PARENTING

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Editor

Ecocultural Pathways, Family Values, and Parenting

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Visualize a parent and child. The picture of parent and child should always include seeing the place on earth they are in, the developmental pathways they are on, the ecocultural (ecological + cultural) context and the developmental niche they are actively engaging (Göncü, 1999; Harkness & Super, 1995; Weisner, 1996; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). That pathway provides the resources, interactional scripts, and parental beliefs and goals that organize behavior. Imagine this pathway as being made up of "stepping stones" of activities and practices (getting ready for school, having breakfast, recess, math homework, soccer practice, visiting your uncle, having a babysitter Saturday night, playing video games, sleeping). Parents and children are engaged in such activities, which in turn are loosely organized into a daily routine of life, and in turn, into a "cultural career" — a way of life that engages the self, identity, and our sense of personhood and meaning (Goldschmidt, 1992).

Thinking of "ecocultural" population-specific influences on parenting and development in this way — as pathways organized into everyday routines of mostly mundane activities and practices — does not mean that the larger cultural group is no longer a useful way to compare parents. To the contrary, these daily routines of activities are organized by a similar moral direction (the "right pathway;" ways to serve God; be all you can be) that provides the basic premises and goals guiding life. The daily routine is shaped by similar resource opportunities and constraints (agrarian or trade or industrial occupations, literacy). Parents and children share emotional and mental experiences (feelings, motives, and a common sense of engagement in some activities and avoidance of others). When developmental research leaps directly from presumed universals of mind, brain, and setting to intra-community individual differences, without considering the pathways and activities that organize everyday life and inhabit the minds of parents and children, it misses a crucial part of what parenting and development mean (LeVine et al., 1994).

There are contentious claims that come out of the study of meaningful pathways of life in population-specific cultural communities. One is that healthy development and well-being do not necessarily require many of

the scripts and activities that currently preoccupy parents in the Western world. Well-being is the engagement in everyday activities and routines deemed desirable by one's cultural community and the psychological experiences that are produced by that engagement (Weisner, 1998). Such engagement makes children and youth feel that they matter — that they are recognized and wanted by members of some community (Burton, 2000). There are certainly common basic needs (physical safety, predictable environments of care, basic health and nutritional needs) and goals shared by parents everywhere, and there are supports and opportunities for children and youth that no doubt have wide cross-national agreement (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Yet there are alternative ways to achieve well-being that do not match the standard, contemporary European American pathways. Well-being is found outside the market-contractual idea of self and person, for example, and outside the conventional "pedagogical" verbal, stimulative, achievement-driven pathway towards well-being (LeVine et al., 1994). "...We become capable of reconceptualizing *normal* human development in pluralist rather than universalist terms (Shweder et al., 1998)" (emphasis in original, LeVine, 2001, p. xiv).

Another methodological implication is that the individual parent or child is not the only unit of analysis essential to understanding parenting and development in cultural pathways. The papers in this collection use the activity setting or niche. Shared scripts and activities, and the features that make them up (goals, people, tasks, motives/feelings, and normative scripts) are essential, not optional, to measure. The content of these activities and interactions (the enactment of which general values; how babies are fed), not only the form or amount (explicit or implicit; calories/day), matters.

These are excellent articles and interesting findings. They use cultural group variation to make discoveries about parenting and children's development, using careful methods and clearly defined samples. The papers in this collection provide a necessarily small sample of the marvelous variations in developmental pathways around the world, and suggest that we need to dramatically increase the range and depth of study of cultural places in the field of human development. Each paper in the collection addresses questions of the impacts of pathways, and the nature of well-being in children and parents.

Peggy Miller and colleagues (this issue) show the culture-specific nature of an idea, "self-esteem," that is so common and pervasive in contemporary U.S. discourse, so embedded in what the people of the United States consider a critical component of well-being, that it goes without saying, and usually remains implicit. It is a self-evident folk theory not in the sense that U.S. parents can't talk about it (the evidence is that they can't not talk about it once started!) but that it is a "naturalized," obvi-

ous, and unremarkable explanation for what parents do. Yet in Taiwan, it may actually be a troubling notion, different in meaning, difficult to get mothers to talk about, and unhealthy for developing children and questionable for parents to focus on. And the ethnographic, qualitative interview situation — the researchers carefully analyzed conversational exchange about parenting, childrearing, and "self-esteem" — is itself a cultural practice, as they beautifully illuminate. Consider from their account, how many specific U.S., Taiwanese, Greek, Italian, Dominican/American, etc. parenting practices have, as part of their folk model, a belief, goal, or value embedded in them having to do with "esteem," or "self-respect-heart/mind" (the Taiwanese notion), or "decency," and so forth. It is in this sense that activities "have values and goals in them." Unpackaging the activities' meanings can lead to discovery of these values, and their functions in directing parenting behavior.

