



Abaluyia family in Kenya

## CULTURE & CONTEXT: THE MOST IMPORTANT INFLUENCE IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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SRCD LECTURE 2005

### What is culture?

- Beliefs and practices learned in & shared by a cultural community or a population
- Held in the mind as part of cultural models or schemas. When in the form of scripts for action in context, these guide action and thought
- Culture is visible in practices
- Practices (activities, contexts) are often the best unit of analysis for studying the way culture organizes & directs (causes) behavior and thought
- Cultural communities provide pathways for development made up of activities

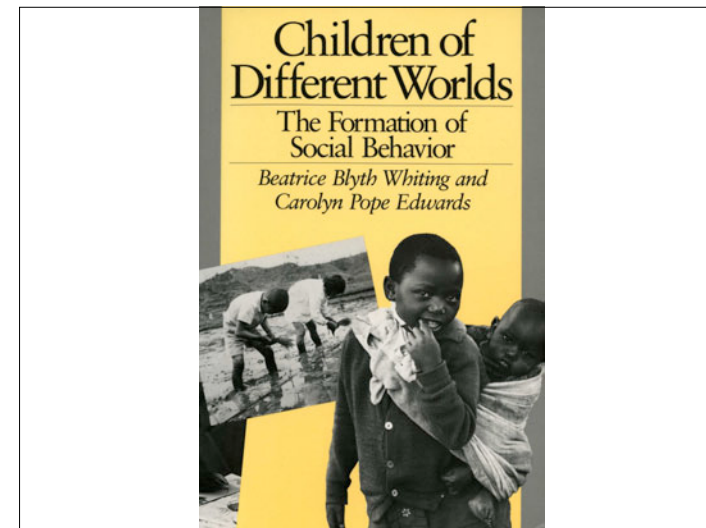
Roy D'Andrade. 1995. *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*. Cambridge U.P.  
Michael Cole. 1996. *Cultural psychology. A once and future discipline*. Harvard U.P.  
Weisner, T.S. (2002). Ecocultural understanding of children's developmental pathways. *Human Development* 45 (4): 275-281.

### Activities and Practices

- Cultural practices have six components:
  - Goals/values
  - Tasks
  - Scripts and rules
  - People
  - Motives and feelings
  - Resources
- Pathways are made up of the practices that make up the daily routine of children's lives

## Understanding Cultural Beliefs and Practices

- What do you call your belief or practice?
- How did it come to be this way? When and how did it start?
- What other beliefs or practices is it connected to?
- Where and when do you do it?
- Why is it different or similar to what others do?
- What are the reasons you do it? What does it do for your child or for you?
- What do you tell your child or others about it?
- How do you feel when doing it?
- What would happen if you did not or could not do it?
- Does it cause conflict or ambivalence for you or others? Why?
- Does it make you feel proud, happy, ashamed or...?
- If you could change some parts of it, what would you change?
- How important is it to you?



## Cultural beliefs and practices are...

- Variable in a community
- Not necessarily functional and adaptive
- Inconsistent
- Produce intrapsychic and social conflicts
- Reflect common human concerns and problems
- Changing and debated
- Better or worse for children

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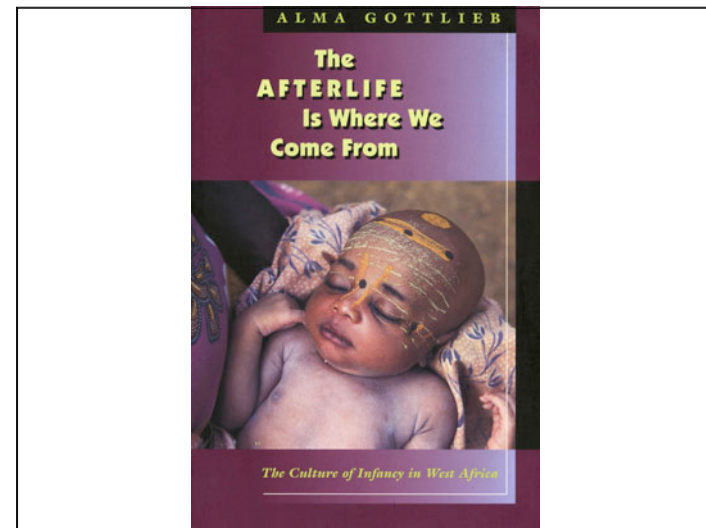
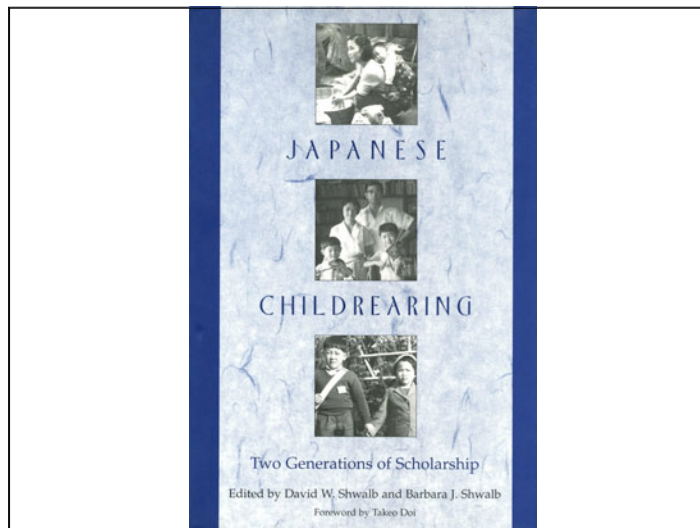
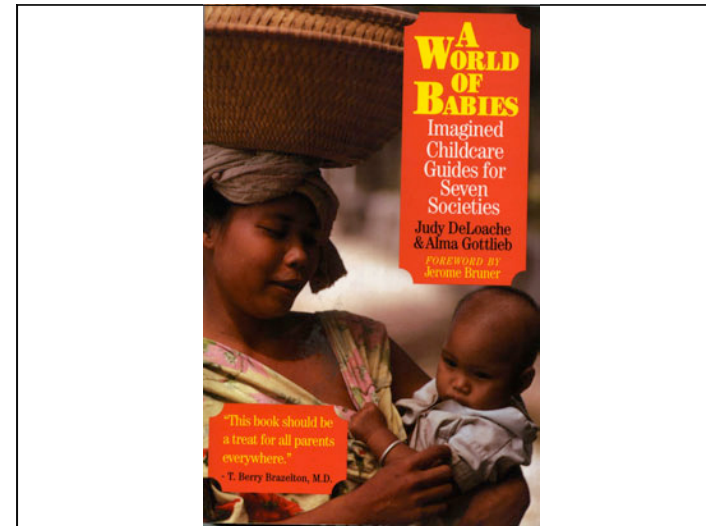
Weisner, T. S., Matheson, G., Coiro, J., & Berthelme, L. P. (2005). Sustainability of Daily Routines as a Family Outcome. In A. Maynard & M. Martini (Eds.), *Learning in Cultural Context: Family, Peers and School* (pp. 47-74). New York: Kluwer/Plenum.

