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Culture, Context, and Child Well-Being

3

Thomas S. Weisner

3.1 Introduction

There are different conceptions of what it means to be happy and what the goals of life are in different communities around the world. Diversity within societies regarding the circumstances that can make for well-being and what we want from life is also apparent, and diversity often includes cultural and ethnic variations. Including "culture" is a way to insure that research does not assume what the goals are, and what makes others happy, since "…there is no unambiguously single pursuit of happiness–rather there are multiple 'pursuits of happiness'" (Mathews and Izquerdo 2009: 1).

Another reason to include culture is that well-being includes subjective and experiential aspects, as well as objective material and health and other assessments. Culture includes models for everyday living, beliefs, goals, and values held in the mind – in other words, subjective experiences that shape the interpretation of what happens and do not only respond to but organize behavior and the choice of contexts. What is life's meaning, what is the moral direction of good child development, and what would be good parenting to strive toward to reach that valued way of life? Cultural communities vary in their answers to these questions, and more open-ended, conversational interviews and naturalistic observations and fieldwork in communities are essential ways to learn about these differences (LeVine et al. 1988).

Hence, cultural evidence is important for understanding well-being. Studying well-being in a wide range of communities with differing beliefs and practices requires qualitative understanding as well as closed-ended survey or questionnaire methods (Weisner 2013). What is going on here? Why are you investing so much

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into religious devotion, ritual bathing, or earning money? Why are the rhythms of your days and weeks and the activities you do organized this way? Qualitative methods to explore and discover the life patterns, the life-worlds, of communities are important for the study of well-being.

3.2 Studying Well-Being in a Diverse Family World

In the current interconnected, relatively easy-to-access media and our rapidly changing demographic circumstances, it is increasingly difficult to find a culturally *homogeneous* sample that would be uninfluenced by multiple models and other groups' conceptions of what is good and what matters for well-being. Yet for this very reason, the globalizing world around us today demands a diverse, pluralistic approach to well-being, not an increasingly uniformitarian one.

Of course, there are many demographic variables and social categories that also influence well-being, in addition to cultural communities, including religious affiliation, ethnicity, race, class, age, gender, and other categories. Cultural evidence adds to such social address categories by asking what unifies these diverse demographic and social categories and institutional influences on well-being and human development. This idea that there are emergent, reasonably coherent cultural models that influence well-being, in addition to social and demographic categorical variables, is a proposal, not a given – it is a suggestion that needs evidence. As many chapters in this *Handbook* show, there is ample proof of the value of a cultural-contextual perspective. At the same time, these no longer are easy to identify, stable cultural groups with isolated, clearly shared models and patterns of belief and practice. These are empirical questions to ask of study populations: to what extent are beliefs shared and what practices and ideals define group identity (Weisner and Lowe 2005)?

However, there is considerable evidence that culture continues to matter to well-being and to human development. Broad differences in family and parenting patterns continue to be found around the world, for instance. With regard to family and household diversity, for example, Therborn (2004, 2009) characterizes seven broad cross-cultural family patterns: Christian European; Islamic West Asian/North African; South Asian Hindu; Confucian East Asian; sub-Saharan African; Southeast Asian; and Creole (U.S. South, Caribbean, Brazil, parts of South America). Each of these seven broad family systems differs along social dimensions that have profound influences on family life. They differ in the norms concerning inheritance (e.g., whether all children inherit equally, or only males, or only firstborn males) or descent rules (e.g., bilateral as in the United States or patrilineal); marriage customs that are preferred or permitted in different communities (e.g., whether there is an ideal norm of lifetime monogamy; whether divorce and serial monogamy are allowed or plural marriage is permitted); beliefs about sexuality, gender, and patterns of household formation (e.g., whether couples form independent households, live with parents, or form joint or extended households; whether children

typically remain in one household or move between multiple households during childhood; how marriages are negotiated; roles of fathers; socially distributed care of children and elderly) also vary across these world family systems. Religious practices of course also influence these and other aspects of family life as does class and other cross-cutting circumstances. Qualitative fieldwork describes the variability, adherence, reach, emotional significance, enforcement, and extent of influence of these diverse family norms. As Therborn (2004, 2009) summarizes the impact of these broad differences: "The boys and girls of the world enter many different childhoods and depart them through many different doors" (p. 338). Kagitcibasi (2013, ▶ Chap. 42, "Family and Child Well-Being" in this Handbook) further explores the family as a developmental context, emphasizing the integration of social and cognitive intelligence, multiple forms of self-construal to be found around the world, and the dimensions of autonomy and relational self-development.

