



Chinese and Turkish parents' reflective parenting: accelerating shifts in contemporary parenting during pandemic contexts

Rachel Lehner-Mear, Yuwei Xu, Chang Liu, Yun Yu, Mehmet Toran, Ramazan Sak & İkbāl Tuba Şahin-Sak

To cite this article: Rachel Lehner-Mear, Yuwei Xu, Chang Liu, Yun Yu, Mehmet Toran, Ramazan Sak & İkbāl Tuba Şahin-Sak (22 Apr 2025): Chinese and Turkish parents' reflective parenting: accelerating shifts in contemporary parenting during pandemic contexts, Journal of Family Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13229400.2025.2495305](https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2025.2495305)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2025.2495305>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 22 Apr 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 81



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Chinese and Turkish parents' reflective parenting: accelerating shifts in contemporary parenting during pandemic contexts

Rachel Lehner-Mear ^a, Yuwei Xu ^a, Chang Liu ^b, Yun Yu ^c, Mehmet Toran ^d, Ramazan Sak ^e and İkbāl Tuba Şahin-Sak ^e

^aSchool of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom; ^bUCL's Faculty of Education and Society, IOE, London, United Kingdom; ^cSchool of Education, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, People's Republic of China; ^dSchool of Education, Early Childhood Education, İstanbul Kültür University, İstanbul, Turkey; ^eSchool of Education, Early Childhood Education, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Van, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during periods of quarantine, parents and children were sometimes together in ways which contrasted their pre-pandemic life. This paper uses a reflective parenting lens and processual approach to analyse the quarantine experiences of twenty-four parents of three-to-six-year-olds from China and Türkiye, gathered in semi-structured interviews. The paper reveals not only that Chinese and Turkish parents were reflective but that such reflections engaged with contemporary shifts in parenting, in particular: (i) *the role of the parent*; (ii) *'fixing' the child*; (iii) *the parent-child hierarchy*; and (iv) *grandparent involvement in parenting*. The practicalities of the pandemic context are shown to enhance social evolution towards reflective parenting by increasing parent-child interaction. The paper also highlights that practising reflective parenting is sometimes challenging, uncomfortable and partial. Structural issues in Chinese and Turkish contemporary life which hinder reflective parenting are highlighted, including working patterns, grandparent involvement, and social scripts that interact with parenting practices. Reflective parenting, assumed to be less common in these contexts, may be inhibited by structural dimensions which had reduced impact in the quarantine period. However, when parents are reflective, they define their own practices and resist, at least in part, traditional notions of parenting.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 November 2023
Accepted 10 April 2025

KEYWORDS

reflective parenting; COVID-19 quarantine; parent-child relationship; China; Türkiye; intensive parenting

Introduction

The study of parenting is well-established. In the psychology and psychoanalytic fields, this often focuses on the socio-emotional needs of children and the different ways parents support or hinder their offspring's development (see Carapito et al., 2017; Eti, 2023). Conversely, sociological studies consider how social pressures attached to the

CONTACT Yuwei Xu  yuwei.xu@nottingham.ac.uk  School of Education, University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham NG8 1BB, United Kingdom

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

constructed role of ‘parent’ inform (and oftentimes normatively construct) the perspectives and experiences of those defined as parents (see Gu, 2021; Pedersen, 2012). The work in both disciplines highlights the development of socially-accepted ideas about parents.

This paper uses the conceptual idea of *reflective parenting* to analyse parental experiences during the disruptive context of the Covid-19 global pandemic, in which forced quarantines closed early education settings and transferred all but essential adult employment into the home. Substantially rupturing day-to-day experiences, this placed parents and children in closer temporal and physical proximity than is common in many contemporary societies, altering family dynamics, the parental role, and the parent–child relationship. By analysing parents’ reflexivity in this dynamic and exceptional context, this paper contributes towards understanding of contemporary shifts in parenting.

Reflective parenting is often studied in the individualized and agential societies of the Global North (Gordo et al., 2020; Slade, 2005). This paper explores reflective parenting in China and Türkiye, contexts historically considered to reflect a more authoritarian parenting culture (Kocayoruk et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2018). Employing a process-oriented approach, we investigate how reflective parenting manifests during the socio-historic context of quarantine. By sometimes placing parents and children in proximity over extended periods of time, the quarantine context affords opportunity for investigating parenting practices, like reflective parenting, which are deeply situated in the parent–child relationship. Semi-structured interviews with twenty-four Chinese and Turkish parents of three-to-six-year-olds, quarantined with their children during 2021, are used to explore the research question: ‘How do Chinese and Turkish parents use reflective parenting during pandemic quarantine and are there any difficulties in adopting this approach?’ This question has the dual advantage of investigating the reflective dimension increasingly described in Chinese and Turkish contemporary parenting studies (Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024; Wang et al., 2024), and simultaneously exploring how reflective parenting allows parents to challenge socially-scripted, normative parenting practices. Challenges in the act of being reflective parents in these contexts are also unveiled. The paper is not, therefore, an investigation of pandemic parenting alone. Rather, it takes advantage of the affordances of the pandemic context and increased parent–child interaction to consider cultural shifts towards reflective parenting, highlighting how reflective parents in these contexts increasingly interrupt traditional scripts of parenting.

This paper adds to the literature on reflective parenting in several ways, providing insight on: reflective parenting generally; reflective parenting in the socio-historic period of pandemic quarantine; and reflective parenting in the specific contexts of China and Türkiye. The findings suggest pandemic lockdowns contributed to the ongoing evolution of Turkish and Chinese parenting towards more relational and reflective interactions, whilst also indicating aspects of contemporary Chinese and Turkish family life which may hinder a reflective parenting approach.

Reflective parenting

Reflexivity, in the parenting context, is defined by Benbassat and Priel (2015) as ‘an ability to think about one’s own thoughts and feelings, as well as those of others. It imparts an awareness of one’s self and others and forms the basis for self-construal and human relationships’ (p. 1). Drawing on Fonagy et al.’s (1991) psychoanalytic

work on reflective functioning and mentalization, Slade (2005) describes reflective parenting as ‘the parent’s capacity to hold the child’s mental states in mind’ (p. 269). With the parent recognizing both their own and their child’s motivations, these internal dimensions shape, and are shaped within, interpersonal parent–child exchanges (Luyten et al., 2017). This makes reflective parenting central to parent–child interaction, for making sense of, and even anticipating, the child’s behaviour. As such, reflective parenting is often considered a critical parental attribute and ‘core mechanism’ of the parent–child relationship, enabling parents to care for, educate and protect their children (Gordo et al., 2020; Menashe-Grinberg et al., 2022, p. 209). Psychology commonly uses assessment of parents’ reflective functioning to understand children’s behavioural pathologies.

Parental reflexivity is also central to ‘intensive parenthood’, a sociological concept which frames parenting as child-centred, expert-guided and emotionally immersive (Hays, 1996). Parents demonstrate appropriate parenting by responding to their child’s needs, with constructions of ‘proper parenthood’ emphasizing ‘parental responsibility, parental control, risk, and competition’ (Wall, 2010, p. 253). In this social script, responsibilized parents are made ‘God-like’, with their behaviours seen as critical to their children’s futures (Lee et al., 2023, p. 25). Considered common in the Global North, intensive parenting promotes constant self-reflection on the appropriateness of parenting actions. It draws on Giddens’s idea that critical reflexivity and relational reciprocity are central to relationships and highlights the ‘interdependence of parents and children’ (Dermott, 2016, p. 138). Yet, whilst centring the parent–child relationship, socially-scripted reflective parenting also binds parents to self-measurement against expected behaviours and practices. In this paper, we therefore consider both intensive parenting, and its partner reflective parenting, as socially-produced parenting norms. Socially-constructed parenting is problematic, since its standardized nature is at odds with the idea of internal self-reflection, tying the individual to outside expectations which can be personally challenging. Given parents’ propensity for self-judgement against socially-accepted standards, the normativity of parenting scripts is considered unavoidable (Dermott & Fowler, 2024), with parents across studies in Sparmann et al.’s (2016) book both *displaying* their practices and *self-reflecting* on them. Social ideologies of parenting thus prompt moments of self-reflection which link individual, micro-level responses to wider cultural discourses and social structures (Moore & Manning, 2019), and, in the case of this paper, to socio-historic events, like Covid-19, which change family dynamics. We adopt this sociological approach to the reflective parenting concept, using it to understand the social context of parenting and parent–child interactions, to explore the ways that parents in the focus locations demonstrate a contemporary self-reflective approach, and to trace this pattern of parenting during pandemic quarantine. Our lens enables consideration of parents’ constructions of themselves and their role during the challenges of a global pandemic, both in-the-moment of parenting and in later self-reflection.

