AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
OF MOTHER-CHILD STORYTELLING
IN EAST INDIA AND NORTHEAST
UNITED STATES

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This study examined cultural variations in parental goals of storytelling and story constructions to and with young children. Sixty-five (34 East India; 36 USA) mothers and their four-to-five year old children were audio taped as they read a non-worded picture storybook. East India mothers told longer stories that included more evaluative comments and responses to their child’s questions than US mothers. Content and evaluation of character and story action reflected cultural themes of collectivism of India and individualism of USA. Enculturation through storytelling is discussed. (Mother-Child Storytelling, Individualism, Collectivism, Narrative)

In every culture, social institutions (e.g., family, school, peer group, media, books, playtime) are involved in transmitting socio-cultural and moral values to young children. Recently, cross-cultural researchers have attempted to explain the variation observed in socialization values by means of the theoretical constructs of independence or individualism and interdependence or collectivism (Bond & Hwang, 1986; Hofstede, 1980, 1983; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994). This theoretical orientation predicts that cultures with a more individualistic orientation (western societies) will emphasize individual achievement, personal growth, and the rights of the individual. While western families encourage their children to become physically and psychologically separated from their parents, self-reliant and independent at an early age (Rosenthal & Bornholt, 1988;

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collectivist cultures (eastern societies) stress a more tightly knit social framework with the rights and needs of the group as paramount (Hui & Triandis, 1986). This collectivist orientation includes an emphasis on cohesion and interdependence among family members, preservation of status quo, and profound loyalty to family (Argyle, 1986; Bond, & Hwang, 1986; Harrison, Serafica, & McAdoo, 1984; Kriger & Kroles, 1972).

Markus and Kitayama (1994, 1998) have explained these observed cultural variations using similar theoretical constructs identifying independent self-construal in Western (individualist) and interdependent self-construal in Eastern (collectivist) cultures, respectively. From this orientation, Western cultures represent the self as an entity with distinct attributes and detached from social contexts whereas Eastern cultures often define the self in relation to others and their surrounding context. Although there has been much discussion about whether there is such a distinct ideological dichotomy (see Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000 for review), recent research bears out that there are both individualistic (independence) and collectivistic (interdependence) tendencies that are differentially emphasized across cultures as well as within the subcultures that often exist within the larger culture (Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000; Harwood, Scholmerich, & Schulze, 2000; Harwood, Scholmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, & Wilson, 1996; Killen & Sueyoshi, 1995; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998; Wainryb, 1995; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994).

Family, school, media, community, religion and many other activities can serve as the social agents that strengthen these individualistic or collectivistic values. The idea that parents likely serve as one of the most pivotal socializing agents during a child’s development has been supported by recent research of Harwood, Scholmerich, and Schulze (2000), where they found that parents often engage in child-rearing practices that reflect values consistent with their cultural group. Empirical evidence consistently finds that working class or less well-educated parents tend to place a higher value on obedience and conformity (e.g., discouraging conversation) and middle-class or more highly educated parents often value more self-initiative (e.g., encouraging conversation) (Bond, Belensky, Weinstock, & Cook, 1996; Bond, Belensky, Weinstock, & Monsey, 1992; Harkins, 1993; Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000; Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995; Kohn, 1977). It is clear both intuitively and empirically that parents are centrally involved in child-rearing that promotes cultural values.
Many researchers (Miller & Moore, 1989; Nicolopoulou, 1997; Polanyi, 1985) have explored these cultural themes within adult and child narratives and indeed found that storytelling often reflects the speaker’s social world. Both Bruner (1992) and Nicolopoulou have cogently emphasized that narrative activity needs to be understood as a linguistic and symbolic device that connects “the construction of reality with the formation of identity...” (Nicolopoulou, 1997, p. 180). Storytelling then can be viewed as another way that parents instill a personal and cultural identity to their children.

It is clear from research by Miller and her colleagues (Miller, 1982; Miller & Moore, 1989; Miller & Sperry, 1988; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997) that the thematic content of personal storytelling is intimately connected to the narrative structure of a child’s story. This is clearly seen when exploring parent-child storytelling, (Cho & Miller, 2004; McCabe, 1997; Oppenheim, Emde, & Wamboldt, 1996) where narrative construction both shapes as well as reflects cultural aspects of self as told through the dyad’s story. This type of narrative activity is not only an integral part of parent-child bonding, but is a powerful tool for transmission of culturally prescribed roles and values that are passed from adult caregivers to young children.

