1   Culture and Peer Relationships

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Cultural context plays an important role in the development of individual social and behavioral characteristics and peer relationships (e.g., Hinde, 1987). As a result, children in different cultures may engage in different types of social interactions and develop different types of relationships. Moreover, cultural values and beliefs, particularly those pertaining to developmental goals and socialization practices, may affect the function and organization of peer relationships. Specifically, cultural norms and values may serve as a basis for the interpretation of particular behaviors (e.g., aggression, sociability, shyness–inhibition) and for the judgment about the appropriateness of these behaviors. The interpretation and evaluation of social behaviors in turn may have pervasive implications for the processes of peer interactions and the formation of dyadic and group relationships. Finally, the cultural aspects of children's peer experiences are reflected in how they affect developmental pathways and outcomes. For example, the extent to which children's interactions with each other do or do not include responsibility for younger children in a culture (see Gaskins, this volume) may be associated with the later display of nurturance and prosocial behavior.

Despite the importance of cultural context for individual social functioning and peer interactions, the research on peer relationships has traditionally focused on Western, particularly North American, cultures. In the past decade, researchers have expanded their work considerably in non-Western regions of the world (e.g., Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002). There has been a steady increase in the number of studies focused on peer relationships in different cultures, and the findings have illustrated the variations of child and adolescent peer experiences across cultures. We initiated this volume to bring this work together. In the sections that follow, we discuss some general issues involved in the study of peer relationships in cultural context. We then provide an overview of the sections of this book.

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Cultural Involvement in Individual Functioning and Social Relationships: Theoretical Perspectives

Developmental theorists have explored the role of culture in human social and cognitive development from two major perspectives. The first perspective, represented by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), focuses on culture as a context or a component of the socioecological environment. Within this contextualist perspective, it is assumed that social interactions and relationships are affected by the beliefs, values, and practices that are typically but often not universally endorsed within a cultural group. Peer relationships may be more directly influenced by these cultural beliefs and values than individual characteristics because peer activities are often based on social norms and norm-related interpersonal perceptions, evaluations, and reactions (Hinde, 1987). Because peer relationships constitute a social setting that exerts immediate and proximal influence on the child, cultural beliefs and values that guide peer activities are likely to be reflected in individual functioning.

In addition to its direct effects, culture may affect peer interactions and individual development through the organization of various social settings, such as community services, school, and day-care arrangements (Tietjen, this volume). Cultural beliefs about socialization goals and practices may guide governments and socialization agents to set up institutions, distribute resources, and coordinate events in the society so that they influence the development of children and adolescents in a systematic and meaningful manner (Super & Harkness, 1986). In many contemporary societies, schools provide children with the primary context for peer involvement because they congregate large numbers of non-kin same-age children under the care of relatively few non-kin adults. The school setting may be a precondition for establishing large same-age peer groups.

One of the cultural dimensions that has been extensively explored is collectivism versus individualism or interdependent versus independent orientations (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1990). In individualistic societies, individual needs and characteristics, personal freedom and independence, and self-realization are highly emphasized. People are encouraged to become autonomous, self-reliant, and emotionally detached from their groups and form only loose social associations (e.g., Triandis, 1995). In collectivistic societies, however, the interests of the individual are considered subordinated to those of the collective. The expression of individuals' needs or striving for personal autonomy, especially when it threatens the group functioning, is often viewed as unacceptable (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998). Cultures with collectivistic values typically emphasize interdependent

ties among individuals, group loyalty, limited personal privacy, conformity to collective standards, and respect for authority (Triandis, 1995). These values are of considerable relevance to social interactions and relationships in the peer context.

