

The Relation Between Parenting Styles and Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Play

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts (Child Studies) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September, 2021

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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Master of Arts (Child Studies)

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Abstract

The Relation Between Parenting Styles and Parents' Perceptions about their Children's Play

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Play can facilitate children's understanding of the world, help them learn how to control their feelings, practice life skills, learn to socialize with others, as well as develop their cognitive skills (Emsli & Mesle, 2008; Kayılı, 2010; Moore & Russ, 2008; Taggart et al., 2020; Yılmaz & Pala, 2019). On the other hand, parent-child interactions and how parents perceive their children's play types can make a fundamental difference in children's early learning and development, and have, therefore, been widely studied in diverse contexts (Khoshbakht, 2012; Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2006; Lin & Li, 2019; Manz & Bracaliello, 2016). This qualitative research investigated how five Iranian mothers perceived their children's play and how this perception was related to their perceived parenting practices. A cultural framework – the Developmental Niche Theory (Super & Harkness, 1986) – was used to understand these Iranian mothers' perceptions who were living in Iran. The participants were interviewed about their practices and perceptions of their young children (aged 3 to 5-year-old). The participants completed the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, 2001), and they were also interviewed about their perceptions of their own parenting styles and practices.

The findings suggested that mothers' cultural backgrounds and their own childhood play experiences influence their perspectives about their children's play. The mothers also perceived playtime as an important element in children's life, and provided their children with opportunities to decide about their play types/toys. Finally, mothers' perceptions of their parenting and their beliefs about it seemed to impact their perceptions of play.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by showing my deepest gratitude to all of my participants. Their words were the rich sources of inspiration, and their stories never ceased to move me. One cannot imagine the value of learning from the lived experiences and I hope I have been able, at least partially, to reverence that of participating individuals in this project. I also thank everyone who offered their kindest help with the recruitment process and provided me with this opportunity.

I wish to express my most sincere appreciation for having Dr. Harriet Petrakos as my supervisor, whose profound knowledge and extraordinary enthusiasm guided me throughout the journey and gave me the amount of support that I could not ask for more. She never withheld from me a single moment of time or a slight touch of knowledge whenever I needed her help, and for that, I am deeply grateful. I would also like to thank the Committee members, Dr. Elsa Lo and Dr. Holly Rechhia, for their unique perspectives and concise comments, which were immediately reflected in the quality of this work.

I have always been blessed with the generous and boundless love and support of my family in every step I have taken in my life, and this time was no exception. My parents and siblings whose support and passion were not weakened by the long distance between us; my husband whose love and spirit never allowed our home's morale to diminish, despite of the difficulties of the pandemic, and finally someone who has probably no idea (yet) how he has filled my heart with overwhelming hope and joy... my little boy, Daniel, who gifted to me the priceless motherhood experience and helped me realize, more than ever, the cruciality of parent-child relationship and child play... For all, I am forever grateful.

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The Relation Between Parental Styles and Parents' Perceptions about their Children's Play

Play has an important role in children's development and can be used as a critical opportunity for them to learn successfully (Emslie & Mesle, 2008; Russ, 2003). Play is a tool that children use to communicate, enjoy, discover and learn from their surroundings; and develop the skills they may need later on (Bergen, 2002; Brussoni et al., 2018; Harley, 1971; Holmes et al., 2019; Ihmeideh, 2019; Taggart et al., 2020). In other words, through play children can gain more information and acquire new cognitive skills which will be helpful in their adolescence (Ahmad, 2016). For instance, when they are playing on a water table, they learn the concept of "sink and float". Appropriate material and play practices foster children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Emslie & Mesle, 2008; Moore & Russ, 2008; Russ, 2003).

Children learn through their interactions with their settings and other people, and Piaget (1952) believed that play is one of the most important tools through which children can gain knowledge. Children are intrinsically motivated to play and share their daily activities and routines in company of other children (Nestor & Moser, 2018). Play takes place spontaneously and children play both for having fun and for learning the real-life behaviors (Aksoy, 2019). Play may also facilitate children's growth and development (Erikson, 1963). Elkind (2008) states that children who have the chance to play may develop improved academic achievement and self-discipline in the future.

Play is a comfortable path through which children can experiment and explore their environment, without undertaking the real world's consequences (Nestor & Moser, 2018). These authors believe that engaging in play helps children to increase their well-being and thriving, it is therapeutic in and of itself, and is considered as children's "occupation" where the child is able to take part in a personal experience. Although play is a method for children to self-create some

experiences, which may empower them to acquire cognitive, social, and emotional skills they could not acquire in any other ways, some caregivers and educators may not value its impact on children (Elkind, 2008). Therefore, play has an important role in children's lives and may be a necessary element in the process of their learning.

Play Stages

Play theorists distinguish different stages and levels in children's play. According to Piaget (1952), the children's play level depends on the cognitive stage they are in. The first stage is called "sensorimotor" which contains the child's repetitive movements either with or without an object. The second stage of play as stated by Piaget is *symbolic/pretend play* which is correspondent with "pre-operational" stage of development. The next stage in play is *games with rules*. In this stage, children become aware of and understand the rules in activities that can be performed either individually or in a group.

Parten (1932) is another theorist who created stages based on different levels of social engagement in play. Parten described six stages of play including *unoccupied behavior* in which the child seems uninterested in others and is mostly engaged in playing with his body parts such as his hair and hands; *Onlooker* where the child does not actively participate in other children's play but watches others playing from distance; *solitary independent play* when the child is playing alone with the toys different from others'; and *parallel activity* where the child plays alone but along with other children. In this type of play the toys that the child is using is similar or related to the ones that other children are engaged with. Two last stages are under the category of *group play* which are associative and cooperative stages. The main difference between these two play types is that in associative play, children share toys, converse with each other, and everyone has the same status in the game. However, in cooperative play, children have division

of labour, they are organized for the purpose of making or doing something, and there is usually one child in charge to make the commands and control the others.

Play types

There are various types of play which children tend to get involved in. For example, dramatic play, also known as pretend play, includes new projections to different objects, changing the objects' functions, and symbolic combinations (Piaget, 1952). With Vygotsky's (2004) definition of creativity in mind, one can say that pretend play facilitates the creative thinking in children's development. In Russ and Wallace's (2013) study, creativity in children's lives is manifested in the form of pretend play, and there is a reciprocal influence between pretend play and creativity. Although pretend play is a common type of play in childhood, children by the age of five tend to have more real activities such as book reading rather than pretend play (Taggart et al., 2020).

Another type of play is physical/risky play, in which children need to do more physical activities and will learn how to face the challenges, explore boundaries, and learn to decide in the case of injury or harm (Little & Wyver, 2008; Sandseter, 2009). Fathers tend to engage in this type of physical play more than mothers and it improves father-child bonding (Bentley et al., 2012; StGeorge et al., 2018). White et al. (2013) illustrate that parents believe physical play (like rough-and-tumble) will teach their children how to control their body strength and withhold them from hostile attitudes; management of social behaviors will decrease the probability of conduct and antisocial behaviors. Research has found that parents' attitudes and their perception about risky play will affect their child's engagement in this type of play (Sallis et al., 2000) and access to risky play (Little et al., 2011).

Play and Parents

Since parents and guardians are the first people with whom children have contact from the earliest moments of their birth, parents play an essential role in the child's life. Parents are responsible for ensuring their children access to opportunities in which they can be socialized (Backett-Milburn & Harden, 2004), however, some parental beliefs may lead to parenting behaviors that may limit children's activities (Little, 2010). What parents think of and how they perceive different kinds of play can act as either a facilitator or a barrier for their children's access to play opportunities (Boufous et al., 2004). Parents who believe in the advantages of play on children and their development, are more likely to encourage their children's play, interact more with their children in play settings, and act as facilitators in play activities (Parmar et al., 2004). This is why parents are considered as influential figures in their children's exploration of the environment and engagement in play (Chak, 2007).

Parent-child play may be used to strengthen familial relationships since it helps parents to fully engage with their children's interest and give them love and attention (Ward et al. 2019). On the other hand, parents' perception of play affects how parents create a high-quality environment for their children in the home setting (Farver & Wimbarti, 1995; Haight et al., 1999). Since one of the functions of play may be to facilitate the process of creative thinking (Silverman, 2016), parents' vital role in providing appropriate play material to facilitate children's creativity has been studied (McFarland & Laird, 2018; Parmar et al., 2004). Parents' beliefs about play vary; for example, some parents think that play helps children prepare for school whereas others may think that play is beneficial and educational in and of itself, and others consider play as pointless and of no use to children's development (Colliver, 2016; Parmar et al. 2004). But most of the parents believe that play has practical use, and if the

appropriate time and opportunity to free-play is given to children, they will initiate creative activities (Gullikson, 2018).

Play theorists believe that play is extremely vital for children and they display various developmental competencies in play environments; the ones which may never be exhibited during other non-play settings (Emslie & Mesle, 2008; Fasoli, 2014). Parents' role is important in establishing and providing play environment and material for their children, encourage them to play with their peers, and to support their children's play (McFarland & Laird, 2018; Parmar et al., 2004). The parents' understanding of their parenting roles and their beliefs about play will be reflected in the types of play they encourage in their children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Fisher et al., 2008). When parents value and have positive perceptions of child play, there may be more chances for the child to be considered socially competent and gain more from play (Lin & Yawkey, 2014).

Parents' Play Perceptions and Culture

Although play may be a highly engaging activity for children which may lead to learning and expanding their knowledge of their surroundings, its nature and context may be influenced by cultural considerations (Harkness, 1992). Parenting has some universal aspects, however, parental norms and perceptions are possibly rooted and constructed in parent's cultural belief systems (Singh & Gupta, 2012). For example, McFarland and Laird (2018) conducted a study in rural areas of Australia and the United States, and found that some parents felt outdoor play was important for their children's motor skills and exploration of the environment, the parents were also worried about their children's safety. These authors stated that parents tried to provide opportunities for their children to engage in outdoor play, however, they also protected their children by hovering over them. In other words, parents tried to balance their

feelings/perceptions and their children's needs (Little, 2010). Another study performed on Irish-American and Chinese families illustrated that parents who valued play and perceived themselves as suitable play partners for their children and were more likely to facilitate their children's play environments in ways to help their children benefit more from play (Haight et al., 1999). Also, LaForett and Mendez (2017) found that parents who registered their children in Head Start programs in the United States were inclined to support play and had children with more interactive play skills. It seems that parents in this study, tried to facilitate their children's environment to benefit more from social-like interactions in play setting (LaForett & Mendez, 2017). Likewise, Taiwanese children whose parents had more positive play perceptions tended to be more socially competent in play situations (Lin & Yawkey, 2014).

However, other studies found that some parents have dichotomous beliefs about play. More specifically, Lin et al. (2019) studied six Chinese parents' beliefs about their children's play. Although some parents showed awareness that play contributes to their children's development and believed in play benefits, they preferred to engage their children in academic activities rather than in play. It seems that these parents considered play as an important element in their children's development but not for their academic preparation. As Lin et al. (2019) explained, these Chinese parents thought that play would distract the children's attention from serious learning and that it should only be allowed when there is no education involved in the activities. It may be related to traditional classroom learning in China which encourages children to focus on learning and limit playing in the classroom (Jiang & Han 2016; Lin & Li, 2019). Lin et al. (2019) used the term "eduplay" which was first described by Rao and Li (2009), as a combination of a Chinese version of play-based learning and tried to merge the concept of child-centered play with adult-centered education. It seems that Chinese parents tend to merge play

and academic learning opportunities for their children to play and learn at the same time, instead of separating these two types of contexts for their children (Rao & Li, 2009). This idea may be contrary to Western parents' beliefs about play, which highlight the importance of play in children's lives and their learning (Fleer et al., 2009).

In this project, Iranian parents' perceptions were studied by investigating parents' beliefs, thoughts, and ideas about their children's play. Based on the research I did, although there are some studies in which quantitative methods have been used such as high number of participants, using questionnaires, and conducting statistical methods (e.g., Alizadeh et al., 2011; Khoshbakht, 2012; Ndari et al., 2019), a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, questionnaires, case studies, and observations either directly or through video-taping have been used in the majority of the studies (e.g., Amir, 2013; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006; Linebarger, 2015; Raja, 2017). When investigating peoples' perceptions regarding a topic, it will be more helpful if the researcher gives the participants more freedom to talk about their opinions and perspectives. By only using the quantitative methods, the opportunity for the participants may become limited in terms of sharing their life experiences related to the topic and that in turn, may lead to a restricted amount of data. Whereas, the qualitative methods such as interview is more likely to open the participants to an extended amount of opportunities for them to share their stories, real life experiences, and some examples of their lives to clarify what they think and how they look at the topic in question. Besides, in the current project, the context – which is children's play – is of importance, and according to Hays and Singh (2012) qualitative methods provide the opportunity to use rich information regarding the setting and context in which the topic is taking place. Investigating parents' perceptions of their children's play requires a closer look to understand the ways by which participants' create

and interpret their real life experiences; and that is more likely to be achieved through qualitative methods.

To my knowledge there are no studies on Iranian participants' perceptions and play in early childhood. Only one study focused on school-aged children to understand the parents' perceptions of their children's after-school outdoor activities (Amiri et al., 2013). This qualitative study followed 952 primary students in the third and fifth grades, who were enrolled in Iranian schools, in Tehran. Their parents group included 942 mothers and fathers, were included in the study as well. Two semi-structured questionnaires were completed by the children and parents. The findings showed that only 27 percent of parents considered their children's outdoor activities safe. In the other words, the majority of the parents perceived their children's choices of play places after school as unsafe and dangerous. Amiri et al. (2013) concluded that parents' judgment of outdoor play and its hazards affected their attitudes toward their children's access to after-school activities and may cause some limitations for children's development. This research has implications for understanding the impact of Iranian parents' perceptions of outdoor play and access to after-school activities.

The Developmental Niche Framework and Parenting

In this study, the Developmental Niche framework was used to understand Iranian parents' beliefs about their children's play, because it allowed for an understanding of how cultures guide the process of development (Harkness & Super, 1994). Super and Harkness (2002) highlight that children's environment is not a random series of rules, situations and features, but is based on culturally related values, customs, and interactions. Understanding parents' ethnotheories – cultural models through which parents think about their children's different aspects of development – provides information regarding their perceptions of what they

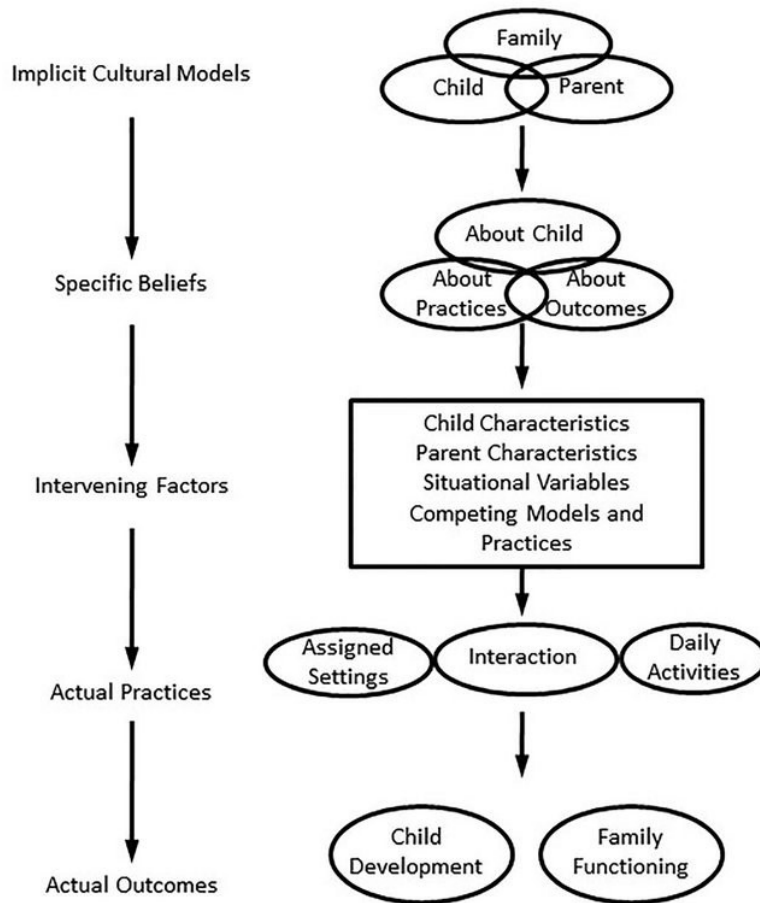
promote in their children's environment and about their child-rearing strategies (Harkness et al., 2009). Harkness et al. (2009) believe that ethnotheories are mostly implicit and are known as “natural” ways of thinking or acting in a culture. An in-depth understanding of these ways can provide important information about parents’ thinking about play.

Harkness et al. (2009) believed that parents’ ethnotheories provide a basis for their ideas and regularities toward their children’s environment for learning. Since play is an inseparable element of the child's setting and his/her learning process (Emslie & Mesle, 2008), learning about parents' perceptions in terms of how they see the significance of play is important (Parmar et al., 2004). The way that parents see the link between play and learning, which happens through their cultural lenses, shapes their interactions with their children (StGeorge et al., 2018). Three elements in this framework guide development, including the caretaker’s psychology, the customs of childcare/child rearing, and child’s physical and social settings. By analyzing all these three elements of developmental niche framework, one can figure out how they influence the child’s environment (including parental ethnotheories) and in turn parents’ behaviors toward their children (Super & Harkness, 2002).

According to the developmental niche framework, the psychology of caretaker includes parental ethnotheories such as parents' beliefs about children's needs, and parental goals and techniques for child rearing (Super & Harkness, 1986). For instance, how parents facilitate children's engagement in play activities illustrates their goals for their children's development and expresses their beliefs about competencies of their children. Psychology of the caretaker, or more specifically, the parental ethnotheories which originate from the parents’ cultural background, shape the parents' approach toward child rearing and influences their choices they make for their children (Harkness et al., 2011).

