

A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Chinese and American Parental Attributions of Child Misbehavior,  
Discipline Strategies, and Children's Behavioral Adjustment

by

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### Abstract

The goals of this study were: (a) to test whether American and mainland Chinese parents differed in their disciplinary responses to children's hypothetical misbehavior, (b) to test whether these parents differed in their causal attributions for children's hypothetical misbehavior, and (c) to examine how culture, disciplinary response styles, and attributional patterns differently predict children's externalizing behavior. Participants were 82 American mothers and their kindergarten-aged children (45 boys) and 87 Chinese parents (53 mothers) and their preschool children (39 boys). During interviews, parents completed child behavior inventories and were presented with six hypothetical vignettes in which their children misbehaved. Parents spontaneously reported their disciplinary responses and causal attributions for their children's behavioral infractions. Chinese and American parents did not differ in their endorsement of high power disciplinary responses but American parents reported more prosocial and democratic practices. Chinese parents' disciplinary responses and attributions were both characterized by a concern about social environmental and reciprocal influences. Hierarchical and stepwise regression modeling revealed that culture was not a significant predictor of child externalizing behavior, but that threat of nonphysical punishment and empathy were positively correlated with externalizing, and distraction and information seeking were negatively correlated. This study highlights the importance of deconstructing parenting into behavior and cognition and of examining how cultural contexts influence both of these dimensions. Proposals for future methodological and theoretical innovations are discussed.

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In her seminal investigation of parenting styles, Baumrind (1967) differentiated between three types of parents: those who were permissive, authoritarian, or authoritative. Baumrind (1967, 1971) asserted that the authoritative style, characterized by direction through rational, issue-oriented induction and a high degree of warmth and support, promotes prosocial behavior and confidence in children. Conversely, children of authoritarian parents who induce obedience through punitive, power-assertive, and restrictive measures tend to be antisocial and emotionally maladjusted. An abundance of parenting research has supported Baumrind's claims (e.g. Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Pfiffner, McBurnett, Rathouz, & Judice, 2005; Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008; Lansford et al., 2009). However, much of this literature has examined superficial aspects of parenting behaviors and their effects on children (e.g. Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Steinberg et al., 1994), overlooking the importance of the underlying cognitions that influence these acts.

Parents' attributions about children's behavior are useful in developing a framework in which parenting cognitions help shape socialization practices. In particular, parents' inferences about the causes of children's behavior (*causal attributions*) are important components of parent-child interactions (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). The causal attributions that parents make not only shape their behaviors toward their children, but also the nature of the dyadic relationships (Milner, 1993; Milner, 2003). Furthermore, parenting cognitions are relatively stable across time and can be transmitted intergenerationally (Bailey, Hill, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2009). Without intervention, maladaptive parenting practices may persist and worsen (Nix et al., 1999; Bugental & Johnston, 2000; Wilson, Gardner, Burton, & Leung, 2006). Several social

information processing models (e.g. Newberger & Cook, 1983; Dix & Lochman, 1990; Milner 1993) propose that parents' inferences about their children's behaviors influence their discipline strategies which, in turn, impact children's adjustment. This is one way in which maladaptive parenting practices can be transmitted intergenerationally, as children who received high levels of harsh parental discipline become at risk for developing maladaptive styles for processing social information (Milner & Foody, 1994; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992). Because of the indirect impact that parenting cognitions have on behaviors and, subsequently, child adjustment, studies of overt parenting practices should include assessments of parents' causal attributions about their children's behavior.

Another gap in existing knowledge of parenting behavior is its focus on Western, particularly European-American samples. This is problematic because culture imbues parents with complex schemas about the nature of children and appropriate child-rearing behaviors (Dix, 1993). Universally, every parent's child-rearing cognitions are shaped by socially constructed ethnotheories, or what Super and Harkness refer to as "cultural common sense" (1996, p. 115). These provide the basis for how parents organize their relationships with their children both cognitively and in practice. Whereas the relationships between child-rearing cognitions, behaviors, and children's adjustment lack integration within Western populations, they are even less well-understood in non-Western cultural contexts. Parenting practices that might be considered normative in one culture could be maladaptive in another. For example, frequent physical discipline has been consistently associated with childhood aggression and anxiety in the West. However, the extent to which members of a given culture perceive physical discipline as normative has been found to moderate its association with child behavioral problems (Lansford et al., 2005).

Moreover, the generalizability of Baumrind's (1967) parenting typologies to non-Western cultures has been questioned. For instance, Chao (1994) asserted that Chinese parenting, which is marked by high levels of parental care and involvement, is often mischaracterized as being authoritarian. It is influenced by the indigenous tenets of *chiao shun*, or training, and *guan*, the "firm control and governance of the child" (Chao, 1994: 112). Among members of Chinese cultures, both concepts have positive connotations indicating high parental care and concern for children's welfare, rather than negative intentions. Indeed, high parental endorsement of this training ideology has been found to moderate the relations between authoritarian parenting and both internalizing and externalizing psychopathology among Chinese-American immigrant children (Fung & Lau, 2009).

Clearly, culturally comparative study is integral in fully understanding the complex dynamics between parenting beliefs, behaviors, and child behavioral adjustment. Thus, the goal of this study was to examine associations between parental attributions of child misbehavior, discipline strategies, and children's externalizing behaviors in two cultural settings: the United States and China. In what follows, I review literature supporting both cognitive and cultural mediators of parental disciplinary strategies and the development of externalizing psychopathology in early childhood.

### **The Association between Parenting Attributions and Behaviors**

Parents' causal inferences about their children's behavior are integral in determining their discipline strategies (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, & Zabarano, 1989; Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989). For example, Dix and colleagues (1986) proposed a three-step model of parental reactions to child behavior. First, parents assess children's motivation and control over their behavior in order to make inferences about intent. They then use these inferences to make

further inferences about children's dispositions. If parents perceive that the child purposefully behaved in some manner, they will infer that this behavior is reflective of the child's personality. Alternatively, parents will make situational attributions ("she has not yet learned how to behave properly") if they believe that the child behaved unintentionally. Finally, based on these attributions, parents will respond in a manner they believe to be appropriate. For example, mild forms of misbehavior such as refusing a request or talking back are common in young children. Parents could attribute this misbehavior to either internal, child-specific factors, such as temperament ("he is an irritable child"), or to external, context-dependent factors ("he is cranky because he skipped his nap") and will act accordingly (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). As shown below, certain types of parental attributions have been related to harsh parenting and child externalizing problems.

