Parenting Style Preference in Malaysia

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The European Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2014

Abstract
This is a cross sectional study that investigated perceived parenting style and its effect on social skills development among 500 young adults in Malaysia. Specifically, parenting style was investigated in two dimensions (responsiveness and demandingness). The results indicated gender difference, as well as sub cultural differences in perceived parenting style. The study also revealed the significant effect of parental responsiveness on social skills development. The paper attempts to raise the concern that, although Baumrind's parenting style was a product of a cultural context, however authoritarian parenting may not always be associated with positive outcomes in the Asian hemisphere.

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Earlier studies on parenting style in Malaysia indicate that the dominant style among Malay parents was permissive parenting (Hanifi, 2002), while Chinese parents practiced authoritative parenting (Chi, Rozumah & Ziarat, 2011). The present study therefore sought to confirm or refute the above findings. Parenting style was defined as the attitudes towards the child that are expressed through behaviours, gestures, tone of voice, or the spontaneous expression of emotion (Baumrind, 1971). These individual parenting behaviours are part of a milieu of behaviour's whose influence cannot be easily disaggregated. The concept of parenting style developed initially as a heuristic device used to describe parenting milieu and was accurately captured by measures.

Based on Baumrind (1971, 1978) there are three parental typologies comprising of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting. These findings were based on the interaction of parenting attitudes and parenting that consist of factors like control, involvement and warmth. However, Maccoby and Martin (1983) attempted to merge Baumrind's approach in the definition of parenting along a more concise dimension. The scholar captured parenting style as a function of two facets, known as responsiveness and demandingness. Demandingness refers to the parent's willingness to act as a socializing agent; this includes demands and supervision, while responsiveness refers a parent's recognition of a child's individuality, this implies supporting the child in his/her endeavours. For both Baumrind (1978) and Mccoby and Martin (1983), parenting style was best understood within a social learning or ethological context.

Based on these dimensions, the scholars introduced four different parenting styles, which are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful. Studies thus far have found authoritative parenting high in both responsiveness and demandingness. This means that both constructs indicate warmth and support to children by understanding their needs. On the other hand, authoritarian parents are highly controlling and demanding, but affectively cold, requiring children to be responsive to parental demands. This type of parenting evaluates the behaviour and attitudes of children based on a set of standards. These parents expect their children to obey explicit standards and rules; disobedience was usually dealt with forcefully and punitively.

Children of authoritarian parents tend to be withdrawn, mistrusting and unhappy, they also have a tendency to have low self-esteem and lack spontaneity (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). On the other hand, permissive parenting was characterized as warm, with high nurturance, responsiveness, but low in parental control and the demands for matured behaviours. Permissive parents are more likely to give way to the child's impulses, desires and actions. These parents place few demands on their children and let them do whatever they want. This style of parenting appears unsuccessful in enabling children develop a range of self-directing abilities that underlie academic success.

Finally, neglectful parenting style consists of low demandingness and responsiveness. Parents with this style of parenting provide less control and demand less from their children as well as give less support and warmth in their relationship (Diaz, 2005). Evidence support the concept that parenting styles have been greatly influenced by the cultural milieus of societies (Uba, Siti Aishah, Mofrad, Rohani & Siti Nor, 2012), and the values transmitted from generations through child rearing practices (Keller, Abels,

Borke, Lamm, Lo, Su, et al., 2007; Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009). This clearly suggests that parenting styles are socially constructed and are not universal typologies as suggested by Baumrind (1971). Most research has been concerned with the role of parents as socialization agents for their children. However, parents' values, beliefs and socialization goals are influenced by their cultural context (Tamminen, 2006). Therefore understanding the cultural context of each society can potentially help us envisage the differences in parenting styles that predominate in such societies and to comprehend why these differences occur. Within cultures, parents are powerful agents in the socialization process (Chen, Bian, Xin, Wang, & Silbereisen, 2010). Analogously, parent-child interaction can be consistent within a particular cultural context and can change substantially from one context to another (Sheth, 1995) or child's gender (Shek, 1998).

