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# CHILDHOOD WITHIN ANTHROPOLOGY



## Introduction

Looking back on the ways that children and childhood have been analyzed in anthropology inevitably reveals gaps, but it also shows that anthropologists have a long history of studying children. This chapter will give an overview of several schools of anthropological thinking that have considered children and used ideas about childhood to contribute to holistic understandings of culture. It will examine how anthropologists have studied children in the past and what insights these studies can bring to more recent analyses. Although not always explicit, ideas about children, childhood, and the processes by which a child becomes a fully socialized human being are embedded in much anthropological work and are central to understanding the nature of childhood in any given society. Work on child-rearing has also illuminated many aspects of children's lives and is vital to understanding children themselves and their wider social relationships. Having discussed these, this chapter will then turn to newer studies of childhood, based around child-centered, or child-focused, anthropology with the assumption that children themselves are the best informants about their own lives. This has been presented as a radical break with the ways that anthropologists have studied children previously, when, as Helen Schwartzman has argued, anthropologists "*used* children as a population of 'others' to facilitate the investigation of a range of topics, from developing racial typologies to investigat[ing] acculturation, but they have rarely been perceived as a legitimate topic of research in their own right" (2001:15, emphasis in original). This chapter will examine the history of studies of children and childhood within anthropology, evaluating the extent to which Schwartzman's view is correct.

## Children: The First Primitives

Children have been continual motifs since the earliest days of anthropological writing, the savage and the child existing in parallel to explain social and cultural development. It was through understandings of childhood that early British anthropologists such as Edward Tylor, John Lubbock, and C. Staniland Wake examined the nature of human society and the development of humankind. Before the advent of sustained fieldwork, the child, like the savage or the primitive, stood in opposition to the rational, male world of European and North American civilization. Children were of central importance to these theorists because they provided a direct link between savagery and civilization. The child came to prominence in 19th-century anthropology because of contemporary theory that linked ontology and phylogeny: the view that the transformation of an individual was mirrored in the development of the human race, so that the development of the child from infancy to maturity could be seen to parallel the development of the human species from savagery to civilization. Tylor argued that in children, and in particular in the games that they played, there were echoes of the ways in which our human ancestors lived. "As games thus keep up the record of primitive warlike arts, so they reproduce, in what are at once sports and little children's lessons, early stages in the history of childlike tribes of mankind" (Tylor 1913[1871]:73–74). Children were, he claimed, "representatives of remotely ancient culture" (1913[1871]:73) and analyzing the child alongside the savage was a way to understand the condition of contemporary humanity.

The idea of "the savage as a representative of the childhood of the human race" (Tylor 1913[1871]:284) was elaborated by other anthropologists. John Lubbock, for example, argued that

> the close resemblance existing in ideas, language and habits, and character between savages and children, though generally admitted, has usually been disposed of in a passing sentence, and regarded rather as a curious accident than as an important truth. . . . The opinion is rapidly gaining ground among naturalists, that the development of the individual is an epitome of that of the species, a conclusion which, if fully borne out, will evidently prove most instructive. (1978[1870]:360)

The stance of both Tylor and Lubbock was explicitly evolutionary: the highest stage of evolution was the European adult male while the savage

and the child were at the bottom of the hierarchy. This theory was further developed by C. Staniland Wake, who developed a complex theory of the stages of human evolution that corresponded directly to the observable stages of development in children.

> It has become a familiar idea that mankind, as a whole, may be likened to an individual man, having, like him, an infancy, a childhood, youth, and manhood. In the early ages of the world mankind was in its infancy, and from that stage it has progressed, by gradual steps, until now it may be said to have attained, in peoples of the European stock, at least, to a vigorous manhood. (1878:4–5)

In *The Evolution of Morality* Wake attempted to trace these stages in relation to understandings of morality in both children and savages. He identified five stages in moral development, which he characterized as "the selfish, the wilful, the emotional, the empirical and the rational" (1878:6). Each of these stages corresponded both to a stage in a child's development and to particular groups of people who represented different developmental states of the human race. Wake argued that the first stage of development, shown both in infants and in the Australian Aborigines, was that of "pure selfishness" because it was characterized by "an entire absence of moral principle, and a disposition which seeks its sole satisfaction in the gratification of the passions" (1878:7). The next stage of development could be seen in North American Indians and slightly older children and was characterized by an innate cruelty characteristic of a pre-civilized state of being.

The third stage of moral development was shown after the age of puberty, when the child entered the emotional period. In this his development mirrored that of the Negro, who was represented as "a creature of passion, which leads him to abandon himself to sexual excesses, and an indulgence in intoxication . . . he has a disregard for human life, and when his passions are aroused he is utterly careless about inflicting pain" (1878:8). While Wake acknowledged that education had a restraining effect on the European young man, "*subjectively*, the youthful phase of the civilised mind is exactly similar to that which is observed among the negroes as a race" (1878:8, emphasis in original). The empirical stage was shown by older youths and by the Chinese and the Hindus, who, while imaginative and clearly of a higher order than others, still had, Wake claimed, an incomplete control over their emotions and a limited grasp of morality. It was

only when a child finally reached the rational stage, with a fully formed moral character, that he became an adult. Similarly, in Wake's view, it was only when the races had reached rationality, characterized as being when "imagination comes to be controlled by the reflective or regulative faculty; and when reason has established its influence" (1878:6), that they were fully civilized. This stage was attained, of course, only by members of Northern European and American societies, and only by men.

In 1906 the first monograph specifically on childhood was written by Dudley Kidd, called *Savage Childhood: A Study of Kafir Children*, which examined aspects of black South African children's lives. Deeply imbued with racist attitudes, Kidd found in "kafir" children a charm and interest that he claimed had vanished from adults, even though he also saw them as lagging far behind European children in intellectual and moral development. Yet Kidd did acknowledge the importance of studying children's lives, claiming that "childhood, so far from being beneath our notice, is the most important, instructive, and interesting period in the life of a savage" (1906:viii). It is possible to dismiss such comments, along with the views of Tylor, Lubbock, or Wake, as rather unpleasant anthropological curiosities. Indeed Laurence Hirschfeld has suggested that because of the offensive early parallels drawn between savages and children, anthropologists have been reluctant to look at childhood for fear of resurrecting these embarrassing antecedents.

> Like Sartre's anti-Semite, who, as a result of a disagreeable encounter with a Jewish tailor, despised Jews but not tailors, anthropologists uncomfortable with their predecessors' awkward comparisons of children's and primitive thought did not end up abandoning the study of native populations, only children. (2002:613)

It goes without saying that the ideas of Tylor, Lubbock, and Wake are outdated and discredited, despite C. R. Hallpike's recent (1979) revival of some of these long-dead debates to draw parallels between the mentality of "primitive" people and children. What is interesting, however, is not so much the prejudices of the time, as the importance placed on children in understanding humanity in general. Without wishing to rehabilitate the conclusions of these authors, ideas about the nature of children were central to the development of early anthropology. Before fieldwork, children were the only observable "others"; they were the savages at home, and as such they could be studied and observed and their development

charted and noted. Children enabled anthropologists to write in a way that familiarized the strange and that domesticated ideas about savages.

In the USA such explicit evolutionary frameworks were rejected, and children had a much more prominent role to play in the development of anthropology, as sources of data rather than as providing close-at-hand parallels to exotic primitives. Franz Boas in particular challenged the idea that race was linked, in a hierarchical manner, to language and culture. He criticized the idea of an evolutionist scale with "the savage," represented by children and primitives, at one end and civilization, evidenced in European culture, at the other. He also rejected any idea of racial descent being linked to perceived biological superiority, claiming that "the old idea of absolute stability of human types must, however, evidently be given up, and with it the belief of the hereditary superiority of certain types over others" (1974[1911]:218). In "The Instability of Human Types" (1974[1911]), he used studies of child development to chart the environmental impact on human physiology among immigrants to America. By comparing parents and children of Eastern and Southern European descent, and the observable differences between their children born in Europe and those born in their new homeland, he demonstrated how phenotypes such as face shape changed. This, Boas (1916) suggested, meant that the most important differences between people were not biological or racial in origin but environmental. Boas argued that the changes and adaptations in immigrants could be best noted in children and their bodies, as it was during childhood that the most important physiological changes took place.

