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Analysis of Educational and Cultural Attitudes in Chinese Society Toward Adolescent Dating among Students

Junrong Chen[1,a,*]

[1]*St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1A1, Canada*
a. jr.chen@mail.utoronto.ca
**corresponding author*

Abstract: In recent years, with an increasing awareness of mental health issues among Chinese adolescents, teenage dating has gradually become a focal point of discussion among society, educational systems, and parents. Within the unique cultural context of China, adolescent dating intersects with educational values, family attitudes, and social morality. Traditional Chinese society generally maintains a conservative stance on adolescent romantic relationships, viewing them as potential distractions from academic performance and future development. However, as globalization progresses and adolescents' sense of personal identity strengthens, an increasing number of teenagers are exploring emotional autonomy, making teenage dating an undeniable social phenomenon. This paper systematically examines the varied perspectives of Chinese society, schools, and parents on teenage dating through literature analysis. It investigates how these attitudes impact adolescents' emotional development and academic performance. Findings reveal that, although parents and schools predominantly hold negative views toward teenage dating, citing concerns about academic distraction, psychological pressure, and potential health risks, adolescents' emotional needs and the influence of social culture have grown more pronounced in recent years, leading to the normalization of teenage dating. Moreover, the lack of systematic emotional education in schools has exacerbated adolescents' confusion about romantic relationships, resulting in a need for more effective guidance. This paper proposes that schools and families improve communication, provide balanced emotional education, and harmonize emotional guidance with academic development to support adolescents' healthy growth and mental well-being.

Keywords: Romantic Relationships, Adolescent, Sex Education, Social Norms, China.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Teenage dating has become a significant issue in present-day Chinese society, attracting the attention of the whole society, educators, and families in general. The conservative attitude in traditional Chinese families and schools towards adolescent emotional development makes many view teenage dating as a factor that contributes to lowering self-control and thus interferes with school performance or overall achievements. In such cultural and moral contexts, the practice of teenage dating is often seen as an obstructive factor disrupting the course of "normal" development of adolescents. Academics, duties towards one's family, and self-discipline are all given immense emphasis. As one

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would probably understand, emotional issues are usually considered to interfere with school performance. Hence, the concept of emotional education is rarely emphasized in either the school curricula or at home. The result is that adolescents are poorly guided in navigating peer relationships.

However, in recent years, with the slow opening of Chinese society, teenagers' self-consciousness and need for independence have vitally gained momentum, transferring teenage dating from a private, forbidden issue to a public question to talk about. This is part of more general cultural and globalization influences, where popular culture and social media will play their role in shaping the perceptions of teenagers concerning romantic love, emotional lives, and self-expression. These external influences sometimes clash with tradition and in the course of sometimes create a synergy; accordingly, the evolving context creates social and cultural importance for teenage dating studies because the adolescent has to balance personal emotional expression within the confines of the societalized expectations that accompany them.

1.2. Research Question

The central research question is: *How do the differing attitudes of Chinese society, schools, and families toward teenage dating affect adolescents in their emotional development and academic performance*? Relating to this question, this paper will analyze the different standpoints from the point of view of the adolescents' needs and difficulties in their emotional development, and will propose feasible educational and guidance strategies.

1.3. Research Significance

This study has filled the vital gap in the study of adolescent emotional development in China since, for the first time, it conducted an in-depth probe into Chinese society, schools, and parents' attitudes towards teenage dating. By identifying the core factors of this phenomenon, assessing their impact on the emotional development of adolescents, and providing remedies for improvement, this research tries to contribute to the emotional education of teenagers. This is done by exploring the socio-cultural context and the practice of schooling with regard to adolescent dating. This study would, therefore, help parents, educators, and policy thinkers prepare for a well-informed approach that would give the right guidance and support to the integral development of adolescents.

It constitutes a contribution to the sociological and psychological analyses of dating among teenagers and outlines a theoretical basis for the emotional education of adolescents. It also holds great social value: from the findings of this study, recommendations are made to better the mechanisms of emotional education at school, and parents are able to understand and respond more appropriately to the emotional needs of adolescents. Besides, a greater awareness of adolescent mental health issues is raised among both parents and educators.

