

## Culture, Development, and Diversity: Expectable Pluralism, Conflict, and Similarity

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**Abstract** Cultural values and scripts for parenting can be inconsistent, producing intrapsychic and cultural conflict. For example, many middle-class U.S. parents encourage independence, self-reliance, and autonomy in children, yet also encourage children to seek out help and look for attention from adults. Parents respond with egoistic recognition of children's achievements—a set of contradictions that lead to dependency conflicts. Another example of conflicting goals and fears for many U.S. parents is bedsharing with children. Parents hold strong beliefs about the importance of bedsharing and its positive or negative outcomes; their beliefs are important to their identity and beliefs about good outcomes for their children, even where actual impacts of bedsharing on children show no strong differences. At the same time, if enough features of the cultural learning environment are similar, outcomes of childrearing practices will be reasonably similar and consistent within a community. These examples suggest that conflict, diversity, and pluralism are expectable within and across communities, but also that shared cultural learning environments will simultaneously encourage similarity. In this article, I present empirical examples of these processes, some of which organize diversity to produce consensus, whereas others produce intrapsychic, intersubjective, and cross-cultural conflict. [cultural pluralism, conflict, cultural learning environment, dependency conflict, bedsharing]

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Anthony Wallace asked 47 years ago how cultural knowledge is organized in the mind and how it leads to cultural practices that, if not completely consistent and coordinated, do cohere. Wallace (1970) observed that in most anthropology of that era the model for the transmission, cognitive organization, and sharing of cultural knowledge was “the replication of uniformity” of putatively widely shared knowledge and practices in a relatively homogeneous local community. He contrasted this model with the “organization of diversity,” and pointed out that both theory and evidence from psychology and anthropology would suggest that there often is individual and subgroup variation in cultural knowledge and practice. What produces and perpetuates this diversity, and how can we better integrate the fact of diversity into culture theory and empirical research? By foregrounding diversity of belief and practice within communities, Wallace proposed a view of culture quite different from much of the anthropology of his era. Culture, as seen from this viewpoint, becomes like a “policy,” tacitly and gradually concocted by groups of people for the furtherance of their interests, and consists, at least in part, of “contracts” established by practice between

and among individuals to organize their strivings into mutually facilitating equivalence structures (Wallace 1970:24).

Although the era in which Wallace wrote presupposed cultural homogeneity, the opposite assumption more often prevails today: contested knowledge, individual agency, and social conflicts produced by differences in social categories (racial, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) frame the problems to be addressed. The current assumption is that local variations, personal resistance to imposed sociocultural constraints, and shifting positioning by others strongly limit shared consensual knowledge.

Yet the current widespread assumption in anthropology that cultural knowledge is not shared, but, rather, highly fragmented and diverse, has not included evidence from the mind, nor rich understanding of socialization and the acquisition of culture during development. It is both puzzling and very unfortunate that Wallace's call to include the mind and the psychology of cultural knowledge (its acquisition, socialization in childhood, storage and retrieval in memory, organization, distribution across individuals, experience for each person, and causal role in directing behavior) still simply remains largely unaddressed or actively opposed in general anthropology today. However, the study of the interconnections of mind and culture certainly is very much alive in the many varieties of psychological anthropology today (Casey and Edgerton 2005; D'Andrade 1995; D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Geurts 2002; Hinton 2004; Hollan and Wellenkamp 1996; Quinn 2005; Schwartz et al. 1992; Shore 1996; Shweder 1991; Strauss and Quinn 1997; LeVine 2003; Romney 1999).

Those presuming high group uniformity in cultural knowledge include a more psychological approach today, not just those arguing for diversity. For example, in 1992, Claudia Strauss used the vivid expression, the "fax model of socialization," for the assumption that cultural knowledge is somehow "copied" into the mind (and back out into engaged practice in communities and relationships). This is still a widely invoked, usually implicit, black box account for cultural acquisition and shared knowledge in mainstream approaches to socio-cultural anthropology. Yet as psychological anthropology and many other fields have demonstrated, cultural knowledge is not faxed from one subject to another—it is actively acquired and transformed. The joint influence of psychological, neurological, and socio-cultural processes all should be considered to advance theory and evidence for the learning, remembering, and distribution of cultural knowledge. Shared cultural practices, including shared patterns of public emotional displays for example, clearly can coexist with very different inner experiences of those practices and emotions, discovered through intensive psychodynamic, "person-centered" interviews. Theories of culture in contemporary anthropology do not sufficiently consider the personalization, and transformation of shared knowledge, through internalization of experience (Hollan, 2000).