> Thus at the time of birth the bulk of the body and stature are very small, and increase with great rapidity until about the fourteenth year in girls, and the sixteenth year in boys. On the other hand, the size of the head increases rapidly only for one or two years; and from this time on the increment is, comparatively speaking, slight. Similar conditions prevail in regard to the growth of the face, which grows rapidly for a few years only, and later on increases, comparatively speaking, slowly. . . .
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> It is a well-known fact that the central nervous system continues to develop in structure longer perhaps than any other part of the body, and it may therefore be inferred that it will be apt to show the most far-reaching influences of environment.
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> It follows from this consideration that social and geographical environment must have an influence upon the form of the body of the adult, and upon the development of his central nervous system. (1974[1911]:215)

Children, in this understanding, are not simply primitives by another name and the stages of their development are not analogous to any sort of racial typographies. Instead they are valid sources of data and one of the ways in which the impact of environmental factors can be seen in human populations. Child development was thus an integral part of US anthropology from the beginning, a point emphasized in LeVine and New's recent (2008) reader on child development and anthropology, in which Boas's 1911 article is the first in the collection. Boas's interest in children, and young people, also had a profound influence on one of his most famous students, Margaret Mead, who became such a prominent figure in the anthropological study of childhood, and to whom we now turn.

## Culture and Personality

It was with Boas's encouragement that Margaret Mead began her famous studies of Samoa and the South Pacific. Like Boas, she viewed the differences between various peoples as cultural rather than biological. In particular she focused her attention on children and young people, looking at how they were brought up, and the effects that their upbringing had on their adult personality and behavior. Mead's thesis was a direct challenge to psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall, who had argued in his influential 1904 book, *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Anthropology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, that adolescence was a transitional process in the life-cycle between childhood and adulthood, characterized by particular traits and behaviors brought on by the biological changes at puberty. Most famously Hall described adolescence as a time of storm and stress, when young people were in the grip of powerful biological changes they could not control. He wrote that "every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind, and morals. There is not only arrest, but perversion, at every stage, and hoodlumism, juvenile crime, and secret vice" (Hall 1904:xiv). Although he acknowledged that adolescence could be a time of creativity, and saw it as crucial to the later development of personality, he also saw it as a time of instability and extremes.

Mead set out for Samoa with the explicit aim of disproving this universal, biological determinism. In *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1971[1928]) she analyzed the daily lives of Samoan girls from infancy through early childhood until adolescence. She rejected the idea that adolescence was necessarily a stressful and disruptive experience for both the child and the

society and claimed that behavior in adolescence was caused by cultural conditioning rather than biological changes. Based on close observation and discussion with young women and girls in Samoa, Mead found none of the tensions inherent in the lives of American adolescents. She pointed to two factors that caused adolescence to be so stressful in the USA, and which created tensions between society and its young people: the large variety of choices in religious and moral matters in the USA and the repressive attitudes to sex and bodily functions. In contrast she found that adolescence in Samoa was not characterized by stress and strain because of the different cultural expectations about appropriate behavior for children and the ways that these notions of appropriateness were transferred to children. From an early age, children were taught to be demure, courteous, quiet, hard-working, loyal to their families, and obedient. The expectation that children would conform to these norms was made easier by the lack of choice. The society was homogeneous, believing in one religion and attending one church. There were no alternative belief systems or models that children could follow and rebellion was not an option. Boys and girls avoided each other when very young, playing only with members of their own sex. As they grew older they started to come together again until girls began to take lovers. As long as these lovers were within certain social groups (i.e., not family members), these sexual affairs were tolerated or ignored.

Mead subsequently came in for a great deal of criticism concerning both her methodology and her interpretation, but *Coming of Age in Samoa* placed children on the anthropological agenda and Mead remains one of the first anthropologists to take children, as children, seriously. She was also one of the most significant members, along with Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict, of the Culture and Personality school of anthropology, which was concerned with how the child became a cultural being. Sapir (1949) in particular argued that anthropologists should study child development in order to understand the relationships between the individual parts of a culture and the whole. This insight was taken up by Ruth Benedict, who stressed the necessity of anthropologists engaging with psychology, and famously wrote that "cultures . . . are individual psychology thrown large upon the screen, given gigantic proportions and a long time span" (1932:24). She also emphasized the importance of understanding the entire life-cycle and the ways in which children became adults, as well as the interdependence between child and adult. In "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning" (1938) she identified a paradox at the

heart of American society, in which the features favored and promoted in boys' childhoods – irresponsibility, submission, and sexual ignorance – were the very ones that had to be inverted and suppressed when a boy grew up and his role was transformed from son to father and he had to take on the attributes of responsibility, dominance, and virility. Children were encouraged to act in particular ways until they reached adulthood, when they were explicitly discouraged from displaying any of these behaviors. Benedict claimed that this change of role might well be a universal "fact of life," but how this change was managed varied greatly cross-culturally and there was nothing natural about particular paths to maturity. By using ethnographic evidence from non-Western societies, she argued that children outside Europe and North America had to undergo much less dramatic discontinuities in their cultural conditioning, and that through institutions such as age-sets and initiation into secret knowledge, people could pass from role to role without the stress and strain of Western adolescence.

For Mead, Benedict, and their colleagues, one of the important questions for anthropology was how an infant became a cultural being and what impact early childhood experiences had on adult personality, as well as on the collective culture of a society. Developing the work of psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner and the anthropologist Ralph Linton, Cora Du Bois conducted fieldwork on the Indonesian island of Alor between 1937 and 1939, which she published as *The People of Alor* (1944). Kardiner and Linton had proposed a specific link between culture and personality, arguing that any given culture had a "basic personality," which Kardiner defined as "that personality configuration which is shared by the bulk of the society's members as a result of the early experiences which they have in common. It does not correspond to the total personality of the individual but rather to the projective systems or, in different phraseology, the value-attitude systems, which are basic to the individual's personality configuration" (1945:viii). Studying the early experiences of children allowed anthropologists to look at the individual members of a society and to compare shared characteristics and traits in order to propose a "basic personality" for each culture. Du Bois modified this idea with her concept of the "modal personality," which, while based on an assumption of a "physic unity of mankind" (1944:2), allowed for individual variations within a culture. She understood the infant as a blank slate on which the effects of aspects of childcare would have observable effects. She argued that each culture promoted the development of particular personality types which would occur most frequently within that culture and claimed that the

most common personality structure in any society was "the product of the interplay of fundamental physiologically and neurologically determined tendencies and experiences common to all human beings acted upon by the cultural milieu which denies, directs and gratifies these ends very differently in different societies" (1944:3). Basing her work heavily on Freudian psychoanalytical theory, Du Bois used life histories, Rorschach blot tests, children's drawings, and participant-observation in order to arrive at a particular personality type for the Alor. She concluded that Alorese were insecure and fearful, had low self-esteem, and suffered from greed, dislike of the parental role, and negative feelings about human relationships. This could be traced back to their earliest experiences, when the discipline of children was inconsistent, veering between harsh and indulgent, and the fact that mothers returned to work in the fields a couple of weeks after giving birth, leaving the child in the care of others, thereby causing him or her frustration and dissatisfaction.

