

Parenting Style Influences on Mothers and Daughters' Relationship on *Astonishing Color of After*

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ABSTRACT

Young Adult fiction's popularity is at its peak right now due to the topic being related to the problems that teenagers are facing in today's era. One of those novels is *Astonishing Color of After*, a novel about the mother and daughter's relationship between two generations, Dory with her mother, and Dory with her daughter, Leigh. This novel intrigues me to analyze the characteristics of Dory's and Dory's mother's parenting style, the influence of their parenting styles, and how it affects the mother's and daughter's relationship and their daughter's behavior problems. To analyze these three points, I will apply the authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style based on the types of parenting theory by Diana Baumrind. My analysis will show how Dory's and Dory's mother's parenting style is influenced by the culture and childhood trauma, and how their parenting styles affect the relationship between them and their daughter as well as their daughters' behavioral problems. This thesis will end with a conclusion that there is a line between when the parents become authority figures and when the parents become the companion of their children.

Keywords: parenting styles; mother and daughter's relationship; authoritarian parenting style; permissive parenting style; behavioral problems

INTRODUCTION

A lot of fiction books have been published in the world today with different types of genres, contents, and languages. However, the most trendy fiction books today are Young Adult books. Although, Young Adults fiction is usually for teenagers approximately around twelve until eighteen-year-old. However, it can be interpreted as a bridge for beginner readers from children's fiction to adult fiction (Belbin, 2011, p.143). One of the most popular Young Adult fiction subgenres nowadays is coming-of-age. In this genre, Young Adult Fiction authors use their novels as a tool to address authentic teen issues and fears in the real world or society to provide 'bibliotherapy' or therapeutic storytelling models and problem-solving plots for their young readers (Wickham, 2018, p.1). One of the Young Adult novels that the author uses this method is *Astonishing Color of After* written by Emily X.R.Pan

This novel provides mental illness in normal life without overly analyzing or romanticizing the characters' psychological problems, victim-blaming the characters, and being able to show the raw feelings or life of someone who is suffering from mental illness and it is hard to explain their situation to their loved ones. This novel focuses on the relationship of mother and daughter, the effect of parenting style on their children, especially on their future behavioral problems, and cultural differences between Western culture (precisely American culture) with Asian culture (precisely Chinese culture). The author, Emily X.R.Pan, with this novel as her debut novel, has achieved a lot of success and awards, such as debuting in the New York Times Bestseller list #10, winning the 2019 Asian/Pacific American Award for Young Adult Literature, 2019 Walter Honor Award, 2020 Lincoln Award, and nominated 2018 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Young Adult Literature, 2018 Goodreads Choice Award for Young Adult Fiction and Debut Author. Not only with awards, but the book also got 4.1 out of 5 stars on Goodreads.

The novel is set in two places in the United States and Taipei, Taiwan, and from two different points of view, Leigh's point of view at present and Dory's point of view in the past before her death. The central conflict of this novel is a strained relationship between parents with their children, focusing on the conflict between Dory and her parents. The reason for the conflict is that Dory's views are always contradicted by her parents. The climax of this conflict happens when her sister passed away because of illness and her parents blamed her for it. Her parents (especially her mother) raged at her out of grief by saying that because she is being a troublemaker; her parents are neglecting her sister's illness which leads to her sister's death. Therefore, she decides to cut off her contact with her parents, run away from her home, marry her boyfriend, Brian, move to the United States, and start a new life. However, the conflict between Dory and her parents ends up with no solutions in it until Dory's death which leaves her parents feeling guilty.

Based on the plot and the main conflict of the novel, lead to my interest on the opposite of the parenting style between Dory's mother and Dory and how their parenting affects their mother and daughter's relationship and their daughter's behavioral problems when they grow up. Therefore, in this, I want to know why Dory and Dory's mother have their parenting style as such and how these parenting styles affect the mother and daughter's relationship and their behavioral problems. The purpose of the study is to reveal the reasons why Dory and Dory's mother have their parenting style such as permissive parenting style and authoritarian parenting style respectively and finds out the ways both parenting styles affect the mother and daughter's relationship and their behavioral problems. I hope through this study; people will realize the importance of good parenting and knowing what they should do as parents without hurting the mental and physical health of their children.

