Sensitivity Beliefs of Egyptian Immigrant Mothers in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The current study examined the contributing role of ethnic background and family income in mothers' beliefs about the ideal sensitive mother across Egyptian, Moroccan and Dutch mothers living in the Netherlands. A total of 75 mothers with at least one child between 6 months and 6 years participated. The Maternal Behavior Q-Sort was used for mothers to describe their views of the ideal mother. Maternal views of the ideal mother were very similar across the different cultural groups, and very similar to the construct of sensitivity. Mothers from ethnic minorities showed the lowest sensitivity belief scores, meaning that their views of the ideal mother were least similar to the construct of sensitivity. However, family income, not education, mediated the relationship between ethnic background and sensitivity belief scores. Families with lower income had lower maternal sensitivity belief scores. The findings add evidence to the effect of family economic stress on parenting across cultures more so than ethnicity. Our findings emphasize the importance of measuring multiple socioeconomic status indicators in cross-cultural studies.

Keywords: sensitivity, Egyptian, immigrant, mothers, the Netherlands

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Parents from different countries and cultural backgrounds may have different ideas about child-raising. To date, most research has focused on cultural differences in terms of general parenting ideas most often related to school-age children and adolescents. As we learn more about the mechanisms of the parent-child relationship and the effects of early experiences across the lifespan, the focus has turned towards parenting during the early years of the child's life. Still, little is known about what parents of different cultures find important when it comes to parenting very young children, meaning infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Learning more about parents' different cultural perspectives on parenting can help develop parenting support programs that fit with and address parents' specific culture. Providing culturally appropriate support for parents can help parents provide better care for their children while at the same time remaining sensitive to parents' cultural child raising priorities. Gaining insight into the parenting ideas of different cultures can also help us understand what certain parenting behaviors really mean in specific cultural contexts. This can be especially important and useful when trying to reach and aid immigrant families who come from different cultural backgrounds than the host culture. In our current study we examine the parenting ideas of mothers of young children of Egyptian immigrant families living in the Netherlands.

Parental Sensitivity and Attachment

During the first years of life young children form an important relationship with their primary caregiver called an "attachment relationship" (Bowlby, 1969). Ainsworth (1985) describes "attachment" as a form of "affectional bond" where the partner is important as a unique individual and cannot be substituted with another. It is distinguishable from other relationships in the sense that it is the *other's role* that is significant. The child forms an attachment relationship with a caregiver based on the pattern of experiences of care and response that he/she goes through with the caregiver. A child can form different attachment relationships with multiple caregivers. However, each attachment relationship is unique and the child's attachment figure cannot fully be replaced by another (Ainsworth, 1985).There is a special characteristic to the attachment bond between children to their parents and that is the child's seeking to find comfort and security from the attachment figure in times of distress

and at the same time use the parent as a secure base from which to explore (Ainsworth, 1985). While almost all children form an attachment relationship with their mother, who is usually the primary caregiver in most cultures, not all become *securely* attached and are able to use their attachment figure as a secure base. Empirical evidence has shown that parent-child attachment relationship status can have lasting effects on the child's development. Children who are securely attached to their parent show more favorable development in social functioning (Kochanska, 2002), self-regulation (Eisenberg, 2001) and cognitive competence (Baumwell, Tamis-Lemonda & Bornstein, 1997) in later years. Conversely, *insecurely* attached children are at risk for externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems (Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010; Groh, Roisman, van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012), as well as difficulties maintaining healthy peer relationships and later psychopathology (Sroufe, Carlson, Levy & Egeland, 1999). Thus, a secure parent-child relationship is considered the "desired" status for more favorable outcomes in the child's development. Traditionally, feeding was considered to be the most important factor in forming the mother-child bond and that infants became attached to their mother because she was the source of food and basic survival. However, in 1959, Harlow and Zimmerman's work on Rhesus monkeys demonstrated that the infant's attachment to the mother is not dependent on the need for food but rather on the mother's warmth and comfort. (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959). Since then, parental sensitivity has been identified as an important differentiating factor in the development of a secure versus insecure attachment relationship between child and parent.

Parental sensitivity is defined as the parent's ability to correctly identify and interpret the child's signals and respond to these signals in an appropriate and prompt manner (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1974). This requires empathy from the caregiver and freedom from distortion (Ainsworth, 1969). In their meta-analysis, De Wolf and van IJzendoorn identified maternal sensitivity during the early childhood years as a significant moderate predictor of a secure attachment bond between child and parent (De Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). Moreover, a causal effect of maternal sensitivity on child's attachment security was found in a meta-analysis of intervention studies that focused on enhancing maternal sensitivity (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2003). These findings show strong evidence that maternal sensitivity is an important contributing factor to the child-parent attachment relationship. Additionally, according to attachment theory, maternal sensitivity greatly influences the quality of the secure base relationship (Posada, Carbonell, Alzate, & Plata, 2004). Infants who are in a secure base relationship and who experience

appropriate response by the caregivers to their signals can most likely be described as secure. On the other hand, infants whose signals are not being met with satisfactory responses can most likely be described as insecure.

Sensitivity - Security Link across Cultures

While studies on attachment theory are predominantly conducted in the West, the concept of maternal sensitivity and attachment relationship originated in the fifties with Ainsworth's observational study of Ugandan mothers and their infants in Africa (Ainsworth, 1967). This shows that while supporting evidence for the sensitivity link has been conducted on Western populations, it is not solely relevant to middle-class Western populations. In their literature review on the cross-cultural patterns of attachment, van IJzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz discussed the universality of attachment in infancy and the generality of attachment related constructs across cultures (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). They reviewed cross-cultural studies with a focus on attachment theory including Uganda (Peterson, Drotar, Olness, Guay & Kiziri-Mayengo, 2001), Kenya (Kermoian & Leiderman, 1986), Nigeria (Marvin, VanDevender, Iwanaga, LeVine & LeVine, 1977), Mali (True, Pisani, Oumar, 1994), Botswana (Konner, 1977), China (Posada et al., 1995), Israel (Sagi-Schwartz, van IJzendoorn, Aviezer, Donnell, & Mayseless, 1994), Japan (Vereijken, Riksen-Walraven, & Kondo-Ikemura, 1997; Takahashi, 1990). Their findings show that parents across cultures seem to prefer the secure child. The majority of children appear to develop secure attachments to their parents and that in many cultural contexts it seems that secure attachment emerges from the most sensitive parenting. However, it is unclear to what extent the perception of parental sensitivity is the same across different (Western versus non-Western) cultures.

