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Abstract

The Whiting vision of a holistic, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural understanding of human development continues today. The Whiting team approach had an ethos, core intellectual projects, and ways of working—their practices, norms, goals, and values. The Whitings believed that the cultural learning environment (CLE) is a powerful influence on development, but not the only one. The Whitings asked descriptive, process, causal, and functional questions and worked with international teams on holistic studies of local communities which then were used for comparative studies. They were open to a wide range of theories, used integrated, mixed methods, shared their data, and included local students and researchers as apprentices or colleagues. Their research ethos was egalitarian, pragmatic, and generative. The articles in this special section exemplify the continuing relevance of this model. There are new units of analysis for understanding CLEs in globalizing settings across space and time, new biological measures, and new kinds of reciprocal international team collaborations. New technical aides to measurement are available, such as the use of digital video, the use of new research designs, and a greater concern with policy, practice, and intervention. The conceptual framework of the CLE continues to produce new empirical evidence in the United States, the European Union, and around the world.

Keywords

John & Beatrice Whiting, cultural learning environment, cross-cultural, comparative, human development

This special section addresses the contributions of Beatrice (1914–2004) and John Whiting (1908–1999) to the understanding of child and adolescent development in cross-cultural context. Bea and John Whiting profoundly influenced the social scientific study of childhood and

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adolescence and promoted the deeper infusion of cultural understanding into contemporary work in psychology and education (D'Andrade, 1994; Edwards, 2007, in press; Ember, 1999; Weisner & Edwards, 2002). The impact of their work has permeated many fields, particularly cross-cultural psychology, psychological anthropology, developmental psychology and human development, comparative education, and early childhood education, through their scholarly collaborations as well as the continuing work of their many students. The contributors to this volume are all senior scholars whose work continues the Whiting tradition of conducting research on socialization and child development in cultural context.

Together, the articles in this volume examine the theoretical contributions of the Whitings using the results of their three major international projects: (a) the Six Culture Study of the Socialization of the Child (J. W. M. Whiting & Whiting, 1975), (b) the Child Development Research Unit (CDRU) at the University of Nairobi, and (c) the Harvard Comparative Adolescence Project. Other projects also are described in several of the articles. The special issue examines central themes, theories, concepts, and methods in the Whitings' research that continue to influence research on the role of the cultural learning environment (CLE) in development.

The Whitings established an ethos, intellectual projects, and ways of working—a set of practices, norms, goals, and values constituting their own CLE—that characterize their approach. The Whiting vision of a holistic, interdisciplinary, international, cross-cultural understanding of human development is worth appreciating today. The Whitings' projects remain among the most ambitious attempts to systematically document and explain child rearing and children's social behavior across cultures.

Robert LeVine's article outlines the history of the Six Cultures project as initiated in the 1950s and through to the publications of the 1960s and 1970s. He notes that the vision of the original planning team was truly expansive, envisioning 100 field sites around the world, not just the 6 accomplished, and anticipated ongoing research collaborations at those sites—both local and international collaborations. The intellectual project planned a worldwide comparative research network for the study of human development including measurement innovation within and across sites, student training, and continuous international scholarly collaboration. The goals of this project remain, even if those 100 field stations were not funded.

The articles in this special section describe some of the experiences and research findings from those participating in the "second and third waves" of the initial Six Cultures vision, particularly the second wave, the CDRU in Kenya, which began in 1967 and continued through 1974, when it became the Bureau of Educational Research at Kenyatta National University, Nairobi. The CDRU was founded as an international collaboration funded by the Carnegie Corporation, the University of Nairobi, and subsequently Kenyatta University College (Carnegie Quarterly, 1979). The structure of the CDRU exemplifies many of the Whiting model features. In fact, 7 of the 10 articles in this special section have authors who were participants and/or senior advisors in the CDRU (Edwards, C. Ember, LeVine, Munroe, Super, Harkness, Weisner, and Worthman).

