Assess the Relationship Between People's Big Five Figures and Their Parents and Parenting Styles

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Abstract. Parenting style represents a psychological construct that typifies the standard strategies used by parents in raising their children. It is known that the Big Five Traits (BFT) indicate individual characteristics and differences, therefore, the research aimed to assess the relationship between adolescents' BFT and the parenting styles they received. An interview and self-report were used for the case studies. The result of the study confirmed that parenting styles have significant impacts on conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism, however, limited effects were found on extraversion and openness.

Keywords: Big Five Traits, parenting styles, openness.

1   Introduction

The causes of human personalities are complex. It is suggested that personality traits showed a moderate degree of continuity, a pattern influenced by genetic, environmental, transactional and random factors [1]. On the acquired side, everything that an individual experience happens in a specific form at a specific point in time, which makes up the person's character. Therefore, since personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving [2]. It would be interesting to explore the interaction among the growing environments and personalities. Within the factors, parents and their parenting styles play a crucial role. According to Kimberly Kopko, parenting is "based upon two aspects of parenting behaviour; control and warmth. "[3]. According to a group of studies in the US and New Zealand, children need at least one consistently responsible adult with whom children can make positive emotional connections. Having more than one such figure helps to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for children [4]. Baumrind's early work identified three parenting styles: a) authoritarian; b) permissive; and c) authoritative. In her classification, authoritative parenting is considered to be the best parenting style in terms of child outcomes. Specifically, authoritative parenting styles were repeatedly found to be associated with positive self-perceptions, while authoritarian parenting styles were repeatedly found to be associated with negative self-perceptions. [5-7]. But Asian parenting styles, particularly Chinese parents, have been described as 'authoritarian', 'controlling', 'restrictive' and 'hostile' [8-9], which are a type of parenting that runs counter to

the standard type. Therefore, I am intending to focus on Chinese parenting styles. However, the complexity of personalities also indicates that they could not be classified and determined easily. Hence, various personality traits, for instance, the Big Five, are able to categorise personalities relatively effectively. It was initially developed in 1949, which is a theory established by D. W. Fiske and was later expanded upon by other researchers.

Five dimensions were used in the Big Five test, typically referred to as openness to experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Openness captures the imagination and intellectual curiosity [10]. People with high scores tend to be more creative and more aware. Standard characteristics of conscientiousness include a high level of thoughtfulness, good impulse control and goal-oriented behaviour. It has to do with the way people control, regulate and channel their impulses. Extraversion is characterised by the breadth of activity, as opposed to depth, the urgency from external activities/situations and the creation of energy from external means [11]. The agreeableness trait reflects differences in individuals' general concern for social harmony. Identified people value getting along with others. Neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety or depression [12]. It is sometimes referred to as emotional instability, or conversely as emotional stability. According to Hans Eysenck's theory of personality, neuroticism is interrelated with a low tolerance for stressful or aversive stimuli [13]. Neuroticism is a prototypical temperament trait that has been studied in the study of temperament for decades before being adopted by the Five-Factor Model [14]. Those scoring high in neuroticism is emotionally responsive and susceptible to stress. In the following discussion, I would like to assess the relationship between the results of the Big Five test and Chinese parenting styles if the big five is necessarily representing one's growing experience.

2   Methods

An interview was taken for this research, in order to gain further understanding of the interviewee. In the interview, summarised experiences of each life stage (e.g., before primary school, every two years of junior school, senior school, and high school) and three major events in the interviewee's life so far were asked. Also, a Big Five test based on the Five-Factor Model was asked to be taken. The content of the interview and self-report could be found in the appendices. As I am intending to focus on Chinese parenting styles, an 18-year-old Chinese girl was chosen to be the interviewee. Participant 1 was born in a Chinese family and has never been raised in a non-Chinese environment. Meanwhile, a self-report was taken as I set myself as the corresponding group. The same structure was used and the same test was taken by myself. As participant 2, I was born in a Chinese family, however, left the country on my own for the UK at the age of 16. To reduce the bias, the same test was taken twice, which was by the interviewee and myself, according to the perception of the same person. Therefore, there would be two sets of results for the same person.