In the following sections we discuss the shifts and developments in Chinese and Turkish parenting cultures that have led to current parenting approaches, before justifying our processual approach.

Chinese parenting cultures

Chinese society reflects a cultural and political emphasis on children’s educational achievement and future prospects (Gan & Bilige, 2019; Liu et al., 2020), with the

Chinese home environment often analogized to a school setting and parents framed as their child's first teacher (Liu & Bray, 2022). Pressures on Chinese parents arise from their social responsibility for nurturing the next generation's educational progress (Lam et al., 2019). This has resulted in a traditionally authoritarian parenting approach such as the 'tiger mother' who pushes her offspring to academic success (Chua, 2011).

Helwig et al. (2014) demonstrate how *Chi* or 'shame' is used as a moral tool to teach offspring social norms. *Guan Jiao* or 'discipline', a central cultural concept in Chinese parenting, localizes parental control over children as parents train, or censor, their child's behaviour with firm discipline. However, challenging authoritarian stereotypes, Long et al. (2021) argue that *Guan* also implies care and nurture, operating in tandem with the idea of *Xiao*, or filial piety, to construct mutually supportive family interconnections. Indeed, Chao (2001) posits that nurture and governance cannot be separated, possibly accounting for Ren and Edwards's (2015) discovery of an authoritative parenting style which includes warmth, responsiveness and support for social competences. Inter-parental differences in Chinese parenting profiles suggest authoritarian, tiger and supportive parenting are all visible (Xie & Li, 2019). Given the social dynamism of Chinese society, with urban-rural contrasts, and wide variations in educational achievement, it is unsurprising that multiple parenting approaches exist.

Recognizing the nuance in these constructs produces a more relational understanding of Chinese parenting. Shifts in contemporary practices in the Chinese context reflect similar parenting dimensions as have been evidenced in Western countries for some time. For example, although Gu (2021) finds variation in Chinese parents' focus on both educational and emotional development, a shared framing of the 'emotionally priceless and educationally achieving child' exists (p. 578). Similarly, the rise of 'sharenting' amongst the Chinese middle-classes, sees individuals share and display their parenting practices in online spaces (Wang et al., 2024), with a consequence that parents continuously self-reflect, seeking to improve their parenting by adopting new methods. Indeed, comparing parenting across three generations, Guo (2021) highlights the way childrearing practices may be 'distinctively constructed' between generations, with a more child-centred approach developing over time according to the shifting ideological context (p. 269). Likewise, Chinese fathers, traditionally positioned as distant disciplinarians, have recently become more participative (Li, 2020). In urban China particularly, children are increasingly viewed as autonomous subjects with needs (Naftali, 2016, cited in Li, 2022), though several scholars also highlight a rise in rural parents' focus on their children's emotional and educational needs. As Gu (2021) states, 'there is a cultural imperative for Chinese parents to practice education-oriented intensive parenting, which may transcend social class boundaries' (p. 563).

Understanding the complexity of Chinese parenting requires consideration of China's historical one-child policy, which resulted in several documented shifts away from traditional patriarchal parenting. Settles et al.'s (2013) review of the policy's impacts suggests individuals are increasingly likely to view parenting as emotionally satisfying, fulfilling, or natural, rather than associating it predominantly with moral obligation or economic need, such as family succession and later life support. In smaller family units, practices connected to filial piety (*Xiao*) are considered less practical, and reduced parental emphasis on academic progress results in parents spending more leisure time with their child. These findings recognize changes in parenting approach

towards more affective dimensions. Although abolished in 2016, the policy represents the social and political milieu in which this study's participants developed their parenting practices.

Chinese parenting culture is further complicated by the prevalence of cross-generational practices, in which co-resident grandparents are sometimes involved in day-to-day parenting, (Hong et al., 2022; Lo & Lindsay, 2022). Women's influx into the job market prompts multigenerational parenting, particularly in urban areas (Breengaard, 2018). Wang et al. (2024) recognize this as 'extensive mothering' (Christopher, 2012) through which kin-groups aid families to maintain social norms of child-rearing. High degrees of grandparental involvement in domestic practices may inhibit opportunities for in-the-moment reflective parenting.

Discussions of China as a collectivist society obscure relational dimensions (Wang & Liu, 2010). This literature review suggests this criticism is valid, given both variety and changes in parenting. With Chinese parenting multifaceted, 'flexible, mutually interactive, and setting-dependent' (Fung et al., 2017, p. 473), a universal definition, particularly one framing Chinese parents as rigid disciplinarians, is problematic. By exploring reflective parenting, this paper further challenges traditional constructions of Chinese parents, moving beyond parenting scripts which reflect pre-defined, external standards. By investigating reflective parenting in a challenging context, this paper contests restrictive notions of the Chinese parent and recognizes contemporary shifts in parenting.

Turkish parenting cultures

In the same way that framing Chinese society and parenting as collectivist is critiqued (Hofstede, cited in Wang & Liu, 2010), claims that Turkish parenting reflects a more individualistic, Western perspective are also contested.¹ Hofstede et al. (2010) argue Türkiye orients between individualist and collectivist cultures, because despite the prevalence of the nuclear family, Turkish families are 'functionally extended' (Ataca et al., 2005, p. 99), with many generationally shared activities, and grandparental involvement in childrearing common (Durmuş & Tunca, 2023; Tezel Şahin & Şahin, 2020). Türkiye's 'culture of relatedness' encourages emotional interdependence between family members, supporting expectations that children are obedient, respectful, and loyal (Kagitcibasi, 1989, cited in Sen et al., 2014; Sunar, 2005). Indeed, powerful asymmetric generational hierarchies frame children's agency and privacy, which Üzümcü (2024) argues may even tie adolescent children closely to their parents' rules. A better way to understand Turkish parenting is therefore to recognize a model of 'emotional interdependence' which integrates intergenerationally-related collectivist and autonomy-promoting individualist modes of parenting (Kagitcibasi, 2007). This understanding challenges predictions that socio-economic development would eliminate Türkiye's collectivist values by spreading individualist tendencies (Akkan et al., 2023; Sunar, 2005).

However, as with Chinese families, assuming a homogenous Turkish parenting approach is problematic. Although often framed as hierarchical (Ataca et al., 2005; Erdem et al., 2022), there is nuance in Turkish families by social and emotional (dis)advantages, by parental education, and by urban/rural location. Family closeness, children's autonomy and parental preference for obedience are all found to vary by socio-economic group and parental education (Akkan et al., 2023; Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024;

Topal Özgen & Ekşi, 2023; Yagmurlu et al., 2009). While these distinctions may lead to educated Turkish mothers' greater responsiveness to children's emotions (Yagmurlu & Altan, 2010), Sen et al. (2014) warn this should not be assumed to imply less parental warmth in socially and economically disadvantaged families. Rather, urban parents across all classes promote both child autonomy and relational interdependence (Erdem et al., 2022). Moreover, despite some tendencies towards authoritarian parenting, Turkish youngsters do not experience parents' behavioural control negatively (Selcuk et al., 2022). Instead, parental warmth is noted across social groups (Erkan & Toran, 2010; Sen et al., 2014). Indeed, demonstrations of warmth reflect the cultural emphasis on kin relationships (Laible et al., 2017). Distinctions between cross-classed parent-child relational warmth and in-cultural differences in parental response to specific behaviours suggest both socio-economic factors and socio-cultural preferences underpin Turkish parenting. Differences may also be generational (Sunar, 2005). Similar to China, contemporary Turkish parenting is both varied and demonstrates aspects which may align with reflective parenting.

Turkish parenting culture appears to remain gendered, albeit with varying manifestations across classes (see Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024). Childcare is constructed as a mothers' primary responsibility, while an emphasis on familialism expects mothers more than fathers to sacrifice their individual values to their families (Arzuk, 2020). Sadıkoğlu and Erdoğan Coşkun (2024) assert that Turkish mothers are subject to socially-constructed motherhood scripts which are child-centred, expert-guided, and emotionally fulfilling. Despite these gendered parenting scripts, Turkish fathers are increasingly expected to participate in child-related activities, progressively becoming subject to standardized notions of fatherhood situated in social policy (Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024; Ünlü, 2023). City-dwelling fathers may demonstrate a greater propensity for such interactive parenting (Sen et al., 2014). Nevertheless, father-child attachment appears high across socio-economic groups (Aslan et al., 2017), with behavioural similarities between Turkish mothers and fathers (Kuscul & Adamsons, 2022). As pandemic quarantine provided an 'opportunity' for greater paternal involvement (Toran et al., 2021), a reflective parenting lens affords understanding of how Turkish parents, including fathers, reflectively negotiated the norms of contemporary parenting during a global pandemic.

