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The 5 to 7 Transition as an Ecocultural Project

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The 5 to 7 transition involves changes in internal states and competencies of the maturing child—shifts in cognitive capacities, self-concept, visual-perceptual abilities, and social abilities. The transition marks the emergence of increasing capacities for strategic and controlled self-regulation, skills at inhibition, the ability to maintain attention and to focus on a complex problem, and planfulness and reflection. These changes are well described by other chapters in this volume. But the 5 to 7 transition is a transition period not only within the child, but also in interpersonal relationships, and in the wider cultural contexts that surround the child.

Maturational transitions in development shape cultural contexts and interpersonal relations through their effects on family adaptation. They create new constraints on and opportunities for adaptation for families and communities, just as they do for the individual. This is a two-way transaction: The community defines the meaning of the transition, as well as responding to changes in children's abilities. The child may be prepared to develop new competencies, but it is only in the particular cultural place in which new cultural activities develop that they can be understood.

In many cultures, for example there is a quite striking shift in children's roles and cultural opportunities during and after the 5 to 7 period. From a cross-cultural perspective, children from around 4 to 9 participate in more nurturant, caretaking interactions with other children (Rogoff, Sellers, Pirrotta, Fox, & White, 1975; Rogoff, Newcombe, Fox, & Ellis, 1980; Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). They also take on new domestic task responsibilities, and are expected by parents and other adults to have the social skills to manage these domestic tasks and to act appropriately in social situations. Children in many cultures around the world appear to be participating more extensively and creatively in a cultural world of "socially distributed" care, nurturance, and task responsibility, as Robert Serpell

has recently called these practices regarding social support and obligation (Serpell, in press). The 5 to 7 transition for the family and community in these societies is one in which children increasingly are capable of actively participating in socially distributed support and work.

Children moving through the 5 to 7 shift in many cultures, then, begin to assist in shared caretaking and help with domestic tasks. Finding such assistance and help is of course an adaptive problem facing parents in all societies. Developmental transitions, whatever else they may be, generate adaptive changes in families, and these changes may well help to solve a variety of problems faced by families and communities. Transitions, of course, present adaptive problems as well as opportunities, such as possible competition, jealousy, and disruptiveness of children; the increased complexity and sophistication of the children's ability to understand their own role and position in the family adaptation process; and children's efforts to manipulate others. Regardless of whether some aspect of this transition is viewed positively or negatively in a particular family or cultural community, the 5 to 7 period represents a predictable "perturbation" (Chisholm, 1983) in development that is associated with changes in cultural context and family adaptation. Developmental transitions like the 5 to 7 period create and help resolve important adaptive problems in families and cultures.

Anthropologists have long recognized another feature of cultural transitions: They are potentially dangerous as well as hopeful. They represent changes in the social order, in social relationships, and in personal identity, changes in which many in the community have a stake. They are often, therefore, marked through rituals, initiations, ceremonies, and special, culturally marked events. Children and their families passing through such transitions enter a liminal state with heightened symbolic recognition of the changes that are occurring in them and their social world. In this transitional state, specialized teaching occurs; ritual participants leave their normal routines; and foods, housing, sleep periods, and bodily security are all changed. The end point of these events is a socially recognized return to "normal society," but in a new social role. It is interesting that the 5 to 7 transition is not as often marked by such cultural practices as are other periods such as adolescence, marriage, survival at the early infancy period, and so forth. Although not as culturally marked, it is nonetheless widely recognized in cultures around the world through changes in the child's participation in the tasks important for family assistance and caretaking. The 5 to 7 transition is less dangerous and more hopeful to the family and community than are other periods.

An Ecocultural Model of Development Transitions

What, then, is the adaptive problem for which the 5 to 7 transition is both a solution (i.e., a help and opportunity for families and children) and a concern?

The example of socially distributed support and work is, of course, a specific family adaptive problem—an 8-year-old caretaking young children or doing domestic tasks assists in family adaptation. But what is the more general adaptive problem of which this is but one aspect?

One approach to finding an answer is ecological-cultural (ecocultural) theory (Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman, & Bernheimer, 1989; Weisner, 1984, 1993). Ecocultural theory proposes that the adaptive problem is constructing and sustaining a daily routine of life that has meaning for culture members and that fits with the competencies of available members of the family and community. The construction and sustenance of a daily routine are adaptive problems that challenge all families. "Constructing" a routine reminds us that this is a proactive process in which families shape and are shaped by the social world around them as they try and create and change their routines. "Sustaining" a daily routine means adapting it to a local ecology and the family resource base— that is, the family adaptive problem involves survival, work, and wealth. A "meaningful" routine is one that has moral and cultural significance and value for family members. Although there is always variation within a cultural community in daily routines and practices, any possible one will not do: There are always moral and social preferences that matter. The "competencies" of family members depend on many maturational and cultural indicators, such as age, gender, temperament, kinship status, and cultural beliefs about competencies and status. A developmental transition like the 5 to 7 shift, filled as it is with gradually emerging, powerful new social and cognitive potentials, surely presents enormous new opportunities for familial and community responses to the adaptive task of constructing and sustaining a meaningful daily routine of life.

A central argument of ecocultural theory is that a child's participation in such routine everyday family activities is the preeminent experience shaping the child's development. The construction of the daily routine by families provides these activities for children. Even a cursory glance at the great variety of cultures around the world reminds us that the single most important influence on the developmental trajectory of a child is the particular, local cultural place into which the child is born. The meaning and adaptive use of the 5 to 7 transition by families and cultural communities depend on the transition's use in each cultural place.

Ecocultural theory draws on anthropological and cross-cultural human developmental research (LeVine, 1977; Munroe, Munroe, & Whiting, 1981; Nerlove & Snipper, 1981; Super & Harkness, 1980, 1986; Weisner & Gallimore, 1985; Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan, 1988; B. Whiting, 1976, 1980; B. Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). The focus on cultural context, the daily routine, and behavior settings—and their power to shape interaction and cognition—come from this research transition. The ecocultural model also draws on sociocultural and activity theory and research (e.g., Cole, 1985; Rogoff, 1982, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky,

1978; Wertsch, 1985). This different, but related, line of work emphasizes the socially constructed nature of cognition and mind, as well as the role of activities and practices as the constitutive elements of the daily routine producing developmentally sensitive interactions.

The general idea that developmental transitions are interchanges between person and environment—that development is always occurring in a social context—is, of course, a well-known and well-understood approach in the study of development generally (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kessen, 1979; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Super and Harkness, (1980, 1986) have called this changing, interactive environment around the child the developmental niche, consisting of physical and social settings, customs of child care, and cultural beliefs and goals, and have long called for the study of its development alongside the developing child.

What ecocultural theory adds to this general exhortation to consider social context is its focus on the activities and practices of the daily routine as the locus for this contextual influence, its focus on the task of family adaptation in constructing this routine as a common adaptive task around the world, and its attention to cross-cultural variations in ecocultural context. The model also proposes 12 ecocultural domains that seem to be involved in shaping family adaptation everywhere (Weisner, 1984). These domains represent resources and constraints for families that seem related to the 5 to 7 transition, such as the family domestic workload, subsistence adaptations of parents, supports for mothers, gender role training, peers and child activity groups, and others. The involvement of children in caretaking and domestic tasks directly relates to a number of these domains.

