



Journal of Fundamentals
of Mental Health



Mashhad University
of Medical Sciences



Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Research Center

Original Article

Designing a model for predicting moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength: The mediating role of the self-transcendence structure

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Abstract

Introduction: This study aimed to design a model for predicting moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength with the mediating role of the structure of self-transcendence among university students.

Materials and Methods: The statistical population of this descriptive-correlational study included all students of Bu-Ali Sina University of Hamadan city-Iran in the 2020-2021 academic year. Two-hundred eighty-five students were selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling method. The instruments were the moral behavior scale, parenting styles scale, ego-strength scale, and self-transcendence scale. The data were analyzed by path analysis with LISREL software.

Results: The results indicated that the proposed model fitted the experimental data (GFI= 0.95, IFI= 0.98, and CFI= 0.97). Also, the results of path analysis indicated that the effects of parenting styles on moral behavior and self-transcendence and the effects of ego-strength and self-transcendence on moral behavior were significant. The results of Sobel's test (z) indicated that the self-transcendence variable has a significant mediating role in the relationship between permissive style ($Z= -2.68, P < 0.01$), authoritative style ($Z= -2.55, P < 0.01$), authoritarian style ($Z= -3.61, P < 0.01$), and ego-strength ($Z= 4.56, P < 0.01$) with moral behavior.

Conclusion: Based on the results, it can be said that parenting styles, ego-strength, and self-transcendence can predict conducting moral behaviors. Also, self-transcendence can be one of the factors that influence the relationship between parenting styles and ego-strength with moral behavior.

Keywords: Ego-strength, Morality, Moral behavior, Parenting styles, Self-transcendence

Please cite this paper as:

Farhadi M, Delfan Beiranvand A. Designing a model for predicting moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength: The mediating role of the self-transcendence structure. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2023 Jan -Feb; 25(1): 17-26.

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Received: Mar. 04, 2022

Accepted: Oct. 12, 2022

Introduction

Morality and moral behaviors are fundamental facilitators of social interactions. As moral behaviors are carved deep in society, more ease is observed in how people perform in their social and individual lives (1). The perception of 'right' and 'wrong' behaviors in moral terms empowers people to live and work alongside each other in different situations and communities. Following moral principles, respect, and social virtues are ensured, while immoral behavior will lead to disrespect and social rejection (2). Morality guides human beings based on justice, fairness, and virtue. The purpose of moral principles is to define and encourage appropriate behavior and manners. Morality should be an integral part of not only our behavior with others (e.g., avoiding lying, refraining from stealing, doing no physical harm) but also with animals (respecting animal rights and appropriate use of resources) and also even with culture and beliefs (avoiding plagiarism and cultural confiscation) (3). Morality deals with the righteousness and appropriateness of deeds (i.e., how to act) and what forms a good character (3). Thus, *moral behavior* can be defined as the extent to which a behavior, a decision, and the consequences of an action accord with the moral standards and the values related to and supported by a situation (4).

Parenting styles are one of the influential factors in moral behavior. Parenting styles of parents greatly impact the development (5) and formation of the behavior of their children (6). There is a relationship between parenting styles (authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian) and ultra-social and internalized moral values in individuals (7). In their study, Esmaeili et al. argued that there is a relationship between parenting styles and moral development and that the variable 'attachment' significantly mediates between parenting styles and moral development (8). Rahbar and Salaripour claimed a significant reverse relationship between moral development and arbitrary parenting style and a significant direct relationship between moral development and authoritative and secure attachment parenting styles (9). Fatima, Dawood, and Munir suggested that a negative relationship was found between permissive parenting style and moral identity and social behaviors of teenagers. In addition, a positive relationship was observed between perceived

authoritarian style and moral identity and social behaviors. They also found that moral identity has a significant mediating role in the relationship between perceived parenting styles and social behaviors because parenting styles have a key role in the internalization of moral values in teenagers (7).

Ego-strength is another predictive factor of moral behaviors. Ego-strength is a reflection of a powerful internal core followed by solid commitments to ideals and beliefs important to others and a greater community. It has an impact on flexibility, tackling challenges, emotional stability, and effective interaction (10). People with strong ego are more open to interpersonal conflicts and respect individuality, and they would take a less aggressive stance against others' differences from theirs (11). Ego-strength helps individuals be at peace with themselves and others and successfully perform their social roles in various cultural textures (12). In a study, Gharadaghi suggested that ego-strength has a significant mediating role in the relationship between the perception of a father's parenthood and wisdom in students (13).