A processual approach to understanding reflective parenting in China and Türkiye

A review of existing literature leads us to understand that whilst Chinese and Turkish parenting cultures have historically shared a discourse of homogenizing and standardizing parenting, recent social shifts in some socio-economic groups have moved towards a more reflective approach. Parenting in these contexts is neither fixed to historic, cultural traditions, nor to binary models such as individualism versus collectivism; parenting versus grandparenting; strong discipline versus parental warmth. Indeed, the application of restricted parenting models to these contexts may obscure variation in parents' responses to social pressures and parenting shifts arising from changing social dynamics. Moreover, developments in contemporary parenting suggest Chinese and Turkish approaches which are increasingly responsive and rooted in the parent-child

relationship. In this paper, we investigate how reflective parenting manifests in the two contexts during the Covid-19 pandemic, a time when parents and children were sometimes together for extended periods in ways which contrasted their pre-pandemic life. We trace examples of reflective parenting against the backdrop of this dramatic social phenomenon which ruptured and then reoriented usual parent–child interactions, revealing how contemporary shifts towards reflective parenting exhibited in these contexts.

To understand these parenting shifts, a processual approach was needed. A processual lens explores a phenomenon as a process not an event (Lucas, 2023; Thomson, 2007), highlighting the ‘dynamic interplay of the personal and the ecological’ (Thomson, 2007, p. 580). This affords understanding which goes beyond a before–after binary, recognizing gradual shifts over time (Al-Dabbagh, 2022). Al-Dabbagh describes a ‘process of reflexive selves’, relating this to the changing localities in her study of migration (p. 267). We use a processual lens to understand the reflexive process in the shifting temporalities and spaces of parenting. In taking this processual view of reflective parenting, our analysis also elicits the dimensions of Turkish and Chinese family life and dominant social scripts which sometimes restrict reflective parenting.

Reflective parenting may be considered an inappropriate lens for these cultural contexts, arising, as it does, from neoliberal discourses of responsibility and individualism, and the reproduction of Western class structures (see, for example, Lareau’s, 2003 theory of concerted cultivation). However, shifts in Chinese and Turkish parenting, already described, suggest an increasingly multifaceted and variable parenting approach, particularly in higher SES and urban settings, demonstrating the oversimplicity of binary framings of parenting (e.g. the collectivist/individualist binary). This indicates the potential suitability of a reflective parenting lens for exploring relational interactions and responses within these contexts, particularly given the cultural ‘creep’ of parenting scripts described by Lee et al. (2023, p. 31). Miller (2005) argues that, although parental self-reflexivity is ‘not universally experienced’, exploration of the contexts in which individuals make parenting decisions helps identify how and where it takes place (p. 140). With Miller’s and Lee et al.’s comments in mind, we explore whether, and in what ways, Chinese and Turkish participants engaged in reflective parenting during pandemic quarantine, and possible contextual challenges to their adoption of this approach. Our research question is therefore: ‘How do Chinese and Turkish parents use reflective parenting during pandemic quarantine and are there any difficulties in adopting this approach?’

Context

We recognize that the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted families and acknowledge the growing literature on parenting in this context. Blikstad-Balas et al. (2022) outlined a binary in parental experiences: those who suffered relational tensions, and those who gained relational closeness. Hazarika and Das (2020) identified gendered spaces, as fathers prioritized work and mothers absorbed extra childcare, while Cordini and de Angelis (2021) argued that class polarized experiences: professional parents, struggling to balance high-pressure tasks, felt temporal stressors, whilst less educated parents experienced economic anxiety from loss of work and income. Several studies, including

our own paper (Toran et al., 2021), suggest parents experienced a combination of positive and negative outcomes (Gelir & Duzen, 2022; Shum et al., 2023).

Despite the number of pandemic parenting studies, we contend these predominantly centre on practical experiences and the division of family labour (e.g. Hazarika & Das, 2020; Pitzalis & Spano, 2021). Limited attention, to our knowledge, has been given to parents' reflexive responses to their children in the quarantine context, even though the negative impact of stress on parental responsiveness is known (Guajardo et al., 2009). This re-analysis of existing interviews explores what can be understood by applying a reflective parenting lens to data collected during and immediately post-quarantine. It reorientates the pandemic discussion to capture how changes in the parenting context accelerated parental reflexivity as part of ongoing cultural shifts in parenting. This paper contributes to the broader reflective parenting literature, firstly by highlighting its role in navigating contextual experiences, and secondly by revealing how a dynamic alteration in family circumstances increased reflective parenting. The study cannot explicitly demonstrate *change* in parenting approach, given that we do not also have data regarding participants' pre-pandemic parenting. Rather, it uses the increase in parent-child interaction during the pandemic to explore Chinese and Turkish parents' perceptions of their parenting. However, given that some participants claimed personal change in their parenting, we discuss the implications of this in the conclusion.

The study

Ethical approval came from Istanbul Kültür University Ethics Committee (No. 2020-18). Recruitment occurred through random and snowball sampling, via researcher networks and online communities. Informed consent was gained through sharing the information sheet and consent form via email. Participants could ask questions during a short Zoom meeting. All participants were at home during quarantine with a child aged three to six who ordinarily attended a pre-school setting. None had prior training or employment in early childhood education. Eleven Chinese parents (three fathers, eight mothers) and thirteen Turkish parents (six fathers, seven mothers) participated. Table 1 lists the participants (anonymized and pseudonymized), their parenting roles, country locations, number and ages of children, and educational background. Most participants were university educated; three were high school educated. One Turkish father described his educational level as 'literate'. Participants across both cohorts had professional or semi-professional occupations; three were self-employed. Just one Chinese mother was a full-time parent. Most participants were relatively affluent; all were from urban locations. The social similarity of the cohorts enabled our approach.

Following a pilot study (one Chinese; one Turkish parent), eight questions were agreed for the online, semi-structured interviews, covering: the quarantine process; perspectives on pre-quarantine, mid-quarantine and post-quarantine relationships with children; and views on positive and negative aspects of quarantine. Additional comments were also welcomed. Although a processual lens may draw on multiple interviews (see Wickenden et al.'s, 2021 pandemic study), our interview schedule afforded a processual dimension by orienting questions across several time points. Despite the topic's potential to be somewhat sensitive, particularly given some of the reflections made, participants actively shared their experiences. To account for parenting pressures, interviews,

Table 1. Study participants.

Chinese participants					Turkish participants				
Name	Role	No. of children	Children's ages	Education	Name	Role	No. of children	Children's ages	Education
An Na	Mother	1	3	Graduate	Ali	Father	2	11, 4	Graduate
Ding	Father	1	6	Undergraduate	Betul	Mother	1	3.5	Graduate
Fan	Father	2	5, newborn	Undergraduate	Ilay	Mother	1	5	Undergraduate
Juan	Mother	1	3.5	Graduate	Zeynep	Mother	1	3.5	Graduate
Chen	Mother	1	4	Undergraduate	Ayşe	Mother	1	4.5	Graduate
Li	Mother	1	5	High school	Umut	Father	2	11, 5.5	Undergraduate
Chalis	Mother	1	3	Undergraduate	Sema	Mother	2	6, 4	Undergraduate
Lily	Mother	2	5, 2.5	Graduate	Agit	Father	3	9, 7, 3	High school
Feng	Mother	1	5	Undergraduate	Tahir	Father	2	5.5, 4.5	Undergraduate
Rui	Father	2	14, 4	Undergraduate	Kemal	Father	5	18, 17, 10, 8, 4.5	Literate
Qiqi	Mother	2	6, 3.5	Undergraduate	Yusuf	Father	3	13, 6, 1	Graduate
					Hilal	Mother	1	3	High school
					Elif	Mother	1	4	Undergraduate

which were transcribed and translated into English prior to coding, lasted twenty to thirty minutes and participants were reminded of the right to withdraw at any time. Shorter interviews, using smaller question sets, are sometimes used in qualitative research, including in other pandemic family studies (see Neece et al.'s, 2020 pandemic 'short interview' study). Agha (2021), argues that 'even short interviews convey[] very meaningful information' in family research (p. 73). Indeed, Catenaccio (2020) suggests variable interview length carries greater risk by accentuating some participants' narratives over others. Online research increased during pandemic lockdown (Hazarika & Das, 2020; Shum et al., 2023), with advantages including accessibility and increased participation. Researcher-contributor distance can lessen participant tension when reflections touch on sensitive topics (Westland et al., 2024). Given our interest in reflective parenting during a dramatic period of danger to life, an online method was helpful on several levels.

