

APPENDIX 2

Values Mentioned by Mothers in the Open-Ended Task,
 Organized into Broader Categories

Decency	Self-Maximization	Proper Demeanor	Sociability/ Lovingness
Honesty ^{1,2,3}	Creativity ^{1,2,3}	Respect elders ^{1,2,3}	Compassion/ consideration ^{1,2,3}
Charity ^{1,3}	Curiosity ^{1,2,3}	Good habits ^{1,2,3}	Loving your family ^{1,2,3}
Patriotism ¹	Assertiveness ^{1,2,3}	Humility ²	Respecting others ^{1,2,3}
Responsibility ^{1,2,3}	Self-esteem ^{1,2,3}	Loyalty to family ^{1,2,3}	Sharing ^{1,2,3}
Dignity ^{1, 2, 3}	Education/school ^{2,3}	Polite ^{1,2,3}	Getting along with others ^{1,2,3}
Religion/ spirituality ^{1,2,3}	Diligence ^{1,2,3}	Good manners ^{1,2,3}	Being Affectionate ^{1,3}
		Independence ^{1,2,3}	Obedience ^{1,2,3}
		Follow social rules ²	

¹Mentioned by at least one Greek mother. ²Mentioned by at least one Taiwanese mother.
³Mentioned by at least one U.S. mother.

Self-Esteem as Folk Theory: A Comparison of European American and Taiwanese Mothers' Beliefs

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SYNOPSIS

Objective. Self-esteem is seldom recognized to be a culture-specific, historically situated idea, and parents' folk theories of self-esteem are rarely investigated empirically. This paper remedies these omissions by comparing European American and Taiwanese mothers' beliefs about childrearing and self-esteem. The substantive goals are to understand the variety of meanings that these mothers associate with self-esteem and to delineate the local folk theories that contextualize this idea or offer alternatives. A related methodological goal is to develop an approach to interviewing that respects local communicative norms and thereby offers a sounder basis for comparison. *Design.* The study was situated in two large towns in rural areas, one in the Midwest and one in Taiwan. In each site, 16 mothers of 3-year-olds participated in in-depth, open-ended interviews concerning childrearing beliefs and practices. *Results.* Nearly all American mothers spontaneously invoked self-esteem early and often in response to a variety of childrearing questions and spoke at length about the importance of building children's self-esteem. In contrast, very few Taiwanese mothers talked about "self-respect-heart/mind" (a Chinese term that approximates self-esteem) and those who did articulated a view that contradicted the European American view. *Conclusions.* Self-esteem looms much larger in American mothers' folk theories of childrearing than it does in their Taiwanese counterparts'. In the American version, self-esteem is a central organizing concept, believed to be crucial to many aspects of healthy development. In the Taiwanese version, self-esteem is either not something that mothers worry very much about, or it is believed to create psychological vulnerabilities rather than strengths. Adaptation of the interview to local communicative practice enhanced the cultural validity of these findings.

INTRODUCTION

From earliest infancy, when babies learn who they are by seeing themselves reflected in their parents' faces, the self-esteem and self-respect that will maximize children's fulfillment of their potential, their resilience in adversity and their ability to esteem and respect other people depend on feeling

loved, respected, even celebrated, for who they are, now, not for what they do or might become in the future.

Penelope Leach, *Your Baby And Child* (1997)

There is growing awareness that a culture-inclusive understanding of child development cannot be achieved without taking into account parents' folk theories about the nature of children and childrearing (Bruner, 1990; DeLoache & Gottlieb, 2000; Harkness & Super, 1996; Lutz, 1983; Miller & Sperry, 1987). Folk theories or ethnotheories refer to local, informal belief systems that vary within and across cultures. Parental folk theories about children and childrearing are culturally organized, and they are systematically related to parenting practices, on the one hand, and to other local meaning systems, on the one hand.

