

Childhood in Different Settings: LeVine & Preschool in Three Cultures

Lecture 8

Variables that effect child development:

- socioeconomic conditions (LeVine)
- values (Tobin, Wu & Davidson)

Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa by Robert LeVine et al. (1994)

- **POINT**: how differences in soci-economic conditions results in **differential treatment** of children and **GOALS** of childcare

Important because:

- took on sacred cow of child development/
psychology: mother - infant attachment

different subsistence:

- **Gussi** - agropastoralists, obedience and responsibility vital
- **U.S.** - affluent, urban, education imp., job specialization

Different reproductive environments:

- **GUSI** - marry early, many children
- **U.S.** - marry late, few children

Difference in communication:

- **Gussi** - relatively emotionally inexpressive
- **U.S.** - relatively emotionally expressive

communication goals:

- **Gussi** - proper respect
- **U.S.** - self-confidence and initiative

Different populations =
different concepts of childcare
and their agenda for the
development of children

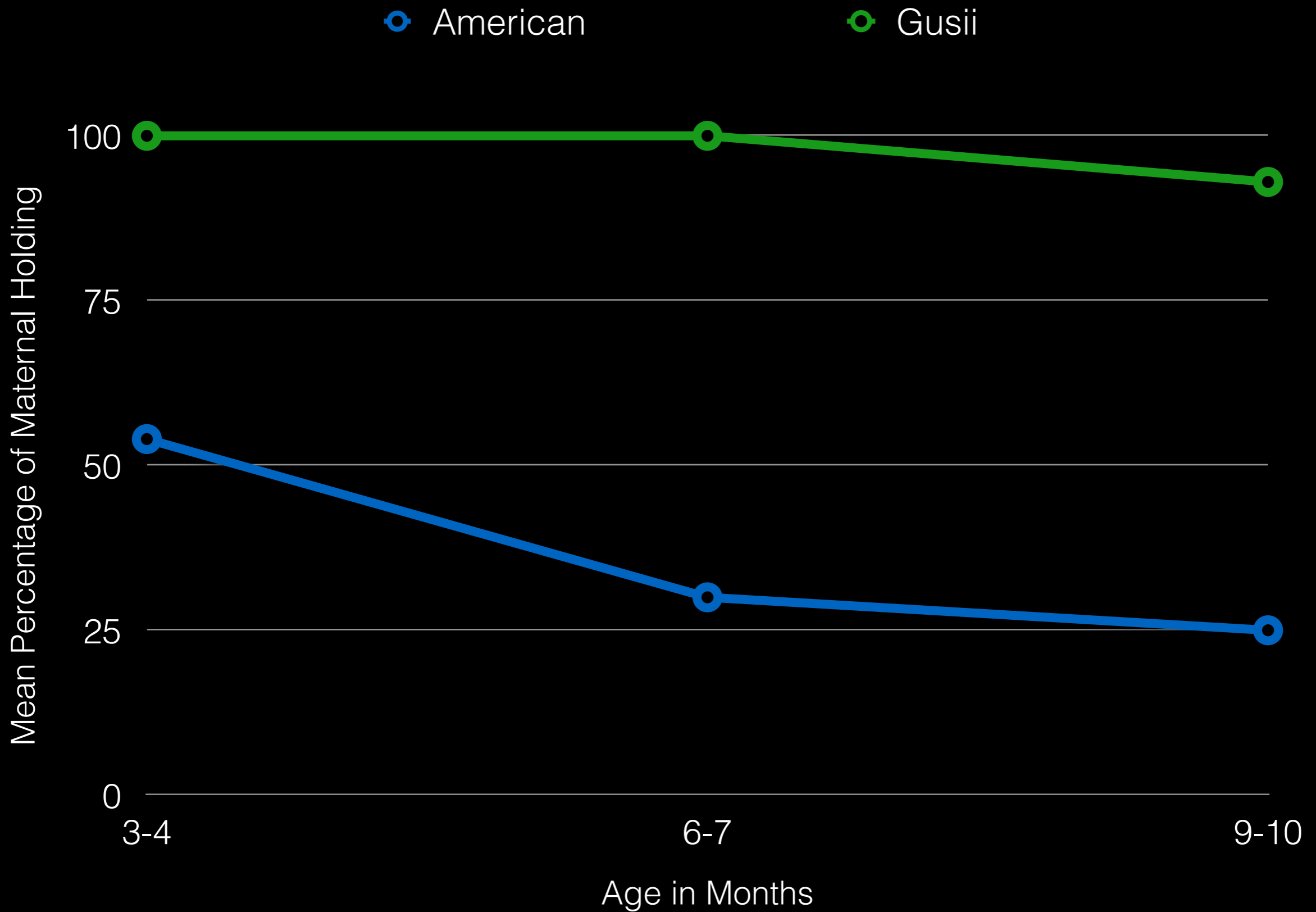
Primary concern:

- **Gussi** – survival, health and physical growth of child
- **U.S.** – behavioral development of the infant and its preparation for educational interactions.

