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Maternal Expectations of Child Development in Two Cultural Groups in Germany

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Abstract

Cross-cultural research on developmental expectations has shown that the ages mothers expect children can master developmental skills vary according to their cultural background. This study examined the role of culture on developmental expectations by comparing Turkish-German ($n = 107$) and German ($n = 127$) mothers with preschool aged children in terms of their estimations regarding children's mastery on 8 different developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, physical, social). Results have shown that Turkish-German mothers expected children to attain developmental milestones later than German mothers in nearly all domains. But the differences were not quite to the same extent in all domains. Furthermore Turkish-German mothers who grew up in Germany differed in some domains less from German mothers than mothers who grew up in Turkey. This is seen as an evident that parental ethnotheories are not adopted in a determined and probably already dysfunctional mode for the child's adaptation to its current environment but that they are reinterpreted by integrating new information and reflecting the demands of the environment in order to allow their children an optimal adaptation to their environment.

Introduction

A considerable number of children in Germany have an immigrant background. In the age group of 0-6 years the proportion of children with an immigrant background amounts to 35% throughout Germany; in metropolises like Munich or Stuttgart their proportion exceeds those of children without an immigrant background. Children with Turkish immigrant background represent one of the two major immigration groups in Germany (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2010). In contrast to their demographic importance, children with immigrant background are rarely represented in developmental psychological research. Only a few empirical studies refer to early childhood in families with immigrant background (Leyendecker, 2003; Otyakmaz, 2007), not much is known about parental beliefs in these families (e.g., beliefs about child rearing and development or socializations goals). However, since parents are the persons whose parental beliefs determine the physical and social environment they provide to the children and in turn shape their social, cognitive and emotional development (Goodnow, 2002; Harkness & Super, 1992), it is important to study and understand parental beliefs about child development.

Parental ethnotheories vary in the concepts of parents about the nature of a child and its development, in their valuations of a child's skills they give priority and worth to be fostered or in their expectations, when a child should have attained which kind of developmental milestone and should have achieved which kind of skill (Goodnow, Cashmore, Cotton, & Knight, 1984; Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001; Sissons Joshi & MacLean, 1997; Willemsen & van de Vijver, 1997), whether at all and if so, how and by whom a child should be supported in the attainment of these skills (Goodnow et al., 1984; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993). Besides individual differences the variations are due to different determinants like educational, socio-economic, generational and not least cultural background of the parents. The latter aspect is of special interest in the present paper.

One of the earliest studies on the role of culture in developmental expectations compared middle-class Anglo-Australian mothers to the Lebanese-Australians (Goodnow et al., 1984). Goodnow et al (1984) had shown that Anglo mothers believe children are born with a bundle of 'potential' traits and mothers' task is to become aware of these potentials as early as possible and arrange the environment to support the child's devel-

opment to the fullest. Unlike Anglo mothers, Lebanese-Australians considered early childhood as a moratorium which should prevent children from untimely learning requirements. Studies show that several other cultural contexts also reflect a similar understanding of early childhood as Lebanese mothers do. Stevenson, Chen and Lee (1992) argued that in China, childhood is divided into two periods: Innocence and comprehension. It is assumed that children in the period of innocence widely lack cognitive abilities. Ho (1994) states that traditionally Chinese parents see early childhood as a period when children are passive and dependent who are to be cared for, who should not be held responsible for his or her wrongdoings or failures since they don't have the cognitive capacity to think about their actions, and thus there is no clear attempt of parents to actively stimulate their children's cognitive development. Once children reach the period of comprehension, at the age of four to five, parents begin with the systematic training of a child. A similar concept of early childhood could be identified also in traditional Korean and Japanese families (Ho, 1994). It is important to point out that the authors describe this concept of early childhood as the traditional way to conceptualize childhood. As cultures go through a societal shift in accordance with technological and socio-economic transformations this specification is likely to change; not as an adaptation of the Western concept of early childhood but probably a transformation and variation of the traditional idea. A similar view of childhood can be seen in Turkish culture as well.

