

Chapter #14

WILL PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AMONG PARENTS AFFECT THEIR CHOICE OF PARENTING STYLE?

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ABSTRACT

Parenting is vital to children's psychological development. Previous research mainly studied the impacts of parental control over child discipline but not the association between parental perceived controllability and parenting style. The purpose of this study was to fill up this gap. There were three independent variables to measure parental attributes on the control in this study, including self-efficacy, self-control, and perceived controllability over their children. A one-item scale measured parental efficacy: "How much can you do to control the time your child spends." Parental self-control was measured by the frequency of mobile phone usage with absent-mindedness. Parental perceived controllability was measured by their child's expected time usage of mobile phones minus the child's exact time usage on a mobile phone. The difference indicated the strength of parental perceived controllability over child discipline. Result: Authoritative parenting was predicted by self-efficacy ($\beta=0.255$, $p=0.001$) and perceived controllability ($\beta=0.202$, $p=0.011$). Authoritarian parenting was predicted by a lack of self-control ($\beta=0.433$, $p<0.001$) but not self-efficacy ($\beta=0.024$, $p=0.745$). Permissive parenting was predicted by both lack of self-control ($\beta=0.488$, $p<0.001$) and lack of parental perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.167$, $p=0.019$). Implication: Authoritarian and permissive parents may have more difficulties in controllability than authoritative parents. Recommendations for future parent education will be discussed.

Keywords: parenting styles, parental self-efficacy, self-control, perceived controllability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting has long been a focus of study among professionals, such as psychologists, educators, psychotherapists, sociologists, and social workers. While child development is one of the significant concerns in child-rearing, whether parenting is effective will directly determine the quality of child development outcomes.

In the study of parenting, scholars from different disciplines may have various focuses. For example, psychologists or psychiatrists might emphasize the association between parents' mental health and the parenting process and its impacts on child development outcomes (Tungpunkom, Maybery, Reupert, Kowalenko, & Foster, 2017). Social workers might focus more on studying the impact of parenting practices or parenting beliefs on child development (Zuar et al., 2021). Other family workers may work on the influence of various parenting styles on child development. However, parenting style is still a core focus of exploration in most studies. Previous research supported the claim that parents learn the practice of parenting style through intergenerational transmission (He, Liu, Chen, Huang, & Luo, 2020; O'Brien, 2010; Sun, Fu, Li, & Gong, 2021). In other words, parents learn their parenting styles through their observation and influence from their parents at the time of their childhood experiences, which may become their parenting styles and practices. Parents with

authoritarian parenting practices have their parents with an authoritarian parenting style, or authoritative parents have their authoritative parents. However, one may wonder if intergenerational transmission is the only explanation. Intergenerational transmission involves a process of social learning (Abraham et al., 2021). However, social observation may not be the only factor determining parenting style practice. One of the examples is personality (Kitamura et al., 2009). Empirical evidence reported that personality traits might mediate intergenerational transmission. However, the study between parental self-control and its impact on parenting styles is rare.

The importance of parental self-control in parenting is obvious. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) reported that parents with a low level of self-control are less likely to instill self-control in their children effectively. In other words, parents with low self-control are unlikely to exercise effective parenting practices but more likely to engage in inconsistent disciplinary practices with less parental love and affection (Boutwell & Beaver, 2010). There are few empirical studies exploring the relationship between parental self-control and parenting practices. For example, Verhoeven, Junger, Van Aken, Deković, and Van Aken (2007) reported that parents with lower self-control levels often used harsh parenting practices and psychological control in parenting. Meldrum et al. (2015; 2018) also found a negative association between parental self-control and effective parenting. Current empirical data seems to support the claim that factors other than intergenerational transmission may affect the choice of parenting style. At the same time, parental self-control is associated with effective parenting practices. Therefore, this study aims to fill up the research gap by exploring other factors, such as internal resources on "parental self-control," to explain parents' choice of which parenting style to practice.

