

Korean Mothers' Ideal and Actual Parenting Behaviors Toward their Young Children as a Function of Child Gender, Age, and Birth Order

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Abstract : The purpose of this study was to examine mothers' ideal and actual parenting behaviors toward their infants in three parenting domains; social, didactic, and limit setting. A total of 264 mothers of young children under age three from Seoul, Korea completed Parental Style Questionnaires (PSQ). Mothers' self report on their ideal and actual parenting were explored as a function of child sex, age, and birth order. As expected, there were significant differences between mothers' ideal and actual behaviors in all three parenting domains: Mothers' ideal behaviors such as social interaction, didactic interaction and limit setting were higher than those of their actual behaviors. For mothers' ideal parenting, results revealed neither significant main effects nor interaction effects. However, the Parenting Domain x Birth-Order 2-way interaction and the Parenting Domain x Child Age 2-way interaction were significant for mothers' actual behaviors. Specifically, mothers reported more social and didactic behaviors with their first-born than later born children, but not for limit setting behavior. It was also found that higher limit setting behaviors were apparent for their 2- and 3-year-old than 1-year old children whereas lower social interactions were found for 3-year-old than for 1-year-old. In light of universality and uniqueness, mothers' parenting behavior toward young children has been discussed.

Key Words : ideal parenting, actual parenting, mother-infant interaction, maternal behavior, maternal attitude

I. Introduction

Child development is influenced by the interactions they have over time with people, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Of particular importance are the increasingly complex and reciprocal interactions that occur between children and their parents as children develop, because parents directly shape their children's experiences by virtue of interaction with them.

Although parents typically share strong feelings of love and concern for their children, they differ in the

ways they care for their children. Many factors play a role in the way parents care for their children. It is generally recognized that parent-child interactions or parenting behaviors depend on characteristics of the child (e.g. temperament, health, age, gender, birth order), characteristics of parents (e.g. personality, child rearing beliefs, educational background, psychological well-being), and the context (e.g. marital relationship, social network, work, culture). Among these, societal factors such as culture and family structure- most germane to this study- are clearly important contexts which influence beliefs and behaviors of parents.

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A growing body of literature on cross-cultural differences in socialization is helping us understand the socialization process in different cultures. Differences found between parenting in different cultures are used to suggest differences in socialization outcomes. Super and Harkness (1997) asserted in developing the concept of the developmental niche, three components organize the child developmental context: 1) physical and social settings in which the child lives, 2) the customs of child care and child rearing, and 3) the psychology of the child's caregivers. The three components operate together as a system. As an aspect of the psychology of the caregiver, the parental cultural belief system (i.e. parental attitudes and ideas) is considered an important source of parenting practice and for the organization of daily life for children.

Parents' thoughts about child rearing and the ways in which they interact with children to achieve developmental goal are culturally determined. In other words, culture influences parenting patterns and child development from early in infancy through such factors as how parents care, the extent to which parents permit infants to explore, how nurturant or restrictive parents are and so forth (Bornstein, 1991). Cross-cultural developmental studies reveal that psychomotor differences among infants reflect to some substantial degree the influence of parents' child-rearing practices that vary with culture (Bornstein & Cheah, 2005).

In spite of the general recognition of the importance of parent-child interaction in infancy, parenting attitudes or ideas about child rearing-of young children has not been well documented in Korea. Instead, most of the research on parenting has been aimed at investigating the effects of parenting behavior on child socialization. Moreover, research has focused attention almost exclusively on older children and conceptually diverse domains of parenting, including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglecting behaviors. Researchers have been in agreement that the domains of parenting behavior in infancy could be different from those of parenting in childhood and even the same parenting behaviors could

change in both quality and quantity as the child grows. In reviewing American literature, a small number of domains of parenting interactions in infancy or toddler age could be identified as common 'cores' of parenting. That is, research on child-rearing pertinent to infancy has mainly focused on social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors (Belsky, 1984; Bornstein, Tamis-LeMonda, Pascual, Haynes, Painter, Galperin, & Pecheux, 1996). According to Bornstein *et al.* (1996), social interactions involve expression of sensitivity, reciprocity, and affect parents in interpersonal exchanges within the parent-child dyad. Didactic interactions include stimulating children's awareness of properties, objects, and events, whereas limit setting involves inculcation of conventions and rules as well as respect for authority. Likewise, Bornstein (2002) also suggested four superordinate categories of parental care giving, which apply to the infancy period: they are nurturing, social, didactic, and material. These parenting domains are considered universal as well as varying across cultures. Mothers' social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors toward children in infancy are the focus of this study.

