

How do parenting concepts vary within and between the families?

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How do parenting concepts vary within and between the families? The present study regards parenting as a complex family process by considering three concepts of parenting: styles, differential treatment and coparenting consistency. A main question was addressed: whether and how these parenting concepts vary within the families towards siblings or between the two parents, and between the families according to the child's, the parent's and the family's characteristics? The parenting concepts were computed from the ÉPEP questionnaire (Meunier & Roskam, 2007) in a sample of 101 non-divorced families: 101 mothers and 101 fathers of two siblings from 6- to 12-years-old. The parenting concepts were found to vary within the families towards two siblings and between the mother and the father. They were also found to vary between the families according to the child's age and personality traits as well as a function of the parent's educational level and the number of siblings.

Parenting has been studied for six decades as one of the most important environmental influences on child's outcomes. Among the parenting variables, parenting *styles* were studied according to three dimensions and combination of these dimensions: supportiveness, behavioural control and psychological control. Parenting styles were considered as general contexts in which the more specific childrearing behaviours were expressed. Supportiveness referred to warmth, responsiveness and involvement; behavioural control referred to autonomy demands, monitoring and setting rules; psychological control referred to harsh punishment, ignoring, coerciveness, guilt induction and inconsistent discipline (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Baumrind, 1971; Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998). Supportiveness and behaviour control were associated to a variety of positive outcomes for children in adjustment, personality, temperament or social and cognitive skills while psychological control was related to negative ones.

Beside parenting styles, other parenting variables were studied: the parental differential treatment and the coparenting consistency. They also referred to a large body of literature about the influence of non-shared environment for the differential treatment and the impact of divorce for the coparenting consistency, but rare were the studies that combined these three main parenting variables.

The *parental differential treatment* of siblings arise when siblings receive different parenting styles. Some authors (McHale & Pawletko, 1992; Mekos, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1996) suggested that differential treatment occurred according to the children's characteristics (as age, personality or special needs) as well as to parental characteristics and family functioning (e.g., scapegoat or favoured child). Differential treatment was mostly assessed by questionnaire focusing on preferential behaviour (e.g., Barret Singer & Weinstein, 2000) or by a difference score of the parent's style towards one target child minus its parenting style towards a sibling (e.g., Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001). Most of those studies consequently considered two children within the same family displaying important results regarding the impact of non-shared environment (McGuire, Dunn, & Plomin, 1995; McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Uppdegraff, 1995). Although the differential treatment induced differences between siblings within the family, it was not necessarily considered as negative. Indeed, the sensitive and supportive parents interact differently with each of their children according to their perceived characteristics or needs (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000). For example, the parent should be more supportive towards one child compared to others because he has to cope with learning difficulties. Also, the parent should set more limits to one child compared to other because he is more likely to be non compliant. Furthermore, the siblings' perception of differential treatment and attribution about its fairness and soundness impacted on children's outcomes and on sibling relations (Kowal & Kramer, 1997).

The *coparenting consistency* refers to another parenting variable. It relates to the extent to which the two parents cooperate as a team in rearing their children in a predictable and non contradictory way which do not undermine each other's efforts (Lindahl, 1998; McHale, 1997). The coparenting was measured by observational procedures (Russell & Russell, 1994) or self-report questionnaires (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001) with couples of parents regarding one of their children, mostly in divorced families.

Parenting concepts were found to vary within the families between the mother and the father. Only few studies considered both the mothers and the fathers who sometimes differed in how they treated their children. For example, the mothers were reported using more reward, magnify and override as well as more authoritative and permissive parenting than the fathers (Conrade & Ho, 2001; Garside & Klimes, 2002). The studies reported also that the siblings were treated differentially but to a similar extent by their mother and father (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Jenkins-Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003; McHale et al., 1995; Stocker, 1995).

Parenting concepts, at least styles and differential treatment, were also found to vary between the families according to the child's, the parent's and the family's characteristics.

Child's age. Mills and Rubin (1992) have shown that, as children grew older, their mothers favour less control for dealing with their children's unskilled social behaviour. These results have partly been supported by Vandenplas-Holper, Roskam, and Pirot (2006) who showed that the mothers of the nine-year-olds referred more often to stimulating childrearing behaviour and autonomy demands than the mothers of three-year-olds. Following the sibling de-identification theory (Schachter, Shore, Feldman-Rotman, Marqueis, & Campbell, 1976) suggesting that siblings become more different from one another across development, the siblings were also found to be treated in a more differential way when they grew older (McHale, Uppdegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker, & Crouter, 2000).

Child's gender. Studies concerning parenting styles towards boys and girls (Block, 1983; Fagot, 1995; Vandenplas-Holper et al., 2006) reported inconsistent gender-related differences.

