The Influence of Parenting Styles on Adolescents' Emotional Expression in Peer Competition

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Abstract. Based on questionnaire survey data, this paper empirically examines the theoretical transmission pathway of "parenting style → attachment relationship → children's emotion regulation ability". The study confirms that parental behaviors are key distal factors in shaping children's emotion regulation capabilities, and their effects are realized through the parent-child attachment relationship as a core mediating variable. Specifically, emotionally warm parenting helps establish secure attachment, providing a classroom for children to learn positive emotion management; in contrast, negative parenting practices can lead to parent-child alienation, hindering the development of emotional skills. The focus of family education should be on creating a warm and trusting communication environment, thereby empowering children to effectively cope with peer pressure and achieve healthy psychological development.

Keywords: Parenting style, attachment relationship, emotion regulation, adolescents, peer pressure.

1. Introduction

Peer pressure refers to the influence that an individual feels from their peer group on their attitudes, values, or even behaviors, leading them to change their behavior in a way that tends to conform to peer norms. Peers not only refer to members of the group you belong to (classmates, colleagues, etc.), but also include people of similar age, status, or environment. In the field of psychology, peer pressure is particularly common among adolescents, manifesting as the stress individuals feel from comparing themselves to their peers. This pressure may come from the need for recognition and acceptance, or as a response to comparison and competition.

Peer pressure is an almost universal phenomenon during adolescent development; the vast majority of teenagers experience peer pressure at some stage, though the intensity and type of pressure they feel vary. Multiple studies indicate that over 90% of adolescents report experiencing peer pressure during their middle school years. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) survey shows that teenagers rank peer pressure as one of the main sources of stress in their lives. According to the Report on the Development of Chinese National Mental Health published by the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a considerable proportion of Chinese adolescents report interpersonal relationship issues, with peer relationships being a core component [1].

2. Theoretical Analysis

Different parents have various differences in their parenting styles, and different parenting styles have different impacts on the psychological development of adolescents. A parent's parenting style acts as a foundational builder of a psychological immune system, profoundly influencing how a child responds to peer pressure, their judgment, and inner strength in the future. Parenting styles do not directly determine how children cope with peer pressure, but they have a far-reaching impact by shaping the child's core psychological assets (self-esteem, self-confidence, judgment, moral values, and social skills). Table 1 summarizes four main parenting styles and their different impacts on adolescent psychological development. As shown in Table 1, authoritative parenting, through a combination of high demands and high responsiveness, provides children with high self-esteem, independent judgment, and internal moral standards, thereby building a strong psychological immune

system. In contrast, authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful parenting styles, whether due to a lack of emotional warmth, absence of rules, or lack of care, can lead children to rely on external validation and lack inner strength, making them more prone to confusion and conformity when facing peer pressure in the future.

Table 1. Four Main Parenting Styles

Type	Characteristics	Main Manifestations
Authoritative Parenting	High demand, high responsiveness	Building high self-esteem and confidence, cultivating critical thinking and decision-making skills, developing strong internal moral principles, secure parent-child attachment, and excellent social skills.
Authoritarian Parenting	High demand, low responsiveness	Family rules are strict but lack explanation and emotional warmth; there is obedience to external behavioral norms but a lack of internal judgment, low self-esteem, dependence on authority, and insufficient social skills.
Permissive Parenting	Low demand, high responsiveness	Parents are loving but lack rules and guidance; children may become self-centered, struggle to adapt to group life that requires following rules, rely on peer approval, and find it difficult to cope with setbacks.
Neglectful Parenting	Low demand, low responsiveness	When parents lack both affection and discipline, children lack basic security and a sense of belonging, resulting in severe low self-esteem and behavioral problems.

Table 2. Types of Adolescent Attachment

Type	Characteristics	Corresponding Main Parenting Styles
Secure attachment	Having sufficient inner security. They trust their parents and will actively seek comfort and help from them when encountering difficulties. At the same time, they confidently explore the world, develop an independent self, and are able to balance intimacy and independence in relationships.	Authoritative parenting
Anxious-ambivalent attachment	They strongly desire intimacy but are extremely afraid of being abandoned or losing love. They may demand a high level of attention from their parents and appear overly dependent and clingy. They might doubt their parents' love over minor issues and have significant emotional fluctuations.	Permissive/indulgent parenting
Avoidant attachment	They exhibit excessive independence, seeming not to need their parents. They may downplay the importance of close relationships, emotionally distance themselves from their parents, and prefer to handle difficulties on their own rather than seeking help. This is actually a defense mechanism used to avoid potential rejection and disappointment.	Authoritarian/neglectful parenting
Disorganized attachment	The least secure type. They both crave and fear intimacy, struggling between approaching and avoiding their parents. Parental behavior may be a source of their fear (e.g., abuse or extreme neglect), preventing them from forming consistent coping strategies.	Unpredictable/abusive parenting

