

Adolescents' Perceptions of Parental Behaviors as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem in Mainland China

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Abstract:

Parents' child-rearing behaviors have been identified as major sources of influence on the self-esteem of adolescents from Western societies and Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. The pattern of relationships found in samples of Hong Kong adolescents has been similar to the pattern found among samples of U.S. adolescents, but contrary to what might be expected in collectivistic societies such as mainland China. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to test specific dimensions of parenting behaviors as possible predictors of adolescents' self-esteem in mainland China. Self-report data were acquired for this study from 480 adolescents who attended secondary schools located in Beijing. Results indicated that patterns of socialization between parents and adolescents in mainland China were similar to those found in the United States, although explanations for these results may differ from those characteristic of the United States and other Western societies. Reasoning, monitoring, and autonomy-granting behavior by Chinese parents were positive predictors, whereas punitiveness was a negative predictor of Chinese adolescents' self-esteem (both males and females). Contrasting with patterns commonly found in the United States was the finding that parental support was not a predictor of Chinese adolescents' self-esteem.

The development of the self-concept has been a focus of social scientists for more than a century (Cooley 1902; Harter 1983, 1993; James 1890; Mead 1934; Rosenberg 1979). Conceptualized as constantly changing, the self is essentially both a social process and a product, with roots in language, communication, and social interaction (Gecas and Burke 1995; Harter 1993).

During the period of adolescence, the self is subject to substantial change and development of new capabilities. Compared to young children, the newly emergent cognitive abilities of adolescents allow youth to structure a more complicated sense of who they are, both as individuals and in reference to others (Harter 1993). Of particular importance is the development of complicated abilities to assume the attitude of the other and to imagine how one is being perceived and evaluated by an array of significant others (Gecas and Burke 1995). Each adolescent's growing self-awareness also results from interacting with and receiving feedback from an ever-widening circle of significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, and teachers). Consequently, during adolescence, a more complex picture of oneself emerges as a more diverse combination of social involvements develops (Harter 1993; Gecas and Burke 1995).

The most frequently researched aspect of the self is a person's self-esteem, the criterion variable for this study. Self-esteem is that part of the self concerned primarily with an evaluative process or the degree to which adolescents develop either positive or negative feelings about themselves (Gecas and Burke 1995; Harter 1993; Rosenberg 1979). This research attention results primarily from the idea that high self-esteem functions as a psychological resource that promotes many prosocial outcomes such as academic achievement, popularity with peers, social competence, individual success, and personal happiness. Self-esteem is often portrayed as a protective mechanism that functions to shelter adolescents from such problematic outcomes as delinquency,

academic failure, early sexual involvement, and depression (Gecas and Burke 1995; Lui, Kaplan, and Risser 1992; Owens 1994; Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenback 1989).

An important source of variation in the self-esteem of adolescents occurs within the parent–youth relationship. A large amount of research on adolescents from Western societies has demonstrated that higher self-esteem in teenagers tends to be encouraged by parents who grant autonomy and make use of firm control, reasoning, support, and clear communication. Parents who foster self-esteem also resist using forms of excessive control such as punitiveness and love withdrawal (Barber, Chadwick, and Oerter 1992; Demo, Small, and Savin-Williams 1987; Gecas and Schwalbe 1986; Openshaw and Thomas 1986; Peterson and Hann 1999; Peterson and Rollins 1987). Consistent with these themes, the purpose of the present study was to reexamine these issues within the parent–adolescent relationship using data acquired from a sample of adolescents from mainland China. The specific intent, therefore, was to examine how several child-rearing behaviors would be predictive of youthful self-esteem within a society often believed to foster the developing “self” in a different manner than Western patterns.

Socialization: Individualism and Collectivism

Many of the studies examining parent–adolescent relationships within Chinese cultures make contrasts between the general cultural orientations of collectivism and individualism to conceptualize how socialization goals differ across societies. Researchers who view Chinese parent–adolescent relationships as varying substantially from those found in Western cultures attribute many of these differences to China’s collectivistic orientations (Lam 1997; Yang 1981, 1986). China is viewed as a society that emphasizes group focused values, whereas Western societies, such as the United States, are seen as emphasizing such individualistic values as personal agency, freedom, autonomy, and assertiveness (Lam 1997; Triandis, McCusker, and Hui 1990; Yang 1981, 1986). In contrast, social traits such as interdependence and connectedness with others characterize the social orientation of individuals in collectivistic societies (Triandis 1989, 1995; Triandis et al. 1988).

Chinese parents from the mainland are reported to discourage such individualistic characteristics as independence and creativity, and are viewed as strictly prohibiting hostility, aggression, and impulsive behavior (Ho 1986). Chinese youth are socialized to view themselves as serving societal rather than individual goals (Lam 1997). Moreover, adolescents in Chinese cultures are expected to conform to socialistic ideology, become self-sacrificing, and respect family/group decisions (Lam 1997).

