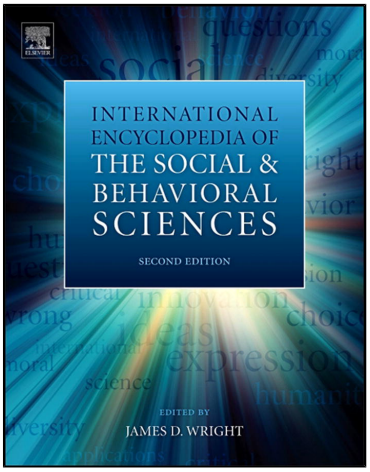

From Weisner, T.S., 2015. Childhood: Anthropological Aspects. In: James D. Wright (editor-in-chief), International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2nd edition, Vol 3. Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 451–458.
ISBN: 9780080970868

Childhood: Anthropological Aspects

Thomas S Weisner, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Abstract

Anthropologists believe that the most important influence in human development is the ecological and cultural setting within which a child will grow up. The anthropological study of childhood documents and accounts for the variety of childhoods found around the world, using comparative ethnographic evidence to test hypotheses about human development. It also studies the mechanisms in child, family, and community life for the acquisition, internal transformations, sharing, and intergenerational transmission of culture. Most importantly, it does this with close attention to the everyday contexts and routines of life, experience, meanings, intentions, and beliefs and goals of the communities, parents, families, and children themselves.

Introduction

The anthropological study of childhood documents and accounts for the variety of childhoods found around the world, using comparative ethnographic evidence to test hypotheses about human development. It also includes the study of the mechanisms in child, family, and community life for the acquisition, internal transformations, sharing, and intergenerational transmission of culture. Most importantly, it does this with close attention to the everyday contexts and routines of life, experience, meanings, intentions, and beliefs and goals of the communities, parents, families, and children themselves.

A thought experiment will illustrate the anthropological point of view about childhood. Imagine a newborn, healthy infant. What is the most important thing that you could do to influence the life of that infant? Most respond by mentioning dyadic interaction with the baby: hold and touch the infant a lot; provide good nutrition and health care; provide stimulation to achieve school success; love the baby; give it wealth and social capital; and so forth. Anthropologists believe that the most important influence in human development is the cultural setting within which the infant will grow up. Where on earth is the child growing up – where did the child end up in the 'birth lottery'? It is how, why, and by whom children are held, loved, fed, stimulated, punished, provided resources, and so forth, and how that varies so widely across human communities, that is, the focus of inquiry. Shaping a whole person engaged in family and cultural community life is the purpose of childhood development from an anthropological perspective. Childhood is a cultural project with goals, meanings, constant adaptation, and struggle, and anthropology provides the evidence for the startling and remarkable varieties of childhoods found around the world. Biological, psychological, and cultural anthropologists collaborate in the study of childhood, since biology, mind, and the cultural context are all required to understand childhood (Weisner, 2011).

The study of childhood and the process of children acquiring culture was almost entirely neglected by anthropologists until after 1925 (Whiting, 1968). Although a great deal of progress has been made, anthropology does not yet provide a single unified theory of why and how childhoods vary around the world or of childhood acquisition of culture. Rather the field offers rich, multivariate hypotheses and data on childhood (Super and Harkness, 1997).

The Stages of Childhood

Five stages of human growth and development are common to *Homo sapiens*: infancy, childhood, juvenility, adolescence, and adulthood (Bogin, 1999). Margaret Mead described lap children (infants, aged 0–1), knee children (toddlers, 2–3), yard children (preschool, 4–5), community children (juveniles in middle childhood, 6–12), and adolescence (Schlegel and Barry, 1991). These are maturational periods of development, alongside which cultural groups provide their own varied categories and marked stages of life. A new stage perhaps has emerged for study in the United States and some other Western, developed countries: emerging adulthood, the period from about age 18 to 25 or so, during which marriage may be delayed, education extended, and a search for work and identity continues (Arnett, 2011). Anthropologists analyze the cultural meaning of the very idea of stages, since they are used to account for children's behavior ('he's crying, but it is OK, because he's still a toddler'), as well as to assure and define normal and appropriate development ('she is eight and, so, old enough to start helping run our household'). Human cultures weave wonderful variations, meanings, and stories around panhuman maturational stages of childhood. The Beng of Ivory Coast, for example, believe that young children are still partly in yet another stage, a cultural world called *wrugbe*, where ancestors share life with prebirth children who are ambivalent about leaving that world. This helps explain for Beng why infants cry or are sickly: they want to return to *wrugbe* (Gottlieb, 2004).

