

Psychology

Application of Yin-Yang Dialectical Psychotherapy A Case Study of Psychological Counseling for a Rebellious Adolescent

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Yin-Yang Dialectical Psychotherapy (YYDP) was developed by Profession Zheng, a Chinese psychologist. It conflates the traditional Chinese Yin-Yang theory with humanistic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and the philosophy of structuralism from Western cultures. YYDP is effective in addressing a wide range of psychological issues. This article is a case study of the use of YYDP in psychological counseling for an adolescent who was experiencing teenage rebellion with a risk of dropping out of school. YYDP successfully helped the client, and her parents develop more positive and balanced attitudes towards interpersonal relationships and supported the client in restoring normal school life.

Keywords: Yin-Yang Dialectical Psychotherapy; Psychological Counseling; Teenage Rebellion; Adolescent

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Introduction

TEENAGE rebellion is a developmental phase in an adolescent's life where they begin the transition into adulthood. The young rebel's seemingly defiant behavior and disregard for the existing parenting rules are actually a signal of their needs for independence and a separate identity (1). To some youngsters, rebellion in adolescence can be a normal part of growth; others may need special assistance services such as psychological counseling and guidance to go through this turbulent period.

Richang Zheng, a psychology professor at Beijing Normal University, developed Yin-Yang Dialectical Psychotherapy (YYDP), also known as Yin-Yang dialectical counseling and

guidance. It draws on the traditional Chinese doctrines of Yin-Yang and the Mean as well as humanistic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and the philosophy of structuralism from Western academia (2). YYDP also employs narrative therapy and solution-focused therapy, which are based on postmodernist psychology. YYDP is applicable to a wide variety of psychological issues, such as interpersonal conflicts, source-specific anxiety disorders and phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders (2). This article is a case study of the use of YYDP in psychological counseling and guidance to practically verify the validity of YYDP.

A Brief Overview of Yin-Yang Dialectical Psy-

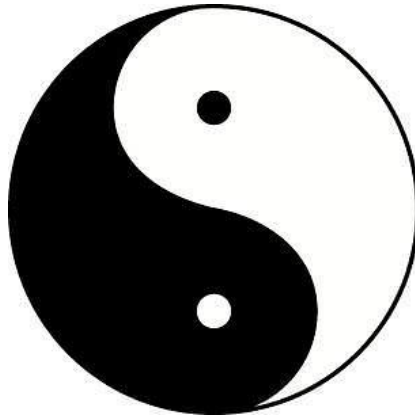


Figure 1. The Taiji Diagram.

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The Taiji Yin-Yang Theory

The traditional Taiji diagram (Figure 1) may appear simple; nevertheless, it contains broad and profound notions, providing a sophisticated summary of the essence of the cosmos, matter, life, and the spiritual realm. The black part of the diagram represents Yin, and the white part represents Yang, indicating that any of the myriad things in the world is a complex system and a unity of opposing forces or factors composed of multidimensional Yin and Yang, from the celestial body in the cosmos to an elementary particle, from nature to society, and from the physical to spiritual worlds (3).

Furthermore, the diagram demonstrates the incorporation of black in the white, and vice versa, signaling the complementary nature of Yin and Yang. It implies that good and evil, advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss, and true and false co-exist in all things. In addition, the black and white parts of Taiji resemble two moving fish, indicating that contrasting Yin and Yang are mutually transformable into each other, with two small circles representing internal causes of change that respond to external conditions. The S-shaped dividing line between the black and white marks the interaction and dynamic balance between Yin and Yang.

To recap, Yin and Yang coexist in myriad things in the world; Yin contains Yang, and vice versa; they are opposing yet complementary forces, constantly interacting with each other. The three Yin-Yang principles agree with dialectical thought (3).

The Methodology of YYDP

YYDP uses the Taiji Yin-Yang theory as its main theoretical underpinning. After establishing smooth communication with the client, the therapist begins to help them develop a Yin-Yang-based dialectical way of thinking. With Yin-Yang dialectical thinking habits, they are likely to modify their thinking patterns and view themselves, others, and occurrences more positively, thus regaining positive life experience and getting rid of psychological problems (2).