With the emergence of humanistic psychology in the 1950s, several concepts, including meaning, love, self-transcendence, self-actualization, and related concepts, have been presented (14). According to contemporary psychology theorists, self-transcendence is considered a turning point in the process of development in an individual for its relationship with high levels of an individual's psychological-spiritual development and maturity (15). Self-transcendence is defined as recognizing the world and joining humankind and nature, paying attention to others' welfare, and being free of external definitions of self, which often leads to internal peace, happiness, and a feeling of wonder (16). Frankel defines self-transcendence as achieving an infinite meaning. Self-transcendence is a reduction of attachment to one's own opinions and a decrease in self-centeredness (17).

On the contrary, it is an expansion of attention and kindness and caring about others, including past and future generations (18). Mohagheghi et al. argued that self-transcendence significantly mediates the relationship between moral intelligence and personal characteristics, e. g. honesty,

modesty, dutifulness and empiricism, and moral behavior. The results of their study also revealed that self-transcendence has a direct impact on moral behaviors (19).

Unfortunately, widespread incidents of immoral behaviors have been observed in students of higher education institutes over the recent decades (20). These behaviors could be referred to as unproductive behaviors. Rimkus presents ten dimensions for unproductive educational behavior: cheating, substance abuse, lying, plagiarism, discriminatory behavior, absence, passive presence, negligence, indolence (laziness), and peer pressure (21). Therefore, the need is felt to promote moral behaviors in society. This is because morality is related to the weal and welfare of humankind (22), and it is considered a strategic possession of communities and provides the prerequisites of an efficient social life (23).

On the other hand, the in-depth promotion of morality and moral behaviors within society is one of the most unique and foundational ideals of official education and the human community (24). In addition, observing ethical principles and values in all dimensions is one of the most important ways of survival and promoting social health (25). Thus, paying attention to morality and moral behaviors as vital issues before organizations is a dire need (26). Therefore, the present study aimed to design a model for predicting moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength with the mediating role of the structure of self-transcendence among university students.

Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this descriptive-correlational study included all students of Bu-Ali Sina University of Hamadan city-Iran in the 2020-2021 academic year. The path analysis and structural equations observe various methods in terms of the sample volume. For instance, some argue that the principles of sample volume determination in multivariate regression can be used to determine the sample volume in modeling the structural equations because the methodology of modeling the structural equations is highly similar to some of the multivariate regression properties. In multivariate regression, the relation of the number of samples (observations) to the independent variables must be at least 5. Otherwise, the regression equation results will not be generalizable (27).

James Stevens (28) and Kline (29) suggest that considering 15 observations per predictive variable in multiple regression using the normal method of the lowest standard squares is a good simple regulation. It is also stressed that the least number of the sample must be at least 200 (28). Therefore, as explained above, 285 individuals were selected as the research sample using the multi-staged cluster sampling method.

The online method was used to conduct this research work and collect the needed data. In this regard, the scales of moral behavior, parenting styles, ego-strength, and self-transcendence were primarily designed and prepared using online systems. Following that, with the official permission of Bu-Ali Sina University, allowing for the online presence in the classes about each educational group (faculties of economic and social sciences, basic sciences, engineering, literature, agriculture, and arts), an electronic link was shared with students in their virtual group in order to collect their responses the mentioned scales. A one-month duration was assigned to the responses to the scales, and reminder messages were sent to the virtual network groups of students daily.

The inclusion criteria included students studying at Bu-Ali Sina University and willingness to participate in the study. In order to analyze data, path analysis, Sobel's test, and fit indices for codified patterns such as RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), IFI (Incremental Fit Index), CFI (Confirmatory Factor Analysis), GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index), TLI and X^2/df fit index were used.