Well-being is an intentionally holistic, inclusive, contextual, hard-to-precisely-define construct. Hence, there are significant difficulties in cultural interpretations and measurement of well-being. Yet constructs much more specific than well-being also are difficult to transport cross-culturally, and require local modifications. There also are competing constructs with more established measures (stress, happiness, goal orientations, preference hierarchies) that are more specific and sometimes substitute for and overlap with well-being, but may not capture cultural differences in well-being. Going to other cultural communities around the world opens the door to new, surprising cultural concepts and activities for well-being – but it does not mean that we do not also find *universal* aspects of well-being when we go to other communities. Vast differences in purchasing power, living conditions, chaotic contexts and family settings, war and violence, state-level oppression, and other circumstances can deeply affect well-being, net of cultural influence.

3.3 Conceptual Frameworks for Well-Being and Culture

The conceptual framework of this *Handbook* is remarkably broad and inclusive, and clearly considers well-being in a global, international context. Cultural perspectives are very much a part of child well-being looking across the *Handbook* and from the points of view of the editors. The conceptual framework includes the understanding that well-being is within "...a multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary framework". It includes "...the social opportunities to realize goals." Well-being includes subjective experiences and meaning as well as objective indicators of material conditions, health, and behavior. Well-being of course also involves parents' children's, and community members' "...own points of view, opinions, perspectives and perceptions, evaluations and aspirations." The final sign of the important role of culture is the statement proposing that "Child well-being and well-becoming are tied to social and cultural contexts necessary for the realization of development consistent with cultural values and goals." This points to the important role of well-being as including the moral direction of life and of child development. This includes the present condition of a child and family (well-being) and the future that is being pointed

toward (well-becoming). So there is no need for this chapter to knock on the door of the methods, theory, and samples elsewhere in the *Handbook*, and remind us that cultural pluralism matters and that qualitative and quantitative methods are important. Instead, the focus can be on some examples of well-being and some frameworks for using a cultural approach in the study of well-being.

Colby (2009) considers contemporary cultural study of well-being as understanding the *self-world* of individuals in context, a framework that encourages combining the personal/experiential with the cultural context. He assesses three domains that link a person's reports of happiness and well-being to the context: the natural and cultural ecology perceived by a person – the material and biophysical situation; the social relational and interpersonal realm; and the symbolic realm of language categories, religious, and other beliefs.

Super and Harkness (1999) have developed an influential construct of the cultural niche of development, which also includes three domains: the resource and material setting; the beliefs shared within a cultural community; and the practices or behaviors that parents, children, and others engage in on a regular basis. Many cultural definitions in the field of child development include versions of these three: resource setting and ecology; beliefs, goals, and values; and behaviors/practices. Hollan (2009) also provides examples of ways to link person-centered to contextual or culturally centered accounts through methods of person-centered interviewing.

LeVine (2003) conceptualizes enculturation as the acquisition of "local idioms" for action, based on goals and practices within diverse local populations. These local idioms (meanings, beliefs, scripts for action, shared practices, ways of organizing everyday routines of life) shape how families sustain family life and how they conceive of and socialize for well-being.

3.4 A Definition of Well-Being as Sustained Engagement in Culturally Desired Activities

These and many other cultural concepts point toward a useful way to think about well-being and to use cultural evidence in research on it. The focus is on how culture, along with other environmental circumstances, shapes the activities of everyday life. *Well-being is the engaged participation in the activities that are deemed desirable and valued in a cultural community and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement.* This definition includes the resources and support needed for activities as well as the experience and meaning of participation in activities, the contexts and activities that matter in a community, and the active engagement of a person, including their feelings about those activities.

