

The Closed Loop Between Parental Upbringing and Online Game Addiction: A Narrative Study of Rural Children's Growth in China

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Purpose: With the rapid development of information, digital networks, and artificial intelligence technologies, the new generation of children growing up with electronic products faces the dilemma of addiction to online games. There is a significant correlation between the addiction of rural children to online games and the lack of proper parental upbringing.

Patients and Methods: Based on purposive sampling, the research selected 41 sixth-grade rural children, 20 parents, and 14 teachers from three cities in Zhejiang Province, China. Three rounds of semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted.

Results: The research portrayed that the parental upbringing styles of rural children addicted to online games could be categorized into four types: conflict and chaos type, indulgent and permissive type, disciplinary neglect type, and coercive and brutal type. All four parenting styles were related to emotional involvement and value guidance.

Discussion: Both the parenting styles of rural parents and the children's addiction to online games were difficult to self-update and change, and they mutually "affirmed" and even reinforced each other. Insufficient cultural capital was found in rural families, resulting in a closed loop between parental upbringing and online game addiction. Introducing professional expertise, increasing cultural capital, and promoting improvement in rural parenting styles are crucial.

Keywords: rural children, online game addiction, parental upbringing, closed-loop effect, narrative research

Introduction

With the advent of the digital era, everyday electronic devices are gradually becoming increasingly ubiquitous and user-friendly. Consequently, a serious problem has arisen, wherein children are becoming addicted to online games.¹ Children are captivated by the constantly evolving content of online game programs, reshaping the landscape of childhood entertainment and its integration into their daily lives. According to the Chinese 2020 National Research Report on Internet Use among Minors, 62.5% of minors have accessed and engaged with online games.² This indicates a trend towards lowering the age at which children become addicted to these games. Research shows that addiction to online games can reinforce aggressive tendencies in children,³ contribute to academic neglect, increase social interaction barriers,⁴ and even result in physical harm.⁵ The issue of children's addiction to online games has surpassed the scope of a single "educational" concern. In August 2021, the National Press and Publication Administration issued the Notice on Further Strict Management and Effective Prevention of Minors' Addiction to Online Games. This initiative strives to address the problem of minors' addiction to online games from a national perspective and with a comprehensive approach to prevention.

Owing to factors such as their relatively secluded living environment, insufficient family capital, and a lack of high-quality educational resources in schools, rural children are more susceptible to the harmful effects of online game addiction, and this susceptibility is difficult to control. Examining the issue of online game addiction among rural

children and delving into the theoretical underpinnings of their “entrapment” in online games can offer valuable theoretical support for the development of effective strategies. Existing research findings suggests that compared with societal governance of online games and school-based education on preventing game addiction, families can exert a more direct and profound role in addressing the issue of children’s addiction to online games.⁶ Family parenting practices mainly manifest in the interactive behaviors of daily transmission and example-setting, which is the process of children continuously accumulating cultural capital.⁷ In light of aforementioned points, this study investigates the correlation between parental upbringing and online game addiction, employing a narrative research approach to discern the practical implications inherent in examining family upbringing styles that induce online game addiction among rural children.

Literature Review

Online Games and Addiction to Online Games

In Chinese, online games are abbreviated as “WangYou” and are essentially game products in which computers or mobile phones serve as clients; the internet serves as a medium for data transmission, and multiple users can participate simultaneously by using IP or TCP protocols.⁸ The immersive nature of online games stimulates the central nervous system of children, fostering heightened sensation of joy and contributing to the development of prolong dependency.⁹ The reasons behind this phenomenon can be attributed to several factors: first, the strong visual appeal provides players with a sense of novelty;¹⁰ second, the rich content satisfies the desire to play different roles in various scenarios, fostering a sense of belonging to a team;¹¹ third, the absence of geographical restrictions caters to players’ curiosity about making friends from different places;¹² fourth, virtual equality sparks and sustains players’ passion;¹³ fifth, the inclusion of violence fulfills children’s emotional compensation and emotional release needs.¹⁴ These characteristics of online games can stimulate children’s enthusiasm and become an important choice to escape from real-life challenges.

The phenomenon of addiction to online games is frequently explored in the fields of psychology and sociology. Addiction is the condition in which a subject develops a strong preference for a particular object, attaching themselves psychologically and physically to it. A person who is addicted may use an object of addiction as a means of eliminating negative emotions to gain a sense of satisfaction, recognition, pleasure, and belonging.¹⁵ The term addiction to online games refers to players finding themselves continuously drawn to online games, immersing themselves in them for extended periods, and experiencing psychological, physiological, and social skill impairments as a result.¹⁶

