

A Study on the Relationship Between College Students' Self-Confidence and Their Parents' Parenting Styles — A Case Study of Universities in Jiangsu Province

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, against the backdrop of relevant policies and systems introduced by the Party and the state, family education has garnered widespread societal attention, particularly regarding the influence of parental parenting styles. However, the impact of family upbringing is multifaceted. This paper focuses on undergraduate students enrolled in Jiangsu universities, employing a questionnaire survey to explore the correlation between college students' self-confidence levels and their parents' parenting styles. The findings aim to better guide parents in adopting appropriate family upbringing methods, thereby further enhancing students' self-confidence levels.

KEYWORDS

Parenting styles; College students; Self-confidence

1 Introduction

In recent years, the Party and the state have elevated family education to the strategic level of a "cornerstone of the national education system." The 2019 Revised National Family Education Guidance Outline explicitly proposed the core principle of "respecting the laws of children's growth,"^[1] requiring parents to adopt scientific parenting approaches to promote their children's comprehensive development, highlighting the pivotal role of parenting styles in family education. As the core interactive model within the family system, parental parenting styles exert long-term, profound influences on individual psychological development through pathways such as emotional transmission, behavioral norms, and value formation. Particularly during adolescence, college students are in a critical phase of self-identity construction. Their self-confidence levels are not only shaped by their current environment but are also closely linked to early family upbringing experiences. In today's era of promoting quality education, students' psychological well-being has gained significant attention, and whether students possess self-confidence has become an important assessment criterion.

This study focuses on undergraduate students in Jiangsu universities. By analyzing the impact of parental parenting styles on their self-confidence levels, it responds to national family education policy directives. It reveals how different parenting styles influence college students' self-confidence and provides guidance for parental approaches in future family education.

Parenting styles, in a narrow sense, refer to parental approaches to childrearing. As defined in the 2014 Psychological Terminology, they constitute a set of parental attitudes and behaviors exhibiting cross-situational stability. Essentially, they represent consistent patterns and tendencies in how parents guide and control their children within the family context. American psychologist Diana Baumrind categorized parenting styles into four types—democratic, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful—based on two dimensions: parental demands and parental responsiveness^[2]. This classification framework is widely adopted in research.

In psychology, the concept most closely aligned with self-confidence is self-efficacy, proposed by Albert Bandura in his social learning theory. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's assessment of their ability to successfully navigate specific situations^[3]. Broadly speaking, self-confidence itself is a form of positivity—a positive attitude toward self-evaluation. Narrowly defined, self-confidence is intrinsically linked to positivity. Some scholars argue that in psychology, self-confidence can be equated with self-esteem, representing recognition of the self. Thus, self-confidence describes an individual's psychological state.

2 Research subjects and methods

2.1 Research subjects

This study involved 320 undergraduate students from universities in Jiangsu Province, comprising 170 males and 150

females. After excluding 14 invalid data points, 306 valid data points remained, yielding a questionnaire return rate of 95.6%.

2.2 Research method

2.2.1 Family parenting style survey

The majority of current studies employ the Evaluation of Parenting Behavior (EMBU) scale, developed in 1980 by Perris Cetal. from the Department of Psychiatry at Umea University in Sweden. This scale assesses parental attitudes and behaviors toward children, covering 15 parenting styles including permissiveness, encouragement, and punishment ^[4]. The Chinese version was revised by Yue Dongmei et al. in 1933, assessing participants' recollections of parental parenting styles they experienced ^[5]. To enhance measurement efficiency, Jiang Jiang et al. translated and revised the Simplified Parental Style Scale (S-EMBU) by comparing it with the standard version translated by Yue Dongmei et al. The S-EMBU covers three dimensions—rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection—using a 4-point scoring system to assess the quality of parental styles ^[6]. This experimental study employed the Simplified Emotional and Behavioral Unresponsiveness Scale. Participants were college students aged 17–25. The questionnaire used a 4-point scale to score behaviors of both fathers and mothers, where 1 indicated "never" and 4 indicated "always." Item 17 was reverse-scored, and final assessments were based on total scores.