Super and Harkness (2005) have created a hierarchical model in which the significance of the psychology of the caretaker is manifested. In this model, implicit cultural beliefs and models are located on the top. These beliefs may refer to parents' psychological dispositions, perceptions, and incentives about cultures' features which in turn shape their attributes (Culture & Distance, 1973). In this part, both parents' ethnotheories are interwoven and both mother and father's cultural beliefs play a role. Further down, these cultural models change to more specific acts and practices which consequently shape the parents' goals for child rearing. These practices may include parents' perceptions regarding importance of the family, child rearing strategies, or any other types of cultural related beliefs. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy, the actual practices and beliefs are found which influence the child's environment directly. In this hierarchical model, Super and Harkness (2005) have tried to show the leading role of parental theories in creating and reshaping the other two subsystems. Hence, the psychology of the caretaker plays a pivotal role in parents' behaviors toward the child's daily activities and how they manage their children's play opportunities (Schaik et al., 2020).

Figure 1. *Theoretical model of Parental Ethnotheories, Practices, and Outcomes*



In this study, parents' perceptions were studied by investigating parents' beliefs, thoughts, and ideas about their children's play; something which was highly influenced by parents' cultural background (Becker, 2014; Kazemeini & Pajoheshgar, 2013; Lin et al., 2019; StGeorge et al., 2018). Based on my literature review, some studies worked on parents' perceptions of play by quantitative methods with a large number of participants, using surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Alizadeh et al., 2011; Khoshbakht, 2012; Ndari et al., 2019). In addition, both quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, questionnaires, case studies, and observations were used in the majority of the studies (e.g., Amir, 2013; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006; Linebarger, 2015; Raja, 2017). When

investigating peoples' perceptions regarding a topic, and in an exploratory study, researchers can give the participants more freedom to talk about their opinions and perspectives. By limiting participants to quantitative questionnaires, and sharing their life experiences related to the topic, we may not allow for an in-depth understanding of the topic. In-depth interviews are more likely to facilitate participants sharing their stories, real life experiences and thoughts about parenting and their perceptions of play. Providing an opportunity for parents to discuss contextual information regarding their children's play, may lead us to a rich data regarding the setting, how parents create and interpret their real life experiences, and their children's natural play environment (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Parenting Styles

Another important factor that may influence parents' perceptions of children's play is parenting styles and their relation with parents' perceptions regarding children's play. The concept of parental style was first introduced by Diana Baumrind in the 1960s. the concept "parenting style" is defined as ways by which parents assert their power and control over their children (Baumrind, 2012). In other words, the package of different strategies and practices that parents use to parent their children and raise them is considered as their parenting styles. Baumrind (1966, 1968, 1971, 1991) extensively studied the association between children's development and their parents' parental styles. Numerous studies have shown that the type of parenting the child receives, plays an important role in his/her development (Baumrind, 1971; Carson & Parke, 1996; Putallaz, 1987; Roberts & Strayer, 1987).

Baumrind (1966) was the first one who classified this concept into three categorizations. The first category is "permissive". Parents with this style are acceptant, indulgent, and do not care about disciplinary rules. These parents tend to avoid exercising the power over their

children, make few demands regarding household responsibilities, and let the child regulate his/her activities, rather than being a source for him/her to modify the child's behaviors.

Baumrind then introduced the second parenting style as "authoritarian". Authoritarian parents are strict regarding assigning house work to their children, respecting the rules, following parents' instructions, and punishing the children in case of disobedience. These parents do not entitle their children to have independence and deprive them from sharing their ideas since only the parents' words are acceptable. The last parenting style described by Baumrind is called "authoritative" which is a balance between freedom and responsibility (Patterson & Turney, 1962), and is basically considered as a type which falls between these other two types. Authoritative parents tend to stabilize asserting the power and respecting the child's individuality. These parents try to explain the rules and the logic behind them, they listen to their children's ideas, set rules and stick to them but at the same time they avoid enforcing their opinions. They try to guide the child toward the desirable direction while considering the child's interests at the same time (Baumrind, 1966). Studies show that the children of authoritative parents have the most favorable development, the children with parents in permissive and authoritarian styles have negative outcomes in their development, and children with neglectful parents have the poorest development (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) used the term "parenting patterns" to explain parents' different ways of behaving with their children, and they specifically studied the impact of these patterns in child's development. Gafoor and Kurukkan (2014) defined parenting as the activities that parents do to help their children improve. Underlying parental behaviors, there are two main dimensions which affect the way mothers and fathers parent their children; parental demandingness, and parental responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Demandingness refers

to the extent to which parents try to enrich their children's uniqueness and autonomy, and their efforts to help children meet their needs based on the societal and familial norms (Baumrind, 1971). Baumrind (1971) on the other hand explains responsiveness as to the parents' control and supervision over their children; the disciplines parents use to regulate and monitor their children, which can also be defined as the degree of parents' support and warmth. By using two dimensions - demandingness and responsiveness - in explaining the parental styles, Maccoby and Martin (1983), added one more style to what Baumrind had created; neglectful parenting. They described the parental styles as combinations of these two dimensions. Based on what the parental values, behaviors, and practices are (Baumrind, 1971), four parental styles appear which include authoritative (high demandingness/ high responsiveness), permissive (low demandingness/high responsiveness), authoritarian (high demandingness/low responsiveness), and neglectful (low demandingness/low responsiveness).

Baumrind (2012) believed how parents practice power and force in their relationships with their children, defines their parental styles. In contrary to permissive and neglectful styles in which parents avoid using power, parents with authoritative and authoritarian styles assert power and force over their children to make them follow the rules and obey the commands (Baumrind, 1966). However, Baumrind (2012) explained that the kind of power which parents use in these two types of parental style, differ significantly. The power which parents use in authoritative style is “confrontive”; it focuses on explaining the reasons behind the commands, is based on the consequences of the behavior, is open to negotiation, and aims to regulate and discipline the children which the child is able to choose between either obeying or suffering the known consequences. Whereas, the type of power which is used in authoritarian style is “coercive”; it is

forceful, aims to maintain the power hierarchy, lacks explanations, includes unnegotiable commands and threats which the child has no other options than obeying (Baumrind, 2012).

Determining the factors that influence parental attitudes and perceptions is difficult. However, several studies have shown that parenting styles may be influenced by culture and the environment in which parents have been raised (Chang et al., 2004; Rodriguez et al. 2009; Stevenson et al., 1992; Van Campen & Russell, 2010). For example, in some cross-cultural studies Turkish parents were found to overprotect their children and that in turn, resulted in exposing children to excessive amount of warmth, control and no responsibilities (Alat et al., 2012; Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016). There is a need to understand parents' cultural values and consider the norms, beliefs, and disciplines they maintained in their own parenting styles. Ndari et al. (2019) believe that parents raise children based on their understanding of their own culture. Therefore, knowing parents' ethnotheories, that is, their beliefs and views of children's development and their perceived parenting practices may inform us how parents influence their children's play.

A review of the literature revealed only three studies investigating Iranian parents' parenting styles. Alizadeh et al. (2011) investigated the relation between the parents' parenting styles and their children's behavioral problems. To this aim, 681 mothers of children in primary schools, in Tehran completed the Parent Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). Moreover, children's behavioral problems (both internalized and externalized ones) were assessed using the Children's Behavioral Checklist (CBCL). The results showed a significant correlation between the mothers' parenting styles and their children's behavioral problems. For example, authoritative parenting style was directly related to fewer internalized and externalized behavioral problems in children. However, permissive parenting style was positively correlated with internalized problems and

the children's higher tendency to internalizing their behaviors. Lastly, Alizadeh et al. (2011) also demonstrated how authoritarian parenting style was significantly related to children's both internalized and externalized behavioral problems.

Another study was for Shafi'poor et al. (2015) who believed behavioral and emotional problems were the most common forms of psychological trauma in children. Similarly to previous studies, these authors explained how parents' parenting strategies may affect the children's personality, and utilizing inefficient parenting styles could lead to many consequences including behavioral problems. To this aim, Shafi'poor et al. (2015) conducted a study on 741 first to fifth graders in Rasht, Iran. These authors gathered the teachers' reports about children's internalized and externalized problems, while their parents were given Baumrind's Parenting Style Questionnaire. The results showed that 96 percent of the parents had authoritative parenting style, which was characterized by a mixture of control with high emotional support, appropriate levels of independence, and reciprocal parent-child communication. Similar to Alizadeh et al. (2011), Shafi'poor et al. (2015) found that authoritative parenting style had a significant negative correlation with children's both internalized and externalized problems. These authors finally concluded that permissive parenting style, that was characterized by low and indifferent attitude toward the child's behavior could lead to behavioral problems.

Finally, Bahrami et al. (2017) also conducted a study to identify the determinants of mothers' authoritative parenting styles. In the first stage, these authors distributed Baumrind's parenting style questionnaire among 272 Iranian mothers who had at least one preschooler. The results showed that only 157 mothers had an authoritative parenting style, hence, were chosen to be the main participants. Bahrami et al. (2017) conducted seven other questionnaires and scales including NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Hazan and Shaver's Attachment Style

Questionnaire, Malhotra Temperament Schedule (MTS), Marital Satisfaction Scale, Work-Family Conflict Scale, Gross and John's Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and Social Support Appraisals Scale (SS-A). Results showed a significant negative correlation between authoritative parenting style and the mothers' neuroticism. In other words, mothers who had scored high in their authoritative parenting style, were emotionally stable and were able to focus on their children's requirements. Finally, Bahrami et al.'s study illustrated that mother's authoritative parenting style can predict the child's sociability in the future. That is to say, children who received more positive parenting may have fewer behaviour challenges. Overall, the findings were consistent with North American studies that favoured authoritative parenting styles for children's development.

Parenting Styles and Parents' Play Perceptions

Knowing the importance parenting styles have on children's development, I am interested in understanding the relation between parents' parenting styles and parents' perceptions of their children's play. Some studies have focused on the different parental styles and parents' play behaviors/thoughts, and how parents facilitate or impede their children's play; others have described parents' play perceptions in general (e.g., Carter et al., 2016; Dubrow & Howe, 1999; Khoshbakht, 2012; Loprinzi et al., 2014; Amiri, 2013; Schary et al., 2012). In one study, Cevher-Kalburan and Ivrendi (2016) studied 890 Turkish parents of 4-6 year-old children and investigated parents' perceptions regarding risky play (i.e., uncertainty about and severity of events/consequences). They used questionnaires to investigate how parents with different parental styles think about risky play for their children. The findings of this study showed that authoritarian parents who were considered overprotective tended to assert more control and attention to their children while engaging in risky play (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016).

These authors also found that authoritarian Turkish parents limited their children's opportunities toward risky play since they had a constant fear of danger for children. In contrast, parents with permissive parental style were found to be lenient with risky games and believed in the benefits of this type of play. This may be due to permissive parents' attitude who are inclined to have almost no limits for their children (Baumrind, 1966). Parents with permissive parenting style were more likely to provide opportunities for and support their children to engage in risky play (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016).

In parallel with previous study about parents' perceptions regarding play through the lens of their parental styles, Schary et al. (2012) did a study in the U.S and asked 201 parents of preschoolers to complete Child Rearing Questionnaire (Paterson & Sanson, 1999) about their parental styles and then investigated its link with their perceptions with regard to their children's active play behaviors. This tool was previously described by Wake et al. (2007) and the questions related to three parental dimensions including warmth, control, and irritability. The 5-point Likert responses were ranged from never to all the time and were intended to investigate different types of parents' behaviors toward their children's active play. These authors found that authoritative parents (who use more of warmth and control in their parenting practices) were more likely to encourage their preschoolers to get engaged in active play behaviors rather than sedentary ones, such as spending screen time. Similar to the present thesis research, this study was based on the belief that parents can influence their children's play and their levels of active behaviors in play by providing opportunities, information, and instructional support (Schary et al., 2012; Trost & Loprinzi, 2011). Loprinzi et al. (2014) also found consistency between parenting styles and play activity opportunities. The researchers asked 186 American participants to answer Child Rearing Questionnaire (Paterson & Sanson, 1999), and the results illustrated that

parents with higher levels of control tend to restrict the amount of sedentary time for their children and monitor them to have more active play.

Along with above-cited studies which were conducted in the US, Linebarger (2015) also worked with 139 parents of school-age children (6-8 years) to investigate children's behavioral problems related to video game play. Linebarger integrated parenting styles as a contextual factor that may impact these problems in children. Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Robinson et al. 1995) was administered to all parents to determine their parenting styles. The results showed that children's exposure to video games was directly associated with increasing levels of hyperactivity in children. Linebarger (2015) concluded that parents who were responsive and had the ability to monitor and sensitively respond to their children's behaviors were more likely to diminish and to moderate the video games' negative effects on their children. In contrast, children with the least responsive parents tended to show higher levels of attention problems.

Another example of the parenting style effectiveness on how parents perceive and/or impact on their children's play behaviors is Amir et al.'s study (2013) which was conducted among 20 mothers in Iran. They asked the participants to fill out Baumrind's questionnaire which was first designed in 1973 and consists of 30 items (including 10 questions for each of the parenting styles; authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive). In this questionnaire, parents' opinions were measured through a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree". The results in this study illustrated that mothers who used more authoritative parenting practices such as warmth, responsiveness and positive communication toward their children were more likely to have children who showed active play behaviors.

These authors concluded that authoritative parents tended to show more awareness and eagerness to facilitate their children's play environment.

Khoshbakht (2012) was another researcher who did a study in Iran about the relation between parents' parenting styles and their preschoolers' social behaviors in play. The author aimed to know if parents' different parenting styles could act as a predictor of their children's social behaviors in play. Khoshbakht asked 100 parents of 3-6-year-old children to fill Parental Modernity Scale (PMS; Schaefer & Edgerton's, 1985). This questionnaire was identified as ideas about raising children. This scale was on a 5-Likert point, ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree which measured traditional/authoritarian parental beliefs and progressive/democratic beliefs in parents. The results showed that parents' parenting styles and their perceptions about their children's play influenced the way they acted in terms of providing opportunities for their children to engage in various types of play and learn social skills. This in turn, affected children's attitudes toward play and play behaviors. In one study conducted in Iran, Khoshbakht (2012) demonstrated that authoritative parents tended to have children who were more engaged in social play and were inclined to talk more during play. Whereas, authoritarian parents seemed to have stricter beliefs about play and increased control over their children during play and their children engaged less language during social play activities. In other words, authoritative parents who believed in a need for children to express themselves using language may have encouraged children to engage more with others. In contrast, authoritarian parents who expected their children to obey without explanations, were more likely to raise children who engaged less in social play. Khoshbakht (2012) concluded that parents' parenting styles may influence how parents encourage or discourage social skills in their children.

Moreover, Lagacé-Séguin and d'Entremont (2006) did a study in Canada, using Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Robinson et al. 1995) to explore the association between parenting style, negative affect, and children's play behavior. This tool contains 62 items to assess Baumrind's (1971) three parenting styles and included 20 items related to authoritarian, 15 items related to permissive, and 27 items related to authoritative parenting styles. The findings in this study showed that parents with both authoritative and permissive parenting styles tended to raise children with less negative affects in play. Results from this study suggested that these parents who showed ability in coaching and directing their children's emotions were more likely to successfully regulate their children's emotions and behaviors in rough-and-tumble play.

According to the cited studies, parents' perceptions are important because their attitudes can act as influential factors in the way they encourage and involve their children in play. Studies have shown that parental involvement in children's play, provides opportunities to enhance children's learning, problem-solving skills, social competencies, and language and cognitive abilities (Lori et al., 2004; Strom, 1977). On the other hand, parents' parenting style can influence the play opportunities children are given and may be significant in determining a healthy growth and development of children (Ndari et al., 2019). In a recent study, Ndari et al. (2019) studied 125 parents of kindergarteners in Indonesia to investigate the relation between parents' parenting styles and their perceptions regarding outdoor play. Findings in this study illustrated that authoritative parents who more actively protected children, believed that outdoor play would expose children to danger and that led to prohibition of their children from engaging in outdoor play. These parents were more concerned about safety and may have ignored the importance of children engaging in outdoor play to practice social skills. On the contrary, the

findings showed that parents with authoritarian parenting style encouraged their children engage in outdoor play and believed in the benefits of outdoor play for developing social skills (Ndari et al., 2019).

In summary, play is a fundamental element in children's lives which illustrates the developmental level of the child and provides an opportunity for him/her to practice some life-like skills (Russ, 2003). On the other hand, parents as the first significant figures of the child's life are also influential in their children's development (Harkness et al., 2011) in terms of how they perceive play and either provide or discourage their children from play opportunities (Kane, 2016; Lin et al., 2019; Zare et al., 2016). Efforts to better understand how parents' perceptions and parenting strategies influence children's development and their environment can be studied using these parenting style classifications: including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles (Baumrind, 1968, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). What parents think and believe about play may help us understand how their children's play.

Present study

Play has an important and primary role in children's development (Becker, 2014; Delvecchio et al., 2016; Kazemeini & Pajoheshgar, 2013; Nestor & Moser, 2018; Román-Oyola et al., 2018), and parents have a significant contribution in facilitating their children's play opportunities (Baumrind, 1971; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; L'Abate, 2009; Singer et al., 2009). In other words, children who may have been deprived from play opportunities may have difficulties adjusting socially well into adulthood and may demonstrate some maladaptive social behaviors later in adolescence (Brown, 2010). Likewise, parents' perceptions and attitudes towards children's play is of importance and plays a role in supporting healthy development (Baumrind et al., 2010; Karavasilis et al., 2003). Play is described as critical for children's development in five

domains including social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and language development (Emslie & Mesle, 2008); yet how the parents evaluate the importance of play and perceive its necessity may determine the quality and quantity of play opportunities for children (Zare et al., 2016). In addition, understanding parents' parenting styles may help us understand how they perceive their children's environment, learning and play opportunities.

