COLLEGE 6: Cultuur en opvoeding vanuit wereldperspectief (23 december)

1. **Gotlieb, A. & DeLoache, J.S. (2016).** *A world of babies. Parenting in the 21st Century.* Chapter 1: Introduction (pages 1-23 only). Cambridge University Press. LINK. Hier p.1-23.

2. **Mesman et al. (2018).** Universality without uniformity: A culturally inclusive approach to sensitive responsiveness in infant caregiving. *Child Development, 89*(3), 837-850. doi: 10.1111/cdev.12795. LINK. Hier p.24-37.

3. **Mesman, J. (2021).** Attachment theory's university claims: asking different questions. In: R.A. Thompson, J.A. Simpson & L.J. Berlin (Eds.), *Attachment. The fundamental questions,* pp. 245-251. New York, NY: Guilford. Hier p.38-44.

4. **Lansford et al. (2018).** How International Research on Parenting Advances Understanding of Child Development. *Child Development Perspectives, 10,* 202-207. LINK. Hier p.45-50.

5. **Aflevering 5 Podcastserie** Interculturele Pedagogiek met Kaveh Bouteh: LINK
Kaveh Bouteh is trainer en adviseur bij Pharos op het gebied van interculturele communicatie, omgaan met verschillen in een pluriforme samenleving, en het doorbreken van stereotypen en vooroordelen. Kaveh vluchtte als jonge man uit Iran en kwam in Nederland terecht. Hij heeft een schat aan praktijkervaring met vraagstukken rond interculturele pedagogiek.

Raising a World of Babies

Parenting in the Twenty-first Century

Alma Gottlieb and Judy S. DeLoache

- Should babies sleep alone in cribs, or in bed with their parents?
- What's the best way to bathe newborns?
- Should parents talk to babies, or is it a waste of time?

In this book, you'll find answers to these and many other questions about how to care for infants and young children. In fact, you'll find several different answers to each one, not only from different societies around the world but even within the same society, as a result of both social complexity and social change. Whether the practices you read about here are longstanding or recent, and whether they are widely accepted or hotly contested, many differ significantly from what the majority of contemporary middle-class, White, North American or European parents do. Here are just a few examples of diverse views you'll encounter in these pages.

- In the Faroe Islands (an autonomous province of Denmark), babies always nap outdoors for a few hours every day – to avoid indoor germs, accustom the baby to cold

temperatures, develop the immune system, and toughen children for a difficult life. Elsewhere in Europe, babies of Muslim immigrant families from Guinea-Bissau now living in Portugal are always allowed to nap uninterrupted – in case Allah might be sending angels delivering messages to the dreaming infant.

- Most middle-class North Americans bathe their infants inside their homes on a daily basis – socializing them early into a life that values privacy. In the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians bathe their babies outside, with local children gathered around the basin in which the baby is bathed – socializing them early into a life that values the community.
- The Beng of West Africa talk regularly to their babies – who are cherished as reincarnations of ancestors and, as such, deemed to be able to understand all the languages of the world. In contrast, Somali adults in East Africa typically do not address babies and toddlers at all, because children in this authoritarian society are not permitted to respond to adult communications.

As these brief ethnographic summaries suggest, people in diverse communities hold dramatically different beliefs about the nature – and the nurturing – of infants. This book celebrates that diversity. At the same time, this book also addresses the challenges that violence, poverty, and rapid social change pose to parents in raising their children. For example, how should Israeli mothers answer questions about World War II that their children bring home from kindergarten after their teachers introduce a three-day unit for Holocaust Remembrance Day – inaugurated by a loud siren that disrupts their playful classroom at 10 a.m.? How should Palestinian mothers raise their sons to fight for statehood, while urging them to resist the call to throw stones at Israeli tanks or plan bomb attacks in Israeli cafés?

Attending simultaneously to the divergent goals of understanding cultural differences, as well as the larger political and economic contexts of globalization, poverty, and war facing so many families, calls for a creative approach. Accordingly, each of the eight chapters in this collection is

written as though it were an "advice manual" for new parents in a particular society. This approach offers two distinct advantages. For one thing, the advice manual format makes for engaging reading. For another, the combination of eight distinct and sometimes contradictory "manuals" undermines the universalist assumption that underlies the "manual" genre itself – as we explore later in this Introduction.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLDS OF BABIES

This book is an entirely revised edition of an earlier collection of essays written in the style of childrearing manuals (published in 2000). The new edition speaks directly to conversations gaining momentum across the US and elsewhere. In recent years, US interest in childrearing strategies has skyrocketed, with the proliferation of TED talks and popular books that have advocated "other" childrearing practices inspired by places as diverse as China and France. These books and talks have produced heated debates about whether mainstream, middle-class, Euro-American practices are too laid-back and forgiving compared to parenting practices elsewhere. Their authors' willingness to "parent in public" by airing personal thoughts and decisions about childrearing has encouraged a new generation of parents to consider both the virtues and the deficits of different parenting approaches.

With such texts and podcasts readily available, parents today increasingly realize that beliefs and behaviors differ substantially from one place to another. However, that awareness does not necessarily bring acceptance. Understanding and appreciating the ways of other people present a challenge precisely because our sense of how to do things we consider to be of great importance is so deeply ingrained. This is especially true for the task of raising children.

Every group thinks that its way of caring for infants and young children is the obvious, correct, and natural way – a simple matter of common sense. However, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once pointed out, what we complacently call "common

sense" is anything but common. Indeed, what people accept as "common sense" in one society is often considered odd, exotic, or even barbaric in another.

Oddity cuts both ways. Although our readers will no doubt be surprised, perhaps even shocked, by some of the ideas and practices described in these pages, many parents who follow those practices would find our readers' values and behavior – *your* values and behavior – equally surprising.

Each of the eight childrearing "manuals" we present here is intended as a "common sense guide to baby and childcare" – echoing the title of the original edition of the best-selling childcare guide by "the world's most famous baby doctor," pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. Since 1946, seven editions of that book have sold over 50 million copies – second in sales only to the Bible. Unlike the advice offered in that and other "how to" guides, however, the nature of the advice contained between the covers of this book varies dramatically from one chapter to another, underscoring the variability of how children are understood and raised in different communities.

Our primary aim is to illustrate how the childrearing customs of any community, however peculiar or unnatural they may appear to an outsider, make sense when understood within the context of that society, as well as within its broader geopolitical context. Childcare practices vary so much across time and space precisely because they are firmly embedded in divergent physical, economic, and cultural realities.

Challenges of Caring for Children

The remarkable diversity of infant and childcare practices is all the more remarkable when we consider that, to a substantial degree, these diverse practices largely represent strategies for dealing with similar challenges. Human infants are distinguished from many other animals by, among other things, extreme helplessness at birth and a very long period of dependence on others for survival and development. A crucial role undertaken by their parents is ensuring their survival, health, and safety. Parents or other caregivers furthermore typically assume a major

role in encouraging their children to develop desirable personal characteristics and social relationships, acquire technical skills, and adopt the values and beliefs that will enable them to participate fully in their society. In the following pages, we focus first on the general challenges involved in keeping infants alive and healthy and then on the practices that promote cultural learning.

Helping Babies Survive and Thrive

The first challenge to rearing children is successfully navigating pregnancy and childbirth. People in the communities represented in the chapters that follow posit culturally distinctive models and practices of conception and pregnancy to enhance the likelihood of a successful birth.

Infant Mortality

The likelihood of surviving infancy depends on basic economic resources. In industrialized societies throughout the world today, the rate of infant mortality is very low – only two to five children of every thousand die, making it likely that few of these parents worry constantly about their children perishing. Parents in many areas of the world today face a far more grim reality. As of 2015, many countries in the global south have very high infant mortality rates, including three countries in which fully 10–11 percent of all babies die. A great majority of these deaths could be averted by access to professional medical care. Here, we address the more proximate causes, while reminding the reader of the geopolitics of the past half-millennium of European colonizing of the world that contributed to the current tragic state.

Nutrition

Economic factors play a major role in whether infants have a diet sufficient to promote their survival and development. Medical researchers assess the incidence of "undernutrition," and the more serious condition of "malnutrition," by measuring the

proportion of children who are significantly below the standard height ("stunting") and weight for their age. Although these statistics have improved significantly over the preceding twenty-five years, in 2013, 161 million children under five years of age were estimated to be "stunted." That same year, 99 million children under five years were classified as "underweight." In both cases, nearly all of these children lived in Asia and Africa.

Such nutritional deficits frequently take a fatal toll. As of this writing (2015), approximately 3.1 million children die from hunger each year, even though the world's farmers produce enough food to feed the world's population. The unequal distribution of global resources that causes tragic inequities in food availability remains a major political issue of our planet.

Adequate maternal nutrition is necessary for the development of the fetus, and most societies encourage pregnant women to pay attention to their diets for the sake of their unborn children. Yet the specific rules and recommendations for expectant mothers about which foods they should seek out and which they should avoid vary greatly around the globe.

In many places, traditional reasons for forbidding certain foods based on various symbolic notions have now been replaced by practical considerations. For example, in the Faroe Islands (an autonomous province of Denmark), industrial pollution from fertilizers, distant mining, and fossil fuel combustion has contaminated the local waters with high levels of mercury and PCBs. These poisons accumulate in the fatty parts of fish and whales – and in the bodies of pregnant and nursing women who eat them, posing a particular threat to healthy fetal brain development. Pregnant Faroese women are now advised by government-sponsored maternity nurses to avoid eating these traditionally rich sources of protein.

People in societies around the world adopt a wide variety of strategies for providing adequate nutrition to developing infants. Throughout human history until the last few decades, breastfeeding was the *only* way to supply young infants with a reliable source of sustenance. Although their biological mothers have most often provided infants' primary source of breastmilk, "wet nursing" – the practice of having an infant breastfed by

someone other than his or her own biological mother – has been practiced in both Western and non-Western settings, and in both ancient and modern times. In the ancient world, from Mesopotamia and Egypt to Greece and Rome, wet nurses commonly fed wealthy women's babies. In western Europe, the practice became common in elite families in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and lasted through the eighteenth century: infants of wealthy mothers were nursed by peasant women, who in turn handed their own babies to others for their sustenance. In 1780, this practice was so common in Paris that, of the 21,000 infants born in the city, only about 700 were breastfed by their own mothers. In some European countries, wet nursing did not cease entirely until World War I, when poor women could, for the first time, make more money working in factories than from serving as wet nurses.

Elsewhere, infants who are breastfed primarily by their mothers may occasionally be nursed by other women as well. In many Muslim societies, infants who are breastfed by the same woman become "milk kin." Having suckled at the same breast is considered to create a bond between children as strong as that between biologically related siblings. In these societies, a marriage between "milk kin" would be considered incestuous.

Before the relatively recent introduction of "infant formula," there were several disastrous attempts to substitute something for breastmilk as infants' main source of nourishment. For example, in seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Iceland, infants were typically fed cow's milk rather than human breastmilk. So many babies died that women bore as many children as they could, in an effort to offset the shockingly high losses.

In the current era, breastfeeding occupies an increasingly contradictory space in the public imagination. On the one hand, scientific research overwhelmingly testifies to the nutritional superiority of breastmilk over any other substance for the human infant. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization both recommend exclusive breastfeeding, with no supplements, for virtually all infants for the first six months of their lives. These two organizations also recommend

continuing to breastfeed (supplemented by solid foods) for another six months or eighteen months, respectively.

Yet the proven nutritional superiority and health benefits of breastmilk have come to be ignored in many places. In the United States, while the percentage of infants who begin breastfeeding at birth has increased significantly from recent public health campaigns, only 49 percent of all infants are still breastfed at six months – although there is substantial variation by region, economic status, educational level, and ethnic background. For example, 71 percent of six-month-old infants are still breastfeeding in California and Oregon compared to only 2 percent in Mississippi. Beyond the US, the figures are even lower: globally, fewer than 40 percent of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed.

In industrialized countries, commercially produced "infant formula" can support healthy growth and development, although with a somewhat higher rate of infections and other medical problems, both short and long term. In many countries in the global south, however, formula-feeding presents far graver health risks. Some 750 million people around the world – approximately one in eight people – lack access to safe water. In such places, infant formula is inevitably mixed with polluted water in unsanitary containers. Furthermore, impoverished parents often dilute the formula, to make the expensive powder last longer. Under such circumstances, parents' sincere efforts to promote the health and well-being of their babies can be tragically undermined.

