How do cultural differences in parenting and socialization before the age 15 impact an adult's social skills?

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Abstract

Cultural values differ vastly across the world, leading to differences in parenting practices due to different preferred outcomes in children's social skills. Children are raised differently across the globe to adhere to contrasting expectations and develop social skills that allow them to fit into their society. This paper examines the role of culture differences in parenting towards children before the age of 10, and how it has an impact on the development of social skills. Through incorporating evidence from other relevant research papers and articles, I demonstrate how and why cultures and societies lead to different behaviours and skills being developed. In particular, I explore two types of societies with distinct cultural norms – individualist and collectivist – to argue that social skills differ between countries and cultures depending on the norms of that culture.

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Culture is defined as the beliefs, behaviors, customs, and values that characterize a particular social group (Lansford, 2021). This paper will explore the concept of culture by examining two contrasting types of societies: individualist and collectivist. Countries with collectivist societies include: China, India, Ghana, Japan, South Korea, and several Latin American countries. Countries with individualist societies include the US, Australia, Germany, and the UK. In individualist societies, social ties are relatively loose, and individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families (Pinquart & Kauser, 2017). For example, in individualist countries such as the UK, parents are less focused on emphasizing respect for elders and more focused on emphasizing expressing one's needs, which is fitting for an individualist society where individuals need to assert themselves and actively pursue their wishes and needs. In contrast, collectivist societies emphasize strong group bonds, where individuals are integrated into cohesive groups that provide mutual support and protection (Pinquart & Kauser, 2017). Therefore, parents in collectivist societies, such as South Korea, require obedience from children without expression of their point of view, to fit into a society where individuals must respect members in their groups and communities.

Social skills have been defined in various ways. Caballo (2003) and Del Prette & Del Prette (1999) describe them as learned behavioral abilities used in social interactions. According to Del Prette and Del Prette (2001, page 2), social skills refer to "the existence of different ranges of social behavior in the individual repertoire to deal adequately with interpersonal situations". Agreeing to that Caballo (2003, page 6) says that, "socially skilled behavior is a group of behaviors in an interpersonal context, expressing feelings, attitudes, wishes, opinions or rights, in an adequate manner to the situation, respecting these behaviors in others, usually solving immediate problems and decreasing the possibility of future problems". Socialization, according to Raj and Raval (2013, page 58) is "an ongoing process of social interaction through which children become functional members of a society". Overall, social skills are difficult to define, considering the amount of definitions created over the last decade and longer. I followed Del Prette and Del Prette's interpretation through the paper, as I found it to be the most relevant and accurate description.

Social skills are critical during childhood, as they foster healthy relationships and contribute to overall development. For instance, learning simple manners such as saying "please" and "thank you" helps children navigate social exchanges appropriately. Children who demonstrate such behaviors are more likely to be accepted by peers, which enhances their sense of belonging and supports the development of positive self-esteem (Marinho-Casanova, 2017).

Throughout the paper, the years 'before the age 10' are specified to distinguish young children from adolescents, as these groups are at different developmental stages. Adolescents often face increasing academic demands and pressures related to school achievement. At the same time, younger children are more focused on socio-emotional challenges, such as gaining acceptance from parents, caregivers, and peers (Yim, 2025).

Literature Review + Argument

Developing social skills is a crucial part of an individual's childhood, as it prepares them for interactions with various members of society. Marinho-Casanova & Leiner (2017, page 3) argued "social skills become vital behaviors in childhood as they allow positive interactions with peers and others and are necessary to develop a healthy behavioral repertoire in life". This suggests that by developing social skills, children learn how to interact with others around them and create relationships with people. Additionally, it allows children to enhance their communication skills and cooperation, teaching them habits and behaviours they can apply in their adolescence and later in their adult life.