Before children are old enough to enter formal social situations, most of their experience stems directly from interaction with their parents at home. Therefore, exploring the ways parents interact with young children within the home environment in a particular culture provides valuable information to understand parenting beliefs and child development. Parents develop a system of beliefs in child-rearing and enact their beliefs via parenting behaviors. In this process, general cultural attitudes shape parenting beliefs and practices of young children. In other words, parents in a culture have their own goals and aspirations about parenting children and their ideal behaviors, which reflect their goals as parent guide parenting strategies. It is a common proposition that parents have high aspirations of parenting, but their actual behaviors fall short of their ideal behaviors. Disparity between mothers' ideal and actual behavior results in their dissatisfaction with parenting, which may provoke emotional stress (Alexander & Higgins, 1993).

Thus, investigation of the discrepancy between actual and ideal behavior would provide information on cultural differences and practical implication as well.

The purpose of this study was to explore the discrepancy between mothers' perception of their actual and ideal behavior and the mean differences between parenting domains. To this end, Korean mothers' perception of their own actual and ideal behaviors in three domains; social, didactic, and limit -setting was compared. Related to this issue, two questions were addressed: 1) To what extent do mothers' actual behaviors deviate from their ideal behaviors in the three domains of parenting? 2) What are the behaviors in most disagreement (or agreement) between domains of actual or ideal parenting? Cote and Bornstein (2004) found that discrepancies between parents' ideal and actual behaviors emerged for all three parenting domains. Specifically, both South American and Japanese American mothers have higher expectations for all three domains of parenting (i.e. social, didactic and limit setting behaviors) with infants than they can reach. On the other hand, some researchers have found discrepancies in some domains of parenting but not others. For example, Lawton, Schuler, Fowell, & Madsen (1984) found Caucasian middle class parents perceived the most agreement between their actual and ideal behaviors toward their preschoolers in the social domain. Ethnic differences have also been reported. Argentine mothers displayed greater actual-ideal discrepancy in social and didactic interaction than U.S. mothers, but none for limit setting (Bornstein *et al.*, 1996). In light of common discrepancies between ideal and actual behavior of human, it is reasonable to assume that Korean mothers' ideal behaviors would be rated higher than actual behavior in all three domains.

No specific hypothesis was made for the second question in this study. It is generally assumed that parents in a collective culture are involved in more social exchanges than didactic interactions with their children. In accordance with a common collectivist orientation, Japanese-American and South American mothers

engaged in more social than didactic interactions with their infants (Cote & Bornstein, 2000). Considering the fact that Korean culture is more sociocentric than individualistic, it is possible that mothers in this sample would engage in more social than didactic interactions. However, Park, Soe, and Bornstein (2005) in a home observation study, reported that Korean mothers' interaction with 5 month old infant did not differ between social and didactic behaviors whereas mothers involved in more didactic interactions with 13 month old infants. In fact, contemporary Korean middle-class mothers place most emphasis on influencing intellectual development from infancy. On the other hand, they have little concerns about rules and are very permissive with children in early years. Moreover, mothers generally believe that children become well behave as they grow (Kim & Park, 2002). Thus, a second possibility is that mothers would be involved in more didactic than social interaction and be involved least in limit setting.

This study also aimed at exploring the variation of social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors as a function of child gender, birth order and age. The origins of individual variation in parenting or parent-infant interaction are extremely complex, but certain factors such as characteristics of the child, characteristics of the parents and contextual influences seem to be of paramount importance. In Asian culture, sex and birth order are particularly the most important variables to explain the differences in parenting behavior (Han, 1999). Due to the fast changing nature of Korean society, young mothers are not likely to have traditional attitudes of thinking highly of sons, (particularly the first son) as much as their parents did (Park & Belsky, 1998; Park, Lee, & Park, 2000). Nevertheless, even young parents rather wish to have a first son rather than a first daughter for themselves and their parents as well (Choi, 2006). It was also found that mothers interacted more with baby girls than boys, particularly in didactic interactions (Park, *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, Korean mothers have different goals of parenting, socialization beliefs, and expectations of their children depending on their child's

