
An International Perspective on Parenting and Children's Adjustment

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Abstract

This chapter provides an international perspective on parenting and children's adjustment, which can inform understanding of the development of minority children. It begins with an historical overview of this area of inquiry, which has been conducted primarily with North American and Western European samples, and presents two of the main theories that have guided research attempting to understand children's development in cultural contexts. The chapter then describes current key research questions as well as measurement and methodological issues in adopting an international perspective. The bulk of the chapter reviews empirical research on links between parenting and children's adjustment in a variety of domains (socioemotional adjustment, behavioral adjustment, academic achievement, moral development, social relationships) around the world. The chapter then highlights universal versus culture-specific mechanisms through which parenting has been found to relate to children's adjustment. Finally, the chapter suggests policy implications and directions for future research. Throughout, the review of theories and empirical research is not comprehensive but rather illustrative, attempting to provide an international framework in which to conceptualize parenting and children's adjustment.

Historical Overview and Theoretical Perspectives

Historically, the majority of research on parenting and children's adjustment has been conducted in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Arnett's (2008) analysis of the research participants in the most influential journals in six sub-disciplines of psychology from 2003 to 2007 revealed that 96 % of the participants were from

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Western industrialized countries, with 68 % from the United States alone. Thus, 96 % of the research participants in these studies were from countries with only 12 % of the world's population (Henrich et al. 2010). These findings are corroborated by analyses of other journals conducted in different ways. For example, in a review of developmental studies published between 1986 and 2005, only 1.8 % involved Central or South American countries (Ribas 2010). This historical underrepresentation in the research literature of populations from most of the world's countries is concerning because findings from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies may not generalize to the majority of the world's population, which does not live in such countries (Henrich et al. 2010). Despite this historical underrepresentation, recent efforts by professional organizations, universities, and bodies such as the United States National Academy of Sciences have focused on promoting international collaborative research and increasing international representativeness of study samples and researchers in the social sciences.

In the past, studies that included samples from underrepresented countries tended to take a deficit approach in which findings from the minority world of WEIRD countries were used as the gold standard against which findings from the majority world were compared and often interpreted as lacking (particularly in psychology, not as much in anthropology). For example, parent and child behaviors observed in low- and middle-income countries were often compared unfavorably to parenting in high-income countries. This has posed a lasting weakness in the developmental research base because indigenous childrearing practices and aspects of child adjustment historically were treated not as crucial to scientific knowledge in their own right but instead as confirming or failing to confirm theories that had been developed primarily using middle-class European American norms (Nsamenang and Lo-Oh 2010). Scholars have increasingly recognized the importance not only of including individuals from many countries as participants in research studies, but also of having native researchers lead scientific

study of parenting and children's adjustment to be able to bring an emic perspective to the research questions, methods, and interpretation of results.

Two particularly notable theories have guided research on children's development as situated in broad cultural contexts: Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model and Super and Harkness's (1986) developmental niche model. First, Bronfenbrenner's theory places child development within a set of systems ranging from proximal processes (e.g., direct parent-child interactions) to more distal processes (e.g., sociopolitical contexts and cultural beliefs), which are situated within chronosystems that acknowledge the importance of historical time and cohort effects. One of the primary contributions of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the idea that parent-child interactions are embedded in larger ecological and cultural contexts that can have a profound effect on parents, children, and their ways of interacting together.

Second, Super and Harkness's (1986) developmental niche model emphasizes how culture shapes children's development through physical and social environments, childrearing customs and practices, and culturally-influenced beliefs, attitudes, and values about parenting and children's development. This framework is built from the understanding that different parts of cultural systems influence one another such that modes of childrearing stem from opportunities and constraints in the larger society. For example, in agrarian societies, children tend to be taught responsibility and obedience from an early age so that they can contribute to the family's livelihood through household chores. Their framework also acknowledges similarities in human development across the widely varied contexts in which children are reared; for example, children everywhere must learn to walk, to get along with their peers, and to contribute in meaningful ways to their communities.

Current Research Questions

Individuals in different countries conceptualize positive parenting and child adjustment in ways that vary in some respects by cultural context.

Parents in all countries share goals of rearing their children to be successful, competent members of their respective societies, but what parents believe is necessary to achieve these goals and what defines success and competence varies around the world. Current research questions center on between-country differences in parenting and children's adjustment, mechanisms linking parenting with children's adjustment in different countries, and understanding universality versus cultural specificity in developmental processes.