Research instruments

A) Moral Behavior Scale: This scale is created by Delfan Beiranvand, Rashid, and Bayat. It encompasses 43 items. Each item of this scale is shown on a 5-grade Likert scale index (5= almost always, 4= often, 3= sometimes, 2= hardly ever, and 1= never). The moral scale comprises three subscales (positive community-based, negative community-based, and individual-based). The internal consistency of this scale was obtained at 0.956 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and 0.993, 0.857, and 0.826 for positive community-based, negative community-based, and individual-based components, respectively (30). The moral behavior scale as a whole was considered in the present study. The internal

consistency of this scale in the study was obtained at 0.963 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

B) The Parenting Styles Scale (Child-Raising Methods): This scale is created by Diana Baumrind. Parenting methods include three styles: authoritative (4–5–8–11–15–20–22 – 23–27–30), authoritarian (2–3–7–9–12–16–18–25–26–29) and permissive (1–6–10–13–14–17 –19–21–24–28). This scale is graded on the Likert scale index (1= totally disagree, 2= disagree, 3= almost disagree, 4= agree, and 5= totally agree). The higher elation of each of the dimensions shows the dominant parenting method of that parent, based on the fact that the scale to which the higher score has been given shows the dominant parenting style in that family (31). In this study, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the internal consistency of this scale was 0.731 for the permissive style, 0.837 for the authoritarian style, and 0.854 for the authoritative style.

C) Ego-Strength Scale: The psychological scale of ego-strength was created by Markstrom et al. in 1997. This scale has 64 items and measures eight ego-strength points, including hope, expectation, purpose, adequacy, loyalty, love, care, and wisdom. Each scale item has been graded on a Likert scale; 5= accords with me, 4= a bit accords with me, 3= I have no opinion, 2= a bit discords with me, and 1= discords with me. Reverse questions are answered in a reversed manner. A high score on this scale means a high level of ego-strength. One's score is obtained by summing their scores in each question. Markstrom et al. confirmed the face, content, and structural validity of this scale, and they reported the reliability of this scale by 0.68 using Cronbach's alpha method (32). In the present study, the internal consistency of this scale was obtained at 0.771 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

D) Adult Self-Transcendence Scale: According to the designers of this scale, self-transcendence is defined as a decrease in reliance on the social definitions of 'self', an increase in internalization, and finding a strong feeling of a bond with the past and future generations. This scale is comprised of 14 items, and it is graded on the Likert scale from 1 (totally agree) to 4 (totally disagree). The internal consistency coefficient of this scale was reported as 0.75 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (33). In the present study, the internal consistency of this scale obtained 0.784 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The data were analyzed through the descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and path analysis with LISREL software.

Results

In this study, 285 people (234 women and 51 men) participated. The men aged 31.93 ± 8.72 years, and women aged 29.51 ± 7.95 years.

Before analysis administration, the path analysis defaults, including the normality of data distribution, error independence, and multicollinearity, were examined. Skewness and kurtosis of the distribution of the scores were used to investigate the normality default of the research variables, which indicated that the scores distribution of all variables was normal (distribution range between +1 and -1). The Durbin and Watson's test was used to examine the error independence, which demonstrated no correlation among the errors (D. W= 1.89, the range between 1.5 and 2.5 is acceptable). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance were used to examine the multicollinearity, which indicated no collineation among the variables (VIF range was obtained less than 5, and tolerance was obtained higher than 0.1). Pearson's correlation was used to investigate the linear relationship between the research variables (Table 1).

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and the correlation between research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Permissive parenting style	28.48	5.51	-					
Authoritative parenting style	19.65	7.89	- 0.29**	-				
Authoritarian parenting style	34.17	7.03	0.28**	-0.50**	-			
Ego-strength	177.15	19.04	-0.08	0.31**	- 0.11	-		
Self-transcendence	24.89	8.38	- 0.16	0.25**	-0.22**	0.23**	-	
Moral behavior	81.78	18.45	- 0.30**	0.37**	-0.32**	0.27**	0.45**	-

** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that there was a significant negative relationship between the permissive parenting style and self-transcendence ($P < 0.01$ and $r = -0.16$) and between the permissive parenting style and moral behavior ($P < 0.01$ and $r = -0.30$). There was a significant positive relationship between the authoritative parenting style and self-transcendence ($P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.25$) and between the authoritative parenting style and moral behavior ($P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.37$). A significant negative relationship was observed between the authoritarian parenting style and self-transcendence ($P < 0.01$ and $r = -0.22$) and between the authoritarian parenting style and moral behavior ($P < 0.01$ and $r = -0.32$). There was a significant positive relationship between

ego-strength and self-transcendence ($P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.27$) and between ego-strength and moral behavior ($P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.27$). A significant positive relationship was observed between self-transcendence and moral behavior ($P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.45$). Path analysis was used to test the relationships between the research variables. Taking the correlation between the exogenous variables and self-transcendence and moral behavior into account, all variables were put in the model and analyzed. The general fitness of the model was examined in the first step, and the regression weights of the measuring models and the coefficients of the relationships were then analyzed.