Note that this view of well-being foregrounds social activities that produce and drive psychological experience, not the other way around, which is not the more common approach to the direction of effects. Actually, of course, the relationship is bidirectional, and the evidence clearly shows this throughout child development.

Every individual has a unique history and psychological predispositions and temperament, all of which influence the activities the person engages with in the first place (which niches or activities they pick and prefer) and the degree of happiness they have both as a baseline and in varied settings.

This conception of well-being as engaged participation in desired activities that matter is a functional approach to well-being, which also includes the experiences and affective state that would go along with the competence and sense of effectence that such participation entails. Unlike the association of well-being with happiness, however, well-being includes affective states such as engagement, attention, satisfaction, struggle to accomplish goals, and sometimes distress, frustration, and disappointment. Effective, engaged participation in activities we desire does *not* always lead to immediate happiness, but if sustained over time, can lead to well-being.

Given the importance of cultural practices and beliefs for well-being, the *quality* of daily activities and family routines, on the one hand, and well-being, on the other, are closely connected. The connection likely has to do with the ability to *sustain* a meaningful routine in some cultural community. Every family and community is involved in the project of sustaining their household and family and community – that is, keeping it going, hopefully in the ways and along the path desired, using morally significant cultural idioms and shared values. What could we expect to find in any culture that might link daily routines and activities to well-being in positive ways (Weisner 2008)?

3.5 A Cross-Cultural Contextual Universal About What Produces Well-Being: Sustaining a Meaningful Daily Routine

Sustaining a daily routine involves four processes (Weisner 2002; Weisner et al. 2005): fitting the routine to family resources, balancing varied family interests and conflicts, experiencing some sense of meaningfulness of family activities with respect to goals and values, and providing stability and predictability of the daily routine. *Routines that have better resource fit, less conflict, more balance, more meaningfulness, and enough predictability are posited to be better for families, and so to provide greater well-being for those participating in them.* Sustainability in the life of a family and children is better for a child's development and for parenting. To the extent that these features of a sustainable routine can be assessed and understood in a community, these data would be evidence for a reliable and valid *contextual universal* for comparing families and communities across cultures.

Well-being, like sustainability, is an ongoing project, not a one-time end point. It is contextual, embedded in an everyday routine of life, and so part of some local social context with its local idioms. It includes both the local resources and ecology of the family and community, and the goals, values, and meanings that the community affords and people bring to their practices. For this reason, understanding well-being requires contextual and ethnographic data and methods, just as

sustainability does. Such methods are complementary and add value to quantitative assessment methods and the growing use of mixed methods in family and child developmental research (Barata and Yoshikawa 2013, ▶ Chap. 101, "Mixed Methods in Research on Child Well-Being" in this Handbook).

With these notions of well-being and cultural pathways in child development in mind, this chapter reviews ways to measure cultural context and provides some diverse examples of how variations in children's socialization can lead to differences in the qualities that matter for well-being.

3.6 The Units of Analysis for Studying Well-Being, Culture, and Children's Developmental Pathways

A cultural perspective on well-being does not require a single definition of what "culture is" to guide good research. It does not require a single measure. This is fortunate, since it is fair to say that there is no agreed-upon definition of culture, just as there is no agreed-upon method for measuring cultural factors. Rather than a single definition, it could be more useful to establish a set of key concepts and indicators that would be important to include in any cultural study. There are perhaps three key processes to focus cultural measurement on, and they would be valuable for well-being research and children and families. Three such keys are:

1. Widely shared and accepted *scripts and norms for behavior and thought* in the context of important *settings and activities*
2. *Cultural models of the person; what is good*; what are the shared (or at least widely recognized) beliefs about the nature of the sources, causes and consequences of well-being, wellness, and well-becoming; the valued *moral directions* for one's life
3. *Experiences and their meanings* common in a community regarding well-being and the *circumstances* (health, resources, threats and dangers, uncertainties, etc.) that contribute to well-being

A study that included these key constructs, with the measures and qualitative descriptions for them clearly presented, would provide a useful, scientifically sound cultural account. Those methods would probably include both qualitative and quantitative methods. Using the Ecocultural Family Interview approach to assessing the family daily routine, reliable coding of sustainability and the other dimensions that go along with it are possible and have been done in a number of studies (Weisner et al. 2005).

