Parental Ethnotheories: How to study them and why they matter

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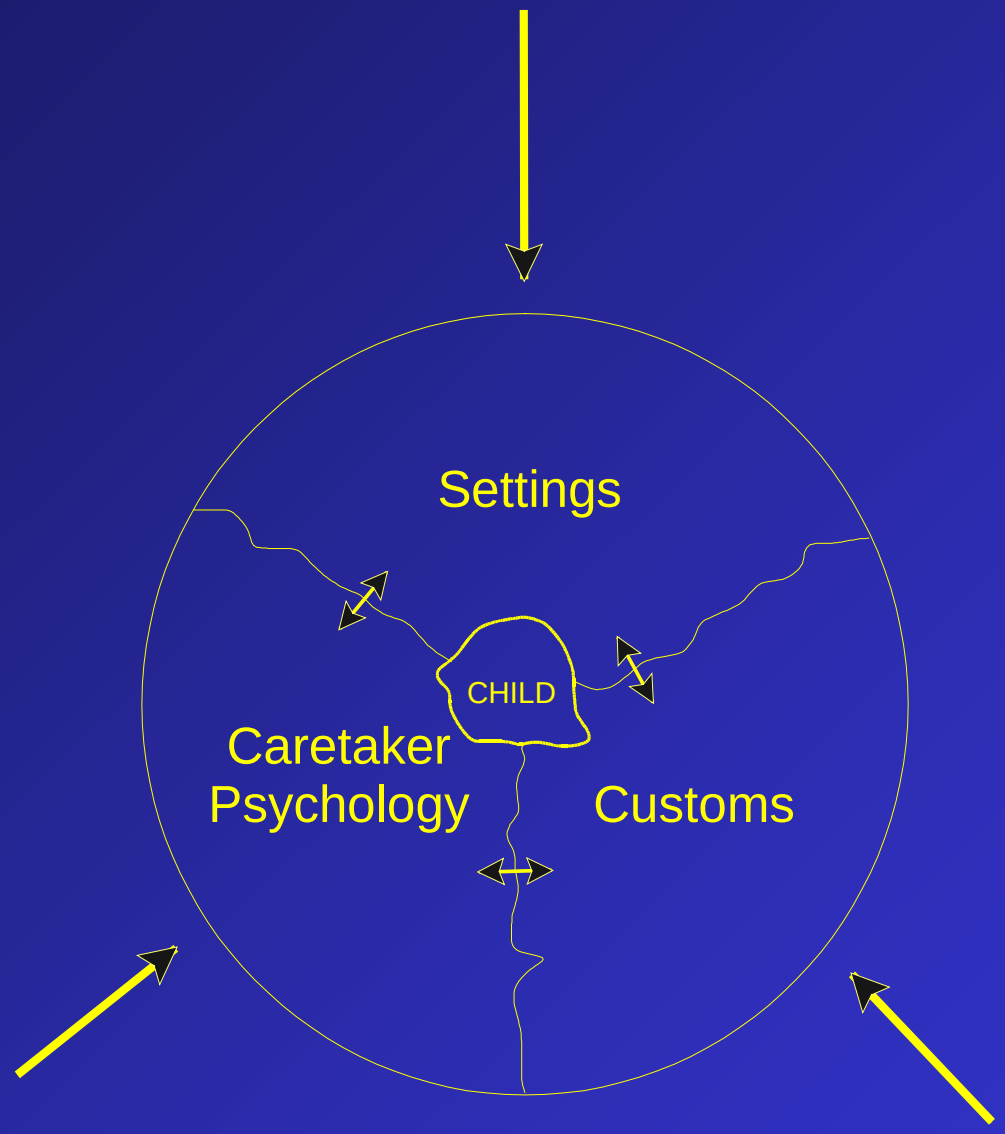
What are the “secrets” of children’s successful development?