Several studies have detected a robust association between parenting quality and attachment across cultures (Belsky & Fearon, 2008) which show evidence that the overall direction of findings appears to be consistent across a range of cultural contexts. There have been studies that have shown evidence for the cross-cultural generality of the link between the quality of early care and attachment security. Posada et al. (2004) conducted a naturalistic study of mother–infant interactions in Colombia and investigated the generality of the sensitivity–security link across cultures and the association between culturally specific expressions of caregiving and the construct of sensitivity as defined by attachment theory. Their study showed significant association between Ainsworth’s conceptualization of early

care and mothers' caregiving behavior during the 1st year of an infant's life in a sample of Colombian dyads and supported the hypothesis that the sensitivity–security link can be generalized across cultures and in cultures different from those in middle-class Western societies. Similar supporting evidence for the sensitivity-security link hypothesis across cultures was found in Chile (Valenzuela, 1997), Colombia (Posada, Jacobs, Richmond, Carbonell, Alzate, Bustamante, Quiceno, 2002), Japan (Vereijken et al., 1997) and Indonesia (Zevalkink, Riksen-Walraven, van Lieshout & Cornelis, 1999).

In their literature review Mesman, van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (in press) reviewed 27 studies conducted in the USA and 6 studies conducted in the Netherlands that dealt with investigating parental sensitivity and its outcomes in ethnic minority families. American studies typically involved African-American and/or Latin-American minority families while Dutch studies included minority populations of Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese origin. They found that sensitivity was linked to positive child outcomes across groups which indicated its relevance across cultures. Their results also showed that for both American and Dutch studies ethnic minority parents appeared to display significantly lower levels of sensitivity towards their children in comparison to the majority families. However, these differences were significantly reduced or disappeared altogether once families were matched for socioeconomic status (SES). Mesman et al.'s findings concluded that overall, SES indicators and stress were stronger indicators of maternal sensitivity than ethnic or cultural factors.

It can be speculated that information on mothers' beliefs of the "ideal child" behavior during child-mother interaction can reflect desired cultural behavior (Posada et al., 1995). In their study, Posada et al. (1995) reviewed studies from across different cultures to investigate whether mother's preferences and experts' definitions of secure-base behavior are similar across cultures or cultural specific. The study results showed that mothers' perceptions of the "ideal-child" and expert's definitions of the hypothetical "most secure child" were highly similar across countries regardless of culture. However, despite the apparent similarities further analysis showed that there may still be room for differences among countries. The authors argue that even though mothers' perceptions of the "ideal child" were correlated across countries, this does not imply that all children across different cultures express their secure-base behavior similarly. There appears to be a broad range of behaviors that conformed to the definition of the securely attached child. Therefore, there appeared to be cultural differences in mothers' preferences of the specific secure-base behaviors they would like from their children (Posada et al., 1995).

Cultural Differences and Parenting Practices

Ethnic minority families have been found to experience stress through several factors including migration, discrimination and acculturation (Berry, 2005). Acculturation is a process in which psychological and cultural changes take place as two cultural groups interact (Berry, 2005). It requires a change in the person's behavior on an individual level to adapt to the current culture while maintaining features of their heritage culture, such as parenting styles or perception of sensitivity (Berry, 2005). These changes may take years or even generations to occur (Berry, 2005). In the meantime immigrant parents who come from different cultural backgrounds than the host culture may face difficulties as they undergo the acculturation process. They may experience significant stress as they struggle to reach a balance between maintaining their cultural values and being active participants in their host country (Berry, 2005).

Cultural backgrounds can be broadly distinguished as “collectivistic” or “individualistic”. Collectivistic cultures (e.g., Turkish, Moroccan and Egyptian) focus on the person as an active member in society, the community identity and welfare is as important as the individual's (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Families, the community and group rights supersede the rights of the individual. Collectivistic cultures are also high in rules, order and demanding obedience. Parents from collectivistic cultures are more likely to require obedience from their children and thus tend to use more authoritarian parenting style when dealing with their children to achieve their parenting goals. Authoritarian parenting is based on strict, non-negotiable rules which the parents enforce on the child. This parenting strategy has been associated with lower self-esteem and lower academic performance. Conversely, Western countries (e.g., Netherlands) are considered to be individualistic cultures in which there is a strong value for the individual. Autonomy and independence are highly valued and there is less emphasis on obedience and control (Tamis-Lemonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman, & Niwa, 2001). Parents in individualistic cultures tend to promote authoritative parenting among families, where negotiation, open communication, and compromise are practiced. Authoritative parenting has been associated with more positive child development outcomes (Baumrind, 1966). However, it is important to note that the demand for obedience and control in families from collectivistic cultural backgrounds is not indicative that these parents are rejecting or lacking in warmth towards their children (Dekovic, Pels & Model, 2006).