Attachment theory was originally proposed by British psychologist John Bowlby, aiming to explain the emotional bond between infants and their primary caregivers (usually parents). Later research found that this attachment pattern continues to influence a person's life, especially during adolescence, manifesting in new forms. Adolescent attachment type refers to the relatively stable emotional connections and behavioral patterns that adolescents form in interactions with their parents (and other significant people). It primarily reflects whether adolescents consider their parents to be a reliable safe haven when they feel stressed, fearful, or in need of help, and whether they regard their parents as a supportive secure base when exploring the outside world (such as making friends or learning new skills). Based on these two dimensions, adolescent attachment types are generally divided into four categories. While parenting styles are the most critical factor in shaping a child's attachment type [2]. In Table 2, based on the stability of emotional bonds between adolescents and their parents and the sense of security, attachment types can be classified as secure (corresponding to authoritative parenting), anxious-ambivalent (corresponding to permissive parenting), avoidant (corresponding to authoritarian or neglectful parenting), and disorganized (corresponding to unpredictable or abusive parenting). Among them, secure attachment provides adolescents with the healthiest psychological foundation, enabling them to explore the world courageously while also seeking comfort with ease.

There is a close and complex interaction between adolescents' attachment patterns and peer competition pressure. Simply put, adolescents with secure attachment usually receive stable love, support, and acceptance from their family (especially their parents), and the peer competition pressure they experience is moderate, manageable, and can even be transformed into positive motivation. Adolescents with insecure attachment are more likely to perceive normal peer competition as a threat to their self-existence, thereby experiencing higher intensity and more destructive stress. Based on the above analysis, we can derive the following mediation model: different parenting styles influence adolescents' attachment types, which in turn affect peer interactions and have a significant impact on how middle school students express their emotions under peer competition. In psychology, many studies use such mediation models for analysis, for example, using adolescents' attachment types as a mediating variable to analyze the effect of parenting styles on adolescent depression.

In order to test the mediation model in this study, we propose the following hypotheses: (1) Parenting styles significantly affect the security of children's attachment. (2) The level of attachment security significantly influences adolescents' emotional expression under peer competition. Next, we test the above hypotheses through a series of empirical analyses.

3. Method

3.1. Research Subjects

This study recruited participants online, using the SoJump platform to invite junior and senior high school students in the Beijing area for interviews. The recruitment targeted adolescents aged 12 to 18 who were attending junior or senior high schools in Beijing. A total of 39 valid samples were ultimately included. The average age of the interviewees was 17.33 years, comprising 19 boys and 20 girls, including 1 third-year junior high school student, 5 second-year senior high school students, and 33 third-year senior high school students.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1 Parental Rearing Style Evaluation Scale

This study used the Simplified Chinese Version of the Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (s-EMBU-c). This questionnaire was adapted and localized by Jiang Jiang et al. based on the simplified parental rearing style questionnaire developed by Arrindell [3, 4]. The revised questionnaire consists of 21 items and has three dimensions: rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection. Among the sub-questionnaires, six items belong to the rejection dimension, seven items belong to the emotional

warmth dimension, and eight items belong to the overprotection dimension. The questionnaire uses a 4-point scoring system, with 1 indicating “Never” and 4 indicating “Always”. Some items require reverse scoring, and higher scores indicate that children perceive their parents as exhibiting the behavior of that particular item more frequently [5].

3.2.2 Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment

This study used the short version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). This questionnaire was simplified and revised by Raja et al. based on the Parent and Peer Attachment Inventory developed by Armsden & Greenberg in 1987 and is used to measure adolescents’ attachment to their parents [6, 7]. The questionnaire includes two sub-questionnaires for paternal and maternal attachment, each containing 10 items across three dimensions: trust, communication, and alienation. The questionnaire uses a 5-point scoring system, with 1 indicating “Does not apply at all” and 5 indicating “Applies completely”. The total score is obtained by summing the original scores of communication and trust, and then adding the reversed score of alienation. This total score is used to assess the participant's attachment relationship in each subscale [8].

3.2.3 Emotion Regulation Questionnaire

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, developed by Gross, consists of 10 items with a total score of 7 points. Higher scores indicate a higher frequency of using emotion regulation strategies. This questionnaire includes two dimensions: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The cognitive reappraisal dimension consists of 6 items, while the expressive suppression dimension consists of 4 items.

