2015

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Edwards, Carolyn P.; Ren, Lixin; and Brown, Jill, "Early Contexts of Learning: Family and Community Socialization During Infancy and Toddlerhood" (2015). *Faculty Publications, Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*. 120.  
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Early Contexts of Learning: Family and Community Socialization During Infancy and Toddlerhood

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Abstract

The contexts of early learning and socialization are diverse and complex but not without predictability. The tension between predictability and variation fascinates researchers interested in childhood and culture and motivates careful exploration of different developmental niches to better understand socialization during infancy, toddlerhood, and early childhood. Contexts of early socialization vary in the people and activities present, and the beliefs and norms of caregivers and daily companions. The chapter utilizes anthropological constructs (household structure and composition, settlement patterns and subsistence level, mothers’ workload, gender division of labor, intimacy levels between husbands and wives, and cultural roles and norms pertaining to sibling caregiving and fostering of children) to better understand how parents, siblings, grandparents, extended kin, foster families, early childhood centers, and welfare institutions work together to raise healthy children. The authors explore how opportunities and constraints as well as expectations and demands influence children in enduring ways.

Keywords: early learning, socialization, childhood, culture, development

Relationships provide the framework for young children’s development. When relationships are predictable, responsive, and reciprocal, they help children break down the incoming stream of information from the outside world so they can assimilate, understand, and trust it. The rhythms of close relationships with parents, siblings, extended kin, and other caregivers in the community support cognitive, social, emotional, language, and motor development in young children. Relationships provide more than the context of early learning: “development takes place within, through and for relatedness” (Josselson, 1996, p. 2). Thus, relationships provide not only the setting but also the constituent elements and motivation for early development.

This chapter focuses on family and community socialization practices and goals during the early years of childhood, with a particular focus on infancy and toddlerhood. Using evidence from diverse cultures—drawing from multiple scholarly disciplines and methodologies—we show that different early contexts for socialization vary in their objective parameters (people present, activities, and experiences provided), as well as in their subjective dimensions (values, beliefs, and norms held by the socializers). In our view, these objective and subjective differences in turn play out in different kinds of opportunities and constraints, on the one hand, and expectations and demands, on the other, that influence children in lasting ways. In forefronting these features, we assume an ecocultural perspective, originally formalized by John Whiting (1994) and now reframed by contemporary scholars such as Sara Harkness and Charles Super, Heidi Keller, and Carol Worth-
man (see Edwards & Weisner, 2010). This functionalist perspective links history, ecology, and maintenance systems (e.g., subsistence, settlement, household) with cultural belief systems, adult routines, and the learning environments and developmental outcomes of children.

In addition to synthesizing findings from past research, we also offer short portraits of child and adult behavior gathered from our own research studies conducted in Italy, China, Kenya, Namibia, and the United States to illustrate the concepts and arguments we advance. In this way, we try to provide what we regard as "memorable instances" and to draw the reader inside the material in order to spark new insights and questions about the contexts of early childhood development in the contemporary world. We open with one such example from ongoing research in Pistoia, Italy, that illustrates the first trust- and relationship-building stage as a child transitions into an infant–toddler center. This caregiving context involves intersecting systems of family and center, functioning within a municipality that explicitly invests in public child care as a way of fostering a "culture of childhood."

**Pistoia, Italy.** It is early morning, and baby Clara (10 months old) and her mother are entering the door of infant-toddler center, Il Grillo ("The Caterpillar") for the first time. Clara and her family live in Pistoia, a city of about 90,000 people, located between Florence and Pisa in the region of Tuscany. As in other Italian cities, educators have been working for several decades together with parents and city administrators to build high-quality public systems of care and education. Pistoia aims to be a "child-friendly city," with enrichment and support programs designed for all age groups of children.

In the infant programs, educators have put much thought into creating welcoming environments and transition procedures to create community and belonging. As Clara and her mother come into the center, a teacher named Franca comes forward to greet them. Clara’s mother invites Franca to hold her baby, and together they go around and look at the spaces. Franca says, "Here there will be notebooks compiled by both parents and teachers—a notebook to go back and forth. You can write what you see, and we will respond what we see." Then they sit down to talk in a specially prepared area. The teacher and mother fall into rhythm in offering Clara toys from a basket, while she contentedly plays. Clara’s mother describes what she likes to eat, how she likes to go to sleep, and why the parents have decided to bring her to the center. Throughout the week, Clara’s mother leaves her for gradually lengthening periods, as the baby becomes more and more comfortable. By the end of the week, the *inserimento* ("settling in") process is complete, free of abrupt separation and distress.

(adapted from Edwards & Gandini, 2001, pp. 187–190)

Beliefs and values provide the context for human interactions and relationships in any historical time or community setting, of course. In northern and central Italy, core cultural values about the community’s responsibility toward its children have led to the development of welcoming public services for even the youngest children. In other cultural contexts, child care services may not be as well developed, but systems of support include (to varying degrees) mothers, fathers, siblings, extended family, and hired help or child care providers.

Throughout history, parents have needed to find ways to share the care of young children while they perform other important work for their families. Therefore, they have created ways to enlarge their children’s circle of relationships while they are busy or unavailable. It has always been to parents’ advantage to have their children form important secondary relationships that can be depended on on a routine basis. Furthermore, societies must make provision for children who are orphaned, abandoned, or otherwise in dire need, and this can be done through systems of fostering or institutional care. In this chapter, we examine two general types of socialization contexts: *family-based settings*, including child fostering; and *early care and education services*, including child welfare institutions. We discuss the full range of contexts, but the portraits we highlight represent examples we would consider to promote generally healthy growth and development. These examples illustrate that young children can thrive in different kinds of contexts when conditions are met for promoting emotional security, complex learning, and rich interaction with the social world.

**Adult and Sibling Care in the Context of the Family**

Cultural patterns of childrearing differ across time and place according to such macrofactors as climate, geography, demographics, economics, political systems, and technology, yet they are not totally random and unpredictable. Indeed, underneath the variation, the care of infants and toddlers has many common features cross-culturally because all societies desire their
children to survive and thrive. Parents everywhere face certain similarities in the tasks of caring for and socializing infants and toddlers, even though their styles of caregiving are influenced by the features of their daily cultural routines, resources, and roles (Harkness & Super, 2002; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), as well as by non-normative characteristics that create heterogeneity.

Salient cross-cultural similarities arise because infants and toddlers have universal needs for primary care related to health, nutrition, and safety if they are to stay alive and grow. Furthermore, babies' immature, floppy bodies need to be physically supported (held, carried, or contained) much of the day. As their motor systems develop, toddlers seek physical challenge and freedom to move and practice reaching, sitting, crawling, and walking. Their perceptual and cognitive systems likewise need visual and object stimulation to promote learning. Finally, infants and toddlers have universal needs for attachment and social companion-ship requisite for social and emotional health.

