

**The American dependency conflict: Continuities and discontinuities in behavior and values of counter-cultural parents and their children.**

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## Abstract

Beatrice Whiting recognized that adolescents will identify the weaknesses of their parents and the social institutions they see, and seek to change them. She also described the American “dependency conflict” -- i.e., teaching the value of independence and self reliance while at the same time rewarding a type of dominant-dependence and seeking attention in parent-child interaction. The countercultural youth of the 1960’s and 70’s certainly identified problems in American life and tried to change them. But what kind of parenting and intergenerational transmission of new values would be found once these youth became parents themselves? 150 countercultural parents and their children born in 1974, as well as a comparison sample of two-parent married parents and their children, have been followed for the past 20 years. The parents were all Euro-American, lived in California, and practiced a wide variety of nonconventional family lifestyles. Home behavior observations when children were between 6 months and 4 and a half years show remarkably high rates of seeking attention and verbal interactions across countercultural and comparison sample families alike; this parenting and child behavioral style, which encourages dependency conflict, did not change even when other values orientations and practices did. But there is also evidence for intergenerational transmission from parents to their adolescents 18 years later, of strongly held countercultural values such as questioning authority, gender egalitarianism, and a nonmaterialistic orientation. Intergenerational values transmission also was influenced by gender (mothers and daughters were stronger on gender egalitarianism than fathers and sons), by the changing cultural economy (teens were more materialistic than their parents), and by the new identities of adolescents’ own generation (teens were less likely than their parents to question authority among countercultural families, but more likely to than were comparison sample families). Change processes require the study of the intimate, cultural-emotional worlds of children and families, as well as broader forces of political economy and social movements.

## Introduction

Beatrice Whiting was interested in bringing the findings from cross-cultural research on culture and human development to parents struggling with their own children and change. She saw that the folk wisdom transferred across generations about children and parenting in most of the world should be understood as containing many universals of valuable knowledge that could be relevant in the modern world and suggested ways to encourage and value such folk wisdom (Whiting 1974). She urged development planners in Africa to provide supports for mothers struggling to make the transition from a world in which they were training their children for interdependence and community participation, to one in which individual achievement and autonomy are required (Whiting 1973). She described the family world of East Africa in terms of changing family life styles. The mothers she came to know in Kenya had a deep sense of competence, self-esteem and “civilized sociability” based on their ability to manage their family and children in their community (Whiting 1977: 223). But climbing on the “modernity escalator” puts new pressures on children and parents alike. She recognized that the mothers and children she worked with in Kenya were ambivalent about what they wanted from and for their children. They wanted their children to be obedient, generous and goodhearted, respectful and responsible in their family, yet also to have the cleverness, independence, and other skills to do well in school and in the market society they now faced (Whiting 1996).

Among the many stresses and conflicts Whiting observed in changing American family life, she specifically focused on the conflicts over dependency in modern middle class families: “We teach the value of independence and self reliance and at the same time reward a type of dominant-dependence.” [e.g., seeking help and attention, demanding that others act in such a way to meet ego’s stated desires (Whiting 1978:218, fn. 1). Babies are early detached from the

mother and other caregivers, and sent to some kind of school early and often thereafter. This puts children with same-age peers both in and out of school. At the same time, children are encouraged to engage in intense interaction with a parent or parents, and there is a great deal of seeking attention, adult-child interaction, and emotional warmth with powerful adults who respond in kind. Children are placed in settings where they have to be independent and at the same time are rewarded for seeking out and being dependent on adult affection and rewards.<sup>1</sup>

The dependency conflict is especially likely in settings in which children live in relatively small households and interact with near in age peers. Whiting correlated the dependency conflict with this pattern of family and peer circumstances and distinguished it from larger extended family worlds, where children are embedded in a larger kin group where they flow amongst mixed – age and mixed-sex groups of children, non-parental adults and youth.

The U.S. middle-income individual may be taught to value independence and aspire to self-reliance, but the dependency bonds remain. The affective bonds in the isolated nuclear family are within the small group....(Whiting 1978:224)

The mixed messages of this dependency conflict (seek attention from others but be independent and autonomous, and find rewards for that independence from close social ties in small families) refer to intra-psychic as well as social conflicts. Encouraging agency, choice, exploration, and autonomy in children, while also valuing a strong social orientation to a social group or to family members produces conflict in individual psychological experience and in social groups. The origins of developmental conflicts like the dependency hang-up Whiting identified, come from the psychodynamics of the human mind refracting and emotionally redefining cultural meanings through intimate familial social worlds, as well as from the inconsistencies between the everyday

routines and social settings children inhabit (e.g. small conjugal families encouraging repeated contact between parents and children) and cultural goals and ideologies (e.g. egoistic autonomy).