The cross-cultural literature is filled with examples of the assumption of caretaking and domestic tasks by children of about ages 5 to 7 (Rogoff et al., 1980; Rogoff et al., 1975; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Children during and after this stage are better able to both learn and recall a general social schema or plan for action, as well as keep track of the details of interaction. For instance, they can mind a child moment-to-moment by responding to his or her cries, but they can also keep tabs on and manage the larger task of organizing the domestic routine so that a shop is open for selling, a fire is maintained, food prepared, and animals tended to. It is, then, a plausible hypothesis that the 5 to 7 maturational shift has the adaptive benefit for families around the world of preparing a child who will be able to assist in caretaking and domestic tasks, and who will be able to do so increasingly in the wider social community, and so is better prepared to assist in the maintenance and survival of the family daily routine of life.

To summarize the argument so far: Developmental transitions like the 5 to 7 period are cultural projects for families and communities—that is, they are a part of the universal adaptive problem of constructing and sustaining a mean-

ingful daily routine of life for family members, a routine that is congruent with the competencies of family members. In the ecocultural model, the 5 to 7 transition may create new adaptive problems for families, but it also provides opportunities for the solution of many existing adaptive problems. An example of this, the primary topic of this chapter, is the role of children in providing caretaking, social support, and task assistance in the family during and after the 5 to 7 transition.

The Western cultural project surrounding the 5 to 7 transition is reflected in the name often given to it: the "school-age" transition. This Western concern with cognition, literacy, numeracy, and verbal skills reflects what the West has made of some—only a small portion—of the emerging abilities of children during this period. It reflects specific sociohistorical concerns over what defines competence in children, much as other cultures show concern over doing family and community tasks to assist in their survival. Although the school setting may have indirectly taken advantage of certain psychological abilities afforded by evolution and past cultural experiences, it hardly capitalizes on most of the competencies I argue evolved in the past.

Why Is There a 5 to 7 Transition in Development? A Family Adaptation Hypothesis

A focus on the adaptive uses of the 5 to 7 transition today leads to asking about its adaptive origins. If there is a 5 to 7 developmental transition, an assumption that appears broadly correct based on many of the chapters in this volume, it may have originated in human evolution as a solution to adaptive problems, just as it can be situated today in the context of the human adaptive problem of organizing family and community routines of life. What were the adaptive problems in our human evolutionary past, including our nonhuman primate past, that might have led children of about this stage in their maturation to develop the kinds of skills that have been identified: increased complexity in reasoning abilities; strategic decision making; empathy; memory and cognitive abilities; social communication; and self-concept changes?

Perhaps one of these problems was assistance for parents in caretaking of infants and other juveniles. Assistance must have included direct care of full siblings or related individuals in the community, as well as other tasks essential for providing a sustainable daily routine, such as improving communication and signaling skills, protecting the group against predators, seeking and defending food supplies, and fully learning group roles and social positions through a combination of play and apprenticeship. All of these behaviors assist in the survival of a domestic group and in caretaking.

My argument is based on the general notion in studies of the evolution of human growth that both juveniles and their families would have benefited from

continued sharing of food and from age-graded caretaking by older children of younger (Bogin, 1988, pp. 92–93). But my argument extends this notion by focusing on the wider adaptive problem—sustaining a meaningful, coherent routine of everyday life—which continues today. Some of the psychological mechanisms assisting in this adaptive task include the tendency to analyze problems in terms of social costs and benefits, to be able to grasp the complex network of social roles and relationships in a community, and to do so by taking into account the reference points of others' minds. These are among the abilities that appear to emerge, or significantly increase in complexity and generalizability, during the 5 to 7 transition.

These are abilities that assist children and adults alike in acquiring, remembering, and using cultural models for action. D'Andrade (1987, p. 112; 1992) defined cultural models as "a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group," and that is hierarchically organized. "Buying something," for example, is a cultural activity that is schematically organized, involves shared knowledge, and includes concepts like money, seller, and price. "Taking care of an infant," "delivering messages to an uncle's house," "herding cattle," and "guarding the house and minding younger siblings" are practices embedded in cultural models. Children's abilities to use such cultural models and schemas appear to increase dramatically during the 5 to 7 period. Older children can manage complex, hierarchically organized sequences of tasks essential to families because they have acquired cultural models of great complexity (Nerlove, Roberts, Klein, Yarbrough, & Habicht, 1974). This is one of the achievements that emerge at the 5 to 7 transition.

An understanding of the psychological mechanisms that might have evolved during the 5 to 7 transition is central to understanding how the 5 to 7 transition may have evolved and what its enduring adaptive value for families and children may have been. This is because selection operates on these mechanisms as well as on behaviors that might be adaptive. Chisholm (1992) has summarized this point:

> [W]e cannot confuse a trait—like the chin, or infanticide—with genes "for" that trait. We must instead understand how the trait works and where it comes from. Selection acts not only on behavior, but also on the developmental biological and psychological mechanisms that produce behavior. (P. 130)

Thus, although the abilities emerging at the 5 to 7 transition may have evolved in part to assist in caretaking and related aid in family and community survival, they need not be tied to a specific past ecological environment. The 5 to 7 transition may have somewhat different functional-adaptive behavioral patterns in varied ecologies (Borgerhoff-Mulder, 1991) as well as a set of interrelated psychological mechanisms gradually favored by natural selection (Cosmides

& Tooby, 1989; Tooby & Cosmides, 1989). Some of the psychological characteristics of the 5 to 7 transition are abilities that would be adaptive for both caretaking other infants and juveniles and for adapting to survival in the social group, in situations in which juveniles are less and less under the mother's immediate gaze.

This seems to be a "sensible paradigm" (Blurton-Jones, 1990, p. 353) for thinking about the evolution of the 5 to 7 transition. It seems useful to view the process as a mix of functional utility (without tying behavior to some necessarily adaptive function in what are, after all, highly changing behavioral environments) and a study of the evolved psychological processes or mechanisms in children that might have enhanced fitness under varying ecological and social conditions. These mechanisms included the child's ability to use cultural models in complex ways to solve problems in changing and uncertain, new environments. These abilities assisted in meeting adaptive problems facing families as they attempted to construct a meaningful, sustainable routine of everyday life, one which would be congruent with the ages and abilities of those in the domestic group.

Of course, the fact that the 5 to 7 transition may have current utility for family adaptation in contemporary cultures does not necessarily mean that this same functional utility is the basis of its evolutionary origins. There are many ways that the juvenile period in human development likely evolved in addition to an adaptation related to caretaking and family-group survival. Indeed, the juvenile or extended childhood period has a series of adaptive advantages in addition to caretaking, as outlined in Bogin (1988, p. 75), including a general opportunity for cultural learning and brain development, small juvenile body size, which reduces parent-offspring conflict and competition over resources, delayed eruption of molars, and others. Some of the characteristics associated with the 5 to 7 transition could have coevolved with other traits that were selected for in some past environment of evolutionary adaptedness. These past environments may have favored practices different from shared caretaking or domestic task maintenance or group protection of children in the family, yet the same cognitive abilities and social communication skills successful in that other environment might be now focused on those new practices.

The 5 to 7 period is when children enter the juvenile period—defined as a stage of life when children could probably survive if their caretakers died or if they were to lose some or all of what their parents provide them, but they are not yet mature sexually (Pereira, 1993, p. 19). In human communities, children could survive alone in large numbers, but only with the social assistance of individuals other than their parents. In fact, this is what occurs in human communities—other kin or non-kin often do take in such children, and adoption, fosterage, and child lending are common practices. In nonhuman primate communities, the arrival of a new infant is often the time when the young juveniles

are pushed out of the mother's immediate social group and into the wider group. This is simultaneously the time, then, when social awareness and social communication skills are needed for survival and when, in many primate groups, juveniles start assisting in the care of infants.

