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## [Beatrice Whiting:] Introduction to Special Issue of *Ethos*

Thomas S. Weisner

*University of California, Los Angeles*

Carolyn P. Edwards

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln, cedwards1@unl.edu*

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# Introduction

THOMAS S. WEISNER  
CAROLYN POPE EDWARDS

**B**eatrice Whiting influenced psychological anthropology and the social scientific study of culture and human development through her lifelong commitment to comparative studies of children, families and communities throughout the world. She taught and influenced three generations of scholars in these fields. She pioneered the use of comparative ethnographic and quantitative methods in the study of children's social behavior, and she directed, with John Whiting, three major international comparative studies of human development: the Six Culture Study (Whiting 1963; Whiting and Whiting 1975); the Child Development Research Program in East Africa (Whiting and Edwards 1988, Whiting and Edwards, eds. in press); and the Harvard Comparative Adolescence Project (Whiting and Whiting 1987; 1991). Whiting always focused on the complex effects of change on children and families, particularly the changing roles of women (Whiting 1973; 1977). She discovered dimensions of everyday routines and settings across cultures (such as the age and gender composition of children's peer groups, the kinds of tasks children were responsible for, and the cultural goals of parents managing the domestic world) which shaped patterns of social interaction involving children (Whiting 1983; Whiting and Edwards 1973).<sup>1</sup>

Beatrice Whiting always worked to integrate multiple levels of analysis, combining theory and data in biology, personality, cognition, social interaction, culture, and ecology. When speaking to anthropologists, she did not fail to push them beyond an exclusively cultural theory of child development and family life, towards integrating some conception of human nature into both theory and empirical work (Whiting 1965, 1980). When speaking to developmental psychologists and the other social scientists, she strove for a much deeper infusion of cultural understanding into studies of childhood and family life, and for attention to comparative data, theory and systematic fieldwork methods (Whiting 1983; Whiting and Whiting 1960).

The Society for Psychological Anthropology cosponsored a symposium at the American Anthropological Association meetings in November 1999, honoring Beatrice Whiting and her work. At this symposium, 14 former students, colleagues and collaborators presented papers and discussion comments.<sup>2</sup> The organizers (Thomas Weisner and Susan Abbott) sought to reflect Whiting's varied interests and projects, and worked to include different generations, students, collaborators (graduate and undergraduate), and projects. This special issue presents a set of seven papers from the symposium. Each contribution focuses on one or more of Whiting's career-long interests, including gender, women's work and education, social structure and child socialization, adolescence, and culture change and modernization.

We are pleased to lead off this special issue with a piece by Beatrice Whiting herself, "Freud in the Field," which she recently wrote as part of composing an intellectual autobiography. It describes a formative period of her personal and professional development when she discovered psychoanalytic ideas and methods during her years as a graduate student in the Yale Anthropology Department. While doing fieldwork among the Paiute of Oregon as a further part of her graduate training, she experienced an illuminating moment of insight when she realized how she could use Freudian concepts and theories in her analysis and understanding of Paiute belief systems. Whiting narrates how young Paiute women helped her come to this discovery through the study of dreams, and presents an uncompromising view of what fieldwork was like in Bend, Oregon, with the remnants of the Paiute. The article helps us understand how Beatrice Whiting created her own formula for conducting scientific research and developed a lifelong curiosity about cultural processes of social control, which she extended and built upon in all of her later work on childhood socialization and learning environments.

Robert and Sarah LeVine trace Whiting's contributions to the comparative study of human development from her early work through the Six Cultures project and the transformation of that study from its initial grand goal of 100 cultures in a world sample, to the intensive analysis of child and parent behavior in their eventual six culture studies. The LeVines then turn to unpacking the meaning and significance of maternal education. Women's school experience "measured simply as years attended or highest level attained, was the most consistent and robust household-level predictor of reduced fertility and child mortality in developing countries." But the measure is a classic packaged variable, opaque to cultural variations and mechanisms producing such a strong effect. Four possible and not mutually exclusive pathways from schooling to altered reproductive and health behavior in women are identified: status aspirations, identity (including empowerment), skills, and models of learning and teaching.

Their series of studies in urban and rural Mexico, rural Nepal, urban Zambia, and Venezuela show that the skill pathway, specifically literacy and language skills, show consistent connections to comprehension of health messages and use of services. All the pathways have some evidence in some communities, particularly Cuernavaca, Mexico, where mothers with more formal education were more verbally responsive to infants—acting more like teachers with their children (and also as pupils able to interact with bureaucracies and use health advice).

