

Academic disengagement more common for US teens than Chinese

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In the United States, adolescence is a time when many teens become less interested in academics. A new longitudinal study has found that this disengagement is greater for American teens than for Chinese teens.

The study, by psychologists at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, appears in the July/August 2009 issue of [Child Development](#), a journal. It may help explain why Chinese children consistently outperform Americans in academic areas such as math.

The researchers followed more than 800 Americans and Chinese from 7th to 8th grade. The students completed questionnaires four times over two years, reporting on how much they valued achievement and how they viewed mastery (specifically, whether they liked to do difficult work in a particular subject). They also reported on their use of constructive learning strategies and how much time they spent on schoolwork outside of school. The youths' grades also were collected.

American youths reported being less motivated academically as they made their way through 7th and 8th grades. Over time, they placed less value on achievement, grew less concerned with mastery, used fewer constructive learning strategies, and spent less time studying. In contrast, Chinese youths' reports suggested that the value they placed on achievement, their use of constructive learning strategies, and the time they spent studying stayed stable.

"This may be because in China, a higher priority is placed on learning because it is seen as a key to future success and is considered a moral undertaking," explains Qian Wang, assistant professor of psychology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the study's lead author.

The study also found that both American and Chinese students became less concerned in middle school with mastering schoolwork. "This decline in both countries may reflect a poor fit between children's developing psychological needs and school settings," adds Wang.

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 4, The Motivational Landscape of Early Adolescence in the United States and China: A Longitudinal Investigation by Wang, Q (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Pomerantz, EM (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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