Chinese Parenting and Self-Esteem

Very limited research currently exists on family and parenting predictors of Chinese adolescents’ global self-esteem. Despite theoretical and philosophical traditions that emphasize collectivistic norms, the existing empirical research suggests patterns that are surprisingly similar to those found within the individualistic traditions of Western cultures. Research on global self-esteem among Chinese adolescents (i.e., in Hong Kong) has identified such positive parental predictors as parental functional control (i.e., similar to the Western conception of firm control), autonomy-granting behavior, and support/acceptance (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). In contrast, forms of excessive or dysfunctional parental control such as punitiveness and emotional rejection (i.e., love withdrawal) have been identified as negative predictors of self-esteem (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987).

Recent investigators of self system variables among Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong have focused on multidimensional aspects of self-concept, although most have also examined global self-esteem (e.g., Hamid and Cheng 1995; Luk and Bond 1992). Many recent studies investigating self-esteem/ self-concept among Chinese samples have been confirmatory in focus, with the primary intent being to establish the validity of various measurement instruments (e.g., Watkins and Dong 1994).

A few researchers, however, have explored how family variables predict adolescent self-esteem. Early studies of Hong Kong adolescents, for example, conceptualized separate aspects of Chinese parental control, functional and dysfunctional control, in relation to global or unidimensional conceptions of self-esteem (e.g., Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). Functional or organizational control (i.e., firm control) is defined as an atmosphere created by parents emphasizing structure, order, and clear rules for children and adolescents.

An important element of parental organization is the care and concern conveyed by Chinese parents as well as the emphasis on consistency, structure, and coordination. In contrast, dysfunctional control (i.e., similar to the Western version of excessive control) occurs when parents use behaviors that are highly restrictive, dominating, or interfering in nature, without a corresponding emphasis on care and concern.

A pioneering study by Cheung and Lau (1985) was designed to investigate the relationship among family relations, school relations, and self-esteem among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. Results indicated that family variables were more strongly related than school variables to adolescent self-esteem. Specifically, higher self-esteem was a positive correlate of (1) greater family cohesion and support that family members provided one another, (2) greater independence, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency of family members, (3) greater participation by teenagers in social and recreational activities, (4) clearer structure and organization of family responsibilities (i.e., functional control), and (5) greater moral and religious emphasis placed on family values. In contrast, lower self-esteem was associated with higher degrees of expressed family conflict, anger, aggression, feelings of rejection, and greater parental control characterized by highly restrictive rules (i.e., dysfunctional control).

A later study by Lau and Cheung (1987) was designed to assess the relationship among Chinese adolescents' perception of parental dysfunctional control (i.e., excessive control), parental organization (i.e., functional or firm control), and the perception of parental warmth. Results from this study supported their earlier work (i.e., Cheung and Lau 1985) as well as studies on adolescents from the United States by indicating that self-esteem was a positive correlate of parental organization (i.e., firm control) and independence-granting behavior (Bartle, Anderson, and Sabatelli 1989). Further confirmation of this "Western" pattern was the negative relationship between the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents and dysfunctional parental control (i.e., excessive control), somewhat similar perhaps to authoritarian parenting in Western societies.

Results from these early studies (i.e., Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987) stand in sharp contrast to the body of more theoretically based literature describing patterns of collectivistic socialization in Chinese families (Berndt et al. 1993; Lam 1997; Ho 1986; Stevenson, Chen, and Lee 1992). Moreover, these results are contrary to previous research conducted in Korea, a country also commonly believed to have a collectivistic social orientation (Chun and MacDermid 1997). Specifically, Chun and MacDermid (1997) examined data from a sample of Korean adolescents and found that youthful individuation from parents was a negative predictor of both male and female adolescents' self-esteem. These investigators explained their results in terms of Korea's social orientation, a society that emphasizes collectivistic values. Adolescents who experienced greater intergenerational fusion (or a collectivistic orientation) with their parents were found to report higher self-esteem, whereas adolescents who were less connected with (i.e., more individualistic in reference to) parents reported lower self-esteem. Such findings supported the view that Korean adolescents with lower self-esteem did not perceive themselves as fulfilling cultural expectations for strong social relationships with their families. Consequently, this study provides support for the conventional "collectivistic" view of Asian culture, but contradicts recent research on Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). These findings also differ from the typical expectation in Western society in the sense that psychological separation or individuation from one's family is thought to predict functional development and adjustment (Allen, Hauser, Bell, and O'Connor 1994; Bartle et al. 1989; Chun and MacDermid 1997).

An important point to emphasize is that most studies focusing on the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents have been conducted with samples of adolescents from Hong Kong. A limitation of these studies, however, is that Hong Kong is a "westernized" metropolitan area, and individuals living in these areas may have a greater

orientation toward Western values than individuals living in mainland China (Cheung and Lau 1985). Compared to youth from mainland China, adolescents from Hong Kong may be both more interested in pursuing individualistic activities and actually may strive to become more autonomous in reference to their parents (Cheung and Lau 1985; Yau and Smetana 1996). More precise examination of these issues within mainland China has been hampered by the fact that until recently, little data have been gathered on family life within the People's Republic of China.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the extent to which youthful perceptions of several parenting behaviors predict adolescents' self-esteem in a sample of youth from mainland China. The specific parenting behaviors of interest (i.e., predictor or independent variables) were supportive behavior and several control dimensions consisting of reasoning, punitiveness, love withdrawal, autonomy-granting behavior, and monitoring. Analyses were conducted to determine the strength and direction (i.e., positive or negative relationships) of the hypothesized relationships. A measure of global self-esteem was used as the criterion (or dependent) variable for this study.

