Cross-Cultural Differences in Development

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Development Overview

- **Human Development**: Changes in physical, psychological, and social behavior and thought across the lifetime
  - **Enculturation**: Process of learning about one’s culture, typically without direct teaching
  - **Socialization**: Deliberate teaching of a culture
- A child’s development and enculturation depends on:
  - With whom the child interacts
  - Where they interact with others
  - Roles children play
  - Parents’ beliefs of appropriate parenting practices
Developmental Niche

- **Developmental Niche**: World in which the child learns the values and norms important to the culture
- Three components of the developmental niche:
  - Physical and social setting
  - Customs of child care (cultural norms and institutions)
  - Psychology of the caregivers (beliefs and values)
- The developmental niche promotes, nurtures, and constrains development
- Before examining the cultural influences on development, a key first question to ask is:
  - What is good development within the culture?

Infant Development

- **African Infant Precocity**: African babies develop psychomotor skills before Euro-American babies (Gerber & Dean, 1957)
  - For example, African babies sit up and walk about 1 month before Euro-American babies
- Cultural factors that may influence faster psychomotor infant development in African babies:
  - Less anesthesia during birth
  - Massaging babies
  - Deliberate teaching and practice of motor skills
  - Vertical position of baby while mother works

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Similarities and Differences in Parenting of Infants

- **Intuitive parenting practices**: Cross-cultural similarity in parenting of infants
  - Attempt to capture and maintain the infant’s attention
  - Exaggerating facial expression
  - **Motherese**: Higher pitch and larger variations in pitch when speaking to infants

- **Differences in infant parenting practices**
  - Speech to children
    - **Affect-salient speech**: Songs, nonsense expressions, and incomplete statements
      - Empathize with needs of infants
    - **Information-Salient speech**: Provide information about the environment with a child
      - Encourages individual expression

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Similarities and Differences in Play

- **Children playing is culturally universal**
  - Functions of play:
    - Promote cognitive development (Symbolism, Language use, Problem Solving, Creativity)
    - Promote social development (Friendship, Social competence, Emotional maturity)

- **Cultural differences in play**
  - Amount of time children spent playing
  - Age at children stop playing
  - Sibling involvement in play
  - Adulthood involvement in play

- **Children in complex cultures play more and play with more complexity**
Cultural Differences in Play

- Chinese children spent more time playing with other children whereas American children spent more time playing individually (Haight, Wang, Fung, Williams, & Mintz, 1999)
- When playing with toddlers, Japanese mothers focus more on social interactions while American mothers use play to teach knowledge of the world.

Influence of Childcare Customs on Development

- Frequency of mothers in western Kenya holding their infants had positive correlation with the child’s affective disposition at 12 years (Keller & Eckensberger, 1998)
- Frequency of mother-holding did not influence cognitive performance
- Children’s early experiences lead to Domain-specific consequences

**Conclusion:** Different parenting practices do not have general development consequences, but the outcomes are specifically related to the parenting practices
Parents’ Goals

• Parenting goals of rural Gusii mothers (Kenya) and urban American mothers (LeVine, Levine, Dixon, Richman, Leiderman, & Keefer, 1996)
  – American mothers’ goal is to actively engage and socially interact with their children
    • Mothers respond to 20% of baby’s vocalizations
    • Gusii mothers only respond to 5% of vocalizations
  – Gusii mothers believe that stimulation leads to self-centered adult
• Goals and beliefs of parents are rooted in what is appropriate for the culture.

Dimensions of Child Rearing
(Barry, Bacon & Child, 1957)

• **Obedience Training:** Degree to which children are trained to obey adults
• **Responsibility Training:** Degree which children are trained take responsibility for tasks
• **Nurturance Training:** Degree to which children are trained to care for the younger siblings and others
• **Achievement Training:** Degree to which children are trained to strive for standards of excellence in performance
• **Self-Reliance:** Degree to which children are trained to be independent of the assistance from others for supplying their own needs and wants
Parenting Ethnotheories

- Parenting Ethnotheories: Knowledge and beliefs about the domain of parenting
  - Beliefs, values, and practices of parent about the proper way to raise a child
  - For example:
    - Affection and warmth between parents and children
    - Amount of time breastfeeding
    - Development: When a child walks, talks, chooses friends
    - Why children misbehave and how to discipline
    - Amount of talk to children
    - Sleeping patterns

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Parenting Ethnotheories

- Videotapes of children in preschool in Japan and USA were shown to teachers (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989)
  - Perspectives on class size:
    - US: Disapproved of the large responsibility on teachers by having a large number (30) of children in Japanese classrooms
    - Japanese: Disapproved of the small class size in the US because children would be unable to learn from others
  - Perspective on misbehavior:
    - Japanese: Children did not develop a healthy dependency on their mother.
    - US: Children had inherent problems

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Parenting Ethnotheories

- Conclusions
  - Parents and other caretakers influence their child’s development through socialization practices based on their cultural beliefs.
  - Parents reflect the standard and expectations of their cultural environment in:
    1. How they treat their children
    2. How they perceive social situations
  - Parents do not tend to realize the extent to which they direct their children into cultural practices.

Child Rearing Conclusion

- Some child-rearing practices are similar across all cultures.
- Child-rearing also differs from one society to the other.
- **Universalist Perspective**
Conclusion

• A particular institution or practice cannot be removed from one culture and inserted into another and expect the same developmental outcomes
• Understanding healthy development and taking action to promote healthy development requires thinking about the elements of a child’s developmental niche and how they interact

Revision

• Explain the six dimensions of child rearing.
• Explain the concept of parental ethnotheories and how they can influence development.
• What are some common and different parenting practices across cultures?