The Good Parent: Southern Italian Mothers’ Conceptualization of Good Parenting and Parent-Child Relationships

Abstract

Thirty mothers, ranging in age between 30 and 46 years old, participated in seven focus groups aimed at analysing perceptions and ideas of the characteristics of a good parent and parent-child relationship in southern Italy (Sicily). The discussions were transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative analysis approach. Two major themes, discipline and affection, emerged from the discussions about the idea of a good parent, with seven further subthemes. In defining good parenting beliefs and practices, Sicilian mothers mostly believed that control, discipline and demandingness were imperative and prioritized over warmth and responsiveness. Despite the importance given to demandingness, a good parent-child relationship was predominantly described as the result of a balance between love and control, mainly based on communication, confidence and respect. Our findings were interpreted and discussed with consideration to the collectivistic and familistic nature of Sicilian society.

Keywords: Good Parenting, Focus groups, Parent-child relationships, Culture, Mothers
INTRODUCTION

Parents play a significant role in children’s early development because they regulate the majority of child-environment interactions and help children adapt to the world around them (Bornstein, 2006). However, despite the demonstrated importance of positive parenting practices, few studies have examined what constitutes appropriate or ideal parenting from the perspective of their principal actors, such as mothers. Moreover, childrearing practices are influenced by multiple factors, including culture (Bornstein, 2012). For example, whereas some beliefs, including the assumption that children need care and protection, are considered universal, others, like the ways in children protected, are more likely to vary across societies and to be consequences of the particular cultural context (Senese, Bornstein, Haynes, Rossi, & Venuti, 2012). Given the importance of conceptualizing the definitions of a good parent within specific cultural contexts, the present study focused on the ideas of Italian mothers of young children living in Sicily.

The Idea of a Good Parent

The concept of good parenting was introduced by Winnicott (1957, 1964) in his discussion of the term, “good enough parent” to promote the idea that perfectionism is unattainable and unrealistic, and should not be the basis upon which a parent is judged. In fact, imperfect parenting can be sufficient for raising children to be functioning adults through a variety of parenting methods (Ramaekers, Leuven, & Vandezande, 2012). Budd and Holdswoth (1996) used an alternative term, “minimal parenting competence,” and underscored the lack of agreement on what constitutes minimal parenting competence or “good enough” parenting. In particular, these authors emphasised the lack of consensus about what is or is not normative because definitions of good parenting vary by community, culture and country (De Panfilis & Girvin, 2005; Fontes, 2005; Voight, Tregeagle, & Cox, 1996).
Some communities adhere to general parenting principles that are considered less important or unacceptable in others (Choate & Engstrom, 2014).

A growing body of literature indicates that cultural ideologies shape how parents think about their parental roles (Bacchini, Miranda, & Affuso, 2011; Bornstein & Lansford, 2010; Harkness & Super, 1996). People come to understand what is expected of good parents according to the characteristics and skills that are considered important for successful adults to possess within that context (Pedersen, 2016). Thus, contemporary parents are challenged with parenting information from numerous, often contradictory, sources, including family, health care professions, and the internet. Specific and differentiated patterns of parenting behaviors are observed and considered good according to the needs, beliefs and values emphasized in each culture, (e.g., Miller & Harwood, 2002). Thus, the cultural model of the belonging society defines the socialization goals, which in turn guide parental beliefs and theories that constitute the complex system on which the behavioral strategies - or parental practices - are structured (Keller, 2007; Leyendecker, Lamb, Harwood, & Schoelmerich, 2002).

Notwithstanding, parenting is often evaluated using questionnaires focusing on parents’ perception of their ability to perform their role (Waldman-Levi, Finzi-Dottan, & Weintraub, 2015). These questionnaires have been developed within a specific cultural context guided by its particular goals and practices, and may not fully capture the beliefs and practices that characterize others. Consequently, qualitative studies offer the advantage of obtaining a better understanding of the specific meaning of good parenting, since they provide a more in-depth understanding and exploration of parents’ own conceptualizations and lived experiences (Harwood, Schoelmerich, Schulze, & Gonzalez, 1999). In one of the few studies that have employed qualitative methods to explore parents’ beliefs of fundamentals of good parenting in Britain, Kellet and Apps (2009) found four themes:
dealing with children’s needs; placing children’s needs first; providing regular and constant care; and parental commitment with support services. In the present study, we utilized focus groups to elucidate southern Italian mothers’ conceptualizations of good parenting and parent-child relationships.

