



Published in final edited form as:

J Fam Psychol. 2011 October ; 25(5): 790–794. doi:10.1037/a0025120.

The Association between Parental Warmth and Control in Thirteen Cultural Groups

Kirby Deater-Deckard,
Virginia Tech, USA

Jennifer E. Lansford,
Duke University, USA

Patrick S. Malone,
University of South Carolina, USA

Liane Peña Alampay,
Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Emma Sorbring,
University West, Sweden

Dario Bacchini,
Second University of Naples, Italy

Anna Silvia Bombi,
Rome University 'La Sapienza,' Italy

Marc H. Bornstein,
Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, USA

Lei Chang,
Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

Laura Di Giunta,
Rome University 'La Sapienza,' Italy

Kenneth A. Dodge,
Duke University, USA

Paul Oburu,
Maseno University, Kenya

Concetta Pastorelli,
Rome University 'La Sapienza,' Italy

Ann T. Skinner,
Duke University, USA

Sombat Tapanya,
Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Liliana Maria Uribe Tirado,
Rome University 'La Sapienza,' Italy and Universidad San Buenaventura, Colombia

Arnaldo Zelli, and

University of Rome 'Foro Italico,' Italy

Suha M. Al-Hassan

Hashemite University, Jordan

Abstract

The goal of the current study was to investigate potential cross-cultural differences in the covariation between two of the major dimensions of parenting behavior: control and warmth. Participants included 1421 (51% female) 7- to 10-year-old ($M = 8.29$, $SD = .67$ years) children and their mothers and fathers representing 13 cultural groups in nine countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America. Children and parents completed questionnaires and interviews regarding mother and father control and warmth. Greater warmth was associated with more control, but this association varied widely between cultural groups.

Keywords

socialization; parenting; parent-child relations; culture

International cross-cultural research on parenting in under-represented groups is needed for building knowledge about universal vs. culture-specific family processes that have important consequences for children's developmental outcomes (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Parents' childrearing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are constructed and interpreted within their historical and cultural contexts (Harkness & Super, 1992) and are organized along two theoretically independent dimensions of parenting behavior—warmth and control. Warmth includes affection and acceptance, and is a universally “positively valued” dimension of parenting. Parental control involves material/physical and psychological verbalizations and behaviors intended to modify the child's thoughts, emotions and behaviors (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parents strive to develop attributes in their children that enable competence and successful membership in the family's culture, which is reflected in the parenting behaviors that are exhibited (Harkness & Super, 1992).

Childrearing behavior has readily identifiable features of parental control and warmth that may appear to be the same across cultures, but may have different functional relations with each other and with children's developmental outcomes arising from distinct meanings in those cultures (Bornstein, 1995). For example, parental control is positively associated with perceived parental warmth among adolescents in Asia, but negatively associated with warmth among youth in North America and Germany (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Rohner & Pettengil, 1985; Trommsdorff & Iwawaki, 1989). Thus, although parental control and warmth may be independent in theory, the literature has not established whether this is true across cultures.

In the current study we examined whether the correlation between warmth and control varied across cultural contexts. We investigated parenting in 13 cultural groups in nine countries that differ in average levels of parental control and individualism/collectivism, types of religions, and childrearing policies (Gershoff et al., 2010; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008; Holden & Vittrup, 2009). These included China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and United States. The nine countries had under-5yr old mortality rate rankings spanning 3rd to 128th, national populations from 6.1 million to 1.3 billion, 2008 per capita annual incomes from US\$770 to nearly US\$51,000, life expectancies at birth from 54 to 81 years, and percentages of children enrolled in school from 76% to 100% (United Nations Children's Fund, 2009).

Method

Participants

Participants included 1421 children (age range = 7 to 10 years, $M = 8.29$, $SD = .66$; 51% girls) and their mothers ($n = 1398$) and fathers ($n = 1146$). The sites and sample sizes are provided in Table 1. Participants were recruited through letters sent from schools (24% to nearly 100% response rate depending on site). Most parents (82%) were married, and nonresidential parents were able to provide data. Nearly all were biological parents, with 3% being grandparents, stepparents or other adults. To maximize representativeness, sampling focused on including families from the majority ethnic group at each site; the exception was in Kenya in which we sampled the Luo ethnic group (3rd largest, 13% of population), and in the United States, where we sampled European American, African American, and Latino families. To ensure economic diversity, we included students from private and public schools and from high to low income families, sampled in proportions representative of each site. Child age and gender did not vary across sites and were not examined in these analyses.