The broad framework of collectivism versus individualism has been criticized on both theoretical and methodological grounds. Theoretically, there are concerns regarding its oversimplistic categorization of complex cultural systems (e.g., Miller, 2002), as well as the inadequacy of these dimensions to explain the substantial heterogeneity within cultures and massive differences between cultures that are assumed to be collectivist or individualist. Methodologically, there are questions about what the defining features of individualistic and collectivist cultures are and how one can assess them. Many of the problems have arisen from researchers' attempts to use the individualism and collectivism constructs to understand and compare individual personality traits across and within cultures (e.g., Triandis, 1990). This may not be consistent with Hofstede's initial notions of culture at the national level because collectivism and individualism are mainly "sociological" rather than "psychological" constructs (Hofstede, 1994) and are mainly defined by political, social, and economic organizations (e.g., socialist vs. capitalist economic systems) and general ideological orientations. These macro- or context-level organization styles and orientations may not be measured using attitudinal scales at the individual level (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). The influence of social and cultural contexts on personal value systems, relationships, and behaviors at the individual level is not straightforward (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002), and the manner in which societal or group-level cultural orientations are reflected in individual beliefs and behaviors needs rigorous scientific investigation.

Many researchers, nevertheless, continue to rely on the collectivism–individualism value dimension to explain cross-cultural differences in individual attitudes and behaviors. Two reasons may account for this reality. First, there is a paucity of theories that can be employed to explain similarities and differences among various cultural systems, and researchers have necessarily used the theories that are available. Second, the constructs of collectivism and individualism appear to be useful in characterizing some of the main differences between cultures that differ in extreme form on these dimensions (e.g., the United States and many Asian countries). The utility of these constructs, however, appears to break down when one attempts to compare different collectivist (e.g., South Korean and Indonesian) or individualistic (Swedish vs. United States) cultures or to describe cultures that display a clear mix of individualistic and collectivist features.

The second major perspective on cultural influence, represented by the Russian sociocultural and activity theories (Leontiev, 1981; Luria, 1928; Vygotsky, 1978), focuses mainly on the process of the transmission or internalization of cultural values from the interpersonal or social level to intrapersonal or psychological level. According to this perspective, the development of human mental processes is mediated by psychological "tools" (e.g., language, concepts, signs, and symbols) that are products of human culture. During development, children master these tools through internalization of the external signs, along with their cultural meanings, so that they can rely on them to perform various mental processes, such as remembering and recalling (Karpov, 2005). A major mechanism of internalization is collaborative or guided learning in which more experienced peers or adults, as skilled tutors and representatives of the culture, assist the child to understand and solve the task. Peer interactions among same-age children have received relatively little attention, as these are not considered as important for cultural internalization as activities under the guidance or "tutoring" of adults, older siblings, or more knowledgeable peers. Nevertheless, the descriptions of cultural mechanisms and processes in the sociocultural and activities theories, such as the "zone of proximal development," participation in cultural practices, and interpersonal cooperation, are useful for understanding peer interactions, especially with more competent peers who may serve as co-constructivists (e.g., Rogoff, 2003).

Researchers from the sociocultural perspective have typically been interested in uncovering the processes by which activities in a particular cultural setting affect the development of competencies. For example, Luria (1976) explored in the 1930s how cultural change from traditional pastoralism to participation in collective activities and schooling led to cognitive development (e.g., from context-specific reasoning to more abstract thinking) (Cole, 2005). Similar studies have been conducted in recent years in other societies to investigate how participation in different cultural activities affects individual development (e.g., Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003).

Theorists and researchers from both the contextualist and sociocultural backgrounds have become increasingly aware of the active role of the child in cultural activities. There is evidence that child disposition, behaviors, and experiences may interact with socialization practices, such as parenting (e.g., Collins et al., 2000; Schafer, 2000). Moreover, children are not passive recipients of cultural influence, but instead, are active participants in adopting and modifying existing conventions and values, and more importantly, in constructing their own norms and cultures in peer interactions (Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Edwards et al., this volume). The active role of the child in socialization

requires that scholars and researchers theorize and investigate the mutual influences among the child, peer relationships, and culture from a contextualized, dynamic, and developmental perspective.

Cultural Imprint on Peer Relationships

Cultural beliefs and values are likely reflected at each level of children's peer relationships, including interactions, friendships, social networks, and acceptance and rejection within the larger peer group. At the *interactional* level, cultural norms and values may affect how sociable or active children are with peers. DeSouza and Chen (2005), for example, recently found that Canadian preschool-age children were more active in participating in peer interactions than their Chinese counterparts. In contrast, Chinese children engaged in more nonsocial behaviors, such as passive solitary and parallel play activities, than Canadian children. The differences found in this study between Chinese and Canadian children on the overall engagement of peer interactions may indicate the different cultural expectations concerning the development of sociability, as this is less valued and encouraged in Chinese culture than in North American cultures (Chen et al., 2000; Liang, 1987; Yang, 1986).