Social skills can differ between countries and cultures, and can often depend on the norms of that culture. The study also mentions a point from (Ullman & Krasner, 1975), stating that the definition of healthy behaviours and adequate social skills depends on the socio-cultural context of the culture, which essentially connects to my topic of research, suggesting that behaviours often depend on the cultural context of the environment. This is because certain societies, communities, and countries have preferences and expectations for how they want their children to behave and what skills they promote. Furthermore, Jennifer E Lansford (2021, page 2) stated that "Beliefs and norms of cultural contexts affect parents' and children's expectations and behaviors in their relationship with each other." As parents and children observe behaviors in their community, they create expectations about how their parent-child relationship should be. Therefore, specific social skills are preferred or disapproved of depending on the cultural context of the environment. Due to this, parents raise their children to portray the favoured characteristics and social skills of their community.

For example, two types of societies with distinct cultural norms that affect parent behaviors are collectivist and individualist cultures. In collectivist cultures, individuals are expected not to express their emotions openly in public settings. Therefore, parents in these cultures may adopt an Authoritarian parenting style, where discipline is used more than emotional warmth, to discourage their children from openly expressing emotions in public settings. Pinquart and Kauser (2017) provided a relevant discussion on individualist and collectivist cultures. The study mentioned that in collectivist groups, Authoritarian parenting, such as obedience and respect for elders, is normal. This influences parenting practices and the effects they display. In collectivist societies, individuals must learn to express their wants and needs and attend to the needs of others in their group or community. Authoritarian parenting promotes these qualities, as the parenting style follows a more strict and discipline-based approach, where children should not question parental instructions. This is ideal for living cohesively in a group society because iit teaches children to respect their elders and integrate within a society.

The study also states that authoritative parenting would be effective in transmitting values in individualist societies. This is because individuals in this society would pursue their own needs; this style of parenting encourages them to assert themselves and communicate what they want.

A common theme throughout research papers is the topic of cultural normality. A study by Duane Rudy and Grusec found that in some countries, authoritarian parenting is everyday and not associated with adverse outcomes. The paper gives the example of African American mothers in high-risk environments. They are likely to use authoritarian techniques as children

need to follow their mother's instructions, as the consequences if they disobey could be severe. Similarly, a study by Martin Pinquart on cultural differences in harsh parenting found that cultural normativeness also plays a role in addressing the effects of children's behavior problems on harsh parenting. The research paper discusses that children interpret harsh behaviour based on the behaviour of other parents in their culture or community. Therefore, physical punishment does not have as adverse effects on child outcomes if seen as culturally normative. This concept of cultural normality links back to the overall topic of cultural impacts and differences on parenting, as different societies, communities, and cultures have their norms that influence parental styles and behaviours towards children.

Societal Expectations of Children in Collectivist and Individualist Societies

Collectivist Societies

These cultural norms (as laid out above) lead to different societal expectations of children. Collectivist societies exhibit various behaviors that influence children's social skills, including promoting the development of skills such as conformity to social norms, adherence to societal expectations, recognition of children's achievements, and prioritizing familial needs over personal ones. These actions and attributes are fitting for collectivist cultures because self-assertion is negatively valued and individuals are required to align themselves with larger groups (Rudy & Grusec, 2001). In collectivist societies, it is necessary to express self-interest and attend to the needs and wishes of others.

However, these skills have both positive and negative effects for children when they become adults. Conformity to social norms and expectations can improve social harmony and create a sense of unity, and enhance cooperation and social understanding. However, it can suppress individuality and personal growth by reducing the concept of a unique identity, and it can lead to a fear of rejection for children as they grow up, or even a herd mentality. Recognition through achievements is also a characteristic that is developed in collectivist societies. It can allow for increased confidence and motivation to do better, thanks to praise and recognition; however, it can foster unhealthy competition, less personal satisfaction, and reduced intrinsic motivation (only wanting external validation).

