

CHILD DEVELOPMENT



MARTIN J. PACKER

3RD EDITION

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

UNDERSTANDING A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

 **Sage**



1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks
California 91320

10th Floor, Emaar Capital Tower 2
MG Road, Sikanderpur, Sector 26
Gurugram, Haryana – 122002
India

8 Marina View Suite 43-053
Asia Square Tower 1
Singapore 018960

Editor: Amy Maher
Assistant editor: Hanine Kadi
Production editor: Imogen Roome
Copyeditor: Sarah Bury
Proofreader: Neil Dowden
Marketing manager: Elena Asplen
Cover design: Bhairvi Vyas
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed in the UK

© Martin J. Packer 2026

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research, private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publisher.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025940004

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-03-620146-3
ISBN 978-1-03-620147-0 (pbk)

CONTENTS

<i>About the Author</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>Online Resources</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xix
<i>P.1 A Cultural Perspective on Children's Development</i>	xix
<i>P.2 Symbolic Artifacts</i>	xxii
<i>P.3 Stages, Transitions, and Pathways</i>	xxiii
<i>P.4 Developmental Science Today</i>	xxv
<i>Conclusion</i>	xxviii
1 Theoretical Perspectives in Developmental Psychology	1
Introduction	2
1.1 Genetic Psychology	2
1.1.1 Granville Stanley Hall	2
1.1.2 Arnold Gesell	4
1.1.3 Erik Erikson	4
1.1.4 The Concept of Development in the Genetic Perspective	5
1.1.5 The Child Study Movement	5
1.1.6 Research Methods in the Genetic Perspective	6
1.2 Behaviorism	7
1.2.1 Ivan Pavlov	7
1.2.2 John B. Watson	8
1.2.3 Burrhus F. Skinner	10
1.2.4 Albert Bandura	11
1.2.5 The Concept of Development in the Behaviorist Perspective	12
1.3 Cognitive Developmental Psychology	12
1.3.1 The Computer Metaphor	12
1.3.2 Social Cognition	14
1.3.3 The Concept of Development in the Cognitive Perspective	15
1.4 Constructivism	15
1.4.1 Jean Piaget	16
1.4.2 The Concept of Development in the Constructivist Perspective	17
1.5 The Cultural Perspective	19
1.5.1 Lev Vygotsky	19
1.5.2 Alexander Luria	24

1.5.3 Jerome Bruner	24
1.5.4 Michael Cole	25
1.5.5 Barbara Rogoff	25
1.5.6 Urie Bronfenbrenner	25
1.5.7 The Concept of Development in the Cultural Perspective	27
1.5.8 Research Methods in the Cultural Perspective	29
Conclusion	32
 2 Prenatal Development and Physical Differentiation (conception to 6 weeks)	 37
Introduction	38
2.1 Prenatal Development of Body and Brain	38
2.1.1 Conception	39
2.1.2 Steps in Prenatal Development	40
2.1.3 Epigenetic Programming	42
2.1.4 Prenatal Brain Development	44
2.1.5 How the Brain Works	46
2.1.6 Computer, or Embodied and Embedded System?	47
2.2 Cultural Pathways through Conception, Pregnancy, and Childbirth	52
2.2.1 Restrictions on Conception	52
2.2.2 Pathways of Sex and Gender	52
2.2.3 Care during Pregnancy and Childbirth	54
2.2.4 Birth: The First Developmental Transition	57
2.2.5 The Medicalization of Childbirth	57
2.2.6 Becoming a Caregiver	58
2.3 Neonatal Dependence: The Newborn Needs Other People	60
2.4 Neonatal Capabilities: What the Newborn Can Do	63
2.4.1 Neonatal Assessment	64
2.4.2 The Newborn's Sensory Abilities	65
2.5 Coordination between Newborn and Caregiver	67
Conclusion	70
 3 Infancy: A Practical Understanding of the World (6 weeks to 12 months)	 75
Introduction	76
3.1 Sensorimotor Understanding	78
3.1.1 Sensorimotor Schemas	79
3.1.2 Reality Is Constructed	81
3.2 Dynamic Field Theory	83
3.3 Dual Systems Theory	85
3.4 "Theory Theory"	87
3.5 Primary Intersubjectivity	89

3.5.1 Protoconversation	90
3.5.2 Protosong	92
3.6 Emotion: A Distributed Psychological Function	92
3.6.1 What Is an Emotion?	93
3.6.2 Biology and Culture in Emotion	95
3.6.3 Regulation of Emotion	96
3.7 The “Great-We”	98
3.7.1 A Preferred Person	99
3.8 Understanding Other People: Contingencies	101
3.8.1 Preference for Helpers: Are Goals Visible?	104
3.9 Changes to Body and Brain during Infancy	105
Conclusion	109
 4 Infancy: Culturally Defined Developmental Pathways (6 weeks to 12 months)	 115
Introduction	116
4.1 Culture, Caregiving, and Infancy	116
4.1.1 Ecology, Culture, and Caregiving	117
4.1.2 Ethnographies of Infancy	119
4.1.3 Caregivers’ Goals	120
4.2 Cultural Pathways of Development	124
4.2.1 Forms of Autonomy and Relatedness	128
4.3 The Transition at 1 Year: Biological Differentiation	132
4.4 Starting to Walk	132
4.4.1 The Psychological Consequences of Locomotion	135
4.5 Starting to Talk	137
4.5.1 Approaches to Language Acquisition	137
4.5.2 Learning How to Mean	139
4.5.3 The First Words: Holophrastic Utterances	140
4.6 A Secure Base and Multiple Patterns of Attachment	141
Conclusion	144
 5 Toddlerhood: Biological Differentiation (12 to 30 months)	 149
Introduction	150
5.1 A World of Irresistible Invitations	150
5.1.1 New Affordances	151
5.1.2 The Toddler’s Practical Understanding	151
5.1.3 Changes in Brain and Body during Toddlerhood	154
5.2 Caring for the Toddler	154
5.2.1 Is Attachment Universal?	155
5.2.1.1 The Universality Hypothesis	156
5.2.1.2 The Sensitivity Hypothesis	159

5.2.1.3 The Normativity Hypothesis	162
5.2.1.4 The Competence Hypothesis	164
5.2.1.5 Attachment and Culture	167
5.2.2 Guided Participation	168
5.3 Understanding Other People: Intention-in-Action and Customs	170
5.3.1 Theory of Mind	170
5.3.2 The Teleological Stance	172
5.3.3 The Customary Stance	180
Conclusion	185
6 Toddlerhood: Towards Psychological Differentiation (24 to 36 months)	189
Introduction	190
6.1 A Year of Great Linguistic Effort	193
6.1.1 The First Developmental Psycholinguists	193
6.1.2 The Semantics of Child Language	195
6.1.3 From Holophrastic to Multiword Utterances	197
6.1.4 A Transition in the Functions of Speech	197
6.1.5 How Words Are Learned	201
6.1.6 Language Is Emergent	205
6.2 Understanding Material Representations	207
6.2.1 Starting to Understand Pictures and Models	208
6.2.2 Pretend Play	209
6.2.3 Object Substitution Play	210
6.3 Becoming Self-Conscious	211
6.3.1 Self-Reference	211
6.3.2 Self-Evaluative Emotions	212
6.3.3 Self-Recognition in a Mirror	214
6.4 Cultural Pathways to Self-Consciousness	215
6.5 Consciousness of Self: Mental Concept or Material Artifact?	218
Conclusion	222
7 Early Childhood: Becoming Symbol Minded (3 to 6 years)	227
Introduction	228
7.1 Mastery of Societies' Symbol Systems	229
7.1.1 Play and the Semiotic Function	231
7.2 A Tipping Point in Brain Growth	233
7.2.1 Simulation	234
7.2.2 Simulations are Modal and Conscious	237
7.2.3 Psychological Functions Based on Simulations	237

7.3 Talking: Both Doing and Learning	238
7.3.1 Cultural Categories and Generalization	240
7.4 The Origins of Thinking	241
7.4.1 Self-Directed Speech	243
7.4.2 Actions on Images	247
7.4.3 Two Constituents of Thinking in Early Childhood	249
7.5 Sociodramatic Play	254
7.5.1 Piaget and Vygotsky on Play	254
7.5.2 Play across Cultures	256
7.5.3 The Colonization of Young Children's Imagination	260
7.5.4 Play and Social Reality	260
7.6 Culture and Cosmology	261
7.6.1 Is Animism Childish?	263
Conclusion	266
 8 Early Childhood: Encouraging Autonomy (3 to 6 years)	 271
Introduction	272
8.1 Styles of Caregiving	273
8.1.1 An Optimal Style?	276
8.1.2 The Consequences of Caregiving Style	276
8.1.3 What Is Autonomy?	280
8.1.4 The Nursery School as Context	281
8.2 Understanding Other People: Prior Intentions and Social Conventions	282
8.2.1 The Intentional Stance	283
8.2.1.1 Understanding Perspective	284
8.2.1.2 Understanding Beliefs	285
8.2.1.3 The Impact of Language	288
8.2.1.4 Failing True-Belief Tasks	290
8.2.1.5 Prior Intentions	290
8.2.2 The Conventional Stance	293
8.2.2.1 Status and Expectations in Sociodramatic Play	293
8.2.2.2 Games as Prescriptive Conventions	295
8.2.2.3 Agreements	296
8.2.2.4 Social Conventions and Moral Prescriptions	297
8.2.2.5 Characters and Conventions	299
8.3 Becoming a Type of Person: Gender	301
8.3.1 Cultural Constitution of Gender	302
8.3.2 Gender and Relations with Parents	303
8.3.2.1 Sigmund Freud	304
8.3.2.2 Nancy Chodorow	305
Conclusion	307

9 Middle Childhood: Differentiating “Inner” and “Outer” (6 to 12 years)	311
Introduction	311
9.1 The 5 to 7 Transition	312
9.1.1 Changes to Body and Brain in Middle Childhood	313
9.1.2 The Constitution of Middle Childhood	314
9.2 A New Context for Learning	316
9.3 The Community Perspective on Schooling	318
9.3.1 The Functions and Organization of School	319
9.3.2 School and Society	321
9.4 The Interpersonal Perspective on Schooling	324
9.4.1 Symbolic Artifacts in the Classroom	326
9.5 The Personal Perspective on Schooling	330
9.5.1 Schooling and Piagetian Stages	330
9.5.2 The Psychological Consequences of Literacy	336
9.5.3 Literacy and the Brain	340
9.5.4 Executive Function and Schooling	341
Conclusion	347
10 Middle Childhood: Non-Schooled Development (6 to 12 years)	351
Introduction	352
10.1 The Importance of Non-Schooled Learning	352
10.1.1 Non-Schooled Development in the Maya People	355
10.2 How to Understand Non-Schooled Learning?	358
10.2.1 Formal versus Informal	359
10.2.2 Legitimate Peripheral Participation	360
10.2.3 Learning by Observing and Pitching In	361
10.2.4 Variation in Strategies to Encourage Learning	363
10.2.5 Guided Rediscovery	364
10.2.6 Concrete versus Abstract	365
10.2.7 Cosmology and Development	368
10.3 Understanding Other People: Mental States and Institutions with Roles and Rules	372
10.3.1 Studies of Moral Thinking	374
10.3.2 The Mentalistic Stance	378
10.3.3 The Institutional Stance	380
Conclusion	390
11 The Teenage Years: Adolescent or Adult? (13 years and up)	393
Introduction	393
11.1 Defining Adolescence	394
11.1.1 Puberty	395
11.1.2 Timing of Puberty	396

11.1.3 Psychosocial Acceleration	397
11.1.4 The History of Adolescence	398
11.2 Adolescent Reasoning and Decision Making	400
11.2.1 Piaget and Formal Operational Reasoning	400
11.2.2 Vygotsky and the Higher Psychological Functions	404
11.2.3 Vygotsky and Piaget Compared	406
11.2.4 Judgment and Decision Making	409
11.2.5 Changes in Prefrontal Cortex and Limbic System	411
11.2.6 Positive Youth Development	414
11.3 Understanding Other People: Integrity and Perspective	416
11.3.1 Epistemological Relativism	417
11.3.2 Ethical Relativism	420
11.3.3 The Critical Stance and the Societal Stance	424
Conclusion	429
 12 The Teenage Years: Integrating the Actual and the Possible (13 years and up)	 433
Introduction	433
12.1 Who Is the Adolescent?	434
12.1.1 Erikson: The Task of Forming an Identity	435
12.1.2 Identity and Culture	435
12.1.3 The Identity Status Model	437
12.1.4 Achieving Identity Status	439
12.2 Culture as a Constituent of Identity	440
12.2.1 Family Context: Caregiving and Identity	441
12.2.2 Identity as an Ethnic Minority	442
12.2.3 Migration and Identity	443
12.2.4 Identity Research Today	444
12.3 Youth Culture and Adolescent Sexuality	446
12.3.1 Changing Relations with Caregivers	446
12.3.2 New Relationships with Peers	448
12.3.3 Adolescent Youth Culture	449
12.3.4 New Mediators	450
12.3.5 Adolescent Sexuality	451
12.3.6 Gender Identity and Sexual Preference	454
12.4 Postscript: And on through Adulthood ...	456
Conclusion	459
 <i>Glossary</i>	 463
<i>References</i>	489
<i>Index</i>	545



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin J. Packer is an independent researcher in Bogotá, Colombia. He received his BA in Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge, UK, and his PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a research psychologist at Bedford College, University of London, and at St Mary's Hospital Perinatal Research Unit. He has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, University of Michigan, Duquesne University, Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, and Universidad de San Buenaventura in Cali, Colombia. He has been visiting professor at Universidad de las Américas, in Puebla, Mexico, and at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, in Xochimilco, Mexico City, and worked at Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. His research has explored interactions between neonates and their mothers, early childhood peer relations, conflict among adolescents, and the way schools change the kind of person a child becomes. Packer is co-editor of *Entering the Circle: Hermeneutic Investigation in Psychology* (with Ritch Addison), *Cultural and Critical Perspectives on Human Development* (with Mark Tappan), and *Reflections on the Learning Sciences* (with Michael Evans and Keith Sawyer). He is author of *The Structure of Moral Action*, *Changing Classes: School Reform and the New Economy*, and *The Science of Qualitative Research* (now in its second edition, and translated into Spanish). He was one of the founding co-editors of the journal *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, has been an editor of *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, and has published articles in *American Psychologist*, *Educational Psychologist*, *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, and *Mind, Culture & Activity*. He has been an editorial board member of *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *Methods in Psychology*, and *Mind, Culture, and Activity*. He is currently working on a book about human evolution.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere thanks are due to Sage publishers, especially Amy Maher and her team. And thanks also to all the colleagues, students, and friends who have inspired and influenced my thinking.



ONLINE RESOURCES

Child Development: Understanding a Cultural Perspective, Third Edition is accompanied by online resources for lecturers to support teaching, which are available at study.sagepub.com/packer3e.

- The **Teaching Guide** offers lecturers ideas and suggestions for using the textbook.
- **PowerPoint slides** feature figures and tables from the book, which can be downloaded and customized for use in your own presentations.
- **Testbanks** containing multiple choice questions related to the key concepts in each chapter can be downloaded and used in class, as homework or exams.



PREFACE

Human beings do not grow up, and adults do not parent, in isolation, but always in physical and social contexts. Children, parents, and cultures are, therefore, intimately bundled because children must learn and adapt to their culture to survive and thrive; a major goal of parenting is to successfully embed the next generation into the existing culture. (Bornstein, 2010, p. ix)

P.1 A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Current developmental theories about social cognition are narrowly focused on Western, middle-class infants, with an implicit assumption that Western, middle-class settings are both the *norm* and the *optimal* human setting (Bard et al., 2021, p. 187)

You are an amazing animal! For one thing, you can read these words. You can also talk with your family and friends, you can add, subtract, and multiply, and you can probably reason in many other ways too. You are familiar with a dazzling array of technologies, from stoves to cars to tablet computers. Perhaps you know how to fix or even build those artifacts.

I could list many more abilities that are uniquely human. All these abilities are acquired during development. None of them is within the capabilities of a newborn baby. But how are they acquired? That is the question this textbook sets out to answer. Let us establish one central point at the start: you are an amazing animal, but you didn't become amazing by yourself. Humans are highly social animals. Humans show "obligatory interdependence" (Caporael, 1997). I will build the case that it is through this interdependence that you, and other humans like you, have acquired your amazing abilities.

