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Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences in Parenting

Jennifer E. Lansford[1]
[1]Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy, Box 90545, Durham, NC 27708, USA.

Abstract

This article reviews contemporary research on cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting. The article begins by providing a definition of culture and how both parenting and culture can change over historical time. The article then presents some classic theoretical frameworks for understanding culture and parenting before considering why parenting may be similar across cultures and why parenting may be different across cultures. The article next turns to a review of cross-cultural similarities and differences in several aspects of parenting, including physical caregiving, cognitive stimulation, warmth and acceptance, control and monitoring, and discipline. Cultural normativeness and beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority are then considered as potential moderators that contribute to cross-cultural similarities and differences in relations between parenting and child outcomes. The article then considers implications for parenting interventions and laws and policies related to parenting. Finally, the article suggests directions for future research.

Introduction

Developmental scientists and anthropologists have long been interested in how parenting is situated in particular cultural contexts. These interests have become more pressing over time in response to two factors. First, prominent reviews have highlighted the disproportionate preponderance of studies on the development of middle-class White children in the United States, Canada, and western Europe. For example, a review of articles published between 2003–2007 in *Developmental Psychology* indicated that 64% of the research participants were from the United States, 19% from other English-speaking countries, 11% from Europe, 4% from Asia, and 2% from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East combined (Arnett, 2008). Similarly, research participants in studies published in high-impact developmental journals in 2015 represented less than 8% of the world's children (Nielsen et al., 2017), raising concerns that knowledge of parenting and child development is biased by focusing on cultural contexts not representative of the world's population (e.g., Henrich et al., 2010). Second, cultural diversity within countries has become increasingly a focus of research studies. For example, the United States is projected to become a majority minority nation by 2045 (Frey, 2018), drawing attention to ways that parenting sometimes differs across cultural

Correspondence: Jennifer E. Lansford, Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy, Box 90545, Durham, NC 27708, USA. Phone: 1-217-722-0965. lansford@duke.edu.

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groups within a particular country. This article provides an overview of cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting.

In any review, difficult tradeoffs must be made between depth and breadth. The current review leans toward breadth rather than depth by covering key issues in the study of cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting but sacrificing depth to cover that full range. For example, a search in Google Scholar for "culture and parenting" yields 907,000 results, 71,600 just since 2016. With a body of research that broad and large, a systematic, comprehensive review or meta-analysis would be overwhelming. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses are better suited to more narrow aspects of cultural similarities and differences in parenting, such as parents' discipline, demonstrations of warmth and affection, or some other more narrowly defined aspect of parenting. Instead, the review that follows takes a broad perspective to provide an overview of many issues in understanding parenting from a cross-cultural perspective. Classic theories proposed decades ago that situate parenting in cultural contexts are presented briefly, but the studies used to illustrate the state of the empirical literature were published in the last ten years.

The review begins by providing a definition of culture and how both parenting and culture can change over historical time. The article then presents some classic theoretical frameworks for understanding culture and parenting before considering why parenting may be similar across cultures and why parenting may be different across cultures. The article next turns to a review of cross-cultural similarities and differences in several aspects of parenting, including physical caregiving, cognitive stimulation, warmth and acceptance, control and monitoring, and discipline. Cultural normativeness and beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority are then considered as potential moderators that contribute to cross-cultural similarities and differences in relations between parenting and child outcomes. The article then considers implications for parenting interventions and laws and policies related to parenting. Finally, the article suggests directions for future research.

Definition of Culture

Culture often is defined as the beliefs, behaviors, customs, and values that characterize a particular social group. Culture can encompass nationality, ethnicity, region, religion, and other socially defined groups. Individuals also have intersecting cultural identities based on their identification with more than one group (e.g., as an ethnic minority within a particular country). Researchers operationalize culture in a range of ways. This review focuses primarily on cultural groups defined by nationality because researchers frequently use nationality as a proxy for culture. However, some examples reflect other ways of operationalizing culture (e.g., religion or ethnic group). These "social address" variables are less important than the constellation of beliefs, behaviors, and other characteristics of parenting that drive cultural variation.

Within-culture differences in parenting are often larger than between-culture differences (Deater-Deckard et al., 2018). Within-culture differences can be a function of socioeconomic status (SES), parent or child gender, parent or child age, urban/rural residence, and other factors. To illustrate, social safety nets may make SES differences in parenting less

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pronounced in some countries than others by reducing the stress parents experience, and harsh parenting that can stem from stress, in the face of food or housing insecurity in the absence of social safety nets (e.g., Kotchick et al., 2021). With respect to within-country differences based on gender, a meta-analysis of 52 studies with samples primarily from the United States but also from Canada, Europe, China, and Malaysia concluded that parent-adolescent conflict was more strongly related to internalizing, externalizing, and academic problems for girls than boys (Weymouth et al., 2016). However, a different meta-analysis of 1,435 studies, also with samples primarily from western countries, found no moderation of links between parenting (warmth; behavioral, harsh, or psychological control; autonomy granting; and authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting style) and externalizing behavior by parent or child gender (Pinquart, 2017). Differences between mothers' and fathers' parenting or parenting of girls and boys may be more pronounced in countries with less egalitarian gender roles.

