

# Argentine Culture and Parenting Styles

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## Introduction

Parenting styles have been used to understand the complex behaviors and attitudes of caretakers and how they are related to child development and wellbeing (Domenech Rodriguez et al. 2009). Parenting styles differ by variations in the levels of parental sensitivity (i.e., warmth and affection) and parental control (i.e., the granting of autonomy), and both of these constructs are related to child development and wellbeing (Broderick and Blewitt 2003).

According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), it is necessary to distinguish parenting styles from parenting practices. Parenting practices are the behaviors that parents carry out to ensure their children reach specific academic, social, and emotional objectives. These authors state that the socializing behaviors of discipline and support and the interactions between parents and children vary by situation. They

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also say that a parenting style is a combination of attitudes toward the child that creates an emotional climate in which parents act. Parental behaviors are expressed with characteristics such as tone of voice, body language, and sense of humor.

The first studies in this field proposed typologies of parental child-rearing styles. Baumrind's (1966) concept of parenting style was based on the control parents exerted over their children or *parental responsiveness* and on the degree parents respond to the child's needs or *parental responsiveness*. By the combination of these two dimensions, she proposed three different parenting styles: Authoritarian (high demandingness and low responsiveness), permissive (low demandingness and high responsiveness), and authoritative (moderate demandingness and moderate responsiveness). In later years Maccoby and Martin (1983) added a fourth style known as uninvolved and Baumrind (1991) later added a traditional style to her list, or neglectful parenting, characterized by lack of responsiveness and demandingness.

The first parenting style researchers, such as Baumrind (1966, 1996) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), as well as more recent authors (Kotchick and Forehand 2002; Richaud de Minzi 2010a) emphasize an analysis of the contexts in which childrearing occurs. These authors recommend performing studies on parent-child interactions across a variety of socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. Montandon (2005) underlined the importance of accounting for parental beliefs regarding education for their children. These beliefs are directly related to the parents' visions of childhood, which are in turn related to specific economic, cultural, and social contexts.

Izzedin-Bouquet and Pachajoa Londoño (2009) state that childrearing guidelines are linked to social meanings within each culture or social group. When analyzing the styles, practices, guidelines, and beliefs concerned with childrearing, an understanding of the different concepts that a social group holds regarding children, social class, customs, and socio-historical and cultural norms is essential.

In contrast, parental competencies are the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral resources or abilities of mothers and fathers that allow them to connect appropriately with their children and provide adequate and timely responses to their needs (Barudy and Dantagnan 2005, 2010). The primary parental capacities, according to Barudy and Dantagnan, are parental empathy and attachment capacity. Furthermore, these authors have demonstrated in several studies that social context plays an important role in the formation of social parenting.

Although the evidence for the universality of attachment is fairly sound, the evidence for the sensitivity and competence hypotheses is less clear (Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi 1999). Attachment behaviors are observed across cultures, and secure attachment is most typical. However, the cross-cultural evidence that supports the importance of sensitivity and developing competencies in later childhood is less firm (De Wolff and Van Ijzendoorn 1997). Parenting and the outcomes that parents value for their children differ across cultures, which might explain this ambiguity. Mothers, fathers, and families in general interact with their children based on their cultural beliefs and values. Cultural differences in the definitions of sensitivity and responsiveness affect how parents rear and relate to their children (Reebye et al. 1999). Cultural differences in the expectations of children at each stage of

development might also lead to varying patterns of parent-child interactions and differential child outcomes (Richaud de Minzi 2010a).

## Parenting Styles in Middle-Class Argentine Culture

Argentina is a country in South America; it is the continent's second largest by land area, after Brazil. It is constituted as a federation of 23 provinces and an autonomous city, Buenos Aires. It is the eighth-largest country in the world by land area and the largest among Spanish-speaking nations. Argentina is a constitutional republic and representative democracy. It is Latin America's third-largest economy, with a "very high" rating on the Human Development Index. It is classed as middle emerging economy. Argentina is considered a country of immigrants. The vast majority of modern Argentines are descended from settlers and immigrants from Europe from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, some of whom had later mixed and intermarried with the indigenous populations. The majority of these European immigrants came from Italy and Spain. 86.4 % of Argentina's population self-identify as being of European descent. An estimated 8 % of the population is *mestizo*, of mixed race. According to the World Christian Database Argentines are: 92.1 % Christian, and most are Roman Catholic, with estimates for the number of Catholics varying from 70 to 90 % of the population (though perhaps only 20 % attend services regularly) (Fig. 1).

