

Influence of Parental Rearing Behaviors on Adolescent Dispositional Greed: Maternal Rearing Behaviors Play Dominantly Predictive Roles

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Abstract: Research on the topic of greed is scant. The present study aimed to examine the effects of parental rearing behaviors on adolescent dispositional greed and the relative contribution of maternal rearing behaviors and paternal rearing behaviors. A sample of 1270 Chinese middle school students completed the Dispositional Greed Scale and the short-form Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (own memories of childrearing experiences). The results showed that maternal rejection and overprotection significantly positively predict adolescent dispositional greed as assumed, however, maternal emotional warmth also emerged as a positive predictor out of expectation. It was also found that none of the paternal rearing behaviors account for dispositional greed of adolescents. The findings contribute to both theoretical and practical implications. Limitations and directions for future research were discussed.

Key words: Dispositional Greed • Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviors • Parenting Styles • Adolescence • China

INTRODUCTION

Greedy people are witnessed in everyday life. For example, some people always take miniature shampoo bottles away from hotels, buy much more stuff than what they actually need, or complain about their salaries even after getting a pay-raise. On the contrary, there are also many people who are satisfied with what they already own. In this article, we focused on dispositional greed and the influencing factors on this trait.

The concept of greed has been commonly discussed in the fields of philosophy, economy and politics [1]. In the contrast, research on greed in the perspective of psychology by empirical ways has just begun for the reason that no consensus had been reached on its definition [1-3]. With a prototype analysis, Seuntjens *et al.* [4] collected a set of central and peripheral features closely descriptive of greed. After simplification, greed was defined as “desiring to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough”. This study also proved that self-control, impulsiveness and tunnel vision are very important elements of greediness. Although

greed can be situational, individuals are different in greediness essentially [3]. Research has demonstrated that dispositional greed is a stable personality [5].

Most major religions and philosophical traditions consider greed sinful and destructive. Greed is often associated with negative financial outcomes. Previous research has proved that greed is a potential cause of debts [6-8] and is related to spending too much money and buying impulsions [5]. Greed is also linked to immoral or antisocial behaviors. A recent research indicated that children scoring higher on dispositional greed tend to behave more unethically, for instance, greedier adolescents were more likely to cheat on partners, bully kids in school, lie in the own interest, buy imitation brand clothing but pretend it's the real thing, etc. [9].

Because of the scarcity of empirical studying and the harmful consequences about dispositional greed, attention on the causes of dispositional greed is called for. Previous research has suggested that personality traits and financial behaviors acquired during adolescence and young adulthood are usually maintained in adulthood and accordingly affect financial decisions in the rest of

life [9-11]. What's more, adolescence is also a key period for intervention [12]. Hence, in the present study, we focused on the predictive factors of adolescents' dispositional greed.

Family practices exert a profound influence on child mental development [12-16]. Previous research has showed that parenting styles are associated with several psychological consequences which are similar to greed. It was mentioned that parental childrearing strategies influenced children's self-control [17, 18]. Parenting styles were also related to immoral or antisocial behaviors. In a study with delinquent adolescents, compared with noncriminal adolescents, delinquents scored lower on the characters of self-directedness and cooperativeness, but higher on most aspects of negative childrearing practices [19]. The study of Nishikawa *et al.* [20] revealed that insecure attachments and rejection from parents were predictive of both internalizing and externalizing problems (including unethical behaviors) among boys and rejection, overprotection and anxious rearing from parents were influential on these problems among girls. It has also been found that perceived rejection and overprotection were positively correlated to and perceived emotional warmth was negatively correlated to antisocial behaviors [21-23]. Furthermore, emotional warmth was proved to promote pro-social behaviors [18].

Majority of previous research on the impact of parenting styles on mental development of children exclusively focused on maternal parental styles. Indeed, in the past decades, mothers took the primary responsibility for childrearing. However, the involvement of fathers in children's life has been increasing [24, 25]. The existing but few studies considering both maternal and paternal childrearing practices suggested that the associations between mothers' and fathers' parenting styles within families were not always that strong [25]. Hence, instead of putting eyes on parenting styles of mothers only, parenting styles of fathers were also taken into account in the present study.