- Every culture has its own secrets to success – they are cultural models that guide parents’ thinking and practices
- Often these cultural models are implicit, taken-for-granted ideas about the right way to bring up children to achieve culturally defined goals
- Mixed methods are especially helpful for discovering and verifying them

Using Mixed Methods to Identify Culturally Based "Secrets for Success"

- INTERVIEWS
  - Qualitative analysis
  - Quantitative analysis (coding and counting)
- DAILY ROUTINES
  - Based on parental diaries
  - Activities, settings, and people present are coded into categories
  - Frequencies are calculated

The Developmental Niche



Physical and Social Settings

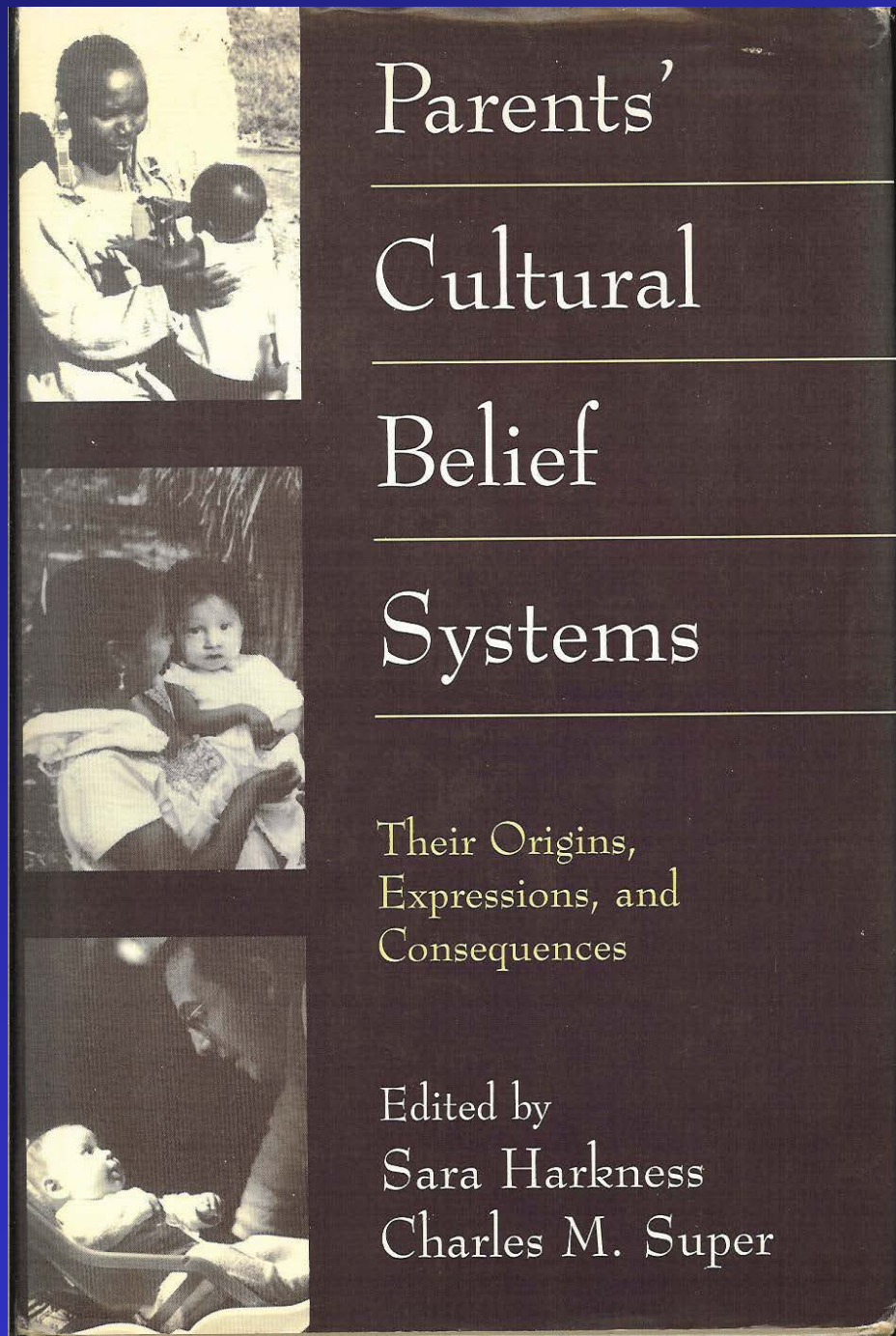
Settings of daily life reflect cultural agendas: The Netherlands & rural Kenya