The decision of when to introduce solid food – and what, and how – differs greatly from one society to another, for reasons including both local availability of alternatives to breastmilk, and cultural norms. In Palestinian communities detailed in this book, for example, infants from three months on receive food pre-chewed by their mothers and other female relatives. With this practice, the decision to introduce solid food becomes a social one shared among women.

Weaning decisions are not just individual or even community-based; government policies can also have an enormous impact on when a mother weans her child from the breast. In northern

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European nations that offer generous, paid maternity leaves, women have the luxury of exclusively breastfeeding their infants for four to six months. In this volume, our manual for the Faroe Islands of Denmark chronicles such a case:

From between four and six months of age, you should start introducing solid foods to your infant. Most families make their own food for their infants – for instance, by putting cooked vegetables in a blender. Because you have a long maternity leave and will therefore be home more than your husband, you'll probably be the one to make this food most of the time.

In nations lacking such government support, many working mothers may find it impossible to continue breastfeeding their babies exclusively (or at all) once they return to their jobs. Some women in industrialized settings may also find it impossible to continue breastfeeding because of lack of workplace facilities to pump breastmilk. From local norms (and, sometimes, laws) that assume that women's breasts should never be bared in public, scolding and other shaming practices further discourage many women from breastfeeding in restaurants, shops, parks, and other public spaces. Frustration over such constraints led one American journalist to call for a return of wet nurses, to help working mothers continue their working lives.

Broader issues of global import also affect micro-level feeding decisions. In this volume, our chapter on China discusses dangerous levels of food contamination due to lack of government oversight, with accompanying risks to infants. Chinese mothers who prefer to use infant formula are cautioned to buy or import formula from the West. Such scenarios underscore the extent to which globalization also includes fatal flows of poisonous substances.

Illness

Whether or not an infant survives also depends on the resources that are locally available for treating disease. Strategies and resources to prevent, diagnose, and cure illness vary dramatically around the globe. At the pragmatic level, they depend on whether medical clinics are available and affordable. At the

cultural level, they also depend on what parents believe are the underlying causes of given ailments. What you do for a case of diarrhea may differ depending on whether you think your baby has "caught a bug" or has been "caught by a spirit."

In many societies today, including those featured in this book, parents have exposure to both traditional healers and modern medicine. If they can afford it – a big *if* – many will use both. For example, if she can pay for transportation to the closest clinic, a Beng mother of a sick child in Ivory Coast might consult not only a village diviner but also a clinic nurse or doctor. As insurance against medical risks, she might secure for her baby both a cowry shell bracelet and – if she can find the money for it, and if it is available locally – a tetanus shot.

Yet modernity not only offers beneficial new treatments for disease, it also brings new exposure to sickness. One of the bitter ironies facing many immigrants to the US is a general decline in health and an uptick in dangerous conditions such as obesity and diabetes due to changes for the worse in their diet – as chronicled in our chapter on Somali-Americans in Minneapolis.

Supervision

Babies also need protection from mishap and accidents. Strategies for safeguarding children depend on the nature of local risks. Cars whizzing by on a busy street, an open cooking fire in the middle of the family compound, and poisonous snakes all require different approaches to keeping babies and toddlers safe. Very different strategies are needed to protect against risks that are less visible but still perilous, such as the machinations of witches or malicious spirits who are said to harm or steal babies – or the equally mysterious workings of bacteria that might be killed by vaccines. Ideas about such invisible risks do not necessarily fade in modern, industrialized settings. In the Faroe Islands of Denmark, for example, mothers who are addressed in our imagined manual receive mixed messages about the relevance of such folk beliefs:

You might . . . teach your child about our traditional belief in the "hidden people," or *huldufólk*. Most young people do not believe in these supernatural beings any more, but older people still share

stories in which they claim to have seen them . . . [and] people are still careful not to move large boulders in which they reportedly live. But you don't want to scare your children when you tell them these stories: they should be entertaining and are important to remember only as a part of our history.

Other risks to babies' health and survival may depend on the work that their mothers perform to earn a living, and how the infants are supervised. In societies in which all healthy adults work in the fields, tend livestock, or engage in hunting and gathering, babies are typically cared for during the day by older siblings, cousins, or other children. As long as the child babysitter can bring the baby along to the mother's workplace to be nursed, the infant can thrive (Figure 1.1).

However, this caretaking arrangement is less viable in other settings, where extreme poverty makes it difficult or even impossible for working mothers to care effectively for their

Figure 1.1 In many communities around the world, older siblings commonly take responsibility for younger siblings. In this Balata refugee camp in Nablus (West Bank), a Palestinian baby is being well cared for by an older sister.
Photograph by Bree Akesson.

infants. Such is the case in the *favelas* of northeastern Brazil, for example, where many mothers perform domestic work for wealthy families. Because their employers see the house cleaners' children as dirty and contagious, young infants often remain at home with an older child, or even alone in a hammock. Deprived of their nursing mothers' milk, these babies do not get adequate nourishment; some eat nothing all day, and an alarming number die.

Relationships

Right from birth, forging satisfying emotional attachments is a fundamental part of the human condition. In many Western societies, it is generally assumed that infants will form close attachments to their parents, but not with many others – possibly only with immediate family members. By contrast, adults in many other societies place a premium on integrating infants into a larger group. In Beng villages in Côte d'Ivoire, this effort begins right away: A member of every household in the village is expected to call on a newborn baby within hours after the birth to welcome the tiny person into the community.

Elsewhere, the expectation that a child will be cared for by a group of people beyond the biological parents supports a variety of adoption practices. On the Micronesian island of Ifaluk, the adoption of infants is very common. Because they retain close ties with their biological parents, the adoptees feel they are an integral part of two families.

Such an "additive" approach can work well in a small community. Yet with globalization, adoptions now occur well beyond the local community. Increasingly, children are being adopted outside their racial, ethnic, and national boundaries. The challenges of such interracial and international adoptions are just beginning to be charted, with the most vexing cases involving unwitting participation in human trafficking schemes. For example, some children from impoverished families in countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, and Guatemala are misidentified as "orphans" to be put up for adoption by international agencies, with parents misunderstanding the structure and outcome of the process.

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The caretaking arrangements of many rural African societies foster a different set of ties. Older siblings (who may be as young as six or seven) typically care for their infant and toddler siblings for much of the day while their mothers work, resulting in a strong bond between the siblings. In industrialized societies, young children who attend formal daycare programs often develop strong relationships with their daycare teachers, as well as with a number of other unrelated children.

Beyond connections with relatives and neighbors, many societies also encourage ties with the departed. Those who view infants as reincarnated ancestors may endeavor to maintain a relationship between their flesh-and-blood child and the ancestor's spirit. In Kenya, the Baganda naming ceremony for an infant features someone calling out a series of names belonging to various deceased relatives of the baby. When the child smiles, it is taken as a sign that he or she is a reincarnation of the ancestor just mentioned and wishes to be called by that name.

Elsewhere, connections with spiritual beings may continue actively throughout life. For instance, in Australia, pregnant Warlpiri women may dream that they conceived their child in a place associated with a certain spirit that has given life to the baby. Once born, the child has a lifelong tie to the land associated with that spirit and, as an adult, can always have a say in matters relating to that piece of land. With current movements of people well beyond their homelands, will such spiritual ties continue to have meaning? Will they serve as sources of comfort, longing, or distress? Perhaps the Portuguese concept of *saudade*, that complex notion combining regret, desire, and nostalgia for a place or time, may become the clarion call of our age.

Meanwhile, as the world grows more interconnected, developmental psychologists have increasingly considered the implications of cultural differences for children's lives. For example, early advocates of "attachment theory" assumed the model to have universal relevance regardless of local family structure or parenting practices. Now, psychologists acknowledge "the different faces of attachment" that are produced by the variety of cultural values and political institutions (local and global alike) that structure parents' ideas of what sorts of

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emotional attachments *should* be sought for their children – and what sorts *may be possible*, given constraints.

In this volume, Shirdon poignantly chronicles the ways that, in Somali-American households in Minneapolis, apartment living results in a much smaller group of people to interact with infants and toddlers than would have been the case back in Somali villages or urban neighborhoods. This new American setting, with its restricted linguistic and social interactions, is now resulting in diagnoses of autism in twice as many young Somali-American children as in the general US population. As the Somali-American case suggests, models of attachments need updating to take into consideration the global flows of people to new living spaces that often create new contexts for social interaction – sometimes enriched, but all too often impoverished.

Life Skills

Most parents have clear ideas about how to prepare their children for successful lives as adults. Children everywhere need opportunities to acquire life skills that will enable them to become fully functioning members of their particular society. In traditional societies, young children typically learn how to do work by serving, in effect, as apprentices – whether watching a parent weave at the loom, washing laundry and cooking, hunting, or weeding, hoeing, and harvesting on the farm (Figure 1.2).

In the contemporary world, the life skills that many children must learn for a successful life have changed drastically. In Lisbon, migrant Mandinga and Fula parents from Guinea-Bissau have adapted a traditional naming ritual for infants in ways that acknowledge these changes. In our imagined manual for these parents, a Guinean mother living in Portugal advises:

Back home [in Guinea-Bissau] on this special day, babies are shown those things that will be important throughout their lives, depending on their gender and caste: a cooking pot or hoe for a girl, for example, or leatherworking tools for a baby from a leatherworking family. But . . . this part of the ritual . . . doesn't make sense in Lisbon, where children have so many options available to them. Which objects will be important to your child depends entirely on what he or she ends up doing in life. Who are we to make assumptions about that in this new country?

Figure 1.2   In Côte d'Ivoire, this Beng toddler and young girl are already proficient at pounding food in a large mortar. Beng girls play an important role helping their mothers prepare meals for their large families.
Photograph by Alma Gottlieb.

Implied in this set of comments about new work opportunities is the set of broad-ranging, literacy-based skills offered by a modern education. Whereas earlier generations were educated by their communities for a life path that was narrowly delimited, current generations are exposed to myriad job options. Our chapter on a Quechua community living in a small town in rural Peru highlights the difference that schooling can make for newly educated peasants. "Study hard!" becomes the rallying cry

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motivating young people to get ahead, not just for themselves, but to improve the quality of life of their families.

Yet for too many, this equal-opportunity model remains more a dream than a reality. The combination of class, race, religion, immigrant status, and national origin puts refugees such as the Somali-Americans profiled in this book at an enormous disadvantage. In this context, those Somali-Americans who become successful business owners in the face of such long odds seem especially remarkable, whereas those who fail to overcome the enormous obstacles often become, troublingly, stigmatized with designations ranging from "autistic" to "terrorist."

We now consider an extended example illustrating many of the points we have made about childcare and culture.

Where Should the Baby Sleep?

Although sleeping is a necessity for everyone, never do we spend so much time asleep as when we are babies. People in all societies accommodate infants' need for sleep, but they do so in very different ways – and sometimes for different reasons.

Across most of the world today, and throughout most of human history, infants have spent the night in the company of others. In early childhood (and sometimes into the later childhood years), sleeping has been a social, not a solitary, affair. Most commonly, infants sleep with their mothers, although others might play this role. In many contemporary urban, middle-class families in China, a baby sleeps with his or her paternal grandmother, who serves as the primary caretaker and brings the baby to her daughter-in-law to nurse.

Co-sleeping is rarely motivated by lack of space. Even when families live in multi-room dwellings, parents in co-sleeping societies take their infants into bed with them. One virtue is that the mother can easily breastfeed whenever the baby awakens – often without fully awakening herself. Children continue to sleep with their mothers or other older relatives for varying lengths of time – from one or two years for Mayan babies in

Guatemala to, until recently, into the teen years in Japanese families.

A very different practice characterizes the sleeping pattern in North America (and some other Western nations). In middle-class, Euro-American families, the most common pattern is for infants to sleep in their own beds, and often in their own rooms – a practice long approved and recommended by the vast majority of American pediatricians. In fact, recent public health campaigns in US cities have warned against the risks of unexplained deaths (sudden infant death syndrome, or "SIDS") from infant–parent co-sleeping – the concern being that a parent might accidentally roll over onto the infant and smother it (Figure 1.3).

