

Culture and the Individual

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Describe universals in human psychological development.
- 3.2 Discuss anthropological findings regarding childhood.
- 3.3 Describe cross-cultural variations in childrearing and their implications for behavior and psychological development.
- 3.4 Explain psychological variability in adults.
- 3.5 Discuss psychological explanations of cultural variation.
- 3.6 Discuss and give examples of individuals as agents of social change.



Anthropology, with its focus on culture, may seem to ignore the individual. To be sure, individuals provide information about culture, but their psychological characteristics, a central concern of psychology, are often considered irrelevant. However, there are anthropologists who think that understanding individuals and psychological processes is vital to anthropological understanding. Take culture change as an example. *Individuals* are ultimately the source of culture change. They discover and invent, they adopt new behaviors or ideas from others, or they resist or accommodate to changes other societies try to impose. In other words, culture is reinterpreted by individuals.¹ Culture changes only when enough individuals alter their ideas or their patterns of behavior. Individuals are the *agents* of change.

Anthropologists who are interested in the relationships between culture and the individual and the importance of understanding psychological processes call themselves *psychological anthropologists*. Psychologists who study people in two or more societies call themselves *cross-cultural psychologists*. Psychological anthropology is a very diverse field, but we focus here on four important questions: (1) To what extent do all human beings develop psychologically in the same ways? (2) If there are differences, what are they and what may account for them? (3) How do people in different societies conceive of individuals and their psychological development? and (4) How can understanding individuals or psychological processes help us understand culture and culture change? This chapter discusses some of the attempts of researchers to answer some of these questions.

The Universality of Psychological Development

3.1 Describe universals in human psychological development.

Anthropologists became interested in psychology in the early years of the 20th century partly because they did not believe that human nature was completely revealed in Western societies, as psychologists then generally assumed. Only in the last quarter of the century did many psychologists join anthropologists in questioning the assumption that humans are exactly the same psychologically in all societies. Psychologist Otto Klineberg, for example, scolded his psychologist colleagues in 1974: "My contact with anthropology affected me somewhat like a religious conversion. How could psychologists speak of *human* attributes and *human* behavior when they knew only one kind of human being?"²

How can we know what is universal about human behavior and what is variable until we study all kinds of humans? Because humans the world over are the same species and share a very large proportion of their genes, we might assume that there is a good deal of similarity across societies in the way people develop psychologically from birth to maturity or in the ways they think, feel, and behave. We have already discussed many universals—culture, language, marriage, the incest taboo—but here we discuss some that are related more to psychology. Donald Brown compiled a list of probable human universals in the psychological realm.³ They include the ability to create taxonomies, make binary contrasts, order phenomena, use logical operators (e.g., *and*, *not*, *equals*), plan for the future, and have an understanding of the world and what it is about.

With regard to ideas about people, it seems universal to have a concept of the self or person, to recognize individual faces, to try to discern other peoples' intentions from observable clues in their faces, utterances, and actions, and to imagine what others are thinking. With regard to emotions, people seem universally to be able to empathize with the feelings of others; facially communicate and recognize, as well as hide or mimic, the emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and contempt; smile when friendly; cry when in pain or unhappy; play for fun; show and feel affection for others; feel sexual attraction, envy, and jealousy; and have similar childhood fears (e.g., fear of strangers). Indeed, it seems that people in different cultures even conceive of love in much the same ways, despite love's reputation as something mysterious and culturally variable.⁴

What about psychological development? In what respects is psychological development the same the world over? In what respects is it different?

Research on Emotional Development

When Margaret Mead went to American Samoa in the mid-1920s, psychologists believed that adolescence was universally a period of “storm and stress” because of the physiological changes that occur at puberty. Mead’s observations of, and interviews with, Samoan adolescent girls led her to doubt the idea that adolescence was necessarily a time of turmoil. Samoan girls apparently showed little evidence of emotional upheaval and rebelliousness, and therefore it was questionable whether psychological development in adolescence was the same in all societies.⁵

Bronislaw Malinowski, another early anthropologist, questioned the universality of an assumption about emotional development, in this case Freud’s assumption that young boys universally see themselves, unconsciously, as sexual rivals of their fathers for possession of their mothers. Freud called these feelings the *Oedipus complex*, after the character in Greek mythology who killed his father and married his mother without knowing that they were his parents. Freud thought that all boys before the age of 7 or so would show hostility toward their fathers, but Malinowski disagreed on the basis of his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands.⁶

Malinowski suggested that young boys in male-oriented societies may feel hostility toward the father not as a sexual rival but as the disciplinarian. Malinowski proposed this theory because he thought that the Oedipus complex works differently in societies organized around the female line, such as the matrilineal Trobriands. In societies where kinship is organized around the female line, the mother’s brother is usually the main authority figure in kin group, not the father. And Malinowski suggested that hostility was more often directed to the mother’s brother.

Derek Freeman criticized Mead’s conclusions about Samoa,⁷ and Melford Spiro challenged Malinowski’s conclusions about the Trobriand Islanders.⁸ Mead and Malinowski may or may not have been completely correct about the societies they studied, but the issues they raised remain crucial to the question of whether psychological development is similar across societies. To find out, we need research in many societies, not just a few. Only on the basis of extensive cross-cultural research will we be able to decide whether stages of emotional development can be affected by cultural differences.

For example, Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry reported that adolescence is generally not a period of overt rebelliousness. The reason, they suggested, is related to the fact that most people in most societies live with or near (and depend on) close kin before and after they grow up. Only in societies like our own, where children leave home when they grow up, might adolescents be rebellious, possibly to prepare emotionally for going out on their own.⁹

A considerable body of research supports “attachment” theory, the idea that attachment of an infant to a caretaker is a major milestone in development—one that has important survival value. Secure attachment is believed to allow a child to deal with negative emotions during stress and enables the child to explore the environment safely, not too far from a caretaker. A common way of measuring how securely “attached” a child is to a caretaker is to put a child between 12 and 24 months into



In societies with a lot of different occupational choices, adolescents may be more anxious about what they will do as adults. A group of schoolboys visit a financial institution as part of their education course work. They are looking upwards to the tall banks and insurance institutions in London’s financial district.

an unfamiliar situation, have the child interact with a stranger, and have a short separation from the caretaker. Insecurely attached children either are inconsolable during a stressful episode or avoid the caretaker when they are reunited. Attachment researchers are careful to point out that attachment does not have to be with the mother; in fact, in societies with important multiple caretakers, attachment is shown with more than one person. It is thought that caretakers who respond to a child's needs quickly are most likely to produce a child with secure attachment. If attachment is important for survival, it follows that in most societies the secure attachment pattern should be found. So far, that has been the case in both Western and non-Western societies, in technologically simpler to more complex societies. While most researchers agree that the secure attachment pattern is apparently usual, some, like Robert LeVine and Karin Norman, question the underlying moral presumption by attachment researchers that if most children in a social group score "insecure," the child-rearing pattern is somehow deficient. They point out that some cultures value self-reliance and independence and consider responding to a child's every cry as "spoiling."¹⁰ If parents ignore some crying, believing that a child will be better off learning to comfort or play by themselves, is it insecurity if a child doesn't go to a caretaker after a separation, or has a young child already learned the cultural value of self-reliance?

Research on Cognitive Development

One day the Embers went out for pizza. The pizza maker was laughing hilariously, and they asked what was so funny. He told us: "I just asked the guy ahead of you, 'How many slices do you want me to cut the pizza into, six or eight?' 'Six,' he said, 'I'm not very hungry.'" According to a theory of cognitive (intellectual) development suggested by Jean Piaget, the renowned Swiss psychologist, the "not very hungry" guy may not have acquired the concept of *conservation*, which characterizes a stage of thinking normally acquired by children between the ages of 7 and 11 in Western societies.¹¹ The pizza customer ahead of us, like many very young children, seemed not to understand that certain properties of an object, such as quantity, weight, and volume, remain constant even if the object is divided into small pieces or removed to a container of a different shape. They have not acquired the mental image of *reversibility*, the ability to imagine that if you put the pizza back together again it would be the same size whether you had cut it into eight or six slices. To the child or adult who has not acquired the ability to reverse actions mentally, eight slices may seem like more pizza than six slices because eight is more than six.

