

# *The Relationship between Self-esteem Level and Parenting Style of Post-00s College Students*

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**Abstract:** To investigate the status quo and relationship between the level of self-esteem and parenting style of college students, a self-esteem scale (SES) and simple parenting style questionnaire (S-EMBU) were used to collect questionnaires from 300 college students randomly selected from universities in Guangdong province. The results show that post-00s college students have a middle level of self-esteem. There is a significant difference in grade, but no difference in gender, whether the only child; The main parenting style of college students is emotional warmth, followed by overprotection, rejection is the least. There are significant differences in gender, grade, and whether the only child; The self-esteem level of college students is highly negatively correlated with rejection and over-protection, and highly positively correlated with emotional warmth. This study concludes that parenting style has an impact on college students' self-esteem. Parents' emotional warmth is conducive to college students' self-esteem, while their rejection and excessive protection will lower the level of college students' self-esteem.

**Keywords:** Parenting style, Self-esteem level, College students.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 21st century, people pay more and more attention to the meaning and value of their own existence, and self-esteem has become a high-level need for people to realize their own value [1]. As the main force of the new era, the development of college students' self-esteem is related to personal growth, national prosperity and national revitalization. Therefore, in recent years, the self-esteem of college students has attracted more and more social attention.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's positive self-evaluation and positive emotional experience, which is an important psychological resource of an individual [2]. At home and abroad several studies have shown that self-esteem is one of the core components of the individual self-system, it is not only associated with individual psychological health immediately, having important influences on the personality, but also plays a role of intermediary as a personality variable, having broad effects to individual cognition, motivation, emotion, and social behavior [3-6].

Family is the most important place for children to grow up. At the same time, parents are the first teacher of children's socialization. According to Kohlberg's cognitive socialization theory [7], children will identify with same-sex role models at the age of 4 to 6, and parents are most likely to become the objects of children's identification and learning. Bandura also mentioned in social

learning theory that children learn social behaviors by observing and imitating their parents' behaviors and characteristics [8]. Among many family factors, parenting style plays a continuous role in a person's life. It is one of the most important factors affecting children's social development and psychological health, and the most important factor affecting the early development of individual self-esteem. Previous studies on the relationship between self-esteem and parenting style show that there may be a close relationship between parenting style and children's self-esteem. Garbarino believes that family, as the main place where individuals interact with the outside world in the early stage, is the most specific and direct micro-environment that affects individuals [9]. Many relevant studies in China also found that self-esteem was positively correlated with parents' positive parenting style, but negatively correlated with parents' negative parenting style [10, 11].

College students have entered the later stage of adolescence and are largely out of the care of their parents. At the same time, under the influence of the new college environment, the objective and psychological influence of their parents reduced relatively. A survey shows that the post-00s generation has become the majority of college students. As for the psychological characteristics of the post-00s, they are more avant-garde in thinking, more diversified in value orientation, more self-conscious, and less obedient to authority [12]. With the improvement of living standards, people pay more attention to the level of mental health, scholars also pay more attention to the psychological problems of college students, including physical problems, depression, anxiety and so on. Therefore, this study raises a question: Self-esteem, as one of the important measures of mental health, is still closely related to the parents of post-00s college students? Most previous studies which discuss the question focus on middle school students, but there are few studies on college students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the level of self-esteem and parenting styles of college students and to study the impact of parenting styles on college students.

This study put forward some hypotheses: the self-esteem level of college students is significantly different in gender, grade, and whether they are the only child; The parenting styles of college students show significant differences in gender, grade, and whether they are the only child; The self-esteem level of college students is highly correlated with the parenting style in all factors.

With the gradual increase of national attention to mental health and parent-child education, exploring the relationship between college students' self-esteem and parenting style can provide theoretical basis for good parenting style. In addition, a good parenting style is conducive to a better family environment for children, contributing to their mental health and all-round development, which is of far-reaching significance for the future development of the country.