Additionally, a significant aspect of collectivist societies is prioritizing familial needs over personal needs. This can enhance empathy and increase children's sense of responsibility, which can promote caring habits as children grow into adults. However, this can create difficulties in asserting oneself and setting boundaries, and may even lead to limited social experiences, as many cultures value spending time with family and are strict with children attending other social events. In general, parents in collectivist societies tend to adopt more authoritarian parenting as a strategy for the child's benefit, as it allows for more open and conscious reflection, and is more flexible.

Individualist Societies

Likewise, individualist societies lead to the development of certain behaviors, such as independence, personal achievement, self-expression, openness, and discussion. These

characteristics are effective for individuals in this society, as they need to assert themselves and actively pursue their wishes and needs (Rudy & Grusec, 2001).

In addition to collectivist societies, these social skills also have both positive and negative impacts. The development of independence can increase confidence by enhancing self-reliance, although independence too early can lead to children feeling overwhelmed or stressed by responsibilities. It may also lead to difficulty with collaboration in later years. Personal achievement is another valued social skill in individualist societies, as it leads to increased self-esteem, which leads to increased confidence, enhancing emotional intelligence and even better academic performance. However, it can have adverse effects, such as increasing competition among children and leading to comparisons with their peers, which can impact their behaviors in adulthood. Self-expression is another noticeable result of parenting in individualist societies. It has several positive aspects, including promoting connection with others that children can relate to, improving confidence, and allowing children to feel validated.

On the other hand, it may lead to reduced sensitivity to social norms and even overconfidence. Lastly, openness and discussion are social skills commonly displayed in individualist societies, allowing parents to promote active listening and clear expression. This, in turn, can translate as emotional intelligence to children, enabling them to express their thoughts and feelings. Conversely, it may lead to aggressive discussion and overconfidence. Overall, parenting in individualist societies uses styles and attributes that allow children to grow up expressing their wants and needs and becoming independent individuals. All of these social skills are skills that are introduced and developed throughout childhood, and eventually strongly influence an individual's personality, habits, and behaviours in their adult life.

This difference in children from different cultures has been tested in numerous ways, one of them being a study performed by Bettina Lamm and her team that was a replica of the famous psychology experiment known as Mischel's (1972) Marshmello test. The Marshmello test involves giving children a marshmello and not allowing them to eat it until the researcher returns. Lamm did the test with 125 4 year-olds from urban middle class Germany and children from farming families in rural Cameroon. They found that about 70% of Cameroonian children could wait, while less that 30% of German children managed to do so. The difference in their behaviours is thought to come from the children's cultural backgrounds. Cameroonian kids grow up in larger family groups (collectivist) where they learn to control their emotions and prioritize group harmony. In contrast, German children are raised in smaller families that emphasize individuality and self-expression.

Parenting in Multicultural Contexts

As the world becomes more connected and the number of migrants increases, the amount of children being raised in a multicultural society increases. This means that children are raised in between collectivist and individualist expectations. This is evident in cases like Turkish immigrant families that migrated to the Netherlands (Yaman, Mesman & Linting, 2010). Individuals migrating from a collectivist to an individualist society undergo a difficult process. Changes in behaviour (in this case parenting behaviours) are expected from immigrants. Second-generation immigrants may not experience the actual migration, but are exposed to living between two cultures, with consequences in their parenting behaviours. Their parenting

practices may differ from those in their home country, as well as their resident country. Immigrant parents that have accustomed to the cultural values in their home country are more likely to adopt child-rearing attitudes similar to their host society.

Alternative Arguments and Limitations

Some researchers argue that the classifications of individualist and collectivist are too broad. This is true - it is a generalization, and people within cultures have different parenting styles and values (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, Hughes, 2007). However, researchers need a way to categorize and find patterns in communities and cultures, and individualist and collectivist societies have characteristics that make them unique. Additionally, most parents have a goal for their children that aligns with their society or culture, therefore creating patterns in certain behaviours. Furthermore, not all cultures have different parenting styles, as there are practices that are similar across cultures due to behaviours being universally adapted and essential for an infant's survival, such as the need for love, comfort and support (Lansford, 2021). Many aspects of parenting remain different throughout cultures, and cultural values, beliefs and customs all play a role in parenting behaviours (Lansford, 2021), which leads to different cultural norms. These norms are usually similar throughout individualist countries and collectivist countries, making it easy to identify their impacts.