Parents as Caregivers

Yet, in spite of these general requirements, the relational contexts for infant and toddler socialization vary greatly, as do parental belief systems, or ethnotheories, about what children need. For example, who provides the caregiving and where it takes place can be distributed in many different ways within and across cultural communities. Yet, during the nursing period, mothers are the most important caregivers in more than 80% of the world's societies (Barry & Paxton, 1971). Mothers are more likely than any other single individuals to feed, clean, hold, and interact with their infants, but how they do so varies widely. For example, patterns of cultural variation are seen in how much mothers carry and hold their babies during the day; where they put them to sleep at night; how early they wean them and how abruptly; whether they interact with them in a more distal and verbal or more proximal and kines-thetic style; whether and how they involve them in their daily work and leisure activities; what style of discipline and control they use; how much they play with them and interact face to face; how early they expect independent skills of hygiene, dressing, and feeding; and what kinds of politeness and mature behavior are expected. These differences are described in several chapters in this volume; therefore, here, we focus on the different relational contexts of early socialization.

Although mothers are usually the primary caregivers of young children, they are not usually the exclusive caregivers. Instead, shared caregiving that extends the child's circle of consistent relationships is the norm. Sometimes these supplementary caregivers are family members, for example, fathers, grandparents, or siblings. However, today, in many parts of the world, supplementary nonfamily caregivers or professionals are often employed to look after children either in their own or the child's home or in a group care setting. These systems demonstrate the range of possibilities for appropriate infant–toddler care and provide strong evidence that sharing care within and beyond the family is as much part of the human story as is the mother-exclusive pattern.

What factors best predict variations in the mothering role with infants and toddlers? Researchers have established that the following factors are of paramount importance: household structure and composition; settlement pattern and subsistence level; mothers' workloads; the gender division of labor and level of intimacy/distance between husbands and wives; and cultural roles and norms pertaining to sibling caregiving.

Household structure and composition are clearly important. When people live in extended families, with many close kin in the compound or in nearby courtyards, then grandmothers, aunts, and co-wives (women married to the same husband) often assist the mother in childbirth and infant care. In contrast, it tends to be the father who comes next to the mother in involve-ment in communities where people live in nucleated, monogamous family households—especially where population density is low, females contribute heavily to the food supply, and husbands and wives interact in their daily work and social activities. Thus, it is not surprising that many scholars have found that fathers in hunter–gatherer or foraging societies tend to be generally high in involvement with infants and tod-dlers (Fouts, 2013; Hewlett & MacFarlan, 2010; Katz & Konner, 1981; Marlowe, 2000). For example, Aka and Efe pygmy fathers of Central Africa can be highly participatory; Aka fathers have been observed to spend over half of their day holding or being nearby their infants, and in fact are very affectionate, hugging and kissing their babies while holding them even more often than do mothers (Hewlett, 1991). Yet, even in these nomadic hunter–gatherers, the salience of the father may vary across the year. For instance, Efe and Aka may spend part of the year in settled villages and part
of the year wandering the land in small bands (Hewlett, 1991; Morelli & Tronick, 1992). In the settled villages, surrounded by other adults, fathers are less active in infant care than they are when they are isolated with their wives and children in the bush, under which situation their help and support is more needed. Thus, fathers’ roles are flexible depending on the family’s living situation, suggesting that fathers are capable of picking up their level of child care depending on what is asked and needed from them.

It is interesting to compare these findings from the Central African foraging communities with those from other type of societies. Marlowe (2000), using data from the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample, found the highest level of father involvement in foraging peoples; followed by the horticultural peoples (shifting cultivators, working with hoes and machetes); and with the lowest level among pastoralists and settled agriculturalists (farming with plows and draft animals). In all societies, fathers play roles as policy makers, figures of authority, providers of material resources, and, where necessary, warriors and defenders.

The further importance of ecology and subsistence—as played out in mothers’ workload and the division of labor between men and women—is evident in findings from the Children of Different Worlds Study (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). This book is based on observational data collected between 1965 and 1975 by 10 collaborators and ourselves, as well as on data reanalyzed from the 1954–1956 Six Cultures Study (Whiting & Whiting, 1975) and spot observation samples collected under the leadership of Lee and Ruth Munroe. In contrast to the Central African hunter-gatherers, the majority of samples in Children of Different Worlds were traditionally part of tribal societies with pastoralism and settled agriculture as the basis for subsistence ("middle-level" societies). Several others were part of complex, stratified societies with economies based on intensive agriculture and/or industry. None was a foraging group. The total corpus of data included communities located in the countries of Kenya (six communities), United States (three communities), India (two communities), and Guatemala, Liberia, Mexico, Okinawa, Peru, and Philippines (one community each). Looking at the rank orders of coded behaviors, and poring over the qualitative ethnographic data, we concluded that we could see at least three different "profiles" of maternal behavior with children aged 3–10 years, which we called the "training mother," found in all of the sub-Saharan agricultural communities; the “controlling mother,” found in other agricultural communities of North India, Philippines, and Mexico; and the “sociable mother,” found only in the United States.

In all of these samples, mothers had the primary responsibility for infant care, but the amount of paternal responsibility varied widely. Ethnographers made an estimate of the fathers’ participation in the care of infants and toddlers. The Kenyan fathers were judged to be the least involved in the care of infants (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, table 2.9, pp. 64–65). Polygyny was a favored form of marriage, and husbands and wives often ate, slept, worked, and socialized separately, with the father frequently having a hut or room of his own. Furthermore, sexual relations between husband and wife were often prohibited for a long postpartum period to prevent an immediate next pregnancy that might threaten the nursing mother’s milk supply. As reported by the ethnographers, the Kenyan fathers never cared for infants even in the mothers’ absence and rarely held the child even at home. The fathers were more involved with toddlers but still did not care for, carry, teach, or take charge of them more than occasionally. The most involved fathers were found in Claremont, California, and Orchard Town, New England, where marriage was monogamous, husband and wife slept and ate meals together, and husbands assisted women in their household work.

It is not surprising that the US samples showed the highest level of father involvement, but it was still relatively low. Today, however, throughout the industrialized world and increasingly in the developing countries as well, mothers have been drawn into the labor force and, at the same time, are more likely to be separated from the extended kin network that prevailed in the traditional rural community. Moreover, their children of middle childhood age, potential “helpers at the nest,” are in school all day. These factors all lead to an increase in father involvement and the use of child care systems (e.g., Haas & Hwang, 2013; McFadden & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; US Census Bureau, 2010).