Along with these maturational and social stages, evolution has prepared children and their caregivers to seek out information from the environment in all its many forms, cultural and noncultural. There is no question that despite the remarkable variation in parenting and children's learning environments around the world, children and adults alike are

International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, Second Edition, 2015, 451–458

prepared by evolution to be what Melvin Konner (2010) has called 'culture acquisition devices,' or CADs. Thinking of children as uniquely prepared by our evolutionary past to respond to and learn from the environment is a useful way to think about the continual interactions between our genetic inheritance and the importance of the cultural learning environment (CLE). Konner (2010) outlines 20 of these CADs or putative mechanisms that evolved to acquire cultural knowledge. These are divided into four broad categories of these learning mechanisms that are involved in the acquisition of culture: reactive processes in the cultural surround (such as classical conditioning, or social facilitation due to reduced inhibition, or instrumental or intentional conditioning); social learning (such as scaffolding, mimicry, imitation, and direct instruction); emotional/affective learning processes (attachment processes, along with positive or negative identification, or emotional management through rituals and scripts); and symbolic processes (cognitive modeling, schema learning, narrative, and thematic meaning systems).

Conceptions of Childhood in Anthropology

There is a variety of perspectives on childhood in anthropology. In one view, children are socialized into a set of norms and customs that they learn and then perpetuate. In this view, children are small adults in the making, ready receptors of traditions, shaped by parents and community adults to insure continuity in cultural and moral education, provide competence for survival in the ecology of the community, respect for tradition and appropriate behavior, and respect for elders in demeanor and gender roles.

In a second view, children's personalities and minds are understood as reflections of the cultural themes as well as the anxieties children grow up with (such as in the work in Bali of Bateson and Mead, 1942). The focus also is on the semiotics and communication of cultural meanings to children and on how these cultural patterns are absorbed and internalized, which in turn reproduce the meanings as well as neurotic obsessions and conflicts of their parents' cultures.

Third, the psychocultural, or personality integration model (Whiting and Whiting, 1975) begins with the climate, history, and ecology of a community, which shapes child-care practices, which in turn produce psychological effects on children. These contextual influences on children are produced by direct social learning as well as by psychodynamic processes shaping personality and defenses in children. These children become adults who then project into myths, rituals, art, and other forms (including in turn their own practices as parents) of the learned patterns, as well as intrapsychic conflicts produced in childhood and shared by others in their community.

The psychocultural model does not depend on a psychodynamic theory of learning. Children and adults alike have universal needs of the self, including the hunger for recognition, reward, and material and bodily satisfaction, to which communities respond through the cultural careers made available to children in a community. This core, psychocultural motivational force has been described as *affect hunger* by Walter Goldschmidt, who argues that this underlying need drives children to voraciously acquire cultural knowledge and also drives their parents and others to want them to do so (Goldschmidt, 1992). The desire for social recognition and inclusion more generally insures that most individuals link to and engage with society; however, culture channels these desires and, so, inevitably thwarts these needs, leading to intrapsychic and cultural conflicts. Melford Spiro, for example, used both psychodynamic and sociocultural approaches to understand the ideological, political, and ecological reasons for and consequences of the care of children by designated community caretakers, or *metapelets*, in socialist-inspired agricultural collective groups in Israel (Spiro, 1975).

Fourth, anthropologists study the 'developmental niche' of childhood: everyday physical/social settings, cultural customs of care, and the psychology of the caretakers of children. The cultural models of parenthood that are part of the customs and psychology of care direct behavior in their local, everyday settings (which include the goals, meanings, and rationales for parenting and being a child) (Harkness and Super, 1996). Parenting of children also is shaped by the organic hardware given by our common mammalian heritage and by socioeconomic conditions in the community. Children experience culture as it is practiced within their family's daily routine of cultural life. Cultural routines consist of activities children engage in (mealtimes, bedtimes, family visits, chores, going to church, school, play, etc.). Activities are the primary mechanisms bringing culture to and into the mind of the child, since cultural activities are what a child directly experiences day in and day out, repeated thousands of times. Activities consist of goals and values; tasks of an activity; the scripts for how to engage in that activity; the people present and participating in the activity and their relationships with the child and with one another; the motives and feelings and affective and emotional experiences of those involved; and the stability and persistence in the lives of the child and family (Weisner, 1996).

A related concept to the developmental or ecocultural niche is the CLE (Edwards and Bloch, 2010). The CLE consists of a cultural activity in progress, occurring in a social setting in some ecological and historical context, with norms of behavior for that activity and with characteristic people and relationships in the settings. Many features of the CLE have been shown to influence children's social behavior and mind. For example, gender, status in the community, resources, age, family structure (nuclear or extended), formal education, and other features all influence the amounts and ways of expression of children's prosocial behaviors, aggression, nurturance, and other outcomes.

Cultural and ethnic group identification, and the child's and family's own strength of social identity, is an important influence both of a child's own self and, therefore, of the child's and family's connections to the cultural community. Families often are the context in which this sociocultural identity is acquired and experienced due to co-residence, shared surnames and language, and similarity of physical appearance, among other features. The more this social identity is tied to provision of resources and support, and the more salient it is, whether due to external threats or opportunities or a positive sense of a shared heritage, the greater the importance the cultural community has in a child's development.