Thomas Weisner revisits a longstanding interest of Beatrice Whiting in culture change, and in bringing the results of cross-cultural work to the problems of American mothers and children. Whiting described an American “dependency hang-up”: children seeking attention, resources and recognition from their parents (and vice versa) while at the same time hearing about the importance of independence, being rewarded for a more egoistic self expression, and being pushed towards autonomy. Whiting pointed to the fact that values often reveal social and personal conflicts and contradictions of this kind, not only consensus. In this article, Weisner analyzes data from a longitudinal study of California countercultural and nonconventional families from the 1970s, who were trying to challenge and counter American family practices and put new values into practice in raising their own children, including questioning the dependency conflicts they had experienced growing up. But observational data show that these families had children with high levels of attention from parents, verbal negotiations, and dependency interactions, suggesting that these parents and children were reproducing the characteristic American socio-emotional “dependency/autonomy” hang-up. This behavioral pattern generally occurred whether parents were strongly countercultural or not. At the same time, there was significant intergenerational transmission of countercultural values from countercultural parents to their adolescent children. However, these values (antimaterialism, questioning conventional authority, gender egalitarianism, and others) reveal intergenerational as well as intrapsychic conflicts.

Carol Ember and Melvin Ember revisit another long-standing interest of Beatrice Whiting, the effects of social structure on personality and behavior, particularly psychosexual identity conflicts and aggressive behavior in boys (Whiting 1965). Using their own new codes for low father salience and subjecting data to a multiple regression analysis, they find the hypothesized associations: low father salience (as indexed by father-infant sleeping arrangements) is positively related to male aggression (homicide and assault), although socialization for aggression in boys in late childhood remains the strongest predictor of homicide/assault rates. However, the results for low father salience become even stronger when they make an appropriate correction and remove matrilineal societies with only occasional

warfare from the sample, as these would not be expected to show the hypothesized links between variables. The findings provide good support for Beatrice and John Whiting's hypothesis that sex-identity conflict in boys will be associated with higher rates of male aggression in contexts where men control important resources in society and where aggression is already part of the male role.

Robert Munroe also takes up the topic of early father absence, cross-sex identity conflict, and male aggression. What effects do these social patterns have on boys' selective attention to male versus female models? Munroe uses convergent validation methods, conjoining the results from two independent methods (ethnographic data on social organization, and naturalistic behavior observations of children) across four cultural communities. He concludes that boys' attention to males is affected by their own father's absence versus presence, but also by the general position of men in the community. A high frequency of father absence, coupled with male salience and dominance in the adult world (as among the Logoli of Kenya), leads father-present boys to give their fathers a high level of attention. In contrast, father absence, when coupled with male nondominance in the adult world (as among the Black Carib of Belize), seems to prompt father-present boys to give their fathers a low level of attention. In all four groups, father-absent boys allocated to males a high level of attention, whereas the attention level of girls was not affected by father absence.

Beatrice Whiting argued that social structure shapes children by how it influences "the company they keep" (Whiting 1980; Whiting and Edwards 1973, 1988). Michael Burton, Karen Nero, and James Egan show that in both Yap and Kosrae gender differences in residence emerge in middle childhood, reach their maximum between ages 11 and 14, and disappear by late teens. Girls move into the kinds of households where they do the most work, where their work is needed, and where they can be taught socially valued roles. The company these children keep (shaped by the different households they selectively move into) therefore shifts throughout childhood; hence boys and girls tend to learn "very different versions of cultural and practical knowledge, be exposed to different normative systems, and experience different degrees of modernity." Household composition changes as children develop. These changes occur not only to optimize children's work and energy allocation, but also to "maximize their chances of learning vital subsistence knowledge, appropriate social behavior, and to strengthen each individual's vital kin linkages," thus, to take on vital cultural tradition and expertise. Burton et al. focus on effects of time (developmental changes over time) and history (of these atolls and of their economies) in a way that Beatrice Whiting would clearly appreciate. She emphasized the elements of time and history in her writings about the Kenyan Kikuyu-speaking village of Ngecha, where she collected

observational and interview data over many years under the auspices of the Child Development Research Unit at the University of Nairobi (Whiting and Edwards, eds. in press).

Sara Harkness and Charles Super build on Whiting's focus on the cultural significance of daily routines, the informal organization and management of everyday life, through a study of men's and women's social networks in a Kipsigis community in Western Kenya. They investigate the basis of relationships felt to be meaningful by adapting a technique for mapping social networks. In their study they visited adults in their homes, showed them photo albums depicting the adults in the community, and through a guided interview asked in what contexts people knew each other. The answers were subjected to correlational analysis and multidimensional scaling, to produce a map of the bases of the social relationships. For both men and women, core helping relationships were at the center of the multidimensional space, suggesting their foundational importance to the cultural ethos of mutual help and support and to the community moral discourse. Somewhat surprisingly, these helping relationships seemed to be independent of other traditional ties such as kinship, age grade, and clan. Harkness and Super conclude that the research technique uncovers the cognitive map of meaningful relationships, "ties that bind," among Kokwet adults.