Hypotheses

Generating hypotheses for this study is a difficult task because many existing results are inconsistent with theory, contradict the reputed collectivistic orientation of mainland China, and/or are inconsistent across studies. Some reliance was placed in developing hypotheses, therefore, on ideas from existing studies conducted in Hong Kong and from other more "westernized" Chinese cultures. The samples used in these studies, however, may be quite different from the population of adolescents in mainland China, from which the current sample was drawn. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed with some caution:

H1: Parental support will be a positive predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents.

H2: Parental monitoring will be a positive predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents.

H3: Parental reasoning will be a positive predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents.

H4: Parental love withdrawal will be a negative predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents.

H5: Parental punitiveness will be a negative predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents.

A sixth hypothesis is more inconclusive, but is shaped, in part, by research and theory indicating that Chinese adolescents are believed to be socialized within a collectivistic family orientation (Lam 1997; Tafarodi and Swann 1996; Triandis 1989; Triandis et al. 1990; Yang 1986). Families characterized by collectivism are viewed as working cooperatively, with a focus on group goals versus individual goals and achievement. Consequently, independence or autonomy is not supposed to be a socialization value of high priority and is expected to be discouraged (Lam 1997; Triandis 1989; Triandis et al. 1988, 1990). Recent research from Korea, a collectivistic Asian society, for example, indicates that being individuated (i.e., independent) from one's family is a negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem (Chun and MacDermid 1997). Contrasting with these findings, however, are recent results indicating that youth from both mainland China and Hong Kong often desire to achieve autonomy (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987; Yau and Smetana 1996), with self-esteem being a positive correlate of parental independence-granting behavior (i.e., autonomy) among Hong Kong adolescents (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). Based on the current research, therefore, numerous inconsistencies prevent making a directional prediction about the expected relationship between parental autonomy granting and adolescent self-esteem. The final hypothesis, therefore, is included as an exploratory issue in the sense that a relationship direction could not be specified.

H6: Parental autonomy granting is expected to be a predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents, but in a direction that cannot be specified.

Methodology

Sample

Participants consisted of 480 adolescents selected from six state-funded high schools in Beijing, China, who volunteered to participate in this study. Although probability sampling was not possible, the sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, and social class) of the participants vary sufficiently to be a reasonable representation of the larger population of adolescents from Beijing, the economic, social, and political capital of the People's Republic of China. For example, over half of the adolescents comprising the sample attended the more average schools, that is, B, C, and D level. Contacting adolescents through the schools was a convenient and cost-effective means of sampling a diverse population within a specific area of China. Moreover, surveying adolescents with a questionnaire in school classrooms is an efficient means of acquiring a sample size that is large enough to examine models with multiple predictors.

The selected high schools in Beijing were classified in terms of test score standards required for enrollment. Adolescent respondents were drawn from schools classified in terms of four different test score classifications in proportionate numbers. In Beijing, a particular school's academic level may reflect, in part, the socioeconomic status of an adolescent's family, although class definitions are difficult in a society that remains at least somewhat influenced by Marxist thought. A determination was made that parents' education (i.e., years of formal education) would be the best indicator of class-related socialization values and behavior in the parent–adolescent relationship.

The final sample consisted of adolescents who ranged in age from 12 to 19 years, having a mean age of 15.42 years. The gender of these participants was fairly evenly distributed, with 242 of the respondents being female and 238 being male. Average scores on the parental education variable were “some high school” for fathers, and “completion of grade school” for mothers.

Procedure

Six hundred questionnaires were distributed in classrooms of the participating secondary schools. A total of 480 surveys (or 80%) were completed and/or provided useful data for this study. Teachers who were trained in accordance with a standardized protocol administered the survey in classrooms to the participating students. Respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaire independently and to answer each item in terms of responses that corresponded most closely to their experience. During administration of the survey, teachers provided assistance to participants by remaining in the classroom to answer any questions of clarification about the basic meaning of the items.

Measurement

The questionnaire for the larger project consisted of questions that assess characteristics of the relationship between the participating adolescents and their parents and families. Sociodemographic questions included age, birth order, gender, parental education, and parental occupation. The survey was designed to assess a variety of family relationship, parent–adolescent, and social psychological variables, among which were measures of the variables examined in this study: parental support, monitoring, reasoning, punitiveness, love withdrawal, autonomy-granting behavior, adolescent self-esteem, and three sociodemographic control variables (i.e., age of adolescent, gender of adolescent, and father's education).

The questionnaire used for this study has also been administered to samples of adolescents in the United States, Chile, Russia, India, and Mexico. For the Chinese sample, translation was conducted using the technique of back translation in which the survey was first translated from English to Chinese and then from Chinese back to

English. This procedure was employed to ensure that both versions of the questionnaire conveyed item meanings that were as comparable as possible.

