

AN ECO-CULTURAL AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT OVER THE LIFE SPAN

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to illustrate the role of culture for development over the life-span. First, theoretical approaches on development in culture are presented, starting from early anthropological to recent eco-cultural approaches. Then culture-specific conceptualisations of development over the life span are discussed, including childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Finally, recent studies on subjective theories, transmissions of values, and intergenerational relations are discussed as aspects of a more extended interpersonal relations approach to development in culture.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is based on several assumptions. The first is that human development starts before birth and ends with death. Therefore, a life-span perspective is needed. The second assumption is that human development takes place in a given cultural context; it is both affected by culture and affects culture. Culture and human development are constantly interacting. Therefore, a culture-inclusive life-span view of human development is taken here. Such a view is still not common in developmental psychology which has mainly been advanced in Western cultures.

Historically, human development was seen as taking place in infancy and childhood, thus assuming that further development is not very interesting. Most personality characteristics (e. g., intelligence, social competence) were seen as fully developed by young adulthood without undergoing significant changes thereafter. With more refined empirical studies on human development it became obvious that individual behavior can significantly change until very old age. Therefore, an important issue of modern developmental psychology is to study stabilities and change of human development over the life span.

One explanation of changes in human behavior over the life span focuses on biological processes (e.g., hormonal production in puberty; biological changes in old age). Another approach to developmental change focuses on the changing social roles throughout the course

of one's life, thereby studying age-related norms and "developmental tasks." Both perspectives are too narrow since they ignore the role of the individual person who actively constructs his/her development. These perspectives need to be integrated in a broader framework of development in culture (Valsiner, 2000). The neglect of culture in present developmental research is amazing since even a historical perspective on changes of developmental tasks in one society, the United States, clearly demonstrates significant differences among various cohorts. For example, the period of adolescence is extended, or the beginning of adulthood is no longer characterized by establishing a family, and leaving one's parents house since marriage and parenthood is no longer a normative event in the life of an adult man or a woman. Thus it is problematic to define a specific developmental age by reference to chronological age. At least the functional age, the biological age, the psychological and the social age need to be taken into account. The social age is defined by expectations of the socio-cultural group which role a person should play at a certain chronological age. The social meaning of age groups can change according to the "social construction" of age and development. Studies on cognitive development in old age demonstrate significant cohort differences related to effects of different schooling in different historical periods in the United States. These and other findings have challenged traditional developmental methodology and have resulted in refined research designs combining cross-sectional, longitudinal, and time-lag methods (sequential testing) in order to disentangle effects of age, cohort and period. However, cross-cultural methods are still rarely used. Another example in the same line of reasoning is that longevity, which is a result of scientific and medical advancement, occurs for an increasingly larger proportion of older adults and offers new options for development over the life span in technologically- advanced modern societies. Accordingly, very old age has become a new phenomenon in developmental psychology which simply cannot be accounted for by a social constructionist view but obviously is obviously affected by interactions between biological conditions and culture.

Modern developmental psychology now goes far beyond infancy and childhood, and includes studies on adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Even intra-cultural comparisons based on data from different historical periods point to the impact of culture and of changing socio-cultural norms on development. They also demonstrate that the conceptualisation of human development, the areas of research in developmental psychology, and the understanding of development over the life course has changed significantly during the last century. A historical view alone can already demonstrate the influence of the socio-cultural context on development, the conceptualisation of human development, the choice of topics for research, the theorizing, the methods used, and the empirical results. However, a major shortcoming of developmental psychology still is the uncritical neglect of culture in human development. This is also true for the study of human development over the life span.

Theoretical Approaches on Development in Culture

The low importance of culture-inclusive studies in developmental psychology is especially surprising given the relatively long tradition in this field. Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of modern psychology, extensively elaborated on culture's effect on human behavior. Also, at the beginning of the 20th century, early anthropological research demonstrated relationships between culture, socialization practices, and child development. In his classical ethnographic studies, Radcliffe-Brown (1964) analysed observational data on the Andaman Islanders from about 1904; Malinowski (1922) studied the Trobriand Islanders during the First World War. After that time, cultural anthropology in the United States was blooming. The famous "Culture and Personality School" emerged, partially initiated by Franz Boas. It was further advanced by Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, both searching for "patterns of culture" and

their relation to personality characteristics. After the decline of the "Culture and Personality School," the "hologeistic" (whole world) approach followed. It was assumed that economic conditions influence child development. Barry, Bacon, and Child (1967) described agricultural as compared to hunting and fishing cultures as contexts where children learn more compliance, nurturance, and responsibility and less self-reliance and initiative. The authors base their conclusions on the analysis of data from 100 societies (from the Human Relations Area Files), which is characteristic of hologeistic approaches.