The familiar and widely described contrast between independent and interdependent social orientations in individuals, and the contrast between individualism and collectivism orientations in the United States and across cultures (Greenfield and Cocking 1994; Kim et al. 1994) reflect universal tensions which are found everywhere, not discreet ideal types. These are then selectively elaborated or suppressed at the cultural as well as individual levels. Varying interpretations about what is valuable or worrisome about dependence and independence in children clearly are found even among Western countries as closely related as Holland and the U.S. (Harkness, Super, and van Tijen 2000). There also are studies of blended patterns of emotional and cultural frames which cross the ideal types of individualism/collectivism, such as autonomous relational selves (Kagitcibasi 1996) with agency yet sociocentric self orientations, or those who follow others but are strongly individualistic. Even where there is a predominant ideological and social organizational frame favoring individualism or sociocentrism, the individual experience of these patterns varies, is refracted psychosocially, and can produce conflict.

There is a strong moral and evaluative component to this model in the minds of parents as well – these are not only tactical options for parents as to whether to encourage both autonomy and seeking affirmation and dependence. What kind of parent am I and how would others evaluate me if I don't reward autonomy as well as my child seeking praise and attention? The dependency model Whiting describes is tied to still other powerful U.S. parental concerns for literacy and verbal skills – what LeVine et al. (1994) describe as a “pedagogical” model of child development and good parenting. This familiar culture complex emphasizes stimulation and

verbal responsiveness towards children in the service of boldness, exploration, verbal skills, and literacy. It is characterized by a concern with individual child stimulation and active engagement of the child with others, exploratory behavior, active recognition of cognitive and verbal signs of intelligence, verbal communication (such as treating the child as a presumptive co-equal interlocutor), and question-response exchanges between adults and children. To not encourage ones children in these ways, to minimize active verbal questioning and engagement with ones children, or to wait until children are past the 5-7 age period to begin more active training, could be morally questioned by many U.S. middle class parents.

Whiting applied these ideas to the countercultural experiments and changes in family lifestyles in the 1960's and 1970's in the United States. She offered an interpretation of and predictions about the counterculture (Whiting 1978). Countercultural parents clearly recognized many of the constraints of the isolated nuclear family and felt the conflicts of the dependency conflict in themselves. Countercultural youth certainly tried to change family life in the spirit of experimentation with all social forms, but also to break out of the emotional and social constraints they felt needed reform, including the dependency conflict. She suggested that the dependency conflict is a deep part of many American childhoods, and that this pattern would make it difficult psychologically to participate in larger communities, since dependent seeking and its related self-identity and psychological correlates are developed in conjugal family settings where children spend the majority of their waking hours, and these settings encourage the kind of highly engaged seeking behaviors that create and reflect dependency concerns. In this report I present evidence from a 20-year longitudinal study of countercultural American families and their children which both supports and extends these ideas.

During or soon after living in a countercultural, nonconventional lifestyle in one form or other as a young adult, this generation had to put their ideals into practice in their own parenting and their choices regarding marriage and childrearing. In the present report, we focus on two aspects of countercultural family lifestyles: 1) how these parents interacted with their own young children; and 2) the intergenerational transfer and transformation of parents' countercultural values and goals to their adolescent children.

Indeed, as Whiting anticipated, all these parents, whether in the conventional comparison sample, strongly countercultural families with explicit goals to change what they did not like about American family practices, or less strongly countercultural, had children seeking and receiving attention. They do so at far higher rates than is found in other cultures. There is continuity in the pedagogical parenting model. At the same time, many parents remained strongly committed to countercultural values and tried to express them in family life. Eighteen years later, parents with strong and persisting values of humanism, tolerance, questioning conventional authority, alternative achievement, and less materialism were likely to pass those values on to their adolescent children, although not without evidence of some discontinuity, conflicts and some generational changes across the cohort. Along the way, our data illustrate another research methods practice Whiting always promoted: the collection of data across different levels of analysis. In the present paper for example, we utilize some general sociocultural description of our countercultural family samples, naturalistic behavioral observations of parents and children, and both parents' and children's reports of their values and beliefs.

### The Countercultures and Their Children

“The young of every generation, in the process of becoming adult, identify the weaknesses of their parents and of the current social institutions and seek to change them.” (Whiting 1978: 217)

The countercultural youth of the late 1960's and early 1970's certainly tried to change weaknesses they saw in their own family lives, and the culture and social institutions around them (Weisner 1986). These youth not only did what youth in every generation do, they did so unusually collectively, as part of a cohort with a generational identity (Newman 1988) focused on change, rebellion, and a moral critique of self and society. Generational identities can be especially powerful when they crystallize a symbolic and cultural schema for acting in and appraising the world shared by a cohort with a common collective experience. The generational cohorts coming of age during the Depression, World Wars I or II, or the '60s each exemplify such unusual, culturally and emotionally charged eras.