Argentina retains Latin—people of Southern European origin (especially Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal)—and Catholic cultural traditions that have a high regard for collectivistic values, especially those related to the family. The family is considered to be much more important than country, religion, or politics. Argentine children feel a greater closeness to their parents (especially their mothers), siblings, and members of their extended family than to friends, when compared with their North American and Northern European counterparts (Facio and Resett 2006). Childrearing practices are based on power assertions during discipline, and Argentine parents control their children's outings, schedules, and friends in what may be a more intrusive manner than their North American and Northern European counterparts (Facio and Batistuta 1998).

In general, children observe a close relationship between their parents and their grandparents, especially between their mothers and their maternal grandmothers. The gap between the genders has narrowed over the decades with regard to work, education, and political activity (Facio and Resett 2006).

There are apparently no gender differences in Argentine formal education with regard to preparing for adult work roles; both genders attend the same schools, the vast majority of which are coeducational (Facio and Resett 2006). Although it is highly probable that due to cultural differences in norms and expectations regarding appropriate gender roles and behaviors, teachers and other officials would treat men and women differently.



**Fig. 1** Argentina on the Earth Globe (On line: Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Argentina\\_orthographic.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Argentina_orthographic.svg))

Several studies have been conducted in Argentina to study how children of different ages perceive parenting styles, and the results have supported the cognitive theory that the quality of the parent-child relationship affects the child only insofar as the child perceives it. That is, a child's attributions regarding his or her father's or mother's behavior will be more related to his or her development than the actual parental behavior. Schaefer's (1965) proposed model allows for a joint and interactive consideration of the effects of different parenting behavior dimensions in studies of different parenting styles.

Gender differences in Argentine parenting and child outcomes can be attributed to societal norms. The mother is the central figure in Argentine family life, most likely due to the country's Latin and Catholic traditions. Facio and Batistuta (1998) asserted that there is a belief in the moral and spiritual superiority of women compared with men. The Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary places a high

importance on motherhood. Women are expected to sacrifice themselves for their children and the rest of the family; in exchange, they are venerated and exercise a considerable amount of power at home. Boys and girls are more likely to forgive their mothers' faults than their fathers', and relationships with mothers deteriorate only as a consequence of serious circumstances. In this sense, 4- to 6-year-olds perceive a relationship of control with their mother; however, in an affiliative culture,<sup>1</sup> such as Argentina, control is not perceived as negatively as Schaefer defined it within the context of the United States (Richaud de Minzi 2002). Interestingly, children perceive the affirmation, "Your mom says that if you love her, you will behave well" positively as a natural reciprocity of affection, and not as emotional "blackmail" from the mother or as a source that generates anxiety. The social definition of a "good child" can explain this finding. However, younger children perceive control exerted by the father as more intrusive; that is, he spends the small amount of time he has with them controlling them (have they done what was ordered, did they tidy up their clothing, who were they with, and so on). It is also interesting that the aforementioned affirmation about behaving well out of love for their mother has a different meaning in the context of their father. As previously mentioned, Argentine culture exalts and honors the mother's selflessness, but this behavior is not as pronounced with respect to the father. Therefore, it might be more natural for children to return their mother's love than their father's (Richaud de Minzi 2002).

A similar pattern has been found in 8- to 12-year-olds (Richaud de Minzi 2007a, b). The statements related to control that Schaefer (1965) discussed in the context of the United States refer to possessiveness and intrusiveness. Argentine children do not always perceive these characteristics as undesirable. On the contrary, statements that begin, "My mother/father..." and conclude "...always wants to know where I am and what I am doing all the time", "...makes me come home on time", "...is always vigilant of what I do in school and during my free time", "...tells me that, if I truly love her/him, I must behave well to not upset her", or "...insists that I must do everything that she/he tells me" are indicative of acceptance. That is, they are expressions of affection and care. This finding is most likely due to cultural reasons, given that these are Latin children from an affiliative culture. Age might also play a role, given that 8- to 9-year-olds are expected to return home on time (e.g., from school) so that their parents know where they are and what they are doing.