In the literature dealing with nonhuman primates, researchers have discussed a number of ways in which juvenile members of a primate group who are not actually breeding new offspring themselves contribute to group and offspring survival (Periera & Fairbanks, 1993). These contributions include reducing the carrying load of the mother or in other ways providing direct child care (alloparenting); acting as "sentinels" detecting and warning against predators; or defending feeding sites from competitors. Juvenile vervets in Amboseli, Kenya, for instance, learn to recognize the calls and signals of dangerous animals in their environment, as well as learn to produce the calls their own primate group will recognize as warnings (Cheney & Seyfarth, 1990). Such social cooperation among maternal kin (full and half siblings) does affect reproductive success in primates. If an infant is orphaned, siblings are most likely to care for it and help it survive. Juvenile care also promotes independence and assists in the weaning transition of the younger offspring. There is evidence that juveniles in many primate groups dramatically increase their caretaking, social communication skills, and reciprocal social roles during this period. The nonhuman primate evidence is at least not inconsistent with the evidence from human groups, who clearly begin to deploy children of these ages for such tasks.

Why do these developing abilities in reasoning, decision making, social competencies, and self-understanding begin around age 4, and why do changes continue through about age 8? The reason for this may have to do with adaptive concerns not exclusively having to do with the 5- or 6-year-old himself or herself, but rather with the parents and any younger infant or toddler who would have by this time been born into the child's domestic group. The new child would require the mother's time and would place the older children more often in a daily routine shared with peers or other adults. It would be valuable to the domestic group and family unit if the juvenile could in various ways assist the parent and other caretakers of the infant. These forms of assistance could include direct infant care or performance of domestic tasks that the mother would otherwise have done or the sharing of food or the insuring of the safety and the physical and social viability of the family unit so that the mother could safely care for the new infant. The new competencies that emerge during the 5 to 7 period are compatible with a child's being able first to assist others and then more independently to assist by undertaking caretaking and domestic tasks.

Although birth spacing varies widely today and probably has in the past, birth-spacing data on human foragers such as the !Kung suggest that there is about a 50-month interval between births of children who survive to a year

(Blurton-Jones, 1986) and that this is a theoretically optimal interval in that particular environment. However, other foragers have different patterns of birth intervals, and it appears unlikely that the wide variations in environments faced by our nonhuman primate ancestors and our human ancestors would have selected for a single such interval such as between age 4 and 5. The expectable, rather high demographic variability, owing to mortality and fertility variations within human communities, also means that spacing will vary across domestic groups within any society (Hewlett, 1991). Although births may occur more or less often than at a median interval of 50 months, the 5 to 7 period as the onset of juvenality could well have emerged due in part to birth spacing.

Age in the study of this transition is a relational or positional index variable. Age is not only elapsed time (on some scale of years or life expectancy or age-specific mortality) but also relative status and position in a group. It is not the juvenile's absolute age of 5 that is important, but rather the juvenile's relative position of age 5 or so compared to the timing of the birth of younger children and the normal juvenile maturational period. The age range of this transition is more gradual than precisely 5 to 7 because there are anticipatory beginnings of some aspects of this transition early on and others do not fully emerge until later. Furthermore, the complex set of intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic, visual, and other competencies are not changing in lockstep, nor do children move through this period at the same rate with respect to each ability. Since diverse cultures place different expectations and pressures on children for different kinds of change, one or another of these competencies might appear at an earlier chronological age among children in one culture than in another. In addition, although the onset and end points of the transition may differ in different individuals, nevertheless, there may be a relatively clear demarcation within a social group around the 5 to 7 period.

The reason for the evolution of any development-maturational transitional period is that those genetic tendencies that encouraged the development of these competencies during roughly the 5 to 7 age period, or equivalent period for nonhuman primates, would have increased the direct or indirect fitness of the individuals who had those tendencies. Fitness in this sense is the survival of an individual's own genetic material (direct fitness) or survival of the genetic material of one's relatives, who on average share some of one's own genetic material (indirect fitness). If one reason for the evolution of the 5 to 7 transitional period was because juveniles could assist in infant caretaking and assist the new mother in other tasks related to family and group survival, then those offspring who had competencies that assisted them in those activities would have been more likely to survive, as would their kin. In this way, these competencies developing during the 5 to 7 period would be more likely to persist in a community. As I will show in the next section, families and cultural communities throughout the world do, in fact, provide opportunities for children to

assist in care of younger children and to assist in family adaptive tasks after this transition—and children are prepared to do these tasks.

Cultural Opportunities and the 5 to 7 Transition: Caretaking, Tasks, and Social Support

Families and communities in a wide range of cultures recognize the cognitive and maturational changes in children between about ages 4 to 9 (Rogoff et al., 1980; Rogoff et al., 1975). Among the ways they do so is to assign children more responsibility for doing tasks and chores around the house and in the community. Children are also involved in caring for younger children. Some cultures have codified these changes in children's activities by defining clear roles for children as child caretakers or assistants in managing the domestic domain. Others have not culturally elaborated the roles, but the practice is widely shared. Whether or not these roles are defined explicitly or assigned more to girls or boys or to particular ages, such changes in children's activities very often appear. Children's participation in the family adaptive task of shared support and maintenance of the family routine is a clear example of the patterned expression of the 5 to 7 developmental transition at the cultural and interactional levels.

The provision of nurturance and social support for kin and community is a universal adaptive problem. Although its form and content and cultural meaning varies widely around the world, there are universal features recognizable in cultures everywhere. One can have a deep appreciation of the very important and meaningful local cultural differences and also recognize that it is not necessary to "start over" conceptually or methodologically each time we visit a new cultural community, in the hope of studying activities in the daily routine that involve support and nurturance. These activities include affection, physical comfort, assistance in doing tasks, shared solving of problems, provision of food and other resources, and protection against harm and aggression (Weisner, 1993). Nurturance and support involve anticipating, intuiting, and recognizing the needs and the circumstances of others and then acting to assist the other person or persons. Domestic tasks assigned to children also share many common features and have been systematically compared in cultures around the world (Bradley, 1993).

The examples of cultural practices, children's caretaking, social support, and task involvement presented here come primarily from sub-Saharan African societies, particularly East African (Weisner, in press). The African data are from studies done among the Abaluyia of Kisa location in western Kenya, a group of Bantu, horticultural communities. These groups also have a history of extensive wage-labor migration throughout Kenya and East Africa (Wagner, 1949/ 1970; Were, 1967). The Abaluyia live in dispersed homesteads connected by

paths and surrounded by their fields of maize, potatoes, vegetables, cassava, plantains and bananas, sugarcane, groundnuts, and other crops. Their homes and lands sit on green, gently rolling hills, with rainfall adequate for two crops a year when the region is not affected by drought. Well over half the adult males, and substantial numbers of women and children, are away from the community at wage jobs, or trying to find such jobs, or living with kin in Nairobi or other urban centers (Weisner, 1976b). The Abaluyia have been in extensive contact with national and international economies for generations, and schools have been operating since the 1920s. Hence, the circumstances of children's 5 to 7 transition in these communities, which I describe in this chapter, are not from some long-past "traditional" history; these are the practices of contemporary generations. Because Abaluyia are living in cities and towns as well as in rural communities, data are presented from urban-resident families as well as rural ones.

