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## GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN ADOLESCENCE

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The primary aim of the study was to examine gender-specific parent-adolescent relationships characteristics. The article discusses the features of parent- girls and parent-boys relationship in adolescence, the specific image of mother and father in the context of parent-adolescent relationships. With the Scales “Adolescents about their parents” (L.Wassermann) and “Child-parent Interaction” (I.Markovskaya) main gender contexts of parent-child relationships are measured: mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter relationships. Boys indicate an increased directivity of their parents (foremost – of their father). Girls indicate emotional closeness, cooperation and harmony in the relationship with their mothers, rather than male adolescents. Mothers are generally more involved in the parent-adolescent relationship and seem to be more cooperating, but more prescriptive. Fathers seem to give adolescent less control, representing a greater degree of autonomy in relationships.

**Keywords:** Family Psychology; parent-child relationship; parent-adolescent relationships; gender-specific parent-child relationship; female adolescents' relationship with her mother, male adolescents' relationship with his father.

## ГЕНДЕРНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ДЕТСКО-РОДИТЕЛЬСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ПОДРОСТКОВ

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Статья посвящена исследованию гендерных особенностей детско-родительских отношений подростков. Рассматриваются особенности воспитания девочек и мальчиков подросткового возраста, специфика образа матери и отца в контексте детско-родительских отношений. С помощью методик «Подростки о родителях» в адаптированном варианте Вассермана Л.И и др., «Взаимодействие ребенок-родитель» И.М.Марковской определяется специфика основных гендерных контекстов детско-родительских отношений: мать-сын, мать-дочь, отец-сын, отец-дочь. Мальчики указывают на повышенную директивность родителей, прежде всего, – отца. Девочки-подростки указывают на эмоциональную близость, сотрудничество и согласие в отношениях с матерью, нежели мальчики-подростки. Матери, в целом, более вовлечены в детско-родительские отношения с подростками и кажутся им более сотрудничающими, но и более директивными. Отцы представляются подросткам как менее директивные и контролирующие, представляющие большую степень автономии в отношениях.

**Ключевые слова:** психология семейных отношений; детско-родительские отношения подростков; гендерные особенности детско-родительских отношений подростков; отношения подростков с матерью; отношения подростков с отцом; воспитание мальчиков-подростков и девочек-подростков.

## **Introduction.**

In recent years of social changes and transformation of the structure and role of the modern family as well as the understanding of importance and ambiguity of the adolescence for the personality development, the issue of parent-adolescent relationship becomes more relevant than ever. Researchers pointed out that about one-third of all relevant articles on the problems of adolescence had topics dealt with child-parent relationships [13; 15]. Despite the large number of empirical psychological studies on parent-adolescent relationships, there is a certain lack of complex studies of parent-child relationships in adolescence and their transformation in the modern society. Based on the theoretical context we can assume that there is a gender specificity in parental strategies dealing with male and female adolescents, and in the father-adolescent and mother-adolescent relationships. The purpose of this study is to examine the complex structure of parent-adolescent relationship, consisting of 4 contexts of parent-adolescent relationships: 1) mother-son relationship, 2) mother-daughter relationship, 3) father-son relationship, 4) father-daughter relationship. The object of study is the system of parent-child relationship, the subject is gender specificity of parent-adolescent relationship.

## **Theoretical issues about the gender characteristics of parent-adolescent relationship.**

The family as a basic social unit of special nature with affective involvement of family members and significant contemporary changes in the structure and role distribution is a popular subject in psychological researches. Parent-child relationships are often the subject of theoretical and practical researches, they are fast-changing through the social variation, but stable in the extent of the influence on the child and family development. (Eidemiller E.G., Zakharov A.I., Spivakovskaya A.S., Karabanova O.A., Podolsky A.I., Idobaeva O.A., Makushina O.P. et al.). Parenthood has a social and cultural nature, and is characterized by a system of prescribed cultural and society assigned norms and rules. It determines the content of

family roles, and role-model behavior, governing the distribution of functions of caring for the children between the parents [4]. Due to the transformation of the traditional role-structure of the family, the distribution of roles and functions, the transformation of traditional male and female roles in the family, the question about gender-specific aspects of child-adolescent relationship is as relevant as ever. A. Adler, E. Fromm and others suggested that the model of parental behavior of fathers and mothers varies depending on the sex of the child, which is an important condition for the formation of gender identity of the child. The mother's love, by E. Fromm, is blind and does not know justice; the father's love is, however, demanding, conventional; the traditional role of the father is seen in the context of suggesting social norms and requirements [9].

Recent studies have shown that there are differences in the maternal and paternal relationship to the child: overprotection is more common for mothers, fathers are more likely to exhibit lower overprotection and involvement in the relationship itself [3; 8]. Intense father-child relationships increase the level of psychological well-being of adolescents, their self-acceptance and self-esteem [11; 12], participation in the father-daughter relationships has a significant impact on the emotional well-being of female adolescents in romantic relationships [14]. Fathers appear to be more authoritarian than mothers. Mothers are more inclined to support the cooperation in child-parent relationships [18]. The amount of time the child share with each parent increases in the adolescence, the relationships with each parent get their own scheme [16]. A number of studies have shown, that parenting is also a gender-specific for boys and girls, the roles of the parents are specified in accordance with the child's gender, they contain a variety of social expectations and demands for sons and daughters [4]. However, there are only a few research findings about the complex system of maternal and paternal relationships with sons and daughters. Based on theoretical considerations it can be assumed that the general parent-child relationship in adolescence has four contexts: the mother-daughter relationship, the mother-son relationship, the father-daughter relationship, the father-son relationship.

