

# Social and Emotional Development From a Cultural Perspective

Kenneth H. Rubin  
University of Maryland College Park

The study of social and emotional development is recognized for its complexity. To better understand developmental norms, and deviations thereof, researchers typically focus on individual (e.g., temperament), interactional (e.g., parenting behaviors), and relational (e.g., attachment, friendship) levels of analysis. Often forgotten, however, is the extent to which cultural beliefs and norms play a role in the interpretation of the acceptability of individual characteristics and the types and the ranges of interactions and relationships that are likely or permissible. This special issue comprises four sections in which culture is examined insofar as it relates to the aforementioned levels of social analysis: "Emotional Development," "Parenting and Parent-Child Relationships," "Social Cognition and Social Relationships," and "Social and Emotional Adjustment and Maladjustment." Each section is followed by a commentary.

The study of social and emotional development has long been recognized for its complexity. It is complex because social and emotional development appears to be the product of multiple "levels" of deterministic complexity working all at once. Borrowing from the writings of Robert Hinde (e.g., 1976, 1979, 1987, 1995), these levels comprise within-individual, within-interaction, within-relationship, and within-group factors. According to Hinde, events and processes at each "level" are constrained and influenced by circumstances and processes at other levels. Thus, *individual* children carry with them somewhat stable, biologically determined factors, such as temperaments that dispose them to be more or less aroused physiologically and emotionally to social stimuli or that facilitate or inhibit social approach orientations and emotional expression. Other relevant characteristics include the individual's repertoire of social cognitions, skills, and competencies.

At another level, there are *interactions* that occur between individuals. When two individuals meet for the first time, they bring with them their physical, dispositional, cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics. Their interactions vary, in form and function, in response to fluctuations in the parameters of the social situation, such as the partner's characteristics, and social initiations, overtures, and responses. Further, these interactions may be interpreted as being interpersonally attractive, positive, and rewarding or as unacceptable and unrewarding.

From these interactions there develops a *relationship*. Relationships are influenced by memories of previous interactions and by expectations of anticipated, future interactions. Indeed, these memories and expectations may serve to move either of the individuals to avoid (reject), neglect, or approach the other in positive, neutral, or hostile manners. Thus, relationships not only have a cognitive component but also are defined by the

predominant emotions that participants typically experience within them (e.g., affection, love, attachment, and enmity). Over the long run, the kinds of relationships that individuals form depend on their history of interactions both with the given other and with others in earlier relationships.

Once formed, relationships become part and parcel of a system of relationships that comprise the individual's social circle. Thus, individual relationships are embedded within *groups*, or networks of relationships with more or less clearly defined boundaries (e.g., cliques, teams, or school classes). As the highest level of social complexity, groups are defined by their constituent relationships and, in this sense, by the types and diversity of interactions that are characteristic of the participants in those relationships.

It is important to recognize, however, that each of these social levels falls under the all-reaching umbrella of the cultural macrosystem (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). By culture is meant "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto, 1997, p. 5). Cultural beliefs and norms help interpret the acceptability of individual characteristics and the types and ranges of interactions and relationships that are likely or permissible.

## Cultural "Meanings": The Example of Behavioral Inhibition

A simple example of the significance of culture may be drawn from recent work on the phenomenon of *behavioral inhibition*. Researchers have suggested that there are biologically based, individual differences in the extent to which children will respond with wariness and fear to unfamiliar circumstances and people (Fox, 1994). The suggestion that behavioral inhibition is undergirded by biological factors is enhanced by findings that inhibited toddlers display greater muscle tension and higher levels of salivary cortisol compared with uninhibited toddlers (Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1987). Moreover, these children display elevated resting heart rates (Kagan et al., 1987). At preschool age, inhibited, socially reticent children demonstrate

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kenneth H. Rubin, Center for Children, Relationships, and Culture, University of Maryland College Park, 3304 Benjamin Building, College Park, Maryland 20742-1131. Electronic mail may be sent to krubin@rubinlab.umd.edu.

greater reactivity in the sympathetic nervous system and right frontal electroencephalogram asymmetry in response to mild stress (Fox, Calkins, Schmidt, Rubin, & Coplan, 1996). When these children are followed into elementary school, their behavioral and physiological profiles remain constant (Kagan et al., 1987), suggesting that there are stable physiological patterns corresponding with the behavioral expression of inhibition.

When extremely wary individuals come into contact with other children, they typically demonstrate a paucity of social initiations, a lack of social assertiveness, as well as visible discomfort and anxiety. This demonstration of wary behavior in the peer group often "marks" the child for rejection by peers (Rubin, Chen, & Hymel, 1993) and for concern by parents (Mills & Rubin, 1990; Schneider, Attili, Vermigli, & Younger, 1997). Thus, the individual characteristic of inhibition produces a social interactive profile that is best described as minimally existent. Further, as noted above, this wary behavioral style appears to result in less than positive peer relationships. By late childhood and early adolescence, socially wary children experience the intraindividual concern that they are lacking in social skill and have poor relationships with peers (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995); loneliness and depression are two potential "outcomes" for these children (Boivin et al., 1995; Rubin, Chen, McDougall, Bowker, & McKinnon, 1995).