Much of the research on parent-child storytelling indicates stylistic differences in parental narratives to children that often is attributed to not only culture (Health & Thomas, 1984; McCabe, 1996, 1997; Michaels, 1991; Minami & McCabe, 1995) but to the gender of child (Chance & Fiese, 1999; Fivush, 1998) and social class/education (Hansen, 1993; Heath, 1986; Hicks, 1991; Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brody, 1991). Empirical research examining gender differences in mother-child narratives reveals that mothers use more emotional words with their daughters than their sons (Gleason & Melzi, 1997). Similar research examining the influence of education on mother-child storytelling reveals that more highly educated mothers use reading time for relaxation and socialization whereas less well-educated mothers use reading time for school preparation (Harkins, 1993).

The present study sought to further explore the role of culture, gender and education in the narratives of mother-child storytelling.

Studies on narratives have demonstrated that parent-child narratives serve many functions including transmitting cultural values (Minami & McCabe, 1995), spirituality (Dancy & Wynn-Dancy, 1994), morality (Tappan & Brown, 1989) as well as describing conflict resolution strategies (Duryea & Potts, 1993). For example, research by McCabe and her colleagues (McCabe, 1996;
Minami & McCabe, 1991, 1995) have found differences in how Japanese and American mothers elicit past event stories from their children that reflect the ideological preferences of each of these cultures. They found that English-speaking mothers elicited more elaboration, evaluation and descriptions from their children that reflect the American value of independence. In contrast, Japanese mothers “show more verbal attention” (using the verbal equivalent to "Uh huh" in English) that kept the child’s narrative turns concise and short. This attention elicitation pattern of Japanese mothers mirrors the Japanese value symbolized in the proverb “Still waters run deep.” (McCabe, 1997, p. 162). These observed differences in how parents elicit stories demonstrates clearly how the values of a culture can be reflected in and structure the narrative process as well as how parents are intricately involved in the narrative enculturation process of children.

Although there has been recent research on cultural differences in parent-child storytelling, much of this research has examined past event stories or personal storytelling. These stories are often elicited through similar or the same interview questions and it is likely that the choice of the past event or personal story to narrate varies as a function of culture. The present study examined cultural differences in mother-child storytelling of a non-worded picture storybook to compare how the same thematic and pictorial material might vary within individualistic (United States) and collectivistic (East India) cultures.

Narrative researchers have identified that stories have both structural/referential (e.g., setting, problem or goal, obstacles toward achieving the goal, resolution) and evaluative composition (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletsky, 1967). The referential element is defined as the recounting of events in the temporal sequence in which they are inferred to have occurred. However, the primary function of a narrative is not to simply report a temporal sequence of events but rather to provide a perspective on actions and events that create a comfortable pattern of themes selected from one’s own cultural traditions. This evaluative element of a narrative provides meaning to objects and events during story construction and is created through linguistic devices, which signal the relationship amongst characters, objects and events. Questions may play an important evaluative role in adult-child storytelling including assessing a child’s understanding of the story, promoting child responses that elicit story construction and evaluating of story events (McCabe, 1997; McNamee, 1979).
Examination of some of these narrative elements, as well as the themes emphasized, may provide further empirical support for how parents transmit and strengthen cultural norms through narrative discourse. To explore these issues, the present study compared families across Eastern and Western cultures – East India and Northeast United States, respectively. East India was chosen due to the second author’s familiarity with the cultural background, her language skills and her access to these community resources. Specifically, the Indian mothers of this research are primarily from a Hindu religious orientation which stresses the values of compassion, respect for nature and all living creatures, family integrity and righteous performance or Dharma of age related duties. Hinduism reflects the guidelines for leading lives not necessarily through religious groups. The foundation comes from Vedic lineage that stresses unity of all living beings. The notion of self and society is contained in the Indian cultural notion of family and community as a whole (Roland, 1986; Bacon, 1996) in contrast to the American focus on individual self. The Vedic description of the individual self describes the self as part of the larger universe with less rigid boundaries between self and others. This Vedic view is expressed in the Indian heroic characters of films, novels, and folktales and a sense of we-ness that permeates Indian culture (Kakar, 1989; Roland, 1986).

