'I CANNOT GIVE SOMETHING THAT I DIDN’T RECEIVE’ – FAMILY ORIGINS OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS TO INFANT CRYING

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The experiences in family of origin have been linked to responsiveness to child’s crying (Leerkes & Siepak, 2006) – a reaction that most strongly engages caretakers (Bell & Salter Ainsworth, 1972). The presented study was aimed at analyzing the retrospectively assessed parenting styles’ effects on caretaking behaviours and emotional reactions to infant crying with use of a life-like doll (Voorthuis et al., 2013).

In each of two experiments participants reacted to a crying doll. 100 couples (age: $M_{females}$= 26.04, $SD$= 3.18; $M_{males}$= 27.49, $SD$= 3.81; relationship duration $M_{years}$= 5.98, $SD$= 3.05) participated in experiments independently (1), and as a couple (2). The couples assessed parenting styles of their parents („My Family” - Field’s family types; Rys, 2001), emotional reactions to doll’s crying („My Emotions Scale”; Kazmierczak & Pawlicka, 2018) and partner’s perceived support, engagement in communication and depreciation during the experiment 2.

Participants assessing their parents’ style as democratic and loving in childhood (group 1) expressed more empathy and sympathy towards the crying doll than those who perceived their parents as autocratic and unloving (group 2) (experiment 1: $t(198)=-3.082; p< .01$; experiment 2: $t(198)=-3.985; p< .001$). No effects of family of origin were found for self-oriented emotional reactions to crying. Maternal, compared to paternal, parenting styles more strongly correlated with reactions to crying in both, women and men (Spearman's rho, $p< .05$).

In experiment 2, couples who both were in group 1, compared to other participants, assessed their partners as more supportive while taking care for the doll (women: $t(91.317)= 2.107, p< .05$; men: $t(98)= 1.884, p=.06$); and men were perceived as more engaged in mutual communication during the experiment ($t(92.801)= 2.005, p< .05$).

The results confirmed a significant effect of family-of-origin for the experimentally measured emotional responsiveness towards infant’s crying. Unique couple effects were obtained.