**Parenting in the Southern Italian Context**

Italy is a country with contrasting characteristics; although it is a capitalistic society, it has maintained its rural and agricultural nature, especially in the southern regions. Consequently, it offers a unique context to explore the intermixing of traditional and contemporary cultural values, especially concerning issues such as parenting and the socialization of children. Some researchers have proposed that Italian parents believe that their key task is to take care of their children and to rear them in a safe and caring family setting (Bembich, 2016; Bombi Carugati, Emiliani, & Molinari, 1990; Edwards, Gandini, & Giovannini, 1993). In general, Italian parents emphasize the promotion of children’s social skills by favouring dyadic exchanges in which parents and their children can experience warmth and security (Senese, Poderico, & Venuti, 2003). Therefore, a good parent is generally perceived as someone who spends time with their children and promotes their sociability (Bombi, Di Norcia, Di Giunta, Pastorelli, & Lansford, 2015; Lambert, 1987; New, 1989), encourage children’s interactions with people who are not part of the nuclear family (Richman et al., 1988), and give them time and attention (New, 1989). Although Italian parents were reported to be less warm than northern European parents (Perris, Maj, Perris, & Eisemann, 1985), more recent literature found Italian parents to be more warm and affectionate than others across different European cultures (Putnick et al., 2012). Moreover, Italian parents expect early social maturity in their children and emphasize the significance of infant sociability; consequently, they consider it to be important and good to talk to their children from infancy, whereas they do not believe that didactic activities, such as object play
and exploration of the environment, are necessary to improve infant development (Bornstein, Cote, & Venuti 2001).

Despite these general descriptions of Italian parenting, local differentiations in the ways families function and value parental rearing practices may exist (Bembich, 2016; Harwood et al., 1999) especially as a consequence of economic, cultural, and social differences across northern and southern regions of Italy. For example, it has been hypothesized that the more disadvantageous economic and social life conditions of the southern regions could elicit a parenting style which more highly values child obedience, perceived as necessary to overcome life challenges that arise from economic hardships and crime-prone environments that families may experience (Bombi et al., 2011; Bombi et al., 2015).

Moreover, although an individualistic orientation general prevails in Italy (Hofstede, 1991), some authors recognize a collectivistic attitude in its southern regions (e.g., Triandis, McCuskar, & Hui, 1990). Together, this complex situation makes it particularly interesting to investigate the socialization values and the specific parental practices of southern Italian parents. Rudy and Grusec (2006) reported higher levels of authoritarian parenting within collectivistic cultures where parents tend to give more importance to family members’ interdependence and to endorse higher levels of controlling attitudes to achieve their parenting aims.

Thus, to understand the conceptualizations of parenting within southern Italy (Sicily), the overall aim of the study was to explore what southern Italian mothers see as relevant in identifying a good parent and a good parent-child relationship. We approached this core issue by directly asking Italian mothers using the focus group method. We choose this method because it has several advantages over individual interviews: participants can respond to each other, and some participants may feel more secure and willing to elaborate in a group than in
a one-on-one setting with the researcher (Hoppe, Wells, Morrison, Gillmore, & Wilson, 1995). Moreover, the group setting was a more suitable match for our goals of identifying shared conceptualizations of parenting. We expected that in southern Italy, including Sicily, parents would emphasize defining a good parent in terms of one who socializes values such as obedience, discipline and control. Relatedly, a good parent-child relationship would be one characterized by interdependence and respect for parents.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were mothers contacted through their child’s enrollment in several local day cares and preschools in Palermo, Sicily, Italy, which served children between the ages of 4 and 5 years old. Mothers completed a demographic form and reported their age, place of birth, length of residence, family composition, child’s age, education and occupation. The overall sample comprised 30 participants, who ranged in age between 30 and 46 years (Mean age = 37.61 years, S = 3.97) and lived in Palermo (Sicily, southern Italy) and surrounding areas. Approximately 35 percent of these participants had university degrees, more than 48 high school diplomas, and the remaining elementary or middle school degree. More than half were housewives, so they did not have a personal monthly money entrance. Ninety-six percent of them were married and 60% of their husbands were underemployed or poorly paid. The majority (54.8%) had only one child ranging between 4 to 5 years old.