## 2. Literature Review

Family is an important part of society, and parenting style, as a part of it, will have a significant impact on all aspects of the individual.. This part briefly reviews the basic concepts and related theoretical studies of parenting style and self-esteem to lay a theoretical foundation for subsequent research.

### 2.1. Parenting Style

On the concept of parenting style, domestic and foreign scholars have not reached a consensus. Foreign scholars Darling and Sternberg believed that parenting style consists of parents' attitude, behavior, and non-verbal expression, reflecting the essence of parent-child interaction and having cross-situational stability [13]. Parents not only influence children's ideas and behaviors through words and behaviors but also affect children's emotions and feelings through unconscious nonverbal information. The concept was widely accepted and used today. Domestic scholars also put forward many different definitions. Li believes that parenting style refers to the behavioral tendency of parents

in the process of raising and educating their children for certain educational purposes [14]. Xu et al. believe that it refers to parents' attitudes and emotions towards their children's education as a summary of the characteristics of parenting behavior, and reflects the essence of parent-child interaction [15].

At the end of the 19th century, Freud made a distinction between the different roles of parents in the family. He believed that the father represented severity and discipline, and the mother represented love and warmth. American psychologist Symonds was the first to study the effect of parenting on children [16]. He proposed two dimensions of "acceptance-rejection" and "domination-submission". Based on several studies, he has found that children who are accepted by their parents are not only more empathetic but also have a wide range of interests and emotional stability. However, children who are rejected by their parents will be indifferent to others and show a stubborn personality. Children who obey their parents are more likely to lack self-confidence and depend on others. In addition, children who want to control their parents will present a powerful offensive. Sears et al. combined previous research ideas with learning theories and proposed two important concepts, namely warmth, and control [17]. On this basis, Baumrind classified parenting styles into three types: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive [18]. Children who receive an authoritative education are more independent, responsible, and achievement-oriented. Taking into account the differences between eastern and western cultures, Chinese scholars have proposed a new division method in their research. Yue proposed two dimensions: father and mother. There are many factors in the parental dimension, such as emotional warmth and understanding, over-protection, denial, over-interference, and preference [19]. The father dimension also has a punitive severity factor. This categorization has been widely accepted.

Li found that school type, parents' education level, children's grades, and gender would affect parenting style [14]. Xu et al. found that parenting style has sufficient influence on children's socialization [15]. Song's research on college students proves that parenting style will affect learning engagement [20]. Guo also found in his research that the parenting style of college students is influenced by many factors, such as parents' occupation, education level, and children's gender [21].

## 2.2. Self-esteem

Self-esteem was first proposed by James, an American psychologist. He defined self-esteem as the ratio of one's actual success to potential ambition and came up with the formula:  $\text{self-esteem} = \text{success}/\text{ego}$  [22]. Rosenberg said that self-esteem reflects the difference between an individual's actual perceived self and expected self [23]. The smaller the gap between the real self and the desired self, the higher the individual's self-esteem. Smith said that self-esteem consists of three parts: an individual's feeling of his characteristics and potential, an individual's recognition and evaluation of his ability, and others' evaluation of himself. In his view, self-esteem is a person's positive or negative evaluation of himself [24]. The higher the rating, the higher the individual's self-esteem. Romin et al. believed that self-esteem has two dimensions, namely, self-ability and self-preference [25]. In his view, self-ability is the evaluation of self-worth, and self-liking is the acceptance of self.

Many scholars have also done relevant research on the influencing factors of self-esteem. Domestic scholars have also carried out a series of studies. Cao recognized the college students as objects, her study found that a high level of self-esteem would enhance social support and subjective well-being [26]. Zhang also found a positive relationship between self-esteem and social trust [27]. Zeng's research also indicated that self-esteem was positively correlated with social support and negatively correlated with social trust [28].