Individual diversity and personalization of cultural knowledge is complementary to (not the opposite of) processes encouraging shared, homogenous beliefs and practices as determinants of human action.

We do not have to choose between theories that acknowledge actors' intentions and theories that acknowledge the role of durable, shared cultural schemas: intentions depend on schemas. These may be widely shared or intraculturally variable; long-held or recently invented; thematically repeated or juxtaposed in odd combinations. [Strauss and Quinn 1997:252]

Many mechanisms of the mind and characteristics of cultural knowledge and social structure combine to produce the diversity of schemas that constitute expectable pluralism in communities—and simultaneously lie at the root of conflict. Wallace also shared this view of socialization: “And, most importantly, the human organism is creative: it selects, rejects, seeks information, thinks, makes decisions, and ultimately modifies the systems of which it is a part” (1970:22). In this article, I present two examples illustrating the production and organization of diversity in cultural communities, and two mechanisms (intrapsychic and social conflict) that can produce both diversity and consensus.

Cultural beliefs, values, and practices are inconsistent and produce intrapsychic and social conflict. (Example: the U.S. dependency conflict.)

Cultural fears and conflicts can become crystallized in opposed normative expectations and authoritative advice within a community. (Example: bedsharing in the United States and cross-culturally.)

Both of these mechanisms involving conflicts (one the intrapsychic tensions and conflict because of socialization, and the other conflict between groups that uphold the value of different socialization practices as morally appropriate and productive of positive outcomes) lead to organized diversity. I would argue that the extent to which there is at the same time coherence and uniformity in a community has to do with the wider cultural learning environment that provides structural constraints and a broader context for adaptation. The cultural learning environment does not simply replicate uniformity entirely; but nor do the mechanisms generating conflict and difference occur outside of some shared, common community constraints.

### **Cultural Beliefs, Values, and Practices are Inconsistent and Produce Intrapsychic and Social Conflict**

The human mind simultaneously holds conflicting and contradictory goals, beliefs, and scripts for social practices. Consider the dependency conflict as it develops in families in the United States (Weisner 2001). Beatrice Whiting (1978) called this the “dependency hang-up.” Middle-class U.S. parents want to socialize their children to be independent, self-reliant, and autonomous, with high self-esteem and pride. Public displays of pride are not only acceptable but also a sign of good parenting. “Good job!” beaming parents say—while their children are expected to respond by orienting back to their parents and accepting the praise and applause. Children quickly come to expect these positive affirmations and the focused attention and monitoring that goes with them. Children doing everyday activities,

organized sports, homework, household help, or everyday play in the United States, among middle-class parents, are likely to be expectably rewarded by a warm sign that a parent is both closely monitoring that behavior, judging it against some standard, and recognizing the achievement. Not providing such recognition (a mere nod, or simple copresence) may translate into the experience by the child or caretaker or both, of disapproval in the U.S. cultural context, rather than a quiet acceptance of the child, which often would be the meaning elsewhere.

At the same time, for similar reasons, these same middle-class parents reward children who seek attention from others. Parents encourage putative coequal interlocutor interactions with their children, such as questioning, challenging, open expressions of affect, and attentiveness. An exemplar vignette is the mother who encourages her five-year-old to explore independently. Twenty feet away, the child turns back and looks at the mother. Mother says, “Hi! I’m here! Look at me! Wave! I love you! How are you doing?” This pattern of emotional connection in the context of a push for autonomy is closely related to the belief in, and anxiety about, the accomplishment of early child language stimulation and preliteracy skills. Active verbal engagement with adults is taken to be a sign of intelligence and readiness for school. Pedagogical scripts for parenting to promote literacy include such interactions (LeVine et al. 1994), along with vocabulary development, reading, familiarity with text, and sound-object-symbol relationships.

