

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS ON ADOLESCENTS' MORAL SELF-CONCEPT

Mamanazarov Uchqun Burxon o'g'li

Department of Continuing Education Pedagogy, PhD

Oriental University Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8980-1906>

uchqunmamanazarov115@gmail.com

Abstract: Adolescence is a period in which young people begin to think more seriously not only about what is right or wrong, but also about what kind of person they themselves are becoming. During these years, honesty, fairness, responsibility, empathy, and respect for others may gradually become part of a young person's self-concept rather than remaining only external expectations imposed by adults. The present article examines how parental relationships may contribute to the development of adolescents' moral self-concept. The study was conducted as a narrative review of literature on adolescent moral development, moral identity, moral self-awareness, parenting, and parent–adolescent relationships. Particular attention was given to parental warmth, autonomy support, inductive discipline, psychological control, moral modelling, and family conflict. The reviewed literature suggests that emotionally supportive and autonomy-promoting relationships create more favorable conditions for moral internalization, while humiliation, psychological control, and conditional acceptance may interfere with the development of an independent moral self. Parental example also appears to be important, as adolescents observe whether the moral principles expressed by parents are reflected in their everyday behavior.

Keywords: adolescence, moral self-concept, moral self-awareness, parental relationships, moral identity, parenting, moral development.

Introduction

Adolescence changes the way a person thinks about morality.

A younger child may understand moral behavior mainly through external rules: do not lie, do not hurt others, respect adults, follow instructions. During adolescence, however, these rules begin to acquire a more personal meaning. Young people increasingly ask themselves whether they are honest, fair, trustworthy, responsible, or caring individuals.

This shift is important because moral development is no longer limited to understanding what society expects. It gradually becomes connected with identity.

An adolescent may know that helping another person is considered good, yet this does not necessarily mean that helpfulness has become part of his or her self-concept.

The more difficult developmental task is to move from knowing a moral rule to seeing oneself as the type of person who wishes to live according to it.

This process can be described through the concept of moral self-concept.

Moral self-concept refers to the way individuals perceive and evaluate themselves in relation to moral qualities and standards. It is closely related to moral identity and moral self-awareness, although these terms should not simply be treated as synonyms.

Moral identity usually refers to the importance of moral qualities within a person's overall identity. Moral self-awareness places greater emphasis on understanding and evaluating one's own moral values, emotions, motives, and behavior.

Mamanazarov (2023) conceptualizes moral self-awareness as a process involving recognition and evaluation of personal moral values, beliefs, emotions, actions, strengths, and weaknesses. His later work on adolescence emphasizes that moral self-awareness develops through cognitive growth, social experience, emotional development, reflection, and communication.

This perspective makes the family particularly important.

Parents are often the first people from whom children hear moral rules, but their influence is not limited to instruction. Adolescents also learn from how parents react to mistakes, how they manage disagreement, whether they admit their own errors, whether they listen, and whether the values they teach are visible in their own behavior.

Methods

Research Design

The article was prepared as a narrative literature review.

A narrative review was selected because the purpose was to integrate psychological and developmental findings rather than calculate a pooled statistical effect.

The review focused on research concerning adolescent moral self-concept, moral identity, moral self-awareness, parenting practices, and parent-adolescent relationships.

Particular attention was given to empirical studies involving adolescents, as well as theoretical works that helped explain how family relationships may become internalized within the adolescent's developing sense of self.

The conceptual framework also incorporated the work of Uchqun Mamanazarov on adolescent moral self-awareness.

Analytical Procedure

These themes were then considered in relation to the cognitive, emotional, reflective, communicative, and behavioral dimensions of moral self-awareness.

Because no original empirical sample was used, the results below represent patterns identified in previous literature rather than newly collected statistical findings.

Results

Emotional Warmth Creates a Safer Context for Moral Self-Reflection

One of the clearest patterns in the literature concerns emotional security.

