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## Self and Personality

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### Introduction

The influence of culture on self and personality development has a long and venerable history. For more than 75 years, scholars in cultural anthropology, personality, developmental psychology, and education have debated how cultural practices help to create the characteristics and self-referential beliefs in its members that enable cultures to function. Included in this rich legacy are the classic ethnographic studies of culture and personality by Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and their colleagues; the psychoanalytically oriented explorations of culturally based early experiences and the formation of adult personality; the Six Culture Study by Whiting and Whiting (1975) and other culturally comparative field studies of childrearing practices and beliefs; and more recent research on parent ethnotheories of children and development, the developmental niche, acculturation, and globalization and child development (see Harkness and Super, 2002, for a review). In all of these literatures, culture and the development of self and personality loom large because these developments are central to understanding how cultures create persons.

The view that cultural practices contribute to the social construction of personalities that mesh well with cultural values is provocative. In recent years, however, with growing interest in biological influences on development, studies of culture and personality have increasingly had to consider species-typical universals in developmental processes. One example is the literature on attachment and culture. Attachment theory has traditionally emphasized the deeply rooted biological incentives for infants to develop secure attachments in response to sensitive care (Bowlby, 1982). But a large research literature reveals that there is considerable cultural variability in how the sensitivity of care is associated with attachment security and in the outcomes of a secure or insecure attachment (see Thompson, 2006). To some commentators, this means that the claims of attachment theory concerning parental care and personality development must be reworked for each cultural setting in which attachment is studied (see Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, and Morelli, 2000). An alternative conclusion, however, is that although relational security and parental responsiveness are probably universal requirements for healthy psychological development, how security develops and how sensitivity is conveyed (and assessed) are likely to vary cross-culturally according to local developmental ethnotheories, cultural needs, and ecological constraints. This alternative view reflects the importance of incorporating species-typical influences into an understanding of culture and development, especially when early developmental processes are concerned.

This orientation guides this chapter. Our goal is to profile research on the development of self and culture, a topic of considerable recent research interest because of its importance to

personality development. Our analysis focuses on the earliest and most fundamental elements of self-understanding that emerge in infancy and early childhood, and the influence of cultural practices on the emergence of self is discussed. In doing so, the question is asked of how basic (and probably universal) achievements in early self-awareness are affected by practices and values of the culture in which children grow up. By focusing on developments early in life that are biologically and culturally shaped, we are interested in how early and significantly the self becomes enculturated.

This chapter begins with a short reflection on the nature of culture to expand conventional portrayals of the dimensions of cultural variability that might be most influential in the development of self. Then, considered in turn are several critical early achievements in the growth of the self: the initial emergence of subjective self-awareness, the growth of self-recognition, the development of self-regulation, the emergence of the conceptual self, and finally, autobiographical self-awareness. In each case, the goal is to understand cultural variability in practices that shape each of these advances. Of particular interest are studies that connect cultural values, culturally specific care practices, and self-related outcomes in infants and young children.

### Conceptualizing Culture in Relation to Self and Personality

When considering the development of self within a cultural context, researchers have typically portrayed cultural conceptions of self according to two dimensions; independent (or individualist) cultures are contrasted with interdependent (or collectivist) cultures (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Schweder et al., 1998; Triandis, 1989). Markus and Kitayama (1991), for example, portray self-construal in independent cultures as emphasizing separateness from the social context, internal attributes, and the ability to assert oneself as unique and self-contained. By contrast, the self in interdependent cultures is portrayed as emphasizing connectedness, external roles, self in relation to others, and the ability to forego one's own desires in the interest of group goals. In general, the United States and Western European societies are assumed to reflect the independent orientation, and certain Asian, South American, and African cultures are considered to be interdependent.

Critics of this approach have pointed out the remarkable heterogeneity of cultural approaches to the self within each orientation, as well as the changes that societies undergo intergenerationally and with the impact of globalization. Furthermore, this approach neglects cultural systems that span the independent–interdependent distinction. Kagitcibasi (1996, 2005) has proposed, for example, that a third orientation bridges the preceding two and is associated with a sense of self that is both autonomous (agentic) and relational. She argues that this orientation is found most often in collectivist societies that are experiencing increased urbanization and industrialization and in which psychological interdependence is valued while material dependence among family members is lower than in interdependent societies.