The present study focuses on the specificity of these four aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship.

### **Method.**

The goal of the present study is to examine the specificity of the maternal and paternal relationship to adolescents - sons and daughters. The image of the parent-child relationship through the eyes of the adolescents was studied. The participants (N=189) were adolescents in age from 13 to 18 years (72 male, 117 female adolescents). Adolescents completed measures about parenting styles of their mothers and fathers, the emotional relationship with their parents. Three questionnaires were used: 1) the general questionnaire to obtain socio-demographic information about the family situation of the adolescents; 2) the questionnaires "Parent-child interaction" [5] and 3) ADOR («Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory»), the Russian-language version adapted by Wasserman et al. [2] were used to define the character of parent-child relationships in adolescence. Each of the parent-adolescent questionnaires was done separately for the adolescent-father and the adolescent-mother relationship. The aim of the present study was to prove following suggestions: 1) due to greater emotional acceptance, the mother-daughter relationship will be more emotionally positive than other contexts of parent-adolescent relationships; 2) the male adolescents are more eager for freedom and independence, and therefore would indicate a larger degree of prescriptive and control of the parent; 3) mothers tend to be more prescriptive in relation to sons than to daughters; 4) fathers will experience more positive interest in the relationships to sons than to daughters, mothers will experience a greater interest in the relationships with daughters, rather than with sons.

The study conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, which allow to make statistically valid conclusions about the results.

## Results.

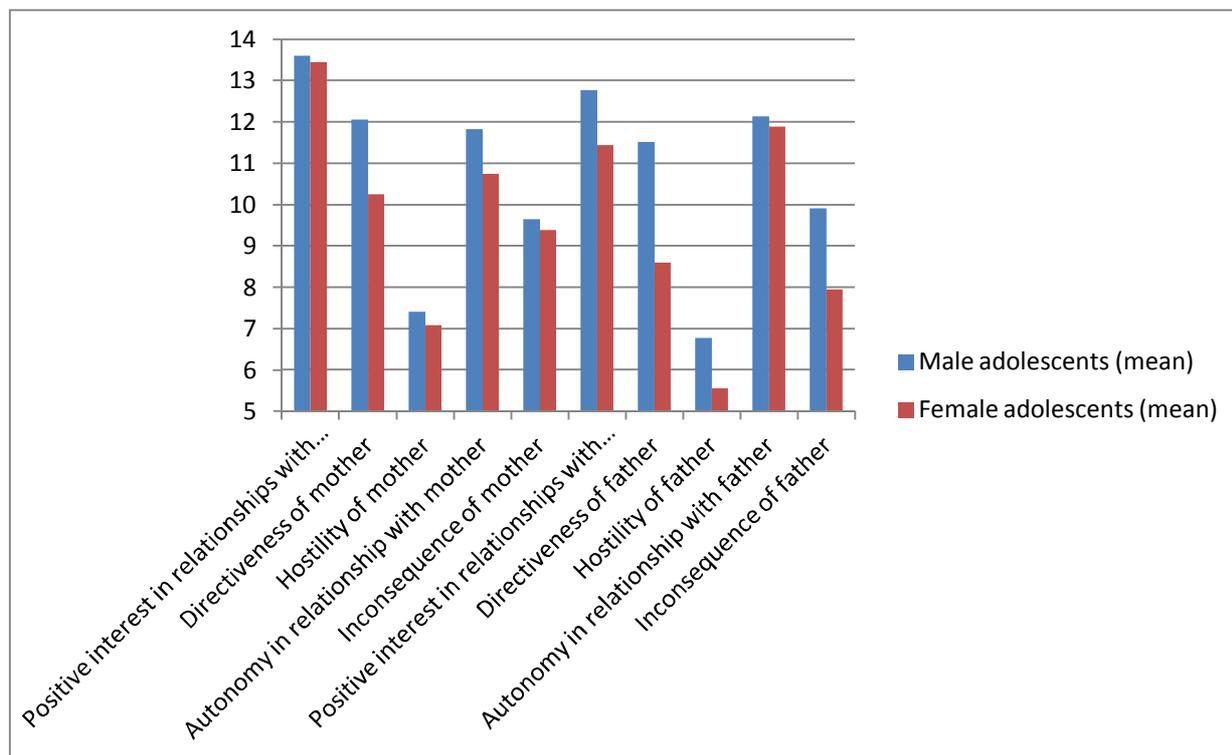
The study of differences of perception of parenting style for adolescent boys and adolescent girls showed that there are some differences in the perception of parents. Table #1 and figure #1 demonstrate the specificity of perception of maternal and paternal relationship to the adolescent (procedure "Adolescents of parents").