Parents who make negative internal ("she is purposefully trying to manipulate me") or dispositional attributions ("he is an unpleasant child") for their children's misbehavior tend to endorse harsher and more dysfunctional parenting styles than others (Lorber & O'Leary, 2005; Dadds, Mullins, McAllister, & Atkinson, 2003; McElroy & Rodriguez, 2008). There has been ample empirical support for the proposition that such hostile attributions for children's misbehavior lead to increased endorsement of punitive, critical, and coercive responses (Dix et al., 1989; Nix et al., 1999; Milner, 2003). In their longitudinal study of 277 families, Nix et al. (1999) found that hostile maternal attributions indirectly predicted a continued increase of preschool children's externalizing behavior into third grade via increases in harsh parenting. In contrast, parents who acknowledged situational and environmental factors influencing misbehavior, such as developmental immaturity, were less likely to have strongly negative emotional and behavioral reactions to children's behavior (Dix & Grusec, 1985; Azar, Reitz, &

Goslin, 2008). This pattern was reversed when parents were asked to evaluate instances of children's prosocial behavior. Under these circumstances, parents who endorsed high levels of harsh discipline tended to make situational attributions for children's behavior and to endorse coercive parenting (Dadds et al., 2003). These findings affirmed other research indicating that lower levels of parental perspective-taking ability and child development knowledge have been positively correlated with endorsement of harsh parenting practices (McElroy & Rodriguez, 2008). In general, negative dispositional rather than situational attributions of misbehavior have been linked to endorsements of punitive, authoritarian responses (Dix & Grusec, 1985). Under these circumstances, the likelihood of child maltreatment is moderated by the valence and extremity of parents' emotional responses. Parents who make hostile dispositional attributions for child misbehavior have reported experiencing more negative emotions than do parents who account for mitigating factors such as the child's immaturity (Dix, 1993). Such negative attributions in combination with greater levels of experienced negative emotion have predicted parents' increased likelihood to perpetrate severe physical punishment (Dix, 1993; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000).

### **Associations between Parenting and Child Externalizing Psychopathology**

Ample studies conducted using Western samples have shown strong and consistent relationships between restrictive, harsh parenting and negative child outcomes (Gershoff, 2002). For example, adverse parenting practices such as corporal punishment and restrictive discipline have predicted a plethora of maladaptive child outcomes later in life, including aggression, conduct disorders, and delinquency and substance abuse (e.g. Snyder, Cramer, AfFrank, & Patterson, 2005; Bailey, Hill, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2009; Pears, Capaldi, & Owen, 2007). In a study of 2,582 parent/child dyads from the Dartmouth Prevention Project, McKee et al. (2007)

found that adolescent reports of parents' harsh physical and verbal discipline were associated with both child internalizing and externalizing psychopathology, even after accounting for the protective influences of positive parenting. Throughout the span of development, continued parental usage of corporal punishment (e.g. spanking, slapping) has been positively associated with children's aggressive and antisocial behavior problems (Gershoff, 2002; Straus & Stewart, 1999). Children who experience harsh parental discipline have been found to pursue hostile goals, have shown an increase in hostile attributions even in ambiguous situations, and subsequently choose more aggressive solutions while expecting positive consequences (Heidgerken, Hughes, Cavell, & Wilson, 2004). Thus, children's highly aggressive behavior, particularly when it emerges in early childhood, is a risk factor for many undesirable social outcomes, such as peer victimization and rejection (Keane & Calkins, 2004; Barker et al., 2008). When children's high levels of externalizing problems remain stable or increase across development, they often lead to serious forms of maladaptive behavior in later life, such as substance use and conduct disorders (White, Xie, Thompson, Loeber, & Southamer-Loeber, 2001).

Conversely, positive parenting practices, such as clear guidance, reasonable limit-setting, and mild to moderate power-assertion, have been strongly associated with the development of a broad range of adaptive developmental competencies. For example, in a meta-analysis of 41 studies with preschool-age participants, Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken, & Deković (2006) concluded that such behaviors increase child self-regulation, particularly compliance. Positive parenting also predicted higher levels of other aspects of self-regulation, such as inhibitory control (Moilanen, Shaw, Dishion, Gardner, & Wilson, 2010) and emotion regulation (Feng et al., 2008). Self-regulation has been shown to be a protective factor in the face of multiple risks,



contributing to child and adolescent resilience (Lengua, 2002). Additionally, parental warmth and positive expressivity during middle elementary school predicted lower levels of adolescent externalization by means of increases in child executive functioning (Eisenberg, et al., 2005). In a study of approximately 10,000 adolescents of diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds from Wisconsin and California, Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, and Dornbusch (1991) found that the benefits of authoritative parenting were present across “ecological niches”. Thus, supportive parenting might serve to at least partially counteract the injurious effects of co-occurring harsh parenting practices or other undesirable environmental circumstances by encouraging children’s development of executive functioning and self-regulatory abilities. Interventions designed to improve children’s problem behavior by first encouraging positive parenting, such as the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), have been shown to improve dyadic functioning and reduce parent-reported child behavioral problems (Markie-Dadds & Sanders, 2006).

### **Cultural Moderators of Parenting and Child Psychopathology**

How do parenting beliefs and practices in Chinese families relate to behavioral adjustment in their children? This topic has been the subject of much debate. Compared with European Americans, Asian American college students retrospectively reported that they received lower levels of warmth from their parents, such as verbalization of positive emotions and displays of physical affection (Le, Berenbaum, & Raghavan, 2002). Additionally, both Chinese and Chinese American children have reported that their parents are more restrictive, harsh, demanding, and less warm than have European American children (Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Wang & Phinney, 1998; Camras, Kolmodin, & Chen, 2008). As shown above, in Western cultures, authoritative parenting has generally been associated with positive child outcomes, whereas authoritarian parenting has been associated with poor outcomes (e.g. Baumrind, 1971;

Steinberg et al., 1994; Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008; Lansford et al., 2009). However, studies of Chinese populations have both supported (e.g. Chen et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2007) and contradicted (e.g. Chao, 1994; Quoss & Zhao, 1995) the cross-cultural validity of this dichotomy.

Chen et al. (2000) found that Chinese mothers' authoritative attitudes were positively associated with low power parenting strategies, and negatively with high power strategies, whereas authoritarian attitudes showed the opposite pattern of association. Authoritative attitudes also were linked to a positive parent-child reunion after a separation and authoritarian attitudes were linked to child resistance. An expanding body of research has supported Chen et al.'s (2000) findings that authoritative parenting is associated with positive child adjustment in Chinese and Chinese-American populations (e.g. Cheah, Leung, Tahseen, & Schultz, 2009; Wang, Pomerantz, & Chen, 2007). However, the literature is mixed as to whether authoritarianism is associated with children's behavioral problems in China as has been found in the West.