Cultures are not static over time but are affected by historical changes, including globalization, technology uptake, social media, urbanization, and other forces that have had a somewhat homogenizing influence on some aspects of culture over time (Lansford et al., 2021). Thus, it is important to recognize that findings about cultural differences from the past may no longer be found today. For example, parents' endorsement and use of corporal punishment has declined over historical time in many countries, partially in response to laws that have made corporal punishment illegal in 63 countries as of August 2021 (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2021). As another example, in previous decades, parents' views regarding their children's shyness in China differed from those in more individualistic countries such as Canada, with Chinese parents regarding shyness as more of a desired characteristic associated with social competence and fitting in with the group (Chen, 2019). However, with increasing westernization in China and the historical shift to a market-based economy in which personal initiative is rewarded, urban parents' views about children's shyness shifted toward believing that shyness is indicative of social incompetence and changing parenting to avoid reinforcing shyness; these changes in parents' views regarding shyness are less pronounced or absent in rural areas of China that have experienced less westernization (Chen, 2019).

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Culture and Parenting

Several classic theoretical models inform understanding of culture and parenting. Ecological theories of development situate parent-child relationships in nested contexts that include relatively proximal social contexts such as neighborhoods and more distal contexts that encompass values, belief systems, norms, and laws that characterize cultural contexts (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). In these theories, beliefs and norms of cultural contexts affect parents' and children's expectations and behaviors in their relationship with each other. As parents and children observe how others in their community behave, they come to hold expectations about parent-child relationships and reproduce culturally-shaped patterns of behavior in their own relationship (Rogoff, 2003). Cultural-ecological models also highlight the importance of applying developmental models derived from studying specific cultural groups in their own contexts, rather than attempting to understand one group through models that originated with a different group (Ogbu, 1995).

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Indigenous psychologies have been under-represented in the literature but can be crucial for understanding parenting within specific cultural contexts. For example, theocentric views common in Africa emphasize the importance of working together for the benefit of all and children's social integration in their communities, as opposed to their individual sovereignty, which can help explain why African parents socialize their children to derive meaning and identity from their communities rather than themselves (Nsamenang & Lo-Oh, 2010). Likewise, three family models, the Family Model of Interdependence (traditionally more typical in rural/agrarian societies), Family Model of Independence (traditionally more typical in urban/western societies), and Family Model of Emotional Interdependence (which synthesizes relatedness and autonomy), emphasize different socialization practices and parenting styles (Kagitcibasi, 2007).

Other ecocultural models describe how daily routines incorporate cultural activities that are important because they encompass goals, values, emotions, motives, social relationships, resources for accomplishing the activities, and norms about how to engage in them (Weisner, 2002). The "developmental niche" is another framework that has been used to describe how parent-child relationships are shaped by beliefs and childrearing practices in particular cultural contexts, as well as by physical and social characteristics of the environment (Super & Harkness, 1986). Cultural scripts also shape parent-child relationships by providing information about desired socialization goals and what parents can do to reach those goals (Greenfield, 1994). Taken together, these classic theories provide frameworks for understanding how cultural contexts shape parenting beliefs, scripts, goals, and behaviors by providing opportunities for observational learning and affordances regarding what is possible in a particular social and physical environment.

One useful framework for understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting relies on understanding the form (specific cognitions and behaviors of parents) versus function (underlying meaning of the cognitions and behaviors) of parenting (Bornstein, 2012). Distinctions between form and function have been described in both evolutionary developmental models (Ellis et al., 2017) and parenting frameworks (e.g., Grusec & Davidov, 2010). Envision a two-by-two matrix with form on one axis and function on the other. The form of parenting can be either the same or different across cultures, and the function of parenting can be either the same or different across cultures, resulting in four cells in the matrix. If a particular parenting cognition or behavior has both the same form and same function across cultures, it is culturally universal. For example, the behavior of maternal vocalizations to infants serves the function of increasing infants' vocalizations to their mothers in consistent ways across diverse linguistic and cultural groups in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, France, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States (Bornstein, Putnick, Cote, et al., 2015). However, a particular parenting cognition or behavior can also serve different functions in different cultural contexts. For example, family obligation values serve the function of increasing Korean American, but not European American, college students' perceptions of their parents as being supportive (Oh et al., 2020). Alternately, different parenting cognitions or behaviors can serve the same function. For example, parenting behaviors as diverse as hugging, saying "I love you," preparing a favorite meal, or supporting a child's education can all serve the same function of making the child feel loved and accepted (Cheah et al., 2015). Finally,

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different parenting cognitions or behaviors can serve different functions in different cultural contexts, demonstrating cultural specificity in both form and function. For example, in Japan, mothers more often orient their infants to themselves, which serves the function of promoting interdependence in mother-infant relationships, whereas in the United States, mothers more often orient their infants to objects in the environment, which serves the function of promoting independent exploration (Bornstein et al., 2012); both behaviors and the functions they serve are consistent with socialization goals in the respective cultural contexts.

Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences in Parenting

Conceptually, it is useful to consider why some parenting behaviors may demonstrate cross-cultural similarities whereas others may differ across cultures. Reasons for similarities and differences are considered in turn.

Why Would Parenting be Similar across Cultures?

Across cultures, some parenting behaviors appear to be universally adaptive. Consider physical caregiving. Infants' survival depends on their parents' physical caregiving in terms of feeding and protection from environmental hazards. Thus, to the extent that a parenting behavior promotes infants' survival, it would be expected to be similar across cultures. Likewise, infants and children depend on their parents for cognitive stimulation and emotional security. Therefore, parenting behaviors such as contingent responsiveness to infants' vocalizations, which is cognitively stimulating and promotes language acquisition, as well as responsiveness in other areas that enable infants to develop secure attachment relationships, are likely to be similar across cultures. For example, children have a universal need for love and acceptance that can be fulfilled by warm (as opposed to hostile, neglecting, or rejecting) relationships with parents (Rohner & Lansford, 2017).

Why Would Parenting be Different across Cultures?

Despite these similarities across cultures, a number of factors also help account for differences across cultures. For example, cultures differ with respect to norms for expected behaviors (e.g., Lansford et al., 2018) and the role of extended family and siblings in terms of who provides care for children (e.g., Kramer & Hamilton, 2019). These differences across cultures are well captured by qualitative and ethnographic approaches to studying parenting, which have a long history in anthropology. These approaches generally take a monocultural approach by delving deep into a single cultural context rather than taking a comparative cross-cultural approach. Anthropologists have documented case studies of belief systems guiding a diverse array of childrearing practices that are culturally distinct in their own right (Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2017). Cultural values often play an important role in these belief systems and parenting behaviors. For example, discourse analysis of mother-child conversations revealed ways in which cultural values common in European-heritage (European American) and Confucian-heritage (Taiwanese) families were transmitted in everyday interactions (Li & Fung, 2020).

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Differences in parents' behaviors are also a function of affordances and constraints in physical environments. For example, Yoruba parents in Nigeria socialize their children's behavior related to food in response to changes in the availability of food caused by distinct rainy and dry seasons (Babatunde & Setiloane, 2014). Parents socialize their children to be thrifty, delay gratification, and show proper etiquette by teaching them not to visit other families during meals, to be patient waiting for food, and to eat valuable fish and meat at the end of the meal. Without environmental constraints on the availability of food, parents in some cultural contexts may not devote time and effort to socializing their children's behavior in this way.

Aspects of Parenting

Parenting encompasses a number of different aspects of behavior, including physical caregiving, cognitive stimulation, warmth, control and monitoring, and discipline.

Physical caregiving.—Physical caregiving involves the multitude of ways that parents provide for children's bodily needs, health, and safety, which is important for parents in all cultures. Feeding is one of parents' earliest responsibilities in physical caregiving. To optimize nutrition and provide antibodies to help infants' immune systems, the World Health Organization (2018) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and breastfeeding paired with solid foods for two years, but countries differ widely in the proportion of mothers who meet those goals.

Large differences also are found across cultures in the amount of physical contact parents have with their infants. For example, hunter-gatherer !Kung infants spend 90% of their first year of life in skin-to-skin contact with their mother or another caregiver as they co-sleep at night and are carried in slings attached to caregivers' bodies during the day (Diamond, 2012). In contrast, infants in many western cultures sleep alone not only in separate beds but even in separate rooms, and during the day they are often placed in strollers, infant seats, and other devices that are not connected to parents' bodies (Diamond, 2012). Parents also differ in other kinds of physical experiences they provide for their children.

As children develop, they are increasingly able to take care of their own physical needs. Nevertheless, some differences across cultures in physical caregiving persist into childhood and even adolescence, often related to what children are expected to do at certain ages. For example, in nationally representative samples from 24 sub-Saharan African countries, only 4% of children in Zimbabwe compared to 44% of children from Niger were the primary water collectors for their families (Graham et al., 2016). More than 100,000 residents of each of six of these 24 countries reported that children were their households' primary water collectors when more than 30 minutes per day was spent collecting water from a river or other communal source to bring to the family home (Graham et al., 2016). Water collection is a chore not expected of children who live in communities with water piped into their home. Differences in physical caregiving are driven in part by different beliefs about what children are capable of and should be expected to do on their own at different ages in different cultures and in part by constraints and affordances of the physical environment.

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Differences in physical caregiving often are related to differences in child behaviors. For example, naturalistic observations of mother-infant dyads in Argentina, Cameroon, Italy, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States revealed differences in opportunities that mothers provided for their 5-month-old infants to sit on different surfaces, sit with support, and sit independently (Karasik et al., 2015). Mothers in Cameroon and Kenya provided the most opportunities for their infants to sit independently, and their infants sat more proficiently than infants in the other countries.