**Procedure**

The psychology department ethics committee of the University of Palermo approved this study and all procedures were performed in accordance with the Italian Association of Psychology’s ethical principles for psychological research (2015). Participants’ informed consent was obtained in person, where they were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of responses.
Seven focus groups, with 4 to 6 participants each, were conducted in order to discuss the topics of being a good parent and a good parent-child relationship. Each focus group lasted approximately 2 hours and was led by the first author and a research assistant. The questioning route focused on the explanation of the characteristics of a good parent, and the most important child rearing aims that a good parent must pursue. Moreover, participants were asked to also give real examples of behaviors that illustrate all the ideas expressed. Last, we invited the mothers to discuss their conceptualizations of the characteristics of a good parent-child relationship. Questioning route is presented in table 1. All focus groups were tape-recorded and then transcribed, to better aid in the integrity of content analysis (Krueger, 2006).

**Data analysis**

Data analysis were conducted by the first and second authors, with consultation from the third and fourth authors. Coding followed a Constant Comparative Analysis Approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Padgett, 1998), in which the data were analysed by grouping them into themes, which were then confirmed by further analysis of the data. Next, a third review of the data was conducted to look for new codes. Each focus group transcript was coded separately and the codes from the seven groups were first examined independently and then together to ensure the coherence of the themes across the groups.

Coders read each transcript independently and developed a first set of codes of themes that were discussed separately for each focus group. Subsequently, the coders met again to group the themes generated across all the focus groups together. The codes were then refined based on the discussions until an agreement was reached between the coders. Following this procedure, we identified two overarching codes consisting of several subcodes in describing a good parent, and three themes were recognised in defining a good parent-child relationship.
RESULTS

Characteristics of a Good Parent

Two major overarching themes were revealed from mothers’ responses to the question regarding what characteristics a good parent must possess: (a) discipline, and (b) affection. The subthemes and specific examples for discipline and affection are presented in Table 2.

Discipline. The theme of discipline was the strongest and more common issue that appeared across all the seven focus groups conducted. A good parent was repeatedly described as one who is able to make rules, educate their children with the use of some “no’s” and punish when necessary. Mothers were expected to devote a lot of attention to educating their children and considered this aspect of parenting to be the most important ones in defining good childrearing practices. Generally speaking, a good parent was described as the opposite of “someone who does not have interest in the child, lets him do whatever he wants and, as a consequence, gives their children the chance to behave very badly when they are with other people”.

Rules of conduct. Almost all participants considered it imperative to set rules that regulate what children should and should not do, for example, “don’t break things,” “don’t jump on the sofa,” “wash your hands before dinner” or “eat what I prepared, without hesitation,” fundamentally because they believed that, “children at this age are like sponges, they absorb everything. So, it is important to give them the right rules, to leave them free but at the same time give directions, to make them understand that there are certain things that can be done and others that cannot.” Some mothers underscored the importance of punishment, saying that a good way to educate children was based on “punishing them, for example [to send them to] their bedroom, if they do something wrong.”
Threats of punishment. Another common subtheme that emerged was related to the use of threats. Pressuring and intimidating children were considered effective ways to obtain obedience and positive development by most of the participants in our sample. Some of the mothers discussed using mild threats with their children for example, by simply telling them that if they do not do something that the mother wanted, they (the mothers) would “take and use the wooden spoon,” which mothers believed was sufficient to scare children and induce them to comply. Other mothers highlighted the necessity to ground their children, such as by telling them that, “you can’t go to play football if you don’t do what I say!”