Like Chen et al. (2000), Wang, Pomerantz, and Chen (2007) found that high power parenting was associated with children's behavioral deviance. Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, and McBride-Chang (2003) found that, despite gender differences among both parents' behaviors and children's psychological outcomes, harsh parenting was highly correlated with child aggression and emotional dysregulation. Several other studies have suggested similar conclusions (e.g. Nelson, Hart, Yang, Olsen, & Jin, 2006; Fung & Lao, 2009). However, some studies have provided conflicting results. Although authoritarianism often has been linked to child maladjustment, Quoss & Zhao (1995) found that Chinese children were generally satisfied with their parents' authoritarianism. Despite expressing some dislike of family rules, Chinese

children perceived their parent-child relationships more positively if their parents were more authoritarian. This was drastically different from the American sample, where children only rated their relationships so highly if their parents were authoritative and democratic. Quoss and Zhao (1995) credited the influence of filial piety with making authoritarian parenting acceptable to Chinese children. Similarly, Chao (1994) asserted that two other indigenous socialization strategies, *chiao shun* (training) and *guan*, were responsible for Chinese children's academic success despite authoritarian parenting. High parental endorsement of training ideology has been shown to reduce the correlation between authoritarian parenting and both internalizing and externalizing problems among Chinese-American immigrant children (Fung & Lau, 2009). These diverse findings indicate that categories of authoritarian and authoritative parenting are generalizable to non-Western cultures, but their relationships with child outcomes may be moderated by the presence of other culturally specific beliefs about child socialization.

### **Current Study**

In the present study, I examined whether culture influences the types of disciplinary responses and causal attributions that parents make for their children's misbehavior. I also investigated whether these behaviors and cognitions differently impacted children's externalizing behaviors. The cognitions that parents have about child-rearing and the attributions that they make for their children's behavior directly affect their parenting behaviors (Dix & Grusec, 1985). In turn, parenting practices greatly influence children's psychological development (Gershoff, 2002). Thus, adverse parenting cognitions are linked to child maladjustment via parenting practices. While this is assumed to be true in the West, it is important to investigate whether these psychological assumptions function similarly in different cultural contexts. Prior cross-cultural studies have suggested otherwise (e.g. Chao, 1995). Culture has been shown to be

a moderator of the association between harsh parenting and child externalizing behavior (Lansford et al., 2005). There is also much cross-cultural variability in parents' socialization beliefs and causal attributions (e.g. Cheah & Rubin, 2003).

While many culturally sensitive studies have examined how culture moderates the associations between parents' attributions for their children's misbehavior and their subsequent disciplinary strategies, none have asked parents to spontaneously generate their responses. Narratives provide rich and contextualized qualitative data, and are "uniquely suited for displaying human existence as a situated action" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). Thus, an integrative mixed-methods design is an ideal approach to more fully comprehend the cultural complexities that motivate and shape parenting behaviors and cognitions.

My major research questions were:

(1): Do parents in China and the US differ in their behavioral responses to their children's hypothetical misbehavior?

Hypothesis (1a): American parents will more frequently endorse more democratic practices such as reasoning.

Hypothesis (1b): Chinese parents will more frequently endorse more high-power practices such as time outs.

(2): Do parents in China and the US differ in the types and frequencies of causal attributions they make for their children's hypothetical misbehavior?

Hypothesis (2a): American parents will more frequently attribute child misbehavior to dispositional factors, such as child's temperament and immature development.

Hypothesis (2b): Chinese parents will more frequently attribute child misbehavior to external factors, such as their own inability to appropriately socialize their children.

(3): How does culture moderate the associations between harsh parenting practices and child externalizing behavior?

Hypothesis (3a): In the US, authoritarian parenting will be associated with higher reported frequency of child externalizing behavior than in China.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

82 American mothers and their children (45 boys) were drawn from the ongoing Michigan Longitudinal Study (MLS) (Olson, Sameroff, Kerr, Lopez, & Wellman, 2005). The original MLS participants were recruited with the goal of creating a sample with a range of behavioral adjustment levels. Thus, two different ads were periodically placed in local and regional newspapers and child care centers, one focusing on hard-to-manage toddlers and the other on normally developing toddlers. The child's attendance in a formal preschool program was not a requirement for family enrollment. Most families (95%) were recruited from newspaper announcements and advertisements sent to day care centers and preschools; others were individually referred from pediatricians and teachers. Once a parent indicated interest, a screening questionnaire and brief follow-up telephone interview were used to determine the family's appropriateness for participation and willingness to engage in a longitudinal study. Children with serious chronic health problems, mental retardation, and/or pervasive developmental disorders were excluded. At recruitment, children represented the full range of externalizing symptom severity on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/2-3; Achenbach, 1992), with oversampling of toddlers in the medium to high range on the Externalizing Problems subscale ( $T > 60 = 44\%$ ). The remaining sample was split relatively evenly between children

whose Externalizing Problems T-scores exceeded 50 but were below 60, and those whose T-scores were below 50.

MLS families were representative of the local population. Most children were of European American heritage (91%); others were African American (5.5%), Hispanic American (2.5%), and Asian American (1%). The majority of children resided in two-parent families (87.9%), with the remaining families identifying themselves as never married (5.3%), living with a partner (3.3%), or separated/divorced (3.3%). Fifty-five percent of mothers worked outside the home. Nineteen percent of mothers had completed high school education, 46% had completed four years of college, and 35% had continued their education beyond college in graduate or professional training. The median family income was \$52,000 with the range from \$20,000 to over \$100,000.

The Chinese sample consisted of 87 parents (53 mothers) of preschool children (39 boys) who were recruited from the Beijing area as part of an emotional regulation study at Peking University. With permission from three local preschools, a Peking research team sent invitations to all parents of 4-year-old children. Interested parents contacted the team for further details. Twenty-nine percent of mothers and 5% of fathers had finished senior high school; 46% of mothers and 43% of fathers had finished junior college; 17% of mothers and 38% of fathers had finished college; 4% of mothers and 8% of fathers had continued their education in graduate school. Mothers were primarily employed as teachers (37.7%) and officers in companies (20.8%). Fathers were primarily listed “other” as their occupation (23.7%); 21.1% were officers in companies, 15.8% were in the army, 10.5% were employed by private companies, and 10.5% were teachers.

## **Procedure**

Parents were interviewed in their homes by a female social worker and then asked to complete a packet of questionnaires. Families were paid for their involvement in the study.

### **Measures**

**Child externalizing behavior.** Parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist for ages 6-18 (CBCL/6-18; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). The CBCL is a commonly used, 99-item, 3-point scale (from “2” = very true or often true of the child, to “0” = not true of the child) rating inventory that measures a child’s behavioral and emotional problems based on parents’ observations over the previous two months. The CBCL consists of two empirically derived dimensions of child problem behavior: Externalizing (with subscales in Aggressive Behavior and Destructive Behavior) and Internalizing (with subscales in Anxious/Depressed Behavior and Withdrawn Behavior). The CBCL was translated into Mandarin Chinese by a team of researchers at Peking University and back translated by researchers at the University of Michigan.

