

Autocratic Parenting Style: Between Externalising Behavioural Disorders, Self-Esteem, and Bodily Experience in Adolescence

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of autocratic parenting style on the development of externalising behavioural disorders, relating to self-esteem and bodily experience among adolescents. To achieve this objective, quantitative and qualitative survey was conducted with a sample of 245 adolescents aged 14 to 20 years in Yaounde, Cameroon. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square (χ^2) test. The findings reveal a deep connection between autocratic parenting style and the occurrence of externalising behavioural disorders in adolescents. Paradoxically, the results also indicate a connection between autocratic parenting style, positive self-esteem, and an exhibitionist bodily experience among adolescents. These findings are discussed in the light of developmental perspectives and theoretical models of parenting practices, particularly those proposed by Baumrind (1971, 1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983).

Keywords: Autocratic Parenting Style, Adolescence, Externalising Behavioural Disorders, Self-Esteem, and Bodily Experience.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the developmental process of the individual, adolescence is a transitional phase marked by profound transformations on biological, psychological and social levels. It also involves psychological processes such as the acceptance of gender, the construction of identity, the assertion of autonomy, and the development of meaningful social relationships. These changes weaken the individual's equilibrium and make this period particularly vulnerable due to emerging challenges.

In Cameroon, the challenges faced by adolescents are strongly characterised by the persistence of externalizing behavioural disorder that young people manifest in their daily lives. According to EDS (2018) (INS, 2020), about 21 percent of young people aged 13 to 18 in Cameroon have already used drugs. Before the age of 15, almost 90 percent have already consumed alcohol, and 59 percent have been drunk at least once. Furthermore, conduct disorders account for about 40 percent of the reasons behind adolescent psychiatric consultations, and about 5 to 15 percent of adolescents in urban areas manifest oppositional defiant disorder.

In light with this observation, the works of Tsala Tsala (1992, 2002, 2009); Bayambaye Djiraingar (2024); Kana Sontsa (2016); Eyenga Eloundou (2016), which falls within the field of parenthood and adolescence in developmental psychology, show a link between parental educational practices, the dynamics of family relationships, and the observed adolescent behaviours.

In the same vein, the works of Baumrind (1971, 1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983); Bowlby (1969); Bronfenbrenner (1979), establishing that family factors, and more specifically parenting styles, play a vital role in all of an individual's developmental trajectories, whether behavioural, emotional or social. In other words, parental educational practices, depending on their nature and consistency, can promote harmonious psychological development or contribute to the emerging of affective, cognitive, and behavioural vulnerabilities in children (Valleur & Matysiak, 2002; Blatier, 2007).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the developmental approaches to parenting practices established by Baumrind, (1971, 1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983) served as theoretical models in examining the link between autocratic parenting style, externalising behavioural disorder, self-esteem and bodily experience in adolescents. The underlying assumption is that, autocratic parenting style carries rules that guide the adolescent's action and also influence their self-esteem and bodily experience.

As a reminder, the works of Baumrind (1971); Maccoby and Martin (1983) identifies four parenting styles based on the levels of control and affection observed in parenting practices: autocratic, permissive, democratic, and neglectful. Among these, the autocratic style, characterised by high control and low emotional responsiveness, is often associated with adverse developmental outcomes (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). However, the possible links between autocratic parenting style, externalising behavioural disorders, self-esteem, and bodily experience in adolescents remain underexplored. The links examined in this study, which focuses on the impact of autocratic parenting style on the emerging of externalising behavioural disorders, as well as on self-esteem and bodily experience in adolescents.

➤ Parenting Styles

Parenting styles, as developed by Baumrind, (1971); Maccoby and Martin (1983), are based on two fundamental dimensions: parental affectivity or responsiveness, and parental control or demandingness. Parental affectivity or responsiveness is the expression of parental support; through the way parents respond to their child's needs and expectations. Parental control or demandingness, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the parent regulates, supervises and structures the child's behaviour. The effects of these two dimensions on the simulation of individuality, self-regulation of behaviour and self-assertion in children depend on their balance within the parenting style.

The autocratic parenting style which is the focus of this study, is characterized by high parental demands, rigid discipline, and a low parental affectivity (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby and Martin, 1983).