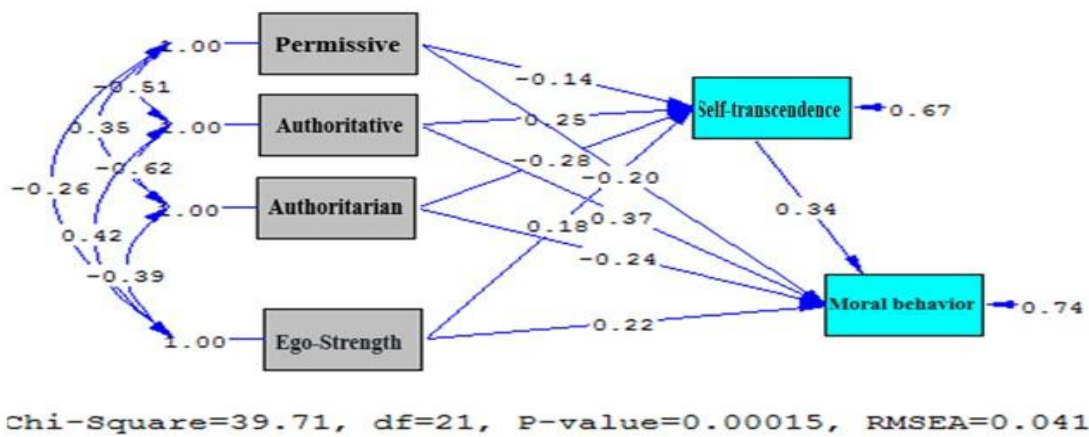


Figure 1. The standard coefficients of the relationships between parenting styles plus ego-strength and moral behavior with the mediating role of self-transcendence at the standard mode

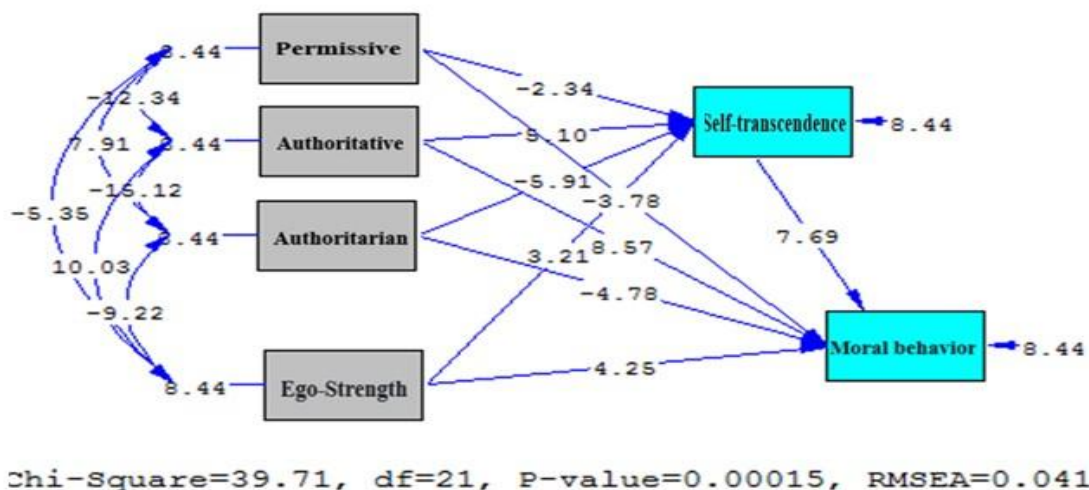


Figure 2. The standard coefficients of the relationships between parenting styles plus ego-strength and moral behavior with the mediating role of self-transcendence at the significant mode

The fit indices of the model were first investigated in order to determine the general

fitness of the model. Table 2 displays the fit indices. In X^2/df fit index, values less than 3

are acceptable and the closer they are to zero, the higher the fitness of the model will be. Values close to or higher than 0.90 for the GFI, IFI, CFI, and TLI fit indices are considered acceptable and indicate the appropriateness of the model. Considering the RMSEA index, values close to or less than 0.05 show a suitable fitness level for the

model, and values equal to or less than 0.08 show the logical approximation error; values higher than 0.10 indicate the necessity to reject the model. The fit indices presented in Table 2 show the acceptable fitness values of the model. In the next step, all impacts of all various paths were investigated, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. The fit indices for the designed model