A fundamental point of view across these essays is that the local cultural community where a child is born and will grow up is among the most important influences on the life that child will live because it defines the pathways in life that child will have available to follow. (I would suggest that the CLE arguably *is* the single most important influence.) The child's local cultural World, has a deeply important influence on parenting and socialization. As the contributors to this special section show, the idea of the CLE, like many of the Whitings' other key ideas, has permeated contemporary child and life span development research and evolved in productive ways in the hands of current researchers. The articles by Edwards and Bloch, New, and Worthman in particular review these current influences. Edwards and Bloch define and describe the CLE in their article and discuss its influence in contemporary human development research in anthropology and psychology.

The Whitings' comparative team research model, familiar to many *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* authors and readers, served first and foremost as an organizational system for generating and testing conjectures about the CLE and how or whether it influenced socialization and child behavior. All authors in this special section trained in such teams and subsequently have led interdisciplinary teams themselves. The Whitings and their colleagues and students focused on the CLEs that constituted a child's everyday activities in a particular community and strove to measure those environments, the behavior settings that constituted them, and the children, families, and caretakers in them. Heidi Keller argues that an important aspect of the psychocultural model was its pioneering role in linking cultural approaches with modern evolutionary theory and ecological models and findings. Carol Worthman, a member of the CDRU and Harvard Adolescence Projects, tracks the history of ideas from the Whiting model through three current conceptual frameworks (developmental niche, ecocultural theory, and the bioecocultural microniche).

Of course these research programs did not simply assume that the ecocultural context and its CLE for children were the most important influence on human development. Actually, the core shared belief was that there were *multiple* determinants of children's behavior and parenting and that all of these determinants had to be understood with respect to the surrounding cultural context. Those cross-cultural settings were used to search for universals (e.g., universals in social behavior, cognition, gendered behavior, and age or developmental differences). Deborah Best's article reviews the history of work on gender socialization from this perspective, and Edwards's work on gender with Bea Whiting remains foundational in the field. The Embers' and Munroe's articles on male initiation ceremonies and pregnancy symptoms, respectively, assess multiple theories of gender development. Seymour emphasizes the interest of Bea Whiting in the changing lives and important influence of women as parents and community innovators over generational time spans. Edwards and Whiting's (2004) longitudinal study of Ngecha in Kenya also illustrates this theme.

Fieldwork as Part of a Team and Part of the Research Social Contract

Participation in the CDRU, and in many of the other team research projects described in these articles, was predicated on a kind of social contract research model. All team members had support from others and were expected in turn to contribute to the larger project by describing their community systematically, collecting child behavior observations, and developing collaborations with local students and scholars. For the CDRU, for example, each researcher selected a field site somewhere in Kenya that fit with his or her research interests. Our research proposals perhaps had specified a general region we planned to study in Kenya and a set of topics of specific interest (sociolinguistic processes, gender development, cognitive development, urbanization and culture change, social behaviors), but the actual communities were selected after arrival and some scouting around. In every case, researchers carefully identified the group of households, or the primary sampling unit (PSU), to be included for systematic observations of children's behavior in this CLE. Our research "contract" was to describe our community ethnographically, focused on the topics of special interest to us, and then collect data for use by each of us and shared by the team. In Weisner's case, for example, the topic was the consequences of rural-urban migration on parenting, socially distributed caretaking of children, including sibling caretaking, and associated children's developmental outcomes. In Edwards's case, moral development and gender were the focus.

A second contract involved conducting a careful census of our households and then undertaking systematic behavior observations of a sample of children aged 3 to 11 years old from within that set of households. Those observations would then be contributed to a data pool, available for

comparative analysis once they were systematically coded for context and for children's social behavior. These data and ethnographic descriptions were then synthesized and analyzed in, for example, *Children of Different Worlds: The Formation of Social Behavior* (B. B. Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Bea Whiting compared the social and moral meaning of these contributions of our field data to the potlatch: The more you redistribute and reciprocate your wealth of good data, the greater honor and recognition would come to you!