However, members of some groups in the US prefer other sleeping arrangements. In a recent study, 28 percent of Asian parents reported sleeping in the same room with their children, compared to 8 percent of White parents. Moreover, despite recent critiques of how "attachment theory" has been mischaracterized in popular discussions, a recent trend in "attachment parenting" has taken hold in some slices of urban, educated Euro-America, for whom it is now fashionable for infants and parents to co-sleep (among other "attachment"-promoting practices). However, it remains difficult to estimate the extent of this trend, since infant/parent bed-sharing remains stigmatized in mainstream discourses (both medical and popular) – a situation that, doubtless, leads some parents to conceal their bed-sharing habits, making it likely that bed-sharing is under-reported in the US.

To make matters even more confusing, the above-mentioned public health campaigns against co-sleeping rely on warnings by US-based pediatricians that bed-sharing increases the risk of SIDS – yet, other scientific researchers have reached the opposite conclusion. For example, biological anthropologist James McKenna has concluded that the risk of SIDS is actually lower for infants who share their parents' bed, so long as the parents are non-smokers unimpaired by alcohol or medication, and in safe circumstances (without loose pillows or blankets). This stark contrast between models of bed-sharing as both *increasing and*

Figure 1.3 In New York City, a public health campaign launched in 2008 put posters in subways to urge parents not to sleep with their babies.
Photograph by Alma Gottlieb.

decreasing the likelihood of SIDS, as interpreted by pediatricians versus biological anthropologists (respectively), gives us pause.

In effect, these divergent beliefs and practices belie different values on the part of parents. In a study comparing attitudes of middle-class Euro-American mothers and Mayan mothers, for example, the American mothers viewed co-sleeping as, at best, strange and impractical – at worst, suspicious or even immoral. In contrast, the Mayan mothers regarded physical closeness at night as part of normal caring for children. When told

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of the middle-class American practice of infants sleeping alone, the Mayan mothers were shocked at what they considered mistreatment and felt sorry for the babies – echoing adults in many other societies who view the nightly isolation of many middle-class American infants as parental neglect.

Why do so many people disapprove so deeply of where other people choose to have their babies sleep? Co-sleeping strengthens ties between baby and mother, but parents evaluate this result differently: as a benefit in the eyes of co-sleepers, but a source of concern by others, who worry that co-sleeping will make their infants overly dependent. Societal goals of **interdependence** are well served by parent–infant co-sleeping, whereas those of **independence** are not.

In short, a question so seemingly simple as where to put a baby to sleep conceals layers of cultural beliefs. And unlike some other childcare practices, sleeping decisions seem fairly stable. In the US, some of the most devoted bed-sharing families are found in immigrant communities hailing from bed-sharing societies, as we have learned from over three decades of conversations with Indian-American students. Sleeping decisions may be one form of "cultural intimacy" that has a great deal of staying power even in the face of globalization and social change.

LEARNING TO CREATE THE WORLDS OF BABIES

As we have been suggesting, the care and raising of infants are generally considered far too important to leave to personal preference. In every society, new generations of parents are expected to follow a set of practices that replicate basic values that are widely approved, while adapting to new conditions. How do parents acquire these culturally approved caretaking practices?

Advice for Parents

Part of what every one of us knows about being a parent comes from our own early experiences. For better or worse, we all

acquire at least a good chunk of our model of how parents behave toward their children from how we were cared for. Even those who deliberately reject aspects of their parents' (or other caretakers') childrearing style in raising their children nevertheless find themselves basing their behavior on their own childhood experiences. After having children, many of us have had the sudden, sometimes disquieting insight, "Oh, no, I sound just like my parents!"

In most societies until recently, children also learned about childrearing not only through what their parents did with them, but also from observing other adults. Living in close proximity to others – whether in extended family groups, small bands, or villages – children could observe at first hand how other adults treated their children. What they mostly saw was other people behaving pretty much as their own parents had acted – that is, following common cultural norms. Such daily observations become part of children's knowledge base. Seeing mothers carrying their babies around in homemade cloth slings all the time, a child forms the idea that carrying babies is a natural part of mothering. Another child, seeing mothers transport their infants in a succession of backpacks and front packs, strollers, and car seats, assumes the naturalness of manufactured baby carriers. When these children eventually become parents, they simply "know" how these things are done and rarely reflect critically upon that knowledge.

However, opportunities to observe and learn about traditional childcare practices in stable communities have recently been diminishing. In many nations across the global south, parenting practices are changing – sometimes gradually, sometimes dramatically. As a result of global capitalism, some groups are gaining new access to economic resources and are experiencing upward mobility, while many more are experiencing the opposite. In yet other places, long-term political strife and unrelenting poverty are causing tremendous upheaval and suffering. In extreme cases, refugee camps created to accommodate those fleeing unrest in Syria, Afghanistan, and other unstable places are creating new social forms whose parenting challenges are just beginning to be charted. In this

book, the chapter on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza focuses on one case of this troubling scenario.

For their part, urban industrialized societies also offer fewer opportunities for learning early in life about parenting by directly observing other people and interacting with infants. Nowhere is this more evident than in the US. With high levels of occupational and geographical mobility, family members are increasingly isolated from one another. Young couples may have no mothers, grandmothers, or aunts close by to advise them about the birth process, or what to do when the baby cries or is ill, or when one can expect the infant to begin walking and talking. Advice communicated by telephone or, increasingly, via the Web is useful, but a poor substitute for on-the-spot assistance.

The high value placed on family privacy, combined with the modern pattern of newly married couples moving into their own homes, further diminishes the possibilities (for both children and parents) of directly observing and learning from how others care for their infants. Moreover, the smaller size of today's families in many places around the globe makes it likely that a new parent will have less experience with babies than did new parents of previous generations.

Over the past century, North Americans and western Europeans have made up for this decreased level of hands-on experience with children in a variety of ways. Many parents sought advice about child behavior and development from pediatricians. The second most common source of information was books.

A massive amount of information is now available for Western parents to answer their questions and allay their concerns about children and childrearing. Bookstores in the US and the UK typically boast shelf after shelf of books devoted to advice on parenting. In addition to manuals covering child development in general, a wealth of books – as well as magazine and newspaper articles – offer advice on specific topics targeted to specialized audiences. A pregnant woman can easily find books and articles on the benefits of sound nutrition and yoga, as well as programs for communicating with her unborn baby. Books abound to help new parents learn how to encourage

their babies to sleep through the night, how to succeed in breastfeeding, or even how to accomplish toilet training in twenty-four hours. New terms proliferate to describe (or criticize) parenting styles – current ones being "helicopter parents" and its obverse, "free-range parents." One blogger dubs the current glut of childcare advice, the "Parenting Industrial Complex." The fact that advice for parents is such big business suggests the existence of a very eager readership.

With any popular literary genre, there must be a good fit between the basic cultural orientation of author and reader – a shared set of assumptions about the nature of the world that facilitates communication. Childcare manuals are very much cultural products that reflect the dominant values and beliefs of their authors and intended audience. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise: No parenting manual that flies in the face of the locally accepted cultural beliefs and practices of its target audience could possibly achieve great success and influence.

At the same time, some of these best-selling parenting manuals have also served as agents of change. For example, Dr. Benjamin Spock is credited with relaxing the emphasis on rigid scheduling that pervaded American infant care when he began writing in the 1940s. In the next generation of pediatrician advice givers, Berry Brazelton was acknowledged for drawing attention to the active role that infants play in their own development. Currently, many parents appreciate Penelope Leach's sensitive efforts to examine parenting from the perspective of children, even infants.

How can these manuals both reinforce common cultural practices and in some cases transform them? Some of the more influential books have proven influential in subtle ways – by first appealing to what readers already know, while playing down the revolutionary aspects of the advice to come. The opening lines of Dr. Spock's best-selling childcare guide read: "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do."

Although parents today continue to consult childrearing books, an even greater assortment of childrearing advice is now readily available to anyone with an Internet connection. Shortly before completing this book, we asked a student assistant to

estimate how many websites and blogs offer discussions about parenting. She reported the impossibility of the request, as thousands of such sites have proliferated. Our own daughters-in-law may be typical of their generation in that, when confronted with a new parenting challenge, their first impulse is to check the Web.

Despite the dizzying array of perspectives on childrearing offered online, many bloggers communicate confidence that whatever works for their child should work for others. That confidence – like that of book authors before them – is itself rooted in largely unconscious assumptions about the nature of children and the goals of parenting.

Now, imagine a childrearing manual from another part of the world. A Berry Brazelton who had been born in a Beng village in Côte d'Ivoire and had become a diviner (rather than a pediatrician) would emphasize how critical it is for babies to form close and loving ties with their grandparents. Indeed, he would advise parents to teach their children how to dish out ribald insults to their grandparents as a sure-fire way to help the children feel free and familiar with their much older relatives.

Or suppose Penelope Leach were a Palestinian resident of the West Bank instead of a Cambridge University-educated psychologist. Would she still suggest that mothers be content whether they have boys or girls? Or would she instead advise mothers to keep trying to have a boy in order to gain greater respect in their community?

And so we come to this book.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The First Edition

The first edition of this volume developed from a seminar on cross-cultural views of infancy and young childhood that we co-taught at the University of Illinois several years ago. Our interest in designing this course sprang from our shared fascination with the nature and challenges of childhood,

Universality Without Uniformity: A Culturally Inclusive Approach to Sensitive Responsiveness in Infant Caregiving

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Do caregivers in non-Western communities adapt their behaviors to the needs of infants? This question reflects one of the most long-standing debates on the universality versus culture-specificity of caregiver–infant interactions in general and sensitive responsiveness to infants in particular. In this article, an integration of both points of view is presented, based on the theoretical origins of the sensitive responsiveness construct combined with the ethnographic literature on caregivers and infants in different parts of the world. This integration advocates universality without uniformity, and calls for multidisciplinary collaborations to investigate the complexities and nuances of caregiver–infant interactions in different cultures. Salient issues are illustrated with observations of infants (ages 7–31 months) in Mali, the Republic of Congo, and the Philippines.

Caregiver sensitive responsiveness was first formulated in the context of attachment theory and refers to a caregiver's ability to notice infant signals, to interpret these signals correctly, and to respond to them promptly and appropriately by adapting her behaviors to the infant's needs (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974). Theoretically, sensitive responsiveness is hypothesized to be a universal aspect of parenting in infancy that is related to positive child development, given the evolutionary advantage of being taken care of by a responsive caregiver when infants themselves cannot take care of their own needs (Bowlby, 1969; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, &

Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016). The notion of sensitive responsiveness originated in part from Ainsworth's observational work in rural Uganda (Ainsworth, 1967), clearly serving as a significant starting point from which her future work emerged (Bretherton, 2013). However, the bulk of research on caregiver sensitive responsiveness has since been carried out in parents as primary caregivers in Western countries and urban areas, and studies in non-Western rural regions, where extensive shared caregiving is the norm, are very rare. This state of affairs leaves the field vulnerable to criticism from scholars who contest the universality of the sensitivity construct. Indeed, several authors have argued that caregiver sensitivity simply does not exist in some cultural contexts as it is suggested to be incompatible with local norms, customs, and attitudes (Keller, 2013; Lancy, 2015; LeVine, 2004; Weisner, 2015).

The current study aims to dissect the sensitivity construct to examine to what extent and in which form it is or is not applicable to non-Western cultural contexts. Of course the Western versus non-Western dichotomy is a simplification of a complex set of interacting socioeconomic, physical, and social factors that vary across communities in almost infinite combinations. We analyze the literature for insights into the exact meaning and manifestation of sensitive responsiveness across cultures in the context of nonexhaustive examples of such variations, and we add to the existing literature by drawing from our own observations of families in rural parts of the world that are off the beaten track of mainstream attachment research. We will first describe the point of view of attachment theory and its universality claims, and then discuss arguments against these claims from scholars who emphasize the importance of cultural context.

