Maternal Strategies for Regulating their Children's Behavior in Brazilian Mothers of German and Italian Descent

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Abstract

Maternal strategies for regulating their children's behavior were examined in two Brazilian samples. The influence of mothers' cultural descent (Italian or German), type of transgression (moral or conventional rule), children's age (2 to 3 or 5 to 6 years) and gender was investigated. Authoritarian strategies were the most frequent strategies employed by parents. Italian descent mothers mentioned more authoritarian strategies, while German descent mothers used more authoritative strategies but also showed more permissiveness. Mothers employed more authoritarian strategies and were less permissive with older children. They were more permissive when a conventional rule was transgressed, and more authoritarian in moral situations. In moral situations, German descent mothers were more authoritarian, while Italians showed more authoritative strategies. No main effect was found regarding the child's gender.
Keywords: Parenting style; Cultural descent; Transgression; Preschool; Gender.

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Compendio

Fueron exploradas las estrategias maternas para regular el comportamiento infantil en dos grupos de madres brasileñas. Fue evaluada la influencia del origen cultural de las madres (italiano o alemán), del tipo de transgresión (reglas morales o convencionales), de la edad de los niños (2 a 3 ó 5 a 6) y del género. Estrategias autoritarias fueron las más frecuentes. Las madres de origen italiana describen con mayor frecuencia respuestas de tipo autoritario, mientras que las madres alemanas utilizan estrategias participativas pero también son más permisivas. Las madres fueron más autoritarias y menos permisivas con los niños más grandes. Fueron más permisivas cuando se trataba de reglas convencionales y más autoritarias cuando se trataba de reglas morales. En situaciones de orden moral, las madres de origen alemán eran más autoritarias y las madres italianas más participativas. No se constataron diferencias en cuanto al género.
Palabras clave: Estilo educativo de los padres; Origen cultural; Transgresión; Prescolares; Género.

Parental practices constitute an emblematic example of how human behavior may be influenced by external systems that are beyond intraindividual and intrafamilial processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). These practices can vary from one cultural community to another, inside the same community, and between families within the same cultural group. Some situations which engender the intervention of the parents seem to be similar between the cultures, such as the child's feeding, sleep and aggressive or destructive behaviors. In the present study, the strategies used by Brazilian parents descending from German and Italian immigrants were examined.

Most studies refer to three main types of parental strategies: authoritarian, reasoning/authoritative, and love withdrawal. Authoritarian practices include physical punishment, verbal reprimands, deprivation of privileges and the use of rewards (Baumrind, 1997; Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995). Without having recourse to justification, the parents obtain the child's compliance by imposing their authority or their physical advantage. Authoritative and cognitive or inductive methods such

as reasoning involve encouraging the child's positive behavior, explaining the consequences of the actions taken by the child for other people, with a close monitoring of the child's behavior (Baumrind, 1997; Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993). Based on the child's need to be loved and to have her/his parents' approval, by withdrawing love the parent aims at obtaining the child's compliance through isolation, the expression of disappointment, or ignoring the child. In contrast, where the parent is permissive, the child is given no directive and the parent expects that the child will be brought to understand by her/himself the consequences of her/his acts (Henderson & Bergan, 1976). For the purposes of this study, parental strategies include the practices employed by parents to socialize, to regulate or to develop values and attitudes in their children in agreement with their personal and cultural beliefs. When these practices are taken as a whole, they will be described as parenting style (Carvalho & Gomide, 2005).

Many parental and child characteristics, as well as context conditions, may contribute to variations in the types of strategies employed by the parents. Socioeconomic status (SES) is reliably associated to parenting quality (Belsky, Bell, Bradley, Stallard, & Stewart-Brown, 2006), positively correlated to parental autonomy granting and the use of reasoning practices, and negatively with physical punishment (Glanville, 2004). Many studies show that parents, and also children, perceive and respond differently to transgressions of moral values as compared to conventional principles. Moral rules imply the respect of justice, the notion of trust and the rights of the individual, and are unlikely to be negotiated (Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Turiel, 1983), while conventional rules are arbitrary, variable and negotiable within a particular social group, and relate to a set of agreed-upon expectations regarding how to behave properly. Research, however, has found conflicting findings in regard to the use of strategies across conventional and moral transgressions. Higher levels of reasoning are associated with moral transgressions (Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993), but reasoning is also high in response to conventional transgressions (Dawber & Kuczynski, 1999). Chritchley and Sanson (2006) found that both the use of power assertion and inductive reasoning were higher when the child violated a moral compared to a conventional principle. In a comparative study of Japanese and American mothers, Conroy, Hess, Azuma, and Kashiwagi (1980) argued that, cross-culturally, parental strategies were rather invariant in relation to conventional transgressions, contrary to what we would observe in moral situations.