Argentine children accepted specific expressions that began, "My mother/father..." and concluded "...worries when I misbehave because I will suffer the consequences when I grow older", "...tells me that, if I truly love her/him, then I must behave well so that I do not upset her/him", and "...says that misbehaving is bad, and I might have problems when I grow up". These statements indicate the use of control through anxiety and blame according to Schaefer's model. This

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<sup>1</sup> In an affiliative culture, groups place a high priority on constructive interpersonal relationships. Members are expected to be friendly, open, and sensitive to the satisfaction of their group. Members are loyal to their work groups and feel they "fit in" comfortably. In Latin culture this refers specially to the familial group.

difference is due to Latin cultural guidelines regarding the definition of a good parent, which include worrying about and suffering for the children (Richaud de Minzi 2007a, b).

Conversely, Argentine children do not accept the statements that begin, “My mother/father...” and conclude “...makes me comply with what she/he orders”, “... insists that I do my homework”, and “...worries when I do something that I should not”. These statements operationalize coercion to comply with orders and control according to Schaefer’s model. However, these statements do not express extreme or harmful forms of control, such as hostility or rejection. They are perceived as expressions that are neither damaging nor benign. Specifically, these statements are perceived as a strict form of control that is fair but unpleasant. The control that we denote as pathological due to its negative effects on child development (i.e., hostility, isolation, guilt, distrust caused by intrusion and dependence, and possessiveness) is well differentiated from the two aforementioned forms of control.

Although women are highly regarded for their role as mothers, young people of both genders consider “being capable of caring for children” to be an important quality of adult males. Nevertheless, girls are socialized to be more involved in domestic chores and less involved in jobs than boys (Facio and Resett 2006). Children, especially boys, perceive that their fathers spend little time with them (Richaud de Minzi 2002, 2005). Children’s perceptions of parental support and availability within their own unique cultural niche are likely to affect related social-emotional outcomes, such as depression, loneliness, and self-competence (Richaud de Minzi 2010a, b).

Argentine maternal attachment facilitates social involvement and is a protective factor against loneliness among girls and boys (Richaud de Minzi 2010a, b). As previously stated, the mother is typically the central figure in Argentine family life, whereas fathers tend to have less involvement in their children’s friendships, homework, parent-teacher conferences, and so on. Despite the fact that the mother establishes family norms, she is also perceived as more tender, understanding, and devoted than the father (Facio and Batistuta 1998). Although in the last years there has been increased father involvement in families, and many women have entered the labor market, in Argentina it is still considered that a father’s work is more important than a mother’s and that fathers can be out of home more than mothers can. In fact, many women stop working when having a baby, especially in the low socioeconomic levels. Fathers help mothers in some housework, but the responsibility of home and children is mainly the mother’s.

In Argentina, girls typically have close relationships with their mothers and maternal grandmothers (Facio and Resett 2006). These relationships are most likely an important protective factor against loneliness. In contrast, fathers tend to display affection for their sons in a different way, although they love them a lot. They accomplish household chores/tasks, play soccer, attend games, and engage in more functional tasks together. It is also common that men embrace each other and their children, and even say hello with a kiss. However, boys typically demand more availability from their fathers compared with girls (Richaud de Minzi 2002, 2005).

In Argentina, girls typically have more academic success than boys. However, they evaluate their scholastic competence as lower than that of boys, most likely because of the cultural belief that males are more capable than girls. Nevertheless, girls try harder than boys (Facio 2006; Richaud de Minzi 2005). Girls gain security and build scholastic competence by relying on their fathers and their mothers. Boys rely on their mothers and fathers to motivate them but seek their mother's help to a lesser degree. The only significant predictor of girls' social self-competence is the availability of the mother. This finding is likely due to the previously described Argentine mother-daughter relationship (Richaud de Minzi 2010a, b).