## A Cultural Activity: Bedsharing and Co-sleeping

- Cross-Cultural Pattern
- US Study

## Evidence Regarding Parent-child Bedsharing -- Cross-cultural

- Mother-infant/child bedsharing, a human near universal
- A phyletic universal
- Varies across ethnicity & class in the U.S. Varies in Europe and industrialized societies
- Not limited to night, beds, parents & concerns about attachment
- Occurs as part of a complex of related practices, not in isolation
- Goals and values for development and parenting, combine with “mundane” accommodations to daily routine



## Evidence Regarding Parent-child Bedsharing In The U.S.

- Maternal obesity and heavy tobacco/drug use + bedsharing increases infant mortality and morbidity risk
- Sleep disturbance not established as a consequence of bedsharing
- Bedsharing facilitates breastfeeding even if mother & child not routine cosleepers
- Bedsharing infants have higher levels of neurological arousal synchronously with mother
- Solitary sleeping infants and toddlers use more transitional objects and complex rituals at sleep time

Okami, P., Weisner, T. S., and Olmstead, R. (2002). Outcome correlates of parent-child bedsharing: An 18-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 23* (4), pp. 244 – 253.

## Family Lifestyles Study Sample (1975-present)

- 150 Nonconventional Or Countercultural (“Hippie”) Families (Snowball Sample)
  - 50 Single Mothers By Choice
  - 50 Unmarried Couples
  - 50 Mothers In Communes
- 50 Comparison Families: Two Parent Married Couples (Random Sample)
- All Living In California In 1975, & All Euro-American

Weisner, T.S. and L.P. Bernheimer. (1998). Children of the 1960s at Midlife: Generational Identity and the Family Adaptive Project. in *Welcome to Middle Age and Other Cultural Fictions*. (Ed.) R. Shweder. 211-257. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.  
Weisner, T.S. (2001). The American dependency conflict: Continuities and discontinuities in behavior and values of countercultural parents and their children. *Ethos, 29*(3): 271 - 295

## Acknowledgements -- Family Lifestyles Study

The 200 families participating in our study

Co-Founders:

Prof. Bernice Eiduson

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NIMH

NICHD

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## Pronaturalism -- A Culture Complex for U.S. Bedsharing

Parenting Practices that are Seen as “Natural”:

Close Relationships

**Bedsharing**

Breastfeeding

Natural Foods

Carrying

Nudity/Touching

Emotionally Open And Expressive

Labile

Open Expression Of Emotions

Child Inclusion In Family Life

Environmentalism

‘Green’ Beliefs And Practices

Deemphasis On Materialism

Nonplastic & Homemade Toys

Weisner, T. S., Bausano, M., and Kornfein, M. (1983). Putting family ideals into practice: Pronaturalism in conventional and nonconventional California families. *Ethos, 11*(4): 278-304.