To analyze Dory's mother's and Dory's parenting style and the effect on it through their relationship with their children as well as their children's behavioral problems, I use the four types of parenting by Diana Baumrind. However, for this study, I will use and focus on two of the four parenting styles which are the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles to help me compare two different generations of parents and to reveal the reason why and how cultural and past experience can influence the parenting style of a parent. I will apply it by comparing the two different characteristics of Dory's mother and Dory's parenting with the characteristics of authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting respectively and revealing the reasons and effects on the mother-daughter relationship and their daughters' behavioral problems.

Thus, I will explain briefly what authoritarian parenting styles and permissive parenting styles are. Authoritarian parents tend to be both demanding and directive, but not responsive. They demand their children follow the expectations they set for their children. They see themselves as someone who lives longer and knows better than children. Therefore, they value obedience and are status-oriented. Because of that, they expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation. They provide an orderly environment, a clear set of regulations, and monitor their children's activities carefully. Therefore, authoritarian parents prefer to control their children's lives rather than give them freedom (Baumrind, 1991, p.62). However, the authoritarian parenting style gives negative impacts on their children's mental health (Chen et al. and Shek in Zaki & Ibrahim, 2010, p.52). Permissive or nondirective parents are more responsive and less demanding than authoritarian parents. Their approach to parenting their children is nontraditional and lenient, does not require mature behavior, allows considerable self-regulation, and avoids confrontation. They value their children's voice and freedom more than their own. Permissive parents see themselves as a companion to their children, they think that as long as what their children want to do is make them happy, then it all matters. Therefore, permissive parents prefer to give their children freedom in their life choices rather than controlling them (Baumrind, 1991, p.62). The effect of the permissive parenting style itself

differs. As a companion to their children, it creates a less rigid atmosphere between them and is very responsive to their children's emotional needs. However, because the parents do not set or enforce any rules or guidelines, the child most likely will fail to develop good problem-solving and poor decision-making skills (Cabanatuan & Ahmad, 2021, p.91).

ANALYSIS

The Reasons of Parenting Styles of Dory's mother and Dory

There are two parenting styles that focus on *Astonishing Color of After*. The first one is Dory's mother or Yuanyang and the second one is Dory. These parenting styles are hugely influenced by cultures. However, in Dory's parenting, her parenting is not only influenced by cultures, but also by her past trauma from her mother's parenting.

Dory's mother or Yuanyang adopts authoritarian parenting. She values obedience and is status-oriented. Because of that, she expects her orders to be obeyed without explanation. She provides an orderly environment, and a clear set of regulations, and monitors her children's activities carefully. Thus, she tends to control her children's lives rather than give them freedom. The reason why she has such a parenting style is that she gets the influence from Traditional Chinese culture that is based on Confucian values. One of the Confucian values is called *chiao shun* or training, which means parents must train their children from an early age through guidance and continuous monitoring of their children's behavior while providing them care, support, and parental involvement (Huang et al., 2017, p.796). Another value of Confucian values is filial piety. Filial piety in daily life is reflected in children's respect and obedience to parental demands and authority. Thus, children must meet and comply with parents' expectations (Huang & Gove, 2012, p.12). Therefore, based on these values, Confucian values are mostly associated with authoritarian parenting including Yuanyang's parenting. One of the expectations she sets for her daughters is that they must be responsible for many family functions such as caring for their siblings, cleaning the home, and cooking meals from an early age. This can be seen in the chapter *Smoke & Memories* on pages 228 until 229, Yuanyang talks to 4-year-old Jingling about her role after Dory's birth. She asks her to take care of and becomes a good role model for her little sister, Dory. By training Jingling to have small responsibilities when she is young, she hopes her daughter will grow up into a responsible woman who can bear a much bigger responsibility.

Another expectation that Yuanyang has for her daughters is that she wants her daughters to live according to what she wants without rebellion. This is because she sees herself as someone who knows better and she must feed and raise her children to be ready in the real world. With that mindset, she tends to worry her children will do bad behaviors and decisions and wants her children to have a better life than hers. Therefore, she will make sure the children follow her ideas and monitor her children's lives. Rebellion against her authority will cause several harsh punishments towards her daughters. One of the examples where she demands obedience from her daughters is she wants Dory to not pursue her dream as a pianist and do a practical job like her big sister, Jingling in the chapter *Smoke & Memories* on page 229. She also forces Jingling to stop Dory from being a pianist because her plan of stopping Dory by herself does not work. Her method of stopping Dory is based on how close Jingling and Dory are and use Jingling as a tool to reach her goal. However, her method does not work because Jingling does not tell Dory to give up on her dream and keeps telling and pursuing her to go to America based on how Jingling sees Dory's potential. Thus, after her plan does not have the result she wants, Yuanyang gives a silent treatment to Dory by not looking into Dory's eyes when she is about to say goodbye at the airport. This treatment is part of her punishment to Dory, so she will feel guilty because of her disobedience to Yuanyang.