Piaget's theory says that the development of thinking in humans involves a series of stages, each of which is characterized by different mental skills. To get to a higher stage of thinking, one has to pass through a lower stage. So Piaget's theory would predict that the pizza customer would not be able to think systematically about the possible outcomes of hypothetical situations, a defining feature of Piaget's *formal-operational* stage, because he had not acquired the notion of conservation and the other mental skills that characterize the previous, *concrete-operational* stage of cognitive development (see Figure 3.1).

What does the evidence suggest about the universality of Piaget's supposed stages? And do people the world over get to each stage at the same age? The first stage of development, *sensorimotor*, has not been investigated in many societies, but the results of studies conducted so far are remarkably consistent. They support Piaget's notion that there is a predictable order in the sequence of stages.¹² And, on the basis of their reactions to the same conditions, babies in different places seem to think similarly. For example, a comparison of French babies and Baoulé babies in the Ivory Coast showed that the Baoulé babies, who had never seen objects such as red plastic tubes and paper clips, nevertheless tried to pass the clips through the tubes in the same way the French babies did. The two sets of babies even made the same kinds of errors.¹³ And even though they had few toys, the Baoulé babies showed advances over French babies on such tasks as using instruments to increase the reach of the arm. But Baoulé babies are allowed to touch all kinds of objects, even things that Europeans consider dangerous.¹⁴

Most of the cross-cultural studies of Piaget's stages have focused on the transition between the second, *preoperational*, and third, *concrete-operational*, stages, particularly the attainment of the concept of conservation. The results of many of these studies are

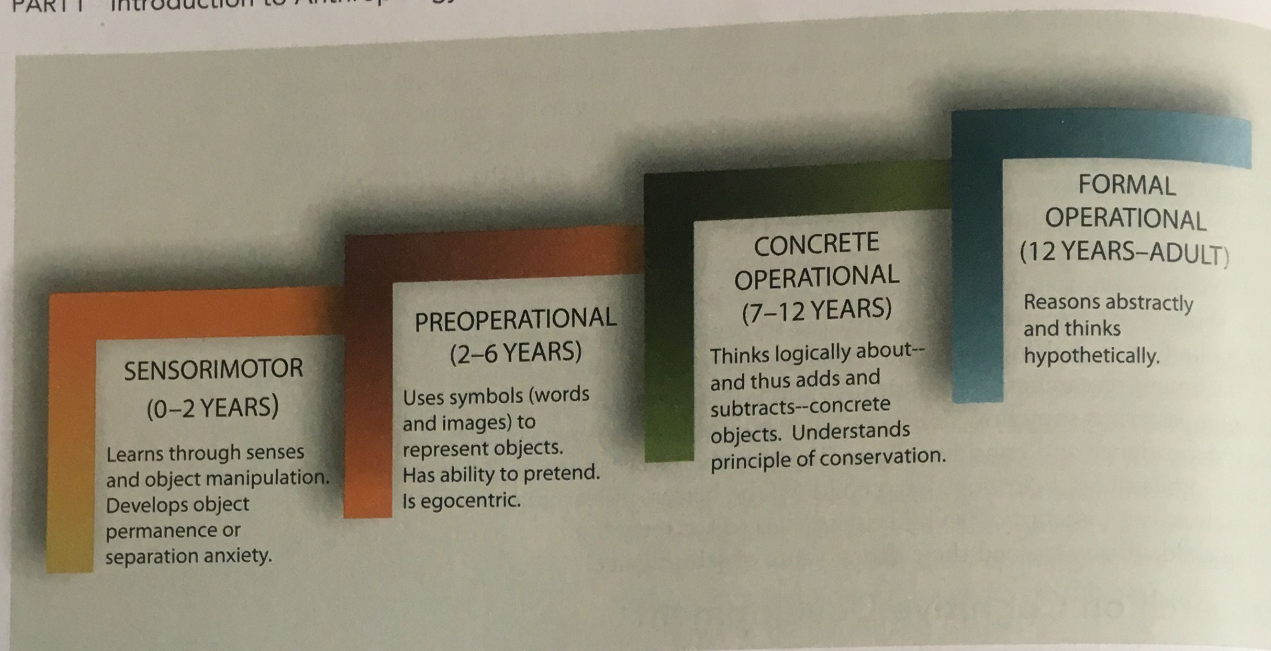


FIGURE 3.1

Piaget's Theory of Human Cognitive Development.

somewhat puzzling. Although older children are generally more likely to show conservation than younger children, it is not clear what to make of the apparent finding that the attainment of conservation is much delayed in many non-Western populations. Indeed, in some places, most of the adults tested do not appear to understand one or more of the conservation properties.

Can this be true? Do people in different cultures differ that much in intellectual functioning, or is there some problem with the way conservation is measured? Is it possible that an adult who just brought water from the river in a large jug and poured it into five smaller containers does not know that the quantity of water is still the same? We may also be skeptical about the findings on the formal-operational stage. Most of the studies of formal-operational thinking have found little evidence of such thinking in non-Western populations. But people in nonliterate societies surely have formal-operational thinking if they can navigate using the stars, remember how to return to camp after a 15-mile trek, or identify how people are related to each other three and more generations back.

One reason to be skeptical about the apparent findings regarding delay of conservation and formal-operational thinking is that most of the cross-cultural psychologists have taken tests developed in our own and other Western countries to measure cognitive development elsewhere.¹⁵ This procedure puts non-Westerners at a considerable disadvantage because they are not as familiar as Westerners with the test materials and the whole testing situation. In tests of conservation, for example, researchers have often used strange-looking glass cylinders and beakers. Some researchers who have used natively familiar materials, however, have gotten different results. Douglass Price-Williams found no difference between Tiv, in West Africa, and European children in understanding the conservation of earth, nuts, and number.¹⁶ A second reason to be skeptical is that some researchers have retested children after brief training sessions and found that they improved substantially. It would seem, then, that children anywhere can acquire the concept of conservation if they have had preparatory life experiences or appropriate training.¹⁷ Finally, some researchers noted that adults who performed poorly on tests were observed to show remarkable skill in everyday life.¹⁸ Even Piaget accepted that formal-operational thinking was probably tied to experience and was probably not just a developmental stage.¹⁹

While there may be disagreement with the universality of some of Piaget's stages, there is widespread agreement that around the age of 5 to 7, a time roughly corresponding to the acquisition of concrete-operational thinking, there is a broad shift in childhood

thinking. Some refer to these competencies as “understanding of mind.” Children begin to understand the difference between conscious and unconscious states, take the perspective of others and infer what others are thinking, and understand different views of reality. Not surprisingly, this is the time of formal schooling in Western societies, and cross-culturally, this is approximately the same time that parents consider children to be teachable and capable of responsibilities, such as caring for a younger sibling.²⁰

In trying to find out what may be universal in emotional and cognitive development, researchers have discovered some apparent differences between societies. These differences, to which we now turn, need to be explored and explained.