Every human child is born into a community, a society with a culture, in which she will live, grow, and develop. This community is essential for her survival, and in time she will become able not only to participate in it but may also to help reproduce and even transform her community. How this happens is a knot that developmental research is beginning to unravel. The thread that this book traces arises from the idea that the most important characteristic of human beings is our ability to construct a complex, organized environment in which to live. This environment is what I mean by "culture." For much of the history of developmental psychology, however, the role of culture has been ignored. Or it has been reduced to a simple influence such as shaping behavior or socialization. For example, one of the most influential researchers in developmental psychology, Jean Piaget, focused on the child's interaction with the physical environment and largely ignored the fact that the child

lives with other people in a complex constructed world of artifacts and institutions. When one reads Piaget's books on infancy, which are based on case studies of his own three children, one wonders who changed their diapers!

However, the field of developmental research is in an important and exciting transition, with growing recognition of the significance of culture in children's development. There is a pressing need for a fundamental change in the organization of textbooks in this field, for very few currently place culture at the center. The challenge is to appreciate cultural differences and cross-cultural variation but at the same time to recognize that the role of culture goes beyond these.

The central question that this text sets out to answer is this: how does a child, who at birth knows nothing of how her culture works, develop the psychological skills and abilities to participate in that culture and contribute to its reproduction and transformation? The book explores what we now know about the answer to this question, and what we do not yet know. My goal, put simply, is that you understand a cultural perspective on children's development.

Developmental textbooks that attend to culture usually focus on cross-cultural differences. This reflects an assumption that culture leads to variation in children's development. Often this is accompanied by an assumption that similarities are due to biology. The reality is that all human beings need to live in culture, and culture is an essential component of every child's psychological development. In my view, a child development text should represent the variety of cultures (plural) in which children live and explore the ubiquity of culture (singular). Culture is a characteristic of the way all human beings live, and one result is that culture, in the singular, plays a *constitutive* role in children's development. Outside culture a child would not develop. They would not survive.

Adopting a cultural perspective on the development of children means paying attention to the artifacts that people have created in order to survive and thrive and that they then pass down to their children. It requires abandoning the assumption, central to Piaget's account of development as well as many others, that there is a universal sequence of stages all children pass through. It means being skeptical about measurements and evaluations of children's abilities and performance when these are created in one culture but then used in another.

What has started to emerge over recent decades is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children's development that does not restrict itself to the limited techniques of traditional experimental research design. The fruits of this approach, and this way of thinking, are what I will share in this text.

The text, then, adopts the perspective of "cultural psychology." This is not simply a specialized area within psychology, it is a fresh approach to all areas of psychology, whether developmental, cognitive, clinical, or even neurological. Cultural psychology pays attention to the undeniable fact that human beings are cultural animals. Humans live in culture, create culture, and are created by culture. This is not to say that biology plays no part. On the contrary, we shall explore how culture and biology are woven together so tightly that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

A cultural perspective on children's development is, then, a fresh approach that helps us understand how human children develop uniquely human abilities without drawing a rigid

boundary between ourselves and other animals (by claiming that humans have unique genetically based capacities, for example), and without dividing research in two (insisting that neurobiology has nothing to say about the study of culture and social interactions, for example).

Since cultural psychology is a relatively new theoretical framework, some of the proposals in this textbook may be contested, particularly by psychologists trained in another framework. And of course, some of the proposals will in time be revised and corrected, because that is how science works.

The book has a chronological organization because it is essential to trace development through time. In addition, each chapter interweaves social, cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of development, rather than treating each as a separate topic. Understanding how these psychological functions interconnect is, in my view, essential. These functions form a dynamic system, and separating their components, as most textbooks do, is misleading.

What is developmental psychology? It is the scientific study of the acquisition of human psychological functions, including perception, knowledge, thinking, memory, emotion, and language. It is the study of **ontogenesis**, the development of the human organism from childhood to adulthood and beyond. (Note: the term “genesis” here does not refer to the genes, the biological carriers of inherited characteristics. Genesis here means the origins of something, or its mode of formation.) One of the central themes, however, will be that the child should not be studied in isolation, abstracted from her social relationships or her cultural circumstances. One psychologist who was critical of the lack of attention given to culture in the study of children’s development wrote: “it can be said that much of contemporary developmental psychology is the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 513). A cultural perspective on children’s development calls for us to look at children in familiar everyday situations and in their relations with familiar people. I will certainly describe laboratory research, but it cannot tell us everything. The child is always a member of a community, and we need to pay attention to her place in this community.

Developmental psychology is often assumed to be just one branch or specialty within psychology, alongside clinical psychology, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and so on. But it is more appropriate to think of developmental psychology as a specific approach to *all* psychological phenomena. Developmental researchers are interested in clinical phenomena (such as autism and aggression), cognitive phenomena (such as reasoning and memory), and social phenomena, such as attachment and communication. Developmental psychology is also increasingly a cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary enterprise; that is to say, it involves researchers and investigative techniques not only from psychology, but also from biology, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies. Some have proposed the term **developmental science** for this collaborative work. I will use “developmental science” rather than “developmental psychology,” though psychology is still the predominant discipline in the study of children.

P.2 SYMBOLIC ARTIFACTS

Cultural psychology defines culture as the material artifacts that mediate human activity. The point is not whether this is the correct definition of culture. Other definitions are certainly possible. What is important is that developmental scientists ignore surprisingly often the fact that humans have filled our environments with material artifacts. More accurately, we have completely transformed the environment with these artifacts. Tools are important for human psychology. So are the architectural constructions in which humans live. But so too are the *symbolic* artifacts that humans learn to create.

Chimpanzees create simple semiotic artifacts. Facial expressions, vocalizations, gestures ... all these need to be interpreted. But they are not symbolic. Only humans create *symbolic* artifacts—material representations—and all of us now live in a world filled with them. We talk to each other all the time, using the symbolic artifacts of spoken language. In addition, modern life surrounds us with books and pictures, films and videos, money, signs and models, diagrams and maps, graphs and drawings, photos and plans, calendars and clocks. In fact, virtually anything can be used to represent something else. Someone describing a holiday in Paris to friends around the dinner table can use a salt-shaker to stand for the Eiffel Tower. The designer of a new enclosure at the zoo can demonstrate their work to colleagues by using a pen to stand for an elephant. Symbolic artifacts are crucially important to human life.

It is important to pause and appreciate that speech is a material artifact. That may seem an odd idea. But to speak is to shape the molecules of air, to create vibrations that are detected by another person's ears. Those sounds are understood as symbols. Speech is a highly structured **symbolic artifact**, and people use it constantly to mediate their interactions with each other.

Why do humans create so many symbolic artifacts? In part because they provide us with information about what is not directly present. Pictures inform us about the North Pole, or the Moon, or the bottom of the ocean. Photos inform us about people we have never seen. Diagrams show us a hidden internal structure. Maps provide a bird's-eye view. Most of our knowledge today comes not from first-hand direct contact with things but from these material symbolic artifacts.

How are humans *able* to produce these artifacts? ***Homo sapiens*** is apparently unique in possessing the ability to create and comprehend drawings, paintings, and sculpture. No other animal species alive today can do this. It is possible that Neanderthals could too, but it seems unlikely that any earlier **hominin** ancestors did. Consequently, it is both interesting and important to understand when and how this ability is acquired during human development.

First, children must acquire the ability to *recognize* and *understand* symbolic artifacts. Then, I will suggest, they become able to *simulate* them, so that humans today (at least in the West) insist that they have “minds.” Then children can be taught how to *manipulate* these simulated symbolic artifacts as *cognitive tools*, in ways that are considered appropriate and useful in their community.

P.3 STAGES, TRANSITIONS, AND PATHWAYS

This book is organized chronologically, as a sequence of stages and transitions along diverse pathways. Developmental psychology textbooks often give a description of stages which combines common-sense divisions—infant, toddler, preschooler, school-age child, and adolescent—with theoretically grounded distinctions. But this approach can completely lose the diverse, concrete circumstances in which children grow up.

The sequence of stages that researchers have often described, and often assumed to be universal, is actually that of middle-class families, predominantly white, living in technologically advanced societies. Most of the children who have been studied by developmental scientists are “**WEIRD**”—Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). For example, Piaget’s research was conducted for the most part with a very elite sample of children of middle-class Genevans, but even then, he abstracted from the concrete circumstances of their lives. They were not representative of the diversity of communities around the world.

A review of over one thousand ethnographic reports about children from hundreds of cultures concluded that the majority of those cultures recognize six life phases (Grove & Lancy, 2016). The first phase begins at birth. The second phase begins when caregivers are confident that their baby will survive. Often the transition from crawling like an animal to walking is taken as a sign. The toddler is then introduced to the community, usually with ceremonies such as a first haircut or naming. The third phase begins with weaning (except when this occurs far earlier). The young child becomes more independent of caregivers and often spends more time with **peers**. In the fourth phase children are assigned useful work; for girls this is largely within the household while, for boys, it is more often work outside the home. The fifth phase begins with **puberty**, which is recognized in variable and flexible ways both within and across cultures. Often this phase is short, ending when young people begin to live together. The sixth phase, adulthood, begins with marriage or the equivalent, and is defined primarily by the successful bearing and raising of children, or other contributions to the survival of the community.

In a transition there is a dramatic change in the child’s way of being in the world, so that she discovers new possibilities and gains a new sense of herself. As Barbara Rogoff has noted:

Developmental transitions are commonly portrayed by researchers as belonging to individuals, as in the stages of cognitive development described by Piaget. However, transitions across childhood can also be considered cultural, community events that occur as individuals change their roles in their community’s structure. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 150)

Each transition involves **differentiation** and **reintegration** of the child with other people. It is helpful to think of the child, her family, and the community as components of a system. With each new transition the child becomes both more differentiated from the other components. Then she needs to become reintegrated with those other components in

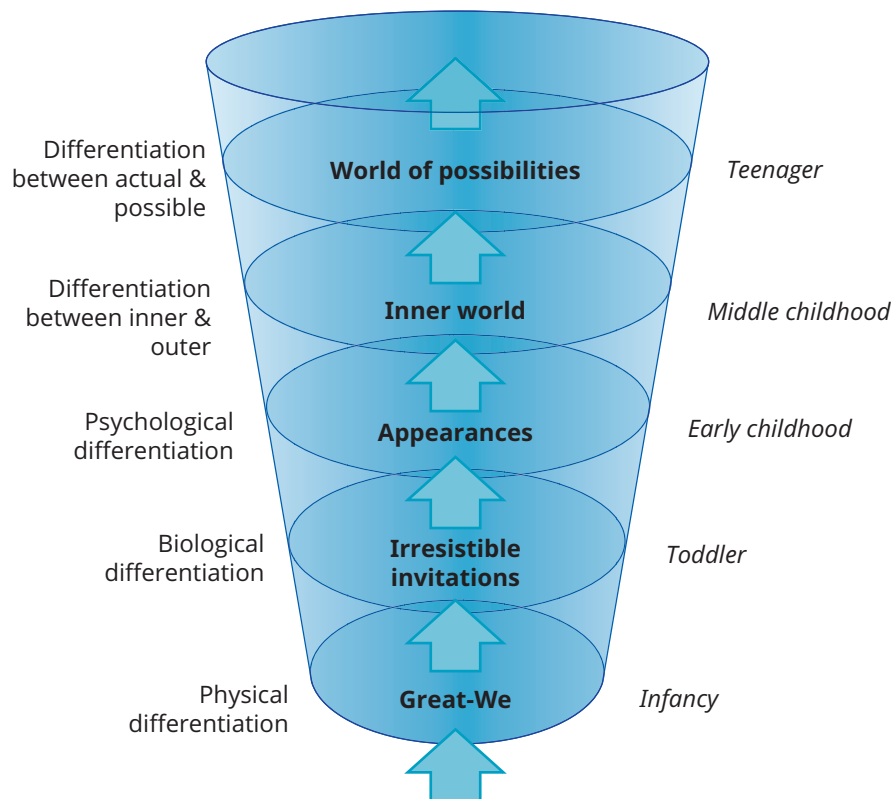


Figure P.1 Overview of stages and transitions

Source: Author

a new way (Figure P.1). Differentiation is not separation, it is a change in the quality of the relationship between the child, her family, and her community.

These stages and transitions make sense from the perspective of **life history theory**. This theory, from evolutionary biology, describes different **life history strategies**, each of which allocates resources between the competing needs for survival and reproduction. Each strategy explains a specific organization of the pace of growth, the length of lifespan, size of the brain, the number of offspring, and the care they require.

Humans have a life history strategy that is unusual. Some species grow rapidly and have many offspring, to which they provide little care. Humans grow for a long time and have few offspring, but these require extended care. But the number of children, the timing of births, and the duration of care have varied greatly since the evolution of *Homo sapiens* around 300,000 years ago.

The generality of this life history strategy makes me reasonably confident that the chronological organization of this book is not insensitive to cultural differences. In each of the chapters we will compare children in different parts of the world, or in different economic circumstances in the same location.

Within this broad human life history strategy, however, researchers are beginning to understand how different communities create distinct developmental pathways. From about 7000 BC until around two hundred years ago the majority of children lived in small communities which lived on the basis of agriculture. Today, many children still live in such communities, but many more live in urban settings: in cities. The developmental pathways in these two ways of life are very different. We don't yet know enough to describe even one in complete detail, but important progress has been made. The pathways differ not only in the ages at which stages begin and end but also in the characteristics—the abilities and interests—that a child acquires in each stage. They differ in what a child's development leads to. They differ in what is considered normal and healthy.

P.4 DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE TODAY

Decolonizing developmental science involves broadening our focus by embracing wide ranges of vastly different lived experiences ... by respecting beliefs, values, and ethnotheories about development that differ from our own ... and by battling against the automatic privileging of western middle-class perspectives and conclusions. Decolonizing developmental science means having more inclusive foundations, upon which we may be required to rebuild developmental theories. (Bard et al., 2021, p. 170)

There is much work still to be done. And much to be learned about the rich multiplicity of psychological development on our planet.

Singh, Killen, and Smetana (2023) looked at all the empirical articles published in 2021 in mainstream developmental science journals—*Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Developmental Science*, *Infant and Child Development*, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*—to see where the children who had been studied were, and how representative they were of the wider population. Their results are shown in Figure P.2 and highlight that, even when children outside the West are studied, often they are still from middle-class urban families. The use of convenience samples has produced a lack of diversity in the children who are studied (Sabine & Michael, 2024).

Most fundamentally, a very narrow range of cultures, experiences, languages, methods, and epistemologies are currently represented in developmental research. (Singh & Bortfeld, 2024, p. 1)

In addition, there are still significant barriers that researchers outside WEIRD countries must overcome to publish in the major journals, and this leads to decreased access to funding for those researchers, creating a vicious cycle (Draper et al., 2023). In addition, the language used when reporting results is often generic, as though they apply to all children in all places and times (DeJesus et al., 2024).

