# Dialogues On Culture and Psychology:

*Interviews with Psychologists from Around the World*

Edited By:

**Yalcin Acikgoz**

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This book first published 2024

Ethics International Press Ltd, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library



Print Book ISBN: 978-1-80441-387-6

eBook ISBN: 978-1-80441-388-3

# Table of Contents

**Chapter 7: Mental Health**



**Chapter 8: Social Behavior and Motivation**



**Chapter 9: Organizational Behavior**

# Preface

"WEIRD" is an acronym that is used to refer to countries that are Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic. It is coined by Henrich, Heine, and Norezanyan (2010) [1] in their article "The weirdest people in the world?" in which they discuss how most of the psychology research that is taught in schools is produced by using samples entirely drawn from "WEIRD" societies and that psychologists generally assume little variation across humans and accept these "standard subjects" as representing the entire human species. Then, they go on to compare populations from "WEIRD" nations to those from other countries on several domains including perception, moral reasoning, self-concepts, reasoning styles, and motivation, and conclude that "members of WEIRD societies, including young children, are among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans" (p. 61).

The fact that most psychology research is done in these Western nations may be seen as a minor issue as long as the users of the research also are the populations of these countries. However, this is increasingly not the case, as the literature is being used in every country, and most of the Western countries are becoming more diverse through immigration. For example, according to data presented by the Migration Policy Institute [2], immigrants' share of the total U.S. population has increased from 4.7% in 1970 to 13.9% in 2022 (the term "immigrant" refers to people residing in the U.S. who were not citizens at birth). Similarly, according to data published by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany [3], as of 2022, 17.3% of Germany's population were immigrants who have immigrated after 1950. Including second-generation immigrants (whose parents have immigrated after 1950), this figure increases to 23% of the population. These trends suggest that psychologists trained in Western universities will increasingly serve populations that do not reflect the demographics that were the participants in the studies their trainings were based on.

One obvious consequence of this shift is that it will not be clear whether

an intervention shown to work in the literature will be effective for a patient who has a different cultural background. In other words, to the extent that research findings do not generalize across cultures, the effectiveness of interventions based on this research will be suspect. Even if the intervention itself is to be successful, the psychologist will face challenges connecting with the client with a limited knowledge of how the client's self-concept might be different, for example. As another example, without knowing whether the same parenting practices are similarly effective across cultures, a developmental psychologist will be limited in their ability to provide guidance to parents from different cultural backgrounds. In the workplace, which is my area of expertise, an industrial-organizational psychologist will be limited in their ability to provide suggestions to increase work motivation if the worker population is mostly immigrants rather than native-born citizens.

As a Turkish immigrant to the U.S., I have received psychology education in both the U.S. and Turkey. During this time, I often found myself thinking about how some of the concepts we were learning in the classroom would not translate to my home country's context. For example, in I-O psychology, in the area of employee performance appraisal, there is a method of performance assessment called 360-degree performance appraisal, in which not only direct supervisors, but also coworkers and subordinates rate each employee's performance. This approach is somewhat common in the U.S., with one widely-cited statistic by Forbes [4] showing that 85% of Fortune 500 companies are using it. However, this tool would be a recipe for disaster in a collectivist high power distance country like Turkey, as coworkers would be extremely lenient while rating each other and subordinates would find the task of rating their own supervisors dreadful. This is only one example to many ways in which cultural differences would have an impact on the extent to which research done in "WEIRD" nations would generalize to the rest of the world. Similar examples can be found in every area of psychology, from perception to emotion, from parenting to counseling, from learning to motivation, from psychological disorders to psychological interventions, and so on.

Cambridge dictionary defines culture as "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time" and "the attitudes, behavior, opinions, etc. of a particular group of people within society" [5]. It is clear from this definition that psychology, as the study of human mental processes and behavior, is deeply influenced by the culture of the society in which it is practiced. Even though my colleagues often emphasize in their teaching these cultural differences and how they affect theory and practice of psychological science, it typically happens as an afterthought. Psychology textbooks generally do not reserve sufficient space for discussing and emphasizing how culture impacts every single subject in them. However, the conversations I had in creating this book reinforced my belief that every single chapter in every single psychology textbook should come with an asterisk that says, "Validity subject to the cultural similarities between the target population and the populations studied in generating the findings described herein". This does not mean that we should study every culture separately. After all, a lot of our mental processes and behaviors are influenced by our biology, and as members of the same species, this means we have a lot in common across cultures. However, there is also a lot that we do not share, and it is of the utmost importance that students of psychology know which one is which. This book is a step in that direction.