In general, Argentine children of middle socioeconomic levels perceive moderately high levels of acceptance, moderate to extreme levels of control, a moderately high level of accepted control, and a low level of extreme autonomy or negligence from their parents, especially their fathers. This style is characterized by a concern that focuses on the child to express affection and emotional support. At the same time, this style promotes open communication and exchange, freedom of expression, independent thought, and sensitivity to the child's needs. However, the establishment of boundaries and norms (which are perceived as caring for the child in Argentine culture) accompany these forms of acceptance. Moreover, close parental supervision establishes norms. Although the child might perceive these norms as an imposition and protest, they are not rejected. However, forms of excessive control, such as intrusion, imposition of strict norms, punishment, and reprimands are also found in moderation. Lax parental control in which the child is given total freedom without the imposition of rules or the establishment of boundaries appears infrequently. Furthermore, Argentine children generally perceive this style as parental negligence or ignorance with regard to meeting their needs.

## Parenting Styles in the Context of Argentine Poverty

Many theories have been generated to explain the differences between the parenting styles of middle- and low-economic level families (Danziger and Waldfogel 2000; Elder et al. 1985; Ghate and Hazel 2002; Harris and Marmar 1996; Jefferis et al. 2002). However, studies of parenting styles in the context of poverty should consider the economic levels and the cultures as well as the formal and informal social systems in which the family is embedded (Katz et al. 2007). Different authors (Barnes 2004; Deater Deckard 2004; Marsh and Mackay 1994) assert that economically-deprived parents who belong to different cultures respond differently to poverty stressors.

Parents who live in socially vulnerable conditions are likely to face a series of difficulties (beyond material deprivation) that can affect their parental competencies. These difficulties include less education, lower job qualifications, a lack of access to jobs and services, isolation, physical and mental illnesses, and domestic violence. These factors can act independently of each other; however, they are

likely to interact and affect both the parents' child-rearing style and their children's outcomes.

In this regard, Borstein and Bornstein (2010) argue that the environmental factors related to working in impoverished contexts (e.g., high-risk and urban-marginal zones), including insecurity, economic problems, and low access to services might significantly influence the development of parenting styles. Barudy and Dantagnan (2005, 2010) observed that the three most important functions of social parenting (nurture or affective behavior, socialization, and education) are weakened or reduced in the majority of the parents who live in poverty and social risk.

In Argentina, during the last three decades, there has been a persistent increase of poverty, modifications in the social classes, difficulties in generating good quality work, high indexes of unemployment, labor vulnerability and precariousness (Aguirre 2009). According to the 2012 Report of Barometer of Social Debt of the Argentine Catholic University, 21.9 % of the Argentine population is poor and 5.4 % is indigent.

A study of impoverished Argentine children compared parenting style from the perspective of the parents between groups of low and high psychosocial risk due to marginal urban poverty (Vargas Rubilar and Lemos 2011). In general, the marginal urban population comes from the interior of the country and especially from bordering countries. It is made up of very poor people, without work opportunities in their original places, that in many cases have lost their cultural habits, with a high rate of unemployment, economic shortages and grave social, emotional and family problems.

Vargas Rubilar and Lemos (2011) have found that the parents at greater psychosocial risk simultaneously used more physical punishment, severe reprimands, shouting, isolation, intrusion, withdrawal from relationships, and negligence. Therefore, parenting styles depend on socioeconomic status. However, this study found that these parents accepted their own statements that implied intrusive control, such as, "I want to know where my child is and what he/she is doing all the time" and "I want to control everything that my child does". In turn, they did not consider verbal expressions of affection toward their children to be necessary, such as telling their children that they love them, trying to make their child feel like the most important person in the world, or showing their children that they (the parents) feel proud of the children's actions. Although these parenting practices are inadequate from the perspective of Schaefer's model, these parents feel that they have an adequate style of childrearing that values control over affective expression displayed to their children.

The Argentine populations that are typically socially vulnerable come in general from indigenous or mixed-indigenous/Spanish communities, whereas the middle class generally has European origins, primarily Spanish and Italian. The cultures associated with each group differ, particularly with regard to expressiveness, the manifestation of affection, and child-rearing practices. The Latin culture of the Italians and Spanish is characterized by a lively expressiveness, verbal and physical demonstrations of affection, warmth, and nurture, less use of physical punishment, and greater use of psychological control. People from indigenous and



mixed-indigenous/Spanish cultures are more reflective and self-focused, and they use less verbal and affective expressiveness. These characteristics, which are aggravated by the marginality to which these social groups are subject, sometimes generate parental negligence and lead to severe physical punishments. As in the case of the middle class, the mother dominates the parental culture.