What makes the above-described scenario particularly germane to discussions of culture is that it simply fails to replicate when studied in the People's Republic of China. Thus, the developmental concomitants and outcomes known to be the case for North American (e.g., Hymel, Bowker, & Woody, 1993; Rubin et al., 1995) and Western European socially wary, shy, inhibited children (e.g., Asendorpf, 1993; Broberg, Lamb, & Hwang, 1990; Olweus, 1993) are not the same as those for their counterparts growing up, for instance, in Beijing or Shanghai.

Shyness, or *hai xiu* in Mandarin, is viewed as an anxious reaction to stressful novel situations or social evaluations; the behavioral manifestation of shyness, or social inhibition, is virtually identical in Western and Chinese cultures. Nevertheless, the cultural "meaning" of the phenomenon as well as the social responses to it vary across cultures. In individualistically oriented cultures, such as those found in North America and Western Europe, there is an explicit endorsement of assertive and competitive behavior. In this regard, the socially reticent child is at a distinct disadvantage relative to her or his more sociable and assertive age-mates. However, given that inhibited behavior is unlikely to cause negative outcomes for the group, this behavior is not regarded as maladaptive by peers and adults within the collectivistic Chinese culture (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995). Further, because group functioning requires behavioral restraint, obedience, and submission, shy-inhibited behavior appears to be positively valued and encouraged (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997; Ho & Kang, 1984). Thus, shy, reticent, and quiet children are described by parents and teachers as well behaved, and these children receive praise and encouragement from adult figures (Ho, 1986; Ho & Kang, 1984). Indeed, inhibited children are viewed as interactively competent and perhaps because they are viewed as achievement oriented, independent, and academically accomplished, they develop positive relationships with their peers (Chen et al., 1995; Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). Finally, unlike their Western counterparts, these children think well of

themselves and of their social relationships (Chen, Rubin, & Li, in press).

Further evidence for culture providing varying "meanings" for given behaviors stems from work on parental beliefs about wary, inhibited, overcontrolled behavior. For example, Weisz, Suwanlert, Chaiyasit, and Weiss (1988) compared the judgments of Thai and American parents, teachers, and clinical psychologists about a child described as shy and fearful. Compared with Americans, Thais rated problems of this type as less serious, less worrisome, less likely to reflect personality traits, and more likely to improve with time.

Given that the majority of the world's inhabitants do not reside in culturally "Westernized" countries, the cross-cultural work on behavioral inhibition bears careful note. From the example of a single individual characteristic, social inhibition, one can begin to understand the significance of culture in determining the "meanings" of social and emotional behavior and development at all levels of social complexity. Clearly, child development is influenced by multiple factors. Within any culture, children are shaped by the physical and social settings within which they live, culturally regulated customs and child-rearing practices, and culturally based belief systems (Harkness & Super, 1995). The bottom line is that the psychological "meaning" attributed to any given social behavior is, in large part, a function of the ecological niche within which it is produced. If a given behavior is viewed as acceptable, then parents (and significant others) will attempt to encourage its development; if the behavior is perceived as maladaptive or abnormal, then parents (and significant others) will attempt to discourage its growth and development. Of course, the very means by which people go about encouraging or discouraging the given behavior may be culturally determined and defined. Thus, in some cultures, the response to an aggressive act may be to explain to the child why the behavior is unacceptable; in others, physical discipline may be the accepted norm; in yet others, aggression may be ignored or perhaps even reinforced (for a discussion, see Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990). All in all, then, it would appear most sensible for the international community of child development researchers not to generalize to other cultures their own culture-specific theories of normal and abnormal development.

### The Special Issue

The introduction establishes a basis for that which follows in this special issue, "Social and Emotional Development: A Cross-Cultural Perspective." In this issue, the reader is treated to the writings of researchers from the continents of North and South America, Europe (East and West), Asia, Australia, and Africa. Intracontinental comparisons are also provided in some cases, demonstrating that "culture" and "country" are not interchangeable phenomena.

This issue comprises four separate sections of articles. The first section, "Emotional Development," includes three articles. In one study, Linda A. Camras and colleagues (Camras et al., 1998) examine the emotional reactions of Chinese, Japanese, and American 1-year-olds to arm restraint and the presentation of a growling toy gorilla. In the second investigation, Barbara S. Kisilevsky and colleagues (Kisilevsky et al., 1998) study

the effect of encountering a motionless, expressionless face in Chinese and Canadian 3-to-6-month-olds. And in the third study, Pamela M. Cole and Babu Lal Tamang (Cole & Tamang, 1998) describe parental beliefs about emotional displays in two Nepali subcultures. These studies provide the substance for a commentary by Carolyn Saarni (1998), in which she discusses several significant issues that need be heeded by those intent on delving into the complexities of culture, including distinctions between emic and etic approaches, the role of cultural beliefs in the collection and coding of data, the significance of folk theories in the understanding of what is meaningful within and across cultures, and the nature of change in development when taking culture into account. Her commentary is relevant not only to the articles included in this first section but also to those that follow.