Some of the characteristics of the 5 to 7 child transition in these places can stand for other cultural places around the world, but some cannot. For example, the gender preference for girls doing caretaking and domestic activities appears widely around the world. The activities children do together, the extent of maternal and paternal involvement, and the styles of caretaking, all vary much more widely. There is a useful contrast worth making between preindustrial, less technologically developed societies, on the one hand, and industrial or postindustrial societies in Europe and North America, on the other. (For convenience, recognizing the enormous diversity within each grouping, I will gloss this contrast as preindustrial and Western, respectively. Preindustrial societies include the horticultural, peasant, and simple agricultural communities, such as the East African or Polynesian communities described in the chapter.) By no stretch of the imagination are these two distinct and homogeneous categories, nor have they been isolated from one another. Indeed, some of the characteristics of the cultural transition for children in African communities can be found in the West, and Western children, of course, do child-care and domestic tasks. There are elites and middle-class families and communities with similar characteristics throughout the preindustrial world. Active child participation in socially distributed nurturance and support is a family adaptive pattern that can be found in more culturally elaborated forms in preindustrial communities but is available and found in some degree everywhere.

Patterns of Child Nurturance, Support, and Family Task Assistance That Develop During the 5 to 7 Transition

In a system for caretaking and support based on age-graded care by juvenile children, children are expected to turn to parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, grandparents, and socially recognized others for help. In turn, they are often

expected to assist others in their family. Parents may manage and direct their family caretaking system without directly providing care themselves. Children may spend time living with other kin and participating in the care of others away from their natal home. Interdependence, more so than independence, is culturally expected of children at these ages particularly (Weisner, 1982).

Although the qualities of social interaction and role that characterize child caretaking and domestic task participation for children vary widely around the world, there are some patterns frequently found in field studies of children and parenting. Although no one characteristic of this pattern defines the transition for children and families, some subset of these features is very often found accompanying the 5 to 7 transition (Weisner, 1989).

Other Children Provide Assistance and Support

Children look to other children for assistance and support as much or more than to adults. Figure 14.1 shows data from observational studies done among the Abaluyia (Weisner, 1979, 1987). These naturalistic observations were done in and around children's homes throughout the day and were subsequently coded jointly by Kenyan students and American researchers. Mothers were the exclusive providers of nurturance and social support in only 23% of all supportive acts in the sample. The remainder of the support either included other children or occurred in the absence of the mother. Girls do about as much caretaking as mothers. Abaluyia children in urban Nairobi do not differ substantially in the amount of care they provide compared with children in the rural community.

Nor are the Abaluyia unusual. Cross-cultural samples showed that older children were the caretakers of younger children after infancy about 35% of the time (Barry & Paxson, 1971). Leiderman and Leiderman (1974a, 1974b) found that polymatric care was widely practiced among Kikuyu in the Central Highlands of Kenya. Reed and Leiderman (1981) demonstrated that infants show attachment behaviors with sibling caretakers similar to that shown toward their mothers, although the nature of the caretaking provided by mothers and siblings differs. Grace Shibadu (1978) interviewed women in Kenya, who reported that 90% of girls 5 to 9 did child-care tasks, as did 82% of boys. However, boys drop to 38% during ages 10 to 12, whereas 82% of girls remain involved in child care. Pamela Reynolds (1991) reported similar observational data from Tonga families in Zimbabwe; the Tonga are a community dependent on wage-labor migration and are a mixed horticultural economy in a relatively dry and arid part of the country. Child care clearly was the predominant work activity for girls and was done in the context of a heavy overall domestic workload. Tonga women spent 20% of their work time caring for children, girls 33%, and boys 4%. Girls under 10 spent 56% of their time caring for infants
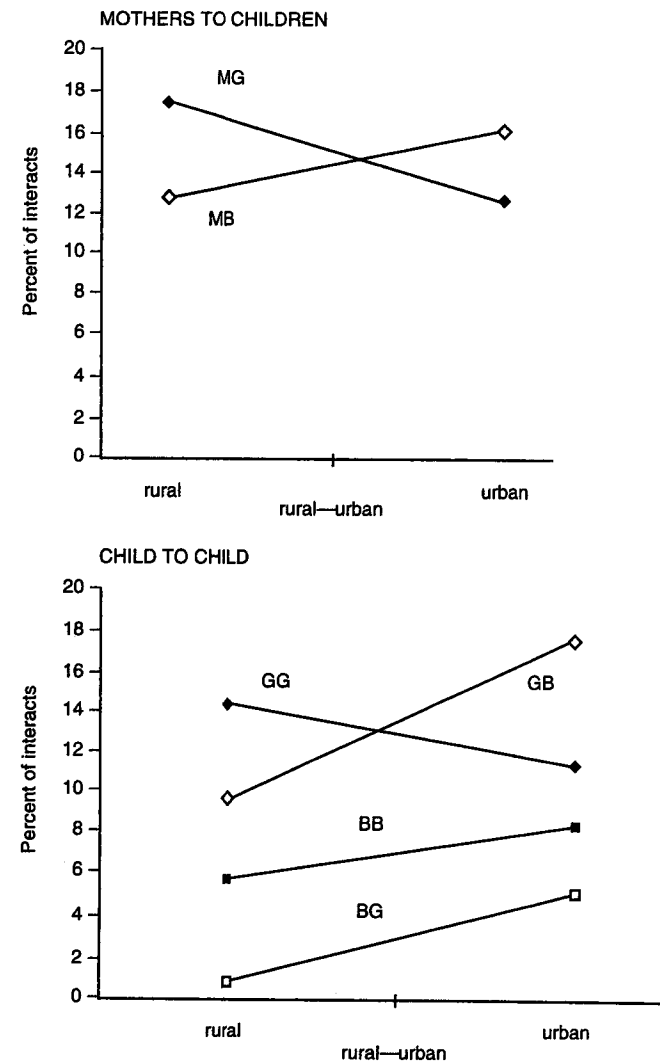

Figure 14.1   Nurturant interactions (direct care and emotional support), by dyad and rural-urban residence. From T. S. Weisner, 1987, "Socialization for Parenthood in Sibling Caretaking Societies," in *Parenting Across the Lifespan: Biosocial Dimensions,* (p. 254), J. B. Lancaster, J. Altman, A. S. Rossi, and L. R. Sherrod (Eds.). New York: Aldine de Gruyter. Copyright 1987 by Aldine de Gruyter.

and young children. These data include being directly involved in attending to a child—not merely being around children while doing other tasks (Reynolds, 1991, p. 80).

Indirect Chains of Support

Children care for other children within indirect chains of support in which one child (under a mother's or other adults' management) assists another, who assists a third, who shares help for others, and so on. For instance, an Abaluyia toddler of 3 years or so will fall down and cry. The child's mother and a teenage sibling will not necessarily run to assist, although they will be aware and perhaps glance over at the situation. A 7-year-old sister will come over and help the child up. Later on, if the 7-year-old needs help in gathering wood or in weeding, the teenage sibling will help the girl out.

