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2 Children's Social Behaviors and Peer Interactions in Diverse Cultures

Carolyn Pope Edwards, Maria Rosario Tretasco de Guzman, Jill Brown, and Asiye Kumru

Cultural socialization has long interested behavioral and social scientists, but recent advances in theory and methodology have allowed researchers to construct new and more powerful theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the complex ways in which children interact with their environments during the course of development. Studies of childhood socialization in the classic tradition of cross-cultural research were static in their approach to analyzing underlying processes because of limitations in the theories and methods available at the time they were conducted. Many studies, for example, involved straightforward associations or comparisons of levels of parental socialization pressure (the antecedent condition) with children's social or cognitive behavior (the consequent condition). In contrast, using new theoretical and methodological tools, researchers today can go beyond testing predictions about how differences in childhood environments may predict group differences in some kind of child characteristic and instead consider dynamic and transactional child-environment relations. For instance, current researchers have employed theoretical frameworks from social-cognitive development, Vygotskian psychology, and cultural psychology to characterize the children and their contexts in reframed ways and to highlight such themes as *self-socialization* and *guided participation* in cultural socialization.

In this chapter, we address the topic of *peer relations in cultural context* to elaborate how classic and recent approaches to research can be brought together to construct a set of guiding principles for thinking about the cultural dimensions of children's socialization by peers. We define peers as nonfamily children who are similar to one another in age and competence level. The discussion allows for a close analysis of children's self-initiated and self-directed behavior within peer relationships and provides ways to understand how participation in activity settings containing peers gradually channels children toward higher levels of expertise with respect to culturally valued

skills and competencies. Throughout the chapter, we argue that one of the most important remaining challenges for the field is to find ways to integrate this more sophisticated understanding of self-socialization, activity settings, and guided participation with an equally complex understanding of the role of *biodevelopmental processes* in cultural socialization within the peer context.

To begin with some definitions, *self-socialization* is the process whereby children influence the directions and outcomes of their development through selective observation, imitation, and choosing to engage in particular activities and modalities of interaction that reinforce some rather than other child development outcomes. In many or most cultures, peers relative to adults play ever more prominent roles in socialization as children leave behind early childhood and move into middle childhood and adolescence.

Activity settings are the routine everyday experiences that provide children with opportunities to learn and develop through modeling and interacting with others. They are the instantiation of the ecological and cultural systems surrounding the child and family, and the means by which institutions and prevailing cultural norms make themselves felt in the lives of children and influence their development.

Guided participation can be defined as the process by which children become actively involved in progressively more advanced activities and skills, for example, engaging with peers more competent than themselves who structure their tasks, actions, and experiences, and thereby shape the direction and outcomes of learning and development.

These concepts of self-socialization, activity settings, and guided participation readily lend themselves to a consideration of how cultural socialization may reflect not only purely social processes but also biodevelopmental processes. Scarr and McCartney (1983) have proposed a theory of genotype–environment interaction that can be applied to this kind of analysis. In their theory, there are three types of genotype–environment interactions. As we will discuss, these apply to cultural socialization within peer contexts because opportunities for peer interaction are differentially constituted and available for children across cultures.

The first type of genotype–environment interaction, *passive*, involves children being exposed to socializing environments that reflect both the children's and the parents' genetic predispositions. Parents provide their children with their genes, and at the same time, parents frame child-rearing environments for their offspring that are generally correlated with these genotypes. Children passively receive both. For example, parents who are genetically predisposed to be physically active and coordinated may create childhood environments that encourage athletic interests with peers in whatever way is culturally

appropriate (e.g., through contact with the culturally preferred sports and through training and practice in physical skills). Thus, just by being born into a certain type of family, children become passive recipients of socialization experiences that may reinforce their participation in certain directions rather than others with respect to peer interaction.

Second, the *evocative* type of genotype–environment interaction involves children receiving enhanced opportunities for socialization that are influenced by the children’s own genotypes, which may evoke or elicit particular patterns of reactions from others. For example, social companions often respond differently (within the frameworks of their cultural values) to physically active, coordinated children than they do to low-active, uncoordinated ones. Most likely, people will engage the active children in high-arousal games of some kind, for example, play with bouts of laughter, tickling, rough and tumble, running, chasing, or throwing – according to the norms of what is age, gender, and culture appropriate. Such reactions to children (and their genetically influenced attributes) by adults and peers are environmental influences that interact to exert modifying influence on children’s developmental outcomes.

Third, the *active* type of gene–environment interaction involves children coming to manage and direct aspects of their own learning and development by choosing (from within the choices culturally available) those kinds of companions and activities that are most compatible with their genetic endowments and developing predispositions. For example, as children grow older, they direct selective attention to certain kinds of peer companions in preference to others, and they seek out particular activities with peers that they have found favorable to them and that further enhance their distinguishing characteristics. Athletically inclined children, for instance, may join sports teams, practice and refine skills, and increase their exposure to physical challenge. As children select environmental niches for themselves, they self-socialize, that is, organize their own learning and development in particular ways.

In sum, children, both through genetic order and environment, create individual meaning out of their experiences. Passive and evocative interaction may predominate during infancy and early childhood stages, but active interaction comes on line during middle childhood and adolescence, when individuals gain more and more control of their daily activities, settings, and companions. From the beginning of life, children construct cognitive and emotional sense of the events and people that are the form and content of their guided participation. At the same time, as they grow older, they exert more and more of their own influence on their environments through the choices they make; they accept, resist, or transform their interactions and activities and become

co-creators of their socialization and self-socialization. As White (1996) has put it:

A child lives in a complex ecology of homes, schools, farms, stores, roads, and factories. Part of the growing child's task is to learn how to act in these behavior settings; part of the child's task is to learn how to move among them, selecting some and rejecting others; part of a child's task is to learn how to build them and redesign them. (p. 28)

The full picture of cultural socialization, then, must be understood within this framework of activity settings, complex guided participation, self-socialization, and gene–environment interactions. Culture is implicated in all of children's socialization experiences. Because culture is embedded inside everyday life, normative routines, and patterns of social interaction, cultural influences on socialization cannot be studied as a source of statistical variance separate from social class, ethnicity, or religion. Culture must be identified inside developmental contexts, for example, inside peer relationships, the subject of this volume, rather than being modeled as a source of influence on human development with its own independent pathways.

