

## Negative Parenting Styles in the Second Anime Adaptation of *Fruits Basket* the Series (2019-2021)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the negative parenting styles employed in the second anime series adaptation of *Fruits Basket* (2019 - 2021) and the effects on the children, focusing on Ren Sohma, Akito Sohma's mother, and Isuzu Sohma's parents as well as the two children. The main theory in this analysis is the parenting styles theory by Diana Baumrind, Eleanor Maccoby, and John Martin. While Ren Sohma's extreme competitiveness, abuse, and neglect resulted in Akito's emotional hunger, violent tendencies, and rebellion, Isuzu's parents' superficial care, abuse, and abandonment led to Isuzu's low self-worth and self-isolation. This study proves that although both children suffer from authoritarian and neglectful parenting, the different methods that their parents employ lead to different results. Thus, this analysis highlights the long-lasting effects of the negative parenting styles and the varying impacts they have on children.

**Keywords:** authoritarian parenting, neglectful parenting, parenting styles, psychological outcomes

### INTRODUCTION

Japanese animation, more commonly known as “anime,” has become a prominent and influential branch of cartoons originating from Japan. Anime is distinguished by its unique and exaggerated art style and appeals to a wide audience of all age groups. This broad appeal is due to its clean and colorful graphics, as well as a diverse array of genres, themes, and storylines ranging from simple to complex. Among these genres, the slice-of-life genre is one of the most popular, ranking seventh in the number of global monthly searches (Acharya, 2023). Slice-of-life anime, as its name suggests, typically focuses on everyday experiences, often set in schools, and provides a form of escapism without always centering around a main conflict (TV Tropes, n.d.). However, some slice-of-life anime integrate central conflicts into their narratives, as seen in the popular series *Fruits Basket*.

*Fruits Basket* is a famous slice-of-life anime series aimed primarily at a young female audience. This anime is the second adaptation of a manga series of the same name, created by Natsuki Takaya (a pen name for Nana Hatake). Takaya, born on July 7, 1973, in Shizuoka, Japan, published *Fruits Basket* in 1998. The manga received the Kodansha Manga Award for shoujo manga in 2001 and was first adapted into an anime the same year. Although there is no continuation for the first anime adaptation due to creative differences, a second adaptation was aired in 2019 with Takaya overseeing the production (TV Tropes, n.d.). This second adaptation spans three seasons with a total of 63 episodes.

The narrative of *Fruits Basket* revolves around Tohru Honda, a high school student who becomes involved with the Sohma family. The Sohmas are cursed. Thirteen family members transform into animals of the Chinese zodiac (including a cat) when weak or hugged by someone of the opposite sex, and a fourteenth member has the role of the “god” of the zodiac. This curse severely impacts the Sohma family relationships and often leads to strained parent-child relationships. Parents struggle to bond with their cursed children, which leads to

various forms of abuse and neglect, further complicating the children's lives. Through Tohru's compassionate influence, the cursed members break free from their curse.

While *Fruits Basket* is a work of fiction, it addresses real-life issues of parenting and the serious effects it has on children. The series shows numerous negative parenting styles, which is a contrast to the commonly insignificant roles that parents play in most high school-themed anime. Due to a lack of parents with positive parenting styles and the highlighted negative effects of negative parenting styles, I decided to focus on exploring the negative parenting styles used by the bad parental figures in *Fruits Basket* the series. My focus will be on the second anime adaptation which aired from 2019 until 2021, specifically analyzing the parenting approaches of Ren Sohma and the parents of Isuzu Sohma. These characters were chosen due to their explicit depiction of harsh negative parenting and its evident effects. This paper aims to identify the types of negative parenting styles used by Ren Sohma and Isuzu Sohma's parents and examine the consequences of these styles on Akito Sohma and Isuzu Sohma in *Fruits Basket* the series.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, I utilize parenting style theories to analyze the negative parenting strategies depicted in *Fruits Basket*. Parenting style refers to the approach that parents use in raising their children. Diana Baumrind's research identified three main parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Later, Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin added a fourth style: neglectful parenting (Jessup University, 2019).

