

What Mothers of Young Children Care about: A Grounded Theory Study

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Abstract

Mainstream psychology of parenting styles minimizes the wisdom of mothers in being able to navigate parenting within a complex ever-changing system. This empirical study involves in-depth interviews conducted in two different contexts. This paper explores the major concerns mothers have about their child-rearing experiences, their children's welfare, and the impact that these concerns have had on their personal wellbeing. The paper will outline some ways in which mothers attempt to address the barriers to a fulfilling mother-child relationship.

Keywords: motherhood, parenting style, cultural context, child-rearing, family dynamics

1. Introduction

The frameworks used in parenting studies today originate in a Eurocentric model conceived almost seven decades ago. The first studies major on parenting in psychological literature began in earnest in the late 1950s and picked up steam over the last six decades. The effort has been to distill good parenting behaviors and attitudes that can reliably lead to successful child outcomes (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Robichaud, Bureau, Ranger, & Mageau, 2019).

Success in child outcomes has most frequently been defined as successful academic performance, though rarely self-regulation and emotional health have also been operationalized and measured as dependent variables (Sahithya, Manohari, & Vijaya, 2019; Tani, Pascizzi, & Rafagnino, 2018). Advice to parents have involved prescriptions for relating to children as a way of maximizing children's success. Today, parents globally confront a plethora of advice from sources scientific and popular, as to how to raise the right kind of child (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Much of this advice takes as relevant only in a marginal fashion the specific cultural and economic setting that mothers are raising their children in and even less, target advice specifically to mothers' concerns for their children's developmental needs (Delvecchio, Germani, Raspa, Lis, & Mazzeschi, 2020).

John Bowlby (1969) was one of the first psychologists to propose that early attachment was the key to infant survival. According to Bowlby, the quality of a child's attachment to the mother was principally influenced by the caregiver's behaviors towards the child and the consistency with which these behaviors are exhibited. Barbara Ainsworth (1970), a student of Bowlby added that caregivers who had had ideal interactions with their wards produced secure attachment in their children while caregivers who engaged in inconsistent nurturing produced children who were insecure. Her ideas have been applied in clinical settings and has been incorporated into the diagnostic manual of mental illness under the name Reactive Attachment Disorder.

In the 1970s the notion that parents, especially mothers are unquestionably responsible for any negative consequences for children gained strength within psychology. Diana Baumrind who is perhaps a leader of this research movement, elaborated on the concept of parenting styles as enduring patterns of interactions of parents with children that had long term consequences (Baumrind, 1971). She classified parenting styles into 4 different categories - democratic, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. She found in her work with suburban white parents that the democratic style was the most effective form of parenting and leads to the best outcomes in children. A count of the articles by the author revealed that in the early 1960s, there were a little over 50 articles on parent interactions with children published in psychological journals in the country. In 2014, the number of articles on parenting touched 5,000. Most parenting studies today are based on the parenting styles framework proposed by Baumrind nearly 5 decades ago (Kooraneh & Amirsardari, 2015; Sorkhabi, 2005).

There have been a number of studies and review articles critiquing Baumrind's work and its various offshoots but the basic framework and the reasoning that parents indeed have an enduring style of dealing with their children that is impervious to the contextual nature of the interaction has never been questioned (Chao, 1994; Gorman, 1998; Juan & Larry, 2004; Lamm & Keller, 2007; Quoss & Zhao, 1995). Some studies have found that there are class and cultural differences in parenting while others have found that age and gender of child makes a difference (Rudy & Grusec, 2001; Supple & Small, 2006). The most serious critique comes from examinations of the methodology that has been used to measure parenting style. In most scenarios, parents or their college student children are given a questionnaire to measure parenting styles. Since there are several dimensions to parenting styles, the minor connections that demonstrate statistical significance are selectively chosen to represent the entire spectrum of 'parenting style' and the results are typically generalized inappropriately (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Conger, 2009; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009).