In this chapter, we seek to move toward such an updated understanding by laying out five significant implications, or guiding principles for research, about children's peer relationships in cultural context, deriving from classic and recent views of cultural socialization. Drawing from our own research studies as well as those by other researchers, we provide examples of empirical findings supporting each of the five principles; in addition, we note where we believe there are important questions and gaps in the literature.

Early Parental Scripts for Children's Peer Relationships

The first principle is that *cultural scripts for socialization in peer relationships are evident in early childhood*. This principle carries a strong line of continuity with the great body of classic research on cultural socialization where cultural differences have been convincingly established in every area, from gender socialization to training for responsibility and aggression (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2004; Munroe & Munroe, 1975). We define cultural scripts for socialization as shared childrearing routines that guide a community's behavior toward children, for example, the normative patterns of discipline (for boys and girls, different ages, etc.), formal instruction, task assignment, and moral socialization. LeVine and his colleagues consider these scripts to be part of the "cultural software" of human parental care (LeVine et al., 1994, pp. 18–19). They derive from the traditions and ideologies but shift over time

as communities adapt and respond to changing conditions and as the scripts are communicated from generation to generation.

The major point to be made here is that cultural scripts for interaction with young children are evident not only in adult-child but also child-peer relationships. Certainly, cultural differences have been extensively documented in organization and physical/verbal styles of adult caregiving (e.g., Bornstein, 1991; Field et al., 1981; LeVine et al., 1994; Morelli & Tronick, 1992; Munroe & Munroe, 1992; Nugent, Lester, & Brazelton, 1989; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Cultures vary significantly primarily along two dimensions. The first is *who* provides different elements of nurturance throughout the day (for example, whether fathers, grandparents, older siblings, or nonfamilial child care supplement maternal care), but usually one or a few individuals play the role of significant attachment figures. The second dimension is the *how*, or stylistic mode, in which care and stimulation are provided, for example, whether it is more proximal and kinesthetic or instead more distal and vocal in orientation. However, underlying these variations in interactions with infants are certain commonalities: The vast majority of social interactions with infants and toddlers can be coded as nurturance or sociability (Whiting & Edwards, 1988).

Likewise, because young children have limited social competence, their social interaction with peers necessarily follows simple scripts, such as watching, physical play, simple play with objects, and beginning constructive and symbolic play. Observational data from the Six Culture study suggest that physical practice play and simple play with objects are culturally universal, but that specific norms and cultural opportunities predict the degree to which symbolic and constructive play with peers are encouraged, depending on whether adults consider play to be a good use of children's time or just an annoyance, whether adults prefer to preserve conservative tradition or instead encourage innovation, and whether the environment provides easy access to models and materials for creative and constructive play (Edwards, 2000).

Cultural communities vary significantly along one dimension of early peer relationships: *age of access*. Three societal-level factors influence children's opportunities for interaction with peers, defined as nonfamily age-mates: (1) *settlement pattern* (the density and clustering of families in space), (2) *reproductive strategies* (number and spacing of children), and (3) *educational goals and institutions* (affecting age at which children first attend school or preschool). In places where children have more autonomy to explore the neighborhood or where communal play areas or preschool bring together large groups of children, young children have more and earlier contact with peers and more opportunity to divide themselves into sex- and age-segregated

play groups. Thus, in most of the world's (traditional) communities until recent times, infants have only rare or occasional interaction with nonfamily peers. Toddlers likewise have little peer experience and make most contact with peers as a result of their mothers' patterns of movement and sociability. They receive most opportunity to observe and make contact with peers when they live in settlements with a greater density of people and where women have more freedom of movement (for shopping, visiting, etc.). Children aged four or five years are the first age-grade to have independent access to their entire house and yard or homestead area, and cultural differences in children's autonomy and access to peer relations become more salient. In communities with clustered housing and public areas, young children typically have greater opportunity for peer interaction.

As children gain access to activity settings outside the family, they become subject for the first time to cultural scripts about appropriate interaction with peers. Observational evidence suggests that children similar to the self (in size, age, and gender) elicit a high proportion of both affiliation (sociability) and conflict and challenge behavior (Edwards, 1992; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). In a twelve-culture comparison, girls aged two to twelve, in all but one community, most frequently engaged in sociability (defined as behavior – such as chatting, greeting, singing together – whose judged intent is friendly interaction) with same-sex peers. The behavior that ranked second varied by cultural community: Nurturance was most frequent in the three communities where girls were most involved in child-caretaking, whereas miscellaneous aggression or dominance was more frequent in the others. For boys, sociability ranked first in four of the communities, whereas various forms of testing behavior (egoistic dominance, rough and tumble play, or miscellaneous aggression) ranked first in the others. For boys in particular, peer interaction was characterized by frequent tussling, social comparison, and jockeying for dominance, sometimes in the context of competitive games, sometimes not. Boys' peer interaction was especially high in a set of behaviors called "challenging." This included verbal challenges (insulting, threatening, boasting, taunting, warning, comparing the self, and inciting to competition) and physical challenges (all sorts of physical testing and rough and tumble play). True assaulting (attempts to physically hurt another) was rare. Constant moments of comparison and challenge seemed to arise in peer interaction because of the children's relative equality in size, strength, and verbal ability. Peers have similar cognitive and social agendas that make competition and comparison particularly interesting and motivating to all concerned. In sum, peer relations provide opportunities for learning about the self (the gendered self) through reciprocal interaction and social testing and comparison.

