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From an Asian perspective, all Western cultures may look more or less alike. Indeed, many Westerners believe that there are no real cultural differences among societies in Europe, the U.S. and other parts of the European diaspora. Much cross-cultural research has been based on this assumption: it is not hard to find comparative studies of societies in Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, and Asia, but there is very little cross-cultural research comparing various Western cultures to each other. The lack of such studies is all the more striking given that cultural differences among European groups in social and emotional behavior have been the subject of frequent literary comment. Nash, for example, offered his observations of English and Italian passengers disembarking from ships at an Australian port:

"I had occasion twice in one week to meet passengers from ships at the ocean terminal in Sydney. One ship was the *Southern Cross*, from Southampton, and the other was the *Galileo Galilei* from Milan. In the one case the dockside was crowded with a throng of people, babies, and grandparents, laughing, weeping, shouting. Men embraced and kissed; women shrieked and rushed into passionate greetings. There was tumultuous confusion. From the other ship the passengers passed sedately down the gangplank, in orderly groups; there were waves of hands and smiles, polite handshakes and impassive greetings such as "how nice to see you again." (Nash 1970: 428).

The issue of cultural variability among Western societies is particularly relevant when we consider ideas and practices of parenting, since families bear the fundamental responsibility of producing the next generation of citizens who will need to work together across cultural boundaries in an increasingly complex world. In addition, cross-cultural research within a larger category such as "the West" offers the possibility of discovering both universals and differences: the themes and variations that make each culture seem recognizable yet different.

In this chapter, we offer some observations on research with parents and children in several Western countries, focusing on the process of discovery of parental ethnotheories and their instantiation in parenting practices. The approach described here is an elaboration of the "developmental niche," a theoretical framework proposed by Super and Harkness for understanding the interface between child and culture (Super & Harkness, 1997; Harkness & Super, 1993). In the developmental niche framework, the culturally constructed environment of the child is conceptualized as consisting of three components or subsystems: 1) The physical and social settings in which the child lives; 2) Culturally regulated customs of child care and childbearing; and 3) The psychology of the caretakers, including parents and others such as teachers or child care providers (Super & Harkness, 1997). The three components operate together as a system, although each is functionally embedded in aspects of the larger culture. It follows from this principle that parental ethnotheories, as an aspect of the third component of the developmental niche, can be accessed and studied through the other two components of the niche as well as directly.

Parental ethnotheories: What are they?

Culture and parenting has long been a topic of interest to anthropologists (Harkness & Super, 2001), but it has only recently come to the fore in psychological research and thinking (Bornstein, 1991; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Sigel, McGillicuddy_DeLisi & Goodnow, 1992).

Our approach draws from both disciplines, and has evolved to an increasing emphasis on the importance of parents' cultural belief systems, or parental ethnotheories, as the nexus through which elements of the larger culture are filtered, and as an important source of parenting practices and the organization of daily life for children and families (Axia, Prior & Carelli, 1992; Eliasz, 1990; Harkness & Super, 1996; Palacios & Moreno, 1996; Welles_Nyström, 1996).

Parental ethnotheories are cultural models that parents hold regarding children, families, and themselves as parents. The term "cultural model," drawn from cognitive anthropology, indicates an organized set of ideas that are shared by members of a cultural group (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Quinn & Holland, 1987). Like other cultural models related to the self, parental ethnotheories are often implicit, taken-for-granted ideas about the "natural" or "right" way to think or act, and they have strong motivational properties for parents. It is this characteristic - the relationship between ideas and goals for action - that ties parental ethnotheories to the other two components of the developmental niche.

International collaborative studies of parental ethnotheories and practices

Recent research by our international collaborative team has been organized by this conceptualization, as we will illustrate here with findings from research through the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools (ISPCS), the International Baby Study (IBS), and earlier studies of Dutch and U.S. parents. The ISPCS - a collaborative effort in seven countries with core funding provided by the Spencer Foundation - investigates parents' and teachers' cultural belief systems, practices at home and at school that instantiate these beliefs, and the normative issues that children encounter in the transition from home to school. The lead investigators include Giovanna Axia (University of Padua, Italy), Andrzej Eliasz (Advanced School of Social Psychology and Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland), Jesus Palacios (University of Seville), Barbara Welles-Nyström (University of Stockholm, Sweden), as well as the late Harry McGurk, who was at the time of data collection the Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Sara Harkness and Charles Super (now at the University of Connecticut, USA) have been the lead investigators for the Dutch and American research in addition to coordinating the overall project. In each cultural site, we recruited a sample of 60 families with target children divided evenly into five age-groups balanced for birth order and sex: 6 months, 18 months, 3 years, 4.5 years, and 7 to 8 years. The sample families, recruited mostly through community networks, were broadly middle-class, with one or both parents employed and no major health problems; most of them were nuclear families with both parents present in the home; and parents in each sample were all native-born to that culture. Using a combination of psychological and ethnographic methods, we collected parallel data in each sample on parents' and teachers' ideas, on many aspects of child and family life, and on child temperament. The sample and methods for the ISPCS were elaborated from earlier research on American parents' ethnotheories of child development, funded by the National Science Foundation, and a comparative study of Dutch parents, funded by the Spencer Foundation (Harkness & Super, 1992; Harkness & Super, 1993). The ISPCS, in turn, provided a foundation for the International Baby Study.

