Introduction: What Do We Mean When We Talk About Good Parenting?

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What do we mean when we talk about "good parenting"? How do we decide whether a parent or other caregivers are doing things the "right way"? These are important questions not only for parents and caregivers who are doing the hard work of childrearing but also for professionals who support parents and caregivers – teachers, doctors, therapists, and researchers. Everyone involved in childrearing, either directly as a parent or caregiver, or indirectly as a scholar or teacher, wants to do the best job they can for the children in their care. This can often lead to anxiety and uncertainty about parenting techniques and approaches (Joyce, 2015), and this anxiety is only made worse when parenting experts or other parents present a narrow definition of what counts as "acceptably good" parenting.

One of the main obstacles in the way of helping parents and caregivers understand what constitutes "good" parenting is that most of the research on the topic has focused on European-American, middle-class, mostly White parents and children (e.g., Baumrind, 1996). Because these families constitute the majority of research participants, the findings and conclusions based on their data have become known as what we might call the "gold standard of parenting." Many scholars have made the mistake of attempting to extend this assumed gold standard beyond the population to which it should apply (Chao, 1994). Our goal for this edited volume is to demonstrate that too often, psychological scientists equate "good" parenting with the attitudes and parenting behaviors of White,

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middle-class Americans rather than recognizing that good parenting and childrearing are whatever lead to culturally valued outcomes for the child (Weisner, 2002).

There are some empirical studies that have attempted to incorporate the way that culture influences parenting, childrearing, and child outcomes; however, many of these studies, while making valiant attempts to extend our cultural understanding, unfortunately too often reduce culture to nothing more than a quasi- or semi-independent variable. This approach, which some scholars characterize as a "box" approach (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002), results in researchers and other scholars categorizing different cultural and ethnic groups into boxes that attempt to encapsulate the entirety of culture's influence on childrearing (e.g., Fuligni & Pederson, 2002; Shek & Chan, 1998). While perhaps better than ignoring cultural influences all together, these box approaches are incapable of taking into account the flexibility, motivations, and consequences of cultural influences on childrearing and parenting. This leads us to ask ourselves: how can any parenting or childrearing approach or technique be understood or critiqued unless the parents' childrearing beliefs and behaviors are fully situated within the appropriate cultural context?

The Importance of the Cultural Context

For decades, Baumrind's (1996) parenting research and consequent parenting types (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, indifferent/neglectful, permissive) have provided the foundation for parenting and childrearing research in the United States. Many parenting and childrearing experts and scholars continue to argue that authoritative parenting (in which parents and caregivers are warm and kind and demonstrate high levels of acceptance toward the child while also maintaining clear and high expectations for the child's behavior) is the best, healthiest, and most likely parenting type to lead to high levels of adjustment in a child (see Baumrind, 1996; Steinberg, 2001).

While there is empirical evidence to support some of these claims, they are based on the beliefs held by White, middle-class Americans. This limitation in the scholarly literature is not a result only of the characteristics of the participants who have provided the vast majority of the data for these studies. It is also due to the way these studies define healthy adjustment and desired outcomes for the children reared in an authoritative manner, based wholly on Western, mostly US-supported cultural beliefs about how children should behave (Chao, 1994). Researchers and scholars who have broken beyond the constraints of these Westernized ideals of childrearing have documented that authoritative parenting does not lead to the same kind of culturally valued outcomes in children across different ethnic and cultural groups (Chao, 1994, 1995, 2001; Halgunseth, Ispa, Rudy, 2006; Mason, Walker-Barnes, Tu, Simons, & Martinez-Arrue, 2004).

There are various reasons why the type of childrearing that leads to valued outcomes among US parents is not the type of childrearing that leads to valued outcomes among other groups. What is considered a valued outcome is going to vary,

sometimes drastically, from culture to culture and group to group. For instance, Chinese-American parents tend to value children who are well-trained, which results from different types of parenting and childrearing behaviors than European-American parents in the United States engage in (Chao, 1994, 1995, 2001). Different ethnic and cultural groups value different types of child outcomes, leading the child's caregivers to engage in the types of behaviors that will elicit those culturally valued outcomes. For example, Black teenagers in the United States respond to greater levels of parental control with more feelings of love and care than do White or Hispanic teenagers (Mason et al., 2004).

These differences in culturally valued child outcomes, and the way that parents and caregivers will engage in different types of childrearing techniques to elicit the valued outcomes, make it clear that trying to define "good" parenting is a quixotic quest – and, really, a quixotic quest that is culturally blind at best (Berry, 2013) and scientifically imperialistic at worst (Ashdown & Buck, 2018). Too often, relying on research and theory based on Westernized beliefs leads to comparisons between US culture (or, perhaps, another Westernized, White, middle-income sample) and some other non-Westernized group. Unfortunately, this almost always results (albeit often implicitly) in the non-Westernized approach to childrearing being classified and discussed as deficient in some way (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).