These domains also are included in most theoretical frameworks for the study of development. For example, the most widely cited conceptual framework for child development in an ecological context is Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work. Bronfenbrenner (2005) subsequently extended this model in his "person, process, context, and time," four-part approach. In this latter approach, the child is an individual person, engaged in complex developmental processes, growing within particular family and sociocultural and historical contexts, which are changing across both developmental time and historical time.

In keeping with the broad scope of the *Handbook*, I would suggest that an approach to understanding culture and well-being could usefully center around a *cultural learning environment* (CLE) conceptual framework. John and Beatrice Whiting, Carolyn Edwards, and others provided the psychocultural model for development in cultural context, which includes the subsistence base and wider environment, the community and family context, the settings and activities that children and others are in, and the social behaviors and beliefs that are associated with differential experiences in those varied settings (Whiting and Edwards 1988). CLE studies are oriented toward culture and human development topics, but are not limited to those topics. A recent paper by Carol Worthman (2010) reviews several of these models: the developmental niche, from Super and Harkness (1999); ecocultural theory from Weisner (2002); and bioecocultural approaches from Worthman (Worthman et al. 2010). ▶ Chapter 20, "Child Well-Being: Anthropological Perspectives" in this Handbook (Stevenson and Worthman 2013) also further describes this approach. That chapter usefully distinguishes between heuristic models (the CLE being one instance) and predictive models, which offer the potential to predict or account for regularities that can account for variations in child well-being across cultures and through time. The many transitions in the ecological and health contexts around children and families that affect well-being (such as the demographic transition, mass schooling market and state economies, and the postcolonial world and others) also are captured by such models.

The CLE approach outlines what culture is and how it *directs* our behavior and thought with particular reference to child development. It includes the following components:

- Culture is found in the everyday settings (activities, contexts, events, practices) we live within and engage with: bedtime, getting ready for school; visiting your cousins; helping plan, prepare, and cook dinner; going to Sunday school; doing homework; getting a checkup; hanging out with friends, etc. Activities are an important unit of analysis for seeing and measuring culture because this is where it is experienced and lived; context is bracketed into studies of well-being by using activities as a unit for analysis, not bracketed out.
- Settings and activities have common attributes that organize our behavior and thought in them. Those characteristics include: *resources and material objects available; values and goals that provide the purposes and endpoints for actions; scripts and norms ("customs" or "beliefs" or an "ethnopsychology") that provide guides for the ways to act in that setting; emotions, motives, and feelings brought to the setting and created by it; people and the social relationships among those people; the stability, predictability, and familiarity of that setting.* While we would not know everything – we would know a great deal about the cultural world of a person or community if we understood and measured the key activities and settings, and these six characteristics of those settings. These features *organize and direct* our behavior and thought in cultural contexts.
- The activities and settings of a community are organized into a daily routine of life and are linked together into community ways of life. Culture creates pathways through development using these linked activities and routines.

Activities and settings are the stepping stones making up those cultural pathways. *Differences in cultural pathways influence health behaviors, well-being, and outcomes for children.*

- Activities and settings are influenced by the wider cultural ecology (demography, ecology, subsistence system, institutions, public health context, inequalities, community safety and threats, heterogeneity of ways of life, and others).

It is an empirical question, which if possible should be assessed, as to the extent culture is *shared* among a community. A cultural analysis does not expect complete homogeneity, but rather *predicts* some diversity, and expects both internal and social conflicts and ambivalence (Weisner 2009). Cultural analysis is not about only finding homogeneity. Evidence of some heterogeneity is not an indication of the absence of shared culture if there are patterns and common shared beliefs and activities as well. Although for many studies, we will need to use social address categories to gloss a cultural group or nation (India; China; Hispanics; African-Americans), unpacking those categories is preferable where possible.