Community goals about when and where children should interact in organized settings create the major source of cross-cultural contrast in the scripts for children's early peer relations. Rogoff (2003) notes that the growth of emphasis in many societies on age-graded institutions has created conditions in which associations with similar-age people have taken precedence over intergenerational family and community relations. Whereas in the past, primary schools were the institutions that usually first introduced children to the age-graded society of peers, today the growth of preprimary care and education are creating a further massive shift in children's expected age of access to peer relationships (Edwards, Gandini, & Giovannini, 1996; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

Preprimary settings (preschools, child care) have certain common features (hired teachers or caregivers, child-oriented environments, toys and play resources). However, parents come to them with ideas about what they want their children to gain from their preschool experience. These ideas are studied as examples of parental ethnotheories, or cultural belief systems (Harkness & Super, 1996).

Hess and colleagues initiated a productive line of research on parents' and teachers' belief systems about young children's development (Hess et al., 1980; Hess et al., 1981). They developed an instrument that compares parents or teachers in terms of their developmental timetables: how early they expect young children to master skills of emotional maturity (such as not crying easily) and independence (such as taking care of one's clothes and doing regular household chores). Three comparative studies, using the same methodology, have shown that mothers in certain groups expect early mastery of verbal assertiveness and social skills with peers, whereas mothers in other groups look equally (or more) toward development of competencies for family harmony and group cohesion. For instance, in the original study by Hess and colleagues (1980), Japanese mothers from Tokyo and Sapporo, relative to American mothers from the San Francisco Bay area, showed earlier expectations for emotional self-control, compliance with adult authority, and courtesy in interaction with adults. The San Francisco Bay mothers, in contrast, had earlier expectations for social skills with peers (e.g., showing sympathy, taking initiative, negotiating, standing up for their rights) and verbal skills (seeking information, stating own needs, explaining ideas) – all clearly related to getting along and getting ahead with peers and teachers at preschool. Goodnow et al. (1984) used 32 items of the same instrument with 81 native-born (Anglo) and Lebanese-immigrant mothers from Sydney, Australia. The Anglo Australian mothers had significantly earlier expectations than the Lebanese immigrants, and the domains of sharpest difference related

to the social skills with peers and verbal assertiveness. Finally, Edwards et al. (1996) used the instrument to study parents and teachers of preschool children in two small cities in the United States and Italy that have extensive early childhood programs. The Amherst, Massachusetts (United States), mothers showed significantly earlier expectations than did the Pistoia, Tuscany (Italy) mothers on most items. The Pistoia, Italy, mothers actually had quite early expectations for social skills with peers and verbal assertiveness; their mean scores were comparable with the San Francisco Bay and Anglo Australian samples. But the Amherst, Massachusetts, sample was simply even farther out on these dimensions and had the earliest social and verbal expectations of any group tested so far.

Besides their developmental timetables, parents have many other cultural beliefs about young children's peer relationships that relate to the types of child care and preschool they favor. For example, a study of parents of preschool and child care children in four communities found strong group differences in parental descriptions of their own child's early friendships and in their ethnotheories about the importance of young children developing intimate and long-term ties with peer friends (Aukrust et al., 2003). Oslo (Norway) parents favored the value of close, long-term (multiyear) continuity with peers and teachers. Lincoln, Nebraska (United States), parents had a more academic than relational focus on school and wanted their children to deal successfully with (new) teachers and children from year to year. Ankara (Turkey) parents (an upwardly mobile sample) were low in reporting their child's friendships at preschool but valued parent-teacher and child-child relationships there. Seoul (Korea) parents were oriented to education as a means to economic success and favored their children having quality learning experiences while getting along in a large classroom peer group. They rated the importance of their child developing an attachment to the teacher as low.

In sum, beginning in early childhood, cultural differences are already emerging in caregivers' conceptions and expectations for children's peer relationships. These cultural differences are also reflected in children's experiences – both in availability of companions and access to peer contexts. Likely, there are also differences in the nature of peer interactions (Tietjen, 1989) as the contexts in which early peer contact occur also differ; for instance, whether they occur in nonorganized peer play without adult supervision or in structured preschool or child care settings where trained adults are readily present to guide children's play and help mediate disputes. Although the role of self-socialization might not be as important in early peer relationships as in later childhood and adolescence (as discussed previously), nonetheless, cultural scripts for peer socialization are already evident during early childhood.

Children's Increasingly Active Role in the Socialization Process

The second principle about peer relationships in cultural context is that *both across and within cultural communities, children's active role in the socialization process becomes increasingly evident as they grow older*. Children's own characteristics, based on their gender, age, and unique characteristics such as their temperaments, personalities, and interests, become ever more important in determining their behavior, response patterns, and choices of preferred playmates, settings, and activities. Children are active protagonists in their own development in ways that become ever more influential as their personal characteristics become more elaborated and their scope of control increases. This principle is based directly on the theory about gene–environment effects, which states that active and evocative forms of gene–environment interactions become more prominent as children grow older, whereas the passive form becomes secondary. The very environments in which children participate are both influenced by and reflective of their genetic predispositions; indeed, children become actively more able to choose their contexts and manage their experiences.

Studies examining how children become engaged in their own activities show how children play an agentic role in their own socialization experiences. For instance, Tudge and Hogan (2005) have developed an observational methodology that includes recording not only the types of activities children engage in, but also the extent to which they are engaged, *how* they became involved, and their role in initiating others' participation. They provide empirical data suggesting that children are active agents in their participation in various contexts and activities and are by no means passively experiencing settings and events structured and chosen by adult figures. Children are indeed able to choose to participate in various activities, initiate new ones, and encourage the participation of others, including adult caregivers (Tudge et al., 2000; Tudge et al., 1999). Moreover, active engagement in activities appears to be related to perceived competence over the years and varies within cultures along the lines of social class.