In many of these conceptualizations of parenting, mothers are depicted as being principal determiners of the kinds of interactions that they seek with their children's lives. Discipline, control and warmth play an outside role in these theorizations; the picture of what children need from their parents is replete with biases that the investigator brings with them to the situation based on their own cultural and socio-economic contexts (Zulfiqar, 2020). Furthermore, parents are rarely looked at as subjects with their own needs and desires in relationship to their children. While there have been decades of research about what children might need from their parents at least in terms of interactions with them, there is little information regarding what parents value and seek within the context of their family lives in order to feel fulfilled as mothers and as functioning citizens in society. This is a very important aspect of the puzzle that is missing in terms of making policy determinations about healthy families.

The few research studies on the needs of parents have revolved around families of children with disabilities. One constant theme that emerge from studies of families of children with disabilities, is that parents need social support when they are dealing with a child with special needs (Nair, Jack, Meaney and Ronan, 2014; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). Thus, research with families of children with disabilities has shaped policies and allowed for better support for parents (Denman, 2014; Piškur, Beurskens, Jongmans, Ketelaar, & Smeets, 2015). A similar framework for looking at parents' needs when raising children who have not classified as needing special accommodations has not been established (Inglis, Lohn, Austin, & Hippman, 2014; Romaniuk, O'Mara, & Akhter-Danesh, 2014; Wiart, Darrah, Kelly, & Legg, 2015). Psychological literature is replete with studies that show gender, age, culture and social class significantly alter parenting styles as well as how well children function and develop within these different groups (Cheadle & Amato, 2011; Lareau, 2015). To adequately measure the effectiveness of parental behaviors it is critically important to examine how parents define their role in their children's lives, and what concerns they have in terms of child-rearing and the welfare of their children. It is also important to explore the contexts in which families make these choices and how the social web of the family's connections affect these perceptions.

To that end, this author used a grounded theory research methodology to explore the following questions:

- How did mothers of young children perceive their own role in their children's lives?
- What were some barriers that prevented them from fulfilling their vision of their roles?
- What were the consequences for mothers in the face of their difficulties in feeling fulfilled as mothers?
- What was their support system that helped them navigate the challenges of motherhood?

A grounded research design would allow the researcher to explore Indian parenting issues without a preconceived Eurocentric upper-class framework to color the findings of parental interviews. In other words allowing the interviewees to set the path forward with questions allows for the identification of new areas of concern for young parents.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

One of the metrics in grounded theory research is to interview new participants until there is no new information to be gained from further interviewing. In the present study, the saturation was achieved after interviewing 14 mothers of young children below the age of 5 in Chennai. In phase 2 of the study, we interviewed 11 mothers of young children from North America. Most of the interviews were conducted in the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018. All the mothers had children under the age of five.

2.2 Participant Characteristics

All the women who were interviewed had completed college; three women from India and two from the US had their MA degree. The mothers in India lived with the father of their children and seven lived in a joint family setting. Six of the women in the US lived with their children's father, two had remarried and three were single. Eight of the women in the Indian sample had two children and six had one child. Among the US mothers, one had three children. Seven had two children and three had one child each.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The sample was chosen after extensive outreach in both Chennai and in New York. Emails were sent out to principals of several community organization and neighborhood groups soliciting participants with young children. Everyone who offered to meet were interviewed and no one was rejected unless they did not have children under the age of 5.

2.3.1 Research Design

Before the study began, the women who were interviewed, were informed about the goals of the study. They were given a day before informed consent was signed. Special consideration was given so mothers could ask questions throughout the interview and initiate new trains of inquiry. They were permitted to ask to stop being interviewed or end a session at any point during the study. However, none of the participants chose to terminate the sessions; when participants felt uncomfortable about a question that was asked, they often chose to deflect the question or interpret it in a way that felt comfortable to them. Several participants suggested new paths of inquiry that the researcher had not thought about prior to the interview.