These dimensions of cultural variability are important for our analysis only if they are associated with differences in family practices and childrearing behaviors that influence developing self and personality in children. In general, cultural psychologists argue that these orientations are indeed transmitted to children, beginning early in life, in parenting practices, family customs, and the broader structure of family life (e.g., Harkness and Super, 2002; Keller, 2007; Rogoff, 2003; Schweder et al., 1998). According to this view, interdependent cultures are associated with parenting practices emphasizing child obedience through control-oriented (e.g., authoritarian) parenting methods, close relationships, and other practices supporting a self that is high in relatedness and compliance and low in autonomy. By contrast, independent cultures are associated with greater affection and more child-centered, permissive parenting practices promoting self-reliance and personal privacy. Kagitcibasi (1996, 2005) argues that families in societies with an autonomous-relational orientation are more likely to enlist practices involving

both parental control and child self-determination in which relational connectedness is also emphasized (such as authoritative parenting). Keller (2007) notes that from early in life, caregivers from interdependent systems are more likely to exhibit close physical contact with young offspring, face-to-face interaction, and other practices emphasizing relational closeness, whereas those from independent cultures are more likely to emphasize object stimulation, contingent responsiveness (fostering a sense of agency), and sensitivity to infant signals across a distance.

The following section examines research exploring whether these practices can be observed in different cultural systems and, equally importantly, whether they are associated with the development of self in young children.

### Culture and the Development of Self

How does the “self” develop? One conclusion from the research literature is that the “development of self” is not a singular achievement but rather a gradual process as different features of self-awareness emerge in the early years. According to Thompson (2006), an early foundation of the development of self is the emergence of *existential or subjective self-awareness* (James’s [1890] “I-self”) during the first year as the result of certain perceptual affordances, contingency awareness, and the experience of agency. These experiences provide infants with a basic subjective self-awareness that helps to organize their experiences and perceptions. By the end of the first year, extended episodes of social interaction combined with a dawning awareness of others’ perceptions, intentions, and emotions contribute to the emergence of the *intersubjective self*. *Featural self-recognition* (James’s [1890] “me-self”), which is most commonly manifested in mirror self-recognition, is an achievement of the second year. The second year also witnesses the beginning of *self-regulation* as toddlers acquire the skills for managing their behavior in relation to a standard; this process continues for several years. Later, as young children begin to think self-referentially and as theory of mind informs their understanding of themselves and others, early childhood witnesses the emergence of the *conceptual self* by which children think about and refer to their inner experiences, characteristics, and traits. By ages 4 and 5 years, a new capacity for *autobiographical self-awareness* emerges as young children memorially “tag” certain past experiences as meaningful to the self in the present. Other aspects of self-awareness continue to emerge as young children become capable of thinking of themselves in a temporal context and in increasingly complex ways, underscoring that the “development of self” is an extended process of psychological growth.

Not all of these features of the developing self have been studied in a culturally comparative context, but the results of recent studies reviewed in the following sections suggest that culture is an important developmental context for emergent self-understanding.

#### *Subjective Self-Awareness and Intersubjectivity*

How do young infants develop an initial sense of self—that is, an implicit subjective frame of reference for organizing their interactions with the social and nonsocial world? Early experiences of contingency, in which the infant’s behavior reliably elicits an environmental response, are likely to be an important influence (Gergely and Watson, 1999). Indeed, whether contingent responding derives from a nonsocial crib mobile (that moves when babies kick their legs) or a social partner (who smiles in response to the baby’s smiles), it elicits a young infant’s interest and pleasure probably because it provides some of the earliest experiences of agency and consolidates a sense of the self as a potent actor on environmental events.