2. Current Situation Analysis

This paper will review the literature on various levels of acceptance in Chinese society, schools, and families in response to teenage dating. This section explains the views of society, schools, and parents on dating among teenagers to clearly understand how all these standpoints influence adolescents' emotional development and academic performance.

2.1. Social Perspective

In the past years, popular cultures, such as online novels and TV dramas, have played an important part in forming the views of Chinese adolescents on romantic relationships. An "overbearing CEO" genre has gained much popularity in online novels. This genre often characterizes an ideal love

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relationship—namely, strong yet gentle male and gentle yet resilient female—which shapes the ideal view of love that appeals to many young readers and influences their perceptions and fancies about romantic relationships. [1]. While China is still operating under a censorship system for cultural content, works such as those included in "danmei" (romantic relationship between two men) have become extremely viral online and are already flowing into mass media. Many of these works have to stand under the most severe scrutiny, especially when it comes to the involvement of LGBTQ+, and should be expressed subtly, with the plot origin obscured or changed in its narration so it does not hit censorship. Many creators and platforms publish online in a state of relative anonymity, with more lenient community guidelines, to attract a specific audience. In such cases, works may originate from robust fan participation and word-of-mouth promotions, permeating everywhere, creating awareness and sparking public discourse despite restrictive legislation. These books, when dramatized into TV dramatizations, in turn, easily attract many young audiences and give adolescents an even bigger repertoire of stories about romance that further stir their interest and imagination about romantic relationships [2]. This cultural trend is particularly prominent among young women, who tend to develop a more open and inclusive attitude toward romance [3].

A study of high school students' romantic relationships in China demonstrated that, with increased experience in dating and influenced by the social environment, adolescents develop diversified understandings about romantic relationships. Some adolescents show a compromise with mainstream romantic concepts, while others express resistance to established social norms [4]. However, in light of the increasing diversity of views on romance, unfavorable views about dating among teenagers continue to dominate the thinking of society, especially among parents and educators worried that it may affect academic performance. The concern further ranges from academic performances to the emotional pressures that such relationships may heap on them. It is observed in studies that adolescents, especially girls, in love affairs face the dual burden of maintaining emotional equilibrium and academic performance, which might adversely affect their mental health [5]. Additionally, controlling and violent behaviors within romantic relationships significantly increase the risk of depression among teenagers [6].

Even though the attitude of teenagers toward sexuality has become more liberated during the last years, the attitude of society still remains very judging against early sexual activities among adolescents. Society has this conservative attitude primarily due to concerns on sexual health such as acquiring sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. As a result, society generally takes a conservative position concerning adolescent dating issues with efforts to reduce adolescents' emotional development through moral persuasion and educational input to reduce potential health and social problems [7].

2.2. School Perspective

2.2.1. School Policies and Regulations

In the Chinese education system, adolescent dating is often labeled as "misconduct" or a "violation of school rules," leading most schools to implement a "zero-tolerance" policy that explicitly prohibits romantic relationships among students on campus. The enforcement of this policy typically involves intervention by homeroom teachers or school administrators who proactively counsel or warn students. Additionally, parents are often engaged through parent-teacher meetings to ensure students comply with the rules. Although these policies aim to maintain a focused learning environment, they actually overlook the emotional needs of students. With such rigid policies, emotional growth and social interaction skills, which form a part of the building block for the development in a student, are pushed down the order. The suppression and confusion felt by students who are not able to express their emotional needs freely may give rise to emotional stress and dissatisfaction. Regrettably, these

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regulations not only suppress students' normal emotional developmental needs but also could make them develop a mistaken belief that emotional needs are inappropriate or unacceptable.

Such a simplistic approach to managing emotional relationships not only does not prevent adolescent dating but may even push such relationships underground, making students pursue them in secrecy. This secrecy not only complicates school management but also renders impossible any effective guidance and support by schools for students' authentic emotional lives. Moreover, such strict regulations and fines are claimed to be an indicator of the lack of emotional education. Therefore, while emphasizing the academic performances of scholars, the school should also pay attention to emotional education and psychological health, teaching them the proper way of maintaining good interpersonal relationships for their balanced development.