Finally, some anthropologists view childhood itself as a cultural construction shaped by forces within as well as outside a single cultural community. The very idea of what a child or parent is, in this view, is more the outcome of processes of power in an increasingly global political economy, in which children as well as parents are *constructed* or *positioned* by these agents of power (the state, market economy, political and other elites, and other economic and political forces) (Stephens, 1995). The emphasis of this approach also is on the child as active agent or engaged actor in defining its own socialization. This view counters the idea that socialization and enculturation is done primarily to the child. Culture acquisition also depends on the child's active, often thoughtful participation as well. Children can and do resist what family and society want for them and want of them, and this process of resistance and transformation is an important perspective in anthropology.

Anthropology has contributed to our understanding of formal education through work on classrooms and schools, showing the cultural influences on how teachers teach and manage classroom behavior. Anthropology broadens the study of 'education' to include all forms of social and cultural learning outside of schools, however, and how this much broader world of everyday learning connects with formal classroom learning (Lancy et al., 2010). Anthropological studies also include nonformal and informal education as well as formal schooling, such as out-of-school activities (clubs, music, church groups for children and youth, sports, gaming), various forms of private and commercial schooling (other than formal education), and the intersections between these various settings for learning that are common everywhere.

Some Cultural Influences on Children's Development

Cultural Scale and Complexity

Children in more complex societies (with occupational specialization, an extensive market economy, a nucleated settlement pattern, centralized and hierarchical political and legal system, and a centralized religious priesthood) are more likely to seek help and assistance from others, to try and dominate or control others, and to be more egoistic. Children in less complex societies are more likely to show nurturance toward other children (to offer assistance and respond to their requests), be more responsible, make more responsible suggestions to others, and do more tasks required for family and community survival. Mothers who have heavy subsistence workloads are more likely to expect responsible work from children and use stricter discipline. Children living in extended, joint, or expanded households and family systems are more often involved in directive, aggressive interactions, while children living in smaller nuclear families are more often engaged in sociable and intimate interactions with parents and others. Additionally, fathers in smaller conjugal households and family systems are, on average, more involved with children compared to fathers in joint/extended families.

Of course, children and adults everywhere seek help, show responsibility, or are aggressive and so forth. These patterns only reflect the modal tendencies of communities, not a rigid uniformity within them (Whiting and Edwards, 1988).

Gender Differences

Gender differences in children's development are recognized and shaped by all cultures (Ember, 1981). Of five kinds of interpersonal behavior in children aged from 3 to 11 (nurturance, dependency, prosocial dominance and affiliations, egoistic dominance, and sociability), girls on average were more likely than boys to be nurturing toward others, while boys were more likely to be egoistically dominant and aggressive than girls. Play styles and types of play vary by gender (girls are more likely to do joint work-play and to do so nearer their homes, for instance). Women and girls do most caretaking of children during the juvenile period in most cultures, so girls experience care by their own sex, while boys do not, leading to differences in early gender identification and psychosocial and self-development. Peer groups have a tendency to segregate by gender, and children in middle childhood tend to prefer same-sex children to interact with where there is a choice. Cultures with more mixed-age and mixed-gender groups in settings around children are likely to have less sex-segregated roles for children. Individual differences among boys and girls are usually substantial, even within communities where there are strong overall gender differences in development.

Father roles are recognized in all societies (Shwalb et al., 2013). Fathers seldom are involved in direct care of infants and young children in most societies, but they do have complementary nurturing and affiliative roles. Fathers also are more likely to be involved in economic, protective, and didactic child training. In a study of 80 preindustrial societies, fathers were more often nearer to and involved with young children in monogamous, nuclear family, and non-patrilocal residential situations and in sociocultural circumstances where mothers make relatively large contributions to family subsistence. Father involvement is related to sociocultural evolution: foraging societies report more father participation in childcare, while horticultural, agrarian/peasant, and pastoral subsistence-based societies have tended to have less. There is an upswing in contemporary societies in encouraging paternal care. The cultural beliefs about gender (how women's as well as men's roles are defined by parenting), as well as the ability of fathers to provide consistently for their children, influence father involvements. Poverty and uncertain economic life, or migration and dislocation, can drastically change father as well as mother involvement in patterns of childcare.

The study of gender continues to broaden in scope to include anthropological studies of the trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation – a growing world problem. There is selective abortion practiced around the world, which favors male births over female. Anthropology also is focused on the education of girls and the consequences of that education for a broad range of outcomes. For example, LeVine et al. (2012) ask why there is a correlation between increasing education for girls and women and gradually declining fertility rates and improved health for those women with more formal education and the communities they are in. Although the association has been known for a long time, the mechanisms

were not. Girls' and women's education and literacy provides tools and mechanisms for increased interactions with health and other bureaucracies regarding managing family size, birth control, and family health. These women also are more likely to recognize and practice birth control and wider birth spacing and to socialize their own children using more pedagogical child-rearing practices.