sex (Park & Cheah, 2005). Western studies also suggest mothers are more likely to show responsiveness to baby boys than to baby girls (Brody, 2000; Weinberg, Tronic, Cohn, & Olson, 1999). Inconsistently, other studies did not find child gender differences in parent-infant interaction (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984; Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, Moulton, 2002; Park & Lim, 2000). In spite of these inconsistent results, Leaper (2002) in reviewing parenting literature, concludes that parenting infant girls and boys is surprisingly similar. In light of this literature review, it was hypothesized that mothers would not interact differently with their children depending on child gender.

Research with infants has also shown birth-order effects. According to American literature (Jacobs & Moss, 1976; Lewis & Kreitzberg, 1979), parents provide more stimulation, talk more and spend more time in non-feeding activities with the first-born. In a similar vein, Korean parents have been reported to have special and higher expectations for their first-born sons (Han, 1999). Most importantly, they have higher expectations of academic achievement for their first-born child (Han, 1999; Lim, 1993). Reflecting on Korean traditional values, it is reasonable to assume that Korean mothers should interact significantly more with their first-born son. Alternatively, due to the low birth rate (1.08/family) in contemporary Korean society, it is also possible that birth order would not make any differences in parenting behaviors. The differential treatment and experience a child receives within the family structure as a function of his ordinal position produces the subsequent behavioral differences related to birth order. Comparing mothers' behavior of first and later born infants should be helpful for understanding child behavior associated with ordinal position.

Child age is another factor which influences parental behavior. It is a common proposition that types of parent-child interactions are changing depending on children's age or development. For instance, as a child gets older, a mother's social interaction with the infant decreases, whereas didactic interaction increases (Belsky

et al., 1984; Bornstein & Tamis-Lemonda, 1990). In contrast, Park *et al.* (2005), in their home observation study, recently reported that both maternal, social and didactic interactions decreased over the 5 to 13 month time period. Meanwhile, limit setting becomes a more important aspect of parenting for older infants or toddlers (Bornstein, 2002). When the child is beyond the age of 2, behavior may be influenced more by the child's sense of autonomy. Many studies have documented developmental changes in the ways that toddlers express their autonomy. For instance, younger toddlers express passive noncompliance and direct defiance whereas older toddlers use direct refusal or negotiation (Edwards & Liu, 2002). It is also believed that these behavioral changes are accompanied by changes in parenting. Despite the prevailing view regarding behavioral change in toddler, few studies been attempted to provide empirical evidence of developmental change in parenting. One of the purposes of this study was to explore the variation of parenting behaviors in the three domains as a function of child age.

II. Methods

1. Participants

The participants in this investigation were 264 Korean mothers of young children under three years of age ($M = 18.4$ months; $SD = 8.8$ months; 131 boys and 133 girls) in Seoul, Korea. Mothers were recruited from childcare centers or early education centers in the surrounding Seoul area. Mothers averaged 33 years of age ($SD = 3.1$), and 82% of the mothers were in their late 20's and early 30's. About 94% of the mothers have had 'college and up' education and 67% of the mothers were homemakers and the remaining 33% were employed in mostly skilled occupations. The average family income represents the middle-class socioeconomic status in Korea. For the statistical analysis, the sample was grouped into 2 levels of birth order (first born, later-

<Table 1> Socio-demographic information for subjects (N = 264)

	Child Age	Mother Age	Mother Education	Income
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
Child Gender				
Boy	17.89(9.24)	33.24(3.50)	3.11(.52)	4.72(1.74)
Girl	18.84(8.47)	32.75(2.66)	3.12(.48)	4.83(1.68)
Birth Order				
First	18.03(8.69)	32.37(3.01)	3.13(.48)	4.72(1.68)
Later	19.29(9.28)	34.67(2.78)	3.08(.55)	4.92(1.79)
Child Age(yr)				
1	7.24(3.27)	32.22(2.97)	3.14(.48)	4.68(1.68)
2	18.53(3.40)	32.76(3.03)	3.12(.51)	4.76(1.76)
3	29.54(3.38)	34.20(3.10)	3.09(.50)	4.90(1.66)

born) and 3 levels of child age (less than 12 months, 12-24month, & 24-36month). <Table 1> contains socio-demographic information about the sample. Preliminary analyses showed no significant differences in terms of mothers' education and family incomes between the sub-groups of children, but not surprisingly, mothers' mean age in both birth order and age subgroups was significantly different <Table 1>. As such, only 'age of mother' was used as a covariate where appropriate.