The two core principles of the counterculture most often mentioned by parents and by studies of the period are the exploration of all aspects of life and continuing progressive moral critique of self and others (Gitlin 1993). The beliefs, values and practices of the counterculture generation were certainly wide-ranging: free expression and thought in all aspects of life, self-enhancing, experimental, morally aware, emotionally labile and externalized; politically radical, opposed to the Vietnam War; drug-taking; for civil rights; egalitarian, anti-materialistic, pro-natural, anti-authority; spiritual; and experimenting with family lifestyles (Berger 1981; Flacks 1988; Gitlin 1993; Gottlieb 1987; Keniston 1968; Miller 1991; Partridge 1973; Reich 1970; Roszak 1969; Tipton 1982; Yinger 1982). Gitlin and Kazin (1988:49) themselves describe counterculture ideals in “...constant flux -- civil rights, student, anti-war, countercultural,

feminist, gay, and none of the above.” There were many sub-groups making up the counterculture with often conflicting ideas, and so no person or community believed in all parts of this sometimes contradictory agenda for change. The countercultural generation was influenced by many ideals and social conditions of the time: a political movement, a moral search for personal meaning, a desire for the “natural,” open, and free, by the baby boom demographic bulge and the economic expansion of the time (Easterlin 1980), by the search for new forms of religious and spiritual expression (Rochford 1985), and by the particular subsets of American youth who formed it (e.g. working class youth and minority youth had different goals and opportunities than upper middle class Euro-American university students).

The historical influences on countercultural ideals include strong strands of earlier American communitarian thought, American populism, European socialism and “naturism” (Green 1986), and notions about non-Western, preindustrial societies providing templates for more “natural” or communitarian ways to live. Hence the ideas and practices of the American counterculture certainly did not arise *de novo*, although the movements took new contemporary forms, and was a very American critique of America.

The counterculture would be seriously misunderstood, however, if viewed solely as a collection of positive values, freeing ideologies, radical politics, self-expansion, tribe-like cohesion, and spiritualism -- as recent videos (Law 1990) and film series, and some of these commentators suggest. There were darker sides to the counterculture. Under its broad scope countercultural groups and those claiming to be under its umbrella could be violent, grotesque, health-endangering, exploitative, sometimes sexist, and cruel to family members. The counterculture could and did hurt. Many parents in our study experienced some of these injuries and gave painful reports about the damage done to themselves and others. Some regret such

aspects of their past and present and blame the 1960s and its aftermath for their bad experiences (Weisner and Bernheimer 1998). Listening to a broad range of countercultural parents, not only the successful and positive, does not leave a romantic or consistently positive view of the counterculture as it was experienced and as participants subsequently viewed it.

Although the content of what parents mean by a countercultural identity could be varied and inconsistent, the identity remains salient for many. Many of the young parents who began as participants in our study in the 1970's still are largely liberal, progressive, feisty, experimental, quirky, and still going against -- countering -- society. Others have regrets about their countercultural experiences and feel that it put them and their children on difficult pathways later in life, or exacerbated other problems in their lives concerning drugs or mental health (Weisner and Bernheimer 1998). Many are still making a lasting impact on society at midlife, and hope that their own children will carry on their ideals.

We identified eight values orientations which both characterized the countercultural movements and mattered to parents (Eiduson, Cohen, and Alexander 1973). These include alternative achievement goals (Weisner 1982), pro-naturalism (environmental concerns, emotional openness, being "laid-back") (Weisner, Bausano and Kornfein 1983), gender egalitarianism (Weisner and Wilson-Mitchell 1990), humanism, a present rather than future orientation, an acceptance of non-conventional authority and distrust of conventional social authorities, relatively low interest in a scientific/rational approach to life, and anti-materialism.

For the present study, I focus on three questions suggested by Bea Whiting's argument on the dependency conflict in the U.S. The first is whether the countercultural families in our study, in fact substantially altered the pattern of dependent seeking which is such a common pattern in the U.S. To do this, I compare rates of such behaviors between countercultural families and a

conventional-lifestyle comparison sample. Second, I compare the domestic family arrangements of parents and their children, focusing on the question of parent-centered or socially distributed child care: were the countercultural parents more likely, overall, to encourage more socially-distributed care? Third, I turn to the intergenerational transmission of parental values. Whether or not countercultural parents differed in dependent seeking and parent-centered child care, have they transmitted some of their core values and ideological commitments to their adolescent children?

### Sample and Measures

#### Sample

Our data come from a longitudinal study of countercultural and nonconventional youth begun in 1974, the Family Lifestyles Project (FLS) (Eiduson, Kornfein, Zimmerman and Weisner 1982). We followed a sample of 205 Euro-American families from the time the mother was in her third trimester, until their children completed adolescence. One hundred and fifty-four families were in nonconventional family lifestyles, including 47 single mothers by choice (not divorced or widowed), 53 social contract couples (not legally married but living together), and 54 in various forms of communes and collective living situations (creedal and noncreedal communes, as well as informal groups of adults). All the families were living in California when recruited, and all the mothers were in their third trimester of pregnancy when first interviewed. Participants came from all over the state and were located through community organizations, countercultural organizations and informal networks, doctors who often saw countercultural women, and advertisements. We used snowball sampling; however, not more than two referrals came from any one participant to ensure a wide range of participants. We also

followed a comparison group of 51 two-parent conventionally married couples selected from nominations from a random sample of obstetricians contacted in major urban areas of California.

