

Parental Control and Style in Australia and India: A Cross-Cultural Study

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting style demonstrates parents' attitudes toward their children and is displayed in a wider range of parent-child interactions. Whereas parenting practices are parental behaviours in specific situations and are governed by particular socialisation goals. Through parenting practices, parents directly influence their children's behaviour. For instance, parents can arrange social contacts for their children and help them in initiating social interactions (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). In contrast to parenting practices, the influence of parenting style on the social behaviour of children is indirect in nature (Ladd and Coleman, 1993).

Parents could be classified as belonging to one of the three parenting style categories: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Authoritarian parents are highly controlling and are less likely to use reasoning with their children. They value obedience and use harsh methods to control their children. Authoritative parents are also high in control but their demands are developmentally appropriate and they use reasoning and explanation with their children. They are also warm and affectionate. Permissive parents are nondemanding and exercise little control over their children, but are generally warm and affectionate (Baumrind, 1977).

Attitudes mothers held about child-rearing practices were related to their parenting practices in real life. Mothers who believed in an authoritarian pattern of child-rearing were found to use controlling and directive methods with their children during naturalistic interactions. Whereas mothers who believed in an authoritative pattern were more likely to use indirect and positive ways of controlling children and were more responsive to their children's demands and requests (Kochanska, 1990). In another study, Holden et al. (1995) found that mothers beliefs toward spanking were related to their own behaviour in controlling their

children's behaviour. Mothers who believed spanking to be useful disciplinary technique in parenting were found to use this technique with their own children.

Zayas (1994) reviewed the literature on socialisation in Hispanic families and concluded that the child-rearing values and expectations for children's behaviour of Hispanic parents were different from those of other ethnic groups. Hispanic parents were found to be more authoritarian and preferred their children to be obedient. In contrast, American parents preferred children to develop independence, verbal expressiveness and self-directive skills.

In a study conducted in India, Kenya and Sweden, Ekstrand (1994) found that parents in India and Kenya expect their children to be obedient, to fulfil demands set for them and to listen to them. Compared to their Swedish counterparts, Indian and Kenyan children are expected to develop self-control. In contrast, Swedish parents teach their children to think for themselves and encourage negotiation. Individuals are allowed to express their emotions openly and children are not punished for crying.

In a recent cross-cultural study, Robinson et al. (1996) examined parenting practices in the United States, Australia, China and Russia. The authors found that across four cultures parenting styles were somewhat similar, particularly in Australia and the United States. In China and Russia there was a higher prevalence of authoritarianism. These authors emphasised that there is little research which focuses on the nature of parenting style across cultures.

Literature reviewed indicate that there exists differences in parental beliefs, parental control and expectations and parenting style across cultures.

In the present research efforts have been made to examine the parental control and expectations for mature behaviour and parenting style across Australian and India cultures.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The subjects of this study were parents of 100 four to six year old preschool children (100 mothers and 55 fathers) in Brisbane, Australia and parents of 178 four to six year old preschool children (178 mothers and 149 fathers) in Hisar, India.

In the first phase data were collected in Brisbane, Australia. Families were contacted through child care centres, kindergartens and preschools. Families were invited to participate if parents were born and brought up in Australia or who had been living in Australia for more than 10 years. One hundred mothers and fifty five fathers constituted the Australian sample.

In the second phase data were collected in Hisar, India. Families were contacted through seven schools with lower and upper kindergarten classes. Families were invited to participate in the study if the father had at least a high school education. This was a criterion in order to provide reasonable comparability in education levels across the cultural groups. Both parents of the target children were requested to participate in the study. In the Indian sample, 178 mothers and 149 fathers constituted the Indian sample.

The mean age of the Australian children in the study was 59 months, and that of Indian children, 65 months. In Australia, 55% of the children were male, and 45% were female; in India, 49% were male and 51% were female. The mean age of Australian mothers was 35 years and that of Indian mothers was 30 years; the mean age of Australian fathers was 37 years and that of Indian fathers was 35 years.

With regard to education of parents, in Australia, 63% mothers and 58% fathers were university educated; 17% mothers and 25% fathers were + 2 level and diploma holders; and 20% mothers and 17% fathers were high school educated. In India, 44% mothers and 77% fathers were university educated; 17% mothers and 16% fathers were + 2 level and diploma holders; and 25% mothers and 7% fathers had education up to high school. A small proportion of Indian mothers (14%) had very low level of education.

MEASURES

From responses to items on two scales, Parental Control and Maturity Demands (Greenberger, 1988), parenting style was able to be categorised.

Parental control scale has three subscales: Firm Control, Harsh Control and Lax Control. Parents were requested to rate the frequency of their control practices on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Component scores were calculated for parental control.