Research on the dependent variable for this study, teenage self-esteem, has demonstrated that youthful perceptions of parental behavior are more strongly predictive of the adolescents' own self-perceptions than are parents' reports of their own child-rearing behavior (Buri 1989; Gecas and Schwalbe 1986). Moreover, assessing parental behaviors directly from parents' perceptions is subject to possible response bias from parents who may attempt to conceal certain behaviors that are socially sanctioned such as harsh or punitive behaviors (Gecas and Schwalbe 1986; Peterson and Hann 1999). A reasonable methodological (and theoretical) assumption, therefore, is to expect that aspects of adolescents' self-perceptions (i.e., self-esteem) would be more likely to be influenced by their own constructions of reality (i.e., their own perceptions of parental behavior) than would their parents' conceptions of the same phenomenon (Gecas and Schwalbe 1986).

The questionnaire for the larger research project also included measures of sociodemographic variables included as control variables for this study. These variables were assessed with standard fact sheet items that measured parents' educational attainment (i.e., years of formal education) as an indicator of family socioeconomic status and gender of adolescent (male or female).

Self-Esteem. Adolescents' global self-esteem was assessed using 7 items taken from the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965, 1979). Eight items were initially selected based on having high loadings (.50 or above) on a previously conducted factor analysis. The participants responded to the items in terms of a 4-point Likert scale that varies from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Five items provided positive assessments of self issues ("I feel I have a number of good qualities"), whereas three items were derogatory in nature ("I certainly feel useless at times") and were reverse coded. Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-esteem. This eight-item version demonstrated internal consistency reliability coefficients (i.e., Cronbach's alphas) of .86 in a U.S. sample of adolescents (Clare 1994). One of the items, however, does not appear to be an appropriate item for this population, as indicated by a low item-total correlation of .09. This finding is consistent with research using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale among Hong Kong Chinese adolescents (Hamid and Cheng 1995). Consequently, this item, "I wish I could have more respect for myself," was dropped from subsequent analyses. The remaining seven items demonstrated adequate reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .71 in the present sample from mainland China.

Parental Behaviors. The parental behaviors examined in this study were assessed with the Parent Behavior Measure (PBM), a 34-item self-report instrument used in previous studies that measures adolescents' perceptions of several supportive and controlling dimensions of behavior that parents direct at adolescents (Henry and Peterson 1995; Peterson, Rollins, and Thomas 1985; Peterson, Bush, and Supple 1999). The PBM assesses several parental behaviors, including support, reasoning, monitoring, punitiveness, and love withdrawal, and is indebted to previous research for its conceptualizations (Barber, Olsen, and Shagle 1994; Devereaux, Bronfenbrenner, and Rodgers 1969; Heilbrun 1964; Hoffman 1980; Schaefer 1965; Small 1990). The items composing the scales of the PBM are from previously existing instruments and were selected based on having the highest loadings on identified factors in previous factor analytic studies (Peterson et al. 1985). Many of the PBM items were taken from the 80-item Rollins and Thomas Parent Behavior Inventory that was, in turn, a distillation of the best items from the 192-item Schaefer's Parent Behavior Inventory (Schaefer 1965). Items that measured parental support originated from a scale based on a factor analytic study that examined the Heilbrun (1964) and Cornell measures (Devereaux et al. 1969) of parental support. The items measuring reasoning were developed based on the original conceptualization of induction by Hoffman (1980), whereas monitoring items were developed based on the work of several previous researchers (Small 1990; Barber et al. 1994). Participants responded to the items composing the PBM in terms of a 4-point Likert scale that varied from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Perceptions of parental support were measured by four items concerning the degree that mothers and fathers were perceived by adolescents as being accepting, warm, and nurturant. Parental reasoning was assessed by five

items that measured the extent to which mothers and fathers are perceived as explaining to adolescents how their behavior affects other people. Parental punitiveness was assessed by 10 items measuring the perception that mothers and fathers use verbal and physical behavior in a coercive manner. Love withdrawal was assessed by four items intended to assess the extent to which mothers and fathers communicate disapproval to adolescents by threatening to deny love. Parental monitoring was measured by six items intended to capture how much mothers and fathers are perceived as supervising the ways that adolescents spend their free time, money, and relate to their friends. The Cronbach's alphas for these parental behaviors ranged from .71 to .87.

Sample items for each of these parental behaviors (adolescents' perceptions) are as follows: (1) This parent tells me how much he/she loves me (support); (2) This parent explains to me how good I should feel when I share things with other family members (reasoning); (3) This parent yells at me a lot without a good reason (punitiveness); (4) This parent will not talk to me when I displease him/her (love withdrawal); (5) This parent knows where I am after school (monitoring).

Adolescents' reports of autonomy-granting behavior by mothers and fathers was measured by a scale of 10 items based on previous research dealing with the growth of self-direction by the young (Sessa and Steinberg 1991). These items measure the extent to which mothers and fathers allow adolescents to make their own decisions and engage in activities without excessive parental intrusion regarding choices about friendships, lifestyle preferences, clothing selection, educational goals, and career plans. A sample item from this scale is: This parent allows me to choose my own friends without interfering too much. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .85 for both maternal and paternal models.