The child's age is a good predictor of the type of strategy adopted by the parent. Taking into account the child's increasing capacity to understand and to assimilate the rules, parents tend to raise their level of demands with increasing child age. Rules for young toddlers relate mainly to safety, safeguarding property and interpersonal issues, while social conventions are progressively introduced by parents as children get older (Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000). Thus, mothers become less permissive and employ more strategies of power assertion with older children because they are supposed to be more conscious and responsible for their acts (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989; Mills & Rubin, 1992). However, the increase of the children's social and cognitive competencies contribute to a reduction in the frequency of disobedient and immature acts, in particular moral transgressions (Smetana et al., 2000), and this would lead the parents to use punitive strategies less frequently with older children (Baumrind, 1996). Whiting and Edwards (1988) showed, in a study concerning child social behavior in 12 different cultures (Mexico, The Philippines, Japan, USA, Liberia, two ethnic groups of India and five of Kenya), that 4 to 5-year-old children were more obedient than 2 to 3-year-old ones.

There is no well-established relationship between the use of strategies and the child's gender, although most studies do show differences in parental practices or beliefs as related to this variable (Fagot, 1995). Noller (1980) found that parents were more restrictive with the child of the same gender, whereas Kuczynski (1984) and Smetana (1989) observed that mothers were more authoritarian and punitive with boys. Smetana (1989) also found that 3-year-old boys engaged in nearly twice as many moral transgressions as girls, which may be a consequence of the fact that mothers tend to provide boys with less information about the intrinsic nature of the act's wrongness than they do for girls. Kim, Arnold, Fisher, and Zeljo (2005) observed that parents tend to show overreactive parenting towards preschool-aged children's problematic behaviors which are inconsistent with gender stereotypes, and lax parenting towards those consistent with gender-stereotyped behavior (e.g. internalizing symptoms for girls and externalizing symptoms for boys). Mothers of girls may express more negative emotional responses to aggression compared to mothers of boys, and this gender difference appears to increase with children's age (Mills & Rubin, 1992). Physical punishment seems to be more often used for boys than for girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991). Miner and Clarke-Stewart (2008) found that child male gender is associated with harsher maternal attitude toward discipline. Werner and Grant (2009) also found that child gender interacts with mother's discipline cognitions and responses. Cross-cultural studies, however, have not found the child's gender to be related to the parents' attitudes, conceptions or practices with their children (Best, House, Barnard, & Spicker, 1994; Bornstein et al., 1998; Strom et al., 1984).

The Brazilian population as a whole, as well as the different cultural groups which make it up, have seldom been the object of inter-cultural comparative studies (Carlo, Koller, Raffaelli, & de Guzman, 2007; Lisboa, Féres-Carneiro, & Jablonski, 2007; Neuhouser, 1998; Salazar, 1997; Tudge et al., 2006). Since the beginning of the Portuguese colonization in 1500, Brazil has been composed by a multiethnic population as a result of the successive crossbreeding of settlers, native Indians, African slaves, and several groups of other European and Asiatic immigrants. In the south of the country, Germans and Italians represent the two major immigrant groups, and both had similar settlement characteristics (Ribeiro, 1995). There are very few descriptions and studies on these families, and most available literature is limited to historical data, biographies and travel books (Caldana, 1998; Seyferth, 1988).

