Parenting: Cultural Influences and Impact on Childhood Health and Well-Being

Reviewed by Jason Meier
University of Connecticut
Jason.Meier@uconn.edu

Parenting: Cultural Influences and Impact on Childhood Health and Well-Being presents fourteen studies that explore the effects of parenting styles on developmental outcomes in Southern European and Latin American countries. In an effort to provide a culturally sound discussion of parenting styles and optimum developmental outcomes, studies contained within the book come from researchers from different institutions in South America, Southern Europe, and North America. Historically, the authoritative parenting style, which is characterized by a high level of warmth as well as a firm level of strictness, is often viewed as the optimal parenting style because it tends to be associated with positive developmental outcomes for children. However, research on this issue has typically focused primarily on middle-class, European-American parents. As a result, conclusions about authoritative parenting are not necessarily cross-culturally generalizable.

Each chapter provides evidence about which parenting style has optimum developmental outcomes in the region studied. Fernando Garcia asserted that collectively, evidence in this book suggests that “authoritative parenting is not always associated with optimum developmental outcomes and those relationships between parenting styles and developmental outcomes also depend on the ethnic, cultural and cultural-variations context where the socialization process takes place” (p. vii).

Chapter 1 begins with the intellectual foundation for describing authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful, and indulgent parenting styles. In this chapter, Fuentes explained that most studies that analyze the relationship between parenting styles and the developmental outcomes of children are conducted in the US. This has led to the common notion that the authoritative parenting style leads to optimum developmental outcomes. She continued to present emergent research demonstrating that other parenting styles lead to optimum developmental outcomes. She continued to present emergent research demonstrating that other parenting styles lead to optimum developmental outcomes. She continued to present emergent research demonstrating that other parenting styles lead to optimum developmental outcomes in contexts other than the US. This led to Garcia’s conclusion that “an optimal parenting style does not exist, but it is rather determined by the values implicit in each cultural and social context” (p. 8).

Exploring samples from different contexts in Southern Europe and Latin America, the next theme of the book outlined ways in which the indulgent style of parenting may lead to optimum developmental outcomes for adolescents. In Chapter 2, for example, Garcia, Fernandez-Domenech, Veiga, Bono, Serra, and Musitu analyzed current evidence between parenting styles and parenting practices in the Spanish context. Their findings indicated that adolescents from indulgent families (families high in warmth but not high in strictness) experience more granted autonomy and, consequently, better developmental outcomes when compared to authoritative families (families high in warmth but also high in strictness).
Utilizing a sample from Brazil, Martinez, Camino, Camino, and Madrid discussed the conceptualization of socialization and family socialization processes in Chapter 3. Their study shows that adolescents raised by indulgent and authoritative parents exhibited better psychological well-being than adolescents raised by neglectful (parents low in warmth and low in strictness) or authoritarian parents (parents low in warmth and high in strictness). Additionally, they discovered that adolescents in Brazil who were raised by indulgent parents scored similarly to adolescents raised by authoritative parents in measures of internalization of values. Transitioning to a Portuguese sample, Rodrigues, Fuentes, and Veiga reported similar findings in Chapter 4. They discovered that adolescents in Portugal from indulgent families scored the same or better than adolescents from authoritative families in measures of psychosocial adjustment. The authors posited that this may be a result of Portuguese culture being collectivist-horizontal instead of being collectivist-vertical (such as Asian or Arabic societies) or individualistic (such as the United States). Horizontal collectivism is based on making decisions collectively among equal individuals. Vertical collectivism relies on power, and conformity to social hierarchy. Individualism strives to place power within the individual to promote autonomy. Utilizing a Peruvian sample in a similar study, Alberti, Gabaldon, and Frias-Navarro also reported similar findings in Chapter 5, noting that adolescents in Peru from indulgent families scored equally or better than children in authoritative families on measures of self-esteem. They emphasized the importance of parental warmth and bidirectional communication for the positive development of adolescent self-esteem.

In addition to the indulgent parenting style leading to favorable developmental outcomes, the indulgent parenting style may also act as a protective factor against unfavorable developmental outcomes in the Spanish context. In Chapter 6, for example, Lorence, Hidalgo, and Menendez explored the connections between parenting styles and internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescents. The authors found that parenting styles were significantly related to externalizing problems. In this context, the indulgent parenting style “could be considered a protective factor for females and males of Spanish families, both at risk and not at risk” (p. 86). This reflects the fact that parental warmth does have an effect on how adolescents externalize problems.