Parenting Styles and Addiction to Online Games

While the definition of parenting styles is relatively mature, there are variations in the classification methods. Parenting styles encompass the attitudes and behaviors of parents in raising their children, with the emotional atmosphere created during parent-child interactions being a critical factor in examining parenting styles.¹⁷ According to Baumrind,¹⁸ when raising children parenting styles can be classified as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive based on parents’ relatively stable thoughts and behaviors. Similarly, MacDonald¹⁹ divides parenting styles into authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful based on the degree of responsiveness and demands in parent-child interaction. Annette Lareau²⁰ introduces the strategies of concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth, considering daily life organization, language use, social networks, and interactions between family and social institutions as the basis. Chinese scholars have also proposed various parenting styles, including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, based on satisfying children’s needs and restraining their behavior.²¹ Other approaches include a combination of rewards and punishment, cautious planning, the law of the jungle, and helplessness based on factors like achievement evaluation, parental roles, cultivation orientation, parent-child interactions, time arrangements, and family-school interactions.²²

Focusing on the parenting styles of rural children, most parents prioritize the safety of their children as a primary consideration.²³ They adhere to the philosophy of allowing children to grow naturally,²⁴ expecting the logic of nurturing children’s health and allowing them to follow their instincts.²⁵ Parents adopt this parenting style for various reasons, including the challenges of their own complicated lives, which make it difficult for them to take care of their children.²⁶ Additionally, a subset of parents faces limitation in economic, cultural and social capital, making it difficult to address their children’s educational needs.²⁷ To compensate for a lack of educational resources for their children, some parents

adopt a parenting style characterized by loose time management, permissive daily education, and irrational economic investments.²⁸ While few parents wish to break their children away from the rural lifestyle, they emphasize their children's intellectual and educational achievements when choosing a parenting style.²⁹ The choice of parenting styles reflects differences in parenting philosophies and is influenced by family capital,³⁰ parents' life experiences, and nurturing capabilities.³¹

Inappropriate parenting styles serve as catalysts for children's addiction to online games.³² Studies indicate that authoritative parenting styles exhibit a negative prediction towards adolescent internet addiction,³³ while permissive and mixed parenting styles pose as risk factors for adolescent internet addiction.³⁴ Some scholars argue that warm parenting styles are negative predictors of adolescent internet addiction,³⁵ whereas strict parenting styles exhibit positive predictions.³⁶ According to the "compensation deficit" hypothesis, adolescent internet addiction arises from the hindrance of adolescent psychological development, resulting in internet usage issues and even pathological psychological compensation mechanisms.³⁷ Therefore, parental parenting styles have a significant impact on children's internet gaming addiction behaviors.

Parenting Styles and Social Mobility

Cultural capital serves as the foundation of values and guiding principles for parenting styles, leading to different parenting approaches based on a family's cultural capital.³⁸ According to Pierre Bourdieu,³⁹ cultural capital refers to "cultural goods transmitted through various educational activities" primarily enjoyed by the upper-middle class. The lack of this cultural capital in lower-class families contributes to class solidification and perpetuates class inequality.⁴⁰ Cheng Meng⁴¹ argues that lower-class families also possess cultural capital, demonstrated through attributes such as the spirit of hard working, being positive, optimistic attitude cultivated in daily life and interpersonal interactions.

Parenting styles play a crucial role in social mobility. Scholars have conducted empirical research on parenting styles and social mobility, presenting two contrasting viewpoints. One, represented by Bourdieu⁴² and Lareau,²⁰ argues that parenting styles harm social mobility. They argued that lower-class families lack cultural capital, and their parents pass down generations of parenting styles that do not adequately cultivate a high culture in their children. As a result, children struggle to adapt to the learning patterns in schools, inheriting their parents' occupations and becoming trapped in repetitive class replication. The other viewpoint, represented by Cheng Meng,⁴³ Zhu Rongjun,⁴⁴ and Yu Xiulan,⁴⁵ argues that parenting styles in lower-class families motivate children to strive and instill moral thinking about studying for social mobility. Through diligent studying and higher education, children break free from the fate of working in fields or factories, achieving upward social mobility.

Existing literature has detailed classifications of parenting styles. Still, it overlooks situations where parental intentions deviate from parenting outcomes and the phenomenon of conflicting parenting styles among multiple guardians in the same household. Even though there is some connection between children's addiction to online games and parenting styles, there is insufficient focus on the specific parenting styles experienced by rural children addicted to online games within the unique urban-rural dual development pattern in China. The interplay between these parenting styles and addictive phenomena, coupled with the resultant social stratification effects, remains insufficiently explored. This study centers on addressing this gap in the existing literature.

Materials and Methods

Narrative Research

The interweaving, fluidity, and complexity of characters' thoughts and actions are clearly expressed in narrative research.⁴⁶ Rural children's addiction to online games manifests in children spending long, involuntary hours holding their phones, seeking solace in the virtual world.⁴⁷ Upon closer observation, it becomes apparent that these children often receive an education considered "poor" and, since their parents work outside or their grandparents prioritize their safety as the parenting goal,⁴⁸ they become entangled in the space of online gaming due to the prevalence of information technology in rural areas. The education system in rural areas, comprising schools, children's families, and the village,

constitutes an intricately interwoven system.⁴⁹ The addiction to online games in these children is complex, and narrative research serves as an appropriate method to reveal the relationships between factors and underlying reasons.