In Italian families, the authority was centered on the figure of the father (Costa, 1974; Giron, 1992). Giron (1992, 1997) observed that the woman was under the authority of the man, and, as a mother, she was expected to follow the parenting principles established by the father. Both in the families and in the schools the principles which guided parenting and education generally followed a severe, inflexible moral sense, and the child was often subject to physical punishment (Battistel & Costa, 1982; Frosi & Mioranza, 1975). Although over a century has passed since the Italian colonization, these characteristics still seem to be prevalent among the descendants (Paviani, 2000). Several decades of geographic isolation and socioeconomic hardship have also led the Italian communities to create mutual aid organizations and many cultural associations that contribute to maintaining the immigrants' customs and traditions (Giron, 1997). This picture is to be contrasted with that of Italian parents living in Europe which has been described, in general, as a more tolerant and affectionate parenting attitude (Bornstein et al., 1998). However, comparisons with European Italian parents of today may be risky, since each of the two populations has evolved in a particular way during this last century. In light of the aforementioned notions, Italian descent mothers are expected to have a rather authoritarian parenting style.

The Germans were the first immigrants who reached the country (towards 1850), and were installed in small-scale family farms (De Boni & Costa, 1984). Just as with Italians, the lack of assistance from the Federal government and the geographic isolation reinforced their autonomous organization and their feeling of being an ethnic community to be preserved, expressed by the notion of "*Deuschttum*" ("Germanism") (Müller, 1984; Seyferth, 1994). Seyferth (1988) observed: "in the context of the immigration, no other ethnic group has lived in such homogeneous and compact areas" (p. 4). More recent studies confirm the perpetuation of German

immigrants' cultural values in the sense of the identity of the descendants (Paquette, 1996). These include holding as important the notions of autonomy, responsibility, moral sense, and work (Radünz, 1997). In fact, individual autonomy and self-actualization were found to be highly valued also among European Germans (Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993). The woman had a central role both at home and in the farmwork. Mother and father were both concerned with their children's upbringing, and they shared the same principles of autonomy and responsibility (Müller, 1984). It emerges from the few available descriptions that their children experienced dialogue and reasoning, with moderate monitoring, rather than authority or permissiveness. Thus, authoritative strategies are expected to be more frequent than other strategies for German descent parents.

For both groups, the memory and the perpetuation of their ancestors' traditions constitute a source of pride and satisfaction reflected in several cultural events and practices. For instance, in Santa Cruz do Sul, one of the cities where this study was carried out, the *Oktoberfest* is celebrated every year; the immigration anniversary is also regularly remembered; many music, culinary and sport associations perpetuate German traditions; the German language is taught in schools and is still spoken in shops, churches and the media. Similarly, the influence of Italian culture is still very present in Caxias do Sul, the other city selected for this study.

The aim of the current study was to examine the use of regulation strategies of child behavior by Brazilian mothers, taking into account the influence of their cultural origin (German or Italian), as well as the child's age (2 to 3 years and 5 to 6 years) and gender. Considering the perpetuation of immigrants' cultural traditions and values in several domains of these communities' everyday lives, parental strategies are expected to reflect in some degree the continuity of parenting style described for their ancestors, i.e. authoritarian strategies would be more frequent for Italian descent parents, and authoritative strategies for German ones. In addition, although there are not convergent data on this point, parents are expected to employ different strategies when disciplining boys and girls. They are also expected to use more authoritarian strategies with older children.

Method

Participants

This exploratory study was carried out in Santa Cruz do Sul/BR and Caxias do Sul/BR, two cities with predominantly German and Italian immigration hubs respectively, located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the south of Brazil. The sample included 40 mothers of German descent, and 38 mothers of Italian descent. Descent criteria were: all mothers were of Brazilian na-

tionality and belonged to the third generation of immigrants; their respective husbands belonged to the third or fourth generation of immigrants of the same cultural origin as the mothers'; both parents of each child were born and were living in one of the two immigration cities; all children's grandparents were also inhabitants of these cities (or another city nearby in the same cultural region), and had the same cultural origin; all children were living in their family of origin (recomposed families were excluded), and had family names of either German or Italian origin.

The mothers had a child belonging to one of two age groups: 2 to 3 years and 5 to 6 years. The gender of the child was balanced across the groups. There were four sub-groups: Gr1: 18 mothers of 2 to 3-year-old children of Italian descent (10 boys and 8 girls); Gr2: 20 mothers of 5 to 6-year-old children of Italian descent (8 boys and 12 girls); Gr3: 21 mothers of 2 to 3 year-old children of German descent (12 boys and 9 girls); and Gr4: 19 mothers of 5 to 6 year-old children of German descent (9 boys and 10 girls).