The present study aimed at addressing the following questions: (a) How does each of the six parental rearing behaviors (maternal rejection, maternal emotional warmth, maternal overprotection, paternal rejection, paternal emotional warmth and paternal overprotection) predict adolescent dispositional greed specifically? (b) Given that maternal rearing behaviors contribute to the development of adolescent dispositional greed, do paternal rearing behaviors make extra contribution?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Procedure: The study was conducted with a sample of 1270 middle school students in China. Five hundred and fourteen participants (40.5%) were male and 737 (58.0%) were female. The remaining 19 participants (1.5%) did not mention their gender. Seven hundred and twenty-nine participants (57.4%) were in early adolescence (at seventh or eighth grade, 12-14 years old), 539 (42.4%) were in late adolescence (at tenth or eleventh grade, 15-17 years old) and 2 (0.2%) did not inform the grade.

The paper-pencil test was group-administered in classroom settings with the assistance of classroom teachers. Adolescents were informed that it was an academic study and they had right to choose whether to participate in or not. Voluntary participants then completed measures assessing dispositional greed and parental rearing behaviors.

Measures: *The Dispositional Greed Scale (DGS).* We applied the 3-item DGS to assess adolescents' dispositional greed [9]. The scale was established based on the prototype analysis mentioned above and has high reliability and good construct validity. The DGS consists the items: "Actually, I'm kind of greedy", "I always want more" and "As soon as I have acquired something I start to think about the next thing I want". Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that these items were descriptive of themselves on 5-point scales (1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"). The Cronbach's α of the scale was .760.

The short-Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (s-EMBU). Parental rearing behaviors were assessed by the s-EMBU [26], a short form of EMBU (Swedish acronym for Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran, meaning own memories of childrearing experiences) [27]. The s-EMBU is widely used and has been proved highly reliable [26, 28]. The scale contains three subscales: Rejection (R, seven items), Emotional Warmth (EW, six items) and Overprotection (P, nine items). Although the item "My parents tried to spur me to become the best" had not been put in any dimension originally, we scaled it into Emotional Warmth in line with existing relative research in Chinese context [29]. Additionally, we excluded the item "I felt that my parents liked my brother(s) and/or sister(s) more than they liked me (R)" from the questionnaire, since few Chinese adolescents have siblings due to the One-Child Policy enforced for decades in China. Items were measured on 5-point scales (1 = "totally disagree", 5 = "totally agree") for mothers and fathers, respectively.

The Cronbach's α s of maternal rejection, emotional warmth and overprotection were .791, .818 and .690, respectively. The Cronbach's α s of paternal rejection, emotional warmth and overprotection were .798, .834 and .664, respectively. The corrected item-total correlations of the item "It happened that I wished my parents would worry less about what I was doing (P)" were very low for both parents, namely, .086 for mothers and .069 for fathers. Further confirmatory factor analysis showed that its item loadings were .063 for mothers and .042 fathers. After eliminating this item, the Cronbach's α s of Overprotection raised to .712 for mothers and .690 for fathers. Thus, the resulting s-EMBU includes Rejection with six items, Emotional Warmth with seven items and Overprotection with eight items.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics: Mean scores of items were calculated to represent (sub)scales. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations of variables. As the results showed, rejection and overprotection from both mothers and fathers were significantly positively correlated with adolescent dispositional greed. Emotional warmth from neither mothers nor fathers was significantly related to adolescent dispositional greed, however. Since we are interested in whether, how and how differently the six parental rearing behaviors influence adolescents' dispositional greed, maternal emotional warmth and paternal emotional warmth would still be entered into the following data analysis. Because age stage was significantly associated with adolescent dispositional greed, it would be controlled in further data analysis.