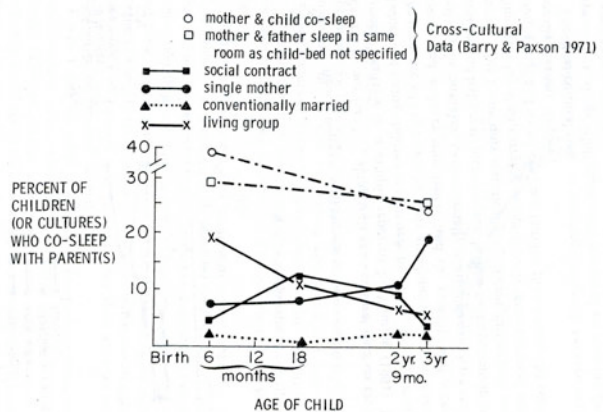


Figure 4. Percentage of children who share parents' bed by family lifestyle and age of child.

Weisner, T. S., Bausano, M., & Kornfein, M. (1983). Putting family ideals into practice: Pronatalism in conventional and nonconventional California families. *Ethos, 11*(4), 278-304.

## Variations in Bedsharing did not Impact Developmental Outcomes at Ages 6 or 18

### Age 6:

- Cognitive
- Socioemotional
- Sexual Concerns
- School Adjustment
- Creativity

### Age 18:

- Sexual Experiences
- Romantic Relationships
- Relations With Parents/Other Adults
- Relations With Peers
- Self-concept/Self-acceptance
- Theft, Vandalism, Crimes, Fighting
- Alcohol, Tobacco, Drug Use
- SAT/School Achievement

## Implications

- ... For Understanding The Cultural Practice Of Bedsharing
  - What does bedsharing mean for parents?
  - Where is U.S. On range of cross-cultural variation?
  - Where does bedsharing fit in overall family routine?
- ... For Policy
  - Offer evidence & contextual information
  - Only proscribe what is conclusively shown clearly dangerous to child or parent
- ... For Parents
  - Have a conversation with parents
  - Include the beliefs and experiences and meanings of parents
  - An ecocultural conversation: the family daily routine and its component activities

## Women, Family, and Child Care in India

A WORLD IN TRANSITION



SUSAN C. SEYMOUR

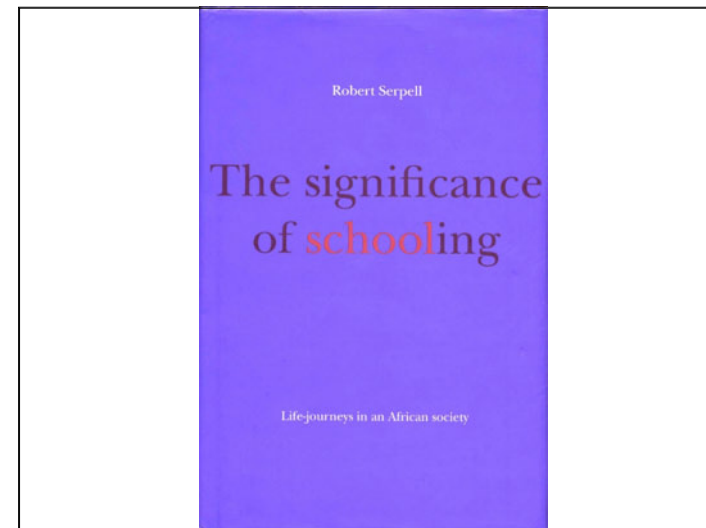
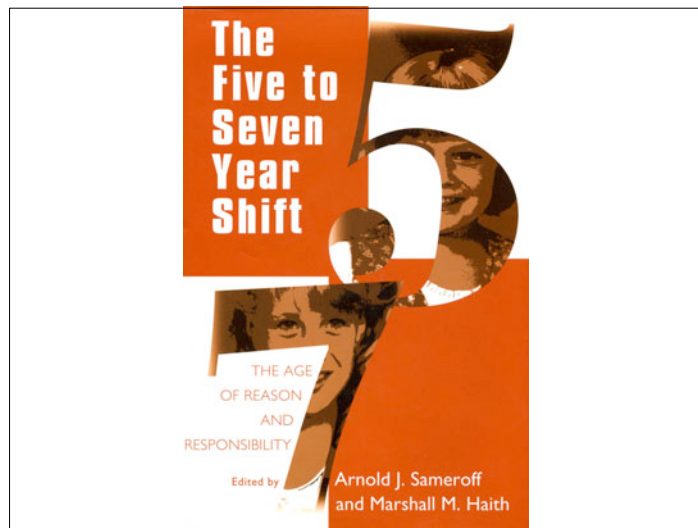
## Sibling and Polymatric Care of Children