The sample ranges from lower working- to upper middle-class and was between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on a standard socioeconomic scale when selected. Average age was 23 years for mothers, and 27 years for fathers. Mothers had completed an average of 14 years of formal schooling, and fathers had completed 16 years, so, like many countercultural adherents, this is a relatively well educated group. The conventional comparison sample had higher monthly family incomes in 1975 (\$2400, or \$8749 in 1999-adjusted dollars) compared to the countercultural group (\$1500, or \$5468 in 1999-adjusted dollars), but in most other respects -- age, formal education, grandparents' SES (e.g. the children's parents' parents) -- the conventional and nonconventional samples were similar.

Naturally, the family arrangements of our participants changed as the years of the study went by. The nonconventional families changed more than the comparison sample. At 18 years, 39% of the original single mothers, 36% of the social contract couples, 14% of those in communes, and 73% of the comparison sample were still in their original family arrangements. When the study started, the women were in the third trimester of pregnancy and each lifestyle (single, social-contractual, communal, and two-parent married) comprised roughly 25% of the total sample. Married couples rose to 52% of the total by the end of the 18-year period, whereas communards dropped precipitously to 4% and unmarried couples to 11%. Single parents first dropped and then increased steadily to a current 28% of the total sample. A new category, "unstable" family situations, appeared once the study began. These were families that changed frequently and for whom we could not establish a predominant lifestyle pattern. After early

instability in a large number of the families, the persistently unstable group declined to 5% after 18 years.

We also learned more about the values of the parents in the study once they began participating in the study. Based on their values and lifestyles, we used cluster analysis to identify six groups of families according to their commitment to the counterculture and their family circumstances (e.g. single mothers, unmarried couples, communards, etc.) (Eiduson and Weisner 1978). These include 1) families that remained in some sort of *Communal* or collective living arrangement. These groups ranged from spiritual and religious communes with national scope, a leadership hierarchy and very clear boundaries for membership, to loose and relatively unbounded collective living situations based on political or social affiliations. 2) *Avant-Garde*, parents strongly committed to the counterculture with strong countercultural values orientations. 3) *Countercultural* families with less strong countercultural commitment, identity, and values than the Avant-Garde. 4) *Conventional Alternative* families who were living in divergent lifestyles (unmarried couple, single mother, a collective living situation other than a credal commune) but not for reasons of countercultural values and ideals, but for other reasons such as convenience, financial circumstances, etc. 5) *Changeable/Troubled* families in which commitment to clear countercultural values was inconsistent and not very salient, and parents struggled with drugs and other significant personal problems, and family situations were unstable. 6) The *Conventionally Married* comparison sample.

## Measures

*Family Arrangements and Demographic Data.* SES was assessed using the four-factor Hollingshead scale and direct FLS interview and questionnaire items that elicited information on

annual income, occupation, and years of formal education at each time period. Information on family and household arrangements was gathered from home visits and FLS interviews.

*Family Value Orientations and Attitudes.* FLS questionnaires were used to assess value orientations and attitudes (pronatural values, materialism, beliefs about authority). Each value dimension was assessed using a 7-item scale (average alpha = .91). Adolescents' values orientations were assessed with the same scales used for parents. In addition, we used open-ended conversations with parents and teens and data from our ethnographic subsample on values and goals (Weisner et al. 1983). The adolescents also completed the Astin Freshman Questionnaire, a survey completed by over 300,000 entering US college students each year (Astin 1993). This questionnaire asks about social attitudes, career goals, political beliefs, and values, and provided us with comparison group data from a large national sample of teens.

*Child home behavior observations.* We visited each child in their homes at ages six months, 18 months and 4 and 1/2 years old (Weisner 1982). The visits typically lasted three to four hours. At each visit we talked with the parents and child, asked them about their daily routine and typical activities, and did fieldnotes following the visit. We scheduled the visits to include a family meal (a "feeding" at six months, usually dinner at 18 and 4 and a 1/2), based on whatever way each family organized their mealtimes with their child. Fieldworkers then did a one hour systematic observation focused on the child and all those the child interacted with. We used a combination of five-minute spot observations of children and parents, and continuous behavioral observations of children and sibs or others in the home for 30 minutes. Behavioral observations were divided into time intervals (e.g. 30 1-minute intervals) which were summed to measure the frequency of kinds of interactions or affect (e.g. positive or negative affect, engagement with parents, or verbal exchanges between parents and children). Reliability was

established by having pairs of home observers visit a ghost sample of families similar to but not in the FLS study, and through the use of videotapes. A minimum of .70 reliability was required for each behavior or event rated to be included in the protocol; the median reliability was .82 across all observational ratings.

Sixteen waves of longitudinal data were collected between 1974 to 1994, including home observations, child assessments, teacher reports, and parent and adolescent questionnaires and interviews. For the present study, we concentrate on data from five time periods: Values reported by mothers during the third trimester; three home observations at six months, 18 months and 4 and 1/2 years, and parent and adolescent interviews at age 18.