Pfluger-Schindelbeck (1989) found in her ethnographic study in a Turkish village that children in their early childhood were seen as not capable of rational thinking and behavior because of the assumed immaturity of their intellect („aklı ermemiş“). According to Karakaşoğlu-Aydın (2000) in Turkey, a child is met with permissiveness in early childhood because he is regarded as not capable of distinguishing between wrong and right, between good and bad, and that his behavior is not guided by rationality but by his needs. An intentional education in the sense of guidance regarding right or wrong behavior is not seen as possible in this period. The child should be given unlimited freedom during this stage. Only after this period conscious education and stronger guidance begins (Karakaşoğlu-Aydın 2000; Pfluger-Schindelbeck 1989). While Pfluger-Schindelbeck and Karakaşoğlu-Aydın refer to parenting in Turkey Leyendecker (2003) found that children in Turkish immigrant families in Germany also perceive unlimited freedom and experience permissive parenting until about the age of three. Though there is no empirical research on Turkish-German mothers' beliefs about children's nature and development in early childhood, the mentioned references let conclude that they may also have similar concepts of early childhood as it is described for parents in China or in Turkey.

Cross-cultural variations in parental ethnotheories can be reflected in different organizations of children's developmental contexts or in parents' child-rearing behavior and thus, in children's developmental outcomes (McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995; Goodnow, 2002; Harkness & Super, 1992). But this cultural “canalization” (Valsiner, 1987) of children's development is not to be understood as unidirectionally influenced by the parents, but as an interactional process of co-construction between individual and environment, here parent and child (Bornstein, 1991; Valsiner, 1987). Nor are parental ethnotheories unidirectionally and uniformly shaped by a more general cultural belief system, but are individual reconstructions of the proposed beliefs and behaviors of a culture (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992).

Parental ethnotheories do not only vary by culture; individual variances (Keller, 2003) as well as educational (Ninio, 1988; Ribas, Seidl de Moura, & Bornstein, 2003) or generational (Ho, 1994; Keller, 2003) differences are also of importance. Cross-cultural differences are not only to be found in international but also in intranational comparisons in immigration societies between parents with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Carlson & Harwood, 2000; Willemsen & van de Vijver, 1997). In immigration societies the socioeconomic and ethnic/cultural backgrounds of the families often confound (Otyakmaz, 2007). Moreover, studies show that in these societies parenting beliefs of immigrants can adapt to those of the majority culture by acculturation (Berry et al., 2002). Second generation parents, in contrast to the first generation, are socialized not in the origin but in the immigration context (Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Durgel, 2011).

Developmental Expectations

One important aspect of parental ethnotheories which was focused in several cross-cultural studies is parents' expectations about ages of children at which various skills should be attained. The studies on developmental expectations showed that cultural variations occur even in the relatively short period of early childhood not only for a few months but years.

One of the first attempts to interpret the obtained cross-cultural differences in mothers' developmental expectations was made in using the family models of independence and interdependence which were handled as antagonists in early cross-cultural psychology (Hess et al., 1980). The family model of independence which is considered as characteristic for urban western middle-class families emphasizes autonomy from birth on, uniqueness, self-confidence and the separateness from others. The family model of interdependence, which is regarded as typical for families in non-western, rural or low socioeconomic urban contexts, stresses relatedness and hierarchical involvement of its members, self-effacement, obedience and conformance (Keller, 2011). But in the last years this prototypically described family models are not viewed as solely existing in pure but also in hybrid and transitory forms (Keller 2011). Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) criticizes the antagonism between *the* "modern Western" culture and *the* "traditional non-Western" culture which is inherent in the two contrasting family models and also the implicated evaluation of the Western model as the better family model which is assumed to be adapted by members of traditional cultures by the means of technological and economic improvement. She conceptualizes a third family model which she regards as an alternative model of modernization: The family model of emotional interdependence. This family model is characterized by maintaining emotional relatedness of family members as essential but at the same time the child's autonomy gains high significance as a socialization goal (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007).