Parental Ethnotheories in the Developmental Niche

Parental ethnotheories are difficult to see directly, but they are intricately related to the other components of the developmental niche; thus, gaining understanding of parental ethnotheories is best achieved through use of multiple methods. In our research, we have used several methods in combination in order to achieve convergent validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). This is particularly important because of the implicit nature of many parental ethnotheories, which may not even be readily accessible to members of the culture themselves. In addition, the study of parental ethnotheories requires a comparative cross-cultural perspective in order to make apparent the patterns of belief and practice that are both shared and culture-specific, and which may easily escape notice in a flat, monocultural perspective.

Settings of daily life in the family

Observation of how children's environments of daily life are actually organized can provide a starting point for both researchers and parents to reflect on the meanings that shape parental strategies of care. In the studies mentioned above, parents themselves have been ethnographic observers through keeping "parental diaries" of their children's daily routines over the course of several days. These diaries can be used to generate a narrative account of the child's day, as in the following examples from the American and Dutch studies (adapted from (Harkness, 1998):

It's 7:30 AM, and Jane, a three-year-old girl living with her family in a suburb of Boston, gets up to have breakfast with her mother and little brother. Daddy has already left for work, but her mother, a part-time social worker, has planned a special day to make the most of her time at home with the children. After breakfast, they all pile into the car and drive into town where, after dropping the little brother at his babysitter's, they meet another mother and her three-year-old at a theater to watch a performance of Pinocchio. After the show, the two mothers and daughters go to McDonald's for lunch, then they part company and Jane goes with her mother to do some shopping. After picking up Jane's little brother, it's home again, where Jane plays by herself in the back yard while her mother does housework. In mid-afternoon, Jane is taken by her mother to a swimming lesson at the town pool (her little brother comes along in the car and watches with her mother). After coming home at the end of the afternoon, Jane watches Sesame Street on TV, then eats her supper in her parents' bedroom while her mother folds laundry. Daddy gets home at 7:30, in time to read Jane a story and tuck her into bed at 8:15.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, in the Dutch town of "Bloemenheim," another little three-year-old girl has also gotten up. Marja's day begins with a shower with Daddy at 7:00 AM, followed by breakfast with mother, father, older sister (aged 7) and brother (aged 5). At 8:15, it's time for Marja's older sister to leave for school. It's just a five-minute bike ride away, but today Mother will take the car rather than haul the other two children along on her bike, as Marja's brother is staying home with a cold. When they get back home, Marja plays at counting pennies in her piggy bank in the family room, and then goes out to ride her bike in the child-safe streets of the neighborhood. The morning ends, and it's time to go back to school to pick up Marja's big sister, along with a neighbor child who will spend the afternoon at their home. After lunch with Mother, siblings and the neighbor child, Marja is taken by her mother to

the "Children's Playroom," a nursery school where three-year-olds go for a couple of hours twice a week to get used to being in a group outside home. Mother comes back at 3:00 to pick Marja up and then get her sister at school, then it's time for a snack of juice and a cookie at home. By 4:00, Marja is outside riding her bike around with other children in the neighborhood. At 5:30, Daddy arrives home on his bike from his job as a chemist at a nearby factory, and the children play together in the family room while the parents prepare dinner. At 6:00 the family sits down to eat together, then Daddy gets Marja ready for bed. By 6:50, Marja is tucked in and off to sleep.

These narratives of two middle-class children's days, based on their mothers' diaries, tell stories richly laden with cultural meanings. In each place, the child's daily routines - an aspect of the physical and social settings - are structured to help the child become a competent member of her culture, but there are systematic similarities and differences between them. Both Jane and Marja spend their days in the company of their mothers and siblings, engaged in activities designed for their enjoyment and development. Unlike three-year-old girls in non-Western cultures such as those of Africa, neither Jane nor Marja is expected to take responsibility for helping with household tasks such as food preparation or the care of a younger sibling. In this regard, Jane's and Marja's days are organized by similar themes. There are variations too, however: whereas Jane's mother takes her to two special events away from home, Marja's day is spent entirely in the familiar settings of home, neighborhood, and pre-school. Whereas Marja has three meals and a snack in the company of her family, Jane's family has no meals together. Although both girls have bedtime routines with their fathers, Marja's bedtime is almost an hour and a half earlier than Jane's.

Customs and practices of parenting

Reflection on the structure of children's daily life, as recorded in parental diaries, can lead to the discovery of culturally regulated customs of care, the second subsystem of the developmental niche. As we have explained elsewhere, customs in this sense are behavioral sequences or arrangements of care that are so well integrated into the culture that they seem to require no justification; they appear to be self-evident, common-sense solutions to everyday problems (Super & Harkness, 1997), although parents and other caregivers generally find it easy to identify and talk about them. Implicit in the daily routines of Jane and Marja are different parental ethnotheories about what kinds of activities or experiences are most important in these formative years. We focus here on two of these ethnotheories as expressed in interviews with U.S. and Dutch parents; both have to do with the ways that parents think about using time with their children.