Research Measurement and Methodology

Many measurement and methodology issues in international research on parenting and children's adjustment are the same as in other areas of psychological and developmental inquiry. For example, researchers must attend to questions about how samples should be drawn such as whether it is possible to recruit a nationally representative sample and, if time and budget constraints make national representativeness unfeasible, how a convenience sample can be constructed to be as generalizable as possible. Issues of measurement reliability and validity are important to all research, particularly if measures are being used for the first time with new populations. Decisions must be made about the mode of data collection (e.g., whether to use observations, parent reports, or direct assessments of children).

Despite these similarities, international research on parenting and children's adjustment faces several measurement and methodology issues that differ from issues in research with just a single population in one locale (Bornstein and Lansford 2013). One of the most pressing issues is whether to import into one country measures that have been developed in another or to develop new measures in the new country. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. Adopting measures developed elsewhere has the advantage of building on previous research and making it easier to compare findings from the

new population with findings from previous populations, perhaps identifying universal aspects of parenting. However, taking an emic approach and developing new measures instead of importing already existing ones has the advantage of being able to capture aspects of parenting and children's adjustment that may be unique to the new context and therefore not covered on measures imported from elsewhere. If measures are imported from a different country, then translation from the original language to the target language, back-translation from the target language to the original language to identify problems in the translation, and a process of cultural adaptation to check for inappropriate items are necessary (Erkut 2010). Hambleton and Zenisky (2010) described 25 criteria useful in evaluating the quality of translated and adapted measures. For example, does a particular item have the same or highly similar meaning in the two languages? Are there differences between the two versions in the use of metaphors, idioms, or colloquialisms? Are the format of the items and required tasks equally familiar in the two languages? Using these methods, one might be able to tap into universal constructs using measures that are culturally-tailored.

A second issue involves establishing measurement equivalence or invariance across countries, a process meant to assure that constructs are being measured in the same way in different groups. Vandenberg and Lance (2000) outline a series of steps through which measurement invariance should be established, ranging from whether items load on the same factors across groups to whether intercepts of indicators are equal across groups. In practice, it can be very difficult to establish strict measurement invariance, particularly when working with a large number of groups. Therefore, a challenge for the field lies in determining when measures have captured a construct similarly enough across countries to produce confidence in the comparability of the findings.

Finally, socioeconomic factors pose a number of methodological challenges in conducting international research because such factors within countries can play as meaningful a role in

shaping parenting and children's adjustment as differences between countries. For example, less educated parents and parents with less household income are less likely to provide cognitive stimulation and more likely to behave harshly toward their children (Hoff et al. 2002). Countries differ widely in the socioeconomic conditions of daily life. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, for example, have large proportions of their populations (as high as 88 % in Madagascar, World Bank 2014) living below the international poverty line of less than US\$1.25 per day, but this standard of poverty is seldom found in North America and Western Europe. Socioeconomic factors are reflected in large differences in infant and child mortality rates, life expectancy, literacy rates, and numerous other indicators. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the infant mortality rate is 10 %, and of children who live to be age 6 years, one-third are chronically malnourished; life expectancy is just 36 years in Zimbabwe and 38 years in Zambia, in contrast to life expectancy of 82 years in Japan and 80 years in Iceland and Switzerland (Nsamenang and Lo-Oh 2010). Therefore, any international comparison of research findings must attend carefully to socioeconomic differences to avoid confounding country differences with SES differences.

Yet, cultural contexts are varied above and beyond differences between countries in poverty. For example, Durbrow et al. (2001) collected data from mothers of 5–18-year-old children in a poor village in the Philippines, in a poor village in St. Vincent in the Caribbean, and in an inner-city African American homeless shelter. In all three samples, mothers believed that children's competence was promoted by encouragement, attention, and discipline, but American mothers also stressed the importance of physical affection, praise, and minimizing the impact of dangerous neighborhoods whereas mothers in the Philippines and St. Vincent were more likely to emphasize the importance of health and nutrition. Attempts to understand parenting and children's adjustment in different countries should attend carefully to socioeconomic in addition to cultural factors.

Empirical Findings

The following sections provide illustrative empirical findings regarding ways that parenting is related to children's adjustment in socioemotional, behavioral, academic, moral, and social relationship domains. Taken together, the empirical literature suggests both similarities and differences across countries in associations between parenting and children's adjustment.