Since its heyday the Culture and Personality school has come in for much criticism. It has been attacked for using children to discuss adults rather than in their own right, for isolating specific practices and looking for their long-term impact while ignoring others, for implying that adults are no more than the sum of their earliest childhood experiences, and for suggesting that there can be such a thing as a national character, which, following Du Bois, was understood as a result of early childhood experience and was unrelated to later developments or intervening events (Harkness and Super 1983:222). National character studies in particular, based on Du Bois's modal personality type, sometimes carried out by those who had not done fieldwork, were condemned as crude, unhelpful, and of limited interest in understanding children, adults, or social institutions. Despite the criticisms, however, the Culture and Personality school remains a pioneering, if flawed, way of understanding children's lives and ideas about childhood. For all the problems inherent in her work, Margaret Mead "broke the stranglehold [that] biology and genetics held on studies of child development" (Langness 1975:98) and *Coming of Age in Samoa* remains in print to this day. The Culture and Personality school envisaged an interdisciplinary anthropology that drew upon, but also challenged, the universalist premises of developmental psychology. Yet psychology itself has changed, and as Robert LeVine has argued, child psychologists have re-evaluated their own theories and understandings throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries, leaving the theories of the Culture and Personality school open to further criticism.

> Anthropologists are at least partly dependent on developmental knowledge from other disciplines in their assumptions about how children experience their environments – including the environmental features to which they are sensitive and their age-related concepts for understanding – and they have often turned to psychology and psychiatry for guidance in making these assumptions plausible. For much of the 20th century, however, this guidance was unreliable, as one developmental theory followed another into the trash heap of history. (LeVine 2007:249)

## Cross-Cultural Studies of Child-Rearing

Although Margaret Mead's influence declined in American anthropology in the 1950s, the attempts to integrate psychology and anthropology continued, and the work of John Whiting and others developed out of the Culture and Personality school and focused on particular aspects of child-rearing and cross-cultural child development. After fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, John Whiting turned his attention to cross-cultural research, focusing his anthropology on broader patterns of human behavior, and their links to childhood experiences. Using material from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), the immense database of ethnographic information based at Yale University and set up in 1949 by George Murdock as a way of making statistical cross-cultural comparisons, Whiting and his collaborators set out to undertake systematic analyses of childhood experiences and the effects that they had on adult society. He later recalled: "I decided to carry out a cross-cultural study to explore the basic assumption of Freudian theory that childhood experiences are a powerful force in shaping adult personality and behavior" (1994:24).

*Child Training and Personality*, published in 1953, attempted to apply Freudian theories about the stages of a child's psychosexual development to ethnographic data. Using information from 75 societies, Whiting and his co-researcher Irvin Child focused on three particular aspects: weaning from the breast, toilet training, and sex training – stages which Freud had labeled oral, anal, and phallic, and which, he claimed, always occurred in that order. In looking at the ethnographic evidence, however, Whiting and Child found that these were not salient variables in many societies, and while all societies dealt with issues of weaning, toilet training, or the management of sex, these stages did not always occur in the order Freud had suggested and there was evidence from many societies that toilet

training preceded weaning (Whiting and Child 1953). Furthermore, in many cases, weaning from the breast or toilet training were regarded as relatively unimportant while "weaning from the back" (when a child was no longer carried by the mother or caregiver) and the management of aggression were considered greater issues in the socialization of children. Whiting and Child concluded that parents in most cultures were more concerned with interpersonal relations than they were with bodily functions. They dropped the idea of temporal stages in favor of behavior systems, which they defined as "oral, anal, genital, training for independence and for the control of aggression" (Whiting 1994:24). They found correlations between each of these behavior systems and other factors such as the degree of initial indulgence, the age at onset of socialization, the severity of socialization, and the techniques of punishment used by parents (Whiting 1977:32). Whiting, however, called these results only a "crude beginning" (1977:32) and spent the next four decades studying child-rearing and socialization in as scientific, and comparative, a way as possible. Throughout his work, Whiting was concerned with testing specific hypotheses about the links between particular aspects of social life: for example, he looked at how a combination of practices such as a boy sleeping exclusively with his mother and a taboo on sexual relations between parents for a substantial period after birth might lead to a boy's strong identification with his mother and a hostility toward his father; an Oedipal situation which could only be resolved by elaborate rituals at puberty such as circumcision (Whiting et al. 1958).

One of the most important projects initiated by Whiting and his wife Beatrice was the Six Cultures study (Whiting 1963). Rather than relying on other people's data, Whiting and his collaborators set out to compare six different cultures using the same methods, and to look at the same problems of child-rearing and socialization. Their fieldwork sites were Japan, the Philippines, North India, Mexico, Kenya, and New England. In each instance a male and female ethnographer simultaneously went to each community and carried out systematic observation and data collection, based on instructions from a single field manual, on children and child-rearing behavior in each community. The Six Cultures study allowed for certain conclusions to be drawn about the interplay between cultural variations in child-rearing, the later personality of the child, and wider aspects of society. One of the most important of these conclusions was the level of complexity of the society, and the Six Cultures surveys showed that children in complex societies tended to be less nurturant and

more egotistical than those in simple societies. They found that girls, in all six cultures, were more nurturant than boys and that children of nuclear families were generally low on aggression and high on sociable interaction, while the opposite was true for children of polygamous households (Whiting 1977). Perhaps the most important aspect of the Six Cultures study was, as pointed out by Robert LeVine (one of Whiting's collaborators, who worked among the Gusii in Kenya, see below), the fact that it introduced the "systematic naturalistic observation of children – that is, [the] repeated and aggregated observations of children in their routine 'behavior settings' as a method for recording the interactions of children with their environments in diverse cultures" (2007:253). The Six Cultures study provides a wealth of detail about children's lives, how they were treated, and their place in the life-cycle. There were problems with the implementation of some of the psychological tests, as both Whiting (1977) and LeVine (2007) point out, and some of the methods were later discounted as unreliable. However, the data from this project are still used and developed (see, for instance, Whiting and Edwards 1988) and it has remained one of the most comprehensive studies of child development within anthropology.

The work of John Whiting and his co-researchers has been extremely influential in North American anthropology. It has proved that there is nothing natural, or universal, about the ways in which young children act and that their lives are defined as much by their culture and environment as by biology. Much of the work influenced by Whiting has been explicitly comparative, showing how childcare differs across societies, how children are socialized through these practices into full membership of the group, and how these practices are optimally developed to ensure the continuation of certain behaviors and belief systems. It has also been longitudinal, looking at infants within the life-cycle and analyzing the long-term effects of caregivers' behavior. One of the pioneers of this type of work was William Caudill, who first conceived of a longitudinal, comparative study of infant care and child-rearing in the USA and Japan. His study insisted on the importance of in-depth participant-observation and on the symbiosis of anthropology and psychology. Caudill was concerned with the cultural goals of parenting above and beyond survival: what parents wanted their children to be like, and how they achieved this. Caudill and his co-researchers observed women in both Japan and America, looking at the care they gave to their babies, the ways they interacted with them, and the effects this had on the infants' behavior.