**Parental responses to aggression and noncompliance.** During the interviews, parents were presented with six hypothetical vignettes in which children misbehaved in a variety of different contexts (Appendix A). Vignette C: Unprovoked aggression was eliminated from analyses because the target child was not the aggressor in this scenario. For each vignette, parents were asked to imagine that the misbehaving child was their own child. Parents were then asked to report their responses to this situation, their reason behind their responses, their causal attributions for their child’s misbehavior, and the valence of their emotional reaction to this event. These interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded. This study examined parents’ responses to aggression to noncompliance and their causal attributions.

### **Analysis Plan**

**Coding.** Parental disciplinary responses to their child's misbehavior were coded using the following categories: *rule setting and reasoning; provide alternative behaviors, modeling, empathy building, and request apology or reparation; directives, threat of non-physical punishment, and power assertion; physical punishment, threat of corporal punishment, and verbal aggression; passive non-involvement and strategic non-involvement; information seeking; support; encourage compliance; distraction; playful redirection; compromise; and incentive.*

Parents' causal attributions for their child's misbehavior were coded using the following categories: *negative and positive internal states; developmental; temperament; social environmental influence, physical environmental influence, and social reciprocity; seeking attention and seeking material gain; manipulate parents, testing limits, and testing independence; and negative view of children.*

Two independent coders analyzed parents' causal attribution and disciplinary responses using a code-book developed by the investigators (Appendix B). Coding was simple and, for all codes, a "1" was coded if the behavior was present, and a "0" if absent in each vignette. Coders entered their codes into Microsoft Excel 2003 spreadsheets, which were later imported into SPSS 17.0. The coders met frequently to compare codes and, if a discrepancy between coders was discovered for a given response, would discuss to reach a consensus. Percent agreements between coders were calculated based on 15% of the total sample. Analysis for inter-rater reliability revealed excellent reliability, ranging from  $\kappa = .89$  to  $\kappa = .93$ . Individual codes were summed across vignettes to produce a total score representing each parent's reports of a particular disciplinary or attribution response. These summed scores ranged from a minimum of 0 (no reports of code endorsement) to 6 (endorsing a code in each of 6 vignettes).



**Data preparation.** Analyses were conducted using SPSS 17.0. Due to low frequencies and variation, parental response codes *verbal aggression* and *threat of physical punishment* as well as the attribution code *seeking attention* were eliminated from analyses. All other codes showed acceptable response distributions. The remaining data were checked for multicollinearity and normality. Intercorrelation tables (Tables 1 and 2) showed sparse correlations but formal collinearity diagnoses revealed Variance Inflating Factors ranging from 1.196 to 3.371 and thus no signs for concern. A Shapiro-Walk test indicated that the data had significant levels of skew and kurtosis. These were not remedied by logarithmic, square root, inverse, or natural logarithmic transformations. Thus, all between group comparative analyses were conducted using nonparametric methods. However, parametric linear regressions were possible because adding a constant of 5 to each summed variable score and performing a logarithmic transformation produced normally distributed standardized residuals.

## Results

### Cultural differences in responses to misbehavior.

A series of Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted to examine whether Chinese and American parents differed in their frequencies of reported disciplinary strategies. The Mann-Whitney *U* was chosen as a nonparametric alternative to independent samples *t*-tests because, since it analyzes rank orders of medians, it does not rely on the normality assumption (Corder & Foreman, 2009). The hypothesis that American parents would endorse more democratic practices was partially supported. As expected, American parents endorsed prosocial, authoritative techniques of providing alternative behaviors, information seeking, empathy building, offering support, playful redirection, and providing incentives significantly more frequently than did Chinese parents (see Table 3). However, Chinese and American parents did

not differ in their reports of other prosocial responses such as modeling, encouraging compliance, distraction, and compromise. Chinese parents reported high levels of requesting apology or reparation but, unexpectedly, they also reported higher levels of reasoning.

The related hypothesis that Chinese parents would more frequently endorse higher-power practices than Americans was not supported. There were no significant cultural differences in parent reports of power assertion or physical punishment. Surprisingly, American parents reported significantly more controlling and authoritarian behaviors like rule setting, directives, and threat of non-physical punishment than did Chinese parents.

**Cultural differences in attributions for misbehavior.** Cultural differences in parents' attribution for children's misbehavior were assessed using Mann-Whitney *U* tests. I hypothesized that American parents would make more stable, dispositional attributions while Chinese parents would make more contextualized, external attributions for their children's misbehavior. This hypothesis was partially supported. Compared to Chinese parents, American mothers made more attributions to children's negative internal states, their desire to manipulate parents, test limits, and test their own independence (see Table 3). Surprisingly, American parents also more frequently attributed children's misbehavior to immature development, a desire to seek material gain, and to the physical environment. As expected, Chinese parents placed great importance on social contexts and made more attributions to social environmental influence and social reciprocity than did Americans. Chinese parents also more frequently reported having a negative view of children, while no American parents did. There were no cultural differences in reports of attributions to children's positive internal states.

**Culture, disciplinary responses, and attributions as predictors of externalizing behavior.** An exploratory stepwise regression was run with all disciplinary and attribution codes

as predictors of CBCL externalizing behavior. The stepwise regression indicated that the codes threat of nonphysical punishment, empathy, information seeking, and distraction were significant predictors. A hierarchical linear regression was run with culture on the first step and threat of nonphysical punishment, empathy, information seeking, and distraction on the second step. The second model was significant,  $R^2 = 0.12$ ,  $F(5, 163) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, culture was a non-significant contributor to this model,  $\beta = -.024$ ,  $t(163) = -.789$ , *ns*. A bivariate correlation between culture and CBCL externalizing scores was conducted as another examination of whether culture differently predicted externalizing behavior. However, this correlation was also non-significant,  $r = 0.13$ , *ns*. A Mann-Whitney  $U$  indicated that Chinese and American children did not differ in parent-reported externalizing (Table 3). Thus, country was excluded from the final model.

The final model included threat of nonphysical punishment, empathy, information seeking, and distraction, and significantly predicted child externalizing behavior,  $R^2 = 0.11$ ,  $F(4, 164) = 5.27$ ,  $p < .001$ . A unit increase in empathy was associated with a 143% increase in externalizing,  $\beta = .889$ ,  $t(163) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ; a unit increase in threat of non-physical punishment was associated with a 62% increase  $\beta = .48$ ,  $t(163) = 2.54$ ,  $p < .05$ ; a unit increase in distraction was associated with a 59% decrease  $\beta = -.88$ ,  $t(163) = -2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and information seeking was associated with a 45% decrease in externalizing behavior  $\beta = -.60$ ,  $t(163) = -1.98$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

This study investigated the question of whether culture influences the types of disciplinary responses and causal attributions that parents make for their children's misbehavior, and whether these differently predict child externalizing behavior. The study provides some

evidence that culture is an important part of shaping parents' behaviors and cognitions about their children and child-rearing. Chinese and Americans differed in many aspects of both their disciplinary responses to and causal attributions for their children's behavioral infractions. They did not differ in their reports of their children's externalizing behavior, nor was culture a significant predictor of CBCL externalizing. However, certain parenting strategies and attributions were predictive. In what follows, I discuss these findings in greater detail and elaborate on possible explanations for them. I end with a discussion of the study's limitations and implications for future research.

