

Childrearing as cultural adaptation: universals & socio-economic differences

Lecture 7

Variables that effect child development:

- Culture/Composition of household (Malinowski)
- Culture (Mead & Benedict)
- Mother's duties & composition of household (Whiting & Child)
- Composition of household & socioeconomic system (Whiting & Whiting)

today:

- Universals
- socioeconomic conditions (poverty & wealth)
(situational)

#1 - Universals?

Children of Different Worlds,
Beatrice **Whiting** and
Carolyn Edwards (1988)

- Data used much the same as Six Cultures study

Now - Are there universals across cultures?

- if so, why?
- is it because there are some kinds of biological or wired in universals?
- something else?

#1

All children are born with characteristics that are similar
–equip them for survival.

#2

Children across cultures may be grouped into categories which show great similarities

- Lap children 0 - 2.5 years
- Knee children 2.6 – 3.5 years
- Yard children 3.6-5.5 years
- Community/school children 5.6 – 10.5 years

#3 Mothers

- Their behaviors show transcultural similarities to each age (especially youngest).
- Similarities derive from universals in the **nurturing role** and **eliciting power** over children.
- Also differences in Mothers:
“training” (Africa); “controlling” (India);
“sociable” (U.S.)
- fathers???

#4

Other children

- Generic interactions between children of different ages cross cultures (especially youngest).
- Yard and school age children – common goal is to establish gender identities
- Same sex play groups

5

Similar outcome in behaviors

- Girls – nurturant
- Boys – egoistically dominant

WHY????

- Does this mean then that girls and boys are biologically different in this area?
- They claim NO - differences can be accounted for by amount of interaction with different social partners (all culture)

Nurturance training (girls):

- work more around the compound, under thumb of mother
- spend more time & interact more with small children
- assigned job of caretaker - develop skills in nurturing

Dominance training (boys):

- interact more with older companions
- work out pecking order
- work and play more away from home
- adult men often more dominant - see as example

#2 - Is there is a correlation between **socio-economic** conditions and the **treatment** of children?

Yes - because:

- Are **similarities** between pre-industrial Western societies and non-Western societies today in terms of socio-economic conditions, demographic conditions and how they treat and think of children.
(situational - *Trading Places*)
- **Socioeconomic hardship** in a culture can cause similar patterns as pre-industrial Europe.

- The idea that current European/American middle-class relations provide a universal standard of child treatment is **challenged**, not only by looking at other cultures BUT ALSO by our own history.

CHILDHOOD IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL EUROPE:

- **Gives** us another way of questioning what we consider a “normal” or “natural” childhood.
- **Question** own practices by looking at our own history, not only non-Western societies.
- **Shows** the link between socio-economic conditions - treatment of children.

Demographic conditions &
economic structure of pre-
industrial Europe – determined
the definition of childhood and
youth.

psychohistorian Lloyd De Mause, *The History of Childhood.*

- accepted practice to kill or abandon young children

John Gillis in his book *Youth and History* suggested socioeconomic conditions accounted for the lack of a proper childhood.

- Not lack of affection - practical

How understand a system so different?

- lack of tenderness?
- Thomas Hobbes
- Parents - avoid spoiling

WHY?

- Demographic conditions and economic structure of pre-industrial Europe determined the definition of childhood and youth

High MORTALITY

- life = “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”
- Life expectancy short - (1660's – 32 in England; 27 in Germany)
- English aristocracy 18th century M (45.8); F (48.2)

Village of Challain

- 18% died first month
- 35% died 1st year
- 53% died before 20

High FERTILITY

- If 1 in 2 children dies, just to replace themselves parents had to have many more children.
- 60% chance one male heir - 4 children

WEALTH FLOW

- Children were to pre-industrial Europe what pensions and disability insurance are to our own society.
- investment

AGE DISTRIBUTION

- An abundance of children with median age ranging from 8 to 21 yrs.
- Stoke-on-Trent - 1701, 49% under 20
- now - 29% under 20

EMOTIONS

- due to high mortality rate - attitude bound to be different.
- PRACTICAL

PEASANT LIFE CYCLE

- informal and formal apprenticeship of children prevailed in all European countries until the 18th century.
- Children started working 6 or 7

more resent examples:

- cotton factories
- “breaker boys”

Conclude:

- There is a relationship between economic conditions and the treatment of children
- The idea that current European American middle-class mother-child relations provides a universal standard is challenged
- cross-culturally better understanding how poverty and child mortality effect child development

“Culture, Scarcity and Maternal Thinking” by N. Scheper-Hughes (1985)

- Brazilian shantytown
- Challenges the innateness of middle-class expressions of maternal affection.

There is a correlation
between **socio-economic**
conditions and the
treatment of children.

- Upper class?

Perfectly Prep 2008

upper class also has issues

“Afluensa”

The Price of Privilege:

- “culture of affluence”= an over-emphasis on achievement and isolation from parents.
- Intense pressure to succeed
- Most affluent report being the least happy

- Highest use of marijuana, inhalants, and tranquilizers
- Often use these substances in an effort to alleviate emotional stress
- Popularity = substance abuse
- Endless pursuit of perfection and excellence

- Stressful and competitive lifestyles
- nothing meaningful
- Emphasis on appearance

Reading:

- Tobin, Hsueh, Karasawa Ch. 5