He examined which behaviors were valued in a society, which were discouraged, and how mothers communicated this. He hypothesized that American parents would value independence-related behavior more than Japanese parents, who emphasized interdependence and the importance of harmonious social relationships. His observations and statistical analysis confirmed this, and he found that American children were more active, more vocal, independent, and able to manipulate their social and physical environment, while Japanese children were quieter, displayed fewer extremes of emotion, but were more socially skilled (Caudill and Weinstein 1969; Caudill and Schooler 1973). Self-reliance and independence were not goals of Japanese child-rearing and the promotion of the individual was valued less than the collective. As Robert LeVine concludes of these studies:

> The importance of these findings does not depend on an assumption that the child behavior patterns observed are fixed psychological dispositions that will maintain themselves regardless of environmental support. Rather, the findings indicate that the direction of child development, and the behavioral contexts of early experience, vary by culture according to adult standards of conduct. They also show that children of different cultures acquire different interpersonal skills and strategies, differing rules for emotional expression, and differing standards by which to judge their own behavior. (2003:202–203)

Robert LeVine has analyzed child-rearing practices and child socialization extensively in the decades since he worked with John Whiting as one of the Six Cultures researchers and he remains at the forefront of research on children and the interface between anthropology and psychology. For him, studying child development cross-culturally is central to studying children within anthropology, and such work forms the backbone of an anthropology of childhood. He claims that "socialization research is not a complete 'anthropology of childhood,' though it is an indispensable part of one and has laid the basis for the other parts by describing the environments of children throughout the world" (2003:5). His work has illuminated the differences between child-rearing practices cross-culturally and shown how these are adaptive processes which are rational within their own situations (even if parents do not or cannot articulate why they act as they do) and which enable children to grow up effectively, understanding the norms of their society. From the earliest days of a child's life, LeVine and his collaborators have shown the impact of cultural beliefs

on child-rearing and looked at the interplay between the cultural, the biological, and the environmental. In 1977 LeVine identified three universal goals of child-rearing which parents strove to fulfill:

1. The physical survival and health of the child, including (implicitly) the normal development of his reproductive capacity during puberty.
2. The development of the child's behavioral capacity for economic self-maintenance in maturity.
3. The development of the child's behavioral capacities for maximizing other cultural values – e.g., morality, prestige, wealth, religious piety, intellectual achievement, personal satisfaction, self realization – as formulated and symbolically elaborated in culturally distinctive beliefs, norms, and ideologies. (1977:20)

LeVine went on to argue that there is a "natural hierarchy" among these goals, so that goal one is the most fundamental priority because it is a prerequisite of the other two goals. In situations where parents are not assured of the survival of their children, they may well postpone the other two goals until the first is secured. In other instances, such as modern America, or Europe, the survival of children is taken as implicit, so parents are more likely to devote time and energy to the second and third goals. Parental child-rearing and childcare are necessarily adaptive to the environment. In African societies, where infant mortality is high, and the early years of life the most dangerous, mothers are likely to keep their children in very close contact with them, carrying them everywhere, and breast-feeding them for up to two years. They will feed them on demand, but generally do not treat them as emotionally responsive individuals they should make eye contact with or talk to, or about whose behavioral development they should be concerned (LeVine 1977). It is not that they are uninterested in their long-term development, or have not made explicit plans for events later on in life such as betrothal or initiation, but they are less concerned with shaping their behavior at this point.

By contrasting Gusii mothers in Kenya and middle-class mothers in the USA, where he and his colleagues have carried out long-term observational research, LeVine is able to analyze two fundamentally different models of child-rearing and childcare, which, although they have the same ultimate aim of socializing the next generation, challenge ideas about the universal needs of infants. He terms the two models of development the pediatric, practiced by the Gusii, and the pedagogic, undertaken by Americans, viewing the first as being concerned with protection and

survival in the early years and the second as more concerned with learning and behavioral competencies (LeVine et al. 1994:249). There are very different parental strategies at work here and very different conceptualizations of the relationship between the child and the parent. LeVine describes this, in the African case, as parents expecting to be "united with their children in a long-run relationship of 'serial reciprocity' " (2003:92). In this model, the care given to infants by parents is reciprocated by children working on the family land and supporting their parents in their old age. Obedience is a crucial factor in this, the teaching of which to the growing infant is one of the main goals of child-rearing. A child must learn to be quiet, make few demands, and must not be allowed to disrupt the hierarchical basis of society. Gusii mothers explicitly discourage praise as they think it would make even a compliant child conceited and disobedient and therefore a threat to the social order. American mothers have no such expectations and they praise their children, engage in protoconversations with them, and encourage them to walk and talk early (LeVine et al. 1994). LeVine's work clearly shows that infant care is not simply about ensuring that a young child's basic needs for food or shelter are met, but is part of much larger systems of cultural practice which ensure that, even from the earliest days of a child's life, he or she is socialized and enculturated into the social values of the society.

This emphasis on infant enculturation and the plasticity of human behavior has also been used to challenge the universalist tendencies of developmental psychology, which has insisted on, for example, optimal forms of attachment between infant and mother (or maternal caregiver), regardless of cultural background (Levine and Norman 2001). Attachment theory, as first formulated by John Bowlby, suggested that "it is essential for mental health . . . that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute – one person who steadily 'mothers' him) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment" (1953:13). Bowlby went on to conclude that a baby would become distressed and resist separation from his or her mother, and that this was a biologically adaptive, species-wide, mechanism that had evolved to protect vulnerable young humans by ensuring that mother and infant remained in close proximity.

Detailed studies by anthropologists have challenged these findings and shown enormous variations in ideas about attachment and the ways in which mothers promote certain values, such as independence, in their children. LeVine and Norman (2001) have argued that data from

Germany have shown that self-reliance and learning to play by themselves are valued cultural attributes of babies and that German mothers are not always responsive to their child's cries or demands for attention and are less likely than American mothers to pick up a crying child simply because he or she wants attention. Infants would therefore be seen as insecurely attached compared to their American counterparts, whose mothers are more responsive to their children and do not promote a tolerance of being left alone. LeVine and Norman conclude that relying too heavily on Bowlby's theory of attachment, or taking American patterns as the universal norm, might lead to some dubious conclusions which suggest

> the secure attachment pattern found in the majority of American one-year-olds is adaptive for all humans and that other patterns jeopardize the child's mental health. From this perspective, the findings from German samples in which a majority of infants are classified as insecurely attached could be interpreted as indicating that the majority of German parents are raising emotionally disturbed children. Attachment researchers have understandably refrained from that conclusion, but without offering a satisfactory alternative explanation of the results. (2001:101–102)

This work has also been developed in other very different settings. In his extensive work with Native American Navajo infants, James Chisholm has looked at whether their mothers' use of the cradleboard had any noticeable long-lasting impact on a child's attachment. (A cradleboard is the wooden board on which the Navajo strapped their babies. They were carried by the mother while she traveled or was working and were generally used from birth until the child could walk.) His hypothesis was that the cradleboard might be a source of "perturbation" for children, interfering with their attachments to their mothers by reducing their arousal and activity levels, which would lead to less interaction with their mothers. According to Bowlby, this would have long-lasting effects on the child's later behavior. Chisholm found, however, that while a cradleboard did reduce a child's activity and the mother's responsiveness, the effects were transitory. After a session on the cradleboard, mothers would be particularly responsive to their children and there would follow a very intense period of interaction. Chisholm concluded that infant behavior was more changeable and malleable than Bowlby's theories would allow, and that, furthermore, the differences in the ways that infants responded constituted an adaptive process which showed "an evolutionary trend toward increased plasticity" (1983:216).

Building upon this work on infant socialization, other anthropologists have examined a variety of infant behaviors, and caregiver responses, looking at the impact of interactions between environmental, biological, and cultural factors (e.g., Hewlett and Lamb 2005). Some of the most striking work has been done on crying patterns in infants. It is widely assumed in the West that all young children cry for hours, sometimes without cause, and that there is nothing that parents can do to assuage this crying. This crying is even pathologized and described as "colic," although in other settings such a label does not exist (Small 1998). Cross-cultural studies have shown that this behavior is far from universal, and several anthropologists and pediatricians have noted significant variations in the intensity, amount, and even time of crying in infants, so that while all babies do cry, the patterns of crying are very different. Some of the most detailed work on this has been carried out among Kalahari !Kung babies in sub-Saharan Africa in comparison to infants in Western societies such as America or Holland. There appears to be a crying curve, found in both Western and !Kung babies, in which the crying reaches a peak at the end of the second month and gradually decreases by the age of 12 weeks (Barr 1990). However, within this general pattern, there are observable differences: !Kung babies cry with much less intensity and for shorter periods than do American or Dutch babies (Konner 1976; Barr 1990; Barr et al. 1991).

