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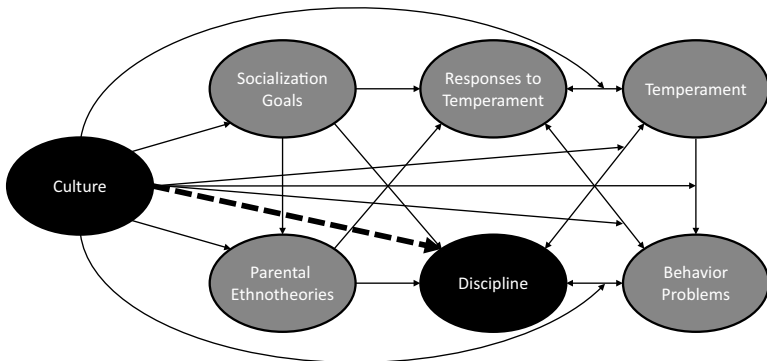
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# 9

## CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN DISCIPLINE

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A universal task inherent to parenting involves the correction of undesirable behaviors. Cultures not only differ in the conduct they deem to be inappropriate, they also differ in terms of the parental behaviors that are most frequently used in response to child misbehavior. The second and third years of life are often viewed as a challenge for parents, as they balance their offspring's increasing desire and capability for autonomy with socializing their young children to conform to societal expectations (Edwards & Liu, 1995). Because cultures differ dramatically with respect to the ages at which they expect children to gain various competencies



**FIGURE 9.1** Discipline in the JETTC Conceptual Model

(Goodnow, 1995; Super & Harkness, 1986), as well as the nature of the characteristics they wish to promote (Keller et al., 2006), cultural differences in the use of discipline may be particularly pronounced during the toddler period. In this chapter, we explore differences between the JETTC cultures in discipline techniques reported by parents (see Figure 9.1).

Discipline strategies vary in terms of the mechanisms that are presumed to result in changes to children's behavior (e.g., Hoffman, 1975). Power assertive techniques, such as hitting, yelling, removing privileges, or separating the child from others (i.e., "time out"), rely on the parent's relatively greater physical size and their control of important resources. In contrast, inductive discipline communicates the rationale for parental expectations and provides guidance regarding how to address a previous wrongdoing. These types of discipline are not mutually exclusive and a cultures' characteristic use of one strategy does not preclude frequent use of another.

Corporal punishment has been most thoroughly studied, both in traditional developmental psychology and the cross-cultural literatures. A number of studies indicate frequent use of corporal punishment in East Asian cultures (see Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Lau, 2010). However, recent research suggests diminishing use of physical punishment in China (Chang, Lansford, Schwartz, & Farver, 2004), with Lansford et al. (2005) reporting lower rates of physical discipline in China than in five other countries, including Italy, which scored highest. Also relevant are studies of immigrant families from Central America and East Asia, who have endorsed corporal punishment more frequently than other cultural groups in their host nations of the United States (US), Canada, and Australia (Gorman, 1998; Hong & Hong, 1991; Kulig, 1998; Papps, Walker, Trimboli, & Trimboli, 1995). A study of six countries (including four Joint Effort Toddler Temperament Consortium (JETTC) cultures) by duRivage et al. (2015) relating corporal punishment to laws regarding its use reported infrequent levels in the Netherlands and Germany, with relatively higher use in Romania and Turkey. In sum, the results of previous comparative studies lead us to anticipate higher levels of corporal punishment in East Asia and Latin America, and lower levels in northern than in southern and eastern Europe.

As noted by Gershoff et al. (2010), there is almost no research on global variation in parenting techniques beyond corporal punishment. This may be surprising in light of the relative infrequency of physical discipline. In a sample of 24 developing countries (of which none are

included in the JETTC), Lansford and Deater-Deckard (2012) reported that nearly 80 percent of caregivers reported that their child had received an explanation for why a behavior was wrong in the past month, whereas around 40 percent had spanked their child. In a study of 11 discipline techniques used by parents in Kenya, Philippines, Thailand, India, China, and Italy, Gershoff et al. (2010) found teaching, requiring an apology, and yelling were more commonly used than techniques such as time outs or corporal punishment. Comparisons of the two JETTC countries included in the Gershoff et al. (2010) study suggests considerably higher use of time outs and yelling or scolding by Italian parents, and higher withdrawal of love by Chinese parents, but few substantial differences in other techniques including teaching, asking the child to apologize, or taking away privileges.