Fit indices of the model	X ²	df	X ² /df	GFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
After modification	39.71	21	1.89	0.95	0.98	0.96	0.97	0.041

Table 3. The coefficients of the model predicting moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength with the mediating role of self-transcendence

Direct path	Regression coefficient	t-statistics
The effect of permissive parenting style on self-transcendence	-0.14	-2.34
The effect of authoritative parenting style on self-transcendence	0.25	5.10
The effect of authoritarian parenting style on self-transcendence	-0.28	-5.91
The effect of ego-strength on self-transcendence	0.18	3.21
The effect of permissive parenting style on moral behavior	-0.20	-3.87
The effect of authoritative parenting style on moral behavior	0.37	8.57
The effect of authoritarian parenting style on moral behavior	-0.24	-4.78
The effect of ego-strength on moral behavior	0.22	4.25
The effect of self-transcendence on moral behavior	0.34	7.69

T= 2.98 is significant at 0.01 level.

The analysis of the data regarding the relationships between the variables obtained through the regression coefficients path in Table 3 indicates a significant impact of the permissive parenting style ($\beta = -0.14, P < 0.05$), of the authoritative parenting style ($\beta = 0.25, P < 0.01$), of the authoritarian parenting style ($\beta = 0.28, P < 0.01$) and of ego-strength ($\beta = 0.18, P < 0.01$) on self-transcendence. The results also showed that moral behavior was significantly affected by permissive parenting style ($\beta = -0.20, P < 0.05$), authoritative

parenting style ($\beta = 0.37, P < 0.01$), authoritarian parenting style ($\beta = -0.24, P < 0.01$) and ego-strength ($\beta = 0.22, P < 0.01$). According to the results, there was also a significant positive impact of self-transcendence on moral behavior ($\beta = 0.34, P < 0.01$).

Also, Sobel's test was used to investigate the mediating role of self-transcendence in the relationship between parenting styles plus ego-strength and moral behavior, which are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. The results of the investigation of the mediating role of self-transcendence in the relationship between parenting styles and ego-strength with moral behavior through the Sobel's test

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	Mediating variable	Sobel's test (z)	P
Permissive style	Moral behavior	Self-transcendence	-2.68	0.001
Authoritative style	Moral behavior	Self-transcendence	2.55	0.001
Authoritarian style	Moral behavior	Self-transcendence	-3.61	0.001
Ego-strength	Moral behavior	Self-transcendence	4.56	0.001

The results of Sobel's test reported in Table 4 indicate that the self-transcendence variable had a significant mediating role in the relationship between permissive parenting style ($Z = -2.62, P < 0.01$), authoritative parenting style ($Z = 2.55, P < 0.01$),

authoritarian parenting style ($Z = -3.61, P < 0.01$), ego-strength ($Z = 4.56, P < 0.01$) and moral behavior. According to the results, the variable self-transcendence significantly mediated the relationship between parenting styles, ego-strength, and moral behavior.

Discussion

This study was conducted in Bu-Ali Sina University students aiming to design a model to predict moral behavior based on parenting styles and ego-strength taking the mediating role of self-transcendence into account. A correlation and relationship were found in the results between parenting styles, self-transcendence, and moral behavior. A significant negative relationship was observed between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles and self-transcendence and moral behavior. In contrast, the authoritative parenting style was found to have a significant positive relationship with self-transcendence and moral behavior. Also, a significant positive relationship was found between ego-strength, self-transcendence, and moral behavior. In addition, a significant positive relationship was observed between self-transcendence and moral behavior. The results indicated that the variable self-transcendence was observed to have a significant mediating role in the relationship between parenting styles and ego-strength, and moral behavior. Self-transcendence plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between parenting styles and ego-strength, and moral behavior. By the results of the present study, it can be said that when parents behave with their children based on authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, the development of ego-strength or power and self-transcendence will be troubled in children and, consequently, a reduction in conducting moral behavior will be seen in them. In addition, when the authoritative parenting style is dominant in families, the ground is provided for the development of ego-strength and self-transcendence, and there will be an increase in the internalization of moral values as well as the utilization of moral behaviors in life situations. Therefore, the authoritative parenting style is followed by ego-strength, self-transcendence, and internalization of moral behaviors and utilizing them by individuals. Thus, the authoritative parenting style, ego-strength, and self-transcendence can predict the occurrence of moral behaviors by individuals. In line with the present findings, the results of some other studies can be pointed out.