First, it was expected that length of story, evaluative comments, reported goals of storytelling and questions and responses would vary as a function of culture. More specifically, it was expected that children from the US (Northeastern United States) would have more narrative phrases during storytelling than their Indian counterparts signifying the value of autonomy often found in more individualistic cultures (Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1998). In contrast, mothers from India were expected to have a greater number of phrases than their US counterparts signifying the value of subordination and respect of elders often found in more interdependent or collectivist cultures (Killen & Wainryb, 2000; Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000).

A qualitative analysis of narrative evaluations of the resolution of the story was examined for themes of independence and interdependence. More specifically, it was expected that mothers from India would evaluate this story based on themes related to interdependence such as family integrity and loyalty whereas mothers from the US would evaluate this story based on
themes related to individualism/independence such as individual goal attainment (Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1998).

Also explored was whether mother’s educational level, gender of child, and mother’s goals of storytelling would be related to the use of evaluatives, length of story, questions and/or responses. It was expected that length of story would vary between same gender dyads and cross gender dyads (Ely, Gleason, & McCabe, 1996; Ely & McCabe, 1996). It was also expected that more highly educated mothers and their children would produce more narrative phrases, evaluative comments, and questions/responses compared to their less well-educated counterparts (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Rauff, 2000; Harkness, Super, & Tijen, 2000; Harwood, Scholmerich, & Schulze, 2000). Lastly, it was expected that mothers who reported that their goal of storytelling was socialization and relaxation would have longer stories, more evaluative comments, and more questions/responses than mothers who reported their goal of storytelling as comprehension and school preparation (Harkins, 1993).

METHOD

Participants
Thirty-four urban Oriya speaking children (14 females; 15 males) and their mothers from East India and 36 (19 females; 17 males) urban English speaking children and their mothers from Northeastern US participated. Four-to-five year old children (India $M = 4.8$ yrs., $SD = 4.7$ months; US $M = 4.9$ yrs., $SD = 4.5$ months) from two parent families were included. Sixteen Indian mothers with lower education (less than or equal to 16 years) and 18 with higher education (more than or equal to 16 years) and 14 US mothers with lower education and 22 with higher education made up this sample. Indian families were all Hindu upper caste and mothers were given the option of using Oriya or English language during storytelling. All Indian mothers chose the Oriya language and Indian tapes were transcribed by bilingual Oriya immigrant professionals living in the US. Transcripts were then back translated for reliability. All participants indicated prior experience using storybooks with their children.
Material

The book “Frog, Where Are You?” by Mercer Mayer is a picture book that contains no words; thus, the narrator is forced to use his/her own words to create the story. Both the episodic structure (Bamberg, 1987) and goal structure (Trabasso, Nickels, & Munger, 1989) of this book have been extensively analyzed making it relatively easy to identify the story elements (setting, initiating event, internal response, attempts, outcomes, and consequences). According to the structural analysis of this picture storybook (Bamberg, 1987; Bamberg & Marchman, 1991; Trabasso, Nickels, & Munger, 1989) the major episode of this story is “searching for the frog.” The story begins with the “frog leaping away” and then proceeds through a number of obstacles as the child and his dog search for the frog (e.g., dog falls out the window, boy is bitten by a gopher, chased by an owl and carried away by a deer). These obstacles appear during the story and interrupt attempts to obtain the goal (i.e., finding the frog).

Procedure

Participants were contacted through day care and community centers. Mothers were instructed to engage in storytelling and interact as naturally as possible with their child using the non-worded picture storybook. A second visit included asking parents to indicate their goals and storytelling patterns, educational level, etc. These storytellings occurred in the home and were audio taped in the absence of the investigators. Although most parents reported that they rarely “read” wordless books, recorded sessions were not felt by parents to be different from their usual worded storytelling sessions.

Measures

Maternal reported goals of storytelling. From a questionnaire, mothers were asked to rank their most important to least important goals of storytelling (comprehension, shared social time, preparation for school, reading readiness, or to enchant their child with books). Reported goals were collapsed into two categories for analysis with “comprehension, preparation for school and reading readiness” labeled as comprehension focused goals and “shared social time and enchant child with books” labeled as social goals. This measure is
an adapted version of research by Dickinson and Keebler (1989) on teacher storytelling.