The mothers were 22 to 47 years old (mean age = 34 years, SD = 5.57 years), and belonged to middle to high socioeconomic class, according to Lautrey (1980). All mothers were married and were living with the child's father. Most of the mothers had either high school or university educational level (mean number of years of education: Gr1= 11.83 years, SD= 2.55; Gr2= 13.40 years, SD= 2.01; Gr3= 11.29 years, SD= 1.79; Gr4= 13.26 years, SD= 2.77; t-tests G1/G3= .76, ns; G2/G4= .18, ns), but only approximately half of them were working at the time of the study (working mothers were 53 % for Gr1, 50% for Gr2, 49% for Gr3 and 55% for Gr4).

Criteria for not including mothers were: having twins, mother or child having a physical or mental handicap or a severe somatic disorder, being an adolescent mother (under 18 years) or not living with the child's father. The mothers were recruited through the nursery schools attended by their child. Most Brazilian children, from all social backgrounds, enter a public or private crèche or kindergarten generally from the age of 12 months. In the present study, the two kindergartens attended by the children were private. When a mother had more than one child fulfilling the criteria of inclusion, she was approached only in relation to one of them.

Interview

For the purpose of this study, we developed an interview whose aim was to examine the strategies used by the mothers in regulating their children's behavior. The mother was presented with six typical situations involving daily events that require the regulation of child behavior at home or in the social environment (e.g. *"Do you remember a day when your child did not want to eat at mealtime?"*). The six situations were: (a) the child refuses to eat; (b) the child hits another child; (c) the child refuses to go to school; (d) the child refuses to go to sleep; (e) the child brings home an object which does not belong to her/ him, and (f) the child deliberately damages an object or a part of the house. The situations b, c, d and e have been adapted from a study of Hart, Ladd, and Burleson (1990). The two other situations (a and f) derived from a few interviews with volunteer mothers and appeared to be common situations. In order to examine the impact of the specific nature of the situations on the mothers' strategies, situations a, c and d were considered as conventional transgressions, while situations b, e and f were taken as moral transgressions. In each situation, the mothers were asked about their reaction and strategy vis-à-vis the situation. In particular, they were asked to report their actual behavior with the child and not the hypothetical reaction they would have had in such a situation (see Smetana, Toth, Cichetti, Bruce, Kane, & Daddis, 1999 for a discussion on this point).

Data Collection Procedure

The mothers were interviewed individually in the nursery school attended by their child. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes. They were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The maternal strategies were identified through a 7-step content analysis (Sommer & Sommer, 1980): (a) preliminary reading; (b) choice and definition of the units of classification; (c) development of a first list of categories; (d) reduction of the list of categories; (e) classification of the answers by two external coders, which were blind to the aim of the study and the group assignment of subjects; (f) consensual agreement in case of doubt; (g) analysis and interpretation. Mean intercoder reliability (number of agreements/number of agreements + number of disagreements) based on a random sample of 20% of observations was 90%.

The first reading of the mothers' answers generated a large variety of categories. After successive readings, the researchers and the two coders agreed to combine the categories into three major types of strategies, which covered almost all responses: permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian (see Table 1).

We defined as "permissive" all the strategies where the mother yielded, allowed or even justified her child's transgression, or when she abstained from intervening. "Authoritative" strategies reflect disciplinary techniques based on reasoning, explanations, orientations, a certain degree of insistence and close monitoring of the child's behavior. The answers where the mother mentioned the use of threats, deprivations, punishments ranging from

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Table 1
Categories of Maternal Strategies

Categories of maternal strategies	Major types of strategies
- yields, since she does not perceive her child's attitude as wrongful or prejudicial; - allows the child to do what she/he wants; - does not do anything;	Permissive
- punishes by deprivation of an object or activity the child appreciates; - says to the child she/he will not receive a gift; - is indifferent to the child; - reprehends physically (hits, draws hair/ ears, shakes); - reprehends verbally (blaming, crying); - gives a lecture to the child; - threatens the child with calling her/his father; - obliges the child to do what she/he must do; - punishes by isolating in the room; - takes the child to her/his grandparents / moves away the child from home; - deprives the child of demonstrations of affection (kisses, caresses); - blackmails (e.g. "*If you disobey, you will not have what you want / a "monster" will catch you* "); - threatens the child with scolding or hitting; - ignores the child;	Authoritarian
- asks the child to obey; - insists several times so that the child obeys; - offers the child alternatives/ another food or toy; - insists and checks strictly the child's agenda or behaviors; - discusses with the child on the importance of rules and compliance; - says to the child she/he must be an example to others; - tries to appease the situation and reasons with the child; - shows that she understands the child's motivations but tries to convince she/he to obey;	Authoritative

verbal reprimands to use of physical force, and more generally, where the mother obliges the child to obey, were combined into the "authoritarian" category. When the situation had not happened to the mother and to her child, the situation was coded as "absent" and was not considered for analysis. This was also the case for any answer not describing a strategy of regulation, or which was considered to be nonrelevant.