A third social contract was the one we made with our local communities and with our Kenyan research teams. An explicit goal of each research team was to train Kenyan students and develop mutual collaborations with them so that they could become the next generation of social science researchers. These collaborations emphasized the importance of indigenous perspectives and local knowledge and expertise as well as systematic training and further education for students. We hired local students to help with observations and other tasks as part of these local community sample teams. We were encouraged to analyze our data while we were in the field, check back on missing information, and get feedback from other students and Kenyan colleagues. Edwards and Whiting's (2004) Ngecha book, and *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change* (Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997), for example, are jointly authored studies with European, U.S., and African contributors.

Research Team Practices, Norms, Goals, and Values

Some common research themes, professional practices, and professional values continue from the Whiting team approach and can be found in the work of the contributors to this issue and many other colleagues influenced by the Whiting tradition. One such theme is illustrated in John Whiting's description of his training at Yale. In an autobiographic essay, John Whiting (1994) describes his first postgraduate seminar, known as the Monday Night Group:

[At Yale, in the 1930s I had] my first experience participating in a group that made a conscious attempt to develop rules for collaborative research. A taboo on what was labeled "point making" was agreed upon. No one could claim or imply that his discipline had the exclusive path to the truth. (p. 23)

This proscription on "disciplinary protectionism," while at the same time providing a model for research and theory in one's own discipline (whether anthropology, psychology, education, or otherwise), characterized the CDRU research teams 35 years later and continues to guide other programs today, more than 70 years later.

Other norms for collaborative research that developed in CDRU and other teams include egalitarianism and pragmatism. Everyone at the table is one of the team, part of the conversation, and able to suggest ideas and present evidence. The egalitarian ethic ensured that all at the table had a voice. Pragmatism and egalitarianism also influenced the use of mixed methods. The principle was that many methods for gathering data, if done well and as part of the overall research program, could offer relevant evidence. We all recognized the distinction between having an idea or hypothesis and collecting the evidence to show if it was supported or not (J. W. M. Whiting, 1994).

Bob LeVine (1973, p. 560) commented more than 35 years ago on the fact that John Whiting certainly was neither a didactic teacher lecturing his students and colleagues very much nor a pedagogue using references and libraries. He also describes the early genesis of this model of team research, and the discussion and debate within such teams, as a climate encouraging "science as conjecture-and-refutation, conducted in a playful context that permitted controversy without the inhibiting fear of narcissistic injury which haunts most seminar rooms; the stimulation was

enormous" (LeVine, 1973, p. 561, cited in J. W. M. Whiting, 1994, p. 27). Although incidents of narcissism and defensiveness of course were not eliminated, the Whittings' model encouraged open discussion.

Other characteristics of this research teams approach flowed from these charter principles. Spouses who had relevant training or interest were included in discussions and often in fieldwork, for example. At that time, the inclusion of spouses usually meant that women were important contributors to fieldwork, analysis, and writing. This partnership approach (as well as the encouragement of diversity in skills and intellectual orientations among students and collaborators; LeVine, 1973, p. 562) was a major contribution of Bea Whiting, fully supported by John.

We held seminars while in the field with whomever was back from their field sites in Kenya. These rather informal sessions included African research assistants and students. At that time, the goal was to blend insider (African staff) and outsider (American and British researchers and students) perspectives from each project and to provide scholarships for African staff to receive further social science training at Harvard University. There were few PhD-level professional researchers in human development in sub-Saharan Africa at that time. As the CDRU report to the Carnegie Corporation funders put it, "The first and most important step in breaking out of the bounds of western culture [so as to establish a general social science including all peoples of the world] is to train a cadre of non-western behavioral scientists" (J. W. M. Whiting & Whiting, 1970, p. 1).