The underlying idea of these studies was that the socio-economic and cultural context gives rise to specific socialization conditions which influence the developmental outcomes of the child. In this simple eco-cultural model a direct influence of culture on the person was assumed. This was in contrast to the search for universals based on the assumption of biological factors influencing development. The underlying question was whether biological ("nature") or environmental factors ("nurture") are more influential. This question has dominated studies in developmental and cross-cultural psychology for many years.

A major problem of these early anthropological studies was the underlying assumption that relationships between context (or socialization conditions) and developmental outcomes (personality characteristics) are unidirectional: the cultural context was seen as influencing child behavior. Little attention was paid to the processes underlying such influences such as biologically-rooted conditions for learning in relation to influences of the environment and in relation to the needs and the ability of the child, or the individual differences with respect to ways the child internalises cultural values or develops specific competences.

In the meantime, more refined theorizing has modified this simple eco-cultural model of development. Whiting and Whiting (1975) in their famous Six Cultures Study and more specifically Bronfenbrenner (1979) differentiated between various aspects of the context, assuming that the various levels of the context are interrelated both affecting and being affected by development.

In contrast to the eco-cultural models (the simple and the refined), Super and Harkness (1997) assumed that causal relationships between the context and the person do not exist. The authors suggest that the child grows up in a "developmental niche" which consists of "subjective child-rearing theories," "caretaker psychology," "parental ethno-theories," and "parents' cultural belief systems." Following the reasoning of Vygotsky, development is understood here as "guided participation in cultural activity". Cultural values and parental beliefs are seen as part of the developmental context which can be changed by activities of the child. Direction and processes of relevant influences are not specified in this model.

Both the eco-cultural model and the model of the developmental niche have strengths and weaknesses which let us assume that an integrative model may be more fruitful (Trommsdorff & Dasen, 2001). Such an integration may be possible when taking into account context variables such as the socio-economic system, religion, the family system, and so forth with respect to their specific meaning for the relevant caretakers and the children. Thus, the subjective representations and value orientations of the individual caretaker, their socialization practices, the child's personality, and the quality of relations between the child and the caretaker become important. This integrative model assumes that according to the meaning system of the context, human development can follow different pathways.

Also, with respect to the above-mentioned question of which is more important, "nature" or "nurture," more refined studies starting in infancy and even before birth take genetic and

environmental conditions and their interrelations into account (Plomin, 2000; Rowe, 1994). Typically, in behavior genetic research, interaction processes between mothers and their infants are observed over time, including measures of genetic factors, temperament, and various personality variables. This research and longitudinal studies on twins as compared to adopted children have demonstrated that empirical evidence does not show simple unidirectional influences of environment on developmental "outcomes." Instead, the active construction of development by the child has to be taken into account. Also, mutual interrelations between the person and his/her environment build up even before birth (during pregnancy) and give rise to differential developmental paths.

The present approach starts from a specific conceptualisation of culture. The cultural context is seen here to provide certain options and restrictions for development. At the same time it provides a "shared meaning system," which allows the individual person to internalise certain cultural values and to develop adaptive competences. The developmental outcome is affected to a certain degree by the given context depending on its meaning for the person and the person's active modification of the context during his or her own development. Thus, possible universalities of human development which base on biological processes may function in different ways according to the given cultural context and the related proximate contexts (e.g., the family) according to its respective subjective meaning. To summarize, one may see development and context as being related with each other in ways that optimise the respective "goodness-of-fit." This is a life-long process.

Culture-Specific Conceptualisations of Development over the Life Span

In considering culture-specific conceptualisations of development over the life span, an initial quite striking approach is to search for culture-specific values of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. For example, in some cultures, *childhood* directly leads to adulthood without transitions such as the developmental stage of adolescence. In these cultures, children are continuously prepared to take adult roles, including having children of their own, as soon as their physical maturation allows.