2.2.2. The Absence of Emotion Education in Schools

Chinese have traditionally placed "academic achievement" as the most important factor in schools, relegating emotional education to secondary attention in the curriculum. Whereas the latter is rather important for healthy development, it usually always gives way to strong academic demands and proficiency test platforms, because the latter is normally considered the primary measure of success. Although most educational institutions have established a psychological counseling set-up, these facilities are usually severely limited in terms of personnel and infrastructure. Further, students are often unaware of the availability of such facilities, which can be termed as grossly underutilized. As a matter of fact, in most cases, such counseling services work more as a symbolic gesture on the part of the school rather than as a service to help students emotionally. It means that this gap is a serious deficiency in the systematic education of emotional understanding and handling in the school environment.

This deficiency in emotional education leaves the students limited in judgment when faced with romantic relationships and impacts their whole mental health in general. Unmet emotional needs are suppressed under academic demands, which even might make some of the students seek emotional outlets from the Internet or other things, which leads to disengagement with academic affairs. Therefore, the absence of emotional education within the education framework only encourages adolescent dating issues and fosters increasingly complex emotional and psychological challenges among students.

2.3. Parental Perspective

2.3.1. Parental Concerns and Interventions

In most Chinese family settings, parents believe that the primary task of adolescents is focusing on studies, hence leading to a strong opposition to teenage romantic relationships. The most common grounds for such opposition involve apprehensions that early romantic involvement may interfere with academic performance. More fiscal concerns of parents encompass apprehension that a relationship would distract teenagers and lead to worsened grades, and consequently lowered chances of getting into select schools or finding good jobs later in life. More importantly, there is a great amount of uncertainty and anxiety about the risks and the unpredictability of adolescent dating, as parents fear that a relationship might heighten psychological distress, cause emotional instability, and even lead to emotional abuse, thus having implications for their children's development.

As a result, most parents adopt a series of strict control measures to deter adolescents from engaging in romantic relationships. For example, they might limit social activities to control the teenager’s social circle and reduce opportunities for interaction with the opposite sex. Additionally, many parents enforce restrictions on smartphone use, particularly during evenings and weekends—times typically associated with social interactions—believing that these measures help shield

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teenagers from external distractions, thus “protecting” their academic performance and well-being. However, such restrictive approaches often overlook teenagers’ growing independence and emotional needs. As adolescents develop self-awareness, they seek autonomy and understanding. Yet, excessive parental control often suppresses their natural emotional desires, leading to strained communication and, at times, emotional distance in parent-child relationships [8].

Adolescents at this stage particularly crave peer support and self-identity, and parental suppression or denial of romantic relationships may actually intensify their curiosity and interest in dating. For avoiding parental interference, some of them even hide their relationships, which again contributes to furtive contact and plenty of emotional problems not shared with the family. Because of this, family communication might get really tricky and affect the level of trust between parents and children. It can even lead to some serious intergenerational conflicts on occasion [9].

This is exemplified by the fact that some teenagers, upon being found out, go to the extreme extent of even running away from home in order to protest and express frustration in search of "understanding" and "respect." That indeed shows that strict parental control over teenage dating tends to add to the adolescents' emotional burdens and makes it difficult for them to balance academic pressures with their emotional needs. Such situations can make teenagers mentally ill and may even damage parent-child relationships beyond repair, possibly depriving adolescents of family support and guidance during critical developmental stages, which will further increase their confusion about romance and emotional matters.

2.3.2. The Lack of Emotional Education from Parents

Parents can also be very instrumental in guiding and supporting adolescents through their emotional education, especially on matters that deal with emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relations. These aspects are of the essence to help adolescents gain insight into how they can manage their feelings, understand emotions from people, and interact properly with people at different levels of life. In Chinese families, however, parents have often failed to fully recognize the importance of these aspects in the adolescents' growth and have mostly adopted an evasive approach to all subjects touching on emotions and romantic relationships. This reluctance to address emotionally educative topics openly at home leaves adolescents without sufficient advice from their families when facing emotional confusion, which often makes them feel confused and helpless during their development.