Father Rejection Dimension Score Distribution

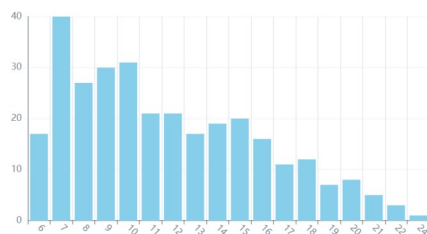


Figure 1

Mother Rejection Dimension Score Distribution

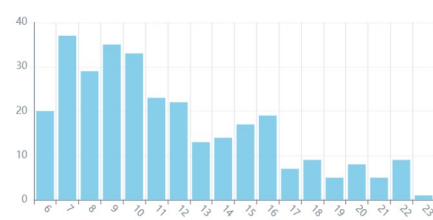


Figure 2

Father Overprotection Dimension Score Distribution

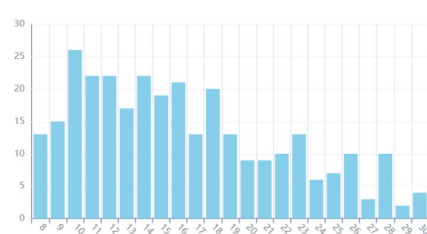


Figure 3

Mother Overprotection Dimension Score Distribution

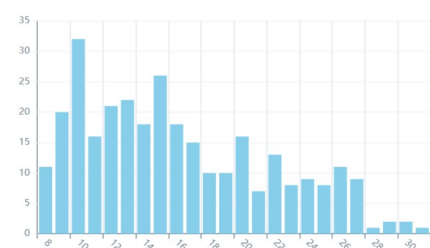


Figure 4

Father Emotional Dimension Score Distribution

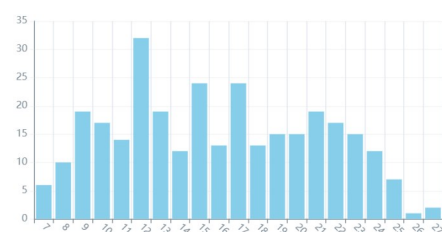


Figure 5

Mother Emotional Dimension Score Distribution

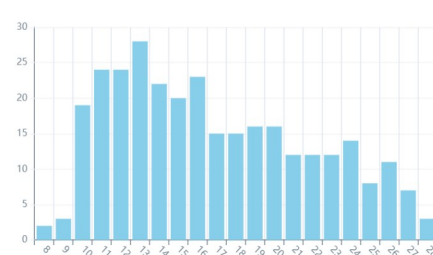


Figure 6

Figures1–6: Bar charts of sample data for the Rejection, Emotional, and Overprotection dimensions

2.2.2 Self-confidence assessment

The measurement tool commonly used in related experiments is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale developed by

American psychologist M. Rosenberg in 1965^[7], or its Chinese version translated by Wang Xiangdong et al. in 1999 and revised by Wang Mengcheng et al. in 2010, designed to assess individuals' self-confidence levels^[8]. This scale is operationally convenient, straightforward, and highly reliable, making it widely adopted by scholars both domestically and internationally. Additionally, the Personal Evaluation Inventory (PEI) developed by Shrauger can also be used to measure college students' self-confidence levels^[9]. This questionnaire comprises six dimensions: academic performance, athletics, physical appearance, romantic relationships, social interactions, and conversational skills. It also includes items assessing overall self-confidence and mood states that may influence self-confidence judgments^[10].

Both scales were employed in this study. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale comprises 10 multiple-choice items, each rated on a 4-point scale: 1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Disagree, 4. Strongly Disagree. Scoring follows a reverse-scoring pattern: items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 are positive-scoring items; 3, 5, 8, 9, 10 are reverse-scored items. The overall score range remains unchanged, falling between 10 and 40 points. Higher scores indicate a higher confidence index. The score range and corresponding confidence categories are as follows: 10–15 points: low self-confidence; 16–25 points: average self-perception; 26–35 points: Confident; 36–40 points: Super Confident.