Tamis-LeMonda and her colleagues (this issue) compare values orientations among parents of 3- to 4-year-olds in Taiwan, Greece, and the United States. She argues that childrearing values, not only behaviors of parents, are an important area for research on parents' goals and the meaning of parenting behaviors. Values reflect ideology, and there are consistent cross-cultural differences in how parents think about socializing children. How values questions are framed influence what parents say: Open-ended frames, vignettes, and forced-choice frames using a rank-ordering task each can produce different responses, for instance. What next could be added to the methods for studying values would be the ethnography of values — fieldwork within the intimate settings in which values, beliefs, and practices actually are enacted and experienced. As the authors say regarding implications for future work: "Actions taken by parents are choices that are selected from a repertoire of possibilities (Eccles, 1986) and as such are likely to be shaped by parents' ideas, knowledge, and goals about children, development, and parenting."

Clyde Kluckhohn, an anthropologist who (with Strodtbeck, Vogt, and others) did foundational comparative cultural work on values and childhood, contrasted values orientations with life (Weisner, 2001). He emphasized just what Tamis-LeMonda finds: a lot of the action is in the translation from values to behavior in everyday activities and local cultural pathways. Values reflect conflicts in a society as well as consensus about what is to be valorized. Values are used as rationalizations for action as well as guides prior to action, and they orient us to what is important as well as explain why we act. How and when to use them can create conflict: Americans are high on Self-Maximization but also Sociability/Lovingness! The authors characterize this as "...individualism in the context of caring about others." In the Tamis-LeMonda studies, Decency was em-

phasized most by Greek mothers, and both Self-Maximization and Sociability/Lovingness were emphasized most by U.S. mothers. But Taiwanese mothers attended to independence and education as aspects of Self Maximization more often than the U.S. mothers. When sorting pre-defined values, all mothers ranked honesty and responsibility most central (with the U.S. adding independence). There is intra-cultural variation in relative preferences among parents of course, but more to the point, there is conflict and ambivalence about values in whole communities and within individuals.

These values are embedded in a culture complex, which includes practices, specific beliefs, values, institutional systems, myths, and stories — all elaborating on a core value that also represents a cultural concern. A culture complex reflects the anxieties of parents and the community about making sure that these difficult-to-achieve pathways will be traveled. Such values become a hypercognized (Levy, 1973), culturally elaborated complexes of values, beliefs, and activities, in order to try and be sure that these behaviors and thoughts really are going to shape children's pathways, because we all know very well that children resist, are indecent and rude, are lazy and not necessarily going to have a drive for the right kinds of Self-Maximization or Decency, for example.

Individualism can be expressed in different ways, as Tamis-LeMonda (this issue) shows. It includes "...the need for positive self-regard..." as part of a folk model of parenthood and good development, as Peggy Miller et al. (this issue) describe it, yet it includes conflict, ambivalence, and contradiction as well. American families have a kind of dependency conflict in their parenting (Weisner, in press). American middle-class parents will say to their child: "Oh what a good boy; you finished that puzzle all by yourself! Now come over here and give Mommy a big hug! You are such an independent, smart boy! Good job!" Exploration and autonomy/independence/self-reliance are praised, while at the same time the parents encourage children to seek reward, direction, and praise from parents. This produces conflict about values and their meanings in practice. Miller et al. found that their Centerville mothers fluently and richly talked about self-esteem in preschoolers. But in a complex and sometimes "paradoxical" way, they also revealed worries and conflicting outcomes embedded in the same valorized developmental goal:

Although these mothers believed that having high self-esteem is a great advantage to a child, almost everyone distinguished between high self-esteem and a variety of negative qualities that might be related to or confused with high self-esteem. They did not want to raise children who are conceited, self-centered, egotistical, or self-promoting.