Emotional Development

Emotional development in childhood is influenced by cultural expectations at each developmental stage about the demeanor expected by boys or girls of that stage in particular cultural settings. A child should show that he or she is a certain kind of cultural person with an appropriate self and identity in his/her emotional comportment. Cultural management of emotion relies on what Robert Levy (1973), in his study of Tahitians, called *redundant cultural control*. Tahitians, for example, as well as many other Pacific Island communities, expect children to be calm, gentle, and quiet in demeanor (except for an extended period of adolescence and youth called *taure'are'a* in Tahiti, in which adventures, autonomy, rebellion, and aggressiveness are culturally expected and common). Redundant community management of 'gentleness' includes many beliefs and practices: children are somewhat distanced from their mothers and fathers after infancy and spend much of their time with peers; socialization networks are diffuse, meaning that affect toward others also is diffused; severe anger is strongly discouraged, while mild transient episodes are tolerated; threats are common, while actual aggression toward children is not; accidents are reinterpreted as punishment by spirits for aggression; there can be magical retaliation for serious anger; and, it is generally shameful to show lack of control. A culture complex of many interrelated beliefs and practices of this kind, such as the Tahitian example, including lexical labeling of the expected behavior patters, recognized cultural scripts, and stories adding to its emphasis, all are strong signs that some emotional pattern or competence in children is of adaptive and moral importance to a society.

Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) have tied emotional development to processes of learning responsibility and a sense of obligation and respect. There are clear differences in how communities socialize their children for responsibility and task performance around the world. The US middle class is unusually low in accomplishing such training in responsible tasks for their children compared to many regions of the world.

Basic Trust and Attachment

Another example of cultural variation in development comes from studies of basic trust and attachment. The universal socialization task for cultures regarding attachment concerns the learning of trust, rather than insuring the *secure* attachment (as defined by particular psychological scales) of an individual child to a single caretaker in a dyadic relationship. The question that is important for many if not most parents and communities is not, 'Is (this individual) child securely attached?', but rather, 'How can I insure that my child knows whom to trust and how to show appropriate social connections to others?' 'How can I be sure my child is with others and in situations where he or she will be safe?' Parents are concerned that the child learns culturally appropriate social behaviors that display proper social and emotional comportment and also show trust toward others.

Successful attachment does not depend on only one kind of maternal care in nuclear families, nor a specific kind of infant and toddler behavioral style. Anthropological studies show that a wide range of family and parenting practices found around the world can produce close affiliation and trusting attachments in children (Otto and Keller, 2013; Quinn and Mageo, 2013). Although the individual child is named and recognized everywhere (this is the basic process of individuation), individualism and egoistic autonomy as goals clearly are not universal. Sociocentric and interdependent self-development is more common ideals in much of the world compared to autonomous and independent development (Shweder and Bourne, 1991).

Chisholm (1999) proposes an evolutionary developmental hypothesis regarding trust and attachment. Considering the long course of evolution, children and families faced highly changing kinds of environments. These environments varied in how risky, uncertain, and variable they were. Less threatening, more favorable material and social conditions led to greater investment in fewer children and, so, encouraged closer attachments to one or a few caregivers. Unfavorable conditions encouraged what are labeled (inappropriately so from an anthropological perspective) *insecure* or avoidant/ambivalent infant and child behaviors observed during standardized assessments or rated through interviews or questionnaires. In threatening, insecure conditions, those often were the more adaptive, successful parental and child responses that were likely to increase the chances of children reaching reproductive age.

Multiple caretaking is found widely across communities around the world (Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). Most cultures provide multiple caretakers to children, rather than a single person. Care is socially distributed across many in the family and community in most children's lives, not dependent on a single person. Indeed, a child living an entire childhood exclusively in his or her natal home may well be the exception around the world. Older siblings and cousins are widely used as caretakers as well as other kin, hired care, and group care. Extended families in village and agrarian-based societies have high levels of multiple care of children. In India and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, for instance, there is an intense childhood experience with several maternal figures (Seymour, 1999). This means that a focus on a single dyadic connection as the key indicator of 'secure' emotional attachment does not fit the experience of most children and caregivers, nor evolutionary evidence (Hrdy, 2009).