Parents' expectations regarding mature behaviour on the part of their children were measured by the Maturity Demands Scale that contains three subscales: Self-Control, Independent Behaviour and Prosocial Behaviour. The parents were requested to rate their expectations on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*).

Parenting style was categorised from the component scores on the Parental Control Scale and the total score on the Maturity Demands Scale. Scores were cross-classified on the two parenting scales to identify parenting style. The median scores used in this classification process were obtained from the scores of the sample groups - Australian mothers, Australian fathers, Indian mothers and Indian fathers.

PROCEDURE

In Brisbane, Australia, questionnaires were sent to the parents who had volunteered to participate in the study. They were provided with reply-paid envelopes to return the completed questionnaires. Mothers and fathers were requested to complete the questionnaires separately.

For the Hisar study, the questionnaires were translated into Hindi. A similar procedure for adaptation was used by Malhotra and Randhawa (1983). Malhotra and Randhawa (1983) had suggested that a structured interview schedule for parents was more suitable than a self-administered questionnaire. Participants in the sample of parents from Hisar also expressed a preference for interviews over questionnaires, hence interviews were conducted. It is important to note that the *interviews* actually consisted of writing the parents' reports by posing the questions from

the questionnaire to parents orally. In Hisar, 178 mothers and 149 were available to be interviewed. Interviews took place in the family home. Mothers and fathers were interviewed separately. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour.

RESULTS

Parental Control Practices in Australia and India

A three-way MANOVA was performed using culture (Australian, Indian), parent gender (mothers, fathers) and sex of child (male, female) as independent variables and parental control (firm, harsh, lax) as the dependent variables. This was followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffé tests (alpha set $\alpha = .05$). *F* statistics for Wilk's Lambda are reported. The main effects for culture and parent gender were significant, $F(3, 454) = 468.99$ and 3.16 respectively, $ps < .001$ and $.05$ respectively. The main effect for sex of child was not significant. There were no significant interactions between parent gender by sex of child and culture by sex of child. There was a significant interaction between culture by parent gender, $F(3, 454) = 9.28$, $p < .001$. The three-way interaction of culture by parent gender by sex of child was not significant.

For the interaction effect of culture by parent gender, univariate *F*-tests were significant for firm control, $F(1, 456) = 17.09$, $p < .001$; harsh control, $F(1, 456) = 9.53$, $p < .005$; and lax control, $F(1, 456) = 4.78$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc Scheffé tests revealed significant differences between Australian and Indian parents and between Indian mothers and Indian fathers. As presented in table 1, Indian fathers were more firm ($M = 51.51$) than Indian mothers ($M = 48.49$) and Australian mothers and fathers ($Ms = 48.29$ and 46.87 , respectively). For harsh control, Indian mothers were more harsh ($M = 59.41$) than Indian fathers ($M = 56.18$) and Australian mothers and Australian fathers ($Ms = 32.41$ and 34.55 respectively). Also, Indian fathers were significantly more harsh than Australian parents. For lax control, Indian mothers and fathers were more lax ($Ms = 49.06$ and 52.61 respectively) than Australian mothers and fathers ($Ms = 35.33$

and 35.91 respectively). Indian fathers were significantly more lax than Indian mothers.

Correlations were also run to examine associations between firm, harsh, lax control and age of children; and firm, harsh, lax control and education of parents. As presented in table 3, for Australian study, there existed a significant moderate positive correlation between firm control and age of children, $r = .30$, $p < .005$. A similar trend was observed for Indian study. For Indian study, although marginal, there was positive correlation between the age of children and harsh control, $r = .18$, $p < .05$. A similar trend was observed for Australian study. Marginal positive correlation was also observed between firm control and education of parents in India, $r = .21$, $p < .005$. Although not significant, a similar trend was observed for Australian study. There were negative correlations between harsh and lax control and education of parents in Australia, $rs = -.28$ and $-.17$ respectively, $ps < .005$ and $.05$ respectively. A similar negative trend was observed for Indian study. These results suggest that with increase in children's age, firm and harsh control increase. Also with higher parental education firm control increases and harsh and lax control decrease.

Maturity Demands in Australia and India

A three-way MANOVA was performed, using culture (Australian, Indian), parent gender (mothers, fathers) and sex of child (male, female) as independent variables and parental expectations for mature behaviour (self-control behaviour, independent behaviour, prosocial behaviour) as dependent variables. This was

Table 1: Means and standard deviations for parental control measure in Australia and India

Measured variables	Australia		India					
	Mothers <i>n</i> =100	Fathers <i>n</i> =55	Mothers <i>n</i> =178	Fathers <i>n</i> =149				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Firm Control	48.29 _a	5.38	46.87 _a	5.65	48.49 _b	5.16	51.51 _c	5.39
Harsh control	32.41 _a	8.97	34.55 _a	9.27	59.41 _c	6.46	56.18 _b	9.34
Lax control	35.33 _a	7.90	35.91 _a	8.41	49.06 _b	5.33	52.61 _c	7.68

Note: Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ significantly at $p < .001$.

followed by univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and post-hoc Scheffé tests. *F* statistics for Wilk's Lambda are reported. Strong main effects were found for culture and parent gender, $F_s(3, 467) = 74.08$ and 3.59 respectively, $p < .001$ and $.01$ respectively. The main effect for sex of child was not significant. Interactions between culture by parent gender, culture by sex of child and parent gender by sex of child were not significant. Also the three-way interaction between culture by parent gender by sex of child was not significant.