Keller (2007) argues that in face-to-face interaction with young infants, parents from independent and interdependent cultural systems respond differently because of their different values concerning infant development. More specifically, parents from independent cultures are more likely to respond contingently to infant cues because of their attention the child’s unique

emotional expressions and to support the baby's experience of agency and self-efficacy. In a study of mothers with their 3-month-old infants from German and Greek urban middle-class families, Keller et al. (2003) observed mothers and infants in free play episodes lasting 15 minutes, and subsequently, they conducted a detailed analysis of the video records. German families were assumed to reflect their culture's independent orientation, and Greek families were assumed to reflect the autonomous-relational orientation identified by Kagitcibasi. The researchers found, as expected, that whereas Greek mothers exhibited more smiling and warmth in their interactions, German mothers were more contingently responsive to infant signals.

Although there were no assessments of infant self-awareness in this study, a companion study by Keller, Kartner, Borke, Yovsi, and Kleis (2005) found similar differences between German middle-class mothers and mothers from the rural Nso community in Cameroon, who are members of an interdependent culture. German mothers were more contingently responsive to their 3-month-olds, and when children's mirror self-recognition was subsequently assessed at 18 to 20 months, German children were more likely to recognize themselves than were Cameroonian toddlers. Moreover, infants in both cultural groups whose mothers had been more contingent in their interactive behavior at 3 months tended to exhibit greater self-recognition at the follow-up assessment. Although these findings are suggestive, it will be important in future research to assess early self-awareness as a function of maternal contingent responding and to explore later maternal behaviors that may also promote featural self-recognition in toddlers.

Other researchers have also examined early mother–infant interaction in different cultures in ways potentially relevant to the development of intersubjective self-awareness. In a series of studies, Bornstein and his colleagues analyzed observations of the interactions of mothers with their 5-month-olds in Tokyo and New York (Bornstein, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, and Ogino, 1990; Bornstein, Toda, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, and Ogino, 1990; see also Bornstein et al., 1992). Although similarities between mothers in the different cultural contexts were more prominent than differences, different patterns of maternal responsiveness emerged with respect to infant attention. Specifically, when Tokyo 5-month-olds looked toward their mothers, mothers tended to encourage infants to attend to the environment, but when infants were gazing at objects or events in the environment, mothers encouraged infants to look at them. By contrast, New York mothers tended to encourage their infants to look in whatever directions the infant chose. The authors interpreted these differences to reflect broader cultural patterns, with the American emphasis on fostering independent initiative and exploratory competence contrasted with the Japanese emphasis on controlling children's exploration and guiding it interpersonally. These differences could be relevant to the development of intersubjectivity during the first year, particularly as Japanese mothers insinuate themselves into infant orientation to the environment to promote *sunaosa*, or receptivity to adult behavior (Bornstein, Toda, et al., 1990).

This study was not designed to include an independent assessment of infant self-awareness or social responsiveness to determine whether these differences in maternal behavior influenced early intersubjectivity, and such an inquiry is a worthwhile topic for future research. This is especially so because the first year is when, in some communal cultures such as the Gusii of Kenya and Marquesas Islanders, infants become oriented toward others as well as the caregiver in everyday social activities (Tamis-Lemonda, Uzgiris, and Bornstein, 2002).

### *Self-Recognition*

To many developmental scientists in Western countries, the ability to recognize one's mirror image by 18 to 24 months is the hallmark of the development of self. This criterion reflects the orientation of Western cultures toward the independent, autonomous child whose capacity to identify her or his unique physical features, independent of the social context, is a critical indicator of self-awareness. As Rogoff (2003) and other developmental cultural scientists have noted,

mirrors are not familiar cultural tools in all societies, and more fundamentally, physical self-recognition may be a more important marker of individuality and self-awareness in Western than non-Western contexts. This is an important interpretive framework for research on cultural practices and the development of mirror self-recognition in toddlers.