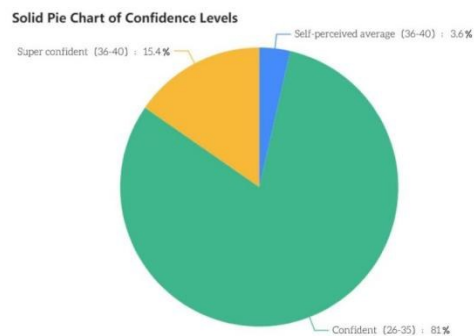


Figure 7 Data presentation of the rosenberg self-esteem scale

3 Results and Analysis

3.1 Analysis of parental child-rearing practices data

In the father rejection dimension, the data exhibits a central tendency with an average score of 11.75 and a median of 11.0, indicating that most respondents' father rejection levels are moderate. Regarding the distribution range, scores span from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 24, reflecting significant individual variation in respondents' perceptions of paternal rejection. Concurrently, a small number of higher values (21-24) exist in the data, potentially representing instances of severe paternal rejection. Notably, the overall distribution shows most data points clustered around the midrange, exhibiting a near-normal distribution pattern. This suggests that paternal rejection manifests in the population in a manner consistent with general psychometric characteristics. Values for the maternal rejection dimension primarily cluster between 6 and 15, with the most frequent scores being 7 (occurring 37 times) and 10 (occurring 33 times). High scores (above 20) appear infrequently, accounting for only about 4.5% of the total. The overall distribution exhibits an approximate normal distribution, peaking in the 7-10 range. Thus, it can be observed that values for the maternal rejection dimension are generally low, indicating that most participants perceive relatively little maternal rejection. Additionally, the data distribution is relatively concentrated, primarily within the 6-15 point range (accounting for approximately 85%). 3. A small number of high-value data points (above 20 points) exist, indicating that a minority of participants perceived higher levels of maternal rejection behavior. These results reflect the overall distribution of maternal rejection parenting styles within the sample, with rejection behaviors in most families occurring at lower levels.

The chart data reveals that fathers' emotional dimension scores predominantly cluster between 12 and 14 points, indicating that most respondents' fathers exhibit moderately high emotional engagement. The minimum score of 7 appeared infrequently, while the maximum score of 27 occurred only once. The overall data distribution is relatively concentrated, with no significant clustering of extreme values. This distribution may reflect that within this surveyed group, fathers' emotional expression and parenting styles are relatively consistent, with most fathers in similar families exhibiting comparable emotional dimension performance.

The chart data shows that mothers' emotional dimension scores predominantly cluster within the 11-15 point range, accounting for over 44% of responses. Compared to fathers, mothers' emotional dimension scores exhibit a more dispersed distribution, with a significantly higher proportion in the high-score segment (20 points and above). This indicates greater internal variation among mothers in emotional expression, coupled with an overall slightly higher average score than fathers. Notably, the mothers' emotional dimension scores included an exceptionally high score of 28, whereas the highest score for fathers was only 27. This further suggests mothers may exhibit richer emotional expressions.

Regarding the overall data for the paternal overprotection dimension, all participants' scores fell within the range of 8

to 30 points, with no extreme values below 8 or above 30. The scores exhibited an approximate normal distribution, with the highest concentration in the middle range (10-20 points) and a gradual decrease in numbers at both ends of the scale. Notably, the minimum score of 8 appeared frequently, indicating that a significant proportion of participants perceived their fathers' overprotection as relatively low. Simultaneously, 10 was another high-frequency score, potentially representing a "moderately low" level of paternal overprotection. The scarcity of scores above 25 suggests that in most families, paternal overprotection remains at moderate or low levels.