2. Procedures

Packets of questionnaires including a brief description of the study, the informed consent forms, a demographics form, and parenting questionnaires were sent home to mothers of children. Participating mothers were instructed to return the completed questionnaires to the centers. About seventy percent of the solicited mothers participated.

3. Mothers' ideal and actual parenting behaviors

Parental Style Questionnaires (PSQ: Bornstein *et al.*, 1996) were used for data collection. PSQ, a self-report measure of parents' behavior, was constructed to index differences in domains of parenting behaviors with infants and toddlers. The PSQ, originally consisted of 17 items was translated into Korean. The questionnaire

assessed ideal and actual behaviors toward young children regarding three aspects of parenting domains, i. e. social behavior, didactic behavior and limit setting. Mothers were asked to respond to each item of two versions of PSQ, one dealing with ideal parenting (i.e. How would they ideally like to behave?) and a second dealing with actual parenting (i.e. How do they believe they behave in these specific domains of parenting?).

Mothers rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "hardly at all (1)" to "all the time (5)". An example of social interaction is: "(Ideally), I (would) promptly and appropriately respond to my child's expressed distress or discomfort". An example of didactic interaction is: "(Ideally), I (would) provide my child with a variety of toys and objects for play and exploration". An example of limit setting is: "(Ideally), I (would) emphasize the importance of abiding by rules and being well mannered to my child".

Factor analysis of responses of 264 Korean mothers yielded 3 parenting factors consisting of 16 items for ideal behavior and 14 items for actual behavior. Each version had the same items except 2 items, which were deleted in the actual PSQ. Reliability analysis revealed adequate internal consistency. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the social (8 items), didactic (5 items), and limit setting (3 items) were .80, .71, and .65 respectively, for ideal PSQ items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the social (7 items), didactic (4 items),

and limit setting (3 items) were .78, .71, and .61 respectively, for actual PSQ items.

In comparing ideal and actual behaviors, paired *t* tests were performed on the means of each of the three parenting domains. A series of paired *t* tests on the dissonance scores (defined as ideal-actual scores) was also carried out. To determine whether there were differences in ideal or actual parenting behaviors as a function of child gender, age and birth-order, MANOVA with child gender, age and birth-order as between-subject factors and the three parenting domains as within subject factors, and mother's age as a covariate was employed.

III. Results

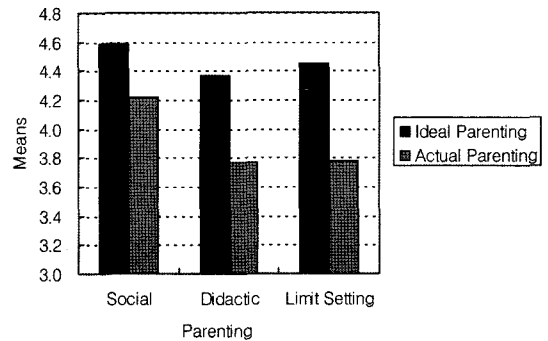
A series of correlations were computed between demographic variables (such as age of mother, mother's education, and income) and all the outcome variables (i.e. ideal and actual parenting domains). Non-significant correlations emerged except for the variables "age of mother" children, which were related to mothers' actual social behavior ($r = .16, p < .05$). Thus, only mothers' age was used as a covariate.