Many communities (particularly more hierarchical, agrarian/horticultural, and respect-oriented) want infants and children to exhibit calm, respectful, quiet demeanor in the presence of strangers and community members generally, and there is evidence from the Nso of Cameroon, Gusii of Kenya, and many other societies that even very young children learn

and display this relationship style. This is not a sign of insecure attachment (Keller, 2012; LeVine and Norman, 2001). Learning about trust and security in many communities includes socialization for respecting hierarchy, showing deference, and training children to not expect parental responsiveness and warmth, as Jeannette Mageo has shown for Samoan family life (Mageo, 1998). Mageo suggests that achievement of group trust and attachment is not based only on a positive feeling of security. Trust and relational security may well include experiences of ambivalence and even avoidance of some family and kin, as well as acceptance within the group, including kin and community support. Similarly, managing anger and expecting and accepting only intermittent maternal attention are believed to be the appropriate training for learning how to anticipate and deal with security and separation among the Murik of Papua New Guinea (Barlow, 2004). The Murik do provide early mother-specific attachment socialization, which is closely tied to nursing and the provision of food. They also emphasize the diffusion of emotional relations outward to other caretakers (siblings and kin), who generally are harsher and who discipline the young child most often (rather than the mother). The Murik cultural intention is to complement the one with the other kind of care. The cultural message is that both of these kinds of caretaking experiences are needed for true, realistic emotional security in the Murik world. Both patterns certainly are what Murik will face in life. Hence, both patterns are emphasized and defined as good mothering and secure attachment. To be pluralistic and situation-centered, not only person-centered or dyadic relationship-centered, is an important component of the socialization for trust and a sense of security in most communities.

Developmental Goals

Anthropology does not assume that competencies valued in Western communities (verbal skills, cognitive abilities, or signs of egocentric autonomy of the self, for instance) are necessarily desired or even meaningful child developmental outcomes elsewhere (LeVine, 1988). However, nearly all cultures are concerned over some version of good communication, mental ability, self-construal, and personhood. LeVine et al. (1994) contrast *pedagogical* goals (cognitive and social stimulation to prepare children for literacy and schools, as well as for an individualistic and autonomous self-construal) and *pediatric* goals (concern for survival, health, and physical growth of infants, and subsequent responsible engagement in family subsistence and family continuity). Of course, in the contemporary world, many parents and communities want a hybrid combination of these goals for their children (Edwards and Whiting, 2004).

Anthropology has a unique point of view regarding the goals for a good childhood: the production of cultural well-being in children. Well-being is more than physical health, the attainment of skills and competence, the absence of illness or misfortune, or of successful subsequent reproduction, important as these are. Well-being is the ability of a child to engage and participate in the activities deemed desirable by a cultural community and the psychological experiences that go along with that participation.

The Acquisition of Culture

The roles and settings in which children learn of course influence when and how children will acquire cultural knowledge. Children are apprentices to more experienced community members in doing important tasks, and this apprenticeship situation is a powerful learning experience for children. Play and work blend in childhood learning. Imaginative, fantasy, toy, physical, and motoric kinds of play (including organized sports with rules) vary according to whether adults encourage it or whether it is considered beneficial for children by adults because they believe that it enhances desired competencies or furthers their societies' developmental goals (such as cognitive and school-like activities in many contemporary cultures). Of course, play is universal among children, as soon as their sheer inventiveness, creativity, and exuberance take over.

Adults are rarely involved in play with children in most societies around the world, in contrast to the emphasis on adult-child play from early childhood on in the United States and other Western, developed countries (Lancy, 2007). For example, the Kpelle of Liberia in the 1970s had children playing on 'the mother-ground,' or open public spaces where children can observe, lurk nearby, and imitate adults going about their activities in their agrarian village community. Formal schooling contrasts sharply with this mother-ground of childhood and everyday learning in context. Anthropological studies of schooling find striking differences in the culture of classrooms around the world, including different teaching practices and student expectations. A moral and cultural curriculum accompanies the formal literacy, numeracy, and sciences training in classrooms. Preschool classrooms around the world reflect implicit cultural models regarding the importance of collective, group activities (in contrast to more individually chosen activities preferred in many US preschools). For example, US teachers intervene and use words to negotiate disputes, while Chinese and Japanese classrooms monitor and encourage children to settle their own disputes. There are many other such national/cultural differences (Tobin et al., 2009). Participation in ceremonies and rituals at times of baptism, birthdays, naming ceremonies, puberty, and marriage also has powerful influence on children's acquisition of cultural knowledge. Such ceremonies crystallize cultural beliefs and practices. They intensify emotionally, politically, and socially salient key concerns that parents and communities have about childhood and elevate the goals the community shares for children and parents (Turner, 1967).

Multiple cultural and mental processes are involved in culture acquisition; however, the relative importance of different mental and cultural mechanisms for emotional, social, or cognitive learning are currently not well understood in anthropology. Evolved tendencies of the mind prepare children to understand the world in certain ways. For example, children in widely disparate cultural communities seem to share understandings about what living things are like and how they behave and think (Hirschfeld and Gelman, 1994). Psychodynamic processes transform emotionally salient cultural information. Stories and narratives embed cultural knowledge, shape recall, and organize cultural knowledge into scripts with shared local meaning. Sociolinguistic studies

of child language acquisition show wide variations in how and when parents talk to their children. Language learning is embedded in interactional routines shaped by cultural practices, with children as active learners (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Children's play, games, and language use show strong evidence of class and race/ethnic influences as well as cultural knowledge. Children display remarkable creativity and agency and use the richness of language in shaping social relationships, beliefs, and practices (Goodwin, 1990). Neither children nor parents generally have explicit, conscious awareness of all the complex cultural knowledge that they know. Most cultural scripts are seldom in conscious awareness, even as they drive actions in accord with their community's beliefs. Cultural beliefs and practices have powerful *directive force* in guiding child behavior and child socialization in part because of this shared, implicit, everyday understanding put into action (D'Andrade, 1995; Lancy et al., 2010).