The distribution of maternal overprotection scores is generally concentrated, with most data points falling between 8 and 15. This indicates that the majority of respondents' mothers exhibit a moderately low level of overprotection. As the record numbers increase, the scores show a gradual upward trend, potentially reflecting an underlying pattern of change or sample selection bias. The maximum value of 31 appears in the final record, significantly higher than other values, potentially indicating a special case or outlier. This distribution pattern suggests that when studying parental parenting styles, the maternal overprotection dimension may exhibit a certain degree of group clustering. Most families demonstrate similar levels of protection, while extremely high levels of protection are relatively rare.

3.2 Analysis of college students' self-confidence levels

Based on the questionnaire data summary, the experimental sample contained no individuals with low self-esteem. Those perceiving themselves as average accounted for 3.6%, confident individuals constituted 81%, and highly confident individuals represented 15.4%. Comparative analysis reveals that most students fall within the confident range, with no low-esteem individuals present and a smaller proportion perceiving themselves as average.

Additionally, this study conducted descriptive statistics and difference tests on the total confidence score (c_t) using gender as a grouping variable. Results show that the average confidence score for male college students ($n=146$) was 32.21 ($SD=3.12$), while that for female college students ($n=160$) was 30.94 ($SD=3.62$). Although the male mean was slightly higher than the female mean, an independent samples t-test indicated that this difference did not reach statistical significance ($t = 1.97, p = 0.051$). Notably, the standard deviation was larger for the female group, suggesting greater variability in self-confidence among female individuals compared to males. These findings indicate that while gender has a limited direct effect on overall self-confidence levels, it may exert an indirect influence through the mediating role of parental parenting styles.

3.3 Overall relationship between parental parenting styles and college students' self-confidence

Analysis of the experimental data using SPSS revealed a significant regression model ($F=163.134, p<0.001$), indicating that parenting styles significantly explain college students' self-confidence levels. Additionally, $R=0.766$ signifies that the parenting styles variable accounts for 76.6% of the variance in self-confidence, representing a very high explanatory power and indicating good model fit.

This study found that parental rejection is a key factor influencing college students' self-confidence levels, with fathers' rejection having a more pronounced negative impact. In contrast, parental emotional warmth and overprotection did not show significant predictive effects on self-confidence in this study. This suggests that reducing parental rejection—particularly fathers' negative, critical, and indifferent attitudes—may be an effective intervention pathway for enhancing college students' self-confidence.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive analysis

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
gender1male2female	306	1.48	.5	1	2
f t r	306	11.748	4.2	6	24
m t r	306	11.631	4.34	6	23
f t f	306	15.922	5.032	7	27
m t f	306	16.866	5.054	8	28
f t c	306	16.304	5.751	8	30
m t c	306	16.065	5.673	8	31
c t	306	31.324	3.483	22	38
Matrix of correlations					

Linear regression

Overall model fit indicator: $R^2 = 0.76$. The model explains 76.6% of the total variance in self-confidence, indicating strong explanatory power. Additionally, the F-test p-value < 0.001 demonstrates that the entire regression model is highly

Table 2 Correlation Analysis

Variables	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) c_t						
(2) f_t_r	1.000					
(3) m_t_r	0.874	1.000				
(4) f_t_f	-0.216	-0.233	1.000			
(5) m_t_f	-0.236	-0.252	0.877	1.000		
(6) f_t_c	0.344	0.324	-0.265	-0.248	1.000	
(7) m_t_c	0.292	0.264	-0.263	-0.245	0.918	1.000

Table 3 Linear regression analysis

c_t	Coef.	St. Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
f_t_r	-.544	.048	-11.30	0	-.639	-.45	***
m_t_r	-.183	.047	-3.93	0	-.275	-.091	***
f_t_f	.019	.041	0.46	.645	-.061	.098	
m_t_f	.008	.04	0.19	.85	-.072	.087	
f_t_c	-.026	.044	-0.58	.559	-.112	.061	
m_t_c	.025	.044	0.57	.57	-.061	.111	
Constant	39.438	.585	67.44	0	38.288	40.589	***
Mean dependent variable		31.324				3.483	
R-squared		0.766				306	
F-test		163.134				0.000	
Akaike criterion (AIC)		1200.725				1226.790	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

significant.