One explanation for these differences is the very different patterns of caregiving in a child's earliest years. Melvin Konner describes the earliest cultural life of a !Kung infant, noting the sacrosanct nature of the mother/child bond, and the fact that the baby stays in close physical contact with the mother at all times. Infants live in a sling on the mother's hip, where they manage their own feeding by sucking at the breast when they are hungry. They are also allowed a great deal of room to wriggle and move around and their mothers actively encourage them to move at an early age, so that generally !Kung babies have more advanced motor skills than their Western counterparts (Konner 1972, 1976). Similarly studies of Korean infants have shown that they are left alone much less than American babies and show significant differences in crying patterns, with no crying peak at two months and less evening crying. Meredith Small cites one study in which Korean babies at one month were left alone for only 8.3% of their time, while American infants at the same age spent 67.5% of their time on their own. Furthermore, parents in America deliberately ignored infants in 46% of crying episodes (Small 1998:154).

Longitudinal studies have shown how practices of childcare have changed. Looking back at 30 years' work on infant care in the Indian city of Bhubaneshwar, Susan Seymour (1999) has described how patterns of infant care have altered in response to changes in social and economic conditions. She describes how, when first doing fieldwork, she found that among upper- and middle-status Indian families, children were raised in a way to encourage interdependence and submission to authority. Children had multiple caregivers to meet their emotional and physical needs and intense dyadic relationships between mothers and infants were discouraged. Children were socialized "to identify with the family as a whole and to put the interests of that collective unit ahead of their individual interests" (1999:268). They were discouraged from thinking of themselves as individuals, and for the first year of their lives they were referred to by a kin name rather than a personal one. Over time, as women have become more independent and educated, children are less likely to live in the multi-generational, hierarchical, and interdependent families into which their mothers and grandmothers were born. Seymour notes that a shift has taken place in attitudes and that the idea of putting the collective before oneself is being challenged. Young women are more likely to challenge tyrannical mothers-in-law and not all family members fulfill their duties to parents and siblings. As families become smaller and there are fewer caregivers available to look after children, mothers, with some help from fathers, have taken on more childcare. Thanks to their education, they are also more likely to apply different models of education to children, tending more toward the pedagogical model, where children must be taught, talked to, and stimulated, rather than the pediatric, where they are simply looked after.

## Children in British Anthropology

The study of children in British anthropology has followed a different trajectory to that in North America, and for many years it was possible to talk about two distinct, and sometimes antagonistic, traditions. The role of psychology, so central to American anthropology, never had the same prominence in the UK, nor did cross-cultural, comparative surveys. While children had first been used as a way of understanding the primitive by Edward Tylor and others, such ideas were soon discredited by first-hand study. Boas had shown in the USA that ideas about evolutionist racial

hierarchies could not stand up to data brought back from fieldwork, and within British anthropology also, studies had changed from broad generalizations based on second-hand sources to in-depth, ethnographic studies, supported by sustained fieldwork and participant-observation. Holistic studies of small-scale societies such as those pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) described and acknowledged children's role in the family and detailed particular aspects of their lives such as their role in kinship or political systems.

It was Malinowski's insistence on the importance of describing all aspects of life which meant that in the works of his followers there are descriptions of children's lives, the relationships between parents and child, and accounts of the ways in which childhood is conceptualized. Raymond Firth's work on the Tikopia of Polynesia (1936) is particularly rich in this regard and children are described and discussed in some detail. Similarly, in the work of Audrey Richards (1956), another student of Malinowski, issues such as the end of childhood and children's place in society are analyzed and children are an important element in her ethnography. By the late 1940s the study of relationships between children and adults was central to Meyer Fortes's work, and over a third of *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (1949) is devoted to a study of parent/child relationships and their mutual dependence and ambiguities, among the Tallensi of northern Ghana. In his historical survey of children in ethnography Robert LeVine comments:

> These works by a generation of anthropologists influenced directly by Malinowski leave no doubt that by the 1930s childhood was an established topic of ethnographic description, often in the context of kinship or ritual, sometimes in relation to education or socialization, only occasionally with psychological interpretations. Childhood was part of their anthropology, not a topic borrowed from developmental psychology or other disciplines (although Richards and Fortes knew the child development literature of their time). (2007:251)

Generally, however, developmental psychology played a much lesser role in British ethnographers' views of children. Malinowski had looked to Freudianism to understand the psychology of non-Western peoples and found difficulties in applying ideas such as the Oedipus complex to cultures that had very different ideas about kinship. Meyer Fortes (1974) also, a psychologist turned anthropologist, brought the insights from his former discipline to his studies of parent/child relationships, but as Richards (1970) pointed out, British anthropologists tended to see certain practices, be

they weaning or initiation, as having normative functions. In general, she argued, most British anthropologists, especially in the period when A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's theories of structural functionalism dominated, were more concerned with social institutions such as age-sets or kinship systems than with psychological interpretations of child-rearing or how children became adults. She commented on the decline in interest among British anthropologists in the subject of child socialization since the 1930s, when many had tackled the subject under headings such as education or child-rearing. She suggested this was due to a deep-seated suspicion shown by many British social anthropologists toward psychology and she encouraged anthropologists who wished to study children to learn from developmental psychology. She wrote that "an institutional study of socialization is a field of inquiries which I believe the social anthropologist is particularly fitted to carry out. Child-rearing practices properly belong to it, but lack of comparative knowledge of child growth and development would probably hamper the ordinary field ethnographer. He or she would require specialist training or alternatively the help of a child psychologist" (1970:9).

Despite the early interest by British anthropologists in children's lives, by the 1970s studies involving children were relatively uncommon (there were, of course, exceptions, such as Goody and Goody 1967 or Read 1968). The rejection of psychology, and the influence in the 1960s of Lévi-Strauss and structuralism, shifted the emphasis away from detailed studies of communities in which children were a visible, if marginalized, part. Furthermore, the large-scale, cross-cultural comparative work that had revealed many aspects of children's lives in American anthropology was treated with suspicion and some disdain amongst certain British anthropologists. The work of George Murdock, starting with *Social Structure* (1949) and continuing on into the Human Relations Area Files, was a source of particular ire. E. E. Evans-Pritchard wrote of Murdock's cross-cultural comparative approach:

> Its arid classifications and terminological definitions seem to me to be of very limited value . . . it is full of contradictions and of assertions and suppositions without supporting evidence. The statistical survey covering two hundred and fifty societies displays in addition to . . . poor sampling, crude itemization, arbitrary and inadequate criteria of classification . . . an almost unbelievably uncritical use of sources. For the most part only one authority is used for each people, and good, bad and indifferent authorities – most conspicuously only in English – are all lumped together

> as though they are of equal value as sources; and the same source is used, without any attempt to estimate its value, for several peoples. (1965:26)

Edmund Leach dismissed the Human Relations Area Files as "tabulated nonsense" (1964:299) and Peter Rivière, as chairman of the UK Social Science Research Council's Social Anthropology Committee in the early 1970s, was instrumental in blocking an application for funding from a British university to buy data sets from the HRAF (Rivière, personal communication, October 20, 2007). It was not until January 2007 that Oxford University's Bodleian library acquired access for its readers to the HRAF.