Socioemotional Adjustment

Attachment theory has been one of the leading frameworks through which developmentalists have sought to understand children's socioemotional adjustment, but the basic tenets of attachment theory are biased toward Western ways of thinking (Rothbaum et al. 2000). A large body of research using samples primarily from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe supports links between maternal sensitivity and secure attachment (De Wolff and van IJzendoorn 1997), between secure attachment and the development of children's social competence (Groh et al. 2014), and between secure attachment and exploration (Grossmann et al. 2008). However, each of those links is called into question using data from Japan (Rothbaum et al. 2000). For example, Japanese mothers anticipate their infants' needs and behave proactively to minimize infants' distress (e.g., avoiding situations that are stressful to their infants), whereas primarily middle-class European American mothers tend to wait until their infants communicate needs (e.g., by crying to show distress) and then respond to those needs. Thus, a review of research drawing from several samples suggests that, on average, Japanese and American mothers construe sensitive caregiving differently; when American mothers behave in ways that would appear to be sensitive caregiving in Japan, American mothers have been described as insensitive and their infants as insecurely attached (George and Solomon 1999). Likewise, social competence in children is regarded differently in Japan and the United States. In Japan,

social competence is demonstrated by a child who works well in a group and is interdependent with others, whereas in the United States social competence is demonstrated by autonomy, open expression of emotions, and independently exploring the environment. Different types of parenting promote these different kinds of social competence. For example, Japanese mothers orient infants' attention to themselves, whereas American mothers orient infants' attention to objects in the environment (Rothbaum et al. 2000). American parents act as a secure base from which infants can explore the environment, whereas Japanese parents promote interdependence instead of exploration.

Chao (1994) described a conception of control in China called *guan*, meaning "to govern," which has been related to upper middle class American Chinese children's socioemotional adjustment. *Guan* involves firm control and training but also love and caring (with some similarities to authoritative parenting); without *guan*, parents of Chinese origin would be regarded as neglectful. This research suggests that the meanings and manifestations of parental control differ in different cultural contexts. Indeed, the association between warmth and control differed across 13 cultural groups in nine countries, with correlations that averaged from a low of -0.35 for European Americans in the United States to a high of 0.85 for Luos in Kenya (Deater-Deckard et al. 2011). Thus, the association between control and children's adjustment may depend on the meaning conveyed by parental control within a specific cultural context.

Differences across countries in aspects of parenting that promote socioemotional adjustment also are found during adolescence. For example, increases in autonomy over decision-making in grades 7–8 are more predictive of working- and middle-class adolescents' emotional functioning (operationalized as a combination of life satisfaction, experience of positive emotions, self-esteem, experience of negative emotions, and anxiety) in the United States (with a sample that was 88 % European American, 9 % Hispanic American, 2 % African American, and 1 % Asian American) than in

China, in part because decision-making autonomy is more normative during adolescence in the United States than in China (Qin et al. 2009).

Different environmental conditions in different countries sometimes lead to different forms of parenting. For example, among the Yoruba in Nigeria, interactions involving food are used by parents to teach their children key life lessons to socialize them to be well-functioning members of their society (Babatunde and Setiloane 2014). This part of West Africa has a rainy season and a dry season, which results in fluctuations in the availability of food during different parts of the year. Parents teach children to wait patiently for food, not to visit other families during mealtimes, and to leave meat and fish (which are rare and valuable) untouched until the end of the meal. In this way, parents use food as a way of instilling the importance of delaying gratification, being thrifty, and showing proper etiquette, which will contribute to success later in life (Babatunde and Setiloane 2014).

Behavioral Adjustment

Perceptions of what constitutes desirable and undesirable child behaviors differ across countries. For example, adults in the United States are more likely to tolerate undercontrolled behavior than are adults in Thailand, who are more likely to emphasize the importance of respect toward others and nonaggression compatible with Buddhist teachings, which can manifest as overcontrolled behavior (Weisz et al. 1995). Similarly, in a review of several studies comparing samples in the United States and Canada with samples in China, Chen and French (2008) concluded that shyness and behavioral inhibition are perceived by American and Canadian mothers as being undesirable characteristics; shy children are less accepted by their mothers and less well liked by their peers than children who are not shy, and shyness is associated with the development of maladaptive behaviors such as poor academic achievement (Chen and French 2008). In contrast, behavioral inhibition and shyness are perceived by Chinese children and adults as being

desirable; accordingly, shy children are treated with warmth and favor by their mothers and are perceived positively by their teachers and peers (Chen and French 2008).