Faced with early romantic involvement problems, parents tend to react by avoiding, denying, or strictly forbidding romantic relationships and even showing indifference or disdain for adolescents expressing emotions. Such reactions not only fail to resolve adolescents' emotional confusion but also make them feel their emotional needs are being ignored. Without emotional support and understanding from parents, adolescents often turn to peers or the internet for information and advice on emotional issues. This reliance fosters a strong dependence on peer feedback or social media for emotional experiences, which can lead to excessive use of smartphones and social media as adolescents seek to fulfil their needs for emotional connection and a sense of belonging [10]. At the same time, the quality of information on these sites can only further distort views of relationships and thus exacerbate their emotional problems. Often, social media projects highly idealized images of romantic relationships, depicting moments of joy while downplaying their struggles and disagreements. Teenagers may come across viral posts or trend-driven content that romanticizes the dramatic gesture and fabricates unrealistic expectations about love and companionship.

In addition, the lack of parental input on emotional education not only prevents adolescents from obtaining proper guidance in handling emotional matters but has also heightened their psychological disorder, stress, and loneliness. Adolescents, while growing up, especially regarding emotional issues, need understanding, support, and encouragement from the family. This will also help them develop a healthy outlook on relationships, learn little by little to recognize and manage their emotions, and

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develop emotional maturity and be in better control of themselves. Understanding and openness of the family environment promote the building of healthy emotional perspectives in adolescents, reduce anxiety and confusion over emotions, strengthen self-confidence, and cope with emotional challenges.

3. Analysis of Causes of Teenage Dating

Teenage dating is influenced by multiple factors, including physiological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these causes, this paper will conduct a detailed analysis from the perspectives of physiological and psychological factors, sex education, and sociocultural influences.

3.1. Physiological and Psychological Factors

These emotional needs and inclinations toward romantic relationships can be traced from the physiological and psychological development during puberty. It is during this period that adolescents experience serious bodily changes through a rise in sex hormones, which heightens emotional dependence and interest in interacting with the opposite sex. Due to these hormonal changes, adolescents are propelled into the spirit of belonging and emotional support in social relationships. This sharpens their desire for romantic partners, being emotionally satisfied and secure [11].

In addition to the physiological aspect, it is in this condition of puberty that psychological development makes emotional belonging and identity more important. At this stage, one's self-consciousness and sense of identity will grow stronger; actively exploring forward, one will seek validation and meaning through feedback in social relationships as to one's self-value and positioning. For adolescents, romantic relationships signify a way to gain confirmation of their own value and also satisfy the emotional hunger within them. They develop attention and recognition through intimate relations and emotional exchange with the opposite sex, an important ingredient in building their self-esteem and sense of security.

According to the research by Zhang & Qin, adolescents during this period show a strong need for belonging, especially within peer groups, and yearn to feel accepted and validated through close relationships [12]. Thus, romantic relationships become not only a means of satisfying an adolescent need for belonging but also an important strategy in the processes of identity construction. As romantic relationships make adolescents feel comprehended and valued, the need and pursuit of romantic involvement become one of the important psychological drivers during this stage. These psychological needs, along with the action of hormonal changes linked to puberty, further fuel the trend of early romantic involvement in teenagers, thus making them demonstrate a strong desire for and dependence on romantic relationships in their emotional lives.

3.2. Sex Education Factors

In China, the lack of sex education is seen as a significant factor contributing to the prevalence of adolescent romantic relationships. As puberty arrives, teenagers experience an awakening of sexual awareness, and their curiosity about sexuality and emotional relationships increases. However, due to the clear absence of sex education in schools and families, adolescents often lack access to scientific knowledge about emotional relationships and sexual behavior during their formative years. The knowledge gap provides poor insight into romantic relationships among teenagers; hence, teenagers have insufficient knowledge of the limits and risks regarding emotional and sexual matters. Since the topic of sex education is considered sensitive in Chinese culture, schools generally adopt an avoidance attitude, while parents are often reluctant to discuss issues related to sexuality. Such an evasive attitude directly results in a lack of sexual knowledge among adolescents, increasing the risks associated with sexual behavior [13].