1. Discrepancies between actual and ideal parental behavior

<Table 2> presents means between mothers' ratings of their ideal and actual parenting for each of the three domains. To compare the ratings of ideal and actual parenting behaviors in three domains, a paired *t* test was employed. As predicted, there were significant differences between mothers' ideal and actual behaviors in all three domains <Table 2>. That is, mothers' ideal behaviors such as social exchange, didactic interaction and limit setting were higher than those of their actual behaviors. In particular, a series of paired *t* tests on the dissonance scores defined as ideal minus actual, revealed that discrepancies for didactic and limit setting

<Table 2> Descriptive statistics for mothers' rating of ideal and actual behavior (N = 264)

Parenting domain	Ideal	Actual	t
	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Social	4.59(.37)	4.22(.47)	13.79***
Didactic	4.37(.48)	3.77(.63)	15.14***
Limit setting	4.45(.51)	3.78(.75)	14.31***



<Figure 1> Mean differences between ideal and actual parenting.

were significantly greater than for social behavior [$t(263) = 6.69, p < .001$ for social vs. didactic; $t(263) = 6.61, p < .001$ for social vs. limit setting; $t(263) = 1.31, ns$ for didactic vs. limit setting] <Fig. 1>. Besides, comparisons among the three means of actual parenting using a paired *t* test indicated that mothers were involved in more social interactions than didactic [$t(263) = 4.1, p < .001$] and limit setting behaviors [$t(263) = 8.87, p < .001$]. However, there were no mean differences among the three domains of ideal parenting.

2. Ideal and actual parenting behavior as a function of child gender, age, and birth order

To explore the proposition that mothers' perceived ideal and actual parenting might vary as a function of child gender, birth order and child age, MANOVA (with child gender, age and birth order as between-subject factors and the three parenting domains as within subject factors, and mother's age as a covariate) was separately carried out for ideal and actual parenting. Neither the

<Table 3> Descriptive statistics for child's sex, birth order and age in actual parenting

	Child gender		Birth order		Child age (yr)		
	Boys (N = 131)	Girls (N= 133)	1 st (N= 192)	Later (N= 72)	1 (N= 72)	2 (N= 122)	3 (N= 70)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Social	4.24(.49)	4.20(.44)	4.26(.46)	4.10(.48)	4.29(.51)	4.24(.42)	4.11(.49)
Didactic	3.80(.71)	3.76(.56)	3.82(.62)	3.64(.66)	3.79(.69)	3.80(.56)	3.71(.71)
Limit setting	3.73(.76)	3.81(.75)	3.78(.73)	3.80(.81)	3.53(.92)	3.80(.72)	4.01(.50)

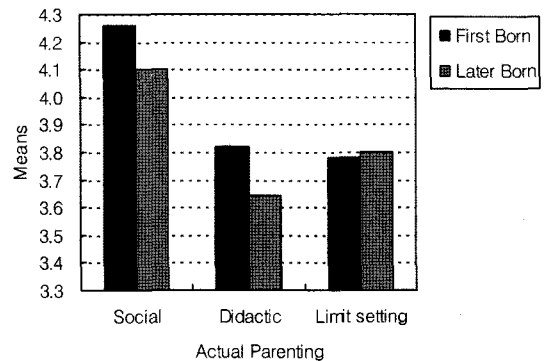
main effects nor the interaction effect was significant for mothers' ideal parenting.

Regarding mothers' actual behavior, neither the main effects variables nor the interaction effect between Parenting Domains and child gender was found. However, a marginally significant interaction effect between Parenting Domains and Birth-Order was found, $F(2, 502) = 2.41, p < .10$. Also, a significant interaction effect between Parenting Domains and child age was found, $F(4, 502) = 7.25, p < .000$. Due to the fact that no significant effects of the three independent variables were found for ideal parenting, only the results related to actual parenting are presented here. <Table 3> presents descriptive data for the three domains of actual parenting by gender, birth order, and age.

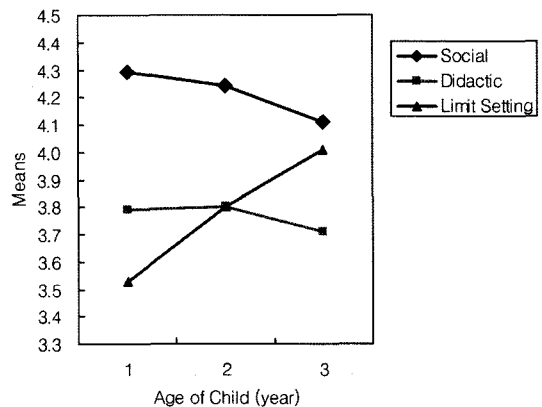
3. Mothers' actual parenting as a function of birth order and child age

