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# MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN AND THEIR SPOUSES' PARENTING STYLES IN CULTURES OF ORIGIN, ACCULTURATING CULTURES, AND CULTURES OF DESTINATION<sup>1</sup>

Linda R. Cote & Marc H. Bornstein

## INTRODUCTION

Culture shapes parents' childrearing beliefs and behaviors (Bornstein, 1991; Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995). We studied cultural differences in parenting style, that is, parental reports of how frequently they engage in social, didactic, and limit setting behavior with their young children. Social exchanges are affective interpersonal dyadic interchanges (e.g., Bornstein, 2002; Kaye, 1982) that include rocking, kissing, comforting, smiling, and playful face-to-face contact. Didactic interactions are defined as caregiver attempts to stimulate the child's attention to objects, properties, or events in the environment (Bornstein, 2002; Papoušek & Bornstein, 1992) by describing and demonstrating or providing opportunities to observe, imitate, and learn about the world. Limit setting can be defined as parents' attempts to socialize self-control in their children (Emde, 1992) and includes the many ways parents guide children's behavior. We chose to study these three parenting behaviors because although they are cross-culturally universal, cultural differences exist in the degree to which parents stress the importance of social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors (e.g., Bornstein et al., 1996; Caudill & Frost, 1972).

We studied acculturation effects on mothers' parenting style at the group level using the comparative approach recommended by Berry, Kim, and Boski (1987) in order to distinguish cultural variation in parenting style and make generalizations about the acculturation process (see also Bornstein & Cote, 2004; Lin & Fu, 1990). Specifically, we undertook two sets of comparisons: *Japanese—Japanese immigrant—European American* mothers and *Argentine—South American immigrant—European American* mothers. The immigrant mothers were similar ethnoculturally to the mothers in their respective cultures of origin but varied in level of acculturation to U.S. culture. We chose a European American sample so that readers would have a familiar reference point (because the bulk of research on parenting and child development studies European Americans; e.g., Parke, 2000), *not* because we believe European Americanism is or should be the endpoint of acculturation (for immigrants).

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We studied different ethnic groups migrating to the same culture of destination at the same historic period for two reasons. First, relatively little is known about parenting among immigrant families (e.g., Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002), and their increasing numbers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) make it imperative to learn more about them so that psychologists, educators, and practitioners can effectively promote children's development. Second, two sets of comparisons allowed us to examine generalities and specificities in the acculturation of parenting style among immigrant groups. We studied Asians and Latinos because they are currently the majority immigrant groups to the United States (Jacoby, 2004). Moreover, because there are childrearing differences among both Asians and Latinos (e.g., Field & Widmayer, 1981; Uba, 1994), we studied one specific subsample of each.

Specifically, we chose to study mothers of Japanese and South American ethnicity because previous research suggests that their social, didactic, and limit setting behavior differs from European American mothers. For example, observational studies have shown that Japanese mothers engage in more social interactions with their infants than do European American mothers and that Japanese mothers value social competence in their children (Bornstein, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, & Ogino, 1990; Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, & Dickson, 1980); similarly Japanese American mothers also engage in more social interactions with their children than do European American mothers (Caudill & Frost, 1972). European American mothers have been found to engage in didactic activities, such as exploratory play, with their toddlers more than Japanese mothers (Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, Cyphers, Toda, & Ogino, 1992). Thus, we expected that Japanese national and immigrant mothers would report engaging in more social and fewer didactic interactions with their children than European American mothers. Similar to Japanese mothers, Argentine mothers have been observed to engage in more social and less didactic play with their toddlers than U.S. mothers (Bornstein, Haynes, Pascual, Painter, & Galperin, 1999); however, Argentine mothers reported that they engaged in less social and didactic behavior than U.S. mothers (Bornstein et al., 1996). Thus, we expected Argentine mothers to report that they would engage in more social and fewer didactic interactions with their toddlers than European American mothers. Because the Japanese mother-child relationship tends to be indulgent during the early years in comparison to European American parenting (e.g., Hara & Minagawa, 1996; Lanham & Garrick, 1996) and a minority of Japanese mothers reported that limit setting was an important childrearing goal (Shwalb, Kawai, Shoji, & Tsunetsugu, 1997), we hypothesized that Japanese national and immigrant mothers would engage in less limit setting than European American mothers. Consistent with previous research (Bornstein et al., 1996), we hypothesized that European American mothers would report engaging in more limit setting than Argentine mothers.