We gathered parents' self-reports of their parenting. Recognizing the constructed nature of interview data (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000), we do not use it to make claims about parents' *demonstrable* parenting behaviours. Rather, like Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, we understand parental reflections as valid sociological data sources which can be used to interpret a parenting approach through the meanings participants attribute to their realities. This is particularly the case as the original research questions were not designed to explicitly ask about parenting *approach*, but focused on parenting *experiences* during the pandemic. Tavory (2020) argues that the open context of semi-structured interviewing affords analysis of additional dimensions beyond the original study design. Thus, we interpret parental reflections on their experiences, using the lens of reflective parenting. We acknowledge the 'network of power' (Holliday, 2004) embedded in any research relying on participant reflections, and the potential for participants to be influenced by the researchers' questions (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022). However, since the questions asked during data collection did not directly focus on reflective parenting, in this sense, they were unlikely to 'lead' participants.

We do not repeat here the practical changes occurring during quarantine (see Toran et al., 2021). Instead, acknowledging the time parents and children spent together, we focus explicitly on reflective parenting, using a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning to analyse data thematically. We discuss five findings which demonstrate how Chinese and Turkish parents adopted reflexive parenting, situating these in ongoing social developments in parenting in these contexts. The findings are in two sections. In Part A we discuss how participants reflected on four culturally dominant parenting themes:

- *the role of the parent;*
- *'fixing' the child;*
- *the parent-child hierarchy;*
- *grandparent involvement*

In Part B we highlight the *difficulties* of navigating such reflections in the context of existing cultural scripts of parenting, and identify structural dimensions of family life which inhibit reflective parenting:

- *difficulties in reflective parenting.*

In this analysis, we indicate nationality with C or T in parenthesis and parenting role with M or F. For example, a Chinese mother is given the symbol (CM).

Part A – how reflective parenting challenged cultural norms of parenting

In this section we discuss how participants' reflective parenting during the pandemic variously interacted with shifting social scripts which are gradually orienting towards more relational and child-centred parenting.

The role of the parent

Quarantine shifted parental focus away from external pressures like employment, instead directing parents' attention towards their children and parent–child interactions. Yusuf's comment (TF), 'We cling to life more, have more time for our children, and care about them more' demonstrates his perception of his parenting role in relation to his children. Elif (TM) questioned the appropriateness of contemporary practices which encourage parents to concentrate on paid work, indicating a desire to be more family- or child-centred in her approach, concluding: 'This virus wants to tell us something ... Treat our children better, our spouses and our elders, right? It is a blessing from God'.

Focusing on the family had profound effects on how some participants wanted to parent, and they vocalized a future approach which challenged established practices:

[A]fter the quarantine, I will not always work ... I want to spend more time with my child, my family, my husband. I want to change the focus of my own life a bit. I would rather put my family at the centre of my life. (Zeynep; TM)

Reflections contrast the distanced, authoritarian, or discipline-focused attributes traditionally assumed to reflect Chinese and Turkish parenting. These included expressions of mutual affection which enhanced the parenting experience. 'Now I'm watching, kissing and smelling him' articulated Hilal (TM), 'I like it very much'. 'If you are really with your child, some of her actions will give you a happy [feeling]' declared Chen (CM). 'I suddenly felt that she was the one who loved me most ... in the world' recalled Li (CM). These mothers found delight in sharing warm experiences with their children, supporting contemporary research that Chinese and Turkish parents demonstrate relational closeness (Li, 2020; Ren & Edwards, 2015) and present a more child-centred approach (Naftali, 2016, cited in Li, 2022; Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024).

Echoing recent findings that Turkish mothers *and* fathers demonstrate attributes of relationally-oriented and present parenting (Ünlü, 2023; Sadıkoğlu & Erdoğan Coşkun, 2024), some of the Turkish parents, like Yusuf, recognized quarantine as an 'opportunity to get to know [my children] better'. Relaxed time together brought familiarity, easier interactions, and increased responsiveness through improved knowledge. Ayse (TM) felt 'less anxious' and parented 'more freely', contrasting her previous experiences in which pressure to create supposedly 'quality' interactions produced more conscious parenting. In Betül's (TM) words, 'We are rediscovering our own child'. Indeed, several of the Turkish parents were sincerely grateful for the chance to be closer to their

children, recognizing that this opportunity may be transient. Tahir (TF) described it as ‘opportunity not obligation’, while Elif (TM) stated, ‘I thank God for spending that time together well, because my daughter will be at school for a lifetime’. Ayse (TM) agreed: ‘Spending a little more time with him is good for him and for us’. These Turkish parents welcomed the chance to develop their parenting, adopting a more restricted, interpersonal, emotionally demonstrative approach that supported the relational dimension of parenting.

One of the ways the Chinese participants adapted their practices, was in relation to education, where some parents relinquished previously high levels of control, for example allowing their child to ‘take the initiative’ (An Na; CM), switching from textbooks to practical activities (Juan; CM), or questioning traditional educational competition, a subject hierarchy, and parental leadership:

I particularly wanted her to [draw accurately] but now I think she can do whatever she likes [laugh]. It was hard to avoid comparison before, and I also like to compare, and I experienced the thinking of our parents. And then when it was time, I figured it out. It is also a growth for me. (Chen; CM)

Chen’s reflection supports literature on ideological shifts in parenting between generations (Guo, 2021), suggesting the pandemic context may have enhanced such transitions.

Chalis (CM) also reflected on highly competitive and inflexible parenting. Instead she observed her daughter, responded to what she saw, and relaxed her expectations:

Her programming class is three-to-six-year-olds. ... My daughter is very interested, but I think she is still a little poor in cognition, the cognitive aspect of mathematics, programming, understanding the order of numbers, the size of numbers ... So I do not think it is necessary to push forward. We have ... decided to slow down.

Orienting away from highly competitive educational behaviours contrasts the Confucianist teaching that academic success reflects good parenting (Guo, 2013) and studies which emphasize tropes such as the Chinese ‘tiger mother’ (Chao, 2001; Gu, 2006).

In the Turkish data, Ilay (TM) also recognized that parents could reduce their educational control. Likening her new parenting to a ‘rope’, Ilay allowed her son to bypass government-provided educational programmes in favour of other activities. In Ilay’s rope imagery, the parent gradually releases their assumed role of influence and direction. Thus, both Chinese and Turkish parents in this study used the social experiences of the pandemic to observe their children, responding to what they experienced rather than to social expectations of their parenting.

‘Fixing’ the child

Emerging from the interviews was a sense that, conventionally, children are made to ‘fit’ both parent needs and wider social expectations. Hilal (TM) described how, ‘Before the quarantine process, I always had to hurry and finish many works. It means that I never had enough time for my child. However, now I feel that the flow of our lives is slower’. In the slower pace Hilal described listening to her son’s views and preferences. Rather than moulding their offspring to social expectations, parents asked questions about their child’s condition. Ilay (TM) crafted her day around questions she asked herself about

her children: were they hungry; what did they want to do? Whilst Hilal and Ilay's child-centred approaches were conscious in-the-moment of parenting, Rui (CF) described an organic process, in which he let the family 'slowly and gradually' adapt. Juan (CM) agreed that life 'form[ed] a fixed pattern' over time. Thus, some Chinese parents also recognized that difficult circumstances were resolved not by controlling their children, but by relaxing their parenting, a powerful contrast to the parental dominance described in traditional discourses (Helwig et al., 2014). These reflections suggest parents across both cohorts recognized that established parenting practices rooted in a fast-paced life, fixed routines, and limited parent-child contact, produce a level of parental control which can be altered during quieter passages of quarantine life.

At the time of the study, Turkish families were still adapting to public health directives. Several participants reflected on the impact new practices had on their children. Constant requests to handwash made Umut's (TF) child 'more sensitive', while Zeynep's (TM) son claimed, 'I don't like water', prompting Zeynep to be 'more gentle, calm and patient'. Ilay (TM) suggested public 'obsession' with cleanliness had altered her five-year-old's language and his worries. She was conscious he needed support to overcome his fears:

While he was painting, he says 'my hand may have been infected' not 'my hands are dirty' ... He says 'I can't go out because there are viruses out there, they can kill me and they can kill you ...' He's going to have such an obsession and I'm afraid of it, but I'm trying to get out of it.

Emotional fallout was also recognized in children's need for parental presence and physical contact. Zeynep's (TM) son 'comes directly to us in the small hours, hugs and kisses me'. Ayse's (TM) child also sought night-time solace: 'He was anxious, and he did not want to sleep alone. He slept with me for days', she recalled. Rather than framing their child's outward behaviour as problematic, parents adapted their approach: showing sympathy, offering affection, or co-sleeping (note that co-sleeping is cultural accepted in Türkiye; Ulus et al., 2020).