Cognitive stimulation.—Parents across cultures are responsible not only for physical caregiving but also providing cognitive stimulation. Early cognitive stimulation can include singing, talking, and reading with children, all of which are important for language development. Parents can also provide cognitive stimulation by providing educational materials and opportunities as well as by playing. Large differences across countries have been found in the percentage of parents who provide different kinds of cognitive stimulation, including activities such as reading that require material resources as well as activities that do not, such as taking the child outside and telling the child stories (Bornstein, Putnick, Lansford, et al., 2015). Similar differences across countries in cognitively stimulating forms of parenting persist beyond infancy (Bornstein & Putnick, 2016).

Understanding the beliefs that underlie parents' behaviors helps explain differences in behaviors. For example, in Senegal, parents traditionally avoided speaking to infants because doing so was thought to increase the chance that infants would be possessed by evil spirits (Weber et al., 2017). Wide differences also exist with respect to parents' beliefs about the importance of play and whether they play with their children. Parents in agrarian or hunter-gatherer societies are more likely to regard play as unimportant to child development, whereas parents in industrialized societies are more likely to regard play as a way to foster children's cognitive and socioemotional development (Roopnarine, 2015).

For older children and adolescents, an important way that parents provide cognitive stimulation is through involvement in their children's education. In some countries, parents play a major role in whether children are able to attend school because parents have to pay for school-related expenses to make attendance possible, and given financial constraints, parents must sometimes decide which of their children they can afford to send to school (Zuilkowski et al., 2018). Beyond attendance, parents in some cultural groups generally believe that education is the responsibility of teachers at school or feel disenfranchised from their children's education so have relatively little involvement, whereas parents in other groups are more likely to believe that they should help their children with homework, volunteer at school, or engage in other direct interactions to promote their children's educational success (Park & Holloway, 2013).

Warmth.—The warmth dimension of parenting encompasses a range of supportive, responsive, affectionate parenting. According to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, children universally have the need to feel loved and accepted (Rohner & Smith, 2019). An overview of 12 meta-analyses conducted in 31 countries on five continents concluded that across cultures, feeling accepted by parents was related to children's (and adults') better psychological adjustment and that feeling rejected by parents was related to maladjustment

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(Khaleque & Ali, 2017). Consistent with the understanding that different forms of parenting can serve the same function in different cultural contexts, a variety of behaviors can all serve the function of making children feel loved and accepted. For example, western parents demonstrate warmth by hugging, kissing, and saying "I love you" more frequently than Asian parents, who are more likely to demonstrate warmth by taking care of their children's educational needs and providing instrumental support (Cheah et al., 2015). Thus, differences across cultures may be in the ways that parents demonstrate warmth rather than in levels of warmth per se.

Responsive parenting is often conceptualized as a component of parental warmth. Understanding responsive, sensitive parenting calls for "universality without uniformity" (Mesman et al., 2017, p. 837), meaning that although parents in all cultures need to provide responsive and sensitive care, they do so differently across cultures. Behaviors that indicate sensitive parenting differ, in part, as a function of world views that prioritize different perspectives. For example, sensitive parents in western cultures often follow their infant's lead by responding to cues about what the infant needs, whereas many non-western parents show sensitivity by directing the infant's activities to help them understand the wants and needs of other people (Keller et al., 2018).

Control and monitoring: In classic parenting typologies (e.g., Baumrind, 1967), control is an aspect of parenting that is orthogonal to warmth in creating parenting typologies. In international research on parenting, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglecting parenting styles that pair high versus low warmth with high versus low control historically have been among the most common organizing frameworks (Smetana, 2017). Meta-analyses suggest that authoritative parenting that pairs warmth with control is related to fewer internalizing and externalizing problems and better academic achievement in ways that are generally consistent across cultures (e.g., Pinquart & Kauser, 2018).

Behavioral control, which focuses on setting rules and limits to manage children's behavior, has been distinguished from psychological control, which uses guilt induction or love withdrawal to invalidate children's views that may differ from those held by parents (Barber et al., 2012). Psychological control usually has been found to be related to worse child adjustment across diverse cultural contexts (Scharf & Goldner, 2018), whereas associations between behavioral control and children's adjustment are more variable across cultures (e.g., Rothenberg et al., 2020). In some countries (e.g., Jordan, Kenya), parents who use high levels of behavioral control also have high levels of warmth, whereas in other countries (e.g., Sweden, United States), parents who use high levels of control have low levels of warmth or levels of warmth that are unrelated to control in systematic ways (Deater-Deckard et al., 2011).

Elements of control are encompassed in the constellation of parenting behaviors related to monitoring, which becomes more salient during adolescence when parents typically begin exerting more distal forms of control. Contemporary conceptualizations of monitoring differentiate parents' active contributions to the process (e.g., setting rules, asking for information) from adolescents' active contributions (e.g., disclosing information, secrecy) to recognize the transactional nature of the process (Lionetti et al., 2019). Monitoring-related

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behaviors differ across cultures, in part as a function of expectations about how much control parents should exert over their adolescents' decisions and activities (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2020).