The Anthropology of Childhood

One thing is common in all human societies—a long period in which the young are dependent on parents and other caretakers. This is one of the most notable human characteristics that differentiates us from our closest biological relatives. Also unusual is the parental role fathers play and the long stage of life following reproduction.²¹ In many animals, life ends shortly after reproduction ends. Human females typically stop being able to reproduce much earlier than males, but this gives them a long period of time to be grandmothers and help their children with their reproduction. Exactly why the long period of dependency evolved is a matter of some debate,²² but this period of time, which we are loosely calling childhood (including here infancy and adolescence), is critical for understanding what kind of people we become. It provides a long period of time to acquire much of the complexity of human social and cultural life. Childhood is also a time when learning from nonparental figures can lead to rapid changes in ideas and behavior. Consider the changes in technology in the world today. Children are much more comfortable, as well as much more adept, with technological innovations than their parents. Children often become the teachers of their parents, showing the parents how to use the new technology. In times of rapid change, adolescents can be a particularly important force for culture change. Adolescents facing new challenges in their environment are not just making decisions based on what their parents tell them—they are facing new realities and make many decisions accordingly. In the United States, differences in generations are reflected in our names for them—baby boomers, generation X, and so on.²³

Anthropologists interested in childhood are increasingly looking at children as agents and actors, not just as recipients of socialization. Children not only have their own culture they can tell us about, but they also have opinions, anxieties, and fears that only they can express. But their voices are often ignored, just as women’s voices were often ignored in the past.²⁴

It is generally agreed that our personalities are the result of an interaction between genetic inheritance and life experiences. But a considerable portion of one’s life experiences, as well as one’s genes, is shared with others. Parents undoubtedly exert a major influence on the way we grow up. Because family members share similar life experiences and genes, they may be somewhat similar in personality. But we have to consider why a particular family raises children the way it does. Much of the way parents rear children is influenced by their culture—by typical patterns of family life and by shared conceptions of the way to bring up children.

Socialization is a term both anthropologists and psychologists use to describe the development, through the influence of parents and other people, of patterns of behavior, attitudes, and values in children that conform to cultural expectations. (The term *enculturation* has a similar meaning.) But, although these terms imply a mechanism to replicate culture (the “cookie-cutter” view of culture), we know that parents don’t always follow societal dictates. Moreover, most parents consciously or unconsciously change with changing times, particularly as their family circumstances change. If a family no longer relies on agriculture because they now rely on wage labor, their expectations and their treatment of children will probably change.

3.2 Discuss anthropological findings regarding childhood.

Socialization A term anthropologists and psychologists use to describe the development, through the direct and indirect influence of parents and others, of children’s patterns of behavior (and attitudes and values) that conform to cultural expectations. Also called **enculturation**.



A young boy imitates his father's actions, hammering wood just like his father; a young girl braids her doll's hair as her mother braids her hair. Observation and imitation are important ways of learning in all cultures.

While we may think of socialization as directive and explicit—being told what to do and what not to do—much of children's learning is by “observing and pitching in.”²⁵ Children are keen observers and can focus intently. Unless they are discouraged, they are eager to participate in adult activities, and even if they cannot do them yet, they will eagerly watch in order to learn.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which members of a society share conceptions about childrearing. As we look at families in our own society, we see differences in upbringing that reflect different ideas about the “right” way to raise children. Some parents seem to go along with conventional ideas about childrearing; others seem determined to bring up their children in ways that buck the conventional ideas. Still, in a study of California families headed by single mothers, unmarried couples, or parents living in communes, researchers found that these so-called “unconventional” parents actually did not differ that much from “conventional” parents (married, living in nuclear families) compared with parents in other societies.²⁶ For example, even though unconventional California mothers breast-fed their children for a significantly longer period than conventional mothers did, both groups usually stopped breast-feeding after about a year, which is far below the worldwide average. In 70 percent of the world's societies, mothers typically breast-feed children for at least 2 years; last-born children may be weaned even later. In a few societies, such as the Chenchu of India, children typically were not weaned until they were 5 or 6 years old.²⁷ In the California study, no parent, conventional or unconventional, was observed to carry a baby more than 25 percent of the time, but it is common in many preindustrial societies for babies to be held more than half the day.²⁸ The point here is that although some parents tried to be different, and indeed were different, they were in many respects not that different from each other when compared on a worldwide scale. But did the unconventional parents bring about culture change? The parental style of holding babies may not be that common in American culture, but it is much more common than it used to be. So although the new behaviors are not yet customary, cultural patterns have shifted.

Explaining Variation in Childhood and Beyond

When we discuss variation in how children are brought up in the following sections, there are two common types of explanation. The first has to do with general belief systems about children. Societies do not just have ideas about individual aspects of childrearing, such as how often to nurse and for how long, and where to put children to sleep, but societies also have their own theories about childhood. These theories suggest why societies do what they do. In heterogeneous societies, different ethnic groups and different classes of people often have different theories. But what might explain these different belief systems? Some belief systems and consequently some childrearing systems may have consequences for survival. Adaptational explanations may suggest why different childrearing customs are adapted to different environments. Finally, there is the possibility that some aspects of personality have genetic or physiological explanations.

Parents' Belief Systems In most of the world, parents do not read books about how to bring up children. Indeed, they may not consciously think at all about their behavior toward children. But parents in all cultures do have ideas about what kinds of children they want to raise and how children should be treated. Many of these ideas are culturally patterned; they have been called "ethnotheories."²⁹ For example, Sara Harkness and Charles Super, who studied Dutch parents and infants, found that Dutch parents believe in what they term the "three Rs"—*rust* (rest), *regelmaat* (regularity), and *reinheid* (cleanliness). Parents follow a calm and regular routine for babies, try not to overstimulate their children by giving them too many things to look at, and surprisingly, for Americans, have babies who sleep a great deal more. (At six months of age, Dutch babies slept an average of 2 more hours a day compared with American babies.) When an American mother will think a baby is bored and give her another toy, a Dutch mother will think the baby is tired and put her to sleep.³⁰ Comparisons of working parents in Italy (Rome) and the United States (Los Angeles) suggest that parents have very different ideas about how to spend time with children. In Rome, time on weekends or evenings with children is often immersed with other members of the community in spontaneous activities and shared social spaces, with little emphasis on the need for separate time, whereas in Los Angeles, parents try very hard to carve out special times and activities for just the nuclear family.³¹

Although it is important to understand parental ethnotheories, it is also important to evaluate whether parents behave in accordance with their theories and whether parental behaviors produce the effects that parents want. Researchers need to observe parent-child behavior, not just understand what parents say they want to do, and they need to observe outcomes in children. Some behaviors by parents and other caretakers do not have the intended effects. American parents, particularly middle-class parents, stress independence and self-reliance, but behavior observations suggest that children frequently seek attention from parents and parents reward this kind of dependency. Even countercultural parents who reject many middle-class values behave in the same ways with their children.³²

Adaptational Explanations Cultural anthropologists seek not only to establish connections between childrearing customs and personality traits but also to learn why those customs differ in the first place. Some anthropologists believe that childrearing practices are largely adaptive—that a society produces the kinds of personalities best suited to performance of the activities necessary for the survival of the society. As John Whiting and Irvin Child expressed it, "The economic, political and social organs of a society—the basic customs surrounding the nourishment, sheltering, and protection of its members . . . seem a likely source of influence on child training practices."³³ The belief that childrearing practices are adaptive does not mean that societies always produce the kinds of people they need. Just as in the biological realm, where we see poor adaptations and extinctions of species and subspecies, so we may expect that societies sometimes produce personality traits that are maladapted to the requirements of living in that society. So we cannot assume that a trait must be adaptive just because it is present. We cannot come to that conclusion unless we carefully investigate whether the trait is beneficial or harmful.³⁴ But we do expect that most societies that have survived to be recorded have produced personality traits that are mostly adaptive.

The anthropology of childrearing involves comparison. Our own cultural conceptions begin to become apparent only when we examine other societies and their patterns of childrearing.