3   Results

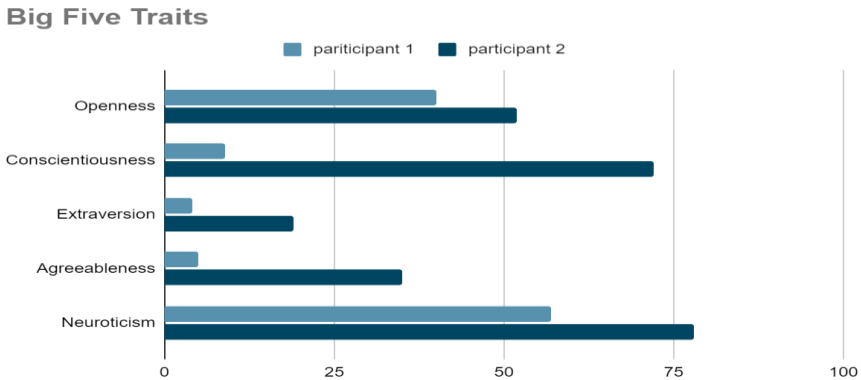## 3.1   Openness

Big Five Traits

Fig. 1. Big-Five Traits results

A person's tendency to be either open or closed to experience is likely influenced by both genetics and experience. Individuals with high openness are imaginative and sensitive to art and beauty and have a rich and complex emotional life; they are curious, behaviourally flexible, and are not dogmatic in their attitudes and values [15]. However, this is not necessarily associated with good mental health [16]. Regarding parenting styles, openness could be determined by the attitude of parents while children face new experiences, also the attitudes of parents themselves. Besides, the reactions and responses from parents may influence the children's future values.

As shown in figure 1, the interviewee scored 40% in openness, which is slightly lower than the average 50.45[17]. This indicates that the interviewee is relatively open to experiences. During the holidays before junior school, she lived in the suburbs with her relatives rather than with her parents, which reduced the regulation that could be put on her at a fairly young age. This allowed her to explore new environments without excessive restraints. However, it was suggested that conscientiousness and openness are not related to parenting in general, but may be related to more content-specific parenting behaviours [18]. Therefore, specific actions of parents could influence children's openness. For instance, according to the interview, while the interviewee ended an unhealthy relationship, her mother perceived her as 'tarnished' rather than hurt, and her father did not provide any supportive actions as well. In this case, the interviewee might be more cautious about new relationships based on her parents' attitude.

Similar events could be seen in the self-report. The participant scored 52% in openness, according to figure 1. When the participants' parents valued the outcome more than the attempt itself, the fear of failure and chastisement led the participants to choose to reduce their exposure to new things, thus reducing openness. The participants' parents, however, chose to encourage their children to be exposed to new experiences, including but not limited to life experiences, literature, art, travel, etc. For example, the

participant's father approved of the child's drinking under the supervision of a guardian, and so on. These behaviours were seen as specific to the parents and guided the openness of the participants to some extent. Even though there were some inconsistent results in this aspect of openness, overall, the participants were encouraged to be more open to new possibilities. In general, parenting patterns are not directly associated with openness, whether authoritative, authoritarian or neglectful, but more prominently with specific parental behaviours.

3.2   Conscientiousness

In the NEO framework, Conscientiousness is seen as having six facets: Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, Self-Discipline, and Deliberation [19]. People with high scores of consciousness often show a tendency to be self-disciplined, behave dutifully and aim for achievement; they show planned rather than spontaneous behaviour, and they are usually reliable. This is demonstrated by characteristic behaviours such as neatness and systematisation; it also includes elements such as attentiveness, thoroughness and thoughtfulness [20]. According to Baumrind, authoritative parenting is closely related to similar characteristics of contemporary views of self-consciousness [21]. As an example, children of authoritative parents are more likely to be achievement-oriented, socially responsible, independent, friendly and cooperative than children of other parents. A sense of self includes elements of achievement motivation, self-discipline and responsibility, which can be interpreted as similar to Baumrind's concept. It can be argued that being socially responsible requires some elements of self-discipline, dutifulness, orderliness, reliability and low fickleness, characteristics that often constitute self-awareness [16].