Customs of Care

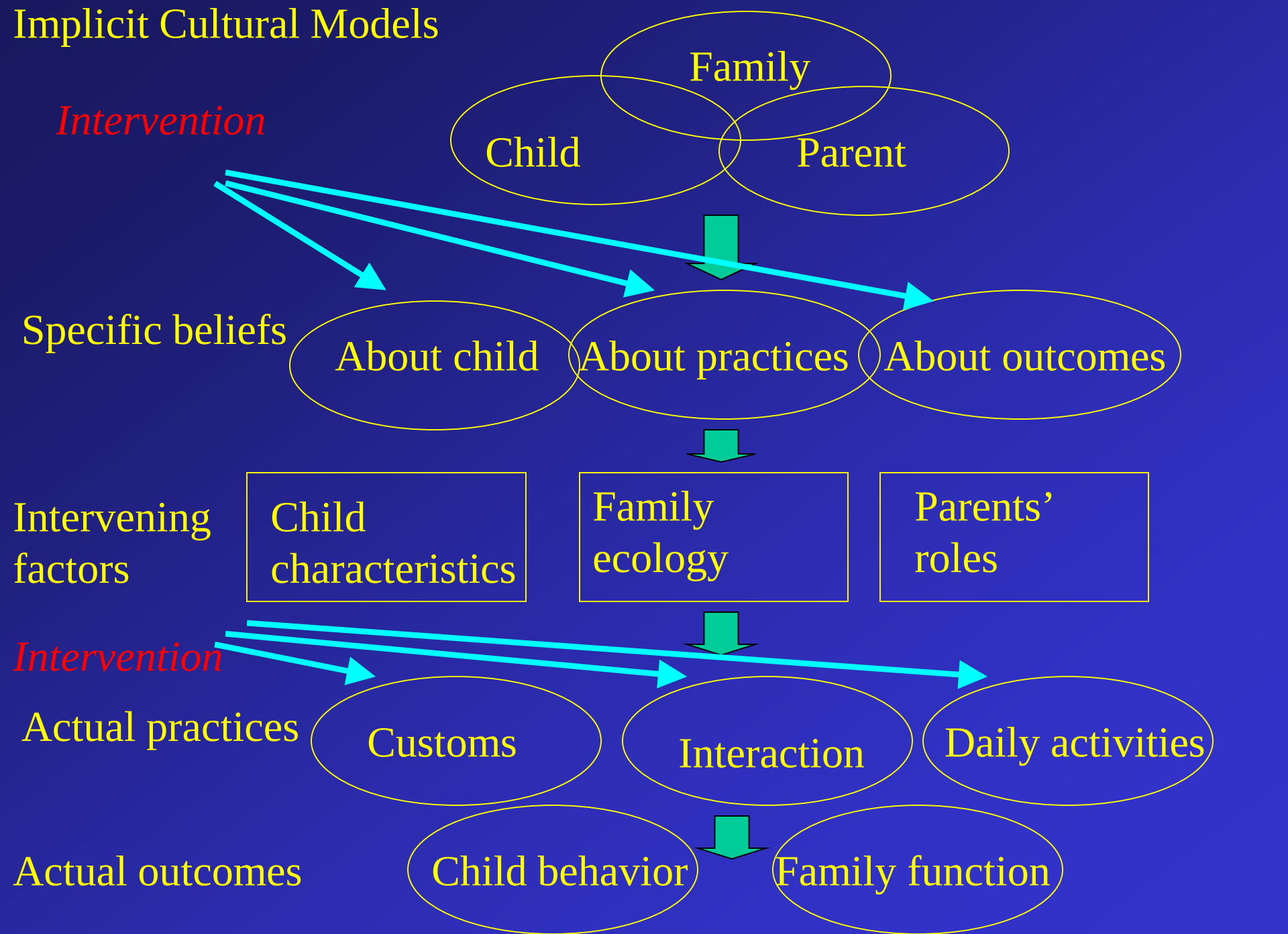
Customs and practices of care instantiate parental ethnotheories: Netherlands & Kenya

Parental ethnotheories are…

"a shared system of ideas held by a community of parents about children and their development, the family, and the self as parent, together with related goals and ideas about action."