Mothers' perceptions of their parenting style were studied because mothers are typically the primary caregivers of their children during the early years (e.g., Barnard & Solchany, 2002; Bornstein, 2002), and we wished to make our study comparable to previous research in this area (e.g., Bornstein et al., 1996). We studied mothers' reports about their actual social, didactic, and limit setting behavior, and also their reports about their ideal behavior, as well as their spouses' actual and ideal behavior. Mothers' ideal behaviors reflect their goals or aspirations—how they wish they would parent. These ideals are believed to guide parenting strategies (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995), and have been found to differ cross-culturally (specifically, among the cultural groups we studied; Bornstein et al., 1996; Kojima, 1996). We studied mothers' perceptions of their husbands' parenting because mothers influence fathering (e.g., Parke, 2002), and

because parental discordance on childrearing issues may affect children's development (e.g., Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981). Furthermore, studying women's perceptions of their spouses' actual and ideal parenting allowed us to evaluate mothers' perceptions of the fathers' role, which have been shown to differ among the cultures we studied (Bornstein et al., 1996; Cote & Bornstein, in press).

In sum, we examined acculturation differences in mothers' perceptions of their own and their spouses' actual and ideal social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors.

## METHOD

### Participants

Altogether 226 mothers of 20-month-old children from five cultural groups participated: Japanese mothers from Tokyo, Japan; Argentine mothers from Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Japanese immigrant, South American immigrant, and European American mothers from the Washington, DC, environs. Mothers in all five cultural groups were recruited to be demographically similar to each other yet representative of middle-class mothers in their country of origin or, for the U.S. samples, their particular ethnic or immigrant group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). All mothers in the study were married to the baby's father, and the majority lived in nuclear families. Their children were firstborn, healthy, and term, with approximately equal numbers of boys and girls. Sociodemographic information for the participants and sample sizes appear in Table 1.

Immigrant mothers self-identified as Japanese American or South American (Marín & Marín, 1991) and were immigrants and not refugees (Berry & Sam, 1997). Japanese immigrant mothers' first language was Japanese. South American immigrant mothers' first language was Spanish, and they were primarily from Argentina, Colombia, and Peru.<sup>2</sup> Japanese immigrant and South American immigrant mothers were either first- or second-generation Americans; in contrast, European American participants were either fourth- or fifth-generation (i.e., most or all grandparents were born in the United States).

### Procedure

Mothers completed the Parental Style Questionnaire, a sociodemographic questionnaire about their family, and a social desirability questionnaire when their children were 20 months of age.

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<sup>2</sup> In areas of the United States where there are several Latino groups and not a large concentration of one particular Latino group, as there are in the Washington, DC metropolitan area (Whoriskey & Cohen, 2001; Wilson & Pan, 2000), people tend to identify themselves as Latinos or by their regional affiliation rather than by their country of origin (Winn, 1992).