**Length of story and evaluative comments.** Length of story was defined as the number of c-units per narrative for mother and child. “A c-unit is an independent clause along with any dependent clauses it contains” (Loban, 1976). The number of mother and child evaluatives (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Berman & Slobin, 1994) was defined as c-units that evaluated story events from the characters’ perspective. Evaluatives clauses included the following: a) references to character’s internal states (i.e., “He was happy.”); b) character speech (i.e., “and the boy said: You should be careful.”); and c) goal-related character statements (i.e., “and they were calling for the frog.”). Evaluatives were also examined from the narrator’s or listener’s perspective and defined as meta-cognitive comments (i.e., “What do you think the little boy is going to do?”). These meta-cognitive comments refer to when the narrator steps out of the story and describes the situation from a second-order perspective or explains why the overall story is told (Bamberg, 1997; Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Berman & Slobin, 1994). Inter rater reliability was obtained for all measures and ranged from .80 to .95 with all disagreements discussed until consensus was reached.

**Questions and responses.** The mean proportion of questions and responses by mother and child during storytelling were examined in relation to culture, gender, mothers’ education and reported goals of storytelling.

**Cultural themes of the narrative.** Exploratory analysis of cultural themes were examined at mothers’ narrative evaluation of the resolution of the story “Frog, where are you?” as this section of the story includes the only episode in this “boy who searches for his frog” story where the frog “family” is presented. Narratives were examined for presence of goal-oriented and family focused evaluative comments. The theme of individualism was defined as evaluative phrases focused on individual goal-fulfillment whereas the theme of collectivism was defined as evaluative phrases focused on interdependence and loyalty to family (See Appendix A for excerpts of evaluative phrases for USA and Indian mothers). Inter-rater reliability for evaluative themes was 100%.
Data analysis. Multivariate analyses were performed to examine possible interactions between culture, gender, mothers’ education and goals of storytelling on the dependent measures of interest: length of story (number of phrases); mean proportion of each type of evaluative comment (internal speech, character speech, absent character, and meta-cognitive); and mean proportion of questions and responses. Mean proportion of questions was calculated by dividing the number of questions by the total number of phrases. Similar calculations occurred for mean proportion of each type of evaluative comment and responses to questions. No interactions were found for the four independent variables so main effects for each independent variable were further explored. Finally, a more qualitative analysis of cultural themes was undertaken to explore mothers’ narrative evaluation of the resolution of the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

No significant interactions were found among the independent variables of culture, gender, education or goals of storytelling for any of the dependent variables examined including length of story; number and type of evaluative comments; and number of questions and responses for mother and child. Additionally, no main effects were found for gender among narrative phrases, comments, questions or responses. The following analyses will address the main effects found for culture, education and goals of storytelling on mother-child narrative construction.

Culture

The first set of analyses involved examination of possible cultural differences within mother-child narratives. Specifically examined were the number of phrases and number and types of evaluative comments used. In addition, the number of questions and responses used by mothers and children were examined, respectively.

First, significant cultural differences were found in the mean number of narrative phrases used by mothers, $F(1, 68) = 13.77, p < .001$; and children, $F(1, 68) = 5.88, p < .02$ with the number of phrases by Indian mothers higher than the number by US mothers. In contrast, Indian children had fewer
TABLE 1
Cultural differences in mother and child mean narrative phrases, mean proportion of evaluative comments, questions and responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of phrases</td>
<td>98.89</td>
<td>158.94***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative comment type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>11.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoted speech</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>10.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent character</td>
<td>14.38</td>
<td>15.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-comments</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>18.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>25.53</td>
<td>17.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>14.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

+ = proportion of evaluatives, questions, or responses /total number of phrases

phrases than US children. As predicted, Indian child phrases accounted for only 15% of the narrative whereas US child phrases accounted for 30% of the dyadic narrative. These results demonstrate that mothers were more verbally active in Indian culture whereas US children had more opportunities to be verbally involved in the narrative (See Table 1).