There was very low attrition throughout the study, ranging from 2 to 10% depending on the assessment contact, averaging approximately 5%. The total sample size for the present analyses (e.g. data from interviews with mothers at the third trimester about their values, home behavior observations of children between six months and 4 and 1/2 years, and interviews with parents and adolescents at age 18) ranged from 172 to 189 out of 205 possible FLS families. Data for home behavioral observations have somewhat lower n's due to our inability to visit all the families had moved out of California, although we in fact did visit many families who had moved.

## Results

The dependency conflict: similarities between countercultural and comparison sample families

“There is an obvious confusion in the U.S. concept of independence. We are training children to be ‘seekers,’ to have strong habits of dominant-dependent behavior, and yet we value independence and self reliance. How do we interpret this inconsistency?”

(Whiting 1978: 223)

In a previous study, countercultural parents who were strongly antimaterialistic, supportive of alternative achievement goals, humanistic and pronatural, were significantly more likely to engage in active parental compliance attempts with their 18 month old toddlers (Weisner 1982). These parents were high in maternal and paternal involvement with their children and used many different styles of persuasion (verbal, physical, reasoning). Parental involvement, in other words, has the potential to encourage the dependency conflict, and was as or more likely in these countercultural families than they were for our comparison sample, or for other, less committed countercultural parents.

For this study, we examined the household context and specific behaviors other than compliance attempts, that would show signs of dependent seeking between parents and children – and found high proportions of such behaviors across the various countercultural and the comparison sample families. Figure 1 shows the number of people present in the households during the observations of the children at 18 months (other ages show a similar pattern). These children are in small households, interacting with their mother, father, and perhaps one other child. Households in communal settings have more people around – but not a lot more. The mean size of commune groups was about 13, with some numbering in the 100's, yet the children were generally not exposed to large numbers of people for most of the day<sup>2</sup>. Although there were many countercultural parents who encouraged the values of nurturance and prosocial behaviors, the everyday settings most of the children were in most of the time did not provide opportunities for sibling caretaking, which would have promoted these behaviors in children. One reason for this is the small family sizes overall in our sample. Whiting's claim that styles of interaction are primarily developed in everyday routines and settings would suggest that these

children would be relatively unlikely to develop the kinds of sociocentric patterns of interdependence that many countercultural parents ideally wanted for their children.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2 shows how intensely and frequently toddlers in our sample interacted with their parents during an hour observation period, and how little variation there is across the various countercultural family lifestyles (there are no significant mean differences across these clusters of families). These children were constantly seeking attention from and being sought by their parents. These are very high rates from a cross-cultural perspective. The high frequency for father-toddler interactions also is of course very unusual compared to data from nearly all cross-cultural studies. These interactions are not secondary to other work the parents are doing. Fieldworkers rated whether each activity they observed was oriented to care, sociability, or child on a scale where 0 indicated almost none were child-related tasks, and 4 indicating that nearly all activities and tasks were specifically focused on the child. Fathers are infrequently interacting with young children and do relatively little routine child care during these ages in most cultures (LeVine et al. 1994; Hewlett 1992). Figure 3 shows that child-oriented activities and tasks were the most common, occurring about half the time during the observations overall.

Finally, Figure 4 shows that talking back and forth with their children was the characteristic way parents and children engaged each other. The conventional comparison group, highly committed countercultural families, and less committed families alike, all talked a lot with their children. Again, from a cross-cultural perspective, there is an extraordinarily high amount of verbally-mediated parent-child interaction among these American families, whether countercultural in values and family form, or not.

These patterns were similar at all three time periods at which we did home observations (6 months, 18 months, and 4 and a 1/2 years) in terms of active verbal exchanges, seeking of

parental attention by children and initiations of interaction by parents, parents' attempts to gain compliance from children through a variety of techniques involving negotiations with children, and everyday settings at home that most of the time had few others present other than parents<sup>4</sup>.

Communards who had their children in collective child care and shared parenting tasks with others in their group did change the contexts for interaction. One large commune, The Family (pseudonym) was led by a charismatic leader based in Los Angeles but with several hundred members spread around the country. Children lived with their mothers some of the time, and with others in their communal family at different times of the year. Children were cared for by parents as well as by commune members chosen for this task. Children in Hare Krishna communities were sometimes separated from their parents and sent to group childcare arrangements in other cities and in India as well (Rochford 1985). Older children were responsible for child care tasks and domestic work for the communities, in addition to their culturally unique social and religious training. These communities in fact reflected the model of child responsibility training, polymatric care, and social settings instantiating sociocentric interdependence. However, of the 54 children born in to some sort of collective living situation, only 15 were still in those groups by the time children were 3 or so. Some parents left their groups because of interpersonal reasons (separations from their spouse or partner, or conflicts with other group members, for instance). Some did not like others disciplining their children and would not agree to collective care arrangements. Some became disillusioned with their group and/or disaffected from its ideology. For others, communal living was a lifestyle they chose while younger and childless, but no longer fit as well with their new status as parents. Although collective living is possible and practiced in the United States, it is difficult to sustain. Among

the reasons parents gave for leaving these groups was, in effect, that they wanted closer, more exclusive control and engagement with their children in nuclear family settings.

