Effects of parenting styles on young children's social skills

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Abstract. The family is the basic environment in which young children live and is the main vehicle for their socialization. Parenting styles, as the consistent style of parenting demonstrated by parents in the family, impact the child's mental health and social skills development to some extent. Social skills are important skills that young children acquire and use appropriately through positive interactions with adults and peers and are widely used in their social interactions and adaptation to social life. This paper categorizes parenting styles, generalizes the social skills of young children, and examines the effects of parenting styles on young children's social skills from both positive and negative perspectives. As a representative of positive parenting styles, the democratic parenting style was positively associated with and positively predicted the development of social skills; coddling, permissive, authoritarian, and inconsistent parenting styles were negatively associated with and negatively predicted the development of social skills. This paper proposes recommendations to promote the development of social skills in young children, such as popular science lectures in schools and parent meetings, parents improving their parenting knowledge, and fathers increasing their involvement in parenting, hoping to help parents learn more about scientific parenting and apply it in practice, and to provide research directions for future studies.

1. Introduction

Family is the earliest and basic implementer of children's socialization, and it has a substantial impact on children's social development and parenting style is one of the most critical factors. Family is the earliest exposure to children in the socialization process, and parent-child interaction is the beginning of individual socialization. In the process of parent-child interaction, parents act on children through different parenting styles to influence children's cognition and behavior [1]. Three to five years old is the critical stage of children's social development; the development of this stage will lay a good foundation for children's future socialization and develop a sound personality [2].

Regarding parenting styles, foreign research is divided into two major directions: the exploration of parenting behaviors and the classification of parenting styles. Due to the difference in the time of education research, the classification of parenting styles in China is mainly based on foreign research. Social skill development is an important aspect of children's social development. However, there are few large-sample studies on social skill development trends in 3- to 6-year-olds at domestic and international levels and few studies that focus on the influence of family-related factors on social skill development in young children.

Thus, this paper focuses on the influence of parenting styles on young children's social adjustment, hoping to fill this academic gap to some extent. This paper will analyze the effects of parenting styles on young children's social skills in three ways. The first is the classification of types of parenting styles. Then is the definition of social skills by domestic and foreign scholars. The last is the effects of positive and negative parenting styles on young children's social skills and relevant suggestions to promote the development of young children's social skills.

2. Definitions

2.1 Parenting styles

There are two main orientations in western research on parenting styles: one is to explore specific parenting approaches under a particular behavioral dimension or behavioral dimension from the dimension of parenting behavior. For example, Baldwin classified parenting styles into two dimensions: emotional warmth-hostility and attachment-interference [3]. Another orientation is to explore parenting styles according to different dimensions and thus typify parenting styles. Becker classified parenting styles into eight types: democratic, arrogant, authoritative, protective, controlling, authoritarian, neglectful, and allergic, based on the acceptance-hostile, restrictive-permissive, and anxious-calm parenting style dimensions. Baumrind proposed that parenting styles contain two basic dimensions, demanding and responsive, and are classified as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, and later distinguished the permissive type into coddling and rejection (neglect) [4,5].

Most domestic studies refer to Baumrind's taxonomy and classify parenting styles into four types: indulgent, doting, authoritarian, and democratic. Lei Lin and Qi Dong et al. classified maternal parenting styles into five
types: harsh, indulgent, extreme, aggressive, and achievement pressure [6].

This paper tends to categorize coddling, permissive, authoritarian, and inconsistent parenting styles as negative parenting styles and emotionally warm, authoritative, and democratic parenting styles as positive parenting styles based on Baumrind's taxonomy and discusses the effects of these two parenting styles on young children's social skills separately.

2.2 Definitions of social skills

Until now, there is no single definition of social skills, but most of them are classified from the following three perspectives. From an interpersonal perspective, children who are popular with their peers in kindergarten or school are often seen as having social skills. For example, Qin Qiwen classified the components of social skills into assertiveness, repayment and reinforcement, nonverbal communication skills, verbal communication skills, empathy, cooperation, and concern for others, and considered social skills as an individual's ability to intervene, adapt, develop, coordinate, and dispose of social relationships, as well as an individual's ability to influence and manipulate others [7]. Early foreign researchers McGinnis and Goldstein identified social skills as including six skills: emergent social skills, school-related social skills, skills for making friends, skills for dealing with emotional problems, aggression, and skills for coping with stress [8].

From the perspective of social validity, Zhou Zongkui argued that social skills refer to the way individuals learn to effectively and appropriately interact with each other in specific social situations. Social skills consist of behavioral, cognitive, and affective components, including behavioral components: environment-related skills, interpersonal-related skills, self-related skills, and task-related skills; cognitive components: effectiveness and appropriateness of problem-solving strategies, and internal attributions of success; and emotional components: social anxiety and loneliness [9].