The Attachment Theory Perspective

Mary Ainsworth developed the notion of sensitive responsiveness within the framework of attachment theory as formulated by Bowlby (1969) who described attachment as the bond between an infant and a specific caregiver, mostly the mother. The infant–mother bond is secure when the infant not only seeks out the mother for comfort in times of distress but also feels free to playfully explore the environment when all is well, knowing that the mother will be there when things go awry (Ainsworth, Belhar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). More sensitive caregiving was hypothesized to predict secure attachment, which has been confirmed in a meta-analysis showing a correlational association (De Wolff & Van IJzendoorn, 1997), as well as a causal relation (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2003). In addition, maternal sensitive responsiveness has been found to predict positive child development across a variety of domains (Bernier, Whipple, & Carlson, 2010; Fraley, Roisman, & Haltigan, 2013; Kochanska, Barry, Aksan, & Boldt, 2008; Mesman et al., 2012; Tamis-LeMonda, Borstein, & Baumwell, 2001).

From an evolutionary perspective, becoming attached to and relying on a sensitively responsive caregiver is crucial for infant survival. Human infants are completely defenseless and require extensive adult care for several years before becoming self-reliant (Bogin, 1997; Gurven & Walker, 2006). Most importantly, sensitive responsiveness enhances general infant well-being because it ensures that the infant will be fed when signaling hunger, protected when signaling fear, and cared for when signaling pain. The fact that consistent caregiving relates to secure attachment bonds in chimpanzees, also a species with costly investment in reproduction and offspring care like humans, further strengthens the evolutionary relevance of the notion of caregiver responsiveness (Van IJzendoorn, Bard, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Ivan, 2009). Although much of Ainsworth's work focused on the 1st year of life (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1974), infancy can also include the 2nd and even 3rd years of life, as human children still require extensive care during that period. Indeed, in her description of the sensitivity versus insensitivity scale, Ainsworth gives examples of infant behavior and sensitive responsiveness in the 2nd year of life (Ainsworth et al., 1974, pp. 129–130). She thus highlights that the appropriateness and therefore sensitivity of a response depends on the child's developmental stage.

The long period of dependency that lasts for at least 2 years, associated with possible maternal mortality, the high energetic costs of reproduction and short interbirth intervals, which are characteristic of humans, are likely to have selected for strong sensitive responsiveness not only in mothers but also in close kin (fathers, grandmothers, aunts, and siblings), who in small-scale societies play a crucial role in caregiving, increasing the rates of child survival (Sear & Mace, 2008). A sensitive caregiver makes sure she is close to the infant so that she can notice its signals, and caregiver proximity represents the first requirement for basic caregiving such as feeding, washing, and grooming, and providing physical safety and shelter.

Sensitive caregiving can also contribute to infant adaptive functioning in a more indirect manner that fits with the notion of sensitivity as an important aspect of caregiving that evolved to enhance offspring survival. An interesting consequence of receiving sensitive responsiveness is that it fosters the infant's ability to detect the link between its own behaviors and the environment, because its behaviors are predictably followed by appropriate caregiving responses. For example, the infant learns that if it cries, a caregiver will come to provide comfort, and when it reaches for the breast, mother will offer milk. The experience of predictable relations between behaviors and outcomes (also known as behavior-based contingencies) in early caregiving interactions enhances infants' ability to learn the consequences of their own behavior in other situations (Tarabulsy et al., 1998), which is a necessary skill for general adaptive functioning (Ainsworth,

1967; Ainsworth et al., 1974; Gewirtz & Palaez-Nogueras, 1992). For example, to develop appropriate social skills, a child needs to recognize which behaviors evoke positive responses from others and which ones evoke disapproval. To learn language skills, a child needs to notice when its utterances are followed by meaningful responses that indicate that its language use was effective. More importantly, it needs to be quick to learn to avoid behaviors that may have harmful consequences (e.g., coming close to a fire or wander of too far from supervision). Thus, the early experience of behavior-based contingencies in the form of caregiver sensitive responsiveness in infancy may serve an important evolutionary function of fostering children's adaptive functioning that is crucial to their survival.

If sensitive responsiveness is a fundamental human adaptation, then it should be a universal characteristic of human parenting and caregiving, relevant across cultures. However, similar to research in many domains of human development, the overwhelming majority of empirical work on sensitive caregiving has been done in urban Western samples (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). There are some rare studies that have applied observational measures of sensitivity to non-Western contexts. In a study among the Dogon in Mali, maternal sensitivity observed during 30 min of daily routines was marginally related to secure attachment (True, Pisani, & Oumar, 2001). Sensitivity during daily routines was also related to infant secure attachment in rural and urban Mexico (Gojman et al., 2012). Sensitivity as observed in more brief and standardized settings has been shown to be associated with secure attachment in samples from urban South Africa (Tomlinson, Cooper, & Murray, 2005), urban Colombia (Posada et al., 2002), urban South Korea (Jin, Jacobvitz, Hazen, & Jung, 2012), and urban Japan (Vereijken, 1996). The potential cross-cultural relevance of the sensitivity construct was also supported by a study showing strong convergence between maternal descriptions of the ideal mother and standardized descriptions of the highly sensitive mother across 26 cultural groups from 15 countries (Mesman et al., 2016). This means that most mothers not only ranked behaviors such as comforting a sad child, being close to the child, but also encouraging exploration as highly characteristic of the ideal mother. This study therefore provides evidence for the universality of sensitivity as an important part of parenting (see also Emmen, Malda, Mesman, Ekmekci, & Van IJzendoorn, 2012).

In sum, there are compelling theoretical arguments to suggest that sensitive responsiveness in the care of infants is relevant across cultures, supported by some, albeit very rare, empirical evidence. However, the scarcity of studies on sensitive responsiveness in non-Western contexts and the lack of in-depth explorations of the potential meaning of sensitive responsiveness in field studies outside of the Western world limits the persuasive power of the theoretical arguments. This shortcoming of attachment research was forewarned by Mary Ainsworth herself, as she noted the risks of moving away from field work (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995). As we will see, field work by cultural psychologists and anthropologists are a major source of doubt about the cross-cultural relevance of sensitive responsiveness.

The Contextual Perspective

Several scholars have criticized the universality of attachment processes in general and the sensitivity construct in particular (Keller, 2013; Lancy, 2015; LeVine, 2004; Weisner, 2015). They refer to ethnographic accounts of mother–infant interactions that apparently show a complete lack of sensitive responsiveness in certain communities. For example, the Gusii of Kenya have been described to only respond to infant distress, to ignore nondistress vocalizations, and to barely look at or speak to their infants, even during breastfeeding (Lancy, 2015; LeVine, 2004). Similar claims have been made about the Nso of Cameroon, who have been described as "generally neither sensitive nor mind-minded" (Otto, 2015, p. 225). Several other ethnographic records have been referred to as evidence of the absence of attachment-related sensitive responsiveness, because the mothers in those studies do not hold their babies en face, do not use motherese, generally speak very little to them, and do not cuddle or kiss the babies (Lancy, 2015).

One of the reasons that have been brought forward to explain the supposed absence of sensitive responsiveness in some communities is its incompatibility with local parenting goals and attitudes toward children. Some have noted that sensitive responsiveness implies that the parent sees the infant as an autonomous being with its own wishes and goals that require satisfaction, whereas in many non-Western cultures the focus is not on the well-being of individuals but on the welfare of the group (Keller, 2013). Thus, it is argued, babies are simply rarely the center of attention in non-Western rural communities and are therefore unlikely to receive a

lot of sensitive responsiveness (Keller, 2015; Otto, 2015). It has even been suggested that in many non-Western cultures infants are trained not to expect sensitive responsiveness from their caregivers, as the parenting goal is to foster obedience, conformity, and respect for authority (Otto, 2015; Weisner, 2015).

The critics also note that the existence of extensive networks of caregivers and frequent care by others than the mother in non-Western societies invalidates the concept of a primary caregiver who needs to show consistent availability and responsiveness to foster secure attachment (Keller, 2015). Indeed, shared caregiving with grandmothers, aunts, siblings, and other kin and nonkin is very common in many non-Western societies, particularly in forager communities (Hrdy, 2009) and in subsistence farming communities (Otto, 2015). This multiple caregiver context is rarely represented in attachment research, as the vast majority of studies in this field focus solely on mothers. There is a growing interest in studying fathers' sensitivity (e.g., Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014; Lucassen et al., 2011), but studying two parents in nuclear Western families is simply not the same as studying a range of caregivers of varying ages and kinship levels who share infant care in a way that is deeply embedded in all daily routines. When Western infants have multiple caregivers, they tend to take care of the infant in a serial fashion, that is, each with their own allocated time slot, relieving each other from the caregiving task at given times so that other activities can be pursued (e.g., babysitter when both parents are at work, mother during bedtime routine when father clears up the dishes, and father on Saturday morning when mother is at the gym, or any variations on this serial care sharing).

The notion of multiple caregivers in many non-Western contexts is far more fluid, with many people in proximity of the infant at the same time and without clearly laid out time slots for each caregiver to take the lead (e.g., Tronick, Morelli, & Ivey, 1992). Instead, infant care is determined more by the availability and proximity of community members at a given time, and this pattern can vary from 1 day to the next, as part of the adaptive pattern of cooperative breeding in small-scale human populations (Hewlett, 1996; Kramer, 2011; Sear & Mace, 2008), which increases child survival and fertility rates in those populations. Thus, assessing the universality of caregiver sensitivity is far more complex and should involve many more people than mothers and fathers in small-scale societies, requiring special attention to test whether caregiver

sensitivity is adaptive across cultures (see also Mesman, Minter, & Angnged, 2016, for an observational method to assess sensitivity by multiple caregivers).

Method

The two camps, those emphasizing universality of sensitive caregiving and those emphasizing cultural differences, are currently heavily entrenched in their own theoretical bunkers and an offer of truce does not seem to be forthcoming. Yet, a truce we need to move forward in this field. Because heated debates often suffer from conceptual confusion, a journey back to the origins and definition of the construct of sensitive responsiveness to infant signals is the logical starting point. We analyze the beginnings of the sensitivity construct as well as its current day use in the literature to elucidate the core of the debate and to identify potential common ground from which to start building bridges between the two points of view.

In addition to an analysis of the sensitivity construct, we draw on three video data sets of caregiver–infant interactions from very different parts of the world to highlight key issues in sensitive caregiving across cultures. We would like to emphasize that observations are included for illustration purposes not for providing systematic evidence. The videos used for these illustrations were collected in the last 5 years for studies unrelated to attachment research, and include:

1. Videos of naturalistic family interactions around two focus infants (aged 7 and 18 months) in an Agta community of six households at Dikaberitbitan, a remote and sparsely populated coastal strip in the northeastern Philippines. The Agta live in small, kin-based settlements and subsist on fishing, hunting, and gathering, complemented with extensive horticulture and paid labor. The videos, which cover a total of 7 hr observation time, were collected over 4 days in August 2013 by the second author (Tessa Minter), in the context of an anthropological study on infant weaning.

2. Videos of naturalistic interactions of one focus infant (age 13 months) with her caregivers among the Mbendjele foragers hunter–gatherers from the Republic of Congo (ROC; total video duration 30 min, collected across 10 days), collected in the context of an

anthropological study on infant learning by the fifth author (Gul Deniz Salali). Mbendjele are a subgroup of the BaYaka Pygmies whose residence spans across the Northern rainforests of the ROC and Central African Republic. BaYaka subsistence techniques include hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering forest products such as wild yams and caterpillars, honey collecting, and agricultural work (for farmers). The Mbendjele live in lango's—multifamily camps consisting of a number of fuma's (huts) in which nuclear families reside; camp size tends to vary from 10 to 60 individuals. They are highly mobile; camp movement is influenced both by the availability of food resources and the availability of the food products for exchange with villagers. The videos were taken during an anthropological study on infant learning by the fifth author (Gul Deniz Salali) across 3 weeks in June 2014, at a campsite of 33 people in the Likouala region of ROC (total video duration: 30 min).

3. Videos of six infants and their caregivers in the small-scale agrarian Fulani community in Nokara (rural central Mali) were collected in the context of a linguistic study of infant babbling and first words, with about 8 hr of video per infant collected across 7 months (March to September 2010) in seminaturalistic situations, that is, free interaction, but specific to one location chosen by mother for every 30–60 min of video collected by the fourth author (Ibrahima A. H. Cissé). The infants' ages ranged from 7 to 31 months across the duration of data collection. The Fulani in Nokara subsist on farming, small-scale trading (mainly of cattle), and paid labor (see also Cissé, 2014).