**Table 1**  
**Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics**

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Japanese <i>n</i> = 33	Argentine <i>n</i> = 41	Japanese immigrant <i>n</i> = 38	South American immigrant <i>n</i> = 34	European American <i>n</i> = 80
CHILD					
Gender <sup>a</sup> (girls:boys)	14:19	18:23	19:19	16:18	36:44
Age <sup>b</sup> (days)	20.39 (0.43)	20.56 (0.32)	20.23 (0.63)	20.46 (0.71)	20.11 (0.22)
MOTHER					
Age <sup>c</sup>	29.71 (3.92)	29.45 (4.34)	33.36 (3.96)	33.42 (4.80)	32.68 (3.59)
Education <sup>d</sup>	4.84 (1.22)	6.17 (1.09)	5.66 (0.78)	6.03 (0.80)	6.20 (0.72)
SES <sup>e</sup>	45.58 (12.24)	48.85 (11.30)	56.74 (9.68)	49.15 (12.62)	56.84 (6.55)
Hours of work per week <sup>f</sup>	9.14 (17.49)	14.02 (17.56)	11.54 (18.76)	19.22 (19.23)	18.58 (18.52)
SDS <sup>g</sup>	18.45 (4.79)	15.95 (4.90)	17.73 (4.17)	20.71 (4.78)	16.21 (4.31)

Notes: *M* (*SD*) unless otherwise specified.

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2(4, N = 226) = 0.52, ns.$

<sup>b</sup>  $F(4, 221) = 8.68, p < .001$ ; European American children were younger than Japanese, Argentine, and South American immigrant children, and Japanese immigrant children were younger than Argentine children (Tukey HSD,  $p < .05$ ).

<sup>c</sup>  $F(4, 220) = 9.33, p < .001$ ; Japanese immigrant, South American immigrant, and European American mothers were older than Japanese and Argentine mothers (Tukey HSD,  $p < .05$ ).

<sup>d</sup> Because differences exist between countries in the duration and content of schooling, bicultural researchers adjusted mothers' years of schooling so that the scales were equivalent to the 7-point Hollingshead (1975) index.  $F(4, 219) = 12.31, p < .001$ ; Japanese mothers had less education than Argentine, South American immigrant, or European American mothers, and Japanese immigrant mothers had less education than Argentine or European American mothers (Tukey HSD,  $p < .05$ ).

<sup>e</sup> Hollingshead (1975) index,  $F(4, 219) = 11.29, p < .001$ ; Japanese immigrant and European American mothers had higher SES than Japanese, Argentine, or South American immigrant mothers (Tukey HSD,  $p < .05$ ).

<sup>f</sup>  $F(4, 218) = 2.32, ns.$

<sup>g</sup> Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960),  $F(4, 217) = 7.35, p < .001$ ; South American immigrant mothers had higher SDS ratings than any other mothers.

## Measures

In order to achieve adapted equivalence (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997) of the measures, the questionnaires were first translated into Japanese and Spanish and then back-translated into English by bilingual bicultural Japanese and Argentine natives using standard back-translation techniques (see Brislin, 1986). The translated instruments were next checked for preservation of meaning and cultural appropriateness by professional collaborators from each country. Professionals and bilingual mothers from each culture living in the United States were then interviewed regarding the comprehensibility and cultural validity of items in the instruments, and finally, pilot testing was undertaken.

The *Parental Style Questionnaire* (PSQ; Bornstein et al., 1996) is a maternal report measure of parenting behavior. This 16-item questionnaire asks mothers to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 *hardly at all* to 5 *all the time*) how frequently they

actually engage in specific parenting behaviors. Mothers were asked to rate the same 16 items again with respect to their *ideal* parenting behavior, and they also rated their spouses' actual and ideal behavior for the same 16 items. The 16 items form 3 domains B social, didactic, and limit setting. Mean scores for each of these 3 domains were calculated separately for mothers' ratings of their own actual and ideal behavior, and for mothers' ratings of their husbands' actual and ideal parenting behavior, thus generating 12 subscale scores. This measure has good construct validity and internal reliability (Bornstein et al., 1996; Cote & Bornstein, in press).

To control potential self-serving bias in mothers' responses to the PSQ, mothers completed the 33-item *Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale* (SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), which assesses an individual's tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable way. This scale has good test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and construct validity (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to analyses, univariate and bivariate distributions of the dependent variables and covariates were examined for normalcy, homogeneity of variance, and outliers (Fox, 1997); to resolve problems, the PSQ social subscales for the Japan comparison were transformed using the cubed value; and the PSQ social subscales for the South American comparison and the limit setting subscales for both comparisons were squared. The covariates mothers' education and SES were cubed and squared, respectively (for both comparisons), and child age was transformed using the reciprocal squared for the Japanese comparison. *M(SDs)* reported in Table 2 are untransformed for ease of interpretation, although transformed scores were used in the multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs).