### **Do parents' disciplinary responses to children's misbehavior vary across cultures?**

The hypothesis that Chinese parents would more frequently endorse higher-power practices was not supported. In fact, Chinese and American parents did not significantly differ in their endorsement of any "high power" disciplinary responses except for threat of non-physical punishment. Contrary to expectation, American parents reported greater levels of high power parenting behaviors in response to child disciplinary infractions and endorsed undemocratic practices such as rule setting and issuing directives. However, in relation to Chinese parents, they also reported more authoritative responses such as providing alternatives, empathy, seeking information, providing support, playful redirection, and offering incentives. Thus, the hypothesis that American parents would endorse more democratic practices was partially supported. It appears that parents of either culture do not differ in their usage of "authoritarian" practices, but instead that Americans tend to report warmer and more overtly supportive responses to child misbehavior. Compared to Chinese parents, Americans appear to report parenting behaviors that fit Hetherington and Elmore's (2003, p. 196) description of authoritative parents as "warm, supportive, communicative, and responsive to their children's needs." The finding that

American parents endorsed more authoritative practices than did Chinese parents is consistent with past cross-cultural research (e.g. Chao, 1994, 2000; Chao & Tseng, 2002).

The lack of significant cross-cultural differences in high-power disciplinary responses contradicts previous studies that have reported parents from China and other collectivistic cultures as being more authoritarian (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). This could be explained by the Chinese ethnotheory of the “age of understanding.” This notion posits that prior to a certain age, typically around six, children are not fully capable of understanding social rules and the consequences of their behaviors (Fung, 1999; Ho, 1989). Thus, as “passive dependent creatures who are to be cared for,” they are treated with indulgence until they are deemed old enough to be responsible for their actions (Ho, 2008, p.4). Indeed, the Chinese child sample was younger than the MLS sample, which itself could be a confounding factor. This finding could also be an effect of China’s “little emperor syndrome.” Since the enactment of the one-child policy, Chinese families have become increasingly focused on their single children. This has contributed to the erosion of traditional Chinese family values as many parents have begun to spoil their children, creating *xiao huangdi* (little emperors) (Ma, Liu, Liu, & Liu, 2007; Marshall, 1997). However, it is also possible that these unusual findings are an artifact of collapsing participant responses across vignettes, rather than examining them individually. Instead of examining how parenting responses differed across misbehavior situations, we examined them as a whole, ignoring possible context-specificity of responses. Thus, we are unable to tell whether particular vignettes elicited high power reactions in American mothers but not in Chinese parents, or whether we simply did not include vignettes that would elicit these reactions in Chinese parents.

Chinese parents endorsed the strategy of requesting an apology or reparation significantly more frequently than did Americans. Collectivistic cultures place great importance on social harmony. Thus, Chinese parents might ask their children to apologize to others in order to make reparations for social infractions that could cause social discord. Contrary to expectations, Chinese parents also endorsed reasoning more frequently than did Americans. This type of induction is typically associated with authoritative parenting. Perhaps Chinese parents used reasoning more often because of the cultural-prescribed responsibility for parents to socialize their children. Hsu, Watrous, and Lord (1960) claimed that “[Chinese] children are regarded as little adults who will become adults after adult models” (p. 44). Wang (2006, p. 185) found that during a task where European American and Chinese mothers were asked to discuss memories that they had shared with their 3-year-old children, Chinese mothers were “directive and didactic” and “encourage[d] them [their children] to abide by rules.” Explaining the reasoning for a rule could be viewed as an effective way to instill in children the knowledge of social rules. However, this finding could also be a result of the coding process. “Reasoning” was coded whenever parents gave any reason for a rule at all; it did not account for the quality of explanation. Thus, frequency of reasoning does not necessarily indicate a lengthy or complex answer. Unfortunately, the coding scheme did not let us examine whether Chinese parents gave more frequent but simpler answers, or if Americans gave more complex but less frequent answers.

### **Do parents’ causal attributions for children’s misbehavior vary across cultures?**

The hypothesis that American parents would make more stable, dispositional attributions while Chinese parents would make more contextualized, external attributions for their children’s misbehavior was partially supported. American mothers made some dispositional attributions

more frequently than did Chinese parents, but Americans also more frequently attributed children's misbehavior to immature development, a desire to seek material gain, and to the physical environment. Chinese parents made more attributions to social environmental influence and social reciprocity than did Americans. This finding indicates that, while American mothers make more internal attributions, parents of both cultures make external attributions. However, Chinese parents are more likely to externally attribute misbehavior to social influences. For example, Chinese parents frequently attributed children's misbehavior to the family's improper socialization attempts ("he wasn't raised well"). This finding is in concordance with past literature regarding Chinese parents' perceived duty to socialize their children appropriately (Ho, 2008).

Chinese parents unexpectedly reported child temperament as a cause of child misbehavior more often than did American mothers. This counterintuitive finding is likely an artifact of the coding scheme. A large proportion of Chinese parents said that their child misbehaved because he or she was spoiled but no American parents did. Due to the dual dispositional and social nature of "spoiling a child," any mention of a child being spoiled was double coded as both *temperament* and *social environmental influence*. Thus, this double coding likely gave an inflated count of reports of temperament endorsement by Chinese parents.

### **How do culture, attributions, and discipline behaviors predict child externalizing?**

Surprisingly, parent reports of child externalizing behavior did not differ across cultures, nor was culture a significant predictor of CBCL externalizing. Studies examining the prevalence of behavioral problems across cultures have produced mixed results. Many studies have found that parents in diverse cultures report approximately equal levels of child behavior problems (Crijnen, Achenbach, & Verhulst, 1999; Weine, Phillips, & Achenbach, 1995). However, some

have found the opposite. For example, Liu, Cheng, and Leung (2010) found that, while overall rates of preschool problem behaviors were similar in China and the US, Chinese children scored higher on internalizing while Americans scored higher on externalizing. However, because MLS participants were oversampled for externalizing behaviors, it is surprising that there were no cultural differences.

