

# Do Parents' Socialization Goals Influence How They Respond to Children's Performance?

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## INTRODUCTION

- American and Chinese parents respond differently to children's performance (e.g., F. Ng et al., 2007; J. Ng et al., 2015)
  - American parents tend to highlight success and downplay failure
  - Chinese parents tend to highlight failure and downplay success
- The more individualistic American culture may lead parents to prioritize children's feelings of self-worth; whereas the more collectivistic Chinese culture may lead parents to prioritize children's feelings of self-improvement (for a review, see Heine et al., 1999)
  - Parents with **self-worth goals** may emphasize children's success and minimize their failure to ensure children's feelings of worth
  - Parents with **self-improvement goals** may emphasize children's failure and minimize their success to focus children on improving
- Although differences in American and Chinese parents' goals (self-worth vs. self-improvement) appear to underlie the differences in their responses (e.g., J. Ng et al., 2015), it is unclear whether their goals actually play a causal role in their responses

## RESEARCH QUESTION

- Do parents goals for children drive how they respond to children's performance?

### Key Hypotheses

- Mothers induced to hold a self-worth goals will focus more on children's success (vs. failure)
- Mothers induced to hold a self-improvement goals will focus more on children's failure (vs. success)

## METHOD

### Participants

- 143 American mothers and 157 Hong Kong mothers and their children (51% boys; mean age = 10.22 years)

### Goal Induction

- Half of the mothers in each country read a brochure that highlighted the importance of children's self-worth
- The other half read a brochure that highlighted the importance of children's self-improvement

Self-Worth Brochure	Self-Improvement Brochure
<b>Title:</b> "Children's Confidence is Key to Logical Reasoning"	<b>Title:</b> "Children's Striving for Improvement is Key to Logical Reasoning"
<b>A Key Point:</b> "What matters is that children have confidence in themselves."	<b>A Key Point:</b> "What matters is that children focus on improving."
<b>Program Objective:</b> "Fostering children's positive feelings about themselves"	<b>Program Objective:</b> "Helping children understand there is always room for improvement"

### Mothers' Response Measures

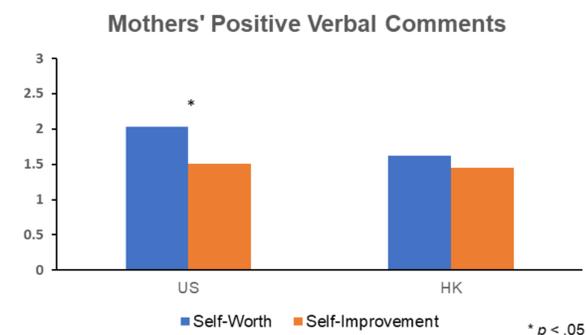
- Verbal comments.** Mothers' verbal comments about children's performance during a 5-minute reunion after children failed or succeed at a task were coded ( $\kappa = .80$  for US;  $\kappa = .76$  for HK)
  - Positive statements (e.g., "You are very smart")
  - Negative statements (e.g., "Did you even try?")
- Intended responses.** Mothers also reported on how they would respond to their children's hypothetical success (14 items;  $\alpha s > .86$ ) and failure (13 items;  $\alpha s > .79$ ) in school
  - Success-focused responses (e.g., "I would make a big deal out of my child's success" when children succeed; "I would talk about what my child did right" when children fail)
  - Failure-focused responses (e.g., "I would focus on any problems my child missed" when children succeed; "I would let my child know that he/she might not be so smart" when children fail")

## DISCUSSION

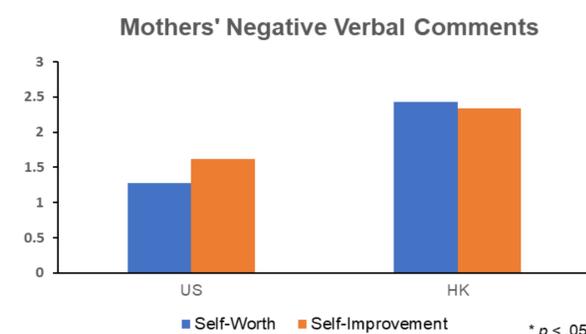
- American mothers appeared to be sensitive to the goal induction both in terms of their observed (i.e., verbal comments) and intended (i.e., self-reported) responses to children's performance
- Hong Kong mothers appeared to be sensitive to the goal induction only in terms of their intended responses. Possible reasons include:
  - Nuances (e.g., tone and severity) of the verbal comments that were not captured by the coding scheme
  - American and Chinese mothers having different ideas about how to foster children's self-worth and self-improvement. For example, Chinese (vs. American) mothers may not think of failure-focused responses as detrimental

## RESULTS

### Did the Goal Induction Influence Mothers' Verbal Comments During the Reunion?

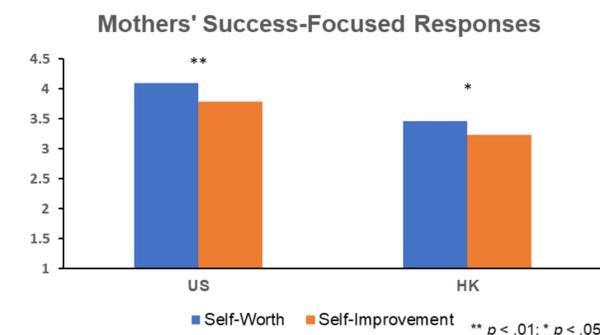


- American mothers in the self-worth (vs. self-improvement) condition made more positive statements (see figure to the left),  $p < .05$
- Hong Kong mothers did not make more positive statements in the self-worth (vs. self-improvement) condition

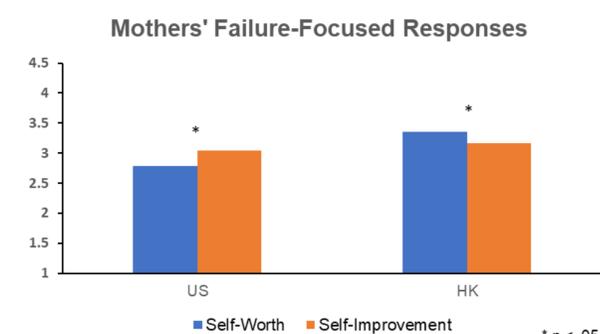


- Mothers in the self-improvement condition did not make more negative statements than did mothers in the self-worth condition in either country (see figure to the left)

### Did the Goal Induction Influence Mothers' Intended Responses to Children's Performance?



- Both American and Hong Kong mothers in the self-worth (vs. self-improvement) condition intended to use more success-focused responses to children's performance (see figure to the left),  $p s < .05$



- American mothers in the self-worth (vs. self-improvement) condition intended to use fewer failure-focused responses (see figure to the left),  $p < .05$
- Surprisingly, Hong Kong mothers in the self-worth (vs. self-improvement) condition intended to use more failure-focused responses,  $p < .05$