Anthropological Methods and the Study of Children

Anthropological methods for the study of children include qualitative interviews and conversations, ethnography, and participant observation (Weisner, 1996). These methods are important for operationalizing the anthropological concept of childhoods lived in cultural pathways in naturalistic settings. Systematic observational procedures, field guides for comparative studies, and special procedures for sampling children's activities and time use enhance ethnography (Bernard, 1995; Munroe and Munroe, 1994). Anthropologists also use assessments standard in child development for comparing physical growth and the cognitive and socioemotional life of children, often revising these standardized measures to insure that culturally appropriate procedures and meaningful outcomes are being measured. The processes of language-mediated culture acquisition, using sociolinguistic methods, are essential to understand the process of 'becoming a speaker of culture' (Ochs, 2002) and are central in anthropology. Film and video records of childhood are invaluable for comparative studies of cultural activities, emotional expression, daily routines and activities, the physical environment of the home, and patterns of gaze and attention, for example (Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik, 2013).

The cumulative cross-cultural ethnographic record of the lives of children and parents around the world is a unique, invaluable, and remarkable contribution to the scientific study of childhood and human development (Lancy, 2008; LeVine, 2007). The use of ethnographic and qualitative evidence in the contemporary study of children's lives is also increasing throughout the social sciences (Yoshikawa et al., 2008; Weisner, 2011). Using these methods for studying children's lives insures that the social, cultural, and ecological context of children's lives is fully included in the study of child development, and that the experiences, meaning systems, and intentions, goals, and values that influence the developmental pathways available to children are never excluded from study. For analytic reasons, it is, of course, important to bracket context out, and use a wide range of methods for study, but anthropologists do not forget that the world is not linear, additive, and decontextualized. Anthropological methods therefore will always be essential (Weisner and Duncan, 2013).

Anthropology and the Study of Childhood in the Twenty-First Century

Anthropology has always been concerned with the experiences and the cultural worlds of minorities, of the poor and nonliterate, and of those, including children, who are so often unable to give voice to and represent their own world. Life histories and autobiographical accounts of childhood have provided rich data, as in the classic *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Shostak, 1981). Scheper-Hughes (1992) describes infants and young children in deeply impoverished political and economic circumstances in northeastern Brazil, circumstances leading to high infant and child mortality, and anger and despair among parents (and anthropologists). Anthropological studies of African-American families and economically downwardly mobile families in the United States demonstrate how some (but not all) can rely on extended kin in their struggles with poverty. Anthropological studies of childhood disability and deviance find greater acceptance and social integration of children with physical and cognitive disabilities in many communities than in the United States and other Western societies, as long as children are able to live as sufficiently cultural persons in their communities and are not violent or dangerous to others (Ingstad and Whyte, 1995). Disability and mental health usually are considered by anthropology in the context of other sources of poverty and social exclusion along with the disability or mental illness itself.

Anthropologists are concerned with children at risk around the globe, including children under stress from academic examinations in Japan and Korea, immigrant children in Europe and elsewhere, including street children, or children facing war, forced migration, and economic exploitation due to globalization and other change in Africa and elsewhere. Child sexual and physical abuse around the world is now a recognized concern for anthropologists. Cultural beliefs and practices regarding appropriate discipline and treatment of children clearly do vary widely, and Western notions of abuse are not universal; however, repeated and unchecked physical aggression or intrafamilial sexual relations between close kin and children are nowhere defined as normative and acceptable (Korbin, 1981). Anthropologists are concerned with children's rights, recognizing their vulnerable status and the lack of provision of basic protections for children (*Cultural Survival Quarterly*). World youth cultures are growing in importance due to the influence of the Internet and mass communications around the world. The recognition of and attention to children who are deprived, vulnerable, and excluded for a wide variety of reasons continues to be a central concern for anthropology. These are all topics for the anthropology of childhood in the twenty-first century (Weisner and Lowe, 2005).

Globalization is an important force in the world today. Nonetheless, regional, cultural, and family system differences remain very powerful. Rogoff (2011) illustrates this remarkable

blending of tradition and change in a Mayan village in Guatemala across four generations, as does Greenfield's multigenerational study of weaving, child development, and economic change in Southern Mexico (2004). Ngecha, a Kikuyu community in periurban Nairobi, Kenya, shows three generations of continuity as well as dramatic changes in education, work, and state-level change. The roles of women in this community are a key to understanding these changes and their consequences for children and family life (Edwards and Whiting, 2004).