Table 1

### Adolescents' perception of maternal and paternal relationship

	Male adolescents (mean)	Female adolescents (mean)
Positive interest in relationships with mother	13,60	13,45
Directiveness of mother	12,06	10,25
Hostility of mother	7,40	7,08
Autonomy in relationship with mother	11,83	10,75
Inconsequence of mother	9,65	9,38
Positive interest in relationships with father	12,77	11,44
<b>Directiveness of father</b>	<b>11,51</b>	<b>8,59</b>
Hostility of father	6,77	5,55
Autonomy in relationship with father	12,14	11,89
Inconsequence of father	9,91	7,95

Male adolescents think their parents (fathers and mothers) are more prescriptive, adolescent girls describe their parents as less prescriptive. Female adolescents find parents less prescriptive, oppressive, but indicate a relatively lower degree of freedom in relations with parents, they accept the views of their parents and following them. Significant differences are marked red in the table, significant differences were found between male and female adolescents on the scale of "Directiveness of father" (U-test,  $p = 0.013$ ).



**Figure 1.** Adolescents' perception of maternal and paternal relationship

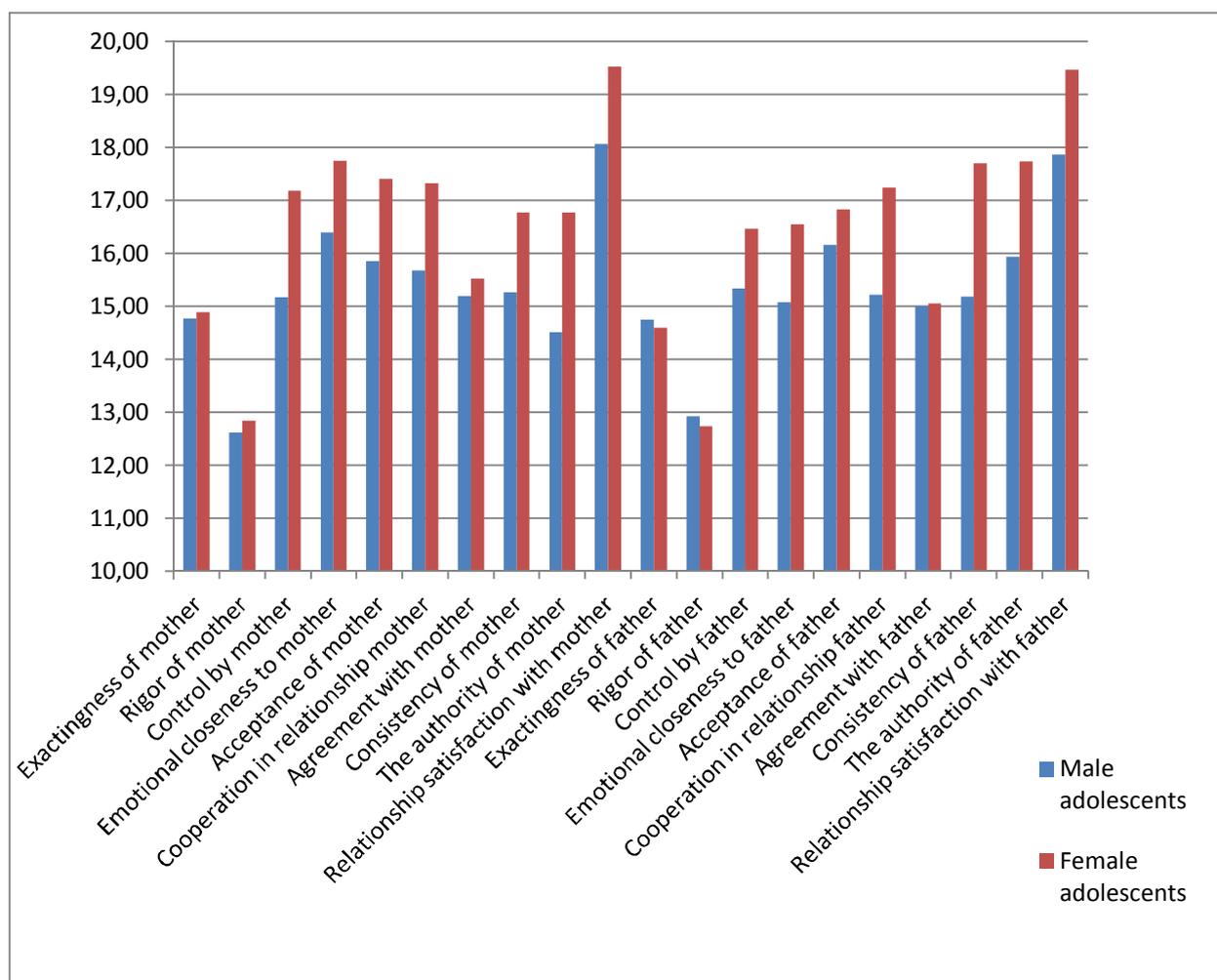
The study of differences of parent-adolescent interaction showed a certain specificity, foremost – for the perception of the maternal relationship to the adolescents (see table #2, figure #2).

