



Linkages Between Parenting Practices and Adolescents' Life Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Resilience

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Background: Life satisfaction is a critical antecedent of adolescents' positive development in many domains. To promote adolescents to feel more satisfied with their lives, it is important to identify the factors influencing life satisfaction and to further investigate the inner mechanisms. The purpose of this research was to examine whether parenting practices were closely associated with life satisfaction among Chinese adolescents and whether these associations were mediated by adolescents' resilience.

Methods: In this one-year interval longitudinal study, 353 students (50.7% girls) in Grade 7 and Grade 10 were recruited as participants. At the first wave of assessment, they reported parenting practices and resilience; at the second wave of assessment, they rated the level of life satisfaction.

Results: The results of this study revealed that parental responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting promoted adolescents' life satisfaction. Additionally, parental responsiveness and demandingness positively predicted adolescents' life satisfaction through the mediating effect of adolescents' resilience; however, resilience did not significantly mediate the relation between autonomy granting and adolescents' life satisfaction.

Conclusion: Adolescents' resilience plays a mediating role in the relations between parental responsiveness and demandingness and adolescents' life satisfaction. The present study highlights the significance of providing adolescents with positive parenting practices and promoting adolescents' development of resilience to elevate their life satisfaction.

Keywords: adolescent, parenting practice, resilience, life satisfaction

Introduction

Life satisfaction is defined as one's cognitive judgement of life quality.¹ As a significant domain of positive psychology, it has received much attention. In this domain, given that adolescents are experiencing many challenges (eg, educational pressure) as well as opportunities (eg, cognitive development) for constructing life satisfaction,^{2,3} particular attention should be paid to this special developmental stage of adolescence. Recently, an increasing body of research found that adolescents' life satisfaction is the antecedent of many critical developmental outcomes, such as achieving academic success and decreasing problem behaviors.⁴⁻⁶ Therefore, it's necessary to focus on the stage of adolescence and identify factors contributing to life satisfaction. Among the influential factors, parenting practices may be vital determinants of life satisfaction.^{5,7,8} This study focused on investigating the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction in the Chinese cultural context. To advance previous research, we also examined whether adolescents' resilience was the underlying mechanism of these relations.

Parenting Practices and Life Satisfaction

The family system is a critical environment that influences individuals' development. Although individuals spend more time with peers during the period of adolescence, parents still are important providers of valuable advice and resources and supporters of their development.⁹ Within the family system, parenting practices play a critical part in influencing

adolescents' well-being in multiple domains, including life satisfaction.^{5,10} Parenting practices are "behaviors defined by specific content and socialization goals".¹¹ Researchers have divided parenting practices into three central dimensions: responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting.¹² Responsiveness refers to expressing emotional warmth to children and responding to children's needs.¹³ Demandingness refers to monitoring children's behaviors and regulating them through mature demands.¹⁴ This dimension is consistent with behavioral control and strictness/supervision but is distinct from psychological control where parents impose intrusiveness and domination on children that hinder their psychological and emotional development.¹⁵ Autonomy granting reflects encouraging children's expression, acknowledging their perspectives, and allowing them to make decisions independently.¹⁶

Empirical research has generally found that responsiveness and autonomy granting parenting practices are positively associated with adolescents' life satisfaction.^{5,7,8,17–20} Since responsive parents often provide emotional support for adolescents and promptly respond to their needs and demands, adolescents are more likely to achieve their psychological need for connectedness, and they would have a greater propensity to perceive life satisfaction.²¹ As for autonomy granting parenting practice, it can fulfill adolescents' psychological need for autonomy and promote the development of positive capacities and beliefs (eg, self-efficacy, self-reliance, and self-esteem), which would contribute to their perceptions of life satisfaction.^{13,22} For the relationship between demandingness and life satisfaction, the existing research found inconclusive results. For instance, some researchers found that parental demandingness promoted adolescents' life satisfaction in the Spanish, Peruvian, Mexican, and Chilean samples,²³ whereas this relationship was insignificant among late adolescents in Greece, Norway, Poland, and Switzerland.¹⁹ The inconsistent results may be explained by various cultural values which determine adolescents' appraisal of parental demandingness and influence the effects of this parenting practice on life satisfaction.