Anthropological perspectives (e.g., Ember & Ember, 2005) have suggested that reliance on agriculture, social stratification, increased economic complexity, and autocratic political decision making are associated with greater use of corporal punishment. Ember and Ember (2005) argue that these factors result in power inequalities, and that corporal punishment may be used by parents to promote strict obedience and to prepare children “to accept that some people are more powerful than others” (p. 612). The Power Distance dimension of Hofstede’s model reflects this cultural difference, as democratic political systems to be representative of low Power Distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Thus, we anticipated an association between high Power Distance and spanking or hitting in our data. Collectivism also places value on conformity and obedience (Park & Lau, 2016; Rudy & Grusec, 2006), leading to expectations of a similar relationship between high use of corporal punishment and Collectivism. Our predictions regarding corporal punishment extended to other forms of power assertion, and we hypothesized that removal of privileges and yelling or swearing may also be high in high Power Distance and collectivist cultures. Expectations regarding associations between other cultural dimensions and inductive discipline practices are elusive, and analyses of these relations were considered exploratory.

## Results

As shown in Table 9.1, substantial cross-cultural effects for all variables were revealed through 2 (Sex) by 14 (Culture) Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs), with age as a covariate. Age effects indicated increased use of all techniques except hitting at older child ages. No sex effects were

significant, although the Sex × Culture interaction was significant for withdrawing privileges. Tests of simple effects of sex by country for this technique indicated higher scores for parents of males than females in the Netherlands and (marginally) Belgium, but marginally higher scores for females in Turkey.

Examining the marginal means (available from volume editors), suggested that talking the issue over and asking the child to repair the damage were frequently used responses to misbehavior in all countries, with average scores in all countries suggesting that parents used these techniques sometimes or often (i.e., scores of 2 or 3 on the Daily Activities Questionnaire). In contrast, across the JETTC samples, shouting and hitting were infrequent, with many indicating these were used never or rarely (i.e., scores of 0 or 1).

**TABLE 9.1** Effects of culture, age, and sex on discipline

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Culture</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Culture × Sex</i>
Talk the problem over	23.61**	7.20**	0.70	0.46
Ask child to repair the damage	29.99**	3.03**	0.82	0.58
Tell child to think about misbehavior	52.07**	6.77**	0.03	0.92
Shout or swear	7.97**	11.51**	1.38	1.41
Hit or spank	1.80	13.56**	0.14	1.37
Separate child from others	40.09**	10.56**	0.23	0.92
Withdraw privileges	25.86**	3.54**	0.36	1.77*

Note: ANOVAs, with age as covariate, gender and country as factors. Dfs for age and sex = 1,812; Dfs for country and country × sex = 13,812. \*\**p* < 0.001, \**p* < 0.05, #*p* < 0.10



**FIGURE 9.2** Map of shouting discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.3** Map of hitting discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.4** Map of take privilege away discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.5** Map of separate child discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.6** Map of talk about it discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.7** Map of repair damage discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores



**FIGURE 9.8** Map of think about it discipline marginal means. Darker shading indicates higher scores

### ***Power Assertive Strategies***

China, Russia, and Brazil reported high use of shouting or swearing, scoring higher than parents from Chile, the US, Turkey, the Netherlands, Romania, Mexico, and Spain (Figure 9.2). China and Russia additionally outscored South Korea. Italian and Finnish parents reported more use than Chile, US, Turkey, and the Netherlands. Belgium also reported more use than the US and Chile, and South Korea more than Chile.

Regarding hitting or spanking the child, main effects comparisons (Bonferroni adjustment) indicated that Brazilian, Korean, Chinese, Mexican, and Russian parents reported significantly more frequent use than Finnish, Chilean, Dutch, and American parents (Figure 9.3). China, South Korea, and Brazil additionally scored higher than Romania and Turkey, with Korea and Brazil also reporting higher levels of corporal punishment than Belgians, and Brazilians more than Italians, Spanish, and Russians. Finland and Netherlands also reported less use than Spain, with Finland also lower than Italy.

Taking privileges away from the child was more frequently used by parents in Spain than those in Russia, Italy, and the Netherlands (Figure 9.4). Brazil and China also reported more use of this technique than Russia.

Separating the child from others (i.e., “time out”) was more common among parents from Spain, Belgium, and the US than those from Finland, Russia, Turkey, South Korea, and Romania (Figure 9.5). Belgians and Russians also used this approach more than Chinese parents. Brazil and the Netherlands scored higher than Finland and Russia, with the Netherlands also scoring higher than Turkey. Finland relied less on separation than Chile, Italy, and Mexico.

### ***Inductive Strategies***

Regarding talking the issue over (Figure 9.6), parents from Brazil, Romania, Finland, Italy, Spain, and Mexico used this strategy more than those from Russia and China. Parents in the four highest-scoring countries also used this technique more than those from Belgium; and Romanians and Brazilians more than Chileans and Dutch parents.

Asking the child to repair the damage was more frequently used by parents in Spain and Mexico than those in Turkey (Figure 9.7).

Telling the child to think about their misbehavior was more commonly used in Brazil, China, Mexico, Romania, Italy, Russia, and



Turkey than in the US. Brazilian and Chinese also used this technique more than Dutch parents, with Brazilians reporting greater use than Finns (Figure 9.8).