Luckily, some researchers and scholars have recently begun making an argument for why culture should be included in scholarship about parenting and childrearing and that the role of culture in this work should be explanatory. That is, that culture should not be a box into which we place different groups of people but a mechanism to help us understand what child outcomes are valued among a particular cultural group and how parents and caregivers engage in childrearing to elicit those outcomes (Rogoff, 2016; Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). Until we stop thinking about the cultural characteristics of a person (or group of people) as things that are static and uniform and that can fit in neat little boxes, we will continue to ignore the explanatory power of culture – not only in the field of parenting and childrearing but in all aspects of psychology and other social sciences (Rogoff, 2016; Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). To avoid this, we must do a better job of defining and examining culture as something that is vibrant, flexible, and fundamentally political and historical (Gjerde, 2004).

As the editors of this volume, we argue that parenting and childrearing are themselves cultural practices and that cultural beliefs and attitudes are already embedded in the behaviors, beliefs, and techniques that parents and caregivers utilize with the children in their care. The outcomes that parents and caregivers attempt to elicit from their children are culturally expected and valued; hence, the way that adults approach childrearing is also going to be culturally expected and valued. This argument removes us from the incorrect and inappropriate approach of trying to identify some type of mythical "gold standard" of parenting that works in all places with all children and for all parents. Instead, it refocuses us toward an attempt to understand parenting and childrearing as inherently cultural in nature and guides us to center parenting practices within the cultural context in which they occur – including the political and historical powers at play (Gjerde, 2004).

We have asked those who contributed chapters to our volume to take this approach. Each chapter in this volume focuses on one or two specific cultural contexts and the way(s) that parents and caregivers engage in particular practices to elicit culturally valued outcomes in their children. We have recruited scholars who have deep and appropriate scholarly experience within the cultures about which they write and who have prepared high-quality and valuable information for our readers. This volume is divided into five different parts, each one containing various chapters that focus on how parents engage with their children at different ages and life stages in specific cultural contexts. These contexts include Rwanda, Bolivia, China, South Asia, Guatemala, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, the Navajo Nation, Egypt, immigrants and refugees in Australia, and various communities in the United States (e.g., a fundamentalist Mormon community, transgender children, Asian Indian Hindu families, alloparenting, and grandparenting).

This Book

Part I: Infancy and Toddlerhood

Taking a chronological approach, the first part of the book focuses on the way that parents and caregivers engage in childrearing practices that elicit culturally valued outcomes in infants and toddlers. There are three chapters in this section of the book that focus on the cultural contexts of Rwanda, African refugees in Australia, and the Navajo Nation. In chapter "Rwandan Infant Caregiving: Promoting a Culture of Peace", *Joyce Yip Green* discusses some of her empirical mixed-method research, framed within an ecocultural model of development, to explore how Rwandan infant caregivers support peacebuilding and Rwandan cultures among the infants in their care.

In chapter "Parenting in an Uncertain World: African Humanitarian Migrant Resettlement in Victoria, Australia" , *Corine Rivalland* writes about the ways in which refugees from Sub-Sahara Africa now living in Australia are adapting their parenting approaches to meet a new, and often challenging, social and political landscape. Finally, in chapter "Understanding Navajo Parents' Beliefs about Cradling and Early Mobility Practices", *Cathron Donaldson, Sara Clancey,* and *Maureen Russell* write about the use of cradleboards and modern baby walkers among Navajo parents living on a Navajo reservation in the United States.

Part II: Childhood

In the largest section of the book, we present six chapters that focus on how parents and caregivers engage in childrearing practices that support and elicit culturally valued outcomes from their middle and older children. These chapters include

fascinating work from the cultural contexts of the Tsimane of Bolivia, China, the United States, South Asia, Asian Indian Hindu parents living in the United States, and Australia.

Chapter "You Don't Have to Know Where Your Kids Are, Just Where They Aren't: Exploring Free-Range Parenting in the Bolivian Amazon", written by *Helen Elizabeth Davis* and *Elizabeth Cashdan*, presents interesting data and conclusions about gender differences in how and whether Tsimane parents in Bolivia support or inhibit their children's spatial explorations. *Nicole B. Capobianco* and *Deborah L. Best*, in chapter "Academic Socialization and Parenting Practices: A Comparison among Chinese and American Preschoolers", discuss some of the similarities and differences in the ways that Chinese parents and American parents socialize and prepare their children for academic success. Chapter "Parenting and Academic Socialization of Young Children: Sociocultural Context for Early Childhood Development in South Asian Families", written by *Ziarat Hossain* and *Giovanna Eisenberg*, and chapter "Unspoken Expectations: Children's Academic Achievement in the Beliefs of Asian Indian Hindu Parents in the United States", written by *Hema Ganapathy-Coleman*, also focus on how parents and caregivers prepare and support their children in academic endeavors. Hossain and Eisenberg write about families living in South Asia (which they define as Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), while Ganapathy-Coleman focuses on Asian Indian Hindu families living in and around Baltimore in the United States.

