

Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance Cultural Dimensions: How Each Influences Parental Disciplinary Methods

Karen Walker Schwab
University of the Incarnate Word

Abstract

This paper is a literature review using the Douglas-Widavasky Grid/Group theory as a framework to examine, from a cross cultural perspective, preferred parental disciplinary methods. The four rival cultures defined in the Grid/Group theory mirror the cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance described by Geert Hofstede. Each of these rival cultures has distinct parenting styles, including disciplinary methods. When trying to predict a preferred disciplinary method based on a parent's country of origin, knowing the country's score under Hofstede's dimensions allows easier assignment to one of the four cultures in the Grid/Group theory. Once assigned to one of the Grid/Group's four cultures, the preferred disciplinary method can be easily identified. For this review, the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) study's ten societal clusters were used as a starting point to identify countries with similar individualism-collectivism and power distance rankings. Findings of this review reinforce the proposed approach. However, the review is limited by the small number of studies focusing specifically on disciplinary methods. Most examine parenting style and do not take into account "modernized" disciplinary methods secondary to immigration.

Keywords: Child abuse, parenting, cross-cultural, child, child maltreatment, multi-cultural, parenting, and discipline.

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 ratified and put into action one of the primary documents used world-wide to protect the rights of children and families. In the document, fifty-four articles outline child, parent and family rights. The preamble of this document also emphasizes "taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of

the child" (Convention on the Rights of Children, 1990, pg 1).

C. Henry Kempe (1982) maintains a basic element in any society is the use of specific parenting practices to teach children cultural values. Furthermore, parenting practices also serve to develop traits in the children considered valuable by others living in the same culture. In contrast, disciplinary methods are used as a means to discourage behaviors not valued in the child's society. These methods are deeply

rooted in culture and are not easily changed even if shown to be ineffective or as having detrimental outcomes (Westby, 2007; Giles-Sims, 2005).

Professionals working with children in the fields of health care, social services and education are dealing more often with cross-cultural issues in child development (Jenni & O'Connor, 2005). The European Union has globalized Europe and opened borders allowing people to move easily into new countries (Festini et al, 2009). Though immigration has increased into Europe, the United States continues to be the most common destination of immigrants (Lejeune-Kaba, 2010).

Immigrant parents have the right to use disciplinary methods common to their culture. However, professionals must be able to recognize and judge when a disciplinary method is actually child maltreatment. When training is lacking, professionals will rely on their own cultural values to make judgments (Jenni & O'Connor, 2005). These ethnocentric judgments on the part of professionals can lead to mistaken referrals to child protective services. Though the professional's intention may be to protect the child, a false allegation of abuse can inflict substantial harm (Westby, 2007). Just as well, professionals with a poor understanding of culturally accepted disciplinary methods may fail to report child maltreatment. At times, a harmful act may be rationalized by professionals as tolerable since it is thought to be a necessary part of the child's culture (Kempe, 1982).

These reporting errors to child protective services can be avoided with a better understanding of cross-cultural disciplinary methods. It is a daunting task to understand thoroughly all disciplinary methods from all cultures. An alternative solution is to consider which cultural dimension the child's home country falls under. Doing so

allows cultures with similar values to be grouped together. However, countries sharing similar cultural dimensions do not necessarily discipline children the same way. The purpose of this paper is to explore literature discussing cross-cultural disciplinary methods and how cultural dimensions influence which methods are preferred by parents.

Search Strategies

Database EBSCO host and Med-Line were searched using key words such as child maltreatment, child abuse, parenting, cross-cultural, multi-cultural, discipline, and child. Several websites were accessed for statistical data and definitions. Journal articles, reports, commentaries, and books were reviewed. The majority of these were published within the past ten years. These search strategies identified numerous studies discussing parenting methods of immigrants in the United States and a moderate number of studies discussing cross-cultural parenting styles. Few studies discuss cross-cultural disciplinary methods. Of those discussing the topic, fewer related the influence cultural dimensions have on the parent's preferred disciplinary methods. Finally there is no consistent theoretical framework among studies (Stevenson-Hinde, 1998).

Theoretical Considerations

One theory bringing a better understanding of cultural dimension's influences on parental disciplinary methods is the Grid/Group theory (Westby, 2007). The Douglas-Wildavsky Grid/Group theory describes hierarchical, egalitarian, individualistic, and fatalistic cultures. These four cultures are rival cultures. Each is thought to have distinct and contrasting concepts of parenting and disciplinary methods. These distinctions are said to explain why different disciplinary methods

are used across cultures (Giles-Sims & Lockhardt, 2005).

Relying on patterns of socialization and interactions, two dimensions are used to measure each culture. The first dimension is Grid. Grid is high when societal roles are ranked strongly along gender, color, lineage, and age. When the same roles are based on abilities, skills, and qualifications, the Grid is low. The second dimension is Group. Group strength is strong when there is strong commitment to a group and low when an individualistic approach is preferred (Westby, 2007). The two dimensions combine into four life styles: low-grid/low-group (individualistic); low-grid/high-group (egalitarian); high-grid/high-group (hierarchical); and high-grid/low-group (fatalistic). The life style in each of these groupings is different including parenting style and preferred disciplinary methods.