Female adolescents see their mothers as more intimate, indicate a close emotional contact with them. In fact, the girls come in a relatively equal relationship with their mothers, pointing to a productive cooperation on the mother-adolescent interaction. Male adolescents perceive the mother's control as excessive, do not see the value in emotional contact with the mother and, in general, are less satisfied with the relationship with mothers, than girls. Female adolescents moreover perceive their fathers as more consistent in the interaction and can predict the actions of their fathers more confidently. Significant differences are highlighted in red on the table #2 (U-Mann-Whitney test).

Table 2

**Adolescents' perception of parent-adolescent interaction**

	Male adolescents (mean)	Female adolescents (mean)
Exactingness of mother	14,77	14,89
Rigor of mother	12,61	12,84
Control by mother	15,17	17,18
Emotional closeness to mother	16,39	17,75
Acceptance of mother	15,85	17,41
Cooperation in relationship mother	15,68	17,32
Agreement with mother	15,19	15,52
Consistency of mother	15,26	16,77
The authority of mother	14,52	16,77
Relationship satisfaction with mother	18,06	19,52
Exactingness of father	14,75	14,59
Rigor of father	12,93	12,73
Control by father	15,34	16,47
Emotional closeness to father	15,07	16,54
Acceptance of father	16,16	16,82
Cooperation in relationship father	15,21	17,24
Agreement with father	15,00	15,05
Consistency of father	15,18	17,70
The authority of father	15,93	17,73
Relationship satisfaction with father	17,86	19,46



**Figure 2.** Adolescents' perception of parent-adolescent interaction

The results of analyzing the differences in perception of maternal and paternal relationships to the adolescents also showed significant differences. The measurement with ADOR (“Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory”) showed significance of differences for all scales (t-test,  $p \leq 0,05$ ), except for the scale of “Inconsistency”. The comparison of father-adolescent and mother-adolescent relationship is demonstrated in table #3 and figure #3.

Table 3

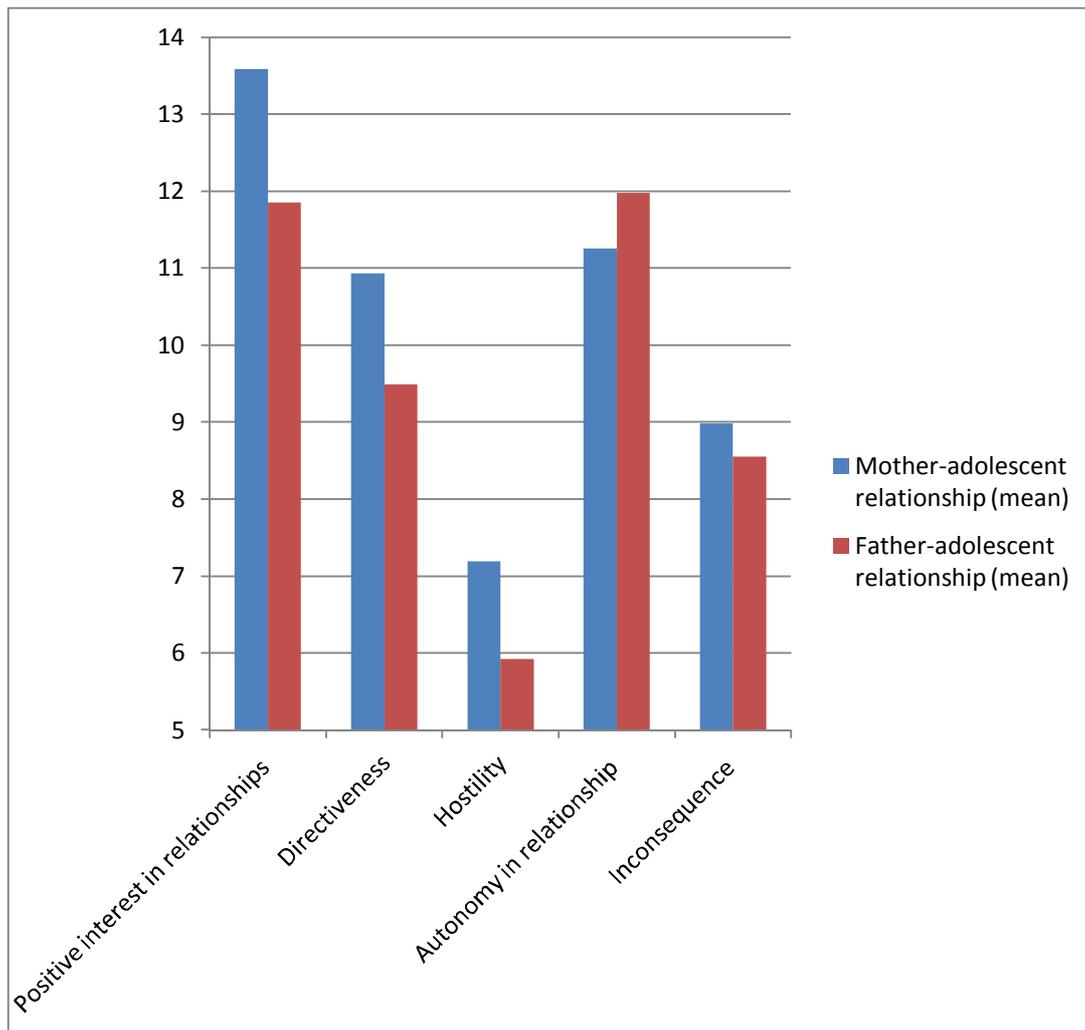
**Adolescents' perception of mother- and father-relationship**

	Mother-adolescent relationship (mean)	Father-adolescent relationship (mean)
Positive interest in relationships	13,59	11,85
Directiveness	10,93	9,49
Hostility	7,19	5,92
Autonomy in relationship	11,26	11,98
Inconsequence	8,98	8,55

The results of the study show, that mothers are more intensive involved in relationships with adolescents, but the relationships of different adolescents with the mother has their specific characteristics: some mothers are showing positive interest in the relationship with their adolescent children, they are interested in their everyday life and give a sense of support to the adolescents; others exhibit a certain level of prescriptive and even - hostility.