Multivariate Regression Analysis: A three-stage hierarchical regression was performed. Adolescent dispositional greed was treated as the dependent variable. Age stage was entered into Block 1 as the control variable. Three maternal rearing behaviors were entered in Block 2. Then three paternal rearing behaviors were entered in Block 3. See results of the hierarchical regression in Table 2.

As the results showed, in Step 1, age stage emerged as a significant positive predictor of dispositional greed of adolescents, $\beta = .187, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .035, F_{change}(1, 1266) = 45.832, p < .001$. In the second step, the results revealed that maternal rejection ($\beta = .115, p = .002$) and overprotection ($\beta = .159, p < .001$) significantly positively predicted adolescent dispositional greed as assumed, however, out of expectation, maternal emotional ($\beta = .114, p < .001$) also emerged as a significant positive predictor, $\Delta R^2 = .046, F_{change}(3, 1263) = 21.242, p < .001$. In Step 2, the effect of age stage was still significant. After putting the three paternal behaviors in the analysis, in Step 3, for all of the seven independent variables, the values of variance inflation factor (VIF) were less than 10, ranging from 1.051 to 4.233, which indicated that each of the independent variables contributed to the prediction of adolescent dispositional greed relatively independently. When six parental rearing behaviors were all entered in, the results revealed that paternal rejection ($\beta = -.022, p = .689$), paternal emotional warmth ($\beta = .000, p = .995$) and paternal overprotection ($\beta = .046, p = .391$) did not add to any significant predictive effect, $\Delta R^2 = .001, F_{change}(3, 1260) = 0.249, p = .862$. Furthermore, the effects of three maternal rearing behaviors were still significant and positive.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Adolescent dispositional greed	-								
2. Maternal rejection	.098***	-							
3. Maternal emotional warmth	.027	-.533***	-						
4. Maternal overprotection	.170***	.565***	-.313***	-					
5. Paternal rejection	.071*	.789***	-.431***	.444***	-				
6. Paternal emotional warmth	.009	-.469***	.808***	-.303***	-.546***	-			
7. Paternal overprotection	.147***	.499***	-.291***	.826***	.542***	-.325***	-		
8. Age stage ^a	.187***	-.214***	.113***	-.088**	-.188***	.082**	-.093***	-	
9. Gender ^b	.006	.081**	-.114***	.087**	.085**	-.082**	.077**	-0.026	-
<i>N</i>	1270	1270	1270	1270	1270	1270	1270	1268	1251
<i>M</i>	2.880	1.909	3.898	2.581	1.892	3.798	2.451	0.430	0.410
<i>SD</i>	1.014	0.797	0.758	0.715	0.799	0.800	0.681	0.495	0.492

Notes: ^aDummy variable (0 = early adolescence; 1 = late adolescence), ^bDummy variable (0 = female; 1 = male). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2: Results of hierarchical regression analysis of parental rearing behaviors on adolescent dispositional greed controlling for age stage

Independent variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age stage ^a	.187***	.213***	.213***
Maternal rejection		.115**	.131*
Maternal emotional warmth		.114***	.115*
Maternal overprotection		.159***	.123*
Paternal rejection			-.022
Paternal emotional warmth			.000
Paternal overprotection			.046
R ²	.035	.081	.082
ΔR^2	.035	.046	.001
SE of Estimate	0.996	0.973	0.974
F for ΔR^2	45.832***	21.242***	0.249
F	45.832***	27.939***	16.044***

Notes: Dependent variable: adolescent dispositional greed. ^aDummy variable (0 = early adolescence; 1 = late adolescence). Coefficients are standardized. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the links between six perceived parental rearing behaviors and adolescent dispositional greed and to clarify whether paternal rearing behaviors make extra contribution to dispositional greed of adolescents given the dominantly predictive roles of maternal rearing behaviors. In the study, the DGS and the s-EMBU were group-administrated in classroom settings. The results showed that all of the maternal rearing behaviors positively predicted adolescent dispositional greed. None of the paternal rearing behaviors significantly predicted the dependent variable, however.

