

Predicting Adolescents' Moral Identity from Family Function

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Introduction

Some researchers suggest moral identity is an important source of moral motivation that facilitates commitment to moral behavior (Blasi, 2008; Bergman, 2008). By moral identity, we mean a commitment that emphasizes behavioral consideration and support of others' welfare, and continues with an ongoing personal feeling about the self (Matsuba et al., 2011; Hardy, 2008; Atkins, Hart & Donnelly, 2004). The present conceptualization of moral identity has two different aspects: a) Internalization is the degree to which moral principles are central to one's self-concept: b) Symbolization reflects the extent to which moral principles are expressed outwardly to others (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Several factors have been identified as influences on the development of moral identity, some of them are individual and some contextual. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family functioning components (cohesion, expressiveness, agreement, intellectual, recreation and religious orientations, organization, sociability, internal locus of control, family idealization, flexibility, laissez-faire decision-making, democratic and authoritarian styles, autonomy) with moral identity of adolescent and its dimensions, internalization and symbolization.

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Research questions

According to the above, the purpose of this research was to answer the following questions:

- 1) Do family functioning predict moral identity of adolescents?
- 2) Do family functioning predict symbolization of adolescents' moral identity?

3) Dose family functioning predict internalization of adolescents' moral identity?

Method

Current study was descriptive, a correlational study. The samples consisted of 533 high school students (260 boys and 273 girls) that were selected by multistage random sampling method. After coordinating the research with the department of education of Qom's quadruplet areas, one school were randomly selected from each area. One classroom from each of the first, second and third grade was randomly selected from each school and the students were administered the questionnaires.

Participants completed Aquino and Reed's Moral Identity Scale (2002) that consists of 13 items and two subscales of symbolization and internalization. Family function scale (FFS) consists of 13 subscales that reflecting family function (cohesion, expressiveness, agreement, intellectual, recreation and religious orientations, organization, sociability, internal locus of control, family idealization, flexibility, laissez-faire decision-making, democratic and authoritarian styles, autonomy).

The relationship between moral identity and family function was assessed by Pearson's correlation. Linear regression analysis (stepwise method) was also used to assess whether family function was a significant predictor of moral identity total score and its dimensions, internalization and symbolization.

Results

Results of data analysis, by using stepwise regression, showed that expressiveness, democratic parenting style and intellectual orientation components had the highest predictive power on moral identity. Also democratic parenting style, expressiveness and religious orientation components, increased significantly the predictive power of symbolization of moral identity. Finally components of expression, flexibility and democratic parental style explained about 6% of the internalization variance.

Discussion

The results of this research indicate that democratic parenting characterized by three dimensions, responsiveness, autonomy-granting, and demandingness, seems to facilitate moral identity development (Hardy, et al., 2010). Responsiveness enables the accurate understanding and acceptance of parental moral values. When adolescents feel loved by and comfortable with their parents, they are more likely to listen to and agree with what they say and do. Autonomy-granting encourages identity

exploration and commitment, including reflection on and commitment to moral principles. Demandingness helps youth understand moral principles and appreciate the consequences that follow from complying with or violating such principles (Dunn, 2014). Democratic parenting together with appropriate atmosphere for dialogue and expressing the needs and feelings in the family, and the existence of religious orientations and religious beliefs, provide the necessary grounds for moral development in adolescents. Also flexibility in responding to the need for independence of adolescents provides space for the discovery of values, internalization, and commitment to selective values, which is one of the dimensions of moral identity.

Keywords: family function, moral identity, symbolization, internalization, adolescents