The second section, "Parenting and Parent-Child Relationships," includes four articles. In the first article, Barry S. Hewlett and his colleagues (Hewlett et al., 1998) compare infant caring practices between hunter-gatherer (Aka) and farming (Ngandu) subcultures in Central Africa. Next, Marc H. Bornstein and colleagues (Bornstein et al., 1998) report on how parents on five different continents evaluate their "parenting" competence, satisfaction, investment, and role balance. In the third study, Xinyen Chen and colleagues (X. Chen et al., 1998) focus on the aforementioned construct of behavioral inhibition; they compare and contrast the relations between parenting styles and child inhibition among parents of toddlers in the People's Republic of China and in Canada. Finally, Craig H. Hart and his collaborators (Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998) examine parenting styles as they relate to overt and relational aggression in Russia. A commentary by Joan Stevenson-Hinde (1998) follows the presentation of the four empirical studies. Stevenson-Hinde focuses on the cultural meanings of significant terms of reference (e.g., "parenting styles") as well as on the fact that researchers often find greater intracultural than cross-cultural diversity—a point repeated in the commentary by Bukowski and Sippola.

The third section, "Social Cognition and Social Relationships," comprises four articles. In three of the articles, the cultural comparisons are based on the assumption that Asian cultures are more collectivistically oriented, emphasizing interdependence among individuals, whereas Western cultures are more individualistically oriented, emphasizing individual independence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the first of these studies by Jessica Jungsook Han and her colleagues (Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998) the researchers argue that differences in maternal communication are responsible, in part, for cultural differences in reconstructive memory among Korean, Chinese, and American children. David S. Crystal and his coauthors (Crystal, Watanabe, Weinfurt, & Wu, 1998) examine the sorts of constructs used by Chinese, Japanese, and American children of different ages to understand differences (and similarities) among peers. Monika Keller and her colleagues (Keller, Edelstein, Schmid, Fu-xi, & Ge, 1998) compare how children, of different ages, from China, Iceland, and Germany think about the resolution of moral dilemmas. The third article in this section focuses solely on children residing in Sicily. Amedeo C. Casiglia and colleagues (Casiglia, Lo Coco, & Zappulla, 1998) argue that the norms of Sicilian and North American cultures are

somewhat different and that, unlike the findings reported by North American researchers, aggression is viewed by Sicilian peers as a psychological concomitant of leadership. The commentary by William H. Bukowski and Laurie Sippola (Bukowski & Sippola, 1998) argues that (a) studies of cultural differences should be well-grounded in developmental theory, (b) interpretation of cross-cultural research is severely limited by the lack of within-culture derived constructs and measures, and (c) within-culture variability requires greater research attention than has so far been the case. This latter issue is one that challenges the often-cited notion, offered forcefully by Markus and Kitayama (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), that Asian cultures nurture the importance of interdependent selves, whereas Western cultures socialize the development of individualistic-independent selves.

The fourth section, "Social and Emotional Adjustment and Maladjustment," consists of four articles. In the first article, Carol S. Huntsinger and her colleagues (Huntsinger, Jose, & Larson, 1998) compare the relations between parenting practices pertaining to academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment among European American and Chinese American children. Paul E. Jose and his coresearchers (Jose et al., 1998) compare the extent to which American and Russian adolescents seek social support from peers and family members in efforts to cope with intrapersonal stress. In the third study, Chuansheng Chen and his colleagues (C. Chen, Greenberger, Lester, Dong, & Guo, 1998) examine the extent to which the North American finding that adolescent misconduct emerges when parental monitoring is lax can be replicated for Chinese adolescents residing in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and the United States. And in the fourth article, Andrew J. Fuligni (1998) examines the parent-adolescent conflict among U.S.-residing families of Mexican, Filipino, Chinese, and European backgrounds. The commentary by Barry H. Schneider (1998) centers on whether cross-cultural similarities should necessarily lead to the conclusion that there are cultural universals in development. Schneider warns that cross-cultural research must be sensitive to issues pertaining to the cultural relevance of the constructs being measured, the means by which constructs are measured, and the possibility that response biases and styles may vary, in large part because of cultural norms, across cultures.

All in all, this special issue is laden with a richness of data and discussion. In many respects, it is probably the case that the research efforts presented herein were a product, at least in part, of technological advances in electronic communication and data transfer and exchange. The world of developmental psychology has become a much smaller place in the past decade. Hopefully, the efforts of those whose work is presented herein will encourage others to examine the meaningfulness of the constructs that they study across the international divide. The efforts made in this regard will produce truly significant developmental outcomes.

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