In the Netherlands

The Netherlands is home to multiple minority populations of different cultures. Many of these families come from collectivistic cultural backgrounds such as the Netherlands' largest ethnic minority groups from Turkey and Morocco. As stated in Mesman et al.'s review (in press), six studies have examined the role of parental sensitivity on the child development outcomes in ethnic minority families. Previous studies on Turkish families in the Netherlands from collectivistic cultural background reported that Turkish mothers appeared less sensitive and less authoritative than Dutch mothers (Yaman, Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). These families also exhibited less respect for children's independence (Yaman et al., 2010) However, both Dutch and immigrant families of collectivist backgrounds exhibited similar parenting behavior patterns when practicing supportive parenting. When both Dutch and Turkish immigrant mothers practiced supportive parenting, they were reported to be more authoritative, more supportive and less intrusive with their children (Yaman et al., 2010). In a similar study the authors also reported that the perceptions of Turkish immigrant mothers on parental efficacy were similar to those of Dutch mothers (Yaman, Mesman, van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg). Similar to Mesman et al.'s findings (in press) Yaman et al. (2010) reported that daily stress and social economic status tended to play a bigger role in children's developmental outcome (i.e. externalizing behavior) than ethnicity.

There are other minority populations in the Netherlands which come from different cultural backgrounds than the Turks and Moroccans. Egyptians could be considered to come from a collectivistic cultural background. However, should we readily assume that all parents from collectivistic cultures have similar parenting beliefs and practices? Studies on Arab countries have shown that there are diverse and mixed parenting styles in the Arab world (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, Farah, Sakhleh, Fayad & Khan, 2006) which can be considered a collectivistic cultural region. Dwairy et al.'s study (2006) found that Egyptian families scored high on both authoritarian and permissive styles, indicating an inconsistent parenting style. However, authoritative parenting was also quite common, among 30% of the reported sample practiced a more authoritative parenting style. The findings show that Egyptian families fall into moderate levels in all three parenting patterns. The authors point out that this diversity may reflect balanced changes towards democracy in Egyptian society (Dwairy et al., 2006). Much like the Turkish mothers in the Netherlands (Yaman et al., 2010), Egyptian families' socioeconomic status played a role in parental discipline. High SES mothers encouraged their children's autonomy and were reported to be more authoritative

than mothers of lower socioeconomic status (Mahmoud, 1997, as cited in Dwairy, 2006). To date there appear to be very few studies examining the effects of parenting on child development in Egypt let alone Egyptian immigrant populations. We were able to identify one observational study which specifically examined the attachment behavior of Egyptian mothers with their newborn infants in Egypt (Govaerts & Patino, 1981). The authors reported that some maternal attachment behaviors such as smiling were culturally independent, others appeared more culturally dependent. During their observation, there was repeated emphasis of the centrality of the family. Mothers showed a strong desire to make the infant more of a group member and less of a separate individual. These findings appear to match collectivistic cultural values which place more emphasis on the group rather than the individual. Another study (Barbopoulos, Clark & El-Khatib, 2002) investigated whether cultural differences were predicted by collectivism theory in a sample of Canadian and Egyptian children. The authors used the Roberts Apperception Test for Children (RATC) where children were asked to describe pictures showing common situations and stresses such as parental disagreement. Egyptian children scored higher on "collectivistic valued traits" such as limit setting and supporting others than Canadian children. However, Egyptian mothers have been reported to exhibit diverse parenting styles (Brink, 1994, as cited in Barbopoulos et al., 2002). Moreover, almost all of the research done on Egyptian has been conducted in Egypt. Very limited research to our knowledge has been conducted on Egyptian immigrants in Europe and even less with an emphasis on the role of parental sensitivity and child outcomes. Further investigation is needed to reveal more about the parenting perceptions of Egyptian immigrant families and their influence on Egyptian children's developmental outcomes.

Egyptians in the Netherlands

About 20% of Egyptian immigrants are concentrated in Western European countries (Zohry, 2006). According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), estimate reports show The Netherlands to be the third highest country with Egyptian migrants comprising around 12% of Western Europe's Egyptian population (Zohry, 2006). Egyptian immigration to Europe started as early as the 19th century. At that time immigrants were mostly students sent to study abroad and return to Egypt. Active immigration of Egyptians to the West started in the 1960s (Zohry, 2006) and since the early 1970s to the Netherlands (Zorlu & Hartog, 2002). Zohry (2006) claims that Egyptian immigrants to the West are considered a "brain drain" to their country of origin since they are perceived as more educated than their counterparts who immigrated to the Arab gulf.

However, contemporary migrants are less educated males who resort to migration due to generally low standards of living and lack of job opportunities in their home country (Zohry, 2006). They see better chances in Europe and almost 90% of them travel with the eventual intention of returning to Egypt (Zohry, 2006). The majority of immigrants in the Netherlands are males with the women of the family following later for family reunion (Zorlu, 2002). Many of both the first and the second generation immigrants have established small firms or small personal businesses. It is unclear exactly how Egyptians came to migrate to the Netherlands. There does not seem to be an explicit trend such as the Turks and Moroccans who came to the Netherlands as (invited) labor migrants in the 1960s. Egyptian migration seems to be dependent on the changes in the social and economic situation and standard of living in Egypt over time.

Egyptians in the Netherlands are estimated to be anywhere between 20,000 and 40,000 individuals. Official records in the Netherlands show the number of Egyptians to be over 20,000 (CBS, 2012). While the Egyptian population in the Netherlands is not as prominent as the Turkish or Moroccan, around 50% of immigrant Egyptians in the Netherlands are or have been married and could be considered potential or current parents (CBS, 2012). As mentioned, little is known about the parenting attitudes of Egyptian parents living abroad. Additionally, there appears to be diversity among the parenting styles of Egyptian parents (Dwairy et al., 2006; Brink, 1994). This diversity reflects differences in parental preference regarding parent-child interaction and how children should behave within collectivistic cultures. Thus, parental sensitivity may be perceived differently even within collectivistic cultures (Egyptian versus Turkish) in the Netherlands. Hinde argued that parents strive to promote parent-child relationships that are desirable in their given society (as cited in Posada, 1995). Given the differences between culture of origin (collectivistic) and the culture of residence (individualistic) of Egyptian families living in the Netherlands, Egyptian immigrant parents may have a different perception of parental sensitivity than Dutch or Turkish immigrant parents.