One of the earliest studies on maternal developmental expectations found (Hess et al., 1980) that Japanese mothers desired "early mastery of skills that show self-control, compliance with adult authority and social courtesy in interaction with adults" and thus were consistent with the interdependent socialization pattern. Anglo-American mothers valued the "early acquisition of skills that display individual action, standing up for rights and other forms of verbal assertion" (p. 269). With their earlier expectations of social and verbal assertiveness they were in line with the independent socialization pattern. Earlier expectations of developmental milestones were interpreted as reflecting the cultural value of a particular skill. In the study of Goodnow et al. (1984) the major differences were also found in the expectations of social and verbal assertiveness. Here the Anglo-Australian mothers expected social and verbal assertiveness earlier than the Lebanese-Australian mothers. In contrast to the results of Hess et al. the Anglo-Australian mothers generally had earlier expectations than the Lebanese-Australian mothers across all domains. But this referred only to pre-school years and not to school-related skills such as counting from 1-10 or knowing colors. Moreover school readiness was expected even earlier by the Lebanese-Australian mothers. Because of the complexity of their findings Goodnow et al. pointed out: "Any simple equivalence of early expectations with high value, however, is likely to be misleading. The more subtle, and more interesting, picture needs to take account of several other facets to ideas about children and parenting" (p.203). Also according to Sissons, Joshi and Mac Lean (1997) who studied maternal expectations in India, Japan, and England the major theoretical challenge is to make sense of the differences with reference to a full understanding of the cultures concerned. They found that Indian mothers had later developmental expectations than Japanese and English mothers. The similarity between English and Japanese mothers and the difference between Japanese and Indian mothers indicate that the results cannot be interpreted „in any simple sense by such dimensions as individualism/collectivism or independence/interdependence“ (Sissons Joshi & Mac Lean, 1997, p.239). Despite a predominantly interdependent orientation in Japan as in India there seem to be other essential differences in the living conditions of the both groups which had an impact on their developmental expectations. Research on developmental expectations of mothers with different ethno-cultural backgrounds in the USA does not allow an unambiguous interpretation of the results along the categories of independence/interdependence either (Carlson & Harwood, 2000; Pachter & Dworkin, 1997). The findings on the impact of educational background on developmental expectations are also not consistent:

While in a study with two groups of Israeli mothers with similar educational but distinct ethno-cultural background domain-specific differences were found (Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001), in an earlier Israeli study the domain-independent overall earlier expectations of the parents of Anglo-American origin in comparison to parents of Asian-North-African origin were widely explained by their educational background (Ninio, 1988).

Two studies in the Netherlands examined the developmental expectations of mothers with Turkish immigrant background: Willemsen and van de Vijver (1997) who made a comparative study with Turkish-Dutch, Dutch and mothers in Zambia, found that in nearly all six developmental domains, that were assessed, Zambian mothers had the latest, Dutch mothers the earliest expectations and the Turkish-Dutch mothers were in between. While there were only marginal differences in the expectations of physical development, major differences were found in the social domain. But there were some single items as exceptions to this general tendency. Turkish-Dutch mothers expected „eat without help“ and „dress without help“ later than Dutch and Zambian mothers but had earlier expectations in school-related items like “count to ten“ or „write first words“. Durgel (2011), who assessed the developmental expectations of Turkish-Dutch and Dutch mothers with a revised version of the questionnaire used by Willemsen and van de Vijver, also found that Turkish-Dutch mothers had significantly later expectations in all domains with the exception of psychomotor development. Moreover, first generation Turkish-Dutch mothers were later in their expectations than second generation mothers. The latter were closer to the expectations of the Dutch mothers. Overall the cross-cultural studies on developmental expectations show that mothers with diverse cultural backgrounds differ in their developmental expectations even in the relatively short period of early childhood not only for a few months but years. But it is not really possible to integrate the various results in a coherent theoretical explanation, such as that in all interdependent contexts later developmental expectations are predominant or that the expected ages reflect the cultural value of a particular skill.

Taking the theoretical reflections about Turkish-German mothers' possible conceptions of early childhood and the results of the two Dutch studies, the present study investigates whether a) Turkish-German mothers expect children to attain the developmental milestones later than German mothers, b) so called school-related items constitute an exception, and c) first generation Turkish-German mothers have later expectations of mastery than second generation mothers.

Method

Sample

The participants of the present study were 127 German and 107 Turkish-German mothers of pre-school aged children living in several cities in a highly industrialized area - the Ruhr area - in Germany. They were recruited either from public day-care centers or by snowball sampling through the recommendation of other mothers. Moreover, Turkish-German mothers were individually contacted by bilingual Turkish-German research assistants at community festivals or similar occasions.

With the choice of distinct recruiting procedures it was attempted to prevent a sample bias resulting from probable unequal rates of participation of the samples (van de Vijver, 2002). The differing motivations for the participation of diverse social groups lead to a sample selection because of the disproportionate participation of middle-class members which is repeatedly discussed in developmental psychological research (Wolke & Söhne, 1997). Recruitment of minority families by contacting face to face is not unusual (Johnson, Breckenridge & McGowan, 1984) and should provide equivalence.