Throughout my research process, I noticed certain limitations of the existing literature. One significant limitation was the continuous mention of western and non-western cultures. It was apparently that western practices in parenting were viewed as 'better', as the results of certain behaviours were considered to be more beneficial towards children, compared to non-western practices. Non-western practices, particularly those found in Asian cultures, were described as 'hostile', 'less-responsive' and 'rejective', which are stereotypical, generalized and even inflating certain attributes. For example, Rudy and Grusec (2001, page 3) state "Chinese mothers score higher on measures of authoritarianism than American mothers, as they are described as more restrictive", making 'western' practices seem ideal and humane. This may be due to the positionality of the researchers, as many of them come from Western backgrounds. This creates an unconscious bias in their research, as their opinion on non-western cultures and practices become tainted by their stereotypes and past knowledge.

Referring to cultures as individualist and collectivist provides a more accurate description of their values and attributes, and by describing both the positives and negatives of each side, it allows for a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of perspectives.

Broader Implications

Studying and understanding parenting in different cultures is extremely important, particularly in multicultural settings, as it promotes cultural respect. We are currently experiencing the largest wave of migration ever seen worldwide, as global cities are becoming more diverse than ever before. According to the most recent data, the total number of international migrants in the world is approximately 175 million - 200 million (Fromowitz, 2014). To live in a multicultural society, we must understand that different styles of parenting in different cultures result in various attributes, behaviours in children. By understanding parenting across cultures, we become more open to differences we see in the people around us, and allows us to realise we were all raised in

contrasting environments. Parents can raise their children to accept and embrace cultural diversity, and celebrate the diversities between them and the other children in the classroom, raised through different cultural practices. This creates cultural respect, allowing individuals to thrive in an interconnected world (Lee, 2025).

Additionally, these variations permit us to recognize the strengths of certain parenting styles. Using cross-cultural studies, researchers are able to identify more beneficial parenting practices towards children. By observing children from various backgrounds interacting, particular actions or traits can be found that stem from a distinct parenting practice that may be specific to a culture.

In general, learning about different cultures allows us to be more mindful of our environments and the people that surround us. Cultural awareness involves learning about cultures that are different from your own. When you become more culturally aware, you gain knowledge and information about different cultures, leading to greater cultural competence. Learning about different cultures makes you more sensitive to the differences between other cultures and your own, therefore you also become less judgmental of people who are different.

Though specific countries, communities and societies have different approaches to parenting, the world is becoming more interconnected, therefore those lines are getting more and more blurred. Large-scale social changes, such as globalization and media, are responsible for a change in parents' attitudes. For instance, social media has introduced new global perspectives that were not a part of traditional family exchanges before the internet. Parenting has been vastly shaped by exposure to different standpoints through technology, as well as via urbanization, globalization and other changes in social forces over time. These various exposures may have contributed to integrating individualist and collectivist natures, as well as a shift away from authoritarian parenting attitudes (Zietz and Chang, 2021).

Conclusion

As children grow older, social skills become increasingly crucial in their development and progression through society. This makes it important to recognize how parenting practices differ between societies and lead to different outcomes in children's behaviours and skills. Through summarizing and discussing various sources, this paper established significant variations in parenting behaviours and outcomes on social skills between different societies and cultures. As a result of analysing individualist and collectivist cultures, I found that each influenced preferred traits in children, altering the attitudes that were observed in parents. Future research into parenting and culture should focus on how traditions and communities in the modern day impact parenting towards children's social skills, particularly living in multicultural environments, as connectivity and progression have altered parent's attitudes.

150 Character Summary

Reviewed literature on cultural differences in parenting and child social skills; produced paper and parent pamphlet under PhD mentor's guidance.

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