More generally, Therborn (2009) characterizes seven broad cross-cultural family patterns that clearly persist and influence anthropological studies of children and families today and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future: 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 patterns differs in social dimensions that have profound influences on the pathways of social development for children growing up within those family systems. These highly culturally variable dimensions of family systems include 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) and 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 and gender and patterns of household formation also vary systematically across these family regions (i.e., 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). Influences of religious practices on families and many other norms, laws, and customs that shape family life show similar patterned variation, and so they deeply affect the developmental pathways of children and youths. As Therborn (2009) comments about the widely varying families around the world, and the lives of children in them, "The boys and girls of the world enter many different childhoods and depart them through many different doors" (p. 338). Along with globalization, the anthropological comparative study of powerful local and regional cultural differences in parenting, childhood, and family life across populations around the world will continue to not only be important, but also to provide enduring scientific questions.

See also: Cross-Cultural Research Methods in Sociology; Early Emotional Development and Cultural Variability; Moral Development, Cultural Differences In; Parenting Attitudes and Beliefs across Cultures; Play, Anthropology of; Pretend Play and Cognitive Development; Prosocial Behavior, Effects of Parenting and Family Structure On; Self and Identity Development During Adolescence across Cultures; Sex Selective Abortion; Sociolinguistics; Street Children: Cultural Concerns; Youth Culture, Anthropology of.

Bibliography

Arnett, J.J., 2011. Emerging adulthood(s). The cultural psychology of a new life stage. In: Jensen, L.A. (Ed.), Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology. New Syntheses in Theory, Research and Policy. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 255–274.

Barlow, K., 2004. Critiquing the good enough mother: a perspective based on the Murik of Papua New Guinea. Ethos 32 (4), 514–537 (Special issue: Contributions to a feminist psychological anthropology).

Bateson, G., Mead, M., 1942. Special Publications of the New York Academy of Sciences. Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis, vol. 2. New York Academy of Sciences, New York.

Bernard, H.R., 1995. Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Alta Mira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Bogin, B., 1999. Patterns of Human Growth. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Chisholm, J.S., 1999. Death, Hope, and Sex: Steps to an Evolutionary Ecology of Mind and Morality. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Cultural Survival Quarterly. World Report on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities, Cambridge, MA (http://www.cs.org).

D'Andrade, R., 1995. The Development of Cognitive Anthropology. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Edwards, C.P., Bloch, M., 2010. The Whitings' concepts of culture and how they have fared in contemporary psychology and anthropology. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 41 (4), 485–498.

Edwards, C.P., Whiting, B.B. (Eds.), 2004. Ngecha: A Kenyan Village in a Time of Rapid Social Change. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

Ember, C.M., 1981. A cross-cultural perspective on sex differences. In: Munroe, R.H., Munroe, R.L., Whiting, B.B. (Eds.), Handbook of Cross-Cultural Human Development. New York, Garland, pp. 531–580.

Goldschmidt, W., 1992. The Human Career. The Self in the Symbolic World. Blackwell, Cambridge, MA.

Goodwin, M.H., 1990. He-Said-She-Said. Talk as Social Organization among Black Children. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Gottlieb, A., 2004. The Afterlife is Where We Come from: The Culture of Infancy in West Africa. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Greenfield, P.M., 2004. Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas. School of American Research, Santa Fe.

Harkness, S., Super, C.M. (Eds.), 1996. Parents' Cultural Belief Systems. Guilford Press, New York.

Hirschfeld, L.A., Gelman, S.A. (Eds.), 1994. Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hrdy, S.B., 2009. Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding. Harvard Press, Cambridge, MA.

Ingstad, B., Whyte, S.R. (Eds.), 1995. Disability and Culture. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Keller, H., 2012. Attachment and culture. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 44 (2), 175–194.

Konner, M., 2010. The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion and Mind. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Korbin, J.E. (Ed.), 1981. Child Abuse and Neglect. Cross-Cultural Perspectives. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Lancy, D.F., 2007. Accounting for variability in mother-child play. American Anthropologist 109 (2), 273–284.

Lancy, D.F., 2008. The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings. University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Lancy, D.F., Bock, J., Gaskins, S. (Eds.), 2010. The Anthropology of Learning in Childhood. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

LeVine, R.A., 1988. Human parental care: universal goals, cultural strategies, individual behavior. In: LeVine, R.A., Miller, P.M., West, M.M. (Eds.), Parental Behavior in Diverse Societies. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 3–12.

LeVine, R.A., 2007. Ethnographic studies of childhood: a historical overview. American Anthropologist 109, 247–260.