“Sour-Grape” and “Sweet-Lemon” Attitudes and Three Perspectives

To make Yin-Yang dialectical thought more understandable to clients, the therapist often cites the “sour-grape” and “sweet-lemon” attitudes during the counseling. In Aesop’s Fables, the fox who states that the grapes that he cannot reach are undesirable is seen as an illustration of those people who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain. From a psychoanalytic perspective, adopting the sour-grape attitude can serve as a psychological defense mechanism. In fact, grapes can be sweet or sour. If the grapes are unreachable, assuming they are sweet will lead to frustration and suffering, while assuming they are sour will not result in much failure (2).

As opposed to the “sour-grape” attitude, with which the individual can doubt the value of what they cannot reach after making sufficient effort, the “sweet-lemon” attitude allows them to evaluate those issues they cannot temporarily get away with in a relatively more positive way. It is well recognized in positive psychology that psychological healthiness is due largely to one’s readiness to understand and accept reality. Zheng emphasizes positive attitudes toward real-world situations as preconditions for mental health. If the individual feels the taste of the lemon acceptable or preferable, what’s wrong with them seeing the lemon as sweet?

In addition, YYDP develops the three Taiji principles into “three perspectives” that are easier to memorize and more operational for the client: the holistic perspective, “some good days and some bad days,” the relative perspective, “the good might exist in the bad,” and the developmental perspective, “what is bad for now might turn out to be the good in the future.” Thus, the “three perspectives” along with the “sour-grape” and “sweet-lemon” attitudes become a simplified interpretation of YYDP’s rationale that combines Taiji Yin-Yang theory, dialectical thought, and humanistic theory-based positive psychology (2).

Basic Procedures of YYDP Counseling and Guidance

First, develop trustworthy relationships between the therapist

and the client. In an assuring setting, the client is more ready to confide in the therapist about their issues with themselves, others, and the environment. The therapist must listen carefully and understand the client empathetically. Every expression and motion of the therapist should contribute to the client's perception of the former's concern and sympathy for their mental distress. Second, familiarize the client with the tenets of YYDP by delivering the "three perspectives" and the "sour-grape" and "sweet-lemon" attitudes through theoretical interpretation, illustration, and discussion. Third, give the client assignments to complete after each therapy session. The client is encouraged to apply the Yin-Yang dialectical theory to analyze everyday occurrences and events covered in the media so that they can progressively develop dialectical thinking skills such as acceptance, substitution, and transformation through day-to-day practice. Whenever the client shows reasonable comprehension of the Yin-Yang dialectical theory, the therapist should give timely recognition and appreciation to reinforce their positive thinking tendency (2).

Application Scope of YYDP

YYDP is applicable to general interpersonal conflicts and psychological problems. YYDP significantly therapeutically affects depression, suicidal ideation, source-specific anxiety disorders, and phobia. However, individuals plagued by these disorders in high degrees should also receive concomitant relaxation and desensitization training. Individuals suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder typically have the disposition to pursue absolute perfection and take things too seriously. YYDP has extraordinary efficacy for this group as it can help change their extreme thinking tendency. Conducting attention-shifting exercises concurrently can enhance its effect even further. It is noteworthy that YYDP has its limitations, like any other therapy. It is not suitable for patients with severe schizophrenia, the mentally retarded, or young children (2).

A Case of the Use of YYDP

Background of the Client

Wang, the client, was a 14-year-old girl (an eighth grader) at X Middle School, referred to the author by a separate psychological counseling institution. Her father, who had been a middle-rank civil servant but later started his own business, was running a trading company. Her mother, who had graduated from a prestigious university, was serving as a middle-rank civil servant. The economic status of the family was good. There was no history of mental illness in the family. Wang herself had no experience with critical disease and was assessed as generally healthy in the recent physical examination.

Wang first played truant in 2022 after a conflict with her classmates. In the spring semester of 2023, Wang had a terrible fight with them and was not happy with her class teacher's handling of it, which she saw as extremely unfair. Subsequently, her relationships with peers further deteriorated, and she discontinued her studies in March. It took much persuasion by her parents to get her back to school in September, but she stopped schooling again because of her poor relationships with classmates. Since then, Wang has been lingering at home, playing games,

and watching videos all day long. Her parents repeatedly urged her to return to school, but Wang disregarded her parents' requests.