The idea for this book came from the cross-cultural psychology course I am teaching. The first time I was scheduled to teach the course was Summer 2020, which, as we all know, looked very different in terms of how teaching happened compared to the beginning of Spring 2020. When COVID shut everything down, I was in the process of preparing my course, and realizing it would no longer be an in-person class, I had the idea that I could invite anyone from any country and my students would benefit from their expertise. After all, who would be better suited to talk about cultural differences in psychology than experts who practice psychology in other cultures? With this realization that this could be a blessing in disguise, I reached out to several experts in different cultures, and many of them very kind enough to accept my invitation. With them, I talked about how culture affects what is being taught in

psychology classrooms, and used the recordings of those conversations as material in my course.

This book is a collection of those interviews. In the conversations that make up this book, psychologists from various cultures share their research, but more importantly, their lived experiences. Many of them contribute to cross-cultural psychology by conducting cross-cultural research, but those who do not also have a deep knowledge of how culture impacts their teaching, research, and practice in their native countries. The interviews cover a broad range of psychology topics, including human development and parenting, self and identity, personality gender, cognition, emotion, mental health and psychological interventions, social behavior, motivation, and organizational psychology. Even though the book is organized into several chapters based on what is being discussed in each interview, several interviews cover multiple subjects, so the chapters are not strictly subject-specific.

In putting this unique group of experts together, I wanted to ensure that as many cultures as possible were being represented. This book therefore includes an impressive group of experts from several nations working in various areas of psychology. My hope is that this book contributes to a better understanding of the effect of cultural differences in the theory and practice of psychology, and thus benefits the students of psychology by helping prepare them for an increasingly diverse future. I want to present every speaker in this book my utmost gratitude and appreciation, for agreeing to help me in this effort, and allowing me to use their insights and expertise in this book. This book would not be possible without their generosity.

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1.

# Human Development and Parenting

# 1. Dr. Zi Jia Ng (Singapore/U.S.)

Dr. Zi Jia (ZJ) Ng identifies as an Asian immigrant woman born and raised in Singapore who pursued her doctoral degree in the United States. She has lived in four different states in the Northeastern and Southern regions of the United States in the past ten years due to school and work. ZJ holds a PhD in school psychology from the University of South Carolina. She is currently an associate research scientist in the Education Collaboratory at Yale University. Her research interests focus on helping children and adolescents to better use and harness their emotions to enable to adapt and thrive even when life throws them curveballs. ZJ is also a licensed psychologist and a certified school psychologist.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** Joining us for this interview is Dr. Zi Jia Ng from Singapore. We will talk about parenting practices, schools, developmental stages, and how they are different across cultures. First, thank you for joining me today for this conversation. Let me begin by asking my first question. In your experience and based on your research and readings, what are some ways in which culture affects child rearing practices? How does culture affect parental values and expectations? For example, what are some differences between the U.S., which is an individualistic nation with low power distance, and Singapore, which is a collectivist nation with high power distance?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** Let me start with parenting practices, which I think is very different between collectivist and individualistic cultures. In collectivist cultures, there is a big emphasis on respect for elders. The first thing I noticed is that in American culture, they usually call their teachers by name, or they call even their parents or older siblings by name. And that is a huge no-no in Singapore, in Chinese, or Malay cultures. We have a separate term in Mandarin or Malay or Indian to call our older brother, younger brother, older sister, mom, or dad, so we never call them by name. For example, I have an older brother, his name is Z, but I never call him by Z. He will get very upset if I call him Z, because it

is a show of disrespect. So, I always call him "koko", which is a Chinese term, which means older brother. When we go to schools, when we call teachers, we do not call them Miss Patty or Miss Zi, we usually call them by Miss and their last name. We never call anyone by their first name, unless they are a friend or peer. It is a very different practice in the sense that there is a big respect for elderly and knowing where you are in terms of the hierarchy.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** I want to chime in real quick because it is interesting you brought the differences in how we call our relatives. I think that comes from collectivism and also to some extent power distance, I believe. It was interesting to me as well when I first began learning English. In Turkish, which is where I am from, there are also specific words, specific terms for older brothers and older sisters. However, in the English language, it is just brother and sister, regardless of age. That was one interesting difference I have observed as well. Also, in Turkish we have different terms for all kinds of complex family relationships. There is a term for your husband's brother's wife, for example. All those relationships have been assigned different names, which I think comes from being more collectivist.