Although most previous studies have found close associations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction, they have mainly been conducted in Western cultural contexts. Few studies have examined these associations under the background of Chinese culture. Furthermore, only a few prior studies have explored the underlying mechanisms and examined the mediating factors of these relationships, such as psychology connectedness,¹⁹ reciprocal filial piety,²⁰ and self-efficacy.²² At present, we are still far from getting a comprehensive insight into the inner mechanism of how parenting practices are correlated with adolescents' life satisfaction. This study attempts to investigate the links between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction in the Chinese cultural background and examine the mechanism of these links by focusing on the mediating effects of adolescents' resilience.

Mediating Effect of Resilience

Resilience is defined as "the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development".²⁴ In a highly competitive society, it is inevitable to encounter setbacks, and it is important to recover mental balance and adapt to the changing environments after suffering setbacks. In the period of adolescence, resilience may be particularly important. Because adolescents face many challenges from various sources, such as adapting to educational transition, renegotiating their relationships with parents, or even experiencing violence in some conditions.^{25,26} Resilience can protect them from negative influences and help them deal with stressful events. Understanding the crucial role of resilience in family systems and adolescents' adaptation would facilitate adopting targeted strategies to promote adolescents' resilience, which in turn may contribute to their positive development in multiple domains.^{27–30}

Both theoretical and empirical evidence supports the idea of adolescents' resilience as a mediating factor in the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction.^{31–35} For the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' resilience, the Positive Youth Development theory provides a framework for understanding these relations. This theory proposes that adolescents' adaptive developmental outcomes can be promoted by harnessing individual and contextual resources.³² As an important family contextual resource, parenting practice may contribute to adolescents' development of resilience.³⁶ Most research supported this theory and demonstrated that responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting were positively correlated with adolescents' resilience.^{31,34,35} Responsive parents show understanding of adolescents' perspectives and provide emotional support for them, which facilitates them to develop resilience to effectively deal with challenges.³⁴ Parental demandingness can help adolescents understand rules,

limits, and consequences, thus making them more likely to develop self-regulation and adapt to challenges or stresses.³⁷ And autonomy granting can provide adolescents with more opportunities to consider and attempt different solutions and learn from the outcomes when faced with problems.³⁷ Adolescents' resilience may derive from the experience of independently planning and making decisions.³¹

For the link between resilience and adolescents' life satisfaction, empirical evidence consistently suggests that adolescents' resilience is positively linked to life satisfaction, and the positive link has been found both in the Western and Eastern cultural contexts.^{29,33,38–40} Resilience can help adolescents develop psychological resources, such as affect balance,⁴¹ self-esteem,³³ and hope.⁴² Then, these psychological resources facilitate adolescents to resist or recover from negative influences of crises and to actively respond to challenges. As a result, adolescents possessing higher levels of resilience tend to feel more satisfied with their lives.

The Chinese Cultural Background

The interactions of parents and adolescents are embedded in a broad cultural background, and the effects of parenting practices are influenced by the match between parenting and cultural norms.^{43,44} Since there are some unique characteristics of the Chinese cultural background, we would like to consider the effects of parenting practices in this specific cultural context. Unlike Western cultural values which place more importance on autonomy, traditional Chinese culture places particular emphasis on hierarchy and conformity to authority.⁴⁵ Additionally, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes parents' responsibility for disciplining and training their children to meet social requirements.⁴⁶ In this cultural context, adolescents tend to interpret parental demandingness with positive meaning, such as a highly involved concern and care rather than domination and control.^{46,47} With the social change, traditional Chinese cultural values are constantly interacting with Western cultural values, and some cultural values are changing towards individualism (eg, encouraging autonomy).⁴⁸ Under the current Chinese cultural background, autonomy granting may meet adolescents' needs, thus promoting their positive development. This study aims to explore the effects of parenting practices on adolescents' resilience and life satisfaction in this unique cultural background. And the exploration of this research question would enrich the literature.