Distinct cultural features may also be found in how children display specific behaviors in initiating and responding to social contact. Consistent with the argument on collectivism–individualism (e.g., Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Triandis, 1990), children in European American societies are socialized to behave in assertive, self-directive, and autonomous ways in social interactions. Moreover, within Western individualistic cultures, individuals are often encouraged to follow their interests (self-determination and self-governance; (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hodgins, Koestner, & Duncan, 1996) and personally choose whether or not to enter into social relationships and assume the social responsibilities (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998). Children are expected and encouraged to maintain personal autonomy and freedom during peer interactions (Larson, 1999; Triandis, 1995), and peer interactions are considered important largely as a social context for the achievement of individual competencies (Oyserman et al., 2002).

In many Asian and Latino group-oriented societies, however, peer interactions are characterized by more affiliative and cooperative activities and greater self-control (Chen, 2000; Domino, 1992; Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990), which may indicate cultural endorsement of interpersonal harmony and individual responsibility for the group. As a major socialization goal, children are encouraged to learn skills and behaviors that are conducive to

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interpersonal cooperation and group functioning (Chen, 2000; Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998). As a result, children in these societies may display relatively lower autonomy and competitiveness and higher mutual sensitivity and compliance in social interactions (Liu et al., in press; Schneider et al., 2005).

Considerable variation across cultures is also seen in the extent to which conflicts are openly expressed and in the preferred methods for addressing interpersonal conflicts (Markus & Lin, 1999). In the United States, conflict is often viewed as inevitable and reflective of ongoing struggles between desires for integration and autonomy (Rothbaum et al., 2000). In many other cultures, conflict is minimized, particularly when it threatens relationships (Markus & Lin, 1999). For example, in Indonesia, individuals are expected to maintain interpersonal harmony and to avoid conflict by staying away from some individuals and refraining from focusing on problematic topics. When conflicts arise, they are often dealt with by disengagement, in contrast to the preference of U.S. children to display assertiveness and negotiation (French, Pidada, Denoma et al., in press).

Cultural values may be reflected in the structural and functional characteristics of friendship and group relationships. French, Bae et al. (in press) found that Korean adolescents tended to form smaller exclusive friendship networks than their counterparts in Indonesia and the United States. Moreover, the friendships of Korean and U.S. college students lasted longer in duration than those of Indonesian students. The results seem to suggest that the Korean culture, with a strong Confucian tradition that emphasizes intensive support and interdependence among friends, may influence the organization of friendships (French, Bae et al., in press).

Cross-cultural differences on the functional roles that children's friendships and peer group networks fulfill have been reported in several studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2004; French Setiono, & Eddy, 1999; French et al., 2003; Tietjen, 1989). For example, whereas the enhancement of self-esteem is regarded as significant among friends in Western cultures, it is not particularly salient in Chinese and Indonesian children (e.g., Chen et al., 2004; French, Pidada, Victor et al., in press). Similarly, whereas group affiliation is viewed in Western cultures as fulfilling individual psychological needs, such as the development of self-identity and enhancement of feelings about self-worth (e.g., Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998; Sullivan, 1953), some Asian cultures place greater emphasis on socializing members to develop cooperative and compliant behavior with others rather than to stand out as individuals (Chen et al., 2004). Accordingly, "good" friendships and groups are those that encourage socially valued goals and norms, whereas "bad" relationships are those that reinforce and facilitate defiant and irresponsible

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behaviors. Although good and bad relationships may both provide children with emotional closeness, the emotional functions are valued only when they are directed by, and serve, the "right" social goals (Chen et al., 2004; Luo, 1996).