Although some studies have demonstrated the importance of play, parenting styles may also impact how parents perceive play. More specifically, their attitudes and perceptions of play may influence how mothers and fathers play with their children. As mentioned earlier, culture significantly contributes to parents' perceptions of play and their parenting styles may be influenced by culture too. For example, how parents think and what parenting strategies they use to raise their children largely depends on the culture in which they have been raised. Thus, in studying parents' perceptions regarding their children's play, considering their ethnotheories and cultural values/beliefs is also important. Furthermore, gaining a better understanding of the relationship between parenting style and parents' perception of children's play may provide insight about how the parents' perceive their roles when they engage in play with their children and provide them with opportunities for play. The following questions lead this study:

- A. How do parents describe and perceive their children's play (e.g., social play, types of play, play materials, etc.)?
- B. How do parents describe their parenting styles? What parenting style do they prefer (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful)?
- C. How do parents with a particular parenting style (e.g., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) describe and perceive their children's play?

Methodology

Research Design

An exploratory qualitative study was used to understand parents' perceptions of children's play in their natural environment (home), and information is gathered about their parenting styles. A qualitative project allowed the researcher to be empathetic and listen to participants' accounts of a specific phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). More specifically, a phenomenological approach was used to understand how parenting style influenced parents' beliefs and perceptions of children's play interactions, play opportunities and different types of play. We explored if parents' parenting style was associated with differences in their perceptions of play. The phenomenological approach provided me with the opportunity to understand the nature of parents' lived experiences from their own perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2012).

To this aim, I conducted a thorough semi-structured interview with parents to gather information regarding their parenting styles and their perspectives/attitudes toward the importance of play, and to determine their rearing strategies and practices they utilize in order to support their children from play opportunities. The questions about the background information were designed to help parents share some information regarding their cultural background and the settings in which they have been raised, to allow me to collect information about the parents' ethnotheories (Harkness et al., 2009). I interviewed each participant individually using semi-structured questions to guide the parents to share their perspectives. Some room was left for the parents to lead the interview in the direction they feel comfortable and share their thoughts in any way they desire.

Participants

I recruited participants who (1) were Iranian; (2) had at least one child in the age range of 3 to 5 years old; and (3) one parent living with the child for at least 50% of the time (in case of

parental divorce or separation). I gathered background and demographic information, including their ethnotheories (e.g., cultural belief systems that parents have about children, development, parenting and the family (Harkness & Super, 1996). I have discovered an apparent gap in the research on Iranian families. Although several studies address children's play, none have explored the link between parenting styles and parents' play perceptions. Therefore, my sample was drawn from Iranian families and the research sought to ascertain if there is any connection between styles of parenting and how parents perceive their children's play. The contextual information regarding the children's age range is important for several reasons. First, according to Taggart et al. (2020) children before the age of three choose pretend activities more often, because they may be unable and/or not allowed to experience real ones. By the age of three, children start to engage in more real activities over pretend ones and that provides them with more availabilities to get engaged in play. This age group also lends itself to more interactive play alone and with parents (Parten, 1932). Secondly, preschoolers at the age of three to five are more inclined to demonstrate the social skills in play; the ones they have obtained in relationship with their parents (Uygunl & Kozikoğlu, 2019). These authors also believe that play behaviors in preschoolers are mainly impacted by their parents' attitudes toward play.

Finally, since the focus of this study was not to compare mothers' and fathers' play perceptions, only one parent of each child was interviewed (only the mothers were interviewed).

I collected data on the families' cultural background to understand how they describe their parenting styles. Due to the pandemic and lack of direct access to people, the study advertisement was posted in a social network application named "Telegram", in which there is a group containing Iranian mothers who are mostly living in Iran. There are about a hundred

members in this group. Although I posted the study advertisement directly in this group, the recruitment process also happened through word of mouth. Five parents who met the criteria and were eager to take part were selected to participate. In order to thank parents for their participation, I sent them an age-appropriate book for their children along with a list of organizations and centers who offer parents' and/or children's play workshops, fun activities for children.

Data collection

Three methods were used in this study to gather information from participants. The first data collection was to obtain demographic information. Parents were invited to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A), including questions about the parents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, area of residence, and age of the participant's child. This demographic information was used to provide context for the participants' responses to the interview questions. This additional data helped to get a bigger picture of parents' cultural background and how this influenced their parenting styles, and their perspective regarding children's play.

The second method was an individual semi-structured interview conducted in a conversational manner. The interview questions were prepared in advance, using a semi-structured format and some questions were open-ended. (see Appendix B). The information gathered focused on parents' perspectives of their parenting styles and their perceptions/attitudes toward their children's play. However, depending on each participant's responses, some prompts were used to help them move forward and share their experiences in their own comfortable way. I was open to have a follow-up session with the participants if needed, however, all the information was clarified in the interview.

Finally, the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001) was used to determine the participants' parenting styles (Appendix E). This questionnaire is the short form of the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ, Robinson et al., 1995), and is a 32-item self-report tool which was validated and based on Baumrind's (1971) three parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive), but only 24 questions were used. The questions 16 to 23 were removed since they would ask about physical punishment and that was more appropriate to be eliminated from the list of questions. The items in this questionnaire assess parents' different practices and strategies for their young children, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (5). This tool contains both self-report and spouse-report features, although only the self-report aspect were used in this study.

According to Robinson et al. (1995), each parenting style scale in PSDQ contains several sub-scales that measure different dimensions in each style. The authoritative style (Qs. 1-15), which is characterized by warmth, reasoning, democratic attitudes, and carefree personality, includes the sub-scales of warmth and support, autonomy granting, and regulation (Kimble, 2014). The authoritarian style (Qs. 16, 19, 23, and 24) combines sub-scales of verbal hostility, physical punishment, disciplinary strategies, and directiveness. I excluded questions 16 to 23 (from the original questionnaire), which were related to physical punishment on the authoritarian scale, in order to protect the parents from having to answer difficult questions as these topics were not the focus of the study. Therefore, the authoritarian sub-scales have been reduced to non-reasoning/punitive only (Robinson et al., 1995; adapted from Kimble, 2009). Finally, the permissive scale of the PSDQ (17, 18, 20, 21, and 22) includes low self-confidence, ignoring misbehavior, and lack of follow-through, which based on Robinson et al.'s (1995) categorization

is the indulgent sub-scale for this parenting style. These sub-scales were analyzed and explained thoroughly in the findings section.

Procedure

Once the participants responded to the social media ad and showed interest in the study, I emailed them an information letter that included the purpose of the study and some further details (see Appendix C). Also, a consent form was sent to them (see Appendix D) and they were asked to complete it prior to the interview session. A preliminary phone call was made to the selected participants to provide them further information and answer any questions or concerns they may have regarding the study and consent forms. The interview was held in Farsi and the participants did not have any issue with the language. The participants were asked to complete two forms including consent and demographic forms in advance of the interview session. All the forms given to mothers had been translated into Farsi for their convenience.

Due to pandemic lockdown, the interview was held online, through the “Zoom” platform. The whole session with the parent were recorded, but just the “audio-only” recordings were used to transcribe the session in order to maintain confidentiality. The beginning of the interview session was devoted to clarifying any doubts/questions regarding the demographic questionnaire and the consent form. There was only one interview session for approximately 60-90 minutes. This timing differed depending on each participant. I informed the parents that I would audio-record the session. I also told them that I needed to take some notes of their answers during the interview session, because keeping a record of these notes and memos were helpful reminders for me to easily get access to the key information provided in the interview session (Hays & Singh, 2012). Each interview was transcribed, coded, and analyzed. All the data obtained from the participants including their demographic information, consent forms, questionnaires, email

addresses, phone numbers, interview recordings, and its transcription are kept confidential in my password-protected laptop. To maintain further confidentiality, I have made sure that the participants' real names are not revealed and I used pseudonyms throughout the data analysis and writing of the findings.

About a week after the interview session, I distributed the questionnaire to parents. There were two reasons as to why I decided to do the interview prior to the questionnaire. First, I believed there might be a probability that in case of filling the questionnaire prior to the interview, participants may have been influenced by the questions in the questionnaire. They may have wanted to answer the interview questions differently to be consistent with what they had reported in questionnaire and that may have influenced their responses. Second, I decided to have a one-week time lapse after the interview so that there would be some time between the interview questions the completion of the questionnaire. Completion time for answering the questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes.

Data analysis

Data sources in my study included participants' demographic information, recorded interview session, parenting style questionnaire, and my field notes obtained during the interview session. After transcribing the interview recording into Farsi, I looked for some specific features in participants' accounts to characterise their perceptions and experiences. These themes were constantly compared across the participants and the questions, since data analysis is essentially comparative (Merriam, 2009). The analysis process provided me with enriched information about the participants' accounts, experiences, and perceptions regarding my study's question. Then, I hand-coded these themes using Microsoft Word, and used emergent coding analysis to categorize the data. All of the process went in English. My field notes contributed to the analysis

with transparency as well as provide contextual information. I sent the Farsi transcriptions to the parents for member checking by asking them if they thought what was written was accurate, and if they wanted any parts to be removed. Finally, the parenting style questionnaire was used to find out about the participants' parenting styles and their child rearing strategies.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure that the collection of data, data analysis and conclusions are accurate, the following methods were used. The triangulation of data methods included the parenting styles' questionnaire, interview, demographic information as well as the field notes helped me interpret and describe the data in a rigorous manner. Also, member checking was used to involve the participants in the process by asking them to confirm if the interview transcription was accurate.

Knowing about one's own understanding of the phenomenon is an essential issue to which the researcher paid attention (Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays and Singh (2012) believe that being aware of subjectivity helps the researcher to try to focus on the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon and it can be achieved by approaching the study by one's curiosity rather than knowledge of the topic. Thus, it was important for me to maintain my role as a researcher in this study and know about my strengths and weaknesses to ensure that I was aware of my biases. I was a high school student when parenting practices and styles caught my attention for the first time. My dad used to act differently from the majority of my friends' dads. He would give me the opportunity to choose whenever I was in dilemmas, but he would always give me advice and suggestions before I would make a decision. He would never force me to do the things I did not like, and would always listen to me when I had a problem. He used to spend time playing with me, and asking me to solve some riddles to stimulate my thinking. The majority of my friends were always astonished as to how my dad would give me the freedom of making a choice, not

practicing power and control over me, and spending fun time with me. When I married, I heard some stories about my husband's childhood and the most interesting part of his experiences was that my father-in-law would never buy toys for him. He would believe that toys are useless and children should not waste their time playing when they have to focus on their education. My father-in-law until now believes that children should be raised under the parents' control and power. He would exercise abundant force on his children's school issues, friendships, jobs, and introduces himself as "the family's number one".

By looking at these two stories, something sparked my interest. I was inspired by two different parents. What is the relation between a parent's perspective toward play and his/her method of parenting? Can I find a link between my dad's parenting style and his view of play, toys, and spending time playing with me? Can I explain my father-in-law's behavior regarding the uselessness of toys and play with his perspective of being the first authority and powerful person in the family? Being a parent, I started to be sensitive toward these ideas. Therefore, during the interview sessions and when analysing the data, I needed to be cautious not to be influenced by my personal experiences in my own life. Also, I had to make sure that my interpretations from the participants' accounts were accurate, based on their lived experiences, and far from comparing with my own personal story. Eventually, caution was exercised to frequently merge the data from all the data sources (interview session, questionnaire, demographic information, and field notes) in order to ensure that I interpreted the words the participants used appropriately and that I clarified any vague statement with the help of the participants.

Findings

This qualitative research aimed to examine the relationship between parental styles and parents' perceptions about their children's play. The underlying aim was to see if there was any relation between the way mothers and fathers parent their children and how they see the role of play in their children's lives. An in-depth interview was conducted with five mothers that included a set of questions related to the parents' perceptions of play in general and toward their children's play in particular. They were also asked questions about their parenting practices. In parallel with the interview, the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001) was used to complement the information derived from the interview. PSDQ is one of the most common questionnaires in parenting styles whose development has made it possible to be used across many cultures (e.g., Kern & Jonyniene, 2012; Önder & Gülay, 2009; & Porter et al., 2005). The findings that derived from coding the interview were discussed in relation to answering the following research questions:

- A. How did parents describe and perceive their children's play (e.g., social play, types of play, play materials, etc.)?
- B. How did parents describe their parenting styles? What parenting style did they prefer (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful)?
- C. How did parents with a particular parenting style (e.g., authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful) describe and perceive their children's play?

In addition, this study was designed to understand these mothers' perspectives and in line with a cultural framework (Developmental Niche by Harkness & Super, 1994); it was important to capture the participants' unique beliefs, perceptions, and experiences. Using this framework provided me with a rich context to analyze the participants' understanding and interpretations related to their parenting styles and their children's play. Before describing the findings, a brief

description about each mother was presented. All of the participants were Iranian and were living in Iran at the time of the interview. Although the recruitment process was open to both mothers and fathers, only mothers showed a willingness to participate in this project. The mothers responded to the Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire. Although four of the mothers answered the questions more closely related to authoritative parenting style, the fifth mother (Anita) responded more closely to permissive parenting style. More details on the parenting practices as described by these mothers in their interviews will follow in a later section.

Participants' Backgrounds and Family Context

Aria

She was pregnant with her second son when she was interviewed. Aria had a 3-year-old son and she believed spending time with him is one of her most important responsibilities: *“He spends most of the daytime at daycare. When he comes back home, I feel bad if I don’t spend time playing with him. He needs me, not just me... even if his dad plays with him I feel good.”*

Aria was the only participant who started crying when she recalled her childhood memories. She was trying to remember how play was for her, when she was a child. The first thing she mentioned was that her father was a soldier in the war when she was young, and she would barely see him. She got emotional when she was explaining how she needed her dad to spend time with, but he was never there for her. She compared her parents’ parenting and her own parenting style.

We didn’t have the chance to choose... to decide... A variety of toys? No... never! [child’s name] has the right to decide what he wants and what he needs. Not that we provide everything for him, but at least we listen. My parents would never give me a chance to share my ideas, but this is something different now for [child’s name].

Anita: Anita had moved back to Iran after 3 years of living in Canada. She and her husband had decided to go back to Iran because they had found it difficult to live far from their families. Anita had a 4-year-old daughter and she lived close to her in-laws. During the interview, there were several times when she talked about how psychology insisted on spending time with children and that was why she had to play with her daughter.

I try to always look for what psychologists suggest, and update my knowledge about child rearing. I know they say that a mom should spend at least 2 hours playing with her child, and it bugs me when I cannot fulfill this amount of time.

Anita seemed unsure about some questions, as she would often use phrases such as “*I don’t know*”, “*I have never thought about this*”, or “*not sure... this is something new to me!*”. This mother seemed uncomfortable talking about her childhood play experiences because she forgot the details. She mentioned some “*inappropriate practices in parenting*” that her parents used and she explained that she did not continue those practices although she did not give many examples. In Iranian culture, high respect towards parents is expected and speaking disrespectfully about her parents may cause feelings of guilty and lack of gratitude. This was why I assumed that she did not share much about those “*inappropriate parenting practices*”.

Nicole

Nicole had a 3-year-old daughter and she was self-employed. The highlighted part about her life was that due to her work situation, Nicole had to work during night and had difficulty sleeping during the day. She would see herself as “*tired most of the time*” and therefore she would ask her husband to “*compensate*” for the lack of time she had to spend with her daughter:

I’m with [child’s name] whole day and even if I don’t play with her, she sees me and she has me next to her. When my husband comes back home, this is his responsibility to

spend time with [child's name]. what a dad does? Is he just an ATM to give us money?!

Of course not!

Additionally, Nicole believed that child and mother should be two separate individuals who could decide about their own lives:

When it comes to her own stuff, she has no rules. I tell her that she can break them if she wants to, but just please don't touch my stuff! She can decide about her own life and not mine. Don't come to my room, don't wear my dress, do whatever you want to do with your own things.

Nicole also shared that they did not spend much time at home. For example, they would go to parties, travelled a lot, and often had picnics with their friends. She stated: *“the child feels more comfortable in their own home than anywhere else. I can see that what we do breaks all those routines and regularities in her.”* She seemed to think that children needed routines and consistency in their daily lives.

Perla

Perla was a housewife who had a 3-year-old daughter. She lived with her husband in Tehran, however, all her family members lived in Shiraz (about 920 km away from Tehran). It means she was alone all the time and could not benefit from others' help. Based on Perla's report, she would read many books about children and their development, and would take part in different workshops on anger management, life skills, and learned how to raise a happy child. She seemed to be knowledgeable in the field of child development, since she would use some professional words and phrases such as *“cognitive play”*, *“pretend play”*, *“trusting the child's inner sense”*,. Perla and her daughter would spend time together during the day, while father was away at work. She seemed to have a lot of energy and would enjoy playing with her daughter..

She emphasized: *“I enjoy playing with [child’s name]. Sometimes I am so deep into the role she has assigned me that I forget that I’m an adult. I become a child just like her... and that’s fun!”*

Perla had a negative experience in communication with her own mother. She did not share details about this issue, however, she mentioned:

Punishment is a red line for me. My mom used to punish me, not necessarily physical punishment, but even like... threatening me that if you do this, I’ll do that. I have had many counseling sessions to overcome these thoughts and bad memories.”

Zelda

Zelda was the only participant who had two children. Her son, 4 years old, was her second child and she had a 15-year-old daughter. During the interview, she would compare the parenting strategies she used with her daughter to those that she was using with her son. She also mentioned the difference between how gender differences may affect her son and her daughter.