## 2.3. Correlation Study

The relationship between parenting style and self-esteem has always been the focus of scholars at home and abroad. Zhang and Lin conducted a study on junior high school students, and the results showed that a positive parenting style had a positive impact on children's self-esteem [29]. On the contrary, negative parenting styles hinder the development of children's self-esteem. Wang found that parents' warmth and understanding are significantly positively correlated with college students' self-esteem [30]. Peng found that college students with more warmth and understanding from their parents had higher self-esteem [31]. Hou et al. believe that a positive parenting style can promote children's self-evaluation [32].

## 3. Methodology

This study conducted an online survey, which distributed questionnaires to 300 College students in Guangdong through email, wechat and campus forums, and collected their information about parenting style and self-esteem level.

### 3.1. Experimental Design

This study adopts the questionnaire survey, which consists of two parts: the simple parenting style scale and the self-esteem scale.

#### 3.1.1. Chinese Version of the Simple Parenting Style Scale (S-EMBU-C).

Jiang et al. revised the simplified parenting style scale with a total of 21 questions, including 6 dimensions of rejection, 7 dimensions of emotional warmth and 8 dimensions of overprotection [33]. It is a self-rating scale that allows participants to evaluate their parents' parenting attitude and behavior through recall. Likert4 score was used in this study to measure the type of parenting style of the subjects. When the score is calculated, the highest score on each dimension indicates that the parent's parenting style belongs to that dimension. The scale divided parenting styles into three categories: cold and rejecting, emotional warmth and overprotection. Therefore, this study defined the three parenting styles of fathers as F1, F2 and F3, and the parenting styles of mothers as M1, M2 and M3. In this study, the reliability of the scale is 0.89.

#### 3.1.2. Self-esteem Scale.

Rosenberg developed the self-esteem scale with 10 questions. It used the Likert4 score to measure the participants' self-esteem level. 4 mean very consistent, 3 mean consistent, 2 mean inconsistent, and 1 mean very inconsistent. The result score of these 10 questions can assess the level of self-esteem of the individual. The score is calculated according to the suggestions of Han Xiangqian et al. [34]. The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem. In this study, the reliability of this scale is 0.71, which is reliable.

### 3.2. Data Processing

SPSS 26.0 data analysis software was used to analyze the valid questionnaire data. Through descriptive statistical analysis of college students' parenting style and self-esteem status, and using T-test, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and other statistical methods, this paper discusses the differences between college students' parenting styles and self-esteem level in demographic variables, and the association between the level of college students' self-esteem and parenting styles.

## 4. Result

There were 300 participants in this study. After excluding invalid questionnaires, 270 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective rate of 90.0%. Among them, 109 (40.3%) were male and 161 (59.7%) were female. The majority of participants were between the ages of 20 and 24, accounting for nearly 75%.

### 4.1. Status Quo of College Students' Parenting Styles

#### 4.1.1. General Overview

First of all, a descriptive analysis of questionnaire data was carried out. The statistical results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of factors in the simplified parenting style questionnaire.

	Factor	N	M	SD
Father	F1	270	10.35	3.75
	F2	270	18.10	4.53
	F3	270	16.82	3.69
Mother	M1	270	10.97	4.22
	M2	270	19.50	4.49
	M3	270	18.14	4.09

As can be seen from Table 1, the scores of the three dimensions of rejection, emotional warmth, and overprotection of the father's parenting style from high to low are F2, F3, and F1 respectively, while the scores of the three dimensions of the mother's parenting style from high to low are M2, M3, and M1 respectively. Therefore, it can be inferred that the parenting style of more parents is emotional warmth, and the parenting style of rejection is the least.

#### 4.1.2. Gender Differences

The independent sample T-test was adopted in this study, with gender as the independent variable and parenting style as the dependent variable, to study whether there is a significant difference in gender of college students' parenting styles. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Gender differences in parenting styles.

	Factor	Male	Female	t
Father	F1	11.06	9.87	2.594
	F2	18.00	18.17	-.298
	F3	17.39	16.43	2.089
Mother	M1	11.87	10.36	2.878*
	M2	19.17	19.73	-1.021
	M3	18.75	17.73	2.032

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

As can be seen from Table 2, there are impressive gender differences in the parenting styles of college students only in M1( $p$  value  $< 0.05$ ), and no significant differences in the other five dimensions. In the M1 dimension, the score of boys is significantly higher than that of girls, so it can be inferred that boys receive more parental rejection than girls.