This ability to engage in one's own choices and to play an active role in one's experiences also increases with age. As such, children's own preferences and individual proclivities in peer interaction become more evident. This is reflected in the increasing variability in children's choice of companions. For instance, in studies of U.S. children, where most of this research has been conducted, friendships evolve dramatically between early and middle childhood (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998), likely reflecting both societal experiences at those ages, as well as developmental changes that they are undergoing.

Older children spend more time with peers (Feiring & Lewis, 1989) and attribute more importance to peer relationships than do younger children (Berndt & Hoyle, 1985; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Pitcher & Schultz, 1983). Older children's friendships also tend to be more stable (Berndt & Hoyle, 1985), and, at least for girls, more intimate (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Lastly, children's conceptions of friendship evolve to focus on more affective, motivational, and prosocial intentions and less on external characteristics (Furman & Bierman, 1983). Thus, with age, children's friendships become more delineated and stable, and conceptions of friendship become more sophisticated.

With age, children are more able to choose with whom to interact and, as such, children's own preferences become emergent. One of the most substantiated and cross-culturally robust patterns in peer relationships is the tendency to spend time with same-gender companions (e.g., Belle, 1989; Feiring & Lewis, 1987; Pitcher & Schultz, 1983). In fact, researchers have found the same-gender friendship pattern in studies using several methodologies, including observations of children's interactions (e.g., Boyatzis, Mallis, & Leon, 1999; Harkness & Super, 1985; La Freniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), nominations of friends (e.g., Graham et al., 1998), and sociometric ratings of peers (Lockheed, 1986). Children as young as 33 months display the same-gender friendship pattern (Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978). This pattern appears to increase in intensity with age until middle childhood (Belle, 1989; Benenson, Apostoleris, & Parnass, 1998; Maccoby, 1988, 1990).

Although children show same-gender preference across cultures, it is likely that contextual factors affect these patterns. For example, children in different communities develop preferences for same-gender peers at different ages (de Guzman et al., 2004). In forming this preference, availability of companions is clearly important. Harkness and Super (1985) found that same-gender friendship preferences among children in Kokwet, Kenya, emerged later than in the United States. The relatively late emergence of same-gender friendship preference in Kokwet coincided with parental and social expectations at that age, including the greater freedom that older children experienced as they moved around the neighborhood either to socialize or to do assigned chores, such as running errands, gathering wood and water, and herding. As such, gender segregation emerged when children had greater autonomy to seek out their own companions.

The ways by which children spend their time around the world and the contexts in which they choose to participate are also reflective of these evolving capabilities of children to become agents of their own socialization. Older

children have a greater array of settings that they can frequent and a steadily broadening social network with whom to interact. Consequently, children's time use and activities show greater variability with age – both across and within cultures (Larson & Verma, 1999). There is increased variability in the relative amounts of time spent with family and peers and engagement in structured and unstructured activities, as well as in other various types of endeavors. Certainly, cultural scripts limit children's choices. For example, there are large differences in the amounts of unstructured leisure time allowed to children and adolescents, depending on whether they live in East Asian or Western postindustrial societies (Larson & Verma, 1999). Children in different cultural communities also have different amounts of freedom to leave their house and yard for the wider neighborhood (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). However, children work within the allowable constraints to put their own individual imprint on the quality and quantity of their peer interaction (de Guzman, Edwards, & Carlo, 2005).

Children, therefore, become increasingly active in their own socialization with respect to peer relationships. Although the nature and frequency of their interactions are somewhat limited and shaped by the sociocultural milieu in which they live, as well as availability of companions and contexts with and in which they can participate, children have increasing capabilities to pick and choose their interactions. With age, their choices become more apparent, and variability in individual preferences becomes emergent; their active role in their own socialization thus becomes even more evident with age.

Socialization Process

The third principle is that *because children are active agents in their own socialization, they can not only make choices but can also negotiate, deflect, and resist socializing attempts by others*. Traditionally, child compliance has been a central focus of developmental research because compliance to parental requests and demands is considered such a good indicator of socioemotional competence and the development of conscience, whereas noncompliance is seen as evidence of immaturity or behavioral disorder (Abe & Izard, 1999). However, noncompliant behavior may not necessarily reflect immaturity or disordered behavior. It can also indicate resistance to socialization pressure and evidence of children thinking for themselves and participating actively (perhaps unpredictably) in the socialization process.

In the Children of Different Worlds study, children's "total compliance" (immediate or delayed) to mothers' prosocial commands and reprimands was examined for children aged three to ten years in twelve cultural communities.

Even in those communities where mothers strongly valued child cooperation and obedience, total compliance rates were only 67 and 58 percent across sex and age groups – meaning that one-third or more of mothers’ commands were not obeyed (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 151). In our recent re-analysis of the Ngecha, Kenya, observational data on children aged two to ten years (Whiting, 2004b), children’s responses to mothers’ prosocial demands were closely examined (de Guzman et al., 2003). Prosocial task demands included tending to younger siblings and infants, performing household chores, garden and animal labor, and the like. We found that, although there was a high incidence of immediate compliance (80 percent) to mothers’ demands, children also showed noncompliance (9 percent), and often negotiated with their mothers rather than simply complying (11 percent). Further, children’s rates of compliance differed somewhat, depending on the type of task – with the highest rate of compliance to baby-tending demands, followed by various household chores and labor demands. The lowest rate of compliance was to demands with regard to self-care and propriety (e.g., to act appropriately). These findings suggest that Ngecha children complied most readily to commands that seem really important to them – concerning welfare of other children – and most slowly to commands about hygiene and proper behavior.