Regarding the data, college students' overall self-confidence scores were in the upper-middle range (mean = 31.32, with a maximum score of 38). Parents' "rejection" behaviors (f-t-r, m-t-r) averaged between 11 and 12 points (out of 24 or 23), falling within the moderate range but exhibiting significant standard deviation, indicating pronounced individual differences. Parents' "emotional warmth" (f-t-f, m-t-f) scored relatively high, with a mean close to 16, approaching the upper-middle range of its possible scope. This indicates that parents in the sample generally provide a certain level of emotional support. "Overprotection" (f-t-c, m-t-c) also falls in the upper-middle range (around 16 points, with a maximum score of approximately 31), suggesting that some parents exhibit a certain degree of controlling or protective tendencies toward their children.

Data analysis reveals: Parental rejection behaviors (f_t_r and m_t_r) exhibit extremely strong negative correlations with college students' self-confidence (-0.867 and -0.814 respectively). This indicates a profoundly negative relationship: the more parents exhibit rejection, denial, or non-acceptance, the lower their children's self-confidence levels. These two factors exhibit the highest absolute correlation coefficients with self-confidence among all variables, exerting the most significant negative impact.

However, emotional warmth (f-t-f and m-t-f) showed a weak positive correlation with self-confidence (0.232 and 0.248, respectively). Although positive, this correlation was relatively weak, indicating that while emotional warmth has a positive effect on self-confidence, its impact in this sample was less pronounced than the negative effect of rejecting behavior. In other words, providing emotional warmth may help boost self-confidence, but its effect in this data was not as evident as the detrimental impact of rejecting behavior on self-confidence.

Furthermore, overprotection (f_t_c and m_t_c) showed a moderate negative correlation with self-confidence (-0.315 and -0.260, respectively). Excessive parental protection and control can also weaken children's self-confidence to some extent, though the impact is less pronounced than that of "rejection behavior."

4 Conclusion

Parental rejection is the core factor influencing college students' self-confidence. Both paternal and maternal rejection (especially paternal) showed a strong negative correlation with self-confidence and emerged as significant predictors in the regression model. That is, the more rejection experienced, the lower the students' self-confidence. This may stem from prolonged parental rejection eroding an individual's sense of self-worth, thereby diminishing self-confidence. This phenomenon may stem from China's distinctive parenting culture, where parents often believe strictness benefits children's development, while encouragement and praise foster arrogance detrimental to personal growth. However, relentless suppression and negation of children can lead to a lack of personal self-worth and self-acceptance. Parental "rejection-oriented" parenting styles—marked by criticism, disapproval, and lack of acceptance—severely undermine children's confidence development and warrant special attention.

The positive effect of emotional warmth is relatively weak. Parental emotional support shows a weak positive correlation with self-confidence. However, after controlling for rejection behaviors, its independent influence becomes insignificant. This may occur because the effect of emotional warmth is overshadowed by the strong impact of rejection behaviors, or because its influence on self-confidence requires mediation through other variables (such as security).

The negative impact of overprotection is limited. Overprotection shows a moderate-to-weak negative correlation with self-confidence but is not significant in regression analyses. This may indicate that moderate protection does not significantly harm self-confidence, while the negative effects of overprotection only manifest when combined with other factors (such as rejection).

Parental Consistency in Parenting Styles. High correlations between parental behaviors across dimensions (e. g., rejection, emotional warmth) indicate a cohesive family environment where both parents' behavioral tendencies synergistically influence children.

In summary: Reducing parental rejection (particularly from fathers) may be a key intervention to enhance college students' self-confidence. While the direct effect of emotional warmth was not significant, its positive role warrants attention; families should prioritize increasing emotional support to foster a nurturing atmosphere. Future research should explore the mechanisms through which emotional warmth and overprotection influence self-confidence and expand sample representativeness to validate the generalizability of these findings.

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