Child's personality traits. Previous research showed that how parents reared their children was partially shaped by the characteristics of the children they bring up (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Oldehinkel, de Winter, & Ormel, 2006). Children's characteristics were studied through temperament or personality traits. High level of behavioural and psychological control was found in parents rearing a child displaying negative personality traits or difficult temperament (i.e., Lengua, 2006; Lengua & Kovacs, 2005). According to studies having

reported on differential parenting toward difficult children, those displaying negative characteristics were also found to be treated in a very different way than its siblings (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Lindhal, 1998; Nicholson, Fox, & Johnson, 2005; McGuire et al., 1995).

Parent's educational level. Gerris, Dekovic, and Janssens (1997) documented the adults' educational level as a powerful predictor of their perspective-taking and demands of autonomy but Vandenplas-Holper et al. (2006) did not verified that the mothers of a high educational level reported more cognitive stimulation and autonomy demands than the mothers of a low educational level. It was also documented that parents with low educational level were more sensitive to social desirability of equal treatment between siblings (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000; McHale et al., 2000).

Number of siblings. Differences according to the number of siblings were not consistently supported (Furman, 1995). Most of the studies were conducted in the sixties or seventies stating that parents in large families demanded more autonomy, used more punishments and were less supportive than parents in small families (Elder & Bowerman, 1963; Kidwell, 1981; Nye, Carlson, & Garrett, 1970; Schek & Emerick, 1976). Other studies however reported that sibling size effect disappeared when parents' educational level, occupation or social class were controlled (Bell & Avery, 1985; Blake, 1989).

The present study regards parenting as a complex family process. In an innovative way, it considers simultaneously three concepts of parenting assumed to be independent variables: styles, differential treatment and coparenting consistency. These concepts were studied with a questionnaire in a moderate large sample of 101 non-divorced families with two siblings in each. A main question was specifically addressed. How do these parenting concepts vary within and between the families? Several hypotheses were specified for the parenting styles. Higher behavioural or psychological control was expected to vary according to *age* with high control towards young children (Mills & Rubin, 1992; Vandenplas-Holper et al., 2006). *Gender* was not expected as meaningful predictor of parenting styles. Child's *personality traits* were supposed to predict parent's behavioural and psychological control with high control towards children displaying negative personality traits (Lengua, 2006; Lengua & Kovacs, 2005). Also, differences were waited according to the *parent's gender* with mothers reporting more supportive style than the fathers (Conrade & Ho, 2001; Garside & Klimes, 2002). The *parent's educational level* was assumed to predict parenting style with higher supportive style expected for the high-educated parents (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000; Gerris et al., 1997; McHale et al., 2000). Finally, no prediction was made for the *number of siblings* over parenting styles since the parent's educational level was entered in the model (Bell & Avery, 1985; Blake, 1989).

Several hypotheses were designated for differential treatment. Child's *age* and *personality* were presumed to predict differential treatment with less differential treatment towards young children than towards older ones (McHale et al., 2000) and more differential treatment towards the children displaying negative personality traits than to the others (McGuire et al., 1995). *Gender* was not expected as meaningful predictor of differential treatment. Also, no differences were expected in the amount of differential treatment according to the *parent's gender* (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Stocker, 1995). The *parent's educational level* was assumed to predict differential treatment with low amount of differential treatment in low-educated parents (because of their sensitivity to social desirability of equal treatment among siblings) and conversely higher amount of differential treatment in high-educated parents (because of their sensitivity to the child's personality) (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000; Gerris et al., 1997; McHale et al., 2000). Differences according to the number of siblings were explored for differential treatment.

Rather few hypotheses were displayed for coparenting consistency since the studies considering this parenting concept in non-divorced families were scarce. Nevertheless, the parents who experienced more inconsistency and less support in coparenting were shown to face more problems with their children than parents experiencing coparenting consistency (Schoppe, Mangensdorf, & Frosch, 2001). Also, the children displaying negative characteristics were shown to challenge their parents' cooperation and consistency in a greater extent than children

displaying positive ones. Significant relations were then expected between child's *personality* and parenting consistency with negative traits predicting low coparenting consistency (Schoppe et al., 2001). Differences according to the other variables (*age, gender, educational level* and *number of siblings*) were explored for coparenting consistency.

The present study addresses a number of limitations evident in previous research regarding the parenting concepts and the sample. With regard to the *parenting concepts*, they were often studied in isolation and rare were the studies focusing on the coparenting consistency issue. Furthermore, parental control was studied more frequently instead of supportive parenting probably due to its relation to child maladjustment and psychopathology. Indeed, control was identified as one of the major dimensions of parenting and the center of a large body of literature (Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998). With regard to the *sample*, few studies considered two children within the same family apart from those focusing on non-shared environment (e.g., Dunn & Plomin, 1991). Also, the majority of earlier studies considered only the mothers (e.g., Lengua & Kovacs, 2005; Roskam & Schelstraete, 2007; Vandenplas et al., 2006). Both the mothers and the fathers were considered here allowing for comparisons within the families (e.g., Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000; Conrade & Ho, 2001).