The interviewee's parents were of the authoritative and authoritarian type, but her conscientiousness score was extremely low (9%). This suggests that outside of the general pattern, some particular events had a greater impact on the interviewee. In the interview transcript, it can be learned that the interviewee's mother suffered from mild depression that lasted for more than fifteen years. The status of being an only child resulted in her being the closest person to her mother in the family apart from her father, and therefore her mother's negative emotions would be vented on her to a greater extent. A sense of morality as a child and a natural affection for her mother led the interviewee to accept unconditionally the responsibility of caring for her mother, for example by listening to her long confessions about her grandparents, comforting her when she had an emotional breakdown, and so on. Neither the grandparents nor the father was able to effectively calm the mother during her depressive episodes, so the interviewee felt extreme pressure of responsibility to take care of her carefully. However, the other members of the family were not able to share this responsibility with her and her father did not enlighten her promptly. As a result, the chronic stress caused the interviewee to avoid her responsibilities and duties in the same way that she was conditioned to offend when dealing with other interpersonal relationships. In her subconscious mind, once involved in an intimate relationship, she had to take on the same responsibilities as if she were taking care of her mother. Thus, even though the interviewee's parents had

acted to guide her to do her duty, such as severe punishments for lying, they exacerbated her avoidance and fear of responsibility.

In contrast, in the self-report, participants demonstrated relatively normal conscientiousness scores (72%). This index is slightly on the high side, but still within the normal range. It is clear from the report that the participant's parents are actively guiding her to be attentive and responsible. Although there was a degree of perfectionism and anxiety in her conscientiousness, it remained stable for the most part. The participant's mother had extremely high levels of conscientiousness, such as an extremely high sense of morality and responsibility, perfectionism towards others and herself, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies. The fathers, on the other hand, also had perfectionist tendencies. In such an environment, the participant level is prone to develop a high conscientiousness personality. In summary, in general, authoritative parents tend to lead their children to have a high degree of self-awareness. Also, the status of the interviewee might be an influential factor in the contribution of conscientiousness, for instance, whether there is a tendency towards self-reflection.

3.3   Extraversion

Extraversion is characterised by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, confidence and lots of emotional expression [10]. People who are extroverted are more likely to take the initiative, access opportunities, or step up and steer the course. According to Zahra Vafaeenejad, Extroverted personality traits were directly related to the authoritarian parenting style of the father (β=0.082, p=0.049) [22]. However, as far as women's domestic roles are concerned, it seems, as Belsky suggests, that character is ultimately more predictive of motherhood than of fatherhood [23]. I believe that the attitudes of both parents towards their children can play a decisive role in their child's extraversion. According to the interviewee's self-assessment, her extroversion score was 4%. Whereas in my assessment of her, she scored 19%. This demonstrates, to some extent, the difference between people's outward appearance and their inner tendencies. Sometimes people may have a higher impression score of a person's degree of extraversion than they actually have.

In the interviewee's narrative, it can be seen that being hurt in different intimate relationships diminished her extroversion, while at the same time, the unsupportive and indifferent attitudes displayed by her parents exacerbated her introversion. For example, during her primary school years, the classmates she spent time with made her feel inferior. After confiding in her parents, they emotionally reprimanded her instead of offering appropriate comfort and encouragement. In addition, her parents informed the teachers at school of her feelings without her consent, which indirectly led to her classmates learning about it and causing her social frustration. Parent-facilitated social avoidance can be seen as the first step in the interviewee's attenuation of extraversion. Since then, similar things have repeatedly happened, and the absence of proper guidance from her mother and the negative attitude of both parents toward her social problems during the interviewee's upbringing has reduced her self-confidence and ability to deal with problems.

In the self-report, the participant's mother took the opposite approach. She chose to force her child to participate in social activities and connect with people. The child was pressured to do so by the parent despite her subjective reluctance to be exposed to a crowd. This is also a reflection of the lack of support and reassurance. As a result, instead of increasing extraversion, as her mother had expected, the participant gradually tended towards introversion, scoring 19% eventually. At this point, both parenting styles are authoritarian, thus demonstrating the influence of authoritarian parenting on extraversion.

3.4   Agreeableness

Agreeableness is a personality trait that manifests itself in the behavioural characteristics of individuals who are perceived to be kind, compassionate, cooperative, warm and considerate [20]. Those who score high on this dimension are compassionate and altruistic, while those who score low on agreeableness are associated with selfish behaviour (often expressed as stinginess) and a lack of compassion [24]. Research has found that parental warmth is positively associated with children's extraversion, agreeableness, self-awareness, and openness to experience [25]. Thus, positive, high-feedback parents are more likely to have children with high agreeableness, and when parents are unable to give positive responses, children are relatively less pleasant. It was clear from the interviews that the interviewees' mothers were very poor at giving positive emotions. She was unable to provide support and positivity to her child while she was experiencing depression. The chronic low or even negative feedback makes the interviewee progressively less pleasant, not only because the relationship she has with her parents is not healthy, but also because she has not learned to express and use kindness towards others. Similarly, a vicious cycle arose when the interviewee dealt with other social relationships. Therefore, she scored extremely low in agreeableness (5%).