In order to identify the way the mothers employ different strategies we followed an approach classically used to analyze categorized data (Darses & Wolff, 2006). The 387 mothers' answers gathered from the interviews were classified into distinct categories to obtain different contingency tables. For each situation, up to three answers have been given by each mother. Total of answers is thus not equivalent for mothers and situations (for each strategy, min = 1 and max = 9). However, implemented statistics for these categorized data balance this imbalance. Contingency tables present the distribution of the 387 mothers' answers relative frequencies – percentages – (and observed counts) into the different categories, for each independent variable. With such a

cross-classified data table, the test of a global association is carried out by the chi-square test (χ^2 *test*). Beyond this global association, we also studied the local dependencies (local associations) within the contingency table in order to highlight which specific group of cells was over-or under-represented. The analysis of these over or under representations was carried out with a specific index called the association rate (Bernard, 2003), as presented in the next session.

Results

Global Analysis and Mothers' Cultural Origin

For all mothers authoritarian strategies were more often stated (weighted mean WM: 37%) than authoritative or permissive strategies (WM about: 32%), regardless of cultural descent, type of transgression, and children's age and gender. The global association (*Chi-square test*) between these two categorical variables (Cultural origin x Strategy) was tested on the basis of statistical respected conditions cross-classified data (Hays, 1994), and a cultural origin significant effect

was found ($\chi^2[2] = 9.45$; $p = 0.009$). Association rates are used in exploratory studies since they allow a measurement of local associations within a set of data. For each cell of a contingency table, the association rate between modalities is defined as the comparison between the *observed* frequency and the *expected* frequency[2]. The sign of the association rate indicates whether there is an attraction (+) or a repulsion (-) between the modalities. The association rate can also be interpreted as an over-representation of a cell. For example (Table 2), the cell [*Italian/Authoritarian = +0.20*] indicates that the cell contains 20% more observations than it would have in the case of independence.

Table 2
Observed Relative Frequencies - % - (observed counts) and observed Association Rates (AR) of Mothers' Strategies According to theirs' Cultural Origin

Cultural Origin Strategy	Permissive		Authoritarian		Authoritative		
	% (counts)	AR	% (counts)	AR	% (counts)	AR	Total
German	37.02 (77)	+0.17	30.29 (63)	-0.17	32.69 (68)	+0.03	100% (208)
Italian	25.14 (45)	-0.20	44.13 (79)	+0.20	30.73 (55)	-0.03	100%(179)
Weighted mean (WM)	31.52% (122)		36.69% (142)		31.78% (123)		100% (387)

The rates with a positive sign indicate similarities between the variables of the cells while negative rates would indicate a disparity. Association rates analysis can be supplemented by a geometric analysis aimed at processing a correspondence analysis (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004). In this study, there were not enough available values to allow the use of this method. The more relevant association rates obtained in Table 2 reveal similarities between *German/Permissive* and *Italian/Authoritarian*.

Thus, Italian descent mothers appear to be more authoritarian than German descent mothers, which showed more permissiveness in their strategies.

The Children's Age
Mothers of younger children (2-3-year-old; AR = +0.29) were more permissive than mothers of older children, who showed rather a more authoritarian behavior (Table 3, 5-6-year-old; AR = +0.20; $\chi^2[2] = 16.93$; $p = 0.00021$).