Furthermore, the developmental tasks related to the different developmental stages obviously differ among cultures; and they can change in one culture over time. For instance, in some cultures children are free from any adult responsibilities. They are viewed as being part of heaven and God as historically was the case in Japan (Kojima, 1986). In other cultures, children are seen as economic resource for the parents and the family. In Western societies, children are rather regarded as separate or independent, they are rather conceived of as partners of their parents, or as little adults being responsible for what they are doing and having to decide themselves; they are conceived of as having certain rights for which they get institutionalised support. Early in life they acquire the need to be strong-willed and self-determined, as is the case in many "post-modern" Western cultures (Kuczynski, in press).

Another example is *adolescence* which in some cultures simply does not occur because of the obligation to take over adult roles right after physical maturation. The end of childhood and beginning of adolescence is characterized in some cultures by extended (gender specific) rituals, separation of male adolescents from the family and integration in the male peer group headed by an adult male leader. In other cultures, due to the increasing role of education, adolescence is a separate and sometimes difficult developmental stage which is rather extended relative to other developmental stages. Here, adolescence is characterized by a more or less prolonged "moratorium" which should allow the adolescents develop a sense of identity in order to be able to fulfil adult roles later on. Some studies support the view that this

period is characterized as "storm and stress" and emotional insecurity, contradicting other studies which did not find empirical support for the notion of adolescence as a period of crisis. A dominant view has been that adolescence is characterized by striving for autonomy and independence from parents and by achieving developmental growth through relatedness with peers. However, cross-cultural studies show culture-specific relations between parents and their adolescent children related to the adolescents' preference for independence and autonomy.

Adulthood is usually characterized by establishing a family, taking responsibilities as parents, and as active members of the society (e. g., in economic production; in political institutions). However, cultures differ with respect to conceptualising adulthood and related developmental tasks of adults. Also, social changes are affecting the gender role, and thereby the family system, including the conditions for child care and parent-child relations.

The concept of *old age* is related to different age groups in different cultures, presumably depending on the "normal" life expectancy in a specific culture. In many industrialized societies development over the life span is extended into very old age. This is brought about by technological and social changes which give rise to increasing longevity as well as related changes in the roles of women and men, family systems, and developmental conditions such as health and well-being. Therefore, the concept of old age comprises different meanings in different cultures. Certain cultures pay high respect to old aged people who are conceived of as possessing "natural" legitimate authority and wisdom, and who are taken care of by the family. In contrast, in modern urbanized societies the nuclear family prevails and independence is highly valued; here old aged people rather prefer to be independent, relying on their own resources and/or the social welfare system. This again affects development over the life span and the related cultural context.

Development in Culture: A Life Span and Interpersonal Relations Approach

In the following, we can only focus on some selected areas which are of special importance for the study on human development in culture when taking a life-span perspective. We will first discuss the role of culture for both the caretaker and the child, including goals and practices as parts of the developmental niche. Second, we will focus on the question of how the "developmental outcome" comes about; we will refer to the relations between caretaker and the child, including the socio-emotional bases for the transmission of values in development. Third, we will briefly report on an ongoing cross-cultural study which aims to understand the transmission of values over the generations on the basis of development over the life-span.

Subjective theories and values. Subjective theories of caretakers are often conceived of as ethno-theories reflecting the values of the respective culture; they influence the developmental goals (what characteristics the child should develop?) and the developmental time table (at which age the child should achieve certain abilities?). Also, the behavior of the caretaker varies according to their subjective theories (Goodnow, 1995). Therefore, cultural differences in such developmental theories and goals often occur (Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001; Schäermeier, Friedlmeier, Trommsdorff, & Vasconcellos, 2002). These culture-specific theories, goals, and practices are part of the "developmental niche" of the child (Super & Harkness, 1997) influencing the child's development.

Our own cross-cultural studies on ethno-theories of German, Brazilian, and Korean caretakers have shown that caretaker's child-rearing goals depends less on their personal characteristics

but rather on the norms and values of the society the caretakers are living in (Schäfermeier et al., 2002). Usually, caregivers' child-rearing goals and also practices are part of the general goal to foster the development of those qualities and attitudes in the children which are needed to fulfill certain roles in the society successfully, or more specifically, in their relevant social sub-group. This is another example for the notion of "goodness-of-fit."

To give an example of the relation between caretaker's goals, beliefs, and behavior, Japanese mothers believe in harmonious relations and emphasize cooperation, compliance, and empathy, while German mothers rather prefer the developmental goals independence and individuality, therefore enforcing their child's autonomy. In case of conflicts, Japanese as compared to German mothers rather empathize with their child's needs and attribute their child's behavior to positive factors ("child is only a child") (Kornadt & Trommsdorff, 1990; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, in press). Japanese mothers' sensitivity fosters the establishment of a very close emotional bond with their child. On this "secure" basis the child can control negative emotions more successfully than is the case for German children (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993).