2. BACKGROUND

The pandemic situation affects many people's daily life. Implementing social policies to minimize the possibility of getting infected, such as social distancing, work-from-home arrangements, and the change of class format from a face-to-face setting to online learning, might lead people to become more socially isolated by staying at home. Especially young children, who are more vulnerable to infection, are more likely to stay at home. Mobile phones or computers have become one of the most popular activities among young children. Online addiction is a primary concern that most psychologists or social workers worry about. The role of parents in controlling their children's mobile phone usage is critical and crucial. Because of this, the original objective of this study was to explore which parenting style was the most effective in controlling their children's behavior on mobile phone usage. Moreover, another objective of this study was to understand what other factors might affect the choice of parenting styles practiced by parents in the process of parenting.

The concept of "control" among parents is vital to determining parenting effectiveness. However, most previous research mainly focused on studying "parental control" on its effect on parenting, but not on parents' perception of their capacity for self-control in parenting. It wondered if the perception of their mastery over the external environment might explain the choice of parenting style. Given this, this study included four variables: parenting style, parental self-control, parental efficacy, and parental perceived controllability to explore their relationships.

2.1. Parenting Style and Parental Self-Control

Baumrind (1967) initially developed a three-model parenting style that combines parents' strategies, behaviors, and attitudes in child-rearing. Baumrind (1967) proposed two different dimensions in the process of parenting. They are responsive and demandingness. Based on this categorization, she defined three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parenting is a way of parenting in which parents are both responsive and demanding. Parents with an authoritative parenting style usually care about their children's needs, show parental warmth to them, and set rules with clear explanations and mutual agreement with the child (Santroc, 2007). Authoritative parents allow their children autonomy and encourage them to explore and learn independence.

Authoritarian parents have high parental demands but low responsiveness. They set strict rules with high standards but little negotiation or explanation. The parenting process involves little parental warmth and little communication with the child, but it is very controlling and demanding. Punishment is often used to control their child's behaviors in cases of disobedience. Permissive parenting is characterized as highly responsive but not demanding. In other words, permissive parents are nurturing and warm. They involve with their child's activities and want to be children's friends. However, there are no rules to let their child follow. The expectation of their child is relatively low, and they barely exercise any discipline to control or regulate their child's behaviors. Previous researchers have recognized that parenting styles correlate with psychological or behavioral characteristics (Berge, Wall, Loth, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010; DeHart, Pelham, & Tennen, 2006; Park & Walton-Moss, 2012; Sarwar, 2016). A previous study reported that an authoritative parenting style strongly predicted positive outcomes in child behaviors (Schary, Cardinal, & Loprinzi, 2012). On the other hand, some other studies reported that the authoritarian parenting style was positively associated with controlling parenting (Chao, 1994). It negatively predicted the children's executive control (Zhang, Yan, Nan, & Cai, 2021). However, research on studying the association between parental self-control and parenting style is scarce.

2.2. Parental Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in how well or poorly he or she will handle a specific task based on his ability (Bandura, 1989). The more self-efficacy an individual holds, the more likely he or she will achieve the desired outcome. Parental efficacy can be defined as the "beliefs or judgments a parent holds of their capabilities to organize and execute a set of tasks related to parenting a child" (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005, p.387). Efficacious parents have strong confidence in influencing their child's behavior. They will put more effort into meeting their expectations and persist when meeting obstacles (Bandura, 1999).

On the contrary, parents with lower efficacy in a given situation will put in less effort. Previous research also supported a negative association between a lower level of parental efficacy belief and a higher level of authoritarian parenting practice with less easygoing parental behaviors (Evans, Nelson, Porter, Nelson, & Hart, 2012). Therefore, parents with a relatively lower level of parental efficacy belief will be more likely to choose an authoritarian parenting style to discipline their children to ensure their child's behaviors are under control.

2.3. Parental Perceived Controllability

Parental control is one of the core dimensions of parenting practice. Although the studies are rare, parents with authoritarian parenting style practices were more likely to have more parental control over their children (Cuzzocrea, Barberis, Costa, & Larcana, 2015).