In 1973 there came a limited revival of interest in ideas about children in the UK and Charlotte Hardman published a ground-breaking article in which she claimed that children's lives were as worthy of study as any other section of society, and, furthermore, that a focus on children could reveal aspects of social life not found in most conventional ethnographies. She posed the question as to whether there could be a meaningful anthropology of childhood and concluded that there could, basing her argument on two sources. Firstly, she was inspired by a quote from Iona and Peter Opie, the folklorists who had collected children's rhymes and games throughout Great Britain and who wrote:

> And the folklorist and anthropologist can, without travelling a mile from his door, examine a thriving unselfconscious culture (the word "culture" is used here deliberately) which is unnoticed by the sophisticated world, and quite as little affected by it, as the culture of some dwindling aboriginal tribe living out its helpless existence in the hinterland of a native reserve. . . . The worldwide fraternity of children is the greatest of savage tribes, and the only one which shows no sign of dying out. (1977[1959]:1–2)

Hardman proposed that children, as the Opies had suggested, existed within a separate subculture, and had their own ways of thinking, their own worldviews, and their own cultural understandings in the form of games and rhymes. Secondly, she drew heavily on the newly emerging anthropology of women and, in particular, Edwin Ardener's concept of "muted voices" (1975). Following Ardener's work, she concluded that, like women, children did not have access to power and had to use the language of patriarchy, and were consequently dismissed as incomplete or incompetent adults rather than being looked at in their own terms or as possessing different, but equally valid, competencies.

By drawing attention to the importance of children's views, Hardman staked a claim to childhood and children's worlds as valid subjects for ethnographic research. She also made the point, which has been taken as axiomatic by later anthropologists, that "children [are] people to be studied in their own right" (1973:87). She viewed children as having their own autonomous subcultures that existed outside of, and sometimes in opposition to, adult society and which positioned children as a new "undiscovered and pristine tribe" that had to be uncovered and documented. She argued that "if we conceive of society as a group of intertwining, overlapping circles, which as a whole, form a stock of beliefs, values, social interaction, then children . . . may be said to constitute one conceptual area, one segment of this stock. The children will move in and out of this segment into another, but others take their place. The segment still remains' (1973:87).

Such a stance was also an explicit rejection of the work on children pioneered in the previous decades by the Whitings, Caudill, or LeVine. Hardman uses theorists from psychology, such as Jean Piaget or Lev Vygotsky, but does not cite any work from American anthropology, except for Margaret Mead, who merits only the briefest of critical mentions. Hardman claims that

> those anthropological fields concerned with children [such as Culture and Personality or studies of socialization] . . . view them, to a greater or lesser extent, as passive objects, as helpless spectators in a pressing environment which affects and produces their every behaviour. They see the child as continually assimilating, learning and responding to the adult, having little autonomy, contributing nothing to social values or behaviour except the latent outpourings of earlier acquired experiences. (1973:87)

In the new anthropology of childhood proposed by Hardman, children were seen as the best informants about their own lives as well as the creators of a complete culture that they passed onto other children without adult intervention.

## The Gendered Child

Hardman's use of Ardener's concept of "muted voices" drew attention to the ways in which women and children could be similarly constructed and understood by anthropologists, and how the study of women's worlds,

and gender relations, could inform understandings of childhood and children's experiences. The type of anthropological interest in children proposed by Hardman can be seen as being closely related to the challenges by feminist anthropologists in the late 1960s and 1970s who argued for the necessity of including women in ethnographic descriptions and anthropological theory (Reiter 1975). Children were a part of this, but the focus on family relationships, and particularly motherhood, left studies of children themselves sidelined, or, more usually in anthropology and sociology, delegated to psychologists and psychoanalysts, who focused most explicitly on the gendered child. Psychologist Nancy Chodorow (1978), who had studied under John and Beatrice Whiting, looked at how the relationship between mother and daughter taught girls to grow up to aspire to become mothers themselves. She claimed that the role of gender was crucial in studying children, and she examined this difference in gender roles as being shaped by patterns of human child-rearing. Women, she argued, always took on the care of children, and even when a mother was absent, this work was done by stepmothers, grandparents, aunts, or paid female help. Both infant boys and girls were overwhelmingly dependent on these female caregivers and identified strongly with them, showing anxiety when they were separated from them, but as they got older, they began to break away from this primary caregiver. For boys this process involved devaluing the feminine and identifying with the independence and autonomy of their fathers, while girls never lost their dependency, according to Chodorow, and did not develop a strong sense of separateness or boundaries. After they reached maturity, this manifested itself in a desire for motherhood. Chodorow concluded that "growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a great sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (1978:169). Although there is some discussion about whether it is more difficult for boys or girls to form these new identities, a theme which will be returned to in chapter 8, Chodorow's work is important in psychoanalytical theory because it shifted attention away from the classic father–son relationship that Freud privileged to a new emphasis on mother–child dynamics and a new understanding of how the child is gendered.

Feminist sociologists, while acknowledging that studies of women, by necessity, had to include studies of children, saw the relationship between

women and children as complex and possibly conflictual. Drawing on Marxist criticism, and the work of Friedrich Engels in particular, it was argued that women and children were equally subordinated under patriarchy, both taking on the role of an oppressed proletariat in the household. Yet it was equally clear that women and children did not have the same interests and that while, in some circumstances, children and women might be allies, they could also be enemies, their interests inimical to each other. Shulamith Firestone, for instance, argued that "the heart of women's oppression is her childbearing and child rearing role" (1970:81). She focused on the practical restraints that children put on women and argued convincingly that until children and their care were seen as a social rather than a maternal issue, women could not truly be liberated, and would remain, with children, in "the same lousy boat" (1970:102).

Anthropologists acknowledged the political and social subordination of both women and children, but some, like Eleanor Leacock (1981), drew heavily on Marx and Engels to argue that the subordination of women (and by implication children) was not universal but a product of particular social and economic capitalist systems (see also Sacks 1974). She claimed that women's status was not necessarily related to giving birth and that women in nonindustrial and pre-capitalist societies held important positions of power and prestige. Others, most famously Sherry Ortner (1974), analyzed the symbolic parallels between women and children, examining the ways in which universal dichotomies of nature/culture mapped onto structural inequalities. Ortner claimed that, universally, women were subordinated to men, and given that there was no inherent biological reason for this, the answer must be found in cultural ideologies and symbols, especially in the universal denigration of nature and the admiration for culture. Women, in this analysis, were devalued because of their close association with nature and, in particular, with the messy, "uncivilized" demands of child-rearing, giving birth, and the bodily functions associated with menstruation. Furthermore, they were confined to the domestic domain, along with children, and thus excluded from positions of power, which were associated with the public world of men (see Moore 1988 for a fuller account of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s around gender within anthropology).

Such reasoning had a powerful impact on studies of women in anthropology, and yet these theories continually came up against the difficulty that although they gave cultural and symbolic reasons, rather than biological ones, as to why women should be subordinated, explanations for

this inequality continually seemed to hinge on the biological facts of reproduction, and the ways in which these were culturally constructed (Collier and Yanagisako 1987). Children, and how to explain their relationship to women, remained a problem, and children's lives and needs, as well as ideas about childhood, remained largely unexamined. At best, the rise in feminist analyses of women politicized the role of children, but it had little interest in them as subjects for research. As sociologist Ann Oakley argues:

> What happened was that the deconstruction of notions of "the family" and the uncovering of biases in theoretical assumptions made about women, resulted in an emphasis on *women's* experiences of children rather than *children's* experiences of women (or of anything else). Children came to be represented as a *problem* to women. This reflected the political concerns within the women's movement to do with freeing women from compulsory motherhood and childcare work. (1994:22, emphasis in original)

The idea of an anthropology of women eventually proved problematic because of its need to look for universals, particularly those related to women's oppression and subjugation. In doing so, not only did it set up a false dichotomy between men and women, but it also set up a false alliance between women and children and constructed them both in opposition to men (Oakley 1994). The project of discovering women's worlds and hearing their "muted voices" in anthropology was deeply political. Whereas women had often been excluded from earlier monographs, and their work and ideas dismissed as inauthentic, the new anthropology of women took women's worldviews as serious and important. However, privileging sex above all other factors meant that issues such as age, class, ethnic background, and position in the life-cycle were overlooked or relegated to secondary importance. Similarly, while there may be some parallels in the social and political position of women and children in relation to patriarchal social organization, in reality they have vastly different access to political, social, and economic structures both within the family and outside, and the power that women have over children, as adults, is rarely explored, as both Jill Korbin (1981) and Judith Ennew (1986) have pointed out in their studies of child abuse (see also Malkki and Martin 2003).