Next, there were significant cultural differences in the mean proportion of evaluative comments for mothers, $F (4, 65) = 5.03, p < .01$, and children, $F (4, 65) = 4.21, p < .01$. Specifically, Indian mothers were more elaborative in internal speech and quoted speech than their US counterparts. Similarly, Indian children were more elaborative in internal speech and meta-cognitive evaluative comments than their US counterparts.

Third, significant cultural differences were found in the mean proportion of questions, $F (1, 68) = 48.17, p < .001$, and responses, $F (1, 68) = 4.71, p < .05$, with Indian children asking more questions and US children providing more responses than their Indian counterparts. There were no significant cultural differences found for mothers’ questions or responses.

Qualitative analysis of predicted cultural differences in mothers’ narrative interpretation of the story provides further support for the self-construal theory of cultural values. That is, mother-child narratives from US and India do reflect the cultural values of independent and interdependent self-orientation, respectively. For example, the following is a typical description of US moth-
ers narrating the outcome of this story, “the boy takes a baby frog from the family, waves goodbye and everyone is happy.” Notice that this narration focuses on the boy’s goal with little to no regard for the breakup of the baby frog from the family. In contrast, but in partial support of cultural theory, Indian mothers narrated the outcome more often as “the boy taking the baby froggy’s friend” $X^2(1) = 26.85, p < .001$. This response seems to avoid the breakup of the frog “family” by describing the final picture in this non-worded book (i.e., the boy with a frog in his hand) as “the baby froggy’s friend.” By narrating this event as a non-family member being taken by the boy, the narrator has eliminated the anxiety and negative evaluations associated with a family member (i.e., “baby frog”) being taken from the family – an event that would be perceived as quite disruptive to members of a collective culture.

Evaluative responses to these outcomes also revealed significant cultural differences $X^2(1) = 47.81, p < .001$. Amazingly, all US mothers described the resolution as a “happy ending” whereas Indian mothers were equivocal in their evaluation of the story. First, 41% of Indian mothers described the resolution as the “boy taking a baby froggy’s friend” and then evaluated the resolution as a “happy ending.” No US mother described the resolution as the “boy taking a baby froggy’s friend.” Next, 17% of Indian mothers described the resolution as the “boy taking a baby frog from the family” and then evaluated the resolution as “a happy boy and a sad family” whereas 81% of US mothers described the resolution as the “boy taking the baby frog” and evaluated this as a happy ending.

Discussion of cultural differences

These findings revealed expected differences between Indian and US mothers and children in the number of phrases, evaluatives, questions and responses used during storytelling. Indian mothers’ length of story was longer than their US counterparts, whereas a reverse trend was observed for children’s length of story. These results suggest that US children are twice as active during storytelling than Indian children. Indian mothers may be facilitating listening skills with their children, and/or Indian children may perceive their mothers as a major informant. In contrast, US mothers may be allowing their children the opportunity for individual expression, and/or US children are reflecting their personal freedom towards original thinking. Children’s questioning and
mothers’ response pattern further supports the former thesis that mothers serve as a major informant for East India children. These findings support previous research on cultural values present in individualistic and collectivist societies (Harkness, et. al., 2000; Hofstede, 1983; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

As Triandis et al. (1988) have reported, individualism includes putting a high value on personal goals and this is clearly seen in the US mothers narratives (with the narrative focus on the boy achieving his goal of finding the frog) whereas collectivism puts a high value on hierarchy and harmony and this was reflected in children’s more submissive stance (asking more questions) to their mothers during the storytelling.

More revealing still were the differential themes reflected in the narrative resolution and evaluation of the ending of the story. For example, US mothers narrated the ending of the story as the boy losing and then finding his frog, taking the baby frog home with him leading to a happy ending, clearly reflecting an individualistic emphasis of personal goals above ingroup goals and the happiness that results when these personal goals are achieved. In contrast, Indian mothers focused not only on the boy achieving his goal but on ensuring family integrity (by constructing a narrative that either identifies the lost frog as being a non-family member that was lost, found and taken by the boy leading to a happy ending or explaining the frog as a family frog member who was lost, found and taken by the boy resulting in happiness for the boy and sadness among family members).