1) Birth order differences in social and didactic behavior

Post-hoc LSD tests were used to examine the interaction effect between Parenting Domains and Birth Order. As shown in <Table 3> and <Figure 2>, post hoc analysis indicated that mothers were more likely to have 'social interaction' with their first-born ($M = 4.26, SD = .46$) than with their later born children ($M = 4.10, SD = .48$) [$F(1, 263) = 6.45, p < .01$]. Also, mothers were more likely to have 'didactic interaction' with their first-born ($M = 3.82, SD = .62$) than with their later born ($M = 3.64, SD = .66$) [$F(1, 263) = 4.41, p < .05$]. However, when responding to 'limit setting' behavior,



<Figure 2> Birth order differences in actual parenting.



<Figure 3> Mother-child interactions across 3 age groups.

there was no significant difference in mothers' behavior according to child birth order.

2) Age Differences in Limit Setting Behavior

Post-hoc LSD tests were used to examine the interaction effects between Parenting Domains and Child Age. The results indicated that mothers were most likely to engage in 'limit setting' behavior with 3 year old children ($M = 4.01, SD = .50$) and more with 2 year olds ($M = 3.80, SD = .72$) than 1 year old children

($M=3.53$, $SD=.92$) [$F(2, 263)=7.9$, $p<.000$]. <Figure 3> shows a significant increase of mothers' limit setting behaviors across the three age groups.

Post hoc analysis also revealed that mothers were less likely involved in 'social interaction' with 3 year old children ($M=4.11$, $SD=.49$) than with 1 year old children ($M=4.29$, $SD=.51$) [$F(2, 263)=2.7$, $p<.10$]. However, no significant difference regarding child age was found for mothers' didactic interaction.

IV. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the discrepancies between ideal and actual parenting toward young children in three domains, i.e. social, didactic and limit setting behaviors. This study also aimed at investigating mothers' parenting behaviors as a function of child gender, age and birth order.

As predicted, significant discrepancies between actual and ideal parenting were found for all three domains, i.e. social, didactic, and limit setting behaviors. The results of this study confirm that discrepancy between actual and ideal is a universal tendency across cultures (Bornstein *et al.*, 1996; 2001; 2004) implying parents, in general, have higher expectation and aspiration for parenting than they can reach. Moreover, Korean mothers perceived their actual didactic and limit setting in most disagreement and their actual social behaviors in most agreement with their ideal behaviors. These results are in sharp contrast with those of U.S. mothers or French mothers. In Bornstein *et al.*'s study (1996), U.S. mothers rated their actual social and didactic behaviors as most in agreement whereas French mothers rated their actual limit setting behavior in most agreement with their ideal parenting. Perhaps these data reflect how social, didactic, and limit setting are differentially valued in each culture and reveal culture specific patterns in parenting. Namely, as a particular behavior is valued, the discrepancy between mothers' ideal and actual parenting in that behavior would decrease.

In addition to the discrepancies between ideal and actual behavior, differences within mothers' actual behaviors emerged: mothers reported that they engaged in more social interactions than didactic or limit setting behaviors with their young children. This pattern has also been found for European American (Gfellner, 1990) and US cultural groups (Cote & Bornstein, 2000; 2004). The result of the current study is also consistent with the result of cross-cultural parenting that Asian mothers who are more likely accustomed to collectivism emphasize more social interaction with their children (Cote & Bornstein, 2004). However, these findings are in contrast with the results of observational studies of mother-infant interaction. Specifically, Korean mothers' engaged in social interactions as much as didactic interaction with their infants at 5 months whereas they engaged in more didactic than social interaction at 13 months (Park, *et al.*, 2005). These results may imply that parents' report of their behaviors and direct observation provide different information. The special concern for the importance of methodology in parenting studies has been implied elsewhere. Bornstein, Cote, and Venuti (2001) found Italian mothers engaged in more social than didactic interactions with their infants, whereas in actuality they engaged in didactic behaviors with their infants for longer periods of time. As they postulated, maternal perceptions are more likely influenced by cultural beliefs, but not mothers' observed behaviors.