### ***Relations to Cultural Orientation Dimensions***

To explore connections between discipline techniques and established cultural distinctions, Pearson's correlations were calculated between average country scores (marginal means) on the discipline variables and Hofstede's six cultural orientation dimensions.

Requiring the child to think about their misbehavior was most common in high Power Distance and collectivist cultures,  $r(14) = 0.62$  and  $-0.53$ ,  $ps < 0.05$ . High Power Distance and Collectivism were also marginally predictive of a high use of hitting/spanking,  $r(14) = 0.50$  and  $-0.49$ ,  $ps < 0.10$ . Asking the child to repair damage was most common in countries characterized by Short-term Orientation and Indulgence,  $r(14) = -0.63$  and  $0.58$ ,  $ps < 0.05$ . Conversely, shouting was more common in countries associated with Long-term Orientation and (marginally) low Indulgence,  $r(14) = 0.56$  and  $-0.50$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.10$ , respectively. Talking the issue over was also marginally linked to Short-term Orientation,  $r(14) = -0.48$ ,  $p < 0.10$ .

## **Discussion**

Our analyses reveal substantial cultural differences in the relative use of different forms of discipline. Before focusing on these differences, however, it is worth noting a degree of similarity. Across the different nations, inductive techniques such as talking over the issue and asking the child to repair damage were more frequently used than physically and psychologically aggressive techniques, with mild power assertion (i.e., taking away privileges and giving a "time out") used at moderate levels.

Findings regarding corporal punishment were largely consistent with our predictions. As in previous studies, the four cultures reporting greatest reliance on hitting or spanking were in East Asia and Latin America, and parents in northern Europe tended to report lower use of corporal punishment than those in southern Europe. The cultural dimensions of Power Distance and Collectivism were marginally predictive of high levels of physical discipline, consistent with a connection between societal values emphasizing conformity and the use of parental power to control children's behavior (Ellis & Petersen, 1992; Ember & Ember, 2005).

Surprisingly, requiring the child to think about their misbehavior—conceived of as an inductive discipline technique, demonstrated a similar pattern in relation to Power Distance and Collectivism. One explanation of this finding concerns the integration among different techniques. Parents typically use these approaches synergistically, with a power-assertive technique such as hitting being used to direct children's focus to think about the induction message (Hoffman, 1975). In cultures emphasizing obedience, concerted efforts to ensure that the child remember his/her misdeed by combining spanking with pressure to reflect, may be viewed as important for preventing repetition of the forbidden act.

Cultures with philosophies allowing for indulgence and a focus on short-term rewards tended to ask children to repair damage they had caused, whereas caregivers in cultures emphasizing constraint and long-term goals were more likely to shout or swear at their children in response to misbehavior. A focus on immediate solutions and reciprocal relationships in short-term societies appears to be consistent with expectations that toddlers apologize or otherwise address most salient effects of the current situation. In contrast, long-term societies place value in shame and recognition of social status (Hofstede et al., 2010), and shouting or swearing at a child may instill and reinforce emotions and cognitions associated with these values.

Separating the child from others (i.e., “time out”) was not clearly linked to cultural orientation, but did exhibit a geographical pattern, such that it was more frequently used in western than eastern cultures. Although concerns have been voiced regarding the use of time out, it is included as a component in multiple evidence-based programs aimed at parental management of preschooler's conduct problems (Morawska & Sanders, 2010), and reportedly used by over 80 percent of US parents. Our results suggest that this practice is far less common in Asian cultures. Cultural values not included in Hofstede's model could also be relevant. Whereas separation may be perceived as a firm but benign consequence for misbehavior in western cultures, it is viewed as cruel in countries placing more value on physical proximity.

This potential for differing perceptions by parents has been previously characterized as the distinction between form and function (Bornstein, 1995; Bornstein & Lansford, 2010). Appreciation of cultural context involves the recognition that different behaviors may serve the same function in different cultures, and similar behaviors may be used for differing purposes. Given the common challenge of addressing unwanted

toddler behaviors, parents in the JETTC sites chose to respond in ways that reflect and maintain their cultural values. The meaning of a given discipline technique is also likely to vary according to the context in which it is displayed. These differing meanings, in turn, may result in inconsistencies between cultures in the ways that parent discipline techniques and child behaviors are related, an issue we address in Chapter 15.

It is important to recognize that parenting patterns, including those which are culturally-influenced, are not static. For instance, corporal punishment becomes less acceptable with increasing child age (Ellonen, Lucas, Tindberg, & Janson, 2017), and it has long been acknowledged that parent and child behavior are reciprocal (e.g., Bell, 1968; Pastorelli et al., 2016). Finally, the use and acceptability of discipline techniques in a culture can shift in accordance to legislation, as demonstrated by decreases in corporal punishment in the years after it was banned in multiple countries (duRivage et al., 2015; Zolotor & Puzia, 2010), including the JETTC countries of Finland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Romania, which showed low rates of spanking in our data.

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