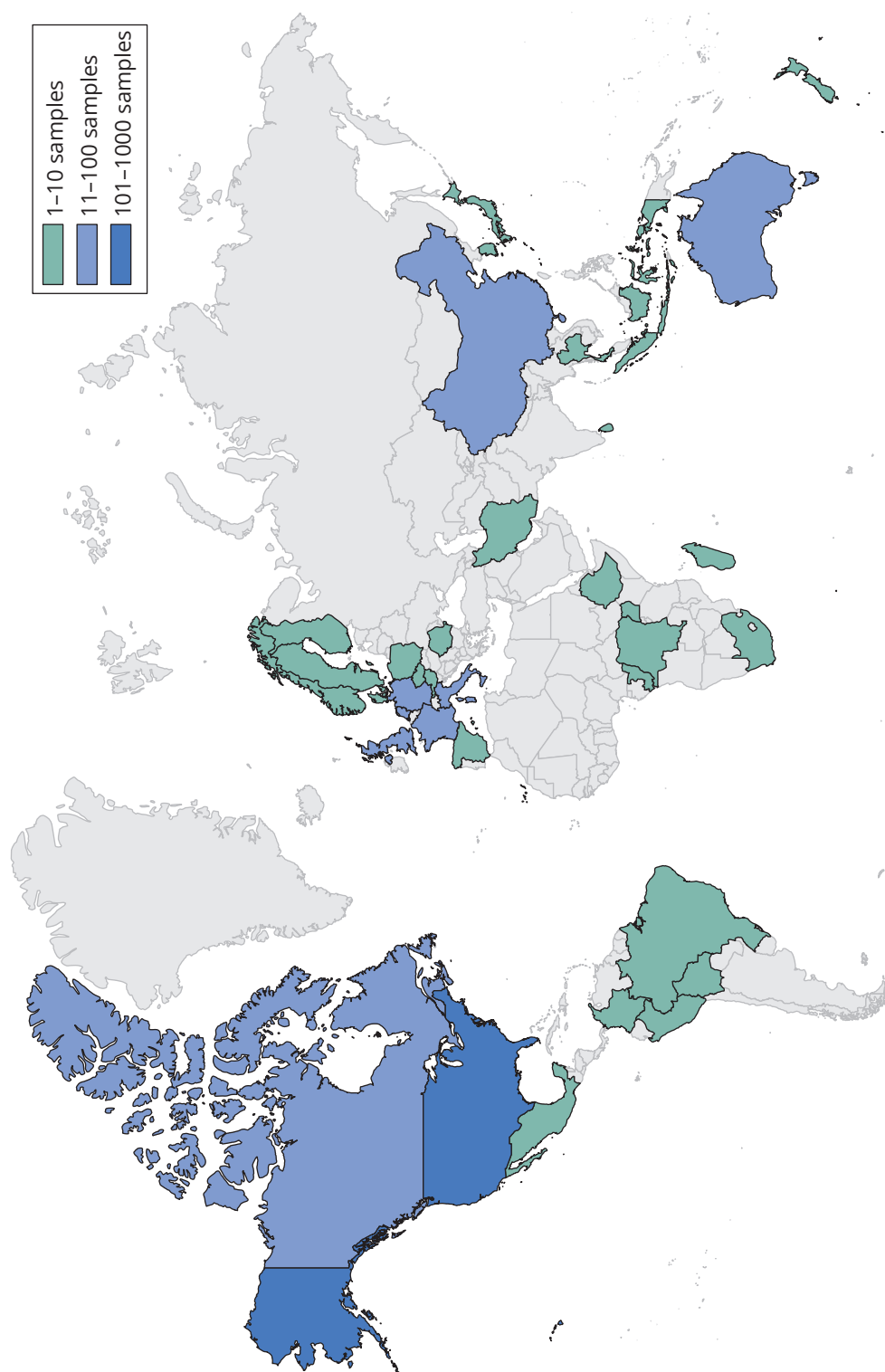


Figure P.2 Participant representation by country in articles published in mainstream developmental science journals in 2021
Source: Singh, Killen, & Smetana (2023)

The solution, though, is not to conduct the same laboratory research in multiple countries. Humans live in settings they have transformed; they must be studied in context. A great deal can be learned from ethnographic research, which has rarely been part of developmental science.

STOP & THINK P.1 WEIRD SCIENCE?

Developmental science was created in the West. Not surprisingly, researchers studied children and families who lived in the West, and treated them as normal, natural, and typical. They also adopted the West's taken-for-granted assumptions about people, community, and society.

There has been progress since that starting point. But there is a pressing need for more. It is no good to study children in other parts of the world if this is done through Western lenses, with Western preconceptions and values. That would be a kind of scientific colonialism. Developmental science needs to better understand non-Western values and ways of life. It also needs to recognize the diversity *within* the West.

Here is an example. Rebeca Mejía-Arauz, Barbara Rogoff, and their colleagues recently contrasted two ways in which they saw people solving problems together. In the first approach, people act as individuals with separate ideas which they then try to combine. Call this "negotiation." In the second approach, people engage as an ensemble, in a unified process. Call this "collaboration." In collaboration, a social group, whether a dyad, a family, a work group, or a playgroup is "like a single organism with many limbs," and social interaction is "fluid synchrony from the beginning of engagement" (Mejía-Arauz, Rogoff, Dayton, & Henne-Ochoa, 2018, p. 117).

The first way of solving problems is typical of WEIRD settings. The second way more typically occurs in indigenous and indigenous-heritage settings. That itself is an interesting difference. But, as Mejía-Arauz and colleagues note, there is a deeper significance, because theories and models in developmental science favor one approach over the other. "The negotiation model is common in psychological research. It seems to stem from an assumption that humans are born as individuals who gradually, and with social support, learn to be social" (Mejía-Arauz et al., 2018, p. 117). Developmental psychologists—in fact, psychologists in general—not only study how WEIRD people interact, they do so using models and theories that are based on WEIRD assumptions.

What if we stopped assuming that people are selfish individuals who have to learn to collaborate? What if we assumed instead that people *everywhere* live and act and develop in ensembles, in unified wholes, which are "like a single organism with many limbs"? What if we learned to think holistically?

For it should be obvious that every child is born into a community, and depends completely on the members of that community. The community's characteristics—its organization, its cosmology, its rights and responsibilities—provide the context for every child's development. They define the possible pathways from genotype to phenotype. That is, they define the characteristics a child must acquire to become a competent adult. Key acquisitions are abilities to use the material artifacts of the community, especially its symbolic artifacts. This "acquisition" is a complex combination of individual exploration and social influence, arranged directly or indirectly by the community. One consequence is a series of distinct *stages*, qualitative reorganizations of the child's relationship to other community members.

(Continued)

You might ask, if people always live in ensembles, why are WEIRD people individualistic? The answer is that the institutions in which WEIRD people live and work require this way of being. WEIRD societies are composed of institutions such as the courts, police, public health, regulatory authorities, all of which support people's individual rights, responsibilities, and liberties. A child becomes an individual when she lives within this kind of ensemble. Yet the ensemble itself remains invisible in much of developmental science. In this textbook I try to make it visible.

CONCLUSION

Until recently, many developmental psychologists assumed that development is the same the world over. Even today:

U.S. textbooks in many areas of psychology are rife with claims stated in universal terms that are in fact particular to the United States. Those claims often presume that the organization of the life course, gender arrangements, societal and family structures, and value orientations are universally shared. (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014, p. 652)

We must add to this criticism the fact that it is usually children from urban middle-class families in the US who have been studied. An important advantage of a cultural perspective on children's development is that it helps us understand better how people live in diverse communities, and how they develop in diverse ways. In today's complex world, a recognition and appreciation of this diversity is important. Another advantage of a cultural perspective is that it helps us recognize that the way children develop in our own culture is not "natural," nor genetically programed, it is based on particular shared goals for how children should behave and develop (Gaskins, 2006). In fact, there is no *single* way to develop in *any* culture.

Hopefully a cultural perspective will prevent us from making negative judgments when a child's development differs from what may seem the norm. And it can stop us from designing interventions that would impose one community's values and practices of childcare on other communities.

In addition, a cultural perspective doesn't aim only to understand differences in how children develop. Culture—the context that humans construct to survive—is universal. Humans everywhere create culture. Human artifacts play a crucial role in every child's development.

At each stage of development the child is a growing, dynamic organism, adapting intelligently to her environment. The context is also changing, and as it changes the child is able to discover new possibilities, of which adults may be unaware. Children will become adults who are different from adults today. In the chapters that follow I try to capture this dynamic interaction between the developing child and her changing context. The process of development, of children becoming adults, is itself open-ended and changing (Toren, 1993).

This open-endedness means we need to do more than simply pay attention to context. We need to pay particular attention to the *relationship* between child and context and explore “how changing contexts affect what children appropriate from them and how children’s appropriations modify the very contexts that guide development” (Modell, 2000, p. 83). The choices that face a child are defined by her context (including, of course, the other people in her life), but at the same time her choices transform that context.

Some people consider gender to be one of those choices. I use the words “male” and “female” to refer to bodies viewed from a biological perspective, and “man” and “woman” to refer to people viewed from a cultural perspective.

Finally, artificial intelligence was not used in the writing of this book. Every word was typed by my own two fingers!



8

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENCOURAGING AUTONOMY (3 TO 6 YEARS)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter concludes our study of early childhood. We will explore the following aspects of this stage:

- Different styles of caregiving have been identified.
- Young children now understand other people not only by recognizing their intentions-in-action but also inferring their prior intentions (the intentional stance).
- Young children are also beginning to understand the power of agreements (the conventional stance).
- They start to understand that the social world contains different *types* of person (“characters”) with different powers.
- The young child becomes aware that she is also a *type* of person.

GETTING STARTED

- Should parenting change when a young child turns 4?
- What do young children learn by attending nursery school?
- You see someone sweeping water in the street. How many different explanations can you imagine for this person’s actions?
- How many of these explanations make reference to the psychology of the person?
- What do the other explanations make reference to?
- Which of these explanations do you think a young child could understand?
- As a young child, were you closer to your father or your mother?
- What are the differences between a boy and a girl?

INTRODUCTION

After “the crisis at age 3” the young child’s relationship with members of her family is reconstructed. Vygotsky wrote of this as an “emancipation”: “it is as if adults led him by the hand before, but now he has developed a tendency to walk independently” (Vygotsky, 1998b [1932–34], p. 286). The young child—aged roughly 3 to 6 years—and her caregivers must reintegrate, given her striking new abilities. Caregivers change the ways they relate what they are doing with what their young child is doing, or wants to do. They have new expectations: their young child should remember what she has been told, and she should anticipate the consequences of her actions. Caregivers in many cultures expect the young child to contribute to household tasks and to understand what counts as appropriate behavior in a range of situations (LeVine et al., 2008, p. 57). Research on caregivers of young children in the West highlights the importance of verbal explanation and reasoning, as representational speech provides the new mediator. The young child grows in her ability to control her actions and impulses. She asserts herself more often and begins to plan activities and play skillfully with others. At the same time, this can be called a stage of co-thinking verbally with other people.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said that generally infants are “lap children,” toddlers are “knee children,” and 4- and 5-year-olds are “yard children,” because they are allowed to leave the immediate vicinity of their caregivers, but not wander too far away. Where they go, however, will vary greatly from one community to another. They may spend their time in a group of familiar children of various ages around the village. Or they may be taken to a special setting, such as a kindergarten, where they are surrounded by strangers.

The young children of urban middle-class families will often start to attend daycare or kindergarten when they are not at home. They find themselves with people—adults and other children—who they have never met before. In contrast, among hunter-gatherers a young child by the age of 3 will spend most of her time with other children, rather than with her mother or father. Boys and girls play at hunting, digging up plant roots, or preparing meals, and adults find their play entertaining, but they are expected to take initiative and be responsible. In fact, they will prepare and cook food. Both young girls and young boys are expected to help take care of infants and keep an eye on the toddlers. Among subsistence farmers, young children become part of a network of children, of mixed ages and both genders, around and outside the compound, often watched over by grandmothers. Young children play together at being mother and father, and at activities like buying and selling, hunting, marriage and traditional ceremonies. At the same time, they will help their mother with simple tasks, such as carrying a younger sibling while their mother is working.

Mead’s ethnographic studies of childhood in the islands of Samoa in the South Seas may make us question some of our basic assumptions about young children. It is easy to assume that they live with their parents, are clearly of a distinct generation, and have fixed names. But in Samoa all these are questionable. A young child will be asked to contribute to the care of her younger siblings, and she is considered old enough to change her own name and even to pick whom she lives with! Such a young child will have no toys to play with, not even a doll. She will be expected to sweep and tidy up the house.

Mead noted that young children in Samoa are cared for very differently from young children in the USA, but they play together in similar ways: “Yet they have their games, playing at ball with square light balls made of pandanus [the fruit of a local tree], stringing necklaces of flowers, playing round games to merry songs of their own improvising in the dusk” (Mead, 2008, p. 23).

8.1 STYLES OF CAREGIVING

Much research today exploring the behavior of the caregivers of young children, and its consequences, is influenced by a research project that was initiated by Diana Baumrind in the 1960s. In her first study (Baumrind, 1967), 110 preschool children were observed for three to five months in their nursery school in Northern California and in a laboratory. Three groups were identified, 32 young children in all. Children in the first group were “assertive, self-reliant, self-controlled, buoyant, and affiliative.” Those in the second were “discontented, withdrawn, and distrustful.” The third showed “little self-control or self-reliance.” Then home visits, structured observations, and interviews were conducted to identify the caregivers’ behaviors and attitudes.

Findings from the first study can be summarized briefly as follows: parents of the most assertive, self-reliant, and self-controlled children were controlling, demanding, communicative, and loving; parents of the unhappy and disaffiliated group were relatively controlling and detached; and parents of the least self-reliant and self-controlled group of children were noncontrolling, nondemanding, and relatively warm. (Baumrind & Black, 1967, p. 292)

Baumrind had already identified three distinct “models of parental control” (Baumrind, 1966), which she called “permissive,” “authoritarian,” and “authoritative.” She described the characteristics of each of these.

The **permissive parent** is accepting and positive, and does not punish the child’s actions or desires. Such parents explain family rules and involve the young child in decisions. “[The mother] presents herself to the child as a resource for him to use as he wishes, not as an ideal for him to emulate, nor as an active agent responsible for shaping or altering his ongoing or future behavior” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 889). She uses “reason and manipulation, but not overt power.” The young child has few responsibilities around the house and is not expected to be orderly or especially well-behaved. The permissive parent does not believe that it is necessary to shape or change the young child’s behavior and attitudes.

The **authoritarian parent**, in contrast, applies a fixed standard of conduct to the young child. Such parents see obedience as a virtue, and they are in favor of punishment and force when their child seems disobedient or willful. When the young child does something that the parent views as inappropriate, the authoritarian parent will put her in her place, restricting the child’s autonomy and imposing tasks as punishment. The parent believes that young children should not talk back, and that a parent’s decision is final and should be

accepted. “She does not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept her word for what is right” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890). Such a parent makes strong demands on their young child, using force and punishment when necessary, and may withdraw affection when the young child misbehaves.

Finally, the **authoritative parent** tries to direct the young child by using reason and encouraging discussion about what is right and wrong. Such a caregiver “attempts to direct the child’s activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner. She encourages verbal give and take, shares with the child the reasoning behind her policy, and solicits his objections when he refuses to conform” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 891). Such a parent explains the reasons behind their decisions, and asks the child for her point of view when there is disagreement. “Both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity are valued by the authoritative parent” (1966, p. 891). Although the parent exerts firm control, they do not unduly restrict the child. The authoritative parent validates the young child in the present but also sets standards for her future behavior, using both reason and rules to achieve these objectives. This kind of parent provides reasons for their demands and is generally consistent in enforcing these demands and explaining them.

It is important to note that all these models of control show the new kind of mediation that caregivers start to use in early childhood. All three make use of the young child’s new ability to understand the representational character of speech. All three involve *reasons* and *explanations*. The difference is that the authoritative caregiver allows and expects the young child to offer her own reasons. The authoritarian caregiver expects the young child to accept and comply with their reasons or be punished. And the permissive caregiver gives reasons and then leaves it to the young child to choose for herself what to do. But all three assume the young child’s ability to understand more complex verbal formulations.

Caregivers using each of the three models also presume that the young child can now recall their reasons, can control and to some degree plan her own actions in the future, and is capable of verbal thinking. They presume an internal ego, even when they differ in whether they continue to play the role of an external ego.

A second study was designed to again explore the relations among parent behaviors and attitudes and child behaviors, but in an unselected group (Baumrind & Black, 1967). All the young children in the nursery school, more than 100 of them, average age 47 months, were observed, and then home visits were conducted and parents were interviewed. All the data were coded in intricate ways, and analyzed statistically.

The home visits aimed to record “parent–child interactions where one member attempted overtly to influence the behavior of another”, where a parent sought to “control or alter the behavior of the child or his future capacity to act” (Baumrind & Black, 1967, p. 304). Of course, these attempts to “control” are made verbally, both by the adults and by the young child. This is what is new to early childhood: young children are starting to understand that speech can be used to control other people—and themselves. Speech can *bind* people to future action.

The following is a simple example of an interaction in which a young child makes a demand of their parent with which the parent does not comply, although the young child makes increasingly stronger efforts:

John: "Can I go out?"

Mother: "Yes. Oh no, I guess you can't. I didn't realize how late it was."

John: "But why didn't you tell me the time?"

Mother: "You have to take a bath now."

John: "Please, Mother. (Crying, beseeching, being terribly cute.) I never get to go down the street."

Mother: "Not tonight, dear." (Baumrind & Black, 1967, p. 305)

In this second study too Baumrind found that:

Parents' willingness to offer justification for directives and to listen to the child were associated with Competent Behavior on the part of the child. [In contrast] Restrictiveness and refusal to grant sufficient independence ... were associated in boys with Dependent, Passive behavior. (Baumrind & Black, 1967, pp. 324-325)

Baumrind's conclusion was that responsible and independent behavior in the nursery school had been facilitated by parental techniques which fostered self-reliance. Such techniques included demands for "self-control and high-level performance," or "encouraging independent action and decision-making." This kind of firm and demanding behavior by parents was often accompanied by warmth. Once again, parents who balanced "high nurturance with high control and high demands with clear communication about what was required of the child" had young children who were observed to be more competent in the nursery school.

For example, this father uses minimal power but the child complies after his father persists:

Mark gets up from the table.