An even more striking example of children’s systematic resistance to socialization pressure can be seen in Munroe’s (2004) findings on sex-role choices among children aged three to nine years in four cultures (Logoli of Kenya, Newars of Nepal, Black Carib of Belize, and American Samoans). The first two of these cultures are structured patricentrically, with virilocal residence patterns, patrilineal descent systems, initiation rites for boys but not girls, and lower frequency of child labor for boys than for girls. The latter two are not structured patricentrically. As an initial hypothesis, Munroe had predicted that because of salient gender differentiation at the societal level, the Logoli and Newar children would be more sex-differentiated than the Black Carib and Samoan children on two structured tasks: (1) choosing same-sex *kinship roles* (when asked, for instance, whether they would prefer to be a mother or father, son or daughter); and (2) choosing same-sex *tasks* (when asked, for instance, if they would rather herd cows or wash clothes, chop firewood or carry water). The tasks included for each group of children were established according to the results of interviews with community adults about what tasks were masculine and feminine, and Munroe expected that children’s behavior would reflect, or mirror, adult culture. However, to his surprise, Munroe found that the results were opposite to the predicted outcomes in thirty-one of thirty-two instances. Children in the more differentiated cultural settings were significantly *less* sex-differentiated on both kinds

of tasks at all four ages. These perplexing findings in a large-scale and rigorously conducted study cannot be interpreted without discussing the ways that children in gender-differentiated societies use fantasy to try out opposite-gender roles, or how children in less-gender-differentiated societies maintain appropriate self-definitions by selecting same-gender choices. Whatever the correct explanation, clearly, the children were not passively internalizing the surrounding culture and unthinkingly accepting cultural norms but instead responding to the experimenter's tasks as an opportunity to "think aloud" about gender socialization in their communities.

Children's Active Role in their Long-Term Developmental Outcomes

The fourth principle is that *children's choices and preferences (self-socialization) during middle childhood have measurable and lasting effects on their developmental outcomes during adolescence*. Less evidence exists to establish this principle than any of the others, and little of this evidence comes from non-Western cultures, but some tentative findings can be brought forward. The major point is that, as children enter the school years, they increasingly try to control and plan their lives so that they can acquire particular skills and competencies, cultivate particular forms of knowledge and expertise, and gain selected material possessions and resources. Middle childhood forecasts adolescence, and children look ahead to the teenage years and construct their own systems of meaning about what resources and opportunities will be available to them in the next few years, as well as what kinds of behaviors and demeanors they may want to learn, practice, and avoid, not only for now, but also for the long term.

Middle childhood is a period that is important in itself because of the significant developments in cognitive, neurological, physical, and socioemotional domains that occur at this age. It is also an important time because, in many ways, it serves as a transitional period between childhood and adolescence – a time in which children gain the necessary skills and competencies to compete as productive members of their society later on. In many places around the world, formal schooling begins at middle childhood, and there are dramatic changes in the expectations for children and the social experiences that are available to them (Sameroff & Haith, 1996). Worldwide, children receive an increased number of assigned tasks, chores, and responsibilities (Weisner, 1996), likely reflecting both their increasing capabilities as well as higher societal expectations that come with age. However, these patterns are somewhat different for children in preindustrialized and postindustrialized societies – with children from the latter spending less time doing chores at the

onset of formal schooling (Larson & Verma, 1999). Altogether, the skills and competencies gained and learned during middle childhood become important building blocks for further training during adolescence and beyond.

Evidence suggests that children display increasingly differentiated skills during this time – again in ways consistent with future societal expectations. Children's skills and competencies differ both across and within countries, such as between boys and girls. For instance, Maynard's (2004) study on Zinacantec Mayan children showed that skills become differentiated and more specialized along the lines of future gender roles. With age, both boys and girls increasingly performed gender-stereotyped tasks, though girls performed more gender-stereotyped tasks at an earlier age. Maynard (2004) proposed that older siblings played an integral role both in the acquisition of gender-stereotyped skills and the disjunction in the age at which they appear. In particular, older siblings provided both younger sisters and brothers with opportunities to participate in feminine tasks. Younger brothers were not necessarily exposed to masculine tasks and instead learned masculine roles through play (e.g., playing soccer). Taken together, this suggests that, at the later stages of childhood, social expectations and future social roles become increasingly reflected in children's experiences, choice of activities, and training – a sort of specialization of skills toward those that are expected for each individual's future social roles.

At the same time that children gain practical skills and competencies, they consider peer relationships to be extremely important to the pleasure and interest they find in everyday activities, including school, play, and work. Adolescence is a time in which peer relations and friendships become linked to identity development (Howes & Aikins, 2002) as teenagers move slowly from reliance and interdependence on family and test the limits of their autonomy in the context of their peer relations. Middle childhood is the time of transition to the adolescent focus on peer relationships, during which they are eager to learn the rules and roles associated with success in the peer world (Feiring & Lewis, 1991). During middle childhood, they have greater access than before to choose and create the peer contexts in which to forge their social identity. Studies (conducted in Western societies) suggest age-related patterns in children's peer relations; middle childhood marks the time when many patterns such as gender segregation become evident (Maccoby, 1998). Middle childhood is also the time at which "true" friendships and peer groups emerge – with friendships and cliques becoming clearly defined and stable relative to the more transient and superficial friendships at earlier ages. Although parents continue to hold significant roles in children's lives, children also have an increased amount of time spent with peers and decreased

amount of time with parents relative to when they were younger (Collins & Russell, 1991).

Within peer relationships, children are able to develop mutual trust and high levels of self-disclosure that will provide critical support during the early adolescent periods for youths who experienced a kind of piling up of changes, such as early maturation, starting to date, and changes in schools. Adolescents, as they mature or change goals or orientations, have some degrees of freedom to actively shift alliances within the network (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003). Children cooperatively co-construct their reality in a unique and selective manner through their peer interactions. This unique selection process is more likely to create novel and independent cultural worlds (Corsaro & Eder, 1990). Peer group interactions provide extensive opportunities for children and adolescents to learn from others (Hartup, 1992). They play an increasingly active role in shaping their own identities and social niches across cultures.