The Present Study

In this study, our purpose is to investigate the relations between parenting practices (ie, responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting) and adolescents' life satisfaction and examine the mediating role of adolescents' resilience in these relations under the current Chinese cultural background. Considering the theoretical and empirical evidence and the contemporary Chinese cultural context, we assume that responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting would positively correlate with adolescents' life satisfaction, and adolescents' resilience would mediate these relations.

Method

Participants

A longitudinal design was utilized to collect data in this study. Using cluster sampling, we recruited 448 Chinese adolescents in Grade 7 and Grade 10 from 4 secondary schools (47.8% girls; age range: 11.06–17.11 years; $M_{age} = 13.83 \pm 1.64$ years). One year later, ninety-five students were excluded because of their incomplete questionnaires or withdrawn from this study. The final data set contained 353 students (50.7% girls) who accomplished two-wave assessments. The result of the missing data analysis showed that except for demandingness, none of the study variables at the first assessment significantly differed between the missing and retained individuals (see [Table S1](#) in [Supplemental Material](#)). For parents' educational level, 57.22% of mothers and 66.00% of fathers got senior high school or higher degrees. For the parents' occupational statuses, 90.93% of mothers and 86.40% of fathers had semiprofessional or professional occupations.

Procedure

This study involved assessment at two time points. Before collecting data, we got written informed consent from all participants. We also informed the participants' parents about this study and obtained their informed consent. At each assessment, we instructed the participants to complete self-reported questionnaires. At Time 1, they rated parenting practices and resilience; and at Time 2, they rated life satisfaction. This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and received ethical approval from the institutional review board of Shandong Women's University.

Measures

Parenting Practices

The Chinese version of the Parenting Styles Inventory II (PSI-II) was used to assess parenting practices.⁴⁹ This measure consists of three subscales: responsiveness (eg, "My father/mother and I do things that are fun together"), demandingness (eg, "My father/mother points out ways I could do better"), and autonomy granting (eg, "My father/mother believes I have a right to my own point of view"). Adolescents reported parenting practices on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The Chinese version of PSI-II had good reliability in this study (responsiveness: $\alpha = 0.80$; demandingness: $\alpha = 0.76$; autonomy granting: $\alpha = 0.81$). The result of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the data fitted well with the three-factor model (RMSEA = 0.056, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91).

Resilience

The Resilience Scale for Chinese Adolescents was employed to assess resilience.⁵⁰ In this study, three dimensions of this scale were used: goal planning (eg, "When faced with difficulties, I usually make a plan and find a solution"), affect control (eg, "I can adjust my emotions very well in a short time"), and positive thinking (eg, "I think compared to the results, the process can help people grow"). Participants rated each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *totally untrue* to 5 = *totally true*. The internal consistency of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.80$). CFA showed that the three-factor model was acceptable (RMSEA = 0.055, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91).

Life Satisfaction

The Chinese version of the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale was utilized to measure adolescents' life satisfaction.^{51,52} Participants reported their satisfaction with life in specific domains on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *completely false* to 7 = *completely true*. The internal consistency of this scale was excellent ($\alpha = 0.95$). As indicated by the result of CFA, the construct validity of this scale was acceptable (RMSEA = 0.060, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90).