The cultural practices of the 5 to 7 transition not only assist children to participate in such intrafamily chains of support but also carry the expectation that children will learn about and understand such networks of support and avoidance across families as well. A 4-year-old may learn and display rules of greeting and avoidance; an 8-year-old learns why these are important rules and how to apply them to novel situations. Whom to avoid or approach in the wider community and how to successfully negotiate visits and exchanges across families is an important concern children learn by age 8 or so. Learning to run errands all around one's community successfully is a sign of maturity (Super, 1983), as is an appropriate understanding of complex kinship connections and community political alliances. There is a cultural value placed on children's interdependence and on hierarchical age structures, more than on autonomy and independence.

Gender Differences

Although boys and girls are capable of doing the full range of caretaking, domestic tasks, vigilance, food gathering, play, and social negotiations that assist their family, they begin to specialize at the 5 to 7 period. Girls in societies with age-graded caretaking, for example, are more likely than boys to be involved in caretaking or other activities that entail doing caretaking, such as tasks done in or near the home.

Girls do over twice as much caretaking and domestic tasks as boys do according to the Abaluyia data, but boys clearly provide support, caretaking, and nurturance to other children as well, although more infrequently as they reach late middle childhood. Figure 14.1 shows this pattern in the Kenya samples, with girls doing two to three times more caretaking and nurturant interaction with other children than do boys. Infant care is particularly common among girls right after the 5 to 7 transition. Edwards (1993) found that cross-cultural

studies support the view that "involvement with infants is one of the most consistent sex-differentiated behavioral domains of middle childhood" (p. 336). This same difference appears in virtually all primate studies. Bradley (1993) examined the patterns of domestic task performance in a large cross-cultural sample and found that, though both boys and girls assist in women's domestic tasks, girls seldom do men's tasks. Furthermore, "the most common children's tasks are women's tasks"; both boys and girls are under the supervision of women, who use both boys' and girls' labor to assist in their often heavy workloads. As boys reach later middle childhood, they are more likely to leave the domestic domain controlled by women, and they gradually do fewer tasks done by and allocated by women or older girls managing the household. Family adaptation seems to capitalize on boys' and girls' abilities at the 5 to 7 transition by involving both genders in work and child care. However, girls do more of such tasks than boys do.

Children self-ascribe cultural standards and beliefs about their appropriate role according to age and gender and are also socialized through apprenticeship learning of their family roles and responsibilities. Native Hawaiian girls, living in a working-class neighborhood in Honolulu, for instance, tended to overreport to others that they were responsible for caring for others, whereas boys tended to underreport (Weisner, Gallimore, & Tharp, 1982).

Boys and girls divided themselves, and cultural practices divide them, into sex-segregated peer groups right at the 5 to 7 transition period in many cultures (Edwards, 1993; Ember, 1981). For instance, as Figures 14.2a and 14.2b show (data are from the Giriama in the coastal region of Kenya, described by Wenger, 1983, 1989), boys and girls spend more time with peers (± 2 years) of their own gender as they move through the 5 to 7 period (Figure 14.2b). But girls spend more time with both boys and girls (Figure 14.2a) of all ages, not only peers, because they are more often involved in caretaking and domestic tasks with boys and girls, whereas boys spend more time exclusively with boys (Figure 14.2a). Abaluyia children's interactions show a similar gender shift (Figure 14.3): Up to age 5, Abaluyia boys are about as likely to interact with girls 10 or older, who are often their caretakers or working around them doing domestic tasks, as they are with boys. But older boys spend most of their time with other boys.

Relevant in speculating about gender differences in the transition is the distinction between the psychological abilities emerging during the transition and the specific behavioral patterns. It seems, from the capability of both boys and girls to do a wide range of tasks, that psychological abilities are transferable across tasks like caretaking, family protection, play, domestic tasks, food gathering and sharing, and so forth. But the differences between juvenile girls and boys specifically in caretaking experiences or in threat and defense, although these might have led to specialization in abilities, is much more likely due to
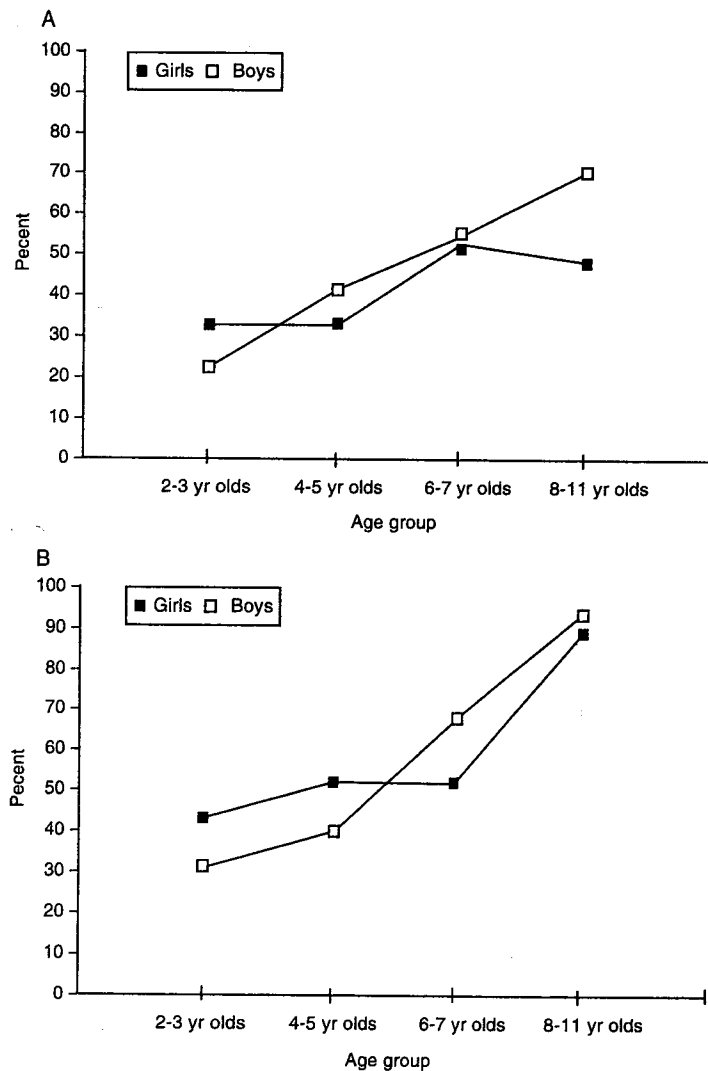
A

B

Figure 14.2 Children's interactions with other children and with their peers. (a, top) Percentage of home and courtyard observations of children ages 2 to 11 in which all children within a child's interactional space are of the same sex as the child observed. (b, bottom) Percentage of home and courtyard observations of peers (± 2 years of age) in which all children within a child's interactional space are of the same sex as the child observed. All data for Fig. 14.2 are from *Children of Different Worlds: The Formation of Social Behavior* (pp. 229–230), by B. Whiting and C. Edwards. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
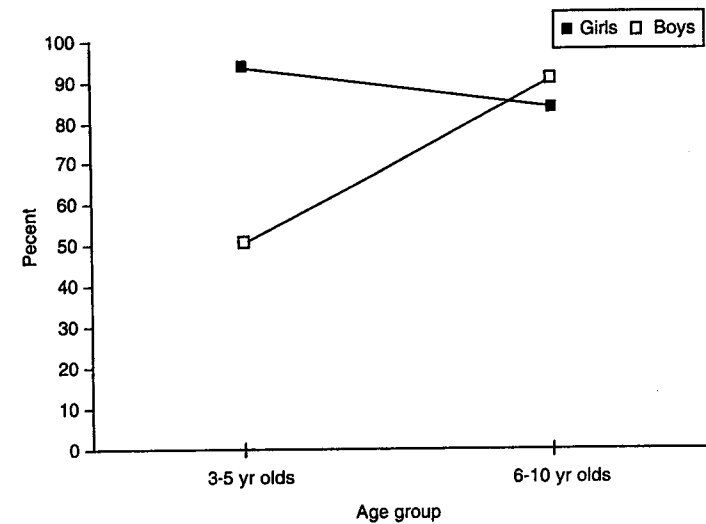

Figure 14.3 Percentage of all social interactions of Abaluyia children ages 3 to 10 with children of the same sex.

the nearly universal sociocultural fact that most "mothering" (e.g., parenting in the prejuvenile years) is done by women and girls (Chodorow, 1974; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1973).