Norms favoring father caregiving are found to be rising in middle-class urban-industrial populations of Europe and North America, especially as more mothers work outside the home (Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, 2013). In most European countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Italy, France, and Germany, as well as in Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, shared caregiving (both inside and outside the family) is fostered
by government policies that are intentionally designed to support the family and women’s participation in the labor force (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006). The Scandinavian countries are famed for their generous policies of paid parental leave that provide parents with an earnings-based wage replacement of 80–100%, up to a high-income ceiling (Haas & Hwang, 2013). To encourage fathers to take advantage of these benefits, Norway and Sweden have achieved some success by experimenting with policies that extend the period of paid parental leave for families when both the mother and father participate.

Although the patterns of change are complex, some studies of contemporary families find a prominent role for fathers. For example, Edwards, Logue, Loehr, and Roth (1986, 1987) conducted spot observations on 38 infants and toddlers aged 2–30 months living in a college town in Amherst, Massachusetts. The study had a matched-pairs design. Half of the children attended a high-quality, university-based infant/toddler program that was open mornings only. The other half (matched by age and sex) also had mothers who were working or studying at least part-time, but these children were cared for in home-based arrangements (by fathers, family day care providers, babysitters, etc.). The study provides a detailed picture of the ecology of the children’s lives. Spot observations were conducted either in person or by telephone, in morning, afternoon, and evening time periods, 7 days a week, over 8 months, for a total of 1,232 observations (with 25.8% of the center-care children’s observations collected at the center). In the at-home observations, mothers were found to be in the immediate vicinity (“interactional space”) of the child in 73% of the observations, compared to 44% for fathers. Mothers were the “closest adult” for 64% of the observations, compared to 33% for fathers. Content of the observations revealed fathers to be very involved in both play and caregiving activities. Similarly, Harkness and Super (1992) employed an in-person spot observation technique to study father involvement in another Massachusetts town, Cambridge. These fathers were directly involved in caretaking from the beginning of the infant’s life, holding steady at about 15% of the time during the child’s first 5 years; fathers engaged in feeding, bed/bath routines, play, book reading, outings, and other activities. Thus, both these studies have demonstrated that fathers are very involved in both play and caregiving in children’s early lives.

### Siblings as Caregivers

Sibling relationships are another context of infant and toddler socialization especially salient in middle-level societies, that is, tribal societies with subsistence economies based on settled agriculture, herding, and fishing (Cicirelli, 1994; Maynard, 2002; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Sibling care of infants is most common in situations in which women have several children and heavy workloads, and fathers are not involved, as in the Kenyan samples in Children of Different Worlds.

In Ngecha, Kenya, for example, the workload of mothers is very heavy (Edwards & Whiting, 1993; 2004). At the time of our study and continuing into the present, the majority of mothers were responsible for obtaining water, cooking fuel, and fodder for the milk cow. They were the principal gardeners, responsible for raising maize, beans, and other vegetables for family consumption and selling any surplus in the local market. These busy mothers often designated a daughter aged about 6–10 years as “child nurse” for an infant, although they would readily involve a son if no girl of the right age was available. The child nurses carried their infants around on their backs or hips while they played or did chores, and when these charges grew older and became ambulatory, they incorporated their toddlers into the little group of children (usually close relatives) who played together in the roads and fields near the homestead. Child nurses might be expected to care for infants for 2–4 hours daily while their mothers worked in the garden or performed household chores—more time than seen in most of the other study communities. Yet, backup was available; usually, the child nurses kept the babies, by now at least 4 or 5 months old, in or near the homestead, where aunts, co-wives, or grandparents could be called upon to help out when needed in an emergency.

In our many hours of observational records of Kenyan child behavior, we mostly find examples of attentive care by older siblings. This finding accords with other studies documenting sibling teaching and nurturing (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1989; Zukow, 1989). For example, with respect to cognitive and linguistic stimulation, Zinacanteco siblings in the Mayan village of Nabenchauk, Mexico, engaged toddlers in interactions that were sustained, elaborate, well-matched to the toddlers’ developmental level, and facilitative of mature responses by the toddlers; as they grew older, the caregivers’ behaviors approached more closely the adult Zinacantec model of teaching (Maynard, 2002).
In a few of the Ngecha observations, however, it is easy to discern when a child nurse was overtaxed. Indeed, mothers said that they preferred a child nurse to be at least 6 years old, and when we compared the behavior of 5- versus 8-year-old sibling caregivers, we found that the younger caregivers were the more inconsistent ones in their treatment of infants, kissing them one minute, then teasing, pinching, or handling them roughly in the next (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 194). In a close microanalysis of the rate scores of social behavior of Ngecha mothers with toddlers (aged 2–3) and their adjacent older siblings (17 girls, 14 boys, aged 4–5 years), we found that the older siblings interacted in a mix of positive and negative modes with their toddler-followers and a combination of nurturing and companion roles (Edwards & Whiting, 1993). The mothers, as is typical in sub-Saharan Africa, did not treat toddlers (or infants, for that matter) as social companions. They rarely engaged in play or purely sociable interaction with them; rather, most of their interaction was “business” of the nurturant or prosocially dominant types. The adjacent older siblings, in contrast, were significantly more likely than their mothers to engage in various kinds of playful and sociable as well as aggressive interaction. The siblings were more likely (on the positive side) to clearly seek the toddlers’ sociability, sit with or follow after them, play, run around with them, and watch them, and (on the negative side) physically tease them, dominate them, seek or grab an object from them, and verbally criticize or insult them.

Here are typical examples of this mixed positive and negative interaction from Ngecha and Nyansongo, two of our agricultural cultural communities. Notice how 3-year-old Muthoni, in the first case, and 1-year-old Moriasi, in the second, do not seem disturbed or overwhelmed by their siblings, but rather take the complexity in stride. Also notice that while Muthoni receives a larger proportion of teasing and dominance, and Moriasi a larger proportion of affectionate interaction, in both cases, the older sisters demonstrate nurturance and empathy.

**Ngecha, Kenya.** Present in the observation are Muthoni and Wambui, sisters aged 3 and 5, along with their grandmother. Muthoni is fiddling with a dry corn husk. Wambui teasingly and playfully tells her that she could be bitten by a lizard, but Muthoni does not respond. Wambui now shows her little sister what she has made, a piece of round metal tied at the end of a string. She asks her if she wants one made for her, and Muthoni says yes. While Wambui is looking for another piece of metal, Muthoni takes Wambui’s playing and tries swinging it. The metal flies off the string. Wambui, upset at this, tells Muthoni she will not make a toy for her because of what she has done, but Muthoni ignores her. Wambui repairs her playing and teasingly calls Muthoni, “You bad Kinono” [a corruption of “Muthoni”]. Muthoni takes it as a joke and repeats it after Wambui, who is amused. Muthoni now sits with her feet together; squeezing a clod of earth between her feet. Wambui takes the piece of earth, saying it belongs to her. Muthoni starts to cry, and Wambui gives the clod back.