Possible Genetic and Physiological Influences Some researchers have suggested that genetic or physiological differences between populations predispose them to have different personality characteristics. Daniel Freedman found differences in “temperament” in newborn babies of different ethnic groups; because he observed newborns, the differences between them were presumed to be genetic. Comparing Chinese and European American newborns with the families matched on income, number of previous children, and so on, Freedman found that European American babies cried more easily, were harder to console, and fought experimental procedures more. Chinese babies, on the other hand, seemed calmer and more adaptable. Navajo babies were similar to the Chinese, showing even more calmness.³⁵ Freedman also suggested that an infant’s behavior can influence how the parents respond. A calm baby may encourage a calm parental response; a more active baby may encourage a more active response.³⁶ So, in Freedman’s view, babies’ genetically determined behavior can lead to ethnic differences in adult personality and caretaking styles. But we cannot rule out nongenetic explanations of babies’ behavior. For example, the mother’s diet or her blood pressure could affect the baby’s behavior. And it may be that the baby can learn even in the womb. After all, babies in the womb apparently can hear and respond to sounds and other stimuli. Therefore, it is possible that in societies in which pregnant women are calm, their babies may have learned calmness even before they were born. Last, we still do not know if the initial differences observed in newborn babies persist to become personality differences in adulthood.

Just as the diet of the mother, including the intake of alcohol and drugs, may affect the developing fetus, the diet of infants and children may also affect their intellectual development and behavior. Studies have shown that malnutrition is associated with lower levels of activity, less attentiveness, lack of initiative, and low tolerance of frustration. Behavior of children can change with short-term nutrition supplements. For example, Guatemalan children who were given nutritional supplements were observed to have less anxiety, more exploratoriness, and greater involvement in games than children who were not given supplements.³⁷ The problem of malnutrition is not just a matter of nutrition. Other kinds of care may also be reduced. For example, caretakers of malnourished children may interact with them less than do caretakers of healthy children. As a malnourished child shows reduced activity, caretakers tend to respond to the child with lower frequency and less enthusiasm. Then the child withdraws from interaction, creating a potentially serious vicious cycle.³⁸ Nancy Scheper-Hughes movingly describes how mothers in an impoverished shantytown believed that some babies “wanted to die so it was best to ‘help them go’ quickly.”³⁹ These conditions are by no means inevitable. When Scheper-Hughes returned in the 2000s to the Brazilian community, the situation had dramatically improved. Poor families received cash grants, schoolchildren were fed nutritious lunches and infant mortality declined precipitously.⁴⁰

3.3 Describe cross-cultural variations in childrearing and their implications for behavior and psychological development.

Cross-Cultural Variation in Childrearing

In what follows, we examine some aspects of childhood that appear to vary cross-culturally.⁴¹ When we can, we discuss possible explanations for these patterns.

Parental Responsiveness to Infants and Baby-Holding

Consider how societies vary in how quickly parents respond to an infant’s needs. In many respects—amount of time holding the infant, feeding on demand, responding to crying—parents in industrialized societies, such as the United States, tend to respond to these physical needs less often or less quickly than do parents in preindustrialized societies. In contrast to those preindustrial societies in which babies are held more than half the day, sometimes almost all day, consider the United States, England, and the Netherlands, where babies may spend most of the day in devices such as playpens, rockers, swings, or cribs. It is estimated that babies are held or touched only 12 percent to 20 percent of their daytime hours in these countries and in Japan. The same pattern continues at nighttime. In most preindustrial societies, babies are much more apt to be close to another person, usually



One major difference in childrearing between the West and other places is the degree to which caretakers hold infants during the day. In the United States and other Western countries, infants spend much of the day in a crib, playpen, or stroller. The Dao babies from Yunnan Province in China (on the right) spend a good deal of time in physical contact with their mother or other caretaker.

sleeping with the mother in the same bed or, if not in the same bed, in the same room. During the day, babies are breast-fed in all preindustrial societies, usually on demand. In industrialized societies, bottle-feeding is common, and feeding is usually spaced out every few hours; in some preindustrial societies, babies are breast-fed 20 to 40 times a day. And in many preindustrial societies, people respond very quickly to an infant's crying. For example, among the Efe of the Ituri Forest in central Africa, a 3-month-old infant who cries gets a response within 10 seconds 75 percent of the time. In the United States, a caregiver deliberately *does not* respond at all about 45 percent of the time.⁴²

The cross-cultural variation just described seems to reflect cultural attitudes toward childrearing. Parents in the United States say that they do not want their babies to be dependent and clingy; they want to produce independent and self-reliant children. Whether children become self-reliant because of our kind of childrearing is debatable,⁴³ but our attitudes about childrearing are certainly consistent with our practices.

We think of a quick response of parents to infants as "indulgence," but although many mothers respond quickly to the baby's physical needs, this does not mean that mothers interact with them when they respond, by looking at the baby in the eye, responding to babbling, or kissing and hugging them. Often the mother is doing something else while she nurses the baby.⁴⁴

Ruth and Robert Munroe studied the effects of more versus less holding by the mother in infancy on Logoli children.⁴⁵ The Munroes had observational information on how often infants were held, and they were able to interview many of these individuals as children 5 years later. They were interested in seeing whether children who had been held more often by their mothers were more secure, trusting, and optimistic. So they designed a series of personality measures appropriate for young children. As a measure of optimism, they showed children smiling faces and nonsmiling faces and asked which they preferred. As measures of trust, they looked to see how long a child was willing to stay in a room with a stranger or play with new toys.

The results of the study suggest that children who were often held or carried by their mothers as infants are significantly more trusting and optimistic at age 5 than are other children. Somewhat to their surprise, the Munroes found that, although time held by other caregivers did not predict more trust and optimism, the sheer number of different people who had held the infant did predict more trust and optimism. Holding by the mother was important, but trust was even greater if a large number of other people had held the baby. One possible explanation is that a highly trusting mother is likely to allow many others to hold the baby; by doing so, she conveys trust to the baby.

Robert LeVine suggested an adaptational explanation for the frequent holding and feeding of infants and quick response of caretakers in preindustrial societies.⁴⁶ Only 1 percent of infants die in industrial societies in the first year of life, but typically more than 20 percent die in preindustrial societies. What can parents do? Parents often do not have access to modern medical care, but they can respond to a baby's fussing immediately if the baby is with them. Also, babies may be safer off the ground if there are cooking fires, dangerous insects, and snakes in the vicinity. When survival is not so much at issue, LeVine suggests, parents can safely leave babies more on their own.

High mortality of infants may also explain why mothers in many of these same societies rarely interact with their infants in more emotional ways—it may help protect them emotionally in case of the infant's early death.

We really don't know much about the long-range effects of short or long response times on the infant. As long as a baby is fed fairly regularly and held some of the time, it might make little difference to the ultimate outcome. We can be more sure that if a baby's needs are seriously ignored, there will be negative physical and social consequences.

Parent-Child Play

In Western societies, it is commonly thought that “good” parents should provide their children with toys and play with them frequently, starting from birth and continuing through adolescence. Parents who do not do this are viewed as deficient. Yet, cross-culturally, parent-child play is exceedingly rare except perhaps in foraging groups. It is not that play is rare. Children the world over play by themselves or with peers. Often, they make their own toys or pretend objects. Adults play too, usually games, but they don't play as often as children. And when children and adults play, they generally do so separately.⁴⁷

Inuit mothers and babies are together for long periods in their houses when the weather is harsh. Under traditional conditions, there are often no playmates or other caretakers nearby, so perhaps it is not surprising that mothers play with their infants and young children and make toys for them. Play with infants also occurs in many small foraging bands, but it is typically play with others beside their mothers.⁴⁸

Lack of play with parents may be related to the same factor that probably explains high responsiveness to infant physical needs—high mortality of infants and the psychological need of parents to create emotional distance. But some societal ethnotheories suggest to parents that not playing may be better than play. The Yucatec Maya believe that “a quiet baby is a healthy baby” and, rather than stimulate babies, they are lulled to sleep whenever possible.⁴⁹ Babies are commonly thought to be “brainless,” and so there is no point to interaction. On Ifaluk, in the Caroline Islands, parents say that “Infants younger than two years of age do not have any thoughts/feelings—*nunuwan*. Without *nunuwan*, . . . it's useless . . . talking to babies younger than two.”⁵⁰

We turn now to the period of time after infancy.