➤ Self-Esteem

According to Coopersmith (1967), cited by CPA (1984), "self-esteem refers to the judgement that individuals make about themselves, regardless of the circumstances. It is an expression of the confidence with which an individual believes in their ability to succeed, in their social and personal worth, which is reflected in the attitudes adopted in everyday life situations in social, family, and professional setting". Coopersmith (1967) argues that self-esteem is a determining factor in the personal and social development of adolescents. It is built primarily through family interactions and parental support. Rosenberg (1965) closely links it to relational experiences.

➤ Bodily Experience

Bodily experience refers to the set of perceptions, sensations, representations, and subjective experiences that an individual has with regards to their own body (Bandura, 1986). It refers to how the body is felt, invested in, and means on a sensory, emotional, and symbolic level in connection to personal history, social interactions and cultural context (Bourdieu, 1972; Foucault, 1975). From a psychodynamic and developmental perspective, bodily experience contributes in building identity and self-image, particularly during periods of transformation such as puberty and adolescence, which affect the individual's relationship with their body (Dolto, 1984). Bodily experience can be manifested in inhibited or exhibitionistic forms.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The main problem of this article lies in analysing the gap between educational practices and adolescent behaviours, as well as their modulating effect on self-esteem and bodily experience in the case of autocratic parenting in Cameroon.

➤ Research Question

Does autocratic parenting style influence the appearance of externalising behavioural disorders relating to self-esteem and bodily experience in Cameroonian adolescents?

➤ Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to systematically examine several relationships with the Cameroonian adolescent population. First of all, it seeks to analyse the link between autocratic parenting style and manifestation of externalising behavioural disorders in adolescents. Secondly, this study seeks to explore the relationship between autocratic parenting style, the level of self-esteem, and bodily experience in adolescents. Finally, it aims to evaluate the combined connection between authoritarian parenting style, externalising behavioural disorders, the quality of self-esteem and bodily experience in adolescents, in order to better understand the connection of these different variables in Cameroon.

➤ Research Hypothesis

The autocratic parenting style adopted by parents towards adolescents influence the appearance of externalising behavioural disorders, as well as the modality of self-esteem and the aspect of bodily experience in adolescents.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study that forms the basis of this article employs a mixed-method approach: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative component relies on a thorough descriptive analysis of the phenomenon under the study, enabling an understanding of its essential characteristics and the context of its occurrence. Simultaneously, the quantitative component is supported by the use of inferential data collected through a Likert-type questionnaire, thus facilitating the measurement and statistical interpretation of the variables considered.

➤ *Participants*

The survey was conducted with a sample of 245 adolescents, comprising 55.9 per cent girls and 44.1 per cent boys, aged 14 to 20. Participants were recruited in a conducive environment to young people's gathering, particularly in various secondary schools in Yaounde, as well as during holiday tournaments organised in Yaounde-Cameroon.

➤ *Process*

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire administered according to a purposive sampling method, in a variety of observational settings. The preparation of this questionnaire took into account the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) by Buri (1991), for the formulation of items to assess parenting styles; the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) by Coopersmith (1967), which measures self-esteem; the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA), Mendelson et al. (2001), for assessing bodily experience; the Youth Self Report by Achenbach (1991), for identifying externalising behavioural disorders; the Lautrey questionnaire (1980), as model for measuring family parenting practices; and the work of Pazué (2016), which provides an interpretation of different parenting styles along with their specific characteristics.

➤ *Variables and Measures*

This study focuses on independent, dependent, and intervening variables. The independent variable is autocratic parenting style, the dependent variables are externalising behavioural disorders, and the intervening variables are self-esteem and bodily experience.

The indicators used to operationalize these variables include parental control, parental affectivity, positive or negative self-esteem, exhibitionistic or inhibited bodily experience as well as various observable behavioural symptoms such as marginal behaviours, addictive behaviours, aimless wondering, emotional disturbances, and intellectual instability.

➤ *Data Analysis*

The collected data underwent statistical analyses primarily using the Chi-square test (χ^2), supplemented by descriptive analyses to characterise general trends observed within the sample.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the linear relationship between the study's primary variable, autocratic parenting style, and the secondary variables, externalising behavioural disorders, self-esteem, and bodily experience in adolescents. The objective was to test whether significant connections exist between these variables and in which direction these connections are manifested.