(Edwards & Whiting, 1993).

**Nyansongo, Kenya.** Rebecca is a 5-year-old child nurse living in a rural farming village (LeVine & LeVine, 1963). She is observed hoeing in a field with her aunt, cousins, and Moriasi, her 1-year-old brother. Moriasi begins to fuss, and Rebecca interrupts her work of hoeing to go and pick him up. She tries jouncing him, but he only begins to cry louder. “Why are you crying?” Rebecca asks, “I don’t have anything to give you.” She becomes impatient and gives him a little slap, but then self-corrects and puts Moriasi onto her back and carries him into the shade at the front of a bigger house where her baby cousin and his big sister are playing. Rebecca carefully sits Moriasi down. She turns her attention for a few moments to her baby cousin, and treats this baby affectionately. The two big girls begin to get involved in laughing and wrestling together and start to drift away from the two babies. The aunt sees this retreat and says to the girls, “Why are you leaving those babies?” Rebecca immediately comes running back and proceeds to amuse the babies by singing and dancing.

(Whiting & Edwards, 1988, pp. 174–175)

Thomas Weisner (1989a), studying the Abaluhia of Western Kenya, has described this pattern of sibling caregiving as a distinct cultural style that provides toddlers with beneficial cognitive and emotional challenge. From repeated opportunities of deciphering their siblings’ intentions, toddlers learn how to deal with teasing and mild aggression incorporated within an envelope of generally benevolent caregiving. They practice and master different techniques of social persuasion. Crying and whining may get their mother, aunty, or grandmother to intervene, but on those occasions when no adult is
present, the toddler must learn to fight back, outwit, or better yet, deflect sibling provocations into playfulness. The toddler is thereby stimulated to cognitively discriminate between different kinds of social situations and to develop a rich repertory of behavioral responses.

Extensive sibling caregiving in Western families is less common than in non-Western agrarian societies. In the United States, sibling caregiving is most common in poor and rural communities and in African-American and other minority communities. Native Hawaiians (like other Polynesian and Pacific Island peoples) are known for their value of lifelong sibling relationships and ethnotheories of shared domestic management by parents (Weisner, 1989b), although with much variability in the amount they delegate care in daily life. Sibling caretaking is especially useful for single mothers employed in the labor force. To be preferred as a caregiver, the sibling should be at least a young adolescent rather than elementary-school aged. Sibling care by elementary-school aged children ideally takes place under the indirect supervision of a parent who is busy with other tasks or while the parent is off for a short, unspecified period of time.

Grandparents as Caregivers

In addition to parents and siblings, other family members, grandparents in particular, often play an important role in children's development across many cultural contexts, providing important backups to mothers, especially in families with extended household arrangements. In contemporary Western societies, with increased longevity and good health, psychologists have become increasingly interested in studying grandparenthood (Dunifon, 2013).

The intensity of grandparent involvement varies substantially across cultures. However, most of the empirical research has been conducted in the United States, where grandparent involvement is relatively low. In the United States, individualism and independence are valued, and the nuclear family is the most common family form; multigenerational households are not usual. Only 1 in 10 children lives with grandparents (Livingston & Parker, 2010). Grandparents are the primary providers of child care for 30% of working mothers with children under age 5.

In some other countries, grandparent involvement is more prevalent and expected (Ikels, 1998). These studies have been conducted mainly by anthropologists and sociologists and have revealed ways in which cultural values influence expectations for grandparent involvement and roles. For instance, in Chinese urban areas, approximately 50–70% of young children receive supplementary care from grandparents (Jiang et al., 2007). There are many benefits when parents and grandparents share the responsibilities of caring for the children. Grandparents are often the ones with whom parents feel most comfortable to entrust their children. Grandparents can share the load of parenting. Some grandparents act as “child savers” who spend a great amount of time providing child care when parents are incapable or unavailable to take care of their children, and some are “parent savers” who take care of grandchildren so that parents can focus on their jobs or education (Baker & Silverstein, 2012). In some cases, grandparents are both “child savers” and “parent savers.”

Additionally, in many families, children feel most comfortable sharing troubles or worries with their grandparents. In some cultures, grandparents and grandchildren develop “joking relationships” characterized by teasing, insults, and suggestive behaviors. Drucker-Brown (1982) worked with people from the Mamprusi of northeastern Ghana where the joking relationship between grandparents and grandchildren serves multiple functions. The joking relationship helps erase the real age differences between the two generations and reduce intergenerational tensions as well. Mamprusi children are required to respect and defer to their parents; they are expected to “kneel or crouch, avert their eyes, and speak softly” (Ikels, 1998, p. 41) when seeking goods from parents. However, it is not uncommon for a child to make demands from his grandparents in a very discourteous way. Similarly, the Mamprusi children may discuss sexual matters with their grandparents but not their parents.

Finally, grandparents can be important socializers who transmit values, ethnic heritage, and family traditions to their grandchildren either through direct contacts or via the middle generation. Children can learn important knowledge or skills that are valued by the culture they live in through interacting with their grandparents. For instance, in Bhubaneswar, India, familial interdependence is highly valued, and learning the significance of extended kin is an important task in early years of life. From infancy on, mothers and other caregivers repeat over and over to infants and toddlers a complex set of kin terms so that children can learn how to address extended kin appropriately (Seymour,
In the following example, the adults, especially the grandmother, teach a toddler how to address the researcher (Susan Seymour) appropriately:

**Bhubaneswar, India.** For half an hour Grandmother, Sita (father’s older sister), Gopal (father’s younger brother), and Rabi (1.5-year-old boy) sat in front of the room. Grandmother, Sita, and Gopal all together told Rabi how to greet me. They repeated the command over and over again. Rabi finally said “nani,” which was an appropriate way to address me. Everyone laughed.

(adapted from Seymour, 1993, p. 56)

Group sleeping is a common practice in Bhubaneswar, India. Children usually sleep together with their mothers and siblings, grandparents, or some other relative in order to reinforce an early sense of interdependence. Rabi (the boy just mentioned) slept with his grandmother for an extended period after his younger sibling was born. This practice was believed to help reduce Rabi’s feelings of sibling rivalry. More importantly, sleeping with an adult makes children learn how to share intimate spaces and experience much physical contact with their siblings when they grow up (Seymour, 1993). Seymour (1993, table 3.1, p. 58) reported that in Bhubaneswar, India, 10–12% of nurturant acts were performed by grandmothers, the next highest to the proportion of nurturant acts done by mother (53–58%). Grandparents appeared to be important caregivers and socializers for infant and toddlers in Bhubaneswar, India.