However, the relationships with fathers gives the adolescent the feeling of more freedom, the relationship with the mother tends more to give support and the feeling of involvement.

The measurement of adolescent-parent interaction showed significant differences between mother- and father-adolescent interactions in two scales (marked red): “Emotional closeness” (t-test,  $p=0.002$ ), and “Authority of the parent” (t-test,  $p=0.016$ ). The comparison is represented in table #4 and figure #4.



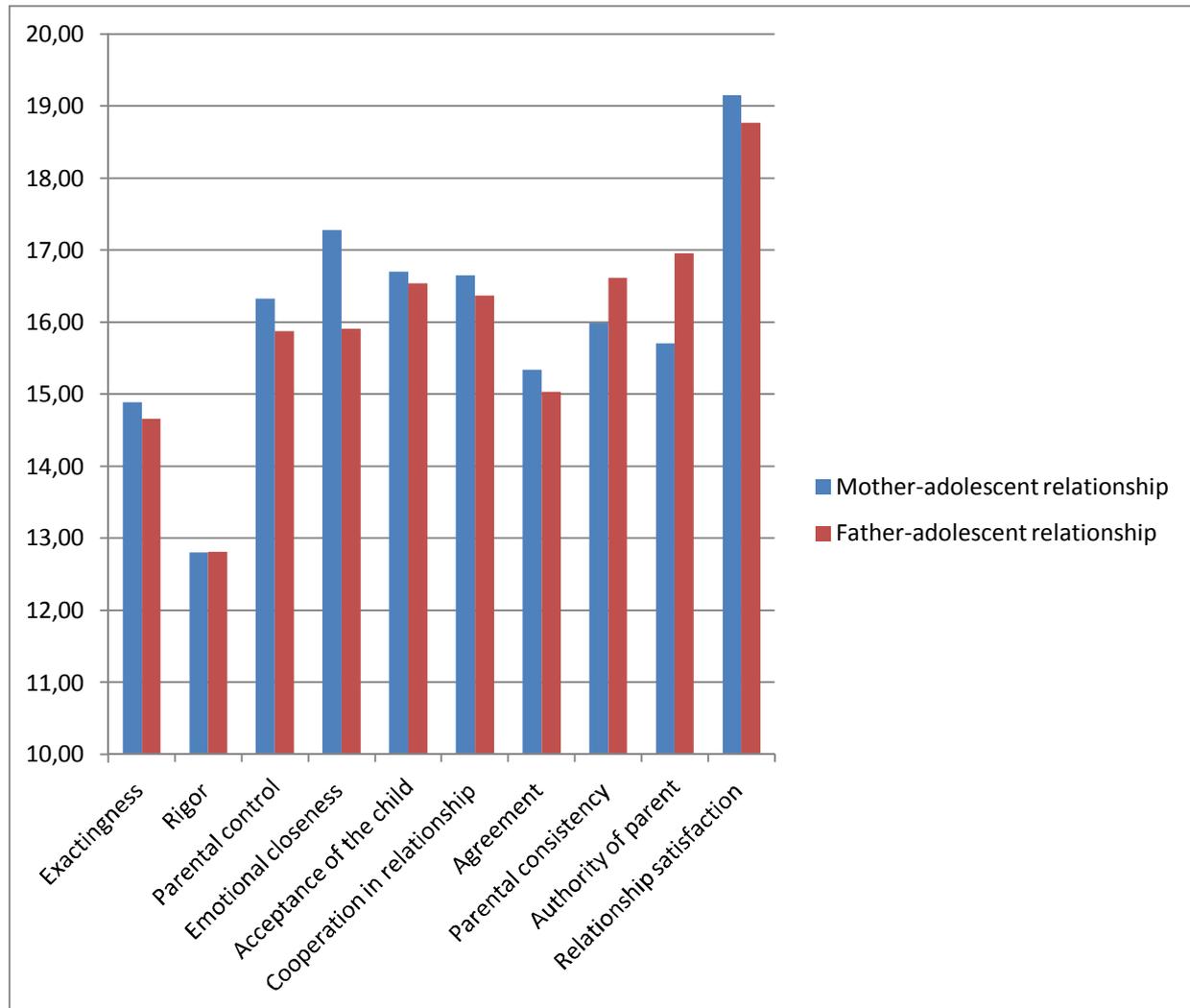
**Figure 3.** Adolescents' perception of mother- and father-relationship

Table 4

**Adolescents' perception of mother- and father-interaction**

	Mother-adolescent relationship (mean)	Father-adolescent relationship (mean)
Exactingness	14,89	14,66
Rigor	12,80	12,82
Parental control	16,33	15,88
<b>Emotional closeness</b>	<b>17,28</b>	<b>15,91</b>
Acceptance of the child	16,70	16,54
Cooperation in relationship	16,65	16,37
Agreement	15,34	15,03
Parental consistency	15,98	16,62
<b>Authority of parent</b>	<b>15,71</b>	<b>16,95</b>
Relationship satisfaction	19,15	18,77

The interaction with the mother seems to be more controlling, but also emotionally closer, while the interaction with the father some distance assumes, adolescents stated a lack of emotional support and coherence. Moreover, the father seems to be perceived as more authoritative for the adolescents.