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This situation is also aggravated by a lack of involvement from either the school or parents in providing sex education, which also leads to confusion and misunderstandings in the emotional expressions and behavioral conduct of adolescents while in romantic relationships. Without scientific guidance, teenagers become like sailors without anchors when dealing with such situations, especially in handling sexual behaviors and expressing emotions. The deficiency in sex education makes it more difficult for them to navigate and cope with these challenges [14]. It is in this search for emotional connectedness and a feeling of belonging that teenagers have turned to social media. The often-uneven quality of information on these sites can only further distort views of relationships and thus exacerbate their emotional problems. Often, social media projects highly idealized images of romantic relationships, depicting moments of joy while downplaying their struggles and disagreements. Teenagers may come across viral posts or trend-driven content that romanticizes the dramatic gesture and fabricates unrealistic expectations about love and companionship.

Due to inadequate sex education, Chinese adolescents often seek the satisfaction of their emotional needs related to sexuality through romantic relationships. Sexual curiosity is one of the main motives for adolescent relationships, especially in learning about gender roles and sexual behavior. The lack of formal sex education at this point, therefore, pressures teenagers to seek information from unofficial channels, such as from the internet, in peer conversations, or through media portrayals that are not always healthy or accurate. Such portrayals present perspectives and myths on gender roles, where girls' consent is of little value and a boy is taught to interpret a girl's expression of disinterest as coy consent. This form of misinformation can lead to a gross misunderstanding related to gender roles and expectations in romantic relationships. Boys, influenced by such misconceptions, may face pressure to initiate sexual activities, while girls, with a lack of structured education and influenced by traditional norms, can adopt passive and submissive behaviors within relationships. Such aspects can further increase confusion and misunderstandings among teenagers in navigating their romantic relationships [15].

The awakening of sexual awareness often prompts adolescents to seek emotional and sexual fulfillment within relationships, which serves as a primary reason for seeking romance to satisfy their sexual needs. Carcedo et al. point out that adolescents, due to a lack of scientific sex education, are prone to engage in high-risk behaviors in relationships to meet their emotional and sexual needs [16]. However, without essential sexual health knowledge, they often overlook the health risks associated with sexual activities, such as sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. Such behaviors not only impact teenagers' physical health but may also negatively affect their mental well-being, placing them under greater emotional pressure and anxiety.

3.3. Sociostructure Influences

With the rise of the internet and popular culture, contemporary adolescents are increasingly influenced by media such as television, online novels, and social media. Research indicates that idol dramas like *Lost You Forever*, highly popular among young viewers, idealize romantic relationships and foster adolescents' longing for romance and idealized expectations about love [17]. While this media portrayal satisfies adolescents' emotional fantasies, it also sets unrealistic expectations for relationships.

Peer pressure also plays a significant role in teenage dating. Within school environments, adolescents are easily influenced by peers, where dating may be viewed as a sign of maturity. Peer relationships can prompt adolescents to emulate dating behaviors among their peers, which is often not motivated by personal emotional needs but rather a desire for peer approval and support. In such cases, adolescents' understanding of relationships can become misaligned with genuine emotional needs, taking on the form of social role-playing and display.

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3.4. Influence of the Education System

In the Chinese education system, emotional education often receives inadequate attention, as schools typically focus on academic objectives and overlook adolescents' emotional needs. The highly rationalized nature of school governance tends to neglect systematic support for students' emotional development [18]. Under academic pressures, adolescents struggle to express their emotional needs, and romantic relationships often become an outlet for the release of accumulated stress and the expression of their pent-up emotions. In the absence of enough emotional education, adolescents may develop a trend of unhealthy patterns while performing the role in romantic relationships, thereby affecting their performance in academia and their psychological well-being.