Analysis and Results

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses by assessing the magnitude and direction of relationships between several independent variables (i.e., parenting behaviors) and the dependent variable (i.e., adolescent self-esteem). Separate statistical models were conducted for mothers' and fathers' parental behaviors as predictors of adolescent self-esteem to help prevent multicollinearity among the adolescents' perceptions of the same parental behaviors for each parent. The inclusion of the same child-rearing behavior of mothers and fathers in the same model might be highly intercorrelated and subject to multicollinearity. None of the scatterplots demonstrated deviations from homoscedasticity.

Separate hierarchical regression models were conducted to examine the hypotheses for adolescents' perceptions of each parent independently. Each regression model involved a nested three-step procedure (see Cohen and Cohen 1983). For the first step, the sociodemographic or control variables (adolescents' age, adolescents' gender, and parental education) were entered into the equation. In the second step, the six parental behaviors (support, reasoning, monitoring, love withdrawal, punitiveness, and autonomy granting) were added to the model. This was followed by a third step involving the entry of the six interaction terms that tested for gender-of-adolescent differences in the manner that each parental behavior variable predicted adolescent self-esteem (e.g., GenderxMaternal Support).

Correlations for the paternal and maternal models are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Descriptive statistics for the predictor, criterion, and sociodemographic variables are presented in Table 3. In the initial stage of the analysis, none of the interaction terms were significant that tested for possible gender-of-adolescent differences in the manner that self-esteem was predicted by each parental behavior. Subsequently, these interaction terms were dropped from the finalized statistical models for this study (Cohen and Cohen 1983).

A summary of the multiple regression analysis is presented in Table 4 for the paternal model and in Table 5 for the maternal model. Because the first five hypotheses propose directional effects, tests of significance for their corresponding regression coefficients are one tailed. In contrast, because Hypothesis 6 proposes a relationship without specifying a direction, its significance test is two tailed.

The sociodemographic variables age of adolescent, gender of adolescent, and father's educational attainment were included as control variables in the regression analyses for both models. As is customary, significance tests for the effects of control variables are two tailed. Standardized regression coefficients indicated that age attained significance as a positive predictor of adolescent self-esteem within both the paternal ($\beta = .100, p < .02$) and the maternal ($\beta = .092, p < .04$) models, whereas gender and father's education failed to attain statistical significance in either model (see Tables 4 and 5). Consequently, adolescent self-esteem appears to improve as the young progress from early to later adolescence.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that supportive parenting would be a positive predictor of Chinese adolescents' self-esteem. However, the standardized regression coefficients (P in Tables 4 and 5) for these relationships were not statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. Consequently, Hypothesis 1, involving parental support as a predictor of adolescent self-esteem was not confirmed by the data for this study.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that parental monitoring would be a positive predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents. Support was provided for this hypothesis with both paternal ($\beta = .092, p < .02$) and maternal monitoring ($\beta = .127, p < .002$) being positive predictors of adolescent self-esteem as

Table 1
Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Paternal Model

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Self-Esteem	1.00									
2. Adolescent Gender	.018	1.00								
3. Adolescent Age	.099	-.042	1.00							
4. Father's Education	.002	.027	.220*	1.00						
5. Support	.094	.026	-.082	.039	1.00					
6. Monitoring	.128*	-.025	.011	.006	.272**	1.00				
7. Reasoning	.124*	.053	-.154*	-.002	.457**	.215**	1.00			
8. Punitiveness	-.078	.198**	-.100	-.061	-.140*	.045	.160**	1.00		
9. Love Withdrawal	-.018	.138**	-.056	-.023	-.047	.075	.148**	.699**	1.00	
10. Autonomy Granting	.249**	-.008	.073	.090	.276**	.108*	.146**	-.243**	-.202**	1.00

Note. $N = 480$ adolescents; * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Maternal Model

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Self-Esteem	1.00									
2. Adolescent Gender	.018	1.00								
3. Adolescent Age	.099	-.042	1.00							
4. Father's Education	.002	.027	.220*	1.00						
5. Support	.138	-.012	-.081	-.045	1.00					
6. Monitoring	.174**	-.069	.048	-.022	.243**	1.00				
7. Reasoning	.141**	.068	-.167**	-.002	.503**	.220**	1.00			
8. Punitiveness	-.075	.202**	-.068	-.006	-.111*	.022	.202**	1.00		
9. Love Withdrawal	.000	.131**	.004	.040	-.025	.046	.198**	.691**	1.00	
10. Autonomy Granting	.269**	.005	.079	.059	.274**	.110*	.172**	-.185**	-.127*	1.00

Note. $N = 480$ adolescents; * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Items: Number	Scale	Range
Self-Esteem	21.861	3.214	7	1–4	7–28
Gender of Adolescent	.501	.493	1	0–1	0–1
Age of Adolescent	15.417	1.648	1	–	12–18
Father's Education	3.140	.919	1	1–4	1–4
Maternal Support	8.012	3.315	4	1–4	4–16
Paternal Support	7.163	3.303	4	1–4	4–16
Maternal Monitoring	11.462	5.430	6	1–4	6–24
Paternal Monitoring	10.637	5.505	6	1–4	6–24
Maternal Reasoning	9.565	4.495	5	1–4	5–20
Paternal Reasoning	9.172	4.249	5	1–4	5–20
Maternal Punitiveness	10.845	7.963	8	1–4	8–32
Paternal Punitiveness	9.998	7.362	8	1–4	8–32
Maternal Love Withdrawal	4.554	3.610	3	1–4	3–12
Paternal Love Withdrawal	3.900	3.338	3	1–4	3–12
Maternal Autonomy Granting	28.986	4.786	10	1–4	10–40
Paternal Autonomy Granting	29.361	4.775	10	1–4	10–40