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** Yes, definitely. More of the group mentality, like which part of the group are you? To show your status within the group. Another difference I can think of is in the activities that the parents would sign up the kids for, which underscores the contrasting cultural approaches to parenting in America and Singapore. In the United States, there seems to be a diverse range of activities, with an emphasis on outdoor experiences such as camping, engagement in sports, and participation in creative endeavors like drama classes. This reflects a broader perspective on holistic development, encompassing physical, creative, and social aspects. On the other hand, in Singapore and many other Asian countries, there appears to be a pronounced focus on academic enrichment activities from a young age. The example of teaching abacus and mental math to a four-year-old illustrates the priority given to early cognitive development. While life skills like swimming are recognized, there may be less emphasis on sports or creative pur-

suits like drama and play. This difference in activity choices aligns with the broader cultural values placed on education and achievement in Asian societies. The emphasis on academic enrichment activities from a young age reflects a cultural belief in the importance of early education for future success. In contrast, the American approach appears to prioritize a more diverse and well-rounded set of experiences for children, encompassing both academic and non-academic pursuits.

It is interesting to note the evolving influence of American and European cultures on parenting practices in Singapore, leading to a growing emphasis on a more diverse set of activities beyond academics. Despite this influence, there seems to be a persistent cultural inclination in Singapore to prioritize academics, even at a very young age. The expectation for children as young as three or four to learn fundamentals like the ABCs before entering preschool exemplifies this emphasis on early cognitive development.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** So, as a follow-up question, would you consider Singapore parenting more hands-on and more involved compared to the U.S.? Would you say there are differences in how parents approach raising their kids in terms of wanting them to be independent individuals versus being part of the group?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** It seems that there is a notable cultural difference in parenting styles between Singapore and the United States. On a general level, it is acknowledged that every culture exhibits a spectrum of hands-on to hands-off parenting. However, in the context of Singapore, there appears to be a tendency towards a more hands-on approach, often referred to as "helicopter parenting" in American terminology.

In the United States, there seems to be a greater emphasis on allowing children to make choices regarding their activities and academic subjects. Children are given more autonomy in deciding what interests and pursuits they want to explore. On the contrary, in Singapore, parents play a more active role in guiding their children's choices, with a preference for subjects like sciences deemed as more lucrative for future career prospects. This reflects a higher level of control from parents and

a corresponding reduction in decision-making power for the children.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** My second question is about human development and developmental stages in terms of young kids, such as when they learn to walk and talk, or when they learn to do other activities at certain ages. Are the sequence and timing of those stages universal and the same or have you seen any differences between cultures? And if there are differences, can you name any examples?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** While physical development tends to follow universal patterns, cognitive development, particularly in language acquisition, takes on a distinct quality in a multilingual environment. Children growing up in Singapore face the challenge of learning and using multiple languages, often including dialects spoken by grandparents. This linguistic diversity can result in variations in language proficiency, and in some cases, the English language may lag behind compared to their monolingual counterparts in American or British contexts. The fact that Singapore was a British colony and follows British English adds another layer to the linguistic landscape. Despite learning British English, the exposure to various languages and dialects contributes to a rich linguistic environment but may also impact language development differently compared to children growing up in predominantly English-speaking regions. Kids always manage to eventually catch up, but when you talk to a four-year-old Singaporean child, his or her Chinese might not be as good as a four-year-old from China, and his English also might not be as good as a child from America or England. But usually, as time progresses, they catch up.

I think the greatest impact in terms of culture is in the social and emotional development. One good example I noticed is that in the American context, it seems common for parents to allow their children to express emotions like crying or having temper tantrums in public settings. The approach involves letting the child navigate and calm down on their own, followed by communication and guidance from the parent afterward. On the contrary, in Singapore, there appears to be a cultural norm where the immediate response to a child's outburst involves removing

the child from the public space. This reflects a different set of expectations regarding acceptable behavior in public settings. The emphasis is on avoiding disruptions and ensuring that the child's behavior is managed outside the public eye. Singaporean parents feel that it is embarrassing when their child has a temper tantrum. But American parents do not seem to find it as an issue.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** I think the example you gave might also be playing a role in how, later in life, people show or do not show their emotions in public. For example, as adults, people from Asian cultures tend to be more reserved in how they display their emotions. Whereas in the U.S. it is more appropriate to express your emotions in public. So, parenting might be one reason why that is the case, since it has a big influence on how kids socialize and learn how to behave in public. And one thing that is taught by the parents from an early age is that they should not show their frustration or emotions in public.

