

The Influence of Parenting in Perfectionism Family Environment on Test Anxiety of Chinese College Students

Yihan Wu¹, Siyu Wang², and Siying Chen³

¹*School of Foreign Language Studies, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, 310018, China*

²*School of Oriental Languages and Cultures, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, 400031, China*

³*Changhe High school, Hangzhou, 310000, China*
905194997@qq.com

Abstract: This work aimed to explore the association between parenting style and personality which reflects the influence perfectionism family environment acting on test anxiety, then towards the cause of test anxiety, find specific solutions. The methods used in this work are document method and case analysis. We compared previous studies of books, newspapers and periodicals. Then selected two typical cases to have further analyses with the measurements of PBI and TAS. It is found that there is a certain relationship between parenting style, obsessive compulsive personality and test anxiety. At the same time, these variables interact with each other. At last, this paper will provide some solutions which can effectively improve pre-test anxiety.

Keywords: Parenting Style, Family Environment, Test Anxiety, Personality, College Students

1. Introduction

In China, due to the huge population and limited social resources, employment pressure is increasing day by day. Especially for college students who are about to enter the society, the pressure is more serious. Therefore, they tend to obtain good academic performance and industry entry qualification through various examinations to enhance their competitiveness. So, there is a widespread test anxiety among college students [1]. Test anxiety refers to an individual's experience of worrying about evaluation before and during an exam [2]. Test anxiety is also well defined as an individual's tendency to react with expansive distress, invasive thoughts, mental disorganization and physiological arousal when students exposed to evaluative situations [3,4]. Test anxiety generally hinders performance, undermines academic achievement and limits access to educational and occupational opportunities [5]. High level of text anxiety has a negative effect on their personal, social, familial, occupational and educational performance. It also threatens individuals' mental and physical health [6]. Psychologically, it can cause tension, anxiety, uneasiness. Physiologically, it can cause headache, diarrhea, sweating, frequent urination and other body reactions. Research shows that anxiety and stress tend to interfere with cognitive activities, productivity and performance. And in severe cases,

it can cause illness and even more dangerous consequences [7]. Therefore, test anxiety is receiving increasing attention from psychologists.

In many studies conducted by psychologists, obsessive compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) is thought to be a major factor to cause test anxiety. It was identified as the third most common personality disorder in the clinical outpatient population, with a prevalence of 8.7% [8]. Fu Wenqing and his team used PDQ uestionnaire to conduct twelve items on over two thousand college students, the result found the rate of OCPD was the highest among the different personality disorders — up to 45.4% [9]. The people who is OCPD is perfectionism, caution, fear of making a mistake and obsessively need to double-check and double-think in order to live up to his expectations [10]. By setting a control group which organized with people who were non-OCPD, the OCPD group scored higher on cleanliness, grooming, self-examination, harming others and compulsion than the control group, the survey found. American scholars have conducted a study on compulsive personality that the number of persistent errors in the OCPD group is lower than that in the normal control group [11]. In addition, when talking about OCPD, some of their performances and perfectionism will show similar characteristics [5]. This kind of excessive expectations of OCPD usually manifests anxiety before the exam at the student stage, for example: their high demands on themselves will make them want to get a good result, especially when the previous time their grades were not good. The demands on themselves are usually higher. This is a kind of “compulsion” in their hearts and also their “desire to control”. When they can’t touch what they planned to achieve, no matter how hard they work, they often cause greater anxiety and may even fall into a vicious circle. Under the influence of this situation, they will find that compulsive behavior is more closely related to perfectionism. Han Zhiwei and Liang Qixiu stated that for the perfectionist, they set unrealistically high standards, strictly and continuously force themselves toward this goal and measure self-worth based solely on the productivity and achievement of self-expression [12]. In fact, according to the term, we can easily connect the OCPD with OCP, so there is a misunderstanding that OCPD is as same as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Although they all have the tendency to let their performance more perfect, but most of their (OCPD) behavior is personality driven and does not interfere much with themselves, as a result they usually adapt to the environment. Sometimes, because people have unlimited potential, under the influence of OCPD, there will be unexpected gains. For those who are already working, it is prevalent in the occupational groups with high work achievement [13]. As students, the environment can be the campus where they are now. Rigorously, the special environment should be the place their personality firstly appears. Because of the development of personality, the influence of childhood is more profound. Therefore, if we want to clarify the factors that cause anxiety before the exam, we must focus on the root.