Discipline is one of the primary means parents use to shape children's behaviors, by punishing undesired behaviors and rewarding desired behaviors. Parents' use of different forms of discipline varies dramatically across countries. For example, as of 2016, 50 countries have outlawed all forms of corporal punishment (www.endcorporalpunishment.org), a number that is increasing steadily as countries attempt to comply with standards related to protecting children from abuse and exploitation as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Yet, in other countries (including the United States), the use of corporal punishment remains widespread. In a comparison of rates of corporal punishment of 2–4-year-old children in 24 low- and middle-income countries, Lansford and Deater-Deckard (2012) found that 27–38 % of the variance in whether corporal punishment was deemed necessary to rear a child properly was accounted for by country of residence. Use of psychological aggression and nonaggressive forms of discipline (such as offering explanations) also varied widely across countries.

Despite these differences in rates of different forms of discipline in different countries, there are many similarities in links between different forms of discipline and children's adjustment. For example, although the strength of the relation between corporal punishment and children's adjustment (aggression and anxiety) is moderated by the cultural normativeness of corporal punishment, more frequent corporal punishment is related to more child aggression and anxiety in China, India, Italy, the Philippines Thailand, and the United States (Lansford et al. 2005). A review of studies primarily with different ethnic groups in the United States concluded that corporal punishment is harmful to children regardless of its intended purpose or cultural context (Gershoff 2013).

Of course, behavioral adjustment involves not just avoiding problem behaviors but also

engaging in prosocial behaviors. In a study of Ngecha children in Gikuyu, Kenya, de Guzman et al. (2005) found that contexts in which children spent time elicited different types and amounts of prosocial behavior. For example, in this subsistence economy, infants and toddlers are often cared for by older siblings; in the context of caring for younger siblings, older siblings were likely to display nurturant prosocial behavior. Likewise, children are expected to contribute to the family's sustenance through household chores, taking care of livestock, and engaging in other types of labor for the benefit of the family, all of which elicited responsible prosocial behavior. Playing with other children and taking care of oneself were the contexts least likely to elicit prosocial behavior. Many industrialized countries provide few opportunities for children to engage in meaningful work to benefit their families and communities, thereby limiting their access to contexts that elicit prosocial behavior. An important implication of these findings is that parents in such countries or communities may need to be especially mindful about how to promote children's prosocial behaviors when children are not often able to see the direct benefits of their actions on others.

Academic Achievement

Since Stevenson's seminal studies of academic achievement in China, Japan, and the United States (e.g., Stevenson et al. 1986), comparisons of what parents in different countries do to promote their children's academic achievement have been a major focus of international research on parenting and children's adjustment. In a review of studies using several economically diverse samples, on average, compared to parents in the United States, parents in China spend more time working on homework with their children, extend learning opportunities beyond assigned homework, and are more controlling in their teaching-related interactions with their children (Pomerantz et al. 2014). In working- and middle-class families, when parents in the United States are involved with their children's learning,

they tend to promote autonomy, whereas parents in China are more controlling (Cheung and Pomerantz 2011). Chinese and American parents also respond differently to children's successes and failures, with Chinese parents reflecting on children's mistakes and minimizing their successes more than American parents (Ng et al. 2007). These aspects of parenting are related to children's academic achievement (Ng et al. 2007), with Chinese children consistently outperforming American children academically, particularly in math and science. Despite the academic advantages conferred by Chinese parenting, emphasis on mistakes and controlling behaviors also appear to take an emotional toll, with Chinese children feeling less happy and having lower perceptions of their own worth (Pomerantz et al. 2014). Pomerantz et al. suggested that optimizing children's academic achievement and emotional well-being could be promoted by parents' greater involvement in their children's education (as in traditional Chinese parenting) while at the same time using strategies that are more autonomy-promoting than controlling (as in traditional American parenting, which has been found to promote emotional well-being in both the United States and China; Pomerantz and Wang 2009).

Moral Development

Historically, researchers focused on whether children's moral development proceeded through a universal set of stages such as Kohlberg's (1984) progression from an obedience and punishment orientation to a stage defined by universal ethical principles. As in other areas of child development, this approach took a theory developed primarily from studying middle-class European Americans (in this case, just males) and used it as a gold standard against which to compare the moral development of females and children in many other countries and cultural contexts. This set of research sometimes concluded that children from certain countries were less morally advanced compared to children from other countries, a perspective that has been

criticized as being biased because Kohlberg's stages place more emphasis on individual rights and social justice than is common in many places. For example, individuals from India emphasize the importance of social relationships and fulfilling one's obligations to others and meeting others' needs, whereas individuals from the United States are more likely to emphasize what is fair or just as the basis for morality (Miller and Bersoff 1992). In their work with Black and White adolescents in South Africa, Ferns and Thom (2001) have described how these differences in cultural orientation can lead to different end points in moral development.