Even though interactional styles were quite similar across the groups, what parents said and did in other respects varied widely. Many countercultural parents selected progressive, co-op schools for their children, and so both they and their children no doubt often had wider networks of children and adults around them. Further, countercultural parents with strong gender egalitarian and nonmaterialistic values were more likely to provide androgenous toys, media and dress for their children (but usually for their girls, not their boys) and to emphasize these values in how they talked to their children about fairness, occupations, and marriage itself (Weisner and Wilson-Mitchell 1990; Weisner et al. 1994). Food provided for children might be vegetarian, organically grown, and from a food co-op. Nearly a third of countercultural parents co-slept with their children in infancy and some longer, in the service of pronatural values, compared to only a few in the comparison sample (Okami, Weisner, and Olmstead ms). Medical care might include herbs and other remedies in addition to biomedical care (almost all of our parents used biomedicine – they got shots and other care for their children). Avant Garde and Countercultural parents included their children in political activities, rallies, spiritual and religious exploration, and their artistic endeavors. Many more countercultural than conventional comparison group parents used pot or other drugs, had higher separation and divorce rates, moved more often, and continued to have lower incomes and more varied occupations.

In summary, although the content of what parents said and what they provided for their children certainly reflected their countercultural values in many respects, the styles of interaction and settings frequented by parents and children were not so different from the comparison

families. The conditions for the American dependency conflicts were present and visible in social interaction.

Countercultural values: parents and adolescents

“It seems clear that valued characteristics, rather than being isomorphic to behavior, are often indicators of problem areas.” (Whiting 1978: 223)

The pedagogical middle class model of parenting and early child care trumped other values of countercultural parents for a more collective setting to bring up children and a different, non-American middle class form of parenting. Values conflict in their implications for action as well as in their meanings. Most countercultural parents described their parenting styles as in fact reflecting their goals for warmth, empathy and responsibility training for their children, and were surprised when fieldworkers asked about alternatives. Their parenting practices were implicit cultural model for them, even though they were highly questioning and explicit about other political and cultural practices. What other ways to be a good parent could there be? There were some parents who expressed the familiar ironic realization that they turned out to be a lot more like their parents in what they did than they would have thought beforehand.

If the great majority of countercultural parents continued the American dependency conflicts in their interactional styles and everyday settings, they nonetheless continued to differ in their countercultural values and political ideals – often fiercely so. There is strong evidence that these values remained especially important to the Avant Garde and Countercultural parents in our sample, and more selectively and less passionately, to others as well. The eight values orientations (achievement, authority, materialism, etc.) we assessed from the third trimester through 18 years remained consistent. For example, all eight values mothers reported at the third trimester and again 18 years later were statistically significantly correlated, and the Canonical

correlation across all eight was a remarkable .72 ( $n=200$  mothers,  $p < .01$ ). All eight values were significantly correlated between mothers and their adolescents as well, with a Canonical correlation of .54 ( $n=200$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (Weisner and Bernheimer 1998: 242). The teens with parents more committed to countercultural values were substantially more to the left of the political center than either our own comparison group, and more so than the national Astin Freshman Questionnaire samples. For example, 27% of the Astin national sample identify themselves as liberal or left in political views, compared to 59% of the teens from high-countercultural families; 23% of the Astin sample say they are “right of center” compared to 4% of the teens in our countercultural groups (Weisner and Bernheimer 1998: 244-247). These teens also had significantly stronger commitments to humanistic, nonviolent, and egalitarian views than the national sample.

Although there was strong intergenerational continuity in values, these values were transformed by gender, the changing circumstances of the teens’ own generational cohort, and by familiar generational conflicts between teens and parents. The longitudinal correlations conceal considerable diversity and conflicts over values. Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate three patterns of intergenerational continuity in and transformations of values between parents and their adolescents. Families were assigned to one of three groups, based on the strength of commitment to various countercultural values: the conventional comparison sample (Comparison sample), parents with relatively high, sustained commitment to the counterculture and its values (High counterculture values commitment), and those parents initially in countercultural family lifestyles who abandoned their values over time, or were never very strong to begin with (Low counterculture values commitment). The values scores are standardized on a scale from 3 to 7.

Figure 5 shows two interesting effects. First, teens today are more materialistic in their values than their parents across all three groups. Parents and teens alike recognized that we are living in more commodified, consumerist, materialistic times, in which wealth and having the right possessions is portrayed as the very sign of individual success in America. But youth in our sample were clearly concerned about their economic futures and saw uncertainty ahead. Countercultural parents who were “voluntarily poor”, choosing artistic, social service, or other nonconventional economic pathways, also worried about their relative economic decline in an increasingly unequal society. Second, differences between the comparison sample and the countercultural parents and teens are small. Most parents moved towards acceptance of a more materialistic orientation as time went on.

