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ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКАЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЯ

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**Association between authoritative school climate  
and school bullying: moderation by school belonging**

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The problem of school bullying of primary school children and possible ways to neutralize them is considered. It is noted that bullying negatively affect the school bullies themselves, they become a transit for involving the bullies themselves in real criminal activity. Victims of bullying are not able to study well, they have mental disorders, emotional and social problems, muscle and skeletal pain. Witnesses to bullying suffer not less, but more than the bullies themselves and their victims, and their depression, anxiety, hostility, and phobic anxiety are reported. The article considers the positive influence of the author's school and the authoritative style of education (demand and warmth) on the problem of school abuse and bullying. The article considers the technology and results of an empirical study conducted with 326 students of Junior high schools in Chongqing, China using the following questionnaires: research of the authoritative school climate (University of Virginia, USA); Scale of school hooliganism (University of Northern Illinois, USA); Psychological meaning of belonging to a school (University of Hong Kong, China). The results of the study showed a positive effect of the school's school climate on reducing the manifestations of bullying. The importance of the sense of belonging to a school in reducing the level of bullying is emphasized.

Keywords: authoritative school climate, moderation, school bullying, school belonging.

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PEDAGOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Лицзюнь Ло, Бинг Чен, Шицзянь Чэнь, Юфанг Чжао

**Взаимосвязь между авторитетным стилем воспитания в школе и школьной травлей:  
формирование принадлежности к школе**

В статье рассматривается проблема школьного буллинга и моббинга младших школьников и предлагаются возможные варианты их нейтрализации. Отмечается, что буллинг и моббинг отрицательно влияют на самих школьных хулиганов, предопределяя их вовлечение в преступную деятельность. Жертвы буллинга и моббинга не способны хорошо учиться, у них наблюдаются психические расстройства, мышечные боли, что вызывает проблемы в эмоциональной и социальной сферах. Отмечается и негативное влияние на свидетелей буллинга и моббинга – они испытывают депрессию, тревожность, подвержены фобиям. Рассматривается положительное влияние авторитетной школы, авторитетного стиля воспитания (сочетание требовательности и теплоты) на проблему школьного буллинга и моббинга. Описываются технология и результаты эмпирического исследования, проведенного с 326 учащимися младших классов средних школ г. Чунцин (КНР) по следующим опросникам: Исследования авторитетного школьного климата (Университет Вирджинии, США); Шкала школьных хулиганских поступков (Университет Северного Иллинойса, США); Психологический смысл принадлежности к школе (Гонконгский университет, КНР). Результаты исследования показали положительное влияние авторитетного климата в школе на уменьшение проявлений буллинга и моббинга. Подчеркивается важное значение чувства принадлежности к школе для снижения уровня хулиганства и буллинга.

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Ключевые слова: авторитетный школьный климат, формирование школьного климата, школьное хулиганство, принадлежность к школе.

School bullying refers to a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1993), which are characterized by intentionality, repetitiveness, and a power imbalance, compared to other aggressive behaviors. Early bullying can predict subsequent criminal behavior. A follow-up study showed that nearly 55 % of the school bullies in grades 7 to 10 had at least one conviction criminal behavior and 36 % had three or more convictions criminal behaviors between the ages of 16 and 24 (Olweus, 2013). Given their long-term fear, victims are unable to learn effectively, prone to mental health, emotional, and social adaptation problems, and even somatic symptoms, such as muscle and skeletal pain (Lien, Green, Welander-Vatn, & Bjertness, 2009). Not only are bullies and victims negatively affected, but bystanders are also victimized. A study of more than 2,000 students between the ages of 12 and 16 found that those who witnessed bullying reported more depression, anxiety, hostility, and phobic anxiety than bullies or victims (Rivers, Potteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009).