Grounded theory was the main methodology used to answer the questions listed above. This is a useful methodological framework to use when studying an area that has not been well explored in the past (Cole, 1988). Content analysis in this method involves organizing statements into broader categories and connecting them into themes that offer a framework to understand and interpret a phenomenon. Coding and content analysis provide a valid method to analyze spoken data (Chen, 2012; Trilling & Jonkman, 2018; Yang, Richardson, French, & Lehman, 2011).

2.3.2 Data Collection

Before conducting the interview, the researcher went over the goals of the study. The interviewer always began each interview with the question, if you were asked to explain your role as mother to your child, what would your response be? Based on the response the second question would be "I hear you saying _____, could say a little more about this"? The interviews were recorded and analyzed in Tamil in India, and then, the final report was translated into English. Each interview lasted about an hour and a half. When the responses were coded and no more categories were derived and no new information found, the researcher stopped further interviews. The researcher kept notes of any observations that were not directly recorded during the interview process to guide future interviews.

- Some of the topics that emerged from the initial interview with the Indian sample included:
- What are some areas of their children's development that mothers feel most responsible for?
- Who do mothers have to negotiate when making major decisions regarding their children?
- How do cultural issues add to their parenting framework?
- What are some major areas of life where mothers were left to make decisions about regarding the welfare of their children?
- What are some areas of their lives that mothers feel most conflicted about?
- What is the nature of the assistance that they obtain from others in their family and connections?

2.3.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and searched for words and phrases repeatedly used by the mothers in the interview. Groups of words and phrases were then classified into themes. The themes were then listed in a frequency table so the themes of American mothers and Indian mothers could be compared. Areas of cultural differences in themes for mothers were recorded and explored. Coding memos emphasized and explained the contextual differences and placed them within themes of cultural meanings and experiences. Participants were added until no new information was obtained. After the completion of the study, there were further analysis conducted on the memos and their connections to the major themes that emerged.

2.3.4 Rigor and Data Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of any qualitative study and it includes the validity of the themes based on the data gathered. How can the researcher be confident that the findings reflected the experiences of participants? The trustworthiness of the data was tested using the criteria of transferability, credibility, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was checked through feedback from the participants regarding the categories resulting from the analysis. Since participants were from two different cultural contexts, cross checking provided transferability while also pointing to some significant contextual influences. In addition, the author offered the data and findings to a colleague for peer feedback and cross-checking.

2.3.5 Ethical Considerations

The institutional human subjects review board at SUNY New Paltz approved the study and informed consent was sought of all participants. Participants could terminate the study at any point during the study. In addition, the confidentiality of the participants was maintained by erasing participant names when storing the interview data and assigning numbers instead. The interview transcripts were stored in private files that were accessible only to the researcher.

3. Results

There were several codes and frameworks that related to motherhood roles that consistently emerged early in the interviews. These were used to verify responses that participants gave in subsequent interviews and they were corroborated with an objective external coder. The themes are described below:

3.1 Motherhood as Ministerial Functionary

One major set of themes that emerged from their interviews was that they perceived that society framed their role as ministerial functionary. Many mothers began the exploration of their roles with the phrase *'I'm supposed to...'* or *'There's an expectation...'* Mothers felt they were responsible for managing the spaces where their children functioned and where there was potential for growth for all the members relating to the child. There were some areas of their family lives that they felt especially required their ministerial skills. The section below outlines some of these areas where these were manifested.

3.1.1 The Enjoyment of Family Life for Everyone

Interviews with mothers reflected the responsibility that the participants felt for creating the space for the family to enjoy each other. The women highlighted both the joys that arose from this role and the stress they endured as part of this role. This is reflected in the interviews of many of the parents in the sample:

"When M's dad comes home, he is often tired, so I try to keep my son away for a while. Once M's dad has rested, he is able to enjoy M." (US Mother, 6)

"My mom-in-law is old fashioned and very religious. It makes her happy when I teach my child Hindu shlokas. That is how I keep the peace." (Indian Mother, 8)

When there was conflict or tension between family members the mothers blamed themselves and used these as lessons on how to manage a similar situation better. The mothers felt responsible for the moods of other family members and they sometimes explicitly made a connection between the positive atmosphere in their homes to their children's optimum development. They actively looked for lessons to be learned and to apply in future spaces without demanding that other members of the family take some responsibility for the situation.