Table 3
Observed Relative Frequencies - % - (observed counts) and observed Association Rates (AR) of Mothers' Strategies According to the Age of the Child

Child's Age Strategy	Permissive		Authoritarian		Authoritative		
	% (counts)	AR	% (counts)	AR	% (counts)	AR	Total
2-3-year-old	40.82 (80)	+0.29	29.59 (58)	-0.19	29.59 (58)	-0.07	100% (196)
5-6-year-old	21.99 (42)	-0.30	43.98 (84)	+0.20	34.03 (65)	+0.07	100% (191)
Weighted mean (WM)	31.52% (122)		36.69% (142)		31.78% (123)		100% (387)

Type of Transgression
Situations which involved a violation of a conventional rule were slightly more observed (52%) than those involving a moral rule (Table 4, 48%). Situation 5 was the less reported one, and was absent for 19 children of the Italian group and for 12 children of the German group. In turn, situation 6 happened to all but one of children. Mothers were more permissive when a conventional rule was not respected (AR = +0.22) and were more authoritarian when the situation implied a moral rule (AR = +0.20; $\chi^2[2] = 11.45$; $p = 0.0033$).

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[2] Expected frequency is obtained by calculating, for each cell of a contingency table, the product of corresponding marginal frequencies of the value a (Variable A) and b (Variable B). The expected frequency is defined as the product-frequency. In independent cases, the observed frequency is equal to the expected frequency. For each cell, association rate

is obtained by calculating the difference between the observed frequency and the expected frequency. This difference is then divided by the expected frequency. For full theoretical demonstrations, see Le Roux and Rouanet (2004).

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Type of Transgression and Mothers' Cultural Origin

In order to examine these results further, we introduced the cultural origin of the mothers to the preceding analysis (Table 5).

When a conventional rule was violated, German and Italian mothers tended to be more permissive (AR respectively equal to +0.28 and +0.12), and German mothers also try authoritative strategies (AR = +0.11). However, when a moral rule was transgressed, German mothers were more authoritarian (+0.45), while Italian mothers employed rather an authoritative strategy (+0.17; $\chi^2[5]$ = 21.19; p = 0.00075).

Type of Transgression, Cultural Origin, and Children's Age

We decided then to examine the same data in relation to the age of the child (Table 6). In conventional transgressions, mothers tended to be more permissive, whatever the age of the child (respectively, AR is equal to +0.19 and +0.29), and they tried also authoritative strategies with younger children (AR = +0.13). In moral situations, they tended to be more authoritarian with younger children (2-3-year-old; AR = +0.43), and to employ authoritative strategies with the older' (5-6-year-old; AR = +0.15; χ^2 [5] = 19.12; p = 0.0018).

Table 4

Observed Relative Frequencies - % - (observed counts) and observed Association Rates (AR) of Mothers' Strategies According to Type of Transgression

Transgressions Strategy	Conventional Transgressions % (counts)	AR	Moral Transgressions % (counts)	AR	Total
Permissive	63.11 (77)	+0.22	36.89 (45)	-0.24	100% (122)
Authoritarian	42.25 (60)	-0.18	57.75 (82)	+0.20	100% (142)
Authoritative	51.22 (63)	-0.01	48.78 (60)	0.01	100% (123)
Weighted mean (WM)	51.68% (200)		48.32% (187)		100% (387

Table 5

Observed Relative Frequencies - % - (observed counts) and observed Association Rates (AR) of Mothers' Strategies According to Type of Transgression and Cultural Origin

Cultural Origin	Transgression Strategy	Conventional Transgression % (counts)	AR	Moral Transgression % (counts)	AR	Total
German	Permissive	66.23 (51)	+0.28	33.77 (26)	-0.30	100% (77)
	Authoritarian	30.16 (19)	-0.42	69.84 (44)	+0.45	100% (63)
	Authoritative	57.35 (39)	+0.11	42.65 (29)	-0.12	100% (68)
Italian	Permissive	57.78 (26)	+0.12	42.22 (19)	-0.13	100% (45)
	Authoritarian	51.90 (41)	0.00	48.10 (38)	0.00	100% (79)
	Authoritative	43.64 (24)	-0.16	56.36 (31)	+0.17	100% (55)
	Weighted mean (WM)	51.68% (200)		48.32% (187)		100% (387)

Table 6

Observed Relative Frequencies - % - (observed counts) and observed Association Rates (AR) of Mothers' Strategies According to Type of Transgression and to Children's Age