Implicit Cultural Models



Themes and Practices of Care

- Themes (and reported practices) in interviews
- Time allocation to various activities across the day
- Stimulation and rest
- Culture and cortisol

THE INTERNATIONAL BABY STUDY

(FUNDED IN PART BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, USA, and the KOREAN RESEARCH FOUNDATION)

Principal Investigators: Charles Super, Sara Harkness, Dymphna van den Boom, Douglas Granger, Peter Molenaar, with:

Marjolijn Bloom (the Netherlands)

Jesus Palacios & Blanca Huitron (Spain)

Vanna Axia & Ughetta Moscardino (Italy)

Jong Hay Rha and On Kang Hyun (Korea)

Four Cultural Study Sites

- The Netherlands – “Bloemenheim” (*n*=30)
- Korea – Daijon and Incheon (*n*=30)
- US – northeast Connecticut (*n*=45)
- Italy – Padova (*n*=52)

US – Provide a stimulating environment to promote cognitive development

The Netherlands: Provide a restful and regular environment to promote self-regulation and positive mood

Italy: Build emotional closeness, promote social-emotional intelligence

Korea – Orient the baby to early academic learning while keeping close physical and emotional contact

Theme-Practice Salience Index (based on coding of interviews)

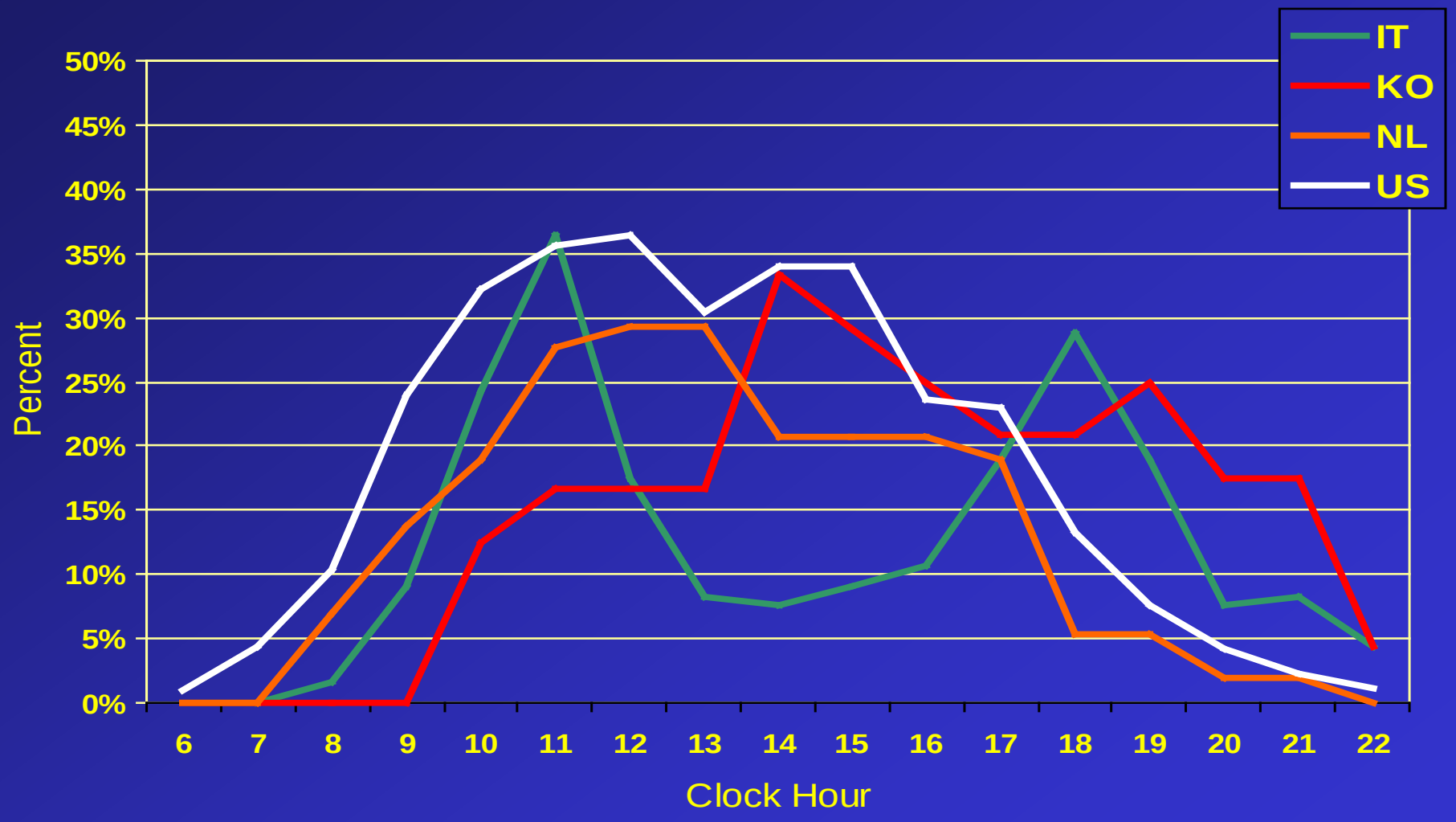
Theme	*sig.*	Italy	Korea	NL	US
Cognitive Processing	****	0.7	4.7	0.0	15.6
Physical Closeness	+	2.9	2.3	0.0	7.9
Physical Experience and Well-Being		8.1	11.4	10.3	10.3
Regularity of Routines	***	2.2	25.3	50.0	15.4
Sleep/Rest		22.9	37.1	31.8	26.7
Social Awareness	+	2.4	3.8	0.0	0.4
Socio-emotional Closeness	****	20.2	3.5	5.6	3.6
Stimulation of Development	****	7.4	11.7	1.5	16.4
Tranquility/Calm	****	33.2	0.2	1.0	3.7