The use of dichotomies between nature/culture and public/private began to break down as non-Western feminists challenged universal models of subordination and the complexities of social systems and the interactions between gender, class, and ethnicity became subjects of analyses. Gender difference was increasingly understood as one difference among many and

straightforward parallels between women and oppression became harder to maintain. Olivia Harris (1980), for example, challenged the straightforward binary opposition proposed by Ortner by looking at children among the Laymi of the Bolivian Andes, where distinctions were made not necessarily between male and female but rather between the wild and the cultivated, and women and men were equally represented symbolically in both categories. Children, on the other hand, were viewed as undomesticated until they learnt to speak. Before they had language, their hair was left uncut and they were understood as wild. Likewise, unmarried people were seen as undomesticated and the married couple who worked, produced, and consumed together represented the core of the social system. The symbolic and social organization of the society was based around dichotomies other than age and gender, and Harris's work showed the problems of using external categories to discuss these issues.

The use of binary opposites, be they woman/man or adult/child, became seen as less important than the interplay and complementarities between these categories, an insight well illustrated by contributors to Jean La Fontaine's edited volume, *Sex and Age as Principles of Social Differentiation* (1978). Enid Schildkrout, for example, analyzed the economic value of childhood in Hausa communities in Nigeria and looked at how that intersected with, and supported, women's role. She argued that

> children and adults [are] complementary participants in the social system. In Hausa urban society, although most children do not play a significant role in providing basic subsistence, they are crucial in social structural terms: the social, economic and political definition of adult roles, particularly those based on gender, cannot be understood without taking account of the roles of children. (1978:133)

In her chapter Schildkrout looked at the variety of childhoods that existed in Hausa society, recognizing that boys and girls had very different roles and that age hierarchy was as important as gender. Women and children could not be placed in the same conceptual category and social organization could not be seen only as a dichotomy between men and women or even between adults and children; each category was informed and made more complex by the interplay of age and sex and the interaction between people of different ages.

The importance of La Fontaine's book for an anthropology of childhood was in its linkage of childhood to a much wider pattern of age-sets

and social differences based on generation and stages in the life-cycle. Children were viewed neither as a subculture nor as an undiscovered tribe, nor were they of interest only insofar as they related to women. In her introduction, La Fontaine set up the most sophisticated analysis so far of the role of gender in childhood, and while not denying links between women and children in structural terms, she rejected any easy conflation of the two.

> The two principles of social differentiation that are the subject of analysis in this volume [age and sex] show many features in common. They are both constructed of selected elements drawn from the processes of human physiology and as formal systems have certain logical properties. These differ in that sexual differentiation is based on the unity of conjoined opposites, while differentiation by age creates a hierarchy out of ordered divisions of the human life span. Both principles exercise direct constraints on human behaviour in that they present clusters of attributes which by association with the "natural" origin of the differentiating structure are ascribed to individuals. (1978:18)

## Child-Centered Anthropology

Since the early 1970s there has been a noticeable shift in studies of childhood, especially in the use of children as informants and as the central participants in ethnography. Despite the long tradition of studying children in the USA, and the popularity of books such as *Never in Anger* (Briggs 1970), which showed how important childhood was in understanding the whole life-cycle, it was European anthropologists and sociologists who began to conceptualize studies of childhood politically. As Allison James argues, "given this much longer U.S. anthropological tradition of work with children, it is rather curious, therefore, that in the 1970s the loudest rallying call for exploring 'children's perspectives' – perspectives that could be articulated through the 'voices of children' when positioned as social actors was from Europe" (2007:263). In the UK Jean La Fontaine (1986a), Allison James and Alan Prout (1997), and sociologists Chris Jenks (1996), Berry Mayall (1994), and Frances Waksler (1991) all argued that childhood must be understood as a culturally constructed, social phenomenon which changes over time and place and that it should not necessarily be seen as a time of universal dependence and powerlessness, although this is often how children experience it. In particular they

examined how childhood came to be understood in contemporary Western society as a time of separation from the adult world, where children were sent to school rather than staying with their families, where they were characterized as weak, powerless, dependent, and vulnerable, and as beings who must be protected rather than empowered. La Fontaine argued explicitly that children should be studied as worthy subjects in their own right, not as unshaped cultural beings. She wrote that "in general, anthropology has retained an outdated view of children as raw material, unfinished specimens of the social beings whose ideas and behaviour are the proper subject matter for social science" (1986a:10). She went on to claim that childhood, like adulthood, "is always a matter of social definition rather than physical maturity" (1986a:19) and therefore that anthropologists should be interested in childhood as a social construction, as a way of ordering culture, and as important a variable as gender.

Child-centered anthropology was seen as a corrective to the previous neglect; it supported the notion that a child's perspectives and understandings should be taken seriously and rejected the idea that children were in any way incomplete or incompetent. Emphasizing children's voices challenged the perception that children did not know what is happening, even on issues such as education or initiation, about which they might be expected to have a certain expertise. However, this gap had not gone entirely unnoticed, and, writing in the 1950s, Audrey Richards, in her work on girls' initiation rites among the Bemba of Zambia, had commented:

> A striking gap in my material is the absence of any comments made by the girls themselves. This is, I think, significant. These girls, who are obliged to remain silent, often covered with blankets, seem to lose all personality for the observer as the rites follow one after the other. They are both the centres of the ceremony, and yet the least interesting of the actors in it. However, I consider my failure to arrange for longer conversations and more intimate contacts with the two girls to have been a serious omission. It leaves an element of uncertainty in my interpretation of the educational function of the rites. (1956:63)

Although a few anthropologists such as Mary Ellen Goodman (1957) did put forward the suggestion that children could be useful as informants and that their worldview should be of concern to anthropologists, it was over twenty years before the idea that children were the best informants about their own lives came to the fore.

One of the earliest examples of anthropologists using children as informants was Myra Bluebond-Langner's study of children in American hospices (1978). She worked with terminally ill children, comparing their knowledge of and reactions to their illnesses with those of their parents and doctors. Her child informants understood very clearly that they were dying, even though their parents and doctors had specifically kept the information from them. By looking at the condition of other children and noting the gestures and attitudes of the people caring for them, the children understood that their illnesses were terminal but tended to shield their parents from this knowledge. By talking to children directly, Bluebond-Langner showed the ways in which children understood and interpreted their parents' attitudes toward their own illness and demonstrated the desire on both sides to protect shared ideas of innocence and ignorance. She also showed that knowledge was a negotiation between parents and children and that children were not just the passive recipients of the information that their carers wanted them to have.