Educational narrative research indicates telling stories based on collected data.⁵⁰ The basic process involves collecting data, interpreting data, and revealing insights. The process involves selecting “key events” and “local concepts”, reconstructing “local stories”, and finally interpreting and extracting certain truths. To ensure the credibility of this study’s conclusions, the subjects interviewed were children who had experienced addiction to online games. The research involved in-depth interviews with these children, their parents, and their teachers, ensuring that the voices of all three parties were heard. The grounded theory method was then applied to analyze the interview data, generating local concepts. Finally, in the presentation of results, the addiction process is described, dynamically reconstructing the childhood of rural children in the context of online games.

Sample Information

This study discusses the research findings on children’s addiction to online gaming, including semi-structured interviews conducted with adolescents aged 12–14 ($n=41$, 23 males, 18 females), their classroom teachers ($n=20$), and parents ($n=14$). Separate interview outlines were used for parents, students, and teachers to understand the experiences of rural children’s internet gaming addiction and to seek correlations with parenting styles. The student interview outline aimed to understand children’s attitudes, behaviors, and the influence of parenting styles on online gaming, with questions such as “Please talk about why you enjoy playing online games”. The teacher interview outline primarily explored the impact of online gaming on students, their attitudes towards gaming, and teachers’ experiences and strategies in guiding students to use online games reasonably, with questions like “Please discuss cases of students addicted to online games”. The parent interview outline mainly aimed at understanding parents’ parenting beliefs and styles, daily parenting practices, parenting styles, and online gaming, to deeply understand parents’ parenting styles and their roles in children’s internet gaming addiction behaviors, with questions like “Please talk about experiences of trying to balance your child’s gaming and study time”.

Samples were drawn from different economic regions (high, medium, and low), school sizes (with a cutoff of 200 students), and geographical locations (remote and suburban), with a total of 9 primary schools recruited. The survey used purposive sampling to consult with sixth-grade classroom teachers through school coordination to understand the situation of students in the class who might be affected academically due to internet gaming addiction. The selection of interviewees was primarily based on the criteria of “gaming addiction” proposed by Young (1998).⁵¹ While organizing the interview data, it became apparent that some respondents’ answers were ambiguous or contradictory. Data triangulation was conducted to ensure precision and reliability. Subsequently, after obtaining student consent, the final list of interviewed parents and teachers was determined based on the personal preferences of their parents and teachers. Interviews were mainly conducted face-to-face ($n=48$), with the remainder ($n=27$) conducted via phone or video calls.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher designed three separate interview outlines for children, parents, and teachers and conducted in-depth interviews based on these outlines to collect data. The interviews were conducted in three rounds, with the first round taking place from May 2020 to January 2021. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees’ consent, capturing key events, interviewee micro-expressions, and subtle movements. From May 2021 to October 2021, follow-up interviews were conducted to better understand parent-child relationships and gaming habits. The follow-up interviews were conducted similarly to the initial interviews, with slight modifications to the content of the interview.

Furthermore, follow-up interviews were conducted from March 2022 to December 2022 to understand the interviewees’ latest thoughts and consider any changes in their perspectives. In the follow-up interviews, specific questions were extracted from the interview outlines related to parents’ interactions with their children, gaming addiction situations, and parental attitudes toward online gaming. As a result, irrelevant responses were excluded from the data collected in the three rounds of interviews. A total of 443,000 words of interview data were collected, including 264,000 words from children, 137,000 words from parents, and 42,000 words from teachers.

For ease of reference, the interviewees were numbered according to the order of their interviews. For instance, the first child interviewed in Jinhua City was labeled as “E-Child-1”, the first parent was labeled as “J-Parent-1”, and the first teacher was labeled as “T-Teacher-1”. The collected data, already numbered, from the three groups of rural children, parents, and teachers were combined for coding. The coding process involved labeling, categorization, dimensionality reduction, identifying key events, summarizing real stories, extracting local concepts, presenting research results, and refining research findings. During the data analysis, conflicts in the answers between children and parents were specially marked, and a focused analysis was conducted with a focus on verification. The article, aiming to emphasize the effectiveness of conveying details in educational narratives, did not present the three-level coding process. Instead, it integrated the coding process into the research findings, showing the results of the coding process. For example, in Research Finding (1), the original materials from “J-Parent-8”, “E-Child-39”, and “T-Teacher-14” were presented. Eight open code categories such as “intergenerational affection” “cheering up children” “personal safety” “limited pulling of children’s attention” “lack of time to manage children” “harsh education” “non-intervention in child growth” and “uncertainty about authority” were analyzed and presented in the text as details of parenting styles. Three axial code categories, such as “permissive parenting” “emphasis on parenting quality” and “lack of safety” were presented as aspects of the family environment. Finally, two selective code categories, “parenting battle” and “online gaming for security” were introduced in the text as typical characteristics of parenting style A.