Age of child	Transgression Strategy	Conventional Transgression % (counts)	AR	Moral Transgression % (counts)	AR	Total
2-3-year-old	Permissive	61.25 (49)	+0.19	38.75 (31)	-0.20	100% (80)
	Authoritarian	31.03 (18)	-0.40	68.97 (40)	+0.43	100% (58)
	Authoritative	58.62 (34)	+0.13	41.38 (24)	-0.14	100% (58)
5-6-year-old	Permissive	66.67 (28)	+0.29	33.33 (14)	-0.31	100% (42)
	Authoritarian	50.00 (42)	-0.03	50.00 (42)	+0.03	100% (84)
	Authoritative	44.62 (29)	-0.14	55.38 (36)	+0.15	100% (65)
	Weighted mean (WM)	51.68% (200)		48.32% (187)		100% (387)

The Child's Gender

No significant difference was found regarding the use of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative strategies by the mothers as related to the gender of their child.

Discussion

This study highlights some significant differences in the use of strategies of child behavior regulation in two Brazilian cultural groups and two preschool ranges of children's age. On the whole, Italian descent mothers more often mentioned the use of authoritarian strategies, whereas German descent mothers more frequently reported permissive strategies. These findings tend to confirm the idea that Italian descent mothers continue to follow, to a certain extent, the severe parenting principles prescribed by their ancestors (Battistel & Costa, 1982; Costa, 1974; Frosi & Mioranza, 1975; Giron, 1992, 1997; Paviani, 2000). Results, however, do not support the notion that German descent mothers would tend more frequently to employ authoritative strategies when disciplining their children. It was expected that authoritative strategies would be possibly chosen by the German descent mothers in order to increase their children's capacity to assimilate the rules, and consequently to achieve their goal of encouraging the children's autonomy and responsibility (Müller, 1984; Paquette, 1996; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993). In fact, it appeared that, at least for some German descent mothers, adopting permissive strategies reflected a way of increasing their child's sense of responsibility, rather than a laissez-faire attitude, as the child is expected to be brought to realize by her/himself the consequences of her/his acts.

Therefore, along with the perpetuation of many cultural traditions and values, and in spite of being third generation immigrants, mothers of both groups tend to employ parental strategies that confirm the continuity of the parenting styles described for their European ancestors (Paquette, 1996; Seyferth, 1988, 1994). As a matter of fact these strategy patterns are not in contrast with some observations involving European German and Italian parents. Focusing on a population of German parents and of Italian parents who had immigrated to Germany, Strom et al. (1984) noticed a rather permissive attitude for the German parents, whereas the parents of Italian descent more often showed attitudes of control and domination within the parent-child relationship. Brazilian-German parents probably still share with European-German parents some of their values, such as the promotion of autonomy, responsibility, and moral sense (Paquette, 1996; Radünz, 1997; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993). Both groups clearly express their attachment to their European origins. Besides, both immigrant cities are located in the extreme south of Brazil, and the mothers approached came from families

that had been living in the same cultural areas of their ancestors, and had married a man having the same cultural origin to their own, which results in reduced geographic mobility and cultural crossbreeding. Thus, it is conceivable that these parents may draw on their ancestors' experience and values for modeling their parental practices.

Our attention was also drawn by the frequency of authoritarian strategies, which were the most frequent strategies mentioned by the mothers, regardless of cultural descent, type of transgression, and children's age and gender. However, it must be stressed that authoritarian strategies in this sample mainly involved setting limits and only very rarely the use of physical punishment. This may be explained by the fact that all mothers were adults, well-educated, living in couple, and came from a middle-to-high socioeconomic milieu (Belsky et al., 2006; Glanville, 2004). Further, these results counterpoise the prevailing image of great permissiveness in parent-child relationships in Brazil. Biasoli-Alves (1995, 1997) has showed, in the nineties, that maternal attitudes in the urban Brazilian middle class were based on an anti-authoritarian ideology, the expression of affect towards the children, and the use of non-punitive techniques, dialogue and explanation of rules. Thus, Brazilian parents descending from German and Italian immigrants seem to have a more traditional thinking on child management, which may reflect in some degree, at least for Italian descent parents, the continuity of their ancestors' cultural beliefs and values. Studies on acculturation processes support the idea that culture-of-origin continues to influence parenting in immigrated groups, since values and behavioral attitudes related to the family appear to remain stable, even several years after immigration (Luque, Fernández, & Tejada, 2006). As for Brazilian groups, this idea needs however more support. Recent Brazilian studies on parenting and child behavior have not examined the impact of cultural background, and acculturation processes (Serpa, Del Prette, & Del Prette, 2006; Weber, Prado, Viezzer, & Brandenburg, 2004), or have not considered the families' specific European descent (Tudge et al., 2006).