Family is the social environment which individuals have the most contacts in their childhoods. As a result, family environment is very important for the formation and development of children’s personality [14]. The parenting is the core of the family environment and a large number of empirical studies have shown that parenting style is an important factor affecting individual social adaptation [15]. In present, it is widely accepted by scholars for classifying parenting style into four types: democratic, authoritarian, drowning and neglecting, which have different characteristics respectively [16]. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by little or no response to the children’s demands. Parents practice excessive power and control and there is lack of trust and understanding between parents and children. The specific characteristic of democratic parenting style is having requirements and responses to children. Centering on the sound physical and mental development of children, supervising but not restricting children. Parents give guidance and help to children, trust them and respect their wishes. Parents and children have equal positions in communications. And parents listen to and absorb children’s views, encouraging them to be independent. The specific characteristic of the drowning parenting style is having no requirements but only reaction for children. This kind of

parents completely concentrate on the will of children but lack control over them. The specific characteristic of neglectful parenting style is having no requirements and no response for children. This kind of parents do not participate in children's activities and do not care about their physical and mental development.

In the family, infants and their parents establish a kind of attachment emotional connection, which makes infants form different types of attachment styles due to different family environment and parenting styles, such as secure, anxious and indifferent [17]. Research shown that family environment has an impact on obsessive-compulsive personality and family environment indirectly affects obsessive-compulsive personality through insecure attachment and negative perfectionism. In the path analysis, in the path of "family environment to insecure attachment to compulsive personality", adverse family environment is an essential factor for the formation of insecure attachment, then insecure attachment leads to the formation of compulsive personality more easily. However, in the path of "family environment to insecure attachment to negative perfectionism to compulsive personality", insecure attachment individuals have a higher degree of negative perfectionism, which leads to obsessive personality. Thus, family environment has an indirect and crucial influence on the shaping of personality. All these analyses indicated the strong relationship between family environment and personality development which gave this study the inspiration of the connection between parenting style and compulsive personality [18].

At the same time, research also shown that excessive pursuit of success or competitive atmosphere in the family will induce shame, anxiety and other high arousal negative academic emotions of children. This reminds family education to pay not too much attention to success and perfection, maintaining moderate pursuit of success requirements and atmosphere, which is conducive to family members to maintain positive emotions and mentality. If parents excessive emphasize on the pursuit of success or competition, it may bring negative academic emotional experience to children [19]. The findings also indicate the importance of parenting style in shaping students' emotions and personalities.

According to the preceding text, previous studies implicate that there is a certain relationship between parenting style, obsessive compulsive personality and test anxiety. At the same time, these variables interact with each other. Since most of the previous studies independently examined the relationship between the above factors, the chain relationship between these three factors have not been comprehensively investigated. Therefore, this study aims to explore the chain reaction of parenting style, obsessive compulsive personality and test anxiety by studying a representative Chinese family, so as to reconsider about how we can create a healthier parenting environment.

2. Method and Result

2.1. Document Method

This research mainly refers to the collection and comparison of books, newspapers and periodicals, the articles on CNKI and other relevant literature and materials.

2.2. Case Analysis

1. This research selected two college students with test anxiety tendency as the objects, analyzing the causes of test anxiety by their self-report and measurements of PBI and TAS. At last relevant suggestions were proposed in the work.

2. Research Scope

The research includes the simple analysis of tendency of parenting style, students' personality tendency and test anxiety tendency.

2.3. Case Introduction:

Case 1: Y, a college student in Zhejiang, who has no history of major physical diseases and family diseases. Y grew up in a healthy family, living with her father, mother and grandmother. Her parents took good care of her. When interviewed, she was conscious and thinking normally.