In a study on modeling the structural equation of determiners of wisdom in students based on the perception of the father's parenting with

the mediating role of ego-strength, Gharadaghi suggested that ego-strength plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between the perception of the father's parenting and wisdom in students. The samples of this study were 190 students of Tabriz University. The instruments used in this study included Ardel's Three-Dimension Wisdom Scale (D-WS3), Dick's Father Scale (FS), and the Psychological Inventory of Ego-Strength (PIES) by Strom et al. (13). In the research conducted by Mohagheghi et al. on 285 individuals, the prediction of moral behavior on the bases of moral intelligence and personal traits considering the mediating role of self-transcendence structure was investigated. The results revealed that self-transcendence structure plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between moral intelligence, personality traits, and moral behavior (19).

The results of another study by Esmaeili et al. on 128 individuals from Tehran province, through Baumrind Parenting Styles Questionnaires (PSQ), the Kinship Center Attachment Questionnaire (KCAQ), and Lotfabadi Moral Development Questionnaire (MDQ) indicated that there was a relationship between parenting styles and moral development. The results of this study demonstrated that attachment has a mediating role between parenting style and moral development (8). In another study, Rahbar and Salaripour (9) conducted on 240 elementary students from Jask, Iran, moral development had a significant reverse relationship with authoritarian parenting style, and there was a significant direct relationship between moral development and safe attachment and authoritative parenting styles (9). Authoritative parenting style and safe attachment predict moral development. Fatima, Dawood, and Munir examined perceived parenting styles, moral identity, and social behaviors in 236 teenagers from various schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The results revealed that there was a negative relationship between permissive parenting style and moral identity and social behaviors in teenagers. Besides, the perceived authoritative parenting style is positively related to moral identity and social behaviors (7).

To explicate the findings of the present study, an authoritative parenting style can have a remarkable role in the formation and internalization of moral behaviors in

individuals. This is because parents' parenting style influences children's personal and moral development (34). The right style and method of upbringing and parenting, transferred to children by parents, leads to moral, social, and life development and evolution (35). Therefore, parenting styles (authoritative) have an impact on the internalization of moral values (36).

Based on the results, ego-strength can predict moral behavior because individuals with a high level of ego-strength act properly in the regulation of excitement and adaptation to the environment (10). High ego-strength can also allow individuals to behave morally in various situations. According to the results of previous studies, ego-strength has a significant positive relationship with sympathetic concern (37), interpersonal individualization (11), positive orientation in interpersonal relations (38), and reducing the impact of perceived stress on social compatibility (37). Psychologists argue that ego-strength is an innate active trait that brings various forms of energy and vivacity to individuals during their lifetime (39). These properties of ego-strength can predict the occurrence of moral behaviors by individuals.

On the other hand, the results of the present study indicated that the variable self-transcendence affects moral behavior and that it has a significant mediating role in the relationship between parenting styles in addition to ego-strength and moral behavior. Self-transcendence transcending one's self is defined as the need to find a more comprehensive awareness of 'self', of 'others', and humankind, nature, and the universe in general (17).

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Based on the results, training classes can be held for parents so as to teach them to raise their children based on an authoritative parenting style so that grounds would be provided for the development of ego-strength and self-transcendence and, consequently, the society would include individuals who will behave morally in various situations. Research limitations of this study include the lack of an atmosphere to measure moral behaviors in real-life situations, the mere usage of self-report instruments, and research conducted in university texture. These limitations restrict the generalization of the results to other age groups in different educational textures. Therefore, researchers should act cautiously when considering the generalizability of the results of this study.

The ethical considerations taken into account in this study include informed consent, voluntary participation of the subjects, the right to withdraw from research, non-disclosure of information, and respecting privacy (secrecy and confidentiality). In other words, all students had the freedom to fill out the questionnaires and scales at their discretion and were assured of confidentiality principles.

Conclusion

Based on the present findings, the self-transcendence structure can influence the relationship between parenting style and ego-strength and moral behaviors.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude to all the students who participated in this research. Also, the authors declare any conflict of interest or financial support.

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