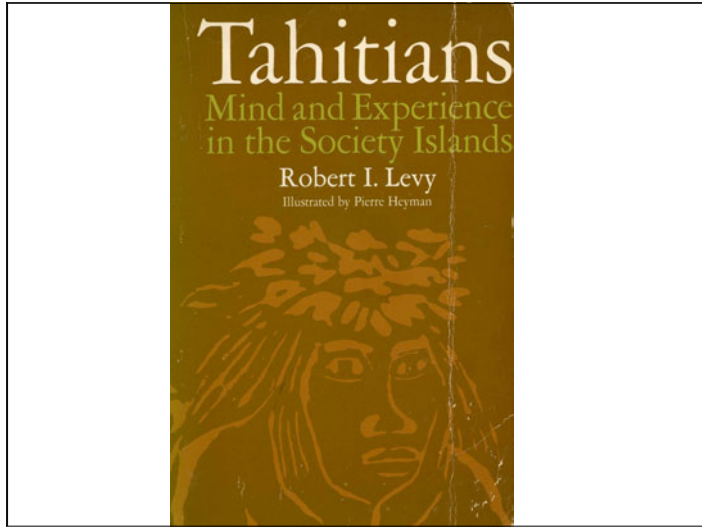
- Cross-Cultural Pattern
- US Study

## Sibling Caretaking & Socially Distributed Care

- Near cross-cultural universal
- Part of a culture complex of care
  - Heavy maternal workload
  - High birth rate
  - Large households
  - Parenting includes managing a domestic economy
  - Gender role specialization
  - Children believed to acquire valued skills
  - Play, work and childcare activities blended
  - Multi-age, multi-sex peer and friendship groups
- 4-5 year age gap preferred
- A pivot role
- Children from age 5-7 to adolescence usually caretakers
- Cognitive and developmental preparedness in juvenile period: evolutionary adaptation?

Weiner, T.S. (1987). Socialization for parenthood in sibling caretaking societies. In J. Lancaster, A. Rossi, J. Altmann, and G. L. Sherrod (Eds.), *Parenting across the life span*, (pp. 237-270). New York: Aldine De Gruyter.





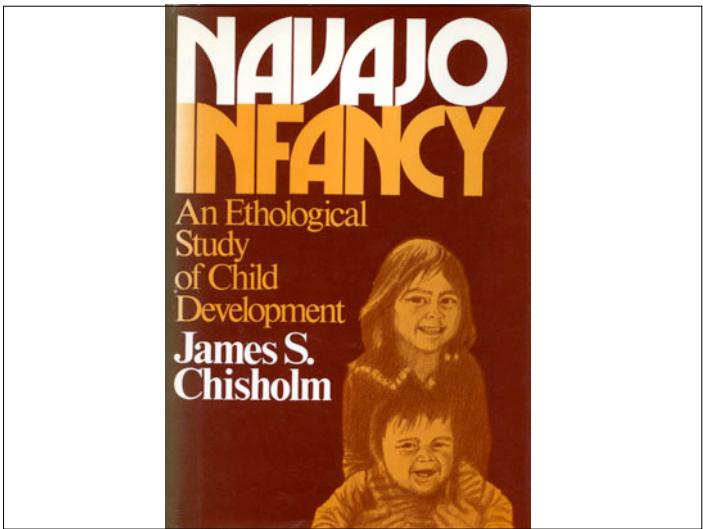
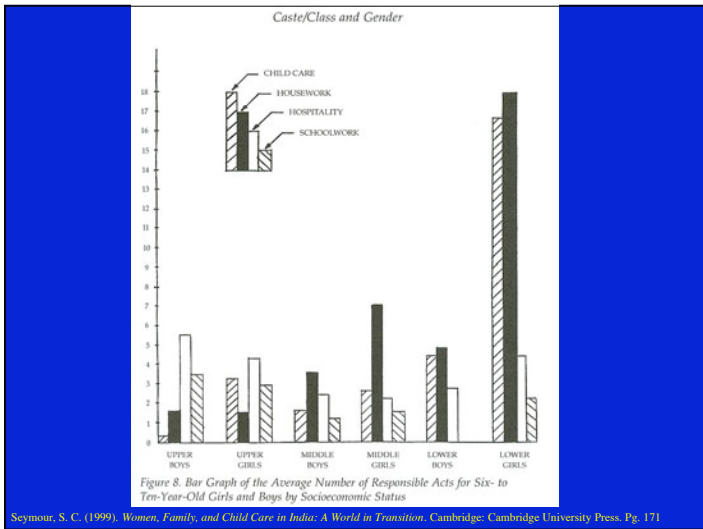
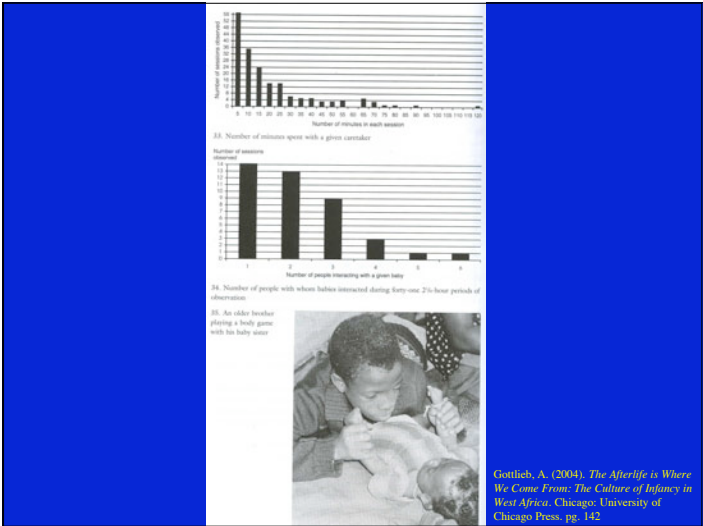
Ngandu secondary caregivers primarily older female siblings