Among these, the authoritative parenting style is the only positive one. Authoritative parents are firm yet nurturing. They encourage independence and responsibility in their children. They support their children through mistakes without judgment, which fosters self-confidence and a sense of responsibility as their children grow up.

The authoritarian parenting style, by contrast, emphasizes strict control. Authoritarian parents act as dictators, demanding obedience while rarely giving affection. This parenting style often produces children who struggle with decision-making, have low self-esteem, and rely on others for validation and guidance. Dunham and Dermer (2011) further categorize authoritarian parenting into substyles: showbiz, fictitious, superstar, zealot, seesaw, and mommy/daddy dearest. Showbiz parents push their children to excel in specific areas to fulfill their desires. Fictitious parents exaggerate their children's lives, often demeaning their identity. Superstar parents compete with their children, belittling their achievements. Zealot parents are fanatically devoted to their own worldview, using threats to control their children. Seesaw parents are unpredictable, switching between indirect and explicit contempt. Lastly, mommy and daddy dearest parents are extremely abusive, punishing their children harshly for minor mistakes.

The permissive parenting style involves parents who avoid upsetting their children. This results in a lack of rules and structure in the children's lives. This style often results in children who have difficulty managing emotions, act rebelliously, and engage in harmful behaviors due to a lack of boundaries. This style aligns with Dunham and Dermer's acquaintance parenting, where parents provide basic necessities but treat their children as mere acquaintances, lacking depth and intimacy in their care.

The neglectful parenting style, also known as uninvolved parenting, is characterized by a lack of interaction. Neglectful parents fail to connect with their children which leads to difficulties in forming close relationships and an increased risk of depression and hostility. Dunham and Dermer categorize neglectful parenting into stepford, prerogative, and donor

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styles. Stepford parents act out of duty rather than genuine care, leading to superficial relationships. Prerogative parents treat parenting as a choice rather than a responsibility, often pursuing their agendas. Donor parents are minimally involved in their children's lives, appearing and disappearing unpredictably, causing issues with building stable connections.

The broad categories identified by Baumrind, Maccoby, and Martin are essential, but their generality can limit analysis. Therefore, integrating Dunham and Dermer's more specific poisonous parenting styles allows for a deeper understanding of the parenting strategies and their effects. In this study, I will focus on negative parenting styles, incorporating Dunham and Dermer's detailed subcategories and three of Baumrind's main styles (authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful). By merging these theories, I aim to identify the specific parenting styles used by the characters' parents in *Fruits Basket* and explore the resulting impacts on the children.

## ANALYSIS

### **Akito Sohma's Mother as an Authoritarian and Neglectful Parent**

Akito Sohma is the head of the Sohma family and the god of the Zodiacs. However, despite her position in the Sohma household, she suffers due to her mother Ren Sohma's toxic parenting style. Ren is explicitly portrayed as a toxic parent in the *Fruits Basket* series. Her behavior is characterized by extreme competitiveness, abusiveness, and neglect.

First, Ren Sohma competes relentlessly with Akito to the point of using any possible means when it is about receiving love. Her competitiveness is deeply rooted in her possessiveness over her husband, Akira. She views her daughter Akito as a rival for Akira's love, even before Akito's birth. Ren's jealousy led her to insist that Akito be raised as a boy to prevent a close father-daughter bond from forming between Akito and Akira. She is afraid that their relationship will overshadow her own relationship with Akira. In one instance, Ren threatened to abort Akito if she were to be raised as a girl, demonstrating her extreme measures to maintain Akira's affection only for herself. After Akira's death, Ren's possessiveness extended to a box believed to contain a part of Akira, and she went as far as threatening Akito with a knife to obtain it. Also, Ren's competitiveness in receiving love extends to the Zodiac members, whom she attempts to seduce and win over Akito. She successfully seduces Shigure, the Dog of the Zodiac, and Akito's love interest, which worsens the relationship between her and Akito. By being antagonistically possessive to the point of not wanting Akito to have the love and attention she deserves, Ren Sohma embodies the characteristics of an authoritarian parent who acts like a dictator in her daughter's life (Huang, 2024). Ren Sohma's behavior can be seen as an example of a "superstar" parent who, according to Dunham & Dermer (2011), desires to show that she is better than her daughter.