V. RESULTS

The results show a prevalence of authoritarian parenting style among the parents of the adolescents surveyed. The link with behavioural disorders is strong, as well as the influence on self-esteem and bodily experience in these adolescents.

➤ *Prevalence of Authoritarian Style*

The descriptive analyses indicate that 38.7 per cent of adolescents surveyed notice their parents using an autocratic style.

➤ *Link with Externalising Behavioural Disorders*

The results highlight a statistically significant connection between autocratic parenting style and externalising behavioural disorders in adolescents ($\chi^2=34,831$; $p > .05$), suggesting a non-random relationship between these variables. In other words, the results show that there is a real link between autocratic parenting style and externalising behavioural disorders in Cameroonian adolescents.

➤ *Link with Self-Esteem*

The data collected from the sample study show that 57.9 percent of the adolescents exposed to the autocratic parenting style have a positive self-esteem, while 33.7 percent have a negative self-esteem. These data highlight a connection between the autocratic parenting style and the level of self-esteem in adolescent, mainly characterised by a positive orientation. Thus, the research hypothesis states that the autocratic parenting style encourages the development of positive self-esteem among adolescents.

➤ *Link with Bodily Experience*

The results highlight a predominance of exhibitionist body experience among adolescents in the study sample in an autocratic parenting context, with a percentage of 56.9. These observations imply a connection between autocratic parenting style and modalities of bodily experience in adolescence. Therefore, the research hypothesis states that the autocratic parenting style influences emerging bodily experience with a dominant exhibitionism in adolescents.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that the autocratic parenting style adopted by parents towards adolescents influences the onset of externalising behavioral disorders, as well as a modality of self-esteem, and a dimension of bodily experience in them. More specifically, the empirical data highlights a connection between autocratic parenting style and the occurrence of externalising behavioral disorders, simultaneously with positive self-esteem and a dominant exhibitionist bodily experience among the surveyed adolescents.

These results are in line with the work of Baumrind (1991), Maccoby and Martin (1983), which establish a link between autocratic parenting style and the emerging externalising behavioral disorders in adolescence. They also agree with the conclusions of Sanson, Hemphill and Smart (2004), who link this parental educational style with high levels of negative emotionality in children, as well as those of Snyder, Stoolmiller, Wilson and Yamamoto (2003), relating it to the development of anger and to externalising behavioral disorders.

Moreover, Baumrind (1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983) point out that adolescents raised in an authoritarian environment tend to develop a negative self-image, due to a lack of consideration for their opinions and a dependence in decision-making. According to these authors, the absence of a space promoting autonomy learning and decision-making contributes to emerging conformist profiles, characterised by low self-confidence and limited behavioral control. From this perspective, the authoritarian parenting style is generally connected to low self-esteem, as well as various internalising and externalising disorders (Aremu et al., 2018); Bacus, 2014; Ngozi Aihie, 2016).

However, the results of this study introduce a significant distinction in these theoretical models. Indeed, although they confirm there is a link between autocratic parenting style and externalising behavioral disorders in adolescence, these results reveal, on the other hand, that this parenting style is connected to positive self-esteem, as well as an exhibitionist body experience among the surveyed adolescents. However, this apparent inconsistency requires a more detailed data interpretation.

Actually, a comprehensive analysis of results indicates that the observed self-esteem could not be understood as a genuine positive self-esteem. Data from the survey tool highlight a strong need for self-worth among these adolescents, which can be interpreted as an indicator of behavioral adjustment disorders. It would therefore be a self-esteem of a defensive and overcompensated character, different from the stable and authentic self-esteem described by Baumrind (1971); Maccoby and Martin (1983) among adolescents benefiting from the democratic parenting style for example.

Moreover, the surveyed adolescents present various indicators of psychological vulnerability, including emotional and oppositional disorders, relative cognitive instability, as well as a propensity to risky behaviors. These factors help to better understand the extent of reported positive self-esteem. For example, most of the surveyed adolescents, about 52.73 percent, are characterised by perseverance traits linked to stubbornness, while the others are perceived as aggressive (49.25 percent) or disrespectful (about 63 percent), by their entourage. In this perspective, the positive self-esteem observed could be connected to a form of artificial or unstable self-esteem, as conceptualised by Twenge and Campbell (2002).