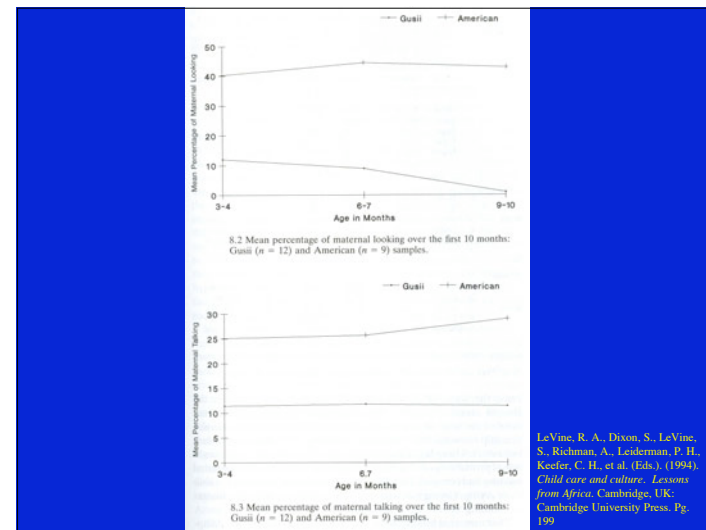
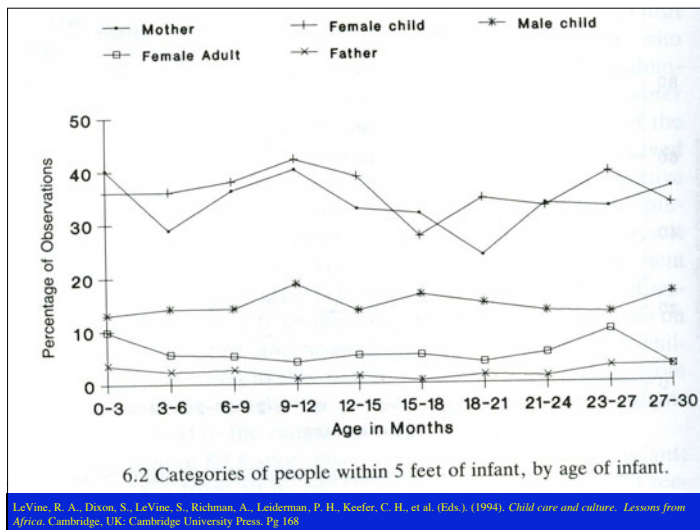
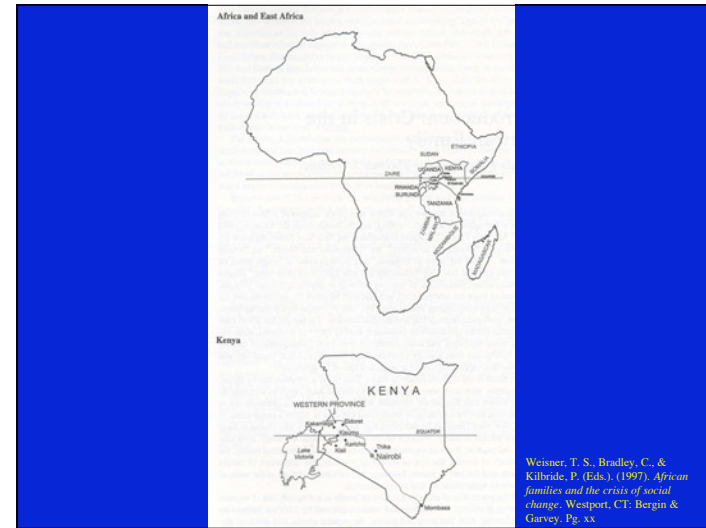
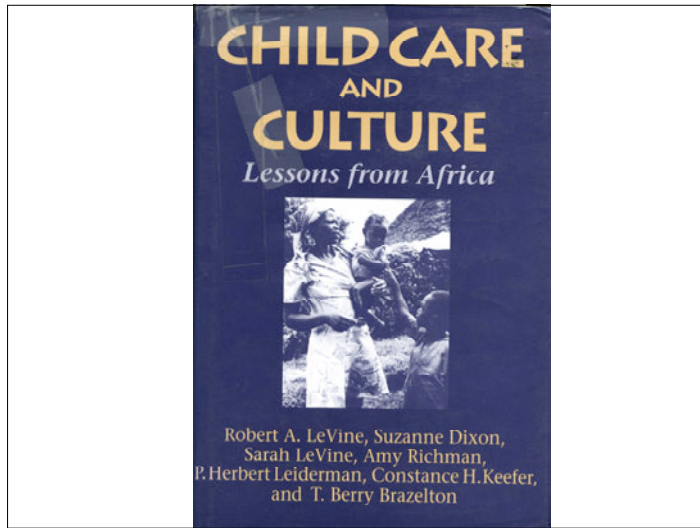
Barry Hewlett

Infant care

Weisner photo. Kisa location, Kenya

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





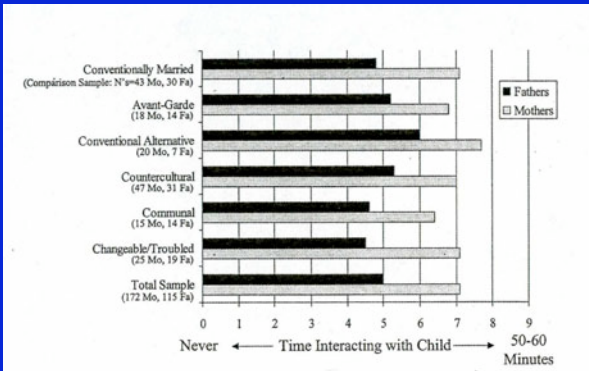


Figure 2. Mothers and fathers are frequently interacting with their toddlers during a one-hour observation period. Based on one or more child-parent interactions in each 45-second observation period for one hour.