Therefore, school bullying jeopardizes campus safety, violates students' basic right to an education, has a continuing negative impact on adolescents' learning, socialization, and mental health, has become a public health issue, according to the World Health Organization. Based on the theory of social ecology, the generation, maintenance, and termination of school bullying are the result of interactions of individuals with peers, families, schools, social culture, and other aspects of the environment. However, compared to the influence of the families and peers, school perceptions is the most predictive factor of youth violence (Laufer & Harel, 2003) and it is critical for preventing and controlling bullying. Educators may have difficulty changing students' personality traits or countering the effects of parenting styles and social culture in the short-term, but schools are the main place where most bullying occurs and they are important ecosystems in which teenagers learn and interact with peers and teachers. In addition, most anti-bullying interventions was implemented in schools. Therefore, the school is the primary place to prevent bullying, and identifying the key factors that affect bullying in the school climate and the internal mechanisms of these factors are particularly important for effective prevention and control of bullying.

The campus environment associated with student behavior is the school climate, which is the patterns of people's experiences of school life; it reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures that comprise school life (National School Climate Council, 2017). Both theoretical and empirical research has shown that a positive school climate has a significant negative correlation with school bullying. According to the theory of social control and social disorder, a certain connection must be established between the individual and the society in order to constrain an individual's behavior. Deviant behavior tends to occur when social-cultural values are confused or the social connection is weak. Adolescents are involved in bullying and other deviant behavior when the social environment limits the ability to control or supervise adolescent behavior. This means that good organization and control, and an orderly and harmonious school climate create the positive setting that is needed to reduce school bullying.

Research findings show that a positive school climate is associated with reduced attacks and violence, including bullying (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008; Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004). However, school climate is a complex multi-dimensional concept, and the relative contribution of different factors that affect bullying on campus may vary. Studies have shown that some secondary factors in the school climate are particularly important for understanding bullying. For example, the teacher-student relationship is one of the most predictive factors for bullying behavior on campus (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011), and a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs has shown that strict disciplinary methods are an important component of an effective anti-bullying project (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). School bullying is lower when students perceive that school rules are fair and consistently enforced, and that faculty members are caring and supportive (Gregory et al., 2010). Authoritative school climate theory provides a model for school climate, use an authoritative parenting style (demandingness and warmth) with a disciplinary structure (i. e., high disciplinary and academic expectations for students), and support students (i. e., teachers and other school staff members interact with students in a respectful, caring, and helpful manner). The theory has been applied in studies to examine the impact of school climate on

school bullying, which have confirmed that an authoritative school climate is conducive to lower peer victimization (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015).

To better guide the practice of bullying prevention and control, it is necessary to understand the mechanisms by which an authoritative school climate influences school bullying. Studies have shown that the relationship between school climate and school bullying depends on the student's connectedness (Wilson, 2004), which is a student's sense of attachment and commitment to teachers and classmates. According to the theory of social identity and self-categorization, both school belonging and school connectedness are students' sense of identity with their school; that is, a student knows s/he belongs to a specific social group, and membership in that group is valuable and important to the student.

A sense of belonging to school can be defined students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993). When individuals classify themselves into specific groups, they regulate their behavior according to group standards, values, and beliefs. If the school rules explicitly oppose bullying, the degree of identity with the school will affect whether individuals are involved in bullying. The stronger the group identity, the more the individual will be opposed to bullying, because bullying behaviors threaten group norms and common social identity. However, when the group supports bullying, the probability of adolescents participating in bullying increases (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009). Therefore, the current study explores the degree to which school belonging moderates the association between an authoritative school climate and school bullying behavior.

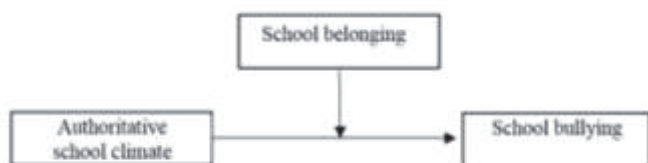


Figure 1. Hypothetical model of the relationship between authoritative school climate, school belonging, and school bullying

## Method

### Participants

A total of 326 junior high-school students in the Beibei, Shizhu, and Wushan districts of Chongqing were selected by convenience sampling, including 145 male students and 168 female students. Thirteen students did not report their gender. The average age of the participants was 12.90 years old ( $SD = 0.58$ ,

age range = 12-15 years old). The study was approved by the Academic Review Committee of the School of Teacher Education of Southwest University, and the questionnaires were distributed after the leaders of the middle school, the classroom teachers, and the students themselves gave their informed consent.