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 101 non-divorced families: 101 mothers and 101 fathers of 202 normally-developing children, two siblings in each of the families (for simplicity, the term "Child 1" refers to the older child in each sibling pair while "Child 2" refers to the younger one). All of them were from the French-speaking part of Belgium. The families were selected randomly within listings provided by ten different schools covering middle to high SES (response rate 62.1%). The parents were interviewed by second-year students of the Department of Psychology and Education at the *Université Catholique de Louvain* who were extensively trained in sampling and data collection procedures. Each student visited two families at home. During the one hour home-visit, the parents were asked to complete a set of questionnaires individually.

Variables

Parenting concepts. The parenting styles was assessed by completing the "Evaluation des Pratiques Educatives Parentales" (EPEP, Meunier & Roskam, 2007), a recent French validation of the Ghent Parental Behaviour Scale of Van Leeuwen and Vermulst (2004), originally created by Patterson, Reid, and Dishion (1992). The EPEP is composed of 35 items related to nine factors: Supportiveness, Monitoring, Rules, Discipline, Inconsistent Discipline, Harsh punishment, Ignoring, Material Rewarding and Autonomy. Items are in the form of affirmatives like for example: When my child seems to have a problem, I discuss what is wrong with him/her (Supportiveness), I keep track of the friends my child is seeing (Monitoring), I teach my child that it is important to behave properly (Rules), When my child has been misbehaving, I give him/her a chore for punishment (Discipline), When I have punished my child, it happens that I let my child out of the punishment early (Inconsistent discipline), I slap my child when he/she has done something wrong (Harsh punishment), When my child does something that is not allowed, I don't talk to him/her until he/she says sorry (Ignoring), I let my child buy something when he/she has done something well (Material Rewarding), I teach my child to solve his/her own problems (Autonomy demands).

A frequency 5-points Liker-type scale is provided under each item which varies from "never" to "always". It has been recently validated on 493 French-speaking mothers and fathers of normally-developing children. Internal consistency assessed by Cronbach's alpha were moderate to high: .86 for Supportiveness, .75 for Monitoring, .83 for Rules, .84 for Discipline, .65 for Inconsistent discipline, .89 for Harsh punishment, .70 for Ignoring, .66 for

Material rewarding and .68 for Autonomy demands. The total percentage of variance explained by the nine factors was 64.27%; test-retest correlations varied between .51 and .84; the items were not correlated with social desirability (Meunier & Roskam, 2007). The EPEP questionnaire was completed by the mothers and the fathers, independently for each sibling.

The parent's *style* was considered from each parent's averaged scores for the nine factors separately towards Child 1 and Child 2. They reflected parenting styles towards the target child. Each of the 202 children in the entire sample had personal scores. A total of 101 mothers and fathers reported their parenting styles towards 101 Child 1-Child 2 pairs allowing for comparisons within the families between styles reported towards Child 1 and Child 2 and between the mother and the father.

Similarly to Feinberg and Hetherington (2001) and Stocker (1995), *differential treatment* was measured by a difference score of parenting styles towards Child 1 minus parenting styles towards Child 2 and towards Child 2 minus parenting styles towards Child 1. A score of zero therefore indicated that parent's style towards both children was equal.

Finally, the *coparenting consistency* was considered from covariance measures between the two parents' styles towards Child 1 and Child 2 separately. They reflected the consistency between the mother and the father towards each of the two siblings. Each of the 202 children received one particular score, as shared by their mother and their father. A total of 101 Child 1-Child 2 pairs were available allowing for comparisons within the families.

Child's characteristics. Age and gender. The children were between the ages of 6 to 12 years. In the Child 1 sub sample, 61 children were first born and 40 were second born or more. In the Child 2 sub sample, 62 were second born and 39 were third born or more. The mean age of the Child 1 sample was 10.45 ($SD=1.28$). In this sample, 53 children were girls and 48 were boys. The mean age of the Child 2 sample was 8.13 ($SD=1.47$). In this group 53 children were girls and 48 were boys.

Child's *personality traits* were assessed by completing the Bipolar Rating Scales based on the Five Factor Model (EBMCF, Roskam, Vandenplas-Holper, & de Maere-Gaudissart, 2000). The EBMCF are in the form of 25 pairs of adjectives – five items for each of the five factors: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness – as for example: reserved-spontaneous (Extraversion). One of the adjectives constitutes the positive pole related to positive traits, the other one the negative pole related to negative traits (introversion, disagreeableness, lack of conscientiousness, neuroticism and lack of openness). A 9-point Likert-type scale is provided under each pair of adjectives. For each item, the parent has to assign a score according to where on the scale she/he would situate the child. The EBMCF were completed by the mothers and the fathers independently, for Child 1 and Child 2. The correlations between the two parents' ratings were moderate, from .55 to .75 for Child 1 and from .52 to .66 for Child 2.

