The Role of Family Socioeconomic Status in Parenting Styles and Practices

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Abstract. This paper investigates the impact of family socioeconomic status (SES) on parenting styles and practices from two main perspectives. The macro perspective emphasizes the overall impact of SES on parenting, whereas the micro indicators of SES further highlight the respective effect of SES variables such as parental educational attainment, parental occupational status, and family income on parenting. It is worth noting that there is no exclusive correspondence between social class and parenting, and the factors affecting their relationship are complex and diverse across the contexts.

Keywords: Parenting styles · Parenting practices · Socioeconomic status · Cultural reproduction

1 Introduction

Parenting styles and practices have considerable impacts on children's development. Sociology is theoretically concerned with family parenting as a microscopic mechanism of class reproduction, and therefore pays attention to whether there are systematic differences in parenting concepts, styles, and behaviors among parents of different classes and socioeconomic status (SES). It is argued that family parenting styles and practices have significant class differentiation characteristics, which will affect children's personalities and social developments, cognitive abilities, and behavioral developments, resulting in unequal childhood and class reproduction [1]. Poverty, for example, may affect families' capabilities to provide nurturing cares for children. Therefore, the study of the influence of family SES on parenting can help us better understand the function of parenting in the social reproduction process.

This paper aims to explore the role of SES in parenting styles and practices. It begins by providing an overview of the parenting styles and associated practices, which is constructed on the developmental psychology. It then highlights the macro analysis, mainly focuses on the impact of family SES as a structural aspect in parenting strategies. When analyzing class disparities in parenting, one widely employed framework is Lareau's analysis of concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth [2]. Apart from this, this paper evaluates the impact of family SES elements into parents' educational attainment, occupational status, and income on parenting independently.

2   Parenting Styles and Parenting Practices

Parenting styles can be defined as the attitudes and emotional environment of parenting that are conveyed to and perceived by children through their behaviors, which include both precise, goal-directed parental behaviors that fulfil parenting tasks and non-goal-directed parental behaviors such as gestures, tone of voice changes, or unconscious emotional responses [3]. Baumrind classified parenting styles into three types: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive [4]. Authoritative parents are warm and responsive, exert proper control, have high expectations for maturity, and promote autonomy. Authoritarian parenting refers to poor responsiveness and excessive demands, as well as less verbal and emotional communication, harsh disciplines, and forceful directives. Permissive parents do not enforce rules on their children and do not demand mature behaviors from children. Instead, they are tolerant, responsive, non-controlling, and non-punitive. Later, research by McCoby identified neglectful or disengaged parenting [5]. Subsequent study has demonstrated that authoritative parenting is the most helpful to children's psychosocial development and academic achievement, and that its benefits are independent by race, culture, family structure, or socioeconomic status, and is therefore considered to be the best parenting style [6].

Parenting practices can be described as the roles parents play in their children's lives, such as interactive partner and manager, or that are associated with children's socialization [3]. The difference between the parenting style and parenting practice are explained by Darling and Steinberg in several ways [3]. To begin, parenting practice is guided or defined by specific goals. For example, if a parent's aim is to pursue academic performance, the associated parenting behaviour would include supervising the child's homework. Parenting style, on the other hand, is a comprehensive pattern of attitudes or behaviors toward the child that is cross-disciplinary or situational. Second, while parenting style can be represented in part through parenting practice, it is not merely an extension of parenting practice, but a completely separate concept. Different parenting practices can be associated with the same parenting style. For example, one authoritative parent may demand children to finish schoolwork before engaging in other activities, whilst another authoritative parent may require children to play outside before completing homework. Finally, parenting practice has a direct influence on children's development, whereas parenting style has an indirect impact. Parenting style may moderate or vary the impact of a particular parenting practice on the child, or it may influence the child's acceptance of the parenting or socialization process. Therefore, parenting practice is more particular, while parenting style is more global, and the latter's indirect and complicated effect should be seen as a parenting climate or setting.

3   SES and Parenting: The Macro Perspective

The macro perspective on SES and parenting typically highlights holistic indicators such as social class or SES indices, emphasizing the correlation between relative positions and interrelationships of individuals and parenting practices.

Bronfenbrenner discover that middle-class parents tend to be more democratic, egalitarian, and inclusive in their relationships with their children, whereas lower-class parents place a greater emphasis on parental power and child obedience [7]. Kohn also

demonstrate that middle-class parents respond to their children rationally (e.g. interpreting events, thinking logically, forecasting behaviors), while lower-class parents tend to respond in a simplistic or even emotional manner (e.g. simple affirmation or dismissal, rebuke or even verbal abuse without control) [8]. Similarly, McLoyd find that low-income groups tend to discipline their children with physical punishment rather than reasoning [9]. Parenting beliefs also have an impact on how parents connect with their children. Middle-class parents, who place a premium on autonomy, prefer two-way communication; while working-class parents, with their emphasis on obedience, tend to use a one-way, command-based approach [10], who seldom express care to their children and rarely respond to their children's emotional needs [11].