### Measures

**Authoritative School Climate Survey.** Adapted from bullying scale in the Authoritative School Climate Survey developed by the team of Professor Cornell of the University of Virginia, USA, consists of 15 items measuring two dimensions. The two dimensions are disciplinary structure and student support, with each item rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree); two items are reverse scored. The sum of the scores of all the items yields a total score for the ASCS, which ranges from 15 to 105 points. The higher the score, the higher the level of authoritative school climate. The internal consistency/reliability of the ASCS was determined using Cronbach's alpha, which was .78 for the disciplinary structure dimension and .85 for the student support dimension in the original ASCS. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .64 for the disciplinary structure dimension and .85 for the student support dimension.

**School Bullying Behaviors Scale.** This scale was adopted from the Bullying Participant Behaviors Questionnaire (BPBQ) developed by Demaray et al. of Northern Illinois University, USA (Demaraya, Summersb, Jenkinsc, & Beckerd, 2014), which consists of 50 items measuring five roles of students involved in bullying (including relational bullying, physical bullying and verbal bullying): bully, assistant, victim, defender, and outsider. The items were measured on a 5-point response scale (0 = never, 1 = 1 to 2 times, 2 = 3 to 4 times, 3 = 5 to 6 times, and 4 = 7 or more times). Only the bullying behavior and victim behavior subscales are reported in this study, with a total score ranging from 20 to 100 points. The higher the score, the higher the behavioral involvement in the role. The Cronbach's alpha was .88 for the bullying behavior subscale and 0.93 for the victim behavior subscale in the original BPBQ. The Cronbach's alpha for the two subscales in this study was 0.87.

**Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale.** We used the revised Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM) by Cheung and Hui of the University of Hong Kong (Cheung & Hui, 2003), which consists of 18 items measuring two dimensions: school belonging and rejection, which are both measured on 7-point Likert-type

scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). After recoding the rejection items, which were reverse-scored, the scores of all the items were summed to obtain a total score of school belonging, which ranged from 18 to 126 points. The higher the score, the higher the sense of belonging. The Cronbach's alpha of the original PSSM was 0.89. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 in this study.

**Procedures and Data Processing**

Trained psychology majors, doctoral students, and psychology teachers at the surveyed schools served as researchers. After obtaining the school leaders', class teachers', and students' informed consent, the researchers conducted group testing during class. The students answered anonymously and the completion time was about 20 minutes. The questionnaires were collected by the researchers after they were completed in the classroom. Data entry was performed using EpiData 3.1, and statistical processing was performed with SPSS 22.0. After the missing values of the data were processed, gender was dummy coded as male = 1 and female = 0.

**Results**

*Preliminary Analysis*

The Harman's single-factor test method was used to assess common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) by conducting a principal component analysis on all the items. Twelve factors were extracted by the un-rotated method, which explained 60.58 % of the variance. As the first factor explained 20.38 % of the variance, which is less than the critical value of 40 %, common method bias was not a problem in this study.

*Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations*

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the key study variables. Authoritative school climate was significantly and negatively correlated with school bullying,  $r = -0.26$ .

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the key variables (N = 326)*

|                                 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1        | 2        | 3 |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|---|
| 1. Authoritative school climate | 85.38    | 13.06     | –        |          |   |
| 2. Total bullying rate          | 32.95    | 10.32     | -0.26*** | –        |   |
| 3. School belonging             | 90.15    | 17.28     | 0.65***  | -0.24*** | – |

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Moderating Role of School Belonging*

Hierarchical regression was used to analyze the moderating role of school belonging on the associa-

tion of authoritative school climate with school bullying. First, authoritative school climate and school belonging were centered (i. e., score minus mean) and the product of the centered values of each variable was calculated. Second, the gender and age of the participants were entered as independent variables in the regression model (Model 1) as first-level predictors of school bullying (the dependent variable). Third, authoritative school climate and school belonging were entered into the regression model as second-level predictors (Model 2). Finally, the product term of school climate and school belonging was entered into the regression model as a third-level predictor of school bullying (Model 3). The regression results are shown in Table 2. After controlling for the covariates gender and age, authoritative school climate remained a significant predictor of school bullying (see Model 2,  $B = -0.13$ ; and Model 3,  $B = -0.17$ ), and this association was significantly moderated by school belonging,  $B = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.002$ ,  $p < .05$  (Model 3).