3.3. Research Process

First, the survey questionnaires were collected through the SoJump platform. Respondents submitted the questionnaires directly after completing them. The platform automatically gathered the data. Once data collection was completed, the data underwent preliminary screening to remove invalid questionnaires (e.g., those completed too quickly or with obviously patterned responses). Then, the valid data were analyzed using three scales: the Parental Rearing Style Questionnaire (EMBU), the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), and the Emotion Regulation Scale. Finally, the measurement results of the three scales were comprehensively analyzed using STATA software to explore the relationships among parental rearing styles, types of child attachment, and peer interactions, leading to the corresponding conclusions.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Parenting Styles, Attachment Types, and Emotional Regulation

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Parenting Style - Emotional Warmth	1	4	2.729	0.642
Parenting Style - Rejection	1	2.833	1.530	0.543
Parenting Style - Overprotection	0.75	2.750	1.788	0.550
Parental Attachment - Trust	1.25	5	3.526	1.059
Parental Attachment - Communication	1	5	3.333	1.137
Parental Attachment - Alienation	1	4	2.462	0.861
Parental Attachment	-0.5	7.75	4.397	2.241
Emotional Regulation - Cognitive Reappraisal	1.5	7	5.013	1.369
Emotional Regulation - Expressive Suppression	1.75	7	4.237	1.295

By examining the basic variables of parenting styles, parental attachment types, and emotion regulation, descriptive analyses were conducted, and the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of each scale across various dimensions were calculated. The results are shown in Table 3.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

In Table 4, we analyzed the correlations among parenting styles, attachment relationships, and emotion regulation. The results indicated several significant correlations among these variables, revealing a close and complex relationship between parenting styles, attachment relationships, and individual emotion regulation strategies. (1) The internal structure of parenting styles is clear. Warm and emotionally supportive parenting is significantly negatively correlated with rejecting and overprotective parenting, while a strong positive correlation exists between the latter two. (2) Parental attachment serves as a key bridge. Parental attachment is highly positively correlated with positive warm and emotionally supportive parenting and negatively correlated with negative rejecting and overprotective parenting. (3) Emotion regulation strategies have complex associations with family factors. Cognitive reappraisal is positively correlated with both emotional warmth and attachment relationships. Expressive suppression, on the other hand, is negatively correlated with emotional warmth and parental attachment, and positively correlated with rejection and overprotection. This indicates that in an environment filled with love and security, children do not need to suppress their emotions excessively. (4) Cognitive reappraisal is positively correlated with all variables, but its correlations with rejection (r=0.306) and overprotection (r=0.294) are slightly higher than with emotional warmth (r=0.224) and parental attachment (r=0.256). This may suggest that under a certain degree of stress or control (originating from rejection or overprotection), individuals may develop cognitive reappraisal strategies earlier or more extensively to cope with the environment. However, this does not imply that negative parenting styles are beneficial; a more likely explanation is that this is an adaptive coping mechanism.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis of Parenting Styles, Attachment Relationships, and Emotion Regulation

	Emotional Warmth	Rejection	Overprotection	Parental Attachment	Cognitive Reappraisal	Expressive Suppression
Emotional Warmth	1.000					
Rejection	-0.352	1.000				
Overprotection	-0.240	0.704	1.000			
Parental Attachment	0.673	-0.472	-0.366	1.000		
Cognitive Reappraisal	0.224	0.306	0.294	0.256	1.000	
Expressive Suppression	-0.287	0.153	0.338	-0.122	0.164	1.000

4.3. Mediation Effect Analysis

In Table 5, we examined the empirical results of parenting styles and attachment relationships. It can be observed that emotional warmth is significantly positively correlated with trust-based and communication-based attachment relationships at the 1% level, but significantly negatively correlated with avoidant attachment relationships. Both rejection and overprotection are significantly negatively correlated with trust-based attachment relationships at the 1% level, but are significantly positively correlated with avoidant attachment relationships at least the 5% level. The results reveal that trust and avoidance have significant and theoretically consistent systematic associations with the three parenting styles. In particular, the three parenting styles have the strongest and most consistent impact on the rejecting parenting style. Communication is mainly related to emotional warmth.