More contemporary research has focused less on stages of moral development and more on different social cognitive domains (e.g., social conventions versus morality; Smetana 2006; Turiel 2002) and factors that affect children's moral judgments in different contexts (Lapsley and Carlo 2014). In some cases, these factors have been found to differ across countries. In a comparison of primarily middle-class Japanese and American (82 % European American, 8 % Asian American, 6 % Hispanic American, 1 % African American, and 3 % multiethnic) 7-, 9-, and 11-year-old children, younger children in both countries were more likely than older children to indicate that they would report their peers' minor transgressions to authority figures; however in Japan, participants of all ages reported thinking it was more appropriate to report minor transgressions than did American participants (Loke et al. 2014). Compared to middle-class Japanese mothers, middle-class Israeli mothers are more likely to find children's disobedience acceptable when such disobedience results from an expression of the child's individuality (Osterweil and Nagano 1991). Prosocial behavior may be fostered in different ways in different societies. For example, in societies in which children are responsible for meeting others' needs (e.g., by taking care of younger siblings or doing housework for the good of the family), parents may not feel the need to specifically socialize prosocial behavior because such behavior is encouraged implicitly as children contribute to their families'

well-being (de Guzman et al. 2005). In societies in which children have fewer opportunities to contribute to the welfare of the family through daily responsibilities, parents may try to socialize prosocial behavior through inductive reasoning and authoritative parenting (e.g., Hastings et al. 2007). Burr (2014) describes how morality and conceptions of what it means to be a “good child” are entwined with a web of cultural values in Vietnam. For example, knowing one’s place in the social hierarchy is highly valued, and children are expected to behave in ways consistent with their position in this hierarchy. A child might be expected to work on the streets to earn money to support a brother’s education or to live in an orphanage to give the family the opportunity to try for more sons (Burr 2014). Zucker and Howes (2009) found similar goals of Mexican mothers in the United States for their children to relate to other people by meeting their needs and expectations.

Social Relationships

Different beliefs about the importance of social relationships shape parent–child interactions in a variety of ways. For example, many parents in Bangladesh believe that showing children too much affection will spoil them and that speaking to infants is not important because infants cannot understand language (Hamadani and Tofail 2014). A classic ethnographic study of a rural, poor sample of the Gusii in Kenya revealed that co-sleeping, breastfeeding on demand, frequent physical contact, and immediate consoling of infants are expected features of mother–infant relationships (LeVine et al. 1994). Gusii mothers expressed shock when they were told that American parents rarely sleep with their infants, and when shown videotapes of American families, Gusii mothers were distressed by how long it took American mothers to respond to infant crying (LeVine et al. 1994). Gusii mothers do not believe that infants are capable of understanding language so do not speak with them in face-to-face interactions that are common in American mother–

infant interactions. Gusii mothers spend more time soothing their infants, whereas American mothers spend more time stimulating their infants (LeVine et al. 1994). With older children Gusii mothers stress obedience and respect and would not praise their child for fear that praise would lead to conceit and rudeness (LeVine et al. 1994). More contemporary research with socioeconomically diverse and more urban Kenyan samples from different ethnic groups shows diversity in parenting attitudes and behaviors (see Oburu 2011).

Socialization in many countries focuses on promoting social relationships more than any other aspect of development. For example, in South Africa, the Zulu nurture *umuntu umuntu ngabantu*, which means that a person is only a person with other people (Zimba 2002). Likewise, the Yoruba people of Nigeria rear children using the concept of *omoluwabi*, which involves a holistic approach emphasizing loyalty to family obligations and traditions in interpersonal interactions (Akinsola 2011). Family obligations are emphasized in socialization in many countries, as exemplified in the Filipino notion of *utang na loob*, which involves a deep sense of gratitude and respect that children feel toward their parents and honor by carrying out their family obligations (Alampay 2014).

Developmental and Gender Considerations

Differences across countries have been reported in what is considered developmentally appropriate and desirable at a given age. For example, the timing of motor skill acquisition during infancy and early childhood varies across countries, in large part because of differences in parent–child interactions related to the development of these skills (Karasik et al. 2010). During adolescence, increasing autonomy is expected in the United States, but a large increase in autonomy is not expected in China (Qin et al. 2009). Countries differ even in how much influence parents are expected to have on their adult children’s lives (e.g., Alampay 2014).