By the 1990s, children's lived experiences, as described by children themselves, had become the focus of several anthropologists, who studied issues such as the nature of children's friendships in British schools (James 1993), their daily lives at home in Norway (Gullestad 1984; Solberg 1997), and playground injuries and sickness in Denmark (Christensen 1999). There was also an acknowledgment of the many ways that anthropologists had been befriended and taught by children in the field (Bird-David 2005). Children's daily lives and concerns were central to these studies, all of which took children's participation in research, and their role as informants, as vital, rejecting the idea that childhood could be seen simply as an "epiphenomenon of adult society and concern" ( James et al. 1998:197). This new perspective entailed changing the emphasis within studies of childhood from socialization, and how parents raised their children, to how children themselves perceived their lives, surroundings, parents, and upbringing. Taking children themselves as a starting point meant that they could no longer be seen as a homogeneous group with views and priorities that depended only on their physical advancement. Child-centered research firmly rejected the idea that because children's roles were impermanent, they were also unimportant. Furthermore it reflected a recognition that children possessed agency and that they could, and did, influence their own lives, the lives of their peers, and that of the wider community around them (Waksler 1991; James and Prout 1995; Morrow 1995). This vision of childhood is a profoundly political one, which has caused some unease

amongst those with a long-standing interest in childhood. Robert LeVine, for instance, rejects the argument that an anthropology of childhood should only be about children as active agents, existing in their own world, and that studies of child-rearing are in some ways redundant or dismissive of children. He argues that studies of socialization do not treat children

> simply as objects rather than subjects, suppressing their voices and taking the perspective of the adults who oppress, victimize and exploit children. These allegations come from those who see an anthropology of childhood as a political weapon against injustice like political struggles to end the persecution of women and ethnic minorities, rather than a search for knowledge and understanding. One of the strengths of socialization research is that it has resisted this kind of politicization in its pursuit of a deeper understanding of children and their parents. (2003:5)

While the idea of childhood as a social phenomenon has been widely accepted, the use of children as informants, and the problems of doing research with children, have remained more problematic (Friedl 2004). For older children, the issue is to do not so much with methods as with ethics. Working with children necessitates an acknowledgment of power differentials between adult researcher and child informant, and this represents particular problems (Morrow and Richards 1996). In Western settings, children may be asked if they wish to participate, but their ability to refuse is constrained by a number of factors. The fact that much research takes place in schools means that it is harder for children to opt out of a group activity when it has been integrated into their daily schedules. While their parents and teachers might be asked for their consent, often children are not. Similarly, in non-Western settings, permission is often granted to work with the whole community and children are rarely singled out or asked their views on cooperation with the researcher. Even if children do give informed consent, further problems remain, however, as Myra Bluebond-Langner and Jill Korbin point out. Emphasizing children's voices, or their right to participate in research, does not necessarily solve all the difficulties: "In using quotations from children we have to be cognizant of all of the following: selectivity of representation, uncritical quoting, polyphony of voices, whose point is being made (e.g., the anthropologist's or the children being quoted), and whose agenda is being served (e.g., the human rights community or the people of the community in which the child lives)" (2007:243).

Many anthropologists who work with children have developed specific techniques which take into account children's attention spans and daily activities. Some of these involve interpreting children's paintings and drawings, which allows younger children to participate in research (although these were first used by Margaret Mead in Samoa; see also Toren 1993 and 2007 for a discussion of how children's drawings can be used to understand their ideas about the relationship between space and status). Others entail giving children cameras and asking them to photograph people and places that are important to them and using this to gain insight into their lives. In his work among street children in Brazil, Tobias Hecht (1998) gave some of the children tape recorders and asked them to interview each other, which they did, elucidating information that they would not tell to adults. Rachel Hinton (2000), working with Bhutanese refugee children in Nepal, used "participatory visual techniques" such as drawing and painting to enable her to understand how they perceived health and healthcare. Rachel Baker et al. (1996) worked with street children in Nepal using methods of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) such as "spider diagrams" and photography. Not only do such techniques offer the possibility of new insights into children's lives, they are also very much in keeping with accepted ethical ways of working with children, which encourage them to become active partners and participants in research conducted about and among them.

The question of how to relate to a child as an adult, as well as an outsider, has also been of concern. Given that an adult can never pass as a child, anthropologists and sociologists who wish to work with children have had to pay particular attention to the role that they play as researchers. Sociologist Gary Fine (1987) has suggested that there are four possible roles an adult outsider can play when dealing with children: supervisor, leader, observer, and friend. All these roles need to recognize the power imbalance between adults and children, and while the role of friend may be the most useful way of observing, and even participating in, a child's world, the difference in status, as well as in physical size, between adults and children continues to cause problems. Other ethnographers have acknowledged that there is a distance and discrepancy. Nancy Mandell tried to overcome this by taking on a "least-adult role," in which she "endeavored to put aside ordinary forms of adult status and interaction – authority, verbal competency, cognitive and social mastery – in order to follow their [the children's] ways closely' (1991:42). Although the differences in size could not be overcome, she attempted to suspend other

markers of status and difference during her research. Similarly, another sociologist, William Corsaro (1985), has worked extensively with young children in schools in Italy and America, and while he concedes that he will never be seen as one of them, he has found that children are happy to assign a special role of "Big Bill" to him – a non-adult-like adult. Others have tried to deny and diminish the physical differences in size and pass as a child. Anna Laerke (1998), for instance, in her work with British schoolchildren, tried to blend in with them, playing in the sand pit with children, dressing like them, sitting on the same small chairs as them, and allying herself with the children against the teacher.

Children have long been used as researchers by ethnographers, both as informants and as the anthropologist's "significant others" in the field, helping their parents to settle in and making connections with other children and their families. As anthropology has become more reflexive, the importance of the fieldworker's own relationships has come to the fore and the impact of taking a partner or children to the field has been examined (Cassell 1987; Gottlieb 1995; Hendry 1999; Handler 2004). In these studies, the challenges of being a parent and an anthropologist and the conflicts between helping children to fit in and retaining the values of their parents' society are all vividly expressed. Diane Tober (2004), for example, has written of the difficulties and benefits of doing fieldwork as a single mother in Iran. She describes all sorts of tensions as her sons embarrass her in public, and learn language she would not have taught them, but also the ways in which they helped her deal with bureaucracy and gave her a privileged entrance into the school system. Christine Hugh-Jones (1987) has written about the frustrations and concerns she experienced when taking her children to Amazonia, but also the positive impacts they brought, such as the change of status they gave to their parents within their host community. Despite their contributions, however, and the emphasis on their own experiences, children have had limited control over the research process and few opportunities to shape research questions. A future way of integrating children into research is likely to be the use of child researchers and the different perspectives that they might bring. In schools in the UK, Mary Kellett (2005) has trained children in research methods so that they can not only set the agenda of what they think should be studied, but also are given the opportunity to devise appropriate research methods, and Allison James (2007) has suggested that this perspective might transform our understandings of children's own experiences.

## Conclusion

By representing a history of childhood within anthropology in this way, I do not mean to claim a teleology in which child-centered anthropology is presented as the best way to understand children, or as the end point for the study of childhood. There can be no neat segmentation of children's issues or children's worlds, and as Bluebond-Langer and Korbin have commented:

> As we study children and childhoods, we need to confront the messiness and untidiness of social reality, not reduce it. Similarly, we need to continue to problematize the nature and development of the individual. . . . we are still struggling with definitions of the terms *child*, *youth*, and *childhood*. In defining these concepts, issues of age, agency, development, roles and responsibilities – not to mention those of essentialization and generalizing – raise their hoary heads. How do we maintain a healthy tension between the individual and the group, the universal and the particular? How do we generalize and particularize in a meaningful way? (2007:245)

The problems of studying children are not necessarily unique, although adults do have particular responsibilities when dealing with children. As Bluebond-Langer and Korbin note, however, the study of childhood is intrinsic to a more generalized study of the life-cycle and of human development. As the numbers of ethnographies of children grow and the theorization of childhood continues, there is now a substantial body of knowledge which rightly claims to constitute a discrete subdiscipline of anthropology (Benthall 1992). Yet an anthropology of childhood has existed for a long time, and however it has been looked at, and in whatever theoretical tradition it has been situated, the study of childhood has always been central to anthropology and has lain at the heart of questions that have been of concern to all. Questions such as: When does life begin? What constitutes a fully human, fully social being? How do children become adults? What is the relationship between child, family and community? The following chapters will examine studies in which children have played a prominent role and which go some way to illuminating these questions.