Taking a generational approach, Queiroz, Camino, Garcia, and Zacares analyzed in Chapter 7 the way in which parenting styles affect psychological adjustment between different generations. In line with the previously presented studies, this study found that adolescents in indulgent families as well as elderly members of indulgent families were associated with the highest levels of self-esteem and self-concept. Moreover, this evidence further validates the assertion that the indulgent parenting style tends to produce optimum developmental outcomes in the Spanish context.

The next theme covered in this book is the connection between parenting style and violence/antisocial behavior as well as substance abuse. In Chapter 8, Garaigordobil, Martinez, and Fernandez focused on connections between antisocial behavior and parenting style, and between the degree of parenting acceptance/warmth and imposition/strictness. Results showed that a high level of acceptance/warmth and a low level of imposition/strictness was associated with low levels of antisocial behavior. This implies that the indulgent parenting style, which is characterized by high warmth and low imposition (strictness) is the parenting style that yields optimum developmental outcome in this sample. In a similar vein, Fuentes, Martinez, and Navarro discussed in Chapter 9 different personal, social, and contextual risk factors that predicted school violence developing during adolescence. As in previous studies, this study also found that the indulgent parenting style scored similarly or better than the authoritative parenting style as a prevention factor against perpetrating school violence or antisocial behavior. Adding to the previous two chapters, Suarez-Relinque, del-Moral-Arroyo, Martinez-Ferrer, and Musitu discussed in Chapter 10, child-to-parent violence, “a crime of assault against one parent or both, done intentionally to cause physical, psychological, or financial harm, in order to achieve power and control with respect to parental figures” (p. 144).
Rates of such violence were found to occur least often in indulgent families and most often in authoritarian families. Chapter 11 by Povedano, Monreal, Cuesta, Muniz, Moreno, and Musitu found that the indulgent parenting style was only weakly associated with teen dating violence, whereas the authoritarian parenting style was more strongly associated with teen dating violence. Most notable was the fact that as parental warmth increased, and parenting imposition decreased, teen dating violence also decreased. In Chapter 12, Calafat, Juan, Becona, and Garcia analyzed current research between substance use during adolescence and parenting styles across Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. Adolescents from indulgent families scored as low as adolescents from authoritative families on measures that observed substance use. As in previous studies, adolescents in this study who came from indulgent families scored higher than adolescents from other families on measures of positive self-esteem.

The final two chapters focused on implications for practice and intervention. Rique and da Silva proposed in Chapter 13 that the way in which parents socialize forgiveness in their children may affect adolescents’ sociomoral competence (i.e. ability to reconcile; positive engagement with peers; empathy). The authors posited that if parents focus on empathy and feelings of guilt when the child commits a moral transgression, that the child is more likely to take responsibility and seek reparation instead of avoiding consequence. Finally, Foster and Brouwer outlined in Chapter 14 an intervention created to reduce child maltreatment. The authors stressed that measures and interventions must grow and evolve within communities where they are implemented, and that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ intervention that will work in all contexts.

Measures used in this book to assess parenting style were not consistent across studies. Several different assessment tools were used. Consequently, different types of data were collected. Moreover, authors of the various chapters construed parenting styles slightly differently – the major distinction being between parenting strictness and imposition as a way to determine either an authoritative or authoritarian parenting style. Though both strictness and imposition are forms of behavioral control, they connote different levels of firmness and they have different operational definitions. These differences may have impacted the general conclusions drawn in the book. As a result, readers cannot be fully confident about the relative benefits of one style of parenting (e.g., indulgent) over other styles of parenting (e.g., authoritative).

Overall, the messages and themes contained within Parenting: Cultural Influences and Impact on Childhood Health and Well-Being work well within the constructs of interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (IPARTheory). In IPARTheory’s personality subtheory, for example, individuals who feel rejected are predicted “to develop feelings of impaired self-esteem and impaired self-adequacy,” among other dispositions (Rohner 2015, p. 10). As seen in the majority of articles in this book, adolescents from indulgent families, which are characterized by high levels of parental acceptance (low levels of rejection), appear to have the most positive levels of self-esteem when compared to adolescents from families with other parenting styles. Additionally, IPARTheory asserts that “Once created, individuals’ mental representations of self…. tend to induce them to seek or avoid certain situations and kinds of people” (Rohner 2015, p. 11). Referencing the chapters of Parenting about violence and antisocial behavior, it can be inferred that individuals who feel rejected may be predisposed or prone to violence and antisocial behavior. Conversely, adolescents who feel the most warmth and least imposition—that is, those who are in indulgent families—may be the most protected from violence and antisocial behavior. In short, Parenting: Cultural Influences and Impact on Childhood Health and Well-Being fits comfortably within IPARTheory’s framework, and provides contextual evidence that adds to the conversation about parenting styles and optimum developmental outcomes.

References