

# Research paper on african culture vs american culture in regards to discipline

[Education](#), [Discipline](#)



## **Introduction**

Discipline is said to be one of the methods that is supposed to instill the desired behavior in the child. The issue of discipline towards the children differs from one culture to another and the meaning attached to it also differs. The bottom line however is that all cultures agree on the importance of condemning bad behavior in the children. The difference is brought about by the differences that arise on the basis of the social environment as well as the rules and norms of the society. The following discussion shall focus on the differences between the approach of discipline observed in the African and the American cultures.

The main aim of disciplining the child is to instill the morals which according to the society are right (Papalia 34) The African form of disciplining differs from that of the American in a number of ways. Firstly, the form of behavior modification that is mostly applied in the American culture is that of positive reinforcement rather than the corporal punishment observed in many African cultures (Papalia 76). Positive reinforcement refers to the process by which the parents notice and reward a desirable behavior that is exhibited by the child. For instance, if the child decides to voluntarily clear the table after the meal, the parents may decide to applaud that kind of initiative. The child therefore learns that the parents shall be expecting him/her to replicate that kind of behavior in future.

On the other hand, the African kind of punishment is more of physical punishment and normally, the parents don't take time to explain the reason

why they are punishing the child (Fowers 43). They are more concerned with punishing the undesired behavior without directing the child on what they are expected to do instead. For instance, the American kind of punishment involves negative sanctions or reinforcement. This means denying the child the freedom to do certain activities that they like doing until they perform the activities which they are supposed to. The parents may decide to switch off the television so that the child behaves better next time. Complimenting the child for a wonderful deed makes them identify within that kind of behavior and that means that they shall repeat it in future. In the African culture however, the child is neither complimented for what they do, instead the punishment is instant once the child behaves in a way that is regarded as infringement on the norms of the society.

One of the major differences between the American way of discipline and the African way of discipline is the fact that Africans view discipline as an aspect of societal concern. In the African society, any elder has the authority of disciplining a child without considering the child's parents. The elder might not even know the child's parents. The child also has the obligation to accept correction and discipline from any person older than him. Discipline in the African culture involves the entire society. The American society views disciplining children as a matter of private concern. This gives the implication that a child's parent is the one with the obligation of disciplining the child and no one else has a right to do so.

The fact that discipline is a matter of personal concern; it should be conducted in privacy according to the American culture. However, this is

contrary to the African culture whereby a parent or guardian can punish a child in public and the child is supposed to perceive this positively. The African culture considers this as a way through which the other children should learn of the wrong doing and hence avoid it in the future. Most Americans consider this is as an unfair and unjust way of disciplining children. The sole reason for this notion is that the child is exposed to a lot of embarrassment especially amongst peers. This way of disciplining therefore ruins the child's social relations with his or her peers.

The American culture allows a reasoning time before a child is punished. In this way, the parent or guardian explains to the child of the wrong act and why the child is being punished. In this way, the child gets to learn of the wrong act and how to avoid it in future. This is contrary to the African culture where there is no time for reasoning between the child and the parent or guardian. The parent or guardian is assumed to be always right and the views of the child are not justified in whatever circumstance. Most children in the African culture are punished without first being counseled or being told why they are being punished. This is another major difference between the way discipline is imposed to children in the American culture and the African culture.

From a scientific perspective, the American way of disciplining children is of a psychological nature. This is where the parent or guardian of the child ensures that psychological aspects of the child are not altered as a result of discipline. Aspects such as self esteem should not be triggered as a result of discipline. Fear on the hand should not be instilled into a child's system due

to punishment. Discipline should hence be conducted in a way that the child will perceive positively (Douglas 92). Contrary to this, the African way of discipline is of a physical nature and hence tends to interfere with the child's psychology. Most children in the African culture grow with the fear of being physically punished after a particular wrong doing (Fowers 49). The child's self esteem is also tampered with and this should not be the case as far as disciplining is concerned.

Despite the differences in the American way of disciplining children to the African way, there are a variety of similarities that can be derived as far as discipline is concerned. These similarities give the implication that both cultures have something in common in matters concerning discipline. One of the most common similarities is that discipline in both cultural settings has one goal. The goal of discipline in the American culture is to ensure that children grow up to be social responsible members of the society. The same case applies to the African culture where being responsible is one of the most valued traits in the society. This similarity is important in both cultures because it ensures that absolute effort is geared towards matters concerning discipline.

In both the American and African cultures, disciplinary action is conducted by an elderly person who should be the parent or guardian to the child. There will be no circumstance where a younger person will discipline someone who is older. This is because the chances of the young person being in a position to impose discipline are limited. It is considered irrational for such occurrences to happen in both cultures. Additionally, an elderly person has

more experience in life hence being in a position to impose discipline to a younger person. Discipline imposed from a younger person would not be as effective as the one imposed by an elderly person (Fowers 48).

The American culture takes disciplinary action against a child after a wrong doing has been fully determined and established. The cases in which a child will be punished for doing nothing wrong are limited. In fact, this is considered as child abuse under the statute laws.

Likewise, disciplinary action in the African culture is taken after a wrong doing has been fully established and determined. This creates a sense of fairness and justice to the child on whom the disciplinary action is being undertaken.

### Conclusion

Discipline is one of the most important aspects in the human lifecycle. Discipline should be intelligently conducted to ensure that its outcomes are of a positive nature but not a negative one. However, there are different ways in which discipline is imposed to children. The different of disciplining children arise due to the differences in cultural or social backgrounds. This has been fully defined in the difference between the American way of disciplining children and the African way of disciplining. Despite the differences, the main goal of disciplining children in both cultures is to raise children socially responsible children. Children should be disciplined and taught how to live a life that is free of stupid errors that would have been avoided. Therefore, despite the nature and difference of imposing discipline to children, it is important to maintain it regardless of the culture.

## **Works cited**

Papalia, D. E.; Wendkos-Olds, S.; Duskin-Feldman, R. A Child's World: Infancy Through Adolescence (10th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill. 2006

Fowers, Blaine J. From Continnence to Virtue: Recovering Goodness, Character Unity, and Character Types for Positive Psychology. 18,. pp. 629–653. 2008

Douglas, Murray A.; Strauss. " Discipline by Parents and Child

Psychopathology", in Felthous, A.; Sass, H., International Handbook of Psychopathology and the Law, New York: Wiley, pp. 1–2 . 2007