Weisner, T.S. (2001). The American dependency conflict: Continuities and discontinuities in behavior and values of countercultural parents and their children. *Ethos*, 29(3): 271 - 295.

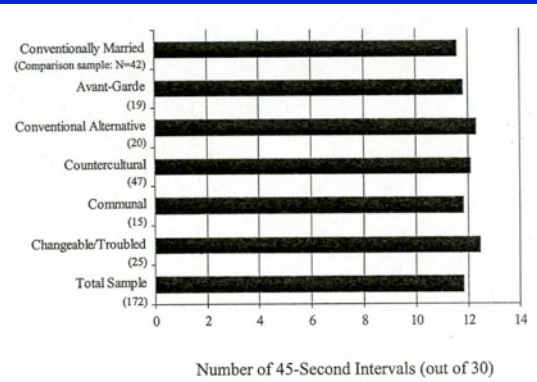


Figure 4. Number of 45-second intervals (out of 30) with verbal interaction involving child at 18 months.

Weisner, T.S. (2001). The American dependency conflict: Continuities and discontinuities in behavior and values of countercultural parents and their children. *Ethos*, 29 (3): 271 - 295



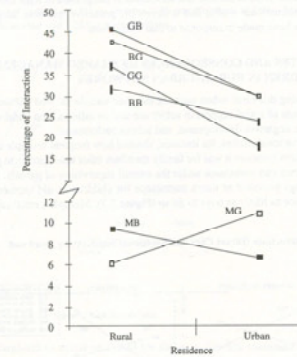
# African Families and the Crisis of Social Change

Edited by Thomas S. Weisner, Candice Bradley, and Philip L. Kilbride

In collaboration with A.B.C. Ochole-Ayayo, Joshua Akong'a, and Simiyu Wandibba



Figure 2.4 Sociable Interaction (Affection, Physical Contact, Seeks Proximity, Sitting Together) by Dyad and Residence

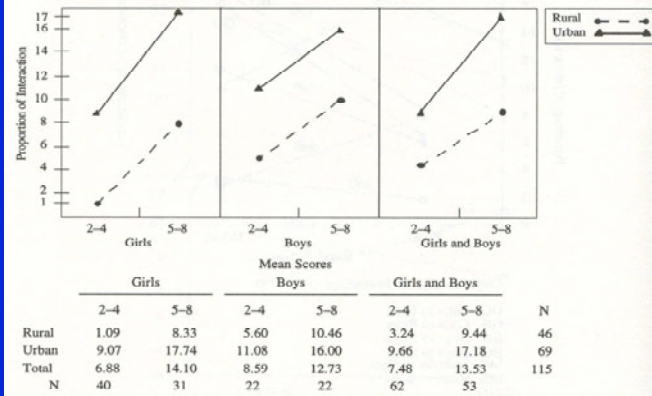


Codes for Dyadic Interaction

GG Girls to Girls  
GB Girls to Boys  
BB Boys to Boys  
BG Boys to Girls  
MG Mothers to Girls  
MB Mothers to Boys

Weisner, T. S., Bradley, C., & Kilbride, P. (Eds.). (1997). *African families and the crisis of social change*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, Pg. 30

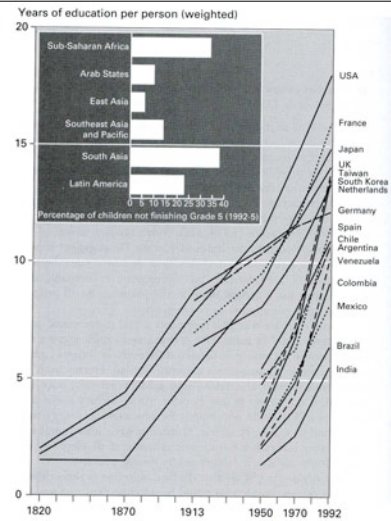
**Figure 2.6**  
**Dominance in Children's Interactions by Age, Gender, and Residence**