As noted earlier, Keller et al. (2005) found that at 18 to 20 months, toddlers from German urban middle-class families were significantly more likely to recognize their mirror images than were toddlers from rural Nso Cameroonian farming families. Furthermore, mirror self-recognition was marginally associated with the contingency of maternal responsiveness during interactions with the infant at 3 months; infants who experienced greater interactive contingency tended to subsequently exhibit greater self-recognition at 18 to 20 months. A companion study extended these findings by comparing Nso toddlers with toddlers from Greek urban middle-class families (presumed to reflect an integrated autonomous-relational orientation) and toddlers from Costa Rican middle-class families, who were expected to be in between the Nso and Greek samples in their independent-interdependent orientation (Keller et al., 2004). Greek toddlers exhibited the greatest rate of mirror self-recognition, and Nso toddlers exhibited the least, as expected, with the Costa Rican toddlers midway between the other two groups. The frequency of object-oriented stimulation during mother-infant free play at 3 months, which was highest among Greek families, and mutual eye contact were significant predictors of individual differences in subsequent toddler self-recognition. The researchers interpreted these findings to reflect how characteristics of the interactive style of mothers in more independent cultures, including an emphasis on object-oriented stimulation to promote curiosity and exploration and the contingency of responding that is manifested in mutual gazing, facilitate the development of independent agency that is especially manifested in featural self-recognition.

A short-term follow-up study of these children found that during the 6 weeks after the mirror assessment, the rate of self-recognition of Nso toddlers increased dramatically, even though they still lagged behind German toddlers at the end of the follow-up period (Keller, 2007). These findings raise questions concerning the significance of differential rates of acquisition of physical self-recognition in toddlers from different cultural contexts and whether these differences have long-term significance for self-understanding.

### *Self-Regulation*

The development of self-regulation is another advance in the growth of self because it reflects young children's ability to apply an evaluative standard to themselves. As Kopp's (1982) analysis shows, self-regulation has an extended developmental timetable because its constituent achievements, such as the growth of behavioral self-control, representations of evaluative standards, and self-monitoring, are slowly developing in early childhood. With respect to culture and the developing self, researchers have been particularly interested in differences in self-regulation manifested in children's compliance with a parental request rather than a self-generated standard. This is important because compliance to a parent reflects the child's willingness to preference a caregiver's request over the child's own desires (such as in a toy clean-up task), in contrast with alternative approaches in which self-regulation is indexed by the child's independent initiative (e.g., a delay of gratification task). Culture may be differentially relevant to each kind of self-regulatory activity.

In the study by Keller et al. (2004) described earlier, 18- to 20-month-olds from Greek, Costa Rican, and Cameroonian Nso families were also observed at home in procedures designed to assess self-regulation. These included assessments of compliance to maternal requests (mother asking the child to bring objects and to put them away) and of compliance to the experimenter's prohibition (resisting a forbidden treat in the mother's presence). The researchers found that in both assessments, Nso toddlers showed significantly greater rates of "internal regulation"

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(i.e., compliance without reminders), especially compared with the Greek toddlers who were more likely to be noncompliant. Toddlers from Costa Rican families were between the other two groups. In predicting individual differences in compliance across cultural groups based on observations of mother–infant play at 3 months, the researchers found that the amount of close body contact between mother and baby (which was highest for Nso families) was the strongest predictor of later differences in internal regulation. They interpreted these findings to reflect the early cultivation of relational closeness by parents in interdependent societies as a motivational foundation for the child’s subsequent obedience. By contrast, in more independent societies, there are fewer cultural incentives to foster obedience because even a child’s noncompliance, although annoying to parents, is often regarded as a healthy expression of autonomy and self-determination.

This conclusion is supported by other cultural studies of compliance and self-regulation. Chen et al. (2003) observed Chinese and Canadian 2-year-olds with their mothers in a laboratory play session followed by assessments of child compliance during a mother-initiated clean-up task and the experimenter’s request that the child not play with an attractive toy in the mother’s presence. Chinese toddlers most often exhibited “committed compliance” (enthusiastic and self-regulated cooperation), whereas Canadian toddlers more often displayed “situational compliance” (cooperative with maternal prompts) or overt protest. Independent self-reported assessments of maternal childrearing attitudes were used to predict individual differences in toddlers’ compliance and also revealed cultural differences. Whereas maternal warmth and inductive reasoning were positively associated with committed compliance (and negatively associated with situational compliance) for Chinese families, reasoning was associated only with situational compliance for Canadians. Maternal punishment orientation was positively associated with situational compliance in Chinese toddlers, but not Canadian toddlers. These findings suggest, as the researchers argue, that different forms of child self-regulation have different meanings for parents within different cultural systems. Consistent with the values of an interdependent culture, Chinese mothers expect cooperation from their children and enlist socialization efforts to foster it through relational activity, such as warmth and reasoning (as well as punishing behavior that is not fully cooperative). Canadian mothers, however, place a greater value on the child’s independence and self-assertion, which may be manifested in the kind of compliance that requires adult monitoring and reminders. This view is supported by a companion report analyzing maternal and child behavior during a play session in an expanded sample. Chinese mothers devoted a relatively greater proportion of their play time to “connectedness” behavior (e.g., cooperative play, sitting close to the child, communicating frequently), whereas Canadian mothers were higher in “autonomy” behavior (e.g., encouragement of independent initiative or decision making), and their children exhibited similar differences in their play behavior (Liu et al., 2005).