We conclude that given the limited literature on Egyptian families, it is unclear whether Egyptian parenting views can be “grouped” with Moroccan or Turkish populations on the assumption of having a collectivistic cultural background. Thus, it may be important to examine Egyptian families as a distinct immigrant group in the Netherlands. It is important to investigate the possible cultural differences with regard to parental perception of sensitivity of Egyptian parents living within the Netherlands to better understand the needs of immigrant families. Information on immigrant parents’ parenting beliefs can contribute to the

development of appropriate family intervention and assistance. Understanding immigrant families may assist practitioners in their ability to reach immigrant families more effectively and apply culturally sensitive practices.

In our current study our aim is to examine Egyptian mother's perception of the "ideal" mother. Based on previous literature on ethnic minorities and the findings reported by Mesman et al (in press), we hypothesize that Egyptian mothers will show overall lower sensitivity belief scores than Dutch mothers. However, we expect these differences to diminish or disappear completely once both groups are matched on SES. We examine if mothers have similar views of the ideal mother within and across the different cultural groups. We also examine if mothers' views of the ideal mother are similar to the construct of sensitivity. We expect that mothers from different ethnic backgrounds will have views of the ideal mother largely similar to each other and to the construct of sensitivity. Since the attachment bond between parent and child as affected by parental sensitivity is formed within the early years, the focus of the current study is on Egyptian immigrant mothers in the Netherlands with children between the ages of 6 month to 6 years.

Method

Participants

A total of 75 mothers with at least one child between the ages of 6 months and 6 years participated in the study. The sample consisted of five subsamples each of 15 mothers: Egyptian first- generation immigrant, Moroccan second-generation immigrant, Dutch low educational level with vocational schooling or lower, Dutch middle educational level with secondary school or middle vocational education and Dutch high educational level with high vocational, university or higher education. The Egyptian mothers were recruited by contacting organizations such as community centers and places of worship that were specific to the Egyptian immigrant community in the Netherlands. An information letter in Arabic about the goal of the study was sent to these organizations and was then given to any potential participant through the organizations. Inclusion criteria for the Egyptian mothers included living in the Netherlands with a permanent not temporary status, to have originally lived in Egypt before immigrating to the Netherlands and to have at least one child between the age of 6 months and 6 years at the time of the study. Data of the Moroccan and Dutch low, middle and high-educated mothers was used from a sample of a previous study on maternal sensitivity of ethnic minorities. None of the mothers responded to the invitation

letter. The interviewer conducted a personal visit to the organizations and discussed the goal of the study with the mothers. Initially, twenty mothers were recruited, five were eliminated when the interviews started because they either no longer fit the inclusion criteria or they were no longer available to participate.

The number of children of participating mothers ranged from 1-5, with an average of three children for Egyptian mothers and two children for the other groups. The average age of all children across the groups was 4.5 years and ranged from 1 month to 22 years old. Out of the total sample 45 mothers worked either part-time or full-time and 24 mothers were stay at home mothers. Of the Egyptian mothers 2 worked between 20-32 hours while 13 mothers were unemployed. In the Egyptian group, two of the participants were Coptic Christian, the remaining 13 were Muslim. Across groups only 7 children had no other siblings, in the Egyptian group only one family had an only child.

Procedure

A trained graduate student visited the families in their homes. The interviewer explained the aim of the study and protocol to the mothers, time was given to help the mother feel at ease with the interviewer. Mothers were asked to provide information about their beliefs on the ideal mother. All mothers participating signed a consent form before participating in the study. The Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS) sorting process was explained to the mothers. Mothers conducted the MBQS to assess their views on the ideal mother's behavior. Mothers completed a general questionnaire which included questions specific to the parent including; age, years of education, employment status, Dutch language proficiency, family income, religious beliefs and child raising values.

Measures

Maternal view of the ideal mother. The maternal views of the ideal sensitive other were assessed using the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson, Moran & Bento, 1999). The MBQS consists of 90 items with statements on maternal behavior that are rooted in Mary Ainsworth's definition of sensitivity and provide descriptions for a mother's tendency to detect, recognize and respond correctly and promptly to the child's signals. Mothers sort the items into 9 stacks from '*least descriptive*' to '*most descriptive'* of the ideal mother. An example of the MBQS items is *"Understands her child well as can be seen from the responses of her child"*. Mothers were told that there was no right or wrong answer and that

the item descriptions represented the hypothetical ideal mother's behavior about what she should or should not do and not their own parenting behaviors. A simpler version of the original MBQS behavioral descriptions was created for the present study to make them more understandable for mothers since it was originally designed to be used by professionals. The same simplified version was used with all groups of mothers. An Arabic version was created for Egyptian mothers by the University of Haifa and the assistance of a native Egyptian Arabic speaker. Mothers were first asked to sort the MBQS cards into 3 stacks; "does not fit the ideal mother at all", "fits the ideal mother well" and "fits the ideal mother really well". They were then asked to sort each stack into 3 smaller stacks. Finally, when all cards were distributed across the 9 stacks, the mothers were asked to distribute the cards evenly across the stacks so that each stack consisted of 10 cards.

Ten Dutch academic experts who were very familiar with attachment theory and research provided sorts for the hypothetical ideal mother. The correlation between Dutch experts' criterion sort with the criterion sort provided by the Canadian authors of the MBQS was very high .94 and their individual scores were quite high (M=.88 range .86-.90). Thus, the Dutch experts' sorts were used as a reference for comparison in the analysis. Sensitivity belief scores were computed by correlating the mothers' Q-sorts with the Dutch expert criterion sort, reflecting the extent to which the mothers' views of the ideal mother corresponded with the highly sensitive mother.