The final model included threat of nonphysical punishment, empathy, information seeking, and distraction as predictors of externalizing behavior. Threat of nonphysical punishment and empathy were positive predictors of child externalizing behaviors. The finding that threat of nonphysical punishment was positively associated with externalizing is not surprising. Kremer, Smith, and Lawrence (2010) found that negative parenting behaviors, which included threatening, inconsistently elicited child compliance. Negative parenting never elicited committed compliant behavior, which helps develop a “foundation for internalization [of the values and goals of the adult]” (Kremer, Smith, & Lawrence, 2010, Appendix 1). They also found that more negative child behavioral infractions elicited more negative and coercive parent reactions. Because of the correlational nature of this study, I could not examine the bidirectionality of negative child behavior and negative parental responses. However, it is clear that the two are positively related and likely bidirectional. The finding that empathy was a positive predictor of externalizing behavior was extremely surprising. However, further examination of the data showed that this relationship was driven by five participants who frequently reported endorsing the code empathy.

Information seeking and distraction were negatively associated with child externalizing behavior. This, too, was expected. I could not find literature regarding information seeking as a response to misbehavior, but its proactive nature implies low levels of parental reactivity and



automaticity in responding to misbehavior. Milner (2003) suggests that parents' behaviors become automatized and that they can develop maladaptive schemas about how to behave during interactions with their children. Mindfulness-based parenting interventions that aim to “deprogram” parental reactivity have been shown to significantly improve the quality of family relationships and reduce children's behavior problems (Dumas, 2005; van der Oord, Bögels, & Peijnenburg, *in press*).

Distraction is popularly touted in popular parenting books and websites as a good strategy to manage a difficult or misbehaving child (Nickelodeon Parents Connect, *n.d.*; Wilson, *n.d.*). It is a time-honored positive discipline technique used to avert negative behavior in preschoolers. However, empirical support for distraction as an effective disciplinary intervention has been limited. Few studies have examined distraction as a strategy outside of a medical setting, Reid, O'Leary, and Wolff (1994) found that distraction was found to be ineffective in controlling children unless it was preceded by reprimands. However, this study was extremely limited. The sample only included the children from 17 to 39 months of age performing a laboratory task and distraction was only examined in conjunction with reprimands, not as a standalone strategy. In another laboratory study, Grolnik, Kurowski, McMenemy, Rivkin, and Bridges (1998) found that mothers frequently used distraction as a technique with their distressed infants but this behavior decreased in frequency after 18 months of age. Surprisingly, when controlling for child age, mothers' use of distraction was positively associated with increased levels of child distress. Grolnik and colleagues (1998) hypothesized that the children of more active mothers were less able to regulate their own emotions. The finding that distraction was negatively associated with child externalizing behavior is thus interesting and worthy of future investigation.

### **Limitations and future directions**

This study was novel in that it asked parents from different cultures to spontaneously generate their disciplinary responses and causal attributions for children's hypothetical behavioral infractions. However, there were several limitations. First, the samples from both cultures were relatively small. The sample from the MLS only included mothers while the Chinese sample included both mothers and fathers. In addition, the MLS children were older than the Chinese children and slightly oversampled for externalizing behavior. Second, reports of codes were summed across the six vignettes. Thus, we could not assess the context-specificity of parent-reported behavior. Third, child behavioral problems were solely assessed via parental self-report. Future research should include other reports of behavioral problems (e.g. teacher reports). Fourth, although the coding scheme provided a nuanced and detailed understanding of the frequencies of parent behaviors and cognitions, it did not allow us to capture either severity of response or intricacy of cognitions. We were also unable to assess parents' deliberation or reactivity before responding, which have been suggested as important measures to include (Pinderhughes, Dodge, Zelli, Bates, & Pettit, 2000). Lastly, it is possible that, because parents were responding to hypothetical vignettes, the external validity was low. This is a particularly salient concern when participants' answers are spontaneously generated (Bugental, Johnston, New, & Silvester, 1998). Previous studies employing vignettes when investigating parenting have failed to acknowledge this potential issue (e.g. Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Zelli, Bates, & Pettit, 2000).

Despite these caveats, this study was an interesting and novel contribution to the literature. It provided new evidence that culture informs both parenting behaviors and cognitions. It also highlighted the importance of studying distraction and information seeking as

possible positive parenting strategies. To the best of my knowledge, this study was the first study to employ the promising new methodology of eliciting parents' spontaneous reports of behaviors and cognitions. Future research should include more robust statistical analyses that would allow the pathway modeling of how parenting cognitions and behaviors relate to each other and to child outcomes. Future research should also include transactional models of parent-child interaction and socialization processes. This would allow researchers to examine how children's behavior provokes certain thoughts and responses in a parent, and how these subsequent parenting practices might likewise provoke patterns of behavior in the child. These additions would give us a more nuanced and complete understanding of the complex dynamics of culture and parenting.

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Table 1  
Intercorrelations among parent disciplinary response variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Rule-setting	---	.085	.038	.034	-.090	.030	---	-.050	---	-.020	.042	-.190	-.150	-.020	-.050	---	.036	.165	-.010
2. Reasoning	.222*	---	.026	.032	.084	.101	-.070	.060	-.060	---	---	-.030	.018	.000	.003	-.050	.012	-.040	.019
3. Providing alternative behaviors	.262**	.236*	---	.206	-.090	-.010	.213*	.019	-.060	-.150	-.050	.128	-.140	.101	-.180	-.020	-.040	.048	.219*
4. Modelling	-.020	.036	.236*	---	.262*	.198	.031	.010	.050	-.080	-.130	.174	.026	-.130	.024	-.100	.052	.000	.188
5. Empathy	.028	.207*	.036	-.030	---	-.080	-.120	-.070	.034	-.030	.133	.098	.078	-.100	-.040	.119	.105	-.070	.155
6. Request apology or reparation	-.120	.020	.207*	.161	.166	---	-.050	-.020	.000	-.090	-.130	.034	-.100	-.050	.358**	.153	.190	.294**	-.080
7. Directive	.032	-.080	.020	-.070	-.170	-.110	---	-.080	.117	-.030	---	.099	.080	.396**	-.130	.058	-.030	.032	-.060
8. Threat of non-physical punishment	.124	-.080	-.080	-.263**	-.060	-.120	-.020	---	---	---	.183	.082	.024	-.080	.047	-.180	-.040	.042	-.030
9. Power assertion	-.226*	-.060	-.080	-.090	-.070	.011	.117	-.010	---	.175	---	.168	-.010	.067	-.080	.138	-.030	.022	-.130
10. Physical punishment	-.080	-.120	-.060	.110	-.140	.036	-.030	-.130	.288**	---	-.050	-.090	.040	-.030	.178	.060	-.080	-.060	-.100
11. Passive non-involvement	.000	-.020	.016	-.080	.019	-.080	-.050	.078	-.050	-.110	---	-.090	.032	-.060	-.150	-.120	-.120	-.060	-.020
12. Strategic non-involvement	-.150	-.030	-.020	.016	.025	.221*	-.050	-.200	-.120	-.120	.042	---	.147	.000	-.010	-.070	-.010	-.120	-.080
13. Information seeking	-.020	.285**	-.030	.048	.135	.322**	.034	.018	-.160	0.002	-.160	.015	---	-.070	-.020	-.090	-.050	-.060	-.060
14. Support	.158	.097	.285**	.131	.034	-.040	.000	-.198*	-.090	.014	-.110	.045	.042	---	-.130	-.050	-.070	.020	-.080
15. Encourage compliance	.122	.168	.097	.130	-.060	.075	-.070	-.040	-.120	-.020	.202*	.049	-.180	.032	---	.144	-.040	.110	.014
16. Distraction	.025	.183	.168	.213*	-.040	-.030	.093	-.100	.088	.075	-.020	.065	-.060	.000	.033	---	.156	-.050	.064
17. Playful redirection	.000	.094	.182	.088	-.180	-.100	.036	-.080	-.050	-.050	-.080	.059	-.020	.033	.009	-.110	---	-.040	-.060
18. Compromise	.068	-.080	.093	.200	-.060	.066	-.020	-.160	.125	.128	-.060	-.170	.109	-.020	-.110	-.140	.069	---	.144
19. Incentives	.207*	-.170	-.080	-.040	-.090	-.020	.072	.078	.000	.006	.013	-.150	.005	-.060	-.150	.006	.278**	.236*	---