These strategies in combination create a recognizable conflict—cognitive, and social—in the child and in the caretaker. A close relationship with and dependence on the parent is encouraged, along with a push for individualistic autonomy and accomplishment monitored by the parent. The conflict is represented in scripts for parenting at the level of everyday practice and in values and goals at the cultural level. U.S. parents encourage independence, self-reliance, and autonomy in children, yet also encourage seeking out help, attention, and egoistic recognition of children’s achievements. Parents are concerned about insuring “secure” attachment to a primary caretaker to provide an appropriate “base” for exploration, yet are also concerned about excessive dependency on that very caretaker, which might inhibit the child’s independent self-development and autonomy (Weisner 2005).

The particular character of these negotiations over autonomy, dependency, and affirmation are not the expectable scripts in many working- and lower-class families (Kusserow 2004; Lareau 2003), in some minority communities in the United States, nor in much of the world (LeVine and Norman 2001). But those other communities have their own versions of parenting practices that produce conflicts analogous to the dependency conflict. If in the United States there is a cultural model of “generative tension” between the autonomous child and parent that produces conflict, in Japan there is the presumption of “symbiotic harmony” between the interdependent mother and child that produces other conflicts (Rothbaum et al. 2000; see also Fong 2007). The Japanese and U.S. scripts confront the same problem that all parents and communities respond to everywhere (how to socialize

interdependence as well as individuation), but the cultural goals and models vary, even as each one includes conflicting goals and socialization messages.

In a study of 150 countercultural families in the 1970s and 1980s called the Family Lifestyles longitudinal sample (FLS), we talked with and observed parents who said they wanted their children to question authority, be egalitarian and progressive, and who did not want to perpetuate excessive parental dominance and control. Many parents described this in the popular phrase, letting their child emerge “like a flower” (Weisner and Bernheimer 1998). These parents did not espouse dependency or parental overcontrol but, rather, espoused the philosophy that too much control was not good for children, their families, or their communities. These were hippy and nonconventional lifestyle parents of the era who proposed to overthrow bourgeois “hang-ups.”

We contrasted these parents with a sample of 50 two-parent, married, middle-class couples who were recruited using nominations by obstetricians (drawn from random lists of obstetricians in California) from their current patients. This second group constituted a more conventional group of parents whose values regarding child rearing more explicitly intertwined autonomy and dependence, and conventional values orientations. In spite of the many differences between these two family samples, home observations at 6, 18, and 54 months showed remarkably high rates in both groups of seeking attention by both the children and the parents, high rates of verbal exchanges and negotiations, and high rates of parent–child interactions. Asking questions, encouraging the child to make choices, asking the child for reasons for why they are doing something, and directives (telling the child to do something) were frequent across both family lifestyle groups (and very high compared to cross-cultural evidence). These exchanges were often then followed by negotiations with the child over doing that same thing across both conventional and nonconventional U.S. families.

The dependency conflict was just as true of the countercultural families as it was of the conventional comparison sample. So the dominant–dependent behavioral patterns were observed across the sample, as well as the verbal exchanges characteristic of literacy stimulation and the encouragement of child self-expression and early independence. Yet the parents’ values and goals about these matters, as measured through qualitative interviews and questionnaires, continued to be reported by parents as different, contrasting the more strongly countercultural parents and the conventional comparison group.

We followed the children of both the conventional and countercultural families through late adolescence and continued to find value differences in the children at adolescence. The teens in the countercultural families clearly had more progressive social values and goals compared to the children raised by the conventional parents. Teens from unconventional families reported more understanding, tolerance, and empathy for others, believed in egalitarian relations between men and women, and were more “pronatural” regarding child care, the environment, nutrition, and emotional expression (Weisner and Bernheimer

1998). At the same time, however, the dependency–dominance conflict style of interaction also was transmitted to children by parents in both groups when the children were younger. (There were no home observations at adolescence comparable to those done at earlier ages.) Nonetheless, the values orientations and social goals of pronaturalism were more likely to have a positive response from the teens raised by the countercultural parents compared to those in the comparison group families. Thus, the diversity of and difference in values orientations (comparing the countercultural to conventional family teens) was transmitted from parents to their children, just as were the shared propensities for the parental interaction patterns of dependency–dominance, and, presumably, the intrapsychic conflicts and anxieties produced by the dependency–dominance conflict that go with this parenting model.