Consistency. A third subtheme that arose under the larger theme of discipline was consistency, which was considered fundamental and vital because, “If a parent says NO, it has to be definitively NO, even if their children cry desperately. To say no is necessary [for the child] to grow.” Another mother emphasized the importance of “[not being] duped by fake tears! Because children already know the rules! In fact, their reaction is always to disregard them, because they want to demand attention, or to impose themselves, so we really need to set markers and to do it consistently.” Moreover, the behaviors of both parents had to also be consistent, because, “If I say ‘no,’ my husband shouldn’t say differently and if I punish him, my husband shouldn’t contradict me.” For example, the other day my son said: "I don’t want to have breakfast." He normally has lunch at school at twelve... "I don’t want to have breakfast." My husband told me, "Give him a cake. Put it in his bag and tell the teacher ..." But I said “no,” he should be hungry until lunchtime! My husband finally agreed with me and now my son doesn’t do it anymore. Every day he gets up and tells me "Mom, please give me milk!"” However, mothers expressed feeling that maintaining consistency between both parents was the most difficult aspect, because, “one thing that is known is that my husband is out all day and sees them [the children] only in the evening...maybe all day I gave rules...and then he comes and messes up everything up, and we fight, ... we must agree on
Linked to the concept of consistency were also daily routines, such as “eat at the same time, go bed always at 9 every day,” which were all considered to be the foundation for promoting a sense of family and cohesion. “It is important for me to have dinner always at same time. The meal is the moment when we can all come together, so we can talk...the table is family.”

**Respect for others.** Mothers also highlighted the importance of socializing a respect for others in their children. “A good parent must teach the respect for others and for their possessions. He must understand that others must always be valued.” In this case, a good parent must teach not by imposing rules, but by their example, “Because a child at this age can understand what [is being taught] only from examples given by the parents. My daughter sees my behavior with others and she puts it into action.” Mothers often described the respect of others as particularly linked to the respect of family members. For example, “It is natural for me to be strict especially if you don’t respect other people, beginning with me or your father. Because sometimes my son doesn’t understand the job his father does, and when he comes home he doesn’t want to say “hello” because maybe the smell is strong, or his hands are dirty. I tried to explain him that if his father has dirty hands it means that he worked. I really get angry. He must understand that ... you must have respect for others!” Another mother explained that “to say hello to others, in particular to his father, is fundamental. I try to teach him every day, but it seems that it enters one ear and exits the other.” Despite the importance of and attention devoted to discipline, some mothers expressed the belief that rules are not made to be permanent. Because “after you set a rule, you have to listen to the children, because maybe the rule can be changed for certain reasons.”

**Affection.** The second overall theme that emerged from the focus group discussion was related to affection. Across all groups, mothers considered a good parent to be one who was warm and affectionate, and showed love and care towards their children, which could be
expressed in different ways: kissing and holding children, “snuggle and cuddle them,” telling them “I love you,” “playing with them even by getting down on all fours.”

**Quality time.** Another way of expressing care and love was based on devoting time to children. Mothers generally describe a good parent as one who is “able to spend their limited time with their children.” Some mothers said that even “if you don’t have much time, you must try to find it in order to do things such as paint and colour together,” or “instead of watching TV, play with them,” or “even if you are tired after a day of working, find the time to read fairy tales.” The focus was always on the quality of the time spent together, rather than on the quantity, as described by a mother who said, “Maybe sometimes parents are physically present but they are not really in the relationship with the child, so they are at home but ... they don’t talk with their children. Or worse, there are parents who maybe work excessively ... are busy in their careers, therefore, have little time to devote to their children, but they decide to not invest this little time in the relationship with their children, even if it is clearly important.”

**Child-focused.** During the focus groups some mothers stated that to be a good parent, it was also necessary to consider the thoughts and feelings of children. For example, “talk with them while looking in their eyes, because they understand.” A good parent is capable of “listening to the child’s needs, taking into consideration their point of view and trying to understand things from their perspectives, and to have patience with them.” In response to this question, one mother replied that "patience is very important ... sometimes my son is just rebellious and when he is overly angry I try to ignore him because I know that if he screams and I reproach him, the situation gets much worse. So, I let him calm down...I ignore him and only when he is calm can we reason, and try to understand each other.”