"Special time" and family time

Two contrasting themes were evident in the interviews: the idea of "special time" (or "quality time") as expressed by American parents, and the theme of family time as described by the Dutch parents. One American couple, parents of a three-year-old girl and her toddler sister, were particularly expressive in talking about the importance of special time with their children. In the following interview excerpt, they describe what special time means to them, and how it helps both them and their children:

Father: Well, I think it is [important]. Quality time, whatever, whatever they want to use. I think

it's important. I think kids need to start connecting with each parent in some way. At this point I don't think it matters necessarily which parent, but I think if each parent can give a certain amount of time to each kid, I think it's important.

Interviewer: Why?

Father: Well, maybe just in getting to know the parent better, sooner. Does that make sense? I don't know, because it seems like when I got to know my parents, it was through a period of accretion kind of thing, over a number of years. And it wasn't _ I mean I had special time for my father and he would coach a baseball team, but it wasn't necessarily that one to one kind. I think it's _ it makes _ I think it makes parents stop and think about what they're doing here. What the purpose is for this whole thing. Maybe that's too much. I don't know. I just think it slows things down a little bit. It puts things a little bit more in perspective.

Interviewer: Marianne, what are your thoughts on special time?

Mother: Well, I just think from _ well first of all, I think that any time that we can spend with them, even if it's time where we're sitting there watching the same TV show as they are, I think that is their thing that they love the best of all. We're sharing something with them. I think that it happens less than it should. You think you're spending time with them when you're kind of in the same room, but on the phone or making dinner or something, but it's not really the same as just putting down whatever you're doing and just kind of being with them at their level.

Father: But you do that. You allow them to participate in like making cookies.

Mother: Well, that's different though. That's kind of involving them in something that I'm doing. But I mean really just doing something for their own sake. Cookies aren't going to be made out of it. Know what I mean? Nothing is going to get produced. It's just kind of time spent with them.

Interviewer: I mean, I think that's a very interesting distinction. Why is it important to have it that way rather than kind of incorporating them into some of your tasks and routines, do you think?

Mother: I haven't really thought about it that much, but maybe something about timing and something about being able to go at their pace and kind of let them take the lead.

Interviewer: Let me put it this way. What do you think that does for kids that's different from having them help you cook in the kitchen or something?

Mother: I don't know. Something about you're interested in something that they're doing, is really important for them. It's important for their growth. Then they believe that what they're doing is important. I mean even when we were outside with them tonight and they just _ we were just kind of swinging them _ that was a big thing for them.

These parents went on to describe another family in which the mother would routinely take a whole day to spend "special time" with one or the other of her children; like many of the American parents in our study, that family found it easiest to focus exclusively on the needs and developmental capacities of one child at a time. The couple quoted here, in contrast, describe activities involving the whole family but their focus on the needs of the child (rather than a product such as cookies) puts these activities in the category of "special time."

In contrast, the Dutch families we interviewed, when asked about the idea of special time with their children, tended to give rather relaxed commentaries about how it was enjoyable to do something with just one child occasionally. When talking about family time together, however, the Dutch parents had more to say, and they tended to wax eloquent about the importance of such customs as family dinners. For example, the parents of a six-month-old girl (Sietske) talked about making sure that the baby was right with them at the dinner table every night:

Father: If I leave at quarter of seven in the morning then I hear something, but if I come home and for example they're again in bed, now I really don't like that.

Mother: Ya, it's really the only time that he is often home, often in the evening either I have to go out or he has to go out again... so at six o'clock we are all three always home.

Father: And after that, Sietske goes to bed.

Mother: Ya, she went to bed at eight or seven, so really it is a short time.

Father: It was really just an hour, an hour and a half that I saw her, and then you can also put her in the playpen and you go eat, but no, we sit her here. Then she is close by, that is important.

Mother: In the beginning it was not so nice, because she had a terrible "screaming hour" at six o'clock, so no, that really was not nice. But now that is over, luckily.

Interviewer: But did you sit her here at the table in spite of that?

Father: Yes, certainly - or on our laps here.

Looking toward the future when the baby was a bit older, the parents explained the importance of having dinner together as a family:

Father: Because you want to hear about each other. I am curious, how did things go for Sietske today, and that is important, you're away during the day and you don't think about it, but when you come home you really do think about it, and ya... I think that it is out curiosity, wanting to see, it's so new and it goes fast. Development goes very fast, and if I... I notice that a little while ago I was very busy and then I couldn't put her to bed at night or I had to pay less attention to her, then I thought that she recognizes me less or she is less involved with me. And I think that

therefore that hour at least is very important. (And what about dinner in particular?) Now, why dinner time.. Now dinner is functional, it has to take place, and so if you sit outside or you sit here, or if you watch TV or read a book or a newspaper, but at dinner you are busy with eating, and then, that is really a resting point in the day. We eat also, we take a long time over dinner. We ... it seems cozier, and that, not just quickly in between things, no - really sit and sit with everyone there together. So I think that dinner is very important for that reason. It has to happen, and during dinner you can pay attention to each other.

The contrast in emphasis on "special time" versus family time in the American and Dutch interviews is evident not only in *how* parents talk about each theme, but also in *how much* they talked about them. A comparison of the frequency of comments about each cultural theme showed that the Dutch parents talked three times as often as the American parents about family time, whereas the pattern was reversed in relation to "special time."