Analysis Plan

In the current study, Structural Equation Modeling along with Mplus 7.4 was used to analyze the relations between parenting practices, adolescents' resilience, and life satisfaction. Specifically, we examined the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction in the total effect model. Furthermore, we examined the mediating effects of adolescents' resilience on these relations in the mediation model. Resilience and life satisfaction were constructed as latent variables based on the subscales in these models. We used 95% bias-corrected bootstrap to test the significance of the total effects and the mediating effects. The effect was significant when a 95% confidence interval (95% CI) did not include zero. To evaluate the overall model fit, the following statistical criteria were used: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). Overall model fit was acceptable when RMSEA was lower than 0.08, and CFI and TLI were higher than 0.90.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the values of mean, standard deviation, and correlation among parenting practices, resilience, and life satisfaction. Three dimensions of parenting practices (ie, responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting) were

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Responsiveness	3.49	0.80	-				
2 Demandingness	3.61	0.67	0.12*	-			
3 Autonomy granting	3.45	0.82	0.43***	-0.20***	-		
4 Resilience	3.62	0.60	0.27***	0.20***	0.19***	-	
5 Life satisfaction	5.32	0.96	0.36***	0.18**	0.26***	0.43***	-

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

positively correlated with adolescents' resilience and life satisfaction. And adolescents' resilience and life satisfaction also were correlated with each other.

Mediating Effect of Resilience

The fitting indexes met the statistical criteria, which indicated that the total effect model was acceptable (RMSEA = 0.080, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94). The total effects of the three dimensions of parenting practices on adolescents' life satisfaction were positive (responsiveness: $\beta = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.38]; demandingness: $\beta = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.34]; autonomy granting: $\beta = 0.21$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.31]). Then we examined the mediating effects of resilience on the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction. The fitting indexes showed that the data fitted well to the mediation model (RMSEA = 0.072, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92). As displayed in [Table 2](#), resilience mediated the relations between parental responsiveness and demandingness and adolescents' life satisfaction. However, resilience did not significantly mediate the relation between autonomy granting and adolescents' life satisfaction.

As shown in [Figure 1](#), responsiveness and demandingness were positively associated with adolescents' resilience (responsiveness: $\beta = 0.23$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.39]; demandingness: $\beta = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.38]); however, autonomy granting was insignificantly associated with adolescents' resilience ($\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.30]). In turn, adolescents' resilience positively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.41$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.54]).

Although the direction of the relation between parenting practices and adolescents' resilience was supported by Positive Youth Development theory,³² these variables were concurrently measured. Therefore, we examined the alternative model in which adolescents' resilience predicted life satisfaction through parenting practices. The result found that the fitness indexes of the alternative model were worse than the original model (RMSEA = 0.129, CFI = 0.81, TLI = 0.75). And the mediating paths were insignificant or marginally significant in the alternative model (see [Table S2](#) in [Supplemental Material](#)). Considering the theoretical background and the result of statistical analysis, the original model was preferred.

Table 2 Standardized Estimates and 95% CIs for Direct and Indirect Effects

Path	Standardized Estimate	95% CI
Direct effect		
Responsiveness → Life Satisfaction	0.16 ^a	[0.03, 0.28]
Demandingness → Life Satisfaction	0.10	[-0.02, 0.22]
Autonomy granting → Life Satisfaction	0.15 ^a	[0.02, 0.27]
Indirect effect		
Responsiveness → Resilience → Life Satisfaction	0.10 ^a	[0.03, 0.18]
Demandingness → Resilience → Life Satisfaction	0.10 ^a	[0.04, 0.17]
Autonomy granting → Resilience → Life Satisfaction	0.06	[0.00, 0.14]

Note: ^aEmpirical 95% confidence interval does not include zero.