The Grid/Group dimensions mirror the cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance described by Geert Hofstede (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2008). Grid is similar to power distance and Group is similar to individualism-collectivism. Hofstede was able to form empirical profiles of countries by studying cultural dimensions, including the two dimensions mentioned previously. When trying to predict a preferred disciplinary method, first knowing how the parent's home country scored in the Hofstede's dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance may allow easier assignment to one of the four rival cultures described in the Grid/Group theory.

The Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) study using nine cultural dimensions (including individualism-collectivism and power distance) defined ten societal clusters. Each cluster included several countries sharing similar languages, religion, geography, and history (Gannon & Pillai,

2010). For this literature review, these clusters will be a starting point for identifying countries with similar individualism-collectivism and power distance rankings.

Body of Review

Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic are a few countries from the GLOBE's Latin American cluster. These countries have in common a high power distance index and low individualism index score per Hofstede (Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions, 2009). These scores match the Grid/Group Hierarchical culture. This culture's parenting style is the most common among countries reviewed. Parent's in this culture tend to be authoritarian; use corporal punishment; and are concerned with teaching children to follow a specific set of standards (Westby, 2007). A child's opinion is not invited and unquestioned obedience is expected (Calzada, 2010).

Research findings do not fully support this description. A recently published study of Mexican and Dominican immigrants to the United States does support a preference for authoritarian parenting and spanking as a necessary means to reinforce obedience. This is in part due to their primary goal of teaching respect, also called *Respeto* (Calzada, 2010). It is important to note the subjects were immigrants. Another study reported no differences in authoritarian parenting style between non-immigrant Mexican and Caucasian parents. In the same study, Mexican immigrant parents used authoritative parenting practices more often. The study's authors suggest ethnic minority status, not affiliation with Mexican culture, influences parenting style (Varela et al, 2004). Furthermore, focus groups from Puerto Rico and the Dominicans felt parental controls must be reasonable and explanations should be provided to older children. The mothers felt this approach was

better than just giving orders (Guilamo-Ramos et al, 2007).

Countries in the Confucian Asian cluster have low individualism and high power distance index scores. South Korea, China, and Japan are part of this cluster. Japan's individualism index score is notably highest of the three countries yet remains lower than countries falling in the Grid/Group Individualistic culture. Like the Latin American cluster, the Confucian cluster Hofstede index scores fit the Grid/Group Hierarchical culture. Unlike the Latin American cluster, literature does partly support the Hierarchical parenting description.

A study of Korean immigrants to the United States reports harsh discipline is used to control their child's behavior. The adolescents in this study perceived their parent's control as a sign their parents did not accept them. Yet, Korean adolescents still living in Korea viewed a high level of parental control as confirmation of their parent's acceptance (Kim, Cain, McCubbin, 2006). Another study, conducted in China, found Chinese parents do use authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles. Authoritative parents were shown to use harsh punishments to discipline children. At times, these same parents used authoritarian parenting methods of reasoning and responsiveness to discipline. Parents also used minimizing reactions (e.g. "you'll be fine") as a means of socializing their children to regulate their emotions. Unlike Western cultures, Chinese children who were shy and reserved scored higher on social competence and adjustment tests (Tao, Zhou, & Wang, 2010).

Contemporary Asian fathers still consider raising children to be the mother's job but are willing to share child care duties. Japanese fathers desire friendships with their children and complete obedience is not always expected (Yun-Shan & Verklan,

2008). Japanese mothers, however, feel less satisfied with their parenting skill. If a child fails to develop correctly, the mother's effort is questioned. This is thought to be the reason contemporary Japanese mothers do not indulge their children even if the mother desired to do so (Bornstein et al, 1998). This emphasis to accomplish set goals is reflected in academics. Among school-aged, Japanese children have reduced amounts of sleep. Children will often take short naps after school; awake to snack; and study into the night even after their parents have gone to bed (Jenni & O'Connor, 2005).

Few studies can be found concerning the remaining GLOBE clusters. Of the few, one study of Nigerian parent-child interaction seems to agree with the Grid/Group theory. Nigeria is part of the Sub-Saharan Africa cluster. It also shares Hofstede index scores similar to (almost identical to China) Confucian and Latin American clusters. Therefore, it is also a Hierarchical culture in the Grid/Group. The study examined parent-child speech and language interactions. Authors of this study found emphasis is placed on full obedience (without explanation) and attainment of specific goals. Mother's speak to children often and continually through the day as a means for communicating expectations and teaching correct behavior. The authors report Nigerian parent-child interactions and speech more closely resembles teacher-pupil talk (Burns & Radford, 2008).