Management of sleep

As in the interview excerpt quoted above, many of the Dutch parents we interviewed seem to show a fine-tuned awareness of the allocation of time during the day, and in particular the importance of regularity and rest. These parents both comment on how the structure of their own days leaves open only limited time for being with their daughter, and thus note the importance of using this time for dinner as a "restpoint" and time that the family can be together - even though the baby was at first colicky at that hour! As we have described elsewhere (Super, et al., 1996), this reasoning fits well with a Dutch ethnotheory that, like the American construct of "special/quality time," actually has a name: the "3 R's" of childrearing, which in Dutch are expressed as *rust* (rest), *regelmaat* (regularity), and *reinheid* (cleanliness). With the last of these easily taken care of by the daily bath, parents focused a great deal of care and attention on providing adequate rest or sleep in a regularly scheduled day, with the goal of bringing up children who would be calm, cheerful, and self-regulated. These ideas were particularly evident in the ways that the Dutch parents, in contrast to American parents, talked about the regulation of infant sleep. Whereas the American parents described their child's sleep patterns as innate and developmentally driven, the Dutch parents hardly mentioned these ideas and instead spoke frequently about the importance of a regular sleep schedule, which they saw as fundamental to healthy growth and development. It is noteworthy that the Dutch ethnotheory of infant sleep, and the caretaking practices that they described to foster it, apparently were more successful in averting children's sleep "problems," at least from the parents' perspective: these Dutch parents hardly mentioned having any problems getting their children to follow the desired schedule. In contrast, the American parents spoke frequently about their struggles to deal with babies and young children whose innate temperaments and developmental patterns militated against easy management at night. As one couple recounted of their one-year-old son:

Mother: He wakes up a couple of times a night, [did it] right from the start. I kept waiting for him to start sleeping through the night. Ever since he was born, he was up most of the night as a brand-new baby, and then he was up like four times a night, going to bed at 7:30 and he'd be up at 11:00 and he'd be up at 1:00, 3:00, 5:00. So the doctor said to let him cry. That was effective when we could stand it, but both of us - it drives us crazy. He could cry for 45 minutes. There were nights when he would not cry, but scream and shriek for 45 minutes.

Father: I know that you should just wait it out, but it's 3:00 in the morning and you know you've got to get up at 6:15.

Mother: And to know that he would go right back to sleep like that [snaps fingers] in our bed.

Father: It's a tough call.

Mother: Now usually he wakes up around 4:30 and he's hanging on to the headboard, jumping up and down. So finally at 5:00 I get up.

Interviewer: What do you do with him?

Father: We both have different strategies. She'll put him in the walker down here and I generally put him in the playpen and try to keep him somewhat entertained, either by the TV or he loves the stereo. He loves music. If he's crying and he sees me going for the stereo, he'll stop crying and start to laugh, in anticipation of the music. Even when he was a tiny baby, one night at 3:30 we discovered a particular song that would calm him down.

Mother: It was a psalm. We wondered if it was some divine intervention.

The key to the Dutch parents' success in achieving a good night's sleep for both their child and themselves seems to lie in the second component of the "three R's" ethnotheory: regularity. Many parents stressed the importance of a regular schedule, including a set time for both meals and bed. As one mother of an 18-month-old explained: "To bed on time, because they really need rest to grow, and regularity is very important when they are so little. If she gets too little rest, she is very fussy." A mother of a 6-month-old commented, "We are very strict about going to bed - at 6:30, upstairs."

The results of the different customs related to rest and regularity were evident in the children's actual daily routines as recorded by their parents in parent diaries: at six months of age, the Dutch children were getting on average two hours more sleep per 24-hour day; the difference narrowed with age but was still evident when the children were four and a half years old. Moreover, observations of the 6-month-old Dutch babies showed statistically reliable differences from an American sample in general state of arousal and related behavior: during observations, the Dutch babies were more often in a state of "quiet alert," in contrast to the American babies who were more frequently in an "active alert" state. The higher state of arousal of the American babies corresponded to differences in their mothers' behavior: the American mothers touched and talked to their babies more than the Dutch mothers did (Super, et al., 1996).

A Model of Parental Ethnotheories, Practices, and Outcomes

Settings and customs of children's lives are relatively easy to access through methods such as observation, parents' record-keeping, and focused interviews. These subsystems of the developmental niche can thus provide a basis for exploring parental ethnotheories more directly.

In our recent international collaborative research, however, we have given this third subsystem of the developmental niche a privileged status in relation to the other two subsystems, in order to gain a greater understanding of the power of cultural ideas as they contribute to the ways that parents organize their children's settings of daily life, the customs that are instantiated within these settings, and their developmental outcomes (Harkness & Super, 1992). From this perspective, the Dutch and American parents' beliefs and practices related to infant sleep, and the actual outcomes in infant sleep patterns and awake behavior, can be seen as parts of a system of ideas, practices and developmental or family outcomes. A theoretical model of this system entails a hierarchy of ideas, with the most general, implicit ideas about the nature of the child, parenting and the family at the top. Below this triad, we find ideas about specific domains, such as infant sleep or parent-child relationships. These ideas are closely tied to ideas about appropriate practices, and also imagined child or family outcomes. Ideas are translated into action in this model, although mediated by intervening factors such as child characteristics, situational characteristics that may be influenced by aspects of the larger culture, and competing cultural models and their related practices. The final results can be seen in actual parental practices or behaviors, and actual child and family outcomes.