Second, Ren Sohma both verbally and physically abuses her daughter Akito. After Akira's death, Ren's verbal abuse escalated, with Ren dehumanizing Akito, referring to her as a "thing" and telling her that she is unwanted. This verbal attack is Ren's way of making Akito question her own value. Physically, Ren's aggressiveness is implied through the intense arguments and violent encounters that she and Akito are involved in. These encounters and arguments suggest that the two of them have a history of physical abuse. Akito's violent tendencies, particularly towards Ren, hint at a cycle of abuse learned from her mother.

Third, Ren also neglects Akito's upbringing in addition to her abusive behavior. The categorization of many of her actions as authoritarian may seem to contradict this neglect. However, this shows that an authoritarian parent does not always have to be perpetually present in his or her daughter's life to loom over or haunt his or her child. Although Ren is present

enough to exert control and abuse, she remains emotionally and physically distant, leaving Akito to be raised mainly by the household maids. This neglect aligns with the donor subcategory of neglectful parenting, where the parent is largely uninvolved in the child's life.

In conclusion, Ren Sohma is the portrayal of a toxic mother. She embodies a blend of authoritarian and neglectful parenting. Her aggressive competition for affection, her verbal and physical abuse towards Akito, and her neglect of Akito's upbringing show that she employs deeply negative parenting styles. This combination of authoritarian control and neglect shows the deep impact of Ren's toxic parenting on Akito's life, proving that a parent can be both abusive and absent simultaneously.

### **Isuzu Sohma's Parents as Authoritarian and Neglectful Parents**

Isuzu Sohma is the Horse of the Chinese Zodiac. According to the anime, she used to be a cheerful child, but her parents' parenting style changed her. Her parents are unnamed in the anime and only appear in flashbacks. Nonetheless, Isuzu's parents are presented as parents with damaging parenting styles. Their damaging parenting styles are present through their shallow fabrication of a perfect family, their abusive actions, as well as their lack of connection with their daughter.

First, Isuzu's parents tried to create a "perfect" family image, hiding their real disdain and lack of connection with her. They build a facade of a loving, happy family to escape the reality of their cursed Zodiac child and to distinguish themselves from other Zodiac families, who often reject or abuse their Zodiac children. This act was shattered when Isuzu innocently questioned the authenticity of their family dynamics, revealing her parents' true feelings. Her mother's violent outburst and her father's apathy exposed their real emotions and their superficial relationship with Isuzu.

Second, Isuzu's parents only maintained a superficial bond with her. Although they took good care of her when she was a child, they only did so because of their "duty" to take care of a Zodiac child and to portray the "perfect" Zodiac family to others. Because of their misguided sense of duty, they did not bother building any parent-child connection with their daughter. This obligation-centered parenting lacked any real emotional connection, making them stepford parents who only raise their child out of obligation (Dunham & Dermer, 2011).

Third, Isuzu's parents verbally and physically abuse Isuzu. Her parents frequently yelled at her, degraded her, and blamed her for their actions, contributing to a pattern of verbal abuse. Physical abuse was also present, though less explicitly depicted. Scenes suggestive of abuse include her mother smashing plates in her direction and her parents locking her in a dark room, indicating their disregard for her safety and their intent to harm her. As Isuzu grew older, the abuse escalated. Her hospitalization revealed that she has multiple hidden injuries. This confirms the severity of the physical abuse. Her parents' treatment of her escalated from superficial care to blatant verbal and physical abuse, showcasing the mommy and daddy dearest substyle of the authoritarian parenting style (Dunham & Dermer, 2011).