Discipline.—Country of residence accounts for large differences in the types of discipline that parents use. In a comparison of nationally representative samples of families with 2- to 4-year-old children from 24 low- and middle-income countries, country accounted for 11–18% of the variance in parents' use of exclusively non-violent forms of discipline (explaining why something was wrong, distracting the child by giving him/her something else to do, removing a privilege) and 10–18% of the variance in parents' use of different forms of corporal punishment (Lansford & Deater-Deckard, 2012). To illustrate the range this variance entails, 49% of parents in Albania reported that they and others in their household had used only non-violent forms of discipline in the last month, whereas no parents in Mongolia reported the use of exclusively non-violent forms of discipline. Part of the variance in parents' use of different forms of discipline can be accounted for by differences across cultures in parents' beliefs about the necessity, acceptability, and efficacy of particular forms of discipline, but parents often use corporal punishment even when they do not believe it is necessary to rear a child properly (Lansford et al., 2020).

Some forms of discipline are not easily comparable across countries because they are embedded in rituals that are specific to particular cultural context. For example, video recordings of deference rituals practiced by Vietnamese children in the Mekong Delta region revealed how discipline could be handled within the context of socializing children to greet, depart from, thank, or apologize to others by using appropriate postural displays and proper verbal respect (Fung & Thu, 2019). Cultural contexts can also shape parents' perspectives on situations in which discipline is warranted or not (e.g., Davidov & Atzaba-Poria, 2016).

Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences in Relations between Parenting and Child Outcomes

Regardless of similarities or differences in parenting itself, parenting may be related to child outcomes in similar or different ways across cultures. Cultural normativeness and legitimacy of parental authority have been proposed as two moderators that could account for cultural differences in links between parenting and child outcomes. Each is considered in turn.

Cultural Normativeness

Cultural normativeness refers to how accepted and widely practiced a belief or behavior is within a particular context. It is important to recognize that normativeness of a belief or behavior does not necessarily mean that it is advisable. The international community recognizes some practices (e.g., child marriage, female genital mutilation) as being harmful to children, despite their acceptance and endorsement by parents in some cultures. Thus, understanding cultural normativeness as a moderator of links between parenting and child outcomes should be situated in this perspective.

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The reason that normativeness might moderate associations between parents' behavior and child outcomes is that both parents and children interpret parents' behavior in the context of the culture in which it is situated. If parents behave in a way that others in their cultural community endorse, expect, and also behave, parents will feel more confident, have more community support, and believe that they are behaving as parents should. Children, likewise, will interpret their parents' behavior as being consistent with how other parents behave and will be less likely to interpret their own parents' behavior as a personal rejection (which could weaken the association between a harsh behavior and child outcomes) and will be more likely to interpret their own parents' behavior as justified (which could strengthen the association between parents' behavior and a desired outcome). However, if parents behave in a way that is not consistent with cultural norms, parents may be doing so because they are acting out of anger or frustration, and children may interpret their parents' behavior as being hostile and rejecting.

Empirical studies of cultural normativeness as a moderator have most often examined normativeness as a moderator of links between corporal punishment and child outcomes, but recent work has expanded to other aspects of parenting. For example, in a longitudinal study of children, mothers, and fathers from nine countries (China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States), normativeness of five aspects of parenting (expectations regarding family obligations, monitoring, psychological control, behavioral control, warmth/affection) was examined as a moderator of links between those aspects of parenting and five aspects of children's adjustment (social competence, prosocial behavior, academic achievement, externalizing behavior, internalizing behavior; Lansford et al., 2018). Normativeness did not moderate all of the associations, but in seven of the eight significant moderation effects, results were consistent with the hypothesis that parenting would be related to better child outcomes when it was more culturally normative. To illustrate, parents' expectations regarding children's family obligations were more strongly related to child social competence in cultural contexts in which high expectations regarding family obligations were normative. Thus, cultural normativeness may moderate associations between parenting and child outcomes because parents and children interpret parenting in the context of beliefs and behaviors not only in their own relationships but also as demonstrated by other parents in their cultural context.

Legitimacy of Parental Authority

A second leading candidate as a potential moderator between parenting and child outcomes is children's beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority, particularly as children reach adolescence. Parents and children in different cultural contexts hold different beliefs about whether it is acceptable and appropriate for parents to set rules or expectations about issues that are moral (e.g., hurting others, stealing), conventional (e.g., chores, curfew), and personal (e.g., choice of friends or clothing). Across cultures, adolescents are more likely to believe that parents have legitimate authority to set rules and expectations about moral and conventional issues than personal ones (Smetana & Rote, 2019). Parents also believe they have more legitimate authority about moral and conventional than personal issues, but parents also tend to believe they should hold more authority about all issues and extending later in adolescence than adolescents believe they should. Even in cultures that emphasize

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filial piety and parental authority, control and decision-making are eventually ceded by parents to adolescents as they develop, especially about personal issues (Smetana & Rote, 2019).

Beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority can moderate the link between parents' attempts to set rules or exert control and adolescents' responses to those attempts. For example, adolescents in an ethnically diverse sample in the United States were more accepting of parents' monitoring-related behaviors such as setting rules and soliciting information if they believed such behaviors were appropriate and consistent with parents' legitimate authority (LaFleur et al., 2016). These legitimacy beliefs moderated the link between parents' monitoring-related behaviors and adolescents' reactions, such as feeling invaded or controlled. Similarly, for adolescents who perceived their parents as having legitimate authority, mothers' monitoring-related behaviors were related to more adolescent disclosure and less secrecy (Keijsers & Laird, 2014). These findings suggest that adolescents are more likely to comply with parents' rules and expectations if they believe that their parents have legitimate authority about those issues. Cultural groups may differ in the extent to which parents are believed to have legitimate authority and the timing with which parents cede control to adolescents.

Practice and Policy Implications

Parenting Interventions

Understanding of cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting has been applied to the development and implementation of parenting interventions in many cultural contexts, particularly as a way of deciding which aspects of parenting programs are transportable across cultures and which aspects need to be adapted to work in specific cultural contexts (Mejia et al., 2017). Parenting programs generally aim to change parents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in specific ways that are ultimately intended to foster children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, but barriers can complicate their implementation (Weisenmuller & Hilton, 2021). UNICEF (2017) recommends nine standards for parenting programs: (1) Support nurturing care to promote holistic child development; (2) Build on a theory of change leading to desired results; (3) Tailor content to the child's developmental stage; (4) Serve vulnerable children and their families; (5) Involve all parents and key caregivers; (6) Adapt to culture and context and build on positive parenting practices; (7) Integrate into existing delivery platforms; (8) Engage trained workforce and service providers; and (9) Improve through systematic monitoring and evaluation.

In some cases, imposing an intervention developed elsewhere on a new population has the potential to do more harm than good; some unintended consequences can be anticipated and prevented, but others cannot (Kleinman, 2010). Even if an intervention does not have unintended negative consequences, interventions are sometimes more effective for individuals from particular backgrounds than for others (Leijten et al., 2018). Focus group discussions with Black mothers in the United States, for example, suggested a number of reasons that Black parents may use corporal punishment as well as ways that multi-level intervention approaches that aim to reduce corporal punishment will benefit from

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incorporating an understanding of parents' beliefs and motivations as well as community norms (Taylor, 2011). Therefore, caution is needed to consider new implementation contexts and needs of specific new populations before attempting to transfer a parenting program from one cultural group to another.

As examples of how UNICEF's (2017) standards for parenting programs can be implemented, consider Standard 6 regarding adapting to culture and context and building on positive parenting practices and Standard 7 regarding the integration of parenting programs into existing delivery platforms. In the Philippines, an existing conditional cash transfer program for low-income families was expanded to include a parenting component, which was a Filipino adaptation of the Parenting for Lifelong Health program originally developed in South Africa (Alampay et al., 2018). Using a heuristic framework for the cultural adaptation of interventions, the original program was modified to address the preferences and perceptions of Filipino parents and to make the program relevant to the Filipino context (Mamauag et al., 2021). The parenting component began with a foundation emphasizing positive parenting and focused on providing parents with skills to prevent child maltreatment. Integrating the parenting program into the conditional cash transfer program facilitated its implementation and sustainability because the infrastructure was already in place to connect with families who could benefit from the program.

Sometimes entirely new parenting programs are developed within a particular cultural context, but more commonly, a parenting program developed in one context is adapted to use in another. Adapting an existing program has the advantage of being more cost-effective in terms of both time and money than developing a new program because existing training materials for program providers and resources for families can be used. Having demonstrated effectiveness in another context also increases the potential for effectiveness in new contexts. A meta-analysis of 17 trials of four parenting programs developed in Australia and the United States found that adaptations of the programs in 10 countries in five world regions were as effective as (and in some cases, more effective than) the programs in their original countries (Gardner et al., 2016). In addition, a meta-regression of 129 randomized trials of parenting interventions found no systematic differences in the effectiveness of "homegrown" interventions versus imported interventions for preventing children's disruptive behaviors, even when programs were imported from western contexts in which they were developed to non-western contexts (Leijten et al., 2016). These findings suggest the promise of adapting existing parenting programs for new cultural contexts without compromising their effectiveness. Caution is also needed, though, particularly with respect to ethical issues if outsiders (typically from high-income countries) are attempting to change parenting practices (typically of poor parents in low- or middle-income countries) in ways that may not be consistent with goals that parents have for their children and without considering what the implications of such changes may be for children, families, and communities (Morelli et al., 2018).