Procedures

Measures were administered in the predominant language at each site, following forward- and back-translation and meetings to resolve any item-by-item ambiguities in linguistic or semantic content (Erkut, 2010). Interviews (1.5 to 2 hours) were conducted in participants' homes, schools, or at other locations chosen by the participants. Procedures were approved by local Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at universities in each participating country; parents and children provided consent/assent, and were interviewed separately to ensure privacy.

We used the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire (Short Form) or PARQ/Control, an instrument with strong psychometric properties that has been translated into 28 languages and used in more than 60 countries (Rohner, 2005). The original four-point scale (“almost always true” to “almost never true”) was modified to refer to concrete time periods to be more comparable across cultural groups: 1 = *almost never*, 2 = *once a month*, 3 = *once a week*, 4 = *every day*. We used the parental warmth scale (eight items, e.g., “I let my child know I love him/her”) and parental control scale (five items, e.g., “I insist that my child do exactly as she/he is told”). Item 20 (“I let my child do anything he/she wants”) from the original parental control scale was dropped from the scale because it was uncorrelated with the other items in most cultures. We derived eight variables for analysis based on informant and construct; see Table 1 for descriptive statistics and α coefficients.

Results

As shown in the bottom row of Table 1, there were significant culture group mean differences for all eight variables, based on separate analysis of variance tests for each variable/column. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed that sites clustered in a variety of ways, as shown using superscripts in Table 1. However, there was one prevailing pattern worth noting. The two Chinese cultural groups consistently had the lowest levels of parental control, and also the lowest levels of parental warmth. In contrast, four cultural groups—Colombia, Kenya, U.S. African American, and U.S. Latino—consistently had the highest levels of parental control, and also had the highest levels of parental warmth for mothers and in some cases fathers.

We estimated a multiple-group structural equation model of the variances/covariances for warmth and control, to investigate whether cultural group statistically moderated the correlation between warmth and control. We fit the model four times—once for mother reports, father reports, child reports about mothers, and child reports about fathers. For each

report, we compared two models—one in which the warmth-control covariance was free to vary across groups (i.e., saturated model with perfect fit) versus one in which the covariance between warmth and control was constrained to be equal across groups.

We applied single-indicator adjustments for non-reliability recommended by Munck (1979) given the low alpha coefficients. Loadings for the single indicators (the warmth and control scale scores) were fixed to the observed standard deviation of the indicator multiplied by the square root of the observed coefficient alpha. Variances of the residuals of the indicators were fixed to the indicator variance multiplied by $(1 - \alpha)$. This correction results in disattenuation of correlations among the latent versions of the variables, which are scaled to unit variances. We estimated corrected bivariate correlations between warmth and control for each of the 13 cultural groups. There were four correlations for self-reported maternal parenting, self-reported paternal parenting, child-reported maternal parenting, and child-reported paternal parenting estimated within each cultural group. The ranges of these four correlations within each group were: Jinan (.01 to .24, n.s.) and Shanghai, China (-.10, n.s., to .26, $p < .05$); Colombia (.07, n.s., to .60, $p < .05$); Naples (.12, n.s., to .68, $p < .05$) and Rome, Italy (.16, n.s., to .45, $p < .05$); Jordan (-.14, n.s., to .35, $p < .05$); Kenya (.44 to .85, $p < .05$); Philippines (.22, n.s., to .54, $p < .05$); Sweden (-.13, n.s., to .48, $p < .05$); Thailand (.21, n.s., to .71, $p < .05$); and African American (.28, n.s., to .46, $p < .05$), European American (-.35 to -.18, n.s.), and Latino families (.23, n.s., to .62, $p < .05$). Twenty-five of the 52 correlations were statistically significant, all of which were positive in sign.

The constrained model in which the warmth-control covariance was fixed to be equal across cultural groups fit significantly worse than the saturated unconstrained model for mother reports, father reports, and child reports about fathers, $\chi^2(12, Ns \geq 1152) = 21.5, 27.1, 60.1$, respectively, $ps < .05$; for child reports about mothers, $\chi^2(12, N = 1412) = 18.9, p = .090$. Thus, the covariation between warmth and control differed significantly by cultural group for three of the four models.