Theoretical Saturation

The research strictly employs a methodological approach based on grounded theory, utilizing theoretical category saturation to determine when to cease data collection and analysis. The theory is considered saturated when the collected data fails to generate new insights and does not reveal novel attributes.⁵² Initially, the researcher analyzes the extracted concepts metaphorically to assess saturation, comparing overlaps between metaphors. The cross-concepts are then re-encoded until no new concepts emerge, ensuring accuracy, independence, and evenness in conceptual density. Subsequently, qualitative researchers who have not participated in this study randomly selected interview data for coding. Upon re-coding the data for participants labeled as “E-child-21”, “E-child-22”, “J-parent-4”, and “T-teacher-2”, it was found that while there were differences in the expression of some concept names, their essence was consistent, and no new categories emerged. This confirms theory saturation, justifying the cessation of sampling.

Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, transparency, and objectivity. Participants were informed on the research’ purpose and the methodology employed for data collection, analysis and presentation prior to the conducting interview. After obtaining consent, the interviews were recorded. Participants may find it challenging to comprehend terms like “solely for academic research” or “research ethics” directly. Therefore, a conceptual analogy approach employed during the informed consent process. In this analogy, “research paper” is compared to “composition”, and “academic research” is compared to “cultivation”, ensuring that personal information will not be disclosed in the composition and thoughts of participants will not be overlooked during cultivation. Throughout the interview process, utmost respect was given to the participants’ individual preferences. Whenever there was hesitation or reluctance to share information on a specific question, it was omitted, and the inquiry proceeded to the subsequent one.

Results

The family serves as a microsystem with a direct and profound impact on individual growth. Parenting style, as a core element of family education, plays a crucial role in the development of children. Data analysis reveals that behind each rural child addicted to online games, there is a unique family story. These stories can be summarized and distilled into four distinct parenting styles. In this study, a total of 36 families were interviewed, and the frequency of parenting styles during the interviews was statistically calculated as follows: approximately 16.7% for Type A, approximately 19.3% for Type B, approximately 41.7% for Type C, and approximately 22.3% for Type D.

A-Type Parenting Style: “Parenting Battle” and “Security Through Online Gaming”

The descriptions of “Parenting Battle” and “Security through Online Gaming” depict A-type rural families’ current parenting situation and childhood experiences. In A-type families, elders actively participate in children’s education and daily life. However, each of them has their parenting ideals and beliefs. When there are differences in parenting views, they persist in raising children according to their ideas, resulting in varying degrees of chaos in family education. This type of parenting style struggles to form educational cohesion within the family.

A-type parenting styles often appear in rural families where parents and grandparents jointly raise children, resulting in conflicting opinions regarding child-rearing. The older generation tends to adopt a “permissive parenting” approach: first, they spoil the child; second, they use electronic devices to make the child happy to avoid conflicts with their children; third, they prioritize the child’s safety, considering staying at home playing on a mobile phone safer than outdoor activities; fourth, due to the advanced age of the grandparents, their energy for “pulling the child” is limited, leading to neglect in the child’s education. Compared to the older generation, parents today are more concerned with instilling good habits and character into their children. During upbringing, the differences in parenting ideologies often lead to conflicts between the two generations. Although they find it difficult to mutually acknowledge each other, young parents lack the time and energy to care for their children and have to entrust the older generation to do this.

My eldest son was originally taken care of by myself. When I was pregnant with my second child, I had no choice but to leave him in my hometown. In his hometown, he learned to play games and became disobedient, picky about food, and unwilling to study. I said playing games is not good, but older people take pride in him playing games. My mother even gave him money to buy software to break anti-addiction system. I am really angry. The battle for educating children has been fought three hundred times. I have said many times not to let him (the child) play games, but my parents don’t listen. How can we go on like this! (J - Parent - 8)

A-type parenting style also exists in rural families where fathers and mothers have strong conflicting views on education. Due to differences in personality, ways of handling things, and educational beliefs, parents may disagree on their children’s education issues. One advocates for strict education, while the other prefers not to intervene in the child’s development. The child cannot determine who is the authority and whose side should be followed. Some children even exploit their parents’ conflicts to gain entry into the game.

In our family, my parents often quarrel. My mother thinks my father and I are not hygienic, love playing games, and lack ambition. Whenever my mother scolds me for playing games, my father takes me for a walk. My father thinks it’s normal for kids to play games. He is so old and still plays games. My mother gets even angrier. If I didn’t want to play alone, my mother scolding me was useless. I have my father as a protective umbrella. (E-Child - 39)

His family (the 39th interviewed child) is chaotic, and it’s from a village near the school; I have heard of some things. His parents let the child choose who to be closer to whenever they quarrel. If they divorce, the child has to follow one of them. Every time they quarrel, they make it difficult for the child. This child used to be cheerful, but now he droops his head. He only smiles a bit when playing games. (T-Teacher - 14)

Conflicts in parenting concepts and chaotic practices within the family can create a sense of insecurity for immature rural children, leaving them confused in their lives and consequently leading to their addiction to online games.