Parent's and family's characteristics. A total of 101 mother-father pairs completed the questionnaires for Child 1 and Child 2 allowing for comparisons within the families between the mother and the father.

The parents' *educational level* was obtained by considering their total number of successful educational years completed. The mothers' mean educational level was 14.44 years ($SD=2.25$). The fathers' mean educational level was 14.41 years ($SD=3.45$).

Across the sample, the *number of siblings* ranged from two to seven children.

Results

Preliminary analyses partly confirmed independence between the three parenting concepts. Indeed correlations between the parenting concepts were low to moderate. However, several significant coefficients were displayed both for mothers and fathers. They suggested that Supportiveness, Monitoring, Rules and Autonomy demands in parenting styles were

related to low differential treatment both for mothers and fathers while Harsh punishment and Ignoring were associated to high differential treatment both for mothers and fathers. Furthermore, Supportiveness, Monitoring, Rules and Discipline in parenting styles were related to low coparenting consistency both for mothers and fathers while Harsh punishment and Ignoring were associated to high coparenting consistency both for mothers and fathers. Correlations between the parenting concepts are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlations between the mothers' and the fathers' parenting styles, differential treatment and coparenting consistency

Styles	Mothers		Fathers	
	Differential treatment	Coparenting consistency	Differential treatment	Coparenting consistency
Supportiveness	-.23*	-.25**	-.04	-.12
Monitoring	-.21*	.06	-.15	-.16*
Rules	-.32**	-.16*	-.30**	-.05
Autonomy	-.15	-.06	-.22*	.10
Discipline	.09	-.27**	-.10	-.24**
Inconsistent discipline	.07	-.13	.03	.14
Harsh punishment	.29**	.48**	.40**	.38**
Ignoring	.34**	.35**	.11	.23**
Material rewarding	.08	.05	-.02	.07

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

How do parenting concepts vary within the families between siblings

Mother's and father's parenting styles towards Child 1 and Child 2 were correlated and compared with t-tests. Both for the mothers and the fathers, most of the correlations were moderate to high. For the mothers, all but two were upper than $r = .79$. Autonomy to Child 1 and Child 2 was only moderately correlated; Ignoring to Child 1 and Child 2 was only low correlated. For the fathers, all the correlations were high and significant, upper than $r = .69$. These results suggested that differential treatment was generally not high within the families. Nevertheless, several significant differences were displayed with t-tests for mothers' Harsh punishment, Ignoring and Material rewarding and for fathers' Autonomy demands, Harsh punishment and Material Rewarding. Most of the significant results may be explained by age differences between siblings with more Autonomy demands and less Harsh punishment towards Child 1 than to Child 2. But our results suggested also that Child 1 was more exposed to Ignoring by its mother and Material Rewarding by its two parents than Child 2. Results for the mothers' and the fathers' parenting styles are presented in Table 2a.

Table 2a

Means (standard deviations) of mothers' and fathers' parenting styles towards Child 1 and Child 2, correlation coefficients between siblings and t-tests

Styles	Mothers				Fathers			
	Child 1	Child 2	r	t -test	Child 1	Child 2	r	t -test
Supportiveness	4.23(.45)	4.24(.45)	.86**	-.42	3.77(.61)	3.78(.60)	.82**	-.321
Monitoring	3.54(.88)	3.45(.97)	.79**	1.38	3.17(1.04)	3.16(1.04)	.87**	.213
Rules	4.50(.53)	4.51(.54)	.89**	-.29	4.31(.60)	4.30(.59)	.86**	.53
Autonomy	3.93(.53)	3.82(.68)	.38**	1.50	3.91(.58)	3.80(.67)	.66**	2.01*
Discipline	3.22(.80)	3.19(.84)	.87**	.70	3.15(.81)	3.18(.86)	.86**	-.68
Inconsistent discipline	2.80(.84)	2.77(.70)	.86**	.68	2.79(.76)	2.78(.77)	.76**	.18
Harsh punishment	1.61(.70)	1.70(.71)	.84**	-2.34*	1.73(.79)	1.80(.77)	.84**	-1.76*
Ignoring	2.00(.84)	1.76(.75)	.17*	2.35*	1.99(.76)	2.00(.84)	.86**	-.23
Material rewarding	2.58(.72)	2.50(.74)	.90**	2.46**	2.71(.73)	2.58(.73)	.84**	3.31**

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Coparenting consistency towards Child 1 and Child 2 were correlated and compared with *t*-tests. Correlations were moderate to high, except for Ignoring which was low and non significant. These results suggested that coparenting consistency was generally intense within the families probably due to broad-ranging sample in middle to high SES. The significant difference displayed for Ignoring suggested that the parents were less consistent in Ignoring towards Child 1 than towards Child 2. Results for coparenting consistency are presented in Table 2b.