Different attitudes were relatively successfully transmitted from parents to children through social learning and the qualities and idioms of parents' lifestyles. At the same time, a deeper, more widely shared U.S. middle-class pattern for relationships, understanding of the self, independence, and styles of verbal negotiation were also transmitted. Thus these socialization practices in combination produce both uniformity, and organized conflict and diversity.

### **Cultural Fears and Conflicts Can Become Crystallized in Normative Expectations and Authoritative Advice**

A second example involving the organization of diversity concerns strongly held commitments to a particular cultural belief or practice and about the outcomes of that belief or practice for children. Contemporary debates over specific parenting practices, such as parent–child bedsharing, illustrate how fears and conflicts over cultural norms can lead to the crystallization of diverse and opposing views (Okami et al. 2002). Bedsharing in infancy and early childhood for the great majority of parents around the world today, continues to be viewed as an obviously beneficial and morally valued practice. Children in many communities may sleep with their siblings, an aunt or grandparent, or their parents up to adolescence. But in the United States, there is a moral debate about bedsharing, entailing highly diverse and often conflicted values, beliefs, and practices. Separate sleeping for very young children, or at least intermittently separate sleeping combined with some cosleeping, is common in the United States today, although bedsharing was more common in earlier generations in U.S. history. The question of when, where, and whether to cosleep with children at various ages is hotly debated by advocacy groups favoring it (Thevenin 1987), professional organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (opposed to it), and in the media (focused on conflict about it, as with Lin 2006). Advocates then push one or another point of view in opposition to others, leading to diverse subgroups with strongly held, different views within the United States today.

McKenna and McDade (2005) provide an extensive review of the evidence regarding cosleeping, emphasizing various positive benefits, including the contingent psychobiological

attunement that occurs between mothers and infants as they sleep together. Respiration, sleep–wake cycles, bouts of breastfeeding, sleep state, and other features are coregulated during mother–child cosleeping. Some form of bedsharing or cosleeping during early childhood, particularly mother–infant bedsharing, appears to be a human “near universal” as well as a phyletic universal across primate species (Barry and Paxson 1971; Caudill and Plath 1966; Konner and Super 1987; Lozoff et al. 1984; Morelli et al. 1992; Stephens 1972; Whiting and Edwards 1988). Yet the practice of cosleeping in various forms is seen as difficult and contested in the United States. Parent needs for sleep because of clock-driven work schedules is one pragmatic reason. But another reason for this debate is that cosleeping has a moral significance far beyond the pragmatic variations in practice that we see. Shweder et al. (1995) emphasize the moral directive force of bedsharing among Brahmin families in India. Shweder et al. work out the number of logical ways in which individuals in a family of seven could be arranged for sleep, and compared families in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, and Hyde Park, Chicago, Illinois. Larger families are not uncommon in India, so Shweder et al. ask informants to consider a seven-member family differing in age and gender (their imagined family consists of a father, mother, son age 15, son age 11, son age 8, daughter age 14, and daughter age 3). They then calculate how many ways any group of seven people could be arranged in one to seven rooms: 877 (1995:30–31).

Of the 877 possible options, few are actually selected by informants either in Bhubaneswar or Chicago. Many possibilities are considered immoral, unacceptable, or just not thought of by informants in these communities. For example, the option that the father and 14-year-old daughter would sleep together in their own room was an option selected by no one. Shweder et al. (1995) predict that fewer than 15 out of 877 possibilities would be selected with any frequency in either of his two communities (and this low magnitude of actual choices from among all the many possibilities would likely be true in any community, although such a study remains to be done). If cosleeping were not culturally regulated at all, many more of the options would likely occur around the world; but the opposite is true. Some sleeping arrangements never occur normatively; some are common in one culture and rare or absent in another. In India, mother–infant cosleeping, with fathers sleeping separately and children often sleeping together, was a very common, morally appropriate, and unremarkable choice occasioning little conflict. In Chicago’s Hyde Park, many preferred mother–father cosleeping with children separated in other rooms. So, cultural communities care about who sleeps with whom, and culturally shared constraints on bedsharing are powerful.