**Independence and autonomy.** Finally, an interesting subtheme of being warm pertained to promoting children’s independence and autonomy. For example, mothers
discussed how a good parent should “let them try by themselves to wear something or brush their teeth,” or that it was better for parents to “not be so oppressive, and let children show their own characters, because only in this way they can develop their self-esteem, and the capacity to be and feel a member of the family first and of the society after.” However, it seemed that mothers of our study were more focused on the promotion of instrumental rather than real emotional autonomy. In this sense, a good parent was thought to be one who gives children the opportunity to do things independently. For example, "sometimes, parents intrude too much in their children’s situations. If my daughter has a problem, for example a quarrel with a friend, she must resolve the issue alone, without me."

**Characteristics of a Good Parent-child Relationship**

The second issue that participants discussed were their ideas regarding what characterized a good parent-child relationship. Themes emerged and specific examples of quotes for them are presented in Table 3.

**Balance.** Related to the main theme of discipline that emerged in response to the discussions about the characteristics of a good parent, a good parent-child relationship was predominantly defined as the result of a balance between love and control. Generally speaking, mothers tended to define a good parent-child relationship as one that is based on “both the sweet and the bitter. A good relationship is not easy to build but it takes always a bit of everything. Then, at the end when they grow up, they will understand it for themselves!”

**Open communication and confidence.** Mothers expressed the importance of open communication and of security and confidence in developing a good parent-child relationship. For example, one mother described such as relationships as: “...based a lot on the communication. Speaking a lot and understanding the needs of the child. Because if the child understands that he is listened to and understood, a good bond is created. Because he knows that he can always count on you. I think this...I project myself into the future, because
I think that in the future he must have the courage to come to tell me: “mum I was wrong, I made a mistake, help me.” What I would like to make my children understand is to not be afraid of me when you be wrong and don’t be afraid to come…I'll reprimand him at first time but then we try to solve the problem. In my opinion this is the basis for creating a good relationship with my children. Don’t be afraid to come to us.” Another mother described how a good parent-children relationship is also built on “confidence, making them understand that they have a secure base, which is central.”

**Respect.** Once again, the issue of respect emerged several times during the focus group discussions, confirming its importance. In terms of good parenting-child relationships, the subtheme of respect was discussed with concern to reciprocal behaviors. For example, “I believe that the respect that the child receives is very important, but also the respect that parents can obtain from the child. This puts both the two figures, according to me, in an ideal position; in the right distance and the right proximity [to each other]. A balance, a good balance between them.”

**DISCUSSION**

Parents from different cultural backgrounds may interpret the role of parents and parenting behaviors differently due to distinct norms and beliefs (De Panfilis & Girvin, 2005; Fontes, 2005). Thus, to determine whether current conceptualizations of parenting, and more specifically, good parenting, can be applied to southern Italian parents, the principal aim of the study was to explore and understand what dimensions mothers see as relevant for identifying a good parent and a good parent-child relationship. We addressed this central goal through focus group discussions with Sicilian mothers. Several themes emerged during these discussions, which were further grouped under the two major themes of discipline and affection.
Almost all participants considered it imperative to define a good parent by focusing on discipline and educating good manners in children. At the same time, mothers considered it to be important to give love to and be warm towards their children. As can be noted, these two main themes correspond to the two dimensions of parental style proposed by Baumrind (1966; 2013): demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness refers to the ability to set limits, to control behaviors, and to demand maturity, discipline, and respect of the rules. Responsiveness refers to the emotional warmth, the capacity to support the child, and the promotion of the child's individuality and emotional self-regulation. Based on the combination of these dimensions, different parenting styles are distinguished. Baumrind (1991) argued that the equilibrium between these two dimensions comprises authoritative parenting, which is considered to be the optimal combination to achieve socialization goals. Authoritative parents are approving, responsive, and nurturing, and use regulatory control to facilitate children's development of social competence. In contrast, authoritarian parents are domineering, hostile, and maintain rigid rules typically enforced via threat and punishment (Baumrind, 1991).