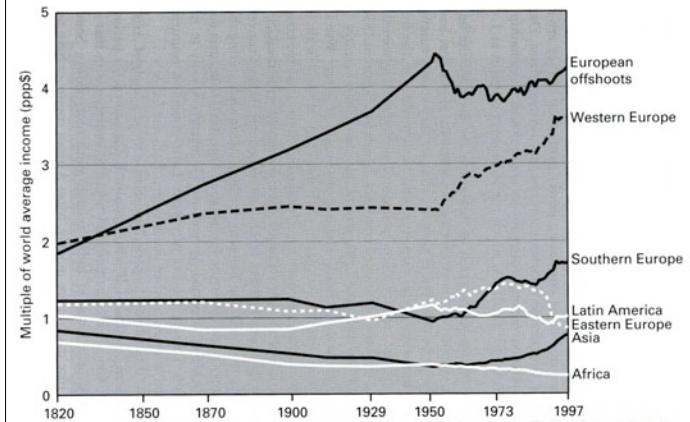
Weisner, T. S., Bradley, C., & Kilbride, P. (Eds.). (1997). *African families and the crisis of social change*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey. Pg. 32

## Four Common Questions About The Future Of Cross-Cultural Research

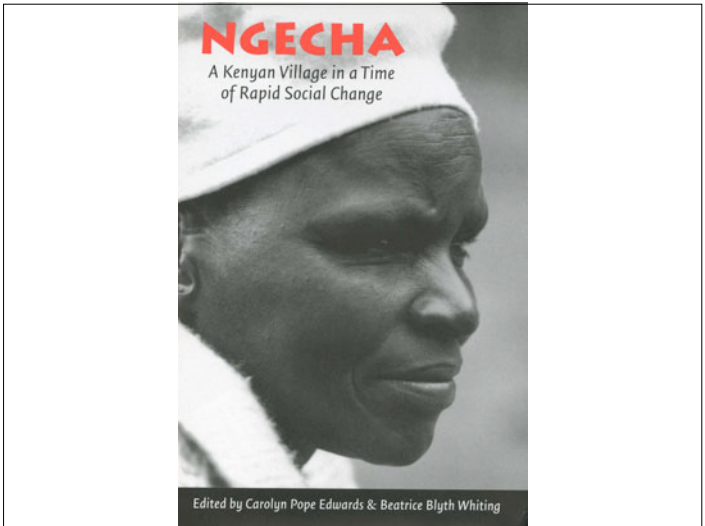
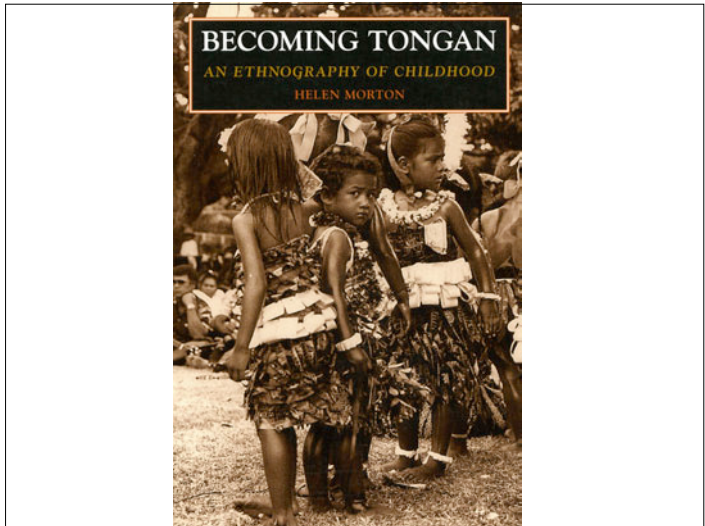
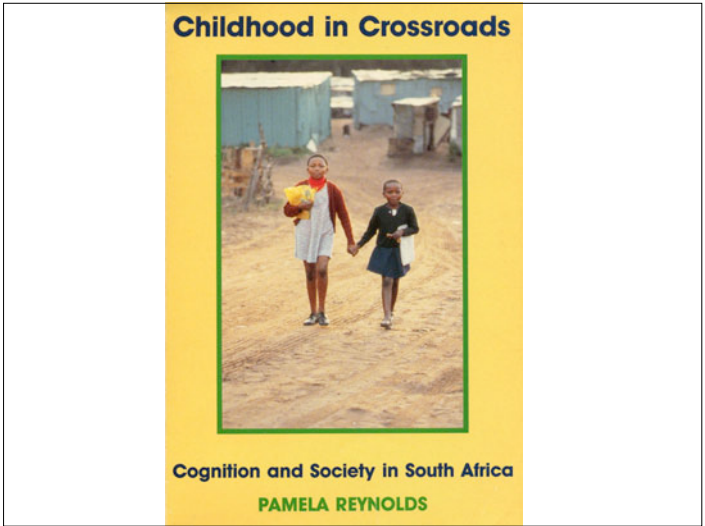
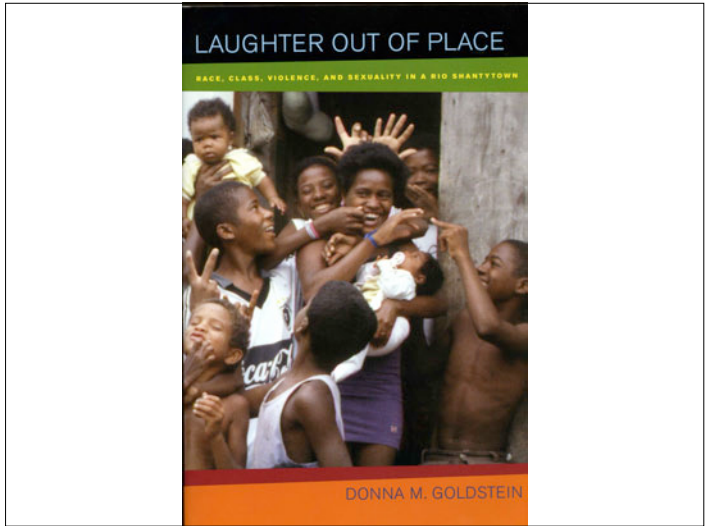
- Globalization
- Essentialization
- Individual differences
- Universals