Figure 6 shows a gender difference across all three groups in commitment to egalitarianism. Mothers and daughters were stronger and more consistent in their gender egalitarian values than fathers and sons, regardless of countercultural lifestyles. In addition, the highly committed parents (fathers as well as mothers) were significantly stronger in their egalitarian values than both the comparison sample parents and the less committed parents. Our conversations with parents about these values showed that most had a liberal and humanistic orientation to feminism, rather than a radical one, although a group of Avant Garde parents were exceptions to this.

Figure 7 shows still another variation in values transmission. We asked parents and teens about conventional authority and the extent to which one should accept and follow established laws and authority figures. The comparison sample is significantly more likely to accept such authority than the countercultural parents and teens. But there is also a difference within each group in their relative acceptance of authority contrasting teens with their parents. Teens who

grew up in the conventional comparison sample families were *less* likely than their parents to say that they accepted such authorities as politicians, advice books, and experts in the media. Teens in the high countercultural commitment families, however, were more likely than their parents to say so, especially girls. When we talked with adolescents and parents about these issues, it was clear that questioning authority remained an important cultural frame, but that many teens were relatively less questioning than their parents -- partly because it was their parents who were doing the questioning. Teens resisted to some extent their parents' objections to conventional authority, especially those features of contemporary life they identified with from their own generational cohort in the media.

It is not surprising that the overall correlations between mothers' and their adolescent's values are positive yet conceal considerable variation within and across families. Clyde Kluckhohn, one of the pioneers of the study of values orientations in anthropology, recognized the conflictual nature of values and in fact contrasted values orientations with their complex instantiation in everyday life (Weisner 2000). Kluckhohn described values in abstract terms, as "conceptions of the desirable", crystallizing shared ideas about what is good (D'Andrade 1995: 13). Kluckhohn actually opposed idealized values and cultural models to "life" itself and to adaptation, and he did not consider values systems as determinative (Edmonson 1973; see also Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961: 21).

Life [Kluckhohn] regarded as essentially disorderly and chaotic. Culture involved order imposed on life, and for the human species, was necessary for life to continue. . . . It was clear enough to [Kluckhohn] that not all individuals are made healthy and happy by their cultures, that in the long run not all societies are insured growth or survival by their cultures, and that successful societies do not

indefinitely preserve their cultures intact but must change them. (Fischer and Vogt 1973: 8)

Barth (1993) also warned against reifying values by concentrating on their institutional expression, and he emphasized their uses in socialization. Although values do affect behavior when they inhere in institutions, they are adaptive tools, subject to negotiation and change. Values matter most for parents in how they guide social action (D'Andrade 1991). They assist in (1) accounting for the world as it is constructed to be--making *sense* of it and why we should even act in it at all in a meaningful way; (2) providing a guide to *attentional* and appraisal processes--what should we be attending to?; (3) providing socially--sanctioned rationales for actions that are *justified* to oneself and others (before and after the fact) by invoking shared values; and (4) providing a form of *social identification* and labeling--the belief that I am a person and participate in a family with countercultural values, for instance, as compared to others who do not share those values.

It is through these mechanisms that values can shape behavior and thought and provide well being. Indeed, we found that sustained, consistent values orientations can be protective for adolescents as they face the difficulties of the adolescent transition. For instance, Garnier and Stein (1998) found that parents with higher scores on conventional achievement, materialistic, and future-oriented values over the years of our study, had adolescents with fewer behavior problems, after controlling for other factors which influenced troubles in adolescence (such as early school problems, parental or teen drug and alcohol problems, and low parental SES). Humanistic, pronatural, egalitarian values also were associated with a reduction in a range of these adolescent risk factors and delinquent behaviors – but they also were correlated with a somewhat higher risk of drug use, particularly for girls. The teens with fewer adolescent

behavior problems (such as drug, alcohol, or mental health problems, and school stopout or dropout) were more likely (again, controlling for other factors) to report a commitment to more conventional achievement goals, materialism and focus on future rather than present orientation. These teens also sustained a cluster of values including humanism, egalitarianism, tolerance, and pronaturalism, which their parents also held more strongly.

### Discussion

“How successful have these experiments in alternative life styles been? Is it easy to break the bonds of the small intimate family group...? Intellectually one can change one’s values, but it is more difficult to change one’s styles of social interaction.” (Whiting 1978: 225)

Countercultural parents by and large reproduced the American middle class model of parenting, including the mixed messages of dependent seeking and pressure for egoistic autonomy, at the same time as they were leading their generation in espousing changes in family lifestyles, politics and cultural values. They identified problems in society and family life, which they helped to change. Indeed, they had many successes with their experiments and innovations, which have subsequently diffused so widely throughout American society that few remember when these practices were not normative or at least an accepted variant to the norm. To mention just a few: growing acceptance of single parenthood by choice; unmarried couples raising children; more gender egalitarian family roles, child rearing and media and toys; the use of “natural” foods; a broad concern for a safe, clean environment; alternatives to biomedical authority and treatments; fathers participating in child birth and child rearing; the practice of non-Western religious focus and spirituality; and many others. It seems that many of these parents’ now young adult children share some of their values and commitments to

experimentation, although in a form refracted through their own childhood and family experiences and reflecting the current economic, social and historical context at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – just as their parents' values and practices reflected the parents' era of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The characteristic American ambivalence and emotional conflicts between interdependence and autonomy, community and self-seeking, nurturing responsibility towards others and seeking advantage over others was still to be found in this American countercultural sample of families, but there is also evidence of continuity in many of the ideals and values for change.