The development of self-regulation thus appears to become associated with different motivational foundations for young children from independent and interdependent societies. In some Asian cultures, parental practices cultivating relational closeness heighten the child’s compliance by tying cooperation to the maintenance of relational harmony. In some Western societies, by contrast, cultural values prize young children’s independent initiative as well as obedience, and consequently, children are likely to be more self-interested in their motivation to cooperate with adult goals.

#### *Conceptual Self*

Parents begin thinking about their offspring as distinct, unique persons from the child’s birth, if not before. They draw conclusions about the child’s temperament and personality qualities and evaluate these qualities based on their careful observations of the child’s behavior. But children

do not derive insight into their own character so early. It is not until late in the second year and early in the third that toddlers exhibit initial indications of psychological forms of self-awareness that can be described as the emergence of the conceptual self. They refer explicitly to themselves (e.g., “Me big!”), for example, and label internal experiences such as their feelings and desires. They assert their competence by refusing assistance, assert ownership, and categorize themselves by gender and size and in other manifest ways. Young children also become sensitive to how their actions are evaluated by others, and self-referential emotions like pride, guilt, shame, and embarrassment begin to appear (see Thompson, 2006, for a review). These advances in psychological self-awareness derive, in part, from the dawning psychological insights accompanying the growth of theory of mind that enable children to understand how their internal experience of desires, intentions, feelings, thoughts, goals, and beliefs differ from those of others (Thompson, 2006). Young children begin to appreciate not only that they have internal characteristics that they can mentally conceptualize, but also that their internal characteristics differ from those of others. By ages 4 or 5 years, moreover, children can explicitly describe themselves using psychological as well as physical and behavioral attributes (Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, and Cowan, 1998).

As young children acquire the capacity to conceptualize themselves in multidimensional ways, the characteristics they attribute to themselves are likely to have social origins. Consistent with Mead’s (1934) concept of the “looking glass self,” there is considerable evidence that young children appropriate descriptions of themselves that they overhear from (or are directly told by) adults and that their earliest experiences of pride, guilt, and shame derive from how they are evaluated by caregivers (Measelle et al., 1998; Nelson and Fivush, 2004; Stipek, Recchia, and McClintic, 1992; see review by Thompson, 2006). Although young children have multiple sources of information for learning about and evaluating their personal characteristics, parental influences are central (Stipek et al., 1992).

Culture can influence the development of self, therefore, as young children appropriate their parents’ evaluations of their characteristics and behaviors because parents’ evaluations are influenced by the beliefs and ethnotheories of their culture (see also Kagan, Chapter 10, in this volume). Behavioral inhibition is a characteristic commonly observed in young children that illustrates this culturally based evaluation. Behavioral inhibition describes a pattern of anxious or withdrawn behavior in response to new situations or stimuli, and in Western contexts, it is regarded as psychologically and socially maladaptive and as a risk factor for the development of internalizing disorders and other psychological problems (Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker, 2006). However, in Chinese society, reflecting an interdependent cultural orientation, behavioral inhibition is instead viewed as reflecting mature capacities for self-restraint, obedience, and accommodation to the group (Chen et al., 1998). To the extent that these cultural belief systems are adopted by parents, they are likely to influence how adults evaluate the characteristics of their offspring and reinforce certain attributes rather than others. Behavioral inhibition, among other characteristics, may be appraised much differently in Chinese and Western cultures.