Results

The Construct of Sensitivity Revisited

In attachment theory, the primary function of sensitive responsiveness is to provide a haven of safety for the infant in times of distress and the subsequent development of a secure attachment by the infant (Ainsworth et al., 1974; Bowlby, 1969). There is indeed empirical evidence to support the prime importance of sensitive responsiveness to distress signals relative to responsiveness to other signals (Higley & Dozier, 2009; Leerkes, Blankson, & O'Brien, 2009; McElwain & Booth-LaForce, 2006). Interestingly, the universality of responsiveness to infant distress in particular does not appear to be

contested, given the clear survival-promoting signaling function of infant crying (Zeifman, 2001). Indeed, we know of no ethnographic studies of regular infant care that report an absence of responsiveness to infant distress. However, this is minimized in some accounts as the "only" responsiveness that mothers in some communities appear to show (Lancy, 2015; LeVine, 2004), when it is in fact a key element of sensitive responsiveness in attachment theory.

However, the ways that crying infants are soothed differ substantially across cultures. In many rural non-Western communities, soothing consists mostly of offering the breast, bouncing the baby, or patting their bottoms (Takada, 2005) and rarely includes the Western pattern of extensive verbal soothing, carrying the baby while walking up and down, and attempts at distraction through (object-mediated) games. Furthermore, Ainsworth's description of sensitive responsiveness includes many more aspects of infant behavior as relevant, such as social bids and expressions of physical needs, such as hunger. Thus, focusing only on distress unnecessarily narrows the sensitivity construct.

What about other elements of sensitive responsiveness? The critics state that verbal responsiveness, face-to-face interaction, and smiling are largely absent in many rural non-Western communities (Lancy, 2015), whereas these are often assessed as key elements of sensitive responsiveness in the Western literature (e.g., Biringen, Derscheid, Vliegen, Closson, & Easterbrooks, 2014). However, the original definition of sensitivity responsiveness by Mary Ainsworth does not actually include any of these specific behaviors. To illustrate this point, we copy the description of the highly sensitive mother as provided by Ainsworth in her observational measure of sensitivity versus insensitivity, with B referring to the baby (Ainsworth et al., 1974, pp. 231–232):

> This mother is exquisitely attuned to B's signals; and responds to them promptly and appropriately. She is able to see things from B's point of view; her perceptions of his signals and communications are not distorted by her own needs and defenses. She "reads" B's signals and communications skillfully, and knows what the meaning is of even his subtle, minimal, and understated cue. She nearly always gives B what he indicates that he wants, although perhaps not invariably so. When she feels that it is best not to comply with his demands–for example, when

he is too excited, over-imperious, or wants something he should not have– she is tactful in acknowledging his communication and in offering an acceptable alternative. She has "well-rounded" interactions with B, so that the transaction is smoothly completed and both she and B feel satisfied. Finally, she makes her responses temporally contingent upon B's signals and communications.

As this citation shows, there are absolutely no references to positive affect, verbal responses, or face-to-face interaction. Such references can also not be found in the other descriptions provided by Mary Ainsworth. The definition of the highly sensitive mother only includes general references to reading the infant's signals and responding to these in a way that meets the infant's physical and social needs. Indeed, there is evidence that nonverbal responsiveness to infant signals also relates to positive child outcomes, even in Western samples in which verbal responsiveness appears to be the norm (Beebe et al., 2010; Lohaus et al., 2005).

Over the years, new conceptualizations of sensitive responsiveness have added elements such as positive affect and verbal exchanges to its definition (Mesman & Emmen, 2013). For example, the sensitivity scale of the Emotional Availability scales includes a subscale on positive affect that weighs heavily on the final score (Biringen, 2008). In the CARE Index, sensitivity is rated based on evaluations of many aspects of parental behavior, including positive affect and vocal expression (Crittenden, 2001). Although the study of such elements of caregiving can certainly provide new insights into patterns of interactions and their roles in attachment formation, the use of the term sensitivity is potentially confusing. The importance of this issue was recently highlighted by Cheah (2016) who describes how a too narrow focus on Western conceptualizations of warmth in Asian American families fails to capture the cultural reality of warmth as experienced and expressed in that cultural community. Similarly, a study of sensitivity in Singapore suggested that the positive affect component of the Emotional Availability scales may not be appropriate for this cultural context (Cheung & Elliott, 2016). In fact, very few of the post-Ainsworth observational measures that use the label sensitivity have retained the focus on function (meeting the infant's needs) over form (how one goes about meeting the infant's needs). These deviations are actually at odds with the organizational nature of attachment processes that emphasizes the functions of caregiving rather than concrete behavioral manifestations (Sroufe & Waters, 1977) and leave little room for what has been labeled context specificity (Bornstein, 1995). Ainsworth's organizational approach actually leaves room for a variety of different ways of being a sensitive caregiver across cultural contexts.

Manifestations of Sensitivity

Let us consider the example of an infant sitting on its mother's lap, twisting its head to face a different direction. A sensitive Western mother would most likely respond by smiling and saying something like "Hey sweetheart, what are you looking at? Can you see the trees over there? Do you like the big trees?" in a high-pitched musical tone of voice known as motherese. However, there are also less extraverted and less verbal ways to respond to an infant's head turning, in the form of physical facilitation, focus following, and tempo adjustments, fitting with the more proximal nature of caregiver–infant interactions outside of the Western world (Jung & Fouts, 2011; Kärtner, Keller, & Yovsi, 2010). For example, detailed analyses of Gusii parenting have shown that holding and touching were common responses to infant signals (Richman, Miller, & LeVine, 1992), and that smooth and regular modulation characterizes mother–infant interactions (Dixon, Tronick, Keefer, & Brazelton, 2014; Tronick, 2007). The sensitivity observations among the Dogon in Mali also emphasized the physical nature of appropriate responding, and maximum scores were described in terms of physical contact and supportive holding (True et al., 2001). Furthermore, mothers in rural Sri Lanka have been described as being acutely aware of and responding promptly to very subtle infant elimination signals, putting the infant in a place where they can empty their bowels (Chapin, 2013). These patterns are likely to relate to customs regarding infant proximity to their caregivers. In communities where infants are generally held close (e.g., in a sling on a caregiver's back or front), verbal signaling may be less necessary, because physical signs are more easily picked up by the caregiver than when the infant is for example in a stroller or baby seat. The nonverbal nature of interactions in the examples from non-Western communities as described above are easy to miss and, if noticed, often fail to be recognized as manifestations of sensitive responsiveness. This issue was already noted more than 40 years ago by Caudill and Schooler (1973) in an

observational study of mother–infant interactions in the United States and Japan. This study showed that meeting the infant's needs during routine caregiving using physical contact is more important in Japanese families but may go unnoticed if one is mostly looking for the highly verbal interaction style that is more typical in the United States.

Our own observations confirm this subtle and nonverbal pattern of sensitive responsiveness. Consider, for example, the following interaction between a 7-month-old infant, her mother, and her aunt observed in the Dimasalansan Agta forager community in the Philippines:

> An infant is sitting on her aunt's lap and next to her mother. The infant turns her head (apparently to look at some children who are passing by. Aunt, without speaking or looking at the infant, moves the infant's position so that she is now facing the children. The infant stretches her hand towards the children walking past. The aunt looks at the infant, waves her arm and says 'bye bye' in the direction of the children. Infant turns her head to face her aunt. Aunt changes her hold of the infant so that she is now facing her. Infant moves head to look at the children again. Aunt changes her hold of the infant so that she is now facing the children again. (. . .) The infant reaches towards her mother. Aunt hands the infant to mother. The infant looks around a little and then reaches towards her aunt. Mother hands her over to aunt. Infant makes fussy sounds, aunt hands infant back to mother. (. . .) Infant turns her head towards mother's chest. Mother changes the infant's position and offers her breast. Infant drinks.

The behaviors described above occurred within a time span of 10 min. The infant was actually handed back and forth between mother and aunt several more times, following the infant's physical and vocal indications that she wanted to move. During these exchanges, mother and aunt rarely spoke and often did not even look at the infant, let alone smile at her. However, the infant's intentions were noticed and the adults adapted their behaviors according to these intentions. In other words, they were sensitively responsive but without showing the typical Western pattern of responding to infants that is far more extraverted and verbal. Whereas warmth in the form of smiling, kissing, or cuddling was less prominent than seen on average in Western cultures, this does not imply

emotional coldness or a lack of affection for the infant. Continuous physical closeness and prompt responsiveness to infant fussing reflect close attention to the infant and his or her needs, which in itself is indicative of emotional involvement. Similar interactions were observed in the videos of the Mbendjele foragers in the ROC, as illustrated by the following observation:

> The 13-month-old infant is standing on the path crying, holding a big piece of cloth. Mother is a few yards away in the background, and starts walking towards the infant. As soon as the infant sees the mother she starts walking towards her, and when the infant reaches her, she hands the cloth to mother, and then puts both of her arms around mother's legs. The infant reaches upwards with her arms, indicating that she wants to be picked up. Mother in the meantime ties the cloth into a carrying sling, lifts up the infant, and puts her in the sling on her hip. The infant stops crying.

Sensitive responsiveness by caregivers in forager populations has been noted in other studies, describing the forager parenting style as responsive and indulgent (Hewlett, Lamb, Leyendecker, & Schölmerich, 2000; Marlowe, 2005). But what about caregivers in rural farmer communities where parenting has been described as more demanding and focused on discipline rather than warmth? The following example is from a Fulani mother and her 12-month-old infant in the agrarian village of Nokara, Mali.

> Mother is busy making little packages of spices to be sold in the village, the infant is sitting next to her, playing with the plastic wrapping. The following sequence is repeated several times: the infant is content playing, then gets bored, starts fussing, mother stops her work, pays the infant some attention, and finds something else for him to play with so she can continue working. Mother's interventions increase in intensity and duration commensurate to the infant's level of fussiness. After the infant's interest in the fourth distraction object has waned, he fusses more intensely than before. Mother takes him onto her lap for the first time, talks to him a little, gives him something to play with and when he is intently focused on the object, mother puts him back on the floor. When after a few minutes the infant starts fussing again, making louder vocalizations than before, mother takes him onto her lap again, and when distractions fail, starts to nurse him. The infant drinks.

Again, very little talking and some of the physical interventions (putting the infant back into sitting position by hoisting him up by only one arm) may seem rough to Western eyes, and the interactions seem more indicative of socialization toward not being a nuisance rather than of sensitivity. However, there is clear monitoring of the infant's signals, and responding in a way that fits the infant's needs within the constraints of mother having to complete a task. Especially sensitive is the fact that mother adapts the intensity of her responses to the intensity of the infant's signals, thus matching her behavior to his needs. These manifestations of sensitive responsiveness are also easy to miss because of the intervals in between these sensitive episodes during which the mother all but ignores the playing infant, and her seemingly nonchalant handling of the infant at times. However, from the perspective of the balance between attachment and exploration, a contently playing infant does not necessarily need a lot of overt attention, just some monitoring when an intervention is actually needed (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970).

It appears that the question is not whether sensitive responsiveness can be observed in non-Western contexts but rather what it looks like in different cultures. Apparently, previous studies have tried to find the Western extraverted variety of sensitive responsiveness in non-Western communities. It appears that contemporary conceptualizations of sensitivity have unwittingly created cross-discipline misunderstandings about the nature of sensitive responsiveness as originally intended. We certainly acknowledge that the newer more affective and verbal incarnations of sensitivity are harder to find, although they are not absent. Both our own observations and the ethnographic literature show many instances of positive affect and vocal exchange between caregivers and infants (e.g., Keller, Voelker, & Yovsi, 2005; Meehan & Hawks, 2013, 2015), but these appear to be less predominant in interaction than in Western samples, at least on average. There is, however, a more subtle and physical non-Western variety of the original notion of sensitive responsiveness that bestows some form of agency onto the infants whose intentions are met with (nonverbal and unsmiling) physical acts of facilitation. Because infant distress is universally met with soothing efforts, the notion of a responsive caregiver as a safe haven when things get scary or otherwise unpleasant is certainly not a Western invention. The ways in which caregivers respond and soothe, however, depend on the cultural context and appear to be consistent with the general styles of social engagement. Thus, where verbal communication is the most salient form of interaction (e.g., in societies with early verbal instruction-based schooling), sensitive responsiveness to infants is also likely to be more verbal. Where physical closeness is an integral part of social life, sensitive responsiveness to infants is likely to be more physical.