LeVine, R.A., Levine, S., Dixon, S., Richman, A., Leiderman, P.H., Keefer, C., 1994. Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

LeVine, R.A., LeVine, S., Schnell-Anzola, B., Rowe, M.L., Dexter, E. (Eds.), 2012. Literacy and Mothering: How Women's Schooling Changes the Lives of the World's Children. Oxford, New York.

LeVine, R.A., Norman, K., 2001. The infant's acquisition of culture: early attachment reexamined in anthropological perspective. In: Moore, C.C., Mathews, H.F. (Eds.), The Psychology of Cultural Experience. Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 83–104.

Levy, R., 1973. The Tahitians. Mind and Experience in the Society Islands. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Mageo, J., 1998. Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, Genders, and Sexualities. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
Munroe, R.L., Munroe, R.H., 1994. Behavior across cultures: results from observational studies. In: Lonner, W.J., Malpass, R. (Eds.), Psychology and Culture. Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA, pp. 107–111.
Ochs, E., 2002. Becoming a speaker of culture. In: Kramsch, C. (Ed.), Language Acquisition and Language Socialization. Ecological Perspectives. Continuum Press, London, pp. 99–120.
Ochs, E., Izquerdo, C., 2009. Responsibility in childhood: three developmental trajectories. ETHOS 37 (4), 391–413.
Ochs, E., Kremer-Sadlik, T. (Eds.), 2013. Fast Forward Family: Home, Work and Relationships in Middle Class America. University of California Press, Berkeley.
Otto, H., Keller, H. (Eds.), 2013. Different Faces of Attachment. Cambridge University Press, New York.
Quinn, N., Mageo, J. (Eds.), 2013. Cross-Cultural Challenges to Attachment Theory. Palgrave, New York.
Rogoff, B., 2011. Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town. Child Development in Cultural Context. Oxford, New York.
Scheper-Hughes, N., 1992. Death without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
Schieffelin, B.B., Ochs, E. (Eds.), 1986. Language Socialization across Cultures. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Schlegel, A., Barry, H., 1991. Adolescence: An Anthropological Inquiry. The Free Press, New York.
Seymour, S.C., 1999. Women, Family, and Child Care in India: A World in Transition. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Shwalb, D.W., Shwalb, B.J., Lamb, M.E. (Eds.), 2013. Fathers in a Cultural Context. Routledge, New York.
Shostak, M., 1981. Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
Shweder, R.A., Bourne, E.J., 1991. Does the Concept of the Person Vary Cross-Culturally? In: Shweder, R.A. (Ed.), Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 113–155.
Spiro, M.E., 1975. Children of the Kibbutz. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
Stephens, S. (Ed.), 1995. Children and the Politics of Culture. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
Super, C.M., Harkness, S., 1997. The cultural structuring of child development. In: Berry, J., Dasen, P.R., Saraswathi, T.S. (Eds.), Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, second ed. Allyn & Bacon, Boston, pp. 1–39.
Therborn, G., 2009. Family. In: Shweder, R.A., Bidell, T.R., Dailey, A.C., Dixon, S., Miller, P.J., Modell, J. (Eds.), The Child: An Encyclopedic Companion. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 333–338.
Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., Karasawa, M., 2009. Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan, and the United States. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Turner, V.W., 1967. The Forest of Symbols. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
Weisner, T.S., 1996. Why ethnography should be the most important method in the study of human development. In: Jessor, R., Colby, A., Shweder, R.A. (Eds.), Ethnography and Human Development. Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 305–324.
Weisner, T.S., 2011. Culture. In: Underwood, M.K., Rosen, L.H. (Eds.), Social Development: Relationships in Infancy, Childhood and Adolescence. Guilford, New York, pp. 372–399.
Weisner, T.S., Duncan, G., 2013. The world isn't linear or additive or decontextualized: pluralism and mixed methods in understanding the effects of antipoverty programs on children and parenting. Ch. 8, pp. #. In: Gershoff, E.T., Mistry, R.S., Crosby, D.A. (Eds.), Societal Contexts of Child Development: Pathways of Influence and Implications for Practice and Policy. Oxford University Press, New York.
Weisner, T.S., Gallimore, R., 1977. My brother's keeper: child and sibling caretaking. Current Anthropology 18 (2), 169–190.
Weisner, T.S., Lowe, E., 2005. Globalization and the psychological anthropology of childhood and adolescence. In: Casey, C., Edgerton, R. (Eds.), A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, pp. 315–336.
Whiting, B., Edwards, C.P., 1988. Children of Different Worlds: The Formation of Social Behavior. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
Whiting, J., 1968. Socialization: anthropological aspects. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 14, 545–551.
Whiting, J., Whiting, B., 1975. Children of Six Cultures: A Psychocultural Analysis. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
Yoshikawa, H., Weisner, T.S., Kalil, A., Way, N., 2008. Mixing qualitative and quantitative research in developmental science: uses and methodological choices. Developmental Psychology 44 (2), 344–354.