Discussion

We investigated the statistical independence of parental control and warmth, in an attempt to fill a gap in the cross-cultural developmental literature on parenting (Henrich et al., 2010). Findings indicated that the association between warmth and control differed significantly (ranging from near zero to the .8 range) across the 13 cultural groups. Depending on the cultural groups in question, the descriptive analyses of mean levels of warmth and control (Table 1) were either contradictory to or consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Chao & Tseng, 2002; Kagitcibasi, 2007; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). For instance, the Chinese and Thai groups had the lowest levels of parent-rated and child-rated parental control—although the literature would suggest that parents in Asian families exercise relatively high levels of parental control. Yet in spite of this uniformity in the low levels of control for the Chinese and Thai samples, the ranges of warmth-control correlations were distinct for the Chinese families (ranging from -.03 to .26, all n.s.) and Thai families (ranging from .21, n.s., to .71, $p < .05$).

In contrast, the data for the three ethnic groups within the United States sample were not surprising, given the literature (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, & Sorbring, 2005). The data indicated relatively high levels of warmth and control for the African American and Latino families, and relatively high warmth but low control for the European American families. Furthermore, the ranges of the warmth-control correlations were seemingly distinct for the two ethnic minority groups of U.S. families (ranging from .23, n.s., to .62, $p < .05$) compared to the ethnic majority families (ranging from -.35 to .18, all n.s.). Thus, there

appeared to be distinct patterns in the means for and covariation between warmth and control across the 13 cultural groups.

A major goal for future research is to identify whether there are systematic factors that account for these cultural variations in the warmth-control link. This will be challenging, given that there are questions about whether one can measure parental warmth and control in the same way in a diverse array of cultural groups. We used the PARQ/Control instrument, which has been the most widely used measure of its kind around the world (Rohner, 2005). However, cross-cultural invariance in its construct validity has not been demonstrated. The scales could be measuring different constructs, depending on the culture. This could explain why in the current study the internal consistency for the control scale was low, and for both scales it varied across cultural groups. There are other caveats to bear in mind as well. The samples were not fully representative, and the measure did not distinguish between different types of control (e.g., psychological, behavioral; see Barber et al., 2005).

In conclusion, policy and intervention efforts that attempt to improve parenting should consider the range of meanings of parenting practices in the minds of children and parents alike. Parental warmth is generally regarded by family scientists and practitioners as a universally positively valued dimension of parenting. In studies involving families of different cultures and ethnicities, parental affection and nurturance are associated with a host of desirable family outcomes, among them child well-being and adjustment, strong parent-child bonds, and an emotional climate that portends successful socialization (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In contrast, parental control may be more culturally variable with respect to its normativeness, meanings, and potential consequences. As the current study demonstrates, this makes it more difficult to measure in a way that captures those differences between cultures while still allowing comparisons. Yet this challenging scenario is to be expected based on contextual perspectives of parenting that hypothesize cross-cultural differences in the many ways that parents strive to enable children's developmental competence (Harkness & Super, 1992; Kagitcibasi, 2007; Shweder et al., 1997). We urge scientists and practitioners not to presume equivalence of the meaning of parenting behavior across cultures, and to continue to struggle with the challenges of measurement and interpretation.

Acknowledgments

This research has been funded by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development grant RO1-HD054805 and Fogarty International Center grant RO3-TW008141. Patrick S. Malone is supported by grant K01DA024116 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Kenneth A. Dodge is supported by Senior Scientist award 2K05 DA015226 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. This research also was supported by the Intramural Research Program of the NIH/NICHHD. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH or NICHHD.

References

- Barber B, Stolz H, Olsen J, Collins WA, Burchinal M. Parental support, psychological control, and behavioral control: Assessing relevance across time, culture, method. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*. 2005; 70(4):1–147. [PubMed: 16359423]
- Bornstein EM. Form and function: Implications for studies of culture and human development. *Culture and Psychology*. 1995; 1:123–137.
- Chao, R.; Tseng, V. Parenting of Asians. In: Bornstein, MH., editor. *Handbook of parenting, Vol. 4: Social conditions and applied parenting*. 2nd. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum; 2002. p. 59-93.
- Darling N, Steinberg L. Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*. 1993; 113:487–496.