As a follow-up question, have you seen any differences in when young adults or adolescents gain their independence, such as they become independent and begin making decisions for themselves? Is it, for example, at a later age, earlier age, or the same?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** For American children, I think they start developing their identity in adolescence. But I think for Singapore, we truly only develop our identity when we go to college, when we have some physical distance from our parents. And I definitely agree with you, in terms of our private self and our public self, everyone has different sides of our different selves. But I think for Singapore, which has a more collectivist culture, our private self and our public self are definitely very different in comparison to our American counterparts.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** The reason I asked that follow up question is because I think group membership is more emphasized in collectivistic nations, so gaining your own identity is postponed maybe to a later time and even then, it is not as emphasized as it is in individualistic cultures. In the U.S., I see that independence beginning to develop at an early age. In Turkey, and also, as you said, in Singapore, that happens

later than how it is in the U.S.

My last question is about schools. Since you have studied school psychology, what differences have you observed between the U.S. and Singapore in how schools function, how education is structured, and what role do you think culture may have played in those differences?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** It is very different because, like what I mentioned to you, we call our teachers by Miss or Mister and their last name, so it is very formal. And actually, in Singapore, I am not sure if it is the same with other Asian countries, when a teacher enters your classroom, there is the class morning talk which is when the class chairman would say, "class stand", and then everybody would stand and the class chairman would say "class bow", and everybody would bow and say good morning or good afternoon, Miss or Mister White, for example. And this routine, this ritual happens every time a teacher comes in. You might see the same teacher in the morning and then again in the afternoon, but you still have to stand and bow and say the same thing every time. So, there is a lot of emphasis on respect for the teachers. Another difference between American and Singapore schools I noticed is that when American children walk and they see their teachers, they would wave and smile or think it is fine if they walk past their teachers. But for Singapore, when the students walk past the teachers, especially those that are more strict, they actually bow, tilt their head downwards and look towards the floor and just keep walking past and try to be as silent as possible. Especially around a teacher's staff room, no students would ever walk or talk loudly around there. So again, a lot of power there in terms of authority.

Apart from that, the classrooms are definitely less colorful. We have very rigid classrooms. I was so surprised by how colorful and how so many visuals there are in the classroom in the U.S., especially in elementary schools. In Singapore it is usually just concrete walls and then maybe in the back of the classroom, there is a blackboard to pin up different posters or things, but it is never all four walls. So, in the U.S. there is more emphasis on creativity, color, and really developing unique personali-

ties. And as I said, in terms of the enrichment activities that they have after school, such as different clubs that students join, there is a much wider range in comparison to Singapore. There are things like gaming clubs or even anime clubs, things that I do not think Singapore school principals would ever allow, because it is not related to academics.

One last thing is that students in Singapore all wear uniforms, they do not wear their personal clothes. They make sure that the students are all on the same identity. They also have name tags that they wear. I actually went to an all-girls school, and it was very strict. It was one of the better schools, but it was pretty strict in the sense that for example they actually would check the length of our skirt. How they check the length of our skirt is they will ask us to bend down and see the hem of our skirt. Obviously, checked by female teachers, when you bend down if it reaches above the half of your thigh, then you will go to detention and your parents will be called to tell them that their daughter's skirt is too short. This is something that they would do once or twice a week. Even hair ties would have to be in certain colors. For example, they would say, you can use black, brown or blue. No yellow, no red, no like rainbow color kind of thing. I would think, "We are already wearing our uniform, but I still cannot wear bracelets or do my hair in a different way. Why are you restricting me so much?" But I think there was one incident whereby a kid wore a very expensive watch, and everybody started comparing. And I started realizing that maybe that is the reason why they do not want; I think they wanted to eliminate the physical comparison in terms of materialistic possession. That is why they do not want the students to wear anything expensive looking or they are trying to keep everyone to the same type, so everybody looks the same and there is little comparison. We all look like one whole group.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** The other reason is I am sure to emphasize the group identity rather than your individual identities. So, your experience is from a strict all-girls school. Do kids in the other schools also wear uniforms?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** All schools wear uniforms, from kindergarten or even

from preschool, all the way to high school. It is only when you go to college, then you can wear your own clothes.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** Okay, so again, they probably want to emphasize the group identity rather than individualism starting from those ages. Was there any difference in the content of education, such as, more applied versus more instruction-based for example?