Relationships between social movements such as the counterculture, and family life and child development are complex, as Whiting suggested. There is continuity and discontinuity in both values and behavior, producing conflicts in mind and in practice. The developmental fates of children growing up in the varied kinds of countercultural families and their children were neither straightforward nor unidirectional. But they do show some clear patterns and continuities over a 20 year period. Systemic change is adapted to, thwarted and refracted through everyday cultural practices at the scale of families and neighborhoods, as well as through broader institutional changes wrought by political, economic, and cultural movements. Hence change needs to be studied from the perspective of the intimate everyday cultural-emotional world of the family and child to see many of its consequences. Change in family life and child care certainly is driven by the political economy and demography, and by the social and cultural movements of every era (e.g., feminism, the counterculture, marketing ploys to define a “generation x”) but these broad structural forces are also shaped and refracted by the power of intimate, everyday cultural scripts and routines of daily life. In the case of the children of the 60's and their now-young adult children, we can see both these engines of cultural evolution at work.

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## Notes

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Whiting used the term “dependency hang-up” to describe both the intrapsychic conflict engendered by this pattern of child rearing, as well as the inconsistencies in the behaviors and messages between children and caretakers regarding the simultaneous encouraging of seeking attention and recognition from parents and others, while at the same time encouraging autonomy and independence. The idea is that there is anxiety regarding dependency and an ambivalent desire for autonomy at the same time. Which after all is what ambivalence is: simultaneously desiring and fearing a thing or a relationship.

<sup>2</sup> Certain communes with collective nurseries and large collective dining areas, and family religious or worship times, however, clearly gave these children much more experience with other children of mixed age and sex. These included creedal groups like Hare Krishna, a Sikh commune, a Zen Center, and several groups with charismatic leaders. However, only eight of our commune groups had this kind of organization and sustained it over several years; most did not. And some parents did not really prefer this for their children, even though they had for themselves, and spent more time in their own apartment area with their children.

Communal lifestyles are usually thought of as limited in time and impact with the hippie countercultural period when our sample was collected, but they are still very active today, and were so prior to the sixties. There is a magazine (Communities Magazine. Journal of Cooperative Living) and a directory (Communities Directory). The range of collective living groups in our sample roughly reflects the range in the United States then and now. Consider this review piece from December 21, 2000, broadcast of PBS's “News Hour with Jim Lehrer” regarding communal lifestyles:

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Communities Directory is a slick, 456-page tome that is sort of a cross between the "whole earth catalog" and the "official airline guide." It leads one into an American subculture that seemingly disappeared off the radar screen decades ago. How many such communities? 700 that care to be listed, another 2,200 who want anonymity. Numbers? Maybe 12,000, 15,000 people around the country, living in places that range from urban homes to farms with several hundred acres, most on the coast; 20 such places here in Missouri; one that now ships a million pounds of nut butter a year. Variety? There's an intentional community in West Virginia devoted to clowning -- clowning. Nine such communities around the country advocate anarchy. Others focus on group marriage, self sufficiency, visions, Zen, esoteric Christianity, war tax resistance, and organic gardening. Name a gig, and there's likely an intentional community advocating it.

<sup>3</sup> As Whiting states the hypothesis:

“...styles of interaction are developed in those settings where children spend the majority of their waking hours. Our research [in Kenya and elsewhere] suggests that our [US middle class] children need less training in settings that encourage seeking interaction with adults, less time with same aged peers, which encourages competition and social aggression, more time with younger children and infants. It is caring for and associating with these younger children that encourages responsibility and responsive nurturance.” (1978: 225).

There clearly were some children who did participate in such settings some of the time, particularly in collective living situations and families who had wider kin and friendship

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networks for themselves and for their children. It is not that many parents did not try to achieve this and sometimes did so; it is that the rest of the time our data show children with relatively little sib care and, as we shall see, very high levels of parent-child dependence and seeking.

<sup>4</sup> Although the various countercultural families were high on involvement, seeking and so forth (relative to our comparison sample and cross-cultural data), there is also of course variation within the sample. Some families had less of the sense of high engagement and intimacy found in most families. I don't mean to suggest that there was uniformity within groups, only that overall differences were small between groups. There certainly were some families with low involvement and even parental distancing from children, and there were cases where typical and expectable dependency needs in children were unmet.