Indirect Care by Parents

Parenting during and after the 5 to 7 period increasingly involves indirect care. Parents provide support and nurturance for children as much by ensuring that others will consistently participate in providing this support after the 5 to 7 transition as in doing so directly themselves (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Children are expected to provide such care, with a more indirect, managerial parenting role than when children were 4 or under. Of course, this is not to say that children under 4 are not cared for by others, nor that children of age 7 or 8 have no direct interactions and continuing close relationships with their parents. Rather, the pattern of cultural activities shifts to place children more often with peers, and multiage groups of children and other adults, and less often in close proximity to their parents or primary caretakers for most of the day. It structures increasingly independent responsibility for children about these ages. As many mothers in Kenya told me in interviews and conversations, indirect care by others and good parenting go together; insuring good placement of one's children and seeing sibling caretaking functioning in everyday practice in the family daily routine are good parenting (Weisner, 1987).

Complex Responsibility Training

Nurturance and support are learned and practiced in the context of increasingly complex responsibility training for many other tasks. Child care and nurturance as part of a specific, baby-sitting role, are both more and less important during and after the 5 to 7 shift. They are more important in that for 7-year-olds child care and nurturance are often more culturally elaborated, with clear expectations, and with mistakes in their enactment strongly sanctioned. Gender differences further elaborate on the role. But it is less important in that the tasks of child minding are merged in everyday cultural activities with other tasks. Super (1983), for instance, showed that children among the Kipsigis of western Kenya increase their domestic work time from around 30% at age 4 to more than 50% by age 7 and older, while play and idle time decline. The typical Kipsigis girl is likely to be in charge of a younger child while doing such tasks, whereas boys increasingly move away from the home, doing herding. Among the Abaluyia, some 9% of all interactions between mothers and children involve instructions and requests regarding child care, and another 17% (20% for girls, 14% for boys) involves other domestic tasks and chores (Weisner, 1987). Children minding other children are also tending the fire, selling in a shop, weeding in a garden, minding small animals, husking corn, playing games, doing their school homework in a group, and running errands. Child minding is culturally an important kind of domestic task, rather than the highly specialized "baby-sitting" activity, kept somewhat separate from family adaptation and survival in the wider world, that it is in the West.

Varied Emotional and Affective Climate

The emotional and affective climate that surrounds caretaking and social support by children of other children is varied across cultures. Children's caretaking is not necessarily characterized by warmth or empathy, for instance. Among the Abaluyia, where child caretaking and support are common and where children have substantial responsibility for managing their domestic tasks and assisting parents, aggression, teasing, and dominance often accompany support. For instance, a 9-year-old Abaluyia child will be carrying a toddler around, and the younger child wants some food. The older child refuses to give the younger child food, proceeding to eat the food herself. At the same time, food is frequently used to soothe and comfort children and adults and child caretakers alike. Or a younger child gets teased by having a burning stick from the fire poked at him or her; the younger child is scared and cries; the older children laugh. Later that same morning, the older child (age 9) comforts the younger sibling, whom he has often caused to cry, get scared, and run out of the house.

Comfort and support thus co-occur, in children's experience and in activities

in the daily routine, with dominance, teasing, and fear (Weisner, 1979). Broch has observed the following among the Bonerate, an isolated small island community in Indonesia (1990):

> One day I observed two children, a boy and a girl, who were looking after their younger siblings. They moved to the edge of the village where the toddlers were teased until they started to cry, to the great amusement of the caretakers. They continued to trouble their charges for a while before they picked them up. Then they returned, hugging the crying youngsters and showing all villagers how kindly they tried to comfort them! (P. 81)

The same kin network that (usually) can be counted on for support can also be counted on to dominate, tease, even exploit.

Similarly, verbal exchanges and elaborated, question-framed discourse do not necessarily accompany support and nurturance for children. For instance, in some 49 hours of observations of support and nurturance among the Abaluyia, there were no instances of support accompanied by the kind of empathic, verbal interactions more common in Western, middle-class relationships (Weisner, 1979). The kinds of verbal and visual contingent responsiveness commonly associated with mother-child interactions in Western studies and learned by siblings (Dunn, 1985; Dunn and Kendrick, 1982; Mendelson, 1990) are not necessarily found in either parents or children in many preindustrial samples. The Western cultural script of treating the young child as a coequal interlocutor, even though the younger child is not yet linguistically capable, is highly elaborated in Western models of maternal responsiveness, but not in other cultural places (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). This is both a cross-cultural difference and a difference owing to low or no maternal formal schooling (LeVine et al., 1991; Richman, Miller, & LeVine, 1992). The point for purposes of understanding children's participation in caretaking and support is that appropriate and responsible care and support are culturally encouraged in children during the 5 to 7 transition, but the same kind of emotional climate and the verbal responsiveness associated with such support in Western cultures are present much less often.

But a deep sense that socially distributed support is both available to children and an activity in which children are expected to participate is present. The culturally elaborated ways—the styles and routinely expected activities—in which this support is manifested and culturally organized differ. Western children do not necessarily experience more nurturance and support but rather, a different way of culturally organizing it.

Children's Social and Intellectual Competence

Social and intellectual competence in children is judged by the children's competence in doing child-care and domestic tasks, as well as by their successful

social functioning in the wider community. Sending children on errands that require knowledge of kinship terms and rules for interaction marks their developmental maturity, and doing this task well is a sign of "responsible intelligence," as well as skill at verbal quickness, which is often used later in development and when they become adults (Harkness & Super, 1982, 1992). Serpell has pointed to the many variations within the diverse meanings of intelligence in many African societies, including (a) cognitive cleverness, (b) cooperativeness, and (c) social responsibility (Serpell, 1977, 1982, 1993). He quoted this definition of intelligence among the Chewa in Zambia: *"to be able to be sent out; . . . one who is willing to go."* The Abaluyia described as "bright" or intelligent those children who could mind others with little supervision or discussion *and* those who did well in school. Nerlove described two criteria for local community folk judgments of "smartness" among children in the Guatemalan villages she studied: the ability to sustain self-managed sequences of activities (e.g., in doing tasks by oneself) and the ability to engage in and sustain social exchanges throughout the community (Nerlove, Roberts, & Klein, 1975). Children living in Bonerate are given tasks and child-care responsibilities at the same time (Broch, 1990):

> When children are from five to six years old they are delegated their
> first chores of importance in the daily activities of the household. . . .
> The assignments are, however, always adjusted to their physical age
> and mental maturity, as interpreted by their parents. (P. 79)

Abaluyia mothers in western Kenya use evidence that a child had the ability to give and receive social support and assist others as markers of a child's more general intellectual development level, much as an American parent might use literacy skills such as knowing the alphabet or numbers or displaying verbal facility to show how grown-up or precocious his or her child is. African mothers proudly include helpfulness and task competence as evidence that their children are maturing successfully. Intelligence as a mental ability and competence in social context are tied to the abilities of children to provide social support and nurturance. Motor skills in children and responsible compliance to others' requests are used as signs of intelligence (Super, 1991). Being "smart" yet *not* being socially competent is a difficult idea to grasp for communities that depend on socially distributed support.