Further differences supporting cultural themes of independence and interdependence were observed in the evaluation of the resolution of story (Harkness, et. al., 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These narrative evaluations may reflect the cultural dynamics of these two societies. It seems that the US narratives ended happily because both narrator and listener focused on the character’s attainment of the boy’s goal rather than on the consequences (i.e., other’s feelings) of that attainment. In this case, evaluation of the goal appears to be independent of the social context in which that goal is achieved. In contrast, Indian narratives had mixed emotional endings highlighting the context-dependent nature of goal attainment. Both of the cultural themes found in this study reflect major priorities of each culture with independence and goal attainment as the overriding theme of US life and moral values and community as the emphasis of East India life.
Education

Recent research has suggested (Killen & Wainryb, 2000) that social class may be as important as the cultural values of individualism and collectivism in promoting meanings and practices that influence the social development of children. To address this issue, education level was used as an indirect measure of social class. The following set of analyses included examination of possible educational differences within the narrative construction of mother-child stories. First, significant differences were found in the mean number of phrases for mothers, \( F(1, 68) = 8.21, p < .01 \), and children, \( F(1, 68) = 18.77, p < .001 \). As expected, more highly-educated mothers and their children had more narrative phrases than their less well-educated counterparts and this was irrespective of culture (See Table 2).

Next, significant educational differences were observed in the mean proportion of evaluative comments for mothers, \( F(4, 65) = 6.05, p < .001 \), and children, \( F(4, 65) = 4.60, p < .01 \). Less well-educated mothers used more references to absent characters than their more highly-educated counterparts. However, children with more highly-educated mothers used more internal speech, quoted-speech, absent character, and meta-cognitive evaluative comments than children with less well-educated mothers. No other educational differences were observed for type of evaluative comments.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of phrases</strong></td>
<td>Low 100.33</td>
<td>High 148.85***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 20.83</td>
<td>High 44.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluative comment type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Low 7.79</td>
<td>High 9.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 1.52</td>
<td>High 5.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoted speech</td>
<td>Low 10.02</td>
<td>High 5.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 2.25</td>
<td>High 3.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Absent character</td>
<td>Low 18.46</td>
<td>High 12.52**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 5.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meta-comments</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 8.05</td>
<td>High 12.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions**</td>
<td>Low 12.11</td>
<td>High 28.61*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 43.49</td>
<td>High 21.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses**</td>
<td>Low 6.28</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low 37.70</td>
<td>High 44.17</td>
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</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

+= proportion of evaluatives, questions, or responses /total number of phrases
Third, significant educational differences were observed in the mean proportion of questions for mothers, $F(1, 68) = 5.30, p < .05$, and children, $F(1, 68) = 6.29, p < .05$. Both more highly educated mothers and their children asked more questions than their less well-educated counterparts. No significant differences were observed in proportion of responses for mother and child by education.

Mother's reported goal of storytelling

Prior research (Harkness, Super, & van Tijen, 2000) has demonstrated that parent’s beliefs influence parenting behavior. These beliefs were expected to influence narrative style in this study (Harkins, 1993). The next set of analyses included examination of possible differences within the narrative construction of mother-child stories according to mother’s reported goal of storytelling.

First, significant differences in maternal reported goal of storytelling were found in the mean number of phrases for mothers, $F(1, 68) = 5.46, p < .05$, and children, $F(1, 68) = 17.19, p < .001$. As expected, narrative phrases by mothers and their children were higher when mothers reported their goal of storytelling to be primarily for socialization or relaxation than for mothers with comprehension or school preparation as their primary goal-and this finding was irrespective of culture. Both mothers and their children were more verbally active when mother perceived the storytelling session to be an opportunity for socialization or relaxation.

Next, significant differences in maternal reported goals of storytelling were observed in the mean proportion of evaluatives for mothers, $F(4, 65) = 4.69, p < .01$, and children, $F(4, 65) = 2.72, p < .05$. Comprehension-focused mothers used more quoted speech and references to absent characters than their social-focused counterparts. Children with social-focused mothers used more references to internal state and absent character evaluatives than children with comprehension-focused mothers (See Table 3).