Bernstein argues that different degrees of social division of labour produce systematic disparities in the language coding utilized by parent-child interactions of various classes [12]. He highlights that middle-class families employ elaborated codes, whilst working-class families use restricted codes [12]. The elaborated code has a richer syntax and vocabulary than the restrained code, and can convey information and self-expression more accurately [12]. The family is the primary site of children's early socialization. Much of children's language acquisition relies on the observation and practice of conversations between family members. Children therefore acquire, consciously or unconsciously, the language coding of the family.

3.1 Lareau's Framework

Lareau and Weininger interpret parenting within the context of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory [13]. They contend that Bourdieu regards culture as a technique or way of collecting limited resources possessed by the dominant class, which separates the dominant class from other groups, marks its social standing, and could be passed down to future generations [13]. Thus, cultural capital encompasses not only the ability to enjoy fine art, and also a collection of information, techniques, habitus, and styles that are consistent with social institutions [2]. For instance, in the workplace or school, cultural capital can assists individuals in better adapting to their surroundings [2]. The intergenerational transfer and reproduction of cultural capital within the family is inextricably linked to parenting style. In contrast to cultural capital, parenting styles are typically not purposeful, but rather emerge spontaneously from daily lives and are habitus [14].

Lareau examines the link between social class and parenting strategies in families in a systematic way [2]. Long-term field studies of middle- and working-class families in the US have revealed that the parenting strategies of these two classes are vastly different [2]. Parents from the middle class tend to prioritize the systematic growth of their children's intellectual and social capabilities, with an emphasis on linguistic and problem-solving skills [2]. They communicate with their children in a sensible manner and enable children to argue against their judgments. In addition, parents emphasize engagement with the school and the methodical planning and organization of extracurricular activities for their children. This type of parenting strategy is concerted cultivation from middle class. Working-class parents, on the other hand, mostly adopt an approach of accomplishment of natural growth, highlighting the importance of leaving children's growth to their own devices without unnecessary involvement. They communicate with their children in an authoritarian manner, are not involved in their children's education, do not organize

extracurricular activities, and delegate the majority of responsibility for their children's education to the school instructors [2].

These findings are critical in explaining class disparities in parenting styles and associated practices in aggregate, whereas it is more challenging to investigate the processes by which SES impacts parenting styles in depth and to separate the specific effects of different aspects of SES in families. According to Duncan and Magnuson, different indicators of SES have varied effects on family parenting and cannot be conflated into a single metric [15]. Therefore, there is a need for further research on the mechanisms and impacts by which family SES influences parenting styles.

4   Micro Influencing Factors of Parenting - SES as a Mediate Role

4.1   Parental Educational Attainment

Parental educational attainment has a favourable influence on parenting approaches in the following ways. Firstly, higher-educated mothers are more likely to engage in parent-child communication and verbal interaction with their children and supply more explicit information than those less-educated group [16]; this is also suggested by Hoff and Laursen [17]. Second, highly educated mothers are more emotionally receptive and connect with their children in a more pleasant and less antagonistic manner [18]. Therefore, the emotional environment that parents offer in the home is also associated with educational performance.

Thirdly, recent research on the effect of educational attainment on family discipline have produced inconsistent findings. Some descriptive statistics indicate that, regardless the household income, parents who firmly think that physical discipline of children is important are much less likely to have completed college degree [19]. In addition, compared to other SES variables, parental educational attainment has a distinctive function in that it enables parents to seek for, discover, synthesize, and evaluate information on child-rearing and their child's well-being [20]. These activities improve children's learning settings, which leads to their better developmental results. It has been demonstrated in other studies, however, that mothers' disciplinary views are less likely to be impacted throughout the course of children's lives by their own educational attainment than other parenting behaviors [21]. This phenomenon may be due to the fact that adults' perceptions of discipline are solely impacted by the disciplinary practices they encountered in their early years, rather than by their level of education.

4.2   Parental Occupational Status

The socialization of work approach emphasizes the influence of work on individual abilities, values, and beliefs. Kohn observes that parental occupation affects parental values and, consequently, parenting styles and practices [22]. Blue-collar occupations necessitate conformity and obedience, and therefore reinforce authoritarian parenting, while white-collar ones require creativity and independence, and hence reinforce authoritative parenting styles [22]. To be specific, middle-class jobs focus more on manipulating interpersonal relationships, ideas, and symbols, whereas working-class ones focus more on

manipulating objects [22]. Moreover, middle-class jobs are more self-directed, whereas working-class employment are more standardized and subject to direct supervision [22]. Therefore, these middle-class occupations are more diverse and less routine, resulting in greater consideration for others' autonomy. In contrast, working class occupations are more monotonous, they are closely managed by others over the course of their work, and they are expected to obey commands, which creates a value of submission to external authority among members of the working class. Nevertheless, Kohn's [22] argument is neither that working-class parents just want their children to comply or that middle-class parents only want their children to develop autonomy. Instead, Kohn's [22] premise is that middle-class parents are more likely to prioritize developing self-direction in their children in order to help them succeed later in life, while working-class parents are more likely to value conformity.