How restful or stimulating are babies' environments in the 4 cultural samples?

- Sleep versus wake time
- At home vs. out in novel environments
- Quiet "sitting around" vs. active play
- Cognitive stimulation through objects
- Social stimulation through interaction
- Social density – variety and number of people in the baby's environment over the day

Out-and-About at 6 months

6:00 hr to 21:59 hr



STIMULATION (6 months)

	IT	KO	NL	US
Out and about	1	2	3	4
Non-family present	1	3	2	4
Social density	1	2	2	4
Play & Grooming	2	4	1	4
Total stimulation score	5	11	8	16

RESTFULNESS (6 months)

	IT	KO	NL	US
Daytime sleep	1	3	4	2
Regular nap time	4	2	3	1
At home	4	3	3	2
Sit around	3	1	4	2
Total restfulness score	*12*	*9*	*14*	*7*

The International Study of Parents, Children, and Schools

Funded in part by the Spencer Foundation

Principal Investigators:

Sara Harkness (Holland and USA)

Charles M. Super (Holland and USA)

Lead Investigators:

Giovanna Axia (Italy)

Andrzej Eliasz (Poland)

Harry McGurk♈ (Australia)

Jesús Palacios (Spain)

Barbara Welles-Nyström (Sweden)

Culture, Temperament, and "Goodness of fit"

- How do parents conceptualize temperament?
- What aspects of temperament do parents find "difficult"?