Table 5. Empirical Results of Parenting Styles and Attachment Relationships

	(1) Trust	(2) Trust	(3) Trust	(4) Communication	(5) Communication	(6) Communication	(7) Alienation	(8) Alienation	(9) Alienation
Emotional Warmth	0.991***			0.964***			-0.395*		
	(0.000)			(0.000)			(0.069)		
Rejection		-0.943***			-0.057			0.948***	
		(0.002)			(0.869)			(0.000)	
Overprotection			-0.764**			-0.092			0.632**
			(0.012)			(0.787)			(0.011)
Constant	0.822	4.968***	4.892***	0.704	3.420***	3.499***	3.540***	1.012***	1.330***
	(0.184)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.311)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.005)	(0.005)
N	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
R^2	0.361	0.234	0.158	0.296	0.001	0.002	0.087	0.357	0.163

Table 6 explored how the parent-child attachment relationship (trust, communication, alienation) influences children's emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal vs. expressive suppression). The coefficient for trust was 0.461 and was significant at the 5% level. The results indicate that the better the quality of parent-child trust, the more likely children are to use cognitive reappraisal as a positive emotion regulation strategy. From a causal perspective, this supports the hypothesis that good parent-child trust can cultivate or promote the development of children's cognitive reappraisal abilities. This finding is consistent with theoretical expectations in developmental psychology, which suggest that a secure and open family trust environment provides a crucial context for children to learn and practice positive emotion regulation strategies.

Table 6. Empirical Results of Attachment Relationships and Emotion Regulation

	(1) Cognitive Reappraisal	(2) Cognitive Reappraisal	(3) Cognitive Reappraisal	(4) Expressive Suppression	(5) Expressive Suppression	(6) Expressive Suppression
Trust	0.461**			-0.144		
	(0.016)			(0.443)		
communication		0.224			-0.167	
		(0.292)			(0.407)	
Alienation			0.085			0.027*
			(0.747)			(0.063)
Constant	3.476***	4.224***	4.804***	4.717***	4.826***	4.304***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
N	39	39	39	39	39	39
R^2	0.147	0.030	0.003	0.016	0.019	0.000

5. Discussion

The conclusion that parenting styles influence children's emotion regulation abilities through the parent-child attachment relationship is based on an integrated model of developmental psychology, attachment theory, and emotion socialization theory. The empirical results mentioned above provide strong data support for this theoretical mechanism. The core of this chain is that the attachment relationship serves as a key "mediating bridge" through which parenting behaviors affect children's psychological development. Through daily parenting behaviors, parents shape the quality of their relationship with their children (i.e., the attachment relationship), and this relationship quality directly constitutes the classroom and safe haven where children learn to understand and manage emotions.

Attachment theory suggests that children form "internal working models" of the self, others, and relationships through interactions with primary caregivers (usually parents). Consistent, sensitive, and responsive caregiving (i.e., emotional warmth) makes children feel secure, leading to the development of secure attachment, characterized by trust and open communication. Conversely, indifference, rejection, or excessive interference (i.e., rejection/overprotection) makes children feel insecure, resulting in insecure attachment, which manifests as a sense of alienation.

Attachment relationships constitute the core environment for children to learn about emotions, a process known as emotion socialization. Good communication between parents and children directly

facilitates cognitive reappraisal. In communication, parents discuss emotional events with children, explain the causes of emotions, and provide different perspectives (e.g., We know you are disappointed, but perhaps you could also consider...), which directly teaches children how to engage in cognitive reappraisal. In alienated relationships, children's emotional expressions may be ignored, denied, or punished. They learn that "expressing emotions is unsafe" and "my emotions are not accepted". To adapt to the environment, their primary strategy becomes suppressing emotional expression (expressive suppression). Over time in a particular emotional classroom, children internalize external interaction patterns as their own capacities. Children who frequently learn cognitive reappraisal through communication internalize this strategy as a habitual response. Children who consistently receive negative feedback for expressing emotions internalize expressive suppression as an automatic self-protective strategy.

Why can't parenting styles bypass the attachment relationship to directly influence emotion regulation? The results of this study indirectly answer this question. If parenting styles could directly influence emotion regulation without going through the attachment relationship, we should see a significant direct effect of parenting styles on emotion regulation. However, this study (and many others) shows that the attachment relationship (especially communication) is a more proximal and direct factor in this chain. Parental behaviors must first be transformed into an atmospheric relationship and interaction pattern, and it is this atmosphere and pattern that directly shapes children's psychological abilities [9].

6. Summary

This paper obtained relevant data through a questionnaire survey and empirically tested the theoretical model of "parenting style → attachment relationship → children's emotional regulation ability" Through their parenting behaviors, parents create a specific quality of parent-child relationship (attachment), which directly defines the content and style of how children learn emotional management, ultimately shaping their lifelong emotional regulation patterns. The findings of this study offer insights for future family education practices. To cultivate children's positive emotional abilities, the focus should be on building communication and trust through emotional warmth; to prevent emotional suppression in children, it is crucial to avoid negative parenting, thereby preventing feelings of alienation. Parents should establish a warm, open, and communicative parent-child relationship, allowing children to freely share the confusion and stress they encounter with peers, rather than first worrying about being criticized, fostering children who are mentally strong and independent in thought, and enabling them to transform peer pressure into positive peer influence for healthy growth.

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