The therapist obtained some background information on Wang's parents through interviews. Her father was doing well in his business and was quite self-righteous in family affairs, but he had no idea how to cope with his daughter's defiant behavior. Due to his dissatisfaction with his wife's dominance and arrogance, and amid the constant arguments with her over their daughter's issues, the father had proposed divorce several times. Because of her own superior educational background, Wang's mother looked down upon her husband's extended family, which triggered a lot of fights between the couple. She was overwhelmingly worried about her daughter and totally at a loss for what to do. Despite participating in specific course training on teenage mental health, she found that it had little effect.

Chief Complaint, Evaluation, and Diagnosis

The chief complaints included gravely defiant emotions against parents, withdrawal from interpersonal communication, being in low spirits and irritable, poor sleep quality, and a loss of interest in learning.

Wang scored 52 points on the self-rating anxiety scale (SAS), which indicated a mild level of anxiety (4). Her score on the self-rating depression scale (SDS) was 58, showing a low level of depression (5).

Based on Wang's self-statement, preliminary observation by the therapist, psychological assessment results, and the medical history of Wang and her family, her problems were preliminarily diagnosed as a mild psychological imbalance, a consequence of interpersonal communication difficulties as well as teenage rebellion against parents. Emotional disorders induced by interpersonal relationship barriers are major factors in psychological health issues (6). The client was aware of her own problems and displayed a willingness to cooperate in the counseling.

Counseling Protocol

Goals and procedures were established for the counseling after a full discussion with the client and her parents. The near-term goal was to help the client alleviate negative emotions, gain proper self-knowledge as well as knowledge about psychological and physical changes in adolescence, and enhance social skills in order for her to resume school life smoothly. The long-term goal was to support the client in developing rational reasoning and discrimination abilities in order for her to build strong character and a healthy mentality.

The counseling process was divided into three sessions. Session one focused on establishing the counseling framework. Its main components included the evaluation of the client's psychological status, identification of problems, preliminary diagnosis, and determination of objectives for the next session. The counselor provided YYDP-based counseling and guidance to the parents in session two, aiming to enhance their ability to improve family relationships and foster their awareness of the importance of familial factors in adolescent development. Session three served as the reinforcement process, in which the client and her parents were required to recall the principles and tech-

niques central to YYDP and apply them to resolve their problems.

The Specific Processes of Counseling

Session One

Objectives: Acquire background information about the client; create trustworthy relationships with the client to facilitate her release of emotions and pressures; identify and analyze the main problems; and formulate goals for the counseling.

Methods: Psychological test; intake interview; attending.

Steps: (i) Obtaining basic information about the client by helping her fill out the registration form; (ii) creating a relaxing, friendly atmosphere via sincere, respectful conversation with the client on an equal footing; (iii) administering SAS and SDS tests to the client; (iv) acquiring more detailed information about the client through the intake interview; (v) ascertaining the causes of the client's present personality traits and coming up with the evaluation and diagnosis; (vi) determining the main problems to be solved and developing goals and protocol for the counseling along with the client.

Summary of the Client's Statement: Wang's mother had an unconscionable sense of superiority and saw the origin of Wang's father, who was from a rural area, as inferior. She looked down upon Wang's grandparents and never joined them on major holidays, though she often paid visits to her own parents. Wang stressed that the frequent arguments of her parents made her feel a strong sense of insecurity, which stood out as a key point of her statement. She was once absent from school for a week in 7th grade after she had a conflict with her classmates and received a reprimand from her class teacher, which she thought was unfair. To her surprise, her parents refrained from quarreling with each other for the entire week as their focus shifted to her absence from school. From then on, Wang would stop going to school whenever her parents started arguing. Over time, both her confrontation with parents and her absenteeism exacerbated. Nevertheless, she did not hate going to school; what she worried about was her classmates' remarks about her absenteeism and the likelihood of her lagging behind in the wake of all these disruptions. From the bottom of her heart, Wang hoped that her parents could live a compatible marital life and that she herself could develop a friendly relationship with her classmates and gain positive comments from her class teacher.

Outcomes: The use of techniques such as attending and empathetic response successfully elicited the client's desire to confide, which helped gather sufficient information for identifying the causes of her psychological and emotional issues.

Assignment: The client was required to create a personal growth profile.

Session Two

Objectives: The analytical results of session one demonstrated that the client's problems are attributable largely to parental factors. This session focused on changing the attitudes of

Wang's parents by applying the YYDP and arousing their attention to their responsibilities for Wang's problematic behavior.