In chapter "Chinese Parenting and the Collective Desirable Path through Socio-Political Changes", *Ziwei Qi* and *Yuxiang Du* present the framework of the Collective Desirable Path and how this helps us understand the changes in Chinese parenting over the last few decades of significant socio-political changes in China. Finally, in chapter "Parenting Far from the Tree: Supportive Parents of Young Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Children in the United States", *Sally Campbell Galman* discusses some of her ethnographic work with US parents and their young (ages 3–11 years) transgender children.

Part III: Adolescence

The three chapters in this section discuss the ways that parents interact with teenagers to elicit culturally valued outcomes in three distinct contexts: Guatemala, Namibia, and a polygamous Mormon community in the United States. *Judith L. Gibbons*, *Erin E. Freiburger*, and *Katelyn Poelker*, in chapter "Parenting Adolescent Girls and Boys in Guatemala", review the literature on gender roles in Guatemala and how particular parenting practices influence adolescent gender behaviors there. In chapter "Parenting into Two Worlds: How Practices of Kinship Fostering Shape Development in Namibia, Southern Africa", *Jill Brown*, *Abril Rangel-Pacheco*, *Olivia Kennedy*, and *Ndumba Kamwanyah* discuss cultural influences and consequences of the practice of kinship fostering in Namibia. In the last chapter of this section, chapter "Theological Parenthood, Demographic Restraints,

and the Making of the Good Polygamous Teenager", *William Jankowiak* talks about parental beliefs and efforts toward making a "good" polygamous teenager in a fundamentalist Mormon community.

Part IV: Emerging Adulthood

The theory of emerging adulthood has attracted a lot of attention from developmental psychologists in the last 20 years, though often the vital role of culture in shaping emerging adulthood has been ignored (Arnett, 2011). In chapter "Emerging Adulthoods: A Micro-Cultural Approach to Viewing the Parent-Child Relationship", *Amanda N. Faherty* and *Deeya Mitra* remind us how important it is to center culture when discussing the way that emerging adults and their parents interact, and they provide two examples (one of how filial responsibility operates in US ethnic-racial groups and the other of decision making in Indian emerging adults) to support their argument. Chapter "Parents and Emerging Adults in India" has *Achu Johnson Alexander* and *Vandana Chauhan* expanding upon the role of culture in emerging adulthood by focusing on parents and their emerging adult children in India.

Sarah Almalki, in chapter "Parenting Practices in Saudi Arabia: Gender-Role Modeling", extends Gibbons et al.'s discussion of gender roles among adolescents in Guatemala by writing about gender role modeling among emerging adults in Saudi Arabia. Finally, *Hani M. Henry* and *Mai Elwy* explain the influences of *takafol* (i.e., mutual benefit) and other family rituals in the way that Egyptian parents interact with their young adult children in chapter "Egyptian Rearing Practices: Takafol and Observance of Family Rituals".

Part V: Other Types of Childrearing

Though the majority of the chapters in this book focus on the way that biological parents interact with and rear their biological children (Chapter "Theological Parenthood, Demographic Restraints, and the Making of the Good Polygamous Teenager" is an obvious exception), we recognize that there are many caregivers other than biological parents who play a role in childrearing. We are also aware that in some cultural contexts throughout the world, biological parents do not have the main (or even any) role in rearing their biological children (Bentley & Mace, 2009). We have tried to be sensitive to this by using language here that includes parenting, childrearing, and caregivers. We have also included three chapters in this section that discuss how non-parental adults play an important role in childrearing and instilling in children culturally valued characteristics.

In chapter "Reimagining the Village: Alloparenting and Community Involvement among the Childfree", *Shelly Volsche* writes about how "voluntarily childfree" adults have a role to play in an evolutionary explanation of parenting and how

these alloparents create the truism that it takes a village to raise a child. *Harry Gardiner*, in chapter "Grandparenting Across Cultures", reviews what we do and do not know about the role that grandparents play in childrearing. Finally, *Hilary Monk*, in chapter "Australian Intergenerational Families Valuing the Great Outdoors: A Tapestry of Children's Cultural Learning through Specific Parenting Practices", presents and discusses some of the qualitative data she has collected from three different intergenerational families in Australia. By interviewing children, parents, and grandparents, she is able to explain some of the ways that values are transmitted across generations

Conclusion

Here, we end our chapter by inviting you to begin reading the other chapters in this volume. Many of the authors have provided further readings at the end of their chapters to help support your further exploration of these important topics. At the end of the book, you'll also find a glossary with the terms that the authors of the chapters have identified as less commonly known. Finally, each author has provided a biographical sketch at the end of their chapters. Please take advantage of all of these aspects of the book to support your thinking as you read these important chapters.

Our hope is that, after reading the 20 chapters that follow, you'll be convinced that a hunt for the mythical gold standard of parenting is time and effort ultimately misdirected…and probably wasted. We hope you'll be convinced that the only way to truly understand parenting practices around the world is to take culture out of a box, accept that parenting is, itself, a cultural practice and that parents are motivated to do what they do in order to elicit culturally valued outcomes from their children. And if you came to this book already convinced of these things, we hope we've armed you with even more evidence you can use to convince others!

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