Although within a community there might be some variation, looking across cultures shows two clear patterns. First, panculturally, only a relatively small number of possible sleeping arrangements are found to occur at all; so there are some universal cognitive, socio-emotional, and demographic constraints that pull toward pluralistic but quite constrained normative variations around the world. Second, whatever variations and debates there might be regarding cosleeping practices and cultural beliefs within a community, those variations also are constrained by shared attitudes regarding cosleeping. Hence, many options routinely practiced and normative in some places around the world are not even

considered as an option in other communities, and if considered, would be strongly proscribed. Organized diversity within a community exists, but is strongly constrained both by those options that are not present because universally dispreferred, as well as by options widely practiced elsewhere yet not even considered in any particular community. The diversity observed within a community is already highly culturally patterned!

The same study used to examine parenting and values described above, the Family Lifestyles Study, also illustrates this pattern. We used the FLS sample to study bedsharing and co-sleeping in countercultural and conventional couples in the United States. Many countercultural parents were avowedly “pronatural”—that is, they wanted to follow “natural” parenting and believed that bedsharing and cosleeping fit this lifestyle. About 20 percent of pronatural parents practiced bedsharing at least some of the time through age three, and some did so up to age six, whereas only around two percent of the comparison sample families did this at either age. To be pronatural included a suite of related practices, not just bedsharing, including the use of organic and natural foods and products and an open, expressive, emotionally free way of life in their families (Weisner et al. 1983). Gender egalitarian child rearing practices also were associated with pronaturalism (Weisner et al. 1994). One way many parents defined pronatural parenting was that they had heard and read about the practice being favored in non-Western communities. This was a sign that the practice was more “natural” in their view! Pronatural child care practices included the use of a carrying sling to hold infants and young children, the promotion of breastfeeding, and letting young children go unclothed around the house.

In the 1970s to early 1980s, cosleeping was unusual for middle-class, educated parents. Those who nonetheless did so fervently believed that their children would have fewer sleeping problems, healthier attachment, be smarter, more verbal, have more behavioral openness and maturity, do better in school and with peers, and be more expressive and creative. Some believed that in adolescence their children would have more positive sexual experiences, less deviant behavior, and be more pronatural themselves. Those who were opposed, equally fervently said that many of these same outcomes likely would be in precisely the opposite direction. The children have been followed for 18 years and most of these hypotheses were then tested by examining evidence from child assessments at ages 6 and 18. The FLS study incorporated mixed methods, including parent reports of their children’s peer relationships, and interviews and questionnaires from the teens themselves at age 18, supplemented by home observations (Okami et al. 2002).

The result? Neither fervently held parental model was confirmed. There were no significant effects of bedsharing on this wide range of outcomes at age 6 or 18, neither outcomes related to problems, such as fighting or aggression in school and negative mood or affect, nor socially desirable outcomes, such as self-acceptance and positive relations with family. Although girls were about 50 percent more likely to bedshare with parents than boys, and single mothers more likely to bedshare than couples, girls were not more likely to show effects of bedsharing than were boys, nor were children living with single mothers. Lower income and other

correlates of single parenthood associated with bed sharing also failed to predict outcomes. If anything, there was a trend for the teens that had experienced early bedsharing to show more positive behaviors, but these effects were small and not statistically significant. Of course, there might have been particular kinds of bedsharing that could have been associated with particular later outcomes. But we did not have those kinds of detailed evidence. Our study did not assess frequency, duration, proximity, routinization, regularity, ages started and stopped, and so forth—the overall FLS study was not an in-depth study of bedsharing and cosleeping.

Although bedsharing was not a clear predictor of behavioral patterns at age six or at adolescence, there were other predictors of subsequent child or adolescent outcomes. Troubled families (because of addiction problems or poverty) were associated with children doing less well in school, for example. There are associations of teen and child problem behaviors with a variety of other early childhood measures and family characteristics, such as social class, overall family income, and gender (Weisner 1982). Thus, it is not that family antecedents do not help account for teen behaviors, but, rather, that bedsharing as a specific cultural practice, analytically separated from other family lifestyle and parenting patterns, does not by itself show an independent influence.