Table 2

*Net effects of an authoritative school climate and school belonging on school bullying*

| <i>Model</i> | <i>Predictor variable</i>                       | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>T</i> | $\Delta R^2$ |
|--------------|---|----------|-----------|----------|--------------|
| 1            | Gender  | 2.42     | 1.17      | 2.08*    | 0.02         |
|              | Age   | 0.89     | 0.99      | 0.90     |              |
| 2            | Gender  | 2.60     | 1.13      | 2.30*    | 0.07***      |
|              | Age   | 0.13     | 0.96      | 0.13     |              |
|              | Authoritative school climate                    | -0.13    | 0.06      | -2.35*   |              |
|              | School belonging                                | -0.08    | 0.04      | -1.97*   |              |
| 3            | Gender  | 2.36     | 1.13      | 2.09*    | 0.01*        |
|              | Age   | 0.22     | 0.96      | 0.23     |              |
|              | Authoritative school climate                    | -0.17    | 0.06      | -2.88**  |              |
|              | School belonging                                | -0.08    | 0.04      | -1.91    |              |
|              | Authoritative school climate × School belonging | -0.01    | 0.002     | -2.27*   |              |

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) was conducted to explore the moderating role of school belonging further. The analysis showed that an authoritative school climate had a significant negative association with school bullying among individuals with high school belonging ( $M + 1SD$ ),  $B = -0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas an authoritative school climate had no significant association with school bullying among individuals with low school belonging ( $M - 1SD$ ),  $B = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

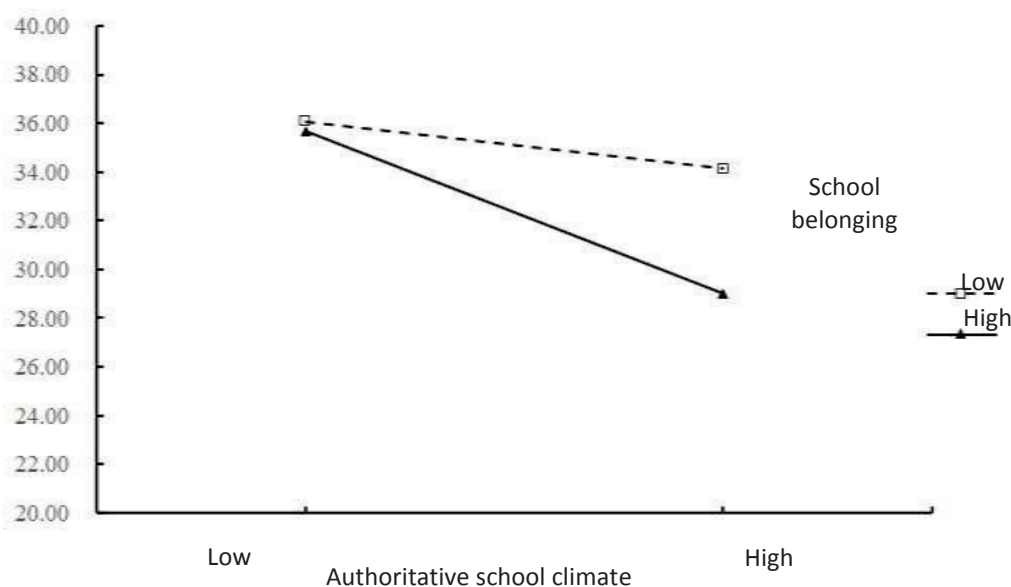


Figure 2. The moderating effect of school belonging on the association between authoritative school climate and school bullying

### Discussion

This study provides evidence for the positive effect of an authoritative school climate on reducing school bullying, which is consistent with previous studies that students exhibit less problem behaviors in an authoritative school climate (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015). School climate is a complex multi-dimensional concept; it proposes that school authorities can learn from the positive influence of authoritative parenting styles to foster the development of teenagers, authoritative school climate theory provides a valuable conceptual framework for analyzing the positive school climate that centers around two key domains of school climate. This study demonstrates that school belonging plays an important role in the association between bullying and an authoritative school climate. On average, students' sense of school belonging declined over time (Anderman, 2003), which means we need to take measures to increase the school belonging of middle-school students.