Worthman and Keller review and extend the Whittings' theoretical frameworks in their essays. The Embers, for example, provide a comparison of two explanations of male initiation ceremonies, one focused on psychological conflict in boys and the other focused on training for warfare roles. The results indicate that a combination of these explanations predicts male initiation better than either explanation by itself. Munroe explores a wide range of theory in his study of men's experience of pregnancy-like symptoms. Many theories of the genesis and patterns of social behavior of children and caretakers were employed by those of us on the Kenya study teams as well. Most often, some combination of theories useful for accounting for our field data won the day, as is evident in Beatrice Whiting's (1980) synthesis of theoretical frameworks for the development of social behavior. An integrative approach to theory also is seen in the pathbreaking studies of gender and social behavior (B. B. Whiting & Edwards, 1973, 1988, pp. 1-5), where biological, cognitive-developmental, and sociocultural processes of socialization all contribute to development:

Far from denying biological and cognitive influences on the development of sex differences, we wished to examine the development of children's social behavior in broad cultural perspective and to determine exactly how, when, and where biological and cognitive factors seem to be operative. (B. B. Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 3)

John Whiting claimed that he saw scientific theories as a set of instructions or directions about how things work. This pragmatic theoretical research framework, according to John Whiting himself, had some roots in his own early socialization experiences some 80 years earlier. Whiting recalls that his father refused to read directions when assembling farm machinery on Martha's Vineyard (Massachusetts, USA), and John did likewise, preferring "what is right and what works irrespective of what the directions say" (J. W. M. Whiting, 1994, p. 16). This remained his everyday definition of empirical pragmatism and extends to his view of theoretical articles. However, this is not the full picture because both John and Beatrice had clear ideas about what theories and processes would help account for people's values, beliefs, and behavior. John was an early and strong adherent of behaviorism and psychoanalytic theories, for example, during those very years at Yale he describes! Christoph Heinicke, an early student and

collaborator with the Whitings, also recalls the intense interest in empirical testing of the psychoanalytic and specific personality theories of the time and John's commitment to understanding processes of self-regulation, individuation, and internal and external control in CLEs around the world.

In considering theoretical explanations, the Whitings typically came to consider multiple frameworks because that is what was often required to account for complex phenomena, and they took very seriously the task of considering the best fit between theory and data in generating interpretations for team-generated data. Studies moved back and forth among descriptive, process, causal, and functional questions, using a variety of theory, methods, and modes of description as needed. Beatrice Whiting led the increasing emphasis over time on the importance of field behavior observations in context, complemented by in-depth interviews focused on the ethnotheories and mental models of local community members. Many colleagues and students have extended the research framework and methods more deeply into matters of ethnopsychology, interpretation, and experiences of parents, children, and community members (e.g., Harkness & Super, 1995; Shweder et al., 2006).

These research teams were part of the broader naturalistic, empirical research tradition in the social sciences, which influenced our ways of operating and the use of integrated mixed methods. Extensive use of multiple methods was and remains the default research practice. We shared skepticism about the reliance on only one method. Donald Campbell commented (originally in the 1960s, but still largely true today) that using one method alone (especially survey or questionnaire methods) is flawed as a way to fully represent the world, and only mixed methods can rectify this.

Today, the dominant mass of social science research is based upon interviews and questionnaires. We lament this overdependence on a single, fallible method. Interviews and questionnaires intrude as a foreign element into the social setting they would describe, they create as well as measure attitudes, they elicit atypical roles and responses, they are limited to those who are accessible and will cooperate, and the responses obtained are produced in part by dimensions of individual differences irrelevant to the topic at hand. *But the principal objection is that they are used alone.* No research method is without bias.

Interviews and questionnaires must be supplemented by methods testing the same social science variables but having *different* methodological weaknesses. (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, Sechrest, & Grove, 1981, p. 1, italics original)

The Whiting Tradition Today

Although we still do not have those 100 field sites that John and Beatrice Whiting envisioned to test hypotheses about human development, there are now vastly more scholars and institutions around the world interested in mutual collaborative research and education compared to the situation 40 years ago. The contributions of international social scientists to the study of comparative human development are ensured today, even though the CDRU could not produce many in the early 1970s (Carnegie Quarterly, 1979). Ideally, funding streams will flow increasingly in multiple directions among research groups around the world. Might we even hope for a reawakened understanding of the advantages for scientific and economic progress of supporting a 21st-century version of the 100 field sites, integrating local, indigenous expertise, funded by consortia of international, national, and private agencies and foundations?!