Using this model is helpful for understanding the connections between parental ethnotheories and practices related to infant sleep, as shown in Figure 1. As we have seen, the Dutch ethnotheory of the importance of rest and a regular schedule contrasts to the American cultural concept of infant sleep as determined almost entirely by age and individual child characteristics. The official "three R's" of Dutch childrearing provide a clear set of guidelines for Dutch parents by mandating a regular bedtime as well as keeping the child's waking environment calmer and less stimulating. It is interesting to note that the "3 R's" were long formalized in advice routinely given to parents through the Dutch national infant health care clinics. The advice reported by the American parents quoted above also comes from an "expert" source: the pediatrician. Note further, however, that this advice is given to solve a problem that the Dutch parents rarely reported, namely unwanted night waking. The American parents, in contrast to the Dutch parents, feel confused because they do not have a clear sense of what practice will be both consistent with their ethnotheory of infant sleep, and do the job of getting the baby to sleep through the night.

Another contrast appears at the next stage of the model: whereas the Dutch parents emphasized the importance of rest and regularity for the child's growth and mood regulation, the American parents focused on the sequelae of interrupted infant sleep for themselves rather than for the child; the assumption seems to have been that children essentially regulate their own sleep needs, and that eventually they will come to sleep through the night on their own. Parents' actual practices, and related child outcomes, are mediated differently in each cultural setting. For the Dutch parents, individual differences among children were not considered important in this regard, as all children were thought to need plenty of sleep and a regular schedule; in contrast, as we have seen, the American parents perceived themselves as captive to the child's individual behavioral style. Situational characteristics including the parents' own work schedules were more favorable for the Dutch parents, who ironically may have had less need for their children to sleep through the night.

Perhaps equally important is another intervening factor: competing cultural models and practices. For the Dutch families in our study, the "3 R's" encompassed a wide range of ideas

and practices - for example, having a regular schedule was also thought to give the child a greater sense of comfort and security, as well as creating a more pleasant family environment. The "3 R's" would appear in a diagram such as this for many specific domains. For the American parents, in contrast, ethnotheories of infant sleep were connected to other broad-ranging cultural models such as the idea of independence, which could be encouraged in the child through sleeping through the night apart from the parents. This cultural model created even more of a challenge to parents whose infant present "sleep problems" such as the one so eloquently described above, as it created a feeling of guilt about picking up a crying baby in the middle of the night. On the other hand, yet another competing American cultural model, as suggested in our discussion of "special time," was that children need responsive and attentive parenting in order to feel secure. Thus, although in principle both Dutch and American parents might be influenced by the same intervening factors, this part of the model is quite simple in Dutch case and rather complex in the American one. Looking at the issue from this perspective may help to explain why infant sleep tends to be so much more frequent a topic of concern for the American parents we studied than it was for the Dutch parents. These differences are reflected in the last links of the model: actual practices and actual child and family outcomes.

The same analysis could be applied to the domain of parent-child relationships, including the idea of "special time." In both cases, the usefulness of the model is demonstrated through its ability to elucidate the links among parental ethnotheories, practices, and outcomes in ways that might not otherwise be evident.

Exploring Implicit Cultural Models of the Child

In the model presented above, implicit cultural models of the child, of parenting and of the family are linked together and conceptualized as the source of more specific, often more conscious ideas about particular domains. These implicit models are in turn linked to themes in the larger culture, what Quinn and Holland have called "general purpose cultural models that are repeatedly incorporated into other cultural models developed for special purposes" (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 11). One approach that we have used to learn about these cultural models is the study of parents' free descriptions of their own children.

An early discovery in the International Study of Parents, Children and Schools was that parents in the different cultural communities tended to talk about their children's personality and behavior in systematically different ways. For example, an American mother of a three-year-old girl told the following story:

"I have this vivid memory when she was born of them taking her to clean her off and put the blanket around her and all that. And she was looking all around. She was looking at us. She was looking around the delivery room. She was alert from the very first second. Even when I would take her out - I took her out when she was six weeks old to a shopping mall to have her picture taken - people would stop me and say, "What an alert baby." One guy stopped me and said, "Lady, you have an intelligent baby there." And intelligent child. And it was just something about her. She was very engaging and very with the program, very observant. She's still fabulously observant." (Harkness, Super & Pai, 2000, p. 26).

Like many other American parents we interviewed, this mother conveyed her sense of

amazement at her daughter's remarkable cognitive abilities, evident from the first moment of her life in the world. As we listened to more such stories, we came to recognize them as not only personal accounts but also cultural constructions that framed parents' experiences of their own child. In these constructions, we could see evidence for a cultural model of "the child," to which a particular child was implicitly compared. Although these cultural models are by definition as unique as the culture to which they belong, they can be indexed by patterns of descriptive words or phrases found to varying extents in parents' descriptions in various settings. The ISPCS researchers thus developed a list of common descriptors that covered virtually all the child descriptions found in parent interviews; and we used this to identify descriptors produced both in response to our request to "describe your child" as well as throughout the interview. A comparison of the frequencies of these descriptors in the discourse of parents from six of the seven cultural samples shows both common themes and cultural variations. Parents from all six samples often described their children as sociable, loving, active, and strong-willed: freqencies of each of these descriptors varied from at least five percent to over fourteen percent of all descriptors and were among the top ten most frequently used. Beyond this common core of parental perceptions of young children, however, differences emerged in the particular kinds of qualities that parents chose to focus on, as shown in Table 1.