B-Type Parenting Style: “Fulfilling All Requests” and “Unrestricted Entry to Online Gaming”

The descriptions of “Fulfilling All Requests” and “Unrestricted Entry to Online Gaming” signify the current parenting situation and childhood experiences in B-type rural families. Furthermore, in B-type families, there is a typical behavior to give the child whatever they want without providing proper value guidance. The parents maximize material satisfaction for their children while pampering them emotionally, resulting in the children’s indulgent behavior. In such families, children have almost no restrictions on the use of electronic devices, which increases the likelihood of them becoming addicted to online games.

B-type parents most often provide unlimited material satisfaction for their children. The maximization of material satisfaction facilitates the child's access to electronic devices, resulting in a hidden risk of addiction to online games. Increasing opportunities for parents to work outside the home increases their material wealth, enabling them to purchase smartphones and computers for their children. Due to the inability to accompany the child, parents use the internet and electronic devices to fill the emotional void in their lives.⁵³ This reduces any psychological guilt toward the child. Meanwhile, influenced by the traditional notion of "hoping for a successful child", parents emphasize academic performance. To motivate the child to "rank high", they link grades with material rewards and generally fulfill their child's requests to buy electronic products.

I initially played using my dad's phone. In the fourth grade, I got my phone and started playing more. Gradually, I fell in love with the games and couldn't help but play. They said they would buy me a phone if I scored over 90 in every subject on the final exam. I did well on that test, so they bought it for me. As long as the grades are good, they don't care whether I play games or not. My grades have always been good; they will buy me whatever I want. Last time, I scored a perfect score, and my grandmother gave me 100 yuan to buy 'skins. (E - Child -26)

B-type parents unconditionally pamper their children emotionally. In a society with a low birth rate, the only child receives all the "love" from all family members and is emotionally pampered without any conditions. In rural areas, parents do not restrain their children out of love; rather, they believe in the need to protect their children. If the children have a penchant for play, the parents feel it is essential to let them engage in such activities. Particularly concerning the issue of online game addiction, they may ignore the potential negative impact of online games on the child.

My grandfather, grandmother, dad, mom, aunt and uncle all love me. They will fulfill whatever I want. My uncle who had not gotten married yet, I would go to their house to play on weekends, play games all night, and he would take me out for fried chicken. He will give me money to buy props. He has never scolded me. (E - Child -2)

My younger brother (child's uncle) is quite indulgent with the child. He just started working, and his personality is playful. He can play with our little devil in the family. We basically don't scold the child in our family. He is still young and doesn't understand things, which is normal. We rarely talk to him about reasoning because children can't understand. They have to experience it themselves. Don't be afraid to make mistakes; he will learn from his own mistakes. (J - Parent -1)

Parents do not know how to guide their children, especially when there is only one child in the family, and parents tend to indulge their child's every desire. They buy whatever the child wants. (T -Teacher -2)

In B-type rural families lacking educational guidance, children raised by parents often only know how to play without self-discipline. The parent-child relationship, sustained by material consumption, ultimately evolves into a situation where the child unrestrainedly demands, and the parents go to great lengths to fulfill those demands. Once these children become addicted to online games, even if their parents realize the harm of addiction, they cannot stop the child.

C-Type Parenting Style: "Child Neglect" and "Compensation for Neglect Through Online Gaming"

The descriptions of "Child Neglect" and "Compensation for Neglect through Online Gaming" illustrate the current parenting situation and childhood experiences in C-type rural families. Children who feel neglected in their families are more prone to internet addiction.⁵⁴ Children in C-type families are more likely to feel emotionally ignored due to parental neglect. The lack of parental companionship makes children seek compensation for the emotional void, and prevalent games like "King of Glory" and "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG)" fulfill the child's need for companionship.⁵⁵

Some rural parents are forced to give up daily care for their children due to tight family conditions, heavy workloads, and frequent marital disputes. Multiple factors make it challenging for parents to find time to take care of their children. Sometimes, parents and children may only meet occasionally, making high-quality companionship a luxury. In this parenting style, parents communicate less with their children, and there is rarely intimate contact or emotional exchange.⁵⁶ Children from such family background seek emotional compensation from games to fill the void in their lives.

My mom and dad disagree with me playing games. But my dad works out of town, and my mom works downstairs. He doesn't know what I'm doing upstairs, and I have my phone. They say I shouldn't play, but I can still play secretly when they are not at home. Every time my mom comes back, I know it. When she opens the door, I quickly hide my phone. (E- Child - 22)

Some parents are unwilling to accompany their children, adopting a *laissez-faire* parenting approach. On the one hand, parents believe that children have grown up and are now independent individuals, so they are no longer dependent on their parents. On the other hand, parents observe that if their children use electronic devices, they tend to become quiet. Therefore, in situations where it is challenging to supervise the child, parents permit them to play games on their phones.⁵⁷ Additionally, parents' gaming behaviors can have a negative impact on children, as the parents' actions can trigger the child's innate imitation. If parents play games like "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG)" or "King of Glory" at home, children may also entertain themselves in the same way. Behind the *laissez-faire* parenting style of C-type families, there is an admiration for "free-range" parenting and a lack of parental experience and sensitivity to education.