Adapting parenting programs to be culturally appropriate both on a surface level (e.g., using materials with locally-derived examples) and a deeper level (e.g., by incorporating cultural values and frameworks related to parent-child relationships) has the potential to maximize effectiveness in supporting parents' relationships with their children. In addition

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to the substantive content of the program, attention is needed to make sure that the mode of delivery and logistics of delivering the program also work in the new setting. Adaptations should incorporate local knowledge of preferences, customs, beliefs, and prohibitions. For example, a randomized controlled trial of an intervention in Bangladesh designed to reduce infant mortality by increasing sanitation and hygiene practices in the home overcame potential barriers by using local knowledge (Ram et al., 2020). In particular, mothers in qualitative phases of the research had reported that although they understood the importance of washing their hands before feeding their infants or after diapering to prevent the spread of diseases, going to an outdoor water source took extra time, and mothers in the community shared beliefs that women should avoid water as much as possible during the perinatal period. The intervention, therefore, introduced a waterless, alcohol-free hand sanitizer that could overcome barriers to use of water as well as alcohol-based products in the largely Muslim communities in which the intervention was implemented. These adaptations to the intervention addressed both logistical and belief barriers.

Laws and Policies Related to Parenting

A number of laws have implications for parenting. Two examples are provided here to illustrate how laws can affect parents' time with and resources to support childrearing and can prohibit certain parenting behaviors. In these examples, laws can be conceptualized as a public instantiation of cultural beliefs about the acceptability of certain behaviors that are promoted or prohibited by laws.

Parental leave policies.—Parental leave policies set the stage for parent-child relationships by making provisions (or not) for time that parents can spend away from work to care for infants and young children. Countries differ in their legal provisions for whether parents are entitled to time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child as well as whether both mothers and fathers are entitled to leave and whether the leave is paid (Bartel et al., 2018). The United States is the only high-income country, and one of only 10 countries in the world, that has no national paid parental leave policy (Bartel et al., 2018). Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have the most generous parental leave policies in terms of guaranteed time off with pay and provisions that both men and women take leave (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2016).

Parental leave policies have important implications for parent-child relationships. For example, women are more likely to breastfeed when they have paid parental leave (Hamad et al., 2019), with health benefits for both mothers and infants (World Health Organization, 2018). Controlling for gross domestic product per capita, health expenditures, child health indicators, and social expenditure measures in a comparison of 19 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, paid leave that protects the parent's job was found to reduce infant mortality, whereas unpaid leave or leave that did not offer job protection did not reduce infant mortality (Shim, 2016). Parental leave policies also have the potential to affect cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional adjustment later in childhood (Han et al., 2019). Children whose fathers take parental leave relate to their mothers and fathers in more equitable ways, and fathers are more likely to regard themselves as equal co-parents (McHale & Sirotkin, 2019). Thus, whether parental leave can be taken

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by fathers as well as mothers has implications for children's relationships with both parents, as well as for gender roles at a societal level (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2016).

Laws prohibiting corporal punishment.—As of February 2021, corporal punishment is illegal in 61 countries (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2021). Sweden was the first country to outlaw all forms of corporal punishment in 1979. The United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) asserted children's right to protection from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment, regardless of how mild. All countries except the United States have ratified the CRC, committing themselves to periodic international reviews to determine their progress in protecting children's rights. Largely in response, the number of countries that have outlawed corporal punishment has grown exponentially since the ratification of the CRC.

Laws prohibiting corporal punishment do not always change parents' attitudes and behaviors (Lansford et al., 2017). For example, parents may not be aware that a law has been passed unless the legal change is accompanied by a public awareness campaign, or parents may not know what effective forms of discipline to use as alternatives to corporal punishment. Outlawing corporal punishment is more likely to lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors when accompanied by educational campaigns (Bussmann et al., 2011). For example, the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting program has been adapted for use in several countries as a way to decrease parents' use of corporal punishment by increasing parents' use of different problem solving strategies during conflicts with children and fostering emotionally close parent-child relationships (Durrant, 2020). Understanding why parents in different cultural groups use corporal punishment can inform efforts to develop interventions specifically addressing reasons for use. For example, conservative Christians have been found to use corporal punishment more than individuals from other religious groups because of an interpretation of the Bible as teaching "spare the rod, spoil the child" (Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2019). An intervention that randomly assigned students at a Christian college to read scientific evidence about the detrimental effects of corporal punishment or scientific evidence paired with a biblical reinterpretation of "spare the rod, spoil the child" demonstrated a larger decrease in endorsement of corporal punishment in the group that received the biblical reinterpretation (Perrin et al., 2017). These findings suggest the importance of using educational materials that address culturally-grounded beliefs as well as legal bans in attempts to eliminate parents' use of corporal punishment.

Working with Immigrant Families

Understanding cultural similarities and differences in parenting is important in working with immigrant families who might experience a disconnect between beliefs and behaviors in their countries of origin and destination (Leyendecker et al., 2018). For example, immigrant parents in the United States have been reported to Child Protective Services for engaging in traditional healing practices, such as cupping and coining, that leave marks on a child that can make it appear that the child has been abused but that are intended to cure illness (Killion, 2017). Training professionals who work with immigrant families can help them approach the work in a culturally sensitive way and avoid adopting a deficit perspective that implies that the parents have shortcomings that need to be fixed (Roggman et al.,

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2016). Cultural sensitivity in recognizing parents' strengths and interpreting differences without value judgments is especially important because approximately 3.5% of the world's population lives in a different country from their country of birth (World Economic Forum, 2020), and international migrants comprise 14% of the population in high-income countries (United Nations, 2019).