As predicted, child gender was not a factor to influence parenting behaviors toward young children. Mothers reported that they interact with girls as much as with boys. Once again, this finding is in contrast with an observational study that mothers involved in more didactic interaction with girls than boys at 5 month, revealing gender differences (Park *et al.*, 2005). Regarding preschoolers' social skills, Park and Cheah (2005) also reported gender differences in Korean mothers' socialization beliefs. Nevertheless, Leaper's (2002) review of literature on gender differences and parenting concludes that parenting infant girls and boys is similar. Thus, to some extent, gender-related variation in

mothers' behavior to their infants may derive from their child's characteristics. It seems that a child's biological characteristics rather than the cultural socialization beliefs are more likely to influence mother-child interactions, particularly in infancy. To clarify this issue, child characteristics data should be included for the future study of parenting infants.

The current data suggested that mothers of first-born children rather than later-born involved significantly more in social and didactic interactions with their children, but it was not the case for limit setting behavior. The findings are consistent with the general view that first-born infants received more frequent attention and stimulation from their mothers (Jacobs & Moss, 1976; Lewis & Kreitzberg, 1979). Korean parents, in particular, have special and higher expectations particularly for their first-born sons, because they are supposed to take all the responsibility for the family's future prosperity (Han, 1999). Therefore, birth order differences in parenting are more likely to reflect Korean traditional values and/ or parents' general aspiration for their first-borns.

Finally, with regard to age differences, mothers involved in more 'limit setting' behaviors with 2nd and 3rd year old children than with one year old children. This result is in agreement with cross-cultural research (Cote & Bornstein, 2004), indicating more limit setting at 20 months than at 5 months. The findings confirm the change in parenting behavior accompanied by child developmental change, such as toddlers' increased autonomy and self-assertiveness. The result of this study demonstrated that limit setting becomes a more important aspect of parenting for older infants or toddlers.

On the other hand, mothers became less likely involved in 'social' and 'didactic' interaction with their children over the first 3 years. In particular, mothers of 3 year olds were involved significantly less in 'social interactions' than mothers of 1 year old children. This reported result is somewhat comparable with the observational study, in which both maternal social and didactic interactions significantly decreased over the 5 to

13 month time period (Park *et al.*, 2005). Mothers in general, would engage in more didactic behaviors with older children because infants' interest in objects increases as they grow, but this is not the case for this sample.

In sum, mothers' perceptions of ideal parenting behaviors toward their young children were higher than those of their actual parenting behaviors. The discrepancies between actual and ideal parenting was significantly greater for didactic and limit setting. In terms of actual behavior, Korean mothers were involved in more social interactions than didactic and limit setting interaction. They also were involved in more social and didactic behaviors with their first-borns. Child age related significant variations in parenting were found for both 'social' and 'limit setting' behaviors.

To conclude, the results of the present study provide evidence for both universal and culture specific patterns of mothers' parenting. Discrepancies between actual and ideal parenting support a general tendency of parenting across cultures. The findings of more social interactions than didactic behavior in this sample appear to be influenced largely by family-centered Korean culture. This explanation is also applicable for the finding of birth order effects on mothers' parenting. Nevertheless, the general view that mothers' higher goals for first-borns affects parenting behavior cannot be dismissed. In accordance with western literature, the results of non-significant gender effects indicate that gender is not a factor which influences on parenting at least at an early age. Mothers' limit setting behavior appeared to be influenced by child age, confirming the reciprocal nature of the mother-child relationship.

There are some limitations and implications. First, in terms of methodology, both ideal and actual parenting data were based on mothers' perceptions. As we mentioned before, some of the findings of this study were contradictory to some observational studies. Nevertheless, the findings of this study imply the importance of multiple methods of assessment when studying parenting behavior. Clearly, observational data are needed to

confirm actual parenting behaviors in future studies. Secondly, to clarify gender effects in parenting infants, other aspects of child characteristics such as temperament and health should be considered as possible predictors. Finally, the findings of Korean mothers' parenting should be interpreted in light of their limited generalisability due to the fact that mothers in this study were urban residents of a large city. These limitations notwithstanding, the present study is a significant step in the investigation of mothers' ideal and actual parenting toward infants from a cross-cultural perspective. Much work remains to be done before there is a thorough understanding of mother- infant interaction in Korean culture.

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