#### *Influence of an Authoritative School Climate on School Bullying*

This study showed that an authoritative school climate had a significant negative correlation with school bullying, which supports authoritative school climate theory. Students in an authoritative school climate who make mistakes have the opportunity to explain their behavior, and the punishment they receive may be modified if their reasons are justified. However, «where there's smoke, there's fire,» so school rules are applied equally to everyone. Studies

have shown that although security measures and strict policies regulations can have a deterrent effect on bullying, the consistent rules, fairness, and respect might more effectively reduce school bullying behavior (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016). Just as a person will abide by the law because he feels that the law is just (Taylor, Huang Yong, 2015), when students think the school is fair and just, they are more willing to abide by the school's rules. According to defiance theory, if punishment is seen as unjust or excessive, it will lead to defiance in the person be punished (Sherman, 1993). Sherman distinguishes between two kinds of rebellious behavior: «direct defiance» towards sanctioning agencies, and «indirect defiance», which is retaliation to sanctions that provoke anger in which the retaliation is aimed at an object (i. e., a person) that vicariously represents the institution which imposed the sanctions rather than at the institution itself. If there is an injustice or an improper regulation in the school's code of conduct or punishment, it will prompt some teenagers to challenge these rules indirectly and cause bullying.

«Student support» means that students believe their teachers and other school staff support and respect them, and are willing to help them. Adolescence is thought to be a period during which dependence on adults turns into self-reliance and self-efficacy, but this does not mean there is no demand for adults. Although there has been a change from early parent-child relationships, the positive development of adolescents still depends on relationships with adults (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). In the authoritative model, compliance

and psychological autonomy are not mutually exclusive, but are interdependent and interact to encourage children to respond in a pro-social manner, respect adult authority, and learn to think independently. In practice, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) which is the most researched and best-known bullying prevention program also emphasizes the role of adults to set firm limits on unacceptable behavior and have warmth for and a positive interest in their students, as two key principles (Olweus & Limber, 2010). A number of studies have demonstrated that this program effectively reduces the rate of bullying (Limber, Olweus, Wang, Masiello, & Breivik, 2018).

*Moderating Effect of School Belonging on the Relationship between Authoritative School Climate and Bullying*

This study examined variables that are crucial to the development of adolescents, and analyzed a mechanism that influences school bullying in an authoritative school climate – i. e., school belonging. The study found school belonging significantly modulated the influence of an authoritative school climate on school bullying behavior. That is, when school belonging was low, an authoritative school climate did not significantly influence school bullying; but when school belonging was high, an authoritative school climate had a significant negative association with school bullying.

A sense of belonging is a basic motivation of human beings that needs to be satisfied to achieve health, adjustment, and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students also need a sense of belonging to their school. School identification (connectedness, belonging, relatedness) and school climate are related but distinct concepts, and the former is a potentially important psychological variable, such as playing a mediator role between school climate and academic achievement (Reynolds, Lee, Turner, Bromhead, & Subasic, 2017). An authoritative school climate will influence school bullying, from the perspective of «discipline structure,» (a) only if there are clear anti-bullying rules and (b) students have a sufficiently high level of psychological connection with their school and school members that they agree with the rules and use them to regulate their behavior. From the perspective of «student support,» self-determination theory proposes that people need to have a sense of belonging and connectedness with others (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The first aspect of the need to belong is that individuals seek positive social interactions with others (Over, 2016). If a student's relationship with the person who imposes punishment is good, the student tends

to judge his/her behavior with a positive attitude and tends to comply with rather than defy the sanctions imposed (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

### Study Limitations

Due to the limitations of time and resources and other conditions, the present study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to make inferences about causality. In addition, the data on school bullying relied on self-reporting measures. Although these data should reflect the actual bullying and victimization of students, it is suggested that subsequent research consider the opinions of parents and teachers and examine the relationship between the variables more accurately and comprehensively.

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