**Figure 4.** Adolescents' perception of mother- and father-relationship

The mother is seen as emotional contact person in adolescent-parent interaction, but also has the controlling function in the family; fathers are seen as more distant in emotional aspects, but as providing autonomy and consistency, they are the authoritative persons in the family.

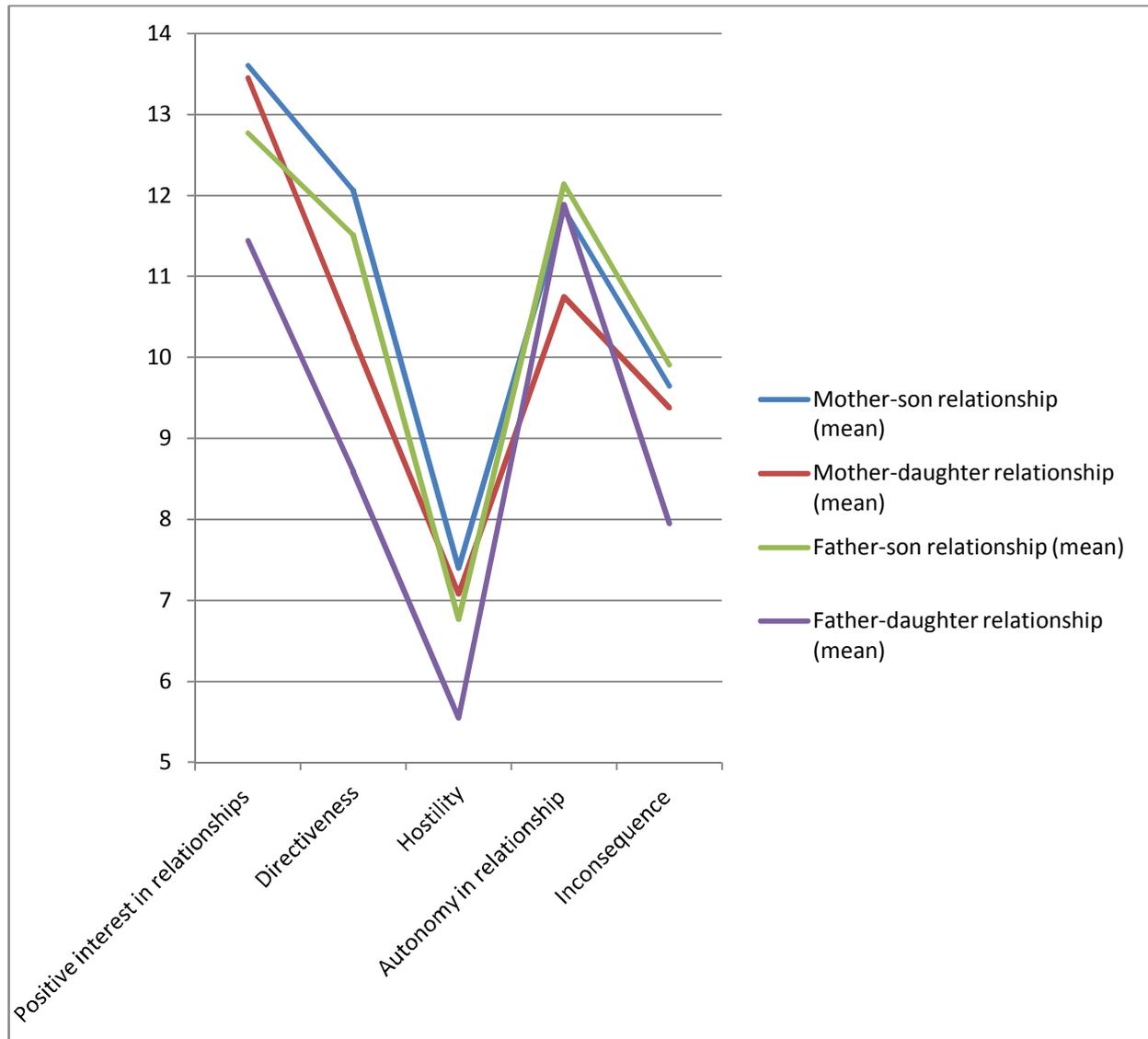
The comparison of the contexts of the mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son relationships in adolescence shows the specificity of the gender roles in families. The results of the present study demonstrate that there is specificity for each of the four contexts of relationships. The results of comparing the four contexts are shown in table #5 and figures ##5-6.