Conflict, disagreement, and change are an integral part of the peer relationship dynamics (Degirmencioglu et al., 1998). Children and adolescents also learn a great deal about themselves, their social worth/identity, and the broader cultural world they live in through experiences beyond close friendships. Brown, Mory, and Kinney (1994) reported that crowds play an important channeling role, providing opportunities for interaction with friends or the opposite sex and setting rules for approval or disapproval of particular choices. Crowds create tougher audiences for developing adolescents by putting more weight on the adolescent's apparent social worth/identity and causing feelings of awkwardness and insecurity. Peer relationships thus become an important venue through which children learn social rules surrounding interactions with others, which become increasingly important during adolescence, and these varied social relationships and social contexts leave long-term marks in their normative development (Howes & Aikins, 2002).

It should be noted that peer relationships, or at least the amount of time spent with peers, vary greatly across societies. These differences become more pronounced during early adolescence and middle childhood, when children from industrialized (and non-Asian) societies experience a decline in time spent with family (Larson & Verma, 1999). Thus, just as competency and skill development diverge in important ways during this period to forecast later social roles and expectations, middle childhood is also a time in which social experiences begin to differ dramatically. It is during this time that group differences in social relationships become very pronounced – with girls and boys diverging in their favorite companions, the size of their social networks, their preferred activities with peers, the amount of time they spend with parents

(Collins & Russell, 1991), and the general amount of time they spend with various members of their social networks (Larson & Verma, 1999).

Thus, middle childhood is an important period in many areas of development – including both in the development of skills and varied competencies as well as in learning rules and roles integral to social development. Peer relationships begin to emerge as an integral component of socialization, allowing children to learn the social rules that will likely be of paramount importance as they enter into the world of adolescence.

Social Change as a Source of Stress and Opportunity for Childhood Peers

The fifth and final principle is that *periods of rapid social change create exceptional stresses as well as opportunities for childhood peers*. Large-scale societal transformations must be considered when studying childhood socialization, because such forces as education, technology, family support, division of labor, and exposure to crime and violence have enormous impacts on the quality of children's lives. Pinquart and Silbereisen (2004) have recently noted the lack of research on the impact of social change on individual development. They discuss the lack of specific theories on psychological consequences of either gradual or abrupt social change, but suggest that Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm and life-span theories of stress and coping have obvious utility for studying the effects of social change.

When societies undergo large-scale transformations, the implications for the daily life and practices of children and families are remarkable and not predictable in advance (e.g., Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997). Coping with social change is an active process, with age variation in individual and social resources and vulnerabilities. Children's own personal and developmental agendas and their meaning systems about new events and experiences must be taken into account when analyzing how children are affected by these societal forces.

Educational anthropologists have provided many studies of differences between formal and informal educational processes and the ways in which schooling changes the lives of children in developing societies. The introduction of schools and preschools into developing societies poses issues and challenges to children, but in general these challenges seem to be ones to which children have readily adapted.

For example, the process of changing values and goals for children is portrayed for Ngecha, a Gikuyu village in Kenya studied during a five-year period of rapid social change, 1968–1973, soon after national independence

(Edwards & Whiting, 2004). Village women in their roles as mothers acted as the mediators of social change for their children by accepting values related to success in a market economy and a national political and educational system. Parents tried hard to find the cash to pay their children's school fees so that all of their children, including daughters, could receive at least a primary and sometimes even a secondary education. For the first time in Kenyan history, the majority of parents sent their children to spend their days outside the family compound and away from the multiage kin groups of playmates. The mothers were thereby sacrificing the valuable assistance of their school-aged children as child nurses and household helpers to give the children access to new kinds of skills. In school, learning symbolic skills was more valued than learning pragmatic skills. The most modernized of the Ngecha mothers were found to have altered their conceptions of what constituted praiseworthy attributes for a "good" child (Whiting, 2004a); they considered the constellation of "clever, inquisitive, confident, brave" more praiseworthy than the traditional Gikuyu values of "respectful, obedient, generous, and good-hearted."

Ngecha school children faced at least four major kinds of changing value systems, and all of them involve peer relationships (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). First, the children had to learn to accept the constant monitoring and evaluation of their behavior – their level of individual academic achievement, leadership, and athletic skill – by nonrelatives (teachers and coaches) in the presence of peers. Even in the Ngecha Nursery School, individuals received attention for coming to the front of 60 or more classmates to recite a story (Whiting et al., 2004). Second, school children had to learn to manage competition within a large peer group of children who were not kin-related, who had not been their constant companions since early childhood, and whose relative age was not their most striking ordering characteristic. Both schools and nucleated settlements provided more interaction with peers, and children in these communities scored relatively lower in nurturance and prosocial responsibility (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Third, in societies with social classes or mixed ethnic groups, school children had to learn to interact with children whose families had different conventions and lifestyles. When Gikuyu children went off to secondary school and the university with others of mixed language and tribal heritage, they began to develop moral values that were acceptable to the mixed group and oriented toward larger reference groups (Edwards, 1978, 1982, 2004). Finally, school children had to learn new motives for good performance that involved the acceptance of remote goals, such as future income, status, or power, where the reference group for success was not a kinship unit such as extended family, lineage, or clan, but instead where they engaged with others as citizens of mixed ethnicity coming together in a new nation.

The peers they encountered in primary, secondary, and postsecondary settings were the kinds of strangers who acquainted the school children with this larger reference group for future success. Ngecha children in the late 1960s were receiving what amounted to a crash course in individualistic and material values, according to Ciarunji's (2004) comparative analysis of themes in traditional Gikuyu folktales and proverbs and in their primary school reading texts.