Methods: YYDP; interpretation as an influencing skill.

Steps: (i) The therapist showed Wang's parents her self-reported growth profile to demonstrate the impact of their behavior on her emotions and psychology; (ii) a conversation about the relation between the home environment and teenagers healthy development was made with the couple; (iii) YYDP, and particularly the "three perspectives" and the "sour-grape" and "sweet-lemon" attitudes as its easy-to-understand components, were introduced to help them develop an appropriate understanding of themselves and their partner. The couple was suggested to use the YYDP theory to raise questions as follows: "What are my merits and shortcomings from a holistic point of view?" "Are there any advantages to my shortcomings from a relative perspective?" "How should I overcome my shortcomings from a developmental perspective?" Also, "What are the benefits of my partner's merits to me?" "Are there any advantages to his or her shortcomings?" "Will my partner change in the future?" "Have I been harsh and unfair to my partner?"

Outcomes: By asking open-ended questions, the therapist had Wang's parents recall those episodes that had profound impacts on their child's emotional development. The YYDP theory became an effective tool for the couple to spot their inappropriate attitudes towards each other. Interpretation, as an influencing skill in psychological counseling, was successfully employed to make the couple realize the severe, negative effects of their relationship on Wang's psychological state. Through the counseling, the couple gained a deeper understanding of the causes of their daughter's problem.

Assignment: Wang's parents were required to practice the YYDP theory in their day-to-day communication and interaction with their family and come up with a list of each other's merits.

Session Three

Objectives: Help the client to discern the source of her problems—her extreme, biased attitudes towards people around her (largely due to the familial influence); apply the YYDP theory to rectify her negative mentality about peers and teachers, boost her social confidence, and encourage her to resume school; and clarify the accountabilities of Wang's parents for her problematic behavior and necessary actions.

Methods: YYDP; participatory skills.

Steps: (i) The therapist checked on the homework of Wang's parents and used their lists of each other's merits in the further elaboration on the YYDP theory for Wang and her parents; (ii) Wang was guided to analyze her biased judgments on classmates and teachers and reflect on their detrimental effects on her school life; (iii) Participatory skills were adopted to instigate open, free exchanges between Wang and her parents to eliminate the former's defiant attitudes towards the latter.

Summary of Wang's and Her Parents' Statements of Recent Improvements:

- Wang was ready to resume her studies at school after witnessing the improvement in her parents' relationships, which augmented her sense of security. The YYDP's "three perspectives" and the "sour-grape" and "sweet-lemon" attitudes were beneficial for her developing an impartial, balanced view of the school environment. She was determined to have more active communication with parents to boost mutual understanding.
- Wang's mother admitted to being responsible for her daughter's discontinuation of school and now began to reflect on her social interactions. She decided to study more of the YYDP theory and apply it in her family life.
- Wang's father perceived significant improvement in the home atmosphere amid the counseling. Now his wife became more considerate and sensible, and his daughter was emotionally stable and willing to resume school.

The Efficacy of the Intervention

Wang's Self-reported Evaluation

The counseling based on YYDP makes me more confident, tolerant, and emotionally stable. The YYDP theory helps me stay cheerful. Now I can view my interactions with classmates and teachers more rationally and objectively. My relationships with my parents have also substantially improved.

The Therapist's Evaluation

With the progression of counseling, the client has undergone a remarkable transformation. First, she becomes more cheerful and optimistic after attaining a more objective and positive understanding of herself. Second, she is learning to look at the external environment, including peers and teachers, in an analytical and multidimensional way. Third, her teenage rebellion is properly managed with the improvement in her communication with her parents and in her parents' marital status. Most importantly, she is more than happy to go back to school.

Post-Counseling Psychological Test Results

At the end of the counseling, Wang's score on the SAS scale was reduced to 46 points, and her score on the SDS scale was reduced to 45 points. Wang's anxiety and depression levels significantly decreased.

Conclusion

It takes an individual a lifelong effort to modify their personality and character, developed in childhood and adolescence (7). Teenage rebellion is germane to family factors and necessitates serious management, including guidance. Familial conflicts and ill relationships with classmates and the class teacher induced psychological problems in the teenager in the present case. Luckily, the client and her parents are receptive to professional counseling and guidance and fully engaged in the whole counseling process. The use of YYDP in this case has achieved its intended objectives. ■

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