On the one hand, it is essential to believe that parents who intend to socialize their children need to use authority and provide discipline. However, what will happen to parents if they perceive their parental authority and disciplinary power are not strong enough to socialize their children to behave? A study reported that parents with authoritarian parenting styles added restrictive parental control in the child-rearing style to reduce delinquency in their children (Pezzella, Thornberry, & Smith, 2016). Because of this, it predicts that parents with a lower level of perceived controllability may execute more parental control over their children to prevent or reduce negative external misbehaviors. It may make them more likely to practice an authoritarian parenting style.

This measure aimed to fill up the research gap. It explored the associations among four variables, i.e., parenting styles, parental self-control, parental efficacy, and parental perceived controllability in parenting. Previous research to study these four constructs is rare. Therefore, there are two hypotheses in this study.

- (1) It predicts that parents who practice an authoritative parenting style will have more internal resources on parental attributes of a control, such as parental self-efficacy, self-control, and perceived controllability.
- (2) It predicts that parents who practice an authoritarian parenting style will have fewer internal resources on parental attributes of a control, such as parental self-efficacy, self-control, and perceived controllability.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

Parents of children aged 3-6 were recruited as participants from an English Training Institution. A total of 159 parents were invited to complete the questionnaires, but only 157 participants provided valid data. Among these 157 parents, 38 (24.2%) were fathers, and 119 (75.8%) were mothers. All of them had a lone child in their families. Among these 157 families, 87(55.4%) of the participants' children were boys, and 70 (44.6 %) were girls. Children's age ranged from 3 to 6 years old, with 4.68 years as the mean age.

3.2. Measurements

3.2.1. Dependent Variable

Parenting Style. Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ)-Short Form was used to measure parents' parenting styles (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, Hart, Perlmutter, Touliatos, & Holden, 2001). The short version of PSDQ has 32 items to group parents into three parenting styles using a five-point Likert scale (1= never, 5=always). There are 12 items to measure authoritarian parenting style with three dimensions: verbal hostility, punishment, and physical coercion. The authoritative parenting style comprises 15 items and three dimensions: support and affection, regulation, and autonomy. There are five items to measure permissive styles in one dimension, indulgence. The scores for each dimension's items were added and averaged to get the score for that dimension. Similarly, the dimensions' scores for each parenting style were added and averaged to get the score for that parenting style. The higher scores on a particular parenting style represented the style of parenting practice the participant most likely used in parenting.

3.2.2. Independent Variables

The constructs as independent variables measured parental attributes on control, including parental efficacy, parental self-control, and parental perceived controllability over their children. This study was conducted during the pandemic in which parents allowed their children and themselves to use mobile phones.

Parental efficacy. Parental efficacy was measured by a one-item scale, as proposed by Bandura (2006), "How much can you do to control the time your child spends."

Parental self-control. This measure aimed to measure the level of self-control that the parents lacked. Therefore, the lack of parents' self-control was measured by studying how frequently they used their mobile phones with absent-mindedness. The Smartphone Use Questionnaire (SUQ-G and SUQ-A; Marty-Dugas & Ralph, 2018) was used to measure parents' smartphone use habits. The Smartphone Use Questionnaire, SUQ, comprised two dimensions: general (SUQ-G) and absent-minded (SUQ-A). Both dimensions consisted of 10 items on 7-point Likert Scale, where one represented "Never" to 7 "All the time." The Smartphone Use Questionnaires-General (SUQ-G) measured how often a participant used the mobile phone. Some of the item examples were "How often do you have your cellphone on your person?", "How frequently do you send and receive text messages or emails?" The Smartphone Use Questionnaires-Absent-mindedness (SUQ-A) measured how frequently people used their mobile phones absent-mindedly without self-control. Examples of these items were "How often do you open your phone to do one thing and wind up doing something else without realizing it?" and "How often do you check your phone while interacting with other people (i.e., during conversation)?" The higher the scores on the frequency of mobile phone usage, the more likely the participant was to lack self-control in mobile phone usage.