India is a part of the Southern Asia cluster. Based on Hofstede scores, it is also a Hierarchical culture. This country is the subject of a disturbing article. Sadly, girls are seen as a burden to their family. Sons, who will be responsible for caring for elderly parents, are the preferred gender. Despite studies showing girls get sick as often as boys, girls are hospitalized at least once a year 35.4% of the time while boys were hospitalized 64.6%. In addition, boys

were immunized more often; breast-fed longer; and allowed to eat before their sisters. Sex-selective abortions have led to an unequal sex ration of 927 girls to 1000 boys. The world-wide average is 105 girls per 100 boys (Sumner, 2009).

Turkey is part of the Middle East cluster. It scores relatively lower on Hofstede's individualism index and higher for power distance. This fits the Grid/Group's Egalitarian culture. Families in this culture view humans as equal; desire quality relations with children; rarely use corporal punishment; and allow children to develop their own way (Westby, 2007). Unfortunately, this description cannot be accepted or rejected due to an absence of studies for this topic. One study of Turkish mothers did conclude mothers have a lack of knowledge regarding basic child development milestones. However, mothers with higher education and fewer children did score higher on caregiver knowledge tests (Ertem et al, 2007). The study does not discuss parenting practices or disciplinary methods.

Another country fitting into the Egalitarian culture is Sweden which is part of the Nordic European cluster. Sweden's index of Individualism is high compared to Turkey. However, it is a horizontal individualism reflecting an affiliation with groups (Gannon & Pillai, 2010). Swedish co-sleeping practices were examined for a better understanding of parental theories about co-sleeping. Swedish parents shared responsibility for child rearing duties. Children are considered to be individuals with rights, including the right to access their parents day or night (Welles-Nystrom, 2005). Again, discipline methods were not discussed.

The Anglo cluster is most often represented in literature by the United States. With high individualism and low power distance scores, this country is an

Individualistic culture in the Grid/Group theory. In this parenting culture, group conformity is less of a concern. Discipline can be permissive. Children are praised for good behavior yet corporal punishment is sometimes used (Westby, 2007). American mothers prepare themselves to parent and view parenting as a personal achievement. They are also highly invested in their children's upbringing (Bornstein et al, 1998). Emotional security is provided willingly through the day. However, during the night, American children are expected to independently sleep in their own room (Jenni & O'Connor, 2005).

The Grid/Group theory's fourth culture is Fatalistic culture. There is not an obvious cluster fitting this culture. Families falling into this culture have little group affiliation and avoid society at large. There is a tendency to follow hierarchical practices as a means of achieving order through rules. Corporal punishment is used most often to discipline children. These parents are inconsistent, impulsive, and stern in their parenting style (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005). Immigrant and refugee parents often fall into this culture (Westby, 2007). However, when asked, refugee parents explain their strict rules and isolation from society as the best way to keep their children safe in an unfamiliar country (Dumbrill, 2008).

Summary

As more and more cultures come in contact with one another through immigration and globalization, ethnocentric view of parenting may lead to conflict. A disciplinary method unfamiliar to some may be mistakenly viewed as abusive. More worrisome, real abuse may be dismissed as an acceptable cultural practice. It is difficult to learn what is considered acceptable disciplinary methods for every country through-out the world. The Grid/Group

theory describes four cultures with distinct parenting styles and disciplinary methods. The theory considers individualism-collectivism and power distance. Geert Hofstede and the GLOBE study can be used as a guide to identify which Grid/Group culture a country may fit into.

A review of literature reinforces this idea. However, the review is limited by the small number of studies focused specifically on preferred disciplinary methods. The majority of studies focus on parenting styles and values. Also, modifying variables require further study. Many studies describe the traditional parenting methods for their study's location yet go on to state many of these methods have been "modernized". Also, immigrant parents in several studies

were reported to parent differently once resettled in their new country. Consistently, the immigrant parents were described as more controlling and stern (Kim, 2006; Varela, 2004). Finally, it is suggested cross-cultural research should focus on one particular issue at a time such as sleep or feeding (Stevenson-Hinde, 1998).

A deeper understanding of preferred disciplinary methods in all GLOBE clusters will help those professionals serving children and their parents preserve the child and family rights established by the United Nations. Furthermore, knowing what is culturally accepted as a disciplinary method will help professionals protect the children they serve.

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Author Bio

Karen Walker Schwab, Doctoral Student, Department of Education University of the Incarnate Word 4301 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209, Kmwalke2@uiwtx.edu.

KAREN WALKER SCHWAB works full time as a primary care pediatric nurse practitioner where she also serves as preceptor to numerous graduate nurse practitioner students. She is also a

Clinical Assistant Professor for The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio- School of Nursing (UTHSCSA) teaching undergraduate nursing students. Mrs. Schwab has her Masters of Science in Nursing from UTHSCSA, and is currently a doctorate student at the University of the Incarnate Word, in Organizational Leadership.