These examples suggest parents responded to behavioural changes as 'challenges in the situation of quarantine', to be ameliorated by responsive and reflective parenting, not as underlying psychological issues needing to be 'fixed', a contrast to longstanding contextual discourses of parents training or correcting children. This may reflect both Türkiye's 'culture of relatedness' and emotional interdependence (Kagitcibasi, cited in Sen et al., 2014) and Long et al.'s (2021) framing of Chinese *Guan/Xiao* as producing mutually supportive interconnections. Indeed, some parents recognized their child's emotional insights through the tense pandemic context. Yusuf (TF) noted 'some truth' in his daughter's description of his quarantine anger. Similarly, Li (CM) was surprised by her daughter's perceptive observations:

I am a hothead. Sometimes I do work or do something, and if I don't do it well, I will be angry. But my daughter suddenly said to me one day, 'Mom, you will learn to wait'. My God, I don't know where she learned, 'Mom, you need to learn to wait'.

Li also realized that her daughter's reaction might indicate a problem with her own anger:

She said 'It doesn't matter, I forgive you'. I said 'Why forgive me so quickly?' 'Because I love you, because we are good friends'. I think she let me [feel] very, very warm, feeling very accepted by the baby kind of feeling. But you obviously feel that she is actually very afraid. She is scared of me.

As reflective parents the participants did not adopt the script of ‘fixing’ their children according to social expectations, or ‘fitting’ them to parental requirements, but instead parented responsively to the children’s needs and tried to understand the impact of their own actions within a dramatic and sometimes frightening context.

The parent–child hierarchy

A reflective parenting lens suggests pandemic family interactions further weakened previously dominant parent–child hierarchies. In Türkiye, a more bi-directional relationship developed because family interactions centred on at-home, interpersonal exchanges such as chatting, reading or playing together. By working at home, Ali (TF) could ‘continue to communicate’. Zeynep (TM) spent time talking with her son. ‘It has started to affect him positively’ she observed. Parental reflection enabled the valuing of the novel, shared, parent–child time, and delight in the reciprocal interactions. ‘We clean home, cook and play together during the quarantine process. We wear our good clothes and dance. All day belongs to us and it is unlimited. We like it and have fun’, said Elif (TM). Zeynep’s and Elif’s comments indicate their pleasure from the social and communicative shift arising from flexible and bi-directional parent–child interactions. Although Tahir (TF) worried about the value of shared play (echoing a traditional view that parent–child interactions should be high quality), he acknowledged mutual enjoyment. Juan (CM) recognized that interaction recharged her child’s ‘cup of love’ through reciprocal connection. Shared time was thus positive for family relationships, in part because quarantine afforded a depth of sociality. Such experiences were rooted in reflective parenting.

The importance of understanding parent–child relational balance during quarantine has been indicated elsewhere (see Liu et al., 2021; Uzun et al., 2021). As hinted, some participants recognized that parent–child emotions entwined. Umut (TF) appreciated that his daughter’s deteriorating behaviour strained his own emotions, so decided to ‘do whatever she wants and she smiles’. Umut’s reflective actions alleviated the emotional difficulties he recognized in his daughter, and simultaneously ameliorated the impact on himself. In balancing parent and child emotions, rather than using discipline to correct children’s ‘moods’, Umut responded to interconnected family emotions.

Several parents went beyond an implicit intent to balance parent–child emotions, by also reflecting on hierarchical, parent-dominated relationships. Showing awareness of the entwined parent–child relationship, Tahir (TF) pondered whether his children’s current need for attention was due to his past parenting: ‘If we had some activities which we did together, they would not be so hungry for us now’. Similarly, Ding (CF) reflected on and altered his domineering approach: ‘It is meaningless for you to spend a lot of anger. You’re just gonna freak the kid out and he still won’t [learn]’ he observed.

An Na (CM) offered the most dramatic example of how pandemic reflections unsettled the parent–child hierarchy. Recalling an occasion when she shut her child in a darkened room as punishment, An Na wondered whether this had been damaging:

I felt that the small dark room closed by others was useful. I also closed the small dark room for my relationship. I did not, that is to say, consider in a deeper way that my daughter did not proceed from [my] point of view. She did admit her mistake to me. I achieved my goal,

but she? Who knows what the dark room thing [has done]? Maybe she will have some claustrophobia in the future.

An Na's profound reflection suggests she was evaluating the long-term impact of her parenting decisions. Similarly, Juan (CM) regretted not previously viewing her parental anger from her child's perspective. Both mothers recognized the potential impact of authoritarian disciplinary practices, and considered amending their approaches. An Na lamented following 'others' models' of parenting, questioning cultural expectations of parents, Chinese cultural values, and deeply embedded behaviour techniques which dominate traditional scripts of Chinese childrearing (Xu et al., 2005).

Although few participants verbalized such explicit reflections on parent-child hierarchies, adoption of balanced relationships and relational connection was widely observed. Strengthened relationships were particularly noticeable for some fathers. Tahir's (TF) 'weak' relationship with his daughter improved, in part through spending time together, but also because he now centred her choice-making. Rui's (CF) paternal relationship became 'closer and more intimate', while Ali (TF) believed family relationships would continue to improve. Several mothers also observed the change in relationships. 'On the positive side, I believed my son was growing up. ... I noticed that we were chatting like two adults. I think he was also aware of my respect to him' (Ilay; TM). Ilay's appreciation that mutual respect improved their relationship challenges authoritarian parenting discourses. Some Chinese mothers described more intense parent-child relationships. 'I think it was the most intimate moment', Juan recalled of co-sleeping, while Chen noticed her daughter's more positive reaction to her: 'In the past, she didn't look up at me when I came back. Now she is very excited when I open the door'. Chalis even described a renewed appreciation of the parent-child relationship:

I finally told myself that the relationship with the child was the most important. Everything is to enlighten the child, provide him with an environment and let him develop, it's [all] based on my good relationship with him. If I do this thing to make him better, but the price is to destroy our relationship, I don't think it is necessary. So finally, I put down this anxiety, put down this persistence, and focus on the relationship with him.

In rejecting hierarchical practices which threaten relational closeness, Chalis decided to nurture a child-centred relationship, reflecting recent scholarship on contemporary Chinese parenting (Breengaard, 2018; Li, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Grandparent involvement in parenting

As outlined already, in both China and Türkiye, grandparents sometimes play a considerable childcare role. Pandemic reflections regarding day-to-day care hint that established patterns of co-parenting sometimes inhibited parent-child intimacy. For example, a habit of sleeping beside his grandmother prevented Feng (CM) from becoming closer to her child. Although Feng parented her child in other ways during quarantine, considered herself 'in charge of him', and invited her son to join her at night, she found 'the position is unshakable in terms of sleep'. Thus, despite more parent-child shared time, sometimes established patterns of grandparent intimacy remained. This highlights not only the importance of grandparents in some Chinese children's lives, but also suggests the parent-child hierarchy continues into adulthood, since Feng's mother did not meet

Feng's maternal wishes, instead maintaining her dominant position in the family hierarchy.

However, some parents did challenge established grandparental care. A literal change in who parented the child sometimes modified parental identities, resulting in a welcome re-discovery of the parenting role. These role alterations offered recognizable parenting benefits. An Na (CM) switched from being 'more like a grandmother' to a hands-on parent whose child 'depends on me completely'. Likewise, Hilal (TM) realized that her son 'needs his mother'. Betul (TM) enjoyed caring for her child, not 'watching [him] on the camera'. Similarly, Fan (CF) described 'wonderful feelings' from taking over from grandparental care. A generational shift in Chinese parenting brought new perspectives, challenging claims that grandparent co-parenting is unproblematic (Li & Liu, 2020). This grandparenting discourse was not discussed in all interviews. Nevertheless, its inclusion suggests reflective parenting touched a range of established practices, including, at times, this generational dimension.

Part B – difficulties in reflective parenting

Notwithstanding the way lockdown parenting afforded a reflective approach, the process of reflecting within the bounds of powerful parenting discourses was complex and sometimes difficult.

In unsettling established discourses like the parent–child disciplinary hierarchy, reflections could be uncomfortable:

For a person like me, right is right, wrong is wrong. Love and hate are clear. That is, if you do something wrong, you must give an explanation. If you do something right, I must give you a reward. But through this period, I can think about what she did wrong from another angle. Why did she do this? Maybe she doesn't think so. Does it attract my attention or something else? I'll be there in the dead of night [laughs] thinking about it for a long time. (Chen; CM)

Chen's description of re-living scenarios 'in the dead of night' suggests a tension between the dominant way she has previously parented, and new considerations of her child's viewpoint. In other words, Chen's parenting has become less straightforward, because now contrasting discourses must be navigated.

Similarly, although An Na (CM) made several observations which suggest a shift towards a more reflective, child-centred approach, she experienced this reflective process as unveiling her own parenting 'defects', aligning herself with a 'responsibility' narrative prevalent in traditional Chinese parenting (Lam et al., 2019):

During the isolation period, many defects in my personality were exposed, including defects in my education model. I will change them. In fact, this process is very difficult ... But at least now I have such a sense, and I am doing it now.