Among the American parents, the attention to cognitive abilities expressed by the mother quoted above was typical: the highest frequency American descriptors included "intelligent" and "cognitively advanced" as well as "asks questions." Along with these qualities, the American parents described their children as "independent" and even "rebellious." At the opposite extreme were the Italian parents, who rarely described their children as intelligent and never characterized them as cognitively advanced. Instead, these parents talked about their children as being easy, even-tempered, well-balanced, and "simpatico" - a group of characteristics suggesting social and emotional competence further supported by the characterization "asks questions," which for these families was an aspect of being sociable and communicative. The Italian parents also described their children as "knowing what they want," a less aggressive version of strong will than the American "rebellious."

Like the Italian parents, the Dutch parents also focused more on their children's social qualities, describing them as "agreeable" and "enjoying life." The attribution of having a "long attention span" is a high-frequency descriptor only for the Dutch parents, as is being "regular" - not surprisingly given these parents' concern with rest and regularity and its benefits. For the Dutch parents, the descriptor "asks questions" may be linked with "seeks attention," two aspects of dependent behavior. The profile of descriptors for these parents, then, indicates a child who is positive in mood, regular in habits, able to entertain himself for periods of time although needing attention every so often.

The Swedish parents were similar to the Dutch parents in describing their children as "persistent," a quality closely related to having a long attention span. Also like the Dutch parents, the Swedish parents described their children as agreeable; however, the Swedish profile of descriptors also includes high frequencies of "easy" and "well-balanced" and a low frequency for "attention-seeking," in contrast to the opposite trends in the Dutch sample. Most striking in the Swedish sample is the frequent use of the descriptor "happy," which is found more than twice as much as any other descriptor. Along with "secure," this profile of descriptors suggests a cultural model of the child as both pleasant and undemanding.

The highest rate of use of the "easy" descriptor occurs in the Spanish sample, where fully one-fifth of the parents used this term to describe their children. Interestingly, the Spanish sample was the only one in which the opposite characterization, "difficult," was among the top ten most frequently used descriptors: it appears that the dimension of manageability was especially salient to these parents. The Spanish focus seems to go beyond this, however, as indicated by the high frequencies of the descriptors "socially mature" and "good character," suggesting that the cultural model of the child may center around an ideal of the good citizen and family member. This conceptual cluster of attributes is balanced by attention to the child's cognitive abilities as indexed by the descriptors "intelligent" and "alert."

The Australian parents, finally, are similar to the Swedish, Spanish and Italian parents in describing their children as "easy," and similar to the US parents in their focus on cognitive competence as indicated by the descriptors "intelligent" and "asks questions." Unlike all other samples, however, the Australian parents seemed to focus on the child's emotional state and reactivity, as suggested by the descriptors "calm" and "sensitive."

In summary, the patterns of both cross-cultural similarity and difference in parents' descriptions of their own children suggest that these descriptions are culturally constructed in the sense that there are locally shared ideas about what child qualities are most important, most worthy of note. Comparing across the six cultural samples, there is evidence of commonality in the group of descriptors that were among the most frequent in all of the samples. At the same time, the particular ways that these are combined with other, more culture-specific profiles of descriptors suggests that each community has its own unique perspective on the nature of the child.

Themes and Variations

In this chapter, we have described an approach that has been developed to identify and study parental ethnotheories. This approach involves a number of different methods, including parents' diaries of their children's daily activities and routines, direct observation of children in their settings of daily life, and interviews with parents (Super & Harkness, 1999). Although the methods are diverse, they are tied together by a basic research strategy of working toward an understanding of general, abstract or implicit ideas through specific instances. For example, parental diaries of actual days provide a level of specificity that is not available if one simply asks parents to describe "a typical day." Especially if kept over the course of several days, parental diaries provide information for both parents and researchers to reflect together on aspects of daily routines that parents might not otherwise have thought about, but that may reveal important underlying cultural beliefs. Likewise, a focus on specific customs of care as observed by researchers or described by parents provides a window into cultural beliefs about children's needs and what constitutes good parenting. Finally, parents' descriptions of their own children offer insights into implicit cultural models of "the child" in general. We have found that this strategy of seeking the general through the specific seems to work well for both parents and researchers. Parents find it easier to talk about their own child's routines and qualities than to answer questions about abstract principles - especially since many of these may be unexamined, implicit assumptions about what is natural and right - and we as researchers are thereby blessed with an abundance of rich data that can be approached from a variety of perspectives. As has

been evident throughout this chapter, capturing parents' actual discourse through transcribed tape recordings is especially important for both studying and conveying parents' culturally constructed ideas.

The concept of the developmental niche has provided a useful way to parse the culturally constructed environment of the child into empirically researchable parts, through the several lenses of physical and social settings of the child's daily life, customs and practices of care, and parental ethnotheories. In each of these areas, we have found common themes as well as dimensions of cross-cultural variation across various Western cultural communities. Some of the common themes are undoubtedly more general than Western cultures, as they concern the universal tasks of parenting. Parents everywhere strive to bring up their children to be happy, healthy, well-functioning and successful members of their own cultures. Parents in different cultures and circumstances, however, may ask themselves different questions related to this universal goal: How can I assure that my child survives the first two years of life? How can I make sure that my child will stay connected to the family? How can I teach my child to be a responsible member of the community? How can I help maximize my child's potential for great personal achievement, and how can I give my child the strength to deal with frustration and failure in that enterprise?