Marida Hollos and Philip Leis speak to Whiting's study of Paiute dreams in their work on the generative but controversial distinction between egocentric and sociocentric models of the self. They argue that the two models are not necessarily exclusive nor are they conflicting but seem instead to coexist in the self-definitions and motivations of individuals within the same society. Among the Ijo of southern Nigeria, both models were present in the social orientation and social behavior, as well as in the way individuals defined themselves and thought about their society and their place in it. They show, using dream reports and ethnographic summaries of two communities collected as part of the Harvard Adolescence Project, that youth have multiple models of achievement and independence. The Ijo youth have no need to separate themselves from kin to achieve independence. They are encouraged to be self-reliant throughout childhood, but they do so within the context of the safety and security of the kin group which stands behind them. Ijo youth are positioned to act independently due to their very interdependency with kin.

The final piece is not a research paper but rather a short tribute by Susan Seymour and serves as an example of the way Beatrice Whiting worked closely with students, shaping their beliefs, values, and practices in scientific research. Both John and Beatrice Whiting guided their students through an apprenticeship model of training. Through a series of experiences from Palfrey House, through statistical analysis at William

James Hall, and into fieldwork in India and beyond, Whiting provided Seymour (and many others!) with indispensable training in and appreciation for systematic, interdisciplinary research methodologies.

In all of these contributions, as well as other papers presented at the symposium, the Whiting tradition remains vital and alive in the questions raised, methods employed, and goals pursued. Beatrice Whiting (1976) believed that *culture* (not only social address variables and categories like maternal education) is too often treated as a “packaged variable” by social scientists, who see it as a nebulous but all pervasive explanation for variance left over and unexplained by individual variables (age, sex, social class, intelligence, and so on), and simply packaged as a black box called “ethnicity *x*” or “culture *y*.” Although Whiting argued that human beings themselves may be ultimately unfathomable and incommensurable, that is not true for human culture (understood as the shared component of everyday beliefs, values, and practices). Whiting strove to define cultural dimensions that explain important normative characteristics of adult and child behavior that could be observed, measured, manipulated, and summarized by the techniques of science. She believed that the best data on the transmission of culture could be obtained by combining a variety of methods, focusing on one domain and a limited set of hypotheses at a time. She spent her life searching for independent variables at the cultural level most powerful for explaining parent and child behavior around the world.

Given the difficulty of this task, it is not surprising that she eagerly enlisted her students, close colleagues, and collaborators in the quest for valid cross-cultural research methods; the appreciation from Susan Seymour is but one of many students and colleagues who were trained as part of this collaborative tradition. The Whiting legacy is evident in the methodologies employed by the researchers who gave presentations at the symposium and contributed papers to this volume. First, there is commitment to comparative methods (between- and within-culture comparisons) to advance knowledge and produce illuminating findings, seen for example in the reports by Munroe and Carol and Mel Ember. Second, subgroup comparisons, collaborative teamwork, and an interdisciplinary approach are important for research conducted within a cultural community, as evident in Weisner’s report from the Family Lifestyles Project. Third, Whiting advocated reliably coded variables available for a systematic sample of world societies used for comparative research, as exemplified by the Embers’ Human Relations Area Files research on father absence and male aggression. Whiting saw that such measures require theoretical and cross-cultural grounding based on careful assessment of ethnographic data. Fourth, Whiting always worked to advance quantitative analysis along with clinical insight and ethnography. She pushed continually for new and more powerful analytic tools and techniques, as seen in several papers. Burton,

Nero, and Egan use ethnographic and descriptive evidence for hypothesis generation and data interpretation, as do Hollos and Leis. Robert Munroe also generates hypotheses and causal explanations through imaginative reinterpretations of past research, and then devises a clever strategy to return to the empirical data to confirm or disconfirm those predictions with new measures of children's attention. Harkness and Super borrow a technique from social network methodology to study cultural meaning systems and discern the basis of reciprocal relationships in a community. Further, Whiting had a lifelong interest in the psychological development of girls and women, and was particularly interested in how women serve as agents of social change throughout the world through their multiple roles as workers, wives, and mothers. Robert and Sarah LeVine's article on women's schooling continues this tradition.

Finally, Beatrice Whiting was interested in research findings. Her mind richly produced creative insights and hypotheses, but she then always wanted to go on and discover patterns, conclusions, generalizations, and associations. "What were your results?" was always a question of the first importance. Certainly, she fully understood the inherent complexity and uncertainty of cultural knowledge applied to human development, but her response to that complexity was to urge us to construct an account based on testable theories and carefully collected empirical data.

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THOMAS S. WEISNER is Professor of Anthropology in the Departments of Psychiatry and Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles.

CAROLYN POPE EDWARDS is Professor of Psychology and Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Nebraska.

## NOTES

1. Tom Weisner thanks the Center for Culture and Health, Department of Psychiatry, UCLA. Carolyn Edwards was partially supported by the Institute for Agricultural and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Journal Series 13264.

2. The participants in the symposium include those with articles in this special issue and in addition: Susan Abbott, University of Kentucky; Mimi Bloch, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Candice Bradley, Lawrence University; Susan Schaefer-Davis and William Davis, Haverford College; Patricia Draper, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Marion Kranichfeld, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Naomi Quinn, Duke University; Richard Shweder, University of Chicago; and Pamela Stern, University of California, Berkeley.

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