Religion in child rearing. The importance of religion in child rearing was measured using 4 self-developed items. An example of one of the items is "*I use my religion as a guideline for the parenting for my child*". The possible answer categories ranged from "*totally disagree*" to "*totally agree*". A total score was computed by summing the item scores. The scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Educational level and family income. Educational level was measured on a 5 point scale from primary school (1), vocational school (2), secondary school/middle vocational education (3), high vocational education (4) and university education or higher (5). The family's annual gross income was measured on a scale from 1-7 ranging from (1) '*no income'* to (7) '*50,000 Euro or more'*.

Results

Similarities and Differences between Groups

Differences between groups was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test if there was a significant difference between groups in their background variables, religion in child rearing and sensitivity belief scores (Table 1).

With regard to educational level, Egyptian mothers were as highly educated as the Dutch high-educated mothers. On average, Moroccan and Dutch middle-educated mothers were most similar to each other. Their mean educational level was higher than Dutch low-educated mothers and lower than Egyptian and Dutch high-educated mothers. The family income of Egyptian mothers was the lowest of the five groups and Dutch high-educated mothers had the highest family income. Dutch low-educated mothers were the youngest mothers than all other groups. There was no significant difference in mother's age between the Egyptian, Moroccan, Dutch medium-educated or high-educated mothers, but Egyptian families had the highest number of children. Among religious mothers, Moroccan and Egyptian mothers found religion more important in child rearing than Dutch high-educated mothers. When non-religious mothers were included in the analysis Moroccan and Egyptian mothers perceived religion as more important in child rearing than Dutch low, middle and high-educated mothers. The mean sensitivity belief scores were significantly different across groups. Egyptian and Moroccan mothered had lower sensitivity belief scores than Dutch high-educated mothers. Egyptian mothers had the lowest sensitivity belief scores.

Table 1. Descriptives for Egyptian, Moroccan, Dutch low, Dutch middle and Dutch high-educated mothers

	Egyptian	Moroccan	Dutch low	Dutch middle	Dutch high	F	P	Post Hoc (LSD)
Maternal educational level								
M (SD)	4.66 (0.48)	3.33 (0.82)	1.87 (0.35)	3.00 (0.00)	4.60 (0.51)	39.50	.000	Dl < M, Dm <
Range	4-5	1-4	1-2	3	4-5			E, Dh
Family income [a]								
M (SD)	3.77 (1.16)	4.92 (1.38)	4.84 (0.90)	5.13 (1.19)	6.47 (0.92)	8.60	.000	E < Dm, Dh;
Range	2-6	2-7	3-6	3-7	4-7			M, Dl, Dm <
								Dh
Maternal age								
M (SD)	34.28 (2.70)	32.20 (4.80)	29.20 (3.32)	34.20 (4.52)	35.93 (4.71)	6.40	.000	Dl< E, M, Dm,
Range	29-40	23-40	25-35	26-41	28-46			Dh
Number of children								
M (SD)	3.06 (1.03)	2.40 (1.06)	2.07 (0.26)	2.13 (0.35)	2.13 (0.83)	0.50	.738	E > M, Dl, Dm,
Range	1-5	1-5	2-3	2-3	1-4			Dh
Religion in child rearing (whole sample) [b]								
M (SD)	18.93 (2.37)	17.00 (2.37)	6.93 (2.25)	8.20 (2.23)	5.07 (1.54)	11.33	.000	
Range	11-20	12-20	0-20	0-20	0-20			
Religion in child rearing (if religious)[c]								
M (SD)	18.93 (2.37)	17.00 (2.37)	14.86 (6.31)	15.38 (4.87)	10.86 (3.08)	4.71	.003	M, E > Dh
Range	11-20	12-20	4-20	6-20	8-16			
Sensitivity belief score								
M (SD)	.68 (.09)	.72 (.11)	.76 (.03)	.74 (.04)	.74 (.04)	3.77	.008	Dh > M, E
Range	.45-.78	.36-.84	.69-.82	.68-.80	.68-.80			

[a] Moroccan $n = 12$, Egyptian $n = 12$, Dutch low $n = 13$, Dutch middle $n = 15$, Dutch high $n = 15$.

[b] Moroccan $n = 12$, Egyptian $n = 12$, Dutch low $n = 15$, Dutch middle $n = 15$, Dutch high $n = 15$.

[c] Moroccan $n = 12$, Egyptian $n = 12$, Dutch low $n = 7$, Dutch middle $n = 8$, Dutch high $n = 7$.

Composite Sorts of the Ideal Mother in the Different Groups

We tested if mothers from the different groups defined the ideal mother similarly. A composite sort was computed by averaging the fifteen sorts of each group. Correlations were computed between the different composite sorts and the Dutch expert's criterion sort (Table 2). The correlations between the composite sorts ranged from .91 to .98, this indicates that the mothers' views of the ideal mother were overall very similar across the different groups. The correlations between the composite sort of the experts and the mothers ranged from .85 to .90, indicating that the experts' views of the hypothetical ideal mother were very similar to those of the Egyptian, Moroccan and Dutch low, middle and high-educated mothers. Egyptian mothers' views of the ideal mother were most similar to the Moroccan mothers .93 and least similar to the Dutch high-educated mothers .91. Egyptian and Dutch middle-educated mothers had the lowest correlation with the Dutch experts out of all the groups .85 and .86 respectively.

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients among composite sorts [a] of the hypothetical ideal mother

	Egyptian	Moroccan	Dutch low-educated	Dutch middle-educated	Dutch high-educated	Experts
Egyptian						
Moroccan	.93					
Dutch low-educated	.92	.97				
Dutch middle-educated	.92	.97	.98			
Dutch high-educated	.91	.96	.97	.97		
Experts	.85	.87	,88	.86	.90	

[a] composite sort = the average sort per group.