Contributions and Implications: Although greed has been often discussed on the level of theory, it was understudied because of the fuzzy nature of the greed concept [1]. Moreover, determining factors for the formation of greed ought to be identified for intervention. In the present study, we do not deny that greed may be a temporary emotion, however, we insist that greed can be a stable and motivational personality trait, which might be shaped in adolescence and be maintained for a lifetime [3, 9]. The present study complements the existing literature on greed by demonstrating that parental rearing behaviors are predictive of dispositional greed of adolescents.

The present study demonstrated maternal rejection and maternal overprotection as positive predictors of adolescent dispositional greed as assumed. The findings are in accord with existing views. Studies have proposed

that childrearing practices and parent-child relationship were important determinants of personality characteristics, accordingly, depriving childrearing practices (such as rejection, overprotection or lack of emotional warmth) might result in adverse outcomes as for the formation of characteristics [27, 30, 31]. The practical implication of the findings is that mothers are supposed to recognize that dysfunctional rearing behaviors would probably shape greedy, selfish and low-self-control children. Hence, within the parent-child interaction, mothers ought to restrain rejection and overprotection towards children.

Out of our expectation, the present study found that maternal emotional warmth positively predicted dispositional greed of adolescents. We attribute this surprising finding to the duality of greed. Despite the majority of greed features seem to be negative, there is evidence for positive perspectives on greed. From the perspectives of evolution, greed ensures self-preservation and ultimately, ensures survival [1]. From the economic point of view, greedy behaviors for individual's interest are considered to benefit the whole society in the long run. Greed could be seen as a form of ambition that leads to success [2, 3]. Research has showed that greedy people would like to strive for a higher income [32] and consequently act high-efficiently [33]. The positive face of greed may provide an explanation of the positive association between maternal emotional warmth with adolescent dispositional greed.

In addition, we failed to discover any significant influence of paternal rearing behaviors on adolescent dispositional greed. Only rearing behaviors of mothers played the predictive roles. Although in the past decades, the role of fathers in parenting has been increasingly important in intact families [24, 34, 35], the influence of mothers on shaping adolescents' personality characteristics seem to be predominate still [36]. It should be noted that although the present study found moderate to high correlations between relative rearing behaviors of mothers and fathers [24, 37, 38], it does not infer that mothers and fathers are similar. High correlations only refer that the parenting styles of one sex of parents can be predicted from that of other sex of parents [34].

Limitations and Directions for Future Research: Several limitations of the present study should be stated. First, only self-reported paper-pencil measures were used. Though applying the measure of s-EMBU is certainly essential for exploring how adolescents perceive parents' rearing behaviors, behavioral observations are supposed

to be adopted for collecting multiple evidence in future research. Second, little demographic information was collected in the present study. Future research should gather more such information to eliminate alternative explanations of findings in the present study. Third, the explanatory power of parental rearing behaviors is limited. As complex events never have singular causes [1], other potential precursors existing in family, school and social environments influencing the formation of dispositional greed are worth attention in following research.

The present study offers suggestions for future research. One future direction is to focus on the positive features and outcomes of greed. It might be a way to investigate the paths through which positive greed and negative greed are affected, respectively. In this case, to facilitate “good greed” and to prevent “bad greed” is probably implemented. Another direction is to put an eye on the cultural differences of greed. The present study was conducted in the context of China. However, researchers have found that there are both similarities and differences in the associations between parent-adolescent interaction and mental outcomes among ethnical groups [36, 39, 40].

CONCLUSIONS

- Maternal rejection, maternal emotional warmth and maternal overprotection significantly positively predicted adolescent dispositional greed.
- None of paternal rejection, paternal emotional warmth or paternal overprotection was significantly predictive of adolescent dispositional greed.
- Parental rearing behaviors have influence on adolescent dispositional greed, especially, maternal rearing behaviors play dominantly predictive roles.

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