Despite the benefits of grandparent involvement, many issues may arise when parents and grandparents hold different childrearing values and beliefs and adopt different childrearing practices. Goh (2006) interviewed parents and grandparents of young children about their joint parenting experiences in Xiamen, an urban city in southeastern China. Both parents and grandparents expressed a lot of ambivalence, dilemma, and contradiction regarding their joint parenting experiences. Some parents expressed the concern that grandparents tended to take over tasks that parents expected their children to perform (e.g., feeding oneself), and, as a result, children learned to depend too heavily on grandparents, which was contradictory to parents’ goal of cultivating independence in their children. Some parents also raised the issue that parents and grandparents might convey mixed messages to the children. This is one of the many aspects of distributed caregiving that deserve further research.

**Fostering: Another Form of Shared Caregiving**

As we have described, the sharing of infant and toddler caregiving among family members is normative in many cultures. Even beyond that kind of sharing, in Africa and some other parts of the world, a culturally specific child care practice and tradition of *child fostering* exists, and here the role of parents is markedly reduced (Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997). Accounts in Africa describe fostering as a social welfare system revolving around kinship; fostering is defined as the rearing of a child by someone other than the biological parent (Bledsoe, 1990). What makes fostering unique is the semipermanent yet adjustable nature of the relationship. Goody (1973) was among the first to describe the practice among the Gonja of Cameroon. She remembers her first entries in her field notes were the Ganja word *kabitha* “a girl given to someone” and *kaiyeribi* “a boy given to someone.”

Early work focused on West Africa, but Southern Africa, in fact, has the highest rates of fostering, in large part due to migration of parents looking for work (Monasch & Boerma, 2004) or to families putting their children into what they believe are advantageous situations. Fostering also affords parents a culturally appropriate outlet to prepare children for the death of a parent or to acquire the emotional skills they need to face loss. In present day contexts like sub-Saharan Africa, where HIV/AIDS rates are more than 20%, fostering is protective and congruent with how orphans are transferred out to families in the midst of the illness, prior to the death of the parent, to protect the child from the trauma of the parent’s death and to help the child adjust to his or her new situation. The percentage of children living away from their mothers ranges from as low as 3% in Sudan to as high as 30% in Namibia. Fostering seems to increase with age. In Namibia, fostering rates are 13.7% (for children birth to age 2 years), 25.9% (for children aged 3–5), 30.2% (for children aged 6–9), and 31.3% (for children aged 10–15). The younger children are fostered primarily to grandmothers, whereas the older children are fostered to those who can provide apprenticeship, work, or access to education (Brown, 2011).

Clearly, the motivations behind fostering children are multiple and complex. Research illuminates such motivations as the desire to gain an heir or a helper (Payne-Price, 1981), provide a better education for a child (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985), gifting and sharing between families (Madhavan, 2004), establishment of so-
cial bonds (Bledsoe, 1990), enhancement of fertility (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Pennington, 1991), the need for the birth mother to be childless when entering a new relationship with a man (Pennington, 1991; Vandermeersch & Chimere-Dan, 2002), and times of crisis, like sickness and famine (Brown, 2011; Madhavan, 2004).

Some of these motivations are intended to benefit the adults, whereas others are intended for the benefit of the child, and concepts link parental ethnotheories with cultural necessities. For example, in ethnographic interviews with Namibian women fostered out as children, an ethnotheory of “suffering as a source of strength” was heard. Suffering was closely linked to moral development and a sense that suffering makes a person stronger (Brown, 2011). Thus, women believed they were benefiting their children when they fostered them out, even if mothers increased suffering in the short run.

Furthermore, in Namibia, as elsewhere, infants and toddlers are often fostered to “grannies” or elderly extended kin with the intention to instill traditional knowledge and ways of behavior that are diminished in urban centers. Many mothers in the capital of Namibia arrange for infants as young as 6 months to make the journey 13 hours north to the tribal homeland to live with extended family. In Ovambo culture, it is not appropriate to deny a “granny” when she asks for a child, yet some mothers struggle with negotiating this arrangement. Mothers spoke of the competing desires for children to learn cultural traditions in the rural area versus keeping them in urban centers where there are opportunities to participate in modern learning environments such as preschool. Mothers also described the emotional attachment they have to the child and the wrench they feel in letting the child go. One mother, Emelia, explained her tactic to keep her child with her, yet placate the paternal grandmother who had asked to have her child. “I sent her to her grandmother. She went to the village, but only for three or four months.... I wanted her back and it was only that Memekulu (grandmother) wants a child.... So I decided to give her away for three months, not to disappoint Memekulu.”

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the fostering customs is the light it sheds on the competency created in the entire family, from oldest to youngest, in child caregiving. Here is an example from Jill Brown’s field notes (2011), focused on Ndeleo.

**Windhoek, Namibia.** I entered the house and found only Ndeleo, 19 years old, home with the children of the house. The house is in the township of Katatura on the outskirts of the capital city in Namibia. I asked, “Where is Meme (mother)?” and Ndeleo tells me she went to the North for the funeral of Memekulu (grandmother) and will return next week. Ndeleo is holding an infant of 6 months, and with her in the sitting room are three girls aged 6, 8, and 12. Ndeleo hands the infant to the 6-year-old, and those two leave the room to return later with a bottle. Two other boys enter the room and greet me and continue on to the back of the house bringing dried meat for dinner. The 8-year-old girl takes the infant and attempts to make her smile. Ndeleo directs the 12-year-old to fetch drinks and bring them to the sitting room.

The above vignette is a snapshot of family life in Southern Africa. But at a closer look it is the relationships among these children that is important and provides the context of early learning. The children in the house constitute a web of relatedness, both social and genetic, that cements families together and provides the context for early development.

Ndeleo is the biological child of the mother of this house and is currently staying at the house. She did not grow up there; she was fostered to a maternal uncle as an infant. The 12-year-old girl is Ndeleo’s biological sister and grew up in this home. The 8-year-old is Ndeleo’s oldest brother’s daughter, and the 6-year-old is the child of her mother’s husband. The boys are both paternal relatives from the north who are living in the home primarily to be closer to better schools in the capital. Ndeleo, who has finished her studies, has come back to stay in this house with her mother and look for a job.

The house runs seamlessly in the absence of adults during their visit to the north, and adults often report little worry in situations similar to this vignette. Each member of this house might be thought of as a small context of care, with Ndeleo providing instrumental support while the younger girls play and tease in emotionally supportive ways. As Suzanne Gaskins describes, work is intermixed with play, and children earn recognition from adults as their competency and work-load increases (Gaskins, 2014, this volume). The fluidity of caregivers and opportunities for interactions are nested within these broader cultural norms of socially distributed child care, fosterage, and extended kin care (Weisner et al., 1997).
Early Care and Education Services

The institution of schooling has transformed the social lives of school-aged children around the world by removing them from the context of the home for much of the day, where education is nonformal and most of their child companions are siblings or “courtyard cousins.” Instead, they gain access to formalized, symbolically oriented learning situations and to intense social relationships with peers, that is, same-age children from outside the family. Correa-Chavez, Manigione, and Black (2014, this volume) point out that in communities with extensive schooling, babies are often talked to in ways that direct and order their attention in much the same way school does.