Importantly, the socially vulnerable children of the parents who perceived that they had a high acceptance based on an extremely controlling style that was beneficial for their children, judged their parents to have low acceptance and inconsistent discipline and to show negligence in meeting their needs. Children who are at psychosocial risk perceive less acceptance, less consistent discipline (fewer clear and firm boundaries), more pathological control (aggression, anxiety, and isolation), and greater negligence than those who are not at risk (Richaud de Minzi 2007a, b, 2010b). Overall, the former group judges their parents as having a punitive and coercive parenting style that is consistent and affective but also negligent.

These results coincide with those of Kagan (1978), who stated that hostile or affectionate parenting cannot be analyzed solely from the perspective of the parent because neither love nor rejection is a fixed characteristic in parental behavior. Parental love is also a belief that the child maintains; it is not only a collection of parental actions. In this sense, the impact of parenting behaviors on children depends not only on objective elements but also on the latter's perceptual and inferential processes. Parents and children do not necessarily perceive the same amount of parental love, demands, or punishment, and frequently, parents incorrectly infer the way in which their children perceive their behavior (Gracia 2002).

## **Culture and the Relationship Between Parenting Styles and Child Development**

Several researchers have concluded that an authoritative parenting style predicts generally positive results in children's development and wellbeing (Carlson et al. 2000; Radzisewka et al. 1996; Steinberg et al. 1992). However, a series of studies conducted across different cultures indicates that authoritative parenting style is not always related to optimal socialization for children and adolescents (Bornstein and Bornstein 2010; García and Gracia 2010). Therefore, the ideal parenting style for socialization depends on the culture in which it develops (Chao 1994; Kotchick and Forehand 2002).

Several studies have suggested that authoritarian parenting styles are necessary and protect children living in urban poverty (which places them at high risk) by facilitating their adaptation to a difficult environment (Brody and Flor 1998; Furstenberg et al. 2000).

Many investigators (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Kotchick and Forehand 2002; Richaud de Minzi 2010a) recommend analyzing parenting styles across cultures. Although the theoretical models that relate parenting styles to the socio-emotional adjustment

of the child do not vary among different socioeconomic contexts and cultures, variations can occur in the characteristics or degrees to which these variables are presented and in the ways that children perceive parental behaviors. Therefore, middle-class children who attend safe schools or live in friendly neighborhoods might perceive always being asked where they are going, with whom, and at what time they will return, or being accompanied by a parent everywhere as intrusion. However, children who live in highly dangerous neighborhoods and whose schools are unprotected might perceive the same parenting style as acceptance and care. Therefore, control should be considered as acceptance in this latter case (Richaud et al. 2013a).

We examined whether the theoretical model that relates parenting styles to children's emotional development and aggressiveness holds true for Argentine and Spanish children who live in poverty (Richaud et al. 2013a). We found that the ways in which parenting styles affect children's development follow a pattern that is maintained throughout social class and culture. Specifically, dysfunctional parenting styles (e.g., excessively controlling or permissive) will lead to inadequate emotional development in children, which in turn will cause difficulties in psychosocial relationships regardless of the developmental context. The degrees of control, negligence, or acceptance that parents exercise can vary based on the context and what is perceived as acceptance or rejection.

Another study (Richaud et al., 2013) examined whether the parenting styles of participants living in poverty influenced children's socio-emotional functioning and their stress coping mechanisms differently across two cultures. The results indicated that parenting styles differed by group. The Argentine group showed medium-low parental acceptance and medium pathological control values but higher than those of acceptance. Furthermore, this group showed a significantly higher level of negligence (a parenting style with rejection characteristics) than the Spanish sample (Richaud de Minzi 2005, 2007b). The Spanish children perceived medium-high acceptance, which was significantly higher than that of the Argentine group; however, Spanish maternal pathological control was significantly higher but still with a medium effect size. Finally, the Spanish groups showed significantly less negligence than the Argentine group. This profile would be classified as an authoritarian parenting style.