The student said that before exams, there are serious test anxiety symptoms hanging with her. About one week before the exam, her physical and psychological adverse reactions are particularly serious, which will produce gastrointestinal discomfort, dizziness and fatigue, difficult to concentrate and insomnia symptoms. What's more, she would always experience a long time in the state of mental tension and irritability. At the same time, the result of exam often do not match to that her expected. As a result, after the exam she would fall into deeper remorse. The interviewee was measured by PBI and TAS scales, and the results are as follows:

PBI:

Mother: caring factor: 18, encouragement factor: 15, control factor: 2

Father: caring factor: 17, encouraging autonomy factor: 12, controlling factor: 6

TAS:

Score at 35, indicating that the respondents had severe test anxiety and felt very uncomfortable about taking the test.

The questionnaire was filled in by the respondent herself and the result was reliable.

Case 2: S, a university student in Chongqing, who has no history of major physical disease or family disease. Y grew up with her parents since birth. Although her parents were busy with their work and didn't spend much time with S, they are generally concerned about their child. When interviewed, she was conscious and thinking normally.

The student said that she had mild test anxiety symptoms before the exam, generally manifested as tension, anxiety and irritability. Sometimes she would suffer from insomnia the night before the exams. When in some particular cases, she would suffer from heart palpitations, loss of appetite and vomiting. The student's test anxiety was also accompanied by test avoidance behaviors, such as giving up reviewing and procrastinating tasks. The interviewee was measured by PBI and TAS scales, and the results are as follows:

PBI:

Mother: caring factor: 15, encouraging autonomy factor: 17, controlling factor: 10

Father: caring factor: 15, encouraging independent factor: 15, controlling factor: 2

TAS:

Score at 22, indicating that the interviewee have serious test anxiety and felt a strong sense of discomfort when participating in the test.

The questionnaire was filled in by the respondent herself and the result was reliable.

3. Discussion

This research focuses on the impact of the perfectionist family. Therefore, the most effective method is to prescribe the right medicine. Xu Wan, Liu Qian and others have shown that a good family environment contributes to the formation of a healthy personality for family members and helps form safe attachment [20]. If an individual is in an insecure attachment, he or she is prone to get anxiety and distrust of interpersonal relationships, which in turn affects the formation of interpersonal relationships and stable relationships [21]. This kind of relationship anxiety will affect students' interaction with classmates which makes students unable to master the test and social interaction at the same time. As a result, the anxiety before the test becomes more serious. In order to ease it, family members can organize family gatherings, watch psychological short films together and communicate more frequently, which will greatly help personality shaping.

It is a pity that the research cannot intervene too much in a person's family environment, but in medicine, the problem of anxiety before exams has been effectively resolved. Unlike other anxiety, test anxiety is a special kind of anxiety that occurs in a specific group of people and in a specific environment. Similar to other mental illnesses, if the symptoms are mild, you can leave it alone. If you feel that your anxiety before the test slightly affects life, it is best to intervene in psychotherapy. However, once a strong physiological reaction such as headache and vomiting occurs, it is necessary to take certain drugs.

For psychotherapy, pre-test anxiety patients with obsessive-compulsive personality usually have strong psychological resistance, such as refusing to admit what they want to hide. Gabbard believes that adopting motivation-oriented treatment, the goal of pre-test anxiety is softening and adjusting the severe superego [22]. Based on this, respect and understanding of their hidden emotions are needed. As for the medical treatment, the first choice is anti-anxiety drugs. Mainly including benzodiazepines drugs, non-benzodiazepines, barbiturates, B receptor blockers, antidepressants, currently commonly used drugs are mainly benzodiazepines, non-benzodiazepines and antidepressants [22]. Although the current mainstream treatment methods are psychotherapy and drug therapy. Taken separately, research results show that both drug therapy and psychotherapy can effectively control anxiety before exams, and the effect of drug therapy is more obvious than that of psychotherapy [23]. But if you want to pursue the most efficient method, you should combine the two. Yuan Xiaolan, Gai Wanliang and Li Yang used the systematic desensitization therapy created by American scholar Volpa. Citalopram, a highly selective 5-HT reuptake inhibitor was introduced in psychological intervention, which not only has obvious ability to fight anxiety, but also has mild side effects, good medication compliance and quick onset of drug intervention. The result shows that psychological intervention combined with drug therapy has a good long-term effect on anxiety before exam [24]. Xu lei has confirmed through research that psychotherapy can relieve the tension of the test takers while the combination of ear acupoint pressing will relieve anxiety to a greater extent. This operation of ear acupoint pressing is safe and simple, saving time and cost. What's more, the adverse reactions are extremely rare [25]. It is easier to accept for college students before the exam.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Implication

