

How Does Authoritarian Parenting Style Influence Adolescents in China?

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ABSTRACT

Authoritarian parenting is distinguished for its high standards for children and a lack of parental input and responsiveness. Due to their strict authority over children and Chinese parents' emphasis on obedience and conformity, authoritarian parenting suppresses the autonomy and freedom of Chinese adolescents. Authoritarian parenting is also related to reduced creativity as adolescents suffer from domineering control and demands for absolute obedience. Nonetheless, many Chinese parents associate high demandingness and authoritarian parenting with better academic performance. Yet, data and studies indicate a negative relationship between authoritarian parenting styles and Chinese students' academic performance. In addition, growing up in an authoritarian family limits the ability of children to cope with pressure and diminishes their motivation to strive toward goals in the long run. Ultimately, authoritative parenting, which combines discipline and autonomy, and is characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness, is shown to be more effective in raising academically successful, creative, resistant, and empathetic adolescents. The present study examines the relationship between authoritarian parenting and adolescents' creativity, autonomy, and academic performance in China, and suggests a solution to its negative effects.

Introduction

Parenting style encompasses several aspects of parental interaction with their children, including their attitudes, behaviors, and the emotional state of their behaviors. Diana Baumrind categorized parenting styles based on two dimensions: responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1991). Responsiveness is referred to as the degree to which parents are supportive and sensitive to their children's emotional and developmental needs; whereas demandingness is the development of obedience through parental supervision and discipline to make the child meet the expectations of the parents. One of the parenting styles that Baumrind identified in her theory is authoritarian parenting, which is distinguished by a high level of demandingness but a low level of responsiveness. Authoritarian parents expect their children to completely obey their demands and utilize harsh punishments to ensure conformity from their children. In an early study, it was discovered that authoritarian parenting is related to the social and cultural background of China. Compared to the Western individualistic cultures, the collectivistic culture in China emphasizes the priority of family interests and the interdependence of family members, which is manifested by the higher authority of the elders who demand obedience and respect from their children and less independence from the children, making authoritarian parenting a widely adopted parenting style in China. In 2015, researchers at the National Survey and Data Center of Renmin University of China found that among the parents of junior high school students in China, more than 40% are authoritarian. Additionally, researchers at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences have found a direct positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and academic achievement (Zahed Zahedani et al., 2016). Chinese parents utilize a more controlling and authoritarian style of parenting due to their high expectations of children and desire for their children to succeed in the future; they're more focused on reducing children's possibility of failure and promoting their success with little respect for children's psychological needs. Although Chinese adolescents seem more academically successful, according to the Director of the China Family Education Association, Chinese adolescents showed more willingness to conform to their parent's expectations compared to western countries. However, researchers have

found that such conformity and obedience can inhibit individuals' creativity and autonomy (Gelfand, 2020). While some researchers believe that authoritarian parenting is appropriate and effective for the development of adolescents in China due to the context of Chinese culture, some emphasize the negative effects of authoritarian parenting on adolescents' individual development such as creativity, self-esteem, and autonomy. Subsequently, considering the dominance of authoritarian parenting among Chinese families and its effects on the development of adolescents raises a question for researchers and scholars: how does authoritarian parenting influence adolescents in China?

Authoritarian Parenting Style - Effects on Autonomy

Laurence Steinberg (1993) strengthened Baumrind's parenting style theory by adding more dimensions to the components of parenting styles, which include acceptance-involvement, strictness-supervision, and psychological autonomy granting. Psychological autonomy granting indicated reducing adolescents' psychological control and promoting their individuality and autonomy. In developmental psychology, autonomy is defined as the ability to form uncoerced desires, considerations, and beliefs based on their own values. Authoritarian parents establish a firm control and exercise authority over their children's behaviors and decisions to ensure that they don't make mistakes. Authoritarian parents in China often adhere to rigid rules and standards that are derived from Chinese traditions and philosophies of blind obedience and conformity to parental authority. As a result, children in authoritarian families are not granted much freedom to make their own decisions. In addition, authoritarian parents often interfere with their children beyond the necessary boundaries of their lives and impose many rules on their speech and behavior, which leaves their children's self-esteem unprotected and autonomy neglected. Thus, under restraint and suppression from parents, adolescents can become uncommunicative and unwilling to open up, leading to difficulties in their interpersonal interactions and withdrawal behaviors in social interactions. As suggested in *The Cultural Evolutionary Trade-off of Ritualistic Synchrony*, "groups that are extremely tight may experience repression and a loss of any autonomy" (Gelfand, 2020). In a family setting, these strict disciplines and demands can thus lead to the destruction of independence and autonomy. In accordance with multiple studies, authoritarian parenting has the expected detrimental effect on the development of a sense of individuality and autonomy throughout childhood and adolescence. For instance, results from a study conducted by Karavasilis et al (2003) demonstrate that negative parenting behaviors such as corporal punishments, shaming, and aggression that are often used by authoritarian parents were correlated with difficulty in developing self-regulating skills and failure to foster psychological autonomy among adolescents. Similarly, Suldo and Huebner's (2004) study also proved that effective promotion of psychological autonomy can cultivate greater self-reliance and self-esteem; on the contrary, authoritarian parenting results in reduced independence and autonomy among adolescents. Ultimately, authoritarian parenting has negative implications on adolescents' autonomy.

