

# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計劃成果報告

家庭互動取向之言語傷害系列研究 ( I I ) :

負向言語情境下青少年及父母對父母管教權限的不同覺知

**A family-interaction approach to verbal abuse in Chinese families (II):**

**The discrepancy between adolescents and parents on conception of parental authority at the second round of family conflict**

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## 一、中文摘要

中國父母常在子女犯錯時施以負向言語管教。父母負向言語對於家庭互動及親子關係的影響，不但受負向言語的內容及頻率所左右，也需考慮負向言語發生的情境，以及親子雙方對於負向言語內容的覺知差異。本研究之主要目的有二，一為探討父母負向言語在涉及道德、社會規範、多重（規範加個人）、及個人等四種過失情境中，是否被當事人加以不同的解釋。二為探討當事人雙方（父母及兒女）是否會因為父母有或無以負向言語加以管教，而對父母往後的管教權限有不同的覺知。受試者為一百六十位台北地區的國中學生及其父母二百一十人。每位受試者需讀十六個親子衝突及父母言語管教的故事，並在每個故事之後回答六個問題。結果發現，青少年及其父母皆認為不同的過失情境下父母所具有的管教權限不同。但青少年比父母更認為：當父母使用的管教言語過於負向時，青少年的頂嘴行為相對顯得較合理、冒犯父母的成份較少、父母繼續管教的權限也較小。

關鍵詞：倫常，頂嘴行為，青少年，親子衝突，負向言語，過失情境

## Abstract

The present study investigates Chinese adolescents' and parents' conception of parental jurisdiction on adolescents' talking-back behaviors. Adolescent's talking-back behaviors are usually in response to parental suggestions or verbal criticism to their own misbehavior in the first place; thus the talking-back behaviors can be considered as in the second round of an immediate stream of parent-child interactions. The evaluation of the jurisdiction of talking-back behavior thus may not only be a function of the particular domain of the original child transgression but also a function of the severity of the antecedent parental verbal discipline exerted on the child. One hundred and sixty eighth to ninth graders and 210 parents of these adolescents read 16 stories about child transgression, parental verbal discipline, and subsequent talking back behaviors. The type of the child transgression was either moral, conventional, multifaceted, or personal. In half of the stories, the maternal verbal disciplines were harsh, in the other half were reasonable. Subjects evaluated each story by answering 6 questions along with the development of the

story. Results confirmed the domain-specific model of parental authority. This study also revealed that compared to Chinese parents, Chinese adolescents are more likely to be influenced by the severity of antecedent parental verbal discipline in judging parental jurisdiction to adolescents' talking back behavior.

**Keywords:** talking-back behavior, adolescence, parent-child conflict, parental verbal abuse, context of transgression

## 二、緣由與目的

Using a domain model of social-cognitive development, recent research has indicated that adolescents' and parents' conceptions of parental authority are differentiated (Smetana, 1983; Turiel & Davidson, 1986). Adolescents and parents were found to be unilateral in their judgments of moral and conventional issues. However, in multifaceted, friendship, and personal issues, the jurisdiction is perceived differently by parents and adolescents (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). One domain that is important in Chinese family but has not yet been examined in the previous research is the issues involving the indigenous concepts of "family ethics" (Luen Charnng) in Chinese societies.

In the socialization processes of Chinese children, parents put strong emphasis on what is the accepted order of relationship. That is, one should pay respect to and not to disagree with the elders in order to maintain the familial and societal goals of harmonious relations with others and the integrity of the family unit. The elders embody anyone who is older than the individual, including grandparents, parents, and even one's elder siblings. Violation of the "family ethics" is most likely to be detected when children "talk back" after parents have verbally disciplined them.

Parent-child Interactions often do not end at the first round (Sackett, 1987; Patterson, 1982). It is very likely that children's talking back

behavior is instigated by prior parental discipline, which, in turn, is instigated by prior parent-child conflict and/or child's transgression in the first place. In another words, previous round of family conflicts often escalate anger between parent and adolescent. As a result, talking-back behaviors on the child's side and coercive disciplinary strategies on the parent's side are both more likely to emerge. The perception of parental authority in each family member may also variate along with the development of the conflict that, in turn, leads to even greater discrepancy of conception among different family members.