"When my husband is unreasonable or mean, I don't respond back because I don't want my baby to feel stressed." (Indian Mother, 12)

"My child loves my mother to come over and so when she is critical of my housekeeping skills, I don't give in to my urge to say something snarky". (US Mother, 4)

All the mothers interviewed confessed to playing the role of mediator between their children and the other members in the family to allow their children to get their needs met.

3.1.2 Physical, Emotional and Academic Growth of Children

One of the main areas where mothers repeatedly took on overwhelming responsibility is assuring that the basic physical, emotional, and academic needs of children are met. There were some cultural differences in this area of family life. For Indian mothers, this role meant ensuring access to the right nutrition for their children and making sure children were compliant within the home and school contexts. The Indian participants confessed to being torn between the convenience of buying pre-prepared meals and the harms they might be causing their

children. The availability of commercially made foods, offered both promise and led to guilt for these women as is reflected in this mother's statements:

"I want to add some flavorings to my child's milk, but you never know what they have in these chocolatey powders. But she just won't drink plain milk." (Indian Mother, 3)

One not too uncommon fear was that someone else, either the sitter at home or a worker or child in the daycare was eating the food prepared for their child. Mothers reported spending time when the child got back from the daycare to quiz them extensively about what they eat at school.

"My child is so fussy about food that it takes me an hour to feed him. I am not even sure he eats his food in school. Who has time to feed him in school? Probably some other kid is eating his lunch." (Indian Mother, 13).

For the US mothers in the sample, weaning their children formed a major source of frustration. Several mothers in the sample had internalized messages regarding the value of breastfeeding but found that they could not continue to breastfeed beyond the first few months. They expressed guilt about not doing their best for their children and worried about what it would do to their bonding with their children.

"I never had enough milk to keep my babies satisfied; so, I resorted to formula early. My friends say I should have persisted. I cannot not feel guilty..." (US Mother 7).

Both mothers in India and the US emphasized the importance of exposing children to work that they may encounter in schools and in the US context to prepare their children for the extended days when their child might have to sit in compliance for long hours. For Indian mothers, this mainly meant teaching children obedience to authority and the elders in the family. On the other hand, mothers in the US spent time exploring all the latest toys and manipulatives that might help their children develop. When dealing with issues with their children's health, many US mothers expressed frustration at the high expectations that society held for what is considered successful.

"I try to shield my child against these messages. I read about how so many young people are depressed and anxious and I worry these pressures will affect my child." (US Mother, 2)

Both sets of mothers interviewed viewed themselves as managers of their children's emotional development. They also felt blamed for their children's displays of negative emotions. For Indian mothers, teaching their children emotional control was a central concern while for the US sample, authentic emotional expression was repeatedly cited as an important goal for maturity. The contrast was especially evident in the reactions that mothers had to children's outburst of emotion.

"My daughter was very rude to my mother when she took away her doll. This was totally unacceptable to me and my husband. We told her she had to apologize to my mother. She watches cartoons and learns these bad habits" (Indian Mother, 5)

"My son had a tantrum in the supermarket. I just let him cry and refused to pay any attention. People were looking at me weird like I abused my child. It's awkward in public but I am not going to be controlling how he is expressing his unhappiness." (US Mother, 9)

In summary, both groups of mothers felt that they were managerial functionaries for their children's growth, and they were constantly trying to navigate a variety of forces that all claimed attention and had competing interests. In many of these situations, the mother's main task was described as one of balancing a variety of obligations.