A similar picture can be summarised in the self-report. The participants' parents were preoccupied with arguing with each other and neglected to take care of their children emotionally. The participant was immersed in a family environment full of confrontation and conflict for long periods and this trait was contradictory to intimacy. And the fear that the arguments between the parents created in the child prompted her to persuade them and try to reconcile them. And this kind of agreeableness is unhealthy, as participants are forced to give positivity and care to others when they need positive feedback. Thus, even though the participant was accustomed to offering kindness to others, she did not score high on agreeableness (35%). This reflects the fact that the participant is inherently tired of dealing with others and does not genuinely care about the outside world. Overall, the values and positives that people received from their parents have a determining impact on their agreeableness.

3.5   Neuroticism

Neuroticism is a trait in many personalities' theory models, but there is wide disagreement about its definition. It is in some cases defined as the tendency to be rapidly aroused by a stimulus and to slowly relax from this arousal and is particularly associated

with negativity in emotional arousal. The other definition focuses on emotional unsteadiness and passivity or maladjustment, rather than emotional stability and positivity or good adaptation. It is also described as a lack of self-control, a poor ability in managing mental stress and a tendency toward complaining. It is also related to several mental disorders, for instance, mood disorders and personality disorders [26-28]. There was an element of traumatic experiences in both the interview and the self-report. Based on the betrayal-trauma theory [29], traumatic events involving betrayal of trust have more adverse consequences than events without betrayal of trust. This is most serious when the perpetrator of the trauma is the caregiver. In this relationship, the victim is reliant on the offender. which limits their response to the event. High-betrayal traumas, such as physical abuse by a close relative, should have a greater physical and psychological impact than low-betrayal traumas, such as those in earthquakes. In support of this theory, several studies have found associations between high-betrayal trauma and physical and mental health outcomes, but not low-betrayal trauma [30-31]. Yet, these studies have depended on self-reports of physical symptoms, functioning status or mental well-being [32].

Interviewees scored 43% as emotionally stable, compared to a slightly lower score of 22% for participants. For the interviewee, her mother's uncontrollable arguing and lashing out exacerbated her neuroticism, especially when she mentioned that she would react to her mother's shouting with stress and instinctive fear. Hence, due to several strongly stimulating events and a lack of detachment, the interviewee had a degree of neuroticism. The authoritarian parenting style, especially the controlling mother, made her prone to anxiety and fear in different situations, and the participant had a strong fear of losing control due to the oppressive parents. At the same time, the participant's tendency toward being traumatised was reflected in a fear of all higher decibel sounds and is easily frightened. This stems from persistent parental arguments during childhood, the father's irritable personality and outwardly violent behaviour. This included arguments regardless of time and place, as well as some domestic violence. However, participants were unable to recall all the details due to self-protective mechanisms, so these translated into higher levels of neuroticism and lower emotional stability. Thus, prolonged exposure to unstable environments can increase people's tendency to become neurotic. Moreover, authoritarian parenting and domestic violence also have a certain potential to develop PTSD, which in turn increases neuroticism.

4   Conclusion

Overall, it can be seen from the study that, openness and extraversion have a limited relationship with parenting styles, as they might be contributed by other factors and genes. Agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism are more likely to be influenced by parenting styles, especially the family environment could be a key factor affecting neuroticism. Language could be a significant limitation while taking the Big Five Test, as both the interviewee and the participant are not English native speakers. Therefore, the accuracy of the answers would be affected because of the limited under-

standing of the context. Moreover, the Big Five Traits themselves cannot represent personalities completely. There are people who argue that the model oversimplifies personality [33], thus bias may exist due to the model itself. Also, I did not pursue some of the questions in the interview further, so the explanation may not be exhaustive. Parents and parenting styles play an important role in the development of personalities. While concluding personalities via the Big Five Traits, parenting styles could be one of the main factors. Besides, traumatic experiences relating to parents' behaviours could also influence the traits. However, parenting styles are not directly related to the formation of personalities, as children's responses vary, as well as their genes.

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