### 4.1.3. Grade Differences

In this study, one-way ANOVA was adopted, with the grade as an independent variable and parenting style as a dependent variable, to analyze whether there is a significant difference in the parenting style of college students at grade level. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Grade differences in parenting styles.

	Factor	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Postgraduate	Doctor	F
Father	F1	10.31	10.32	9.87	10.60	12.00	14.83	2.502*
	F2	16.44	18.18	18.41	17.19	19.00	21.17	1.520
	F3	16.19	16.66	16.47	17.53	19.67	17.67	1.803
Mother	M1	11.81	10.80	10.45	11.40	13.00	14.33	1.767
	M2	17.13	19.32	20.25	18.47	20.44	21.83	2.431*
	M3	17.31	18.03	18.03	18.14	21.22	19.33	1.289

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

As can be seen from Table 3, significant grade differences is significant or at 95% significant level in F1 and M2 of college students' parenting styles, but no significant differences in the other four dimensions. At the same time, in F1 and M2, the score of the doctor is significantly higher than that of other grades, so it can be inferred that doctor receives more parental rejection and emotional warmth from the mother than in other grades.

### 4.1.4. Differences between Only Children

The independent sample T-test was adopted in the study, and whether the only child was taken as the independent variable and the parenting style as the dependent variable, to explore the differences in the parenting style of college students on whether they were the only child. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Differences in parenting style on only child or not.

	Factor	Yes	No	t
Father	F1	11.08	9.54	3.498***
	F2	18.87	17.23	3.027
	F3	17.60	15.94	3.789
Mother	M1	11.95	9.87	4.227***
	M2	20.36	18.54	3.408
	M3	19.19	16.96	4.656

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

As can be seen from Table 4, there is a significant difference in F1 and M1 dimensions between college students' parenting styles and whether they are only children( $p$  value  $< 0.001$ ), while there is no significant difference in F2, F3, M2, and M3. In both F1 and M1, only children scored significantly higher than non-only children. Therefore, college students who are only children will be more rejected by their parents than those who are not only children.



## 4.2. Status Quo of College Students' Self-esteem

### 4.2.1. General Overview

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the self-esteem level of college students in the questionnaire data, and the results were  $M=28.7$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ . It can be seen that the self-esteem of college students is at a medium level.

### 4.2.2. Gender Differences

T-test of sample independence was adopted in this study, with one gender as the independent variable and self-esteem level as the dependent variable, to explore whether there is a significant gender difference in the self-esteem level of college students. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Gender differences in self-esteem level of college students.

	Male	Female	t
Self-esteem level	27.88	29.26	-2.47

As can be seen from Table 5, there is no significant gender difference in the self-esteem level of college students.

### 4.2.3. Grade Differences

One-way ANOVA was adopted in this study, with the grade as an independent variable and self-esteem level as a dependent variable, to explore whether there is a significant difference in self-esteem levels among college students in grades. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Grade differences in self-esteem level of college students.

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Postgraduate	Doctor	F
Self-esteem level	28.69	29.02	29.24	27.81	25.22	26.17	2.176*

Note: \* $p < 0.05$

As can be seen from Table 6, the self-esteem level of college students varies significantly in different grades at 95% significant level. Through multiple comparisons, the results show that the self-esteem level of sophomores and juniors is significantly higher than that of other grades.

### 4.2.4. Differences between Single Children

The independent sample T-test was adopted in the study, with the only child as the independent variable and the self-esteem level as the dependent variable, to explore the difference in the self-esteem level of college students in the only child or not. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Differences in self-esteem level of college students in the only child or not

	Yes	No	t
Self-esteem level	28.41	29.04	-1.14

As can be seen from Table 7, there is no significant difference in the self-esteem level of college students on whether they are the only child or not.