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** I think in comparison to American schools, there are fewer presentations because we are much more reserved. We do not like public speaking. It is usually more didactics or pair work projects. There is less emphasis on class participation or discussion. We can discuss in small groups, but not as a whole class. Maybe three to four people would discuss a little bit, but not class-wide discussions. It is not something that we are familiar or comfortable with. And this is actually the same until college. I did my undergrad in the National University of Singapore. When we had tutorials or things like that, the professor might ask a question and it would be just pin-drop silence. And we are fine with awkward silence, although Americans are not. We are so comfortable with awkward silence. Because we do not feel it is awkward, we feel that silence is part of us, part of our identity. So, it is a little bit different.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** I want to add something sort of unrelated, but still related. And this will go into cross-cultural epidemiology, maybe not cross-cultural psychology. One theory about why, for example, Japan and Singapore did relatively better in the COVID situation is that because people do not talk as much and even when they do, they are not as loud. The spread of the virus is not as likely in those cultures compared to places where people talk a lot and they are loud. So, it is interesting to see how such a cultural difference influences all aspects of life, in education, in everything, and even how easily a disease might be spreading. I found that really interesting when I read about it, that one theory is that the differences in how people talk or how much they talk might explain some of the differences in COVID rates.

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** Yes, given that I have been in the United States for seven

years, I think one of the top skills that I have learned in the United States is to speak up and be more assertive. Around seven years ago, when I first attended my first year of graduate school, it was so hard because all my American friends were all talking. I was never like, "oh my gosh, the discussion was awesome". I wanted to participate and tried my best to participate. That is the point of me going overseas. But I just could not. It was just hard because everybody was so excited about talking about a specific topic. So, I learned to be more assertive when I wanted to voice my opinion. I think that is one of the skills that I definitely treasure learning when I came over the United States.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** I agree. I think I also changed in the same way since coming to the U.S. Again, you are certainly taught not to be as assertive in a culture that is more collectivist. And then when you come to the U.S., it is first a culture shock and then you slowly begin adjusting.

Thank you. This has been a really good conversation. Thank you for joining me.

**Dr. Zi Jia Ng:** Thank you for inviting me.

# 2. Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili (Georgia/U.S.)

Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili is a visiting scholar, professor of Psychology at Bridgewater State University, Massachusetts. Originally from the country of Georgia, since early stage of her career she has been working in various countries and cultural contexts. She teaches Cultural Psychology and also does trainings for students who are going to have an experience in a different culture through NSF-funded undergraduate student research SIMuR project, training in Acceptance and Well-being in the Context of a Different Cultures, Cultural Adjustment vs "Culture Shock", Meaning Making Framework, and Appraisal of Life Events and Coping Strategies. Her formal education has been in Psychological Counseling (Bachelor's and Master's) concluding with a PhD in Personality and Clinical Psychology in 2016. Her early career started with diagnostics and counseling in children's hospital for seven years and she was trained in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy as therapeutic approach. Her research interests are related to religiosity and spirituality as contributing factors for better mental health and meaning in life. She is also curious about values and prejudice formation.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** Dr. Ketevan Moshashvili is here with us from the country of Georgia. First of all, thank you for joining us today and agreeing to have this conversation with me.

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Thank you.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** We are going to talk about how culture affects child-rearing practices, parental values, and expectations. We will talk about the diversity between different cultures, and then we will talk about human development. We will also talk about how schools might be different between different cultures and how education might be differently structured between different cultures. So, let me begin by asking my first question. In your experience and based on your research and readings, what are some ways in which culture affects child-rear-

ing practices, and how does culture affect parental values and expectations? For example, what are some differences you have observed between the U.S. and Georgia? And if you have been in different places, you can also of course talk about those as well.

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Thank you for introducing me and inviting me. It is a pleasure to share my experiences and bring different perspectives. Since Georgia is a developing and a transitional country, it is in the process of changing. And I believe it is changing for good. So, in terms child-rearing practices, of course, we know that culture plays a role. What are the ways or what are the paths through which the culture would play a role? I would mention first, and I think it would not be a surprise, that cultures in a broad way are divided into collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Based on this division, I could even go back before the child is born or before the family plans to have a child, to the reason for having a child or having an offspring in the first place. This differentiation between collectivist and individualistic cultures plays a role here. Because even though it is changing, Georgia is still a collectivistic culture. People around here often view life and having children as a continuation, like passing on the family name, for example. But it is more like a specific, narrow aspect of keeping the father's last name alive, you could say. Then there is another issue, which can be quite disheartening at times in Georgia: the pressure to have a child, specifically a boy or a girl. Here comes yet another gender stereotype, likely ingrained in our culture, that plays a significant role. It is seen as crucial to have a boy to carry on the family name and the father's lineage. So, that is one side of the story.