In a study of behavioral inhibition in response to a standardized laboratory assessment, Chen et al. (1998) found that Chinese 2-year-olds displayed significantly more reticence than did Canadian toddlers; they spent significantly more time in physical contact with their mothers and showed greater latency to approach a stranger and a novel toy robot. Maternal responses to an inventory of childrearing beliefs showed that Chinese mothers scored significantly higher than Canadian mothers on items related to the encouragement of achievement, protection and concern, punishment orientation, and rejection, and they scored significantly lower than Canadian mothers on acceptance. This is the constellation of attitudes, emphasizing child obedience, adult direction, and control, that might be expected from mothers of an interdependent cultural system. However, when individual differences in toddlers’ behavioral inhibition

were associated with these childrearing beliefs, cultural differences were profound. Controlling and rejecting parenting is typically associated with behavioral inhibition in Western samples (Rubin, Hastings, Stewart, Henderson, and Chen, 1997), but punishment orientation and maternal rejection were significantly *negatively* correlated with behavioral inhibition in the Chinese sample. Maternal attitudes of acceptance, encouragement of achievement, and encouragement of independence were positively associated with behavioral inhibition in Chinese toddlers. None of these associations was apparent in the Canadian sample; instead, maternal punishment orientation was significantly *positively* associated with behavioral inhibition, and inhibition was negatively associated with maternal acceptance and encouragement of achievement (Chen et al., 1998). Behavioral inhibition was, in short, associated with a constellation of positive parenting attitudes (acceptance, encouragement, and lack of punitiveness) in the Chinese sample but with more negative maternal attitudes (punitiveness and lack of acceptance) in the Canadian sample (see Bornstein, 1995).

These conclusions are consistent with other studies of parenting practices in Chinese families (Chao and Tseng, 2002), although further research involving direct observations of parent-child interaction at home would help to confirm and enrich this portrayal of parenting. Pending further study, this research suggests that in their affirmative, punitive, encouraging, and critical behaviors toward offspring, parents respond to children's characteristics in ways that reflect broader cultural values and that may therefore shape children's behaviors in the direction of culturally approved qualities. There are other ways, moreover, that parents convey cultural attitudes about personal characteristics and dispositions to young children. One way is through the language that parents share in conversation with young children from early in life.

As a means of representing and sharing knowledge about their inner psychological experiences, language has a revolutionary impact on young children's thinking for several reasons (Thompson, 2006; Thompson, Laible, and Ontai, 2003). First, language lexicalizes psychological experience to specify and provide common referents to the young child's conceptions of emotions, motives, intentions, goals, thoughts, desires, and other internal qualities in themselves and others. As young children acquire words to describe these qualities and verbalize them to others, they become tutored in how these characteristics are represented by the social world in which they live. Second, as language is enlisted into simple conversations with caregivers about shared experiences, young children's direct representations of these experiences confront the different interpretations and inferences of the adult. Because adults approach the experiences they share with young children in a psychologically more sophisticated manner, their representations of events are likely to be highly influential on the child's own thinking about and memory for those experiences. Third, because language incorporates cultural values and beliefs, young children's use of language in their representations of experience enfranchises them into cultural belief systems (Nelson, 1996). Taken together, these influences of language in the context of parent-child conversation reflect both the content and quality of language; it is not only *what* is said, but also *how* it is said that is likely to be influential.

When Chinese and American mothers were observed talking about recent events with their 3-year-olds, cultural differences in the content and the style of maternal discourse were apparent. American mothers were more interactive and elaborative, focusing on the child's preferences and opinions as they co-constructed a shared narrative. By contrast, Chinese mothers were more directive, posing factual questions and using the narrative to underscore moral rules and behavioral standards. In this respect, conversations about events in the recent past served somewhat different purposes for American and Chinese mothers, offering the former an opportunity to help children develop a sense of themselves and providing the latter a context for socializing proper conduct, consistent with broader cultural goals for child development (Wang and Fivush, 2005; Wang, Leichtman, and Davies, 2000). Other researchers have reached



similar conclusions. Miller, Wiley, Fung, and Liang (1997), for example, compared the personal storytelling of American and Taiwanese parents with their 2½-year-olds and found that Chinese caregivers were more likely to use storytelling to convey moral and social standards, whereas Americans used stories as a means of entertainment and affirmation. In these contexts, for example, when mothers recalled the child's earlier misbehavior, Chinese mothers emphasized the shame inherent in misconduct, whereas mothers in the United States tended to attribute child misbehavior to spunk or mischievousness (see also Miller, Fung, and Mintz, 1996).