Our deep proclivity to learn from our environment throughout life in a shared group context is an evolved capacity. Hence, well-being is always a mutually constituted process involving neurophysiological processes learned in a cultural and family context. We *are prepared to be "cultural acquisition devices" (CAD) from before birth* (Konner 2010). These endogenous factors influence how we acquire, store, and transmit cultural knowledge. Although there is a core psychic unity across all mankind (the CAD being such a capacity), this does not mean that there are no individual differences in CAD competence and tendencies. This variability also produces expectable variability in the extent of shared cultural beliefs in a community, as well as in how individuals within any community respond and adapt to "the same" culture (Worthman et al. 2010).

Cultural transmission is bidirectional and selective (Schönpflug 2009). A great deal (arguably most) of such cultural learning occurs without verbal instruction but rather though mimicry, imitation, play, rehearsal and practice, apprenticeship, and observational learning. Hence, *the perception, acquisition, storage in memory, recall, patterning in the mind, and ways of expressing and teaching culture throughout childhood and throughout life are essential aspects of how we define, measure, and describe the impacts of culture for health and well-being outcomes.* Until the recent introduction of formal schooling throughout the world, *all* child learning occurred in everyday activity settings, mixed-age play groups, and adult-managed work and family settings.

The ways cultural knowledge is transmitted are key components for understanding cultural influences on health, because learning and transmission of cultural knowledge always can transform that knowledge. *There is intentional design and change built into cultural practices.* Well-being can always be changed and improved in cultural context. Components of activities and behavior settings in cultural learning environments are not static; but this static view often leads to culture being viewed as a barrier to positive changes in health beliefs and behaviors. To the contrary, cultural studies can discover levers for effective interventions and

change to improve well-being. Translational research on health and well-being can utilize cultural practices for positive outcomes, not only get around them as barriers to well-being. Put more strongly: Unless good ideas for health and well-being are finding a place in daily routines and activity settings (in organizations, groups, families, individuals) such that new beliefs and behaviors take hold, good ideas and interventions will not diffuse, or be able to scale up. ▶ Chapter 18, "Child Well-Being: Anthropological Perspectives", by Stevenson and Worthman (2013) in this Handbook offers a number of positive suggestions for implementing child policy around the world to improve child well-being.

3.7 Some Examples from Cultural Studies of Well-Being

Cultural beliefs and emotional regulation norms influence how members of different cultural communities describe how happy they are, how satisfied they are with life, and how well they are doing. Mathews and Izquerdo (2009) describe an example of this, contrasting Japanese and North American ideals of how to present oneself to others. A frequent finding in survey research on subjective well-being and happiness is that East Asians say they are less happy than North Americans. How might we interpret this result? Cultural beliefs about the goals of life (one should "pursue" happiness) and of the social regulation of pride and boasting (one should not boast much) can influence responses to questionnaires, surveys, and interviews, as well as public displays of well-being.

> ...in a society declaring in its founding document the inalienable right to "the pursuit of happiness," one is culturally enjoined to pursue and proclaim one's happiness... In East Asian societies such as Japan, on the other hand, personal modesty is an ingrained social value–one is enjoined not to boast about one's success in life or declare too loudly one's personal happiness or well-being (Mathews and Izquerdo 2009: 7).

Assessing well-being using questionnaire, survey, observation, or qualitative interviews would benefit from a cultural understanding of display rules for pride or happiness in various cultural contexts and the patterns of emotional regulation (both internal states and feelings, and outward expression) learned in childhood and reinforced in that community for adults. Absent this cultural understanding, the collection and interpretation of data about happiness and emotional states is likely to be incomplete.

The term *ikigai* in Japanese explicitly, lexically points to the basic question of what a good life is, what is the right moral direction, the right activities, and life practices, that give your life meaning. Hence, *ikigai* is "that which makes one's life worth living." One asks in conversation in Japan, "what is your *ikigai*? Now it is likely that communities everywhere recognize the intent of that question, and offer answers: my family; my work; making money; my church and service to God. But according to Mathews (1996), only the Japanese lexicon actually has a term for this. A fuller definition of *ikigai* for Japanese includes: "one's deepest bond to one's social world" and "one's deepest sense of social commitment" (Mathews 1996: 173).