Hypothesis:
Culture influences the development and expression of temperament:

- By creating different kinds of settings of daily life;
- Through different customs of care;
- Through different parental ethnotheories that are coordinated with settings and customs

With thanks to Alex and Stella, OTC 2000

Mystic, Connecticut

The Thomas and Chess Dimensions

1. ACTIVITY LEVEL, amount of physical motion during daily activities
2. REGULARITY, the predictability of body functions and behavior
3. ADAPTABILITY, the ease or difficulty in adjusting behavior appropriately when routines change
4. APPROACH to new situations, places, people, etc.
5. THRESHOLD, external stimulation needed to provoke a response
6. INTENSITY of responses (whether positive or negative)
7. MOOD, the amount of pleasant or unpleasant feelings expressed
8. DISTRACTABILITY, the effectiveness of external stimuli in interrupting ongoing behavior
9. PERSISTENCE and attention span for continuing activities

Assessment of Temperament

- Carey and McDevitt “Behavioral Style Questionnaire” for children ages 3 to 7 years
- 100 behaviorally-based items
  - The child is outgoing with strangers.
  - The child reacts strongly (complains or cries) to a disappointment or failure.
- Summarized into the 9 Thomas and Chess Dimensions

Three Methods of Scale Comparability

- Etic – universal features
  - Imposed Etic – using meanings from a specific group in a different cultural context *(use US scoring)*
- Emic – meanings specific to a culture group *(drop items to maximize alphas in each group)*
- Derived Etic – "universal" features derived from comparing multiple emic systems *(identify items that are retained in at least 6 of the 7 the groups)*

Internal Reliability of Derived Etic Scales

Scale	*# items*	*Max*	***Avg***	*Min*	*N > .50*
Activity	10	.83	**.72**	.70	7
Regularity	4	.17	**.43**	.63	3
Adaptability	11	.59	**.66**	.74	6
Approach	7	.73	**.77**	.81	7
Intensity	10	.28	**.58**	.71	5
Mood	9	.44	**.63**	.72	6
Persistence	6	.57	**.66**	.73	7
Distractibility	6	.69	**.77**	.69	7
Threshold	1	-	**-**	-	-

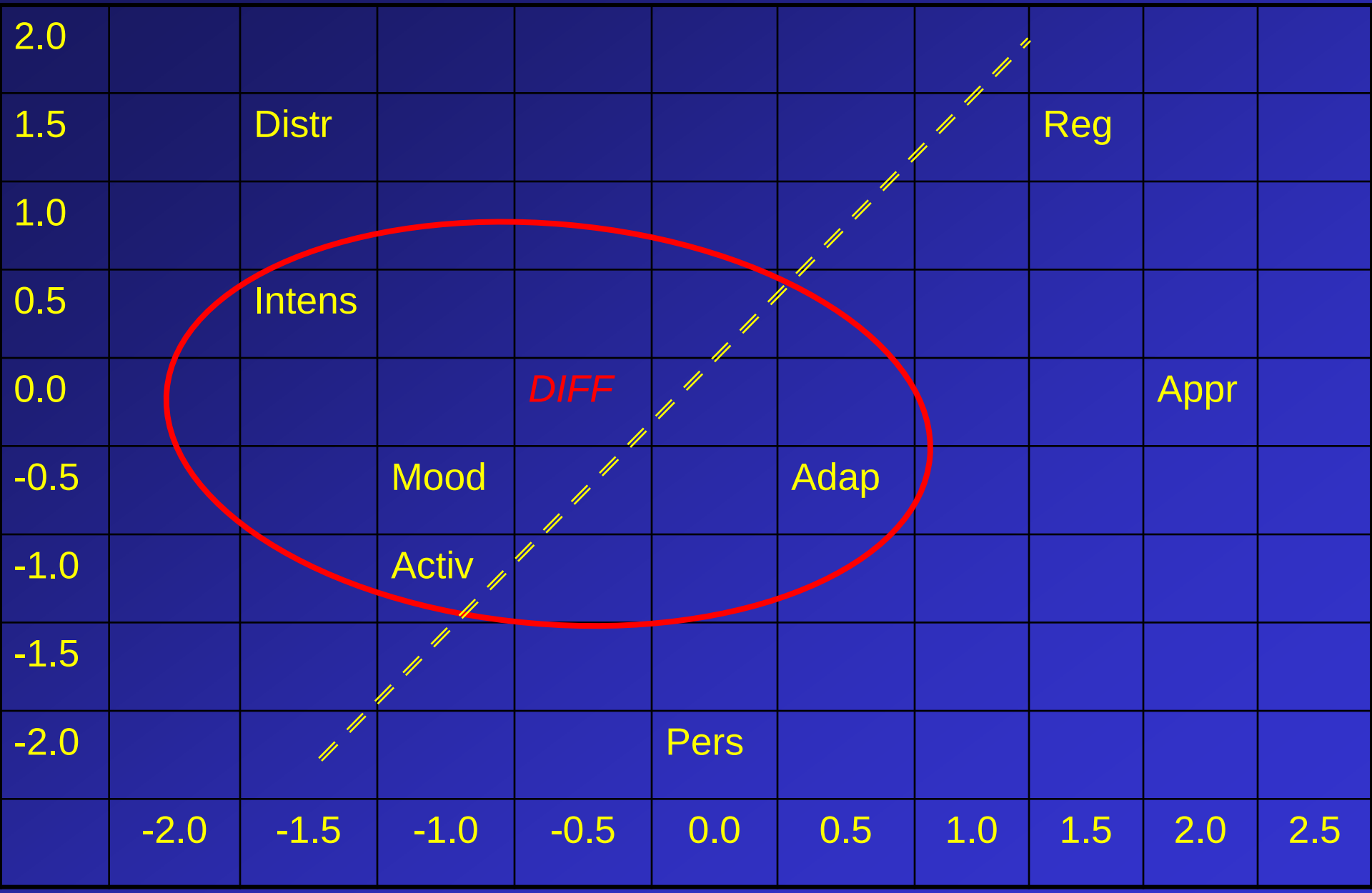
Correlations of Temperament Dimensions with "Difficulty" Rating