**Table 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Parenting Styles**

DVs	Japanese	Japanese immigrant	European American	Argentine	South American immigrant	European American
SOCIAL						
Mother Actual	3.87 (0.50)	4.32 (0.34)	4.39 (0.32)	4.25 (0.45)	4.64 (0.31)	4.45 (0.38)
Mother Ideal	4.58 (0.58)	4.78 (0.28)	4.55 (0.31)	4.61 (0.33)	4.84 (0.23)	4.64 (0.35)
Father Actual	3.56 (0.77)	4.02 (0.68)	3.89 (0.49)	3.91 (0.78)	4.35 (0.46)	3.87 (0.52)
Father Ideal	4.35 (0.72)	4.71 (0.39)	4.36 (0.52)	4.56 (0.38)	4.76 (0.28)	4.51 (0.38)
DIDACTIC						
Mother Actual	3.44 (0.38)	3.54 (0.39)	3.88 (0.33)	3.57 (0.37)	4.04 (0.40)	3.81 (0.35)
Mother Ideal	3.97 (0.56)	4.40 (0.39)	4.18 (0.28)	4.19 (0.41)	4.55 (0.35)	4.27 (0.39)
Father Actual	2.99 (0.58)	3.43 (0.56)	3.24 (0.46)	3.22 (0.55)	3.67 (0.57)	3.26 (0.49)
Father Ideal	3.50 (0.68)	4.32 (0.49)	3.80 (0.47)	4.06 (0.40)	4.43 (0.48)	3.94 (0.44)
LIMIT SETTING						

Mother	3.17	3.13	3.81	3.12	4.26	3.71
Actual	(0.94)	(1.03)	(0.69)	(1.05)	(0.71)	(0.82)
Mother	3.80	3.38	4.08	3.50	4.57	4.11
Ideal	(0.72)	(0.94)	(0.76)	(1.12)	(0.62)	(0.75)
Father	3.09	3.18	3.61	3.43	4.13	3.71
Actual	(0.93)	(0.90)	(0.87)	(1.08)	(0.90)	(0.91)
Father	3.70	3.80	3.93	3.71	4.60	3.92
Ideal	(0.88)	(0.94)	(0.82)	(1.01)	(0.66)	(0.78)

Notes: All are  $M(SD)$ . Unaltered ratings are presented for clarity; however, transformed ratings were used in the analysis.

## Analytic Plan

The European American sample was divided into two groups selected to match the Japanese and Argentine samples (in terms of means and variances on all sociodemographic measures) yet still be representative of the larger sample of middle-class European American families in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. There were no differences between the two European American samples on any of the sociodemographic measures or dependent variables (DVs). Each MANOVA had 1 between-subjects factor with 3 levels (Japanese, Japanese immigrant, and European American for the Japan comparison, or Argentine, South American immigrant, and European American for the South American comparison), and 4 within-subjects factors (the PSQ subscales for mothers' ratings of their actual and ideal behavior, and mothers' ratings of their spouses' actual and ideal behavior). Multivariate interaction effects (Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Subscale; Wilks' lambda) in the MANOVAs were decomposed using t-tests with Bonferroni's correction; only significant results ( $p < .05$ ) are reported. To be used in the analysis, potential covariates (the continuous variables in Table 1) had to correlate meaningfully (explain at least 5% of the variance), significantly ( $p < .05$ ), and independently with a DV. The analyses we report were conducted without covariates and with all scores, however, we reanalyzed the data with covariates and without participants whose scores were outliers, and only results that remained significant are reported.