The last expectation that Yuanyang forces her daughters (in this case, Dory) to fulfill is that her daughters must marry another Chinese only. They cannot marry non-Chinese people, even if their children love them so much. In the chapter *Smoke & Memories* page 342, both Yuanyang and her husband keep telling Jingling that the relationship between Brian and Dory must end. Although Jingling tries to persuade her parents that Dory is in love, both Yuanyang and her husband still want the end of Dory and Brian's relationship. This is because, in their mindset, they see love as something that is not important. In contrast, Dory sees love as something important, and cannot be forced. Because of that, it creates another conflict between Yuanyang and Dory. The clash between Yuanyang's views and Dory's views reaches its climax when Dory dares to introduce her American boyfriend to her parents when he comes to Taiwan in the chapter *Smoke & Memories* on page 298. Yuanyang and her husband repel Brian in front of Brian and Dory although it might offend Brian and embarrass Dory. They do not even want to hear and let Dory explain her point of view, this is because Dory shows her emotional expression by appealing to Brian's fluency in the Chinese language and his will and attempts to rebel against Yuanyang which leads to Yuanyang finding it harmful to Dory's future.

In contrast with her mother, Dory adopts permissive parenting after she marries Brian, her American boyfriend. As a permissive parent, she prefers to give her daughter freedom in her life choices rather than controlling her. The first reason why she has such a parenting style is that she gets the influence of American culture. She gets this influence from her staying in America and her marriage to her American husband. She thinks that her daughter has the right to have her views, opinions, and lives without neglecting her. She must listen to the voice of her daughter and has to be open to her daughter's expression of her spirituality. She has to respect her daughter's views and voices even if it is different from her views. This idea applies to Dory's parenting when Leigh is unsure if she should submit a portfolio of her art to Kreis in Berlin in the chapter *Fall, Sophomore Year* on pages 254 until 255. First, she asks how Leigh's feeling about the art show, then looking at Leigh's negative reaction, she asks why Leigh has that reaction. After knowing the reason for Leigh's reaction because she is being positive that Brian will not let her, she shares her view that is encouraging Leigh not gaslighting her. She is even ready to defend her daughter if someone dares to disagree with Leigh's passion as can be seen in chapter *Smoke & Memories* on page 216. Brian does not like how Dory keeps encouraging Leigh about her passion for art. He thinks that Leigh should have another passion that will give her good prospects in the future. However, she disagrees by saying that Leigh must do things she loves. These examples show how Dory values her daughter's views more than anything. This makes her parenting different from her mother. Unlike Yuanyang, she allows her daughter to explain her views when her views clash with her daughter's views without gaslighting her.

Another reason that influences Dory's parenting style is because of her trauma as a child from authoritarian parenting by not treating her daughter like her parents do. Knowing that because her parents' parenting damages her mental health and relationship, she doesn't want her children to feel what she felt. In her childhood days, Dory experiences childhood emotional neglect. Emotional neglect can be defined as caregivers' or parents' disregard for children's emotional needs, including failure to provide comfort when the children are scared or distressed about something in their life. Therefore, when the children become adults, they will most likely suffer from mental illness and become aggressive and abusive to their future families (Arora, 2014, p.45). In this case, Dory does not show any aggression and does not abuse her husband and daughter physically and emotionally. Instead, she makes her past trauma as her life lesson to give her daughter a better future and prevents her from experiencing the same experiences as hers.

The Effects of Both Parenting Styles in Their Mothers and Daughters Relationship and Their Behavior Problems

According to McKinney and Renk (2008) in their literature review, in general, daughters evaluate their mothers as being providers of a mutually supportive relationship (in Uji et al., 2013, p.293). This is because the role of the mother is to be the one who gives love and support rather than the father whose role is the one who gives authority to their children. In this case, Dory as a mother does her role as a mother who is her daughter's life supporter, however, Dory's mother, Yuanyang, rather than being her daughter's life supporter, is the one who gives the authority to her daughter.