Instrumental aid is an additional provision of friendships that may be appreciated differently across cultures. According to Smart (1999), friendships in Asian cultures, at least in the Chinese culture, are likely to be instrumental, rather than expressive or emotional. This argument has been recently challenged by Chen et al. (2004). In their cross-cultural studies, Chen et al. (2004) found that, although Chinese children were more likely than Canadian children to appreciate the instrumental value of their friendships, both Chinese and Canadian children reported that companionship and intimate disclosure were more important than instrumental assistance in their friendships. French, Bae et al. (in press) similarly found that, although instrumental aid was more salient among Indonesian than U.S. youth, similar to the findings of Chen et al. (2004), this aspect of friendships was rated as being less important than other provisions of the relationship.

Finally, at the *overall peer acceptance* level, cultural values play a major role in establishing standards for the acceptance and rejection of children with different social and nonsocial profiles. Culture may define appropriate or inappropriate behaviors by providing a frame of reference for the social evaluation of the behaviors (Bornstein, 1995; Chen, 2000; Kleinman, 1988). The social evaluation may, in turn, affect how children interpret and react to each other's behaviors in social interactions and eventually determine whether a child is accepted or rejected by peers. Empirical findings have indicated cultural differences in the acceptance of children who are prototypically assertive–sociable (Chen et al., 2000), aggressive (Casiglia, Lo Coco, & Zapulla, 1998; Krispin, Sternberg, & Lamb, 1992; Tomada & Schneider, 1997), or shy–anxious (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992; Valdivia et al., in press) among their peers. For example, Chen et al. found that, whereas shy–anxious children are likely to be rejected or isolated in Canada, their counterparts in China were accepted by peers and well adjusted to the social environment (e.g., Chen et al., 1992; Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995). The different experiences of shy–anxious children in peer acceptance in China and Canada may be related to different cultural values on shy, wary, and sensitive behaviors. In Western cultures, shy and sensitive behavior is taken to reflect internal anxiety and fearfulness and a lack of self-confidence in social-evaluative situations (Asendorpf, 1990). Because of the emphasis on assertiveness, expressiveness, and competitiveness, children who display shy behavior are often regarded as socially immature and deviant (Rubin, Burgess, & Coplan, 2002). In

traditional Chinese culture, however, shy, sensitive, and restrained behaviors are considered an indication of social accomplishment and maturity; shy children are perceived as well behaved and understanding (Liang, 1987; Yang, 1986). The cultural endorsement may help shy children obtain social approval and support in peer interactions.

Taking a different perspective, in the peer relationship literature (Hymel & Rubin, 1985), peer acceptance is often considered an index of social competence and used as an operational definition of success in social settings. This opens up the possibility of examining various competent and incompetent behaviors within a particular culture by linking them to peer acceptance. This strategy was applied by Eisenberg et al. (this volume) in their attempts to study relations between various aspects of emotional control and peer acceptance. Similarly, French, Pidada, Denoma et al. (in press) examined how disengagement from conflict was associated with social competence for Indonesian but not U.S. children. The approach is consistent with the notion that social competence must be considered in reference to cultural context. According to Ogbu (1995), individuals within a culture typically share assumptions about the attributes and competencies that individuals require to be successful. The assumptions are often developed in relation to the subsistence requirements and thus vary between societies as well as different subgroup members within the society. Within-culture links between individual attributes and peer acceptance indicate how children construe social competence in a specific context from an insider's perspective.

The Regulatory Role of Culturally Organized Peer Relationships in Human Development

According to Sullivan (1953), being accepted by peers and establishing close relationships or "chumships" with peers are intrinsic needs of children during the period of childhood and preadolescence. Although Sullivan emphasizes peer relationships mainly in terms of their functions in the development of a sense of well-being or self-validation, the needs for peer affiliation and belongingness may motivate children to modify their behavior to conform to peer norms. This regulatory function may be facilitated by the social learning processes in children's peer interactions (e.g., Hartup, 1992). In a study of children's group entry behavior, Borja-Alvarez, Zarbatany, and Pepper (1991) found that, whereas the behavior of the entering child affected the group functioning, the attitude of the group (e.g., positive initiation, ignoring, overt rejection) in turn influenced the response styles and entry strategies of the entering child and his or her group entry outcomes.

