Source: Lopez, S. R. & Guarnaccia, P. J. J. (2000). Cultural psychopathology: Uncovering the social world of mental illness. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51, 571-598.

This exhaustive review of research in the field of cultural psychopathology includes an interesting section on childhood disorders. The authors define cultural psychopathology as "an interdisciplinary research approach integrating anthropological methods and conceptualizations with traditional psychiatric and psychological approaches" (p. 1).

The section on childhood psychopathology highlights work conducted by Weisz and colleagues on differences between Thai youth in Thailand and American youth in the United States. According to Weisz, "the fact that others determine whether children's behavior is problematic indicates the importance of the social world in defining mental illness and disorders of children and adolescents" (Weisz, in Lopez et al., p. 18).

Two studies by Weisz et al. support the hypothesis that culture "influences the ways in which youth express psychological distress" (p. 18). In both studies, over 90% of Thai children came from a Buddhist household, where self-control and emotional restraint are highly valued behaviors (Weisz et al., 1993). Accordingly, both studies found that Thai youth exhibited more internalizing problem behaviors (e. g., anxiety and depression), when compared to American youth. However, the second study indicated that Thai youth also exhibited aggressive behaviors at a rate similar to that of youths in the United States Thus, no cross-cultural differences could be found with regard to externalizing problems, but differences were found with regard to internalizing problems.

From these two studies, Weisz et al. conclude that "Thai cultural factors …may contribute to the development of overcontrolled [internalizing] problems without significantly suppressing undercontrolled [externalizing] problems" (Weisz et al., 1993 p. 396). That is, "over and undercontrolled problems do not constitute a hydraulic system…forces that may facilitate the development of one problem type do not necessarily suppress the other" (Weisz et al., 1993, p. 401). Interviews with Thai youth help shed light on the complex interaction between culture and behavior: One youth admitted, "We should control ourselves in order to make us happy. Although I know this fact, it is hard for me to control myself" (Weisz et al., 1993, p. 396).

A third study by Weisz et al. (1995) compared Thai schoolteacher ratings with US schoolteacher ratings of problem behaviors in their classrooms. They found that Thai schoolteachers rated more externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors by their schoolchildren than did American teachers. In order to check these findings, Weisz et al. "devised an innovative observational methodology to assess whether it was something about the children or the teachers that contributed to this finding" (p. 19). Independent observers returned to the same schools in the US and in Thailand to rate the same groups of children and teachers; one of the observers was a bilingual Thai psychologist who received his graduate training in the United States. The observers found that "ratings were reliable across both national sites," leading Weisz et al. to conclude that "Thai teachers have a much lower threshold than US teachers for identifying problem behaviors in their students" (p. 20).

Lopez et al. provide further examples of "the possibility that culture shapes the type and degree of problem behaviors of children and adolescents" (p. 20) with brief discussions of the work done by developmental researchers in numerous countries. They also discuss the ecocultural model of accommodation developed by Weisner, Gallimore and colleagues with regard to developmental disabilities.

For anyone interested in ways that cultural psychopathology can inform research in children's mental health, this review is a "must read." The authors discuss the growth of the field from Kleinmann's work in the late 1970s to current trends in the field today, and list over 160 references. Brief discussions of families and children appear in other sections of the review as well (e.g., families' role in schizophrenia, and "US Ethnic Minority Groups"). Full text of this review is available on the internet to those with individual or university access to the *Annual Review of Psychology* [http://psych.annualreviews.org/] or the OVID Mental Health Collection database.

References consulted:

Weisz, J. R., Somsong S., Chaiyasit, W., Weiss, B., Achenbach, T. M., & Eastman, K. L. (1993). Behavioral and emotional problems among Thai and American adolescents: Parent reports for ages 12-16. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 102*(3), 395-402.