Sensitivity and Nonmaternal Caregivers

We now turn to the question of whether others than mothers show sensitive responsiveness to infants in multiple caregiver contexts. Evolutionary theory would suggest that they do, given that the whole point of shared caregiving is that others provide care when mother cannot, and in the case of infants this invariably means being on the lookout for signs of hunger or distress to make sure the infant stays well fed, quiet, clean, and protected.

Several ethnographic accounts describe distressed infants being soothed by others than the mother. Qualitative observations of sensitive responsiveness by nonmaternal caregivers can be found in, for example, rural Sri Lanka (Chapin, 2013), the Hadza foragers in Tanzania (Marlowe, 2005), the Aka and Bofi foragers in Congo (Fouts, 2008), and the Yucatec Mayans (Gaskins, 2013). In a very valuable study among the Aka foragers in the Congo Basin Rain Forest, Meehan and Hawks (2013, 2015) showed that mothers and alloparental (i.e., nonmaternal) caregivers, including juvenile caregivers, show similar latency times in responding to infant distress and were also equally effective in soothing the infants.

First, we would like to illustrate how sensitive responsiveness is also evident in fathers in rural non-Western communities, as shown by a video transcript from the Agta in the Philippines. In the absence of mother, the father is minding his 18-month-old daughter while he is working on a fishing instrument, first standing up with the infant strapped to his back and later sitting down next to the infant at the entrance of their wooden dwelling. For about 20 min there is very little interaction. The infant is awake but does not make any bids for attention, and father does not initiate interaction. Then the following happens:

> The infant starts to make little vocal bids towards father, accompanied by arm and hand movements in his direction, almost touching him. Father stops his work, goes inside the dwelling and comes back with a packet of

crackers and gives it to the infant without speaking, and he then resumes his work. The little girl tries to open the packet with her teeth and when that doesn't work she holds it up to father, who takes it from her, opens it and gives it back to her. The infant starts eating. After a while the infant finishes her crackers and starts making vocal bids again, waving her arm and hand at her father. Father gets up, walks away, and comes back with a cup of water that he holds to her mouth so she can drink.

In ethnographic descriptions, this type of interaction is often described as routine caregiving or even simply child minding, but the father's behavior clearly reflects each of the sensitivity elements: He is close by and notices his infant's signals, he appears to interpret these signals correctly as evidenced by his daughter's satisfied response when he promptly fetches her food, helps her open the package, and then brings her a drink, each time in clear response to her signaling.

Alloparenting was also observed in our videos of the farmer community of the Fulani in Mali, as was sensitive responsiveness by alloparents, as shown in the following example:

A 12-month-old infant and his grandmother are sitting on a mat outside. The infant vocalizes playfully. Grandmother looks at him, smiles, and starts singing a (funny) song, leaning towards the infant for emphasis. The infant is attentive. Then after the first verse, she leans back, looking and smiling at the infant while he laughs. Grandmother then leans closer to the infant again, and sings the next verse. She then leans back again, smiling, while the infant vocalizes in response. This pattern is repeated a few times.

What this example shows is that very common interactions, such as a grandmother singing to her grandchild, also contain sensitive responsiveness. Grandmother carefully times her singing to leave room for her grandson's laughter and vocal input, monitors his input, and then only resumes singing when the infant has had his turn. This vocal turn-taking is accompanied by physical turn taking as she literally makes space for the infant by leaning back to indicate that it is his turn, and leaning forward when he is finished and it is thus her turn. The infant experiences the effects of behavior in this interaction: When he is done laughing or vocalizing, grandmother will start singing again.

Interestingly, juvenile alloparents had also been observed in many small-scale societies. Evolutionary theory predicts that children helping to take care of siblings (or other young kin) would have evolved within the context of food sharing and the division of labor that is characteristic of human evolution (Kramer, 2011). Juvenile investment in taking care of infants lowers the demands on parental care, allowing for investment in multiple juveniles at the same time and thus shorter birth intervals, increasing mother's reproductive success without affecting infant survival rates. Juvenile caregivers are indeed common in many societies (e.g., Ivey et al., 2005; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977), and juvenile alloparents were even found to be equally sensitive as adult alloparents in the study among the Aka foragers (Meehan & Hawks, 2013, 2015). This is consistent with our own experiences, as illustrated by the following observation of an Agta infant and her older cousin:

The Agta infant and her female cousin (about 10 years old) are swinging in a hammock. There are no others within view, although every now and again other voices are heard and one child walks in and out of view of the camera. The infant is holding a plastic object that she handles playfully. Every time the infant drops it or gets it stuck in the hammock netting, the cousin immediately retrieves it for her and hands it back to her. When the infant tries to sit up, the cousin moves to a more upright position, facilitating the infant's movements. When the infant reaches for a piece of fruit that the cousin is holding, the cousin gives her little pieces to eat.

Just 8 min of video, but it is filled with significant and subtle acts of sensitive responsiveness of a young child who is obviously used to "reading" her infant cousin's signals and adapting her behavior accordingly.

In the Mbendjele videos, the focus infant was tended to not only by her mother but also by her grandmother, several aunts, uncles, siblings, and cousins. Clear sensitive responsiveness was observed in the grandmother and one uncle in particular. This uncle, however, was not an adult but a 3-year-old child. One video of him and the target infant was especially noteworthy:

The Mbendjele infant is standing beside her toddler uncle who is sitting on the floor. The infant is scared by something out of view of the camera and starts to cry. Her uncle looks up at her

immediately, stretches out his arms towards her, looks back to see what might have upset her, and takes his niece into his arms. She stops crying immediately, while her uncle continues to hold her. The infant then focuses on the dead animal that they were playing with before the scary incident. She touches the skin of the animal and vocalizes. Her uncle looks to where she is touching the animal and copies her vocalization. He then also touches the animal and says "skin."

The most striking thing about this video is that the young uncle showcases perfect responsiveness to his infant niece's signals. Not only does he respond to her distress by soothing her, but he also follows her focus of attention, responds to her vocalizations, and elaborates on them. A pretty impressive feat for a 3-year-old, who is also seen accompanying his niece in several little adventures and is clearly used to looking out for her, paying attention to her signals, and adapting his behavior to make sure she is okay. It appears that the role of caregiver, even for one so young, triggers this type of paying attention and sensitive responding. This kind of behavior observed in such young ages points to a developmental adaptation for sensitive responsiveness in humans, indicating a strong selective pressure for caregiving across all ages and irrespective of degrees of relatedness. It also seems likely that the young uncle has frequently observed other caregivers showing this type of responsiveness and is simply doing what seems to be the norm in his community.

In sum, a focus on maternal sensitive responsiveness would certainly be too narrow in communities where infant care is shared extensively with many alloparental caregivers. The prominence of responsive care provided by others than the mother in many parts of the world (Hrdy, 2009) and within recent migrant groups in North America and Europe deserves a far more central place in attachment research. However, it is also important to note that even in high-density alloparental contexts, and even when wet nursing is practiced, mothers do play a unique role in the infant's care. First, infants in rural non-Western communities almost always sleep with their mothers (e.g., Jenni & O'Connor, 2005; Konner, 2005; Morelli & Tronick, 1991). It is therefore likely that nighttime responsiveness is almost exclusively and consistently the mother's task, and there is growing evidence that nighttime responsiveness is very important in attachment formation (Ding, Xu, Wang, Li, & Wang, 2012; Higley & Dozier, 2009; Sagi, Koren-Karie, Gini, Ziv, &

Joels, 2002). The special status of mothers in most cultures is also illustrated by the fact that intense crying in infants very often leads to the infant being handed back to mother, or mother herself retrieving the infant (e.g., Marlowe, 2005). We should therefore not be too hasty in relegating mothers to the rank of "just one of many caregivers" when it comes to early social-emotional development and recognize both the mother's unique role and the huge contribution of other caregivers in providing sensitive care to infants.

Discussion

Sensitive responsiveness may very well be the most suitable construct for building bridges between attachment researchers and scholars adopting a more cultural–contextual perspective to caregiver–infant interactions. Regarding its assessment, the original Ainsworth scale appears to be particularly suitable for the observation of sensitivity across cultural contexts, because (in contrast to some newer instruments) it leaves room for culture-specific behavioral manifestations that serve the universal function of making sure that infants receive what they need to survive and become adaptive members of their community. The specific expression of this function can vary widely depending on the physical and social context, and relatedly the cultural beliefs about the best way to deal with infants' needs. For example, the common breastfeeding on demand in rural non-Western communities will make other interactions such as keeping the infant happy while waiting for the next feeding irrelevant, whereas the focus on eliciting infant talking in urban Western cultures (where parents often cannot wait for their infant to speak their first word) will foster extensive verbal rather than physical responsiveness. The Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (Pederson et al., 1990) might be particularly helpful in uncovering culture-specific behavioral manifestations of sensitivity, given that it covers a wide range of specific behaviors relevant to the construct.

The more recent incarnations of sensitivity definitions appear to be less suitable for use in rural non-Western communities where on average positive affect and verbal interaction seem to be less frequent in caregiver–infant interactions than in the Western world. Instead, far more subtle sensitive responsiveness can be observed in the form of physical facilitation, focus following, and tempo adjustment, by mothers as well as a range of non-maternal caregivers. This is not to say that all

caregivers in these communities showed sensitive responsiveness equally or that all mothers within a community showed equal levels of sensitivity but neither do those in Western countries. Unfortunately, a case study of insensitive parenting in a community off the beaten track can easily lead to the conclusion that sensitivity is irrelevant in that context, whereas it may merely reflect one end of a continuum just as found in Western samples. In fact between-individual variations in the level of sensitive responsiveness have been reported by Ainsworth in her Uganda study (1967). Others have shown that sensitivity in non-Western contexts relates meaningfully to infant development including attachment security (e.g., Gojman et al., 2012; True et al., 2001) as well as to maternal characteristics also found to be associated with variations in sensitivity such as the quality of maternal education (Valenzuela, 1997), depression and partner support (Tomlinson et al., 2005), and maternal attachment representations (Gojman et al., 2012). These findings provide evidence for the validity of the sensitivity construct in non-Western cultures. However, just like our own discussion of sensitivity in non-Western communities, studies to date have been limited because the complexities of interrelated variables that define the cultural context as well as the expression of sensitive caregiving is difficult to capture. Similarly, secure attachment may not be the most adaptive style in all cultural contexts (Simpson & Belsky, 2016), which makes a contextualized account of caregiver–infant interactions and their relation to attachment patterns crucial. It is thus imperative that future studies attempt to gather data that do justice to such complexities so that the why and how of sensitive responsiveness can be more fully understood.

We conclude that the debate about the usefulness of the notion of sensitive responsiveness in infant caregiving has suffered from conceptual confusion about the sensitivity construct. The attachment research community has not taken enough time to conduct extensive field studies to look for non-Western behavioral manifestations of sensitive responsiveness and to understand sensitivity in multiple caregiving contexts. In addition, the critics of the sensitivity construct have mistaken the Western variety of responsiveness for the only one to look for, citing only the modern conceptualizations and ignoring the versatility of the original construct. Unfortunately, the debate about culture and attachment theory has been unnecessarily polarized and can clearly benefit from open-minded multidisciplinary collaborations among attachment researchers, anthropologists, and non-Western scholars of child development in general. Scientific debates can either paralyze the field or foster progress. We contend that progress can follow paralysis if attachment researchers commit to looking beyond the boundaries of the Western world and into groups of recent non-Western migrants within Western countries, to sharpen their understanding of sensitive responsiveness, and if scholars well versed in cross-cultural work commit to recognizing the versatility of the original sensitivity construct. Then, genuine collaborations and valuable exchanges of expertise can catapult the field into a fruitful future in which there is room for universality without uniformity.