Consequently, socially learned norms and values offer standards which parents usually use to direct their interaction with their children, largely different in individualistic and collectivist societies (Triandis, 2001; Wang & Leichtman, 2000). Individualism and collectivism refers to the manner in which individuals perceive themselves in relation to the other members of society (Stewart, Rao, Bond, McBride-Chang, Fielding & Kennard, 1998). Collectivist cultures emphasize interdependent relationships with others, while individualist cultures emphasize independence from others (Rothbaum, Morelli, Pott & Liu-Constant, 2000; Stewart et al., 1998; Triandis, 1995). The two cultural orientations have been related to the differences in human thought and behaviour (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 2001). Correspondingly, collectivists tend to act in ways that maintain group cohesion and encourage conformity towards parents, family, and the larger social groups. It was assumed that these different orientations resulted into different family relationships, parent-child interactions, self-conceptions and academic achievement (Chao, 1996, 1994; Triandis, 1995).

Steger (2008) revealed that rising global imaginary finds its articulation in the ideological claims of contemporary social leaders, thereby fuelling the hopes, disappointments, and demands of people who navigate national boundaries in search of their global dream. Malaysia is a multi-racial country with three major ethnic groups which includes Malays, Chinese, Indian and other indigenous tribal people. The proportion of Malays, Chinese and Indian in the country are 65%, 24.6% and 6.9% respectively (Krishnan, 2004) is a collectivist nation, meaning that the culture existent in the country tend to place more emphasis on an individual's contribution to the well-being of the family and the community (Bochner, 1994).

In view of the above, the present study investigated the predictive relationship between parental responsiveness / demandingness and children's social skills development in a collectivist culture. Earlier studies revealed that specific parenting practices may show different associations with child behaviours across cultural groups (Creveling et al., 2010). Scholars have given us insights into which parenting practices work best across childhood, but the studies that delineate how cultures affects parenting in Asia are still developing. Essentially there is limited research on parenting style in Asian societies particularly Malaysia. For this reason, this study aims to understand the dominant parenting style among the respondents and what type of parenting provide the best condition for the development of social skills among Malaysian children.

Methods

Participants
The participants of this study were made up of 500 students from five Universities from the Klang Valley in Malaysia. The students were sampled on the basis of availability and were first year undergraduate students. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years (mean age = 22) with equal representation between male and female respondents. All the participants were full time students in their respective universities. The participants completed a written questionnaire that contained biographical information and the measures of parenting style and social skills. The frequency distribution of the participant's race consisted of 30.2% Malay, 39.4% Chinese, 24.4% Indian and 6% other races.

Measurement
Parenting Style Index (PSI) was used to measure participants' perception of their parents' style of parenting. The PSI was developed by Darling and Steinberg (1993) and was created based on Baumrind (1971) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) types of parenting styles. The instrument measures parenting styles based on two dimensions (parental responsiveness and demandingness). The measure is a Likert instrument ranging 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Four parenting categories were defined by examining the participant's scores on the two dimensions simultaneously. Following Steinberg et al., (1991) and Maccoby and Martin (1983), authoritative parents are those who scored in the upper mean on both responsiveness and demandingness, while authoritarian parents were in the lowest mean on responsiveness but in the highest on demandingness. Permissive parents are those highest on responsiveness, but lowest on demandingness. Neglectful parenting consists of low on both dimensions.

Life Skills Development Inventory-College Form (LSI-CF) which consists of 88-item self-report items was used to measure students' life-skills (Picklesimer & Gazda, 1996). The LSI-CF measure social skills and competency based on four different skills including interpersonal communication, decision making, identity development and health maintenance. All the items were scored on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (completely disagree) to 3 (completely agree). In this study, total score was used to measure the social competency of the participants. The scale was designed for clinical and research purposes, however it can also be used to predict potential skills deficits that college students normally encounter. The LSI-CF measures non-pathological or normal functioning. The reliability of the scale ranges from .80 to .93 (Picklesimer, 1991).

Procedure
Ethical approval was obtained from the students and other relevant agencies. The study was conducted during the students' free time as not to cause any disruption to their lessons. Participants were selected randomly based on availability and willingness to participate in the study. Five hundred participants were recruited from five universities, the respondents were asked to complete a survey booklet that consists of information sheet, demographic form and two measurements. The average time needed to complete the questionnaires was approximately 15 minutes. After the completion of the survey, a small gift was given as appreciation for the respondent's time.

Results

The percentage of the four perceived parenting style is presented in table 1. The result revealed that most of the parents of the respondents were authoritarian parents 31.8% (159), while 24.6% (123) were authoritative parents, 22.6% (113) were neglectful parents and the lastly 21% (105) were permissive parents.