Similarly, the exhibitionist body experience identified among adolescents with authoritarian parents also seems to be part of this dynamic. This could reflect an underlying psychological malaise, such as the adoption of a provocative or sexualised connotation. The data collected show that this modality of bodily experience is connected behaviors challenging parental authority, especially through a low level of consultation with parents in decision-making processes.

These observations support the analyses of Baumrind (1991), according to which rigid parental supervision hinders the establishment of open and two-way communication

between the parent and the adolescent. In such a context, oppositional behaviors are more likely to emerge, or even rebellious behaviors, especially in an adolescent seeking autonomy and recognition. Therefore, although obedience can be observed in the short term, it tends to give birth to feelings of frustration and misunderstanding in the longer term, which is generally noticed through externalising behaviors and bodily expressions aimed at protest.

Finally, the high proportion of adolescents with positive self-esteem is really different from classical models, including that of Rosenberg (1965). This difference could be explained by the implementation of compensatory psychological mechanisms allowing adolescents to preserve a favorable self-image, despite the underlying emotional and behavioral vulnerabilities.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article studies the influence of autocratic parenting style on the onset of externalising behavioral disorders, as well as on self-esteem and bodily experience in adolescence. The results obtained confirm that the autocratic parenting style adopted towards adolescents by parents significantly influences the appearance of externalising behavioral disorders, as well as a positive self-esteem and an exhibitionist body experience in the latter.

These results are broadly in line with the theoretical models proposed by Baumrind (1971, 1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983), while providing some empirical nuances.

First of all, the data confirm there is a link between autocratic parenting style and the appearance of externalising behavioral disorders in adolescents. In this regard, the work of Baumrind (1971, 1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983) connect the autocratic parental educative style with a high risk of externalising behavioral manifestations in adolescents, placing it among the parenting styles strongly involved in this type of issues. The results of this study confirm this trend, while suggesting a different intensity of this relationship according to parenting styles, which appears more marked for the autocratic and disengaged style than for the permissive style.

Secondly, the results attest there is a link between the autocratic parenting style and a modality of self-esteem in adolescence. In line with the work of Baumrind (1971,1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983), self-esteem appears to be influenced by the modalities of parental response to the emotional and educational needs of the child. However, the results of this study are distinguished by connecting authoritarian parenting style with high or positive self-esteem, whereas Baumrind (1971,1991); Maccoby and Martin (1983) generally link it with low or negative self-esteem.

This apparent distinction can be enlightened through a deep data analysis, which highlights the defensive and overcompensated nature of observed self-esteem. Indeed, inferential analysis suggests that this high self-esteem relies

on compensatory mechanisms. Such as an overvaluing of oneself disconnected from reality, an inclination to conceal personal vulnerabilities, and an enrollment in an environment that values performance and success over emotional expressions. In other words, this study shows that adolescents with autocratic parents tend to have artificially high self-esteem, which mediating effects are an overvaluation of oneself disconnected from reality, an inclination to hide one's vulnerability and weaknesses, an environment that values strength and success at all costs. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish this form of self-esteem from an authentic and stable self-esteem, as described by Baumrind (1971,1991), Maccoby and Martin (1983), in the democratic parenting style.

Thirdly, the results highlight a relationship between autocratic parenting style and a dimension of bodily experience in adolescence. More precisely, these results link the autocratic parenting style with a bodily experience dominated by exhibitionism. However, the inferential analysis of the data reveals that this modality of bodily experience refers to an underlying malaise in this context rather than a basic expression of identity. In other words, this analysis shows that the exhibitionist body experience observed among adolescents from authoritarian parents reflects more a malaise they seek to dominate through the wearing of daring or highly sexualised clothes. The adoption of provocative or highly sexualised clothing appears here as a regulation or compensation strategy by the adolescent facing internal tensions.

In this perspective, the observations of Baumrind (1991) provide a relevant insight by highlighting that a too strict parental supervision can lead, in the short term, to obedience, but in the longer term to feelings of frustration and misunderstanding, likely to bring up rebellious behavior. The exhibitionist body experience observed in this study can therefore be interpreted as one of the manifestations of this oppositional dynamic.

In summary, this study highlights the complexity of the relationships between authoritarian parenting style, self-esteem and bodily experience in adolescence. It highlights the need for a nuanced interpretation of apparent psychological indicators, taking into account the underlying mechanisms likely to adapt their meaning.

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