Parental Acceptance and Rejection of Children

What about the overall quality of parenting? Are there positive effects on personality when parents show love, warmth, and affection to their children and negative effects when parents are indifferent or hostile to their children? These questions are difficult to investigate cross-culturally because cultures vary in the ways feeling is expressed. If love and affection are not expressed in the same ways, outsiders may misinterpret parental behavior. Nevertheless, Ronald Rohner and his colleagues did extensive work on the effects of parental acceptance and rejection on children after infancy. In a cross-cultural comparison of 101 societies, using measures based on ethnographic materials, Rohner

found that children tend to be hostile and aggressive when they are neglected and not treated affectionately by their parents. In societies in which children tend to be rejected, adults seem to view life and the world as unfriendly, uncertain, and hostile.⁵¹ A large number of other studies have compared individuals in different cultures to see if the cross-cultural findings were supported. In general, they were. In addition to finding the world more unfriendly and hostile, individuals who think they were rejected are likely to be hostile and aggressive, emotionally unresponsive or unstable, and have negative evaluations of themselves.⁵²

Under what conditions is parental rejection likely in childhood? The Rohner study suggests that rejection is likely where mothers get no relief from child care. When fathers and grandparents play a role in child care, rejection is less likely. Foraging societies (those dependent on wild food resources) tend to show warmth and affection to their children. More complex societies are less likely to be affectionate to their children.⁵³ It is not clear why this should be, but perhaps parental rejection is more likely where parents have less leisure time. Less leisure time may make parents more tired and irritable and therefore have less patience with their children. As we noted in the chapter on economic systems, leisure time probably decreases as cultural complexity increases. More complex societies, which rely on intensive agriculture, also tend to have more economic uncertainty, as we noted in the chapter on getting food. Not only do they tend to have more risk of famines and food shortages, but they also tend to have social inequality. In societies with social classes, many families may not have enough food and money to satisfy their needs, and this factor can also produce frustration in the parents. Whatever the reasons for parental rejection, it seems to perpetuate itself: Children who were rejected tend to reject their own children.

Compliance or Assertiveness

Herbert Barry, Irvin Child, and Margaret Bacon cross-culturally investigated the possibility that child-training practices are adapted to the economic requirements of a society. Such requirements, they theorized, might explain why some societies strive to develop “compliant” (responsible, obedient, nurturant) children, whereas others aim more for “assertiveness” (independence, self-reliance, and achievement).⁵⁴ The cross-cultural results indicated that agricultural and herding societies are likely to stress responsibility and obedience, whereas hunting and gathering societies tend to stress self-reliance and individual assertiveness. The investigators suggested that agricultural and herding societies cannot afford departures from established routine because departures might jeopardize the food supply for long periods. Such societies, therefore, are likely to emphasize compliance with tradition. Departures from routine in a hunter-gatherer society cannot cause much damage to a food supply that has to be collected anew almost every day. So hunter-gatherers can afford to emphasize individual initiative.

Although our own society relies on food production and has large stores of accumulated food, we seem more like hunter-gatherers in emphasizing individual initiative. Are we, then, exceptions to the Barry and colleagues findings? Not really. Hardly any of us are farmers (in the United States, less than 2 percent of the total population is still on the farm), and most of us expect that we can “forage” in the supermarket or store just about anytime. Perhaps more important is the fact that our highly commercial economy, with most people dwelling in or near cities, requires us to compete to get jobs to make a living. In our kind of economy, then, individual initiative is important too. Consider the results of a cross-national comparison of eight countries in which the researchers asked parents what quality they most wanted their school-age children to have. Parents in the more rural countries (Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand) seldom mentioned independence and self-reliance but those in the more urban countries (Korea, Singapore, and the United States) did.⁵⁵

Attitudes Toward Aggression

Societies also differ considerably in their attitudes toward aggression in children. Some societies actively encourage children to be aggressive, not only to each other but even to the parents. Among the Xhosa of southern Africa, 2- or 3-year-old boys will be

prodded to hit each other in the face while women look on laughing. Similar behavior is described for the Gapun of Papua New Guinea; even raising a knife to an older sibling is rewarded.⁵⁶ Yanomamö boys of the Venezuelan-Brazilian Amazon are encouraged to be aggressive and are rarely punished for hitting either their parents or the girls in the village. One father, for example, lets his son Ariwari

*beat him on the face and head to express his anger and temper, laughing and commenting on his ferocity. Although Ariwari is only about 4 years old, he has already learned that the appropriate response to a flash of anger is to strike someone with his hand or with an object, and it is not uncommon for him to give his father a healthy smack in the face whenever something displeases him. He is frequently goaded into hitting his father by teasing, being rewarded by gleeful cheers of assent from his mother and from the other adults in the household.*⁵⁷

In contrast, the Semai of central Malaya are famous for their timidity. Robert Dentan reports that they say that they do not get angry.⁵⁸ Whereas other societies clearly and actively encourage aggression, the Semai communicate nonviolence in more subtle ways. They say, in fact, that they do not teach children. The Semai expect children to be non-violent and are shocked when they are not. When a child loses his or her temper, an adult will simply cart the child off. The Semai do not physically punish a child's aggression, and this approach may be one of the most important teaching devices of all. With such teaching—by example—a child rarely sees an aggressive model and thus has no aggression to imitate.⁵⁹ In comparison, hardly any North American parents would encourage children to hit them in the face or encourage them to hit other children. Yet many probably use physical punishment sometimes, and many feel that boys especially should “stand up for themselves” if another child provokes a fight.

With regard to aggression, research has shown that children who are physically punished when they are aggressive (the parents trying to minimize aggression) actually exhibit more aggression than children who are not physically punished. Children who are hit may learn not to hit their parents and other caretakers, but the aggression caretakers exhibit seems to be a model for children's aggressive behavior. If children see a parent or other caretaker acting aggressively, they may conclude that it is okay for them to act aggressively.⁶⁰

As we discuss later in the global problems chapter, a society's involvement in war cross-culturally predicts parental encouragement of aggression, particularly in boys. Socialization for aggression appears to decrease after a society is pacified or forced to stop fighting.⁶¹

Task Assignment

In our society, young children are not expected to help much with chores. If they do have chores, such as tidying up their rooms, these are not likely to affect the welfare of the family or its ability to survive. In contrast, in some societies known to anthropology, young children, even 3- and 4-year-olds, are expected to help prepare food, care for animals, and carry water and firewood, as well as clean. A child between 5 and 8 years of age may even be given the responsibility of caring for an infant or toddler for much of the day while the mother works in the fields.⁶² What are the effects of such task assignment on personality development?

We now have evidence from more than 10 cultures that children who regularly babysit are more nurturant—that is, offer more help and support to others—than are other children, even when the children who babysit are not babysitting. Some of this evidence comes from a project known as the Six Cultures study, in which different research teams observed children's behavior in Kenya (Nyansongo), Mexico, India, the Philippines, Okinawa, and the United States (New England).⁶³ Ruth and Robert Munroe collected data on children's behavior in four other cultures that show the same relationship between babysitting and nurturant behavior; the Munroes' data come from Kenya (Logoli), Nepal, Belize, and American Samoa.⁶⁴ Clearly, children who babysit infrequently are less attuned to others' needs than are children who babysit often.

Current Research and Issues

Emotional Expressiveness: What Accounts for Cultural Differences?

We all know individuals who express their emotions more than others. But do these differences apply more broadly to cultures? And if so, what may account for the differences? Some researchers think that an important characteristic of societies is the degree to which they “tightly” or “loosely” try to constrain people’s behavior. In an early comparative study, the anthropologist Perti Peltto contrasted tight societies that appeared to have very strong norms of behavior and considerable punishment for violation of those norms with looser societies that have more leeway in how people are expected to behave as well as less stringent punishment when rules are violated. Peltto suggested that the tighter societies had high population densities and were more likely to be agricultural societies. As we discussed earlier in the chapter, farmers and herders, perhaps because they have more risk, appear to have different emphases in childrearing—those that produce food stress compliance more; hunters and gatherers, who live on wild resources, appear to stress more assertiveness.