Table 1
Frequency and percentage of four parenting styles (n=500)

Dimension				
Responsiveness	Demandingness	Frequency	Percent	Parenting style
High	High	123	24.6	Authoritative
High	Low	105	21.0	Permissive
Low	High	159	31.8	Authoritarian
Low	Low	113	22.6	Neglected

We assumed gender differences in perceived parenting style, with detailed analysis, supporting the above hypothesis. The results, as presented in table 2, revealed that males perceived their parents as more neglectful compared with their female counterparts (40% vs. 23.6%), this was closely followed by authoritarian (25.2% vs. 20%), while females perceived their parents as more authoritative compared with their male colleagues (31.6% vs. 17.6%), this was followed by permissive parenting (24.8% vs. 17.2%).

Table 2
Frequency and percentage of four parenting styles based on gender (n=500)

	Dimension				
	Responsiveness	Demandingness	Frequency	Percent	Parenting style
Male	High	High	44	17.6	Authoritative
(n=250)	High	Low	43	17.2	Permissive
	Low	High	63	25.2	Authoritarian
	Low	Low	100	40	Neglected
Female	High	High	79	31.6	Authoritative
(n=250)	High	Low	62	24.8	Permissive
	Low	High	50	20.0	Authoritarian
	Low	Low	59	23.6	Neglected

Table 3
Frequency and percentage of two dimensions of parenting styles in different races

Parental dimension		Race					
		Chinese (n=197)		Malay (n=151)		Indian (n=122)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Responsiveness	High	115	58.4	98	64.9	51	41.8
	Low	82	41.6	53	35.1	71	58.2
Demandingness	High	74	37.6	103	68.7	73	59.8
	Low	123	62.4	48	31.8	49	40.2

The frequency and percentage of parenting style by considering two different dimensions (responsiveness and demandingness) among the three racial groups were presented in table 3. According to the table, Chinese participants perceived their parents as highly responsive and low in demandingness (permissive parenting). The Malay participants reported high responsiveness and high demandingness (authoritative parenting), while the Indian participants perceived their parents as low in responsiveness and high in demandingness (authoritarian parenting). To examine the second objective of the study with the view of discovering any significant difference between low or high responsiveness and demandingness on social skills mean score. The t-test analysis conducted indicated a significant difference between low responsiveness (M= 156.00, SD= 21.17) and high responsiveness (M= 168.98, SD= 23.65) on life skills mean scores [t (498) = 6.466, p < .05]. On the other hand, low demandingness (M= 161.41, SD= 22.10) and high demandingness (M= 162.49, SD= 24.47) did not differ significantly on life skills mean score [t (498) = .522, p = n.s.].

The finding revealed that parental responsiveness has a greater effect on the development of social skills among children. More so, a standard regression analysis was used to test if the two dimensions of parenting style significantly predicted participants' scores on social skills. The results revealed that the two predictors of parental responsiveness and demandingness explained 37% of the variance (R2=.14, F (2,497) = 39.23, p <.001). It was found that parental responsiveness significantly predicted social skills development (β = .56, p <.001), but not parental demandingness (β = -.026, p= .537), meaning that parental responsiveness has greater effect on the development of social skills among children.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to distinguish between perceived parenting style in two dimensions (responsiveness and demandingness) among young adults in Malaysia. The primary objective was to explore whether cultural differences existed among the diverse racial groups in parenting style, since cultural context was considered an important determinant of the type of parenting style that parents decide to adopt (Triandis, 2001). Furthermore, the study examined what parenting style has the most effect in social skills development. It was hypothesized that the amount of control and demand from parents may influence their child's social competency. Across the sample as a whole, the results indicated that the dominant parenting style was authoritarian, followed by authoritative parenting, however the dominant parenting style differed across the different racial and gender groupings.

The current finding is consistent with past literatures that indicated authoritarian parenting as the dominant parenting style in Asia (Rothbaum et al., 2000). The notion of control in the Asian context was defined in terms of guidance and structure, which has positive effects on child outcome. Authoritarian parenting was also associated with caring, protection and tailored to benefit the child. In such cases the consequences of disobeying parental rules may be harmful to self and others. It has been argued that authoritarian behaviour has a positive impact on collectivistic culture because in these contexts strict discipline was understood as beneficial for children, and because different parents and children see authoritarian practices as an organizational strategy that fosters harmony within the family (Keller et al., 2007).