For [daughter’s name] everything was different. She was the first child, a girl, you know... like a princess! We had no COVID and she could choose what she wanted whenever we would go shopping. But now, in this situation, [son’s name] has no chance for it. I don’t say it’s because of him being the second child, but you know... life has changed, I have changed, my energy has changed. I need to try harder.

Zelda believed what educational psychologists say was sometimes not practical and could not be put into practice: *“I cannot stand there and smile to my son while running across the street without holding my hand. It is out of control... I shout at him. Some of those psychologists are not even parents to know!”* Zelda also emphasized the respect for parents. Even when parents were there for their children, they should be highly respected and admired. Comparing her own parenting strategies with her mother’s, Zelda mentioned: *“My mom would do much better than*

me in child rearing. Sometimes, I think why I just cannot be like her? She would act way better than me in challenges she had with us.”

Parents’ play perceptions

The first section of interview pertained to “parents’ perceptions regarding their children’s play.” The five mothers shared their ideas and unique experiences on how they perceived their children’s play, and how much they considered play an essential element in their children’s lives. The following themes were apparent after three cycles of coding: (a) play to learn social skills, (b) fun versus educational aspects of play, (c) play types, (d) play for developmental stages, (e) gender-related play, and (f) play with parents.

Play to Learn Social Skills

Learning how to communicate well with parents and peers, being more aware of other people’s interests, and learning how to express one’s emotions in daily interactions were some of the social skills that all five participants mentioned when they were asked to give their perceptions of play in their children’s lives. It seemed that these five parents would see play as an enriched environment in which their children could experience real-life situations, and learn how to become an ethical and engaged citizens. Below are the sub-themes that they discussed in greater depth.

Communication

All participants believed that play was an important tool that taught children how to have good relationships with people, including parents and peers. As Perla said, children learned many positive communication skills through play that they could never experience with an adult. She gave the example:

Let's say... if they argue over a toy, that kid wants the same thing that this one wants, and this interaction never happens in the interaction with me... because I never stomp my foot on the ground shouting THIS IS MINE. They start solving the problem and that's when they learn how to deal with challenges.

In addition, Anita believed that the playtime in which parents were included was even more important than the peer playtime: *“Play is a treatment... if I, as a mother have made a mistake, I can cure the pain I caused to my child through play. A mother should spend at least 2 hours per day playing with the child.”* Zelda and Aria were two mothers who discussed the reciprocal nature of engaging in play with their children and promoting communication. They described play as an opportunity through which they could know their sons and their interests better, and they focused on: *“enjoying each other.”*

On the other hand, unlike the other mothers, Nicole believed that when her daughter engaged in playtime, this was an opportunity for her as a mother to have free time. Nicole did not see play as a chance to communicate and teach communication skills to her child. According to Nicole, play taught the child how to communicate well with peers and learn social skills such as sharing and getting engaged in a group play. However, a good playtime, in Nicole's opinion, was when the child did not demand the parent to be involve in the play: *“Play is anything which fills the child's time, even if it is sleeping or watching TV. I don't have the time to play; she should be able to entertain herself.”* Due to this participant's lifestyle, it seemed that she needed her daytime for herself to do her tasks and responsibilities and she explained that she was often tired because she did not get enough sleep the night before.

Life Skills

Another category that was described by the mothers' responses was that play taught children many skills required in daily life. The educational nature of play will be discussed later, however, within this sub-theme, the participants explained how play provided an enriched setting in which children could learn about patience, persistence, helping others, respect, and conversation skills. Nicole said: *[child's name] is so impatient in almost everything. He cannot wait for his turn, wait for me to prepare food... but I can see when he is doing a puzzle, he has concentration and is patiently finding the pieces.* Zelda explained: *"In play, children learn how to speak out, how to defend themselves and their rights. [child's name] learned that he needs to ask for my permission before doing it; he just learned it through play."* Although four of the mothers agreed on how play taught their children to learn to speak out and strengthened their self-confidence, Nicole believed that her daughter needed to moderate her self-confidence. She thought her daughter had to learn how to listen to others' interests and to give them the opportunity to control the play process: *"In playing with her peers, she has too much self-confidence. She feels that she has to control and manage everything and everyone. I want her to be less bullying towards others."*

Perla expressed that: *"Play is the child's whole life"*, and it seemed that these parents considered play as an important and inseparable element of the child's life. Nicole described play *"the child's only responsibility during the day"*; an activity that simulated real life situations and helped the child learn how to deal with the bona fide life experiences later in adulthood. I realized from the mothers' statements that they associated play with more benefits rather than disadvantages. Developing themselves and becoming aware of others was another benefit that was often discussed. Respecting other people as individuals who have their interests, thoughts, and opinions is a skill which mothers focused on. From this perspective, Nicole mentioned:

[child's name] is the only child, but she needs to know that she is not the center of universe. There are some people out there who are as important as her. She may have the power at home... not all of it, but still is in the power of choosing and managing her play and her personal life at home. However, she should know that respecting other children's interests during play is something that cannot be ignored.

Also, mothers believed that their children needed to learn self-awareness. Aria explained: “I want *[child's name]* to know with what he likes to play. He cries over a toy today, we buy it, and he disposes it after maximum two days. He does not know what he likes and dislikes.” Perla appreciated this strategy and provided her daughter with toys to learn this skill:

[Child's name] has a closet to which she always has access. I have organized all of her toys in different sections, raw material, books, blocks, pretend play toys, etc... In the beginning, she would always have doubts as to what to choose to play. It seemed like she didn't know about her interests. But now... wow! She knows what she wants, and after choosing the toy, she is engaged with it like for minimum half an hour. I'm proud of myself!

Another example involved Anita explaining how her daughter had no awareness about her likes and dislikes, even in choosing a food type to eat. Generally, these five mothers believed that knowing oneself would probably lead to being aware of others. According to the participants, lack of self-awareness may weaken decision-making abilities because the first step – to know what one likes or dislikes – was missing.

Expression of Feelings

The mothers also described the expression of feelings as being important to learning social skills. According to these mothers, being able to recognize one's feelings and share them

with others appropriately was a valuable skill that children could learn through play. For example, Aria recounted how her son expressed his feelings during playtime:

If we treat him in a way that, for example, he is upset, he doesn't tell us right away.

Instead, he expresses his sadness when we're playing together. For example, he acts like a baby who is sad and is crying. When I ask him why the baby is crying, he explains how the doll's mom was mean to him and has made the doll sad. It is when I realize oh... he got sad with that behavior but had not told me anything before.

More importantly, mothers believed that children could learn the appropriate ways of expressing their feelings through play. One participant stated how she taught her daughter to express her frustration in an acceptable way, rather than shouting and crying: *“When she cannot release her toy after it is stuck, starts shouting. I ask her, do it again... did it work? Can shouting help you release your toy? Think of other ways you can show me that you need help.”* This narrative demonstrated how the mother used play to show an acceptable method of expressing her feelings with the child. Thus, playtime was not only beneficial for children to be able to express their feelings but also for them to learn how to do it in socially accepted ways

Fun versus Educational Aspects of Play

The next theme that the mothers discussed was whether the children tried to pursue a specific purpose through play – such as learning– or whether their playing was happening only for the sake of playing. The clear concept in this theme was that mothers thought their children played only to have fun. In other words, the first and most important purpose during play was to have fun. According to Aria, children may learn something during play, but this was not what they have planned for: *“He plays to have fun. Even if he is learning something, he doesn't understand that he's learning. So, he just thinks about what he can do to have more fun.”*

Although four participants [Aria, Anita, Nicole, and Perla] believed that their children would play without having an educational purpose, Zelda stated that sometimes her son chose educational games to play: *“He goes to his toys to learn. He has a series of cards on which there are numbers and letters. He brings them asking me to read for him. Or his word game... he loves me teaching him to read words.”* It is interesting to note that Zelda believed play had a specific purpose and that her son sometimes chose to learn, whereas Nicole believed children had no idea if they were learning something during play.

Mothers in this study believed that children had fun and would learn while they play. For example, although the children might not have started to play with the purpose of learning, they discovered a new fact or might have learned a new idea during play. However, according to Nicole, this was the mother’s responsibility to indirectly push the child toward play opportunities that were more educational. Nicole and Aria clearly mentioned that they did not care about teaching and learning in play. They believed that children had enough time to learn about the world and their surroundings in the future. As Nicole said: *“There is no rush. She finally learns everything that she has to. When it comes to playing, I don’t care if she learns something. I want her to have fun. Or maybe she learns stuff but I don’t acknowledge that educational aspect.”* Interestingly, four out of five participants stated that their children were curious to learn about many things in their environment. Asking many questions, looking for a good reason as to why something has happened, and trying to learn adult-related tasks were among the behaviors mentioned by the mothers to show how their children were trying to quench their thirst of curiosity.

Asking mothers if they thought play would prepare children for school, a common point emerged from the answers. All of the participants reported how they had used play as a tool to

educate their children. It seems that these parents had taught many life skills and some of the academic skills to their children through play. Aria and Zelda were certain that play was essential in preparing the child for school years. However, Nicole explained how she thought play did not help because the school system was different from the way children would experience their early years of life. Perla and Anita said that they did not know because they believed they did not know much about the school systems yet. Nearly every mother in this study believed that play facilitated teaching life skills to children.

I personally teach every skill through play because [child's name] accepts it easier. For example, I found having her wear winter clothes really challenging. Once I started creating a game out of this task, like playing as if she is the mother and is teaching me how to wear my clothes... everything went smoother.

Nicole explained:

I taught [child's name] how to be patient, how to ask for mom's permission before doing something, and how to share toys through play... that really worked! And the greatest point about it is that it also helps me to bond with him positively. So, it's a mutual thing.

On the other hand, Aria, Zelda, and Perla explained how they were dissatisfied with what their children learn from their peers through play. It seems that their children often preferred to play with either peers, and if not possible, with their mothers. Their dissatisfaction was mainly highlighted in the way children learn “negative behaviors” from their peers. Perla explained how she failed to teach an important concept to her daughter when she realized her daughter had already learned it from her peers.

I always hated competitive games. I didn't like [child's name] to care about winning or losing a game. I liked her to enjoy playing for the sake of playing, not for winning. I

thought I was successful until one day she went out to the yard to play with her cousins and when she came back I realized she would run from one side to the other side of the house shouting, I won, I won! I was so disappointed... but what can I do? Children learn from each other.

To some extent, all mothers reported that they needed some time for themselves, which was somehow impossible considering their children's demands for playing. For example, Nicole stated how she disliked when her daughter would request to play with her. Whereas Perla seemed to enjoy playing with her daughter most of the time. However, she believed her mood affected her energy level and the way she engaged in play.

I'm full of energy in the morning, but as the day goes by, I cannot spend the quality time with [child's name]. It's been several days since I see she is busy playing alone... it doesn't take that much, maybe half an hour maximum, but I'm grateful for that. ”

Finally, all participants included “having fun for both the child and the mother” when they were asked to define play. The mothers explained the role of play in their children's lives and how both mother and the child must enjoy playtime. In contrary, Nicole believed that play was an individual activity of the child and the mother was not required to get engaged in it. She stated that playtime should be done in a way that the mother would enjoy her time while the child was involved either in solitary play or group play: “*Play is what she does alone or with her friends, not me and her doing it together. You know... playtime is even more important for parents! My nerves are relaxed when she is sitting in a corner and playing alone.*” When I asked Nicole if she thought play should be educational for the child and if there should be a purpose to play, she indicated:

I'm not a person of these do's and don'ts. They say the child should play with ABC Legos to learn alphabets... well, I don't care! Or, the child should play as a mother's role with her dolls to learn her responsibilities as a future mom. Why should she do that now?! For me, even if she is entertained with cracking an egg... that would be satisfying.

This parent seemed to make a link between engaging in an educational type of play and the individual needed of the child and parent. In general, most parents in this study believed that there was no need to be concerned with educational aspects of play, because children would learn what they were supposed to learn as they grow up.

Play Types

Participants reported different types of toys with which their children play, including vehicle toys (i.e., cars, trains, trucks, and airplanes), active-type games (i.e., playing football), creativity-related games (i.e., using raw materials, painting, drawing, and sand play), games, problem-solving (i.e., puzzle and book reading), and pretend play material (i.e., dolls, kitchen set, doctor kit, guns, costumes, and etc.). An interesting point mentioned by Perla was that children play in a more effective way when the toys were organized.

She has access to all of her toys, and knows where to find each toy. When she sees them in different categories, it is easier for her to decide if she wants to play, for example, with the puzzles or make something new with the raw materials.

Aria mentioned that organizing the toys had helped her son to have a better vision of what he was more interested in.

Among all the participants, it was only Zelda who mentioned: *“My son loves to play with every kind of toy, except for girlish ones.”* Four of the five mothers explained how they tried to provide many kind of toys that were of interest to their children, and saw no limitations as to

what their children should play with. Zelda described how she tried to control her son playing with guns (which she names as a “violent type of game”) and running around in their apartment. It seems that Zelda attempted to establish some restrictions based on her likes/dislikes and also by the environmental limitations of living in an apartment.

Nicole’s response to the use of toys was that her daughter did not like to use toys. She described her daughter as a child who preferred bona fide materials, such as her mother’s dresses/shoes/make-up material and real kitchen devices. However, she was also satisfied that her daughter was more inclined to listening to stories and reading books than other children: *“I know that this helps her in future... this is what I always liked my child to learn, reading books... I think people who read books are a bit different from other people. In terms of thinking abilities, I guess.”* Anita and Perla had almost a similar narrative about their daughters. They also mentioned how their daughters liked to play with dolls and to imitate them: *“She covers her doll’s hair with my scarves, exactly like the way I wear hijab!”*. It seemed that due to the gender similarity between the mothers and their daughters, these girls were more interested in acting like their mothers when they played.

When I asked the participants if they thought the toys their children used would help them develop and be prepared for their future lives, all of the mothers admitted that if their children were happy with these types of toys and methods of playing, they were satisfied as well. However, some of the mothers shared their preferences about how they believed their children would benefit from playing if some of the play types changed. Being interested in playing with puzzles, having more awareness about his/her interest toward choosing toys, being able to play individually and not demanding the mother’s presence, and having more educational toys during

playtime were some of the issues that were mentioned by the mothers in terms of how they preferred their children to play.

Play for Developmental Stages

The interview also revealed that the mothers were aware of different types of play, similar to Piaget's (1952) play categories (i.e., functional play, constructive play, pretend play, games with rules). Although the mothers did not always use these specific names, the themes that were revealed from the transcripts seemed to match these play types, with the exception of games with rules, as these children were younger (3 to 5 years old).

Functional Play

There were several examples in all the participants' narratives about how their children were interested in functional play and bodily movements. Running around, climbing a tree, and playing football were examples the mothers mentioned when they described their children's physical activity. Perla believed that in recent years, focusing on cognitive aspects such as thinking, being creative, and constructing something had been valued to a degree where physical activity was overlooked in play. Zelda stated: "*I love when he runs around and keeps his body active. However, I cannot let him do that because we live in an apartment and neighbours will complain about the sound it makes.*" In other words, no matter how much the mother liked her son to have physical activity at home, some obstacles would hinder this play type. Perla revealed that she provided different raw materials for her child to get engaged in functional play. This participant explained how she was always careful about providing various toys for her child and was aware of different developmental aspects. She described:

Sometimes she starts playing and suddenly gets stuck in the middle. For example, she cuts a paper into tiny pieces and continues for an hour. I don't know... but I feel when

she repeats an activity like using these scissors, she is trying to learn something, she is challenging her abilities, and that's when I know she is discovering something new.

Functional play such as repetitive movements that were enjoyable for the child were found to be a way that children learned about their world, and in turn prepared them to learn more complicated skills later in their lives. As Aria explained:

Sometimes when he plays with his blocks over and over again, I think every time he learns something new... maybe once he is focusing on the colors, the other time the shapes, or sometimes I can see he is stacking them together and tries to find different ways of doing it.

Finally, Anita believed that her daughter needed to be more active and use her muscles more often. She seemed to be aware of a lack of physical activity.

Constructive Play

Using different play types in a goal-oriented and organized way to create something new was also revealed in the participants' narratives. The parents described their children as seeming interested in making a castle with blocks, making a puzzle, drawing, painting, playing with sand, and using raw materials. Perla discussed how she provided suitable toys and materials for "creative something". This mother explained how she saw it essential for the child to have raw material to create something new in any way (s)he likes.

A lot of raw materials are available for her; she has different types of glues, ice-cream sticks, paper in different colors, foam, watercolor, gauche, different types of scissors, and many more. Now she knows that she can mix them and create something new of her interest. She has realized that she cannot stick two wooden sticks with paper glue. Discovering all these facts is helpful for her.

Perla believed it is crucial for the child to have a private space to make a mess as much as she wants and to create whatever she likes. Aria explained that playing with a puzzle helped the child to see the full picture. This creation, she believed, was of importance because the child realized that (s)he can create a different picture out of some small pieces.

I can see him learning shapes and colors better with puzzles. He realizes that shapes can sit together and create something new. I feel that making a bigger picture with a puzzle teaches something to him, that he needs to focus, be patient and try harder to be successful.”

Anita and Nicole explained how their children liked to make a house with cloth sheets and how they were interested in using real-life material rather than toys. It seemed that Zelda was satisfied with the way her son plays: *“I like the way he plays; he rarely engages in violent games such as using a sword or pretending to kill other people.”* However, Anita described how it bothered her when her daughter would try to use her stuff and would make a mess: *“She takes my scarves, and that really bugs me... but I try to let her play freely.”* Nicole, on the other hand, revealed her dissatisfaction as to the fact that her daughter would prefer to use real-life materials to play with rather than toys.

I really wanted her to play with toys... but you know! She does not even have that many toys. She doesn't like it. She is more interested and entertained in playing with kitchen sets, my make-up, my dresses, and not her own toys. I have a problem with this.