It is not surprising that the content and structure of language in the conversations that parents share with young children should reflect cultural belief systems. After all, adults have represented their experiences according to these belief systems for most of their lives, so it would be natural that these values would also color their conversations with offspring. More importantly, these conversations become a regular feature of parent-child interaction at exactly the period in development when young children are beginning to think of themselves in terms of inner dispositions, characteristics, and traits. This underscores the need for more research that directly relates these cultural differences in adult discourse style to children's emergent conceptual selves. There is little research of this kind. One study, however, found that when Chinese and American young children (preschool through second grade) were asked to describe themselves and recount four autobiographical events, American children described themselves positively, using a richer variety of personal attributes and inner traits, and they provided more elaborate memories focusing on their personal qualities (e.g., roles, preferences, emotions). Chinese children described themselves more modestly and in terms of social roles and characteristics, describing behaviors that were specific to particular contexts. They also provided accounts that centered more on social interactions and daily routines (Wang, 2004, 2006a).

#### *Autobiographical Self*

Another important advance in self-understanding emerges during the preschool years with the growth of autobiographical memory. Although infants and toddlers are capable of retaining specific episodic memories over modest periods of time, it is not until age 3½ or 4 years that preschoolers become capable of mnemonically representing certain events as personally significant and relevant to their present selves. As such, the emergence of autobiographical memory builds on the development of a sense of self, knowledge representation, and an awareness of the temporal connections between past and present events (Thompson, 2006).

This is a considerable conceptual achievement, and according to one influential theory, young children become capable of doing so because of the representational assistance of parent-child conversation. Nelson and Fivush (2004) argue that in conversations with caregivers about the recent past, preschoolers are assisted in representing past experiences in a coherent and meaningful manner, understanding the significance of these events for themselves, and conceptualizing how these events relate to their present experience. In their conversations with young children, in other words, parents not only help children understand themselves but also scaffold their memory of the personal past and add narrative content to these personal representations to make them memorable.

Cultural beliefs and values are likely to be incorporated into children's autobiographical memories as parents insinuate into their shared narratives of the child's experiences their own moral judgments, attributional biases, emotional inferences, and other evaluations drawn from the adult's cultural membership. This is illustrated in the studies earlier described that indicate how mothers in China and the United States discuss events in the recent past in different ways. What is the significance of this for the development of autobiographical memory? In one study, Chinese and American 6-year-olds were asked to recount a series of recent memories as well as to tell stories prompted by pictures and verbal leads. The accounts of Chinese children showed

greater social engagement, a greater focus on moral correctness and proper behavior, and a heightened concern with authority. By contrast, the stories of American children exhibited a greater autonomous orientation involving more frequent reference to the protagonist's personal preferences, evaluations, and self-determination (Wang and Leichtman, 2000). Similar differences have been found when American children's autobiographical accounts were compared with those of Korean as well as Chinese children, suggesting that these differences in autobiographical narrative may reflect a broader independent–interdependent cultural difference (Han, Leichtman, and Wang, 1998).

Another way of inquiring into the impact of culture on autobiographical memory is to study the earliest autobiographical memories of adults from different cultures. In the studies that have done so, similar differences in the content and style of autobiographical narrative have emerged, with Americans providing long, self-focused, and emotionally elaborate memories focused on personal attributes and Chinese adults providing briefer narratives focused on social activities and routines and emotionally neutral events (Wang, 2001, 2006b). Thus although much more research is needed that directly relates parent–child conversation to young children's independent autobiographical narratives (see, e.g., Wang, 2006c), these studies suggest that different styles of autobiographical self-reference are apparent in children and adults in Asian societies and in the United States that are consistent with the interdependent and independent cultural values of these societies.