Third, while significant differences in maternal reported goals of storytelling were observed in the mean proportion of questions for mother, $F(1, 68) = 7.17, p < .01$, and child, $F(1, 68) = 10.87, p < .01$, no differences were observed in the responses to these questions for mother or child. Mothers with a social-focused goal of storytelling (e.g., to engage their child in the magic of books and a time for social relaxation) asked more questions during their narratives than mothers with a comprehension-focused goal (e.g.,
TABLE 3
Differences in maternal goals of storytelling for mother and child mean narrative phrases, mean proportion of evaluative comments, questions and responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mother Comprehension Focused</th>
<th>Social Focused</th>
<th>Child Comprehension Focused</th>
<th>Social Focused</th>
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<td>8.71</td>
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<td>12.49***</td>
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<td>19.28**</td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
+ = proportion of evaluatives, questions, or responses/total number of phrases

Discussion of maternal education and goals of storytelling

The findings of this study support previous research (Harkins, 1993; Harwood, Scholmerich, & Schulze, 2000; Killen & Wainryb, 2000) that maternal education level influences narrative structure and goals of parent-child storytelling. Clearly, mothers’ educational level is an important parameter of social class and impacted the goals and styles of storytelling in this study and this finding was independent of culture. More highly educated mothers asked more questions to their child and reported that their goal of storytelling was social relaxation; thereby, fostering values of taking initiative, self-direction and empowerment in their children. In contrast, less well-educated mothers goals and styles of storytelling revealed their tendency toward conformity and obedience to authority. More research is needed to determine whether national values or social class is the more powerful predictor of parent-child storytelling.
CONCLUSIONS

While previous research (Harkins, 1993) has found interactions between maternal education and goals of storytelling their absence within the present study may simply be due to the small sample size across groups. In addition, the findings regarding gender differences in parent-child storytelling has been inconclusive (Alexander, Harkins, & Michel, 1994; Ely, Gleason, & McCabe, 1996; Ely & McCabe, 1996; Fivush, 1998; Reese & Fivush, 1993). The equivocal findings across these studies may result from the variability in type of narrative examined (e.g., past event, personal storytelling, picture books) and the selection of a given gender group of parent in the study. Also important to consider is that the narrative element being examined across these studies varies considerably due to type of analysis chosen (e.g., story grammar versus conversational analysis) and the measures used (i.e., number of narrative phrases, proportion of and type of evaluative comments, questions and responses).

The present study illustrates how mothers vary their storytelling style as a function of their values and that these values are reflected through culture, education and reported goals of storytelling. More in-depth inquiry is needed to identify variations within and between cultures across SES, age and gender of the child, goals of storytelling as well as types of questions (labeling, yes/no, tag, descriptive and evaluative) used during storytelling. In conclusion, consideration of other narrative approaches (personal storytelling, worded books, etc.) may provide further understanding of how parental socialization occurs through narrative activity.

APPENDIX A

US narrative: ...a mommy and a daddy frog and what is over here <Child: babies> babies that’s where the frog went. He went back to his family he, he was a daddy frog. He had to go back to the mommy and all of the babies. Oh he is so happy now. Look it, he found his frog.. Is he going to leave the frog there with his family? He left the mommy and the daddy and the babies but what’s he got in his hand? <Child: a baby> he taking a little baby frog and everybody looks nice and happy. The End.
Indian narrative: You know what the boy found? Both boy and the doggie saw, no there are not just two, the whole family is there. Look, how small frogs are coming out. You know these frogs are very happy because they were playing near their mommy and daddy. You know as soon as these frogs saw the boy and the doggie they got a little surprised, little afraid too. You know what the boy did? Boy could recognize the frog that they brought home before. So what he did, he picked up that frog from all these small children. The boy then said: “Hey doggie, we are now going to take this frog home because he’s our good friend and we love this frog.” Isn’t it? The boy then is waving at the whole family and saying: “You people stay here but I’m going. I will take this frog to my house.” Tell me, did this boy do the right thing by bringing the frog to his own house? <Child: No, he didn’t do the right thing> M: You know the frog should be with his family. You shouldn’t bring one family member and separate them from all the other members....... You know, this little frog is now separated from his whole family. He is very sad <Child: Yes, he is very sad, mommy> M: Now the boy is very attached to the frog. He in fact fell in love so he cannot leave the frog there. So he picked up that frog said good bye, good night to all the family members and came home with is doggie You know all the family members are sitting here, look at them They are very sad.

REFERENCES

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