Maternal strategies were also largely affected by the nature of the child's misbehaviors. Globally, mothers were more permissive when a conventional rule was transgressed, and more authoritarian in moral situations. As mentioned above, moral rules imply the respect of justice and the rights of the individual, and are unlikely to be negotiated (Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Turiel, 1983). Therefore, the use of less flexible strategies for these situations seems reasonable (Tisak & Turiel, 1988). Authoritative strategies were also frequent in moral situations, while permissive strategies prevailed in conventional transgressions. These findings show that both the use of power assertion and reasoning are higher in moral

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transgressions as compared to conventionals' (Chritchley & Sanson, 2006). These situations seem to combine a short-term goal (stopping the behavior) and a long-term goal (to scaffold child moral development by explaining rules and consequences; Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). Interestingly, the impact of type of transgression was also influenced by the mothers' cultural origin. In conventional situations, both German and Italian descent mothers tended to be rather permissive, but German descent mothers also used authoritative strategies. In moral situations, German descent mothers were more authoritarian, while Italians showed more authoritative strategies. Thus, when facing moral transgressions, German descent parents tended to be less flexible and mentioned their values such as responsibility, respect and moral sense as priorities that they try to instill into their children. Their immediate reaction was to stop the child's misbehavior, whereas Italian descent mothers appeared less severe and more focused on explanations. At this point, these data provide no explanation why Italian descent mothers did not follow their traditional severe parenting principles. These findings give support, however, to the idea that, cross-culturally, parental strategies are rather invariant in conventional transgressions and more divergent in moral situations, as pointed out by Conroy et al (1980). Hence, they suggest an influence of both culture of origin and nature of the situation. The interaction of these factors remains, however, largely unexplored, and deserves to be further investigated.

Maternal strategies also varied according to the child's age, although the present study compared two relatively close age ranges (both were preschool). Overall, mothers mentioned more often the use of authoritarian strategies with older than younger children. Conversely, the use of permissive strategies was higher among 2 to 3 year-old children. The impact of children's age was also influenced by the type transgression. In conventional situations, mothers were more permissive, whatever the child's age, and also used authoritative strategies with the youngest'. In moral situations, they were more authoritarian with the younger children, and used more authoritative strategies with the oldest'. Thus, it appears that, as the child becomes older, indulgence decreases and parental demand level increases, in particular when moral rules are transgressed. As children become progressively more obedient and able to understand rules, parents show less tolerance and tend to use more strict punishment (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989), but also more reasoning and authoritative strategies. This is particularly true for moral transgressions, since these situations are thought to have more implications for the child's social and moral development than the conventionals' (Smetana 1989; Smetana et al., 2000). These findings support the idea that, rather than using the same strategies indiscriminately, parents tend

to adjust their discipline to their child's stage of development, particularly to their cognitive skills (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995).

Although it seems reasonable that parents' behavior with their children varies according to their expectations, ideas and attitudes associated with each gender, the results of this study do not show any difference in the use of strategies related to child's gender. This lack of variance corroborates the results of some previous studies (Best et al., 1994; Bornstein et al., 1998; Strom et al., 1984).

On the whole, the findings of the current study confirm the impact of the family's culture and environment on parental behavior. Parental strategies are associated not only with parental or child characteristics, but also with the nature of the child's misbehavior, as well as the larger sociocultural context. Recent studies describe Brazil as a multicultural nation seeking its own cultural identity, with values as contrasting as conservatism, hierarchy, autonomy, and egalitarianism (Tamayo, 1997). This composite context certainly influences the values and attitudes adopted by Brazilian parents in their interactions with their children. Besides, the coexistence of many parenting ideologies in Brazil may result in a lack of a coherent model for the parents (Caldana, 1998; Dias da Silva, 1986; Zagury, 1995). Since the present research is limited to the study of two particular and relatively close cultural groups, subsequent studies could focus on other large Brazilian cultural groups, such as mothers of Portuguese or African origin, or on comparisons involving urban and rural populations. These data could contribute to understanding the complexity of Brazilian culture and its influence on parental beliefs and behaviors.

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