For the effect of parent gender, univariate *F*-tests on the subscales were not significant. For the effect of culture, univariate *F*-tests were significant for the subscales of independent behaviour and self-control behaviour, $F_s(1, 469) = 168.11$ and 117.61 respectively, $ps < .001$. As depicted in table 2, mean scores for Indian par-

ents' expectations for self-control behaviour and independent behaviour ($M_s = 62.91$ and 49.78 respectively) were significantly higher than those for Australian parents ($M_s = 55.72$ and 43.52 respectively).

Correlations were also run to examine associations between maturity demand sub-scales (demand for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours) and age of children; and between maturity demand sub-scales and education of parents. As shown in table 3, for Australian study, positive correlations existed between age of children and expectations for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours, $r_s = .36, .27$ and $.19$ respectively, $ps < .005$ and $.05$ respectively. Similarly in Indian study, positive correlations existed between age of children and expectations for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours, $r_s = .19, .21$ and $.23$ respectively, $ps < .05$ and $.005$ respectively. In Australian study, marginal positive correlations were found between demands for self-control and education of parents, $r = .17$, $p < .05$. In Indian study, marginal positive correlations were also found between demands for independent, prosocial and self-control behaviours and education of parents, $r_s = .17, .20$ and $.19$ respectively, $ps < .05$. These results indicate that in both countries with increase in children's age and higher parental education demands for mature behaviour increased.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for maturity demand measure in Australia and India

Measured variables	Australia <i>n</i> = 155		India <i>n</i> = 327	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-control behaviour***	55.72	7.77	62.91	5.70
Independent behaviour***	43.52	4.73	49.78	4.78
Prosocial behaviour	26.21	3.33	26.66	3.08

Note: Mean scores for culture (Australian and Indian samples) differed significantly at *** $p < .001$.

Table 3: Correlations between children's age, parents' education and parental control and maturity demand sub-scales in Australia and India

		Parental Control		
		Firm	Harsh	Lax
Children's Age	A	.30*	.10	.06
	I	.11	.18*	-.10
Parents education	A	.12	-.28*	-.17*
	I	.21*	-.12	-.09
		Maturity Demand's		
		Independ-ent	Proso-cial	Self-control
Children's age	A	.36*	.27*	.19*
	I	.19**	.21*	.23*
Parents Education	A	.05	.09	.17**
	I	.17**	.20**	.19**

Note: A = Australia and I = India; * $p < .005$, ** $p < .05$

Parenting Style Categories in Australia and India

In Brisbane, 80% of the total sample of mothers and 75% of the fathers could be classified as belonging to one of the four categories identified by Greenberger (1988). In Hisar, 63% of the mothers and 63% of the fathers within the total sample could be categorised. Greenberger and Goldberg (1989) reported that approximately 70% of the parents in their sample could be classified into different parenting style categories. The frequencies and percentage distributions of parenting style categories are presented in Table 4. A high proportion of Australian and Indian parents fell into the permissive category. A high proportion of Indian fathers (42.6%) were classified as "mixed" (authoritarian/authoritative).

DISCUSSION

In this study it was found that in contrast to Australian parents, Indian parents, particularly Indian mothers, reported more harsh control. A possible explanation for the apparently greater harshness of the Indian parenting style is that, although parents tend to be "harsh" with their children, within the Indian cultural context, parents may not perceive harsh control in the same way as it is perceived in Australian culture. In an Indian study, Saraswathi and Sundaresan (1980) explored perceived maternal disciplinary methods in relation to the moral development of their children and found that there was a higher usage of power assertion and reported that, in an authority-oriented culture, power assertion is not perceived as hostile. Verma and Ghandially (1985) also reported that there is a considerable emphasis on punishment as a means of training children in Indian families. In a recent study, Cherian et al. (1997) also found that Indian parents were more harsh in control than Australian parents.

Indian mothers are more harsh in control than Indian fathers is also evident from the Indian literature. Joshi and Tiwari (1977) found that, in middle-class families, mothers were more punitive than upper-class mothers. Singh et al. (1987) reported that mothers were more likely to express aggression toward their children than towards their husband. Within Indian tradition, the perceived superiority of the husband makes him an inappropriate object of aggression. Children, on the other hand, are an easy target of anger and frustration.