Literacy, urban residence, and formal schooling are changing this picture, of course (Kilbride & Kilbride, 1990). Children are watched closely for success in school grades and national examinations and are encouraged where possible to continue schooling if they do well. Yet other skills are still valued in both rural and urban contexts, and change may sometimes have altered the form of cognitive skills or the way in which they are displayed, more than they have

changed underlying cognitive capacities (Weisner, 1976c). For instance, cognitive assessments of Abaluyia children ages 5 to 11 in both Kisa and Nairobi showed urban-rural differences in how children approached cognitive tasks, but only small differences in the children's overall ability owing to urban or rural residence. For instance, urban-resident children were bolder with the testers and tried out more solutions to the problems presented to them, but the proportion of correct responses did not differ between city-resident and country-resident children. Urban-resident and schooled children did give more partially correct answers to most of the cognitive tasks administered, however, and had better facility in English and Kiswahili because of their greater exposure to both languages in Nairobi.

Furthermore, those children observed to participate more actively in sibling caretaking in either setting, in fact, did somewhat better in primary school (assessed by final exams administered at the school or by the national Kenya Primary Examination, as shown in Figure 14.4. Children involved in caretaking and domestic tasks talked together about schoolwork, used English and Kiswahili more often, and played games children played in school. They integrated their school-acquired abilities into their tasks and caretaking. Education levels of parents (in a range from none to about 2 years of secondary school, with a median of 4 years) were unrelated to parents' beliefs about and commitment to shared caretaking. There is no evidence that the two kinds
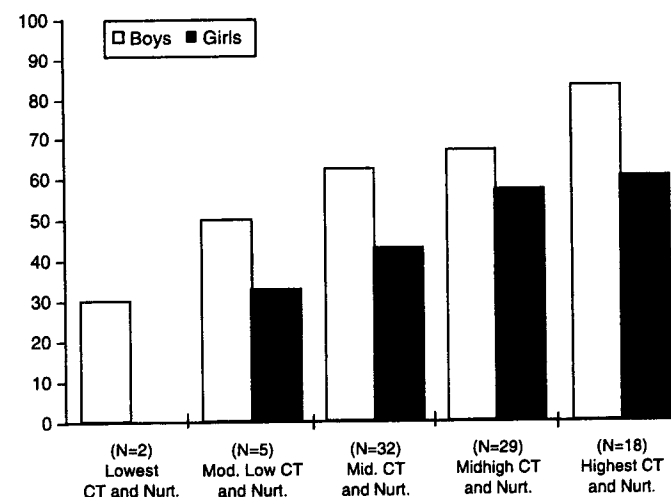

Figure 14.4   Relationship between caretaking experience (CT) and nurturing (Nurt.), and rank in upper primary school, for Abaluyia children (*n* = 86). The *x*-axis shows the mean percentile rank in upper primary school class (ages 11–17+). The *y*-axis charts the times observed in caretaking (CT) role/proportion of nurturant (Nurt.) interactions (ages 4–11).

of competence—schooled and community-social—are mutually exclusive or cannot both continue as valued indicators of child competence.

Families living in Nairobi often left part of their sibling group behind, and the nature of tasks and shared management changed dramatically because of the breakup of the sibling group. Partly as a result, urban-resident children, compared with rural-resident children, showed more disruptive and aggressive behaviors, less sociability, and less shared task performance, and sought out their mothers for interaction (and disturbed them) more than did rural-resident children (Weisner, 1987). This is primarily due to the absence of older children from the Nairobi households. Older children were more likely to be needed for farmwork, remained in school in the rural areas, had difficulty finding appropriate city housing, and were kept home owing to parental concerns over the dangers and bright lights of the city and the costs of supporting children there. Because these rural and urban families were carefully matched by the father's age, education, and kinship affiliation, it was clear from parents' reports and ethnographic comparisons that the breakup of the child caretaking and sibling group support network led to this change in interaction—not selective migration or changes in parents' beliefs about appropriate caretaking or education for children.

The Cultural Complex Sustaining Shared Management

There is a culture complex that seems to favor the cultural elaboration of socially distributed support in an age-graded, shared-management family caretaking system for children, beginning around age 5 to 7. A culture complex includes characteristics of community beliefs and values, ecology, demography, and social history, which often occur together and which mutually support and reinforce each other. The competencies emerging in children at the 5 to 7 period are then used by families to solve some of the adaptive problems characteristic of their culture complex.

None of the features clustered together in such a culture complex, whether alone or in combination, are necessary or sufficient for child involvement in shared domestic-management and socially distributed support. Many aspects of child caretaking and shared support can and do occur in families and communities around the world in the absence of the features defining any particular culture complex. Similarly, features related to children's involvements in shared support are found at least to some degree most everywhere in the world regardless of a particular culture complex. For instance, low-fertility and low-mortality demographic patterns do not preclude such child activities nor do relatively egalitarian gender roles in childhood, formal schooling, or more egalitarian family relationships. However, culturally elaborated and sanctioned child caretaking and support typically occur along with at least some of the following ecological-cultural complex of features:

- High total fertility and declining child and parent mortality (Caldwell, 1982; Hewlett, 1991; LeVine & White, 1986). A consequence of these conditions often means that there are many children who are available for caretaking and who require care, and much work to be done, and that children are close in age, with an interbirth interval smaller than 5 years.

- Sibling caretaking an accepted and well-understood cultural practice (Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Not all families necessarily follow the practice, but it is a routine option, among others, for raising children. Parents and children do not have to explain why or what they are doing. It is a shared cultural script for a child's and parents' development together. Preindustrial cross-cultural samples show that about 35% of the time older children are the caretakers of younger children after infancy (Barry & Paxson, 1971).

- High moral importance placed on shared family social support and child caretaking (Edwards, 1993; Nsamenang, 1992). This is a transition for children that is culturally significant, one that matters to parents and to the community. The sibling relationship may stand as high or higher than do other close relationships (mother-child; husband-wife, etc.) as the culturally idealized close relationship (Marshall, 1983).

- Mobile families may be living in more than one household or exploiting more than one resource for subsistence and support (Weisner, 1976a). Families with members gone for wage labor elsewhere will often commute from one place to another and will have children live in different places to assist in child care and work for the family (Ross & Weisner, 1977). Child lending, fosterage, and adoption practices are frequently present as well (E. Goody, 1982; J. Goody, 1969).

- High variability in family composition, size, and fertility within the community (Hewlett, 1991). Families will be at different points in their development cycle; others will not have high total fertility or low mortality. This variability encourages the sharing of children between households of related kin to assist in child care or work and perhaps to permit children to attend school while living with kin.

- Heavy maternal domestic workload (Minturn & Lambert, 1964; Munroe, Munroe, & Shimmen, 1984; Reynolds, 1991; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Work that takes mothers out of the home for long periods of time and domestic work that requires help from others mean that children and other adults are needed for the maintenance of the domestic routine.