Authoritarian Parenting Style - Effects on Creativity

Despite its effects on autonomy, authoritarian parenting also greatly inhibits the creativity of adolescents. According to researchers from the Department of Psychology and Education Sciences at Alzahra University, authoritarian parents have tight control over their kids' behavior, demand unwavering, strict obedience to their authority, aren't ready to accept their kids' individuality, deal with disobedience with harsh punishment, largely ignore their kids' needs, and have highly directive behaviors (Mehrinejad et al., 2015). As a result, the children of authoritarian parents often grow pessimistic thoughts and may develop fear when experiencing new things. They also found a direct inverse relationship between the creativity of adolescents and authoritarian parents. Besides, authoritarian parents, according to research, are less likely to provide a family environment that is supportive of creativity. While establishing a restrictive environment that encourages conformity to parental authority, authoritarian parents utilize physical discipline and expect children not to make mistakes (Tennent & Berthelsen, 1997). Excessive control and demands for blind obedience, such as those found in authoritarian families, can contribute to low levels of creativity. This further indicates

that parental restrictions and adolescents' conformity to parents contribute to a lack of desire and ability to explore and learn about the outside world among adolescents. In addition, Lim and Smith (2008) identified that lower degrees of parental acceptance and support, as measured by authoritarian parenting styles, are linked to reduced levels of creativity in children. Broadly speaking, multiple studies have found that parenting styles with a high level of responsiveness have a positive link with creativity, whereas authoritarian parenting styles with a low level of responsiveness and high demand for conformity have a negative influence on creativity. Therefore, excessive restraint by parents with authoritarian parenting style will be an impediment to their child's creativity.

Impacts on Academic Performance

Despite the negative effects of authoritarian parenting, some argue that Chinese adolescents that were raised in authoritarian families have better performance at school and achieve more academic success. For instance, data implies that Chinese students get higher SAT math scores and are disproportionately represented among U.S. National Merit Scholars (Zhao and Qiu 2009). In addition, as reported by the Provisional A level results from 2019 to 2020, students from the Chinese ethnic group are the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups that got three or more A grades. However, multiple correlational studies indicate that authoritarian parenting style is most commonly associated with poor academic performance. One study was conducted at universities in Hong Kong to gather information on the relationship between parenting styles and GPA. The researchers found that the authoritarian parenting style has more drawbacks than strengths. Although it had a positive effect on academic performance in terms of "performance-approach goals which focus on outperforming others" (Chen, 2014), it was accompanied by a negative effect in terms of achievement avoidance towards goals. Achievement avoidance towards goals focuses on avoiding failure and self-deception. For example, adolescents must do their best in order to obtain a higher GPA due to the pressure originating from authoritarian parents, their motivation to study comes from their parents' strict demands and fear of punishment. Furthermore, children who grew up in authoritarian families have a limited ability to deal with pressure; if they encounter any failures or obstacles, their academic performance can be greatly affected. Additional research also found a negative relationship between authoritarian parenting style and academic performance of Chinese students. A survey by the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences involved 20,000 parents of elementary school students and 20,000 elementary school students in four provinces and cities: Beijing, Heilongjiang, Jiangxi, and Shandong. The data shows that families with high-achieving students are more likely to adopt a consultative, democratic model of parent-child interaction. The survey demonstrates that 39.11% of families with frequent communication and harmonious family relationships have children with excellent grades, while the proportion of children with poor grades is only 19.90%. In contrast, in families with strict and authoritarian children, only 12.48% and 5.41% of the children performed well at school. Thus, rather than encouraging greater academic performance in adolescents, authoritarian parenting is in fact linked to inferior academic attainment.

Conclusion

Data from the National Survey and Data Center of Renmin University of China in 2015 reveals that only thirteen percent of parents of junior high students in China are authoritative, but nearly forty percent are authoritarian. As both authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles exist in China, more parents choose to employ authoritarian parenting rather than authoritative parenting because it requires less time and effort. However, in response to the detrimental impacts of authoritarian parenting styles on adolescents' autonomy and creativity, authoritarian parents in China could implement authoritative parenting. Authoritative parenting is an approach that combines discipline and autonomy and is characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness, according to Baumrind's theory (Baumrind, 1991). Although it is controlling to a certain extent as it relies on strict rules, it is also a more flexible parenting style. Authoritative parents make reasonable demands on the child and are careful to explain the reasons for requiring

compliance to ensure that the child follows the directions; at the same time, they are also more sensitive to the child's needs and more open to the child's unique perspective. Authoritative parents, therefore, recognize and respect the child's point of view and guide the child in a reasonable, democratic, rather than overbearing manner, with greater emphasis on children's uniqueness and innovation. "Children raised with [authoritarian parenting] style tend to be friendly, energetic, cheerful, innovative, curious, cooperative, and achievement-oriented," according to the American Psychologist Association (2017). In addition, authoritative parenting is also associated with higher academic achievement, self-efficacy, and determination. Authoritarian parenting, on the other hand, was found to have negative impacts on adolescents' individuality, self-esteem, social skills, and academic performance. While strict-affectionate parenting is a popular parenting style among Chinese parents, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, authoritarian parenting has negative consequences for adolescents' behavioral and emotional autonomy, as well as the development of creativity. To conclude, in order to foster more autonomy and ingenuity among adolescents, authoritarian parents in China should implement a more authoritative and democratic approach to parenting that involves more open communication and respect for uniqueness, which benefit adolescents in the long run.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ms. McConnell, my AP Seminar teacher, who helped me structure my research question and guided me through the process of writing my project. I would also like to thank my parents for encouraging me to take the AP Seminar course at school.

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