Psychodynamic processes of the mind and of culture produce such conflicts. There are also the more troubling negative dimensions of thought and behavior to be considered — overtly unexpressed and undesired of course, but present nonetheless. Values orientations are defensive projections as well as overt valorized goals, and in explicit lexical form hide, but not entirely, their darker sides. Values like Decency or Self-Maximization are also defensive projections, hiding, but only in part, their meaner counterparts (Indecency or Other-Minimizing). Examples include dominance, egotism, hatred of the out group, rivalry and envy towards siblings and other families, or the suffering a community has experienced from others, or continues to inflict on others — dominance even enjoyed. Such goals may be hypocognized, but they might well be valued in families and cultural activities nonetheless, and are part of cultural pathways and valued activities.

Cultural values, seen as providing a loosely coupled direction for many specific practices in a community, should then be "visible" even in universally required, mundane tasks of parenting like feeding children. Amy Miller and Robin Harwood (this issue) show empirically that "feeding or playing with your baby" are examples of universal practices yet with widely varying, and locally specific, cultural information embedded in the practice. The unit of analysis in their studies clearly is the activity of baby feeding or play. The Anglo mothers were more likely to show patterns of beliefs and behaviors that emphasize the infant's sense of personal choice and mastery of the feeding situation — self-maximization. In contrast, the Puerto Rican mothers were more likely to show patterns of beliefs and behaviors that emphasize the infant's interdependence with the mother, including proper demeanor. The babies are already on a certain cultural-developmental pathway. "Mothers thus appear to structure feeding [and engaging in social play] in ways that are consistent with larger cultural meaning systems." The concrete, scripted behaviors systematically observed include these:

... the Anglo mothers were more likely to show patterns of beliefs and behaviors that emphasized the infant's personal choice and mastery of the situation, such as early initiation of self-feeding, more active game play, greater use of praise, encouragement, suggestions, maintenance of greater physical distance, and greater emphasis on self-maximization. The Puerto Rican mothers were more likely to show patterns of beliefs and behaviors that emphasized the infant's interdependence on the mother, such as later initiation of self-feeding, more verbal and nonverbal signaling of attention, greater use of socially interactive games, maintenance of closer physical proximity, and greater emphasis on proper demeanor.

The Puerto Rican patterns are reminiscent of Kagitscibasi's (1996) description of a general cultural complex promoting an autonomous yet relational and interdependent self-construal, one which is neither dominantly individualistic nor collective/communal. Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, and Weisz (2000) contrasted the developmental paths towards close relationships as characterized by Symbiotic Harmony in Japan and by Generative Tension in the United States. The similarities and differences between feeding and social play illustrate such a culture complex at work in Puerto Rico and the United States as well: There are common patterns across each activity within each cultural community; they are loosely coupled.

In other work, Harwood, Miller, Carlson, and Leyendecker (in press) point out that there is intragroup variation within the clusters they identified, as Tamis-LeMonda emphasized for values preferences as well, and that some features, such as maternal nurturance measures, did not differ across groups. It is an empirical question concerning the extent of shared engagement in an activity like infant feeding, and shared scripts, values, and beliefs about the task. There are techniques available to ask about the extent of sharing of cultural scripts within a domain of knowledge such as infant care and feeding (Romney & Batchelder, 2002). (I leave open the question of defining what constitutes a shared domain across cultures — but it is not an unlikely assumption that feeding babies qualifies across these two cultures, and is a universal feature. "Social play" is not so clearly a recognizable activity and requires more specification, yet play is universal.)

Marc Bornstein and colleagues (this issue) compare the agrarian, more familial and small-scale South of Italy, to the urbanized, industrial North, specifically in regards to development and regional patterns of change in styles of play. This study is an explicit assessment of two sites where stages in play in children thought to be universal could be compared using identical mixed-method studies of families participating in longitudinal study of children age 13 and 20 months in each community. The predicted changes from exploratory to more symbolic modes of play in children occurred in both communities. Mothers in the South (the presumptively more agrarian, small-community situation) used less verbal praise at both child ages, and demonstrated exploratory play more at 20 months. Hence both settings showed the expected universal developmental changes towards more symbolic play, and there were some regional differences occurring within this broader general developmental pattern. As Bornstein et al. point out, there are many parents around the world, unlike both northern and southern Italian parents, who do not consider it relevant or appropriate to be play partners or agents for training in "better" kinds of play for their children. Perhaps older children are considered the relevant partners for play, or children are simply going to play how and as they will and it is

not a salient adult concern. Peggy Miller et al. (this issue) point out that their rural Taiwanese mothers also believed that development will happen without constant active directive adult intervention and that such interventions are unnecessary and even detrimental.