Many extensions of the Whiting psychocultural model as a framework for the comparative study of the CLE exist today. New units of analysis for understanding the CLE across space and time will be important, for example (Tudge, 2008). In addition to such units as the nation-state,

tribe, ethnic group, cultural community, and PSU, what can and should such units be today? Globalization, the often dramatic lowering of social, economic, and technological barriers to the flow of people, goods, and information, provides many possibilities. We can study multigenerational communities across both time and place around the world and follow immigrant families and communities in the sending, transitional, and receiving communities. We have new measures for assessing shared cultural models and cultural consensus for use with population-based communities that often are dispersed across urban, rural, and international locations yet may well share some of the same cultural knowledge and practices. Seymour, for example, emphasizes the value of taking a long-term approach to field work, as she has done in her work in North India, a technique the Whitings always advocated, and incorporates family and local history as well as culture in studying three generations of women. Raghavan, Harkness, and Super take advantage of the "natural experiment" of changed community of residence among Asian Indian immigrant mothers and Euro-American mothers to examine the role of parental ethnotheories independent of their contexts of origin.

The PSU unit, as defined by the Whitings, was a geographically local, micro-population-based unit. Applying the concept of the PSU to non-geographically based samples is a significant extension of the PSU notion. To do so, however, still requires the careful assessment of shared cultural beliefs and practices within the group, as was done in the Whitings' studies. Their work never assumed homogeneity but instead measured the extent of shared beliefs and practices. Such an approach would include comparing key activity settings (mealtimes, tasks, classrooms, holidays, etc.) of children and caretakers, tracking the full daily routines of children, assessing reported and observed social networks across local sites and creating other methods for analyzing new forms of CLEs. The "custom complex," for example, an early construct developed by the Whitings, emphasizes that ecocultural features can form into patterns of behavior and belief, inherited from historical traditions, stored as cultural models and interpretative frames, and reflected in cultural ecology. The application of the custom complex notion to contemporary populations is an extension of this construct (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

The theoretical models in use today, described by Worthman and Keller, among others, are dynamic and build on the Whitings' psychocultural model. Today's models have extended the original by studying children in behavior settings in the CLE (as the Whitings did) and considering those behavior settings as a linked set of activities on a pathway through time. The concept of the cultural pathway is a model of children, parents, and others as active, engaged participants, guided by values, goals, strategies, plans, and tactics as they negotiate their life in the face of the opportunities and constraints of ecology, culture, and developmental stage (Edwards & Whiting, 2004; Harkness & Super, 1995; Weisner, 2002). The cultural models, ethnopsychology, and subjective experiences of participants in the CLE are more central in contemporary research using the CLE theories than perhaps was true of the Whitings' earlier formulations, though these constructs were important then as well.

There are video, audio, and Internet technologies available today unimagined at the time of Six Cultures and its successor studies. John and Bea Whiting, if alive today, would be at the forefront in using digital video for behavior observations of children and caretakers or using continuous in-home recording of family and neighborhood daily life and routines. This has been realized in projects such as Elinor Ochs's intensive studies of Los Angeles middle-class families, the Sloan/UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families (<http://www.celf.ucla.edu>). The path-breaking but laborious use of hand-written behavior observations could now incorporate much richer and less obtrusive digital video sampling of children's everyday social behaviors. Sociolinguistic studies using analyses of nuanced language in local contexts are now available through new technology in a way that of course was not possible 35 years ago. The use of standardized behavior observational coding categories remains a powerful tool but now can be supplemented

with local behavior and cultural categories, which can be compared and contrasted through the use of qualitative analysis software.

Likewise, gene–environment interactions in development, and the new findings from neuroscience regarding the consequences of early childhood stimulation and experiences are now open to empirical study in ways that the Whitings often envisioned even though they did not have the available tools and theories for biosocial studies that we have today (Hruschka, Lende, & Worthman, 2005). The same can be said regarding the new breakthroughs in biological markers and assessments using only cheek swabs and other nonobtrusive biological measures of stress and genetic markers. Recall that John Whiting, Tom Landauer (Landauer & Whiting, 1964), Worthman, and many others pioneered research linking biological and cultural processes influencing human development long before many of these tools existed.