The participating German mothers had a mean age of 34.69 years ($SD=5.47$), their preschool-aged children of 3.20 years ($SD=1.17$). Fifty-one percent of the German children were female and 49% were male. The Turkish-German mothers had an average age of 32.29 years ($SD=4.60$), their children had a mean age of 3.75 years ($SD=1.45$). Forty-two percent of the Turkish-German children were female and 58% male. Mothers' and children's mean age of both samples differed significantly (ANOVA); this was not the case for the gender distribution (χ^2 -test). The age difference between German and Turkish-German mothers reflects the fact that Turkish-German women are younger than German women when they give birth to their first child (BMFSFJ,

2010). The age differences between the children may be caused by the fact that Turkish-German children enter the early day-care institutions later than German children, so that their average age might be higher than that of the German children (BMFSFJ, 2010). As the children were also recruited via public day-care centers the age differences of the sample might reflect the age differences of the children visiting these centers. Forty three Turkish-German mothers belonged to the first generation and 56 to the second generation. The mothers were assigned to the first generation if they had migrated to Germany after reaching the age of 14 and to the second generation if they had been born in Germany or had migrated before reaching the age of six (Durgel, 2011; Leyendecker et al., 2008). Qualifications received in Germany and Turkey were regarded equivalently. The highest level of education (1 = non, 2 = primary school, 3 = secondary school, 4 = high school, 5 = university) of the participating German mothers was higher than that of the Turkish-German mothers (ANOVA): $F(1, 223) = 29.302, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$. There were no significant educational differences between first and second generation Turkish-German mothers.

Developmental Expectations Questionnaire

The developmental expectations questionnaire which was kindly provided by Elif Durgel in Turkish and English language was translated by the author into German taking both versions into consideration. The instrument was developed by Durgel and van de Vijver (2008) by revising scales of previous studies (Goodnow et al., 1984; Hess et al. 1980, Willemsen & van de Vijver, 1997) and consists of 61 items assigned to eight developmental domains (subscales): psychomotor skills ("Hop on one foot several times"); cognitive skills ("Say own age"), self-control ("Wait for own turn in games"), social skills, ("Invite friends to join the game"), autonomy ("Decide what to eat for lunch"), obedience ("Do not do things forbidden by parents"), family orientation ("Know that family members support each other"), and well-mannered ("Behave respectfully towards adults").

With Chronbach's Alphas between $\alpha = .73$ and $\alpha = .96$ the reliability of the instrument as a whole and of the single domains, all tested separately for both samples, can be accepted as good. The factorial structure of the particular subscales are equivalent for both samples (Tucker's $\phi > .95$). The mothers were asked to mark at what age a child is able to acquire the skills listed on the questionnaire. They had the possibility to indicate their expectations in a range between 1-6 years with half-yearly intervals. It was also possible to mark "earlier" (for the analysis coded as 0.5 years) or later (coded as 6.5 years). Turkish-German mothers were given the choice of getting the questionnaire either in a Turkish or a German version.

Results

A MANCOVA, conducted with the mothers' ethnic background as independent, the developmental expectations as dependent variables, and with mother's educational background and her and her child's age as covariates, was significant: Wilks' $\Lambda = .81, F(8, 210) = 6.286, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$. As with the result of the overall multivariate testing Turkish-German mothers have later expectations of the attainment of developmental milestones than German mothers (Table 1) in all developmental domains apart from psychomotor skills. The major differences are related to the developmental expectations of obedience and family orientation (0.73 and 0.76 years).

Table 1*MANCOVA Developmental Expectations (Maternal Education, Mother's and Child's Age Controlled)*

Domain	German		Turkish-German		part. η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Psychomotor	2.87	.57	3.05	.61	.001
Cognitive	3.22	.46	3.61	.65	.079***
Self-Control	3.69	.79	4.16	.98	.051**
Social	3.02	.65	3.43	.86	.050**
Autonomy	3.69	.66	4.06	.77	.042**
Obedience	3.83	.81	4.59	1.00	.116***
Family-Orientation	3.63	.88	4.36	1.00	.110***
Well-Mannered	3.85	.90	4.14	.93	.027*

Although the difference of the cognitive domain as a whole was significant, some single school-related items in the narrow sense like „counting to ten“ or „writing own name“ showed no significant differences between Turkish-German and German mothers (Table 2).