Maternal Views of the Ideal Mother within and across Groups

We examined whether mothers' views of the ideal sensitive mother's behavior were more similar within or across groups. Mean correlations were computed between all pairs of mothers' as well as the experts' 90-item Q-sort description within and across the subsamples. Results showed that Egyptians showed a diverse range of scores within the group (Table 3). The mean correlations of mothers' views of the ideal mother's sensitive behavior within groups (M = 75, *range* = 67-80) were similar to mean correlations across groups (M = 73, *range* = 65-79). The mean correlations within the group of experts were higher than the mean correlations between experts and mothers.

Table 3. Mean correlations among mother's and expert's 90-items Q-sort descriptions of the ideal mother both within and across groups

	Egyptian	Dutch low-educated	Dutch middle-educated	Dutch high-educated	Moroccan	Experts
Egyptian	**.67 (.41-.82)**					
Dutch low-educated	.69 (.44-.84)	**.79 (.64-.90)**				
Dutch middle-educated	.68 (.47-.84)	.78 (.60-89)	**.77 (.68-.86)**			
Dutch high-educated	.68 (.43-.84)	.79 (.63-.90)	.78 (.60-.90)	**.80 (.70-.91)**		
Moroccan	.65 (.21-.82)	.74 (.30-.89)	.74 (.30-.88)	.74 (.27-.90)	**.71 (.24-.84)**	
Experts	.66 (.41-.80)	.74 (.62-.85)	.72 (.59-.85)	.77 (.63-.90)	.70 (.31-.86)	**.87 (.80-.92)**

Differences between Groups on Item Level

While mothers' views of the ideal mother across the different groups were highly similar, there may still be differences between groups on item level. We tested whether there were differences between groups in how mothers found each item best describes the ideal mother using an analysis of variance. A conservative significance level of $p < .01$ was used because of the large number of tests conducted. Tukey tests were used for the post hoc comparisons. We found significant differences between the groups on 11 items. The mean score on item 1 *"Gives her child little opportunity to play along or to respond*" was significantly higher for Egyptian mothers than all other mothers which indicate that Egyptian immigrant mothers found this item more descriptive of the ideal mother. Egyptian mothers scored significantly higher on item 9 *"Does not respond when her child makes sounds, smiles or reaches"* and significantly lower on item 31 *"Distracts her child to something else when her child wants to sit on her lap, without a gentle transition"* than Dutch high-educated mothers. The mean score on item 19 *"Places her child in another room when her child is in a bad mood or cranky*" was significantly lower for Egyptian mothers than Dutch medium-educated mothers. Egyptian mothers had a significantly higher mean score on item 33 **"***Tries several different things to satisfy her child, without a clear plan***"** than mothers from all other groups. On item 47 "*Shows her affection for her child by touching her child or cuddling him/her*" Egyptian mothers scored significantly lower than Dutch low and medium-educated mothers. The mean score on item 54 "*Teases her child to keep her child's attention, even when the child does not like it*" was lowest for Egyptian mothers and significantly lower for Egyptian mothers than Moroccan mothers.

Table 4. Item level differences for Egyptian, Moroccan, Dutch low, Dutch middle, and Dutch high-educated mothers

	Egyptian	Moroccan	Dutch low	Dutch middle	Dutch high	F	P	Post Hoc (LSD)
#1 *"Gives her child little opportunity to play along or to respond*"								
M (SD)	3.86 (2.06)	1.93 (0.70)	2.0 6(0.59)	2.26 (1.03)	2.26 (1.09)	6.30	.000	E > M, Dl, Dm,Dh
#3 *"Her responses to her child are unpredictable"*								
M (SD)	3.73 (1.48)	2.93 (2.01)	2.33 (1.39)	1.80 (0.67)	1.33 (0.48)	7.48	.000	E > Dm, Dh
#7 *"Treats child as an object when holding him/her"*								
M (SD)	2.13 (1.30)	1.40 (1.29)	1.06 (0.25)	1.13 (0.35)	1.13 (0.35)	3.99	.006	E > Dl
#9 *"Does not respond when her child makes sounds, smiles or reaches"*								
M (SD)	2.80 (1.26)	1.93 (0.88)	2.06 (1.53)	1.73 (1.03)	1.26 (0.45)	3.89	.006	E > Dh
#19 *"Places her child in another room when her child is in a bad mood or cranky*"								
M (SD)	3.06 (1.38)	4.00 (2.00)	3.80 (1.52)	5.40 (1.45)	4.20 (1.37)	4.393	.003	E < Dm
#31 *"Distracts her child to something else when her child wants to sit on her lap, without a gentle transition"*								
M (SD)	2.40 (1.35)	3.53 (.99)	3.33 (1.11)	2.93 (0.96)	4.00 (1.55)	3.730	.008	E < Dh
#33 *"Tries several different things to satisfy her child, without a clear plan*"								
M (SD)	5.86 (1.95)	3.73 (.70)	3.66 (.81)	3.4 (1.05)	3.40 (1.14)	11.15	.000	E > M, Dl, Dm, Dh
#37 "*Steps in when her child does something that can make him/her dirty"*								
M (SD)	5.46 (1.40)	4.40 (1.35)	3.86 (1.06)	4.26 (1.03)	3.80 (1.01)	4.780	.002	E > Dl, Dh
#47 "*Shows her affection for her child by touching her child or cuddling him/her*"								
M (SD)	7.20 (1.97)	8.53 (.83)	8.73 (.59)	8.66 (.61)	8.26 (1.09)	4.558	.002	E < Dl, Dm
#54 "*Teases her child to keep her child's attention, even when the child does not like it*"								
M (SD)	1.86 (.83)	3.26 (1.09)	2.26 (1.03)	3.13 (1.24)	2.33 (1.04)	4.823	.002	E < M
#73 "*When she is irritated with her child, she stops doing things with him/her*"								
M (SD)	4.66 (2.02)	3.33 (1.54)	2.33 (1.04)	2.53 (1.24)	2.46 (1.12)	6.881	.000	E > Dl, Dm, Dh

Association between Background Variables and Maternal View of the Ideal Mother

Table 5 shows the correlations between mothers' sensitivity belief scores and background variables. A dichotomous variable for ethnic background was created for the purpose of the analysis where Egyptian mothers were categorized as "1" and all other mothers as "2". The variable is presented in the results of Table 5 and Figure 1. Ethnic background was significantly correlated with mothers' sensitivity belief scores. Egyptian and Moroccan mothers had lower sensitivity belief scores than Dutch mothers. Family income was significantly highly correlated with sensitivity belief score. Higher income families had higher sensitivity belief scores. Maternal educational level, maternal age and number of children were not significantly associated with sensitivity belief scores. Only with mothers who were reported to be religious was religion in child rearing significantly associated with sensitivity belief scores. More religious mothers had lower sensitivity belief scores.