Another dimension of play assessed in play research is the "creativity" of play, and is usually measured in part by the absence of adult "directiveness" or explicit organization of play. Like the transition to symbolic modes of play, creativity is considered better for children, even a natural and universal process. Consider, however, the Chinese practice of fathers sitting with their children teaching them classical poems thought to enhance moral and mental development (Haight, 1999).

> There is more mutual, "child-centered" U.S. play, and more filial-piety-based beliefs translated into didactic and directed play in Taipei. Haight cites Heidi Fung's report of an interesting cultural practice in Taipei. It challenges U.S. definitions of play as being "structured" (typically evaluated as not as "good" for development) versus play that is "open" or "child-centered" (as the U.S. model names these dimensions). The Chinese parents provide a cultural framework for play through having fathers read poems to their young children. "Through the memorization of many (3,000) Tsang poems, Chinese parents believed not only that the meaning of children's daily lives would be enhanced but also that the children would learn to write poetry (Haight, 1999, p. 144). Is this to be glossed as "overly-structured" play, or (as Haight of course sees it) as a quite striking belief and practice intended to provide developmentally essential cultural meaning for children's play and promote richly engaged development — one that we might well like to emulate?! (Weisner, in press).

Such play activities might be scored as "directive" — and yet what a wonderful tradition! Surely the well-being of a child who sits with his/her father saying these poems is co-creating a marvelous kind of cultural continuity. Along with the maturational changes in play likely to be happening at the same times (demonstrated by Bornstein and others), it would be gross misinterpretation of the cultural pathway parent and child are creating through engaging in this play activity to give these fathers and children a "low" (overly "directive") score on play development! Recall Harwood's infants being fed in different ways, and the cultural messages carried by the practices of feeding. Variations in play interactions and activities surely carry even more explicit meanings of these kinds.

Play and feeding are quite intimate activities, mostly done in homes, yards, playgrounds. The interactions and scripts that make them up, though, reflect the broader cultural complexes of beliefs and values of which they are a part. But what about moving to settings outside the home

— situations that involve institutions (schools) and later developmental ages (middle childhood) and caregivers other than parents (teachers, principals). Garcia Coll and her colleagues (this issue) examine parental involvement in the schools of their second and fifth grade children in Portuguese, Dominican, and Cambodian immigrant (at least one immigrant parent) families in Providence, RI. Their study blends ethnographic data on community and school situations with extensive home interviews. The interviews covered routine cultural practices, as well as values, school involvement, beliefs about teachers and schools, and so forth. This work is an exemplar of the holistic appraisal of school involvement, considered not only as the participation by parents in classrooms or school functions, but as the mutual accommodation of schools (with some responsibility to bring diverse immigrant parents into the school) and parents (facing resource, time, cultural mismatch in values and beliefs, and other constraints on being able to engage with schools). Language comfort appears to be a key indicator for this complex of institutional and familial/cultural influences: "For first generation parents, comfort with language skills may be a proxy for the familiarity and ease necessary to interact with institutions outside the home and ethnic enclave." Language comfort may also be an index for a whole complex of home activities and practices that now are changing, and that suggest that schools might change as well.

The default research designs in studies of parenting and human development increasingly no longer are monocultural studies. The default methods no longer are single sets of questionnaire or observational measures. And the default theoretical approach no longer goes from presumed universals in processes or contexts directly to analysis and interpretation of individual differences. The current standard or best research practices are exemplified in various ways by the studies in this special issue. Best practice expects comparative designs across relevant cultural, ethnic, regional, or other systematically varying communities are the standard. Mixed methods are increasingly the current best practice, including evidence regarding the subjective interpretation parents and children give to their behaviors and contexts, along with ethnographic, observational, and other systematic measures that take us across levels of analysis. All this is because the overwhelming evidence from comparative studies of parenting and child development is that the pathways parents and children are engaging in their local cultural setting, made up of an everyday routine of life and its constituent activities and practices, drive development. Keep the image of parents and children engaging in activities that constitute the stepping stones of their developmental pathways in some specific communities. Best theoretical practice, exemplified by the papers in this collection, combines that contextual vision with universalistic and individual-difference perspectives.

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