Cultural differences exist not only in parenting and child behaviors at different ages but also in how much parents believe they can shape children's development at all. For example, rural, poor Yucatec Mayan parents in Mexico believe that children's development unfolds over time in a steady progression regardless of what parents might do; therefore, they do not attempt to improve or hasten children's development (Gaskins 2000). In contrast, Luo parents in Kenya believe that parents have the ability to mold children's development deliberately toward desired outcomes, as illustrated in the Luo saying, "A tree is shaped while young, or when it is grown up it breaks" (Oburu 2011, p. 155). In some countries, parents believe that they begin influencing children even before they are born (e.g., Shwalb et al. 2010). Similarly, socioeconomically diverse mothers and fathers in primarily urban areas of China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States differ in the extent to which they believe they have control over successes and failures in caregiving situations (Bornstein et al. 2011).

Gender warrants consideration, both in terms of differences in mothers' and fathers' parenting and in terms of how daughters and sons are parented by both parents. Countries vary in societal-level goals, expectations, and behaviors related to gender such as girls' versus boys' access to education, women's and men's participation in the paid labor force, and gender equality or disparities in rights within the family and broader communities. In international rankings of countries by gender equality in health, education, economy, and politics, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are the most gender equitable countries; Mali, Syria, Chad, Pakistan, and Yemen are the least equitable (World Economic Forum 2014). Societal factors related to gender have implications for the ways parents rear sons and daughters, particularly with respect to gender-typed activities such as toy choices and household chores (Lytton and Romney 1991). Nevertheless, effect sizes for

differences in how boys and girls are parented are small when examined across a large number of low- and middle-income countries (Bornstein et al. 2016). Gender differences in how children are parented may depend on developmental stage, with infants and young children treated more similarly than adolescents, particularly in countries in North Africa and the Middle East where girls' mobility is more restricted after puberty in contrast to boys' mobility, which increases to include more community involvement and work outside the home (Ahmed 2010).

In a study of nationally representative samples of more than 170,000 families in 39 low- and middle-income countries, mothers were more likely to spend time with children under 5 years of age in primary caregiver roles than fathers (Bornstein and Putnick 2016). In some countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, the United States), the proportion of caregiving done by fathers has increased over time (Bianchi and Milkie 2010). Differences in caregiving between mothers and fathers are minimized in countries that have paternal as well as maternal leave policies following the birth or adoption of a child (International Labour Organization 2014). Factors such as family structure, socioeconomic status, and the age of children also affect the relative contributions of fathers and mothers to caregiving (Bianchi and Milkie 2010). Although fatherhood has been going through a reshaping toward more involvement by fathers in roles previously assumed primarily by mothers, historically, in many countries, fathers have served as playmates (Parke 2002) and as disciplinarians (Li and Lamb 2013), as embodied in the Chinese adage, "Kind mother, strict father," a Confucian-based distinction also common in other Asian countries (Shwalb et al. 2010). However, recent research shows that fathers are more than just playmates and take on as many different roles as mothers in childrearing (Cabrera et al. 2007, 2011, 2014). Overall, attention to gender is warranted when considering how mothers and fathers parent their daughters and sons in different countries.

Universal Versus Culture-Specific Mechanisms

Norenzayan and Heine (2005, p. 763) assert that “The existence of cultural diversity poses a great challenge to psychology: The discovery of genuine psychological universals entails the generalization of psychological findings across disparate populations having different ecologies, languages, belief systems, and social practices.” Both theoretical and empirical approaches have attempted to elucidate universal versus culture-specific mechanisms through which parenting affects children’s adjustment. Rohner’s parental acceptance-rejection theory represents one example of an account of universal mechanisms. Children’s perceptions of their parents’ rejection appear to be a universal mediator of the link between parenting behaviors and children’s maladjustment, whereas children’s perceptions of their parents’ acceptance appear to be a universal mediator of the link between parenting behaviors and children’s positive adjustment (Rohner 2004; Rohner and Britner 2002). For example, children’s perception of their parents as being rejecting mediates the link between parents’ use of corporal punishment and children’s psychological adjustment (Rohner et al. 1996). There is also some evidence for universality in social cognitive mechanisms as predictors of parents’ behaviors and in the relation between parents’ behaviors and children’s adjustment. For example, Lansford et al. (2014) found in nine countries that mothers and fathers who endorsed aggressive forms of discipline in hypothetical situations were more likely to report using such forms of discipline with their own children. Finally, several studies suggest universality in how SES influences children’s well-being through qualities of the home, including parent–child interactions such as cognitive stimulation and maternal supportiveness (Guo and Harris 2000; Mistry et al. 2008).