Very little is known, however, about parental folk theories of self development, despite mounting evidence that construals of the self are culturally variable (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1990). From a developmental perspective, a fundamental question that arises from this new appreciation of the cultural plurality of selves has to do with the process by which different construals of self get created (Wiley, Rose, Burger, & Miller, 1998). How can we explain, for example, how children living in certain cultural communities (e.g., middle-class communities in the United States) develop selves that are clearly bounded and independent or why they grow up to have a need for positive self-regard? This article rests on the assumption that a better understanding of parental folk theories of self development (and the practices that they inform, motivate, and rationalize) will help to answer these questions.

Self-Esteem is "At Large" in American Culture

The opening quote, taken from one of the most popular childrearing manuals in the United States, expresses key features of a folk theory that is "at large" in American culture. According to this folk theory, children's self-esteem is extremely important because it promotes the development of a whole array of psychological strengths, including resilience, respect for others, and realization of one's own potential. Self-esteem is itself dependent on how other people relate to the child, from infancy onward. Self-esteem develops when children are loved and appreciated for who they are in the here-and-now, when their intrinsic worth is respected. In other words, this folk theory valorizes self-esteem as a childrearing goal. If parents love, respect, and affirm the child, healthy levels of self-esteem will develop, which, in turn, will lead to other psychological strengths.

This folk theory is not only available in many venues of popular culture—parenting workshops, women's magazines, advice columns, TV talk shows. It is also enshrined in the scientific understandings of self-esteem that are taught in courses in developmental psychology and early childhood education. In recent years several prominent educators and psychologists have challenged the idea that self-esteem leads to the positive outcomes often attributed to it and have argued that practices intended to foster self-esteem may inadvertently promote underachievement, narcissism, and depression (Damon, 1995; Katz, 1993; Seligman, 1995). These misgivings are echoed in recent reports in the popular press (e.g., Begley, 1998).

Despite the critical scrutiny that self-esteem received in the 1990s, many American families continue to experience daily exposure to valorizing messages about self-esteem, whether through distant media or communications from authoritative sources closer at hand. For example, in a single month, we collected a wide assortment of textual references to self-esteem from the public media that regularly enter our homes. These included an article in a local newspaper about the rising rates of AIDS among teenagers and the need for more effective sex education, namely education that addresses self-esteem and communication skills; a complimentary copy of a new magazine called *Daughters*, which accompanied a mail-order purchase and contained an article about the ways in which girls' participation in sports builds confidence and self-esteem; an article from the sports section of the *New York Times* concerning the New York Race for the Cure, which raises money for breast cancer research, in which one survivor talked about how her high self-esteem and strong religious faith enabled her to cope with the disease. In addition, one of us received a note sent home from his son's kindergarten explaining the upcoming "ME" project, in which each child would create and present a self-expressive project (collage, story, song, dance, and so forth). The note strongly encouraged parents to get involved in these projects, concluding, "After all, the goal of this project is to enhance self-esteem while increasing parent involvement." Another of us received a *New Parent Survival Guide* when her eighth-grade daughter entered a new school, urging parents to make sure that their teen understands that his or her worth is intrinsic, not dependent on high achievement. Note that this informal sampling of discourses of self-esteem is drawn entirely from the written media; the list would multiply were we to include the influx from television, radio, film, and the internet.

Study Rationale

We argue that the ubiquity of reference to self-esteem in both scientific arenas and popular culture naturalizes self-esteem, promoting a kind of in-

visiblens. This invisiblens is supported, as well, by two striking omissions from the discourse of self-esteem. Rarely is self-esteem and its associated folk theory recognized to be a culture-specific, historically situated discourse. And rarely is the debate about self-esteem informed by the voices of parents as they reflect on and work with these ideas in rearing their children. The study reported here addresses both of these omissions. Its purpose is to identify the meanings and practices associated with self-esteem and with the larger folk theory in which it is embedded. We hope to create a space within which the all-too-familiar notion of self-esteem can be seen for what it is—an element within a particular folk theory.