In disciplinary encounters, It is quite common for Chinese parents to use humiliation, terrorization and other forms of verbal criticism as means to facilitate children's learning and compliance (Lay, Yang, & Li, 1994). However, this "old fashioned" way of child rearing philosophy is not appreciated at least by the new generation in Taiwan. Recent research has found that Chinese adolescents' perception of the quality of parent-child relationship as well as children's self-esteem is damaged in families using hostile verbal criticisms and terrorization as disciplinary technique (Lay, Wang, Soong & Yang, 1997). Under such circumstances, Chinese adolescents may also perceive the talking back behavior differently compared to their parents. Moreover, the evaluation of the jurisdiction of talking-back behavior may be a function of the particular domain of the original child transgression as well as the severity of the antecedent parental verbal discipline exerted on the child.

Patterson's coercive home environment model has demonstrated that it is crucial to pay attention to the continuous string of parent-child interaction. However, Patterson's model places no attention on each member's perception of parental authority. Smetana and Asquith (1994) demonstrated that parents and adolescents differ in their view of parental authority, and they included "talking back to

parents" in the conventional domain of child transgression. However, when talking back behavior is categorized with other child/adolescent misbehavior, such as problems of manners, stealing, or smoking, its effect arising from the immediate sequence of past interactions may be distorted.

In summary, the present research attempts to address the following issues. First, to replicate the domain-specific model of the discrepancy between adolescents and parents in their concept of the legitimacy of parental authority. Therefore, subjects were presented with stories of child transgression of different domains. Second, to compare adolescents and parents in their ability to differentiate the severity of parental verbal discipline. Therefore, subjects were presented with stories of mother either using harsh verbal criticism or reasoning to discipline child's transgression. The third purpose of the present study is, given a particular domain of child transgression and given a certain level of harshness of verbal discipline in the first round of the parent-child interaction, to compare adolescents' and parents' evaluation of how reasonable is the target child's talking-back behavior and the extent of parental authority upon the talking back behavior. In addition, the present study will ask subjects whether the target child has violated the "family ethics" (offended his/her mother) by talking back to their parents.

### 三、結果與討論

#### Subjects

The subjects in the current study were 160 eighth- to ninth-graders (80 boys, 80 girls) from 3 junior high schools and 210 parents of these adolescents (95 fathers, 115 mothers) in metropolitan Taipei area. One school is surrounded mainly by middle to upper-middle class neighborhoods, one school is in an urban area with high crime-rate, and the other school is surrounded mainly by middle to lower-middle class neighborhoods. The wide spectrum of subjects from different social economic

background makes the results of this study more generalizable. However, because of the set-up of the building code in Taipei, the affluent and the poor often live quite closed-by with each other in Taipei and their children may very likely attend the exact same school, to compare the group difference of the three schools is not meaningful.

#### Procedure

Each subject read 16 Stories. Each story was about an adolescent that was the same age and the same sex of the subject, committed a transgression, was verbally disciplined by his/her mother, and subsequently talked back to his/her mother. There were 4 types of transgression in the 16 stories, conventional, multifaceted, moral, and personal transgressions. In half of the stories, the adolescent protagonist's mother applied harsh verbal criticism to discipline her child. This is called Form H. In other half of the stories, the adolescent protagonist's mother applied reasoning to discipline her child (Form R).

Along with the flow of each story, subjects answered 6 questions. Having read about the protagonist committing a transgression, each subject answered Question #1, "should a parent discipline Sam?" on a 6-point rating scale, from definitely shouldn't to definitely should. Secondly, the mother in the story verbally disciplined the adolescent protagonist either by applying harsh verbal criticism (Form H) or by applying reasoning (Form R). The subject then answered Question #2, "considering what Sam had just done, was what Sam's mother just said too harsh or too mild?", on a 5-point rating scale, from too mild to too harsh. Next, the adolescent protagonist tried to reason with his/her mother by saying something from his/her own point of view and wrapped up his/her statement by saying: "how could you accuse me like that?" to the mother. The subject then answered the following 4 questions, all on 6-point rating scales: Question #3, "was what Sam said reasonable?"; Question #4, "from your own

point of view, should a parent further discipline Sam for the content of what he/she had just said?", Question #5, "from your own point of view, should a parent further discipline Sam for the tone he/she had expressed in the argument?", and Question #6, "did Sam violate 'family ethics' and offend his/her mother?". The last 3 questions were randomized while presented to each subject.