Malaysia as an Asian collectivist society, with values such as obedience to authority figures, compliance with parental instructions, cooperation, helpfulness within and outside the extended family systems and good interpersonal relationship. All these features reinforce the child's place within the family (Rothbaum et al., 2000). Children are expected to obey and respect authority, get along with others, and learn good moral character. They learn to become contributing members of the family rather than developing a sense of their own self (Stewart et al., 1998).

Detailed analysis on different subcultural groups revealed dissimilar reports between races. Chinese participants characterized their parents as more permissive, while Malay participants mostly reported authoritative parenting style, and the Indian participants perceived their parents as authoritarian. Clearly, these results differ from the previous studies that found the main parenting style among Malays as permissive parenting (Hanifi, 2002) and authoritative parenting for Chinese (Chi et al., 2011). However, the result is in line with the findings of Sheth (1995) regarding the structure of the Indian families, described as patriarchal. Indian parents tend to stress respect, obedience and high academic achievement in their children. From the above results, it can be deduced that parental practices vary from one culture to another culture and such practices reflect the cultural values of the society (Wang & Leichtman, 2000).

One explanation for the inconsistency in results might have arisen from the age range of the selected sample. The two earlier studies that found divergent results investigated parenting style among young children, while the current research sample were young adults. Available evidence from an earlier study conducted by Chi et al. (2011) indicate that among Asian families, interactions between parent and child differ from one age period to another. Parents tend to be more lenient toward infants and young children because they are considered too young to understand things. In contrast, parents treat older children in a harsh and strict manner and also expect them to control their emotions and impulses.

Indeed parents try to offer more direct, instructional support to children, when they are young, this type of support would be considered unnecessary and inappropriate because children at very young ages are already supposed to have the skills necessary to succeed. In terms of gender, the results indicated that males perceived their parents more neglectful compared with females, while females characterized their parents as more authoritative. The result is consistent with Shek (1998) study that found that parents have different behaviours towards their sons and daughters.

As children are growing, parents are more likely to control, monitor and support their daughters than sons. Parents protect their female children more than their male children. The explanation could be that the finding of the current study was obtained from a group of university students who have left home with little direct control and monitoring from their parents. It could be possible that they may feel neglected by their parents when they experience only little control and a broader range of autonomy (Trommsdorff, 1985). In line with the above, it was possible that male students feel more unsupported by their parents and perceive parent's control as positive, important and necessary.

From the regression analysis, parental responsiveness was found a more important predictor of social skills development. The results add to a growing body of research

questioning the idea that authoritarian parenting style was associated with optimum youth outcomes across the Asian culture (Wang & Leichtman, 2000). Although, the principles of authoritarian parenting strategies in Eastern Asia are culturally appropriate and are implemented for the purpose of realizing important socialization goals (Chao, 1994; Pearson et al., 2003), the present study suggests that other parenting styles cannot compete with authoritative parenting for optimal outcome in children. More so, the rising global imaginary and the shifting ideologies of the 21st century is exclusive and increases the similarities between countries, this inhabits class, race, and gender (Steger, 2008) and thus has effect on socially desirable demands by families (Chen el al., 2010). The current finding highlights the fact that parental responsiveness and being sensitive to the child's needs are also an important factor within Asians cultures as in Western societies.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion was that parenting style is a global construct driven by cultural beliefs, values, and practices of a particular culture, which varies from one cultural context to another. The parental strategies being practiced by parents are effective if they achieve their parenting goals. When parenting behaviour is consistent with cultural values, then the children in that culture will accept it. In other words, whether a particular parenting style produces positive or negative child outcomes depends on the culture where it is practiced. Furthermore, the present study suggest that authoritarian parenting yields positive outcomes among children remains questionable, hence more research is needed.

Some cautions are to be considered with the generalization of the current results. The entire sample was made up of participants from a particular geographic location in Malaysia. Social desirability could not be ruled out in the responses. Participants might have answered the survey based on what they would like to be rather than who they really are. Some participants may not be willing to report negative information about their parents. Further, this study is introspective in nature. Even if a participant was trying to be honest, they may not provide an accurate response to a question.

Acknowledgment

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