4. Suggestions

To address the phenomenon of teenage dating, comprehensive interventions and guidance are needed across societal, school, and family levels to help adolescents balance emotional needs with academic responsibilities for healthy development.

4.1. Societal Level

It is very important at the social level to develop a reasonable and scientific atmosphere through public discourses and to avoid moralization or exaggeration of the negative influences brought about by dating among teenagers. The media and the public should focus on disseminating knowledge about psychological health and emotional regulation to help form a sober understanding of adolescent emotional development. The media could invite some psychologists to offer expert opinions and give some constructive suggestions on the problems of dating in adolescence, which is helpful for parents, schools, and teenagers. Society should also enhance the support given to mental health and emotional counseling resources by establishing adolescent counseling centers or community-based emotional support programs. Professional guidance on romantic relationships could be given through these facilities. The community can also work in conjunction with schools and families by offering emotional educational activities for adolescents, such as going through seminars about mental health or workshops on managing one's emotions, which will promote providing the ability to be in touch with feelings and teach them how to regulate those feelings.

4.2. School Level

The key to solving the problem of teenage dating lies in strengthening emotional education in schools. Schools should include emotional education in the curriculum and additional counseling, which would really enable the students to learn systematically how to manage their emotions, establish wholesome relationships, and take a balanced view of romantic relationships along with their academics. This kind of education will help students to recognize their emotional needs and release stress in a healthy manner that could also reduce disruptions to academics due to romance issues. Schools should also help parents communicate with teachers through parental lectures or workshops so that parents can understand the needs of their adolescents at home. Closer coordination between home and school will, in this way, achieve full guidance for adolescents in times of emotional stress and permit them to think rationally about romantic relationships, thus reducing emotional disputes that could affect academic performance and mental health.

4.3. Family Level

At the family level, parents should shift their approach to teenage dating from strict control to supportive guidance, fostering more positive parent-child relationships. Instead of imposing rigid

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prohibitions or dismissing their children's emotional needs, parents should focus on open and honest communication. This involves helping adolescents understand the importance of responsibility and self-management within relationships. Rather than limiting social interactions to suppress dating behaviors, parents can prioritize respectful and empathetic discussions, encouraging their children to manage emotions constructively and maintain a balanced perspective on academics and romance. Moreover, emotional support from parents is crucial for the healthy emotional development of adolescents. By fostering positive communication, parents can assist their children in cultivating self-reflective and self-regulatory skills, which are valuable not only for managing romantic relationships but also for promoting maturity and confidence in other social interactions. This approach enables parents to create a secure and supportive environment that helps adolescents strike a balance between their emotional and academic responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

Through a literature analysis, this paper examined the perspectives of Chinese society, schools, and families on teenage dating, focusing on the attitudes of these key stakeholders and their influence on adolescents' emotional development. In the context of Chinese culture, teenage dating is shaped by a complex interplay of educational beliefs, parental attitudes, and social morality. While society, schools, and parents often adopt conservative views, perceiving teenage dating as a distraction from academics, a source of mental stress, and a potential health risk, the rising prominence of adolescents' emotional needs and the impact of social culture have contributed to the increasing prevalence of teenage dating.

Research shows that the absence of emotional education in schools, parental avoidance of emotional topics, and societal pressure all negatively affect adolescents' emotional needs in romantic relationships. Many adolescents, lacking emotional support, resort to hiding their relationships or turning to peers or the internet for support, which, without systematic guidance, can lead to confusion and risk behaviors in relationships, amplifying mental health and academic pressures. Thus, strengthening emotional education, fostering open parent-child communication, and guiding rational public opinion are essential steps forward.

Future research could further examine how to balance emotional development and academic pursuit in educational policy and family education, especially in terms of the effectiveness of emotional education and its long-term impact on adolescents' mental health and academic performance. Additionally, societal stakeholders can contribute to adolescent well-being by establishing educational and psychological support systems to help adolescents form healthy views on relationships and develop emotional management skills. Through the combined efforts of schools, families, and society, adolescents' emotional and academic balance can be guided more scientifically, fostering comprehensive mental health and personal growth.

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