In this chapter, we have seen hints of both shared themes and cross-cultural variation, first through comparative studies of U.S. and Dutch families, and then through the examination of parents' descriptions of their own children in six Western cultures. Common themes in parental ethnotheories probably also are based in part on the universal characteristics of children, in contrast to adults, such as the parents themselves. Our examination of the most frequent descriptors of children across six cultural samples suggests that parents - at least in Western cultures - often perceive children as sociable, loving, active, and strong-willed. To anyone who has spent a day with a young child, these qualities probably ring true. By contrast with adults, children are very interested in spending their time in the company of others and they are more open in their demonstrations of affection. They run around a great deal more than adults do, and they are also generally more willing to put up a fuss in order to get what they want.

Thus, the themes in parental ethnotheories probably have a range from the universal to the specific, from those that are shared by parents in all cultures, to those that are more particular to culture areas such as the Western world (or groupings therein such as northern Europe or the U.S. and other British-heritage cultures), and those that are specific to a particular culture. Although we have identified the level of comparison at national entities, it would of course be possible to take the same approach to studying cultural variability within countries as it relates, for example, to regional or socioeconomic differences. In fact, a great deal of research on these differences has already been carried out, but it is generally not undertaken within a cultural framework.

But what of the themes and variations *within* a single cultural community? A central premise of the development niche construct is that the child's environment is not a random collection of settings, customs and parental beliefs, but rather that it is organized in a non-arbitrary manner as part of a cultural system, including contingencies and variable flexibility, thematic repetitions, and systems of meaning that cut across domains both within and beyond the niche (Super & Harkness, 1997, p. 26). In this chapter, we have seen evidence for thematic repetition across the three subsystems of the development niches of American and Dutch

children: for example, the theme of "special time" as an American custom of care resonates with the diary-based account of an American child's actual day, which featured two special outings. This theme is also expressed through the American emphasis on cognitive precocity as evidenced by the American profile of child descriptors with its focus on intelligence and individual achievement.

Likewise, the Dutch child's well-organized, family-based day is clearly consistent with the Dutch "3 R's" system of beliefs about the importance of rest and regularity; and these qualities also emerge in the Dutch descriptions of their children as positive and sociable children who can sustain their attention for long periods of time, but who also need to be with their parents. The thematic connections among different aspects of the niche - as well as within each of its subsystems - are not always so evident, however, and this observation can lead to further discoveries about parental ethnotheories. For example, how does the Dutch emphasis on sociability and an even temper relate to the cultural emphasis on being strong-willed? Questions such as these can most successfully be addressed through collaborative research partnerships that provide perspectives from both within and outside the culture. In this case, we as American researchers learned from our Dutch colleagues that being strong-willed is considered an essential quality in order for children to be self-determined even while living in a densely populated social environment, rather than letting others make decisions for them.

Culture-specific themes also organize individual diversity within particular communities. In describing their children, for example, American parents do not produce identical lists; but they also generally do not produce lists that replicate those of another culture. The human mind can do a better job of discriminating these differences than the computer does: after one has listened to a number of descriptions of children from different cultures, one realizes that parents' descriptions in each culture have their own particular "sound." This is because descriptions from each cultural community tend to deal with the same basic set of themes, although they may use varying language to do so. Such themes tend to be consistent not only across social boundaries within a community, but also across time. The American mother who described her baby as an "alert baby" was a participant in our 1980s research on parents in the Boston area. Twenty years later, a Connecticut mother in our current research commented on how "alert" her baby is, and recounted an almost identical story of comments from others when she took the baby out to the post office - all the while expressing surprise at the term "alert," which she considered unusual for describing an infant.

As the theoretical model presented in this chapter illustrates, parental ethnotheories form part of a system which links ideas about the child, about practices, and about outcomes with actual practices and actual outcomes. Thus, parental ethnotheories by themselves cannot predict child outcomes, but it would be difficult to understand cultural differences in development without reference to how parents in different cultures think about children. While waiting in New York's Kennedy Airport to travel to Korea, we noticed a billboard picturing three different balls for different sports in the U.S., Europe, and Australia, each labeled "football." The message seemed to be that one should not confuse apparent similarities with differences in underlying meaning systems; as the billboard advised, "Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge."