Yuanyang as the authoritarian mother rarely shows her motherly love to Dory. This is because as an authoritarian mother, she sees herself as superior to her daughters. She thinks as long as she does her duties as a mother, her daughter will be good. However, there are consequences for both her and her daughter, Dory, because of her strict parenting. The first consequence is the strained mother and daughter relationship between her and Dory. This type of consequence is one of the most common effects of authoritarian parenting. Bowlby states that consistent rejection by a primary caregiver disrupts the dynamic between them and the caregiver and results in the child experiencing insecurity about how best to maintain proximity to the caregiver. Matchinda adds in a Cameroon study that authoritarian parenting style was found to be associated with children running away from home (in Maepa et al, 2015, p.555). This is also happening to Dory's situation. Because of constant criticism and harsh parenting from her parents, Dory runs away from her home and cuts off all of her contact with her parents. Thus, it affects not only her relationship with her parents but also, her parent's relationship with her daughter, Leigh. She forbids her daughter and her husband to meet and talk about her parents. Because of it, Leigh does not know what her grandparents look like and the problem between them until her death. The strained relationship between Dory and Yuanyang also affects Yuanyang herself. As in the chapter *Smoke & Memories* on pages 343 until 344, Yuanyang and her husband keep asking about Dory's well-being and express their guilt of their past actions and their harsh parenting towards Dory.

The second consequence is that Yuanyang's parenting leads Dory into a lie. Parents who are very strict and too demanding with their children will create a sense of powerlessness in their children. To gain those powers, the children will manipulate their parents by lying (Moffett, 1993, p.17). This also happens with Dory after she calls Brian in the chapter *Smoke and Memories* page 264. Dory knows that Yuanyang suspects her backstreet relationship with Brian by how Yuanyang interrogates and is suspicious of her after the call. So to defend herself, she lies and avoids Yuanyang by changing the topic. These behaviors are the results of Yuanyang's authoritarian parenting. Instead of letting Dory explain her point-of-view of why she loves Brian or what kind of man Brian is, Yuanyang continues to force her idea of marrying a Chinese man into Dory. Therefore, in the feeling of being powerless, Dory tries to manipulate her m by lying and avoiding any conversation that mentions Brian.

Third and last consequence is that Yuanyang's authoritarian parenting leads to Dory's behavior problems such as depressive behaviors and suicidal actions. This type of consequence is also one of the common effects of authoritarian parenting. According to Chen et al. and Shek (in Zaki & Ibrahim, 2010, p.52), the authoritarian parenting style give negative impacts on their children (especially on their mental health) such as hopelessness, low self-esteem, and psychiatric morbidity that leads to several mental illnesses such as depression, panic disorder, etc. In this novel, Dory shows a lot of her hopeless behaviors and psychiatric morbidity such as she is no longer excited about any special events, lies on her bed all day like someone waiting for their time to go, and no longer answering and connecting herself with her friends. Those

signs of hopelessness lead to her depressive behaviors and suicidal actions at the beginning of the story, Dory attempts suicide and becomes the reason for her death.

As a child of authoritarian parents, she knows the consequences she gets because of it. That is why she decides to not do the same thing to her daughter, Leigh. Instead of being superior or all-knowing, she becomes Leigh's companion. However, Leigh also faces consequences from Dory's permissive parenting.

The first consequence of Dory's permissive parenting is her deep bond of mother and daughter relationship with Leigh. This type of consequence is one of the most common effects of permissive parenting. Cabanatuan & Ahmad (2021, p.91) state that the parents become companions for their children, creating a less rigid atmosphere between them and being very responsive to their children's emotional needs. This also happens to Dory and Leigh's relationship. The deep bond between them happens because of Dory's unlimited support for Leigh. She appreciates Leigh's art and encourages Leigh to submit her portfolio to show Leigh her unlimited support. As a result, Leigh and Dory form a deep bond between them and Leigh easily opens up about things going on in her life and is always there for Dory when she is depressed. In this case, not only does Dory know what Leigh wants, but Leigh also knows what is happening to her mother and her mother's needs. This reflects the main idea of permissive parenting which is openness. Dory's mindset leads her to be open about herself and different views of Leigh, therefore, Leigh is also open to her mother and willing to listen to her mother's struggle and help her without judging her or gaslighting her.