The example of Japan emphasizes the importance of cultural differences in how children are socialized with regard to social cues, social context, and interdependence, rather than the ego-entered attentional focus, independence and autonomy, and personal cues for recognition much more common in the Euro-American world. Well-being, at least the social engagement and functional aspects, is more socially centered in many communities. Ochs and Izquerdo (2009), for example, offer this contrast in learning and socialization, comparing the US middle class in Los Angeles, the Matsigenka of Peru, and Upolu, Samoa. Note that the unit of analysis is the everyday routines of family life, particularly tasks and chores and responsibilities for children and what they mean. The outcomes are the goals for well-being, including social intelligence and appropriate behavior. There are clear developmental strengths for the Matsigenka and Samoan children and youth that are linked to desired goals for a good person that are in turn linked to family practices in those cultural groups. The emphasis is on tasks, chores, social cooperation, and other competencies. The child is oriented to learn from others in the social world in Samoa and among the Matsigenka, emphasizing learning through social intelligence and through the observation of others in their daily activities, rather than through dyadic instruction directed only at the child by a parent.

> We propose that social awareness, social responsiveness, and self-reliance are keystone properties of moral personhood and use these properties to articulate ways in which actions and stances of others influence children's accountability in everyday family life. Building on cross-cultural studies of children's domestic activities, this study advances the literature by arguing that much more than practical competence and social responsibility are afforded by children's assistance in tasks. We hypothesize that practical household work is a crucible for promoting moral responsibility in the form of a generative cross-situational awareness of and responsiveness to others' needs and desires. (Ochs and Izquerdo 2009: 391)

The importance of the development of social responsibility in childhood for well-being is that it occurs in the middle of everyday family expectations for tasks and chores, and that it is clearly associated with moral directions that are frequently included in conceptions of family and child well-being: "...social awareness, social responsiveness, and self-reliance integral to hearth and home and the fabric of family life." (Ochs and Izquerdo 2009: 408). Well-being is not marked by awards for the child, or boasting about doing a good job at something, but rather by displays of culturally meaningful tasks, work, and activities. What might be glossed only as child work in an observational measure is an indicator of well-being for much of the world. Now, the child and others might not be feeling "happy" or "joyous" while doing the work, yet he or she might feel satisfaction and well-being at the social inclusion and participation that is part of such work. What those experiences are is an empirical question to be assessed.

There are other efforts in cross-cultural studies to explicitly ask about well-being – the local worlds, the actions, the beliefs, and kind of moral life direction that characterizes it.

Izquerdo (2009) further describes this for the Matsigenka, an isolated fishing, hunting, foraging, and horticultural Amerindian group. The Matsigenka are

a family-level society, though they more recently live in small group settlements. Well-being is *shinetagantsi*, which embodies "ideals and beliefs of what the Matsigenka consider the basic premise of a good life." (p. 251). This involves little self-conscious reflection – questions about personal happiness elicited only blank stares – but rather the ideals of providing for one's family, improving upon one's productive skills, and keeping harmonious social relations throughout a long and peaceful life.

The physical health of Matsigenka has been *improving* over the past 20 years or so – yet the community's own appraisal of well-being is that they personally, and their community, are *declining*. They fear the future due to the rapid change and encroachment of globalization, oil exploration, and other economic and social changes. Knowing both the cultural beliefs about change in health and well-being, as well as the measured physical health, are both important for assessing well-being.

The Canadian Cree (Adelson 2009) and the Australian Aborigines of Murrin Bridge (Heil 2009) also face these kinds of threats posed by the wider state and urban life. In all these cases, well-being includes stable and positive relationships with one's local social community – a common theme in many cultural accounts of well-being around the world, in smaller and larger societies alike.