We approach this problem by listening to American and Taiwanese mothers talk about their childrearing goals and values. The study is intended to contribute to the emerging literature on cultural variation in parental folk theories (Bruner, 1990; DeLoache & Gottlieb, 2000; Harkness & Super, 1996). Our larger ambition is to work towards a developmental cultural psychology that is fully situated in local meaning systems and thereby incorporates knowledge of cultural variation in folk understandings of the self (Cole, 1996; Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus, & Miller, 1998; Stigler, Shweder, & Herdt, 1990).

Apart from its substantive aims, this paper offers some reflections on interviewing, a stock-in-trade tool of ethnographers. In our view, one of the biggest methodological challenges facing cultural psychology centers on the problem of cross-cultural comparison: How can we represent the intricate patterning of similarities and differences across cultures without subdividing the complexity of particular meaning in each (Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Miller, Fung, & Liang, 1997)? In the study reported here, we address this problem by adopting an approach to interviewing that is responsive to the norms of communication in Taiwan and the United States. This approach permits fuller access to the local meanings associated with childrearing in the two cultural cases.

The remainder of this introduction is structured to reflect the dual purpose of the paper. We first present studies pertaining to cultural variation in folk theories of childrearing and self-esteem and then outline the rationale for the methodological approach developed in the present study.

Self-Esteem in Folk Theory and Practice: Cross-Cultural Variation

A recent computer-generated search of the psychological literature revealed that English-language publications concerning self-esteem appeared at a rate of more than 250 per year from 1986 to 1998. The vast majority of these works either examine the antecedents, correlates, or con-

sequences of self-esteem or assess self-esteem as it contributes to other psychological processes (e.g., depression). Very few address the culturally saturated nature of self-esteem. In an important recent exception, Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) point out that self-esteem research has been conducted primarily by North Americans (i.e., Canadians and Americans). They review social scientific analyses of Japanese culture and conclude that "the need for positive self-regard, as it is currently conceptualized, is not a universal, but rather is rooted in significant aspects of North American culture" (p. 766).

Mirroring this conclusion, several studies suggest that European American parents place greater value on children's self-esteem, compared with their counterparts from Japan and China (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, Hsu, & Kitanmura, 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) and from Puerto Rico (Harwood, J. Miller, & Irizarry, 1995). These cross-cultural differences co-exist with subtle but important intra-cultural differences in the meanings that parents attach to self-esteem (Taylor, 1995; Wiley, Rose, Burger, & Miller, 1998). For example, Harwood et al. (1995) found that both middle-class and working-class European American mothers used a dimension of "self-maximization," which included self-confidence, to describe desirable qualities in their young children, but that working-class mothers did so less frequently and with an awareness that its attainment might be problematic for their children.

To our knowledge, the only research that addresses cultural variation in both parental folk theories of self-esteem and observed parental practices was conducted by Miller and Fung and their colleagues (Miller, 1996; Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997). Their work began with a study that was situated in "Longwood," a European American neighborhood in Chicago and in Taipei, Taiwan. The study focused on the modes of participation and interpretive strategies that middle-class families used in narrating young children's past experiences. Observations of ordinary family interaction revealed that Longwood families operated with a distinct self-favorability bias when narrating the experiences of 2-year-olds. These children were exposed repeatedly to stories that cast them in a positive light and that edited their past transgressions from the narrative record. The Longwood families thus routinely enacted a set of narrative practices that embodied a host of self-affirming messages.

These narrative practices were consistent with Longwood mothers' explicit childrearing goals. They said that promoting their young children's self-esteem was a matter of the first importance to them, articulating a folk theory that is strikingly similar to the version expressed by Leach in the opening quote (Mintz, 1999). They believed that parents should enhance children's self-esteem by providing abundant praise and encouragement,

engaging children in conversations about their feelings, showing physical affection, and providing opportunities for children to experience success. Interestingly, however, no one mentioned using stories to support children's self-esteem; that is, they did not talk about the self-favorability bias that we had documented (Miller, Sandel, Liang, & Fung, 2001). Apparently, these mothers were unaware that they repeatedly created positive self-portraits of their children in the stories that they told, even though this practice was consistent with their avowed childrearing goal. These findings suggest that parents who strongly endorse the goal of cultivating children's self-esteem may engage in a complex, converging mix of strategic and unconscious practices.