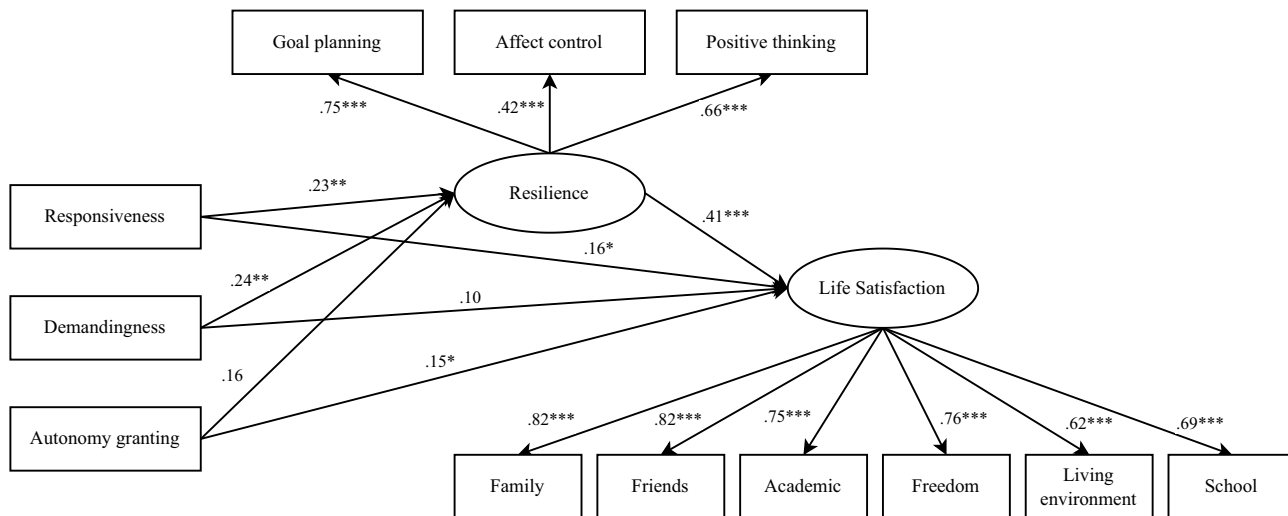


Figure 1 Mediation analysis of parenting practices on life satisfaction via resilience.

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

This study sought to examine the relations between parenting practices and Chinese adolescents' life satisfaction. Furthermore, this study investigated the underlying mechanism of these relations by focusing on the mediating role of adolescents' resilience.

Parenting Practices and Life Satisfaction

Consistent with previous studies,^{7,8,17} the current study found that responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting positively predicted adolescents' life satisfaction. This may be because responsive parents can fulfill adolescents' basic psychological needs for connectedness by providing them with emotional warmth and responding to their needs.²¹ Adolescents are more likely to derive satisfaction with life from perceiving emotional connectedness with their parents.²¹ Regarding the beneficial role of demandingness on adolescents' life satisfaction, the unique Chinese cultural context may explain this result. Western cultural values place more importance on individualism and promote individual freedom and self-expression.⁵³ In this cultural orientation, western parents are encouraged to exert control, directive, and discipline with caution, and western adolescents may treat parental demandingness as less acceptable and desirable.⁵³ In contrast, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism and encourages the parenting practice of disciplining and training children to meet social requirements.⁴⁶ When parents set limitations on their children's behaviors and propose demands for them, Chinese adolescents tend to regard parental demandingness as normative, interpret this parenting practice as a highly involved concern, and perceive parents' good intention of promoting children's development.⁴⁷ Therefore, Chinese adolescents exposed to high levels of demandingness also feel satisfied with life. As for the promotion effect of autonomy granting on adolescents' life satisfaction, it may be that adolescents are inclined to endorse the cultural values of autonomy and individuality in the process of experiencing interaction between Western and Chinese cultural values.⁴⁸ When provided with adequate autonomy, their desire for autonomy would be fulfilled, leading to satisfaction with life.²²