Parental perceived controllability. Parental perceived controllability was measured by the parents' expected time consumption on a mobile phone minus the time consumed in their child's mobile phone usage. Participants were asked to respond to the question, "how much daily smartphone screen time to your child do you think is suitable?" measured on a scale from 1 to 7 with a 0.5-hour interval, where 1= "do not use a smartphone," 2= "0-0.5 hour", 3= "0.5-1.0 hour", and up to 7= "more than 3 hours". Similarly, the time consumed by the child in mobile phone usage was measured by the question "how long does your child play with a smartphone on average per day?" on a 7-point scale where 1= "0 hours", 2= "less than 0.5 hours", 3= "0.5-1.0 hour", and up to 7= "more than 3 hours". The more significant the positive difference, the stronger it represented the parent's perceived controllability over child discipline.

3.2.3. Reliability tests

The reliability of all measuring scales reported a high Cronbach's alpha, having an excellent internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha of different scales, i.e., Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ)-Short Form, Smartphone Use Questionnaires (absent-mindedness), were 0.861 and 0.908, respectively.

4. FINDINGS

It was to initially run a Partial Correlation to understand the strength of associations among different measuring variables. The result is shown in Table 1. The authoritative parenting style got high partial correlation coefficients with parental self-efficacy ($r=0.249$, $p<0.005$) and parental perceived controllability ($r=0.173$, $p<0.05$). For authoritarian parenting style, it had strong associations with a lack of self-control ($r=0.437$, $p<0.001$). In contrast, permissive parenting style got high correlation figures with lack of self-control ($r=0.498$, $p<0.001$) and parental perceived controllability in a negative direction ($r=-0.200$, $p<0.05$).

Table 1.
Partial Correlations between Parenting Styles and measures of Parental Control Variables.

	Parental efficacy ¹	Lack of self-control ²	Parental Perceived Controllability ³
Authoritative	0.249***	0.055	0.173*
Authoritarian	0.023	0.437****	-0.144
Permissive	-0.071	0.498****	-0.200*

Note. All correlations are 2-tailed significance tests.

¹Controlling for Lack of Self-control and Parental Perceived Controllability

²Controlling for Parental Efficacy and Parental Perceived Controllability

³Controlling for Parental Efficacy and Lack of self-control

****p<0.001, ***p < .005, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

On the other hand, the results supported all hypotheses. To put authoritative parenting style as the dependent variable, it measured the predictive power of parental self-efficacy, parental perceived controllability, and lack of self-control after controlling for child-rearing attitude. The results from multiple regression showed that the practice of an authoritative parenting style was significantly predicted by parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.255, p=0.001$) and perceived controllability ($\beta=0.202, p=0.011$) but not lack of self-control (Table 2).

Table 2.
Multiple Regression Table with Authoritative Parenting Style as a Dependent variable after controlling child-rearing attitude.

Predictor	R	R ²	R ² change	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Significant level
Model 1								
Child-rearing attitude	.102	.010	.010	.075	.059	.102	1.272	.205
Model 2								
Child-rearing Attitude	.346	.120	.109	.118	.057	.161	2.065	0.041
Parental Efficacy				.167	.050	.255	3.325	.001
Lack of self-control				.026	.040	.050	.653	.515
Parental Perceived Controllability				.120	.046	.202	2.589	.011

Predictors: Parental efficacy, lack of self-control, and Parental perceived controllability.

However, if an authoritarian parenting style was a dependent variable to replace the authoritative parenting style, the practice of the authoritarian parenting style was predicted by lack of self-control ($\beta=0.433, p<0.001$) but not parental self-efficacy ($\beta=0.024, p=0.745$). The listed figures are reported in Table 3.

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*Table 3.
Multiple Regression Table with Authoritarian Parenting Style as a Dependent variable
after controlling child-rearing attitude.*

Predictor	R	R ²	R ² change	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Significant level
Model 1								
Child-rearing attitude	.092	.008	.008	.062	.054	.092	1.146	.254
Model 2								
Child-rearing Attitude	.457	.209	.200	.038	.050	.057	.765	.446
Parental Efficacy				.014	.044	.024	.326	.745
Lack of self-control				.209	.035	.433	5.982	.000
Parental Perceived Controllability				-.065	.040	-.118	-1.599	.112

Predictors: Parental efficacy, lack of self-control, and Parental perceived controllability.