Nowadays, kids are sensible early. At the age of 10, they are considered grown-up children. They don't need us to manage them; they can take care of themselves. If he likes to play, let him play, as long as he doesn't regret it in the future. (J- Parent - 1)

My mom smashed my dad's phone because he played games when he came home. When my dad is at home, we rarely talk. He usually throws the phone at us and lets us play by ourselves. I started playing games because of my dad. Compared to my parents, I prefer my sister, who can play games with me. She takes care of me in the game. (E- Child - 9)

Parents come home and do not communicate or interact with their children, instead, they just give them their phones. Some children can even directly log into their parents' gaming accounts. (T -Teacher -9)

Whether it is the inability to accompany children, the unwillingness to accompany them, or not knowing how to accompany them, the C-type parenting style in rural areas encompasses high-quality parental companionship. The deficiency of high-quality companionship results in disparate needs between parents and children. Children hope for more parental companionship and communication, while parents may have no time, willingness, or knowledge to accompany their children properly. This conflict can lead to unmet emotional and belonging needs for the child, making them more prone to seeking emotional solace through online gaming.

D-Type Parenting Style: "Forced Obedience" and "Freedom Through Online Gaming"

The descriptions of "Forced Obedience" and "Freedom through Online Gaming" depict the current parenting situation and childhood experiences in D-type rural families. D-type families often judge children based on their "obeying". When a child's behavior does not meet the parent's expectations, parents resort to behavior control and psychological constraints, using harsh methods such as institutional constraints, violent discipline, and verbal threats to force the child to "obey", hoping to bring the child back on the "right track". Parents in such families often speak to their children in a directive and commanding manner, and children are rarely allowed to communicate with their parents on equal terms.

In D-type rural families, parents are accustomed to using behavior control in their interactions with children. Parents believe there is a clear boundary between adults and their children, and the parent's role is to give orders, telling the child directly what to do. Having experienced the bitter consequences of lacking education, some parents consider schooling and studying the most important. They strongly oppose any activities related to online gaming, believing that playing games would "delay" learning. Conflicts between parents and children in Chinese families are primarily centered around academic performance. Whenever parents discover that their children are not studying and are instead playing games, they confiscate the gaming devices and scold the child. However, the high-intensity or even violent regulation of online gaming often triggers a mentality in children.⁵⁸ It fails to address the root cause of the child's addiction, potentially stimulating the child and prolonging gaming time.

My child is like a debt collector sent by heaven. I already have an impatient and big temper, and since he started playing games, my temper has worsened. Our family is now at a point where we get annoyed as soon as we open our mouths. As soon as he mentions games, I get furious. He plays, I beat him, and the more I beat him, the more he plays. Nowadays, when kids touch

a phone, they won't listen. No matter what you say, they won't listen. He will throw things and make a scene if you don't give him a phone". (J- Parent - 13)

Psychological constraints are also a common educational method in D-type rural families. Parents in such families often impose adult standards on children and express their dissatisfaction and disappointment with them emotionally when their behavior does not conform to the "rules". This "cold violence" involves ignoring the child, leaving home angrily, and verbally injuring the child. The excessive interference of high-control parents in children's lives makes children reluctantly compliant but also makes them feel that their right to self-determination is being deprived. In response, they engage the online gaming world to seek comfort.⁵⁹

My mom always saw me playing games and didn't want me. I opened the door, and she pushed hard inside, saying, 'This is how you treat me.' I was very scared when I saw her riding away on her bike. I didn't dare to follow. I told my big brother (gaming friend) about this, and my big brother comforted me with voice chat while playing games. He even carried me in the game. (E-Child - 3)

Conflicts between parents and children over gaming have occurred in recent years. Nowadays, children have rich cognitive abilities due to early exposure to electronic devices, which we often refer to as premature maturity. Parental strictness often clashes with the child's premature maturity, leading to verbal conflicts and even physical friction. (T- Teacher -12)

In D-type rural families, parents perceive criticism and blame as a form of communication with their children. When parents reject their children's requests for gaming entertainment through harsh criticism, children are in a state of rebellion. Although they verbally submit to the power of their parents, their inner feelings are often filled with dissatisfaction and disappointment. The stimulated rebellious mentality makes them more prone to venting anger through online gaming, seeking the care of friends and the joy of improving gaming rankings, thus alleviating the unpleasant experiences at home.

Discussion

A comparative analysis of the characteristics associated with the four parenting styles reveals a commonality in their incorporation of dimension such as value guidance and emotional investment. A, B, C, and D parenting styles can be called conflict and chaos, indulgent and permissive, discipline neglect, and coercive and harsh. The four parenting styles that are prone to inducing children's online gaming addiction are illustrated in Figure 1.