Moreover, the motivation behind wanting children varies. On one hand, there is the desire to carry on the family name, and on the other, there is a somewhat disheartening aspect. Some individuals see having children not just as bringing a new, independent life into the world, but also as a future support system. In Georgia, unlike the U.S. or Europe, we lack the tradition of elderly care facilities. Here, it is the responsibility of the children's generation to take care of their parents in every aspect. It is a positive thing in a way, reflecting our collectivistic culture and instilling

intergenerational care and respect for the elderly. However, it can also become a burden or pressure for the children. That is indeed the crux of the collectivistic and individualistic dynamics. In many families where three generations coexist, it often impacts the autonomy of the children. The emphasis on respect for the elderly cultivates a sense of obedience. This holds significant weight for the children, sometimes conflicting with their own desires or preferences.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** What you have been describing, not surprisingly, has been very familiar to me, because a lot of the things you say are also true for Turkey. People might want a boy for the last name, and then they typically want their kids to care for them. One of the things I emphasize in my class is traditional versus non-traditional cultures. These are characteristics of a traditional culture. Another factor to consider is the existence of subcultures within each nation. Although things are evolving, you can still find certain beliefs more prevalent in specific regions. This is likely true in Georgia as well. In some areas, especially in more traditional or rural settings, the emphasis on carrying on the family name or having a specific gender may be more common. However, in urban regions with middle-class or upper-class families, you would probably encounter a more diverse range of ideas. The same trend holds in Turkey – traditional rural areas might stick to these beliefs, while more urban areas may showcase a shift in perspectives.

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Exactly. It is interesting how our cultures, being neighbors, share similarities. I completely agree with your observation. The somewhat disheartening aspect is that Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, stands out as the only truly urban city. The centralization here affects the cultural dynamics. In Tbilisi, we have witnessed a shift towards more nuclear family structures, with one or two children, aligning with the evolving values reminiscent of the U.S. or Europe. The winds of change are indeed blowing in that direction.

Absolutely, and it is not unique to Georgia but resonates across various cultures, gender stereotypes play a significant role in shaping child-rearing practices, and it is intriguing to observe how these stere-

otypes are embedded in societal rules. In the U.S., for instance, there is paternity leave, acknowledging shared responsibilities from the beginning. Contrastingly, in Georgia, we have maternity leave, reinforcing the notion that childcare is primarily the mother's responsibility. This often results in the mother being the sole caregiver, while the father is frequently away earning for the family. It is important to note that there is a growing recognition of the need for change. Discussions about providing fathers with paternity leave are underway, aiming to involve both parents actively in parenting and child-rearing. Breaking free from these gender stereotypes is crucial for evolving family dynamics and creating more equitable practices.

Building on the topic of parenting styles, in Georgia, the prevalent culture of collectivism tends to lean towards an authoritarian parenting approach rather than an authoritative one that encourages autonomy. On the flip side, there is the phenomenon of helicopter parenting, which is quite common in multi-generational families. Here, if the mother is not around, the responsibility often shifts to the grandparents, ensuring that someone is always looking out for the child and preparing meals and providing care. While the immediate response might be positive, considering the child is well cared for, my point is that this setup can sometimes border on helicopter parenting. It might inadvertently hinder the development of a child's independence and autonomy. It is a delicate balance between care and fostering a child's ability to stand on their own. It might be surprising for some listeners, but acknowledging and discussing these aspects is crucial for a nuanced understanding of parenting dynamics in our culture.

To round off our discussion on parenting, it is crucial to consider the underlying value system within our culture. The cultural backdrop encompasses a set of values, and in our case, the historical context, transitioning from the Soviet Union, plays a role. Since gaining independence, I have observed a prevalent aspiration for wealth. The pursuit of becoming affluent, acquiring houses and cars, seems to be a common goal. This prompts reflection on our core values and how they impact parenting practices. Is it solely about wealth accumulation, or do we

prioritize well-being, care, and relationships? Understanding these values is integral to comprehending the motivations behind child rearing and parenting decisions. It is not just about material success; it is about what we truly value and how those values shape the way we raise our children.

Another intersecting factor is the language, especially in the context of Georgian, with its unique alphabet and cultural nuances. Language is indeed a powerful reflection of culture, and the terms and sayings embedded in it can significantly impact child-rearing practices. Take, for instance, the saying about bringing up a child as an "enemy" for them to love and repay you. This phrase encapsulates a specific cultural perspective on parenting. It reflects the belief that a certain level of toughness or strictness is necessary for a child's upbringing, and excessive care might lead to them being spoiled. Language, with its intricacies and expressions, becomes a dimension of culture that not only shapes relationships but also influences the approach to parenting. These linguistic nuances carry with them the accumulated wisdom, values, and societal norms, creating a unique tapestry that contributes to the fabric of parenting practices within a culture.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** The influence of individualism versus collectivism on parenting styles is indeed a crucial aspect to explore. In collectivist nations like Georgia and Turkey, where societal norms emphasize the importance of the group over individual independence, helicopter parenting tends to be more prevalent. There is a strong sense of interconnectedness, and individuals are expected to conform to the collective, often at the expense of fostering personal independence. In contrast, in individualistic cultures like the United States, the emphasis is on personal autonomy and becoming an individual. This cultural backdrop encourages more authoritative parenting styles, where there is a balance between setting clear boundaries and allowing the child the freedom to make decisions within those boundaries. The cultural context, whether collectivist or individualistic, plays a significant role in shaping parenting styles. It defines what is perceived as appropriate or necessary in terms of child-rearing, and understanding this cultural lens

is key to comprehending the variations in parenting practices across different societies.