(International Study of Parents, Children, and Schools: Mothers only,BSQ derived etic, ages 3 to 7 yrs)

site	*N*	Activity (high)	Reg. (low)	Appro. (neg)	Adapt. (low)	Intens. (high)	Mood (neg)	Persist (low)	Distrac (high)	Thresh. (low)
Australia	*22*	**.44***	.18	.24	**.52***	.06	**.63*****	**.47***	.06	-.20
Italy	*24*	.09	.15	**.42***	**.43***	.19	-.09	.12	-.05	-.02
Nether-lands	*63*	**.38****	.04	.06	**.29****	**.33***	**.30****	**.49*****	**.27***	.10
Poland	*44*	**.32***	.17	.14	**.42****	.14	**.49*****	.24	.13	.13
Spain	*41*	.28	-.10	.11	**.50*****	.12	**.323***	.27	-.05	.26
Sweden	*33*	.06	.02	.14	.27	-.032	**.59****	**.44***	.15	.30
USA	*66*	**.35****	.19	.01	**.51*****	**.38****	**.60*****	.18	.00	-.10
POOLED	*293*	**.26*****	.10	**.18****	**.42*****	**.20***	**.45*****	**.31*****	.11	.12

$^{+}p<.10$; $^{*}p<.05$; $^{**}p<.01$; $^{***}p<.001$ Note: Original scoring: high scores imply "difficult" behavior.