Quarantine, although offering potential relational benefits, was not easy. For those new to stay-at-home orders, suddenly unstructured parent–child time was particularly disconcerting. Ayse (TM) worried, 'how would I spend all this time with the child?' Qiqi (CM) felt 'overwhelmed'. Betul (TM) described how: 'The anxiety started with a fear and we passed the first two weeks like this'. Most participants' professional employment, alongside contemporary practices in both cultures which keep children and

parents apart, meant these parents were unaccustomed to spending long periods at home with their offspring. Consequently, their emotional reactions to this change in family life were intense.

Furthermore, even though reorientation of the parent–child hierarchy was often welcomed, this process was not always comfortable, as demonstrated by Turkish fathers Tahir, Umut and Ali. Despite experiencing a strengthened parent–child relationship, Tahir confessed: ‘It is a stressful process ... We are not used to having an intense relationship with our children’. Umut feared that quarantine had diminished his parental authority: ‘we have stayed side by side for so long, we are not like father and daughter, but like two friends’ he complained. Where some parents valued improved intimacy, Umut disliked losing his traditional authority role. Ali worried about the impact of parent–child closeness on children’s development:

It doesn’t seem right to me that under normal circumstances children are so attached to their parents and spend so long together. Because it is extremely important for their development to be able to do something on their own ... I see that they are more attached to me. I am worried that this may have a negative result.

Ali even resisted changes he found uncomfortable, using his dominant position to impose a routine which mirrored the ‘normality’ he missed: ‘I assign them such tasks. I make them wake up early too. After having breakfast, I have them do sports and play together ... This is the way to get through this process’.

Worries about lost authority or impaired child development and attempts to reclaim normality through parental control demonstrate that the unsettling of established hierarchies was not always embraced. Despite evidence of a shift towards a more child-centred approach, some families consciously sought, or maintained, traditional practices. These fathers’ reflections challenge previous indications that educated, urban fathers are more willing to modify traditional patterns of paternal authority (Sen et al., 2014). Such examples also counter assumptions that reflection is necessarily progressive, revealing that sometimes parents prefer tradition. The challenge to some norms of parenting brought by a reflective approach, does not equate to the rejection of all dominant discourses.

Fathers whose employment prevented them from being more present during quarantine did not accrue the perceived relational benefits felt elsewhere (reproducing the gendered family care highlighted by Hazarika & Das, 2020). Although Ilay (TM) developed a better relationship with her son, her husband did not: ‘I got such good results ... But [my son] is not like that with his father because he goes to work’. Similarly, in Qiqi’s (CM) family, strained interactions continued as her husband struggled to juggle work and home life: ‘when he is busy with his work and under great pressure, he is not willing to accompany them when he comes home. Of course they are closer to me’ she concluded. Different employment expectations made it easier for self-employed Qiqi, and more difficult for her husband, to spend the shared parent–child time during which reflective parenting reoriented family interactions. The situation was even worse for Kemal (TF), a cook working outside the home. To keep his child safe, Kemal forbade their close interaction. Kemal’s child struggled to understand this apparent rejection, though it was unclear whether this would reinforce relational distance long-term, or whether Kemal would establish reflective parenting post-pandemic.

Whilst quarantine gave parents opportunity for reflective parenting, in producing areas of challenge, this highlighted under-developed skills, parental uncertainty, contemporary distance between parents and children, and the strength of established discourses which frame parents as ‘deficit’. Fan (CF) worried about supporting his child’s development, saying ‘we don’t know how to do it’. Tahir (TF) agreed, summarizing parenting challenges with, ‘We parent through trial and error’. Zeynep (TM) believed her son’s difficulties evidenced her parenting failures. Thus, the parents did not always recognize the impact of external factors, such as work patterns which ordinarily keep parent and child apart, or the strain of a pandemic on children. Instead, some parents internalized problems, a response which may reflect established narratives of parental deficiency (Gao et al., 2020; Sylvia et al., 2021).

Finally, although reflective parenting during pandemic quarantine enabled participants to challenge some parenting scripts, several expressed concern about maintaining these practices. ‘I will be a clocked robot and divided into hours [again]’ worried Hilal (TM). ‘When you are busy with work, you will immediately return to the original shape’ remarked Li (CM). Rui (CF) predicted ‘negative and reversed changes’, post-pandemic. These parents understood that powerful dynamics in contemporary life shape parenting in ways which might inhibit the reflective parenting approaches they described. Return to normality, it appeared, might undermine the perceived gains made through reflective parenting.

Conclusion

Where previous pandemic papers have highlighted changes in the practicalities of family life, by using a reflective parenting lens and processual approach, parents’ responses to those changes have been explored in the context of the ongoing evolution of parenting practices. Not only supporting a recognized shift in parenting practices in Turkish and Chinese cultural contexts, this pandemic quarantine data suggests a heightening of, or turning towards, reflective parenting (Menashe-Grinberg et al., 2022; Moore & Manning, 2019). As parents transferred their attentions away from the demands of both ‘normal’ life and established parenting norms, they focused on the more intense parent–child interactions which took place: in the participants’ view they came to know their children better, responded to their needs, and enjoyed greater warmth and relational balance. With the quarantine context affording reflective parenting, the data supports Fung et al.’s (2017) claim that Chinese parenting is ‘flexible, mutually-interactive and setting-dependent’ (p. 473), in this case reflexively responding to changed relational circumstances. Similarly, the relational warmth described by Turkish participants during quarantine substantiates scholarship which posits the interpersonal nature of Turkish parenting (Laible et al., 2017; Sen et al., 2014). The multifaceted, reflective dimensions arising from participants’ quarantine experiences, both individual and responsive, support the breadth in parenting profiles suggested by Xie and Li (2019). By recognizing their own and their child’s needs, some parents recognized that culturally-embedded discourses and contemporary ways of living might impede or restrict a reflective approach and openly questioned the continuation of traditional, cultural practices: the parent–child hierarchy and relational distance, educational competition and the parents’ role in academic success, moulding children to social expectations

and parental needs, and even grandparents' involvement in family childcare. Each parenting trope was, at times, challenged by the reflective parents described in this study.

However, while Smith (2011) argues that parental reflection brings agency and decision-making, this paper's participants did not always experience reflective parenting as emancipatory or empowering. External factors rooted in the social constructs and scripts of parenting (Pedersen, 2012), the parental tendency to self-blame (Dermott & Fowler, 2024), and the socio-historical context being experienced, at times led parents' reflective choices. Parenting constructions have a moral dimension while normative behaviours produce a culturally-idealized view of parents. These scripts which 'shape the "ontological narratives"' held by parents (Miller, 2005, p. 3) mean that, at times, participants experienced a tension between experiential reflections and culturally accepted ways of doing parenting. Reflective parenting, although apparently rooted in the individual's internal thinking, relational responses and choice-making, is thus situated within a broader social context and fundamentally entwined with both cultural norms and the social phenomenon taking place. Therefore, despite *being reflexive*, parents from both cultures were sometimes uncomfortable *about their reflections*, or the reflective experiences they described. This is particularly challenging in cultures where dominant values, such as China's concept of *Li*, teach adherence to social norms (Prevoe & Tamis-LeMonda, 2017). This may partially explain why reflective parenting is not well-established in parental narratives from more interrelated family contexts, where to acknowledge a reflective approach, challenges established parenting practices.

Despite this, Chinese and Turkish parents' reflective parenting during quarantine is captured here through the sudden positioning of parent and child together for long periods. In asking parents about their experiences of increased parent-child interaction, dimensions of reflective parenting were revealed, suggesting the quarantine context may be a factor in continuing contemporary shifts towards reflective parenting. Whilst 'reflexive choice' can lead to parental responsabilization (Jensen, 2018), it may not be reflection itself which is problematic, but the parental accountability which accompanies it (Balcombe, 2020). As seen here, powerful constructs of parenting, modify, restrict, or make uncomfortable, the process of reflective parenting, when parents recognize their potential judgement against assumed norms. Difficulties are compounded, according to Lee (2014), because reflective parenting contradicts the prevailing parallel discourse of parental determinism, which suggests parents should not *learn to raise children through experiential reflection*, but should already *know how to parent*; and if they do not know, then they must be guided by institutions, experts and governments.

In highlighting experiences of reflective parenting in non-Western contexts, this paper suggests that reflexivity, though sometimes personally challenging, might also be empowering within and against dominant parenting tropes. The paper's value lies in underlining the problem of assuming that all collective cultures lead to traditionally authoritarian parenting, and in demonstrating how the quarantine experience supported some parents' adoption of reflexive approaches through an increase in interpersonal family interactions.