Another consequence of Dory's parenting is Leigh has attitude problems or behavioral problems. As a teenager, Leigh has not established her maturity yet. Therefore, a lot of time she does something that is crossing a line and regrets it after. This behavior can be avoided if Dory has authority over Leigh. This is supported by Cabanatuan & Ahmad's statement (2021, p.91) that due to the parents not setting or enforcing any rules or guidelines, the child most likely will fail to develop good problem-solving and poor decision-making skills. Leigh's poor problem-solving has indicated her behavior problems, which is aggression. According to the psychoanalyst of Sigmund Freud and ethnologist Konrad Lorenz, aggression may come as a reaction or frustration with something. It comes as a result of irritation or maybe as a way to answer against an unplanned attack (in Kruti, 2015, p.35). This also happens to Leigh. One of the examples she shows her aggressive behavior is in chapter 55, where she goes to a night market with Dory's mother and her acquaintance, Feng after they talk about Dory's favorite late-night snack. Although Feng has a good intention, Leigh is quickly irritated by it because she thinks that Feng is being Ms. Know-it-All, and in the end, she tells rude things to Feng instead of allowing Feng to explain her intention. She lashes out her jealousy and annoyance at Feng when she knows that her action is inappropriate and regrets her words later. However, due to her aggressive tendency and not being able to control her own emotion, she gaslights Feng and makes her leave the scene.

Another example of Leigh's behavior problem is she can be insensitive toward other people. This is also because of Dory's lack of authority in her parenting. Leigh's lack of boundaries to other people is also because of Dory's permissive parenting which she opens up about herself too much. Therefore, she fails to guide Leigh in terms of boundaries and leads her into her insensitiveness. In the chapter *Summer Before Freshman Year*, Leigh and her best friend, Axel, hang out by strolling around with bikes. When they arrive in some unknown place, they find a unique tree, and Axel wants to bring back some of the leaves to Dory. However, because Leigh is worried about her mother's strange depressive action earlier in the chapter, she says rude things to Axel when she knows that Axel has done nothing wrong. He does not know about Dory's suicidal behaviors, all he wants to do is to bring back some of the leaves to her because he knows that Dory will love them. Leigh also knows that her words are harsh and

insensitive, especially when she knows that Axel does not have and probably never experience motherly love until he meets Dory. However, she lets it out on a whim and cannot save the conversation. In this example, I notice not only that she shows her insensitivity, but also that she shows her aggressive behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to reveal why Dory and her mother, Yuanyang, have their parenting style as such and find out the ways both parenting styles affect the mother and daughter's relationship as well as their behavioral problems. I used four types of parenting theory and focused only on the two types of parenting which are authoritarian parenting style and permissive parenting style respectively to compare two different parenting styles of two generations and reveal the reasons and effects on it the mother-daughter relationship and their daughters' behavioral problem.

To sum up, Yuanyang, Dory's mother is adopting an authoritarian parenting style in how she demands obedience from her daughters and expects them to follow it without question. If she finds acts of rebellion in her daughters, she will scold them harshly. Her parenting is influenced by Traditional Chinese culture. As a Chinese mother, her parenting emphasizes authority, devotion to parents, and emotional restraint. As a result, she forbids Dory to explain her views and scolds her harshly when her views clash with Dory. Because of her strict parenting, her relationship with Dory becomes strained. With a wounded heart, Dory cuts her contact with Yuanyang and does not let her daughter, Leigh, meet and communicate with her. Dory also suffers from depressive behaviors which leads to her suicidal actions that become the reason for her death. Not only Dory, but Yuanyang also left with a feeling of guilt and was never able to apologize and fix her relationship until Dory's death.

In contrast to her mother, Dory is adopting a permissive parenting style by how she values Leigh's views over herself. She encourages Leigh to pursue her passion for art and is ready to defend her if someone tries to disagree with Leigh's views. This is because she is influenced by her marriage to her American husband and past trauma. Based on her stay in America and past trauma that makes her who she is today, she does not want Leigh to feel what she felt. Thus, she opens herself to Leigh and lets Leigh voice her voice. However, Dory's parenting lacks authority which causes Leigh's aggressive behaviors. Leigh tends to lash out quickly at people and becomes insensitive towards her friends. Because of her aggressive behavior, people around her distance themselves and become awkward with her.

Thus, I can conclude that there is no better parenting in Yuanyang's parenting and Dory's parenting. Not only do both parenting have their pros and cons, but also they share the same purpose which is that they want the best of the best for their children. However, parents are sometimes negligent in their responsibility and let their children endure the consequences when they get older. In conclusion, identifying and knowing a line between lenient and strict is good for the healthy relationship between parents and their children and the children's health and future.

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