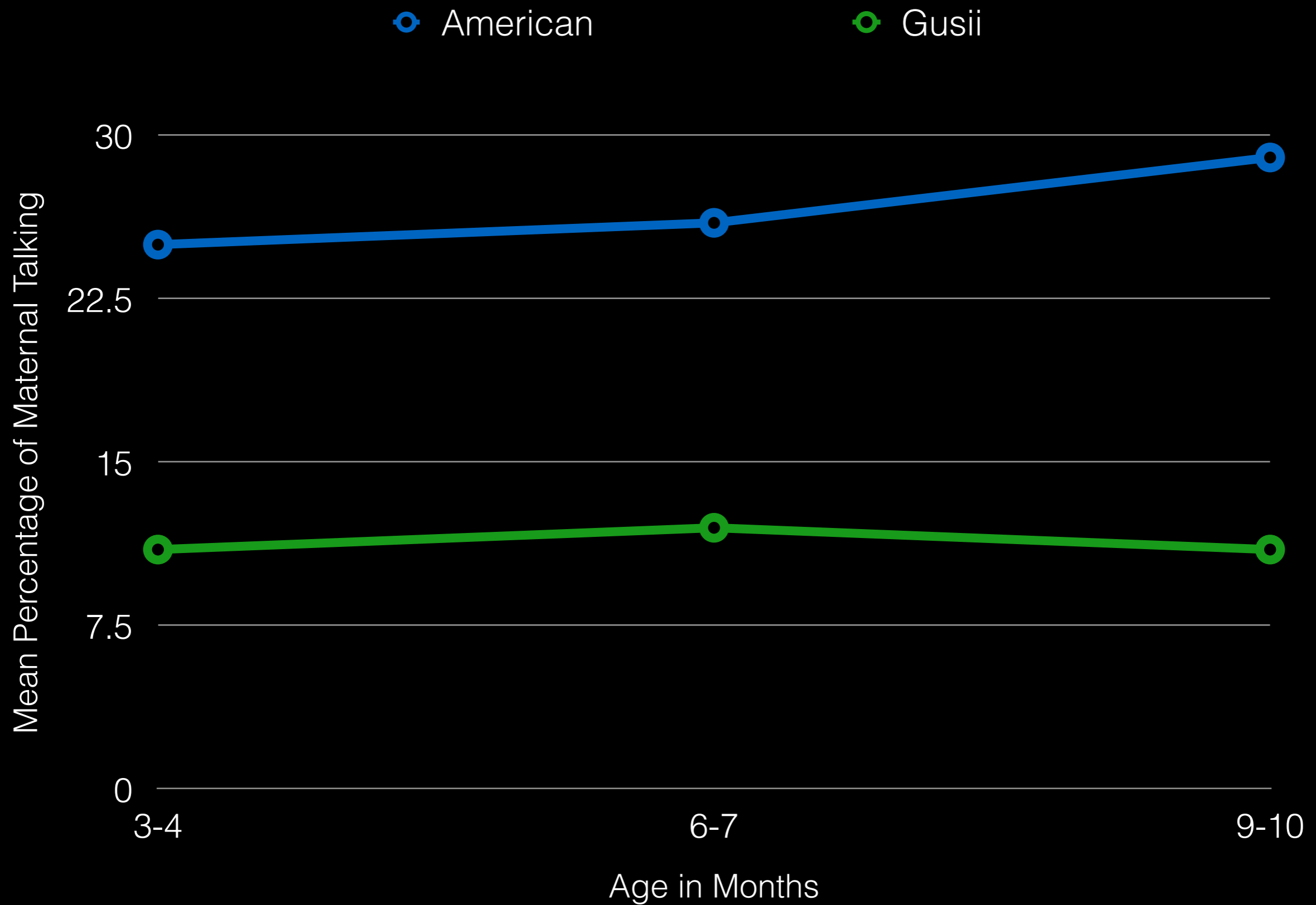
GUSSI & AMERICAN CHILDREARING STRATEGIES

	<u>Gussi</u>	<u>American</u>
1. Goal	Protection	Active engagement
2. Means	Soothing	Stimulation, conversation
3. Amount of attention given over 30 months	Decreasing	Increasing
4. Cultural script for responsiveness	Modulate excitement Commands	Elicit excitement Questions/praise