Father: "What do you say, Mark?"

Mark: "I wanna go."

Father: "What do you say, Mark?"

Mark: "Excuse me, please." (Baumrind & Black, 1967, p. 304)

One can see again in Baumrind's description of the three styles that the caregivers of young children have turned to "reasons" in their interactions with their child. They vary in whether they believe the child should comply with their reasons or be punished (authoritarian), or is permitted to offer her own reasons in turn (authoritative), or is left to choose for herself whether or not to follow them (permissive).

8.1.1 An Optimal Style?

Baumrind clearly considered the *authoritative* model or, as it came to be known “parenting style,” to be optimal for a young child’s development. This style of caregiving steered between the extremes of, on the one hand, hierarchical authoritarianism focused on obedience and, on the other hand, a permissive attitude that let the young child get away with anything. The authoritative style provides a synthesis between these two extremes. Baumrind’s view was that “authoritative control can achieve responsible conformity with group standards without loss of individual autonomy or self-assertiveness” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 905).

To what extent can one generalize from the results of Baumrind’s research? This was conducted in a very specific setting, a university town in Northern California, and with a very specific set of families. Baumrind herself noted that “The population studied consisted of very well-educated, moderately affluent parents who were involved with their children’s welfare even when they were not notably warm and sympathetic” (Baumrind & Black, 1967, p. 319).

Baumrind herself did not ignore this issue. Among the participants in her second study were 16 African-American children and their families. She analyzed their data separately, and came to the following conclusion:

[I]f the black families were viewed by white norms they appeared authoritarian, but ... unlike their white counterparts, the most authoritarian of these families produced the most self-assertive and independent girls. (Baumrind, 1972, p. 261)

Here, then, was clear evidence that the relationship between parenting style and “competence” in young children was not a simple one. Cultural background also played a role.

It is clear that Baumrind’s sympathies lay with the authoritative style. But one might suggest that she had discovered a diversity of caregiving styles, each one of which might be adaptive to a particular environment. This is the same issue we encountered with attachment theory, where there is a clear preference for so-called secure attachment, but in spite of this, some people have suggested that each pattern of attachment is adaptive.

8.1.2 The Consequences of Caregiving Style

However, Baumrind’s finding with African-American families is contradicted by a considerable amount of subsequent research. Developmental scientists have used Baumrind’s typology to look at caregiving and its developmental outcomes in various cultural contexts. This research has studied the consequences of the different caregiving styles not only in early childhood but also in middle childhood and adolescence. A number of researchers have concluded that Baumrind’s model is valid across the world, and that authoritative caregiving is best for all children (Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013).

Initially, perhaps not surprisingly, this research was conducted in high-income countries. Even in 2014, John Jabaghourian and colleagues could still summarize the situation in this way:

A vast literature documents a host of advantages conferred upon middle class European American children whose parents employ an authoritative style of parenting, including enhanced academic achievement and positive behavioral outcomes. The literature is much less clear about the relationship between parental authority style and child outcomes in other cultural contexts. (Jabaghourian, Sorkhabi, Quach, & Strage, 2014, p. 175)

Efforts have been made to clarify this relationship in other cultural contexts, not least by Jabaghourian and his colleagues. But still in 2018 it was the case that “Most of the research on the parents’ role for children’s psychological and behavioral outcomes has been conducted among families from the United States and other western countries” (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018, p. 75).

In spite of this, in his 2001 presidential address to the Society for Research on Adolescence, Laurence Steinberg asserted that:

studies of American samples show that as a general rule, adolescents fare better when their parents are authoritative, regardless of their racial or social background or their parents’ marital status. ... This finding has been confirmed in samples from countries around the world that have extreme diversity in their value systems, such as China, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Scotland, Australia, and Argentina. (Steinberg, 2001, p. 12)

Steinberg declared that “there is enough evidence to conclude that adolescents benefit from having parents who are authoritative: warm, firm, and accepting of their needs for psychological autonomy.” However, it would be rather surprising if adolescents—and adolescents across the world—do indeed all benefit from the same kind of caregiving that benefits (some) young children.

Surprising or not, many researchers agree with Steinberg. A typical statement is that “independence, self-reliance, and individual initiative are necessary for developmental progress [even] in cultures assumed to be collectivistic” and that the development of these characteristics is encouraged by authoritative caregiving (Amani, Nazifi, & Sorkhabi, 2020). There have been a few voices of disagreement. One suggestion has been that Asian children will attain better academic goals with authoritarian parenting. But a comparison of Japanese and American elementary school children found no evidence that authoritarian caregiving benefited the Japanese children. Surprisingly, though, the American children benefited both from authoritative and authoritarian caregiving (Watabe & Hibbard, 2014). Another exception has been a finding that in Southern European and Latin American cultures the optimum style of parenting is **indulgent**, “characterized by high acceptance/ involvement and low strictness/imposition” (García & Gracia, 2014, p. 429).

A recent meta-analysis of 428 studies considered the associations between parenting style and three outcomes: academic achievement, internalization problems (anxiety and depression), and externalization problems (aggression and delinquency) in children up to 20 years of age (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Here too the conclusion was that “all parents could be advised or trained to practice this [authoritative] parenting style” (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018, p. 85).

Three analyses were conducted. The first explored whether or not there were differences in these associations among ethnic groups within countries, specifically White, Hispanic, African origin, and Asian origin. The authoritative style was found to have small but significant associations with positive outcomes in each of these ethnic groups. The consequences of the authoritarian style were mixed. Among Africans living in Western countries, there were no negative associations for this style. But even here, the authoritative style was still associated with positive outcomes. Overall, there were more similarities than differences among ethnic groups.

The second analysis compared countries, grouping them into ten distinct regions. The consequences of the authoritative style varied across regions. Academic achievement was higher with this style in all regions. But the association with behavioral and emotional problems varied. So did the associations with the other styles, though in no region were there positive associations with the authoritarian style.

The third analysis explored the relationship between outcomes and individualism versus collectivism. Each country was scored on Hofstede's continuum (see Key Research 8.1: Geert Hofstede's Six Dimensions of National Culture). Surprisingly, the authoritative style showed *weaker* associations with positive outcomes in countries with a higher individualism score. The authoritarian style also showed weaker associations with behavioral and emotional problems in such countries. These findings ran counter to the "inconsistency hypothesis," that a parenting style will lead to negative child outcomes if it is not consistent with cultural expectations.

The researchers concluded that "young people from western countries benefit from having parents who are authoritative: warm, firm, and accepting of their needs for psychological autonomy" and that "authoritative parenting showed at least one positive association with a desirable child outcome in all 10 assessed regions of the globe" (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018, p. 84). However, the researchers who conducted this meta-analysis noted that "the large majority of studies from non-western countries have been conducted in urban areas where parental behavior and their effects may be less traditional than in rural areas" (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018, p. 85).

This is a key point. Studies of the consequences of caregiving style tend to be carried out with urban middle-class families whose children are in school. Both these families and the schools their children attend are likely to share the values of Baumrind's Northern California participants. School is a Western institution, as will become very clear in Chapter 9.

The main problem with the research on the consequences of parenting style across different cultures is that it too has usually studied urban middle-class parents whose children (or adolescents) attend school. These studies in other countries are of limited value, for they have selected as participants those caregivers and children most likely to value the characteristics of children that tend to lead to school success. That the authoritative style usually helps young people who are or will be studying at school is not surprising.

There are, to my knowledge, no studies of the developmental consequences of caregiving style in families of children who are non-schooled, such as rural subsistence farmers or hunter-gatherers.

CASE STUDY 8.1

Culture and Parenting: Influence of Acculturation on Immigrant Parents

Dr Rucha Londhe, Independent Consultant

The influence of culture on parenting styles and parenting decisions is widely accepted. When a family migrates to a different culture, it adds a totally new dimension to parenting (Kwak, 2003). While rearing children in a culture different from the one they grew up in, parents are often dealing with maintaining a balance between enculturation (e.g., continuing the norms and values of the ethnic culture) and acculturation (e.g., adapting the norms and the values of the dominant culture). This is particularly true for the Asian Indian immigrants in the USA because, as research indicates, this community brings with it a strong sense of native culture and customs (Dasgupta, 1986). One of the important decisions that these families have to make is related to the process of acculturation, the process of “accommodation to a host culture on the part of member of a migrant culture” (Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978, p. 114).

Londhe (2014) studied the acculturation of first-generation Indian parents of young children, particularly focusing on the relationship between acculturation and various parental and child characteristics, such as parenting stress, perceived social support, and child's age and gender. The sample for the study consisted of Asian-Indian parents, both mothers and fathers, of pre-school/kindergarten children between the ages of 3 and 6 in the USA. For each couple, both the mother and the father were first-generation Indians, that is they had been raised in India and had not migrated to the USA before the age of 18, and they were Hindus. Data were collected from 30 such couples using the following three scales:

- The Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS) (Stephenson, 2000), with two subscales: ESI (ethnic society immersion) and DSI (dominant society immersion)
- The Parental Stress Inventory/Short Form (PSI/SF) (Abidin, 1995)
- The Family Support Scale (FSS) (Dunst, Jenkins, & Trivette, 1994)

Overall, there was no significant association found between the total acculturation scores and social support scores obtained from the study sample. In addition, no significant correlation was found between parental scores on stress and acculturation. It was found that the parents of girls and those with younger children had significantly higher scores on the ESI scale.

LeVine (1988) had previously proposed a cultural evolutionary model, according to which minority parents adapt their childrearing methods to combine their cultural values and norms with that of the existent majority culture, and societal and personal factors. This method of childrearing helps parents in the socialization of their children with regard to their traditional cultural values and norms. At the same time, it also allows parents to accept childrearing practices from the dominant culture that match their needs and resources. Londhe (2014), however, found that the age and gender of the child also play a role in their parents' acculturation choices.

Londhe (2014) found a negative correlation between the parental scores on the ESI and the age of the child, with a potential explanation that while their children are still young, parents try to

(Continued)

inculcate ethnic values in them. As the children grow older and are exposed to more of the dominant culture (through school and other social influences), they in turn increase their parents' immersion in the dominant culture.

In addition, in immigrant Indian families, daughters are expected to shoulder the responsibility of continuing the traditions and ethnic identity (Dasgupta, 1998), which can explain the scores from parents of girls in the study. With this added responsibility on the daughters, Indian parents are likely to pay more attention to the socialization experiences of their daughters (Ghuman, 2005). As a result, the daughters in these families are monitored more than the sons when it comes to cultural themes and decisions.

The information from the present study can be used for the enhancement of curricula for parent education and the development of programs for immigrant parents in general and Indians in particular. The acculturation experiences of young children in immigrant Asian Indian families can be helpful to teachers in classroom settings. In the words of Ghuman, "teachers, in my view, should accept in principle that Asian children in their care are going to be bi-cultural and that it is their professional duty to help realize this objective" (Ghuman, 2006, p. 74). Information obtained regarding the acculturation processes of immigrant parents can help parent educators write more appropriate curricula for them. In turn, better education programs can help parents deal with the discrepancies in their traditional attitudes and ideas about childrearing and those in the USA.

8.1.3 What Is Autonomy?

There is also a second issue. The young children that Baumrind considered "competent" were those that she felt displayed "autonomy." But what type of autonomy did she mean? We have seen that one developmental pathway leads to *psychological autonomy* while another pathway leads to *action autonomy*. It seems likely that Baumrind, living and working in Northern California, would value the former.

Turkish psychologist Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı pointed out that in studies of children's development "[a]utonomy and agency are used extensively and often interchangeably." And she noted that:

Autonomy has often been construed as conflicting with relatedness, reflecting tendencies [respectively] toward independence from others and interdependence with others, variously called "autonomy", "agency", or "separation-individuation" versus "surrender", "communion", "union", "fusion", or "dependency." (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, p. 403)

Did Baumrind think that autonomy conflicted with relatedness? Did she think that autonomy means independence? I think not. What she was exploring was the way a particular kind of relatedness—between young child and caregivers—is necessary for autonomy to develop. She wrote that freedom and control are not opposites. Freedom means "power to act, rather than absence of external control." And she valued a combination of autonomy with conformity: "Both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity are valued by the authoritative parent" (Baumrind, 1966, p. 903), and "authoritative control can achieve responsible conformity with

group standards without loss of individual autonomy or self-assertiveness” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 905). It is possible that Baumrind’s definition of autonomy can apply to either psychological autonomy or action autonomy. However, subsequent research seems to have adopted a narrower perspective. Steinberg, for example, referred explicitly to “psychological autonomy.”

One of the strengths of Baumrind’s approach is that she did not view caregiving as socialization, as having as its goal only the young child’s conformity to caregivers’ expectations. Baumrind recognized that the young child is acquiring the ability to control her own actions. In her view, optimal childrearing leads both to moral character—the capacity to *will* the good—and moral competence—the capacity to *do* the good. She insisted that children are born neither wicked nor good. They have both moral feelings and destructive impulses, and their character is formed in their interactions with caregiving adults. In those interactions the adults have more power to control than do the children. Through such interactions the internal structure of the young child’s conscience is formed, and ideally she develops accountability, persistence, and self-discipline.

Viewed this way, caregiving is about *emancipating* a young child, encouraging her self-consciousness and her ability to be responsible. Responsibility, for Baumrind, is not simply a matter of *conforming* to rules about what is right and wrong, but freely *choosing* to do what is considered to be right, and for the right reasons.

One can see some similarities between Baumrind’s views and Erikson’s description of the conflict of early childhood: between initiative and guilt (Erikson, 1950). Erikson noted that young children are increasingly assertive, especially with peers. Given the opportunity, they will develop a sense of initiative and feel secure in their ability to lead others and make decisions. Caregivers, however, may interpret this assertiveness as aggression, and if they respond with criticism or attempt to control, the young child, in Erikson’s view, would develop enduring guilt and a sense of “being a nuisance,” and will consequently become a follower rather than a leader, lacking in self-initiative.

8.1.4 The Nursery School as Context

A third issue can be raised about the approach Baumrind took to study and conceptualize the caregiving of young children. I think she was correct to insist that studying young children’s behavior in an everyday setting has more validity than using questionnaires with teachers, for example. But she took the nursery school to be a “natural environment” (Baumrind, 2013, p. 14). In fact, of course, it is an artificial, human-constructed environment, a developmental niche which itself encourages specific developmental outcomes. Perhaps the young children who Baumrind described as being assertive, self-reliant, and self-controlled were those who fitted into the nursery, while those described as unhappy and disaffiliated simply didn’t fit in. As Joanna Rączaszek-Leonardi has said: “If organisms use structured forms to shape their coordinative dynamics, it seems surprising for the researchers not to incorporate them into their explanations of the cognitive functions and behavior of these organisms” (Rączaszek-Leonardi, 2023, p. 8). If ever there were an organism that uses structured forms to shape its coordinative dynamics, it is human beings!

KEY RESEARCH 8.1

Hofstede's Six Dimensions of National Culture

As investigators have explored psychological similarities and differences across countries, they have identified a number of key dimensions that seem useful in understanding cultural influences. The best known of these dimensions are those identified by Geert Hofstede (1980; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004): (a) individualism-collectivism (IC); (b) power distance (PD); (c) uncertainty avoidance (UA); (d) masculinity-femininity (MA); and (e) long-term orientation (LTO).

For Hofstede, "Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 2021). He analyzed data from employees of the multinational corporation IBM in 50 countries to identify these common factors or dimensions.

Individualism-collectivism is the degree to which a person feels pressure to adopt goals similar to that of the group. Power distance is the degree to which people accept differences in power. Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which there are group processes to reduce or cope with uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk. Masculinity-femininity is the degree to which gender roles and behaviors are traditional. Long-term orientation is people's willingness to pursue long-term goals rather than short-term rewards.

The best known of these dimensions is individualism-collectivism, which is scored along a continuum so that every country has a single score. For example, the USA has a score of 91 out of 100. The United Kingdom scores 89. Colombia scores 13. Mexico scores 30. Denmark scores 74.

We shall see that there are reasons to think that individualism and collectivism can be two independent dimensions, rather than opposites. And any approach that ignores cultural differences *within* a country is of limited use.

8.2 UNDERSTANDING OTHER PEOPLE: PRIOR INTENTIONS AND SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

On all of these views children are constructing or employing a conceptual structure, a theory of mind. An alternative view is that children do not really acquire any theory of mind of their own but, through participation in cultural activities, they come to share their culture's way of regarding and talking about people's relations to one another and to the world. (Astington, 1996, p. 188)

Three-year-olds take the world they see to be the world as it is. For example, although they can understand that what they see may not be visible to another person, they don't yet recognize that people have different visual perspectives—that a person standing in a different place has a different point of view. And they don't yet understand that people know different things about the world—that someone can have, for example, a false belief. Indeed, they don't yet draw a distinction between the world and knowledge about the world.