Table 2b

Means (standard deviations) of coparenting consistency towards Child 1 and Child 2, correlation coefficients between siblings and t-tests

Coparenting consistency	Child 1	Child 2	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i> -test
Supportiveness	.096 (.38)	.082 (.31)	.88**	.78
Monitoring	.263 (.97)	.255 (1.00)	.69**	.09
Rules	.032 (.32)	.0023 (.36)	.81**	.42
Autonomy	.001 (.52)	.035 (.39)	.56**	.78
Discipline	.307 (.78)	.348 (.67)	.86**	-.99
Inconsistent discipline	.081 (.87)	.112 (.68)	.73**	.64
Harsh punishment	.329 (.62)	.283 (.62)	.72**	.99
Ignoring	.110 (.82)	.171 (.60)	.15	4.69*
Material rewarding	.171 (.57)	.189 (.57)	.87**	-.60

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

How do parenting concepts vary within the families between the mother and the father

Mother's and father's parenting styles were correlated and compared with *t*-tests. All but three coefficients were low to moderate. Only Rules Autonomy and Inconsistent discipline were not significant. These results suggested that mother's and father's styles within the family were similar in a certain extent. Nevertheless, five significant differences were stressed with *t*-tests displaying higher scores in Supportiveness, Monitoring and Rules for the mother than for the father as well as higher scores in Harsh punishment and Ignoring for the father than for the mother. Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Means (standard deviations) of mothers and fathers, correlations between parents and t-tests

	Mothers	Fathers	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i> -test
<i>Styles</i>				
Supportiveness	4.23 (.45)	3.77 (.61)	.33**	10.44**
Monitoring	3.50 (.93)	3.16 (1.03)	.27**	3.94**
Rules	4.51 (.54)	4.30 (.59)	.08	3.73**
Autonomy	3.87 (.61)	3.85 (.63)	.10	.33
Discipline	3.21 (.82)	3.16 (.83)	.47**	.70
Inconsistent discipline	2.78 (.84)	2.79 (.76)	.15	-.06
Harsh punishment	1.65 (.71)	1.77 (.78)	.56**	-2.24*
Ignoring	1.87 (.80)	1.99 (.80)	.51**	-2.06*
Material rewarding	2.54 (.73)	2.65 (.73)	.34**	-1.73
<i>Differential treatment</i>				
Supportiveness	.16 (.17)	.22 (.29)	.11	-2.70**
Monitoring	.35 (.49)	.36 (.37)	.31**	-.42
Rules	.15 (.19)	.17 (.25)	-.01	1.12
Autonomy	.39 (.57)	.31 (.42)	.08	1.25
Discipline	.28 (.30)	.25 (.34)	.12	.92
Inconsistent discipline	.26 (.34)	.23 (.36)	.22*	-1.44
Harsh punishment	.23 (.33)	.26 (.33)	.28**	-.13
Ignoring	.79 (.69)	.37 (.33)	.14	10.38**
Material rewarding	.23 (.24)	.33 (.40)	.12	1.48

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Mother's and father's differential parenting were correlated and compared with t-tests. Correlations were low to moderate with only three significant coefficients for Monitoring, Inconsistent discipline and Harsh punishment. Two significant differences were found with t-tests displaying higher scores in Supportiveness for the father than for the mother and higher scores in Ignoring for the mother than for the father.

How do parenting concepts vary between the families according to the child's, the parent's and the family's characteristics

The differences between the 101 families were tested in a regression model estimating the association between parenting styles, differential treatment, coparenting consistency and child's age, gender, personality traits, parent's educational level, number of siblings. The analyses have been conducted for the mothers and the fathers separately. In the regression model, all the predictors were treated as continuous variables. The child's gender that was a categorical variable has been coded with contrast codes since the sum of the two values equalled zero.

The results of the regression analysis for parenting styles are presented in Table 4a. The amount of explained variance was globally low with a maximum of 12% for Harsh punishment in mothers' sample and 11% for Monitoring in fathers' sample. With regard to the predictors of parenting styles, the child's personality traits appeared as the most powerful. Supportiveness, Rules (for mothers) and Autonomy (for fathers) were predicted by positive personality traits while Discipline, Harsh punishment (for mothers) and Material rewarding (for fathers) were predicted by negative personality traits. Also, the number of siblings was revealed as another important predictor of differences in parenting between the families. The more numerous the siblings were, the more they were parented by their mother with Autonomy demands, low Monitoring and Material rewarding; the more they were exposed to Inconsistent discipline by their father, low Rules and Supportiveness.