3.1.3 Builders of Communities

Indian mothers and US mothers spoke extensively about their role as social managers. The connections that they helped foster between their children and others in the social network was an immense source of pride for the women. Indian mothers most often mentioned the grand-parents, especially the grand-mother as a partner in raising children. They worried about the child not bonding with his or her grandparents while the mother worked. In fact, Indian fathers did not seem to factor into the major decisions that mothers made about their children nor did they worry about facilitating attachment with fathers at least as evidenced from their responses:

My son is so attached to my mother in law; she had to leave for her sisters for a few days and now he cries in the evening and is fussy at night" (Indian Mother, 14)

"My child spends more time with her grandmother than she does with me. So she has just stopped listening to my words. It is frustrating." (Indian Mother 9)

The main social connections discussed by US mothers in relationship to childrearing were those of the father of the child and the siblings. The extended family did not take part in essential decisions made about their children. US mothers facilitated communication between their children and the child's siblings and deliberately attempted to teach pro-social values in these spaces.

"I want my children to learn to share with each other. So, I actively intervene when one is bullying another.... I usually don't allow them to resolve stuff by themselves." (US Mother 5)

Some mothers spoke about their struggles with their ex-partners who were the father of their children. For those who had a non-conflicted relationship with their ex-partner, it was easy to communicate and they perceived the fathers as co-partners in raising the children. They worked at maintaining the relationship to facilitate their children's growth. For mothers in a conflicted relationship with their children's fathers, the relationship was fraught with lost opportunities and emotional stress. The mothers asserted that they try to navigate the terrain with the best interests of their children in mind. Divorce and its consequences were a part of many American mothers' experiences being a parent and it changed how the mothers disciplined their children.

"I get so angry with C's dad. He just will spoil her and leave me to enforce discipline and it's just frustrating. If she doesn't learn now, she's going to grow up to be so impulsive and just a self-centered person." (US Mother 8)

They reevaluated their actions after a move or a re-marriage of the partner. None of the Indian mothers interviewed were divorced or separated and so these problems were not something they were struggled with.

3.2 Consequences on Mothers

Interviewees valued their role as mothers to their children. However, they also expressed significant stress and role conflict related to the weight of the responsibilities that they felt that they had. Both samples of mothers felt uncertain and conflicted about the many roles they occupied within a family and work setting and the implication of these for their children's welfare. As one mother described it, "It is like trying to stay upright in constantly shifting ground." The results of trying to cultivate the best space for children's growth were stress and role-conflict for both, but they manifested differently in the mothers' lives based on their specific contexts.

3.2.1 Stress

Stress is defined in a variety of ways, most of these locating stress as a physical, mental, and emotional tension that is a response of a person to change. Most interviewees in the study articulated some level of stress that came out of being disproportionately in charge of their children's future life outcomes. Even though most participants worked full-time, and they had others living in the same household, they did not generally hold others responsible for their children's welfare. Thus, mothers in both cultures exhibited stress in relation to their children's welfare. The sources of the stress came from many quarters such as having to manage the spaces of optimal growth for their children, keeping the peace among the many participants in the child's life, making choices that related to nutrition and physical development, academic and intellectual growth, emotional and social progress - in the midst of immense social change.

Participants in the US exhibited familiarity with psychological theories and child rearing techniques, and this led to heightened expectations and corresponding tension that was related to the responsibility that they perceived over their children's future life circumstances (Bradley, 2015; Cozzi & Vinel, 2015). The US sample of mothers of young children repeatedly expressed concern over not being able to reach established milestones that drove their interactions on behalf of their children. Since there were ever new goal posts, mothers were constantly evaluating their children's progress. Small deviations from norms and other idiosyncrasies observed in their children led to stress in mothers. This was accompanied by marking and measuring of their children's growth and anxieties related to their children not meeting the standards of development.

"I am a little worried because A is not very good at fine motor skills, I am going to keep an eye on her so if she needs help, we can get it for her early. My doctor says not worry but I do." (US Mother, 11).