Lastly, when the abuse was discovered, her parents abandoned her. After being discharged from the hospital, Isuzu was sent to live with another Zodiac family member, Kagura. The fact that they reject and desert Isuzu as well as refuse to have further contact shows that they are neglectful parents. This abandonment and the refusal to maintain contact further classify them into the donor parent substyle of the neglectful parenting style in which parents are loosely considered parents simply for biological reasons (Dunham & Dermer, 2011).

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Isuzu's parents employ multiple malignant parenting styles. They had started by employing the fictitious and stepford parenting style, shifting to using the very abusive mommy/daddy dearest parenting style, and eventually acting as donor parents and abandoning their daughter. Initially, they maintained a false image of perfection without forming a real bond with Isuzu. When that facade was broken, they abused her. Finally, when their abusive actions were exposed, they completely abandoned Isuzu. The progression of the negative parenting styles that Isuzu's parents used on her proved that it was possible for parents to change their parenting styles. Also, causal relationships among different parenting styles are also portrayed in the way Isuzu's parents treated her. This shows that these parenting styles portrayed in *Fruits Basket* the series reflect the complexity of negative parenting styles employed on children.

**Effects of Authoritarian and Neglectful Parenting on Akito Sohma**

Akito Sohma's character in *Fruits Basket* is deeply influenced by her mother Ren's authoritarian and neglectful parenting, which leads to Akito becoming emotionally hungry, violent in expressing her emotions, and rebellious against her mother. Emotional hunger, as defined by Robert Firestone (2015), is caused by childhood deprivation which results in a powerful, exploitative, and destructive need. Lisa Firestone (2022) stated that emotionally hungry people often focus on their own self and exploit others, mistaking this exploitation for love. Signs of emotionally hungry people, according to Laura Spalvieri (2019), include disrespect for boundaries, selfishness, and emotional immaturity.

First, Akito Sohma is undoubtedly an emotionally hungry person. To start, she constantly seeks attention. She wants everyone to cater to her whims and reacts hysterically when she feels neglected. Her behavior is evident in her interactions with the Zodiac members, whom she expects to prioritize her above all else. Akito's disregard for others' needs and her self-centered worldview further highlight her emotional immaturity and loneliness which stem from her upbringing. Also, Akito's emotional hunger is apparent in her inability to acknowledge her mistakes. She often reacts nonchalantly or even proudly when confronted with her wrongdoings, believing her actions are justified and showing no remorse. This behavior, demonstrated in her interactions with Yuki and her treatment of Isuzu, further proves her emotional immaturity and selfishness. Moreover, Akito's yearning for affection causes her to ignore boundaries, especially with male Zodiac members. Her possessiveness and fear of abandonment make her desire to keep them close, often resorting to extreme measures such as sleeping with Kureno and Shigure as well as making sure that no other girl or woman takes the male Zodiac members' attention. Her need for constant affection is a direct response to the neglect she suffered from her mother, reflecting a desperate attempt to fill the void left by her childhood deprivation.

Second, Akito's authoritarian upbringing also results in her expressing emotions violently. According to Hartney (2024), a cycle of abuse happens when children who are abused in childhood become abusive in their relationship with others when they grow up. Akito's words and actions firmly placed her into this cycle of abuse. She was abused and deprived of love as a child, and then she grew up to be violent and abusive to the Zodiac members. Akito's tendency to hurt people is mainly triggered when things do not go the way she wants them to and when girls or women are involved with the male Zodiac members. Akito's violent tendencies, particularly toward those who challenge her authority or express interest in her Zodiac members, reveal her insecurity and need for control.

Lastly, Akito's rebellious and aggressive behavior toward her mother Ren is an unmistakable component in each of their interactions. Akito's aggression is often a form of retaliation toward her mother. The fact that Akito's aggressiveness tends to be a retaliation reveals her desire for validation and acceptance from her mother. She had wanted her mother to

accept her. However, due to all the abuse that she had gone through, Akito believes that the only way of trying to gain that validation was by rebelling and competing with her mother and trying to “defeat” her mother.