Along parallel lines, it becomes timely to consider the comparable effects of child care institutions on children under age 6. Families today have increased needs for such services, reflecting a global increase in the incidence of women in the labor force, single-parent families, and family units isolated from extended kin. In North America, many parts of Europe, and increasingly in Asia and Africa, women have become essential contributors to family income. As working parents increase their use of preschools, organized playgroups, and child care arrangements, their children are encountering formal learning experiences and peer relations at ever earlier ages. Increasingly, these extrafamilial settings have become important contexts of socialization for infants and toddlers. As such, they present different kinds of opportunities and expectations than do family contexts, and their influence may leave lasting impacts.

An infant–toddler program is quite a different place from a family home. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes how “new” in human history it is for children so young to spend all day in the care of adults focused exclusively on them, not on economic or household tasks, and in companionship with same-age peers. The result is that children receive less exposure to the cultural world of work and reduced opportunity to observe and participate in everyday activities of production and household with adults and older children. Rather, they engage in child-centered play experiences that elicit symbolic, fantasy, and constructive play—experiences that professional educators believe are conducive to the cognitive skills of school readiness.

Equally striking is the change in their daily companionship. The global nature of the change in age of access to same-age peer relations is strongly suggested by the rising rates of participation of children under age 3 in organized child care. According to a United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2008) report on the advanced industrial countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “Today’s rising generation in the countries of the OECD is the first in which a majority are spending a large part of their early childhoods not in their own homes with their own families but in some form of child care” (p. 3).

A glimpse into how child care might affect children’s daily companionship is evident in the study described earlier of Amherst, Massachusetts, children aged 2–30 months (Edwards et al., 1986; 1987). Initial interviews had revealed that most parents, whether they used center- or home-based supplementary care, strongly valued early peer contacts for their infant or toddler. Looking at the total corpus of 1,232 observations, it is striking how much contact the children had with other children. Observations were coded in terms of whether a “sibling,” “regular peer,” or “stranger child” was present with the target child (where a “sibling” was defined as a sibling, half-sibling, or stepsibling; a “regular peer” was a familiar playmate from playgroup or day care; and a “stranger child” was any other child, for example, one visiting with a parent). For the half of the sample who attended the university center, the most frequent companions were regular peers, present in 28.2% of the observations. In fact, some of these observations took place during home time, when parents got day care “friends” together. A sibling was present in 16.9% of the observations and a stranger in 3%. In contrast, for the half of the sample who received care in home-based arrangements, the respective figures were 21.7% with siblings, 9.3% with regular peers, and 4.8% with stranger children. Clearly, the center experience was transforming young children’s age of access to same-age peer experiences.

It is evident that interactions with peers are exciting and pleasurable to the children (e.g., Brownell, Ramani, & Zerwas, 2006; Sanderson, 2011; Whaley & Rubenstein, 1994). Mueller and Cohen (1986) speak of “peer hunger” on the part of toddlers. Part of the excitement and pleasure seems to arise precisely from the fact that the dominance hierarchy is not set. Constant moments of comparison and challenge arise because children have not spent years growing up together with relative competence long ago established. Instead, relatively novel to one another, and similar in size, strength, and verbal ability, they have similar
cognitive and social agendas that make competition and comparison particularly interesting and motivating to all concerned. Toddlers grab for the interesting objects waved in the hands of others but often shift between moments of conflict, sharing, showing, and affection (Caplan, Vespo, Pedersen, & Hay, 1991), as if the incidents of aggression are part of the flow of learning to play with others.

What does this changing age of access to peer relations suggest about the opportunities and expectations for children? In our view, this depends on the cultural context because different societies have very different policies and curriculum guidelines for early care and education, as documented, for example, in the 10 “country portraits” in New and Cochran (2007). The approaches that various countries have applied to the field of family policy and child care are deeply embedded in their national histories, core value systems, and basic beliefs about child development. Similarly, Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009), in their research comparing preschool in China, Japan, and the United States, argue that culture acts as a source of continuity and a brake on globalization in education, leading to preschool systems with noticeable differences in their core features. For example, in the case of the Japanese preschools, one finds periods of order and disorder alternating throughout the classroom day, high student–teacher ratios, and emphasis on feelings and the development of empathy. Teachers tend to stand back and let children learn to resolve their own disputes. In contrast, in the case of US preschools, one finds an emphasis on choice, individualism, ownership, self-expression, and risk reduction (that is, removing dangers and challenges in the interest of safety). There, teachers tend to intervene and manage the children’s conflicts, imposing adult standards of justice and fairness. “The unmarked beliefs and practices are supported by ... what we are calling ‘an implicit cultural logic’” (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 242).

These core beliefs play out in innumerable ways in the interactions children are socialized to prefer and the expectations that adults bring to their encounters with children, for example, in managing interpersonal issues that naturally arise in a group of small children. Frustrations and conflicts often arise because the children have not yet developed skills of smooth group entry, negotiating disputes, waiting their turn, and sharing materials and space. One solution to managing a toddler group, favored in American programs, is to teach children the words to resolve their conflicts through verbal means, for example: asking “Can I have that?,” asserting “That’s mine!” explaining “My turn,” and so on. Research has established that American adults tend to have very early expectations for verbal assertiveness and social skills with peers (see Edwards, Gandini, & Giovannini, 1996). This American approach to socializing for verbal proficiency fits well with values of self-expression and individualism, for example, defense of ownership rights.

In Pistoia, Italy, in contrast, observation suggests that adults instead have relatively early expectations for another kind of competence, the capability to become a participant (or “protagonist”) in the social group, finding identity, and sense of belonging (Galar dini & Giovannini, 2001). In Italy, mothers have the right to paid parental leave to spend at least 1 year at home with their infant, while government policies support families in finding public infant–toddler care that is educational and nurturing for the children and at the same time supportive of family needs. Educators in many parts of Italy have interpreted this policy as requiring strategies for incorporating families into the civic community and seeking to create welcoming services that are open to all children and good for them in the present, rather than an investment that produces useful outcomes in the future (Fortunati, 2007).

This chapter opened with an observation illustrating the extreme care and delicacy with which an infant and family are transitioned into the child care center (Bove, 2001). Ten-month-old Clara and her mother arrived on the first day and sat together with the teacher, Franca, who asks about the baby’s routines at home. Franca begins to inquire about the family’s expectations of infant care, where Clara will be part of a group of children staying together for 3 years. As the observation continues, we see how the teacher picks up on the mother’s wishes and demonstrates how the infant center will help fulfill them.