Combining the experiments in this work and the research of other scholars, there are many methods has been found to effectively relieve pre-test anxiety. This research is mainly inclined to discuss the pre-test anxiety caused by family perfectionism. Compared with relieving the pre-test anxiety, it is also very important to improve the family educational environment, which is often overlooked by most people. All the parents love their children. So it is understandable for the wish that they want their children to achieve better grades and have better living conditions in the future. However, excessive expectations may lead to negative effects towards their children, which creates anxiety when they face test. In that terminology, it's an anxiety, a non-positive emotion. But sometimes test anxiety can lead to good results. For example, some people, with moderate levels of anxiety, can revise more efficiently, bring out their potential and achieve unexpected results. It is worth noticing that although the combination of psychology and drug therapy will have better results, some drugs will bring certain side effects. For example, γ -GABA is also a common medication used to treat anxiety, but the common side effects are drowsiness, dizziness, memory loss, fatigue. When it used in large doses, adverse reactions such as muscle tremor, insomnia, ataxia, etc. may occasionally be seen. Long-term use will even cause drug dependence [25]. Anxiety is a psychological problem, we should better solve it from the psychological aspect and provide patients

with relevant help, although sometimes patients who are perfectionist are not aware of their own difficulties.

4.2. Limitation

1. In terms of research scope and field, this work have only discussed about typical cases. Due to the limited scale of research cases and lack of sufficient data support, the overall situation of students cannot be found.
2. In terms of data and methods, due to the lack of scientific data calculation, it lacks sufficient preciseness and professionalism.

5. Further Study

Owning to the limitations of time and instruments as well as the careful consideration of this research group, the questionnaire survey was gave up and the case analysis was applied. Only two typical cases of two female college students were chosen, but it was what the study group found that the test anxiety happened more frequently on female than male. It was a pity that the evidence to prove the difference between gender is not enough. As a result, our research group will continue this study on test anxiety and improve our research data in the future.

Nevertheless, the previous studies compared and collected in the work are instructive and our study group believe that this could be a fruitful area of further work. This work also emphasizes that further discussion at the cause and solution about test anxiety which hasn't be paid enough attention of the colleges and society and would like to consider it as a potentially interesting direction for future research. The problem of stronger proof of family perfectionism leading to test anxiety and finding specific solution towards it will be our future works. At last, we also hope that there will be more attention on the test anxiety of college students and schools as well as government can give relevant support.