In contrast, some mechanisms appear to be culture-specific. Bornstein (1995) distinguished between the form and function of caregiving. Form encompasses parents’ behaviors; function encompasses the purpose served for the child by

parents’ behavior. The form and function of parenting can be either the same or different across countries. In all countries, caregivers (including parents and other adults) need to fill the function of making their children feel loved and accepted (Rohner 2004), but the form of caregiving they use to fill this function may differ (e.g., physical affection, including its intensity and where affection is displayed, and verbal expressions of love in some countries but indirect actions such as preparing special foods in others). In contrast, a particular form of parenting (e.g., making direct eye contact with a child) may serve different functions depending on the broader context in which it is used (e.g., establishing open communication with the child in some countries but signaling aggression and disrespect in other countries).

One consistency across both the apparently universal versus culture-specific mechanisms is that the meaning delivered by parents’ behavior is more strongly related to children’s adjustment than the behavior itself. If parents behave in a manner that is accepted and endorsed by their cultural group, on average, their behavior will be more likely to have intended effects on children’s adjustment than if parents behave in a way that is at odds with the larger cultural group. Children interpret their parents’ behavior from a perspective that involves social norms gathered from observing others in the community.

Policy Implications

In the large majority of cases, one type of parenting strategy or behavior is neither better nor worse than a different kind of parenting, but caution is needed in not adopting a strict position on cultural relativism because there are some instances in which the international community has reached consensus that a particular practice is harmful to children and should not be implemented regardless of how culturally normative it is (see Coleman 1998). Female circumcision is one example of such a practice. Corporal punishment is increasingly regarded as another example. The United Nations (1989) has

included mild corporal punishment as a human rights violation in several official documents since the time of the ratification of the CRC. For example, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is the body assigned to monitor implementation of the CRC, defines corporal punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (‘smacking’, ‘slapping’, ‘spanking’) children, with the hand or with an implement—whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc.” (paragraph 11, United Nations 2007). The Committee has specifically targeted legislation in some countries that allows corporal punishment as “reasonable chastisement,” “moderate correction,” and so forth. In referring to Article 19 of the CRC, which requires protecting children “from all forms of physical or mental violence,” the Committee states (paragraph 18, United Nations 2007): “There is no ambiguity: ‘all forms of physical or mental violence’ does not leave room for any level of legalized violence against children. Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment are forms of violence and the State must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate them.” The Committee goes on to explain, “In the light of the traditional acceptance of violent and humiliating forms of punishment of children, a growing number of States have recognized that simply repealing authorization of corporal punishment and any existing defences is not enough. In addition, explicit prohibition of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, in their civil or criminal legislation, is required in order to make it absolutely clear that it is as unlawful to hit or ‘smack’ or ‘spank’ a child as to do so to an adult, and that the criminal law on assault does apply equally to such violence, regardless whether it is termed discipline or ‘reasonable correction’” (paragraph 34, United Nations 2007). In outlawing all forms of corporal punishment against children, countries are trying to change what is considered normative and acceptable parenting behavior in the interest of protecting

children from abuse and promoting their positive development.

In addition to broad policy implications, international research on parenting and children's adjustment also has implications for parenting interventions designed to improve parenting and, thereby, child outcomes. In low-income countries, parenting programs tend to focus on improving parents' knowledge about topics that increase child survival (e.g., how to prevent mother to child transmission in countries where HIV/AIDS is endemic, the importance of having children sleep under insecticide-treated nets in countries where malaria is a risk). Yet even in countries with high infant and early childhood mortality rates, most children survive, making it important for parenting programs to include socioemotional and cognitive caregiving components to optimize children's development, not just survival. In a review of interventions designed to increase maternal responsiveness, such interventions were found to be especially effective in developing countries, leading the authors to recommend that interventions to promote child survival should also include responsiveness training (Eshel et al. 2006). Although some parenting programs specifically target fathers, the majority of programs either target only mothers [e.g., the responsiveness interventions reviewed by Eshel et al. (2006)] or are open to either parent, which usually ends up drawing more mothers than fathers (Lansford and Bornstein 2007). Evaluating interventions directed toward fathers is an important direction for future research.