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

Limitations of current research suggest directions for future research. An ongoing challenge in understanding parenting across cultures is the need to balance emic approaches grounded in cultural insiders' perspectives that may include constructs specific to a given culture with etic approaches that apply to a new cultural context constructs developed outside of that culture (Lansford et al., 2019). Emic approaches have the advantage of being centered on the world view of a particular group but the disadvantage of making it difficult to make cross-cultural comparisons, if that is the goal. Etic approaches have the advantage of facilitating comparisons across cultures but the disadvantage of losing nuances that might be important to understanding parenting in one culture but that are not relevant in other cultures. Future research can try to balance these perspectives through collaborations among researchers who are cultural insiders in their respective cultural groups so can bring knowledge grounded in the cultures to group comparisons.

Much of the parenting literature still presents a two-parent, heterosexual-parent model of the family. As of August 2021, same-sex marriage is legal in more than two dozen countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021), and homosexual activity is illegal in 71 countries, carrying penalties as severe as life imprisonment or execution in some countries (76 Crimes, 2021). Thus, at a macro level, laws constrain or enable forms that families can take. A growing body of research focuses on parenting intentions, beliefs, and behaviors of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in different countries (e.g., Herbrand, 2018 in Belgium; Wang & Zheng, 2021 in China) and different family forms (e.g., adoptive families, Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019). An important direction for future research will be to examine the extent to which cultural differences and similarities in parenting generalize to more diverse family forms, including sexual minority parents.

Methodological advances in ecological momentary assessments, neuroimaging, and advanced statistical modeling provide exciting opportunities for future research. For example, mobile phones are now widely available around the world, including in low-income countries. By prompting parents or children to respond to short surveys several times a day for several consecutive days, researchers are able to gain new understanding of how day-to-day variability in parenting is related to day-to-day variability in children's emotional and behavioral functioning (Li & Lansford, 2018). These mobile technologies are better able than more traditional longitudinal studies with assessment points separated by months or years to capture development as it unfolds in real time (Rothenberg et al., 2019). Advances in neuroimaging also provide opportunities to understand parenting in new ways, in this case in terms of how parenting—particularly abusive parenting— is related to brain structure and function (e.g., Cassiers et al., 2018). In addition, advances in statistical modeling shape

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the kinds of developmental questions it is possible to address empirically, with important implications for cross-cultural studies of parenting.

An important direction for future research will be to develop conceptual models and empirical measures to operationalize culture. Researchers generally do not believe that country of residence, ethnicity, or other "social address" indicators per se are responsible for differences in parenting across cultures (Rogoff, 2016). Rather, it is beliefs, values, expectations, norms, and the like that differ across nationalities or ethnicities that are thought to be responsible for differences between groups. Future research that measures these underlying factors that capture culture will enable researchers to move beyond comparisons between groups that differ in nationality or ethnicity to come closer to cultural differences.

Four main conclusions are warranted by the current state of the science in understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences in parenting. First, although many similarities in parenting exist across cultures, largely because they are universally adaptive for children's development, parenting also differs in a number of ways across cultures, largely because of environmental constraints and affordances as well as norms for expected behaviors and differences in who provides care for children. Second, understanding cultural differences in links between parenting and child outcomes benefits from consideration of moderators such as the normativeness of particular parenting behaviors, children's and parents' beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority in particular situations, and other factors that may affect how children interpret their parents' behavior within a given cultural context. Third, parenting interventions that are transported from one cultural context to another benefit from adaptations that incorporate local preferences, customs, beliefs, and prohibitions and warrant careful ethical consideration to consider what implications attempts to change parenting may have for particular cultural groups. Fourth, laws and policies related to parenting can serve as a public instantiation of a group's beliefs, such as the importance of paid leave time for mothers and fathers to spend with infants or the protection of children from violent punishment. Physical caregiving, cognitive stimulation, warmth, control and monitoring, and discipline are important aspects of parenting that take can take different (or similar) forms and can serve different (or similar) functions across cultural contexts.

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Key points

- Many similarities in parenting exist across cultures, largely because they are universally adaptive for children's development.
- Differences across cultures in parents' behaviors are a function of affordances and constraints in physical environments, norms for expected behaviors, the role of extended family and siblings in providing care for children, and cultural values.
- Physical caregiving, cognitive stimulation, warmth, control, monitoring, and discipline are important aspects of parenting that take can take different (or similar) forms and can serve different (or similar) functions across cultures.
- Cultural normativeness and legitimacy of parental authority sometimes moderate links between parenting and child outcomes.
- Parenting interventions transported from one culture to another benefit from adaptations that incorporate local preferences, customs, beliefs, and prohibitions and require consideration of ethical implications.