**Pistoia, Italy.** Clara’s mother tells the teacher of her hopes: “I don’t want Clara to be one of those little girls who are so shy that they won’t talk to anyone. Maybe coming here, she will become an outgoing girl.” Just then the baby’s attention is attracted by the sight of a little boy slightly older than herself coming around the corner. Franca picks up immediately on Clara’s attention, “Clara is very interested in other children.” The mother nods, “Yes, yes!” So Franca gently carries Clara close to Lorenzo and introduces the two, in
the affectionate, slightly formal style an Italian mother might use in introducing any two children. The two children are almost touching, and Carla reaches to put her hand softly on Lorenzo’s head. Franca says he is bello (“handsome”). Now Carla turns for the first time to look directly and fully into the face of Franca, as if to take in who she is. Then she glances over to her mother, as if to be reassured it is okay. Her mother gazes with a warmly smiling face, signaling to Carla that she approves of Carla’s interest in these new people.

By the end of the week, Carla’s mother leaves her for the whole morning. On Friday, when she arrives for pick up, Clara rests comfortably in Franca’s arms while the teacher tells about the baby’s day. Then, Clara arches toward her mother, who takes her in her arms. As mother and baby turn to leave, Clara’s mother pauses in the doorway. Revealing their growing sense of belonging, she names everyone present around the room and waves good-bye for Clara to all the friends.

(Adapted from Edwards & Gandini, 2001, pp. 187–190)

Our studies include many such observations, as well as detailed descriptions of strategies used to help children recognize the identity of others and learn empathy. Complementary observations focused on object play and language development by Musatti and Mayer (2011) show how teachers structure and lead activities, including how they position their body and pace their interaction to create prolonged sequences of shared attention and participation by toddlers, for example, in ongoing investigation of musical instruments, toys, or the natural environment.

**Child Welfare Institutions**

We conclude this chapter with consideration of one final context of socialization for infants and toddlers, *child welfare institutions*, providing total care for children who are orphaned, abandoned, or otherwise separated from a family. It is difficult to estimate the number of infants and toddlers involved in such care worldwide, but the risk of poor developmental outcomes is well documented. When committed early to institutional care, young children become vulnerable to long-term problems, including malnutrition, growth retardation, sensory processing difficulties, behavioral and attachment disorders, and cognitive and language delays (see reviews in the St. Petersburg—USA Orphanage Research Team, 2008, and the Leiden Conference on the Development and Care of Children without Permanent Parents, 2012). These poor outcomes result from the constraints of institutional rearing— regimented routines, high child-to-caregiver ratios, impoverished cognitive and linguistic stimulation, and deprivation of reciprocal interactions with stable caregivers (Nelson et al., 2007). It might be said that many child welfare institutions are all constraint, little opportunity, in the sense of their developmental potential.

In light of the findings, many Western countries have closed almost all of their child welfare institutions in favor of systems of adoption, foster care, kinship care, and small group homes. However, in low-resource countries, building such systems will take many years, and, in the meantime many children, particularly in Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia, will still be raised in institutions. What to do in the meantime? An important study conducted by the St. Petersburg—USA Orphanage Research Team (2008) demonstrated that comprehensive changes in institutions, making them less “factory-like” and more “family-like” in caregiver assignments, routines, and caregiver–child interaction—could lead to dramatically improved developmental outcomes (physical and cognitive) in young institutionalized children, even those with disabilities. The group sizes were reduced, children were assigned their own primary caregivers, and caregivers learned how to be warm, sensitive, and responsive during nurturing, as well as child-centered in play. Thus, by approximating the shared caregiving paradigm that is so successful worldwide—not seeking for a “mother-exclusive” arrangement—healthy socialization contexts were re-established.

An example of another such intervention is under way in China, taking place at a much larger scale, suggesting that it is possible to create relatively benign group care contexts for infants and toddlers without families. Half the Sky Foundation, a nongovernmental organization founded in 1998, operates in close partnership with the Chinese government and has established Children’s Centers in 51 welfare institutions in 24 provinces and municipalities all over the country. Today, it focuses on professional development for welfare institutions throughout the entire nation: [http://www.halftesky.org/en/map](http://www.halftesky.org/en/map). For young children, the foundation establishes enrichment programs that supplement custodial care, providing primary caregiving, intimate-style relationships in the context of a group, and an active learning environment. A forthcoming
that belongs to the child. The Memory Books may hold and other artifacts, are compiled into a Memory Book and provided by Janice Cotton, Chief Program Officer.

The study concludes that under Half the Sky training and on-site, follow-up support, all areas show significant improvements.

At the core of the Infant Nurture programs, serving the youngest children, are practices that provide enrichment in the context of a close, caring relationship. Women from the community (“nannies”) go through an intensive training before each is assigned as the primary caregiver of a consistent group of two to four infants (Cotton, Edwards, Zhao, & Gelabert, 2007). The little groups gather together a few hours each day within a large playroom. The nanny pays close attention to her babies, learning each child’s signals and how to respond to them, holding, playing, talking, and encouraging mobility. Through responsive, reciprocal interactions, the nanny helps the babies grow in all domains of development and build a firm attachment. She also observes and makes anecdotal records twice a week on her babies, compiling a Progress Report every few months (Evans, 2003). These reports describe skills and behaviors recently mastered, as well as areas that still need special attention, but are written in a personal, first-person style that conveys the nanny’s emotional investment in the child, as seen in the following example provided by Janice Cotton, Chief Program Officer:

**Lianyungang Social Welfare Institution, China.**

On February 24, 2006, a miracle came true: Geng-Hui stood up without any help. We were so happy and excited. I held her tightly in my arms, kissed her face again and again and praised her ceaselessly and loudly. All the nannies clapped their hands for her and were really proud of her. She was happy too! She snuggled into my arms, with her arms around my neck and her face against mine, uttering “Mama, Mama.” I was so happy, and my eyes were full of joyful tears. After that, we still continued the training every day.

Eventually, the Progress Reports, along with photos and other artifacts, are compiled into a Memory Book that belongs to the child. The Memory Books may hold therapeutic value for orphaned children who have no parents to provide a natural source of personal history and autobiographical memory.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

In this chapter, we discussed several kinds of early contexts for socialization. They vary in their subjective as well as objective dimensions, influenced by such ecological variables as household arrangements, settlement patterns and subsistence level, parents’ workload and employment, gender division of labor, and cultural roles and norms pertaining to sibling caregiving. Through such contextual factors, children’s daily routines and interaction patterns provide them with both opportunities and constraints in development. Despite the variations, the early contexts for socialization we have described are generally based on predictable, responsive, and reciprocal relationships, and these promote healthy development in children. We began with the suggestion that early child development happens “within, through and for relatedness” (Josselson, 1996, p. 2); relationships provide the companionship (e.g., close and caring adult–child and child–child interactions), formative processes (e.g., attachment, language stimulation, social-emotional guidance), and sources of motivation (e.g., desires for comfort, help, attention, information, and play) that power early development.