#### 4.2.5. Comparison of Self-esteem Level of College Students with Different Parenting Styles

To explore whether there are differences in self-esteem levels among college students with different parenting styles, the six dimensions of parenting styles were separated into two groups according to their average values: those scopes higher than average values were classified as high, and those lower than average values were classified as low. On this basis, an independent sample T-test is conducted, and the results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Differences in self-esteem level of college students in different parenting styles.

	Low score group	High score group	t
F1	30.69	26.23	9.53***
F2	27.08	30.54	-6.69**
F3	30.00	27.67	4.32
M1	30.70	26.53	8.53***
M2	27.00	30.46	-6.72**
M3	29.86	27.16	5.12**

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

As can be seen from Table 8, there are significant differences in the results of the other five dimensions except for the differences between the high and low groups on F3( $p$  value  $< 0.01$ ,  $p$  value  $< 0.001$ ). In F2 and M2, the self-esteem level of students in the high group was significantly higher than that in the low group, while in F1, M1, and M3, the self-esteem level of students in the high group was significantly lower than that in the low group.

#### 4.3. Correlation Analysis

The study carried out a correlation analysis on the relationship between self-esteem level and parenting style of college students, and the results were shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Relationship between factors of parenting style and self-esteem level of college students

	F1	F2	F3	M1	M2	M3
Self-esteem level	-0.475**	0.426**	-0.341**	-0.486**	0.416**	-0.251**

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$

As can be seen from Table 3, F1, F3, M1, and M3 are highly negatively correlated with self-esteem, while F2 and M2 are highly positively correlated with self-esteem at 99% significant level. Therefore, the parenting style of parental rejection and over-protection is highly negatively correlated with the self-esteem level of college students, while the parenting style of parental emotional warmth is highly positively correlated with the self-esteem level of college students.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. College Students' Parenting Styles

The results of the study showed that parents were more likely to use emotionally warm parenting, followed by overprotective parenting, and least likely to use rejection parenting. This reflects a



change in social attitudes. In the past, the traditional saying was to produce filial children under the stick, meaning that punishing and strict parents could produce more filial children, so this parenting style is respected by many people. However, with the progress of society, people's living conditions have become better, and parents' educational level has also been improved. More and more parents' ideas have changed, believing that the education method of encouragement and praise is more conducive to the growth of their children. In addition, the pace of life is fast now, and parents are under great pressure from work, so they may forget their children when they are busy. Out of compensation psychology, they will try their best to meet the requirements of their children, hoping to improve their quality of life and happiness.

The results of the study showed that male college students received more parental rejection than female college students. This may be related to the interaction between children's personality traits and parenting styles. Generally speaking, girls are more quiet and obedient, while boys are more aggressive and resistant. At the same time, society has higher expectations of boys, because boys are believed to be the backbone of the family and need to shoulder more responsibilities. Therefore, parents will adopt more severe parenting methods to treat their sons.

The results of the study showed that college students who were only children received more parental rejection than those who were not only children. Shi found that parents' emotional warmth towards only children is more than that of non-only children, which is contrary to the research results [35]. The reason may be that in recent years, various news reports about only children being spoiled by their parents and failing to socialize properly have alarmed many parents. Therefore, they will adopt more methods of rejection parenting, hoping to cultivate their children's independence and achieve good individual development.

## 5.2. Self-esteem Level of College Students

The results of the study show that college students' self-esteem is generally at a medium level. Zhang found that adolescents have a good level of self-esteem, which is consistent with the research results [36]. It can be seen that with the improvement of living standards, the material needs of most families have been met, and parents begin to pay more attention to the mental problems of their children. Mainly through caring for and raising children, giving them sufficient confidence in psychology, make children's self-esteem get healthy development.

The results show that there is no significant gender difference in the self-esteem level of college students. Although Huang found that the self-esteem level of boys in middle school was significantly higher than that of girls, the result of the study is inconsistent with that [37]. With the development of society and the popularization of the idea of equality between men and women, people's cognition of both sexes has changed. With the achievements of women in various aspects, women's status and self-evaluation have been improved to some extent. There was no significant difference in self-esteem between male and female college students.