Another well-studied type of social change with implications for children's peer relationships involves the immigration experience. Immigrant families often experience abrupt changes in their lives as they move from one country to another and tackle the arduous task adjusting to and thriving in a new and foreign place (McDermott, 2001). In such cases, family members sometimes undergo role change and an increased need for interdependence as parents and children rely on each other to successfully cope with the new pressures they experience. Possibly because of these new challenges and the increased pressures, immigrant children may be at risk for negative developmental outcomes, such as school dropout and risky behaviors. However, the challenges faced by immigrant families can also provide opportunities for growth and skill development, as parents often rely more on their children to contribute to family needs. Children are sometimes called on to participate responsibly in family tasks, care for their siblings, and in some cases, help their parents adjust to the new country – as children are often more readily able to learn the new language and ways in their new home. In fact, research suggests that role flexibility within families and the reliance on extended family members can be an integral component of immigrants' successful survival in their new country (Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 2002; Harrison et al., 1990; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Padilla, 2002). These experiences can provide valuable opportunities for families not only to be closer, but for children to acquire skills and capabilities that will benefit them in the future. This ability of immigrant families to be flexible in their roles has been found to help promote positive outcomes in children (de Guzman & Carlo, 2004).

Although there might be an increased need for members of immigrant families to rely on each other for support during the transitional period, peers can also play a prominent role in the successful adjustment of children to a new society. Children's interactions with peers can serve as adaptive means by which children can adjust to their new community in multiple ways. For example, Long (1997) notes that many studies reveal immigrant children learn language from native-speaking peers. Further, she reflects on her own experience of migrating to Iceland from the United States and suggests that

her own seven-year-old child's language learning of Icelandic was supported by peer interactions. Most important was her daughter's motivation to interact with peers and that those interactions occurred in the context of activities that were mutually comprehensible, purposeful, and enjoyable. Time for play was accompanied by material resources, such as games and toys, available as needed to support and extend the play.

In considering the effects of social change, however, it is evident that not all events and experiences represent growth-enhancing opportunities. Indeed, economic and technological transformations may mean that situations that once were positive and conducive to learning may be potentially harmful or even exploitative. To make such evaluations, we need clear definitions of "growth-enhancing" versus "harmful." We would define a growth-enhancing environment as one where children have one of three kinds of opportunities: (1) children acquire knowledge and skills that, from their own and other people's perspectives, will be of long-term use to them; (2) children encounter cognitive challenges of sufficient merit to promote their learning and development; and (3) children's level of peer interaction is sufficiently rich and complex that they can stretch themselves socially and emotionally. In contrast, we would consider an environment to be exploitative or harmful if it does not take into account the developmental needs of the child and denies them opportunities for guided participation to a higher level of social, cognitive, or emotional functioning.

Childhood labor is one important situation that may be either growth-enhancing or harmful, depending on the specific conditions. Youth employment has been extensively studied, at least in Western societies, but outcomes for younger children are less well understood. In their review, Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) concluded that adolescent employment is generally harmful – even part-time youth employment for full-time students – because it interferes with academic learning. Frone (1999), in contrast, looked at the developmental consequences of youth employment and found many positive outcomes in terms of self-esteem, responsibility, and maturity.

However, the outcomes of labor by younger children have received considerably less attention (Hobbs & Cornwell, 1986), perhaps because most psychologists and educators in Western Europe and North America assume that child employment is an exploitative situation. Throughout most of the 1800s, of course, American children were used as cheap labor in textile factories and other manufacturing jobs under conditions that were often extreme, unhealthy, and dangerous. Today, children in many societies still work in industrial, handcraft, and agricultural jobs under harsh conditions for little pay (Kielburger & Major, 2000). In 2000, the International Labor Organization

estimated that 186 million children between the ages of five and fourteen years (roughly one in six) were illegal laborers, mostly in the developing world. Of these, 111 million did hazardous work, such as hard farm labor and mining. Some 8 million were slave laborers, child soldiers, and prostitutes. In the face of data like these, the consensus of psychologists, educators, and child advocates is that childhood is supposed to be a time spent primarily in play ("the work of children"), family time, and schoolwork. A moderate amount of organized work or chores is desirable for teaching prosocial responsibility and time management, as long as it does not unduly restrict time for play and schoolwork.

Anthropological studies, however, have documented the important contribution of children to household economies in traditional communities, without making the assumption that such work is harmful for children (Porter, 1999). Rogoff (2003) argues that excluding children from family labor keeps them from having the experience of pitching in as a member of a productive unit in conjunction with people whose lives they share. In family work, they see the direct products of their work and how their role fits in the overall process. Whiting and Whiting (1971, 1975) and Weisner (1987) argue that observations of children's participation in household and agricultural work and sibling care offer empirical evidence of the development of social skills, including nurturance (offering care), responsibility, and prosocial dominance, which will be useful to children as they grow into maturity and need to manage their own complex households. Greenfield and colleagues (Greenfield, 2004; Greenfield, Maynard, & Childs, 2003) discuss how, through apprenticeship in weaving, children use processes of observation and imitation to acquire an array of cognitive skills that integrate them gradually into the adult society.

A close analysis of the quality of children's daily experiences in traditional, informal family work contexts of sibling care and household work suggests why anthropologists have responded differently to it than to organized child employment. Not only does industrial and agricultural child employment expose children to conditions that are often unhealthy and dangerous, but also it involves them in tasks that are repetitive, dull, confining, and extremely limited socially, particularly with respect to opportunities for child-child interaction.