Table 2*MANCOVA Cognitive Domain Items (Maternal Education, Mother's and Child's Age Controlled)*

Cognitive domain	German		Turkish-German		<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Say own age	2.5	0.6	2.9	0.8	< .00
Name at least 3 colors	2.6	0.6	3.0	0.7	< .00
Write own name	4.5	0.8	4.5	1.0	ns
Count to 10	3.2	0.8	3.3	0.9	ns
Understand time concepts like	3.5	0.9	3.9	1.0	< .00
Understand 'more', 'less', and	3.2	0.9	3.5	1.0	ns
Distinguish men and women	2.3	0.7	2.8	1.1	< .00
Tell what season it is	4.0	0.9	4.8	1.1	< .00

A MANCOVA conducted to analyze the expectations of first and second generation Turkish-German mothers separately showed that significant differences in self-control, social skills, autonomy and being well-mannered only existed between first generation Turkish-German and German mothers, but not between German and second generation mothers (tab.3). At the same time there were no significant differences between first and second generation mothers in these domains. Referring to obedience and family-orientation German mothers had significantly earlier expectations than Turkish-German mothers of both generations. The difference between first generation Turkish-German and German mothers exceeded one year and additionally there was a significant difference between first and second generation mothers (Table 3).

Table 3*MANCOVA Developmental Expectations German, First- and Second-Generation Turkish-German Mothers*

	German		First generation		Second generation	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Psychomotor	2.87	.57	3.20	.65	2.95	.56
Cognitive	3.22 _a	.46	3.65 _b	.68	3.58 _b	.63
Self-Control	3.69 _a	.79	4.33 _b	.88	4.04 _{a,b}	1.06
Social	3.02 _a	.65	3.54 _b	.94	3.35 _{a,b}	.80
Autonomy	3.69 _a	.66	4.26 _b	.82	3.92 _{a,b}	.70
Obedience	3.83 _a	.81	4.91 _b	.95	4.34 _c	1.02
Family-Orientation	3.63 _a	.88	4.69 _b	1.03	4.11 _c	.98
Well-Mannered	3.85 _a	.90	4.32 _b	.93	4.03 _{a,b}	.94

Note. Means with different subscripts were significantly different in a post hoc test.

Discussion

The present study examined developmental expectations of Turkish-German and German mothers and found that Turkish-German mothers expect the acquirement of skills in nearly all developmental domains later than German mothers. The result is hardly surprising since the studies conducted in the Dutch context achieved similar results (Durgel, 2011; Willemsen & van de Vijver, 1997). A feasible explanation for the findings could be the aforementioned concept of early childhood which is assumed to be hold by Turkish-German mothers. If mothers believe that children in their early years are not capable of rational thinking and behavior and are mainly guided by their needs, then they will not expect the development of cognitive or social skills too early in this period. The non-existing difference in the expectation of psychomotor development could be caused by a more genetic predisposition of this domain and less by cultural impact (Willemsen & van de Vijver, 1997). It is noticeable that the major differences between Turkish-German and German mothers occur in those domains which exclusively refer to intra-familial processes: obedience and family-orientation. It seems that Turkish-German mothers are more likely to allow their children greater latitude with respect to their comprehension of childhood in those domains which are in their own decision-making and responsibility. In domains with more relevance for the extra-familial space, like social skills, the differences to German mothers are still significant but smaller. Presumably the permission of extended development ages should have no negative impact on meeting the demands of the extra-familial environment. This prevails particularly for education which is highly valued by Turkish-German mothers as a long-term socialization goal for their children (Leyendecker et al., 2008). This interpretation is concordant with the findings of Goodnow et al. (1984). According to the authors, Lebanese-Australian mothers explained the prolonged development times in early childhood by reasoning that life will become serious for the children soon enough. At the same time they set an earlier age as appropriate for starting school. The differences between the developmental domains and between first and second generation Turkish-German mothers illustrate that parental ethnotheories are not adopted in a determined and probably already dysfunctional mode for the child's adaptation to its current environment but that they are reinterpreted by integrating new information and reflecting the demands of the environment in order to allow their children an optimal adaptation to their environment. The findings are concordant with Kağıtçıbaşı's Family Modernization theory (2007) in the sense that change does not mean to adopt the „Western“ style but to maintain those aspects of parenting which touch the relationships of the family members, in this case a lenient attitude towards child behavior referred to intra-familial processes, and to develop expectations which support

successful behavior in domains like autonomy, self-control and social skills which are needed for advancement in the extra-familial educational context.

A limitation of the present study is that solely the maternal developmental expectations were assessed but neither the mother's actual parenting behavior nor the child's development. Further research is required to examine how the developmental expectations of mothers affect their parenting behavior and child development. Due to the lack of empirical research on Turkish-German mothers' concepts of early childhood, the explanations of the findings are based on descriptions of early childhood concepts in traditional Turkish or traditional Chinese culture. Thus there is a need for updated qualitative research on parental ethnotheories, namely the beliefs Turkish-German, German and Turkish mothers (in Turkey) hold on the nature of the child and its development.

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