From the perspective of behavioral performance, Gresham and Elliott proposed that social skills are an individual's ability to acquire socially acceptable behaviors and learn to avoid socially unacceptable behaviors when interacting with others [10]. Bierman et al. suggest that social skills should include pro-social skills and self-regulation skills [11]. Chen identified initiative and self-control as the core components of social skills [12].

On the whole, it seems that although there is no uniform definition of young children's social skills, they all broadly include, initiative, independence, and responsibility, and thus this paper focuses on three aspects of young children's social skills: initiative, independence, and responsibility.

3. Effects of parenting styles on young children's social skills

3.1 The impact of positive parenting on young children's social skills

Positive parenting styles are warm and helpful positive relationships that exist between parents and children and are a good protective and supportive factor in the individual's development, primarily consisting of democracy and emotional warmth. The type of parenting style parents adopt in early childhood greatly affects the development of children's initiative. A democratic and warm parenting style is conducive to the formation of good parent-child relationships, making the family environment more harmonious and positively influencing the development of social skills in young children [13]. A good family environment helps parents to perceive the needs of their children, prompting them to demonstrate more positive parenting behaviors and to make greater use of educational strategies such as warmth, support, and encouragement. Adopting a supportive, understanding, and warm parenting style, such as supporting children to do what they want to do, understanding children's anxiety, anger, sadness, and other negative emotions, and guiding children to overcome difficulties and other behaviors, is conducive to developing children's initiative and promoting the development of autonomy [14]. When children cry and argue with their parents, their parents frequently accuse them of being unreasonable and causing trouble, but they rarely investigate the reasons for their children's behaviours. Parents who take a positive approach to parenting, on the other hand, usually first understand them emotionally so that children understand that their parents understand and sympathize with their feelings, and then distract children from the unpleasant event by reading a picture book, telling a story, or playing a game, so that children understand that throwing a tantrum or being unreasonable is wrong. These methods are more appealing to children. Even if they do not have an instant impact, stories and games can have a long-term beneficial impact on children's behaviour. While instructing kids how to release their emotions and calm their anger, parents should also concentrate on teaching their children how to express their anger and the reasons for it. It is far more essential to assist children in organizing their thoughts, solving problems, and settling their emotions than to be concerned about their inappropriate expressions. Once children are stable and the issue is properly resolved, future tantrums and inappropriate ways of expressing anger will gradually diminish. Overall, positive parenting is more effective in helping children comprehend and accept their negative emotions.

Positive parenting behaviors such as warmth, support, and encouragement can provide a supportive environment for children to practice social skills and learn how to interact with others. Children raised with positive parenting styles experience more warmth and support from their parents, and they are more likely to have a positive attitude, use their resources more effectively in
stressful situations, and have higher levels of social skills. There is a strong correlation between parental warmth, independence, and social encouragement and children's social skills [15]. A clear division of roles in the family, a high level of problem-solving skills, and timely communication all contribute significantly to the development of children's social skills, especially to the development of cooperation and independence, which in turn also contributes to the development of children's social skills. Positive parenting parents typically designate roles and collaborate with each other, respect children's ideas, view the child as an individual, and interact effectively with the child as an equal.

In general, children raised in positive parenting settings have higher levels of social skills and are characterized by optimism, independence, and responsibility.

### 3.2 The impact of negative parenting styles on young children's social skills

Negative parenting behaviours such as indulgence, permissiveness, punishment, and inconsistent parenting are detrimental to young children's social skill development [16]. Punishment as a negative tool often leads to a disconnection between parents and children, affects communication in the family, makes children reluctant to communicate with their parents, destroys a warm and good family atmosphere, and at the same time, has a huge impact on the acquisition of social skills by children.

Permissive parents tend to over-satisfy their children's needs and over-accommodate them. In this family environment, young children tend to become more self-centered and have difficulty integrating into group life. When parents over-punish and criticize and shame their children, children may internalize these messages, which leads to a lack of confidence in their abilities and a reluctance to initiate social activities, which is detrimental to the development of social skills [17].

Coddling parents are generally cold to their children, have no specific rules or requirements for their children, and rarely reward or punish them, which can easily lead to a lack of responsibility and conflicts with peers in cooperative tasks. In contrast, authoritarian parents tend to interfere too much with their children's behaviours, suppressing their independence and creativity, so children lack independent thinking and are not sufficiently trained to deal with problems, and are prone to problems in peer relationships and coping skills later on [18].