## Social Exchange

For the Japanese comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 212) = 5.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ . Post-hoc tests indicated that Japanese immigrant and European American mothers reported that they actually engaged in more social behavior with their toddlers than Japanese mothers. Japanese immigrant mothers reported that they would ideally engage in more social behavior with their toddlers than European American mothers, and they reported that their spouses should ideally engage in more social behavior than Japanese or European American mothers reported for their spouses. The results for Japanese immigrant mothers are consistent with previous research, which has found that Japanese American mothers engage in more social interactions with their infants than European American mothers (Caudill & Frost, 1972).

For the South American comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 220) = 2.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . Specifically, South

American immigrant mothers reported that they actually engaged in more social behavior with their toddlers than Argentine mothers; however, unlike previous research (Bornstein et al., 1996), no differences between Argentine and European American mothers' social behavior was reported. South American immigrant mothers reported that their husbands actually engaged in more social interactions with their toddlers than either Argentine or European American mothers reported for their toddlers' fathers.

### **Didactic Interaction**

For the Japanese comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 212) = 8.84, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$ . Specifically, consistent with previous research comparing European American and Japanese parenting (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 1992), European American mothers reported that they actually engage in more didactic behavior with their toddlers than either Japanese or Japanese immigrant mothers. Japanese immigrant mothers reported that they would ideally like to engage in more didactic behavior than mothers in Japan, and Japanese immigrant mothers reported that ideally their husbands should engage in more didactic behavior than Japanese or European American mothers reported for their spouses.

For the South American comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 220) = 3.08, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$ . Specifically, similar to previous research comparing European American and Argentine mothers (Bornstein et al., 1996, 1999), South American immigrant and European American mothers reported that they engaged in more didactic behavior with their toddlers than Argentine mothers. South American immigrant mothers reported that their spouses actually engaged in more didactic behavior than Argentine or European American spouses, and South American immigrant mothers reported that ideally their spouses would engage in more didactic behavior than European American fathers.

### **Limit Setting**

For the Japanese comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 212) = 3.67, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .09$ . Specifically, consistent with previous research showing that a minority of Japanese parents value limit setting as a childrearing goal (Shwalb et al., 1997) and characterizations of Japanese parenting as more indulgent than European American parenting (e.g., Hara & Minagawa, 1996; Lanham & Garrick, 1996), European American mothers reported that they actually engage in more limit setting than Japanese or Japanese immigrant mothers and that ideally they would engage in more limit setting than Japanese immigrant mothers. Consistent with previous research suggesting that Japanese fathers' primary role is financial support of the family (Shwalb et al., 1997), in no case did Japanese mothers report that their spouses (actually or ideally) engaged in more social, didactic, or limit setting behaviors than either Japanese immigrant or European American mothers reported for their spouses.

For the South American comparison, the Cultural Group  $\times$  PSQ Scales multivariate interaction was significant,  $F(6, 220) = 2.59, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . South American immigrant and (consistent with previous research; Bornstein et al., 1996) European American mothers reported that they (actually and ideally) engage in more limit setting



with their toddlers than Argentine mothers. South American immigrant mothers reported that ideally their spouses would engage in more limit setting than Argentine or European American fathers. The lack of differences between European American and Argentine fathers' (real and ideal) social, didactic, or limit setting behavior is consistent with previous research (Bornstein et al., 1996).

## CONCLUSION

We found that immigrant mothers tend to report that they and their husbands engage in and value behaviors important in their culture of origin, such as social exchanges, and behaviors valued in their culture of destination, such as didactic interactions. The pattern of results for limit setting was different, wherein Japanese immigrant mothers, like mothers in Japan, reported less actual and ideal engagement in childrearing than European American mothers; however, South American immigrant mothers, like European American mothers, reported more actual and ideal limit setting than mothers in their country of origin. Generally, we also found that immigrant mothers tended to say that they or their spouses would actually or ideally engage in more social and didactic behavior than either mothers in their country of origin or destination, suggesting that immigrant mothers emphasize parenting styles valued in their culture of origin (namely, social exchanges) and in their culture of destination (i.e., didactic interactions), perhaps in an effort to merge the two cultural traditions.

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