Table 4a

Results of regressing child's age, gender, personality, parent's educational level and number of siblings on parenting styles

	Age	Gender	Personality	Educational level	Number of siblings	R ²
	β	β	β	β	β	
<i>Mothers</i>						
Supportiveness	-.002	.042	.272**	.046	-.069	.08
Monitoring	-.055	-.032	-.101	.196*	-.243**	.08
Rules	-.088	-.013	.136*	.118	-.058	.04
Autonomy	.012	-.095	.064	.113	.143*	.05
Discipline	-.073	.188**	-.148*	-.003	.038	.06
Inconsistent discipline	.020	-.004	-.031	-.038	.079	.01
Harsh punishment	-.331**	.067	-.150*	-.044	-.055	.12
Ignoring	.131	-.122	-.071	.023	-.109	.05
Material rewarding	.121	.041	-.022	.024	-.216**	.06
<i>Fathers</i>						
Supportiveness	-.034	.072	.164*	.018	-.154*	.05
Monitoring	.083	-.105	.069	-.231**	-.132	.11
Rules	-.050	.039	-.011	-.083	-.156*	.04
Autonomy	.102	-.053	.139*	.026	-.097	.04
Discipline	-.009	.091	-.160*	.099	.007	.04
Inconsistent discipline	-.099	-.025	-.101	-.090	.151*	.03
Harsh punishment	-.172*	-.001	-.093	-.007	.028	.03
Ignoring	.115	-.101	-.094	-.112	-.049	.05
Material rewarding	.067	.099	-.157*	.101	-.088	.05

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Furthermore, child's age only predicted a decrease in Harsh punishment from both parents as the child grew older. Child's gender predicted mothers' Discipline, with boys receiving higher Discipline than girls. Finally, the parents' educational level was predictor of Monitoring but in a positive way for the mothers and in a negative way for the fathers.

The results of the regression analysis for differential treatment are presented in Table 4b. The parent's educational level appeared as a powerful one especially for the fathers. High differential treatment in Ignoring was predicted by high educational level for the mothers. For the fathers, high differential treatment in Rules, Autonomy and Inconsistent discipline were predicted by high educational level.

Table 4b

Results of regressing child's age, gender, personality, parent's educational level and number of siblings on differential treatment

	Age	Gender	Personality	Educational level	Number of siblings	R^2
	β	β	β	β	β	
<i>Mothers</i>						
Supportiveness	-.110	.113	-.190**	-.134	.087	.07
Monitoring	-.080	-.059	.051	.039	-.049	.02
Rules	-.143*	-.045	-.046	-.020	-.044	.03
Autonomy	-.011	.092	.064	-.039	-.048	.02
Discipline	-.103	-.097	-.127	-.057	-.005	.03
Inconsistent discipline	.045	-.006	-.034	.121	-.032	.02
Harsh punishment	-.017	.108	-.165	.002	-.035	.04
Ignoring	.143*	-.110	.081	.202**	-.125	.07
Material rewarding	.000	-.039	-.076	.000	-.002	.01
<i>Fathers</i>						
Supportiveness	-.080	.035	-.142*	-.110	.011	.04
Monitoring	-.128	-.046	-.145*	.047	-.035	.04
Rules	.052	.084	.009	.174*	.005	.03
Autonomy	.033	-.003	.009	.207**	-.247**	.07
Discipline	-.046	-.083	-.104	-.01	-.138*	.04
Inconsistent discipline	-.172*	.040	-.010	.156*	-.162*	.06
Harsh punishment	-.035	.033	-.014	-.048	-.075	.01
Ignoring	.081	.024	-.054	.036	-.139	.03
Material rewarding	-.082	.075	.054	.011	.061	.02

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The number of siblings was another predictor but only for the fathers. The number of siblings predicted low differential treatment in Autonomy, Discipline and Inconsistent discipline.

Also, positive personality traits predicted low differential treatment in Supportiveness for the mothers and low differential treatment in Supportiveness and Monitoring for the fathers. Child's age predicted low differential treatment in Rules (for mothers) and Inconsistent discipline (for fathers) but high differential treatment in Ignoring (for mothers). Gender was not a significant predictor of differential treatment.

The results of the regression analysis for coparenting consistency are presented in Table 4c. The amount of explained variance was globally low with a maximum of 9% for Ignoring which was predicted by child's age and personality. The personality as rated by the mothers predicted consistency between parents in Ignoring and Material rewarding; the personality as rated by the fathers predicted consistency in Ignoring. Consistency in Ignoring was also predicted by age with consistency improving as the child grew older. Consistency in Monitoring was predicted by gender with higher consistency towards boys than to girls. Finally, concerning the parent's educational level, high level for mothers predicted low Harsh punishment consistency and high level for fathers predicted high Supportiveness consistency.