Adolescents are more able to reflect honestly on their behavior when they do not feel that every mistake threatens their relationship with their parents.

This does not mean that parents should avoid criticism or lower expectations.

The important distinction is between criticizing behavior and condemning the person.

For example:

“What you did was unfair. Think about how it affected the other person.”

is psychologically different from:

“You are selfish. You always disappoint us.”

The first message leaves room for responsibility and change.

The second turns a particular action into a judgment about identity.

Repeated global judgments may eventually affect moral self-concept. Instead of thinking, “I behaved badly,” the adolescent may begin to think, “I am a bad person.”

This distinction matters because moral development requires the ability to admit mistakes without collapsing into shame or defensiveness.

Warm parental relationships may therefore create a more stable emotional foundation for moral self-examination.

Autonomy Support Encourages Moral Internalization

A second major theme is autonomy.

During adolescence, externally imposed moral rules increasingly need to become personally understood values.

A young child may follow a rule because a parent expects it. An adolescent gradually begins to ask whether the rule itself makes sense and whether it fits his or her own beliefs.

This change is central to moral internalization.

Research on parental socialization suggests that parental responsiveness and autonomy support are associated with stronger dimensions of adolescent moral identity.

From Mamanazarov’s perspective, this difference is important because moral self-awareness involves reflection rather than passive acceptance.

Inductive Discipline Encourages Perspective-Taking

Another recurring finding concerns inductive discipline.

Inductive discipline focuses attention on how behavior affects other people.

Rather than relying only on punishment, the parent encourages the adolescent to think about consequences.

For example:

“How do you think your friend felt when you said that?”

or:

“What could you do now to repair the situation?”

This type of response invites the adolescent to move beyond rule violation and consider empathy, fairness, and responsibility.

Research has linked inductive discipline with stronger moral identity among adolescents.

The likely mechanism is straightforward.

Punishment tells adolescents that a behavior has consequences for themselves.

Induction helps them think about consequences for others.

That difference can be significant for moral self-concept because adolescents begin to evaluate not only what they did, but what the action says about their values.

Parental Moral Modelling Matters

Parents teach moral values even when they are not deliberately teaching.

Adolescents watch whether parents:

keep promises;

admit mistakes;

treat others respectfully;

behave honestly when it is inconvenient;

accept responsibility;

respond fairly during conflict.

This creates a practical test of parental credibility.

A parent may speak frequently about honesty but lie when it is useful.

Another may emphasize respect while humiliating family members during arguments.

In such situations, adolescents receive contradictory moral messages.

Research increasingly suggests that caregiver moral identity itself may be related to adolescent moral identity.

This finding is important because it shifts attention away from parenting techniques alone.

The moral qualities expressed by parents in everyday life may be as influential as the formal rules they establish.

One especially powerful form of modelling occurs when parents admit error.

A parent who says:

“I was unfair to you earlier. I was angry, but that does not justify the way I spoke.” demonstrates moral self-awareness in real time.

The adolescent sees that being moral does not mean never making mistakes. It also means recognizing mistakes and taking responsibility for them.

Psychological Control Can Undermine Autonomous Moral Development

Psychological control presents a different pattern.

This form of control attempts to regulate the adolescent's internal world through guilt, shame, emotional withdrawal, or manipulation.

For example:

"If you really cared about us, you would never disagree with me."

Such communication links moral worth with emotional obedience.

This may produce immediate conformity, but it can weaken autonomous moral motivation.

The adolescent may behave according to expectations in order to preserve approval rather than because the underlying value has been internalized.

The difference is subtle but important.

A morally autonomous adolescent behaves in a certain way because the value has become personally meaningful.

A psychologically controlled adolescent may behave similarly, but the motivation remains external.

This distinction becomes especially important when adolescents are outside parental supervision.

Conflict Can Either Support or Block Moral Independence

Conflict is not automatically harmful.