demonstrated by the significant beta coefficients. Consequently, Chinese adolescent self-esteem appears to be fostered as parents use greater amounts of monitoring.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that parental reasoning would be a positive predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents. Support was provided for this hypothesis both within the paternal ($\beta = .111, p < .015$) and maternal ($\beta = .098, p < .03$) models. Consequently, Chinese parents appear to use reasoning as a means of fostering self-esteem in their young.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that parental love withdrawal would be a negative predictor of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents. However, the standardized regression coefficients (β in Tables 4 and 5) for these relationships were not significant within either the maternal or paternal models, indicating that Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that parental punitiveness would be a negative predictor of Chinese adolescents' self-esteem, an expectation that was supported in both the paternal ($\beta = -.102, p < .05$) and maternal models ($\beta = -.110, p < .035$). Consequently, these results indicate that adolescent self-esteem is inhibited by Chinese parents who make regular use of punitive behavior.

Table 4
Paternal Model: Multiple Regression Analysis for Fathers' Behaviors as
Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem

Predictive Variables	<i>b</i>	S.E. β	β
Sociodemographics			
Age of Adolescent	.200	.045	.100 [†]
Gender of Adolescent	.221	.044	.033
Father's Education	-.159	.044	-.044
Paternal Behaviors			
Support	-.001	.052	-.045
Monitoring	.001	.045	.092*
Reasoning	.001	.051	.111*
Punitiveness	-.001	-.063	-.102*
Love Withdrawal	.001	.061	.072
Autonomy Granting	.153	.047	.222***
Multiple correlation <i>R</i>	.306	<i>R</i> ²	.094
<i>F</i> value	5.587	Significant <i>F</i>	.000***

Note. *N* = 480 adolescents; *b* = unstandardized betas; β = standardized beta; S.E. β = standard error of standardized beta.

[†]*p* < .05, two tailed; **p* < .05, one tailed; ****p* < .001, one tailed.

Hypothesis 6 was included as an exploratory issue, with the proposal being that parental autonomy-granting behavior would predict the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents, but without a relationship direction being specified. The regression analyses revealed support for Hypothesis 6 in that both paternal ($P = .222, p < .000$, two tailed) and maternal autonomy-granting behavior ($P = .225, p < .000$, two tailed) were strong positive predictors of adolescent self-esteem (see Tables 4 and 5). Such results indicate that adolescent self-esteem may increase as Chinese parents demonstrate greater tendencies to grant autonomy to the young.

Discussion

The results for this study indicated that Chinese adolescents' perceptions of both their mothers' and fathers' monitoring, autonomy-granting behavior, and reasoning (i.e., induction) were positive predictors, whereas punitiveness was a negative predictor of youthful self-esteem. In contrast, youthful perceptions of parental support and love withdrawal failed to be significant predictors of self-esteem in Chinese adolescents. Except for the notable lack of significant predictions for parental support, Chinese parents were found to share several results in common with Western parents in the approaches commonly used to foster self-esteem. This does not necessarily mean, however, that different explanations, based on distinctive cultural circumstances, do not apply to parenting and adolescent self-esteem development among Chinese.

An unexpected result was the fact that parental autonomy-granting behavior was the strongest of all the predictors in reference to the self-esteem of Chinese adolescents. Such results (positive relationships) suggest that Chinese adolescent self-esteem is fostered through the greater use of autonomy-granting behavior by Chinese mothers and fathers. Moreover, these results are consistent with research conducted on samples of both U.S. adolescents (Allen et al. 1994; Bartle et al. 1989) and those involving Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987).

Table 5
Maternal Model: Multiple Regression Analysis for Mothers' Behaviors
as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem

Predictive Variables	<i>b</i>	S.E. β	β
Sociodemographics			
Age of Adolescent	.184	.045	.092 [†]
Gender of Adolescent	.241	.044	.036
Father's Education	-.120	.044	-.034
Maternal Behaviors			
Support	-.001	.052	-.008
Monitoring	.001	.045	.127**
Reasoning	.001	.053	.098*
Punitiveness	-.001	.062	-.110*
Love Withdrawal	.001	.060	.076
Autonomy Granting	.155	.046	.225***
Multiple Correlation <i>R</i>	.336	<i>R</i> ²	.113
<i>F</i> value	6.902	Significant <i>F</i>	.000***

Note. *N* = 480 adolescents; *b* = unstandardized betas; β = standardized beta; S.E. β = standard error of standardized beta.
[†]*p* < .05, two tailed; **p* < .05, one tailed; ***p* < .01, one tailed; ****p* < .001, one tailed.

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between adolescent self-esteem and autonomy granting found in this study and by previous investigators in the United States and Hong Kong sharply contrasts with expectations derived from theories and descriptions of traditional Chinese parenting. According to this traditional or collectivistic view, Chinese parents are presumed to discourage autonomy and individuality and emphasize responsibility to the family/group. That is, Chinese adolescents are expected to demonstrate such qualities as conformity, subordination of individual goals in favor of responsibility to others, and respect for family/group decisions (Lam 1997). According to this perspective, the Chinese self is more a product of adolescents' connections with others, than a product of negotiating greater individuality (autonomy) in reference to one's parents (Lam 1997).