Many writers have written about the trend in the increasing medicalization of childhood problems and for many American mothers, the choices presented to them to address real or imagined problems were sources of stress. The American mothers in the study repeatedly stated that they were afraid that they might not act in the most appropriate ways to help their child. None of the Indian mothers in the study expressed this fear. Indian mothers displayed much less knowledge of childhood developmental milestones and their worries were mostly vague generalized anxieties or related to nutritional health. Indian mothers had very concrete stresses related to maximizing the life chances of their children in a hyper-competitive world.

3.2.2 Role-Conflict

The mothers interviewed in both settings answered in the affirmative when they were asked about the conflicts that they felt in their many roles within the family. Role-conflict is the contradiction that people feel in their different roles in their day to day life and the fulfilling of their basic responsibilities. While the US sample expressed higher levels of stress, Indian mothers express increased role-conflict. Many of the Indian interviewees lived in a larger family setting with more members and this added to the stress of raising their children. They perceived the fathers of the children to be mainly breadwinners; however, their mothers and mothers-in-law played a bigger role in raising their children leading to conflicts between them. Their responsibilities towards their jobs, the elders in the family and their children created a situation of ongoing role-conflict.

Many of the working Indian mothers felt guilty for being away from their children, especially if the other members in the home were not quite equipped to take care of their children. They took pride in their work and their capacity to earn their own living, but it was accompanied by regrets at not being able to be there for their children. As this one mother said,

"S was sick today; she was throwing up all day. I think my mother-in-law might have given her too many sweets. I had to leave her and go to work. I don't think I'll have another child. It's just too much..." (Indian Mother, 11)

US mothers did express role-conflict but to a lesser extent. Most were satisfied with the daycares their children went to, and while they expressed some regret for having to part with their children every day, they did not consider it enough for them to reconsider working. They also rationalized that it allowed them to buy the things their children need to do well. Some participants expressed that their family could utilize all the resources they can afford to assure stability for themselves and their children. As this US mother explained,

"I would not stop working even with all the stress. I think about all the things I can afford for my child because we have more expendable income. Besides, if something happens to my marriage, I want to be self-sufficient." (American Mother 8)

4. Discussion

In the last 50 years the number of research studies the impact of parental behaviors on children has grown exponentially (Baumrind, 1971; Conger, 2009; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009). The methodology of these studies leads readers to believe that the impact is uniform across contexts (Alsheikh, Parameswaran, & Elhoweris, 2010; Abubakar, Van de Vijver, Suryani, Handayani, & Pandia, 2015; Baumrind, 1971; Kenney, Lac, Hummer, Grimaldi, & LaBrie, 2015; Batool & Bond, 2015). The results of this study demonstrate that mothers are constantly finetuning the environment their children are growing up in, based on complex factors that provide both opportunities for growth as well as challenges to be overcome (Kenney, Lac, Hummer, Grimaldi, & LaBrie, 2015; Pinguart, 2015). Lareau (2006) pointed out that working class parents encourage the *accomplishment of natural growth* in their children while middle class parents engage in *concerted cultivation* of their children. The latter group values conventional educational attainment more highly than the former. As exhibited in this study mothers of young children in India are concerned about academic development in their children but they operationalize it as being to sit still for a long period and they value even more that their children are responsible members of a larger family unit.

American mothers do think about academic success and they expend resources looking for early supports to help develop their children's intellectual growth. They also visualize personal development as self and emotional expression skills. American parents had a better knowledge of the commercial options to facilitate learning especially via technology and looked to fulfill their goals for their children via consumer choices and behaviors. Thus, US mothers, like the middle-class mothers in Lareau's study wanted to actively *cultivate* the knowledge, skills and dispositions that would lead to school success for their children. However, for them school success was not an end goal; only one of the many paths to their children's fulfilled life. Cultural and economic contexts are central in determining parenting (Chao, 1994; Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005; Juan & Larry, 2004; Stewart, 2007).

