

U.S. and Chilean Mothers' Use of Mental References With Infant Girls and Boys: Comparison of Maternal Practices in Gender Socialization via Language in Two Countries

Cita:

Chang, T. F., Farkas, C., Vilca, D., & Vallotton, C. (2017). US and Chilean mothers' use of mental references with infant girls and boys: Comparison of maternal practices in gender socialization via language in two countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 48(8), 1271-1287.

Abstract

Variability in parents' socialization of gender across countries has been understudied. To address the gap, this study compares U.S. and Chilean mothers' practices in socialization of gender through use of mental state language. Drawing on 90 Chilean and 52 U.S. mother–infant dyads, we examined variation in the frequencies of mothers' utterances of five types of mental references—emotion, desire, physiological states, causal talk, and cognition—to determine whether they varied by country and infant gender. Infant age ranged between 10 and 15 months. The frequencies with which both U.S. and Chilean mothers in our sample talked about most mental references did not vary according to infant gender, with the exceptions of causal talk in the United States. Specifically, the U.S. mothers used more causal talk with girls than boys. There were more similarities than differences in maternal use of the mental references in the U.S. and Chilean samples. This study did not observe gendered socialization practices through the use of these mental references in infancy among the U.S. and Chilean mothers. Instead, the current study suggests that, using mothers' mental references in the child's first year as the indicator, both gender-neutral and cross-gendered socialization practices emerge in the United States, and only gender-neutral socialization practices emerge in Chile.