- Deater-Deckard, K.; Dodge, K.; Sorbring, E. Cultural differences in the effects of physical punishment. In: Tienda, M.; Rutter, M., editors. *Ethnicity and causal mechanisms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2005. p. 204-226.
- Erkut S. Developing multiple language versions of instruments for intercultural research. *Child Development Perspectives*. 2010; 4:19–24. [PubMed: 21423824]
- Gershoff ET, Grogan-Kaylor A, Lansford JE, Chang L, Zelli A, Deater-Deckard K, Dodge KA. Parent discipline practices in an international sample: Associations with child behaviors and moderation by perceived normativeness. *Child Development*. 2010; 81:487–502. [PubMed: 20438455]
- Harkness, S.; Super, C. Parental ethnotheories in action. In: Sigel, I.; McGillicuddy-DeLisi, A., et al., editors. *Parental belief systems: The psychological consequences for children*. 2nd. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1992.
- Henrich J, Heine SJ, Norenzayan A. The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 2010; 33:61–135. [PubMed: 20550733]
- Kagitcibasi, C. *Family, self, and human development across cultures: Theory and applications*. 2nd. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2007.
- Maccoby, EE.; Martin, JA. Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In: Mussen, P.; Hetherington, E., editors. *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. IV. Socialization, personality, and social development*. 4th. New York: Wiley; 1983. p. 1-101.
- Morling B, Lamoreaux M. Measuring culture outside the head: A meta-analysis of individualism-collectivism in cultural products. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. 2008; 12:199–221. [PubMed: 18544712]
- Munck, ME. *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Monograph Series, No. 10*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell; 1979. *Model building in comparative education: Applications of the LISREL method to cross-national survey data*.
- Rohner, RP. *The warmth dimension: Foundations of parental acceptance-rejection theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 1986.
- Rohner, RP. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ): Test manual. In: Rohner, RP.; Khaleque, A., editors. *Handbook for the study of parental acceptance and rejection*. 4th. Storrs, CT: Center for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection, University of Connecticut; 2005. p. 43-106.
- Rohner RP, Pettengil SM. Perceived parental acceptance-rejection and parental control among Korean adolescents. *Child Development*. 1985; 56:524–528. [PubMed: 3987420]
- Rudy D, Grusec J. Authoritarian parenting in individualist and collectivist groups: Associations with maternal emotion and cognition and children's self-esteem. *Journal of Family Psychology*. 2006; 20:68–78. [PubMed: 16569091]
- Shweder, R.; Goodnow, J.; Hatano, G.; LeVine, R.; Markus, H.; Miller, P. The cultural psychology of development: One mind, many mentalities. In: Lerner, R.; Damon, W., editors. *Handbook of child psychology*. Vol. Vol.1. New York: John Wiley & Sons; 1997. p. 865-937.
- Trommsdorff G, Iwawaki S. Students' perceptions of socialization and gender role in Japan and Germany. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. 1989; 12:485–493.
- United Nations International Children's Fund. *State of the world's children*. New York: UNICEF; 2009.

Table 1
Means, (Standard Deviations) and [Coefficient α] for Warmth and Control by Cultural Group