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Attachment Theory's Universality Claims
Asking Different Questions

Judi Mesman

The relationship between attachment theory and cultural approaches to the study of parenting and child development has been a rocky one. Even though John Bowlby firmly rooted attachment theory in explicitly evolutionary terms, using ethological research as a foundation for the theory's main elements (Bowlby, 1969/1982), critics have contended its claims of universality (e.g., Keller, 2018). Interestingly, criticism regarding cultural issues comes almost exclusively from those who do not identify as attachment researchers. Cultural criticism from within the ranks of attachment research has been virtually nonexistent. Self-criticism is surely less appealing than self-preservation, but it does constitute a vital aspect of reflective science that is motivated to move forward rather than stay put. If criticism only comes from the "outside," and is therefore more easily dismissed as invalid, important opportunities for growth may be missed.

Having been academically "raised" in one of the world's strongholds of attachment research, I was a firm believer of the universality assumptions of attachment theory and its methods. It wasn't until I started working with young scholars from the Global South, collecting video data of family life in over 20 countries, that I could not escape questioning the basis for some of these universality claims. This does not mean I have lost my admiration for the attachment framework, or my appreciation of the scientific rigor of attachment research and its many novel applications. I would like to argue that acknowledgment of the strengths of attachment research can coexist with the acknowledgment that somewhere along the

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way, avenues of potential cultural enrichment have been trodden too nar-rowly, and that uncomfortable questions need to be asked to make better use of such avenues.

Summarizing the debate, attachment theory's proponents generally support the notion that under nonextreme circumstances (i.e., in terms of the availability of care and basic life resources), four hypotheses are expected to be confirmed across cultures (Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016):

1. According to the universality hypothesis, all children have the propensity to form attachments to one or more caregivers.
2. The normativity hypothesis states that the majority of children will form a secure attachment relationship, successfully balancing the need for care when in distress with the developmental need to explore.
3. The sensitivity hypothesis refers to the prediction that sensitive and responsive care predicts secure attachment in children.
4. The competence hypothesis states that a secure attachment rela-tionship predicts adaptive child and adult functioning.

The research literatures relevant to these hypotheses has been criti-cally interpreted by scholars within and outside attachment theory. The general (evolutionary) notion of the importance of forging social rela-tions and receiving consistent care by one or more caregivers for optimal child development is rather uncontroversial. But when it comes to the definitions and assessments of attachment and sensitivity, several scholars have criticized what they see as a Western-centric and "etic" (perspective from outside the social group) approach rather than "emic" (perspective from inside the social group) approach to studying caregiver–child inter-actions (e.g., Keller, 2018; Otto & Keller, 2014). More specifically, critics contend that relevant literatures on parenting and child development in non-Western rural communities is ignored by attachment researchers, and that promoting a single universalistic view of what constitutes good parenting is not only inappropriate but even unethical. This is especially relevant in the case of the competence hypothesis, where "positive" child outcomes are often not defined according to local needs and opportuni-ties. They argue that there are clearly too many variations in the concepts and daily practices of caregiving across the globe to be able to claim uni-versality of specific processes, let alone of standardized ways to assess the quality of caregiver–child relationships.

A recent debate in *Child Development* shows the entrenchment of the two positions on the universality of attachment-related constructs, where an attempt to bridge the divide and a call for a "truce" (Mesman et al., 2017) led to more criticism (Keller et al., 2018), followed by another attempt that

acknowledged the criticism, but arguably could have done more to question key assumptions in attachment theory (Mesman, 2018). Similarly, in a recent set of observational studies in non-Western contexts, including several rural ones, my coauthors and I advocated the importance of questioning Western formulations and assessments of the sensitivity construct, but we stayed within the confines of mainstream attachment theory rather than questioning the theory more directly (forthcoming special issue of *Attachment and Human Development*: "Sensitivity Off the Beaten Track"). This illustrates a tension between a powerful theory that has engendered a large literature with an authoritative scientific approach to studying parenting and child development, and effort at acknowledging clear and salient cultural differences in caregiver–child interactions and seeking ways to integrate them into the existing attachment framework

The rigorous and highly standardized quantitative research approach of attachment theory is laudable, has led to numerous innovative avenues of research, and contributed to valuable insights on parenting and child development collected in highly informative volumes such as the *Handbook of Attachment* (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). However, when it comes to cross-cultural questions, attachment research has been rather conservative, and may even have been prone to confirmation bias through an insistence on standardized measures that preclude different approaches that may yield different yet informative results. The reliance on overwhelmingly quantitative methods with gold standards of assessment (such as the Strange Situation Procedure [SSP]) increases the risk that relevant studies with different methods (such as the ethnographic methods that Ainsworth used in Uganda) and—more saliently—different conclusions will go unnoticed or unappreciated. In addition, larger publication traditions also seem to play a limiting role. Qualitative ethnographic studies conducted in nonurban non-Western regions are generally published in very different outlets than studies in mainstream attachment research, which results in separate literatures that rarely meet. This leads to limited opportunities for cross-fertilization and the discovery of new, sometimes uncomfortable questions about conclusions that have traditionally been regarded as confirmed. Especially in science, we must continue to ask these questions, or as James Baldwin (1955/1984) put it, "It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question" (p. 131).

What are some of the questions that the field of attachment research needs to ask itself to move forward in understanding the role of culture in attachment processes? They should ideally be open-ended questions that provoke reflection and should not "answer" themselves simply by being posed. Below are four interrelated questions that seem most important for beginning an open-minded debate about the role of culture in attachment theory.

1. What exactly would attachment researchers consider evidence against the four hypotheses outlined above that hold universality claims? In other words, what type of findings could be "the black swan event" that would prove that not all swans are white? What findings might be so unexpected based on attachment theory that they would have a major impact on our understanding of attachment? It is good practice in science to formulate conditions under which a hypothesis should be rejected (Popper, 1959/2002), but scientists rarely do so explicitly or precisely. For example, it would be helpful to specify whether a finding that children with insecure attachment relations function better as they grow up in certain communities is a "deal breaker" for the competence hypothesis. Interestingly, many such specific cases of course already exist in many of our databases: The families that do not follow the average pattern and make our effect sizes for the expected associations medium-sized at best. This also touches upon a more far-reaching problem in many studies in the behavioral sciences: Average patterns dictate large-scale theories and rarely account for the many families for whom the pattern is absent or even reversed, that may sometimes even make up more than half of the sample. Do we do enough to account for those findings? This also means asking critical questions about how specific assessment methods, samples, and effect sizes play a role in this line of questioning, in favoring certain outcomes over others, and in deciding whether the findings are accepted within the attachment framework.

2. Why are there so few studies using the "gold standards" of attachment research in nonurban non-Western settings? As noted in the chapter on culture in the *Handbook of Attachment,* "the current cross-cultural database is almost absurdly small compared to the domain that should be covered" (Mesman et al., 2016, p. 809). With some minor adaptations, the SSP has, for example, been applied in rural Mali (True, Pisani, & Oumar, 2001) and rural Kenya (Kermoian & Leiderman, 1986), and both studies supported universality claims. However, these studies were conducted decades ago, and there seems to have been no attempt to continue such research using the gold-standard SSP with cultural modifications in communities off the beaten track. The few existing studies were conducted over 15 years ago (e.g., Kermoian & Leiderman, 1986; True et al., 2001) and all support universality claims. Why has this type of research not continued in more recent years, and therefore appears to lack urgency in this field? Will those few older studies be cited forever to assert universality without looking further because of practical constraints or because of a lack of curiosity? If the former, what can be done to overcome them, and if the latter, why are we not more curious about the usefulness of the SSP principles across settings?

3. Which literatures outside of mainstream attachment research could provide insights that might raise uncomfortable questions about the universality of attachment processes that may have been missed or dismissed rather than used to sharpen or even revise modern formulations of attachment theory? If we were to do our very best to find "black swans" in the scientific literature regardless of discipline or field, where would we find them and why have they not yet been used to inform attachment theory? An example is the application of principles from life-history theory (a branch from evolutionary theory) to explain unexpected findings from attachment research. In this line of work, a predominance of insecure attachment patterns in harsh contexts is interpreted as being adaptive to the challenging environment (Simpson & Belsky, 2016). In this case, another line of literature was used to strengthen attachment theory. But that is not the same as actively looking for theories and evidence-bases that raise questions about attachment theory. For example, what do we do with evidence from ethnographic work that shows that children in certain rural communities are cared for by more than 20 different people a day (Meehan & Hawks, 2013)? Reformulations of attachment theory have already allowed for multiple attachment figures, but 20? Are these children attached to the entire community? Can this still be described as "selective" or "preferential" attachment? And what about the omnipresence of juvenile caregivers in certain regions, some mere preschoolers themselves? Can they be attachment figures? In other words: It would be worth actively looking for literatures that provide very different pictures of caregiving from the ones we see in our Western labs and not just trying to squeeze their findings into attachment theory, but also using them to deepen our understanding of attachment, even if it means rejecting part of the original theory's claims.

4. How can the field of attachment research protect itself against potential confirmation bias when it comes to universality claims? Scholars strive for objectivity, but confirmation bias is a very powerful human tendency when it comes to processing information about deeply entrenched beliefs, including among scientists (Hergovich, Schott, & Burger, 2010). What can the field learn from scientific and practical insights into the mechanisms that foster entrenchment of ideas, and biased information processing? There is evidence that exposure to and continued engagement with a variety of disciplinary perspectives in higher education enhances critical thinking, and reduces the development of strong convictions regarding the "truth" about the world through more advanced epistemological skills (e.g., Ivanitskaya, Clark, Montgomery, & Primeau, 2002). The early specialization in a particular theoretical framework in a graduate program embedded in a research group that works exclusively

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or primarily from that starting point may not be the best way to foster the development of new critical questions.

Attempting to answer these questions would likely open up many worthwhile avenues for discussion as well as innovative empirical and theoretical work that will inspire future generations of researchers interested in cultural processes in the formation of caregiver–child attachment bonds. Attachment research as a field can only grow if it is willing to entertain uncomfortable questions. We have seen growth in attachment theory through engagement with other fields, for example by acknowledging that the original theory was too mother-centric, that adaptation can be seen in a broader sense than just that of secure attachment, and that we simply do not yet know what processes are hidden in the transmission gap from caregiver attachment representation to child attachment quality. However, we must also allow future generations of researchers to answer such questions in ways that do not sit well with attachment theory. Answers that mean that attachment theory might need to be more modest about its claims and leave room for new generations to generate other theories to take over where the original framework simply does not deliver. Let us be their mentors who admit that our understanding of key issues in questions of universality versus culture-specificity of attachment is inadequate because the scope of our evidence base is incomplete and insufficient. Let us be brave enough to say to our students (paraphrasing Doris Lessing, 1962/1976): What you are being taught is the product of a particular subculture in which your teachers grew up, and that is likely to be an inherently self-perpetuating system. Because history shows us the impermanence of paradigms of thought, we encourage you to seek education outside of this subculture and develop your own judgment. In the same vein, although the conclusion of the chapter on culture in the *Handbook of Attachment* that "until further notice, attachment theory may . . . claim cross-cultural validity" (Mesman et al., 2016, p. 809) is attractive, it would be more elegant and productive to rephrase that to say, "Until further notice, we need to ask more critical questions before we can firmly claim cross-cultural validity of attachment theory."

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How International Research on Parenting Advances Understanding of Child Development

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ABSTRACT—International research on parenting and child development can advance our understanding of similarities and differences in how parenting is related to children's development across countries. Challenges to conducting international research include operationalizing culture, disentangling effects within and between countries, and balancing emic and etic perspectives. Benefits of international research include testing whether findings regarding parenting and child development replicate across diverse samples, incorporating cultural and contextual diversity to foster more inclusive and representative research samples and investigators than has typically occurred, and understanding how children develop in proximal parenting and family and distal international contexts.

KEYWORDS—child development; culture; international research; parenting

Child Development Perspectives

Although scholars have long recognized that child development is situated in broad cultural contexts (1–4), theoretical models of culture and child development have advanced recently. For example, ecocultural perspectives consider cultural pathways consisting of routines that are central to parenting and children's development in different settings (5). Although most empirical studies of parenting and child development include children primarily from North America and Western Europe (6–8), findings from diverse international contexts have challenged theories of parenting and child development. For example, some tenets of attachment theory rely on Western orientations of sensitivity, competence, and security that are regarded differently in non-Western settings (9).