Nicole also confirmed more than once that she seemed to be sensitive to her child playing with her possessions and disliked it when someone touched them. Therefore, she explained to her daughter that she was not allowed to play with her mother's “stuff”. It was then, when she added: *“Why she can't play with childish toys like other children?”*

Pretend Play

The most common play type among the participants' descriptions of their children's play was symbolic play. Role-playing or make-believe play was discussed as a favourite activity; pretending to be a doctor, a superhero, a car/truck driver, a police officer, and a Paw Patrol character were the most popular roles in boys' games. For example, Zelda explained how her son liked to act as a powerful character.

Even when he plays with his toy cars, he should always have the fire truck to save someone. Or likes to have the police car or the tank. I can see how he likes to show he is powerful, his car for example, flies and he gets full of joy when I tell him what a strong superhero he is!

In addition, Aria expressed her satisfaction about her son's play: “[child's name] has many imaginary people for himself. He loves to be the strongest one, and I like it when I see he tries to open his mind to many stories and fantasies.” These two participants emphasized how their sons pretended to be superheroes and demonstrated their power during play. Both Aria and Zelda explained that they were satisfied with this type of play and that they believed their sons needed to show their strength through play in order to avoid violence in real life. An exciting point Zelda noted was that she disagreed with her son regarding some ways of violent power demonstration:

I don't let him pretend to kill someone. He can be the Ninja turtles, for example, but he is not allowed to use his sword to kill other people. I'm afraid he gets the same model in real life, and I cannot let him be that violent person even if it is a game.”

On the other hand, the participants who had girls recounted different narratives about pretend play. It seemed that there was a subtle difference between boys and girls in role playing. Acting as a mom along with all the responsibilities such as cooking, feeding dolls, cleaning, dusting, and

imitating their mothers' activities such as wearing make-up or wearing high-heeled shoes was the significant aspect of girls' pretend play. Symbolic representation was highlighted in these girls' play types. While boys seemed to play with toys based on their primary function (for example using a car as a car), girls were trying to change the objects' functions and use them in a novel way. Perla mentioned: "*[child's name] loves to pretend that she lives in a tent using a big sheet on sofas. She puts the cushions in her house pretending they are her furniture*".

Anita and Perla uttered their satisfaction and contentment about how their daughters would play pretend: "*Sometimes she cooks, pours water in kitchen glasses, adds something to it, and pretends that she has made a dish. The mess she makes is disappointing, but I leave her to play freely.*" However, Nicole felt dissatisfied about how her daughter imitated what she does: "*I don't like when she plays with my stuff. She should know whatever I do is not the right thing.*" However, Perla mentioned how she tried to enrich her daughter's environment to experience real-life situations by imitating her responsibilities: "*[child's name] loves to wash dishes and cook with me. I know... what you do may become two or three times longer than you doing it alone... but I let her experience, see how it feels to do the house tasks.*" Although Perla did not focus on teaching the child about some responsibilities, she emphasized how it was crucial to provide opportunities for the child to do the safe things she liked to do. What this participant implied was that she tried to observe what her daughter's new interest was and whose role she liked to play.

Sometimes I can see she pays continuous attention to fire trucks and firefighters. I buy her books about fire and firefighters. Sometimes she sees her dad working with a screwdriver, hammer, and stuff like that, and she wants them. So I have bought her a mechanic kit.

She explained how she provided different materials without limiting them to the child's gender to let her daughter play different roles.

Finally, how children's behaviour and expression of feelings during play, and more specifically through pretend play, may help parents identify any problems, the children were struggling with and how they perceived their world. Two participants explained how they used what they saw in their children's roles and behaviors in pretend play to reflect on their child-rearing practices and struggles with parenting. Aria explained:

Once I was so angry and shouted at him. He didn't tell me anything, and I wasn't aware how he got sad with what I did. Several hours later, I saw him playing with his cars, and he was literally shouting at the car driver as if he was the driver's daddy or something... exactly like the way I had shouted at him. It was then when I realized how he was upset with my behavior, and I could see the exact thing in his behavior with his toys.

Aria and Anita both perceived pretend play as a "mirror" in which they faced themselves and their behaviors toward their children.

Gender-related Play

The parents were asked about gender-related play, and both Zelda and Anita expressed that gender should be taken into account before choosing the toys and/or play types. While the other three participants seemed to have gender-neutral play perspectives and affirmed that there should be no male versus female play types. All five participants had unique narratives about their perspectives regarding this issue. Zelda – who had a boy and a girl – stated that comparing her two children, she realized boys needed play themes related to their power and strength, while girls needed to get more love, attention, and affection through play: *"Boys enjoy more when you convey them the feeling of power like... wow! You are a superhero! But girls are more inclined*

to play with their dolls, to feed them, and put them to sleep. This is how they enjoy.” Zelda revealed that her son liked, “anything, except for the ‘girlish’ toys.” It seems that Zelda’s gender-related perspective about play had affected her child’s beliefs, as well. Anita also stated that there was a difference between the way girls and boys play: “*Boys like to move all the time, while girls love to sit and take care of their dolls. I don’t know if it is only in Iranian culture, but whatever it is... if I had a boy, my play types would be different.*” Interestingly, Both Zelda and Anita seemed to believe that considering different play types for boys and girls was a natural thing, as Zelda said: “*I see the difference between boys’ and girls’ play preferences in almost every child around me.*”

On the other hand, parents who had a gender-neutral perceptions about play did not agree with restricting a child to specific play types based on the child’s gender. They believed that the child needed to know what his/her interests were and that (s)he needed to try different types of play. Aria noticed the importance of the child’s interests: “*Even if I had a girl, I would play exactly as I’m playing with [son’s name]. I would let her choose the play types and toys based on her own interests.*” Nicole and Perla were in favor of a gender-neutral perspective as well. Nicole explained how her daughter was interested in playing with boyish toys such as guns and cars and that she provided all of those toys because she wanted to be respectful toward the child’s choices.

Regardless of gender, I would provide any type of toys for my child. Even if I had a boy and he would ask me to buy him a doll and a milk bottle to feed him, I wouldn’t say no! You never see me complaining about the types of play my daughter is engaged in because I believe in her own interests.

Interestingly, Perla delineates how some parents emphasized a gendered perspective about their children's play.

I have seen many parents who use clichéd sentences in different areas. For example, we had gone to a park the other day, and I saw a boy who was afraid of coming down a slide. I heard his mom told him that, come on... you're not a girl to be afraid of sliding down!

She revealed her disagreement about how some parents tried to restrict their children from getting engaged in specific types of play or behaviors because they were not suitable for the child's gender. Perla explained how she and her husband had provided a variety of toys for their daughter: *"We have bought her a house toy, dolls, and a kitchen set... and she has a toolbox with the screwdriver as well. All of these were her own choice."* This participant believed that there were some other parents whose beliefs were on the other side of the spectrum; the ones who *"let their boys have long hair, use nail polish for them, and completely disregard their child's gender."* She emphasized on maintaining a balance in having these types of beliefs.

Play with Parents

When the mothers were asked how they perceived their children's play, four themes were evident: (a) parents' spent playtime with their children, (b) parents' feelings/thoughts about their children's play, (c) play benefits and obstacles, and (d) parents' childhood play experiences. The following description elaborated how the parents discussed their play time:

Parents' spent playtime with their children

When the participants were asked to share how they would play with their children, most of them reported that they felt guilty because they played for shorter time than they wanted. In particular, three mothers were not satisfied with how they played with their children. For

example, Nicole stated that she was too busy with her job and housework, and although she knew that time is needed to be spent playing with her daughter, she did not have enough energy nor time to do that. It also seemed that Nicole looked to her husband to compensate for this lack of time: *“I complain a lot to my husband about this. I tell him that he needs to spend more time playing with [child’s name]. I try to do it myself. However, I’m not satisfied with the amount of time I spend.”* Along the same lines, Zelda uttered her utmost dissatisfaction about the time she spent playing with her son: *“[child’s name] asks me a lot to play with him. I really love to, but I always have something to do first. I barely find enough time to play, and that’s a shame! I feel so guilty about it.”* Zelda explained how she thought more time was required to be spent with her son: *“However, my husband thinks I spend too much time with [child’s name]. Maybe he is right... maybe I’m just a perfectionist.”* It seems that Zelda was trying to look at this issue from different angles, and she preferred to think she was a perfectionist rather than a busy mother who did not spend enough time playing with her son. Similarly, Anita was not satisfied with the time she considered playing with her daughter. She recounted that her husband thought that the amount of time she played with her child was sufficient.

I have read in many psychological books that a mom is responsible to convey the sense of self-worthiness to the child by spending enough time playing him/her, and if my husband thinks I’m doing a great job with this responsibility... I guess I should stop being worried and feel better about myself.

I suppose Anita followed the same pattern as Zelda, trying to validate the time they would spend with their children, perhaps to alleviate any guilt about their lack of time.

The two mothers, Perla and Aria had different ideas about the time they spent playing with their children. Aria stated that she tried her best to spend as much time as possible with her

son. Interestingly, she mentioned how she believed that either a mother or father should have quality time with the child, and the mothers were not the only responsible people for that: *“It depends on my mood how I play with him, however, the amount of time I spend playing remains almost the same. He is at daycare for the whole day and is at home for only a couple of hours. I don’t like to convey this message to him that he is not welcomed at home.”* As to the “how” question during playtime, it seemed that Aria mainly let her son manage the play and decide who should have which role. She explained how her son liked to assign a role to her and how she agreed because she thought the child should be free during the playtime, as long as it did not violate the rules and the mother’s physical abilities.

Likewise, Perla seemed satisfied with the amount of time she would spend playing with her daughter. Perla described playtime as important because she believed in making a conscious effort to provide opportunities for the child’s development. Playing with the child and observing as well as reading child-related materials were elements on which Perla was emphasizing. This participant was the only mother who provided more details about how she used observation to understand her child’s developmental needs while engaging in play with her.

I let her choose the toy she wants to play with. If she chooses books, I read them for her. But if I see that she is kind of stuck in books, I try to be creative... for example, I ask her to make a house with books. Or if I see that she is repeatedly bringing some poetry books, I try to introduce her some other genres as well.

Finally, Perla stated how she was more animated in the morning and as the day goes by, she got more tired and would lose her energy. However, she did not stop spending time with her daughter: *“Sometimes in the evening, I tell her that I’m tired. I suggest to her to lie down together and read books.”*

Parents' feelings/thoughts about their children's play

When I asked the participants how they felt about their children's playtime, almost all of them stated that they were generally pleased with the toys their children used and the play types they chose. As these mothers described their children's play, I realized that although they reported their satisfaction with the types of play their children were engaged, they all had preferences about their children's play time. For example, Nicole thought her daughter needed to play with her toys alone. These two factors – using one's own stuff and playing alone – were repeatedly mentioned in this mother's narrative about her child's play types.

I don't like it when she uses my stuff to play with... [child's name] needs to know that she is not allowed to play in my room. She can do whatever she wants in her room, with her own toys. Besides, I really want her to play alone and stop asking me to spend time with her. Playtime should give me the freedom to do my own tasks."

Anita described her daughter's preferences, and believed that her child needed to be more physically active. This mother shared that she was an inactive girl in her childhood, and she did not want her daughter to make the same mistake. For this reason, Anita made sure physical activity and play types such as playing with a ball or balloon were included in her daughter's play preferences. On the other hand, Aria and Zelda focused more on the cognitive aspects of play types. These two participants explained how they valued thinking and learning that these elements should be an inseparable part of playtime. Aria believed that doing a puzzle helped her son to think better.

Thinking about how to put the pieces next to each other boosts his brain, I guess. Besides, she can learn about shapes and colors. In the end what he sees is a full image of small pieces. It's a different form of constructing that I want him to learn.

Correspondingly, Zelda emphasized that reading books and fostering the child's cognitive abilities was important to her. She believed that books would teach children how to think better and make logical decisions: *"When I read him books, I ask him if he was in the main character's shoes, what would he do. I really want him to think about different situations and make a decision. It helps his future life."* Perla expressed her thoughts and feelings regarding her child's playtime: *"I read many books about children's development. If I see her play choices cover age-appropriate play types, I don't interfere. If not, I try to enrich the environment, like providing specific toys, for her to be attracted toward that missing part as well."* This mother seemed to be aware of children's psychological aspects and maintaining her daughter's autonomy in deciding what and how to play.

Play benefits and obstacles

The mothers expressed many positive aspects of play, and they mainly believed that playtime was a positive activity for their children. Only Zelda and Perla mentioned a disadvantage about play, and that was when children learned what they were not supposed to know. Zelda stated:

This was not my ideal for him to learn about competitive games. He hates when he loses, and he has learned it from his friends. After all, each child has been raised in a specific family style, and many of values are transferred to him/her. In a group play, a lot of these beliefs and values may be transferred to your child, and he may learn things that parents don't like.

Nevertheless, the participants shared their thoughts about play barriers that could be explained as parent-related and environment-related obstacles:

Parent-related Obstacles. These obstacles included lack of patience, lack of time, lack of confidence in the child's abilities, lack of attention, not providing enough freedom to the child, and unstable life situation were among the factors which participants mentioned about play barriers. A significant point in Aria's narrative about why she thought children may avoid playing at times was the "fear of parental rejection." She explained: "*Sometimes the child thinks that my parents want me to play alone because they want to get rid of me. Something like... if I start playing alone, my family will forget about me and don't come to me anymore.*" The most common factors were not spending enough time playing with the child and not being patient enough to remain calm and stable during play. Parents in this study believed that their children might have no idea how to play, and this was the parents'r responsibility to provide some ideas, and toys for the children to get engaged playing. For example, Zelda felt guilty of not providing small puzzles because she knew whenever her son wanted to play with them, he needed the mother's presence: "*I want him to be interested in playing with these puzzles with small pieces. However, I don't have enough time playing alongside with him. He gets so demanding when he is busy with this type of toy.*" As to the unstable situations in life, Nicole explained how they mostly would travel, go on a picnic, attend parties, and how this was detrimental for her child maintaining a regular routine: "*She does not know how to play and with what to play. When we are at home, I can see her relaxed and busy with her toys, but when we go to my friends' houses, although they have kids and many toys are available, she doesn't seem interested in them.*" Overall, Nicole believed that maintaining a stable life for the child would promote the child's interest in playing.

Environment-related Obstacles. Anita was the only participant who indicated the environmental factors may also affect children's play. She did not point out any of the parent-

related obstacles. However, she stated that the reason why children were sometimes unable to get busy playing was that they were not in an enriched environment. Lack of sufficient toys, lack of enough space to play, not wearing comfortable/appropriate clothes, and lack of age-appropriate materials/toys for children were among the obstacles the mother mentioned. Anita also stated that some children may lack ideas for play and that may lead them to unstable mood and uninterested in playing: “*Kids don’t know what to play and that we have to give them an idea.*” Although this participant stated during the interview that she was not satisfied with the amount of time she spent playing with her daughter, she did not mention “lack of parent-child playtime” as an obstacle for the play.

Play Benefits. Interestingly, the advantages of play mentioned by the participants covered all five developmental dimensions; social, physical, emotional, cognitive, and language development. According to the mothers who participated in this study, play included many benefits and could facilitate children’s development. Two mothers, Aria and Anita highlighted the opportunities that play provided for their children to enhance their physical strength. As Anita explained:

She normally doesn’t like running and riding a bicycle. But once I ask her if she wants to chase me or if she likes to play the game tag, she welcomes my idea. Well then... I get tired soon, but what else I can do? This is the only way I can encourage her to have physical activities.

The cognitive aspect of development was another play benefit mentioned by three of the mothers. Perla, Aria, and Zelda believed that the child would become intellectually vigorous and gain cognitive abilities including problem solving, creativity, thinking, and decision making: “*Using raw materials lets her decide what to do and how to create a novel thing. She can think*

about her interests, and this in turn, helps her to have a higher sense of self-awareness.” Perla explained that play helped her child to solve real-life problems: “I remember when she was trying to move a chair whose leg was stuck with the carpet. She was frustrated and wanted me to help. I asked her to see if she can find the source of problem.”

The participants also perceived that children developed their social skills during playtime. All of the mothers in this study explained how their children learned communication skills while they played. They talked about how mothers tried to teach their children about life skills and highlighted the importance of social aspects. Zelda believed that she was successful in teaching her son many social skills while playing with him.

I have taught him how to talk politely, ask for my permission before leaving the house, help others, and respect the rights of others through play. everything happens in a real situation for them in play, and that’s how I think they learn better.

Perla also believed that her daughter learned communication skills through group play: *“There are some challenges which only happen when the child is with her peers. They learn how to deal with their communicational problems.”* Nicole explained that her daughter experienced real-life situations and learned to be a responsible person in her future life.

She cooks with me, washes dishes, and vacuums the house. I don’t agree with people who say this is exclusively a mother’s responsibility. However, we’re living in Iran and people expect a girl to know about these life skills. That’s a good thing that she gets familiar with theses social life skills.

The participants also mentioned that obtaining self-confidence in self-expression, learning how to answer questions, being honest in relationships, and creating a positive bond with parents were the other skills developed during play.

Language and emotional skills were also found to be beneficial during play. According to Aria, Anita, and Perla, play facilitated children's emotional expression. Aria explained:

Whenever [child's name] is angry at me, I'm aware of the reason why. But sometimes he doesn't talk to me. I don't know... maybe he's too young to know how to do it, or doesn't want to talk about it... I play with him. That's when he pours his emotions out on his toys. Sometimes plays my role and does the same with his toys. Sometimes plays the role of the victim and talks freely.