During early childhood, however, young children's understanding of how other people perceive and know the world changes and advances in important ways. Once again, we can

distinguish between two different kinds of understanding in early childhood. One focuses on people's intentions and goals. The other focuses on the social situations in which people act. The young child goes beyond the teleological stance as she becomes capable of understanding "prior intentions." And she goes beyond the customary stance as she begins to understand social conventions. The former ability I shall call the "intentional stance," and the latter I shall call the "**conventional stance**."

8.2.1 The Intentional Stance

Once again we will start with Piaget and examine in more detail his claim that young children are "egocentric." Next we consider research with false-belief tasks, and the ways that "mind" is understood across different cultures. Then we consider what a young child's understanding of other people owes to interactions with members of her family. We raise some questions about the research techniques for studying theory-of-mind, which generally involve pretense and make believe. And finally we consider the counterintuitive finding that around the age that young children become able to solve false-belief tasks, they begin to fail true-belief tasks!

8.2.1.1 Understanding Perspective

Piaget's famous "three mountains task" explored the ability of young children to understand visual perspective. A young child is shown a model of a scene with three miniature mountains, together with tiny trees, huts, and other objects. The child is allowed to examine the model from all sides. Then she sits in front of it and is asked to describe what she sees. A doll is then placed on the opposite side of the model, and the young child is asked what the doll can see.

Piaget found that usually the young child will say that the doll sees exactly what she herself sees. He called this lack of ability to understand another person's visual perspective **egocentrism**. What he meant by this (as when he wrote about "egocentric speech") was not that the young child is selfish, but that she has a strong tendency to consider the world in terms of her own point of view. She assumes that everyone sees the world the way she does. She simply assumes that the world *is* as she sees it. In his earlier work, Piaget proposed that in order to recognize that other people have different perspectives, the young child needs to be socialized. Later, he suggested that in order to recognize other perspectives, she must become conscious of herself, so as to draw a distinction between herself and the world she lives in:

In order to be objective, one must have become conscious of one's "I." Objective knowledge can only be conceived in relation to subjective [knowledge] ... originally the child puts the whole content of consciousness on the same plane and draws no distinction between "I" and the external world. (Piaget, 1960 [1929], p. 241)

For Piaget, the young child's cognitive development is a matter of overcoming egocentrism by progressively **decentering**. This enables a distinction between how the world appears from her own point of view and an objective understanding of the world. It means drawing a distinction between how the world *appears* and how it *is*.

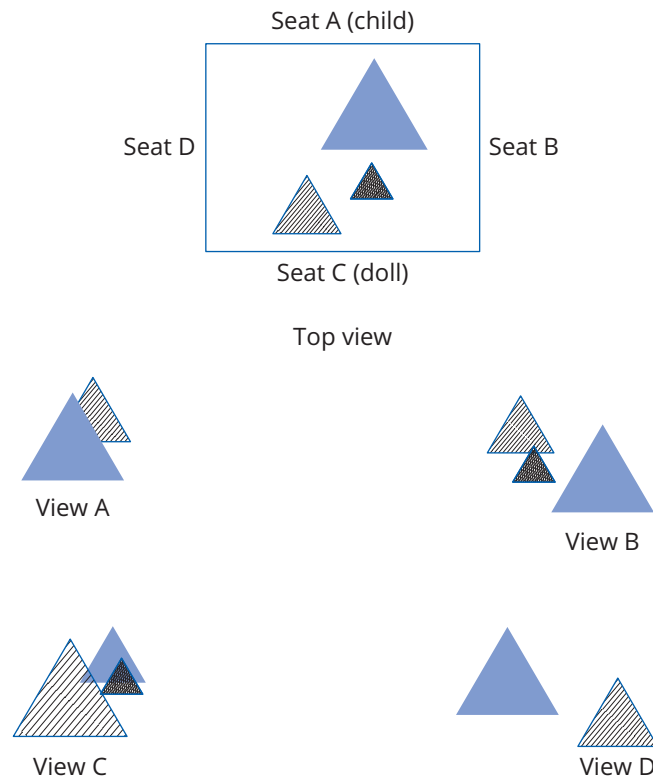


Figure 8.1 Piaget's three mountains task

Source: Author

This suggestion is similar to Vygotsky's proposal that the young child is starting to differentiate psychologically from other people. She is becoming conscious of herself as a distinct agency. She will soon understand that she has a perspective on the world which other people do not share. The young child starts to appreciate that reality shows itself in different ways to different people.

We saw in Chapter 5 that 3-year-olds can appreciate that another person may be able to see an object that they themselves cannot see. As noted, this has been called *level 1 perspective taking* (Flavell, Everett, Croft, & Flavell, 1981). For example, a 3-year-old can tell a researcher where to place the figure of a naughty boy so that he will be out of sight to a toy policeman. She can tell whether or not the policeman can see something that she can see. However, the same young child will be unable to correctly describe the appearance of an object as seen by someone seated on the opposite side of the table. She is capable of level 1 perspective taking but not level 2.

In fact, however, the label is misleading since at 3 years there is no understanding of perspective. The same 3-year-olds do not recognize that an object visible to themselves and to another person will be seen *in different ways*. That ability is called **level 2 perspective taking**, and it doesn't develop until around 4 years of age (Aichhorn et al., 2006).

8.2.1.2 Understanding Beliefs

In Piaget's view, egocentrism also lies behind the young child's inability to understand other people's mental states: their beliefs, desires, thoughts, and intentions. He asked young children about their own thinking and the thinking of other people. As we saw in the previous chapter, he concluded that young children do not distinguish what is material from what is psychological. They attribute intentions to material things and they often propose that thoughts are material. The young child apparently does not think that mental states are private and personal.

Many researchers have followed Piaget's lead, exploring young children's understanding of beliefs and desires. A very popular way of studying this is the **false-belief task**. A young child is shown a toy character, Max, who hides something—a chocolate, for example—in a green cabinet. Max then leaves and while he is gone his mother moves the chocolate to a new location, a blue cabinet. Max returns, and the young child is asked where Max will look for the chocolate, and to explain where Max will think the chocolate is (Figure 8.2).

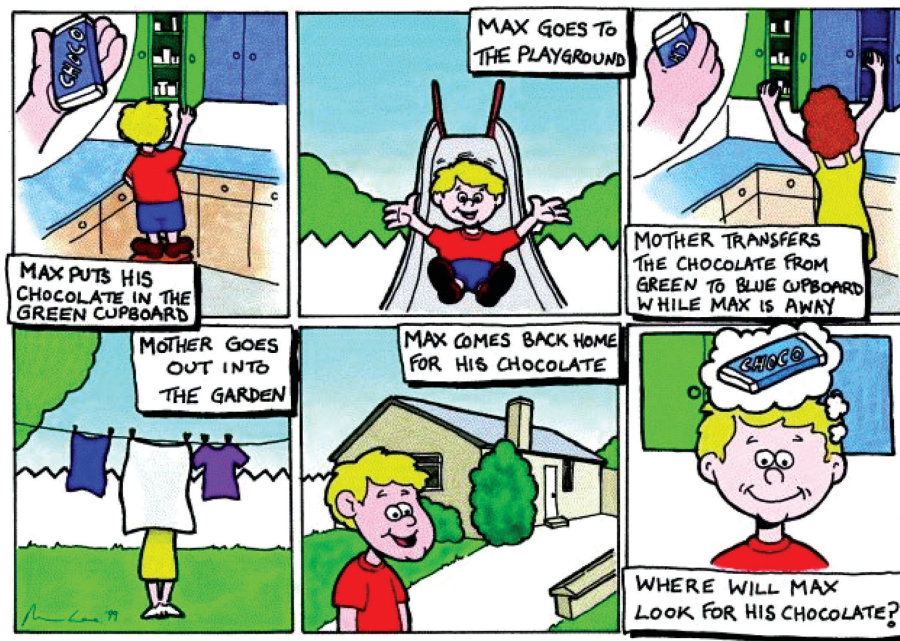


Figure 8.2 The steps in the false-belief task

Source: Perner and Lang (1999)

Older children, aged 6 or 7, give answers in this task just like adults. They say that Max will look in the green cabinet because this is where he *believes* the chocolate is. However, younger children (aged 3 years) answer differently. But they do not give random answers: they consistently say that Max will search in the second location, the blue cabinet, where the chocolate *actually* is (Wellman, 2011).

What is behind such answers? Does the young child fail to understand that Max's belief about the location of the chocolate is no longer correct? Does she fail to distinguish between what she herself knows and what Max believes? Or does she not yet draw a distinction between what she knows about the world and how the world actually is? Does she perhaps not recognize beliefs at all?

The validity of the false-belief task has been questioned. But many researchers have concluded that the phenomenon is a real one: young children do not grasp that a person can believe something about the world that is not true (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001). This phenomenon is generally taken as evidence that young children do not recognize that people have mental states such as beliefs.

However, before we accept this conclusion we should take into account the finding that young children show similar difficulties with tasks that don't require any understanding of mental states (Bloom & German, 2000). For example, 3-year-olds have as much difficulty with a false photograph—one that doesn't accurately portray how things actually look—as with the false-belief task. In contrast, 4-year-olds perform better. Younger children also have difficulty with stories about a false signpost—one that points to an object that has been moved—and about a false label—one that indicates incorrectly what is in a container. This fact suggests that what is difficult for young children is false representation in general (Leekam, Perner, Healey, & Sewell, 2008). What may be happening is that the younger child cannot yet understand how one thing may "point to" another thing incorrectly. The younger child simply accepts that a tin contains what its label indicates, that a sign points where it seems to, and that a person's action "points" towards their goal. Yes, this implies that young children do not understand people's actions in terms of mental states. But as we have seen, they do understand people's actions in terms of intention-in-action. And an intention-in-action is a goal that is visible.

Cross-cultural research has explored whether this inability to understand false beliefs is a universal developmental phenomenon, and the results have been confusing (Lillard & Skibbe, 2005; Liu, Wellman, Tardif, & Sabbagh, 2008). In one of the first studies in non-Western cultures, young Baka children in rural Cameroon seemed to have the ability to make inferences about people's false beliefs (Avis & Harris, 1991). All the 5-year-old Baka children answered correctly in a false-belief task, and some of the younger children, aged 3.5 years, did so too. Other studies have found, however, that performance on a false-belief task is poor in cultures where people are less likely to talk about mental states. For example, even 8-year-old Quechua children in Peru had difficulty solving the task (Vinden, 1998, 2002). However, young children from a variety of small-scale, low-technology groups in Cameroon and New Guinea were able to understand how beliefs affect behavior, though they had difficulty predicting an emotion arising from a false belief (Vinden, 1999).

As I said, findings such as these are difficult to interpret. Poor performance on the false-belief tasks could be because people lack the vocabulary to talk about beliefs, or because they understand beliefs in a different way from children in WEIRD communities. To eliminate the role of vocabulary on the task, studies have been conducted in which it was not necessary to use difficult-to-translate words, such as belief and emotion. In one such study, a toy was hidden under one of three bowls with two adults present. Then one adult left and the other indicated to the young child to put the toy under a different bowl, then asked her to point

to the bowl the first adult would pick up when they returned (Callaghan et al., 2005). This version of a false-belief task uses language only at a simple level, since the child responds by simply pointing, and the children were asked simple questions about behavior, not about beliefs or thoughts.

A large number of children between 2.5 and 6 years of age were tested in this way in Canada, Samoa, India, Peru, and Thailand. A common pattern was found. Performance improved with age, with 50 percent of young children of 4.5 to 5 years of age performing correctly, and all children of 5.5 to 6 years of age responding correctly. This finding has been interpreted as showing that young children's understanding of false beliefs develops in a single way that is independent of culture or the language that is spoken.

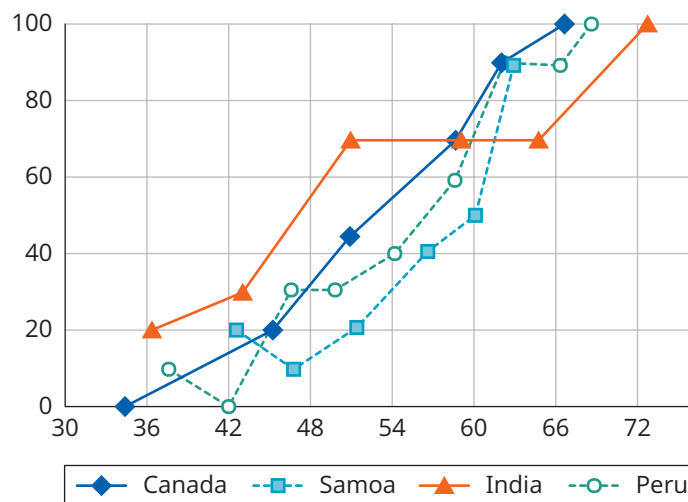


Figure 8.3 Percentage of children passing the false-belief test as a function of age in months, plotted separately for Canada, Samoa, India, and Peru

Source: Callaghan et al. (2005)

However, in a task in which young children were asked to explain the bad behavior of a story character, there were cultural, regional, and class differences in whether the explanation was given in terms of mental states or in terms of external circumstances (Lillard, Skibbe, Zeljo, & Harlan, 2001). Children in all the groups gave both kinds of explanation, but the frequency and patterns varied. The researchers attributed the results to language practices in the different communities. They suggested that parents in poorer and rural communities are more likely to explain actions to their children in terms of situations, while parents in wealthier and urban communities are more likely to explain actions in terms of mental states.

Overall, it seems that when carefully simplified versions of the false-belief task are presented to young children in widely different cultures they perform roughly the same. But cultural variations appear when language is made part of the task—when the children have to explain their answers, for example. This pattern suggests that there may be a universal *basic* way of understanding other people's behavior, but that differences start to appear when young children come

to adopt their culture's way of talking and thinking about what people know and want (cf. Stone, Carpendale, Sugarman, & Martin, 2012). One might hypothesize that the basic understanding uses System 1, implicit teleological understanding, while verbal explanations require System 2.

A study that may illustrate how cultural interpretations shape verbal explanations of belief, desire, and emotion was conducted with 3- to 5-year-old Zapotecan children in Mexico and Spanish children in Toledo, Spain. They were told a story, illustrated with photos, about a child who desired an object that belonged to a playmate but could not get it, and who then witnessed its destruction (Quintanilla & Sarria, 2009). These two cultures differ in the way envy is understood and coped with. The Zapotec children consider envy to be a threat. They emphasize that envy can lead to hostility and that envy implies a view that goods are limited. Envy is an emotion that Zapotecs try to avoid, and they do this in part by sharing goods symbolically, and in part by hiding them. In Spain, like other high-income countries, envy is often viewed as a motivating emotion, and people proudly display their possessions even when (and perhaps because) they know that doing so will generate envy.

From 3 years of age onwards, the young children in both groups attributed first envy and then happiness to the child who desired the coveted object and then saw it destroyed. However, the type of explanation they gave for these emotions depended on both their culture and their age. The 3-year-old Spanish children were able to explain the boy's feelings more easily, and they used arguments about intentions (wanting the object). The Zapotec children, especially the 3-year-olds, had difficulty articulating an explanation and they often explained the boy's feelings in terms of the situation (having or not having the object). Asked how the conflict could be resolved, however, it was the Spanish children who were more likely to suggest sharing the object, which ran counter to the researchers' predictions.

8.2.1.3 The Impact of Language

Of course, a young child doesn't come to understand other people all by herself. Adults help young children make sense of what other people do, and know, and want. Several investigations have shown the importance of a young child's family. For example, Judy Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn et al., 1991) observed young children in central Pennsylvania, USA, interacting with their mothers at 33 months of age, and then gave the children various tasks at 40 months (3 years 4 months). They found that in a false-belief task a third of the young children were able to offer explanations in terms of belief, and that the ability to do this was related to conversations between child and mother about feelings and beliefs at the earlier time:

For example, during the observations mothers frequently attempted to sort out disagreements between siblings by explaining how the other child's (often mistaken) beliefs governed his or her actions: "He thought you had finished yours"; "She didn't know I had promised it to you"; "He thought it was his turn". (Dunn et al., 1991, p. 1363)

As such findings might lead us to expect, young children perform better on false-belief tasks when they have more siblings (Perner, Ruffman, & Leekam, 1994), have older siblings (Ruffman et al., 1998), or have mothers who encourage them to reflect on their feelings

(Ruffman, Perner, & Parkin, 1999) and who talk about mental states (Ruffman, Slade, & Crowe, 2002) and emotions (Taumoepeau & Ruffman, 2008). One study directly compared mothers' "mental state" language—words such as "*think*" and "*know*," and words about desires—with language that did not use such terms, with their 3- to 4-year-old children. It found that only the former kind of language predicted the young children's later success in "theory of mind" tasks (Ruffman et al., 2002).