Table 5

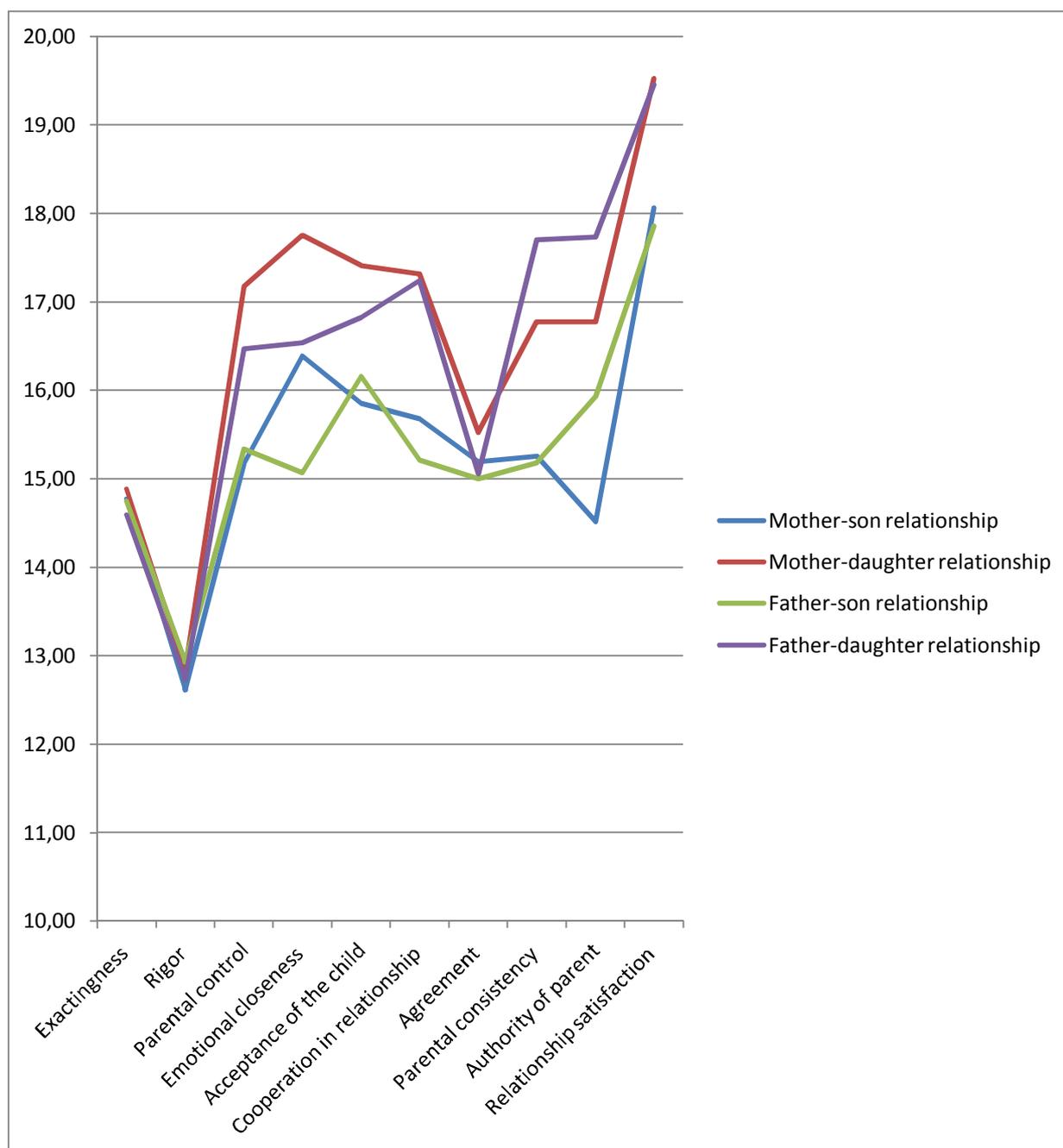
**Comparison of mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter,  
 father-son relationships in adolescence**

	Mother-son relationship (mean)	Mother-daughter relationship (mean)	Father-son relationship (mean)	Father- daughter relationship (mean)
Positive interest in relationships	13,60	13,45	12,77	11,44
Directiveness	12,06	10,25	11,51	8,59
Hostility	7,40	7,08	6,77	5,55
Autonomy in relationship	11,83	10,75	12,14	11,89
Inconsequence	9,65	9,38	9,91	7,95
Exactingness	14,77	14,89	14,75	14,59
Rigor	12,61	12,84	12,93	12,73
Parental control	15,17	17,18	15,34	16,47
Emotional closeness	16,39	17,75	15,07	16,54
Acceptance of the child	15,85	17,41	16,16	16,82
Cooperation in relationship	15,68	17,32	15,21	17,24
Agreement	15,19	15,52	15,00	15,05
Parental consistency	15,26	16,77	15,18	17,70
Authority of parent	14,52	16,77	15,93	17,73
Relationship satisfaction	18,06	19,52	17,86	19,46

As seen in table #5 and figure ##5-6, the four gender contexts of adolescent-parent relationship has their own specificity.



**Figure 5.** Comparison of mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son relationships in adolescence



**Figure 5.** Comparison of mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son interaction in adolescence

The mother-son relationship in adolescence is characterized by intense positive interest of the mother, the relative freedom and consistency of mother's behavior. At the same time, male adolescents indicate excessive control and directivity from the mother.