The distinction in expectations regarding financial independence for high school and college students is also a notable cultural difference between the United States and Turkey. In the U.S., there is often an expectation for high school and college students to work and contribute financially. This early exposure to financial responsibility is seen as a way to instill a strong work ethic and financial independence from a young age. Contrastingly, in Turkey, the cultural norm involves parents assuming responsibility for their children's financial well-being until they graduate, secure a job, and potentially start their own families. This perspective aligns with the notion of familial support continuing into early adulthood, allowing individuals to focus on their education and personal development without the immediate pressure of financial responsibilities. These cultural variations highlight how societal expectations around financial independence are ingrained in different stages of life, reflecting broader values and attitudes towards work, education, and familial support. And what you said about language was also really interesting. I can certainly see how certain terms in the language can also be shaped by and then further reinforce certain parenting practices.

My second question is going to be about human development. Is it universally the same across different cultures, in terms of the specific stages and what people or kids accomplish in different stages, or are there differences between the sequence or timing of the different developmental stages between cultures? If you think there are differences, do you know of any examples?

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Yes, that is a good question. If we consider it solely from a developmental perspective, concerning milestones and associated terms, it seems universal. Numerous psychological theories, such as cognitive, emotional, and psychosexual development, support this idea. However, cultural factors can influence and sometimes act as barriers or challenges, altering the typical sequence of development.

I have been reflecting on examples, particularly within cultural shifts,

and this is evident in Georgia. Currently, there is not an expectation for girls to marry in their 20s or at an early age. However, there was a time when marrying at 18 or 20 was the norm. The societal expectation accompanying early marriages was to have a baby promptly, as merely being married was not considered acceptable. Being married but childless would lead to numerous inquiries from relatives and neighbors, underscoring the collectivist nature of the culture, where communal opinions hold significant weight.

Many girls would indeed marry at the age of 20. Now, considering the significance of this age, it is a time marked by crucial milestones. At 20, individuals typically undergo the process of identity formation, exploring life goals, attending college, and establishing various relationships, aligning with Erikson's developmental stages. However, when one gets married at this pivotal age, a shift occurs. Instead of navigating these fundamental milestones, there is a redirection towards domestic responsibilities, such as staying at home, breastfeeding, and tending to the needs of a newborn baby. This alteration in life trajectory can pose challenges, diverting individuals from the expected developmental course at this age.

From my observations, many of my peers who married at a young age often faced a common pattern. After two or three years, some would experience divorce and then find themselves revisiting the earlier milestone of searching for identity and meaning. I hope I am conveying this clearly. In this cultural context, there are distinct norms and expectations, especially for women. They complete their four-year college education, and then societal pressure pushes them towards marriage and starting a family, almost as if it is the ultimate destination in their life journey. This cultural expectation sometimes interrupts the natural progression of personal development and exploration at a critical stage in life. I am heartened to see these tendencies evolving, but the challenges and cultural barriers have a significant impact on the sequence of events. Ultimately, everyone is affected – children, families, and particularly the girls who might not make mature choices and decisions in their lives. To sum up, while development seems universal, Georgia's

experience is distinct. Looking at some of the other traditional cultures, we observe even more pronounced effects of cultural norms, often not in a positive manner.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** So, what I am understanding is that during early ages, in terms of what kids accomplish, they crawl, walk, talk at a certain age, they are all universal because they are usually biologically induced. Of course, unless the environment being rich versus poor affects how early or late kids might accomplish those stages, maybe to some extent, but otherwise the sequence is universal and the same at early ages, right?

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** When discussing early developmental stages, factors such as culture and socio-economic status, as you mentioned, play a significant role. Deprivations of various kinds, be it intellectual curiosity or censorship, can impact development. While extensive research exists on cognitive and emotional development, suggesting a more or less universal pattern, these factors do exert influence. Providing a definitive yes or no answer is challenging due to the nuanced and varied impact of these cultural and socio-economic elements on the developmental process.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** It seems like the typical human development follows a biological sequence for most people, more or less in the same way. However, the environment, specifically the lack of certain stimulations, can affect when children reach these stages. This can vary based on socio-economic status, making the progression different, especially when comparing to developing or third-world nations.