Similarly, for the practice of a permissive parenting style, it was predicted by a lack of self-control ($\beta=0.488$, $p<0.001$) and a lack of perceived controllability ($\beta=-0.167$, $p=0.019$) but not parental self-efficacy ($\beta=-0.059$, $p=0.397$). The results are reported in Table 4.

*Table 4.
Multiple Regression Table with Permissive Parenting Style as a Dependent variable after
controlling child-rearing attitude.*

Predictor	R	R ²	R ² change	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Significant level
Model 1								
Child-rearing attitude	.083	.007	.007	.061	.059	.083	1.039	.300
Model 2								
Child-rearing Attitude	.530	.281	.274	.023	.052	.031	.434	.665
Parental Efficacy				-.039	.046	-.059	-.850	.397
Lack of self-control				.257	.036	.488	7.080	.000
Parental Perceived Controllability				-.099	.042	-.167	-2.364	.019

Predictors: Parental efficacy, lack of self-control, and Parental perceived controllability.

The results showed that parents with authoritative parenting styles seemed to own more internal resources, such as self-efficacy and perceived controllability, in exercising appropriate parental control in child discipline than parents with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Parents who practice authoritarian or permissive parenting styles lack these internal resources. Perhaps, these parents may express their difficulty in exercising control in parenting differently.

5. DISCUSSION

Most of the previous research on parenting styles was mainly to study their influences on the outcomes in child development. Among this focus of studies, most findings supported the authoritative parenting style to be more effective with positive impacts on children's behaviors than the authoritarian parenting style. However, not much research is to study what factors influence the pathway of authoritarian parenting. Among this study theme, most of them supported the claim to explain the choice of parenting style by intergenerational transmission. Learning through observation and first-hand experience of being parented in childhood are important sources of learning how to be a parent. However, the concept of intergenerational transmission to explain the development of parenting styles seems inadequate.

Effective parenting requires parenting skills and knowledge and energy, and confidence in the process of parenting. The concern of whether parents' internal resources are adequate and robust enough for parenting seems to be an essential topic for parenting effectiveness. The findings in this study reported that the parental attribute of "control" significantly affected parents' intention to use authority and power in child discipline, leading to a higher possibility of exercising an authoritarian parenting style. In other words, parents exercising the authoritarian parenting style may represent a specific group of parents who fear losing power and authority in parenting. To secure their control over their children, using the authoritarian parenting style to enforce strict rules and ensure obedience may make them feel more secure in their role as parents, especially when authority and power are vital to parents.

The findings of this study can provide a new blueprint for developing a parent education curriculum. In addition to teaching parenting skills and re-establishing a parent-child relationship, how to increase a parent's internal resources, especially the sense of parental control, serves as a new direction for parent education. Building up parental self-efficacy is one of the critical elements in parent education. Parent educators can run workshops and seminars to help parents enrich their knowledge and learn new parenting skills. More importantly, parent educators are suggested to emphasize building up parents' self-confidence to let them develop a stronger sense of controllability in parenting. This parent education approach will no longer treat parenting as simply a skill training on child-rearing. Instead, parenting can now be viewed as a process of self-development and growth. The parents and their child can both be the ones to benefit.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study may bring some new insights into parent education. Generally speaking, parent education has been commonly regarded as a skill and knowledge training in which incompetent parents were people who lacked parenting skills or were inadequate in parenting knowledge. However, this study supported a new direction of parent education. In other words, to train parents to be more competent, the focus is to consider how to boost their internal resources, especially the resources in self-control. Parents who perceive themselves

as lacking self-control may encourage them to use control in parenting. It may not be beneficial to both parents and their children. Parent education no longer focuses on parenting skill training. In addition, how to improve the psychological well-being of parents and build up their self-efficacy may be a direction for future focus in parent education.

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