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The regulatory function of peer relationships may depend on specific peer activities (e.g., display of autonomous versus cooperative behaviors), types of relationships (e.g., affective vs. instrumental), and group norms and standards (e.g., encouraging assertiveness vs. social inhibition). Thus, particular patterns of peer interactions and relationships in a culture determine, to a large extent, how they regulate individual behaviors and developmental processes. At a more general level, however, the regulatory function of peer relationships may be affected by such cultural beliefs and values as collectivistic versus individualistic orientations. In societies with a strong individualistic orientation, children are often encouraged to maintain personal identity and autonomy in peer interactions and group activities (e.g., Triandis, 1995). Thus, the self-oriented cultural context may constrain or attenuate the role of peer relationships in regulating individual behaviors. This argument seems to be consistent with the findings from empirical research that, although peer support and communications are associated with self-worth and self-feelings, the effects of peer relationships such as friendships are generally modest on children's social and cognitive performance (e.g., Berndt, 1996; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1993; Tremblay et al., 1995).

In contrast, peers may exert extensive influence on individual behaviors in collectivistic or group-oriented cultures because of the emphasis on interdependence among individuals, group loyalty, and conformity to group norms (Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1990). At the same time, children in these cultures may be highly *sensitive* to peers' evaluations and *responsive* to peer group pressure. Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that collectivistic cultural values may reinforce and facilitate the regulatory effect of peer context on children's behaviors and development in various domains (e.g., Chen, Chang, & He, 2003; Azmitia & Cooper, 2004).

The regulation of peer relationships indicates that children may play an active role in socialization and cultural transmission through participating peer group activities. During these activities, children may adopt some components of the existing culture passed on from previous generations, and they may also construct their own cultural norms according to their circumstances (Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Harris, 1995). Researchers have found substantial between-group variations and within-group homogeneity in social norms that direct group organization. For example, Brown et al. (1993) found that peer groups developed norms consistent with their group identities, such as "jocks," "brains," "populars," "partyers," "nerds," and "burnouts." Similarly, Chen et al. (2003) found that peer groups among Chinese children differed systematically in their academic achievement and prosocial–antisocial

dimensions. The peer culture formed on the basis of group activities may have a significant effect, not only on group organization but also on individual attitudes and behaviors, including how they react to other socialization influences, such as parenting attempts (Chen et al., 2005; Lansford et al., 2003; Schwartz et al., 2000).

The production of new peer culture norms and their role in regulating individual behaviors may be particularly evident in social interactions of immigrant children and children of immigrants. Children from immigrant families differ from others in many aspects of social and school adjustment, such as friendship and peer networks (e.g., Azmitia & Cooper, 2004; Way & Pahl, 2001). The experience of diverse cultural values during socialization may be one of the major factors responsible for the differences. Whereas the different, or even conflictual, cultural experiences in the home and the school may lead to confusion, frustration, and distress, mixed cultural backgrounds may also be a resource for the development of social competence. In their interactions with family members and individuals in the school, children with different backgrounds may develop coherent and sophisticated peer cultures that incorporate diverse, and perhaps complementary, values and behavioral norms, such as responsibility, achievement, independent skills, and individual autonomy (Conzen et al., 1992; Fuligi, 1998; Zhou, 1997). The integrated cultural beliefs and values may play a unique role in guiding children's peer interactions, friendship formation, and group organization (e.g., Way & Pahl, 2001). From a different perspective, it is possible that the peer group culture that children from immigrant families form, either among themselves or with peers of different backgrounds, may be a buffering factor that protects these children in their adjustment to the challenging social environment outside the family. From this perspective, it is also possible that, in many societies that are undergoing dramatic social and economic transitions, peer cultures may buffer the stressful experience of children and adolescents.

The Organization of the Book

There are five sections in this book. The focus of the first section is on theoretical and methodological issues in the study of peer relationships. The chapter "Children's Social Behaviors and Peer Interactions in Diverse Cultures" by Edwards et al. presents recent views on cultural involvement in children's peer interactions, with a particular emphasis on the active role of the child through self-guided participation in socialization. This chapter also analyzes the relations among the child's characteristics, peer interactions, and cultural context from a developmental perspective. The chapter "Cultural Influences on Peer