## Results

The experimental design of the present study is 2 (Adolescent vs. Parent) x 4 (Domains) x 2 (Harsh Statement vs. Reasoning) analyses of variance for Question 2 to 6 and 2 (Adolescent vs. Parent) x 4 (Domains of Transgression) for Question #1, since when subject answered the first question, he/she did not know how the mother would discipline the protagonist.

### Replication of the domain specific model of parental authority

Table 1 presents the group means of the 2 x 4 analyses of Question #1 "should a parent discipline Sam?" Subjects considered that the target parent had different degrees of authority while encountering different types of child transgression,  $F(3, 1095) = 444.22, p < .0001$ . In addition, adolescents and parents had different conception of parental authority as a function of the type of transgression,  $F(3, 1095) = 3.27, p < .05$ . The LSD test for post-hoc comparison revealed that both adolescents and their parents considered parents should retain authority the most regarding moral issues (all  $p$ 's  $< .0001$ ) and the least regarding personal issues (all  $p$ 's  $< .0001$ ). However, adolescent subjects considered parents had the same degree of authority on "conventional" and "multifaceted" issues, while adult subjects considered the mother had more authority on "conventional" than on "multifaceted" issues. In addition, in the "conventional" and "personal" issues, adult subjects granted the mother in the story significantly more power to discipline the protagonist than the adolescent subjects did. Although with slight variations,

subjects' answers for Question #2 to #6 also revealed the domain-specificity of the conception of parental authority (see Table 2).

Table 1: Answers to Q#1: "Should a parent discipline Sam?"

|             | Moral | Conventional | Multifaceted | Personal |
|-------------|-------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| Adolescents | 5.27  | 4.84         | 4.77         | 3.82     |
| Parents     | 5.29  | 4.99         | 4.78         | 4.03     |
| Both Groups | 5.28  | 4.92         | 4.78         | 3.94     |

Table 2: Mean scores of rating on each question in each of the 4 categories of transgression

|      | Moral | Conventional | Multifaceted | Personal |
|------|-------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| Q.#1 | 5.28a | 4.92b        | 4.78c        | 3.94d    |
| Q.#2 | 3.50a | 3.45a        | 3.65b        | 3.78c    |
| Q.#3 | 2.80a | 3.01b        | 2.96b        | 3.43c    |
| Q.#4 | 4.82a | 4.52b        | 4.54b        | 4.15c    |
| Q.#5 | 4.72a | 4.55c        | 4.61b        | 4.40d    |
| Q.#6 | 4.33b | 4.33b        | 4.40a        | 4.21c    |

### Manipulation check: The differentiation of harsh versus reasonable verbal discipline

The second issue addressed in this study was whether adolescents and parents could differentiate the two forms of maternal verbal discipline, given the prior transgression and the subsequent talking-back behaviors were exactly the same. That is, whether subjects perceived the severity of transgression as well as the child's subsequent behavior differently according to the harsh versus reasonable disciplinary strategies the mother applied in the first round of parent-child conflict. Table 3 revealed that both adolescents and parents rated the mother's verbal discipline harsher when she's applying harsh statement as compared to using reasoning. In addition, the effects of the severity of the antecedent verbal discipline on the reaction to talking-back behavior (answers for question # 3 to 6) were also compared. Results revealed that both adolescents and parents think the protagonist's justification in his/her talking back behavior is more reasonable

when the prior verbal discipline is harsh; and a parent should discipline the content of the talking back behavior less when the antecedent verbal discipline exerted on the child is harsher.