There were some significant correlations among the background variables as well. Maternal educational level was negatively significantly associated with ethnic background. Ethnic background was also significantly associated with family income. Ethnic minority families had lower family income. Ethnic background was associated with number of children. Minority families had the most number of children compared to the Dutch families. Maternal age was significantly associated with maternal education and number of children, respectively. Religion in child rearing for the sample as a whole was not associated with any of the background variables. For religious mothers religion in child rearing was significantly associated with ethnic background and family income. Ethnic minority mothers reported higher religious scores and lower family income than Dutch families.

Table 5. Correlations between sensitivity belief score and background variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Sensitivity belief score	-							
2. Ethnic background (Egyptian vs. Other)	- .30**	-						
3. Maternal educational level	.08	.50**	-					
4. Family income[a]	.43**	- .46**	.07	-				
5. Maternal age [b]	.08	.12	.35**	.24	-			
6. Number of children	-.08	-.42**	.17	-.26*	.39**	-		
7. Religion in child rearing (whole sample)[c]	-.11	.03	-.09	-.15	-.22	-.02	-	
8. Religion in child rearing (if religious) [d]	-.30*	.38**	.05	-.45**	-.15	.26	-	-

[a] Egyptians $n = 13$, Moroccan $n = 12$, Dutch $n = 43$.

[b] Egyptian $n = 14$, Moroccan $n = 15$, Dutch $n = 45$.

[c] Egyptian $n = 15$, Moroccan $n = 12$, Dutch $n = 45$

[d] Egyptian $n = 15$, Moroccan $n = 12$, Dutch $n = 23$

* $P < .05$.

** $P < .01$.

We tested whether family income was a significant mediator in the relation between ethnic background and sensitivity belief score (Table 6). There was a significant association between ethnic background and mothers' sensitivity belief score, $\beta = .014$, $p < .05$. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test family income's mediating role in the relation between ethnic background and sensitivity belief score. When family income was added in the second step of the regression analysis, ethnic background was no longer a significant predictor of sensitivity belief score and only family income was a significant predictor of sensitivity belief score, $\beta = .37$, $p < .05$. Family income fully mediated the relation between ethnicity and mothers' sensitivity belief scores (Table 6 and Figure 1).

Table 6. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis testing contribution of family income and ethnic background to sensitivity belief score (N = 68)

	B	*S.E.*	*β*	ΔR^2
Step 1				.07*
Ethnic background (Egyptian vs. rest)	-.05	.02	-.29*	
Step 2				.17*
Ethnic background (Egyptian vs. rest)	-.02	.02	-.12	
Family income	.02	.00	.37*	

* $P < .05$.

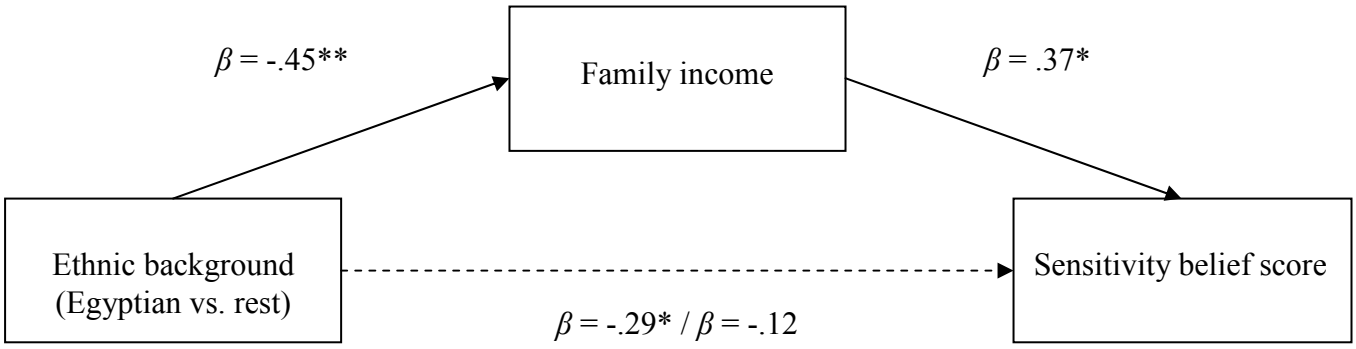

Figure 1. Family income fully mediates the relation between ethnic background and sensitivity belief score.

Discussion

Mothers' views of the ideal mother's behavior were similar across the different cultural and socioeconomic groups. Minority families' views of the ideal mother appeared to correspond least with the expert notions of sensitive parenting in comparison to Dutch mothers. However, we found that socioeconomic factors played a stronger role in mothers' sensitivity beliefs than cultural background.

First, we found support for our hypothesis that Egyptian mothers would show overall lower sensitivity belief scores than Dutch mothers. The average sensitivity scores of the ideal mother of Egyptian, Moroccan, Dutch low, medium and high educated mothers were high in each of these groups indicating that mothers' views about the ideal mother's sensitive behavior across groups was similar to the behavioral patterns that characterize the ideal mother's sensitivity proposed by the Dutch experts. Thus, the overall views about sensitive behavior across experts and mothers of different cultural background within the Netherlands appear more similar than different. These findings are consistent with the findings reported by Posada et al. (1995) in which mothers from different cultural groups provided descriptions of the ideal child that were similar to the behavioral patterns that U.S experts considered indicative of the ideal child's secure-base behavior. However, Egyptian mothers (and Moroccan mothers) were found to have overall lower sensitivity belief scores than the Dutch mothers. This is consistent with the findings by Mesman et al.'s (in press) literature review, where parental sensitivity in ethnic minority families is generally lower than in majority families.