Other studies also reveal that occupations with greater complexity and autonomy seem to incline parents to authoritative parenting styles and practices, whereas work with greater repetition and stricter control tend to do the opposite [23]. Employees who are required to adhere to established protocols at work and who are not encouraged to innovate are more likely to be chilly and uninvolved parents, to restrain their children more often, and more likely to use physical punishment [23].

4.3 Parental Income

The majority of study on family income and parenting concentrates on poverty, examining the effects of poverty, low income, and economic issues on family rearing. The family stress model posits that when families experience financial hardship, such as low income, high debt, uncertain work, and lack of income, parental psychological stress is greatly elevated, resulting in depression and anger, as well as an increase in marital conflict [24]. It is suggested that financial hardship constitutes the relationship between job loss or unpredictable income and mental discomfort, parenting practices and interpersonal violence [25]. These feelings and tensions cause parents to be less warm and responsive, less involved in their children's lives, and more prone to exhibit bad parenting behaviors such as harsh punishment [24]. Moreover, studies demonstrate that in the face of scarcity, including a lack of income, parents are more inclined to prioritize short-term rewards over long-term ones [25]. This drastically reduces the potential for goal-oriented parenting.

Besides, another theoretical framework suggests that income is related to children's development since it allows parents to acquire goods, activities, and services that are beneficial to the progress and well-being of children [26]. This approach is commonly refers to as the investment model since it analyzes the impacts of income through the goods and services that income enables parents to acquire in order to invest in their children's human capital [26]. Family economic investment comprises items connect to cognitive stimulation, such as parents supplying learning materials directly to their children, employing tutors or purchasing educational services, and residing in a community that is more suitable to the growth of children [27]. Meanwhile, family investment theory also emphasizes parents' investment in their children's time; parents from low-income or impoverished households may have less time due to non-standard work hours and rigid schedules.

5   Discussion: Parenting in Diverse Cultural Contexts

Although parenting styles are somewhat universal [28], there are cultural and institutional influences that need to be considered across contexts. Class differences in parenting styles such as concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth are rooted in American society [2]. In the Chinese context, Confucianism, with its focus on collectivism and filial piety via social interdependence, conformity to standards, respect for family members, and fulfillment of responsibilities to care for the family has left its mark on Chinese culture [29]. In contrast, the majority of Western cultures value individuality and autonomy, successful competitiveness, and self-expression [30]. These cultural distinctions are conveyed in part through parental attitudes, objectives, and behaviors. Numerous studies have indicated that Confucian culture emphasize the value of individual effort in the educational process and that parents of various socioeconomic backgrounds have high expectations for their children's academic success [31]. According to certain research on Asian communities, under the influence of Confucianism, parents from various socioeconomic classes supervise their children's academic and extra-curricular activities, and employ tutors for them, and are generally more intimately involved in their children's education [32]. In addition, it is argued that there are no substantial socioeconomic variations in how Chinese families engage with their children, which tends to be authoritarian in nature [33]. This is also impacted by the Confucian culture, which highlights parental discipline and parental control over children's behaviors, resulting in an authoritarian rather than authoritative style to parent-child interaction. Although previous studies of European-American, Asian-American and Taiwanese students in the US have found that authoritarian parenting styles are associated with negative academic outcomes [34], some research suggests that authoritarian parenting styles that contribute to the academic achievement of Asian youth is not applicable to Western youth [35]. Moreover, a comparative study between the US and Japan show that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles contribute to higher motivation for academic achievement among Japanese children, while US children fail to achieve higher motivation from authoritarian parenting styles [36]. The above empirical studies show that the link between parenting styles and students' academic achievement may take different shapes in different cultural settings. Therefore, there are cultural variances in parenting styles' features and effects across diverse contexts.

6   Conclusion

Overall, from the standpoint of macro perspective and micro influencing variables, this paper investigates the influence of family SES on parenting, and concludes that there are considerable variances in parenting tactics across families of various situations. SES and parenting approaches, on the other hand, do not always correspond to exclusivity in real life. Although the binary classification of "middle class-concerted cultivation" and "working class-accomplishment of natural growth" is useful for evaluation, actual family parenting practices are more likely to be a continuum than a simple binary model. For example, although many working-class mothers have fewer cultural resources than middle-class mothers, this does not necessarily mean that they are less involved in their

children's education [37]. Therefore, the specific influential factors of diverse SESs are analyzed in this paper, which includes parental educational attainment, parental occupational status and parental income. This paper further suggests that class variations in parenting are highly diverse in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, variables other than SES could also influence parenting approaches. For instance, some researchers have emphasized the importance of focusing on the two-way interaction between parents and children inside the family rather than limited one-way decision. This is due to the fact that the features of children's age, gender, behaviour, etc. will influence the selection of parenting strategies [38]. The future research needs to deeply explore the dimensional structure of parenting styles in specific cultural contexts, explore how parenting styles are affected by power relations between classes, and examine how parenting styles play a role through mediating variables and cultural contexts.

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