However, parents and adolescents were different in perceiving the talking-back behavior in the following two perspectives. First, Chinese adolescents' perception of what the protagonist's mother said is Milder than Chinese parents' perception. ( $p < .005$ ). Moreover, Chinese adolescents are MORE likely to feel that the protagonist offended his/her mother as compared to Chinese parents. ( $p < .02$ )

Table 3: The discrepancy of conception between adolescents and parents in two styles of maternal verbal disciplines (Form H versus Form R)

|   | Maternal Harsh Statement | Maternal Reasoning | p value  |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Q #2: How harsh did Sam's mother just said?                               |                          |                    |          |
| Adolescents   | 4.00                     | 3.07               | < .00001 |
| Parents   | 4.08                     | 3.23               | < .00001 |
| Q #3: Was what Sam said reasonable?                                       |                          |                    |          |
| Adolescents   | 3.15                     | 2.94               | < .00001 |
| Parents   | 3.10                     | 3.01               | < .001   |
| Q #4: Should a parent discipline Sam for the content of what he/she said? |                          |                    |          |
| Adolescents   | 4.40                     | 4.54               | < .00005 |
| Parents   | 4.52                     | 4.57               | < .01    |
| Q #5: Should a parent discipline Sam for his/her tone of voice?           |                          |                    |          |
| Adolescents   | 4.46                     | 4.60               | < .00005 |
| Parents   | 4.60                     | 4.63               | ns       |
| Q #6: Did Sam violate "family ethics" and offend his/her mother?          |                          |                    |          |
| Adolescents   | 4.37                     | 4.48               | < .005   |
| Parents   | 4.21                     | 4.22               | ns       |

#### Parent-Adolescent Comparison: Results from the interaction effect

Four two-way interaction effects of group x statement with the answers of questions 3 to 6 as the dependent variables revealed that adolescents were more likely to be influenced by parental harsh criticism versus reasoning in deciding (Q #3) whether or not what Sam said

was reasonable,  $F(1, 358) = 8.08, p < .05$ ; (Q #4) whether a parent should discipline Sam for the content of what he/she said,  $F(1, 358) = 5.65, p < .05$ ; (Q #5) whether a parent should discipline Sam for his/her tone of voice,  $F(1, 358) = 7.61, p < .05$ ; and (Q #6) whether Sam offended his/her mother,  $F(1, 358) = 5.13, p < .05$ . On the contrary, parents' judgment of the protagonist's "talking-back" behavior was less influenced by the mothers' prior disciplinary style.

#### Discussion

Concepts of the legitimacy of parental authority are indeed domain specific. This result supports prior research findings. As found in previous research, both adult and adolescent subjects think parents should retain authority the most regarding moral issues and the least regarding personal issues. However, compared to parents, adolescents are less able to discriminate between conventional and multifaceted issues in terms of the legitimacy of parental authority. Maybe a more dogmatic way of child rearing style in this culture made Chinese adolescents develop the ability to differentiate the multifaceted and conventional issues later than western children.

The present study has also found Chinese adolescents and parents can discriminate the severity of parental verbal discipline (i.e., Form H versus Form R). They reflect this discrimination (H vs. R) on how they perceive the same transgression and the same "talk-back" behavior differently. In another words. Parent-adolescent interactions usually do not end at the first round. At the second round, the adolescent's transgression may transfer from CV, MF, MR, or PS issues to the domain of violation in "family ethics". Judgments of the legitimacy of parental authority is influenced by prior parenting tactics applied immediately before the second round of child transgression. This perspective is supported by the findings that both adolescents and parents think maternal criticism is a harsher disciplinary

tactics than reasoning; both adolescents and parents think the content of the talking-back behavior is more reasonable when the maternal verbal discipline involves harsh criticism; and both adolescents and parents think a parent should discipline the content of the talking-back behavior less when the antecedent verbal discipline exerted on the child is harsher.

The present study also found Chinese adolescents' perception of what the protagonist's mother said is Milder than Chinese Parents' perception. In addition, Chinese adolescents are MORE likely to feel that the protagonist offended his/her mother as compared to Chinese parents. These results may lead to a conclusion that Chinese adolescents are more "old fashioned" than their parents. Other alternative explanations may be that parents are more likely to give socially desirable answers; or as disciplinees, adolescents are more used to hearing verbal criticism, and, in turn, more tolerant to the mother's statement in the stories. In her master's thesis, our 4th author, using another set of stories and another group of subjects, has found similar results. Therefore this result should not be a pure artifact. To test the above 3 explanations is necessary in the future studies.

#### 四、計劃成果自評

本研究之家長問卷之回收率不佳，問卷本身可能造成家長之自衛心，而不願交回問卷。本研究因而無法回答原欲探討之部份研究主題。

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