In this article, we examine what international research on parenting and child development can teach us about how parenting is related to children's development as well as broader issues in the role of international research for understanding children's development. Embedded throughout the article and this body of research are complexities involved in situating families within cultures versus countries (10). International research draws on samples and scholars from different countries, yet those countries may share cultural similarities, and many cultures can be represented within any given country. In explicating how international research on parenting can inform our understanding of children's development, we draw on our own research in the Parenting Across Cultures (PAC) project, a longitudinal study of mothers, fathers, and children from 13 cultural groups in 9 countries (China, Colombia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States), and findings from other international research. We also consider whether relations between predictors of parenting and children's development outcomes are similar across countries or whether culture and country moderate these relations. And we discuss challenges and next steps in international research.

COUNTRY AS A MODERATOR OF LINKS BETWEEN PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES

In international contexts, parenting can be conceptualized as a 2×2 matrix based on the forms and functions of parenting, which can be either the same or different across countries (11, 12). If both the form and function of parenting are the same across countries, we see cross-country similarity. If both the form and function of parenting differ across countries, we see country specificity. The same form of parenting may serve different functions in different countries, or different forms of parenting may serve the same function. In many respects, finding differences across countries is not surprising because such differences capture much of what we typically think of when considering cultural diversity. Yet despite these differences, a common parental goal across cultures is raising children to be productive and successful members of society, even if the definitions of what it means to be productive and successful, and the specific parenting strategies used to attain these goals, differ between countries (13).

One reason a particular form of parenting may relate to children's adjustment in different ways across countries is that the meanings delivered by the form of parenting may differ. We examined correlations between parents' warmth and behavioral control and found that some countries (Kenya and Jordan) had generally moderate to high positive correlations between these two forms of parenting, whereas other countries (Sweden and United States) had generally modest and sometimes negative correlations between the two (14). When children interpret their parents' controlling behaviors as indicating warmth, parental control may be associated with more positive developmental outcomes than when children interpret parental control as a sign of negativity.

Indeed, children interpret their parents' behaviors within the larger context in which they are used. For example, children's perceptions of mothers' hostility mediate the link between harsh verbal discipline and children's anxiety and aggression in China, India, Philippines, and Thailand; these relations are moderated by children's perceptions of the normativeness of harsh verbal discipline so the effects of harsh verbal discipline were more adverse when children perceived that form of discipline as non-normative than when they perceived it as normative (15). In addition, more corporal punishment predicts more anxiety among children across countries, but the adverse effect of corporal punishment is more pronounced in countries in which corporal punishment is less normative (16) and authoritarian parenting attitudes are less common (17). In China, India, Italy, Kenya, Philippines, and Thailand, mothers' use of corporal punishment, expressing disappointment, and yelling were related to more aggression in children, whereas giving a timeout, using corporal punishment, expressing disappointment, and shaming were related to greater symptoms of anxiety in children, with some moderation of these associations based on children's perceptions of the normativeness of each parental behavior (18).

In other research, cultural contexts shape how parenting relates to children's development. In Egypt, India, Iran, and Pakistan, maternal authoritarianism is not associated with mothers' negative thoughts and feelings about their children as it is in Western Europe; maternal negativity rather than authoritarianism is related to lower self-esteem among children in Egypt, India, Iran, and Pakistan (19). These examples suggest how country moderates the link between parenting and children's outcomes depending on the meaning children impart to parents' behavior. Children's conceptions derive at least in part from norms and expectations gleaned from the broader context in which families are situated.

Despite evidence that in some domains, country moderates the link between parenting and children's outcomes, overall we have found many similarities in the ways in which parenting is related to children's development. For example, in all nine countries in our PAC study, children who perceived their

parents as being more rejecting had more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and less optimal school performance and prosocial behavior across 3 years (20). Similarly, within countries as well as between countries, parents who were warmer, less neglectful, and more controlling, and who had attitudes that were more authoritarian also had greater expectations regarding children's family obligations (21). In other research, countries are similar in processes linking parenting and children's outcomes. For example, parental support, psychological control, and behavioral control were related consistently to adolescents' social initiative, depression, and antisocial behavior in Bangladesh, Bosnia, China, Colombia, Germany, India, Palestine, South Africa, and the United States (22). Similarly, in a meta-analysis of 43 studies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America, perceptions of parents as being rejecting rather than accepting were related to more psychological maladjustment among children in all countries (23). Thus, international research is as important in understanding which processes indicate similarities in parenting and child development as in understanding differences.

CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Logistical, scientific, and conceptual challenges complicate international research. We highlight four challenges: operationalizing culture, handling measurement invariance and biases, disentangling effects within and between countries, and balancing emic and etic perspectives. First, knowing how to operationalize culture is an ongoing challenge (24). Because the field has fewer measures of culture than of parenting and child development outcomes, comparisons are often made between demographic groups such as countries or ethnic groups within a country. Representativeness of the samples presents additional challenges if the goal is generalizing and comparing across cultural groups (25). Some of the defining features of culture that characterized earlier research, such as focusing on individualism versus collectivism, have fallen out of favor because they are regarded as too simplistic to characterize entire groups, and because individuals within groups can have both individualist and collectivist qualities (26). One approach to defining and operationalizing culture is to assess beliefs and behaviors in specific domains that are the focus of the particular study. For example, parents' authoritarian attitudes or expectations regarding children's family obligations vary across groups and might be key cultural constructs. Even if these kinds of cultural dimensions vary between groups, it can also be useful to assess them to characterize variation within cultures. To the extent that variation between cultures is more common than variation within cultures, one could draw conclusions regarding how much that belief or behavior defines a particular cultural group.

Comparisons across demographic or geographic categories can be problematic because they can lead to stereotyping members of a category (social address) and do not easily handle cross-group links (e.g., with immigrant families or marriages between members of different groups). The situation with international refugees, who now exceed 60 million worldwide (27), illustrates these complexities: In characterizing refugee populations, one could refer to their country of origin or country of destination, but many do not know if the country of destination is permanent (28). In addition, many children and parents are separated, leading to a sense of ambiguous loss (29) and adding further complexity to characterizing families as belonging to one country or another. In this way, *culture* may not be equated with *country*, and immigration (along with other factors related to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, region, and the like) distributes many cultural groups throughout a given country. In addition, without clear hypotheses regarding why differences between groups would exist, researchers do not know how to interpret group differences when they find them and simply speculate.

Instead, researchers should develop rich and nuanced measures of culture that allow us to examine a range of cultural factors (as opposed to categorical demographic groups) as moderators of links between parenting and children's outcomes. In addition, mixed-methods research that analyzes qualitative data on in-depth cultural dimensions will help us understand variations in parenting and children's development within and between countries. What constitutes *data* and *evidence* may also vary across groups, particularly in cultures that are oriented toward storytelling, where parents' recounting of personal narratives to children may be a tool of socialization (30). Therefore, attempts to operationalize culture should be sensitive to different groups' understanding of evidence.

Second, international researchers are challenged by the need to demonstrate measurement invariance, which tests whether quantitative measures operate in the same way in each group (31, 32). Rigorously establishing invariance can be difficult even with two groups, and it becomes more complicated when dealing with many groups (33). We have used a meta-analytic approach as an alternative to demonstrating measurement invariance because meta-analyses do not assume that the same measures have been used in all studies, making it possible to obtain an overall effect as well as variance of the effect that might be attributable to measurement (17). Furthermore, self-report data can be compromised by factors such as social desirability biases that might differ across countries. For both mothers and fathers in our PAC study, socially desirable responding was widespread in all nine countries and countries varied minimally (although China was higher than the cross-country grand mean and Sweden was lower; 34). Measuring and controlling for social desirability biases is one way to address threats to the validity of self-report data.

Third, variance both within and between countries is important for many (perhaps most) parenting and child development variables. Nesting hierarchical data with families within

countries makes it possible to conduct multilevel analyses that parse variance within and between countries, but tests between countries are often underpowered, even in studies with many countries (35). With few countries, only large effects between countries will be detected, but we have found such effects in a number of analyses of the PAC study as well as in analyses using other data sets. For example, using data from 24 low- and middle-income countries that participated in the UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, country of residence accounted for between 27 and 38% of the variance in mothers' belief in the necessity of using corporal punishment to raise a child properly, a large effect (36). Yet even with only nine countries in the PAC study, we detected differences between countries that diverged from differences within countries for predictors of physical abuse and neglect of children (37). Researchers beginning international studies should consider how many countries are enough and whether the disadvantages of low power at the country level are outweighed by disadvantages of lacking internationally comparable data to inform understanding of developmental processes.

Fourth, the field is challenged by balancing emic and etic perspectives (i.e., the views of individuals within the cultural group and individuals outside the cultural group, respectively). Adopting an emic perspective provides a cultural insider's understanding of processes that are important within that culture but that might not be fully appreciated by a cultural outsider. Such processes might be excluded from consideration if an outsider imposed a framework in one culture that was developed in another. For example, *guan* has been described as a way Chinese parents train children that is distinct from authoritarian parenting used by European American parents (38). Likewise, indigenous concepts of *hiya* (behaving with propriety and dignity with respect to the family) and *utang na loob* (referring to a lifelong debt stemming from respect and gratitude toward another person) shape family relationships in the Philippines (39). The concept of *omoluwabi*, derived from the Yoruba people of Nigeria, exemplifies a holistic approach to education that emphasizes loyalty to family obligations and traditions in interpersonal interactions (40). These indigenous concepts of parenting generated within specific cultural groups may not generalize well to other cultural groups and would not be understood by applying a frame of reference developed outside those groups. However, adopting an emic perspective can make it more difficult to investigate whether and how similar processes apply across diverse cultural groups. The PAC study has bridged emic and etic approaches by collaborating with scientists from different cultural groups who share their perspectives and cultural insights, translate, and jointly investigate constructs of common interest across countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Our work with the PAC study has helped us develop the following suggestions that can inform others' efforts in international, collaborative research. First, in addition to broadening the base of participants to include diverse families from around the world, researchers should broaden the base of scholars contributing to developmental science to include researchers from around the world. It is not sufficient for researchers from one country to collect data in another and publish the findings without collaborators from that country because doing so risks losing the cultural insider's perspective in collecting data and interpreting findings. Second, although technological advances in videoconferencing and online collaboration have helped sustain international collaboration, the importance of face-to-face meetings cannot be underestimated. Meeting in person enables collaborators to build personal relationships that are vital for allowing each person to have a voice in the research process and keeps the research team on track by allowing opportunities to discuss issues such as in-depth cultural adaptation of measures; it is difficult to explain the subtleties of culture via e-mail. In the PAC study, the entire investigative team meets annually, rotating sites among participating countries. Meeting in each country gives us the opportunity to engage with the local community through conferences we host at collaborating universities (to which faculty, students, and professionals who work with families are invited). We have also met with local families (some of whom have participated in our research). These steps also reduce cultural hegemony by distributing leadership responsibilities among the international team. Finally, in conducting international research, balancing standardization and flexibility is necessary to yield findings that can be compared (if that is the goal) and that are gathered in a way that is sensitive to local contexts. For example, bringing laptop computers into homes to conduct interviews may work in some locales but be dangerous to interviewers in others because they might be robbed; in these cases, having interviewers conduct their work with paper and pencil rather than computers, or allowing participants to come to a different setting rather than interviewing them in their homes, are possible solutions.

Given the challenges that conducting international research presents and the inconsistent patterns of findings across countries regarding links between parenting and children's outcomes, one may question whether the advantages of trying to understand parenting and child development from an international perspective outweigh the disadvantages. We conclude that they do, for at least three reasons. First, the importance of replicating findings is a hot topic in developmental and psychological science (41, 42); international research provides a meaningful way to test whether findings on parenting and child development replicate across diverse contexts. If the findings do not replicate, this suggests the need to dig deeper to understand what mechanisms account for the differences. Second, developmental scientists have become increasingly aware of the need to acknowledge cultural and contextual diversity and international perspectives that foster more inclusive and representative participants and investigators than has been typical in the past (see

the Strategic Plan of the Society for Research in Child Development, www.srcd.org/about-us/strategic-plan/strategic-goals). Conducting international, collaborative research is one way to accomplish this goal. Finally, as with the adage from the intervention field that the best way to understand how something works is to try to change it, in the field of developmental science, the best way to understand how children develop may be to study them in proximal parenting and distal international contexts to understand the many levels of influence that scaffold development.

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