Most mothers in our study defined a good parent-child relationship as the result of a balance between love and control and this discussion may appear similar to elements of authoritative parenting. However, it should be noted that, at a wider level, Sicilian mothers seemed to view certain authoritarian attitudes or practices favourably, where demandingness appeared to be prioritized over responsiveness. This greater emphasis on demandingness or controlling aspects of parenting, which was centered on discipline in Sicilian mothers’ conceptualizations, is consistent with Bombi and colleagues’ (2011) propositions regarding the role of cultural and contextual forces in shaping Southern Italian mothers’ socialization goals. Specifically, Bombi and colleagues argued that the poor economic and social life conditions of southern Italian parents may lead them to value characteristics of obedience and
respect in children, which are considered necessary for overcoming economic challenges that members of the family may experience in their lives. This finding is also in line with the identification of the southern Italian context as collectivistic in nature, where parents tend to endorse controlling practices to achieve their socialization aims of interdependence among families’ members (e.g., Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Campos et al., 2008; Abdou et al., 2010). The importance of control and interdependence stressed by participants was high even if they mentioned children’s autonomy granting as another essential aspect of good parenting.

As suggested by Schulze, Harwood, Schölmerich and Leyendecker (2002) these aspects in apparent opposition are not incompatible in more collectivistic cultures where the emphasis on promoting autonomy often reflects an encouragement of instrumental aspect of independence rather than its real support.

Furthermore, Rudy and Grusec (2001) posited that in cultures described as more collectivist in cultural orientation, authoritarian parents may not be rejecting and lacking in warmth, unlike in individualist cultures where they are consistently restrictive and demanding of obedience without giving affection. Additionally, Chao (1994), Fung (1999), and Markus, Mullally and Kitayama (1997) suggested that cultures that value interdependence among its members also prefer parenting practices that demand obedience from their children and reflect the belief that respect for family is desired, good and necessary for children’s positive development. In particular, Chao (1994) indicated that in these types of cultures, some aspects of control may be considered as expressions of parental warmth, concern, and involvement. Accordingly, participants of our study may show a positive consideration of demandingness practices because they see them as normative and essential in order to maintain group cohesion and conformity towards parents and family members (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009).
Moreover, our findings also reflect mothers’ expression of the cultural belief of familism that is typical of southern Italian society. Familism describes a strong individual identification with family (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987), emphasizing an ideal for family relationships to be close and that prioritize family over all (e.g., Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Campos et al., 2008; Abdou et al., 2010). It is a highly complex construct that has been defined and interpreted in many different ways, but that generally reflect an attention on interests of the family group and expectancies of family cohesion, respect and obligations: the family goals are higher in importance than those of its individual members (Mucchi-Faina, Pacilli & Verm, 2010; Stein et al., 2014).

Donati (1985) distinguished between the traditional familistic culture typical of the south of Italy (also see Banfield, 1967) and more contemporary thoughts about family that characterize areas of the north. In the classically southern familistic organization, mothers are the centres of the family, and children are raised almost entirely under maternal care and socialized to depend on her guidance (Bombi et al, 2011). Correspondingly, values of familism were repeatedly expressed and represented in the focus group discussions, particularly when mothers discussed the importance of respect for others as primarily concerning parents and the family members. Importantly, these attitudes did not appear to be linked to excessive strictness; instead, mothers tended to also consider warmth to be important, as expressed through various practices, such as spending time with children, playing with them or simply telling them, “I love you.”

Limitations

As with any study, there are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the present study findings. First, our sample of mothers were from one of the biggest city of southern Italy, Palermo, Sicily. As such, these mothers’ conceptualization of good parenting and parent-child relationships may not generalize to those of mothers in other
parts of Southern Italy. In addition, our sample of mothers were rather well-educated. As parenting has been found to vary across parents with different education levels (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002), future studies should include mothers with a wider range of educational backgrounds. Further, our study relied only on mothers’ ideas about parenting and did not included the point of view of fathers and/or other caregivers, which have to be considered in order to depict a more complete picture of good parenting practices in the Sicilian context.