Some disagreement is normal during adolescence because young people increasingly negotiate independence, boundaries, privacy, and responsibility.

The important issue is the form of conflict.

Constructive disagreement can actually support moral development.

It requires adolescents to explain their position, listen to opposing views, defend a judgment, and sometimes revise it.

These are valuable forms of moral reasoning.

By contrast, conflict dominated by humiliation, threats, or refusal to listen may turn moral discussion into a struggle for control.

A family in which every disagreement is treated as disobedience may produce surface conformity without deeper moral reflection.

Therefore, moral independence may require some opportunity for respectful disagreement.

For this reason, studies of parental influence should ideally include both parent and adolescent perspectives.

Parent reports show how adults understand their behavior.

Adolescent reports show how that behavior is experienced.

The two perspectives may differ substantially.

Mamanazarov's Model Helps Explain the Mechanisms

Mamanazarov's multidimensional model of moral self-awareness provides a useful framework for understanding these findings.

Parental relationships may influence the cognitive dimension through explanation and moral discussion.

They may influence the emotional dimension through empathy, guilt, pride, shame, affection, and disappointment.

They may influence the reflective dimension by encouraging adolescents to analyze motives, consequences, and alternative actions.

They influence the communicative dimension through dialogue, disagreement, listening, and negotiation.

Finally, they influence the behavioral dimension through expectations, responsibilities, opportunities for independent choice, and parental example.

This framework suggests that parental influence is not one single process.

It operates across several psychological levels simultaneously.

Discussion

The findings suggest that parental relationships influence adolescents' moral self-concept primarily through the process of internalization.

This is more important than simple obedience.

Parents can control behavior directly when children are young. During adolescence, however, more behavior takes place outside direct supervision.

The adolescent gradually needs to decide:

“What do I believe?”

“What kind of person do I want to be?”

“What do I do when nobody is watching?”

These questions mark the transition from externally regulated morality to a more personal moral identity.

The reviewed literature suggests that emotional warmth, autonomy support, inductive discipline, and moral modelling are especially relevant to this transition.

Warmth seems to create a secure emotional environment in which adolescents can admit mistakes without seeing themselves as fundamentally bad.

Autonomy support allows young people to examine and eventually own moral values.

Induction encourages them to think about consequences for others.

Modelling demonstrates what moral principles actually look like in everyday behavior.

The opposite processes can also occur.

Psychological control may produce moral compliance that depends too heavily on parental approval.

Chronic hostile conflict can make moral discussion feel like a power struggle.

This distinction is especially important in research because obedience is easier to observe than internalization.

Another point deserves emphasis: parental influence is not deterministic.

Adolescents do not simply absorb everything parents provide.

They interpret it.

Their temperament, peer relationships, cognitive development, cultural environment, previous experiences, and emotional state all affect how parental behavior is understood.

The relationship is also reciprocal.

Parents influence adolescents, but adolescents also affect how parents respond.

A useful conceptual model can therefore be expressed as:

The findings do not suggest that parents need to speak more frequently about morality.

In fact, constant moral lectures may have limited value.

More useful may be conversations that require adolescents to think.

If adolescents are expected to be honest, responsible, fair, and respectful, these qualities should be visible in the adults who teach them.

The strongest moral lesson may therefore be consistency between what parents say and what they actually do.

Conclusion

Parental relationships appear to provide one of the most important interpersonal contexts in which adolescents develop a moral self-concept.

Warmth may create emotional security.

Autonomy support may help moral values become personally meaningful.

Inductive discipline can strengthen perspective-taking and responsibility.

Parental modelling can demonstrate how abstract values are expressed in real behavior.

At the same time, psychological control, humiliation, conditional affection, and destructive conflict may interfere with autonomous moral development.

Mamanazarov's model of moral self-awareness helps explain why these influences are broad rather than singular. Family relationships may simultaneously affect cognitive understanding, emotional experience, reflection, communication, and behavior.

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