She perceived her child as able to share his emotions through play, as well as express himself verbally, and experience a real situation in which he could freely talk about different feelings. On the other hand, Aria explained how play helped her son emotionally adapt to a new situation:

"Play helps him to get accustomed to an unknown situation, and that in turn makes it easier for him to accept it." Finally Zelda explained that play provided a novel opportunity for her to teach new vocabulary to her son: *"For example, instead of saying, What a beautiful tree, what a beautiful flower... I can say, what a beautiful landscape. The word 'landscape' will be added to his vocabulary range."* What these mothers believed was that play not only would enrich children's abilities to verbally express themselves and their emotions, but also to learn new vocabulary.

Parents' childhood play experiences

The participants were asked to discuss their childhood play experiences. This was a topic that seemed to arouse the participants' feelings. Almost all of them were smiling while remembering their childhood experiences. However, Aria became emotional and cried when explaining how she had missed her father in her childhood. Anita also explained how she had been eager to play with her dad, however, he was not present most of the time: *"I remember once*

he played basketball with me and I was overwhelmed with joy. But he never played with me again.” Families’ economic status, the high number of siblings in families, different parenting styles, and the country’s political situation such as war were among the factors mentioned as to why the participants believed that they experienced play differently from their children.

Analyzing the data for this theme, I realized that the participants’ narratives about their childhood play experiences were different than what they preferred for their own children. For example, four of the five mothers [Aria, Anita, Perla, and Zelda] explained how their parents would never play with them and that they were mainly playing with their peers. This was a common idea among these mothers, as Zelda said: *“I don’t remember my mom playing with me. We would always play with siblings, cousins, and neighbors’ children.”* Three mothers, Perla, Zelda, and Aria were satisfied with their child’s play engagement, as long as they had access to other children and toys to play with. It seemed that they were satisfied with the way their parents would let them play freely. For example, Aria explained: *“The fact that they would let us play would give us the time and permission to play without nagging and limiting us is an encouragement.”* According to the mothers’ report, they would spend more time playing with their peers than their children do. These mothers stated how their parents’ lack of time playing with them was balanced by their high engagement playing with other children. Perla explained that since her daughter did not have access to her peers and had no siblings, it became her responsibility to play with her: *“We would always play with a child, whoever (s)he was. I never felt my mom’s lack of presence in play because we were enjoying playing with other kids. But [child’s name] has no one else to play with, except me.”*

Another difference mentioned by the mothers was that when they were growing up, that they had access to fewer toys than their children do. Except for Nicole, who explained that she

was not interested in playing with toys but only reading books and getting engaged in educational games, the other mothers remembered having few toys when they were young. For example, Perla said:

We were always playing outside, in the garden, in the yard. Living in small apartments was not common. I had only two dolls that my mom had sewn for me. But I had many raw materials such as string, papers, stones, leaves, and many more to entertain myself.

Similarly, Aria described her childhood experience regarding the toys: “*When we were kids, we couldn’t have too many toys. We didn’t have the opportunity to choose toys for ourselves. We had minimal choices. But for [child’s name], the choices are not limited at all.*” The same was mentioned by Zelda, who explained how she could get busy playing with only some sheets for many hours: “*We would make houses for ourselves, or sometimes would wear them like Indian Sari.*” It seemed that the mothers’ play experiences affected the way they provided toys and play opportunities for their children. For example, Zelda explained how her son was also interested in making houses out of sheets, just like her. Nicole also described how she always preferred books, and that she had no interest in having toys. This was exactly how she described her daughter’s play experiences as well. Similarly, Perla indicated how she would love to play with raw materials when she was a child and how she believed raw materials should be an inseparable and accessible part of the children’s daily toys.

All the mothers also believed in providing the opportunity for peer play. The participants believed that according to current life styles, with a few siblings, and specifically due to COVID, children had very limited access to their peers. These mothers described the benefits of playing with peers and how they always enjoyed being with other children. As Anita explained: “*I had a*

sister, and I want the same thing for my daughter. I want her to play with other children, they learn more from each other than from adults.”

Conversely, there were many experiences that these participants preferred not to repeat with their children, including inadequate access to toys, lack of opportunities to share play ideas, lack of parental engagement/supervision, and lack of educational aspects in play. For example, Aria explained that her son could have access to any toy he wanted, because she did not want him to go through what she did in her childhood. Another negative aspect of the play that Perla indicated was that she wanted to play freely and to decide what to play. However, her mother would not let her experience when it came to risky activities.

I always loved to climb trees, or work with knives. My mom would never come to supervise me while giving me the chance to experience these activities I liked. Instead, she would prevent me from getting engaged in these types of play.

What Perla stated was closely related to “lack of parental engagement/supervision,” which was a common point among the participants’ childhood play experiences. She emphasized how it was important to supervise her daughter in her play and teach her how to solve her problems.

Similarly, Nicole believed that her parents would rarely spend time playing with her: *“I had almost no responsibilities at home. Maybe it was because my parents would think my job is to entertain myself while they take care of the house tasks.”*

Finally, educational aspects of play seemed to be of importance for some of the participants. Asking the mothers if they thought play should be educational to children, only Nicole stated how it was not necessary and how she did not care if her child learned something through play or not. They also shared what experiences they would not like to repeat with their children. Anita explained that although she played to have fun when she was young, she

preferred her daughter to learn something through playing: *“I always loved to paint. My mom would never help me with that. She never asked me if I want to take some classes. This is not something that I want for [child’s name]. She should learn something while playing.”* Overall, it seemed that mothers were affected by their own childhood play experiences; being aware of these experiences, enhanced their children’s play opportunities.

Parents’ Parenting Styles

Data on how the participants parent their children, and their strategies were derived from two sources; the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001) and the interview questions related to parenting practices (appendix A). Although three parenting styles introduced by Baumrind (1960) – authoritative, authoritarian, permissive – were included in PSDQ, neglectful parenting style, that was added to this scale by Maccoby & Martin (1983), was not included in this questionnaire. Overall, four of the five participants consistently responded to the questionnaire as having practices associated with authoritative parenting. One of the parents, Anita gave several responses more closely related to the permissive parenting style. I also found that this study’s participants showed consistent responses across both the questionnaire and the interview. Although I included the questionnaire as another source, I was more interested in the analysing the interview transcriptions that conveyed richer data, including examples from their daily life.

There were a total number of nine questions asking mothers to describe their parenting styles and their parenting practices. These questions included the parent’s attitudes/opinions toward her child’s playtime, decision-making process, attentiveness, reasoning, attitude toward the child’s mistakes, rule-establishing process, assigning responsibilities, and the parent’s perceptions of the child’s autonomy. I also asked the mothers a final question about whether they

perceived their parents' parenting styles as either similar or different from her own parenting strategies. According to Robinson et al.'s (1995) classifications of each parenting styles' subscales (Appendix F), I will discuss the themes that were revealed from the participants' responses to the interview questions:

- Warmth and support, autonomy granting, and regulation subscales represented the authoritative parenting style theme.
- Non-reasoning/punitive subscale, represented the authoritarian parenting style theme; and
- Indulgent subscale, represented the permissive parenting style theme.

Warmth and Support

According to Baumrind (1989), authoritative parents show high levels of warmth and love, and believe that anger expressions should be done when children need to be confronted. This demonstrates how parents with authoritative parenting styles are willing to show a wide range of appropriate emotions when is required. Although authoritarian parents are inclined to show less warmth, permissive parents show less hostility but are not necessarily supportive and warm toward their children (Baumrind, 2013).

Although the majority of the participants expressed their negative feelings about the insufficient playtime they had with their children, it seemed that they all perceived creating a positive parent-child bonding as an essential factor in communication. These mothers believed that spending quality time with children during play would help them get to know their child and bond with each other, leading to an enjoyable parent-child relationship. Aria explains: "*Playtime is a chance for us to get intimate... [child's name] has all my attention and knows when I'm playing with him, I'm only concentrating on him and nothing else.*" Similarly, Perla described the parent-child relationship as an opportunity in which the child would get his/her parent's love

and attention. Zelda explained that having a good relationship with the child and being warm toward him/her was beneficial for both the mother and the child: *“If I don’t have good communication with him, he wouldn’t be respectful toward me. The more time I spend with him, the smoother and easier this positive bonding will be created.”* Having warm and intimate time with the child was one of the questions in PSDQ, which was marked “very often” and “always” by all the mothers.

Looking at the child while talking, listening carefully, and giving one’s full attention to the child were other warmth measurement factors listed by the mothers. Although all the participants shared their opinions about how listening to the child was crucial, Aria, Perla, and Zelda stated how they mostly kneeled at the same level as the child while (s)he was talking and actively listening to what the child was saying. These mothers also explained that their reactions to the talking child depended on their situations; as Zelda described

If he talks to me when I’m busy working in the kitchen, I don’t sit in front of him, looking into his eyes and listening to him like that. The only thing is to nod my head and be like hmmm... for him to know that I’m listening while still doing my work.

Perla and Aria also shared their thoughts about how the situations they were in, may affect how they demonstrated their warmth as their children were talking. However, Anita and Nicole shared two different narratives about their support toward their children. Anita seemed to be aware of the dismissive attitude when her daughter was talking to her: *“It has happened many times when I’m working with my mobile phone, and I don’t notice that she is talking to me. She calls me many times, and that’s when she gets upset. That’s wrong, I should be more careful.”* It seemed that although Anita knew about the “best way” of listening to her child, she did not give many examples of being warm and supportive. Finally, Nicole’s listening strategies were

described as being a combination of warmth/support and teaching the critical concept of “patience” to her child: *“I mostly listen to her with full attention, however, there were times when she keeps repeating what she wants. That’s when I ask her to be patient. She should know that she cannot have whatever she wants in a second.”*

The parents also described “warmth and support” towards their children’s needs. I found there were different degrees of help and support mentioned by these mothers. The mothers encouraged their children to do as much as they could. It seemed that the participants preferred to partly guide their children to be able to solve the problem but also would encourage them to solve it on their own. Perla discussed how she supported her child and encouraged her to learn problem-solving skills: *“I would rarely solve the problem myself. I observe... in case she needs any help, I would move step by step. I won’t always be there for her. She should know how to live independently.”* Scaffolding was another strategy used by Zelda, who believed the child should be appropriately guided: *“I act as a pattern. I may do one thing and ask him to do the rest. He should not be dependent on me.”* Finally, depending on the child’s situation and mood, some mothers explained that they sometimes decided to do the entire task for the child to avoid frustration. Nicole and Anita were two participants who would do the task for their daughters if they noticed that the children felt overwhelmed and required their help. Trying to comfort the child when (s)he needed was indicative of a warm and supportive parent, and closely related with the authoritative parenting style. How the mothers reacted when their children were in need also demonstrated their attitudes toward granting autonomy to their children. Depending on their perceptions, they would either decide to let the children do the majority of the task or they would solve the whole problem for the children.

According to the PSDQ (Robinson et al., 2001), five questions were related to the authoritative parenting style relate to the “warmth and support” subscale. These include, encouraging the child to talk about his/her troubles, giving praise when the child is good, giving comfort and understanding when the child is upset, having warm and intimate times together with the child, and being responsive to the child’s needs and feeling. Except for Anita, who had marked “half of the time” for all these factors, the other four participants’ answers were at the higher end of the Likert scale, indicating that “warmth and support” were highly valued by them.

Autonomy Granting

According to Robinson et al. (1995), the second subscale of authoritative parenting style involves allowing children to become autonomous; Baumrind (1971) first explained this concept as parents encouraging their children’s individuality and independence. There were many cases during the interview where the mothers discussed the importance of encouraging a sense of autonomy and valuing their children’s independence. For example, Perla, Aria, and Zelda defined play as an activity in which the child would manifest his/her independence in terms of choosing the roles, deciding what, and how to play. These three participants explained that they followed their children’s lead and they agreed when their children “assign roles to them” during playtime. However, Anita preferred to choose the type of play she engaged in with her daughter, rather than letting her daughter decide what to play: “ *Although I like puzzle and brain teasers, because [child’s name] does not voluntarily go for physical play, I try to reinforce her to play with a ball for example, or run around playing with balloons. I want her to be more active.*”

Although four of the five mothers asked for their children’s ideas when it came to making a choice, I noticed that one mother disagreed to involve her child in this process. Anita believed that her daughter was unable to make the proper choice.

I never ask her if she wants to go to the park or the zoo, for example. She cannot decide. Sometimes when I ask her what she wants to eat, she is not able to decide what she wants to eat. I always make decisions for her.

Anita explained how she did not provide any choices for her daughter. It seemed that her daughter was not used to making decisions, therefore her mother did not provide her with opportunities to make decisions. Anita did not think that her daughter was ready to have autonomy and to share her ideas/opinions. Zelda was another mother who believed children rarely have the skill to make appropriate choices. However, she granted minimum opportunities to her son to participate in deciding about unimportant issues: *“I should let him decide wherever any kind of decisions seems fine to me. For example, asking him if he wants to wear these shorts or the other ones. But most of the times, he is unable to decide properly.”* Talking about unimportant issues, the other three participants reported how they would ask their children to share their ideas in these situations. Aria, Nicole, and Zelda explained that they would offer some limited options to their children to choose from. As Perla stated: *“When we want to go out for her to have fun, considering some limitations such as our time and the location, my husband and I pick a couple of options before involving her. Then, she can make the final decision.”*

The two questions on the PSDQ (Robinson et al., 2001), focused on the same concept. This question “Respecting the child’s opinion by encouraging him/her to express them” focused on how parents would let their children share their ideas before making a decision. Except for Nicole and Anita who believed they would do this “half of the time”, the other participants marked this item highly in the questionnaire. In addition, another item focused on “taking the child's desires into account before asking him/her to do something”. As it was mentioned before, some of the participants believed that their children were unable to think about their

likes/dislikes. For this reason they seemed to avoid asking their children to share their ideas about their interests.

Assigning responsibilities to the child was the final item that focused on whether mothers would encourage autonomy in their children. Almost all of the participants agreed that allocating responsibility to children was important, however, Nicole seemed more focused on fulfilling the responsibilities for her child: *“If she doesn’t cleanup her toys, I won’t do it for her. I just remind her that if I vacuum the house, all of your toys will be gone.”* Encouraging the child through different methods such as letting him/her know about the consequences, offering help to him/her, and/or choosing the tasks based on the child’s interests were included in participants’ responses. For example, Aria said: *“He loves to clean the bath. I have assigned this responsibility to him. Whenever the bathroom is needed to be cleaned, I ask [child’s name] to do it, and he does.”* Perla believed granting autonomy to the child was of importance due to many reasons, such as child becoming independent, fostering his/her self-confidence, and learning life skills: *“I try to make the environment safe for her to engage in real-life experiences. For example, letting her to wash plastic dishes, or accompanying her to cook safely. She needs to be independent, when I will not be there for her.”* All the participants believed that when assigning responsibilities to their children, they would consider the children’s age and abilities.

Guidance and Discipline Across Parenting Styles

The three themes of regulation, non-reasoning/punitive, and indulgent were merged because they overlapped (e.g., the questions for regulation were also applicable for non-reasoning/punitive and indulgent). According to Robinson et al. (1995), regulation, establishing rules, providing explanations regarding the reasons behind the rules, and the consequences of breaking them are related to the authoritative parenting style. On the other hand, asserting

negative power on the child, being intrusive, being forceful in adhering to fixed rules, and not providing any explanations as to why a specific set of rules are established and should be followed, are the characteristics under the authoritarian parenting style (Robinson et al., 1995). Finally, Baumrind (1971) believed that permissive parents have low demandingness, which means they either avoid establishing rules or fail to follow through them. This also is referred to as being indulgent. The interview questions included four main situations in which each participant could explain about her reaction toward: (a) providing explanations about a decision, (b) when the child makes a mistake, (c) how the rules are established at home, and (d) how the mother follows-up with the child's responsibilities.

Mothers were asked to provide explanations and reasons behind the decisions they made for their children. All five participants believed that supporting children and respecting their questions were vital. The mothers in this study believed that it would be important to provide explanations about any decision they made for the children, and in case the child would ask about the reason why the decision was made. As Aria explains: *"This is [child's name]'s right to know why we have made a specific about him. Even if I'm not successful in explaining the reason to him, I ask his dad to do this. Different explanations may help him to understand better."* Anita had another strategy to explain the reasons behind the decisions to her daughter: *"I simplify the issue if I see she has challenge getting what I'm saying."* In addition, Perla described that her daughter would continue asking questions when she provided explanations. She described: *"I'm fine with that. I answer as many questions as possible, before I go crazy!"* Nicole also pointed out that she avoided lying to her daughter: *"I never lie to her, nor trying to divert her mind from the main topic. Either she likes it or not, I explain the reason."* Nicole recalled a time when her daughter wanted to stay at her grandmother's, however, she could not let her do this. The mother

tried to explain the reason behind her decision, although her daughter would not stop crying. It seemed that Nicole had chosen to warmly support her daughter in terms of staying on the track and letting her child know about why she could not do what she wanted to. It seemed that all mothers were inclined to explain and reason with their children when they asked questions.

Mothers were asked to explain their reactions to their children's mistakes and to share their perspectives about regulating their children's behaviors. Depending on the situation's severity the mothers may become punitive and show harsh reactions. Reminding the child about the rules and providing explanations as to why the mistake was wrong, were two common points in all the participants' narratives. Each mother highlighted the importance of regulating the child by sharing unique descriptions. For example, Nicole believed that the child should take the responsibility of her wrong behavior: *"There was a time when I would ask her WHO DID THAT? But then I realized she was starting to lie about it. I changed my attitude to show her that she is the only responsible person in this mistake."* It seemed that Nicole tried to confront her child about what her attitude should be, after making a mistake. On the other hand, Nicole used emotional consequences as a deterrent to the mistake repetition: *"[child's name] is sensitive not to make her daddy upset. I always remind her that if you do this, daddy will get angry or sad."* Perla had a unique way of disciplining her daughter; it seemed that she preferred to look at the mistakes as teaching her a lesson. Perla encouraged retrospection after a mistake was made to help her daughter learn an important fact.