Although little direct evidence exists from mainland China that supports this traditional pattern, studies conducted in other collectivistic societies provide support for such approaches to socialization (Chun and MacDermid 1997; Rohner and Pettengill 1985). Research conducted by Chun and MacDermid (1997), for example, examined data from Korean adolescents and found that adolescents' individuation (i.e., autonomy) from parents was a negative predictor of adolescents' self-esteem. These results were interpreted by the authors as being consistent with traditional relationship patterns that are presumed to exist within highly collectivistic societies such as Korea and mainland China. Results from the present study, however, provide a different picture in which, at least for self-esteem development, Chinese socialization practices may not be as uniformly collectivistic as such theoretically based arguments (based on presumed cultural orientations) propose. Consequently, these results add to the growing body of research indicating that an important basis for the development of positive self-evaluations by Chinese youth is encouragement to become autonomous (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). Such findings also may suggest that Chinese socialization patterns are experiencing rapid social change toward greater emphasis on social meanings common to the West. However, future investigators who pursue longitudinal designs will be more capable of addressing these issues more adequately.

A finding that is consistent with previous research on the role of “functional” or “organized” control in Chinese parenting is the positive relationship that emerged between monitoring and adolescent self-esteem (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). These results suggest that Chinese parents foster self-esteem by supervising the behavior of their young in reference to standards or role expectations that have been communicated (Peterson and Rollins 1987). The experience of having clearly defined standards that are used as the basis for parental supervision allows the young to more accurately assess themselves within an organized (and nonarbitrary) family environment. This context of family order and stability allows the young to perceive themselves realistically in terms of consistent standards and to develop a positive self-conception (Gecas and Schwalbe 1986; Peterson and Hann 1999). Thus, monitoring, as an important aspect of functional or organized control by Chinese parents, may contribute to their collectivistic emphasis on structure, order, clear rules, and responsibility to the group.

These speculations about the meaning and importance of organizational control may be consistent, in part, because parental support was not a distinct predictor of adolescent self-esteem within this sample. The failure of support to predict self-esteem, however, would be a most unusual finding if this was a study based on a sample of Western adolescents (Gecas and Burke 1995). Such a result, in turn, is consistent with previous research indicating that, compared to European American parents in the United States, Chinese parents demonstrate a relative lack of warmth (support) toward adolescents (Chiu 1987; Dornbusch et al. 1987; Stevenson et al. 1992). However, this finding for support also contradicts other results indicating that parental supportive behaviors are positive predictors of self-esteem among Chinese adolescents (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987).

Rather than a separate support dimension, an important element of the Chinese emphasis on parental organization may be the care and concern conveyed through various forms of parental control. Specifically, the care and concern of Chinese parents may be expressed through forms of control (e.g., monitoring) that emphasize consistency, order, coordination, and respect for the welfare of others (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). Such an approach contributes to a collectivistic orientation (Triandis 1989, 1995; Triandis et al. 1988, 1990), but does so without emphasizing the themes of punitiveness or arbitrary control that are so prevalent in Western forms of authoritarian parenting (Chao 1994; Chao and Sue 1996). The inclination of Chinese parents to use supervision and reasoning as aspects of parental organization seems more consistent with Western conceptions of firm control than with Western forms of autocratic or authoritarian parenting. Future research should explore more extensively the possibility that the organizational or functional influence attempts (e.g., reasoning and monitoring) used by Chinese parents may convey supportive meanings to adolescents as well as being interpreted simply as efforts to exercise control.

Another interpretation of these conflicting findings might be that U.S. and Chinese parents demonstrate supportive behaviors in distinctive ways that are shaped by different social orientations, often referred to as individualism and collectivism (Triandis 1989, 1995; Triandis et al. 1988). From this perspective, the two social orientations (i.e., collectivism and individualism) may provide different socialization goals, social meanings, and parental strategies. Although no single pattern of socialization can be generalized to all Chinese parents (Ho 1986, 1989), many parents from mainland China may use collectivistic approaches more frequently than is typical among Western families, without rejecting all means of fostering individualism. Moreover, this recognition of diversity within the population must further acknowledge that populations of Chinese parents located in different geographic areas may be less collectivistic and demonstrate socialization patterns consistent or similar with the child-rearing practices of the West. Consequently, recent results indicating that parental support is a predictor of adolescent self-esteem in samples from Hong Kong (e.g., Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987) may be due to the increased influence of more individualistic or Western patterns among Chinese populations in Hong Kong. Such influences from the West emphasize that support is used to bolster the self-esteem of youngsters who are being prepared for highly valued autonomous activity and individual achievement.