### Conclusion

The development of autobiographical memory does not conclude the development of self. In the years that follow, children acquire a more sophisticated grasp of the continuity of self over time, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses across many domains of competency, and create a conception of their enduring personality characteristics. Each of these subsequent advances in self-understanding is also affected by cultural values, but our reason for focusing on the earliest accomplishments of self-awareness is because these are foundational. The initial emergence of subjective self-awareness and intersubjectivity and the early development of self-recognition, self-regulatory ability, the conceptual self, and autobiographical memory are likely to be universal elements of the process by which children worldwide begin to understand who they are. The fact that even these initial developments are significantly affected by cultural beliefs and values, mediated by the practices of caregivers, attests to how early and fundamentally young children become enculturated.

The parental practices through which culture influences the development of self are multifaceted. This research review highlights the importance in infancy of the contingency of parental responsiveness, the warmth and support of close body contact, the parent's responsiveness to the direction of infant attention, and the enlistment of object-oriented stimulation and social stimulation in face-to-face play as some of the means by which babies become enlisted into systems of relational connectedness and interdependency or systems of individual uniqueness and independence (see also Bornstein, Tamis-LeMonda, Hahn, and Haynes, 2007). Somewhat later, as young children become psychologically more sophisticated, parental practices such as inductive reasoning, punitiveness or acceptance, warmth, control, and the co-construction of shared understanding in the context of parent–child conversation become equally potent cultural influences on the development of self. These practices are important not only because they influence how young children implicitly and explicitly begin to understand themselves, but also because they influence how children perceive their temperamental individuality, how children are motivated to exert self-control, and many other aspects of personality development. In these ways, the cultural developmental processes affecting the growth of self-awareness are also broader influences on the development of personality.

This portrayal of the cultural construction of the person is provocative, but this literature is thin, and throughout the chapter, several directions have been offered for much needed further research. A broader concern is that most of the research in this field is correlational, which, even in longitudinal studies, can be interpretively challenging. It can be difficult to know, for instance, whether the association between maternal practices in infancy and subsequent dimensions of self-awareness in toddlerhood are causal or are mediated by other unmeasured aspects of parent-child interaction. The problems of correlational research are enhanced when groups are compared based on differences in “culture” (broadly defined), when group differences or similarities in socioeconomic status, urban or rural residency, education, or exposure to certain cultural tools might accentuate or diminish group differences in parent-child interaction or children’s self-reports. These potential confounds are notoriously difficult to control in research of this kind, which makes the replication of patterns of results across different samples particularly important. Finally, it is impressive that researchers who study the development of self in culturally comparative studies are guided by Western portrayals of the development of self, and we have commented on the suitability of mirror self-recognition or compliance with maternal requests as universally appropriate indexes of self for comparative study. We need greater exploration of the nature of indigenous portrayals of the development of self in non-Western societies and how they might illuminate features of the growth of self-awareness that have thus far been unexplored.

Most broadly, of course, it is also valuable to consider whether current research highlights differences between cultural systems at the expense of their commonalities. Consider, for example, the following portrayal of the development of young children’s motivation to self-regulate to comply with parental requests:

Some parent-child dyads establish a mutually responsive orientation (MRO), a relationship that is close, mutually binding, cooperative, and affectively positive.... Children growing up with parents who are responsive to their needs and whose interactions are infused with happy emotions adopt a willing, responsive stance toward parental influence and become eager to embrace parental values and standards for behavior. (Kochanska, 2002, p. 191)

In light of the discussion of this chapter, one might anticipate that this description is based on studies of parent-child interaction in Japan or another interdependent culture. Instead, it is a summary of an influential program of research on early conscience development in middle-class Iowa families. It is not surprising to find that this kind of relationally oriented approach to fostering young children’s responsiveness to adult standards would be apparent in United States families, and it highlights how easily culturally comparative studies can exaggerate cultural differences that exist.

The important contribution of these studies, however, is that they underscore how essentially culture is part of the developing self and the multifaceted ways that children become enculturated members from early in life.

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