Inconsistent parents often adopt contradictory educational methods in dealing with matters related to their children depending on the time, place, and mood, and their parents' educational philosophy is often inconsistent, which puts children in an awkward position and makes them behave differently because they need to meet their parents' different standards, which makes children lack patience and persistence in doing things and generates negative emotions. Research on the relationship between co-parenting and the social skills of young children proves that this type is not conducive to the development of self-control and persistence, which leads to incomplete development of social skills [19]. These negative parenting styles tend to lead to a lack of responsibility and a sense of rules, which makes it difficult to promote the development of social skills in young children [20].

To summarize, children raised in families with negative parenting methods frequently exhibit poor self-esteem, excessive self-centeredness, more psychiatric issues, and lower levels of social skills than children raised in positive parenting settings.

### 4. Suggestions

This section aims to give some suggestions for parents, kindergartens and even communities to help young children improve their social skills.

The findings of Western psychologists show that parents' education level is a key factor influencing their choice of different education styles. Therefore, parents should improve their cultural training, take the initiative to understand parenting knowledge, be proactive in appreciating their children's strengths and abilities, provide more positive feedback to their children, adopt a democratic and equal attitude in the parent-child communication process will make their children more receptive to their parents' teachings, on the one hand they need to value their children's opinions, on the other hand they should avoid making firm control over their children's behaviour, and create an equal, respectful, and harmonious family environment so that their children can acquire high-level social skills in a subtle way. To avoid placing young children in a bind, both parents should be constant in their expectations and instruction of their children, as well as consistent in their tolerance and substance. For preschool children, the influence of their mothers' parenting style on their children's social development is particularly important because their mothers take more care of and educate them. Kindergartens, communities, and early childhood teachers should increase their research and intervention efforts on parenting styles, especially for mothers.

Kindergartens and communities should organize more parent meetings on scientific parenting and free public lectures on positive parenting styles. Early childhood teachers are expected to conduct home visits and point out problems with existing parenting styles and guide parents to a more scientific approach to parenting to provide a healthy, positive environment for the child's physical and mental development so that the pre-schoolers' socialization can proceed smoothly and lay a good foundation for later stages of social development. In addition, fathers are essential role models for young children in their early socialization process, but the role of fathers in the family differs from that of mothers in terms of personality traits, thinking traits, and behaviours. For example, compared to mother-child interactions, father-child interactions tend to be more strenuous, risky, and intense physical action games aimed at exercising children's will, and these physical action games encourage children to grow up with more socially relevant qualities of will such as bravery and strength from their fathers.
Hwang's research shows that children who have good relationships with their fathers have greater psychological adjustment, less antisocial behaviours, and more close peers. Therefore, this paper suggests that fathers of young children should invest more time with their children, focus on interactive care, fully participate in cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects, make scientific judgments and guidance for various characteristics of their children, and take more responsibility for their children's development. They can improve their parenting involvement by giving praise and emotional support, communicating, and chatting more with their children, and paying attention to their children's daily lives to promote their cognitive abilities, emotions and personality, and socialization.

5. Conclusion

This paper finds that positive parenting styles that are emotionally warm, authoritative, and democratic are conducive to the development of young children's social skills, while negative parenting styles such as coddling, permissive, authoritarian, and inconsistent parenting styles are not conducive to the development of young children's social skills. Therefore, this paper recommends that parents improve their own literacy levels, understand the characteristics and needs of young children's development, adopt a positive parenting style, respect the views and aspirations of their pre-schoolers, listen to their children's opinions, provide more positive guidance and praise in the parenting and education process, create opportunities for their children to constantly achieve success and receive praise, and constantly increase their children's self-confidence to help them achieve higher levels of social skills. Kindergartens and the community are also integral to improving the social skills of young children and should take on the responsibility of educating parents about scientific parenting by regularly offering free public lectures so that parents are more aware of their children's development and can intervene in a timely manner with scientific knowledge.

The limitation of this paper is that the data sample is not comprehensive, and the data of domestic and international studies on parenting styles mainly come from fathers, and there are few studies on fathers' parenting styles, and the studies are not comprehensive enough. Another point is that there are few studies on the social skills of young children in China. Due to the special nature of their age, young children are not yet able to complete the record sheets independently by themselves, and most of the indicators for young children are recorded through the evaluation of their mothers or teachers, and the results are somewhat subjective.

Future research could have parents of young children jointly complete a parenting style questionnaire or have each parent complete one to fill in the gaps in parenting styles for fathers. For research on social skills in young children, peer nomination could be used to increase participation among young children. Studies of the effects of parenting styles on young children's social skills can be conducted before and after parents use positive parenting styles to compare the effects of positive parenting styles on young children's social skills. This paper provides suggestions for parents as well as educators to promote the development of social skills in young children and suggests directions for future research.

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