Is there a parallel in modern nations? Some researchers think so. Gathering data from thousands of people from 33 nations, Michelle Gelfand and colleagues measured tightness or looseness of countries by asking questions about the importance of adherence to norms in each country. They then



The Hadza, who live in north-central Tanzania, depend mostly on hunting and gathering. Hunting and gathering societies are more likely to have less constraint on individual behavior.

looked to see what predicted tighter or looser countries. They found that those with tighter adherence to norms appear not only to have higher population densities but also more likely to face the stresses and risks of resource scarcity, natural disasters, threats to territory, and more disease. In addition, tight societies also tend to have autocratic governments and suppress dissent. The researchers surmise that individuals who perceive these stringent demands in their societies will tend to be more cautious, control their impulses, and focus on behaving properly.

Do people in tighter societies express less emotion and those in looser societies report more? In an overview of 190 studies of emotional expressiveness, both positive and negative, Diane van Hemert and colleagues report results that are generally consistent with that idea—in stable democracies with tolerance of civil liberties, individuals appear to express more emotion, both positive and negative. They also shed more tears.

Sources: Peltto 1968; Gelfand et al. 2011; Van Hemert, Poortinga, and van de Vijver 2007; Van Hemert, van de Vijver, and Vingerhoets 2007.

Why might task assignment affect the behaviors of children? One possibility is that children learn certain behaviors during performance of the task, and these behaviors become habitual. For example, a responsible babysitter is supposed to offer help. Mothers might directly instruct the babysitter to make sure that happens. But there is probably also an intrinsic satisfaction in doing a job well. For example, it is pleasurable to see an infant smile and laugh, but it is unpleasant to hear a baby cry. We might therefore expect that a child who is assigned babysitting would learn that comforting a baby brings its own rewards.⁶⁵

Children's Settings

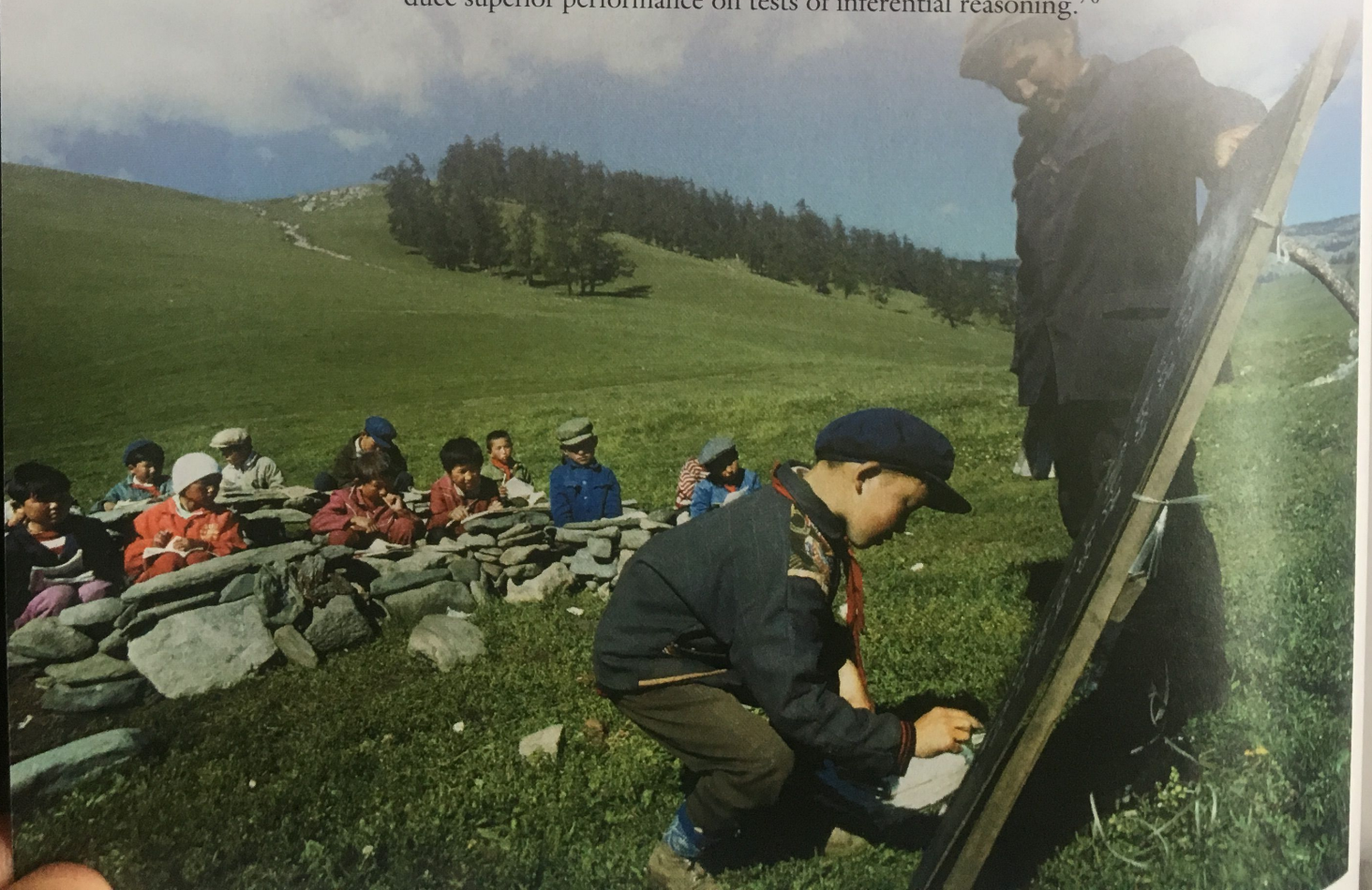
Children who are assigned many tasks may spend their day in different kinds of settings, and these settings may indirectly influence behavior. For example, children who are asked to do many household chores are apt to be around both adults and younger children. Children who are assigned few or no tasks are freer to play with their age-mates. Beatrice Whiting suggests that one of the most powerful socializing influences on children is the

type of setting they are placed in and the “cast of characters” there.⁶⁶ How does the setting influence a child’s behavior? We have already noted that being around younger children may make older children more nurturant. Aggressive behaviors also appear to be influenced by who is in the child’s setting. Results from the Six Cultures project suggest that children tend to be more aggressive the more they are in the company of other children of roughly the same age. In contrast, children tend to inhibit aggression when adults are on the scene.⁶⁷ We know that boys usually exhibit more aggression than girls.⁶⁸ Part of the reason may be due to the fact that girls are generally assigned more work in and around the home (where adults are), whereas boys are more often free to play with their peers. Parents may not be deliberately trying to inculcate certain behaviors, but they may produce certain behaviors by arranging the settings in which children spend their time.

Schooling One of the most important settings for children in some societies is school. Most researchers focus on the parents when they investigate how children are brought up. But in our own and other societies, children may spend a substantial part of their time in school from the age of 3 or so. What influence does school have on children’s social behavior and on how they think as measured by tests? To investigate the effect of schooling, researchers have compared children or adults who have not gone to school with those who have. All of this research has been done in societies that do not have compulsory schooling; otherwise, we could not compare the schooled with the unschooled. We know relatively little about the influence of school on social behavior. In contrast, we know more about how schooling influences performance on cognitive tests.

Schooling clearly predicts “superior” performance on many cognitive tests, and within the same society, schooled individuals will generally do better than the unschooled on those tests. So, for example, unschooled individuals in non-Western societies are not as likely as schooled individuals to perceive depth in two-dimensional pictures, do not perform as well on tests of memory, are not as likely to classify items in certain ways, and do not display evidence of formal-operational thinking.⁶⁹ But schooling does not always produce superior performance on tests of inferential reasoning.⁷⁰

Kazak children out tending flocks are taught by an itinerant teacher who arrives by horse or bull.