In a meta-analysis of 76 studies, mental health interventions that were adapted for use in particular cultures were four times more effective than interventions not targeted to a specific cultural group (Griner and Smith 2006). An important implication of findings about the role of culture in parenting and children's adjustment is that parenting interventions that are tailored to particular cultural contexts are preferable to implementing one-size-fits all programs. In practice, the process of cultural adaptation can occur in both content and mode of delivery. For example, one goal of the Better Parenting

Program in Jordan was to increase fathers' time with their children and knowledge about ways they could positively interact with their children, but the program initially had a difficult time reaching fathers because they perceived child-rearing as the responsibility of mothers and were unmotivated to spend time participating in a parenting program (Al-Hassan 2009). Using a culturally-grounded approach, the implementers adapted the program so that it could be delivered to fathers by Imams in mosques when fathers were there for Friday night prayers; in this way, fathers received the program's messages from highly respected authority figures who stressed fathers' roles within the family.

Future Directions

Adopting an international perspective offers several lessons that can be applied to understanding the development of minority children within a particular country. For example, research questions centering on between-country differences in parenting and children's adjustment, mechanisms linking parenting with children's adjustment in different countries, and understanding universality versus cultural specificity in developmental processes apply not just to international comparisons but also to understanding minority children within a society. In addition, methodological challenges such as establishing measurement equivalence and handling socioeconomic factors are important in research on minority children within a country as well as in international research. Because international research often grapples with issues related to studying populations other than the middle-class Western samples that comprise the majority of psychological research (Henrich et al. 2010), international research is well positioned to inform the study of minority children.

Future studies can advance understanding and promote minority children's positive development in diverse international contexts in at least four ways. First, future research should sample minority and majority children from countries that have been historically underrepresented in

the research literature and should involve scholars from those countries who can bring an emic approach to understanding parenting and child development in particular locales. This will advance developmental science by illuminating processes that are culture-specific versus more universal. In some countries, researchers publish their findings almost exclusively in country-specific journals in the local language, making the research inaccessible to readers outside of that country. As part of an attempt to broaden the international knowledge base, researchers should be mindful to present their findings at conferences that draw international audiences and to publish their findings in international journals.

Second, future research should attend to within- as well as between-country differences. Within-country differences may reflect ethnicity, socioeconomic status, rural versus urban distinctions, and other factors that differentiate individuals within countries. Within-country differences also may reflect changes over historical time. In some countries political, economic, or other sociohistorical factors have shaped the extent to which developmental science is even an academic discipline. For example, Soviet repression of the social sciences hampered the fields of developmental psychology and family studies until perestroika, and it has taken some time since then to build a developmental research base in Russia (Nelson et al. 2010). Just as children develop over time, so do countries. Traditional values and parenting practices evolve over time, especially during times of economic growth and modernization (Chang et al. 2011), so parenting and child development in a particular country should be situated in broader historical contexts. The circumstances of minority children within a society can change in tandem with forces such as immigration policies and demographic shifts in the full population.

Third, studies of parenting and children's development would benefit from including not just mothers and fathers but other caregivers as well. In some countries and in some ethnic groups within countries, parents are children's

primary caregivers, whereas in other groups, parents, grandparents, siblings, and other extended family members share the caregiving role. For example, in India the majority of households include extended family members who actively participate in childrearing (Saraswathi and Dutta 2010). Including other caregivers will broaden the definition of family and advance the field beyond the study of traditionally middle-class Western nuclear families and contribute to understanding of child development in broader family systems with complex configurations and multiple caregivers that are common in many parts of the world.

Finally, future research should try to determine which parenting programs work well in which contexts and with which children. Especially in low- and middle-income countries, there is a strong desire by researchers and practitioners not just to gain knowledge for its own sake but also to use this knowledge to improve the lives of children and their families. By using knowledge about parenting and child development in a particular country or with a particular ethnic group to tailor interventions to be culturally appropriate, it will be possible to maximize the potential effectiveness of such interventions. Rigorous evaluation studies will then be needed to determine whether the interventions are working as intended.

Adopting an international, cross-cultural framework in understanding parenting and children's adjustment offers several advantages over using a monocultural approach. Such a framework reduces the bias toward universality and overgeneralization that comes from adopting a monocultural approach and also adds important cultural variation. Although the ideas and findings discussed in this chapter reflect primarily a between-country perspective, they likely apply within countries as well. That is, they are relevant for understanding factors that improve development in ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and other minority groups. An international approach advances understanding of the diverse ways that competence and adaptation can be defined and promoted around the world.

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