CONCLUSION

Despite these limitations, findings from our study contribute substantially to the understanding of good parenting practices in southern Italy and may have important implications for future research. In particular, results confirm that cultural values and beliefs matter and must be always considered when studying parenting and their implications. Although optimal parenting has been considered the expression of a balance between control and affection (e.g., Baumrind, 2013; Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013), Sicilian mothers in our study appeared to value control and demandingness as imperative and fundamental in defining a good parent, more than other aspects related to warmth and responsiveness. However, their continued attention to affection suggests a need to reconsider the meaning and possible outcomes of traditional measures of authoritarian parenting practices within the Sicilian cultural context. Specifically, our findings raise questions about the accurate measurement of parenting beliefs and practices in this cultural context. A belief or behavior, if interpreted differently by members of particular cultural groups, may not have the same implications in its associations with child outcomes (Cheah, Li, Zhou, Yamamoto, & Leung, 2015). Thus, rather than assuming that current parenting measures are adequate for all cultural groups, researchers need to further explore these assumptions. Importantly, the various practices of parenting documented in our study can guide future efforts in developing
culturally appropriate measurement of parenting and the benefits of such practices across cultures.

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Table 1. Questioning route of focus group discussions

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<th>Questions of focus groups discussions</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. What do you think may be the characteristics of a good parent of a 4-5 years old child?</td>
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<td>2. What are the most important child rearing aims that a good parent must pursue?</td>
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<td>3. Could you give me examples of behaviors and ways of educating that these parents could adopt and that make them good parents?</td>
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<td>4. How would you describe a good relationship between a parent and his/her 4-5 year old child?</td>
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Table 2. Themes and subthemes concerning the ideas of a good parent and examples of quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Examples of Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rules of conduct</strong></td>
<td>“The rules are important because the rules are essential in the world. I hope that my son acquires the rules” “don’t do this”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting rules that regulate what children should and should not do</td>
<td>“don’t shout”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Threats of punishment</strong></td>
<td>“The other day I told my son, “now you get some rest and then we can go to the party,” but he said “no” so I said, &quot;okay, if you don’t get some rest you won’t go to the party”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussions related to threatening, pressuring and intimidating children to obtain child compliance or obedience</td>
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<td><strong>Consistency</strong></td>
<td>“I do not want to give him snacks before dinner. He often insists…but I don’t give in, because it is not nutritional for them”</td>
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<td>Being consistent in between one’s own behaviors across different situations; being consistent across those of both parents</td>
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<td><strong>Respect for others</strong></td>
<td>“It is important at this age to make sure that your child is in contact with other children...just to learn things such as respect for them or turn taking”</td>
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<td>Discussions highlighting the sense of respect for others and their possessions</td>
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<td><strong>Affection</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Quality time</strong></td>
<td>“A parent must devote time to take care to his or her child; just supporting him, sitting with him, helping him to improve his self-esteem and so on”</td>
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<td>Devoting time to children</td>
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<td><strong>Child-focused</strong></td>
<td>“Don’t get angry, but see things from their perspective. Try to understand their point of view and to explain things”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considering the thoughts and feelings of children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independence and autonomy</strong></td>
<td>“The goal [of a good parent] is to increase their self-esteem and autonomy, it is important to support children”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting children’s independence and autonomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3. Themes concerning a good parent-child relationship and examples of quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples of Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance</strong></td>
<td>“Equilibrium between yes and no. A clear distinction of the roles...so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining symmetry between love and control</td>
<td>they [children] know that they can count on parents even if parents say no, because with their no’s they are teaching something”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Communication and Confidence</strong></td>
<td>“For me it is important the presence of both parents, communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with children and making them feel confident in the relationship</td>
<td>with children...I take the example from my father... the proximity and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confidence, talking and explaining things even the most trivial”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect</strong></td>
<td>“A good relationship? Understanding each other...trust, but moreover respect...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that both parties feel respected</td>
<td>“A good relationship for me is based on mutual respect between parents and children, continuously listening to reciprocal requests”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>