Mediation of Resilience

According to our findings, adolescents' resilience mediated the relations between parental responsiveness and demandingness and adolescents' life satisfaction. Responsive parents provide emotional support for their children and show more understanding and response to their needs. Adolescents' development of resilience may be rooted in this positive parenting practice which helps adolescents buffer the consequences of stressful events.^{31,34,35} Demandingness also plays an important role in promoting adolescents' resilience because this parenting practice serves the functions of inhibiting adolescents' problematic behaviors and fostering adaptive outcomes.³⁷ Raised in this parenting practice, adolescents can acquire the skills of regulating

themselves, develop the strategies of flexibly adapting to challenges, and actively deal with the stressors in their lives.³⁷ In turn, the development of resilience may increase the opportunities to perceive life satisfaction.³¹

However, adolescents' resilience did not significantly mediate the relation between autonomy granting and adolescents' life satisfaction. This may be explained by that the participants in this study were in a period of educational transition. During this critical period, adolescents would face increasing educational pressure and adaptive problems and need more guidance and advice from parents. Those receiving much autonomy and freedom may lack adequate strategies or supports to tackle the challenges in their lives. Therefore, adolescents may be more likely to experience severe difficulties which hinder them from developing resilience.³²

Implications for Practice

Our study suggests that positive parenting practices are important elements in promoting adolescents' resilience and life satisfaction. Therefore, programs should be implemented to guide parents to adopt positive parenting practices, for example, how to express responsiveness to children's needs, which family rules should be set to discipline children's behavior and direct them to pursue excellence, and when is appropriate to grant adolescents autonomy. These programs are particularly useful for parents who are facing obstacles in the process of parenting children and those who need more information and support to improve their parenting practices. In addition, it is also necessary to develop programs aiming at promoting adolescents' development of resilience, such as teaching adolescents problem-solving coping strategies,⁵⁴ encouraging them to participate in prosocial activities,⁵⁵ and providing them with mindfulness training.⁵⁶ By developing and implementing targeted programs, adolescents would have more opportunities to get support from family environments and build psychological resources, which may further enhance their life satisfaction.

Contributions and Limitations

The present study has some contributions in the following aspects. First, this study enriches the literature by examining the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction in a non-Western cultural context. Second, this study extends our understanding of the inner mechanism by demonstrating that adolescents' resilience is an important mediator of the relations between these variables. Additionally, the mediating roles of adolescents' resilience varied for the relations between different parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction. Third, there are some practical implications suggested by the results of this study. For instance, parents should provide their children with emotional support, appropriate discipline, and adequate autonomy to enhance their life satisfaction. Furthermore, parents also should use responsiveness and demandingness to promote adolescents' development of resilience which contributes to their life satisfaction.

Despite these contributions, there are several limitations of this study. First, we recruited Chinese adolescents as participants in this study. Caution should be exercised when generalizing the conclusions of this study to other cultural contexts or other developmental stages. Second, we found that individuals retained in the study reported a higher level of parental demandingness than those excluded from this study. Therefore, it should be prudent when interpreting the effects of parental demandingness. Third, the research design of this study was not optimal. In this study, parenting practices and adolescents' resilience were measured concurrently. Future research should conduct a 3-wave longitudinal research design to examine the associations between these variables. Finally, this study only examined the mediation of adolescents' resilience. Future research should explore other possible mediators and compare the effects of different mediators.

Conclusions

This study investigated the relations between parenting practices and adolescents' life satisfaction in the contemporary Chinese cultural background. Furthermore, this study also explored the mediating role of adolescents' resilience in these relations. The findings suggested that responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting can promote adolescents' life satisfaction. Additionally, parental responsiveness and demandingness can help adolescents build resilience, which in turn contributes to life satisfaction. This study may be useful for directing professionals and practitioners to adopt targeted efforts to enhance adolescents' life satisfaction, such as guiding parents to use positive parenting practices and developing projects to strengthen adolescents' resilience.

Funding

This study was funded by the Scientific Research Fund for High-level Talents in Shandong Women's University (2019RCYJ05) and the Science and Technology Support Plan for Youth Innovation in Shandong Province (2021RW022).

Disclosure

The authors declared no conflicts of interest in this work.

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