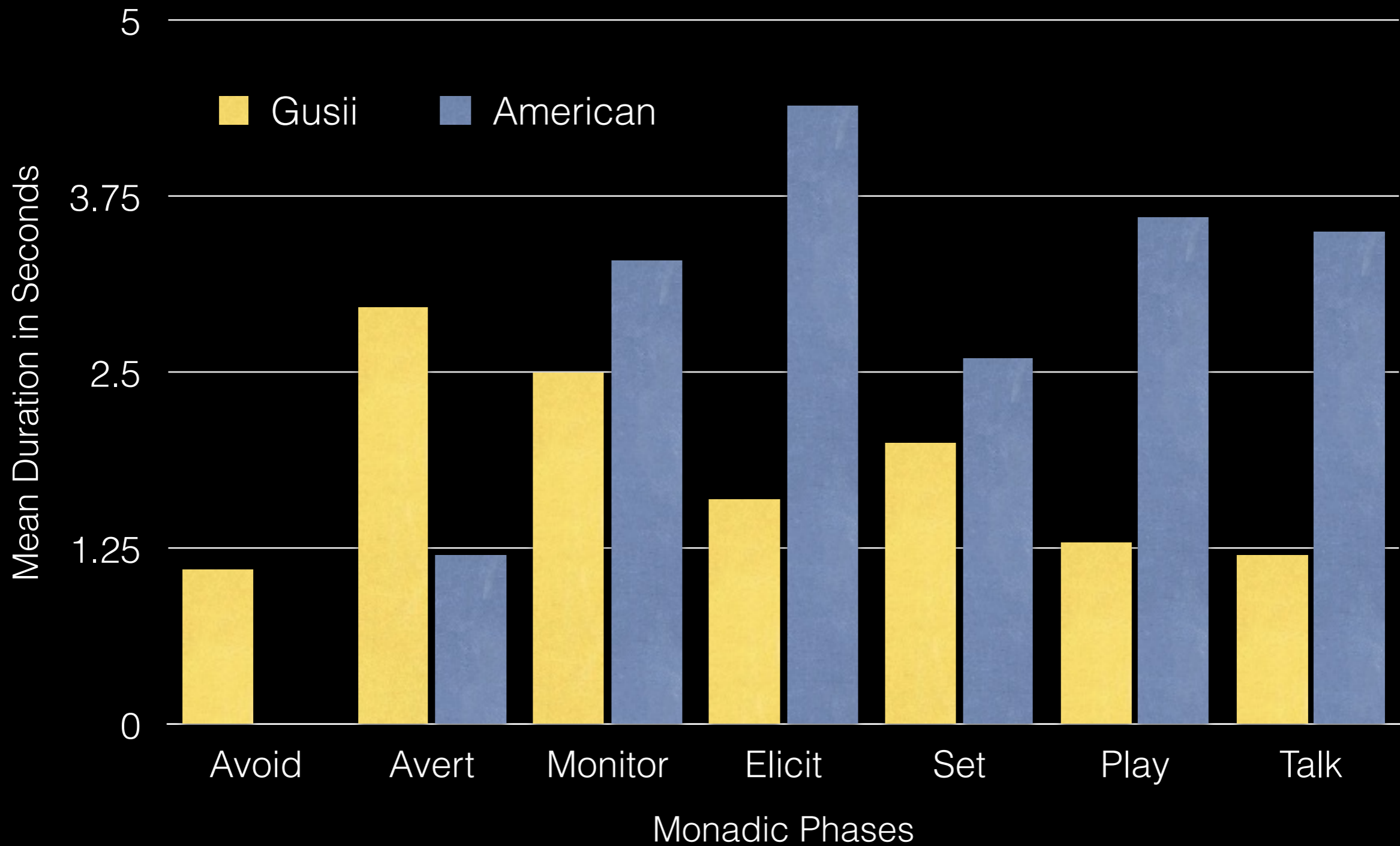
Mean percentage of maternal holding



Mean percentage of maternal talking



Maternal behavior during videotaped face-to-face interaction: mean duration of monadic phases



Costs and Benefits of Gussi infant care:

Benefits

- Early weight gain
- Burn few calories
- Metabolic efficiency high
- gain weight = better survive infectious diseases

Other benefits

- Co-sleeping
- no crying = strong mother/infant relationship
- carrying = more secure infant-mother attachment
- toddlers who are respectful and obedient

Costs:

- Intense maternal attention declines rapidly after 3 to 6 months
- Decline in interaction with caregivers
- Poor physical growth after 6 months

- Cognitive development slow
- low interaction and development
- **MODERN WORLD** - failure to prepare the child for schooling - lack language skills, self-confidence and assertiveness, equality, independence

BUT ...