The parenting that Akito experienced under her mother resulted in several negative behaviors. First, she becomes emotionally hungry, which is shown by her immature and selfish behavior as well as her possessive behavior toward the Zodiac members. Second, she acts violently to express her feelings. Lastly, she rebels and acts aggressively toward her mother. After analyzing Akito’s words, actions, and behavior, it can be concluded that most, if not all, of Akito’s negative actions can be traced back to the authoritarian and neglectful parenting that Ren Sohma employed on her.

### **Effects of Authoritarian and Neglectful Parenting on Isuzu Sohma**

Isuzu’s subjection to her parents’ authoritarian and neglectful parenting style causes her to lack self-worth. Self-worth is defined as “a sense of one’s own value as a human being” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). People with low self-worth, according to the University of North Carolina Wilmington’s counseling center (n.d.), tend to criticize themselves harshly and maintain negative self-opinions. This low self-worth is usually a result of negative childhood experiences.

Isuzu Sohma displays several signs of a person with low self-worth. Most of her internal monologues contain self-degrading thoughts. She views herself negatively. She compares herself to a kind person, meaning that she views herself as the opposite of a kind person. She also labels herself as selfish and weak. Her perception of her weakness seems to be a direct result of her abuse. When an abuse happens, there is a significant difference in power between the abused and the abuser with the abuser holding the power. In this case, since Isuzu is the victim of the abuse, any power that she had was taken by her parents.

Isuzu also objectifies herself. According to Talmon and Ginzburg (2016), self-objectification is a person’s internalized loss of subjectivity and perception of oneself as an object for other people’s use. Emotional and physical abuse contributes to a person’s self-objectification. This is due to the feeling of helplessness that the victim felt and the realization that his or her desire is never relevant to the situation. Isuzu’s life reflects this statement. She objectifies herself because nothing she said or did changed her situation. Isuzu refers to herself as a “stone,” indicating her perception of herself as unworthy, powerless, and unneeded.

Isuzu’s low self-worth also results in self-blame and self-isolation. She internalizes her parents’ abuse, believing she is a burden and responsible for their actions. She blames herself for being a liability to her parents although it is clear that her parents’ authoritarian parenting is to blame for her behavior. This internalized blame is a direct result of her parents constantly telling her that she is the cause of their troubles.

Isuzu’s lack of self-worth also causes her to isolate herself from others to prevent them from getting hurt. In multiple instances, she distances herself from fellow Zodiac members like Hiro and Hatsuharu. She believes that her presence would only bring them harm. She is afraid that staying close to others will bring them trouble, so she pushes them away to protect them from the pain she associates with her existence.

The authoritarian and neglectful parenting that Isuzu was subjected to by her parents results in a major negative result that catalyzes other negative consequences. The major result of the parenting she went through is her lack of self-worth. This lack of self-worth can be observed

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from the multiple self-degrading thoughts that Isuzu has. In turn, Isuzu's lack of self-worth causes her to blame herself for the abuse she went through and to attempt to isolate herself from other people.

## CONCLUSION

By exploring the negative parenting styles employed by Ren Sohma and the parents of Isuzu Sohma in *Fruits Basket* the series as well as the effects of those parenting styles on the two children, this article proves the connection between parenting styles and their impact on the psychological well-being of the children they are employed on. Through this exploration, it is clear that Ren Sohma and Isuzu Sohma's parents both exhibit authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles. However, despite both sets of parents employing authoritarian and neglectful styles, their differing methods produce distinct outcomes in their children. Ren Sohma's extreme competitiveness, abuse, and neglect towards Akito result in Akito's emotional hunger, violent tendencies, and rebellion; Isuzu's parents' superficial care, followed by verbal and physical abuse, and ends in abandonment, results in Isuzu's lack of self-worth. With the differences in the methods employed by the parents as well as the children's responses to those methods of parenting styles in mind, it is clear that though both Akito and Isuzu Sohma suffer under the same parenting style categories, the differences in their respective parents' methods of application result in distinct psychological and emotional outcomes. The portrayal of these negative parenting styles and their results in *Fruits Basket* the series mirrors real-life issues of negative parenting and its lasting impacts, offering valuable lessons on the importance of healthy and supportive parental relationships.

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