The Taiwanese families differed strikingly from the Longwood families in both their beliefs and practices. In contrast to the self-favorability bias, the Taipei families frequently narrated young children's past transgressions, often structuring such stories so as to establish the past misdeed as the point of the story. This narrative practice was compatible with the Taiwanese mothers' belief in "opportunity education," an indigenous notion that involves two interlinked ideas: It is more effective to instantiate moral lessons in the child's concrete experience than to lecture in the abstract and the parent should take every opportunity to do so (Fung, 1994, 1999). Thus, the Taiwanese folk theory and accompanying practices did not foreground self-esteem and self-affirming practices; instead, they were oriented around an explicitly self-critical stance that was part of a larger concern with children's moral education.

In sum, the available literature has very little to say about self-esteem as a cultural ideal or about how self-esteem fits into parental folk theories and practices. Comparative research provides an important vantage point by revealing that other cultures do not share Americans' preoccupation with self-esteem and by underscoring variation within the United States. With respect to the specific cultural comparison addressed in this article, existing work suggests that European American parents are much more likely than their Taiwanese counterparts to privilege self-esteem as a childrearing goal and to engage in self-affirming practices with their young children.

Interviews as Communicative Events

The goal of ethnographic research is to understand meanings from the standpoint of the people being studied, with the understanding that those meanings are more or less collectively shared (Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Malinowski, 1922; Woolcott, 1995). In attempting to understand local meanings, ethnographers try not to mistake their own deeply

taken-for-granted, culturally saturated understandings for those of the study participants—a challenge that is never fully met. If the goal is to appreciate the interpretive frameworks of these particular American parents, for example, and the ethnographer is Taiwanese, then the process of bringing these parents' (American) frameworks into focus will also expose the ethnographer's own (Taiwanese) frameworks. Thus, even when ethnographers study a single cultural case, they aim for double vision (at least). In an increasingly globalized world, in which it is impossible to draw clear boundaries around cultures, many individuals, in fact, have first-hand experience of multiple cultures. In the study presented here, the research team includes individuals with widely varying life experiences in the two cultures: one of us (Wang) was born and reared in Taiwan and the others were born and reared in the United States; Sandel lived in Taiwan for eight years and has a Taiwanese wife. This cultural variability within the research team is a useful resource, allowing us to draw on multiple, insider/outsider perspectives in conducting the study and interpreting the findings.

If ethnographic work is intended to gain insight into local meanings, and incidentally to recoup understandings of one's own culture, how is this knowledge to be attained? Most ethnographic research involves some combination of fieldwork and interviewing. By fieldwork we mean participant-observation in the local, everyday scene. Many years ago, the linguistic anthropologist Edward Sapir (1949) described how difficult it is for a cultural outsider to discover the "cultural key" to an observed event. Clifford Geertz (1973) made a similar point in his famous interpretation of a twitch of the eye: Is it a wink or a blink or a parodied wink or a rehearsed wink or what? These discussions demonstrate the challenges that arise in interpreting other people's meanings, based on our observations of their actions.

If we turn to interviewing, the other standard tool in the ethnographer's repertoire, the situation is no less vexed. Dell Hymes (1975), another linguistic anthropologist, succinctly diagnosed this problem as follows: "Some social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to find out can be found out by asking" (p. 18). This was Hymes's way of acknowledging how difficult it can be to communicate across cultural boundaries: The ethnographer may not stand in the kind of relationship vis-à-vis his informant that would allow him to ask, he may not know how to formulate his question in a way that is intelligible to his informant, the informant may innocently misunderstand the question and therefore provide a misleading response, or the informant may understand the question but not want to reveal the answer. What, then, is the ethnographer to do?

