondents answered affirmatively to Q7b about the impact of yesterday's childhood on today's parenting, one preferred to give a theoretical answer, and two chose not to answer.

The ideal portrait of the parent that today's child needs (Q9a) looks like this: two respondents answered that parents should be authentic, one that they should be balanced, one that they should be a role model for children, and two chose not to answer.

By far, the most numerous and diverse answers are those to Q9b. Thus, parents should ensure harmony in the family; avoid both punishment and reward; be the adults children need; identify and recognize health problems (especially mental ones); combine authority with freedom; mix love with discipline and structure; learn with them (to avoid falling behind them); project divine expectations on their lives; ask questions; seed values deep in children's hearts; show children the way; be by their side; accept children unconditionally; really listen to them (two respondents mentioned it); educate them in the truth, in the Christian spirit and in the spirit of autonomy; teach them skills preparatory for life and the importance of assuming their own mistakes; look at them tenderly; support them; supervise them all along in their lives; have time for them; have a common language and common interests and concerns; do activities together (because children do what they see rather than what they are told to do); spend time with the nuclear family, with the extended family and with the community (in a word, with valuable people); tell stories; not to give unsolicited answers; not to tease them; not to devalue them; not to defeat them; not to blackmail them; not to humiliate them; and, very importantly, to re-educate themselves if they are not genuine. There were eight respondents, and only one aspect was captured by two of them - to really listen to their children - which brings up the importance of parent-child communication.

According to Gadsden, Ford & Breiner (2016), most of these problems could be solved by national policies and investments that support both parents and children; large-scale preventive interventions; specific interventions to support both children with special needs and their parents, as well as parents in difficulty; and parenting programs and strategies.

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