My main approach is to go back and let [child's name] look at the process again. For example, a glass is broken. I bring a plastic glass and ask her to throw it, and then I explain that see... it doesn't break. And then we work on how we can manage the situation in case a similar mistake is made.

Finally, Anita's answer was more similar to an indulgent style, and closely related to the permissive parenting style. It seemed that she had chosen not to confront her daughter for the mistakes she made. This mother described: *“My husband always nag why aren't you serious when she makes a mistake? Why do you spoil her? But I just don't... the most I can do is to frown at her, but I act like nothing has happened.”*

Mothers had different ideas about how rules should be established and maintained for children. Aria and Perla shared many features and attributes in their rule-establishing perspectives. Both of these participants believed that there should be a few fixed strict rules for the child to maintain discipline at home. Besides, both Aria and Perla reported how they try to help their children follow the rules. It seemed that both of them believed that the mother should support the child when (s)he was being punished following making a mistake. As Aria explained:

When he breaks those important rules, he should undergo the consequences which were clarified beforehand. For example, once he threw a statue toward the TV and it was about to break. I took him to his room and stayed with him. I closed the door and told him that both of us need to remain here for a couple of minutes until you think about what a mistake you made.

Interestingly, Perla explained that she would prepare the environment to facilitate following the rules for her daughter: *“When it's the sleep time, instead of repeating to her that it's sleep time and you need to go to bed, I start turning the lights off. This helps her remembering the rule of sleeping on time.”* Perla also believed that rules should be defined and established through play, rather than repeating them. One last commonality between Aria and Perla was that both of them stated that some rules could be flexible. They explained that “how” the rules should be followed

might change depending on some specific situations, however, the main rule should never change. Aria explains: “[child’s name] may decide to first pee and then brush his teeth. But what is important is that he has to brush before going to bed.”

On the other hand, Anita, Nicole, and Zelda had different ways of approaching rule establishment. It seemed that Zelda took a punitive perspective, as she explained how she would act harshly and use verbal aggression when her son defied rules.

In my house, rules are rules, however, I show them to [child’s name] practically, rather than verbally. I lose my temper and shout at him when he disobey the rules, although I know most the time he doesn’t defy on purpose.

Conversely, Anita seemed to behave more indulgently when it came to establishing rules: “I’m weak in establishing rules. My mom would never have rules for us, that’s why I don’t know how to do it.” Anita said that her daughter had no rules at home. She explained that they did not have a specific sleep time, and that the child was allowed to watch television as long as she liked. This parenting style was more closely related to permissive style in which the parent would have a few or no rules at home, and if they did, they would not follow-through them. Finally, Nicole took a moderate stance. She had some specific and fixed rules toward which she was strict, however, when it came to the other domains, she had established no rules and seemed to act indulgently: “I would never establish rules for her stuff. She can treat her toys and her stuff in any way she likes. She wants to break them? break them... but she has no right to touch my stuff. I have strict rules for my possessions.” It seems that depending on the situation, Nicole acted either punitive or indulgent.

Assigning responsibilities to children was discussed in “granting autonomy”, as well. However, I decided to include it in this section, since parents’ perceptions about the importance

of children having some responsibilities at home, may reveal valuable information about their attitudes toward regulating their children. As mentioned before, Anita did not set rules at home. It seemed that she preferred to establish a prevention strategy, which she called a “reward system”, rather than having a set of pre-determined rules. This mother expressed her gender-related perspective toward this issue:

This is more important for boys, they need to know their responsibilities from childhood, otherwise life would be difficult for others. I try to define some responsibilities for [child's name], however, she mostly does not fulfil them. So, I am the one who always complete her responsibilities.

It seemed that Anita did not follow through on her daughter's responsibilities, and let her child skip them when it suited her. This style seemed to be closer to indulgent theme, where the parent did not care if the child fulfilled his/her responsibilities. On the contrary, the other four mothers believed that not only assigning responsibilities to the child was essential, but the child should take part in determining them. Zelda explains:

It's really important that he learns his age-related responsibilities. In determining what to assign to him, I consider his age and abilities. I don't want him to lose his self-confidence in not being able to do the task, but learn a skill and feel good about himself.

Interestingly, Nicole emphasized on how it was crucial for the mother to let the child be responsible in doing the tasks which were assigned to him/her: “*I always tell her that I'll help you in cleaning up your toys if you want me to. But I would never do the whole task for you, because this is your responsibility.*” She also said that she avoided cleaning up her daughter's toys even if they remained where they were for a couple of days. It seemed that Nicole was

closer to the authoritative parenting style in this theme, where the parent tried to regulate her child's behaviour by following through and sticking to the rules.

Finally, getting back to the questionnaire, there were five questions related to "regulation" subscale, which included explaining the consequences of child's behaviors, helping the child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging him/her to talk about the consequences of his/her own actions, giving the child reasons why rules should be obeyed, emphasizing the reasons for rules, and explaining to the child how the parent feels about the child's good and bad behavior. Except for Anita whose answers were more inclined to be closer to lower side of the scale (never and once a week), the other four participants answered "very often" and "always". On the other hand, the authoritarian parenting style was being measured by four questions (considering that I eliminated eight questions related to this parenting style). These included stating "Because I said so," or "I am the parent and I want you to", when the child asks why he/she has to conform, using threats as punishment with little or no justification, punishing by taking privileges away from the child with little if any explanations, and punishing by putting the child off somewhere alone with little if any explanation. In these set of questions, all the participants had answers more closely to "never" and "once in a while". It seemed that the mothers in this study tried to avoid using authoritarian strategies with their children. Lastly, there were five questions that assessed the "indulgent" parent styles subscale. Permissive style included threatening the child with punishment more often than actually giving it, stating punishments to the child and do not actually do them, finding it difficult to discipline the child, spoiling the child, and giving into the child when the child causes a commotion about something. Once more, Anita was the only mother whose answers were more closely to "very often" and "always". However, the other four participants used the lower scores in the scale.

Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to understand the relation between the parents' parenting styles and their perceptions of their children's play. Through an in-depth interview and completing the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001), five Iranian mothers shared their thoughts and beliefs about their children's play and their perceptions of the parenting. Interviewing the participants before they completed the parenting styles' questionnaire, let me have an unbiased perspective about the mothers' narratives. However, after analyzing the data, I found that four of them were inclined to respond more closely to authoritative parenting style, and only one mother responded to questions with a more a permissive parenting style. This finding was verified by the participants' responses to the PSDQ questionnaire (Robinson et al., 2001).

Findings in this study suggest that there is consistency between the mother's parenting style and how she perceives her child's play (Khoshbakht, 2012; Loprinzi et al., 2014). In other words, the mother with a more permissive parenting style expressed that she was more inclined to withdraw herself from engaging in play, and preferred to make the decisions on what her child's play activities, as well as be dismissive of her child's interests during play (e.g., did not attend to her child's requests). On the contrary, the mothers who tended to use more authoritative parenting practices seemed to perceive themselves as being more responsive and warm, gave examples about how they would enrich the children's setting, engaged in various play types, and discussed how they valued play as a way to bond with their children. These findings seem consistent with Amir et al.'s (2013) research, who showed that authoritative parents focused on having positive communication with their children, and they were more likely actively engaged

with their children. Finally, this study demonstrated that parents' parenting styles and practices impact the play opportunities given to their children (Ndari et al., 2019).

Using the Developmental Niche Framework (Harkness & Super, 1986) both in data collection and data analysis offered me the opportunity to have an enriched context in which I could find some contextual information related to Iranian cultural foundations. According to Harkness and Super (1986), ethnotheories are parents' beliefs in the context of culture, hence, how they arrange their parental goals and techniques for child rearing seems to be connected with how they perceive their children's needs. All participant had their unique narratives and experiences regarding play and parenting, some interesting similarities emerged, which reflected the mothers' ideas about child-rearing, their perceptions about their children's activities and their regularities toward their children's environments (Harkness et al., 2009), more specifically with their children's play settings.

Cultural factors

Raising children within a close family is of high importance in Iran and the family is considered as the most essential and primary social unit (Fereidouni et al., 2015; Shanfi et al., 2016). Based on Iranian culture, mothers are considered the main characters in raising children as well as having household responsibilities (Ghajarieh & Salami, 2016). Although there were many studies investigating parents' parenting styles and parents' perceptions of play, the uniqueness of my research was that I worked in a cultural context for which there were few research studies to date. According to the Developmental Niche Framework (Super & Harkness, 2002), children's environments are not some random series of rules and situations, but are shaped by cultural customs, values, and interactions. Among three main elements in the developmental niche framework – the caretaker's psychology, the customs of child-rearing, and

child's physical and social settings – the main focus of my project was on the parents' cultural backgrounds, which can shape their approaches toward their parenting strategies (Harkness et al., 2011), and similarly their perceptions of their children's play.

Obtaining the mothers' demographic information and interviewing them about their parenting styles provided me with comprehensive data about their approaches toward their children's play, including types of play and play activities as well as their thoughts about whether play was perceived as important in their child's life. Mothers' unique cultural situations were investigated by asking various questions about their lives, such as their childhood play experiences and the similarities/differences between their parents' and their own parenting strategies and play. The participants' responses to the interview questions allowed for a rich cultural context in which I could interpret their thoughts and perceptions about their children's play. For example, when I asked if the mothers believed that play prepares children for school, a mother clearly stated how she thought the Iranian educational system was not compatible with children's life experiences. She discussed how she thought children were exposed to three different educational settings: childhood play, kindergarten, and school and that there was clear demarcation between these three systems. This mother uttered her utmost dissatisfaction about the Iranian school system and how she believed the play would not prepare the child for kindergarten, nor would kindergarten prepare the child for school.

Although Lin et al. (2019) found that six Chinese parents in their study had dichotomous beliefs in terms of perceiving education and play as two different categories, five mothers in my research had moderate viewpoints. The participants expressed that play was educational for their children and all five mothers reported that play would teach life skills, even if they were unaware of that educational aspect. However, Nicole and Aria stated how they thought children would not

be aware that they were learning something through play. Generally, the mothers in my study perceived play and education as two interrelated factors in children's lives. This finding is consistent with Yılmaz and Pala (2019), who postulated that education is an inseparable part of the play and allows children to be educated in terms of social and academic skills. These mothers stated that education was not an essential element for their children – considering their ages – and they would prefer their children engage in play to have fun. Conversely, Lin et al. (2019) explained that the Chinese mothers in their study believed that play would distract their children from learning and should be allowed only if it included an educational idea. In other words, it was more important to consider how they defined play and learning, and why they thought play was useful or not in their children's lives.

Findings in this study also revealed that mothers' perceptions about the role of gender in play might affect the child's access to different play materials and opportunities to engage in different types of play (Horwath-Oliver, 2015). Although three mothers stated that they had gender-neutral play perspectives, they all recounted that their childhood experiences were about having different play activities for boys and girls. It seemed that these mothers' parents, who were from a different generation, were more inclined to value gender-related play activities and would prohibit their daughters from engaging in play activities that were considered male. Similarly to Amani et al.'s (2019) study, who believed Iranian mothers tended to be more strict toward their daughters than their sons, the two mothers in my study who valued gender-related play types seemed to encourage their daughters to engage in similar-gender play (e.g., with dolls). This finding was consistent with Horwath-Oliver's (2015) study, who found that the parents who did not believe in gender roles may place fewer restrictions on their children's play behaviors, thus providing more freedom to their children to express themselves during play.

Generally, these Iranian mothers were more inclined to enjoy playing with their children, to provide more play opportunities, and consider more benefits for play rather than express any disadvantages for children's play. Interestingly, these five mothers reported that they believed their own childhood play experiences were different from that of their children's. Mothers' dissatisfaction about their own childhood play experiences seemed to affect their play perceptions and led them to create a high-quality play environment for their children in the home setting, that was different from their own when they were young (Farver & Wimbari, 1995; Haight et al., 1999). They tried to engage more in their children's playtime, let their children decide about the play types they were interested in, and provided a variety of toys for them. Finally, the mothers avoided gender-related play activities and were focused on providing their children with the childhood play experiences they were deprived of, as they actively planned to provide for their own children with play opportunities in a more conscious way.

The cultural lens also allowed to make better interpretations between the mothers' expectations and their children's play. In other words, children would play more consistently with the parent's cultural perspective (Assadi et al., 2007). Other authors, such as Little (2010) believed that some parenting behaviors might limit children's activities. Covering the dolls' hair with scarves (hijab) demonstrated the cultural impact on the child's play. As Iran is an Islamic country in which wearing the hijab is mandatory, girls are exposed to the concept of covering their heads with scarves from a young age. Anita explained how wearing a hijab was valued in their family and how this cultural/religious belief influenced her daughter types of play with dolls.

Listening more closely as mothers described their parenting styles, several themes emerged which were associated with Iranian culture. For example, mothers cautiously reported

how their parents would use strategies that were more closely related to the authoritarian parenting style. Not spending sufficient time playing with children, lack of access to various toys, occasional physical punishment in case of disobedience, and lack of parent-child positive bonding were among the strategies mentioned by the mothers in this study. Based on Iranian culture, children are expected to abide by their parents' orders, and more specifically, their fathers' expectations (Ghajarieh & Salami, 2016). Two themes emerged through this cultural lens when I asked mothers to share their childhood play experiences and their current attitudes/perceptions about their children's play. One was when mothers explained that they would use emotion-induced strategies consequences to prevent their children from misbehavior. For example, two mothers reported how their children should show high respect to their fathers and how it was important not to make their fathers angry or upset. I realized that these mothers would discipline their children by using the concept of "let's not make daddy upset." The interesting point was that the mothers would not encourage their children be scared of their fathers, but perceive them as highly respected and in a way if their father was upset/sad, this could be their fault because they misbehaved. Parvizy and Ahmadi (2015) explained that fathers are the main characters in Iranian families, who are considered the main authority figures.

The other emergent theme was how the mothers would try not to replicate most of their parents' authoritarian parenting styles – as one of them called it "inappropriate parenting" – in raising their children. Similarly, FirouzAbadi et al. (2017) found a relationship between parents' parenting styles and perceived traumas in children. These authors reported how children's behaviours in adulthood are affected by their parents' different parenting practices. In this project, four out of five mothers explained how they would prefer not to repeat the same mistakes their parents did when they were children (i.e., occasional punishment, lack of positive

communication, lack of adult supervision, etc.). Only Zelda believed that her mother's parenting strategies were more efficient and appropriate than hers. However, the mothers' responses revealed several common sub-themes regarding their childhood play experiences. For example, these mothers shared their ideas about how they disagreed with the majority of their parents' parenting practices. For instance, Perla explained that the lack of adult supervision had led her children to approach their problems inefficiently and they could not gain problem-solving skills. Lack of parents' presence in children's play, which is one of the characteristics of authoritarian parenting style (Sorkhabi, 2005), was another common sub-theme mentioned by the mothers. According to Shafi'poor et al. (2015), authoritarian parenting practices were the dominant strategies in traditional Iranian culture which emerged from the participants' narratives about their own parents.

Overall, except for one mother who responded more closely to a permissive parenting style, the other four responded to interview questions more like an authoritative parenting. As Gafoor and Kurukkan (2014) described parenting styles as some specific behaviors through which parents can socialize their children and help them learn life skills, the mothers in my study also believed that warmth, support, supervision, taking the child's decisions into account, assigning responsibilities, and establishing rules were of importance in helping their children's development. Investigating these mothers' parenting styles revealed that culture played an influential role in determining how they would parent their children. For example, providing opportunities for girls to play the roles of a mother, such as cooking, baking, vacuuming, etc., highlighted how Iranian culture may have definite role for females and mothers taught female responsibilities to their daughters through play. Several studies have also shown the effects of

culture and the parents' environments on choosing their parenting strategies (Chang et al., 2004; Rodriguez et al. 2009; Stevenson et al., 1992; Van Campen & Russell, 2010).

Limitations and future implications

This qualitative research project has many strengths, including an in-depth interview, many examples which show mothers' parenting strategies and how they are related to play, mothers' reflections of their own childhood play experiences, and working with Iranian parents who have not received attention in the child development literature. However, there are also several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, I included mostly authoritative parents in this research because it was a convenience sample, and I could not select families with different parenting styles because data collection took place during the pandemic. In addition, the neglectful parenting style, which Maccoby and Martin (1983) described, was not included in the questionnaire I used (PSDQ), although with the recruit strategy I used (i.e., posting a poster on social media) I was doubtful that a parent with neglectful parenting would be interested in the project. Due to these reasons, I could only ask parents questions pertained to the three parenting styles (i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive; Baumrind, 1960), even though there were four in the literature. In addition, I had to remove some authoritarian-related questions from the PSDQ (Robinson et al., 2001), because they were about physical punishment and this may have been threatening to parents especially since the focus was parenting practices and play. As a result, although most of the responses to parents seemed to be closely related to authoritarian parenting, the questions were limited for the reasons mentioned above. Including a variety of parenting styles, such as parents with a neglectful parenting may be interesting to consider in future studies.

Secondly, the four mothers discussed their authoritative practices, and one mother's responses were more closely to a permissive parenting style. Although some characteristics in some parents' responses, such as shouting at the child after making a mistake, were more closely to authoritarian parenting style, none of the mothers had several responses consistent with an authoritarian parent style. Another strength of the study, was that I did not select the participants based on their parenting styles. This allowed me to remain impartial and listen to the mothers' stories about their perceptions of parenting and play. Future studies may select parents with different parenting although the responses to the questionnaire can be kept blind to the interviewee as this facilitates a more open discussion ensuring that the interviewee is not expecting a specific response based on parenting style. The same is applicable for parents' genders. Although I was also open to recruiting fathers, only mothers accepted to be a part of my study. Exploring fathers' and mothers' perspectives on parenting styles and children's play would be interesting to consider in future studies.