Fortunately, the situation is not as bleak as it seems because time and flexibility lie at the heart of the ethnographic approach. Ethnographers learn to flexibly deploy, again and again, the several modes of inquiry encompassed by fieldwork and interviewing: watching, listening, participating, and asking. Perplexed by a witnessed event, the ethnographer can go to a trusted informant to ask for clarification. Or she might choose to observe and listen to other related events to see whether they shed light on the puzzle. Or she might try to participate in the puzzling event the next time it happens to see how she will be corrected. In other words, in practice, watching, listening, participating, and asking are not separate activities but mutually informing ways of knowing that unfold in an ongoing process of discovery.

In this paper we examine interviewing from this perspective. That is, instead of thinking of interviewing as simply a matter of asking questions and listening to responses, we treat interviewing as an observable social practice in which ethnographer and informant participate and which may be more or less familiar to the participants, more or less in need of adaptation to local norms. This perspective owes a great deal to Charles Briggs's (1986) book, *Learning How to Ask*. Briggs urged researchers to recognize that interviews are communicative events, analyzable in terms of the metacommunicative features of the talk and nonverbal action that interviewer and interviewee together construct. When these features are addressed, along with other data from local communicative routines, it becomes possible to offer a more precise and well-grounded interpretation than is possible via the conventional approach to interviews, in which the content of the interviewee's talk is treated as a transparent expression of his or her beliefs. Like other ethnographers who have written about interviewing (Mishler, 1986; Woolcott, 1995), Briggs attends not only to what people say but to when and how they say it, what they convey nonverbally, how silence is patterned. As it applies to comparative research, this approach implies that it will often be necessary to devise different "interview" events, reflecting the different communicative norms of the communities being compared, in order to yield equivalently meaningful discourse. The study reported here builds on this insight.

In sum, this study was designed to address two related substantive questions: What are the meanings that European American and Taiwanese mothers associate with the idea of self-esteem? And what are the local folk theories that contextualize this idea or that offer alternative formulations of the goals and values of childrearing? A third question is methodological and follows directly from the methodological rationale outlined above: How is interviewing, as communicative practice, constituted in the two cultural cases?

METHODS

The study was situated in two large towns, one in the midwestern United States and one in central Taiwan, thereby extending our work beyond large urban areas. The study combined ethnographic fieldwork with audio-recorded interviews. At each site we interviewed the mothers and grandmothers of 16 young children. The present study is based only on interviews with mothers. Because beliefs and practices that support children's development shift with age, the study focused only on young children. The second and third authors collected data at both sites and depended on informal, personal networks to recruit participants. Before providing more information about the participants and how they were recruited, we briefly describe the two communities.

Chhan-chung

Chhan-chung Hiong is a small farming community of 33,000+ inhabitants covering an area of 16 square miles. Nearly all of its inhabitants are native Taiwanese. They are descendants of settlers who came to the island from China's Fujian Province during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries when Taiwan was under the control of the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty. They speak Taiwanese as their mother tongue (also known as Hokklo or Minnanyu), the southern Chinese language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of Taiwan (see Huang, 1995). Most residents also speak Mandarin Chinese, the official language taught in local schools since 1945.

Unlike Taiwan's crowded cities that are dominated by high rise residential complexes, Chhan-chung is a place where a more traditional way of life is still evident. The landscape is open, dominated by fields of rice paddies, sugar cane, and a variety of fruits and vegetables — onions, leeks, cabbages, melons, grapes, asparagus. Breaking up these fields are clusters of houses. Most people live in two- or three-story box-like cement buildings that have been built within the last 20 years. Scattered among these dwellings one can still find many traditional single-story, three-wing Taiwanese farmhouses, where the ancestral hall dominates the central wing, and the two protruding residential wings surround an open courtyard.

Nights and mornings in Chhan-chung are quiet, broken mainly by the sounds of grunting pigs and crowing roosters. And while most farmers today plow their fields with small tractors, one local farmer still uses a water buffalo. In the early mornings people gather around noisy and bustling open markets to buy their day's supply of fresh fish, poultry, vegetables and fruits. Men and women of the older generation, many of whom are