With regard to whether parenting styles develop healthy children in each context, the results indicated that Argentine children (whose parents were less accepting and controlling but more negligent) have fewer prosocial qualities and adopt less efficient coping strategies compared with Spanish children. Furthermore, Argentine children greatly lack emotional control and use avoidance strategies, which involves greater emotional conflict. The Spanish children (whose parents practiced an authoritarian style with high levels of acceptance) showed slightly more social ability, efficient coping strategies, emotional control, and strategies focused on problem solving than the Argentine group.

In conclusion, even in the case of Argentine and Spanish contexts, which have several common elements, culture influences parenting style. Although the control style of the Spanish sample was somewhat inadequate, the parents' acceptance

avored children's socio-emotional development. The low levels of prosocial behaviors achieved suggest that parents negatively affected their children, and low acceptance and negligence were related to greater developmental problems. The same was found for middle-class children who perceived their parents' negative practices, such as excessive control and extreme permissiveness, as negligence and ignorance with regard to meeting their needs. These perceptions negatively affected the children's development, leading in part to behavior problems and aggressiveness. Thus, authoritative parenting remains the most efficient style (Caprara and Pastorelli 1993; Eisenberg et al. 2000; Gámez-Guadix et al. 2010; Mestre et al. 2007, 2010; Richaud de Minzi 2005, 2010b; Richaud de Minzi et al. 2005; Samper et al. 2008). Therefore, the typical parenting style within a culture might not be ideal for healthy child development.

Parenting styles can vary by culture, but the relationships between the characteristics of these styles and child development do not (Richaud et al. unpublished a).

## Intervention Possibilities and Research Implications

The studies presented suggest that the interactions between parents and children should be considered across diverse cultural and social groups (Bornstein and Bornstein 2010). This information will allow all types of families to benefit, especially if the research is used by government- or private-provided services that are psychosocial, communal, or both. Based on specific living conditions, certain authors assert that the activation of certain parenting competencies that permit the parents to resist adversity and provide children with better opportunities for development is unavoidable (Barudy and Dantagnan 2005).

Future interventions must be based on general psychological theory regardless of culture, but these interventions must account for particular cultural characteristics with regard to strategies and specific activities. For instance, feelings of parental acceptance always have positive implications for children. However, researchers must be careful given that parental vigilance can be interpreted as acceptance in one culture (or subculture) but intrusion in another.

There is a great need for intervention programs to focus on strengthening parenting in socially vulnerable contexts, particularly social risk contexts due to poverty in Argentina. To date, the attempts to repair the profound psychological and social deficiencies of families, especially with regard to parenting styles, have been insufficient. Interventions are also important for middle- and upper-middle-class groups who favor the accumulation of material goods. These present the risk of transforming parent-child relationships into mere formalities, thereby depriving children of affection and the parental presence necessary for an adequate socio-emotional development (Barudy and Dantagnan 2010), as has been the case in Argentina in recent years.

Our experience shows that approaches that seek to increase sensitivity and parental competencies and to provide relevant information regarding child



**Fig. 2** Parental strengthening workshop in contexts of social vulnerability



**Fig. 3** Parental strengthening workshop in contexts of social vulnerability

development allow parents to perceive their child in a manner that is less distorted by their own beliefs and family history and thus facilitate child, parental, and family resilience (Vargas Rubilar 2011). This type of intervention has also been known to reinforce sensitive behaviors, model adequate parental behaviors, and provide parental social support in other Latin American countries (Barudy and Dantagnan

2005, 2010; Gómez et al. 2008; Gómez and Kotliarenco 2010; Rey 2006). Many of the intervention programs directed toward parents who are affected by poverty, low socioeconomic levels, unstable living conditions, and a lack of education and social support showed significant improvements months after the intervention (Juffer et al. 2005; Gómez Muzzio et al. 2008). The construction of effective family intervention programs for people from diverse cultures depends on an adequate theoretical foundation and an appropriate evaluation of the target population. If these fundamental factors align with the objectives, techniques, strategies, and modalities of the proposed intervention, then the program can ensure better results for the people involved (Rey 2006; Vargas Rubilar and Oros 2011) (Figs. 2 and 3).

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