Derne (2009) also describes the importance of a *sociocentric cultural orientation* to one's natal family and community among young men in urban India. Raval and Martini (2011) similarly find that there are emotional regulation practices in urban Indian families in Gujarat not commonly included in current ways of measuring problem-focused parent behaviors in the USA. These involve giving the child an explanation of the situation, frequently phrased as "making the child understand." Such an approach is in keeping with overarching *relational* socialization goals, which teach children to adjust their own goals and needs to fit their social environment and to accept the situation, thus facilitating their development as socially interdependent individuals.

> "...elders of the family assumed the role of making the younger members understand. Similarly, the socialization of children's emotions in Gujarati families may be conceived in this broader context of 'making the other understand'. Specifically, our qualitative data suggested that mothers wanted their children to understand that they should accept and adjust to the situation, because internalization of this important cultural value is a critical step toward the larger goal of becoming a socially interrelated person (Raval and Martini 2011: 854).

Such locally meaningful ways of parenting are best understood through conversations and qualitative observations in natural settings that then lead to an understanding of the morally appropriate pathway for learning and emotion regulation that matter to families. Expecting, adjusting, and understanding the social situation by the child is important because that is what a child in an interdependent, socially mediated, and constrained world needs to do to become a growing cultural *person*. It is likely that more of this kind of parental training is going on in some US and European groups than is currently appreciated. Questionnaire scales of parenting or goals are unlikely to fully capture this. Well-being is intertwined with these practices.

"Training" is a more appropriate conceptual frame for another focus found in other cultural groups: well-being as exemplified by persistence in doing and

completing a task and by both family and personal respect shown through *effortful accomplishment* (Chao 1994; Li 2012). This pattern is not limited only to Asian families of course, as already noted for the Matsigenka and the Samoans, but it is marked as a cultural pattern much more clearly in a number of those cultures. Praise in the North Indian context is seen as leading to over-boasting and egocentrism and also means that the child is not focusing on how their own actions might be affecting others or how others might perceive pride (pride being a dangerous display in India, Africa, and elsewhere). Hence, lots of praise ("good job!" many middle class Americans might say) is uncommon-not because parents are not "proud" of their child and do not want them to do well and feel good about this, but because other emotions and social behaviors are as or more important, or the ways of accomplishing these goals are culturally different.

3.8 Distinguishing Cultural Diversity in Pathways to Well-Being From True Threats to Well-Being

A benefit of a comparative, cultural consideration of well-being is that it can alert us to the risk of confusing circumstances in other cultural communities that might seem harmful to children and to well-being from the Euro-American cultural perspective, yet which are neither viewed that way elsewhere, nor produce deleterious consequences for children and their families. There is always a risk of falsely claiming that circumstances in other cultural communities that might seem harmful to children and to well-being from the Euro-American cultural perspective are in fact deleterious. Many contexts that might seem to be troubling do not produce deleterious consequences for children and their families (Weisner 2009).

There is very strong evidence from the ethnographic record and from contemporary studies of children and families that there is a wide range of ways to raise children (LeVine 2007) and that most parenting is "good enough" and is in the service of cultural goals and beliefs that we need to assess in context, rather than imposing a Western framework on them. Many of these ways of parenting and family circumstances may appear chaotic and unacceptable by Eurocentric standards, yet they are nonetheless morally and developmentally appropriate in other places. Perhaps they are not optimal in various ways, yet nonetheless they are good enough, and they produce children and adults who are socially competent and contribute to their communities no more or less so than in the USA. The cultural goals and moral directions for development are met, at least in part, and there is no great gap in well-being outcomes.

For example, socially distributed, multiple caretaking of children is widespread around the world (Evans 2013, ▶ Chap. 65, "Children as Caregivers" in this Handbook; Meehan 2013, ▶ Chap. 61, "Allomothers and Child Well-Being" in this Handbook). Most children are frequent caregivers for their siblings and for their cousins. Nannies, grandparents, and aunts commonly complement or sometimes replace mothers and fathers. Does this lead to relational insecurity, emotional loss, confusion, and anxiety? Or can such caregiving patterns provide a strong sense of

empathy, nurturance, social responsibility, social intelligence, and social competence in children who are caregivers? There is evidence that such care, when not associated with family breakdowns or other chaotic circumstances – when this pattern of caregiving is an expectable, normative, taken-for-granted cultural pathway for children – can promote well-being, and at the least should not be confused with suboptimal care (Weisner 1996; Seymour 1999; Gottlieb 2004; Keller 2007). Attachment security can be achieved through pluralistic models of care and close relationships as well. There is not a single mother-child dyadic style, but rather varied ways to socialize for sufficient security and trust (Harwood et al. 1995; LeVine and Norman 2001).