Parents from mainland China (i.e., exclusive of Hong Kong), on the other hand, may use parental support, not for sustaining autonomous conceptions of the self, but for reinforcing more collectivistic outcomes such as

conformity to parents, the formation of moral character, and loyalty to the family group (Ho 1986, 1989). Moreover, as suggested previously, Chinese scholars have argued that nonpunitive forms of parental control and influence (i.e., monitoring, induction, and autonomy-granting behavior) may be interpreted by the young as indirect expressions of supportiveness (Chao 1994; Lau and Cheung 1987). Consequently, parental support may not be expected to have an effect that is separate from dimensions of parental control (e.g., reasoning and monitoring) as a predictor of Chinese adolescent self-esteem.

Another notable finding was the fact that both fathers' and mothers' reasoning was a significant positive predictor of adolescent self-esteem. Reasoning or explanation (i.e., induction) refers to parental control attempts characterized as rational, noncoercive, and as a type of control that encourages bidirectional exchanges between parents and adolescents (Hoffman 1980; Peterson and Hann 1999).

Chinese parents may use reasoning and explanation to instruct or convey expectations for "appropriate" (or socially sanctioned) behavior to their teenagers. That is, the use of reason or explanation appears to be a noncoercive, even supportive, way through which parents can convey expectations and confidence to sons and daughters. Moreover, this use of reasoning may again underscore the importance of organizational (or functional) control in the form of child training or teaching as embodied in the concept *chia -yang* (Cheung and Lau 1985; Lau and Cheung 1987). This idea (*chia -yang*) emphasizes that parents must function as teachers who actively structure the environment of youth, encourage character development, and mold the young into functional members of society (Chao 1994), all of which are consistent with the kind of rational, nonpunitive, yet structured environment that fosters self-esteem.

An important additional finding was the negative relationship for punitiveness, or what some consider a dysfunctional form of control, to predict the self-esteem of Chinese youth. Similar to the pattern found in Western research (Barber et al. 1992), therefore, parental control that communicates hostility, rejection, disapproval, and threat often functions to devalue the "self" of adolescents (Gecas and Burke 1995; Peterson and Hann 1999). As a result, these findings fail to support the view that harsh or domineering forms of control (as featured in the Western conception of authoritarian parenting) play a central role in Chinese socialization processes (Dornbusch et al. 1987; Lin and Fu 1990), at least as a predictor of adolescent self-esteem. This may support the view that forms of control used by Chinese parents are aimed more extensively at fostering family cohesion and diminishing intrapersonal conflict, rather than expressing hostility, arbitrariness, and distance (Chao 1994; Chao and Sue 1996; Lau and Cheung 1987). Instead, more impulsive or aggressive behaviors are discouraged, therefore, because the primary goal of Chinese parenting is the formation of moral character in children through discipline, education, and child training (Ho 1986, 1989). Harsh or excessive forms of control may endanger family harmony, foster embarrassment, and do not appear to have relevance for the self-esteem development among mainland Chinese.

Finally, only one of the control variables measuring sociodemographic characteristics, age of adolescent, was predictive of Chinese adolescent self-esteem. Specifically, this variable was a positive predictor of adolescent self-esteem, a result suggesting that youthful self-esteem may improve as the young mature and progress beyond the developmental challenges that are characteristic of adolescence in China. This finding is consistent with previous research using Western samples that has reported that self-esteem decreases in early adolescence and then increases in late adolescence (Harter 1993).

Despite the logic of these results, certain methodological and sampling issues may limit the interpretation of these findings. One shortcoming was the restricted geographic area from which a convenient sample was drawn (i.e., portions of Beijing, a single large urban area in a diverse country) and the resulting limitations for generalizing these findings. Moreover, the use of cross-sectional and correlational approaches means that the implied direction of influence (e.g., that parental attributes predict adolescent self-esteem) was offered for heuristic value only. For example, instead of assuming that parental monitoring will influence how youthful self-esteem develops, one might also propose that positive feelings about the self may lead Chinese adolescents to confidently assert their autonomy in a manner that evokes the greater need for parents to supervise the young.

A more realistic assumption, however, is that both reciprocal explanations may apply at the same time (Peterson and Hann 1999). Another methodological limitation is that research models using predictor and criterion variables from the same perception (i.e., the adolescents') may create nonindependence of measurement problems, with the resulting beta coefficients being inflated by shared methods variance.

An overall assessment of these results, however, clearly contradicts traditional perspectives proposing that Chinese parenting of adolescents can be characterized as a simple reflection of collectivistic values and norms. Instead, evidence was provided in this study that self-esteem is fostered in Chinese youth by parents who grant autonomy, an aspect of parenting commonly associated with individualistic orientations of the West. Moreover, this study did not support the idea that adolescent self-esteem would be fostered by harsh or rejecting forms of control such as punitiveness or love withdrawal. Contrasting with these "excessive" forms of influence was the importance of more moderate forms of "organizational" or "functional" control (i.e., monitoring and reasoning) for the self-esteem development of Chinese adolescents. Contrary to harsh or excessive forms of parental control, organizational or functional control signifies order, responsibility, and family cohesion without fostering conflict and aggressiveness. Consequently, if collectivistic orientations guide the efforts of Chinese parents to foster adolescent self-esteem development, this is accomplished primarily through more moderate forms of control that are not arbitrarily restrictive. Chinese parenting that fosters self-esteem may involve a mixture of approaches reflecting a complex balance between individualistic and collectivistic socialization goals.

ENDNOTES

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