Bloch and Adler's (1994) observations of children's developing work skills in a Senegalese village suggest a useful way to evaluate whether child labor has growth-enhancing potential. Instead of looking simply at the social and cognitive skills gained through children's apprenticeship, they consider how work is integrated with play. They define work as activity that is assigned, expected, or structured into children's days by adults, in contrast to object

play and peer play, which are spontaneous, child-directed, and unstructured by adults. In Senegal, Bloch and Adler (1994) found children "learning to labor" through processes of play they label as "play-work." The concept of play-work became necessary because toddlers' first forays into work were hard to distinguish as either pure work or pure play. For example, they tried to pull out weeds as their parents and siblings gardened, but their attempts were not particularly persistent or successful. They tried to soothe or entertain babies, but whether they did this for fun or to be useful was not always evident. Adults did not criticize their results and allowed the children to role-play work as they picked up skills of handling tools and made an imperceptible transition to real work.

Descriptions of children at work in family contexts reveal how often peer and sibling play is integrated into ongoing work (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Child nurses in Ngecha, Kenya, were observed playing with their peers while carrying a baby on their back. Herd boys gathered in the fields and incorporated games of dam-building and hunting of insects and small animals into their duties (Edwards, 2000). Likewise, traditional work contexts are often rich in peer and sibling interaction. Weisner (1989) and Edwards and Whiting (1993) have argued that a close analysis of the stream of interaction in rural Kenyan households shows young children are involved in a rich social life that contains a continuous blend of counterposed intentions, including behaviors that can be interpreted as nurturant, sociable, teasing, provocative, dominant, and aggressive. Weisner (1989) speaks of a distinct Abaluyia cultural style that confronts children with cognitive and emotional challenge that guides them to learn culturally valued modes of skillful social interaction and many different techniques of persuasion. Crying and whining may get an adult to intervene, for example, but on those occasions when the adult is not present, the child must learn to fight back, outwit, or better yet, deflect the other child's behavior into playfulness. The young child thereby is stimulated to cognitively discriminate between different kinds of social situations and to develop a rich repertory of behavioral responses.

In conclusion, we argue that it is important to look carefully at children's activity settings and see how much scope they contain for self-paced learning, playful and rich interaction with other children, and initiative or problem solving. Insofar as activity settings are lacking in these possibilities, they become exploitative rather than development-enhancing. In extreme cases of child labor, normal gene-environment interactions are inhibited. Although children may still be receiving messages and socializing responses from others that are influenced by the child's genotype (evocative), children are not choosing socializing settings or self-selecting into environments they find favorable.

The flexibility of moving between the imaginary and the real is absent. Play is divorced from work and schoolwork, which subsequently divorces the child's own environment from his developmental agenda.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have laid out five principles to guide research on peer relationships in cultural context that reflect both current and earlier bodies of research literature. According to recent views of socialization, children are seen as active agents in their own development – with the degree of their self-socialization constrained by their contexts, available companions and choice of activities, and parental cultural belief systems about child development and child-rearing. The parental ethnotheories surrounding peer relationships are evident from children's earliest infancy and continue to influence the company that children keep, the settings they occupy, and the activities that take up their time throughout middle childhood – a period that forecasts and prepares the child for future social roles. With increasing age, however, children's abilities to self-select become increasingly evident as their own preferences, proclivities, and scope for choice and control become emergent. Furthermore, their abilities to negotiate with socializing agents and even to resist socialization pressure also increase. The increasing importance of self-socialization processes is reflected not only in their noncompliance to adults but also in their interaction and relationships with peers. Clearly, *who*, *how*, and *how much* children interact with different social partners is influenced by the dynamics of individual characteristics and by contextual factors.

Finally, continuing the theme of children as active agents, the chapter concludes by urging the need for more studies to examine peer relationships under current conditions of social change. Research in child development has traditionally been dominated by studies of normative development, and very little is known regarding the role that either abrupt or gradual societal change, with its incumbent stresses and risks, may potentially bring about for child development. Periods of social change can be experienced as difficult and challenging, but they can also bring about promising experiences that provide the child with significant developmental opportunities. Distinctions need to be made, however, regarding which opportunities are harmful and which are enriching.

Although newer models and methods of examining cross-cultural socialization are emerging, many gaps in research continue to exist. The greatest body of literature describes cross-cultural (and within-cultural) differences in children's settings, activities, and companions, and adults' cultural belief

systems around child development and child-rearing. However, much less research can be found on the interplay between children and their environments across developmental (and historical) time. We know more about what is done *to* children than about how children interpret and respond to their socializing agents and settings and, in general, how they actively contribute to their own socialization. We need a better understanding of how children's biodevelopmental dispositions, constructed meaning systems, and interests, preferences, and choices relate to their peer interactions and relationships across cultures and how their self-guided participation in peer settings influence their long-term development. For example, although issues of same-gender preference, gender differences, and the like are well documented in U.S. samples, much less is known regarding the extent to which these are also found among non-U.S. children and how important they are to developmental outcomes. Children in all societies seek out particular kinds of companions for play and learning, but how much of what kinds of peer experiences are required for healthy development is still not known. Likewise, the peer issues faced by children around the world as they cross over into adolescence need to be further explored. Among U.S. adolescents, several important issues have been identified with regard to peer relationships, such as the increasing importance of these relationships for identity development. However, it is not clear to what extent these phenomena are unique to North American populations. Moreover, if adolescent experiences differ across societies, and middle childhood forecasts and prepares the individual for that period, then individual, cultural, and contextual influences on preadolescent experiences need to be better understood. Although it is now widely recognized that children actively shape their own experience, researchers still seem to assume that children's behavior passively reflects, or mirrors, adult values and beliefs. They continue to ignore or underestimate children's evident capacities to ignore adults, noncomply, resist, and improvise their own meanings. Indeed, if the older generations in the world's societies are to support and take full advantage of children's immense creative potential to navigate complex and rapidly changing environments, then we all need to learn much more about children's growth, development, and adaptation in the context of the ambiguities, risks, and multiple pathways encountered in contemporary life worldwide.

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