When mainstream psychologists devise parenting questionnaires, the assumption is often that there is one clear caregiver who is often the biological parent of the child. In many cultural contexts such as in the Indian context, it is not just the biological or socially accepted caregivers who have authority over the child but others in the extended family. Parental decision-making regarding discipline and control is very different depending on the number of people involved with childcare and how the mother and her child are connected to them. The lack of

active involvement of Indian fathers in the day to day disciplining or decision making around children might in fact be classified as neglectful in a Eurocentric framework but none of the Indian mothers who were interviewed discussed this as a source of stress.

The consequences of maintaining the many relationships in their familial web as they related to their children's welfare resulted in significant levels of role-conflict for the Indian mothers ((Anandaiah & Cho, 2000). While they appreciated the help that the family elders provided they were confused about the efficacy of their advice with child-rearing and often perceived this advice as antithetical to being successful in the context of modern day capitalism with few opportunities and where competition and getting ahead was valued. US mothers experienced significantly more stress than Indian mothers did (Mintz, 2004; Kalil, 2015). Children are studied and marked for deviance from infancy and their departure from population norms are a subject of both scientific and popular concerns. The web of relationships that US mothers must negotiate may be unstable and decisions may change from time to time depending on the availability and reliability of a partner. US mothers are engaged in a web of relationships that is just as complex as the Indian mothers were, and this requires a more complex understanding of parenting styles in the US context. It is not surprising that with the public knowledge of the science of child development, US mothers have an intimate knowledge of developmental milestones and react with great concern when their children deviate from the norm in behavior and disposition.

Both Indian and US interviewees exhibited concern for their children's social development. However, while Indian mothers worried about their children's emotional control, US mothers spoke about allowing their children adequate emotional expression. Indian mothers reported worrying that their children were too aggressive or too emotionally sensitive to other people and they wanted their children to develop strong emotional regulation. American mothers expressed a need to allow for the development of their children's emotional full expressiveness even when it caused them embarrassment. They worried about self-confidence and esteem and perceived self-esteem to have a long-term impact.

In conclusion, parenting decisions are affected by many variables besides the immediate spaces of interactions between the parents and the child. It does not occur in a vacuum and is often influenced by social, cultural, and economic contexts. Parenting behaviors is an outcome of a web of social connections that include the major figures in the inner circle of the child, the cultural expectations that undergird the relationship, and the affordances in the environment that allow for parental decision making regarding issues such as discipline, warmth and control. Parents often consider changing nutritional standards, the goals for their children, adults who are available to help care for their children and the fears about deviance and normativity when making decisions about their children (Kakar, 1981; Rao, McHale, & Pearson, 2003; Seymour, 1999; Sharma, 1996).

5. Implications for Future Studies

5.1 New Paths for Investigation

The author intends to use the findings of this study to develop questionnaires that probe the nature of cultural, social, and economic differences in parental decision-making. The participants of this study spoke about the importance of exploring parenting not just as belonging within a family of blood relatives but as inclusive of factors associated with the neighborhood and larger religious and social issues. Another study would have to be conducted to identify the larger factors that play a role in parental decision making. For instance, one of the US subjects wondered how a lack of maternity leave for women in the US might affect the concerns that they exhibit compared to most women in the organized sector in India who do have access to maternity leave.

Another area of new investigations might include the impact of household composition and the influence on child-rearing. In the India sample, there were several members of the same family living in the same household and who took active decision-making roles in a child's life. In the American context, the main decision-makers were the biological parents of the child. This study demonstrated that this had a differential impact on stress and role-conflict on the parents. It might be interesting to study the ways in which family composition influenced decision-making regarding childrearing. The goals of the current study were less about the actual decisions made by families than it was about the concerns that mothers expressed around these issues.

5.2 Operationalize Important Terms

It is important to further define what terms such as stress and role-conflict mean and find culturally appropriate ways to operationalize these terms. Thus, rather than conceiving of universally prescriptive parenting behaviors, formulating connections between various factors in particular contexts regarding child development and parental support might lead to a more constructive and family centered picture of parent-child relationships. Such

conceptualizations might offer policy makers useful tools to support families and children in varied contexts (September, Rich, & Roman, 2016).

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