Of course, in diverse settings, the nature of developmentally enhancing relationships looks quite different, as witnessed in the townships of Namibia, infant centers in Italy, and the welfare institutions of China. However, we may extract a pattern of caregiving that is characterized with closeness, emotional intimacy, commitment, and continuity over time for healthy development in young children, perhaps a microcosm of common ingredients of all the early contexts of socialization we have described for infants and toddlers.

Many fruitful lines of research could follow from the foundations laid by past investigators. We offer some future directions for research involving each early context of socialization. Regarding parents, there is a well-established body of literature about maternal caregiving, but less about the role of fathers. In this chapter, we reviewed studies on the degree of paternal involvement, but, clearly, much more work needs to be done. Given the wide variation in amount and styles of paternal involvement in children’s early life, what are the outcomes for children? Does it matter if fathers violate
the cultural norm, for example, by taking a much more active or less active role in daily caregiving than is typical? How does paternal caregiving interact with maternal caregiving in influencing young children’s socialization? Many children grow up in households where the identity of the male figures residing in the home changes over time: how do very young children comprehend or react to this? How should we conceptualize and measure the dynamic processing of the interactions and relationships among father, mother, child, and others?

Siblings are important caregivers and companions to young children around the world. Although the practice of sibling caregiving has been well documented, we still do not know much about its developmental implications. What is the quality of the emotional closeness or attachment between babies and their child nurses, and does it endure over time, perhaps even into adulthood? What could we find out by interviewing children about being a child nurse, or their memories of having been cared for by one? Furthermore, what could we learn about the maternal decision making involved? What kind of factors do mothers consider in assigning one of their older children as a child nurse to a new baby? Do they have ethnotheories about what makes a good child nurse; have they seen some children who are especially good in this role? We would expect that mothers in middle-level societies would speak of “responsibility” and “obedience” in describing a good child nurse, but do they also have ideas about the child’s empathy or consistency? How do they monitor and train their children for the role of caregiving? Are there differences between more educated and less educated mothers in these regards?

New directions of research into care by grandparents might include how children navigate the messages and varied socialization efforts of the two generations. In societies in which the roles of parents are rapidly changing, how are parental ethnotheories about the activities of grandparents—for example, in discipline, play, feeding—also changing? How do children interpret and internalize conflict that arises between parents and grandparents? How do they retain emotional bonds with grandparents even over separations in time and space? Focusing on infants and toddlers, what methods can be used to study two-generation caregiving from the standpoint of such young children who may not be able to verbalize their ideas well? Are intervention or education efforts needed to minimize potential negative experiences of two-generation caregiving and maximize the felt benefits of two-generation caregiving in young children’s development?

Child fosterage represents a unique variant in caregiving and offers a window into understanding the implications of early relationships, both those with biological origin and those socially created. In the contemporary world, as educational opportunities become more valued, what are the developmental implications for children who receive this opportunity? What happens when parents refuse this practice? Furthermore, what more can be learned about the transfer of resources through the practice of fosterage? Children are but one entity that moves; the webs of connection also act as conduits for material resources to move between families. How large are these webs of connection, and to what extent are families materially intertwined?

As child care centers become an increasingly pervasive and important part of contemporary life, children have earlier and more frequent interaction with same-age peers from outside the family. Of course, peer relationships at the dawn of children’s development differ in profound ways from what they will become in later years, but are they totally transient and replaceable to preschool children, as many American parents believe (Aukrust, Edwards, Kumru, Knoche, & Kim, 2003)? Later peer relationships have been much studied, both the negative side of peer relationships (e.g., aggression, bullying) and the positive (e.g., prosocial behavior). Yet, the emergence of the earliest relationships has only just begun to be understood, and questions remain about their long-term consequences (e.g., in teaching role-taking and empathy, or skills of conflict avoidance and resolution) that set the stage for later development. Are children who have higher levels of early peer interaction—whether in home and neighborhood settings, or in formal child care—different in their social competence from children who have lower levels? What about the quality of the caregiving context; for example, how effective are typical early childhood practitioners in facilitating very young children’s interactions with their peers so that the infant or toddler group becomes a community and all children are included?

It is well known that child welfare institutions often cause poor outcomes for children, especially for the youngest children and those who remain in them the longest. Intervention efforts have been made to examine how changes within institutions may improve children’s developmental outcomes.
Most of our discussion in this chapter has centered around contexts of early learning, where the norms of socialization are implicit. These norms have emerged over the generations within an ecocultural niche in which they are connected to other beliefs and practices. However, norms of adult–child and child–child interaction—implicit in the systems of sibling care in Kenya or of peer interactions in the United States—need to be made explicit in the context of child welfare institutions seeking to achieve a higher and more intentional quality of care. Half the Sky Foundation bases its practices on an explicit consideration of psychological and educational research, translated into written standards of practice, with the goal of creating an enriched and enriching environment, with emotional relationships given priority. We have used Half the Sky as an exemplar of comprehensive intervention carried out to enhance the development of the most vulnerable children: children without families. Other countries may adopt similar approaches, or adapt elements of the Half the Sky approach, to examine what kinds of staff training and ongoing support will be effective in different cultural contexts. What leads to successful implementation? What aspects need to be revised or changed to accommodate cultural differences?

In conclusion, successful cultural scripts for interaction with very young children are evident in adult–child and child–child relationships. We have described prominent cultural differences in organization and physical/verbal styles of adult caregiving, and shown that communities vary in who provides different elements of nurturance throughout the day (e.g., whether fathers, grandparents, older siblings, and/or persons from outside the family circle supplement maternal care), but usually one or a few individuals are most significant. They also vary in the how, or stylistic mode, in which care and stimulation are provided (e.g., whether it is more proximal and kinesthetic, or instead more distal and vocal in orientation) and in how much play and information-sharing, perhaps also horseplay and sociability, are mixed in with caregiving routines. Children seem able to adapt to many constellations of care regimes as long as they contain adequate amounts of warmth and sensitivity, promotion of autonomy, and support for language and learning (Edwards, Sheridan, & Knoche, 2010). 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 contemporary environments, then we all need to learn much more about children’s growth, development, and adaptations to change in the context of the extraordinary ambiguities, risks, opportunities, stresses, and multiple pathways that are encountered in contemporary life worldwide today.

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