Mother-daughter relationships are perhaps the most contradictory. On the one hand, they are the closest in terms of emotional interaction and a sense of complete acceptance by the mother, adolescent girls have expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with the relationship (compared to other relationship contexts). On the other hand - the adolescent girls claim to the expressed degree of control of the mother in the relationships.

The fathers-son relationships are characterized by a high degree of freedom and independence, adolescent boys seem to be least of all controlled by the parents. But they differ the smallest involvement of the father in the relationships with their child: in father-son relationships the least degree of cooperation and harmony in the relationships was investigated. Such relationships appear to be inconsistent, adolescents feel excluded, the relationships with fathers do not completely satisfy their need for child-parent interaction.

Father-daughter relationships are committed characterized as satisfying on productive interaction. Fathers set adolescent girls a reasonable degree of freedom and autonomy, are not too strict and do not express negative assessments of the actions, feelings and thoughts of adolescent girls. The relationship satisfaction of daughters is associated with more collaboration, and acceptance from the fathers, but does not contain fathers' expressed positive interest and involvement in their everyday life experiences and feelings. This may be the reason for the high level of authority of the father with adolescent daughters.

### **Discussion.**

The present study sought to extend research on adolescent-parent relationships with attention to gender characteristics. The results of the study confirm the hypotheses about the difference between mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter relationships in adolescence.

Adolescent boys, in fact, perceive their parents as more directive, than adolescent girls do (should be noted, that mothers are seen as even more directive for

male adolescents than fathers). Male adolescents see the directivity in imposition of guilt, in harsh correction of adolescent behavior “from above”. Adolescent boys tend to indicate directivity as a function of behavior control and separate it from solicitation of opinions.

Adolescent girls find parents less prescriptive, and less oppressive, but indicate a relatively lower degree of freedom in relations with them. Female adolescents are more likely to accept the views of parents and follow them. According to the investigation data we assume that girls are more inclined to take control and directiveness as usual characteristics of parent-child relationships, and the involvement of parents in the affairs of adolescent and parental monitoring does not affect the high level of satisfaction with the relationship among adolescent girls.

Mother-daughter relationships in adolescence, indeed, are characterized by emotional closeness and acceptance by the mother. Daughters are more emotionally secure than sons in relationships with their mothers. Moreover, daughters' relationships with their mothers show the highest level of subjective satisfaction with the relationship compared with the father-daughter relationship and parent-son relationships.

The investigation data are consistent with recent researches showing a high level of satisfaction with parent-child relationships in adolescents [1; 7; 17], a high level of emotional involvement of mothers [6], the relative detachment of the fathers' emotional relationships with their adolescent daughters [10].

The hypothesis that fathers experience more positive interest in relationships with sons, than with daughters, confirmed partially: fathers, indeed, are more involved in the life of their sons (spend more time with them, are ready to help, know the hobbies and interests of their sons). But mothers showed almost the same level of positive interest for sons and daughters (for sons even more, but the difference is not statistically significant). Mothers are generally more involved in interests, hobbies and everyday life of the adolescents, than fathers. Adolescents indicate that mothers combine emotional support and care with control and restriction

of freedom. Fathers offer adolescents more freedom, but not at the expense of greater trust, rather than with less involvement in the relationships with their adolescent children.

The study revealed that the mother-son relationship in adolescence is characterized by intense positive interest of the mother, the relative freedom and consistency of parenting. This context is a great opportunity for the development of adolescent autonomy, but it is not enough to satisfy the urge to have the needed autonomy. Apparently, due to the fact that the adolescent boy feels relatively free in the relationship with his mother, any pressure to impose their point of view creates a feeling of excessive control and directivity of the mother.

Relationships between the mothers and adolescent daughters are contradictory and characterized with feelings of emotional closeness and full acceptance by the mother and the greatest degree of control. It can be assumed that this control is treated female adolescents as participation in the child's life, rather than as tyrannical and oppressive. The combination of control without pressure, the relative severity, which is perceived as fair, emotional intimacy and authority of the mother, makes the context of maternal relationship with daughters in adolescence one of the most promising issues for further research.

The high degree of freedom and autonomy in father-son relationships is associated with a sense of independence and the ability to defend their opinions, and, apparently, the inability to show that independence in the matter: it is a father-son relationship where the least degree of cooperation and harmony in relationship is. Adolescent boys think their fathers are inconsistent, confusing, and emotionally excluding. Male adolescents describe their relationships with fathers as unsatisfactory.

The father is authority and role model in the perception of adolescent girls. It is the father, who gives the necessary freedom, does not bother with overprotection, behaves consistently and is ready to cooperate. Ambiguous on this background seems the least expression of positive interest in father-daughter relationships. It can be

assumed that the collaboration with the father and freedom in a relationship with him is rather perfunctory, does not saturate joint venture and assumes the approval of independent action rather than substantial assistance in these activities.

The results of the study have shown the gender difference in adolescent-parent relationships (mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter relationships), the present study highlights the importance of family relationship research as from systemic point of view, but also in terms of different contexts of relationships with own particularity of each context.

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