- resilience - able to perform and advance in school (13 year-old sample)
- Gusii acquire different skills, virtues, and performances, in accordance with their own goals for human development.
- look to other cultures to see what is possible in child development

Conclude (after studying the Gussi for decades):

- Despite obvious signs of what the Western psychologists would consider “pathology” on the part of the Gussi mothers - no evidence of widespread emotional crippling
- Challenges the ethnocentric lens of Western child development/psychology theories

Preschool in Three Cultures

Japan, China, and the United States

Joseph J. Tobin, David Y. H. Wu, Dana H. Davidson



1991

- In many ways a **continuation** of the type of research in *Six Cultures and Children of Different Worlds*
- In other ways a **departure**

Continuation:

- compares child development and socialization practices in their cultural contexts
- It does this in a comparative framework
- Asks the same questions:
 - 1. How do cultural institutions influence these practices?
 - 2. How are cultural institutions reflected in the treatment of children?

Departure:

In its methods

- Not test children like psychologists
- Not devise some comparable and quantifiable method like behavioral observations (Whitings)
- Visual ethnography

Visual Ethnography

- behavioral differences are depicted on film
- in a narrative form
- shown to insiders and outsiders
- their comments are discussed in the book
- end product = narrative & dialogue
(observed have a chance to comment)

- New - subjects are not depicted as passive but as responding, participating individuals.

looking at **values**:

- NOT focusing on economic or social institutions BUT looking primarily at values
- institutional setting same
- parameters of three cultures same: more complex, nuclear families

- What is **different** is the value system of the culture that shapes behaviors within these institutions and which are reflected in the treatment of the children.

Study sites: similarities

- same type of institution
- same ages of children
- all professional caretakers

Differences

- due to values of society and how the institution is interpreted

Japan

- 1. groupism = egalitarianism (not gifted – all equal)
- 2. provide experience the children can't get at home
- 3. groups can be chaotic or organized
- 4. children interact freely without adults, group pressure

China

- 1. groupism = shared acceptance of order and responsibility
- 2. correct spoiling (4-2-1)
- 3. order, common purpose
- 4. place children in envt where can experience discipline and control under common leader
- 5. identify not with class or school but nation
- 6. academics stressed

U.S.

- Self-reliance & self-confidence
- Both play and academics stressed
- Individuality - but also restraint
- How to be a member of a group
- Communication skills
- Democracy

What most important thing for children to learn in preschool?

- China - Cooperation and how to be a member of a group
- Japan - Sympathy/empathy/concern for others; Cooperation
- U.S. - Self-reliance/self-confidence; Cooperation