It has been proposed that caregivers' talk facilitates the young child's understanding of mental states because their "emerging implicit understanding about mental life is made explicit" (Taumoepeau & Ruffman, 2006, p. 478). Moreover, a general caregiving style (such as warmth/sensitivity) is not associated with young children's performance on theory of mind tasks. It seems that what makes a difference is a specific type of talk rather than a general style of interaction (Ruffman, Slade, Devitt, & Crowe, 2006).

STOP & THINK 8.1 THEORY OF PUPPETS?

When one stops to think, it is rather odd that in false-belief tasks the young child is often asked about the beliefs of a doll or puppet! Dolls and puppets don't actually have beliefs, though psychologists seem to forget this. Dolls and puppets don't act in realistic ways, either. In such a task, what the young child is actually being asked to do is enter into a game of *pretense* with the researcher, a game in which beliefs are *attributed* to a toy, a material representation of a person. The false-belief task, in its most common form, takes for granted a young child's ability to engage in pretense.

We saw in Chapter 7 that sociodramatic play in early childhood builds upon the object-substitution pretense play in toddlerhood, which itself rests on the fact that some objects resemble other objects. Resemblance is something that toddlers learn to pay attention to as they learn the words of their language. When young children engage in pretend play together, it is an activity in which they deliberately make claims about objects that are not true, and in that sense they create false beliefs which they can apparently understand and accept. Josh doesn't really believe that he is a Laser Bat, but he is able to pretend that he is. What is the difference, exactly?

There is evidence that young children understand the distinction between what is pretend and what is real before they understand the distinction between appearance and reality (Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 1987). And young children become able to engage in pretend play before they are able to successfully solve false-belief tasks (Lillard, 1993). These facts suggest the possibility that it may be in play that young children learn to master the distinction between true and false beliefs. They also suggest, more broadly, that the ability to understand another person's desires and beliefs may be based on a capacity for imagination, not representation of that person's representations.

Indeed, Harris has proposed a "simulation" account of the development of theory of mind. He suggests that a child decides what another person believes in a particular situation by imagining what their own actions, thoughts, and beliefs would be in that situation (Harris, 1992).

These facts also suggest that when researchers use pretense in theory of mind tasks they are taking for granted an ability in young children—the ability to pretend with adults—that is more complex than the ability they want to study: the ability to understand other people. Perhaps "theory of mind" should in fact be called "theory of puppets" (Revenu & Csibra, 2020; Packer & Moreno-Dulcey, 2022)!

8.2.1.4 Failing True-Belief Tasks

It might seem obvious that when young children become able to solve false-belief tasks, at around age 5, it is because they have begun to recognize that beliefs are mental representations that may not correspond with reality (Wellman, 2014). However, there is evidence that young children are still not reasoning about mental representations. Instead, they are drawing inferences about a person's intention from the specific situation. The strongest evidence comes from the surprising finding that at the age when young children begin to pass standard false-belief tasks they begin to fail "true-belief" tasks!

This gets a bit complicated, so I will try to be as clear as possible. Recall Max and his chocolate. In the false-belief task, the chocolate was moved to another cabinet while Max was away, so that when he returned his belief that the chocolate was in the green cabinet was false. In contrast, a true-belief task is simply one in which when Max returns to the room, his belief about the location of the chocolate is true. He believes that the chocolate is in the green cabinet, and it is. For example, young children are shown Max placing the chocolate in a green cupboard, then he goes away. During his absence, his mother takes the chocolate out and considers moving it to a blue cupboard, but instead returns it to its original location. When Max returns, his belief that the chocolate is in the green cabinet remains true.

At the age (around 5 years) when young children will correctly solve the first task, they will fail the second task. That is, when the chocolate was moved to the blue cabinet while Max was not present, they will correctly say that Max will look in the green cabinet. They apparently understand that his belief is false. However, when the chocolate was *almost* moved to the blue cabinet but then returned to the green cabinet, they will *not* say that he will look in the green cupboard! Instead, they say that they do not know where Max will look. They say things like "*He didn't see his mother do it,*" or "*He never knew where his mother put it*" (Fabricius, Boyer, Weimer, & Carroll, 2010).

This strange phenomenon was initially discovered by accident. It has subsequently been explored carefully, and remains a topic of some controversy. As Figure 8.4 shows, the proportion of children responding correctly to true-belief tasks drops to around half, at the bottom of a U-shaped curve. (The figure shows that the same general pattern of results is obtained whether the task involves "location"—chocolate in green and blue cabinets—or "contents"—candy in containers.)

8.2.1.5 Prior Intentions

As researchers have pointed out, it seems that these young children have acquired "an intermediate level of understanding" (Hedger & Fabricius, 2011). Their understanding is now more sophisticated than the teleological understanding of toddlers, who can see a person's intention-in-action but cannot take into account what that person has previously seen and done. But their understanding does not center on a person's subjective beliefs. This fact indicates that when young children start to solve false-belief tasks they still do not yet understand beliefs as mental states! The researchers concluded that children "do not acquire an understanding of beliefs, and hence a representational theory of mind, until after 6 years of age, or 2 years later than most developmental psychologists have concluded" (Hedger & Fabricius, 2011, p. 429).

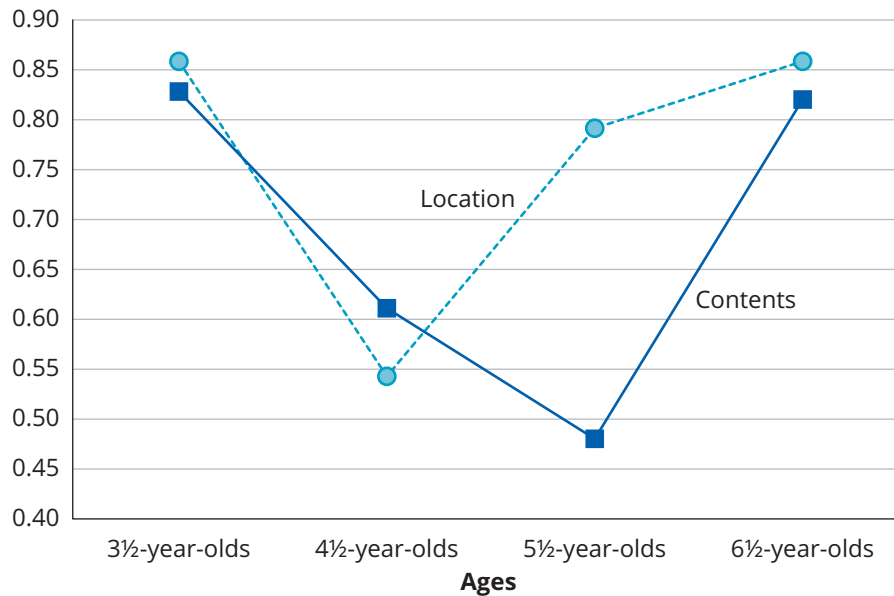


Figure 8.4 The proportion of young children at each age who fail a true-belief task

Source: Hedger and Fabricius (2011)

But what is this intermediate level? William Fabricius proposes that young children are paying attention to what a person *does* and does not see, and they assume that the person's action will be based on this **perceptual access reasoning** (Fabricius et al., 2010, p. 1404; see also Fabricius, 2023). In this kind of thinking, young children have discovered that seeing leads to knowing, which is an important milestone. What they do not yet understand, however, is that a person can form beliefs that are not based *solely* on what that person sees. In the false-belief task they infer, correctly, that since Max hasn't seen where the chocolate was moved to, he will look in the wrong place. In a true-belief task, similarly but incorrectly, they infer that because Max hasn't seen what happened to the chocolate—that it was removed but then replaced—he will be equally “wrong,” and they cannot predict where he will look. Once Max didn't *see* the movement of the chocolate, he cannot *know* where it is. They infer ignorance, rather than a true belief.

These young children are, then, paying attention not only to what a person *does* see, but also to what that person *did* see. The fact that they are able to solve a false-belief task shows that they now understand that someone can form a goal (to obtain chocolate) based on seeing something, but then perform an action that will not in fact lead to that goal, because after the goal was formed the conditions have changed. This is an improvement compared with how they responded at age 3, when they simply assumed that someone who wants chocolate will go wherever the chocolate actually is.

The young children respond in these tasks not by comparing what Max does and doesn't know with what *they* know to be the reality. Instead, and more simply, they respond based on what Max has and hasn't seen. In the true-belief task they infer that Max doesn't know

the changed situation because he hasn't seen it, even though it corresponds with the initial situation that he did see!

In short, then, it seems that the young child has come to understand that an intention can be formed some time in advance of an action being performed. She has become able to attend to two conditions. The initial situation was when Max saw the chocolate and formed an intention to get it. The subsequent situation is when Max's intention-in-action doesn't get him what he wants because he hasn't seen a relevant change.

It seems that the kind of intention these young children are attributing to Max is a *prior intention*. We saw in Chapter 5 that while an intention-in-action is visible *in* an action, a prior intention is a commitment to act that is made before acting. In the example we used in that chapter, when we see James trying to open the window, we might attribute to him a prior intention to get some fresh air. An adult could in addition infer that James also has beliefs and desires; for example, the belief that the air outside is cooler than the air inside, and the desire that this colder air enter the room so that he will be more comfortable.

But the prior intention is not itself composed of beliefs and desires. A prior intention is formed on the basis of knowledge about a situation. When James forms a prior intention to let fresh air into the room, it is based on his knowledge that the window is closed and the room is hot. If, however, the situation changes without his knowledge, his prior intention may no longer be relevant.

Of course, an adult can go further, and consider whether James's intentions might still be appropriate to the changed situation (as indeed they are in the true-belief task). This would require comparing James's knowledge of the original situation (construed as beliefs) with the facts of the new situation. Evidently young children at the bottom of the U-shaped curve are

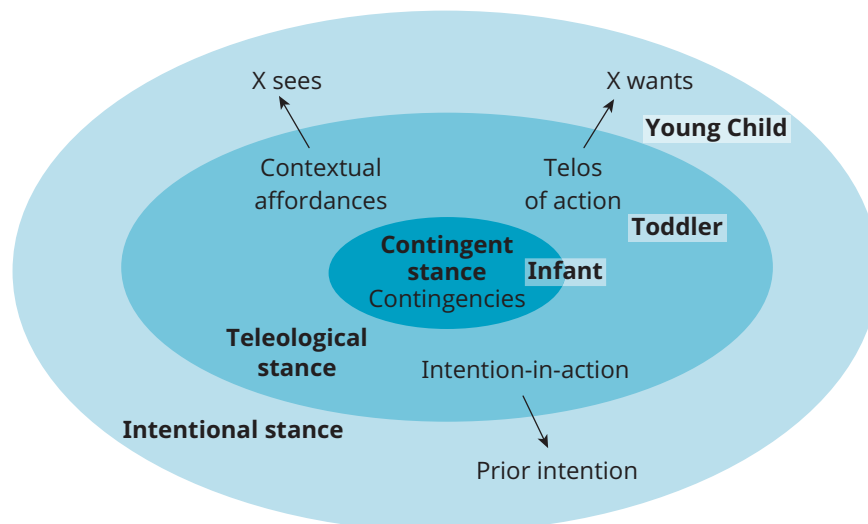


Figure 8.5 The intentional stance of early childhood, and the teleological stance and contingent stance from which it emerges

Source: Author

unable to do this. They understand intentions made in advance—prior intentions based on seeing—but not yet enduring beliefs.

In short, these young children, by around 5 years of age, have moved beyond the teleological stance, in which they understood actions in terms of intention-in-action, to understand prior intention, in what we can call the *intentional stance* (Figure 8.5). They infer or imagine—they simulate—a prior intention, on the basis of what they previously saw the person see. And if the situation changes and the person does not see this change, the young child assumes that the prior intention no longer holds.

It is important to add that although the cognitive perspective has described various steps children take towards “fully fledged” theory of mind, it has offered no explanation of why these steps occur when they do. Sometimes it is claimed that neural “maturation” is involved (Grosse Wiesmann et al., 2017), but that isn’t a satisfactory explanation. I have been trying to show that, in contrast, the cultural perspective does offer an explanation. As differentiations occur between the developing child and other people, at specific ages due to new abilities, such as walking at around 12 months and the start of simulations by age 3, the child acquires new bases for understanding other people’s actions. The ability to understand a person’s prior intentions is made possible by the ability to simulate, and so recall, what that person saw and did earlier.

8.2.2 The Conventional Stance

Baumrind studied the efforts by caregivers to verbally control their young children. Those efforts could be effective only because the children were starting to understand the power of speech. Representational speech permits not only the sharing of information but also various ways of “binding” people. Agreements, rules, commands, declarations, promises, even reasons are all verbal formations that can bind people in their future actions. They are also starting to understand that different kinds of person can bind others in different ways.

Evidence for this comes from laboratory studies, and also from observations in the “natural environment” that Baumrind rather took for granted, the preschool. We shall start there.

8.2.2.1 Status and Expectations in Sociodramatic Play

Sociologist William Corsaro conducted participant observation in a preschool playground, where he became known to the children as “Big Bill.” His detailed study of young children’s talk during sociodramatic play indicated how they understood their social setting (Corsaro, 1979).

In Corsaro’s view, there were two components to the young children’s understanding of “social positions.” First, they seemed to grasp “status”—that some people have more power than others in their relations and interactions. Corsaro noted that this was still a simple, “highly crystalized,” understanding of status as power, which left out issues such as legitimacy and obligation. In their pretense, the young children whose character had higher status, which they often referred to as “the boss” (e.g., mother, teacher, doctor), spoke more and used more imperatives. In contrast, those pretending to be lower-status characters produced more informative statements and regularly displayed deference, by obeying their

playmates' imperatives or asking their permission. They apparently understood status as power to direct others' actions: "Clearly, the children used language to exert authority depending on the social positions they occupied in role play" (Corsaro, 1979, p. 50). The baby never told the mother what to do, for instance. However, they used relatively simple sociolinguistic devices to manage status in their play. Authority, for Corsaro, was power and control exerted over other people, principally verbally.

The second component of social reality that the young children understood, in Corsaro's view, was **role expectations**: "awareness of what they are 'to do' ... when occupying a certain position" (1979, p. 47). Here too their understanding was "underdeveloped when compared to adult knowledge" (1979, p. 56):

Although the children consistently produced scripted behavior in line with the role expectations of various social positions, they were often confused about the structure of social institutions (i.e., family, workplace, etc.). (Corsaro, 1979, p. 58)

For example, two young children playing at husband and wife acted in ways that Corsaro described as "scripted." The "husband" moved furniture, for example, while the "wife" cleaned up. They showed a limited understanding of the duties associated with these roles, and were confused about the coordination of roles. In Corsaro's view, they did not yet understand that roles operate within institutions and involves duties and rights. Even for the family, undoubtedly the social institution with which they were most familiar, they seemed to recognize "husband" and "wife" simply as types of person who act in conventional "scripted" ways.

It may be many years before the children understand that bosses have other duties besides giving orders, the legitimacy of the bosses' authority, or the integrative function of "order giving" in the work place. (1979, p. 54)

Corsaro's sociolinguistic analysis suggests that young children are starting to understand how to use semiotic mediators—**speech acts**—to control each other. They are also starting to understand that their society contains particular types of person who differ in what they can do with their speech. The young children play by acting out the expectations of different types of person, principally each type's power and authority to bind other people. However, they do not yet understand institutions or the way these define roles, duties, and rights.

Even young children do not uncritically obey another person's authority. Corsaro also observed the young children deliberately challenging authorities who told them how to behave. They challenged both the teachers and each other during play, with deliberate misbehavior. He noted that "Misbehavior which challenges the authority of superordinates occurred routinely in all the role play data" (Corsaro, 1979, p. 53).

Preschool rules may seem unfair. "Over time in the school the children eventually develop a shared sense of the injustice of these rules" (Corsaro, 1988, p. 21). He concluded that "In these moments peers are seen in opposition to teachers and such experiences form the basis of young children's conception of the teacher-student relationship" (1988, p. 23).

Evidently even young children can adopt a critical perspective on the agreements and rules that bind them, that tell them what to do.