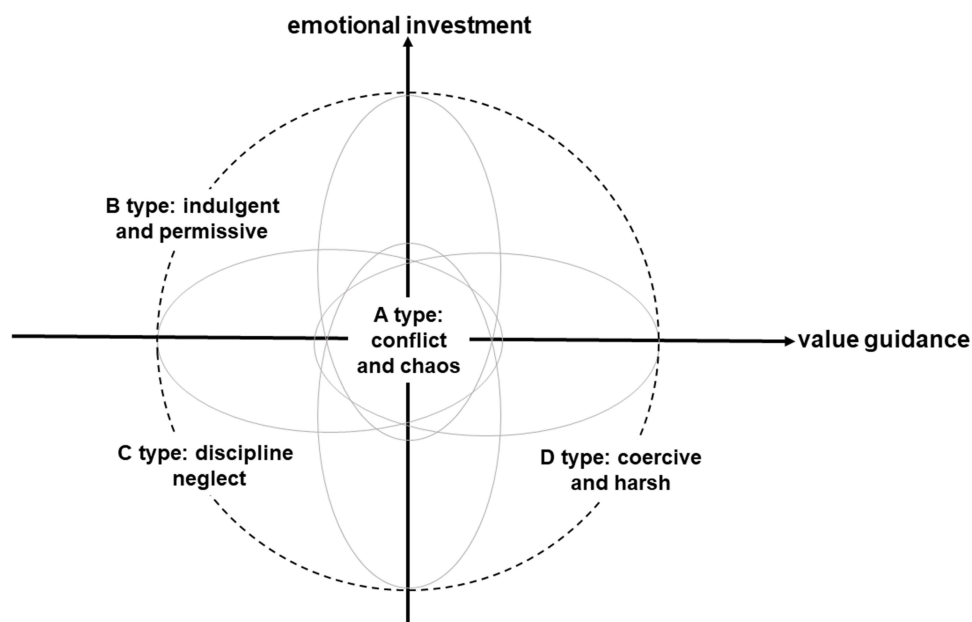


Figure 1 The Parenting Styles of Inducing Rural Children's Online Gaming Addiction.

The four types of rural parenting styles all have their shortcomings. Children, influenced by a combination of factors such as stress management, coping with setbacks, self-awareness, psychological growth, era development, and environmental temptations, become addicted to online games.⁶⁰ The conflict and chaos parenting style lacks rationality, causing children to lose their sense of security in prolonged conflicts between parents. Due to its low constraints, the indulgent and permissive parenting style provides the basic conditions for children to enter the game. Once in the game, it reinforces children’s psychological needs for friendship and curiosity.⁶¹ The discipline and absence parenting style, lacking care and guidance, leaves children without a sense of belonging. Online games meet the child’s need to participate in multiple interactive scenes. During the game, children can forget their emotional needs for their parents.⁶² Seeking autonomy in life, children immerse themselves in online games.⁶³ Once in the game, the sense of self-control it brings makes children extend their game time endlessly, obtaining psychological solace and avoiding negative real-life situations.⁶⁴

The research findings suggest an interlocking relationship between the parenting styles of rural children and their addiction to online gaming (Figure 2). Rural children’s parenting styles induce them to become addicted to online gaming, and this addiction reflects, stabilizes, and even reinforces their parental upbringing styles. On the one hand, online games can compensate for the shortcomings of parental upbringing styles. The relationship between parenting styles and gaming addiction is characterized by a dynamic interplay of deficiency and compensation. The emotional and guidance deficiencies caused by upbringing styles can be consoled and compensated for by children in online games. On the other hand, the study also observes that when rural children’s parents see their children addicted to online gaming, in the absence of external intervention, they often find it challenging to reflect on their parenting styles. Instead, they tend to affirm and reinforce their existing parenting styles. In this way, a stable loop is formed between rural children’s addiction to online gaming and the parenting styles they experience.

The main reason for the formation of a feedback loop between parenting styles and online gaming addiction is the insufficient cultural capital within rural families. On the one hand, parents with insufficient cultural capital exhibit problematic parenting styles, which are challenging to change without external intervention. Furthermore, rural families with children addicted to online gaming also lack the cultural capital of the bottom class. Research indicates that academic achievement in rural children depends on individual effort.⁶⁵ However, factors such as limited time spent between parents and children, parents’ bad temper, or excessive parental control lead children to develop a rebellious attitude, seeking to escape from their parents and family rather than focusing on academic pursuits to change their