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** I can share a brief example from my college days when I worked as an assistant in a children's orphanage. The kids ranged from newborns to three-year-olds, and unfortunately, the nannies or caretakers were not supportive or nurturing. They did not provide toys, fearing they might get dirty or break something. Consequently, these kids faced developmental challenges. In a typical family, children encounter normal developmental hurdles, but socio-economic and environmental factors can significantly impact their progress.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** My last question is going to be about schools; you studied school psychology in the U.S. and now you are working at a school as a counselor in Georgia. What differences have you observed between the U.S. and Georgia in terms of how schools function and how education is structured, and what role do you think culture may have played in these differences?

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Going back about 20 years, reflecting on Georgia's history as a Soviet republic, education faced a devaluation during those times. In the Soviet era, education did not carry much significance, as it was not necessary for college admission or job placement. Connections and financial resources from parents were the primary factors. The prevalent corruption during the Soviet period is well-known, even portrayed in the Georgian movie "A Man Without Diploma." The film highlights the ease with which diplomas could be purchased, emphasizing a mentality that questioned the need for education, a mindset that persists in some individuals despite ongoing changes.

The prevailing notion that having a diploma leads to a good job is understandable, given the external motivations tied to obtaining a quality education, securing a high GPA, graduating from a reputable university, and eventually landing a well-paying job. However, the influence of historical mentalities and traditions on school culture and structure is significant. The question arises: why should a child attend school beyond merely studying subjects like math or physics? Unfortunately, these trends have contributed to the emergence of many private schools, accessible primarily to affluent individuals. The primary emphasis in these schools is often on achieving a high GPA and pursuing university education abroad. This shift has led to a diminished focus on fostering intellectual curiosity and the joy of the learning process. The impact is such that the value of education is sometimes reduced to a means of obtaining grades and qualifications rather than promoting a genuine passion for learning and personal development.

Georgia is not unique in its educational approach; there are similarities with the United States. Both countries heavily rely on a test-based,

outcome-oriented system, prioritizing results over the learning process. Drawing from personal experiences of living in the U.S., Germany, Sweden, and Georgia, a notable difference emerges. Scandinavian countries, particularly, adopt a more child development or student-centered approach. In contrast, Georgia's system often places emphasis on achieving specific milestones like obtaining a high standardized test score and attending college, treating education more as a checklist than a holistic developmental process.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** As a follow-up question to this, we talked about how individualism versus collectivism influences independence versus a more direction-based systems. Do you see that in schools too? For example, in the U.S., school independence is more encouraged whereas in Georgia schools, for example, the emphasis is more on collective work, and not necessarily being your own independent person. Have you seen a difference in that regard as well?

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** You mean in high school students?

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** Even in elementary school students, but yes, high school students as well. Did you see any difference in terms of, as you talked about this being a difference in families, independence being more encouraged in U.S. schools versus in Georgia, for example?

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** In Georgia, I have noticed a paradox in parenting styles over the past few years. Some parents struggle to decide on a consistent approach and tend to change their attitude and parenting style as their children grow older. In the high school where I work, parents often exhibit a form of strictness that does not necessarily promote healthy independence. While acknowledging the need for structure and rules for teenagers and adolescents, these parents interpret encouraging independence as allowing their 15-year-old to go to nightclubs where alcohol is present, despite the legal drinking age being 18 (or 21 in the U.S.). However, this approach seems counterintuitive, as true encouragement of independence for teenagers involves providing a supportive structure rather than exposing them to potentially harmful situations. Teenagers still require guidance and boundaries to navigate

their formative years effectively.

What I do not see in parents is encouraging independence in their own decisions, not just in terms of where to go, but also what they want in life, what they want to study, how they want to structure things, even how they want their room to be painted. So, I am really surprised by this paradox because we are collectivist and obedient; parents encourage obedience. Yet, when these teenagers reach adolescence, they think they become somewhat permissive. This is the paradox I observed last year, and I have also had many talks with parents about this. I think it is very psychological; what they fear is that their teenage children would be angry about that. But that is parenting, that your children are angry and sometimes upset with you, even saying bad things like "you are not a good mother because you do not let me do this or that". That is the resilience parents or adults would like. This is my observation.

**Dr. Yalcin Acikgoz:** Thank you for joining me. This has been a good, interesting, and informative conversation.

**Dr. Ketevan Mosashvili:** Thank you, Yalcin, for inviting me. And I was glad to bring a different perspective, and good luck to you and your students.