References

- [1] Wang Xiaoyu. (2020) *The Relationship between College Students' Family Environment and Test Anxiety — the Intermediary Role of Academic Perfectionism*.
- [2] Ling Wencheng. (1985) *Measurement and Analysis of Chinese College students' Test Anxiety with TAI scale*. *Journal of Psychology*, 02.
- [3] Eum, K., & Rice, K. G. (2011). *Test anxiety, perfectionism, goal orientation, and academic performance*. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 24(2), 167–178.
- [4] Ravin, S. K. (2008). *The mediating effect of locus of control in the relationship between socially-prescribed perfectionism and test anxiety*. Washington DC.
- [5] Ziedner, M. (1998). *Test Anxiety: The State of the Art*. Plenum Press: New York.
- [6] Zahrakar, K. (2008). *Stress Consultant*. (1st ed). Tehran: Bal University Publication, (chapter 1).
- [7] Liu Huijun, Guo Dejun. (2003) *Research on the Relationship between Pre-exam Anxiety, Achievement Goals and Test Results Psychological Development and Education*, (02).
- [8] Rossi A, Marinangeli MG, Butti G, et al. (2000) *Pattern of Comorbidity Among Anxious and Odd Personality Disorders: The Case of Obsessive - Compulsive Personality Disorder*. *CNS Spectrums*, 5: 23-26
- [9] Fu Wenqing, Yao Shuqiao. (2004) *Analysis of the Results of 2592 College Students' Personality Diagnosis Questionnaire (PDQ~ (+ 4))*. *Chinese Journal of Mental Health*, 9: 621,623.
- [10] Li Hongchen, Zhu Chunyan, Zhang Lei, Wang Xue, Luo Yudan (2017) *Study on the Executive and Decision-making Function of Obsessive-compulsive Personality Disorder*. 52(6)
- [11] PintoA, SteinglassJE, GreeneAL, et a1. *Capacitytodelayre — ward differentiates obsessive—compulsive disorder and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder[J]*. *Biol Psychiatry*, 2014, 75 (8): 653—9.
- [12] Xiao Weizhi, Liang Yixiu. (2013) *Success is also perfect, failure is also perfect — A Brief Introduction to the Quarterly Journal of perfectionist Research gifted Education*, 126, 23-32.

- [13] Zhao Ziting, Wu Xiaorou, Huang Yirui. *Causes and Treatment of Obsessive-compulsive Personality Disorder-taking Dynamic Orientation Therapy as An Example.*
- [14] Jiang Yanhua. (2014) *A review of the research on the relationship between personality disorder and childhood abuse.* *Advances in Psychology*, 4: 307.
- [15] Liu Wenjing, Xu Zhixing, Zou Hong. (2012) *Effects of Parenting Styles on Social Adaptation of Adolescents: the Regulatory Role of Personality Types.* *Psychological Development and Education*, 28 (06): 625-633.
- [16] Gong Yihua. (2006) *The Effects of Four Different Types of Parenting Styles on the Level of Individual Achievement Motivation.* *Tissue Engineering Research in China*, 10 (046): 50-52.
- [17] Bowlby J. *Attachment and loss. Vol. 1. Attachment.* London: Hogarth, 1969
- [18] Xu Wan, Liu Qian, Chu Yi, Zheng Kaili, Yang Kailing, Zhang Rongyan, Zhong Mingtian. (2021) *The Effects of Unsafe Attachment and Perfectionism on the Relationship between Family Environment and Obsessive-compulsive Personality.* *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 29 (02): 328-332.
- [19] Ma Yuanguang. (2021) *The Influence of Family Environment on Home Academic Emotion: the Mediating Effect of Self-control.* *Applied Psychology*, 27 (03): 252-261.
- [20] Xu Wan, Liu Qian, Chu Yi, Zheng Kaili, Yang Kailing, Zhang Rongyan, Zhong Mingtian. (2021) *The Effects of Unsafe Attachment and Perfectionism on the Relationship between Family Environment and Obsessive-compulsive Personality.* *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 29 (02): 328-332.
- [21] Xu Xuehua, Ma Lili, Li Fei. (2016) *The Intermediary Role of College Students' Interpersonal Trust between Adult Attachment and Interpersonal Distress.* *Chinese Journal of Mental Health*, 30 (11): 864-868.
- [22] Li Cosmos et al. (2007) *Power-oriented Psychiatry.* Taipei: Mind Workshop (Original author: Gabbard, G.O.).
- [23] Ni Zhi Zhi, Zhang Song. (2004) *Observation on the Efficacy of Different Treatments for Anxiety before Examination.* *Chinese Journal of Mental Health*, 18 (6).
- [24] StahiSM. *Place bocontmlled comparison of the selective serotonin re— uptake inhibitors citalopram and sertraline[J]. BiolPsychiatry*, 2000, 48: 894.
- [25] Zhao Zhengfang. (2017) *Observation on the Efficacy of Auricular Point Pressing Combined with Psychotherapy in the Treatment of Pretest Tension Syndrome.* *Guangzhou University of traditional Chinese Medicine*, 5