Vygotsky too saw early childhood as a stage of growing understanding of social reality. For example, he described two sisters, aged 5 and 7, playing together (Vygotsky, 2016, p. 10). One suggested to the other that they play at being sisters. It might seem odd that these girls would play at being what they already are—imagining what was already true. But Vygotsky argued that playing in this way provided the young girls with an opportunity to explore the “hidden rules” of sisterhood in general. What was tacit becomes explicit:

In life the child behaves without thinking that she is her sister's sister. ... In the game of sisters playing at “sisters”, however, they are both concerned with displaying their sisterhood; the fact that two sisters begin to play at “sisters” makes them both acquire rules of behaviour. (Vygotsky, 2016, p. 9)

In everyday life a young child would never need to think of herself as being her sister's sister. She knows her sister not as “sister” but as a particular person within her family. Even when her parents say “Share with your sister,” she has little reason to reflect on the character of the relationship of sister, as this has been defined in her specific culture. However, such awareness grows during early childhood.

The play of these two girls explored the power of the type of person who is called “sister.” They explored what sisters can and cannot do, something that goes unexamined in everyday life, so as to bring it to conscious awareness. The “hidden rules” of sociodramatic play are conventions that explore and clarify the personal concerns of real life. Play, then, provides an opportunity for young children to become conscious of and explore the conventions of their culture.

What are created in sociodramatic play, then, are not yet true “roles” but what one might call **characters**, types of person—like characters in a theatrical play or a story. (A “character” was originally a stamping tool used to create tokens or types.) These characters do not have rights and obligations, they have characteristic powers to verbally control other people, other characters, and they have *conventionally* “scripted” patterns of behavior.

8.2.2.2 Games as Prescriptive Conventions

A second line of research is laboratory studies with young children which explore what is often described as the normative structure of conventional games and agreements. For example, in one experiment, 2- and 3-year-olds were given the opportunity to watch as the researcher used some objects in what was described to them as a “game.” They were shown a particular action and the experimenter declared, “I’ll show you a game; it’s called ‘daxing’” (Rakoczy, 2007, p. 62). Then they watched while the puppet announced “I’m gonna dax now!” but performed a *different* action with the objects. In contrast, in a control condition, this same action was performed but outside the context of a game (Rakoczy et al., 2008). The young children (aged 3) protested strongly when the puppet “daxed” incorrectly in the game, but not in the control condition. They offered to teach the puppet the correct behavior.

The researchers concluded that “In sum, the 3-year-olds showed a clear understanding of the normative structure of joint game actions” (Rakoczy et al., 2008, p. 877). The researchers called the game “conventional,” and proposed that the definition of what counted as daxing “licenses certain acts and makes others [into] mistakes” (p. 879). They considered the daxing game an example of a “cultural activity.” This is because, as Rakoczy points out, philosopher John Searle has proposed that “declarations” are speech acts that “change the world by declaring that a state of affairs exists and thus bringing that state of affairs into existence” (Searle, 2009, p. 12). Declarations define the “status functions” of an object or person, and this is the basis for an institutional fact. As a consequence, the researchers argued that a game like daxing has both a conventional dimension and a normative dimension: “The conventional dimension of cultural activities specifies what one *typically* does in this context, whereas the normative dimension specifies more forcefully what one *ought* to do” (Rakoczy et al., 2008, p. 875, emphasis added).

Young children are starting to understand that a *declaration* is another kind of speech act, something that can be done with words. A declaration states what something or someone is. Young children use declarations a lot in their sociodramatic play: for example, “That’s a shark. And I’m gonna be Laser Bat!” (Packer, 1994, p. 263). And, as Rakoczy’s study illustrates, they recognize that a declaration is future-binding. Other researchers have described daxing in this way: “the children (a) expected the new player to know the game rules and (b) treated the game rules not as flexible choices but as social conventions with prescriptive force within the participating community” (Diesendruck & Markson, 2011, p. 190).

Promises are a kind of declaration. The promiser declares what they will do, or avoid doing, in the future. Janet Astington presented short stories to children aged from 4 years 5 months to 13 years 5 months. In the story someone promised, or predicted, or asserted something (Astington, 1988). Even the 5-year-olds understood the promises, but were confused about the difference between promising a future action and simply predicting it. “When the promise was kept all children said that the speaker had promised, but when the promise was broken only some of the oldest children were prepared to say that the speaker had promised” (Astington, 1988, p. 163).

Astington concluded that “The most important result of this study is that children do not have a concept of promising as just a speech act, as something done *SIMPLY* by saying. For them, a promise is something you say you will do, but it is not a promise unless it is done” (1988, pp. 169–170). As one 5-year old said: “I know what a promise is, you tell them that you’ll do it and you do it, that’s a promise” (1988, p. 170).

8.2.2.3 Agreements

Binding also occurs when two or more people reach an *agreement*. María Núñez, Paul Harris, and Caroline Brett explored “whether [young children] judge that someone who does not stick to an agreement to exchange goods is doing something wrong, even if no adult authority imposed the agreement” (Harris, Núñez, & Brett, 2001, p. 757). In one experiment, British and Nepalese young children aged 3 and 4 were told stories in which two protagonists agreed to an “exchange agreement”: an exchange with mutual benefit. For example:

This is a story about Susan and Simon. Look—Susan has a green brick to play with and Simon has a gray brick to play with. They say that they'll do a swap. Susan says that she'll let Simon play with her brick if Simon lets her play with his. And Simon says that he'll let Susan play with his brick if Susan lets him play with hers. (Harris et al., 2001, p. 756)

The young children were then shown pictures that illustrated four possible outcomes: (1) both children still holding their original item; (2) the girl in possession of both items; (3) the boy in possession of both items; (4) each child holding the other's original item. These young children were able to accurately identify the appropriate picture when either protagonist had reneged on the agreement (been "naughty") and also when both protagonists had kept the agreement. Apparently, they recognized how people who have entered into an agreement are bound by its terms.

These researchers also explored the linkages between young children's understanding of people's intentions and their understanding of "deontic concepts" (Núñez & Harris, 1998). If someone apparently transgresses an agreement, it is often important to assess their intentions, for "a deliberate failure to meet an obligation is blameworthy whereas an accidental failure is not" (Núñez & Harris, 1998, p. 157).

Núñez and Harris found that young children aged 3 and 4 from Cali in Colombia and Oxford in England responded similarly when they heard stories about "conditional permission" rules made by a parent, followed by pictures of four possible outcomes. For example:

This is a story about Sally. One day Sally wants to play outside. Her Mum says that if she plays outside she must keep her hat on.

Here's Sally playing outdoors. Look! She's taken her hat off!

Or: Here's Sally playing outdoors. The wind has blown her hat off!

The young children typically chose the deliberate transgression as the one that was naughty, showing that they paid attention to both the mother's conditions and Sally's intentions. As the researchers concluded, "the interpretation of an agent's action cannot draw exclusively on psychological concepts; it has to be informed by an appreciation of naive physics on the one hand and deontic obligation on the other" (Núñez & Harris, 1998, p. 168).

8.2.2.4 Social Conventions and Moral Prescriptions

We return to the preschool playground with research conducted by Larry Nucci and Eliott Turiel. Nucci observed and interviewed young children and teachers on the playgrounds of ten preschools. The children ranged in age from 2 years 10 months to 5 years 2 months. His observations were focused on actions that either the teachers or the children viewed as violations (Nucci & Turiel, 1978). His main hypothesis was that the children would "make conceptual discriminations between social conventional [transgressions] and moral transgressions" (Nucci & Turiel, 1978, p. 401).

As the researchers defined them, social conventions “are arbitrary in that they do not have an intrinsically prescriptive basis,” so “violations of implicit or explicit regulations ... would be regarded ... as (conventional) transgressions” (Nucci & Turiel, 1978, p. 400). In contrast, moral transgressions “are neither relative to the social context nor determined by social regulations; they are structured by underlying concepts of justice.” Examples of moral transgressions were hitting another child or failing to share (1978, p. 401). “These were events that involved physical or psychological harm to others, violation of rights, and deprivation of something to which the person is entitled” (1978, p. 402). In broader terms, conventional events were defined as “those that regulated social interactions and social order,” while moral events were defined as involving “the justice, welfare, or rights of individuals or groups” (1978, p. 402). Can we conclude, then, that young children perceived conventions in the actions of themselves and other people? And that they distinguish breaking a convention from breaking a moral injunction?

Nucci and Turiel were working within the framework known as social domain theory (SDT), a constructivist theory in which moral issues, social issues, and personal issues form three distinct domains (Table 8.1) (Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014). The point of their research was to see whether young children distinguish at least two of those domains. But SDT also defines the social domain as made up of “conventions.” Nucci and Turiel themselves defined conventions as “behavioral uniformities which coordinate interactions of individuals within social systems” (Nucci & Turiel, 1978, p. 400).

This definition seems inadequate to grasp the way societies are organized as systems of institutions, in which people have rights and responsibilities. Some of those institutions—the police, the legal system, religious institutions, and others—deal with moral issues. Do those institutions merely reflect arbitrary agreements? It is not obvious that morality and society can be separated so easily. Nor is it obvious that these young children distinguished two separate domains, or that they understood conventions the way those are defined by SDT.

Evidently, though, these young children were able to recognize transgressions of two kinds. They distinguished between violations that caused obvious harm and those that broke the adult teachers’ regulations or rules. Interestingly, it was mainly the adults who responded to the transgressions of so-called conventions. Ninety-two percent of the transgressions of conventions had an adult as the sole respondent. It seems the young children recognized the school’s rules but treated them as matters for adult authority.

In contrast, both children and adults responded to moral transgression. The identification of those seems to have arisen from witnessing distress. Children responded to “intrinsic consequences,” such as the distress of a child who was hurt in some way. Nucci and Turiel reported that the young children “generally responded to the moral events as victims ... [with] emotional responses to the act and expressions of injury or loss [as well as] physical responses, commands, and by seeking to involve adults” (Nucci & Turiel, 1978, p. 404). This response suggests that the sense of morality here arose from sympathy or empathy for another child who was clearly distressed, rather than from any concept of justice or sense that morality is not arbitrary.

Of course, it is no small matter that these young children could recognize each other's hurt and distress and were motivated to respond to it. They seem to understand that it is not okay to agree to hurt people. Whether that makes morality a separate domain is open to debate.

Table 8.1 The three domains in social domain theory

Three social domains	Domain A	Domain B	Domain C
Material conditions	<i>Moral</i> Justice, harm, rights, welfare, allocation of resources	<i>Conventional</i> Social uniformities and regularities, food, clothes, forms of address, sex-roles	<i>Personal</i> Psychological states, personal tastes and preferences
Formal conditions	Rational Universal Unalterable Objective Self-constructed More Serious	Arbitrary Relative Alterable Consensus-based Socialized Less Serious	None

Source: Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller (1987)

8.2.2.5 Characters and Conventions

How to explain these new abilities? One proposal, from the cognitive perspective, has been that at around 3 years of age a second kind of shared intentionality emerges, **collective intentionality** (CI). In shared intentionality theory (SIT), 3 years is viewed as “a kind of watershed in young children’s cognitive and social functioning. This is the age at which they begin to transition from understanding and engaging with other individuals to understanding and engaging with various kinds of group-minded phenomena” (Tomasello, 2019, p. 58).

Collective intentionality is described as an ability to create not just a shared ground with a specific other person but the “common ground” of a group or community. For Tomasello, mirror-self recognition and self-evaluative emotions indicate that the 3-year-old is starting to apply to herself this common ground, “the social norms of the group” (Tomasello, 2019, p. 214). CI a new kind of social engagement in which the young child is able to become equal partners with other people, recognizing the “roles” involved in an interaction and the “perspectives” that these roles define.

Tomasello suggests that with CI the 3-year-old can now adopt an “objective perspective,” understanding that “this is the way we do things” (2019, p. 19). Her language now reflects this perspective, not simply her personal opinions. She will try to argue using “good” reasons, drawing upon the group’s “norms of rationality” (2019, p. 6). She now understands “conventions”—“established by the agreement of relevant parties”—(2019,

p. 119) (which Tomasello distinguishes from norms and institutions), and she now has an impartial sense of fairness. She will conform to the “moral norms” of the group she is part of, as though she now sees “objective right and wrong” (2019, p. 21). The 3-year-old can begin to regulate her own actions in terms of these normative group standards. This is not merely self-regulation, Tomasello proposes, it is “normative self-governance” (2019, p. 21).

In a hunter-gatherer band or a rural farming community, the young child, with more freedom and more responsibilities, will still be interacting with people she knows. In contrast, a kindergarten or nursery school (or a laboratory!) is a very Western institution. The young child will be interacting with adults who are strangers, yet who consider themselves authorities who can tell her what she should and shouldn’t do.

Her peers will be strangers too. How can she establish relationships with them? A common refrain in any nursery school is “Use your words!” It is good advice. Young children start to understand how to use verbal language to control other people, to “bind” them. I have said this several times, but what do I mean by “binding”? The term “obligation” literally means “to tie up, to restrain.” The young child starts to understand and use declarations, promises, imperatives, and agreements to bind other people and herself. And “convention” literally means an agreement, a coming together. Let us call these speech acts that bind people “conventions,” defined in this particular way. The cognitive account of early childhood ignores these semiotic mediators.

The young child is not forming a “we” for the first time. What she is doing for the first time is stepping outside the “we” of the family, for at least a few hours every day. In a society of nuclear families, the “Great-We” is very small! This means she has to form new relations with new people, who are strangers to her. The “we” is being reconfigured.

The young child starts to recognize that her social world contains different types of person, and that they have different kinds of status or authority. Let us call them “characters” (like the characters in a play.) She reconsiders the type of person she is, and the authority she has. Even a “sister” is a type of person. She does not yet understand the rights and responsibilities that are defined by an institution. Or, rather, she understands them but in her own way, in terms of characters and conventions. No longer as contingencies, or as customary practices.

The young child is growing up in a world of responsibilities and obligations. She doesn’t have to invent these, they are all around her. Adults evaluate her actions in terms of them, even though she still doesn’t understand them very well.

The fact that these speech acts are binding does not mean that they cause people’s actions. People, including children, can choose whether or not to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations. They can also choose whether or not to intervene when they see harm being done. One can call this a moral perspective on their understanding of the social world. What is not clear is whether this perspective is based solely on the emotions felt when witnessing harm, or whether other aspects of morality are now involved. (And of course some adults, and some children, decide to do harm.)

The deontic aspect of speech acts such as promising and agreeing is a form of other-regulation, and it relies on self-regulation. I can tell you what to do, but it is up to you to do what I told you. It makes sense that understanding agreements—promises, “making a deal”—coincides with understanding prior intentions. On the one hand, a prior intention can be seen as an *agreement* one makes with oneself. On the other hand, a convention is something established *prior* to the current action. And it is during early childhood that young children begin to formulate plans in advance; that is, to make agreements with themselves and talk to themselves to tell themselves what to do next.

By “binding,” then, I do not mean to suggest that the young child is simply constrained in a new way, as “the infant is enslaved by virtue of his ignorance, his dependence upon others for sustenance, and his lack of self-control,” as Baumrind (1966, p. 903) put it. There is an interconnection of agency and relatedness, of self-control and other-control, of freedom and constraint. The Western ideal, as expressed by Baumrind, is that the young child becomes able to choose to act responsibly. She will place constraints on herself, through the guidance of other people.

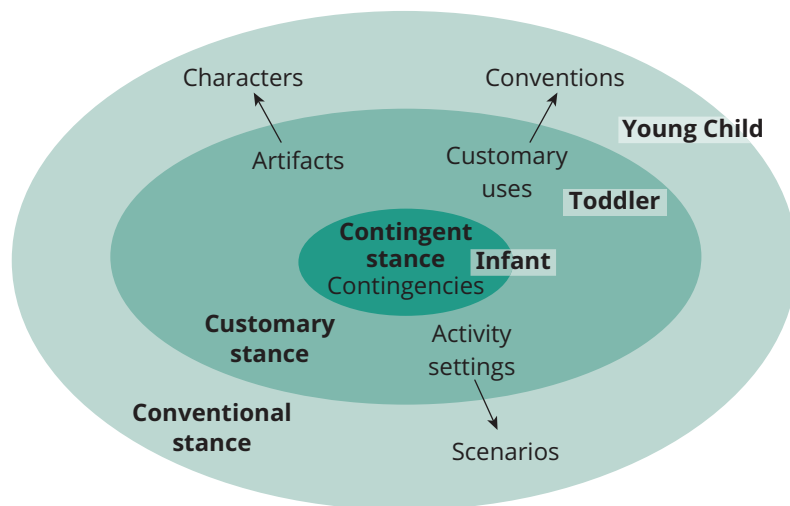


Figure 8.6 The conventional stance of early childhood, and the customary stance and contingent stance from which it emerges

Source: Author

8.3 BECOMING A TYPE OF PERSON: GENDER

In early childhood the young child starts to understand that there are different types of person in her society, and that she is one of these types. The young child has specific relationships with the particular people in her home; if she has heterosexual parents she has likely been calling them “mommy” and “daddy,” but now she starts to understand that these

are cultural categories. In many cultures, there are important distinctions between “male” and “female,” and early childhood is the stage in which young children begin to form their understanding of **gender types**.