The third limitation is that this study was limited to five participants; hence, the perceptions of these mothers are informative in understanding the experiences of these five mothers and similarities may be transferable to Iranian mothers with the same demographics, although it is a small sample and the goal of the study was not to be generalizable to all Iranian mother. Future studies could include a more varied sample with a higher number of participants with several interviews and observations to gain a wider range of lived experiences and delve more deeply into their opinions and perceptions.

Finally, considering the fact that the pandemic has changed people's lives, the study was adapted to the participants' experiences by using zoom interviews, and using simple methodologies that did not require observations. As I had expected, there were many examples in

mothers' narratives specifically about the pandemic and how they would believe some of their stories were different from what they typically would experience; there was a possibility to exploring the impact the pandemic had on them and their children more, but this was not done in order to focus more on the research questions on parenting and play. As people's lives have changed due to COVID, it would be good in future studies to consider the effects caused by the current situation and how this has made parents perceive the world differently as well as adapt their parenting and their children's play opportunities.

Conclusion

Considering the importance of parents' parenting styles and parents' perceptions about their children's play (Linebarger, 2015; Loprinzi et al., 2014; Schary et al., 2012; Trost & Loprinzi, 2011), the purpose of this qualitative study was designed to discover the relation between these two factors. The three parenting styles – authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive – described by Baumrind (1960), were explored to see if they reveal anything about how mothers make decisions about their children's play. As the mothers discussed their beliefs about their children's play, many examples were shared about how the mothers' parenting strategies were related to encouraged different types of play and made decisions about their children's play environments. Many studies have also highlighted a link between parents' cultural beliefs/contexts and their play perceptions (Becker, 2014; Emslie & Mesle, 2008; Kazemeini & Pajoheshgar, 2013; Lin et al., 2019; Schaik et al., 2020; StGeorge et al., 2018). Providing toys and opportunities for different types of play, showing a caring attitude about positive parent-child communication through play, teaching life skills to their children through play, and avoiding replicating their own negative childhood play experiences for their children were among the reasons mentioned by these five mothers. Finally, the findings offered valuable

information about how five Iranian mothers perceived their children's play through the lens of an Iranian culture context, which was believed to play an essential role in influencing the mothers' parenting styles and in turn their perceptions of play.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interviewee (pseudonym): _____

Date and time: _____

Before we start the interview, I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. The questions will be related to your parenting practices/strategies, your child's play, and your thoughts and perceptions regarding this topic. Whenever you feel uncomfortable, we can discontinue the interview and arrange another time for it. I would like to remind you that all the information you share with me will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions?

Play Perception

1. How do you define play?
 - Tell me about how you see play in your child's life?
 - Do you think there are any benefits when your child plays? Tell me what are some positive aspects of play?
 - Do you think there are any disadvantages to play? What are they?
2. Do you think you would have a different play definition or play perceptions if your child was the different gender? how?
3. How does your child play? Please describe the type of toys or the play types your child is engaged in?
 - Do you see them helpful for your child in any way? How?
 - Are you happy/satisfied with the toys/play types your child chooses? Why? Why not?
4. Are there any things about your child's play that you would prefer to change?
 - The ways he/she play?
 - The toys he/she chooses?
 - The friends he/she spends time with?
5. Do you think if play prepares your child for school? How?
6. Can you tell me about any type of play that your child engages in and how it may help them become more competent? In what way? Give me an example.

- Is there any specific type of play you prefer your child to get engaged in, and for what purpose?
 - Any specific skills you think he/she learns through play? (regarding language, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects of development)
7. Do you believe that play is important for your child?
- What are the benefits?
 - What would be the obstacles?
 - How do you feel about the time you spend playing with your child? What do you play together? What is your role during this playtime?
8. In your opinion, does your child learn anything when they are playing or do they play for fun?
- Do you think your child learns anything through play? Why or why not? Give some examples.
9. How play was for you when you were young?
- How did you play?
 - How your family support/encourage your play?
10. Among those childhood play experiences, which ones do you want/do not want to replicate for your own child? Why?

- ***Parenting Styles***

11. Do you spend time playing with your child? What do you do together?
- Do you consider it important? How?
 - What do you usually do with him/her when you are playing?
12. When it comes to making choices, how does it work?
- Do you make your own choices?
 - Do you take your child's opinion into account?
 - Do you just choose what he/she decides?
13. When your child is talking to you, how do you usually react?
- Listening but not looking at him/her?
 - Both looking and listening?
 - Ask him to come back to him/her?
 - Ignore him/her so that he can play by himself?

14. After making a decision (mostly related to your child), he/she asks you about the reason of your decision. How do you react?
- Try to explain your thought process? Or you think there is no need to do that?
 - Do you ignore him/her because you are too busy or think he should follow what you say without questioning you?
15. Think about a scenario in which your child made a mistake. Tell me what he or she did and how you reacted.
- Listened to him/her explaining about what happened?
 - Punished him/her? If yes, how?
 - Explained and reminded him/her the rules and expectations?
 - No consequences?
16. How do you usually establish rules for your child?
- Do you stick to them? Do you define consequences of disobeying?
 - How do you share them with your child?
 - Do you ask your child's opinion/thoughts about the rules?
17. Is it important to you to assign responsibilities to your child?
- What elements do you consider when you want to give him/her some responsibilities?
18. When your child is in need (let's say in his/her homework), how do you usually approach this?
- You completely do the task for him/her and take over the task?
 - Partly help him? What factors do you consider?
 - No help?
 - You never ask him or care about his/her school?
19. Do you see any difference between the way you were raised by your parents and the way you are currently using to raise your child?
- How do you perceive these differences? Positive/negative?
 - Any similarities?

Appendix B
Demographic Form

Parent: Mother Father Legal guardian Other _____

1. Place of birth (Country/City): _____

2. First language: _____

3. Language(s) spoken at home: _____

4. Age of the child (the youngest in case of having several children): _____

5. Child's gender: _____

6. Other children (please specify the number and age):

7. Marital status: _____

8. Highest level of education obtained: _____

9. Occupation: _____

10. Culture/Religion: _____

11. Area of residence? _____

12. Do any other people live with you? (e.g., grandparents, babysitter, etc.): _____

Appendix C

Study Information Letter (Advertisement)

Dear parent,

I am a graduate student in the Masters in Child Studies in the Department of Education at Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec. I am interested in understanding if there is a “relation between parenting styles and parents’ perceptions of their children’s play”. The main purpose of my thesis project is to investigate mothers’ and/or fathers’ parenting style including their culture and the parents’ perspectives of their children’s play. I want to find out if and how their parenting beliefs may influence their perceptions of their children’s play.

By announcing your consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill a questionnaire about parenting styles (which approximately takes 10-15 minutes), a demographic form including some information about your age, education, birth place, etc., and will be invited to an approximate 60-90-minute interview which will be held online through the “Zoom” platform. All of the forms, questionnaire, and the interview session will be conducted in Farsi, as it will be more convenient for you . Then, I will provide you with a translator. A phone call will be made prior to the interview session to clarify your questions or any concerns regarding the study’s purpose, the forms, and/or the questionnaire.

The interview session will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be used to transcribe the session for further analysis. Rest assured that in order to maintain the confidentiality, your identity including the audio-recordings, your or your child’s name will not be revealed under any conditions. At the end of the study, you will be provided with a summary of the findings, and will be asked for your permission to utilize your quotes in the study’s report. After completion of

the interview session, you will be given a book for your child and a list of organizations and centers who offer you and/or your child some workshops and fun activities.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me, Farzaneh Zamanian at 438-4093595, or my supervisor Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-991-9645.

Sincerely,

Farzaneh Zamanian

Appendix D
Consent Form

Study Title: *The Relation between Parenting Styles and Parents' Perceptions About Their Children's Play*

Researcher: *Farzaneh Zamanian*

Researcher's Contact Information: farzaneh.zamanian@mail.concordia.ca,
438-4093595

Faculty Supervisor: *Dr. Hariclia Harriet Petrakos*

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: hariclia.petrakos@concordia.ca
(514) 848-2424 (ext. 2013)

S-FG 6417, Faubourg Street-Catherine Building, 1610 St. Catherine West

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relation between different parenting styles and parents' perspectives/perceptions regarding their children's play. I want to see if there is any link between the parents' child rearing practices and the way they see their children's play.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an one-on-one interview session, fill a questionnaire about your parenting style, and a demographic form including some questions about your age, birth place, education, marital status, culture, etc. In total, participating in this study will take about two hours (including 60-90-minute interview and filling the demographic form and questionnaire). The interview session will be held online via Zoom platform and it will be recorded. Although just the “audio-only” recording will be used for conducting further analysis. This session will be held in Farsi, which will be more convenient for you. You may be contacted through Zoom or telephone after the interview session for clarification purposes or requiring some additional information. Rest assured that this contact will not take longer than approximate 30 minutes. Also, I will ask for your permission to use your quotes in the study’s report. However, all the information which you share with me will be kept confidential by using a pseudonym and not revealing any identifying information about you or your child.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include feeling uncomfortable talking about the methods/strategies you use to raise your child, and talking about your cultural background. You may also experience intense emotional feelings regarding the topics related to your child’s play. Should you encounter distress or any negative feelings in this study, please contact Dr. Harriet Petrakos (514-848-2424 ext. 2013) – a licensed psychologist – who can provide you with appropriate information regarding your needs.

This research is not intended to benefit you personally, although reflecting on your parenting style may permit you to explore and identify the strategies you use to raise your child and this in turn, may result in further insight in your parenting practices. Moreover, sharing your thoughts

and perceptions may equip you with more awareness about your child's play preferences, which may facilitate your understanding of your child.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

I will gather the following information as part of this research: your parenting styles and child rearing practices, your perspectives as to how you see play and how you perceive your child playing. Finally, existence of a link between your parenting style and your play perceptions regarding your child's play will be investigated.

I will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. I will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

I will protect the information by using a pseudonym for you and your child. The information will be stored in my lap top secured with a password, and only I can access to this information.

Also, I do not intend to publish the results of the research. I will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can discontinue at any time. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, the information you provided will be deleted. You can also ask that the information related about you not be used, and your choice will be respected.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle of the study, or asking us not to use your information.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential at all levels. All the information you provide will be kept confidential, unless we think that the children are unsafe in any way. In that case, we will report the related information to the proper authorities.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix E

Questionnaire

Parenting Practices Questionnaire (Robinson et al., 2001)

Rate how often you exhibit this behavior with your child.

Authoritative

Authoritarian

Permissive

	1 (never)	2 (once in a while)	3 (about half of the time)	4 (very often)	5 (always)
1. I explain the consequences of my child's behavior.					
2. I help my child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging my child to talk about the consequences of his/her own actions.					
3. I show respect for my child's opinions by encouraging my child to express them.					
4. I encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles.					
5. I give my child reasons why rules should be obeyed.					
6. I emphasize the reasons for rules.					
7. I explain to my child how we feel about the child's good and bad behavior.					
8. I give praise when my child is good.					
9. I encourage my child to freely express him/herself even when disagreeing with parents.					
10. I give comfort and understanding when my child is upset.					
11. I have warm and intimate times together with my child.					
12. I allow my child to give input into family rules.					
13. I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs.					
14. I take my child's desires into account before asking the child to do something.					
15. I take into account my child's preferences in making plans for the family.					

16. When my child asks why he/she has to conform, I state, "Because I said so," or "I am the parent and I want you to."					
17. I threaten my child with punishment more often than actually giving it.					
18. I state punishments to my child and do not actually do them.					
19. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification.					
20. I find it difficult to discipline my child.					
21. I spoil my child.					
22. I give into my child when the child causes a commotion about something.					
23. I punish by taking privileges away from my child with little if any explanations.					
24. I punish by putting my child off somewhere alone with little if any explanation.					

Appendix F

Parenting Styles' Subscales (*Robinson et al., 1995*)

Parenting Styles' Subscales (adapted from Kimble, 2009)

Parenting Style	PSDQ Scale	PSDQ Subscale
1. I explain the consequences of my child's behavior.	Authoritative	Regulation
2. I help my child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging my child to talk about the consequences of his/her own actions.	Authoritative	Regulation
3. I show respect for my child's opinions by encouraging my child to express them.	Authoritative	Autonomy granting
4. I encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles.	Authoritative	Warmth & support
5. I give my child reasons why rules should be obeyed.	Authoritative	Regulation
6. I emphasize the reasons for rules.	Authoritative	Regulation
7. I explain to my child how we feel about the child's good and bad behavior.	Authoritative	Regulation
8. I give praise when my child is good.	Authoritative	Warmth & support
9. I encourage my child to freely express him/herself even when disagreeing with parents.	Authoritative	Autonomy granting
10. I give comfort and understanding when my child is upset.	Authoritative	Warmth & support
11. I have warm and intimate times together with my child.	Authoritative	Warmth & support
12. I allow my child to give input into family rules.	Authoritative	Autonomy granting
13. I am responsive to my child's feelings and needs.	Authoritative	Warmth & support
14. I take my child's desires into account before asking the child to do something.	Authoritative	Autonomy granting
15. I take into account my child's preferences in making plans for the family.	Authoritative	Autonomy granting
16. When my child asks why he/she has to conform, I state, "Because I said so," or "I am the parent and I want you to."	Authoritarian	Non reasoning/ punitive
19. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification.	Authoritarian	Non reasoning/ punitive
23. I punish by taking privileges away from my child with little if any explanations.	Authoritarian	Non reasoning/ punitive
24. I punish by putting my child off somewhere alone with	Authoritarian	Non reasoning/ punitive

little if any explanation.

17. I threaten my child with punishment more often than actually giving it.	Permissive	Indulgent
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18. I state punishments to my child and do not actually do them.	Permissive	Indulgent
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20. I find it difficult to discipline my child.	Permissive	Indulgent
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21. I spoil my child.	Permissive	Indulgent
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22. I give into my child when the child causes a commotion about something.	Permissive	Indulgent
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Appendix G

A Sample of Transcription Translation – Coding

Interview transcription	1 st cycle coding	2 nd cycle coding	Interview notes and comments
<p>1. How do you define play?</p> <p>One of the meanings is that it is a kind of <u>entertainment</u>, a <u>fun game</u> that I choose. I choose it for entertainment. The other definition of play for me is to have a <u>good time with my child</u>. Like...a <u>useful time</u> that I think the play, I mean with the play <u>I can use that time being with my child</u>. Establishing a <u>good relationship</u> with my child is also important, so that he can both <u>benefit from being with me</u> and I <u>enjoy being with him</u>. And we <u>get to know each other better</u> in the game.</p> <p>I <u>do not look much at the educational aspect</u>, I look <u>more at the fun aspect</u> so that I can spend a good and useful time during play.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fun - Amusing - Spend quality time with child - bonding with the child - know each other - not looking for being educational aspect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - entertainment - positive parent-child communication/bonding 	<p>- It seems that she sees the play as an activity mostly related to the child and every purpose to it should be in favor of the child. Having a positive link with the child seems to be of importance in her comment.</p>
<p>-Tell me about how you see play in your child's life?/any benefits when your child plays?/positive aspects of play?/any disadvantages to play?</p> <p>One is that it has to do with <u>age</u>. When he was younger, for example, when he</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changes regarding the child's age - good bonding with the child - fun - parent manages the time - not being able to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - age-related (dis)advantages - positive communication (advantage) - entertainment (advantage) 	<p>- She differentiates between the child's interests in regards to his age.</p> <p>- She seems to believe that playing with her son used to be easier when he was younger, this was due to parental management in the play.</p>

<p>was under 2 years old, <u>role playing was very important</u>. For example, if I wanted to have a <u>good and stress-free relationship</u> with [child's name], the <u>best solution was to play with him</u>. Because during the play, it was encouraged that ... when I was playing, I would have an easier time, for myself, that time would be much easier. I was not tired, he was not tired, <u>there was no tension between us, there were no fights, he did not have unreasonable demands because I was managing</u> and sometimes he came forward with me. But on the other hand, the time I was playing was getting boring, because [child's name] became <u>so dependant on me, and it had become such that he could no longer play alone</u>. The positive aspect was that I <u>could have a good time</u>. On the negative side, when I was not there, for example, I had something I could not spend time with him, <u>he could not play with himself as if he only knew how to play with me</u>. But maybe from an age when he went to daycare and grew up, his mind changed about the play, <u>instead of defining the play for him, he would start it himself and asked me to play with him</u>... Well, it got much better. In general, I think play, plays an important role in the</p>	<p>play alone - helps the child to develop properly according to his age - <u>learns to bond well with parents</u> - <u>learns how to play with peers</u> - <u>learns how to self-entertain</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>parental management (advantage)</u> - crucial to development (advantage) - losing the ability of self-entertaining (disadvantage) 	<p><i>- It seems that the mother prefers her son to be able to play alone rather than only depending on her. She relates more positive aspects to the play when the child is capable of playing alone.</i></p> <p><i>- The skill of positive communication is the highlighted part of her answer when it comes to play importance.</i></p>
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development of children, because the only thing that makes them learn to communicate with their peers, they also learn to have a peaceful relationship with their parents, or over time, they learn that they can entertain themselves

2. Do you think you would have a different play definition or play perceptions if your child was the different gender? how?

I always thought that if I had a baby girl, I would behave the way I treat [child's name]. She should know that her gender has no effect on the games we play or the behaviors we have with her. I don't like my children act discriminately. I don't think I had a different idea in playing with my daughter, and I certainly had no different idea about choosing its games. And I would play the same games that I play with my son. I let her interests determine that ... exactly what I do with [child's name]. Games should be defined based on their own interests and I should go in the same direction.

- same attitude with girls and boys
 - there should be no gender difference
 - no different play behaviors
 - **one should consider child's own interest in choosing play material**

- gender neutral play
 - **importance of child's interests**

- The mother insists on having the same attitude with her children regardless of their gender. she focuses on the child's own interests.