We did not set out to use the pandemic context to explore reflective parenting. However, a processual lens afforded understanding of quarantine as an important social experience within broader socio-historical transitions in parenting, which enabled reflective parenting where parent-child interaction increased. Nevertheless, by

attributing their reflexivity directly to quarantine gains and expressing a concern that this approach may wane after life returned to normal, some participants implied that reflective parenting might be transitory. Further research is recommended to explore parents' perceptions of their parenting post-quarantine, to enable consideration of the degree to which reflective parenting is a settled dimension of these cultures, or whether, as participants feared, it requires increased parent–child interaction inhibited by culturally-specific or conventional life patterns. Quarantine reflective parenting should also be researched in contexts which contrast those in this paper: in rural communities; with lower qualified parents; with those in non-professional occupations; and in countries with a limited history of reflective parenting.

Acknowledgements

This work is not funded. We would like to thank all the participants who took part in this study and shared their experiences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Note

1. The endnote should read:- We acknowledge the criticisms of the individualist / collectivist binary, a deeper discussion of which is available in Wang & Liu (2010). However, we use these terms to highlight the simplistic way parenting approaches are often drawn, particularly along lines claimed to be culturally distinct. As our paper shows, such binary constructions fail to recognise not only the complexity of parenting, but also how approaches shift over time.

ORCID

Rachel Lehner-Mear  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0129-9935>

Yuwei Xu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4210-9963>

Chang Liu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1198-6990>

Yun Yu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7760-9736>

Mehmet Toran  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3457-9113>

Ramazan Sak  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7504-9429>

İkbal Tuba Şahin-Sak  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9054-6212>

References

- Agha, N. (2021). *Kinship, patriarchal structure and women's bargaining with the patriarchy in Rural Sindh, Pakistan*. PalgraveMacmillan.
- Akkan, B., Buğra, A., & Knijn, T. (2023). Gendered familialism in a Mediterranean context: Women's labor market participation and early childhood education and care in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 69, 111–127.
- Al-Dabbagh, M. (2022). Serial migrant mothers and permanent temporariness in Dubai. *Migration Studies*, 10(2), 253–273.
- Arzuk, D. (2020). Accidents waiting to happen: News coverage of children's health and safety in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 9(1), 91–106.

- Aslan, E., Erturk, S., Demir, H., & Aksoy, O. (2017). Fathers' attachment status to their infants. *International Journal of Caring Sciences*, 10(3), 1410–1418.
- Ataca, B., Kagıtcıbası, C., & Diri, A. (2005). The Turkish family and the value of children: Trends over time. In G. Trommsdorf, & B. Nuack (Eds.), *The value of children in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 91–119). Pabst Publishers.
- Balcombe, J. (2020). *Educating mother: Examining the relationship between childrearing and child-rearing pedagogy in 21st century Britain* [Doctoral thesis. University of Huddersfield].
- Benbassat, N., & Priel, B. (2015). Why is fathers' reflective function important? *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 32(1), 1–22.
- Blikstad-Balas, M., Roe, A., Pedersen Dalland, C., & Klette, K. (2022). Homeschooling in Norway during the pandemic. In F. Reimers (Ed.), *Primary and secondary education during covid-19* (pp. 177–202). Springer.
- Brengaard, M. (2018). Feeding mothers' love: Stories of breastfeeding and mothering in urban China. *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 26(4), 313–330.
- Cairns-Lee, H., Lawley, J., & Tosey, P. (2022). Enhancing researcher reflexivity about the influence of leading questions in interviews. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 58(1), 164–188.
- Carapito, E., Ribeiro, M., Pereira, A., & Roberto, M. (2017). Parenting stress and preschoolers' socio-emotional adjustment: The mediating role of parenting styles in parent-child dyads. *Journal of Family Studies*, 26(4), 594–610.
- Catenaccio, P. (2020). Do you understand?" Interactional strategies in ELF narratives of migration: A case study. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 38, 87–112.
- Chao, R. (2001). Extending research on the consequences of parenting style for Chinese Americans and European Americans. *Child Development*, 72(6), 1832–1843.
- Christopher, K. (2012). Extensive mothering: Employed mothers' constructions of the good mother. *Gender & Society*, 26(1), 73–96.
- Chua, A. (2011). *Battle hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Bloomsbury.
- Cordini, M., & de Angelis, G. (2021). Families between care education and work: The effects of the pandemic on educational inequalities in Italy and Milan. *European Journal of Education*, 56, 578–594.
- Dermott, E. (2016). Doing good parenthood: Reflexivity, practices and relationships. In A. Sparrman, A. Westerling, J. Lind, & K. Dannesboe (Eds.), *Doing good parenthood* (pp. 137–148). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dermott, E., & Fowler, T. (2024). Good normative parenting: Towards a non-teleological and relational ideal. *Journal of Family Studies*, 30(4), 603–616.
- Durmuş, E., & Tunca, A. (2023). Grandmothers who raise working parents' children: Influences on grandchildren, behavior management styles, and educational needs. *Family Relations*, 72(3), 993–1013.
- Erdem, G., Adli-İsleyen, M., Baltarlı, N., & Kılıç, E. (2022). Low-income Turkish mothers' conceptions and experiences of family life. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 756278.
- Erkan, S., & Toran, M. (2010). Child acceptance-rejection behaviors of lower and upper socioeconomic status mothers. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 38(3), 427–432.
- Eti, I. (2023). Associations between maternal parenting styles and beliefs about children's emotions on preschoolers' social skills and problem behaviours. *Early Child Development and Care*, 193(9–10), 1127–1140.
- Fonagy, P., Steele, M., Steele, H., Moran, G., & Higgitt, A. (1991). The capacity for understanding mental states: The reflective self in parent and child and its significance for security of attachment. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 12(3), 201–218.
- Fung, H., Li, J., & Lam, C. (2017). Multi-faceted discipline strategies of Chinese parenting. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 41(4), 472–481.
- Gan, Y., & Bilige, S. (2019). Parental involvement in home-based education and children's academic achievement in China. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 47(12), e8491.
- Gao, J., Brooks, C., Xu, Y., & Kitto, E. (2020). *What make an effective early childhood parenting programme: A systematic review of reviews and meta-analyses*. Report by the Centre for Teacher and Early Years Education, UCL.

- Gelir, I., & Duzen, N. (2022). Children's changing behaviours and routines, challenges and opportunities for parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education 3-13*, 50(7), 907–917.
- Gordo, L., Martinez-Pampliega, A., Elejalde, L., & Luyten, P. (2020). Do parental reflective functioning and parental competence affect the socioemotional adjustment of children? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 3621–3631.
- Gu, M. (2006). An analysis of the impact of traditional Chinese culture on Chinese education. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 2, 169–190.
- Gu, X. (2021). Parenting for success: The value of children and intensive parenting in post-reform China. *Child Indicators Research*, 14, 555–581.
- Guajardo, N., Snyder, G., & Petersen, R. (2009). Relationships among parenting practices, parental stress, child behaviour, and children's social-cognitive development. *Infant and Child Development*, 18, 37–60.
- Guo, K. (2013). Ideals and realities in Chinese immigrant parenting: Tiger mother versus others. *Journal of Family Studies*, 19(1), 44–52.
- Guo, X. (2021). Mothering practices across three generations of Chinese women: from liberated woman, virtuous wife and good mother, to intensive full-time mother. *Families Relationships and Societies*, 10(2), 269–285.
- Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Hazarika, O., & Das, S. (2020). Paid and unpaid work during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study of the gendered division of domestic responsibilities during lockdown. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(4), 429–439.
- Helwig, C., To, S., Liu, C., Wang, Q., & Yang, S. (2014). Judgements and reasoning about parental discipline involving induction and psychological control in China and Canada. *Child Development*, 85(3), 1150–1167.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations*. McGraw-Hill.
- Holliday, R. (2004). Reflecting the self. In C. Knowles, & P. Sweetman (Eds.), *Picturing the social landscape* (pp. 49–64). Routledge.
- Hong, X., Zhu, W., & Luo, L. (2022). Non-parental care arrangements, parenting stress, and demand for infant-toddler care in China: Evidence from a national survey. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–10.
- Jensen, T. (2018). *Parenting the crisis*. Policy Press.
- Kagitcibasi, C. (2007). *Family, self, and human development across cultures*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kocayoruk, E., Celik, B., Altintas, E., & Gumus, G. (2023). Parental control, self-construal and well-being: Evidence from individualistic and collective culture. *Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Journal*, 13(68), 92–105.
- Kuscul, G. H., & Adamsons, K. (2022). Maternal and paternal predictors of Turkish fathers' nurturing and caregiving. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 53(9), 1187–1205.
- Laible, D., Kumru, A., Caro, G., Streit, C., Selcuk, B., & Sayil, M. (2017). The longitudinal associations among temperament, parenting, and Turkish children's prosocial behaviors. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1057–1062.
- Lam, C., Kwong, W., & To, S. (2019). Has parenting changed over past decade? A qualitative study of generational shifts in parenting. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 9(2), 42–47.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods*. University of California Press.
- Lee, E. (2014). The normalisation of parent training. In J. Bristow (Ed.), *Standing up to Supernanny* (pp. 126–128). Societas Imprint Academic.
- Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., & Macvarish, J. (2023). *Parenting culture studies* (2nd). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Li, X. (2020). Fathers' involvement in Chinese societies: Increasing presence, uneven progress. *Child Development Perspectives*, 14(3), 150–156.
- Li, M. (2022). Only mother is the best in the world: Maternal guilt, migrant motherhood, and changing ideologies of childrearing in China. *Journal of Family Communication*, 22(2), 87–103.