Table 4: Frequency distribution of parenting style categories in Australia and India

Parenting style categories	Australia		India	
	Mothers n=80	Fathers n=41	Mothers n=112	Fathers n=94
Permissive	29 (36.30)	17 (41.5)	38 (33.9)	31 (33.0)
Mixed	16 (20.0)	12 (29.3)	29 (25.9)	40 (42.6)
Authoritarian	17 (21.3)	6 (14.6)	20 (22.3)	10 (13.8)
Authoritative	18 (22.5)	6 (14.6)	20 (17.9)	10 (10.6)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

The finding that Indian fathers were more firm in their control than Indian mothers is consistent with previous research in India. Singh et al. (1987) reported that Hindu fathers used inductive discipline to control their children. Although the religion of the parents was not examined in the present study, most of the families were Hindu. Roopnarine, Lu and Ahmeduzzaman (1989) also reported that fathers are the chief disciplinarians in India and through guidance encourage the growth of social competence. Therefore, it appears that fathers are more likely to use firm control in disciplining their children.

In this study, compared to Australian parents, Indian parents reported using more lax forms of control. These findings are also consistent with previous Indian research indicating that, due to changes in the family system, from a prevalence of extended families to an increasing number of nuclear families, parental behaviour is changing from the authoritarian to permissive and authoritative (Sinha, 1984).

That older the age of child and higher the frequency of firm and harsh parental control and lower the frequency of lax parental control, gets support from Dix, Ruble and Zambarano (1989). These authors found that to control older children's misbehaviour mothers' used "power assertive" discipline. In an Indian study, Bhogle (1990) found that mothers were more likely to have permissive attitudes toward their young children.

Education of the parents appeared to have a significant impact on parental control practices. Compared to less educated parents, more educated parents were less likely to use harsh and lax control and were more likely to use firm control. These results are in accordance with previous research (Najman et al., 1994).

Compared to Australian parents, Indian parents had higher expectations of self-control and independent behaviour from their children. Indian parents expect their children to be obedient, to fulfil demands set for them and to listen to them. In a cross-cultural study conducted by Ekstrand (1994), compared to their Swedish counterparts, Indian parents had higher expectations for children's self-control. Ekstrand suggested that, in extended families, individuals are

not allowed to lose their self-control and children are not allowed to misbehave. This may be an influence of Western culture. Sinha (1984) reported that Indian parents believe that dependency in children prevents them from meeting life's new challenges and they therefore encourage their children to be self-reliant and to show initiative.

With regard to demands for mature behaviour, parental expectations for mature behaviour increased with increase in children's age. One of the reason might be as reported by Dix et al. (1989) that parents believed as children grow older they acquire more knowledge about their own behaviour. Also more educated parents had higher expectations for mature behaviour. More educated parents might perceive their children's future life as more demanding and challenging and therefore expect for mature behaviour from an early age as observed by Verma and Ghandially (1985).

In both the cultural groups a higher percentage of parents belonged to permissive parenting style category. This means they were more likely to have permissive attitudes towards their preschool-aged children. In a cross-cultural study of Hupa Indians and Anglo-Americans, Bachtold (1982) also report that parents in both cultural groups were more likely to have permissive attitudes toward children. In India, Bhogle (1990) also reports that mothers are more likely to have permissive attitudes toward their young children.

In conclusion there exist cultural differences and similarities about parental control, maturity demands and parenting style across Australian and Indian cultures. In an authority oriented culture like India, parents are more likely to be power assertive and there is higher prevalence of authoritarianism. Parents expect their children to be independent and have self-control from an early age in this competitive world.

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KEY WORDS Parental Control. Maturity Demands. Parenting Style. Australia. India.

ABSTRACT The research reported in this paper is an exploration of parental control, maturity demands and parenting style in Australia and India. In Brisbane, Australia parents of 100 preschool-aged children (100 mothers and 55 fathers) and in Hisar, India parents of 178 preschool-aged children (178 mothers and 149 fathers) participated. In Brisbane, parental data was collected through questionnaires. In Hisar, data was collected through interviews. For the Hisar study, the questionnaires were translated into Hindi. For parental control, Indian fathers were generally more firm than Australian parents and Indian mothers. Indian mothers were generally more harsh than Indian fathers and Indian parents were more harsh than Australian parents. For lax control, Indian parents were generally more lax than Australian parents and Indian fathers were more lax than Indian mothers. For maturity demands, Indian parents were more likely to expect self-control and independent behaviour than Australian parents. A high proportion of Australian and Indian parents fell into the permissive category of parenting style. In both cultural groups, with increase in children's age, firm and harsh control and expectations for mature behaviour increased. Compared to less educated parents, more educated parents were less likely to use harsh and lax control and were more likely to use firm control. With higher parental education demands for mature behaviour increased.

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