| Cultural Group | Mother Report | | Father Report | | Child Report about Mother | | Child Report about Father | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control |
| Jinan, China (<i>n</i> = 120) | 3.19 ^d (.39) [.72] | 2.48 ^d (.42) [.37] | 3.13 ^f (.44) [.77] | 2.57 ^d (.44) [.48] | 3.22 ^b (.43) [.66] | 2.79 ^{e,f} (.50) [.36] | 3.19 ^d (.52) [.79] | 2.60 ^{c,d,e} (.57) [.48] |
| Shanghai, China (<i>n</i> = 122) | 3.37 ^c (.44) [.75] | 2.51 ^d (.53) [.63] | 3.08 ^f (.55) [.81] | 2.28 ^e (.54) [.62] | 3.22 ^b (.45) [.73] | 2.72 ^{e,f} (.48) [.39] | 3.17 ^{d,e} (.55) [.81] | 2.71 ^{c,d,e} (.56) [.53] |
| Medellin, Colombia (<i>n</i> = 108) | 3.85 ^a (.28) [.74] | 3.21 ^a (.57) [.39] | 3.86 ^a (.32) [.85] | 3.20 ^{a,b} (.58) [.45] | 3.72 ^a (.34) [.52] | 3.37 ^a (.64) [.51] | 3.69 ^{a,b} (.41) [.66] | 3.30 ^a (.69) [.58] |
| Naples, Italy (<i>n</i> = 100) | 3.77 ^a (.26) [.45] | 3.35 ^a (.55) [.42] | 3.60 ^{c,d,e} (.38) [.63] | 3.14 ^a (.55) [.48] | 3.59 ^a (.47) [.70] | 3.34 ^a (.61) [.42] | 3.49 ^{b,c} (.56) [.80] | 3.04 ^{a,b} (.74) [.58] |
| Rome, Italy (<i>n</i> = 104) | 3.75 ^a (.24) [.55] | 3.26 ^a (.56) [.48] | 3.52 ^{d,e} (.44) [.77] | 2.78 ^{c,d} (.57) [.52] | 3.55 ^a (.47) [.73] | 3.20 ^{a,b} (.60) [.34] | 3.49 ^{b,c} (.61) [.86] | 3.08 ^{a,b} (.82) [.72] |
| Zarqa, Jordan (<i>n</i> = 114) | 3.60 ^b (.45) [.62] | 2.80 ^{b,c} (.62) [.44] | 3.57 ^{c,d,e} (.45) [.64] | 2.72 ^c (.63) [.40] | 3.56 ^a (.48) [.76] | 3.05 ^{b,c,d} (.61) [.44] | 3.41 ^d (.58) [.82] | 2.88 ^{b,c} (.65) [.57] |
| Kisumu, Kenya (<i>n</i> = 100) | 3.37 ^c (.50) [.78] | 3.25 ^a (.50) [.34] | 3.45 ^e (.46) [.75] | 3.30 ^a (.48) [.22] | 3.10 ^b (.60) [.80] | 3.27 ^{a,b} (.44) [.17] | 3.08 ^e (.65) [.85] | 3.07 ^{a,b} (.57) [.48] |
| Manila, Philippines (<i>n</i> = 120) | 3.81 ^a (.24) [.56] | 2.98 ^b (.58) [.52] | 3.70 ^{a-d} (.34) [.65] | 2.95 ^{b,c} (.67) [.56] | 3.56 ^a (.47) [.69] | 3.13 ^{a,b,c} (.63) [.29] | 3.54 ^{b,c} (.57) [.80] | 3.12 ^{a,b} (.67) [.46] |
| Trollhättan, Sweden (<i>n</i> = 103) | 3.86 ^a (.25) [.78] | 2.65 ^{c,d} (.61) [.65] | 3.75 ^{a,b,c} (.30) [.73] | 2.56 ^d (.68) [.73] | 3.57 ^a (.44) [.72] | 2.81 ^{d,e,f} (.67) [.47] | 3.60 ^{a,b,c} (.50) [.82] | 2.90 ^{b,c,d} (.77) [.69] |
| Chang Mai, Thailand (<i>n</i> = 120) | 3.56 ^b (.39) [.66] | 2.78 ^{b,c} (.54) [.47] | 3.47 ^e (.46) [.80] | 2.78 ^{c,d} (.53) [.39] | 3.20 ^b (.62) [.77] | 2.74 ^{e,f} (.64) [.38] | 3.21 ^d (.66) [.79] | 2.52 ^e (.66) [.38] |
| Durham, USA: AA (<i>n</i> = 102) | 3.86 ^a (.26) [.68] | 3.26 ^a (.53) [.51] | 3.80 ^{a,b} (.29) [.71] | 3.15 ^{a,b} (.68) [.69] | 3.69 ^a (.48) [.79] | 3.19 ^{a,b,c} (.66) [.52] | 3.64 ^{a,b,c} (.45) [.73] | 3.10 ^{a,b} (.57) [.25] |

| Cultural Group | Mother Report | | Father Report | | Child Report about Mother | | Child Report about Father | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control | Warmth | Control |
| Durham, USA: EA (<i>n</i> = 110) | 3.88 ^a (.16) [.42] | 2.76 ^b (.54) [.61] | 3.83 ^a (.25) [.78] | 2.76 ^c (.56) [.69] | 3.76 ^d (.28) [.56] | 2.92 ^{c,d,e} (.57) [.38] | 3.77 ^a (.38) [.79] | 2.71 ^{c,d,e} (.69) [.58] |
| Durham, USA: LA (<i>n</i> = 98) | 3.79 ^a (.34) [.70] | 3.24 ^a (.62) [.55] | 3.74 ^{a-d} (.32) [.69] | 3.14 ^{a,b} (.56) [.47] | 3.67 ^a (.47) [.76] | 3.35 ^{a,b} (.57) [.30] | 3.67 ^{a,b} (.51) [.82] | 3.26 ^a (.68) [.49] |
| <i>F</i> (all <i>ps</i> < .001) | 50.93 | 34.56 | 35.89 | 27.25 | 24.93 | 18.66 | 18.23 | 14.61 |

Note. AA = African American. EA = European American. LA = Latino.

Superscripts a–f are used for describing the results of the within-variable (column) comparisons of means; the means that were not significantly different from each other at $p < .05$ (Tukey tests) have the same superscript, and those that were significantly different from each other at $p < .05$ have different superscripts.