These differences coincide with cultural values of social orientation in Japan and individuality in Germany and are related to the individualism-collectivism dimension on the cultural level (Hofstede, 2001) and to differences in self-construals on the individual level (independence versus interdependence; cf. Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Also, these results are in line with several cross-cultural studies showing that the preference for independence is more pronounced in individualistic cultures while the preference for interdependence is more relevant in social-oriented cultures even though intra-cultural differences exist. A strict dichotomy suggested by these concepts (autonomy/relatedness; individualism/collectivism; independence/interdependence) is too artificial. For instance, studies on changing societies (in transition from traditionality to modernity) show that both dimensions may be integrated (Kagitcibasi, 1996). It can be assumed that the need for both autonomy and relatedness characterizes human development throughout the life span and allows for adaptation to social change and changing developmental tasks.

Transmission of values as a "developmental outcome." The next question is whether cultural values do not only affect parents' developmental goals and child-rearing practices but are also visible in values, beliefs, and behavior as part of the developmental outcomes of the next generation. Therefore, the transmission of parents' developmental goals to the child need to be studied. This is related to the question of internalisation of values (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Though culture-inclusive research is necessary for understanding the processes of transmission this has so far not been studied cross-culturally.

Cross-cultural research has shown that the "same" parental goal or the "same" child-rearing practice may have very different meanings in different cultural contexts. For instance, "independence" as a developmental goal may have the meaning that the child can take care of the younger siblings or the household duties without the help of the adult caretakers. Or, "independence" goals may mean that the child makes decisions on his/her own (e. g., with respect to choosing a professional training or a marriage partner). The goal of "independence" can thus be rather related to the needs of the family or of the child (as a separate entity). Also, child-rearing practices have different meanings depending on the cultural context. Japanese adolescents who are growing up in a group-oriented versus an individual oriented culture rather believe they are rejected by their parents when parents' conformity demands are missing and independence is demanded. This is in striking contrast to German adolescents who rather feel rejected in case of parental conformity demands (Trommsdorff, 1995).

However, in addition to these culture-specificities one may recognize a universal relationship: when parents' behavior is consistent with the general cultural values, children are more inclined to feel accepted and also to accept such parental behavior as is the case in a harmonious parent-child relationship.

A central precondition for such a relationship can be seen in attachment (e.g., secure, insecure, avoidant) which also constitutes a basis for interpreting the relation between oneself and the environment ("internal working model"). Relatively few cross-cultural studies have demonstrated universalities in the function and structure of attachment for child development and culture-specificities in the caretaker's behavior such as sensitivity (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). Our own studies show that measurements of mothers' sensitivity need to include culture-specific functions, e.g., proactive and reactive behavior of mothers in interaction with their child (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993).

Only a few cross-cultural studies on the relations between caretaker's beliefs, child-rearing, and child development in different cultural context have been carried out. The notion of bi-directionality in parent-child relation dynamics (Kuczynski, in press; Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997) has hardly ever been taken into account in cross-cultural research. Systematic analyses of cross-cultural studies on parenting and child development show that bi-directionality is just one possible facet of parent-child relation dynamics which can occur to a greater or lesser degree in certain cultures, and can change in degree over the life span (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, in press). One conclusion of these studies is that the relationship context (and its culture-specific meaning) has to be taken into account in order to understand bi-directional processes between parents and children, and its effects on child development.

To summarize, at least two factors have to be dealt with when studying the transmission of values: (a) what kind of parent-child relation (including child-rearing) and (b) which cultural context allows for the most effective transmission? Asking these questions again points out to the idea of "goodness-of-fit". More specifically, cross-cultural studies are needed to test whether the internalisation of parental values by the children can be improved a) when related parental goals and practices are in accordance with the prevailing cultural values and the needs of the child, b) when the child can understand the meaning of the parents' behavior, and c) when the parent-child relationship is emotionally warm and close.