As mentioned earlier, parenting practices that emphasize structure, respect, control, and training are not necessarily deleterious or unduly harsh, but rather they can provide effective care and positive experiences for children (Lareau 2003; Darling and Steinberg 1993). Co-sleeping or growing up in "crowded" spaces by some Western standards may not lead to dependency or stress and can be associated with interdependence, and symbiotic relationships as a goal for well-being (McKenna 1993; McKenna and McDade 2005; Shweder et al. 1995). Adults do not play with children in most of the world today and did not in the past, though children engage in play everywhere. It is not a sign of insensitive or nonoptimal parenting to observe this (Lancy 1996, 2007). Even where there are difficult conditions for children and families, we need better understanding of the cultural differences that could moderate or mediate environmental stress and chaos and move such situations in a more positive direction (Wachs and Corapci 2003).

This is not to suggest that there are not circumstances that are not going to be good for children most anywhere. These certainly include facing war, becoming refugees, being in mortal danger, and experiencing severe deprivation. Chronically inadequate nutrition, little or no physical protection from threat or violence inside or outside the home, or unresponsive or not even minimal social stimulation are nowhere promoting well-being and basic health for children or adults. Situations involving chronic violence, anger and conflict, persistent threats and danger, or relative status inequality absent supports are not good for children anywhere. Exposure to toxic substances, dangerous neighborhood, school or other settings, chaotic and unpredictable caregivers and social contexts, forced migration and unpredictable disruptions on a continuing basis are not associated with well-being.

Nonetheless, Ruiz-Casares, Guzder, Rousseau, and Kirmayer (2013, ▶ Chap. 82, "Cultural Roots of Well-Being and Resilience in Child Mental Health" in this Handbook) in their chapter on the "Cultural Roots of Well-being and Resilience in Child Mental Health" emphasize resilience, seen both as an individual trait and as an adaptive cultural response by some communities and families, even in the face of clearly negative circumstances. A cultural or contextual understanding of well-being does not imply or require a relativist position with regard to the expectations of negative consequences for well-being of many situations facing children and families around the world. At the same time, it adds, I believe, a useful complement to other work, which offers positive policy and practice guides for interventions to benefit children around the world (Engle et al. 2007).

3.9 Conclusion

The cultural learning environment provides what many believe is a useful conceptual framework for measuring cultural contexts and settings. CLEs include resources and ecology, behaviors, and beliefs. The settings that make up the everyday contexts that organize the lives of children and their caregivers and peers include norms and scripts for how to behave in them, resources making those activities possible, emotions and feelings occurring within them, people and relationships, goals and values, and some estimate of the degree of stability or predictability.

The notion of more sustainable daily routines and activities for children and their families and communities points to a way to provide a comparative assessment of well-being quality that is not relativistic but rather provides a "contextual universal." Local everyday activities for children and parents that provide a better fit to available resources, less conflict, more balance, more meaningfulness with respect to goals, and enough predictability are plausibly going to be associated with increased well-being for children. Such an approach ideally will be complementary to the suite of other ways to assess well-being that are now available in our field (Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2005; Bornstein et al. 2003).

Culture matters, but it does not trump other ways of predicting, comparing, and describing well-being. It is usually used complementary to other ways of understanding well-being. Cultural comparative work on well-being can be used to demonstrate universals, features that children benefit from everywhere, as well as discovering the effects of the remarkable differences in the life circumstances of children today. We need to be sure that we include the enormous diversity in children's worlds that exist today in our assessments. Culture is important for well-being since it brings the meanings and experiences of parents, children, and others into the description and analysis of well-being and ideally insures that their voices are part of our understanding of well-being.

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