- Li, X., & Liu, Q. (2020). Parent–grandparent coparenting relationship, marital conflict and parent–child relationship in Chinese parent–grandparent coparenting families. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 1–8.
- Liu, J., & Bray, M. (2022). Responsibilised parents and shadow education: Managing the precarious environment in China. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 43(6), 878–897.
- Liu, Y., Sulaimani, M., & Henning, J. (2020). The significance of parental involvement in the development in infancy. *Journal of Educational Research & Practice*, 10(1), 161–166.
- Liu, J., Xiao, B., Hipson, W., Coplan, R., Yang, P., & Cheah, C. (2018). Self-regulation, learning problems, and maternal authoritarian parenting in Chinese children: A developmental cascades model. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27, 4060–4070.
- Liu, J., Zhou, T., Yuan, M., Ren, M., Bian, X., & Coplan, R. (2021). Daily routines, parent-child conflict, and psychological maladjustment among Chinese children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 1–9.
- Lo, S., & Lindsay, J. (2022). My children “My grandchildren”: Navigating intergenerational ambivalence in grandparent childcare arrangements in Hong Kong. *Family Relations*, 71, 1834–1851.
- Long, Q., Rothenberg, W., Liu, Q., & Chang, L. (2021). Four domains of parenting in China. In J. Lansford, W. Rothenberg, & M. Bornstein (Eds.), *Parenting across cultures from childhood to adolescence* (pp. 42–62). Routledge.
- Lucas, S. (2023). Mare’s model of education transitions: Reflections on a powerful continuing resource for understanding. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 88, 1–8.
- Lucius-Hoene, G., & Deppermann, A. (2000). Narrative identity empiricized: A dialogical and positioning approach to autobiographical research interviews. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10(1), 199–222.
- Luyten, P., Nijssens, L., Fonagy, P., & Mayes, L. (2017). Parental reflective functioning: Theory, research, and clinical applications. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 70(1), 174–199.
- Menashe-Grinberg, A., Shneor, S., Meiri, G., & Atzaba-Poria, N. (2022). Improving the parent-child relationship and child adjustment through parental reflective functioning group intervention. *Attachment & Human Development*, 24(2), 208–228.
- Miller, T. (2005). *Making sense of motherhood*. Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, J., & Manning, J. (2019). What counts as critical interpersonal and family communication research? A review of an emerging field of inquiry. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 43(1), 40–57.
- Neece, C., McIntyre, L., & Fenning, R. (2020). Examining the impact of COVID-19 in ethnically diverse families with young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 64(10), 739–749.
- Pedersen, D. (2012). The good mother, the good father, and the good parent: Gendered definitions of parenting. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 24(3), 230–246.
- Pitzalis, M., & Spano, E. (2021). Stay home and be unfair: The amplification of inequalities among families with young children during Covid-19. *European Journal of Education*, 56, 595–606.
- Prevoo, M., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2017). Parenting and globalization in Western countries: Explaining differences in parent-child interactions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 15, 33–39.
- Ren, L., & Edwards, C. (2015). Pathways of influence: Chinese parents’ expectations, parenting styles, and child social competence. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(4), 614–630.
- Sadikoğlu, Z. Z., & Erdoğan Coşkun, A. (2024). Being ‘a good mother’ in Türkiye: Negotiating expert advice and intensive motherhood. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 1–17.
- Selcuk, S., Ucanok, Z., & Sayil, M. (2022). Turkish adolescents’ interpretations of psychological and behavioral control: Relation with adjustment problems and moderating factors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31, 1387–1403.
- Sen, H., Yavuz-Muren, H., & Yagmurlu, B. (2014). Parenting: The Turkish context. In H. Selin (Ed.), *Parenting across cultures* (pp. 175–192). Springer.
- Settles, B., Sheng, X., with Zang, Y., & Zhao, J. (2013). The one-child policy and its impact on Chinese families. In C. Kwok-Bun (Ed.), *International handbook of Chinese families* (pp. 627–646). Springer.

- Shum, A., Klampe, M., Pearcey, S., Cattell, C., Burgess, L., Lawrence, P., & Waite, P. (2023). Parenting in a pandemic: A qualitative exploration of parents' experiences of supporting their children during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(5), 2335–2355.
- Slade, A. (2005). Parental reflective functioning: An introduction. *Attachment and Human Development*, 7(3), 269–281.
- Smith, R. (2011). On dogs and children: Judgements in the realm of meaning. *Ethics and Education*, 6(2), 171–180.
- Sparrman, A., Westerling, A., Lind, J., & Dannesboe, K. (2016). *Doing good parenthood*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sunar, D. (2005). Change and continuity in the Turkish middle class family. In R. Liljestrom, & E. Ozdalga (Eds.), *Autonomy and dependence in the family* (pp. 219–240). Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul.
- Sylvia, S., Warrinnier, N., Luo, R., Yue, A., Attanasio, O., Medina, A., & Rozelle, S. (2021). From quantity to quality: Delivering a home-based parenting intervention through China's family planning cadres. *The Economic Journal*, 131(635), 1365–1400.
- Tavory, I. (2020). Interviews and inference: Making sense of interview data in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43, 449–465.
- Tezel Şahin, F., & Şahin, B. (2020). Turkish grandmothers' experiences of caring for their grandchildren: A qualitative study. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(3), 284–295.
- Thomson, R. (2007). The qualitative longitudinal case history: Practical, methodological and ethical reflections. *Social Policy & Society*, 6(4), 571–582.
- Topal Özgen, G., & Ekşi, H. (2023). Expertise in motherhood: A Grounded Theory study on motherhood during middle childhood. *The Family Journal*, 31(1), 78–87.
- Toran, M., Sak, R., Xu, Y., Şahin-Sak, İT, & Yu, Y. (2021). Parents and children during the COVID-19 quarantine process: Experiences from Turkey and China. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(1), 21–39.
- Ulus, L., Sezgin, E., & Uzun, M. (2020). An examination of the relationship of sleep habits with emotion regulation. *Revista Universidad y Sociedad*, 12(4), 126–134.
- Ünlü, S. (2023). Social policy suggestions of Turkish fathers to increase father involvement. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 15(2), 1257–1281.
- Üzümcü, H. (2024). Children's personal lives in the family: Achieving relational agency and individual privacy in intrafamilial relationships in Türkiye. *Children & Society*, 38(4), 1130–1146.
- Uzun, H., Karaca, N., & Metin, S. (2021). Assessment of parent-child relationship in Covid-19 pandemic. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 120, 1–11.
- Wall, G. (2010). Mothers' experiences with intensive parenting and brain development discourse. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(3), 253–263.
- Wang, G., & Liu, Z. (2010). What collective? Collectivism and relationalism from a Chinese perspective. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 3(1), 42–63.
- Wang, Y., Shao, J., & Li, H. (2024). Sharenting to define mothering: A grounded theory study of middle-class mothers in urban China. *Feminism & Psychology*, 1–24.
- Westland, H., Vervoot, S., Kars, M., & Jaarsma, T. (2024). Interviewing people on sensitive topics: Challenges and strategies. *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, 24(3), 488–493.
- Wickenden, M., Shaw, J., Thompson, S., & Rohwerder, B. (2021). Lives turned upside down in COVID-19 times: Exploring disabled people's experiences in 5 low-and-middle income countries using narrative interviews. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 41(3).
- Xie, S., & Li, H. (2019). Tiger Mom, Panda Dad: A study of contemporary Chinese parenting profiles. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 189(2), 284–300.
- Xu, Y., Farver, J., Zhang, J., Zeng, Q., Yu, L., & Cai, B. (2005). Mainland Chinese parenting styles and parent-child interaction. *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 29(6), 524–531.
- Yagmurlu, B., & Altan, O. (2010). Maternal socialization and child temperament as predictors of emotion regulation in Turkish preschoolers. *Infant and Child Development*, 19, 275–296.
- Yagmurlu, B., Citlak, B., Dost, A., & Leyendecker, B. (2009). Child socialization goals of Turkish mothers: An investigation of education related within-culture variation. *Turkish Journal of Psychology*, 24(63), 1–15.