Value-of-Children and Intergenerational Relations. To summarize, research on cultural contexts, caretaker's ethnotheories, developmental goals, and practices may permit an understanding of how cultural values are transmitted to the next generation, affecting the child's development. This is the underlying idea of our presently ongoing study on "Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations" (Trommsdorff, 2001) which, however, goes one step further since it studies the relations between culture and development over the life span and across several generations. The starting point for this study was the original "Value of Children" (VOC) study in the 1970s. This large international study aimed to explain the conditions for differences in fertility and population growth over the world (Arnold et al., 1975). Differences in fertility have for a long time been seen as a result of economic conditions: Parents of low economic status were assumed to prefer a larger number of children (and prefer sons) because of economic needs: they were assumed to ascertain economic support by the children until old age. However, the economic value of children does not explain why children are born when families enjoy a high economic status. Even though the number of children decreases in affluent societies, this only means a decline of fertility. Other values besides the economic value of children should be relevant for the decision to have a child. Such values can be related to the intrinsic pleasure to have a child, or to take the

responsibility for the development of a new human being, or to expect an intimate companion for later life.

In our own studies we have found significant differences in the value of children between different cultures and also between the generations (of mothers and grandmothers). For example, Indonesian as compared to Japanese, Korean, or German mothers still express a higher economic and social value of children without necessarily having a lower intrinsic-psychological value of children (Trommsdorff, Zheng, & Tardif, in press). Also cultural differences exist with respect to gender preference. However, it seems much too simple to only attribute these differences to an economic value. Instead, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions of ancestor worship can be much more important. Gender preference can even go into the opposite direction: Japanese mothers no longer prefer a son (as was the case some decades ago) but they rather prefer a daughter; they expect their daughters to be emotionally close companions for their old age (Makoshi & Trommsdorff, in press).

While some research on parental ethnotheories has explicitly studied relations to child-rearing, this was less the case in the original research on the VOC which was mainly interested in explaining child-bearing (fertility). However, the question of child bearing needs to be related to the question how child-rearing takes place. Studies by Hoffman (1987) and Kagitcibasi (1996) in the context of VOC have demonstrated significant positive correlations between high economic value of children and high conformity oriented parenting.

The next necessary step would be to study the function of parenting for the development of the children. Therefore, our modified study on "Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations" aims to fill this deficit (Trommsdorff, 2001). Starting from an eco-cultural and developmental approach, a model will be tested which includes (1) the cultural values and socio-economic factors as *contextual factors*, (2) the *person variables* such as individual beliefs, attachment, and value orientations, (3) the *relationship variables* with respect to a) the own child (including preferred child-rearing practices and investments in the child) and b) the own parents (including given support). The relationships among these three aspects (context, person, parent-child relationship) are studied for three (biologically related) generations: adolescents, mothers, and grandmothers in (at least) six cultures (Germany, Israel, Turkey, Republic of Korea, China, and Indonesia) (Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2001). Multi-level analyses are planned to take context, person, and relationships into account. We are, in short, attempting to gain insight into universal and culture-specific processes of development over the life span, and to shed light on the transmission of values over several generations. In the process we plan to contribute to the understanding of interactions between individual development, intergenerational relations, and social change.

Conclusions

This short chapter has highlighted some advantages and difficulties related to a life-span developmental cultural psychology. The method of comparing psychological phenomena in different cultural contexts allows for the testing of universalities and for taking into account culture-specific aspects of these processes. The opportunity to overcome an ethnocentric bias is therefore offered along with the chance to disentangle otherwise confounded variables. One may especially control the effects of certain contextual conditions which can be theoretically assumed to affect development (e. g., socio-economic structure, cultural values, family system) without however being able to fully account for the complexity of the context. Still, one may select those contexts which represent the most relevant theoretical variables.

Two more aspects on the relation between culture and development are to be mentioned. First, socio-cultural conditions and changes affect human development. Second, human development affects the socio-cultural context and may contribute to cultural stability and change. Both sides have to be taken into account (Trommsdorff, 2000). To give an example, changes in adolescent and adult development on account of changing gender roles have affected the family system and in the long run affect the demographic structure of the population. This in turn will affect developmental options for the younger and the older generation, and at the same time this will affect socio-economic changes including the rise of new social institutions (e.g., care systems for the elderly), changing intergenerational relations, and related changes in individual development. Thus, the study of human development over the life span taking into account the cultural context may contribute to a better understanding of the relations between complex individual behavior and culture.

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Questions for Discussion

1. What is the advantage to study life span development from a cross-cultural perspective?
2. How is culture related to parent-child relations?
3. How are cultural values transmitted to the next generation?
4. a) Is the dichotomy between autonomy and relatedness reasonable, and b) What is its relevance for development in culture?
5. Give examples of a) a universal and b) a culture-specific phenomenon in development?