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“Children’s contribution to mother-child conversations about shared past events: A cultural comparison”

The paper compares 4-year-old children’s verbal participation in mother-child joint reminiscing as well as how much mothers and their children talk about the child as compared to other people and non-social topics. Mother-child dyads were from three cultural contexts with different emphasis on autonomy and relatedness. Thirty-six middle-class mothers from Germany; 42 middle-class families from Sweden (both representing the model of autonomy); 38 middle-class families from Estonia (representing the model of autonomous relatedness); and 33 rural farming families from Cameroon Nso (representing the model of relatedness) discussed two past events with their children. Mother-child reminiscing conversations were coded for structure and content. Results indicated that these different orientations were reflected in the children’s verbal contribution to conversations about shared past events, as well as in the aspects of self emphasized in these conversations. German and Swedish mothers provided themselves a lot of memory information, and asked a lot of open questions from their children. Estonian and Cameroonian Nso mothers talked less. Differently from Estonian mothers, mothers from Cameroonian Nso asked little information from their children. The relative contribution of Cameroonian children to joint reminiscing was smaller than in other mother-child dyads. Cameroonian Nso mothers’ strong relatedness orientation was reflected in the fact that they focused on external behavior and actions of human beings – on the child and other people – in a social-relational context. Estonian, German, and Swedish mothers’ autonomy orientation was reflected in the vast number of references to the child’s and, in the case of German mothers, also to other people’s mental states.