Why does schooling have these effects? Although it is possible that something about schooling creates higher levels of cognitive thinking in some respects, there are other possible explanations. The observed differences may be due to the advantages that schoolchildren have because of their experiences in school, advantages that have nothing to do with general cognitive ability. For example, consider research that asks people to classify or group drawings of geometric shapes that belong together. Suppose a person is shown three cards—a red circle, a red triangle, and a white circle—and is asked which two are most alike. A person could choose to classify in terms of color or in terms of shape. In the United States, young children usually classify by color, and they classify more often by shape as they get older. Many psychologists assume that classification by color is more “concrete,” and classification by shape or function is more “abstract.” Unschooled adults in many parts of Africa sort by color, not by shape. Does this mean that they are classifying less abstractly? Not necessarily. It may just be that unschooled Africans classify differently because they are likely to be unfamiliar with the test materials (drawings on paper, geometric shapes).

How can people classify “abstractly” (e.g., by shape) if they have never had the experience of handling or seeing shapes that are drawn in two dimensions? Is it likely that they would classify things as triangles if they had never seen a three-pointed figure with straight sides? In contrast, consider how much time teachers in the United States spend drilling children on various geometric shapes. People who are familiar with certain materials may for that reason alone do better on cognitive tests that use those materials.⁷¹

A comparative study of Liberian rice farmers in West Africa and U.S. undergraduates also illustrates the point that choice of materials may influence research results. The comparison involved a set of materials familiar to the rice farmers—bowls of rice—and a set of materials familiar to the undergraduates—geometric cards. Rice farmers appeared to classify more “abstractly” than undergraduates when they were asked to classify rice, and undergraduates seemed to classify more “abstractly” than rice farmers when they classified geometric cards.⁷²

Schooled individuals may also enjoy an advantage on many cognitive tests just because they are familiar with tests and the way tests ask them to think of new situations. For example, consider the reaction of an unschooled person in central Asia who was asked the following question by a Russian psychologist interested in measuring logical thinking: “In the Far North where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zemlya is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What color are the bears there?” The reply was, “We don’t talk about what we haven’t seen.” Such a reply was typical of unschooled individuals; they did not even try to answer the question because it was not part of their experience.⁷³ Clearly, we cannot judge whether people think logically if they do not want to play a cognitive game.

Much research needs to be done on exactly how and why schooling affects cognition. Is it important which specific things are taught? Is it important to be asked to attend to questions that are out of context? Is being literate a factor? This last question was the subject of research among the Vai of Liberia, who had a somewhat unusual situation in that schooling and literacy were not completely confounded. The Vai had an indigenous script learned outside of school. Thus, researchers Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole were able to see how Vai individuals who were literate but not formally schooled compared with others who were formally schooled (and literate) and those who were unschooled (and illiterate). They found some, but relatively minor, effects of literacy itself; the number of years of schooling affected cognitive test performance much more. Similar results come from a study of the Cree of northern Ontario who have their own syllabic script learned outside of school.⁷⁴ These comparisons suggest that some other aspects of schooling are more important than literacy as determinants of cognitive performance.

By studying other societies where schooling is not universal, we may be better able to understand just what role schooling plays in cognitive and other development. That schooling makes for so much difference in cognitive performance raises the serious issue of how much of what we observe about child development in our society and in other Western societies is simply a function of what children are taught in school. After all, children who grow up in this society not only get older each year, they also go one year further in school. Schools are not just places to learn a particular curriculum. Children learn to interact with one another and with adults who are not parents and family. Therefore, we might expect that schools not only shape cognition but also convey important cultural attitudes, values, and appropriate ways of behaving toward others.

Applied Anthropology

Schools: Values and Expectations

We usually think of schools as teaching skills. But schools also convey much more about the society and cultural values and expectations for individuals.

Joseph Tobin, David Wu, and Dana Davidson videotaped preschool classroom scenes in Japan, China, and the United States. In each country, they asked children, teachers, parents, and school administrators to comment on the scenes in all three countries.

When individuals in the United States viewed the Japanese tape, two things generally bothered them. One was the fact that children in Japan often did the same things simultaneously as a group. For example, the teacher showed what to fold first and subsequently to make an origami bird figure, and the children followed along. Parents and teachers in the United States said that children should have more choice in what to do and how to do it. The second thing that bothered people in the United States, as well as in China, was that the teacher in Japan appeared to ignore what Americans might consider "unruly" behavior by the children. For example, in the tape, a particularly troublesome boy talked loudly, sometimes purposely hurt other children, and threw things around, but the teacher seemed to ignore these behaviors. People in the United States and China thought that the teacher should try to do something in such situations. In Japan, however, most of the teachers preferred not to call attention to, or single out, a troublesome child. Japanese teachers expect such a child eventually to behave more appropriately, and they encourage the other children to exert social pressure in that direction. In fact, in a considerable number of fights, teachers let the other children watch and help to create a solution. In Lois Peak's words: "Learning to go to school in Japan is primarily defined as training in group life."

Most of the activities in the Chinese preschool were highly structured. For example, the first task of the day was building with blocks, but in contrast to the style at the Japanese preschool, the children in China were expected to complete the task on their own and to do so in silence. If they spoke, the teacher reprimanded them. They used a picture as a guide for what to do. When they were done, the teachers checked their work.



Schoolchildren exercising in a playground, Shanghai, China.

If they got it right, they took it apart and rebuilt it; if they got it wrong, they were asked to correct it. At lunchtime, teachers monitored the lunch to make sure that the children ate all their food and ate in silence. After an afternoon nap, the children listened to a patriotic story and then had relay races, which were followed by 15 minutes of free play. Supper was served at 5:00 P.M., and parents came at 6:00. In seeing the videotapes, Americans and Japanese were bothered by the rigidity and "overcontrol" of the children and by the lack of privacy in their communal bathroom.

Compared with the other preschools, the U.S. preschool emphasized individual participation and individualized activity. For example, "show and tell" was voluntary; sometimes only three kids decided to get up and talk. Much of the rest of the day was spent in "learning centers"; the teachers helped the children decide which center they would like to go to. Children started at one activity but could change if they wished. Even lunch was more individual. All children took their lunch boxes to a big table where they all ate and talked animatedly. The U.S. teacher, in contrast to the Japanese teacher, intervened when a child misbehaved, such as when one boy grabbed a block from another. Without raising her voice, the teacher asked the two children to talk to each other about the disagreement. She resorted to

a "time-out" (a period of isolation) when the dispute was not settled by talking.

The value of the individual appears to be stressed most in the U.S. preschool, where most of the daily activities allowed individual choice of some kind. In both Japan and China, group activities predominated, although the Japanese preschool allowed flexible arrival times, more free play, and more freedom to talk or move about than the Chinese preschool. On the issue of social control, the Japanese teachers relied informally on the group to control the children's behavior. For example, after 9 months, the unruly boy sat by himself at lunch; the other children did not want to sit with him. In contrast, the U.S. and Chinese teachers intervened in response to unruly behavior.

Cultural values are not unchanging. For example, a considerable number of Japanese parents and teachers were critical of the Japanese school and said there were "better" schools in Japan that were more like the U.S. preschool. And some Japanese thought that more attention should be paid to the individual needs of troubled children. When some Chinese saw the tapes of the Chinese school, they complained that it was too "old-fashioned."

Sources: Tobin et al. 1989; Peak 1991; Lock 2009; Aronson 2002; Nisbett 2009; Hayashi and Tobin 2011.