8.3.1 Cultural Constitution of Gender

It may be difficult to accept that genders are culturally constituted types, because it seems obvious that they are associated with our sex, which has a biological basis. Most of us take for granted that gender is a dichotomous category, with two mutually exclusive possibilities. We assume that this is because people fall into two biological types, based on their reproductive organs and their DNA. However, none of this is necessarily the case. We saw in Chapter 2 that the biology of sex is complex, with components on the genetic level, the cellular level, the hormonal level, and the anatomical level. We saw also that some babies are born intersex, with both male and female or ambiguous reproductive organs.

If sex is complex, so too is gender. Many indigenous cultures in the Americas—over 130 tribes—have long recognized a third gender category, who they call “Two Spirit people” (Roscoe, 1992). Such people wear clothing and perform tasks associated with both men and women, but they have distinct social roles in the community. They are believed to possess both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and they are often healers, foretellers of the future, or singers of the traditional songs. In many indigenous communities, a child’s gender assignment is based not on their biology but on their preferred activities. Two-spirit people with male bodies would go to war and attend the sweat lodge with men, but they would also cook and perform domestic tasks. Female-bodied two-spirit people would usually marry only women.

If the obligations and conventions for “man” and “woman” are culturally constituted, and if the number of genders is too, then this means that here too what young children have to recognize is not a “natural kind.” First, they have to learn the cultural distinctions between the two (or more) genders. Then they have to learn what is considered expected (or obligatory) behavior for men and women. Then, in many societies, they will learn the institutional roles of a gendered division of labor. Only then will they have constructed their own gender identity.

To say that gender is culturally constituted is not to say that it is simply a matter of “categories,” or merely a “social construction,” as though this is something we could change tomorrow if we simply changed the definitions. The constitution of gender is a profound practical process, as we have seen in this section. Changing young children’s understanding of gender, or changing gender identity in later childhood, may be desirable, but it would require complex changes in the practices of childcare and in the division of labor in the household, and in society at large. Some parents today are raising their children in a gender-neutral manner (see Case Study 8.2: Raising a Gender-Neutral Child).

CASE STUDY 8.2

Raising a Gender-Neutral Child

Some caregivers feel that societal expectations about the behavior and personality of boys and girls can be damaging to their child's development. They may also feel that the gender binary of male and female is unduly restricting. Caregivers of a young baby are often asked "boy or girl?" by strangers, and they probably also heard this question from friends and family during the pregnancy. The hugely popular "gender reveal parties" illustrate the assumption that an unborn child's gender is one of the most important facts about them, if not *the* most important.

Some caregivers are choosing to avoid such gender stereotypes by raising their child "gender neutral." One step is to keep the child's assigned gender secret from people outside the family. Choosing a gender-neutral name—such as Blake, Jordan, or Sparrow—can help. Another step is to provide the child with toys and clothes that are free from gender bias. Many people assume without question that girls prefer dolls while boys prefer blocks, and blue and pink clothes are often associated with boys and girls, respectively. Even infants pick up subtle cues from the clothes and toys they are given.

Another step is to avoid categorizing the child's gender at all. Caregivers may want the child to be able to pick their own gender identity when the time comes, or they may simply hope to raise a child free of stereotypical societal expectations. Film stars such as Angelina Jolie have taken such an approach.

Since children themselves don't begin to understand gender until they are around 3 or 4 years of age, these steps can work well with babies and toddlers. But even after that a caregiver can acknowledge the child's assigned gender, or self-chosen gender, without reinforcing stereotypes. Once children become older, caregivers can begin to discuss gender stereotypes with them, as these are evident in films and TV shows, advertisements, and people's attitudes.

It is often easier for a girl to wear boys' clothes and play with boys' toys than for a boy to wear girls' clothes or play with girls' toys. Gender non-conforming self-identifying boys, in particular, can face discrimination and bullying (Roberts et al., 2012).

8.3.2 Gender and Relations with Parents

It is in early childhood that young children start to recognize their gender and begin to understand the consequences. Of course, parents have known their child's sex from the moment they were born, or even before, although a newborn baby has no understanding of her gender. It is when she turns 3 or 4 years of age that the young child herself comes to recognize the cultural typology of gender that has been applied to her, and she may begin to apply it to herself. Yet understanding one's gender isn't simply a matter of cold cognition. Gender is a profound aspect of one's identity, and its formation entails drastic changes in a young child's relations with caregivers and with peers.

8.3.2.1 Sigmund Freud

One account of the ways that an understanding of gender grows out of changes in the relationship between parent and child in early childhood comes from psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud believed that early experience has a crucial impact on later personality and mental health. Early childhood is the period of what Freud called the **phallic stage**—from 3 to 6 years—a stage in which physical pleasure is obtained through stimulation of the genitals. In Freud's view, it is also the stage during which a young child discovers their gender, in part by noticing that they do or do not have a penis. Freud suggested that the young child begins to direct their affection towards the parent of the opposite gender, and begins to strongly resent the parent of the same gender.

Freud's theory of **infantile sexuality** has always been controversial. He proposed that infants and young children can derive sexual satisfaction from any part of the body, and that adult heterosexuality is not inevitable but is the consequence of society channeling this **polymorphous perversity**: the human ability to obtain gratification from behaviors that are outside what is normative.

Freud argued that around age 3 young children start to become aware of their own bodies and those of other people, and become curious about undressing and exploring the genitals. This is how they learn the physical differences between “male” and “female” and the gender differences between “boy” and “girl.” He also argued that in early childhood, a young boy's attachment to his mother becomes sexualized and the boy starts to view his father as a rival who can destroy or castrate him. To cope with this **castration anxiety** and defend against the threat (even though it is fantasized rather than real), the young boy must deny and repress his connection with his mother and instead engage in a process of **identification** with the father, whom he both admires and fears. It is in the process of this conflict, Freud argued, that the boy forms a **superego**, an internal version of the controlling father.

Freud named this dynamic in little boys' development the **Oedipus complex**, referring to an ancient Greek tragic play in which a king named Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. He proposed that little girls experience something similar, which Freud's follower Carl Jung named the **Electra complex**, after a play in which Electra plots with her brother against their mother and stepfather in revenge for the murder of their father. Freud suggested that when a young girl realizes that she does not have a penis, she feels that she cannot sexually possess her mother. Instead, she directs her desire towards her father. Her **penis envy** is, according to Freud, the basis for her heterosexual femininity in which bearing a child replaces the absent penis.

The suggestion that early childhood is a time of psychosexual drama and conflict remains controversial. One reason for the controversy is that Freud himself apparently believed that the outcome of the psychosexual conflicts of early childhood was positive for boys but negative for girls. He argued that because a young boy has to separate from his mother, he becomes more rational and less emotional, and better prepared for the challenges of life. The young girl, in contrast, becomes an adult woman who remains emotional, and who lacks the detachment and capacity for reason that are needed to handle the challenges of life. It is not hard to see why many people have viewed Freud as having sexist opinions.

8.3.2.2 Nancy Chodorow

However, Freud's suggestion that the young boy and young girl have divergent experiences during early childhood has been developed in interesting ways. A somewhat different account of the consequences of the changing relationships between parents and the young child has been given by the feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow.

Chodorow argued that neither biological sex differences nor deliberate socialization are adequate explanations for the differences between adult masculine and feminine personality and gender roles, which she suggests are almost universal (Chodorow, 1999 [1978]). Biology alone does not determine gender identity, but neither are male and female behavior simply conventions that are deliberately taught to children. Even for young children, these gender differences become tenaciously maintained and filled with emotion, and Chodorow argued that this is because **gender personality** becomes deeply central to young children's sense of who they are.

The universality of gender differences is, Chodorow proposed, a result of the fact that it is women who are responsible for the care of infants and young children in almost every society, as well as for the care of older girls and young women. This means that the relationship between mother and child, and especially between mother and daughter, is centrally and universally important. It also means that boy and girl children have different positions and experiences in the social environment of the family and community.

The result is that feminine personality is defined in relation to and connection with other people. Women's development involves less **individuation** than men's, Chodorow argued. Masculine personality is defined in terms of separation and independence. For a boy, being male is tied in complex ways to his initial dependence on, and then his subsequent differentiation from, his mother (Chodorow, 2001). One consequence, Chodorow suggested, is that women fear and generally try to avoid separation, while men fear and generally try to avoid intimacy. These characteristics operate not at the level of conscious roles, but at a level of unconscious desires and anxieties. They are the result not of things that parents do deliberately, but of social relationships that are emotional, unintentional, and tacit.

As we have seen, infants and toddlers are dependent on other people for all their basic needs. Often it is the mother who meets these needs, though sometimes she has assistance from the father and other family and community members. Only slowly does the child begin to differentiate from the mother: biological differentiation at around 1 year, and **psychological differentiation** at around 3 years. A strong attachment relationship bonds the toddler and the primary caregiver who, again, is often the mother.

The fact that it is the mother who lactates is presumably the basis for the convention that she often has primary responsibility for the child, but clearly this biological fact does not dictate that the other parent cannot participate, cleaning and comforting the baby, for example. Indeed, we have seen that there are cultures where this is exactly what happens. But in many cases both boy and girl infants and toddlers will form their strongest emotional attachment with their female caregiver. Some psychologists call this attachment relationship the child's **primary identification**.

Chodorow argued that primary identification is a two-way street: it is based not only on the toddler's needs and desires, but also on the feelings of the mother towards her baby.

A mother will often identify more strongly with a daughter, while with a son she will adopt a more ambivalent relationship, pushing him to be aggressive and independent. Chodorow pointed out that, for example, mothers among the Brahmins in South India are more lenient and affectionate with daughters than with sons, and they say this is due to their sympathy for the fact that a daughter will have to leave her family when she marries and live in her husband's household. In general, mothers help their sons differentiate from them more than they do with their daughters, though in ways that, in Chodorow's view, may be damaging for all children.

All this begins before the child has established any understanding of gender. When, in early childhood, young children begin to understand the cultural system of gender types and conventions, boys often recognize that they are "male" and girls that they are "female," and they also are generally taught that these categories are mutually exclusive and unchanging. Toddlers, in contrast, think that a person who is wearing a skirt is female, and that if this person puts on pants, they will be male.

In addition to this knowledge, however, what is also required is an emotional and personal **secondary identification** with someone of the same gender, usually personified by the caregiver of that gender. Chodorow argued that after about age 3 there is a dramatic reorganization of young children's relations with their parents. The father becomes a more important figure, for children of all genders. The young boy identifies with his father, even though in many cultures the father works outside the family and is not very accessible to his children. As a result, the young boy identifies with the *position* that his father seems to adopt, more than with the *person*. Rather than forming a close personal relationship with the parent whom he now realizes is the same gender as himself, he has to try to understand a depersonalized role of masculinity. He does this, in part, by rejecting and opposing everything feminine that he sees around him. Being *male* must be the opposite of being *female*.

The young girl is in a different situation (Table 8.2). The parent she now identifies with is the same one with whom she formed an attachment relationship, and on whom she has been dependent, namely her mother. She does not have to break this connection, or reject her primary identification, in order to form her secondary identification. In addition, femininity and female roles are evident to her in the daily life of her family. Consequently, her sense of her gender is grounded in the real emotional relationship she has with her mother.

Table 8.2 The typical relations with the mother for a boy and girl in infancy and early childhood

Gender:	Girl	Boy
Toddler	Attached to mother	Attached to mother
Early childhood	Seeks to identify with mother	Seeks to identify with father
Is there differentiation from the mother?	No differentiation required	Must differentiate from mother

The discontinuity that must come in a girl's life will occur later on, in adolescence, when she has to transfer her primary emotional connection—and her sexual attraction, according to Freud—from her mother and other females to her father and other males, in order to attain culturally sanctioned heterosexuality.

In short, the young boy's development in early childhood generally involves a discontinuity in his emotional connections within the family, while development of the young girl does not require such a discontinuity. The young boy has to differentiate himself from the parent with whom he formed his first attachment, his mother. The young girl is not required to differentiate, and so is able to maintain her **affiliation** with her mother. When, in middle childhood, children begin to prepare for adult work, either through **apprenticeship** or by attending school, these differences will play out in their motivations, as well as in the expectations of the adults who teach them.

It is important to recognize that this asymmetry between the requirement that is imposed on young boys and girls by their cultural circumstances—differentiation for the young boy, affiliation for the young girl—follows on from the fact that the primary caregiving role is often assigned to women. As we have noted, there is no biological necessity to this. If fathers were the primary caregivers, it would be the young girl who would need to restructure her emotional attachments in early childhood, breaking the connection with her father in order to form an identification with her mother. It is the particular cultural arrangements for child-care and parenting that establish the unconscious, emotional basis for the young child's sense of what it means and requires to be a boy or a girl. It is the fact that many cultures adopt similar arrangements that has the consequence that male and female personality, and masculine and feminine characteristics, are similar in many parts of the world.

CONCLUSION

The new abilities of the young child make a new kind of relationship with caregivers both possible and necessary. Baumrind's research on caregiving styles captured important aspects of this reintegration of the young child and her caregivers, as she documented various kinds of verbal reasoning and explanation. However, the participants in her original research were very culturally specific, and this casts some doubt on any conclusion that "authoritative" caregiving is optimal for all young children's development. Unfortunately, studies of the consequences of these three caregiving styles in other cultures have looked only at settings where schooling is the norm.

It is interesting that Baumrind defined "autonomy" not simply as a particular combination of autonomy and relatedness, but as a dialectical relationship between agency and control. However, it remains unclear whether what she had in mind was psychological autonomy or both this and action autonomy. Western urban middle-class families and the preschools that their young children attend generally expect those children to develop independence and self-reliance. But when we consider communities around the world that emphasize cohesion, respect, and responsibility, we still cannot say whether authoritative caregiving is optimal there too.

Regarding theory of mind, the evidence suggests that young children, at least in WEIRD settings, now understand other people in terms of their prior intentions and their characteristic actions. The young child builds on her ability to understand intention-in-action, and her understanding continues to be primarily practical—emotional, intuitive, evaluative, and embodied—rather than taking the form of a theory. She begins to draw inferences about prior intention which will carry over from one situation to another. She also begins to understand that certain kinds of people—characters—act in specific, recognizable ways. She sees *types* of people: parent, teacher, sister, brother. In particular, in early childhood, young children start to figure out what it means to be male or female: they recognize the conventions, the expectations, associated with gender. And so the young child starts to understand that she, too, is a particular kind of person. She comes to understand that she really is a girl, no matter what clothes she puts on in the morning. For those children whose gender does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, this may be expressed from an early age or suppressed until later in life.

The young child may be a “yard child,” spending more time away from her primary caregivers. It would be easy to see this as increasing independence. But the “yard” is full of other interesting people, with whom the young child starts to form relationships.

SUMMARY

Styles of Caregiving

- Baumrind identified three caregiving styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive.
- In her view, authoritative parenting is associated with competence in nursery school.
- Studies in other cultures also indicate that authoritative caregiving is optimal.
- But usually, researchers have studied urban middle-class families. There has been no research in settings where young children don't attend school.

Understanding Other People: Prior Intentions and Conventions

- Three-year-olds take the world as they experience it to be the world as it is.
- They don't recognize that people literally have different perspectives: that a person standing in a different place has a different point of view.
- Young children do not yet understand that people know different things about the world: that someone can have, for example, a false belief.
- Young children do, however, understand other people's prior intentions. They are capable of the intentional stance.
- Young children can also recognize the social affordances (or deontic affordances) of agreements and conventions. They can adopt the *conventional stance*.

Becoming a Type of Person: Gender

- The young child starts to recognize types of person: “characters,” including gender types.
- The young boy often has to separate from his mother, while the young girl does not.
- This difference creates a different basis for adult gender identity.
- The types of gender, however, depend upon both biology and culture.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1970). *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

The brain website at McGill University:

http://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/i_10/i_10_cr/i_10_cr_lan/i_10_cr_lan.html

A false-belief task:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUpxZksAMPw

Parents choose to raise their child without an assigned gender:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXzGwCbhWXY

A commentary on the problems with gender reveal parties:

www.simplemost.com/why-i-think-parents-should-stop-having-gender-reveal-parties/