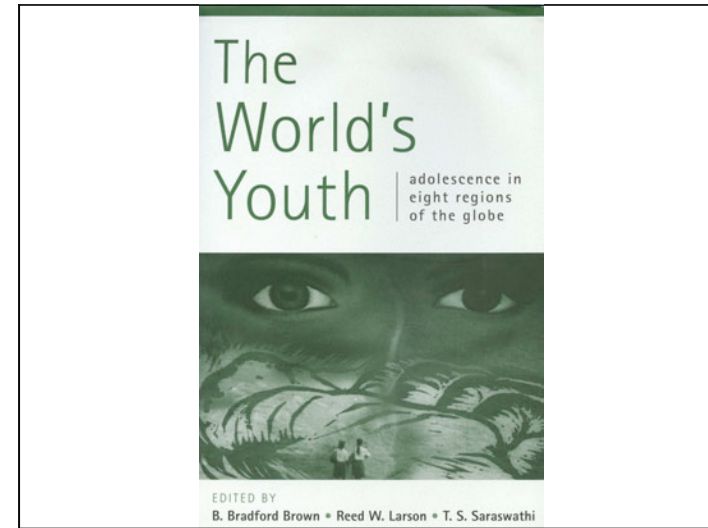
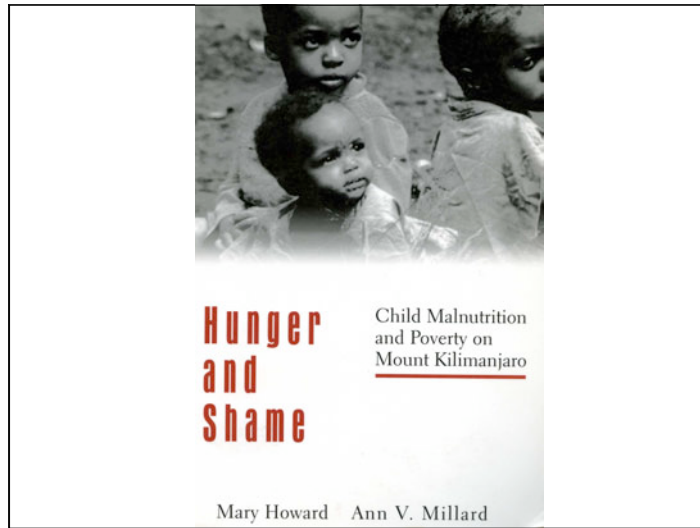


Sutcliffe, B. (2001). *100 Ways of Seeing an Unequal World*. London: Zed Books. Chart 118



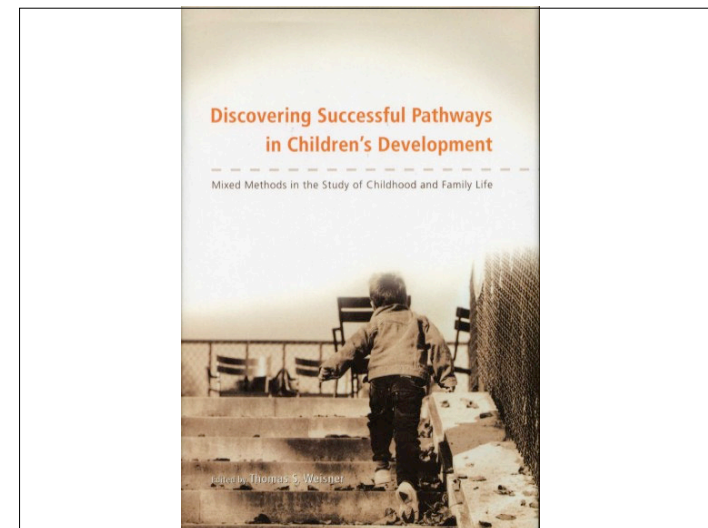
Sutcliffe, B. (2001). *100 Ways of Seeing an Unequal World*. London: Zed Books. Chart 114





“As of now, it would be accurate to say that youth policy decisions, especially in most of the developing countries, are based on guesstimates rather than recent and reliable knowledge. . . . We know virtually nothing about adolescents’ peer relationships in many countries, and very little about parent-adolescent relationships, mental health, religious attitudes, personal strengths, and, especially, how youth experience and view the world.” P. 354

Saraswathi, T.S., & Larson, Reed W. 2002. Adolescence in global perspective: An agenda for social policy. In B. Bradford Brown, Reed W. Larson, & T. S. Saraswathi, Eds. *The world's youth. Adolescence in eight regions of the globe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.





Abaluyia Children Leaving School

To download a copy of this lecture:

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