USA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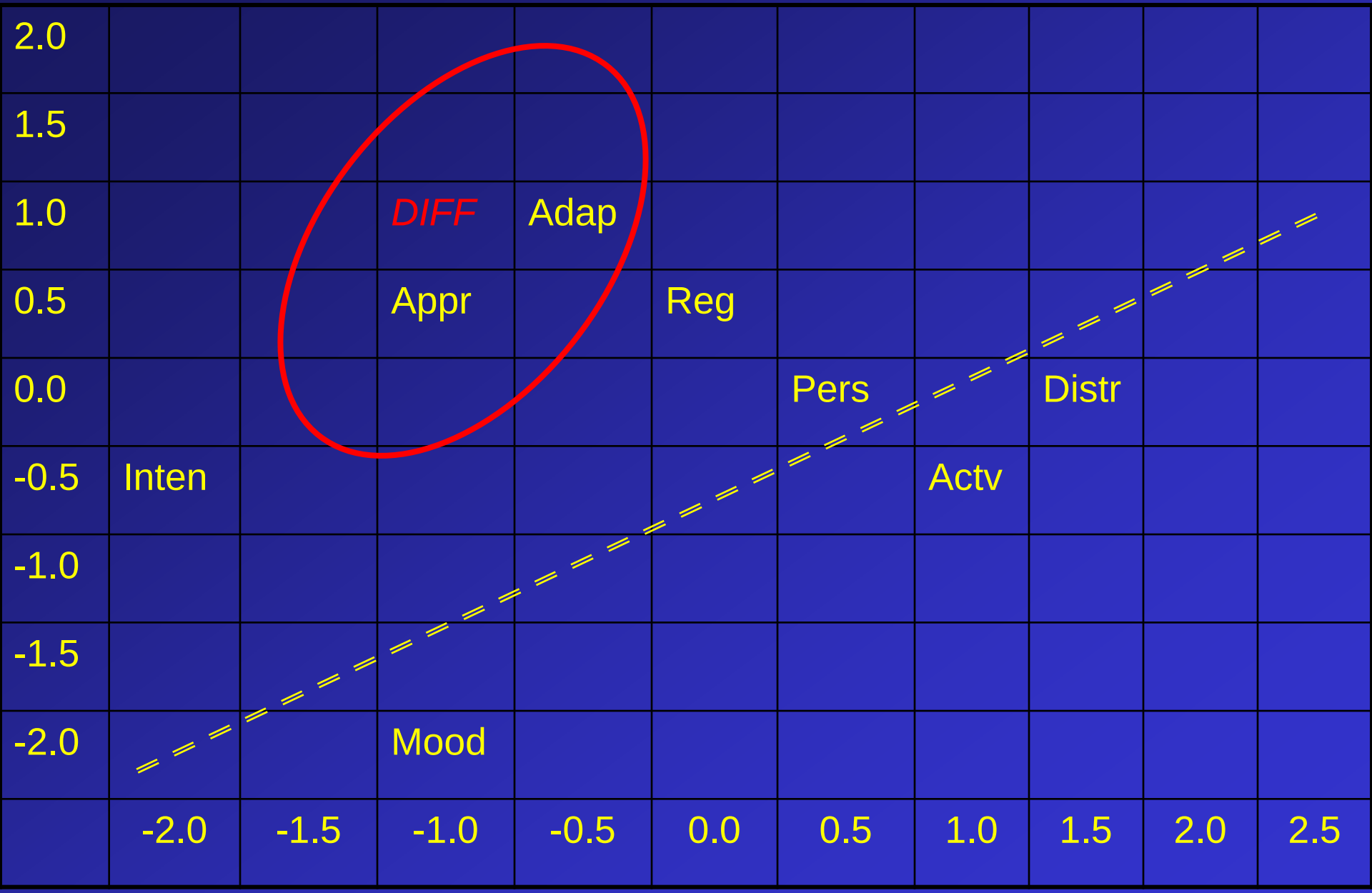
Italy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1.5
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Italy: Francesca, a "selectively" shy three-year-old girl

F She's positive, extroverted…she is responsive to the needs of those around her. I'd say she's not afraid of…she's stimulated by novelty, let's say she's a bit stubborn…

M I almost agree, especially about her sociability, her independence and her stubbornness. I'm in agreement with him about her sociability, but there's one thing we don't agree on- he says she's "selective" and that's what he finds difficult. I still don't really understand this, but it seems that in reality even if she wants to be sociable and although she feels secure, she knows that mainly with adults, with all adults, even the ones she doesn't know. But in relationships with other children she's not so easy. I mean, if there is even one person with her, she is alright, but if she goes to the home of our friends, when there already is one person she knows, there is a child she knows but there are many other people, she gets shy, although not for more than a half an hour.

US Department of State, August 2013
Jefferson Science Fellows with “S”

Joyabaj, Guatemala, December 2012: Community meeting for the USAID “Leer Juntos, Aprender

Fisher-Price International Panel on Children's Healthy Development, September 2015

What is the future of research in culture and human development?

- Increasing recognition of culture's role in human development in the global context
- Multi-disciplinary teams of researchers who can "speak each other's languages"
- New technologies for data collection and analysis will support complex interactions between culture and human development
- Increasing call for researchers to apply their skills to solving global issues