Schooling and cognitive performance are not isolated from their larger surroundings. Recent research also shows how much cultural expectations shape school performance. Most of this research has focused on minority students. Most of them are not often expected to do well by their teachers and others because of cultural stereotypes. Indeed, in most tests in school, these students do less well. The important question is whether stereotyped expectations hamper performance or whether performance has to do with factors having nothing to do with school. Many experiments have confirmed that, even after controlling for factors such as family wealth and SAT scores, even subtle reminders of cultural stereotypes cause performance to suffer. The cues can be as simple as saying that the test measures intelligence (in contrast to the control group being told that they will not be evaluated on their performance) or asking the person for their “race” (in contrast to not asking) as one of a number of background questions. What can be done to improve performance? Some experimental studies suggest that interventions conveying that human intelligence is changeable can minimize the effects of cultural stereotypes.⁷⁵ One of the most fascinating studies was a comparison of African American and European American students before and after Barack Obama was elected president of the United States for the first time. Before the election, the African Americans, even though matched on education and English proficiency, did worse than the European Americans. After the election, the differences practically disappeared.⁷⁶

Schooling does seem to predict having a personality trait we call “patience.” The more schooling you have, the more patience you have. In a study conducted among the Tsimane, a horticultural people living in the Bolivian Amazon, patience or a tolerance for delayed gratification is associated with a wide range of advantages, including higher income, more wealth, and better health. These positive outcomes may be partly the result of respect for authority, obedience, and conformity, which schooling may instill.⁷⁷

Psychological Variation in Adulthood

So far, we have focused on the anthropology of childhood. But there are characteristics of adults (as well as children) that appear to vary as well. Some of these concepts, such as ideas about the self, may shape childrearing as well.

Concepts of the Self Anthropologists have begun to study different cultural ideas of personhood or concept of the “self.” Many have concluded that the concept of self in many non-Western societies is quite different from the Western conception. Clifford Geertz described the Western conception of the person as “bounded, unique, . . . a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole.”⁷⁸ He claimed, on the basis of his fieldwork in Java, Bali, and Morocco, that those societies have very different conceptions of a person, not only different from each other but quite different from the Western conception. For example, Geertz said that the Balinese describe a person as having many different roles, like an actor who plays different characters. The unique characteristics of a person are not emphasized; what is emphasized are the “masks” people wear and the “parts” they play.

Geertz focused on the variation and uniquenesses in different cultures’ conceptions of the self. But other scholars think that there are recognizable and predictable patterns in this variation. One of the most talked-about patterns is the Western emphasis on the self as an autonomous individual and the non-Western emphasis on the relations a person has with others.⁷⁹ Labels used to describe such Western and non-Western cultural differences are “individualism” versus “holism” or “collectivism,” “egocentric” versus “sociocentric,” and the like.⁸⁰ For example, the Japanese concept of self is often described as “relational” or “situational”; people exist in networks of relationships, and the ideal person has the ability to shift easily from one social situation to another.⁸¹

There are two major objections to the idea that the Western sense of self should be contrasted with the non-Western. The first is that studies of other cultures have suggested other dimensions of variation besides “individualism” versus “collectivism.” For example, the traditional Inuit concept *inummariik*, “a genuine person,” seems to include a lifelong

3.4 Explain psychological variability in adults.

process of ecological involvement—interacting with animals and the environment as well as people.⁸² A culture's concept of self, then, may include other dimensions besides individual versus collective. A second objection to the Western/non-Western contrast is that it may not be based on adequate evidence. As Melford Spiro pointed out, it is necessary to find out how a sample of individuals in a society actually view themselves. The ideal in the culture might be different from the actual.⁸³ For example, individuals even in the United States do not just describe themselves as autonomous. When Jane Wellenkamp and Douglas Hollan interviewed Americans about their feelings about the death of someone close, they got statements about autonomy (such as "I can stand on my own" and "At least you have yourself"), but they also got statements reflecting interdependence ("You realize that they're gone and that a part of you has gone with them").⁸⁴ This is not to say that the autonomy of the individual isn't important in the United States. It is. But individuals also realize that they are interdependent. How we actually think of ourselves may not be so different from how people in other societies think of themselves.

If a cultural theme such as individualism is important, societies may express or convey this theme in many ways. It may start right after birth, as when a baby is put in a crib or bassinet to sleep alone rather than with someone in the family. Young children may be given their "own" toys. They may go to preschool or day care, where they are encouraged to make their own choices (see the box "Schools: Values and Expectations"). And schools for older children may require individual, not group, achievement. Does the theme of individualism have to be taught explicitly? Probably not, because it can be conveyed in so many different ways.

Perceptual Style: Field Independence or Dependence

Might the environment influence the way people in different societies think and perceive (interpret sensory information)? John Berry suggested that different perceptual and cognitive processes may be selected and trained for in societies that differ in their adaptational requirements.⁸⁵ Berry's particular focus was on what psychologists call *field independence* and *field dependence*.⁸⁶ Field independence means being able to isolate a part of a situation from the whole. The opposite perceptual style, field dependence, means that parts are not perceived separately; rather, the whole situation is focused on.



The contrast between field independence and field dependence may become clear if we look at some of the ways they are measured. In the rod-and-frame test, a person seated in a darkened room is asked to adjust a tilted luminous rod so that it is upright within a luminous frame. Individuals are considered field dependent if they adjust the rod to line up with the frame when the frame is tilted. Individuals are considered field independent if they adjust the rod to a truly upright position even though the frame is tilted. Field independence is also measured by the ability to see a simply drawn figure when it is included but somewhat hidden in a more complex picture.

Why should some societies produce people who are more field independent or dependent? Berry suggested that people who rely a lot on hunting must be field independent to be successful because hunting requires the visual isolation of animals from their backgrounds. Hunters must also learn to visualize themselves in precise relationship to their surroundings so that they can find animals and get back home. In a comparative study of communities in four societies, Berry found that degree of reliance on hunting predicted field independence. The more a community relied on hunting, the more the individuals showed field independence on tests. Those communities more reliant on agriculture tested out to be more field dependent. How might hunters develop field independence as a cognitive style? Different child training might be involved. In the United States and a few other societies, it has been found that children whose parents are very strict are less likely to develop field independence than are children whose parents are lenient.⁸⁷ It seems that emotional independence from parents is necessary for the perceptual style of field independence to develop. No matter what the precise mechanism is, we know from the Barry and colleagues (1959) study that hunter-gatherers are more likely to train children to be individualistic and assertive and that agriculturalists and herders are more likely to train their children to be compliant. So hunter-gatherers may cause their children to develop field independence by stressing emotional independence in childhood.

Investigations have shown that there are gender differences in the United States and other (but not all) cultures in degree of field dependence versus independence.⁸⁸ Perhaps these differences reflect the fact that girls are encouraged to be obedient and responsible and boys to be independent and self-reliant. And perhaps, too, gender differences in field dependence versus independence may be related to the fact that girls work more in and around the home, close to others. If so, we might expect that girls more field dependent are also likely to have a morality that stresses interpersonal concerns.

Expression of Aggression

Leaving aside behavior during warfare, societies vary markedly in the degree to which adults express anger and act aggressively toward others. Not surprisingly, many of the societies that encourage children to be more aggressive also appear to have more aggressive adults. The Semai and the Yanomamö are good examples. The Semai are famous for their timidity and have never been described as hostile.⁸⁹ The Yanomamö, on the other hand, frequently show aggression within a village. Shouting and threatening to obtain demands are frequent, as are wife-beatings and bloody fights with clubs.⁹⁰ Cross-culturally, all kinds of aggression tend to co-occur, so much so that many researchers discuss a "culture of violence."⁹¹ What drives this pattern is debatable, but as we discussed earlier, there is some evidence that when war ceases, socialization for aggression ceases. So, adults who grow up in more peaceful times may exhibit less aggression of all types.

Whether adults express aggression freely may also be related to a group's economy. In a comparative study of personality differences between pastoralists and farmers in four societies in East Africa, Robert Edgerton found that pastoralists were more willing than farmers to express aggression openly. As a matter of fact, pastoralists seemed freer to express all kinds of emotion, including sadness and depression. Although farmers displayed reluctance to express overt aggression themselves, they were quite willing to talk about witchcraft and sorcery practiced by others. How can we explain these personality differences? Edgerton proposed that the lifestyle of farmers, who must spend their lives cooperating with a fixed set of neighbors, requires them to contain their feelings, particularly hostile feelings. (But these feelings may not go away, and so the farmers