The fervent beliefs about bedsharing and its expected consequences for children (should or should not be practiced; would produce good or bad outcomes in children) were very diverse. Those advocating frequent bedsharing shared a different cluster of parenting beliefs and practices on average, compared to those practicing early, separate sleeping for their infants and young children. But within each group, commitment to the practice and beliefs regarding the likely outcomes were widely shared. They mattered for parents as validating their lifestyle (e.g., good parents should [or should not] encourage bedsharing early in a child's life—and I am a good parent). Norms and moral arguments then crystallized around bedsharing, creating homogeneity of belief and practice within each group advocating one or another cosleeping practice. The practice was emblematic of being pronatural and of countering the wider community (at least the middle-class, Euro-American community) practice of early separate beds and rooms for children. Particular parenting practices can become iconic and take on political and personal meanings in a community in this way, leading to more in-group uniformity in belief and practice and more between-group difference, than would otherwise occur. But as far as child outcomes later in childhood or in adolescence were concerned, there were no clear differences in outcomes across the 200 families in the study.

### **Evidence and the Organization of Diversity**

Why don't parents, children, experts, and policymakers just come to realize that there are dependency conflicts, or that bedsharing is not producing the kinds of large outcomes later in development that their beliefs or reference groups or health professionals claim? One

reason is that although individuals can gain some appreciation of the behavioral patterns of what they personally do, and the practices of others in their community, and then infer causes for those behaviors, people can almost never know the impacts of what one person or group does compared to others.

A behavioral outcome compares the status of people at one point in time, to their status at a later point in time. A parent in our study said “I practiced bedsharing and now my children are healthy, expressive, and creative and doing well in school. It worked!” In everyday life, people make judgments about whether actions are effective by making implicit assessments of the supposed outcomes of those actions. People do the same in evaluating others’ actions and their outcomes. An outcome is something people can appraise in a context, although such appraisals and the memories they depend on are subject to all the quirks and biases of the human mind (Schachter 1999).

What people cannot know are the actual impacts of specific practices, at least not without well designed research. Impacts are what would have happened if there were a true control group—a counterfactual—or at least a carefully chosen comparison group. Impacts are changes in outcomes that occur over and above what we as individuals, families, groups, or public services, accomplish anyway. Impacts control for selection effects and all the other influences on what happens in the world. Only a research study could tell a bedsharing family that a matched comparison sample of families who did not practice bedsharing was nearly identical to their own children on teen outcomes.

This distinction between outcomes and impacts is familiar to researchers interested in study designs for which we want to infer cause (Duncan et al. 2007). But impacts are not routinely used in everyday reasoning about cause; even when explained and modeled, the logic of considering evidence from experiments or comparative study, seldom generalizes to or informs our everyday ethnopsychology of cause and effect. And yet, absent evidence of impacts, inferences about what works and what causes what in the world are influenced by a multitude of factors, recognized either tacitly or explicitly, to which people may attribute causal influence—whether true or not. Both countercultural families, and the conventional comparison group families in the FLS, for instance, could and did remember their early bedsharing practices, find positive outcomes in their children, and conclude that their cultural beliefs and cosleeping practices were positive and the right choices. Not-so-positive outcomes in their children could be accounted for by other life events and circumstances. Parents not only by and large believe, retrospectively, that their decisions were right—but also often conclude that other ways of parenting were misguided.

In general, then, cultural models that govern parental child rearing are likely to persist (both those that are shared and homogeneous and those that are not) regardless of evidence of impacts, even if there is research evidence available to assess the impacts of practices. Even when there is evidence of impacts that contradict outcomes assessments, individuals or groups who share beliefs have great difficulty accepting the contradictory information, and

therefore, seldom change their practices accordingly. One reason is that practices are important signals for groups that matter to us, signaling group identity and solidarity. “I and my friends and partner are pronatural; so it is important to us that we encourage cosleeping.” “I am an engaged American parent; of course I tell my child he does a good job and praise a lot; it’s one reason our kids do so well.” Diversity within and between communities can persist for these reasons, even absent evidence of clear differences in outcomes or impacts.