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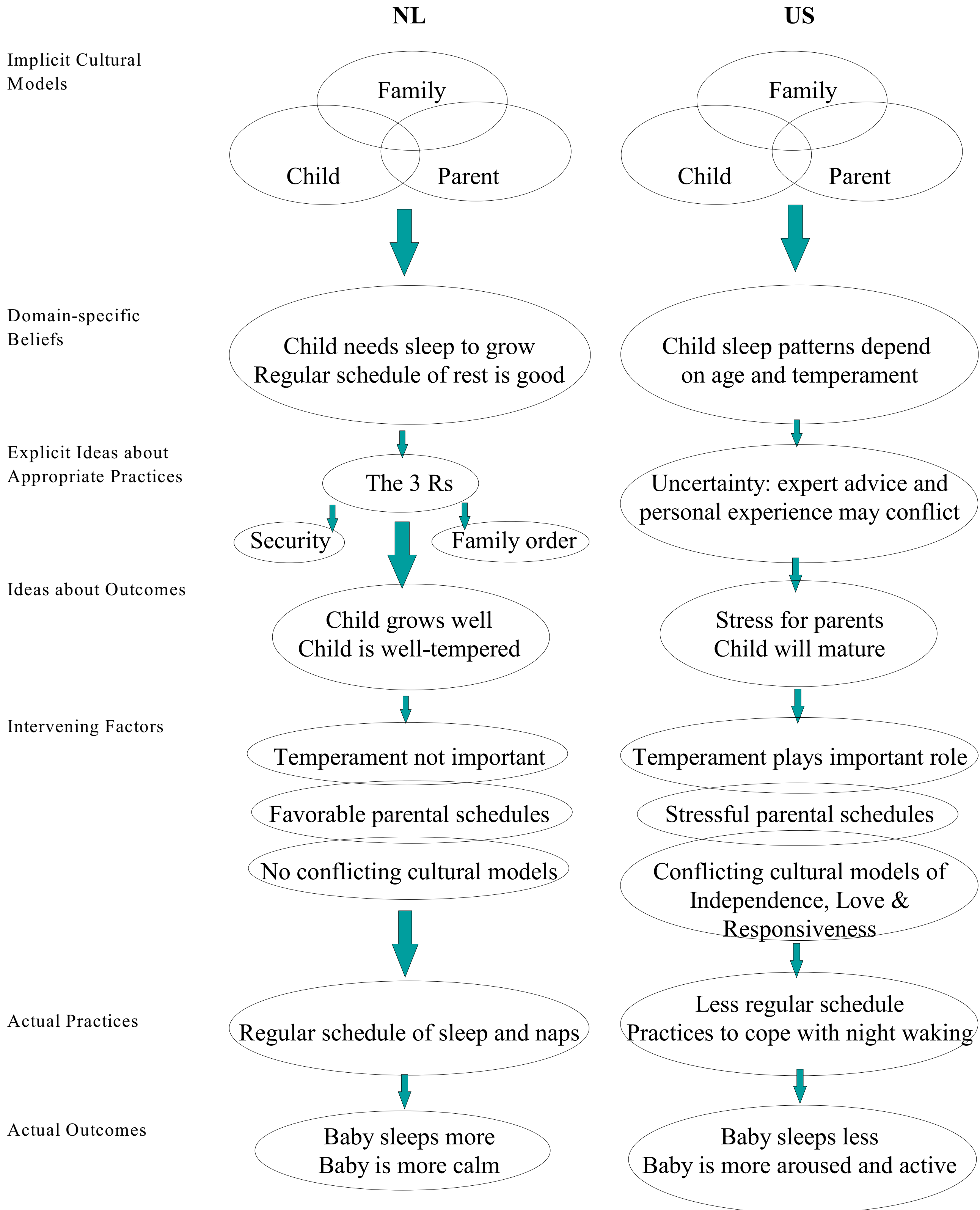
Figure Titles

Figure 1 A Model of Parental Ethnotheories, Practices, and Outcomes: Infant Sleep

Table x. Parents' descriptions of their children in six cultures

Australia	Italy	Netherlands	Spain	Sweden	USA
Common descriptors					
Sociable 15% Loving 8% Active 11% Strong-willed 6%	Sociable 9% Loving 9% Active 6% Strong-willed 10%	Sociable 7% Loving 8% Active 7% Strong-willed 8%	Sociable 8% Loving 10% Active 6% Strong-willed 7%	Sociable 11% Loving 6% Active 10% Strong-willed 5%	Sociable 10% Loving 8% Active 7% Strong-willed 6%
Culture-specific patterns					
Happy 15% Easy 6% Intelligent 9% Asks questions 8% Calm 8% Sensitive 8%	Asks questions 7% Easy 9% Well balanced 9% Even tempered 9% Knows what he wants 6% Simpatico 6%	Agreeable 5% Enjoys life 6% Happy 8% Long attention 8% Asks questions 6% Seeks attention 8% Regular 5%	Easy 21% Difficult 7% Socially mature 7% Good character 7% Happy 10% Intelligent 10% Alert 9%	Happy 19% Easy 10% Agreeable 7% Well balanced 9% Even temper 10% Secure 6% Persistent 5%	Intelligent 6% Cognitively advanced 5% Asks questions 8% Independent 5% Rebellious 5% Adaptable 5%


NL
US
Implicit Cultural Models
Family
Child
Parent
Family
Child
Parent
Domain-specific Beliefs
Child needs sleep to grow
Regular schedule of rest is good
Child sleep patterns depend on age and temperament
Explicit Ideas about Appropriate Practices
The 3 Rs
Security
Family order
Uncertainty: expert advice and personal experience may conflict
Ideas about Outcomes
Child grows well
Child is well-tempered
Stress for parents
Child will mature
Intervening Factors
Temperament not important
Favorable parental schedules
No conflicting cultural models
Temperament plays important role
Stressful parental schedules
Conflicting cultural models of Independence, Love & Responsiveness
Actual Practices
Regular schedule of sleep and naps
Less regular schedule
Practices to cope with night waking
Actual Outcomes
Baby sleeps more
Baby is more calm
Baby sleeps less
Baby is more aroused and active