Table 4c

Results of regressing child's age, gender, personality, parent's educational level and number of siblings on coparenting consistency

	Age	Gender	Personality by mothers	Personality by fathers	Mothers' educational level	Fathers' educational level	Number of siblings	R^2
	β	β	β	β	β	β	β	
Supportiveness	.089	-.018	.175	.143	.062	.170*	-.119	.05
Monitoring	-.006	.153*	-.159	.102	-.089	.116	.046	.05
Rules	-.076	.085	.044	-.058	.095	.094	-.141	.04
Autonomy	.024	-.031	.116	-.055	-.063	-.047	.129	.02
Discipline	.002	-.028	.061	.017	.053	-.033	-.011	.01
Inconsistent discipline	.036	-.023	.041	-.066	-.045	.003	.048	.01
Harsh punishment	-.110	.046	-.064	-.037	-.174*	.076	-.057	.05
Ignoring	.221**	-.091	.227*	.197*	-.020	-.087	.056	.09
Material rewarding	-.024	.067	.192*	-.095	-.017	.001	-.059	.03

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

Parenting was regarded as a *complex family process* in the present study and the results converged to support such assumption. Indeed, parenting was depicted through three concepts reflecting several kinds of family interactions between the parent and his/her child as well as between both parents and their child. The three concepts were supposed being independent but correlations revealed there were not completely independent. Several significant low to moderate correlations were observed and offered a consistent view. The styles that were generally associated with positive outcomes for children were negatively correlated with differential treatment and coparenting consistency in those styles but the styles generally associated with negative outcomes for children were positively correlated with differential treatment and coparenting consistency in those styles. So the parents who adopted positive styles displayed few differential treatment and coparenting consistency in those styles compared with the parents who adopted less positive styles displaying high differential treatment and coparenting consistency in those styles. Furthermore, the coefficients were the highest for the less positive styles (Harsh punishment and Ignoring) suggesting a questionable interactional process within certain families. Some children who were exposed to Harsh punishment and Ignoring by their mother or their father, have also parents who cooperate in a great extent with their co-parent to display such negative styles and treat differently the siblings in Harsh punishment and Ignoring.

The results carried out in previous studies made it possible to generate certain hypotheses concerning the variations of parenting concepts *within* the families which were generally verified. Variations within the families were supported both between the two siblings and between the two parents. Variations between the two siblings indicated that differential treatment in the families was not absolutely high and was mostly explained by age differences between siblings or birth order. Indeed, older children were more exposed to Autonomy demands and less to Harsh punishment than younger ones. However, differences also stressed that older siblings were more exposed to less positive styles with high Ignoring and Material rewarding. Differential treatment thus exists so that siblings are not equally treated by their two parents. Moreover, our results suggested that when the treatment was not equal, that concerned negative treatment. Finally, variations in coparenting consistency towards each of the siblings were scarce suggesting that this last concept depended more on the couple of parents than on the children themselves. A single significant difference appeared in Ignoring which was also the most important difference in differential treatment between the mother and the father as revealed in subsequent analyses. Variations between the two parents within the families were supported by lots of significant differences between the mother and the father,

especially in parenting styles concepts. As expected, the mother was higher in styles which were previously related to positive outcomes for children (Supportiveness, Monitoring and Rules) but lower in styles which were previously associated with negative outcomes for children (Harsh punishment and Ignoring) than the fathers. As expected also, the differential treatment was similar for the mother and the father except for Supportiveness (higher for fathers) and Ignoring (higher for mothers). Nevertheless, since the correlations between the two parents were low, our results suggested that differential treatment as displayed by the mother and by the father was not exactly the same contrarily to what was suggested in previous studies.

Variations *between* the families were supported for several child's, parent's and family's characteristics. Nevertheless, a low amount of variance was explained by the variables which were considered in the models with a maximum of 12% for parenting styles, 7% for differential treatment and 9% for coparenting consistency. There should be many other variables that could contribute to explain variations of parenting between the families as for example the parent's personality traits, the parents' beliefs about their child development, culture, or the quality of marital relationship especially for coparenting consistency. Those variables were not considered in the present contribution and should increase the amount of explained variance.