## Summary

I have described two examples of processes that produce an organization of diversity entailing both conflict and sharing within individual minds and cultural practices. The first is the production of emotional tension and intrapsychic conflict; the example was the suite of dependency practices in middle-class U.S. parenting. Cultural values and scripts for parenting can lead to dependency conflict across middle-class communities in the United States, and produce results that only sometimes fit with intended outcomes. As a consequence, people experience intrapsychic conflict and ambivalence, and both parents and children reproduce this conflict. The second process is exemplified by the case of bed-sharing as a moral practice: pronatural groups fervently believe in it; conventional families sometimes fervently believe it is wrong. This is a practice where parents in the counter-cultural, pronatural families wanted to adapt their parenting practices to fit their broader goals, values, and identities. By countering convention and sharing often fervently held convictions about good parenting, counterculture parents increased in-group similarity and maximized difference with other parents who held more conventional U.S. bedsharing beliefs and associated practices. Both groups of parents held differing beliefs about the outcomes of bedsharing (and neither group had information about the impacts of bedsharing). Uniformity is intensified within each group and enhanced by comparisons with the other, perhaps morally suspect “outgroup.” Professionals and the state then may claim that there is evidence that reinforces one or another belief or practice, each selectively using their experts to support their own beliefs. Yet the behavior of adolescent children raised in both groups of families is similar in crucial regards.

## The Cultural Learning Environment

Wallace focused on the organization of diversity, but he also clearly recognized the existence and power of institutions, subcultures, and shared cultural patterns to produce the replication of uniformity (Wallace 1970:10). What stands out when duly considering conflicts, fervent intensification, and the unavailability of knowledge of impacts, is the power of the cultural learning environment: the everyday settings and meanings that organize behavior in context. The cultural learning environment provides the proximal settings we participate in as we move through daily routines.

The setting or proximal context for learning and behavior has always been an important focus of attention and unit of analysis for theory and empirical research in psychological anthropology. Originally formulated by John and Beatrice Whiting and extended by many others (Bronfenbrenner 1995; Cole 1996; Edwards 2006; LeVine et al. 1994; Super and Harkness 1997; Weisner 2002; Whiting and Whiting 1975; Whiting and Edwards 1988, Worthman 1993), the cultural learning environment includes all the features variously described as the ecocultural niche, developmental niche, activity settings, and everyday practices that matter for child development. The cultural learning environment emphasizes the transactions between context, the mind, and the people engaged in those settings. This ecocultural context can be a press toward diversity, as well as toward shared values, goals, and scripts for everyday life.

Many ecological conditions such as the mode of subsistence, climate, endemic disease, low or high levels of resources, or threats from natural calamities can create some similarity in sociocultural environments. These all affect social institutions and learning environments in somewhat similar ways. Conditions that heighten risk, or are perceived as threats to community survival, often are associated with more homogeneous and widely shared beliefs and practices in a community, for example. Learning environments and relationships in them are influenced by the social addresses of others in those settings—such as their gender, age, status or rank, kinship ties, workload, and patterns of time allocation. Learning environments also include more distal features of social structure, such as, in the domain of work, resources, and economics, features such as technology, work and subsistence patterns, the inequality of wealth and income, relative changes in wealth between generations, and division of labor by gender and age. In social domains, the nature of children's peer and play groups and their constitution, the demographics of households, families and communities, the role of formal education and literacy (and the often unequal access to education by girls or the poor) all can lead to shared socialization contexts.

Communities may be less likely to rely exclusively on shared, uniform, local cultural learning environments today than in the past (Weisner and Lowe 2005). It is possible, then, that organized diversity processes might well be more important than they were in some communities with a similar and more homogenous cultural learning environment in the past. The extent of shared belief and practice in a cultural learning environment should be an empirical question asked of populations and the learning environments they contain, rather than an assumed characteristic of geographically bounded sites.

Cultural learning environments are arguably the single most powerful influence on parenting and children's development. To the extent that cultural learning environments are relatively stable and shared in a community, there will be relative sharing and continuity of cultural knowledge; if not, diversity and change are more prominent. But the organization of diversity as Wallace and many later authors have conceptualized it, will always be present—including the processes of negotiating "policies and contracts" in a community, conflicts (both intrapsychic and across groups), and the creativity in the active learning of

culture throughout development. The examples I have offered of processes producing conflict and diversity occur in the midst of particular cultural learning environments that also produce widely shared beliefs and practices. Psychological anthropology's great comparative advantage in the study of human development is our ability to use explanatory theories of mind and of context, in cultural learning environments around the world, to understand parenting and developmental processes, outcomes, and impacts that matter to science and to those we study.

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