- Gender role differences (Bradley, 1993; Burton, Brudner, & White, 1977; Munroe, Shimmen, & Munroe, 1984). Tasks for boys and girls and for men and women are relatively clear, and gender roles are often segregated.

- Clear status and authority distinction between child and adult. There is unlikely to be a strong cultural presumption of even pseudo-equality between parents and children. Children are expected to invest in the family "estate," both economically with their labor and socially. Hierarchy and deference distinctions within the family are usually clearly marked (Caldwell, 1982).

- Child apprenticeship for caretaking and domestic tasks during and following the 5 to 7 transition. Seldom are there formal instructions or "schooled" learning that begin at this period. Rather, children learn through "enterprise engagement" in the tasks themselves, learning through observation and direct experience. Children are familiar with "pivot roles" (Mead, 1928/1961), in which they are often simultaneously a caretaker or doing a task and being taken care of and supervised in a task by an older, more competent or senior child or adult (Gallimore, Boggs, & Jordan, 1974; Jordan, 1985). Although cultural training is usually apprentice-based, schooling is not incompatible with such training. Indeed, as shown in Figure 14.4, the two kinds of competencies can co-occur.

An Ecocultural Approach to the 5 to 7 Transition: Four Developmental Questions

The ecocultural approach to the 5 to 7 transition focuses on the cultural project of constructing a daily routine and on the shift in interactions and practices that occur very widely around the world during this period. From this point of view, the questions raised in the introduction to our volume—whether there is a 5 to 7 transition, whether changes are quantitative or qualitative, whether there are continuous or discontinuous transitions, and whether there is a reorganization of existing patterns or new ones—can be answered, but in a form somewhat revised from the way they are presented there.

By age 8, children clearly interact differently and participate in cultural practices differently from the ways they did when they were 4. Cultures around the world recognize this in the roles and expectations they have for children at the beginning and end of this period. Families in many societies have utilized the developmental transition as an opportunity for new adaptations that have assisted in child care and domestic tasks specifically and shared social support generally.

At the same time, the adaptive value of both the cultural practices and the chil-

dren's abilities has evolved because children were maturing in families where younger siblings, following after the 5- to 7-year-old child, were being born. Caretaking and assistance in sustaining the family domestic routine—features of the developmental context around the child—would encourage many of the abilities seen in children of that age. There is an interaction between child abilities afforded by evolution and cultural projects shaping children's development.

These differences at the cultural level are differences in both quantity and quality. Children participate as younger apprentices in caretaking and domestic activities, which as older children they continue in, but now as more active organizers and managers. These pivot roles are characteristic of the 5 to 7 transition. The interactional opportunities and cultural practices are there at both younger and older ages; but the quality of the child's participation shifts.

These shifts are continuous for the same reason. Children are less competent at age 4, but they are, nonetheless, gaining the experience, through redundant participation with older children and parents, that will, in turn, lead them to take on much more competent roles by age 8. The child makes a gradual transition in cultures prepared for such gradual assumption of new tasks.

Hence, the transition is the reorganization of existing patterns of interaction and cultural practices for the child. This follows from the view that the 5 to 7 transition is an opportunity and a challenge for family and community adaptation. From the point of view of the cultural tools for adaptation available to parents, the transition is a reorganization of practices encoded in cultural beliefs and values regarding children of different ages. These beliefs are encoded because, at least to some degree, they have been found useful in prior adaptive efforts.

Conclusion

The 5 to 7 period transition influences and is influenced by different cultural projects for children and for families around the world. It is a period in many cultures when children are asked to assume new functions in the family, such as caretaking, social involvements in the wider community, subsistence tasks, and increased involvement in domestic tasks within the family. These changes are a part of the more fundamental family adaptive task of sustaining a daily routine of life.

The 5 to 7 transition is striking in how well children seem to fit into varying requirements of their cultural settings. This is a period of life when children in most societies seem able to meet relatively well the developmental task of understanding the social rules and cultural meanings around them and seem able to use creatively those rules and meanings in everyday interactions rather than to resist or rebel against cultural expectations. This is not to underemphasize the workload, emotional struggles, and conflicts that children do have, a number of which are mentioned in this chapter, or to present this transition in an

overromanticized, idyllic way. Nonetheless, the 5 to 7 period is characteristically not a period of rebellion from social conventions but, to the contrary, a time when children seem to hunger to acquire more and more skill in using and understanding those conventions. It is a period when children appear capable of achieving a significantly more complex and subtle ability to understand and model the roles of their parents and of older children; they want to do this and want approbation at success.

Some Western parents struggling with their children's transition to formal schooling may be surprised at this characterization. The "school-age transition" can be a time of great uncertainty and concern for parents and children. But the nature of the tasks and activities of classrooms may produce the struggle, not something inherent in the 5 to 7 transition. A whole new world of peers; a new everyday routine; greater separation from home, parents, and siblings; and new and perhaps invidious evaluations of competence can all make for a difficult transition. Age-graded classrooms run by a single adult manager-teacher provide little opportunity for the development of the kinds of competencies described in this chapter. The 5 to 7 transition viewed as a shift in the competence of children to participate in tasks of family caretaking and survival is not without struggle. But the transition does not have such sharp and different developmental tasks as literacy and numeracy training in a room with 30 children of the same age in classrooms with a cultural routine very different from the home and family.

There is a relative lack of attention to the emergence of social support and caretaking skills during the 5 to 7 period and after in Western psychology, perhaps because of the focus on school changes and on individual, rather than cultural, transitions. The ecological circumstances of early middle childhood in the middle class of the industrialized world, although they do not eliminate support and caretaking activities, nonetheless do not encourage their cultural elaboration. This may have to do with the decline within some middle-class cultural communities of shared activities providing the opportunity for the expression and cultural elaboration of such skills. This pattern is recent, however, and is not necessarily characteristic of other ethnic and immigrant communities in the United States. Historically, children in North America were routinely involved in their families' farm, trade, or business activities. Various ethnic minority communities throughout North America, such as some African American, Latino, or Asian American groups, have continued to emphasize shared support and child caretaking responsibility, as do many European American families. There are many reasons for this having to do with economic and ecological pressures, historical traditions in these communities, the need for self-reliance owing to threat and discrimination, or moral and religious values. And there are signs that increasing work pressures on dual-income families, on single-parent households, and on others may be increasing the roles that children are playing in caretaking and tasks.

But families in the West attempt socially distributed caretaking and support under very difficult circumstances. Families are separated by divorce and by residential norms and cultural expectations of autonomy driving apart those who might co-participate with children in shared support. The middle-class legal system may define care of young children by older, preadolescent children as exploitative of the children, or illegal in some circumstances. Although such care can become exploitative, it need not. There is considerable evidence that under appropriate adult direction and cultural supports, children are prepared for active participation in such systems of shared child care and domestic management.

During a period of history as rapidly changing and uncertain as the present one, it is important to keep available as much knowledge as we have about the many ways that cultural communities around the world have defined and utilized the abilities of children during the 5 to 7 period. This is a storehouse of cultural knowledge—of tools for family adaptation—worthy of renewed comparative study. These adaptive cultural tools should be studied in cultural context, along with their costs and benefits to children, families, and communities. Cultural practices of shared social support are a widespread example of such tools and clearly have taken advantage of children's abilities that develop at the time of the 5 to 7 transition.

Acknowledgments

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