The results carried out in previous studies made it possible to generate certain hypotheses concerning the variations of parenting concepts between the families which were generally verified. As concerns with *parenting styles*, the decrease of control as the child grew older was supported as well as the absence of discriminative effect of gender. Also, the positive child's personality traits predicted parents' use of high Supportiveness and low control with especially low Harsh punishment and Material rewarding. The influence of the parent's educational level was only supported for Monitoring. Moreover the way of influence was different for the mothers and the fathers suggesting different role or investment of the two parents according to their educational level. As most of previous studies were conducted with the mothers, our results for Monitoring met those carried out by previous ones: high-educated mothers adopted more styles related with positive outcomes for children than less-educated mothers. However, our results were opposite for the fathers with high-educated fathers using less Monitoring than less-educated fathers. Such kind of difference emerged because both parents were considered here. It may reflect that high-educated fathers should be more involved in professional life and thus less invested in childrearing, especially for Monitoring, than less-educated ones. Finally, contrarily to what was expected, the number of siblings remained a significant predictor for parenting styles even when the parent's educational level was entered in the model of regression. Significant differences suggested that positive parenting styles were less adopted by parents when the number of siblings increased, with low Monitoring, low Rules and less Rewarding but high Inconsistent discipline. Maybe due to higher educational demands, parents rearing several children tended to be less inductive and more inconsistent.

As concerns with *differential treatment*, the results for age were opposite to what was expected referring to the de-identification theory with a decrease in differential treatment for Rules and Inconsistent discipline rather than an increase as the siblings grew older. On the contrary, differential treatment in Ignoring increased with age. Influence of gender was not significant as expected. Also, the more positive the child's personality traits were, the less differential treatment towards the child was displayed. Indeed as suggested earlier, children displaying positive characteristics do not need special treatment, especially in Supportiveness and Monitoring, while the contrary for children displaying negative characteristics. Following previous results and our hypothesis, the parent's educational level, especially for the fathers, predicted higher differential treatment. Less-educated parents seemed indeed to be more sensitive to the desirability of equal treatment between the siblings. Finally, the number of siblings was explored as potential predictor of differential treatment and was revealed as predictive for the fathers only with lower differential treatment predicted by increasing number of siblings.

As concerns with *coparenting consistency*, all the relations with the child's, the parent's and the family's characteristics were explored. Three significant differences appeared in Ignoring suggesting that the parents were less consistent in Ignoring towards older children and that consistency varied according to the perceived personality traits. Those results tended to support the assumption that coparenting consistency is higher and easier towards children displaying positive characteristics while children displaying negative characteristics challenged the consistency between their parents. Also, the results suggested an increasing in coparenting consistency as the time goes on with the child growing and the couple progressing. Finally, the impact of the parents' educational level was displayed in the results with high educational level predicting consistency in positive style for the fathers (Supportiveness) and low educational level predicting consistency in negative style for the mothers (Harsh Punishment). Low-educated parents could then be depicted as at-higher risk for inconsistency in positive style but for consistency in negative style than high-educated parents.

Finally, several limits regarding the parenting concepts and the sample were coped with in the present study which added to a growing body of literature about parenting. Implications of those findings are therefore important and concern both research and clinical topics. Indeed, the findings contributed to depict the parent-child relationship with a more complete and complex view by considering simultaneously several concepts. They allowed to a better understanding of the singular relation between a child and his/her mother or his/her father as well as the singular relation between the two coparents. They also permitted to analyse how these unique relations were influenced by several child's, parent's and family's characteristics. These findings improve our knowledge about the family as the core of childrearing process, about several variables that determine how it occurs. In this way, they concur to our knowledge of parenting as an essential background in many educational studies and counselling situations. Nevertheless, several limits remained. The parents who provided the data for the current study were mildly to highly-educated. The results should not be generalized to low-educated families. The computation of difference and covariance scores from self-reported questionnaires had important implications on the results. Indeed, the results should have been slightly different with the children's perception of differential treatment or each parent's preferential behaviour, with self-reported information concerning consistency and with coparenting questionnaire. The replication of our results with alternate data collection procedures may be part of future studies objectives.

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Comment les mesures associées à l'activité parentale d'éducation varient-elles au sein des familles et d'une famille à une autre? L'étude considère la parentalité comme un processus familial complexe en l'envisageant à travers trois concepts: le style parental, le traitement parental différencié et la consistance co-parentale. La question traitée dans cette contribution est de quelle manière ces concepts varient au sein des familles selon les enfants de la fratrie ou entre le père et la mère, et entre les familles en fonction des caractéristiques de l'enfant, du parent et de la fratrie. Les mesures de la parentalité sont basées sur le questionnaire Evaluation des Pratiques Educatives Parentales (Meunier & Roskam, 2007) à partir d'un échantillon de 101 familles nucléaires: 101 mères et 101 pères avec deux enfants de la fratrie âgés entre six et douze ans. Les résultats montrent que les mesures de la parentalité varient au sein des familles en fonction des enfants de la fratrie et entre le père et la mère. Ils montrent également que ces mesures varient entre les familles en fonction de l'âge et de la personnalité de l'enfant, du niveau de scolarisation du parent et du nombre d'enfants dans la fratrie.

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