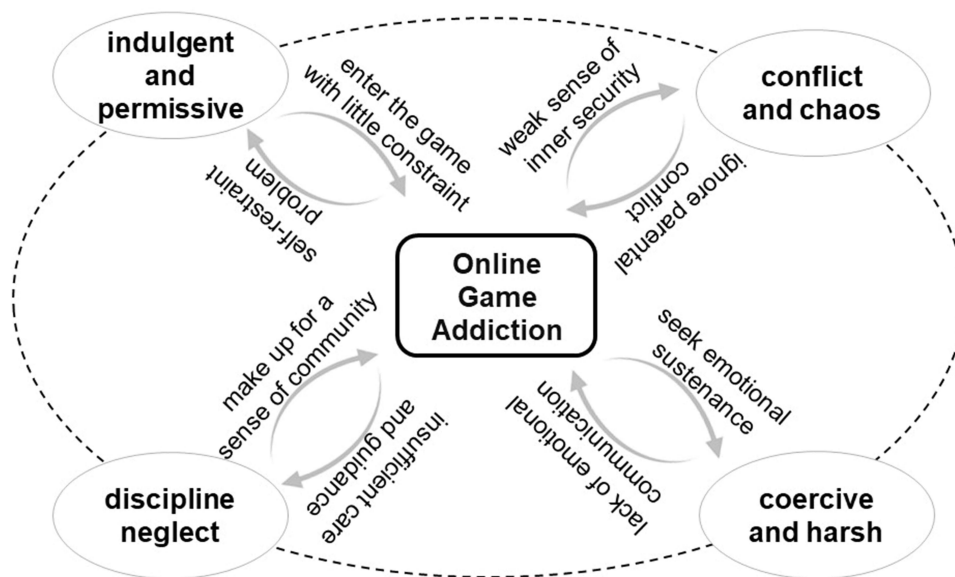


Figure 2 The Closed Loop between Parental Upbringing and Online Game Addiction.

destiny. As a result, a closed loop is formed between parenting styles and online gaming addiction, the consequences often result in obstructed upward social mobility for children addicted to gaming.

The parenting style significantly affected children's performance.⁶⁶ This study is consistent with existing research that indicates that children addicted to online gaming come from poor home environments. The way those labeled as Internet addicts come from maladaptive home environments containing stress- and distress-producing conditions (eg parental divorce, neglect, absence, violence, illness or death).⁶⁷ Authoritarian parents are more likely to exert a coercive type of power.⁶⁸ This finding is also confirmed in the present study. "Authoritative parenting is considered a cross-culturally favorable parenting style".⁶⁹ However, the conclusion is not confirmed in this study. The study is based on low-income families in rural areas, and the findings confirmed that working-class families tend to adopt a free-growth model and that low-income families do not have a sense of collaborative parenting.⁷⁰

Practical Suggestions

It necessitates the intervention and assistance of social forces. Firstly, schools should actively strengthen communication with parents, establish parent schools, and implement parent education. Schools also need to help parents fully understand the "spirit", "form", and "content" of the three-dimensional impact of games on children's growth.⁷¹ Schools should guide and make parents aware to reflect on and improve their parenting styles. Secondly, as a form of social work, grassroots organizations in rural areas need establish support mechanisms to empower family education. For example, they are introducing professional forces from cities and universities to conduct parenting lectures for rural parents, organize experience-sharing sessions, help them understand children's psychological needs and emotional desires, and instill awareness of scientifically caring for children. In addition, rural grassroots organizations should actively improve the external environment for children's growth, construct more entertainment facilities for children, and provide alternative entertainment options to online games.

Limitations

It is pertinent to acknowledge that this study employed narrative research approach to delve into the micro-level issues of rural children's online gaming addiction and its associated family upbringing problems, and demonstrating appropriateness. Although the study obtained detailed and credible analytical data through interviews with children, parents, and teachers from small sample analysis, but that does not necessarily prove the perfection of the study. Rather the caution for generalizing the conclusions, is strictly applicable and it does not negate the intrinsic value of narrative research. This study has limitations in both aspects. Firstly, regarding sample representativeness, the interview subjects chosen for this study are from the same province, which may not represent the entire situation in China. The study selected rural children and may not represent urban children. Secondly, in terms of longitudinal tracking, this study cannot fully capture the overall development of parental styles and children's internet gaming addiction due to research resources and time limitations. Future research will consider using a broader sampling method to address these limitations and improve sample representativeness. Additionally, longitudinal research designs will be employed to comprehensively capture the developmental changes of the target phenomenon through multiple data collection points.

Conclusion

The research findings are as follows: (1) The parenting styles experienced by rural children addicted to online gaming mainly fall into four categories: conflict-chaos type, indulgent-permissive type, discipline-neglect type, and compulsory-coercive type. Under these parenting styles, characterized by insufficient parental value guidance and emotional investment or conflicts, rural children are prone to online gaming addiction; (2) A stable feedback loop is formed between the parenting styles of rural children and their addiction to online gaming. The reason is that rural families often lack Bourdieu-style cultural capital, and bottom-class cultural capital is also insufficient. Both are difficult to update and change automatically, and they mutually "affirm" and even reinforce each other; (3) The closed loop between parenting styles and online gaming addiction in rural children's families tends to hinder social mobility for this disadvantaged group. This closed loop is often challenging to break from within the family, and an "open loop" requires external social forces to inject cultural capital and provide professional assistance to rural families.

Ethics Statement

Informed consent included publication of anonymized responses was obtained from all participants involved in the study. Parents provided informed consent for their children to participate, with the children’s informed assent. All participants’ parents and teachers in charge of the class consent to the study. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the local University, College of Teacher Education, Zhejiang Normal University (Protocol Code: ZSRT2024060; Date of Approval: March 8th, 2024) and followed the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Disclosure

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