Note. Intercorrelations for Chinese participants ( $n = 87$ ) are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for American participants ( $n = 82$ ) are presented below the diagonal.

\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 2  
*Intercorrelations among parent causal attribution variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Negative internal state	---	0.275*	.090	-.151	-.385**	.093	.080	-.190	-.096	.077	.253	.038
2. Positive internal state	-.149	---	.195	-.346**	-.289**	-.333**	.207	-.035	.141	.116	-.019	.032
3. Development	-.305**	-.029	---	-.167	-.205	.307**	.032	-.096	-.159	.037	-.045	-.121
4. Temperament	-.147	-.054	-.035	---	-.094	-.190	-.268*	-.199	-.077	.043	-.118	-.168
5. Social environmental influence	-.027	-.001	-.246*	.112	---	-.177	-.270*	-.059	-.126	-.148	-.237*	-.049
6. Physical environmental influence	-.121	.201*	-.084	.112	.101	---	.322**	-.033	.010	.227*	-.102	.003
7. Social reciprocity	-.035	.135	-.116	-.074	.037	.000	---	.143	.191	-.085	-.052	-.039
8. Material Gain	.042	.100	-.163	-.080	-.073	.010	.058	---	.035	-.045	-.090	-.084
9. Manipulate Parents	-.054	.068	.069	.070	-.098	-.013	-.075	-.137	---	-.027	-.053	-.099
10. Testing limits	-.084	.051	-.018	-.077	-.090	-.056	-.033	-.063	-.117	---	-.023	-.037
11. Asserting independence	-.156	-.115	-.123	.004	-.129	-.096	.193	-.003	-.069	-.005	---	-.074
12. Negative view of children	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

*Note.* Intercorrelations for Chinese participants ( $n = 87$ ) are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for American participants ( $n = 82$ ) are presented below the diagonal.

\*\* $p < .001$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Table 3

*Mann-Whitney U results for CBCL externalizing and parental responses to and attributions for child behavioral infractions*

Variable	Chinese <sup>a</sup>			American <sup>b</sup>			Z	p
	M (SD)	Median	Mean Rank	M (SD)	Median	Mean Rank		
CBCL Externalizing	6.61 (3.89)	6.00	82.37	7.95 (6.39)	6.00	87.79	-0.72	.470
Responses to misbehavior								
Rule setting	1.06 (1.11)	1.00	63.18	2.21 (1.16)	2.00	108.15	-6.13	.000
Reasoning	1.91 (1.28)	2.00	106.13	.77 (.85)	1.00	62.58	-5.99	.000
Providing alternative behaviors	.64 (.76)	0.00	74.67	1.06 (.92)	1.00	95.96	-3.02	.003
Modeling	.16 (.37)	0.00	87.60	.10 (.30)	0.00	82.24	-1.22	.223
Empathy building	.10 (.31)	0.00	76.98	.37 (.64)	0.00	93.51	-3.19	.001
Requesting apology or reparation	.53 (.83)	0.00	93.59	.17 (.49)	0.00	74.73	-3.37	.001
Directives	1.41 (1.21)	1.00	60.43	2.83 (1.16)	3.00	111.07	-6.88	.000
Threat of non-physical punishment	.34 (.57)	0.00	62.99	1.29 (1.05)	1.00	108.35	-6.51	.000
Power assertion	1.44 (1.18)	1.00	79.48	1.72 (1.18)	2.00	90.86	-1.56	.119
Physical punishment	.14 (.38)	0.00	86.65	.12 (.44)	0.00	82.25	-1.12	.263
Passive non-involvement	.32 (.60)	0.00	85.47	.27 (.47)	0.00	85.47	-0.17	.867
Strategic non-involvement	.29 (.51)	0.00	83.95	.34 (.61)	0.00	83.95	-0.37	.720
Information seeking	.06 (.23)	0.00	75.63	.40 (.73)	0.00	75.63	-3.97	.000
Support	.11 (.39)	0.00	71.78	.52 (.71)	0.00	99.02	-4.80	.000
Encourage compliance	.67 (.87)	0.00	85.81	.54 (.57)	0.50	84.14	-0.25	.804
Distraction	.17 (.46)	0.00	88.09	.09 (.32)	0.00	81.72	-1.55	.122
Playful redirection	.05 (.21)	0.00	78.88	.20 (.43)	0.00	90.39	-2.79	.005
Compromise	.36 (.65)	0.00	81.75	.39 (.52)	0.00	88.45	-1.09	.277
Incentive	.08 (.31)	0.00	77.38	.28 (.50)	0.00	93.09	-3.28	.001
Attributions for misbehavior								
Negative internal state	.48 (.73)	0.00	49.70	3.27 (1.66)	3.00	122.46	-9.94	.000
Positive internal state	.38 (.58)	0.00	89.41	.24 (.49)	0.00	79.35	-1.71	.087
Developmental	.72 (.82)	1.00	67.05	1.61 (1.2)	1.50	104.05	-5.14	.000

Temperament	1.44 (1.41)	1.00	106.30	.32 (.54)	0.00	62.40	-6.32	.000
Social environmental influence	2.22 (1.6)	2.00	110.29	.52 (.83)	0.00	58.16	-7.23	.000
Physical environmental influence	.18 (.39)	0.00	77.27	.49 (.76)	0.00	93.26	-2.77	.006
Social reciprocity	2.22 (1.63)	0.00	96.50	.28 (.55)	0.00	72.80	-3.69	.000
Seeking material gain	.15 (.36)	0.00	76.60	.48 (.80)	0.00	93.91	-3.08	.002
Manipulate parents	.06 (.23)	0.00	79.30	.22 (.47)	0.00	91.05	-2.73	.006
Testing limits	.01 (.11)	0.00	80.95	.15 (.45)	0.00	89.29	-2.71	.007
Testing independence	.10 (.48)	0.00	67.98	.87 (1.20)	0.00	103.06	-6.01	.000
Negative view of children	.18 (.54)	0.00	91.13	.00 (.00)	0.00	78.50	-3.63	.000

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<sup>a</sup> n = 87. <sup>b</sup> n = 82.