The results of the study showed that the self-esteem level of college students in their sophomore and junior years was significantly higher than that of other grades. The reason may be that: students who are sophomores and juniors can adapt to the environment well, so their psychological pressure is not so great. Freshmen just enter the university, there may be pressure to adapt; However, senior college students will face the pressure of employment and higher education, which will lower students' self-evaluation level and lead to the decline of self-esteem.

The results show that there is no significant difference in the self-esteem level of college students on whether they are the only child or not. Previous studies have found that only children score significantly higher on self-esteem than non-only children [38], which is inconsistent with the results of this study. According to other scholars' research on only children, compared with non-only children, only children often show some personality defects, such as strong vanity and unsociable [39]. This

reduced the superiority of only children to some extent, so there was no significant difference in self-esteem levels between only children and non-only children.

### 5.3. Relationship between Self-esteem Level and Parenting Style

The results show that the parenting style of parents' emotional warmth is highly positively correlated with the level of self-esteem of college students. In general, the family atmosphere improves when parents adopt an emotionally warm parenting style and understand and accept their children's behaviors and ideas. In such a family environment, children will feel their parents' care and warmth, thus forming a more positive evaluation of themselves and obtaining a higher level of self-esteem. On the contrary, the parenting style of parental rejection and over-protection is highly negatively correlated with the level of self-esteem of college students. Parents' indifference and the denial will hurt children's self-evaluation, and the lack of identity is not conducive to the development of individual self-esteem, which will harm individual mental health.

After discussion of the research results, the following conclusions were drawn:

The parenting style of post-00s college students is warmer and the parenting style of rejection is the least. By comparing different groups of college students, it is found that male and only child college students are more likely to be rejected by their parents.

The self-esteem level of post-00s college students is in the middle level, and there is no significant difference in gender and whether they are the only child. Sophomores and juniors have higher self-esteem than other grades.

Parenting style has a significant influence on the level of self-esteem of college students. Parents' emotional warmth is conducive to the development of college students' self-esteem, on the contrary, parents' rejection and excessive protection will hinder the development of college students' self-esteem, which is not helpful to their mental health.

## 6. Conclusion

Significance Research on the relationship between the level of self-esteem and parenting style of college students can help us understand the overall characteristics of self-esteem of college students more deeply. This is beneficial to enrich the theoretical research on self-esteem and provide support for the mental health education of college students. At the same time, studying the relationship between the level of self-esteem and parenting style of college students has important guiding significance to promote the development of self-esteem of college students. It can provide a reference for parents to choose their way of education, and also has an important influence on family harmony and social stability.

The results provide us with educational enlightenment: parenting style has a great influence on children's self-esteem development. To promote the development of children's self-esteem and improve their level of mental health, parents should adopt a warm emotional upbringing, create a good family atmosphere, and give their children full understanding and support in life. The recognition and affirmation from parents are beneficial to enhance children's self-confidence and thus have a higher level of self-esteem. Rejection, and over-protective parenting, will let children continue to deny themselves, and self-esteem will be at a lower level.

First, the sample range of the study subjects was limited. The subjects of this study are all college students from a certain province in China, which affects the representativeness of samples to some extent. Therefore, the universality of the research conclusion needs to be verified by further research theories. Secondly, the research method is single. The research adopts the method of a questionnaire survey, in a short period through the way of self-report to obtain the information needed for the research. Although the efficiency is high, the form is relatively simple, and the authenticity of data

may affect the research results to a certain extent. Finally, the research is a cross-sectional study conducted in the same period, which ignores the dynamic changes in the characteristics of the research objects over time, which may affect the reliability of the research results.

In future studies, the optional range of subjects should be expanded to make the results more representative. In addition, research methods should be diversified, for example, experimental intervention can be combined to improve the scientific nature and correctness of research. Finally, the longitudinal research method should be supplemented to make the subject research more systematic and comprehensive.

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