We also found support for our second hypothesis that differences in sensitivity belief reports between mothers of different cultural groups would diminish or disappear once socioeconomic status was controlled for. We initially found a strong association between mothers' views of the ideal mother and ethnic background. Our analysis revealed that Egyptian families had the lowest family income of all groups. Furthermore, family income was in turn predictive of lower sensitivity belief scores in minority groups. We found that family income played a more significant role in mother's views of the ideal sensitive mother than ethnicity. The relation between ethnic background and sensitivity belief scores of the ideal mother was completely mediated by family income and not by educational level. Egyptian mothers actually had educational levels comparable to the Dutch high-educated group. These findings show the importance of including multiple indicators that define socioeconomic status when examining cross-cultural differences. These findings are also in line with the Family Stress Model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007) which suggests that economic hardship leads to family stress, which in turn affects parenting behavior leading to less optimal parenting. Our findings indicate that not only does economic hardship affect parenting behavior but it may also effect beliefs about parenting behavior. These findings are similar to other findings based on partly the same sample (Emmen, Malda, Mesman, Ekmekci & van IJzendoorn, N.d.). The authors suggest that mothers from lower socioeconomic background may find it harder to separate their views of the hypothetical ideal mother from

their own parenting practice. This may explain why, compared to Dutch mothers, Egyptian mothers' views of the ideal mother were less similar to those of the Dutch expert's views on sensitive parenting. Egyptian families may be experiencing stress due to their low income level which in turn affects mothers' sensitivity beliefs.

Overall mothers from different ethnic backgrounds appear to have highly similar views of the ideal mother's sensitive behavior as well as similar views to the construct of sensitivity. However, there were some differences found on item level. It may be that mothers of certain ethnicity find some behaviors to be slightly more or less important for the ideal mother than the views of mothers from other ethnicities, while still maintaining overall similar views of the ideal sensitive mother's behavior. Egyptian mothers' views on isolating the child when he/she is in a bad mood or teasing the child reflect that they did not find these behaviors compatible with the ideal sensitive mother, more so than did mothers from the other groups. Ainsworth (1969) explains that one of the features of appropriate interaction between the sensitive mother and her child is to have "well-rounded" interactions where both mother and child are left feeling satisfied from the mother's response. In their study on ethnic minority mothers in the Netherlands Emmen et al. (N.d.) argued that what may be important is how content the child feels after the mother's intervention not necessarily the content of the intervention per se. Thus, mothers may differ in how they choose to respond to their child's signals. However, this does not indicate that one response should be considered more or less sensitive than the other (Emmen et al., N.d.). While Egyptian mothers had views that were least similar to the construct of sensitivity out of all the groups, they also showed some views that were more representative of the ideal sensitive mother compared to the views of the other groups. These item differences may reflect cultural differences in the way mothers interpret the child's signals and what mothers perceive as ideal sensitive behavior in those particular situations. Further observational studies may shed more light on the relation between mother-infant interaction, infant satisfaction and mother's sensitivity beliefs across different cultural groups.

Several limitations of this study should be taken into account. First, the study consists of small convenience samples. Most Egyptian mothers were recruited through the same organization which may have limited our representation of the target population. Second, our sample of Egyptian mothers was rather homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic status. Future research should include groups with different socioeconomic background within the minority groups as well as the majority cultural groups. Third, our sample consisted of first generation immigrant Egyptian mothers and second generation immigrant Moroccan mothers.

This difference in immigrant status may result in an unfair comparison between minority groups. Moroccan mothers who have been living in the Netherlands for most of their lives may be more familiar with the parenting practices of the host culture which may explain why their views on the ideal sensitive mother were similar to the Dutch groups. However, if this were true the first generation Egyptian mothers would show significant difference in their views on sensitivity. In fact, our results show that even though Egyptian mothers had the lowest sensitivity belief scores of the different groups their views were not significantly different from the views of Moroccan, Dutch low and middle-educated mothers. Future research on cross-cultural comparisons should include the views of Egyptian mothers living in their country of origin to examine whether the views of mothers living in their country of origin is similar to the views of Egyptian immigrants in the Netherlands and Dutch mothers. Lastly, our sample examined only mothers' view of the ideal mother. Future research should include fathers as well. Empirical research has shown that fathers play a significant role in children's attachment security and development (Grossman, Grossmann, Kindler & Zimmermann, 2008). Fathers' responsiveness has also been associated to infants' social and communicative behaviors (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2006). It would be interesting to examine if fathers' and mothers' views of the ideal mother and the ideal father are similar within and across cultural groups. Future research should also include observational studies on maternal sensitivity across cultures and ethnic minorities to investigate the association between mothers' sensitivity beliefs and observed behavior in ethnic minority families.

Although the current study may include some limitations, it has provided important evidence for the universality of mothers' perceptions on sensitive parenting. Our findings suggest that research on minority families should include multiple indicators of socioeconomic status including individual indicators for family income and educational level in their analysis. Our findings are also important for practitioners working with minority families. Professionals and interventions with a focus on promoting sensitive parenting may incorporate similar methods and goals when working with both ethnic minority and majority mothers. Moreover, interventions aiming to promote sensitive parenting should focus on aiding families in their income status and reducing the stressors associated with socioeconomic strains in order to maximize the effects of sensitivity focused interventions. Most importantly, cultural background alone is not indicative of parenting behaviors or beliefs; future cross-cultural research needs to take into account multiple socio-economical aspects including family income and educational level.

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