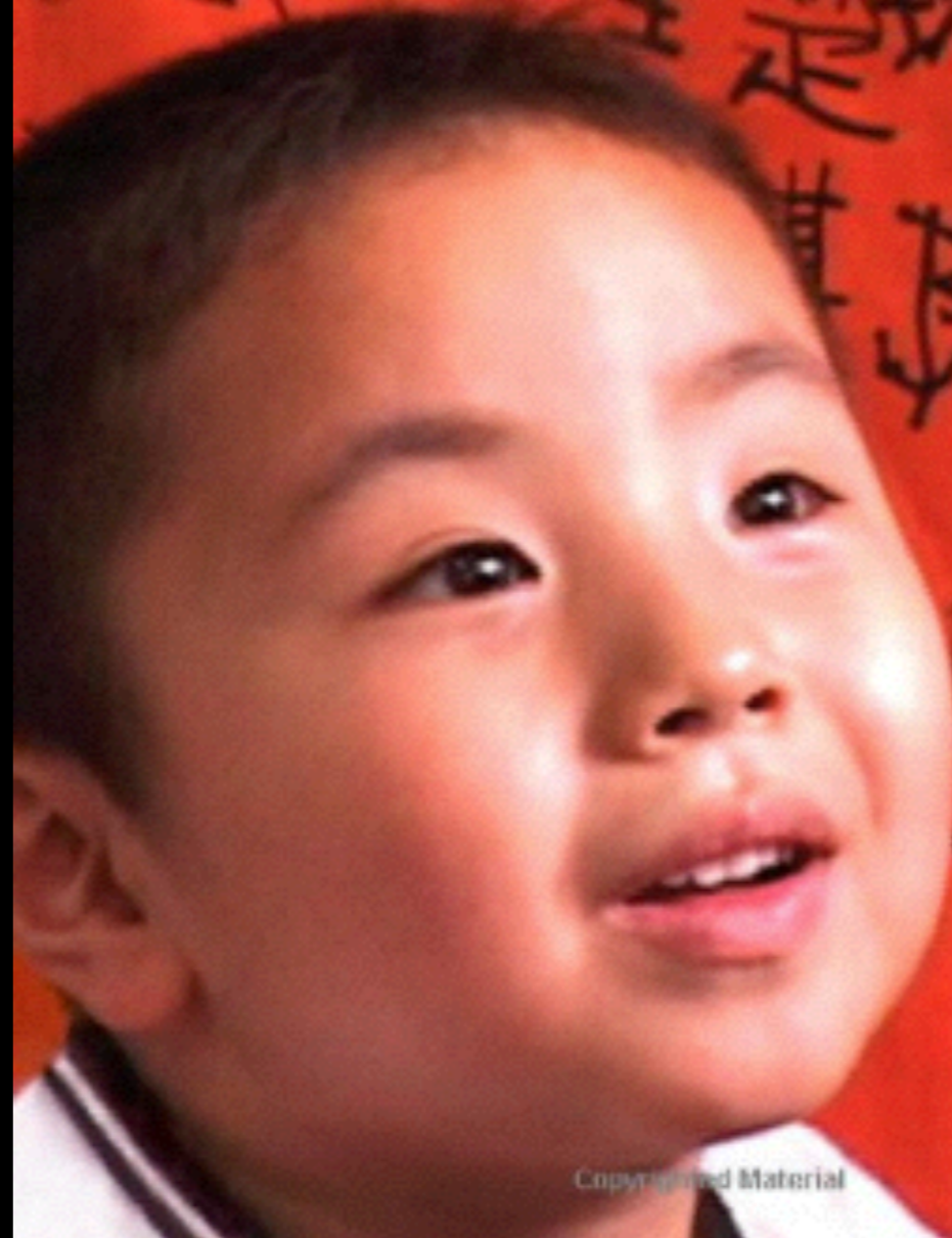
Why should a society have preschools?

- China - good start academically
- Japan - experience being a member of a group
- U.S. - independent and self-reliant; academics

Preschool in Three Cultures

China, Japan,
and the
United States

Revisited



Joseph Tobin,
Yeh Hsueh,
and Mayumi
Karasawa

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- Grad student
- Cross-cultural & historical
- Focus: what has changed and what has stayed the same?

Show:

- How systems of early childhood education in these three countries reflect and pass on cultural values while at the same time responding to changing social pressures and expectations

Biggest methodological change?

- two schools in each country
- 2nd picked for representativeness of new directions

3 ways study continuity and change:

- (1) replicate original study
- (2) show old videos and asking what has changed
- (3) video new school

REVISITED findings:

- 1. Much has changed **BUT** much has stayed the same
- 2. In all three parents want more academics!
- 3. **Culture** acts as a source of **continuity** and as a break for impacts of globalization, rationalization & economic change.
- 4. **Cultural practices** resistant to change

China

- pressure by parents to be more academic - one child must be successful
- move from rules, routines, firmness - more desires and rights of child
- more play - creative, individualistic: characteristics needed in entrepreneurial capitalism
- spoiling again an issue due to rapid prosperity - lack moral grounding
- still many group activities

Japan

- still imp - peer relations (“If it is not dangerous, I welcome their fighting,”), learning to do things as a group, caring for younger children (pee lesson), empathy
- man/child physical intimacy, *Everybody Poops*
- **role to preserve childhood & culture** - so only little pressure for more academics

U.S.

- more need for preschools
- still free choice, self-expression, individual rights, and the pursuit of happiness
- but more academics - more assessments & standards, less play, greater role of teacher
- no touching

which changed the most?

- Chinese (a lot)
- U.S. (some)
- Japan (hardly at all) Look to preschools to hold off undesired social change and preserve endangered cultural values and practices.

conclude:

- Have preschools in the three countries become more alike due to modernization and globalization?
- No. Still very diff in core practices and beliefs because of **VALUES**
- practices change but “pass like ships in the night”

Reading:

- Shostak, Introduction