It is noteworthy that many of the authors represented in this issue, and others trained by the Whitings, have blended basic research with studies relevant to policy and practice, using mixed research methods (e.g., Duncan, Huston, & Weisner, 2007; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1988; Harkness & Super, 1996; Weisner, 2005). Rebecca New, for example, spells out applications in the field of early childhood education, where the Whiting approach has provided a more sophisticated framework for considering the ways in which developmentally appropriate practice involves attunement to issues of cultural diversity. New argues that the cultural and contextual approaches in that field today came, to a significant degree, from the Whitings' research paradigm. Keller has founded a research and policy center as part of her research program in Germany. The CLE is used in all of this work, as are mixed methods. However, policy, practice, and applied research were never a focus of the Whitings' research projects. Their interest was in basic social science and in the training of new generations of researchers rather than in carrying out work with direct applications or policy implications.

One important implication of the use of the CLE for understanding policy is to focus more on the settings around children and families, less on individuals. Can settings be changed, which can in turn improve the well-being of individuals? The questions for policy or intervention then focus on the activity settings around the children and families that we would like to change, which we believe can improve their well-being. What would be necessary and possible to actually change those settings? What person–setting interactions would need to be the focus of such change efforts, and how likely are the change efforts actually to alter those settings in a particular CLE, in the service of improving the well-being of the child, parent, or family? This approach is very much an extension of the Whiting model. The essays by New, Edwards and Bloch, Raghavan et al., and Keller suggest some of the ways the model has been extended.

It is possible today to study human development and policy initiatives in the context of experimental or quasi-experimental designs, designs that the Whitings and many collaborators and students were not able to use in their own work. Such designs add to our ability to make the strongest possible causal inferences. Where experimental designs are not possible (and where natural experiments are not available either), we can still use carefully chosen comparison samples to infer probable causes from patterns of associations across communities or in various matching or case-comparison designs, which also were used by the Whitings and some of the contributors to this special issue.

Conclusion

The articles by Best, Edwards and Bloch, Keller, and Worthman suggest many potential connections between relevant work in cross-cultural psychology and the holistic construct of the CLE, with its emphasis on cultural models, local relationships, and subjective experience linked in turn to the behavior setting and then to the wider cultural ecology. *Cultural*

Transmission (Schönplflug, 2009), for example, reviews a range of conceptual frameworks and empirical work linking individual-level and ecocultural variables in cross-cultural psychology. *Cultural Transmission* emphasizes the complexity, bidirectionality, and selective nature of cultural transmission. There are many potential connections among such work, the Whiting model and its descendents, and the CLE construct ready to be explored. The same is true for connections with cultural psychology and its emphasis on shared patterns, interpretative processes, and mental models that mediate emotions, moral beliefs and practices, and cognition (Shweder et al., 2006).

The differences in methods, concepts, and findings across these different approaches to doing comparative work of course deserve debate and empirical test. However, all these approaches share a common intellectual project: to take culture and context deeply and seriously into account in studies of human development. That is our most important common ground. The default, unfortunately, remains that cultural practices and context are not taken into account at all, are bracketed out of consideration after a cursory mention, or are measured by very distal social address categories. The CLE conceptual framework is a contemporary best practice alternative to any of those defaults.

The approaches pioneered by the Whittings and their colleagues and students are characterized by broad and varied theories; egalitarian, pragmatic, empirical, and interdisciplinary research teams; mixed methods; and attention to systematic assessment of the CLE and its influences on human development and the mind. Edwards and Bloch review how some of the Whittings' ideas have fared in anthropology and psychology in their article: They report that some have fared better than others. Nonetheless, the Whiting model is into its third generation, and its iterations are still active. The psychocultural approach and the CLE framework remain influential in psychology and in human development research more generally, as demonstrated by the articles in this special issue.

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Bio

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