**Appendix A. Vignettes: Parental responses to aggression and noncompliance**

Instructions: I am going to describe some situations involving young children and their parents. Please imagine that each situation has happened to you. Then tell me what you might say or do in response, and if possible, why you would respond that way:

**A. Hitting peer with block**

Suppose that one child wants a toy that another child is playing with, but the other child will not share it. The first child hits the other child in the head and grabs the toy. If you were the parent of the child who grabbed the toy, what would you say or do?

A1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

A2. Why would a child hit another in this situation?

A3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child behaved this way (hit a playmate to obtain a toy)?

**B. Reactive aggression**

Suppose that one child calls another child a bad name (such as “\_\_\_”) and the other child responds by hitting this child and shoving him/her to the floor. Imagine that you are the parent of the child who hit and shoved. What would you say or do?

B1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

B2. Why do you think children would behave this way?

B3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child behaved this way (hit and shoved a peer)?

C. Unprovoked aggression

Suppose that two children are playing together. One child gets mad at the other and pushes him/her very hard, causing him/her to fall to the floor and cry. If you were the parent of the child who was pushed, what would you say or do?

C1. How would you respond to the aggressive child?

C2. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

C3. Why do you think the child who pushed would behave this way?

C4. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child was the one who pushed his/her peer?

D. Tantrum

Imagine that a child is asked to stop playing and clean up his/her toys, but s/he refuses and falls to the floor kicking and screaming. If you were the parent of this child, what would you say or do?

D1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

D2. Why do you think a child would behave this way?

D3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child was the one who behaved this way?

E. Hitting parent

Suppose that a child has been watching TV for a long time and is very interested in the program. When you go to turn off the TV, the child shouts NO! and slaps you. If you were the parent of this child, what would you say or do?

E1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

E2. Why do you think a child would behave this way?

E3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child was the one who behaved this way?

F. Refusing vegetable

Suppose that a child says s/he doesn't like the vegetable that has been served for dinner and refuses to eat it. If you were the child's parent, what would you say to him/her?

F1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

F2. Why do you think a child would behave this way?

F3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child was the one who behaved this way?

G. Disrupting shopping

Imagine that a mother and child are in the supermarket. The child keeps running around and grabbing things off shelves and getting in the way of other shoppers. The mother asks the child to quiet down, but s/he refuses and runs away. If you were the parent of this child, what would you say or do?

G1. Why would you follow this particular strategy?

G2. Why would a child behave this way?

G3. How emotionally upset would you feel if your child was the one who behaved this way?



**Appendix B. Explanation of parent responses to aggression and noncompliance coding scheme**

Variable	Definitions	Examples
Responses to misbehavior		
Rule setting	Stating a rule without explaining the rationale.	I would say that screaming is not allowed in this house.
Reasoning	Explaining the rationale behind the rule. Explaining the consequences of behavior to self.	I would tell her not to do that because she might get hurt
Providing alternative behaviors	Providing non-aggressive alternative behaviors.	I'd say "Can you ask him to stop instead of hitting him?"
Modeling	Parent actually demonstrates alternative behavior.	I would eat the vegetables so he could see that they were yummy.
Empathy building	Explaining the consequences of behavior to others. Helping the child to understand others' feelings.	I would tell him that it hurts me when he hits me.
Requesting apology or reparation	Asking the child to apologize to the victim.	I would ask her to apologize.
Directives	Parent forces compliance or apology and gives the child no choice to refuse.	I would make him apologize.
Threat of non-physical punishment	Threatening the child with a non-physical consequence for aggression.	I would tell her that he can't have dessert if she doesn't finish her vegetables.
Power assertion	Time outs, withdrawing privileges, reprimanding, physically grabbing the child.	I would take away his toys.
Physical punishment	Corporal punishment.	I would spank her.
Passive non-involvement	The parent does not respond because the behavior is not considered to be problematic.	I wouldn't do anything because I don't think kids should have to eat vegetables if they don't want to.
Strategic non-involvement	Parent uses non-involvement as a management strategy.	I would ignore him until he calms down.

Information seeking	Parent asks child for more information about the misbehavior.	I would ask her why she did that.
Support	Parent displays understanding of child's feelings and/or provides emotional support.	I would tell him that I understand that he's frustrated.
Encourage compliance	The parent requests that the child do something but leaves the child a choice to refuse.	I would encourage her to eat her vegetables.
Distraction	Non-power assertive redirection of child's attention.	I would give him another toy so he stops crying.
Playful redirection	Parent turns conflict into a playful game.	I'd ask him to see who could put away the toys the fastest to make it more fun to clean up.
Compromise	Parent changes the specific strategy without changing the goal.	I will put cheese on the vegetables so she will eat them.
Incentive	Promising the child a reward for good behavior.	I'd tell him that he could have a treat if he behaves.
Attributions for misbehavior		
Negative internal state	The misbehavior is linked to a negative internal state.	She was probably frustrated.
Positive internal state	Misbehavior is linked to stimulation or excitement.	He was probably really excited to see so many things in the store.
Developmental	Misbehavior is linked to immature development and lack of more appropriate skills.	She just doesn't know how to use her words yet.
Temperament	Misbehavior linked to child's individual, stable characteristic.	He's just a cranky kid.
Social environmental influence	Misbehavior is linked to modeling and social learning.	She learned the behavior from her friends.
Physical environmental influence	Misbehavior linked to environmental characteristics.	There were too many toys lying around.
Social reciprocity	Misbehavior linked is a response to a social influence.	He was reacting to being called a nasty name.

Seeking material gain	The child misbehaved because she wanted something physical/material.	She wanted the toy for herself.
Manipulate parents	The child has the negative goal of manipulating parents.	He just wants to get the best of me.
Testing limits	The child misbehaved in order to test limits.	She wanted to see how much she can get away with.
Testing independence	The child tests independence by trying to exert his own will.	He wanted to keep watching TV.
Negative view of children	The parent makes a negative statement about the nature of children in general.	Kids do that just to annoy their parents.

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