Childhood in Cross-Cultural Context

Fall 2009
Monday and Wednesday 11.30 am

Ruth E. Toulson
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Childhood in Cross-Cultural Context

Why do Beng mothers in the Cote d’Ivoire decorate their babies with jewelry and paint twice a day?

Why do healthy infants in Kenya sit unsupported at four months when most Western infants cannot achieve this skill before six months?

What does it mean to be a child? Is the concept one with universal validity?

In this course we will explore the highly variable ways childhood has been constructed both across cultures and throughout history. We begin with a focus on the fetus and the mechanisms by which life before birth is understood: from fetuses in jars as the objects/subjects of 19th century science, to the personifying technology of ultrasound and the marketing of menacing fetuses in contemporary Japan. We consider infant development, asking how much is universal. We examine the every day actions – toileting, feeding, sleeping – that make babies into social actors. We also consider the new reproductive technologies and question why they appear technologically innovative but socially conservative.

While the Euro-American child is often portrayed as a cherub, children are also viewed as chattels and changelings. We focus on the processes of learning, work and play, on the consequences for the child of shifting family forms and adoption, of rapid social change, colonialism, poverty and war. Given that the experience of being a child is so culturally varied, can there be international agreement on the rights of the child?
Set texts and resources:

The following texts are required reading for the course and should be purchased.

DeLoache, Judy S. and Alma Gottlieb, eds.,  

Lancy, David F.,  

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Carolyn Sargent, eds.,  

All other resources are available either on e-res (password: baby) or JSTOR (www.jstor.org) or other on-line journal sources. It is not my intention that you read everything on this reading list, indeed to do so may be detrimental to your health and happiness. There are set readings for each class which must be read before class so that we have shared grounds for discussion. Additional sources are provided should you wish to read further or to write a paper on that particular theme. Please be encouraged to read widely and to bring additional material from other disciplines into your work. Think about reading each author ‘against the grain’ of the others; consider what issues they were trying to grapple with and what is at the core of the discussion. It is preferable to read less in a considered way than to read everything thoughtlessly. For each class please prepare three or more questions or comments, writing out what about the text prompted your question.
Office hours: My office hours are Monday, 1pm to 2pm, and Tuesday, 12.30pm to 2.30pm. Please do e-mail me (toulsonr@denison.edu) to make an appointment if these hours are unsuitable. My office is 103A Knapp. I welcome your questions and am happy to discuss any difficulties with the course (or joys), and provide feedback on assessed work or assistance with work in progress. Please do come and talk with me.

Assessment

1. 20% Essay: Selected from a list of questions which engage with the first part of the course. Due Monday 12\textsuperscript{th} October.
2. 25% Child rearing guide for a society of your choice. Due Monday 2\textsuperscript{nd} November.
3. 30% Research paper: Due Monday December 14\textsuperscript{th}.
4. 25% Participation/ Engagement with reading.

Disability and Academic Integrity Statement

“Any student who feels he or she may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss his or her specific needs. I rely on the Academic Support and Enrichment Center in 104 Doane to verify the need for reasonable accommodations based on documentation on file in that office.”

“The students and faculty of Denison University and the Department of Sociology/Anthropology are committed to academic integrity and will not tolerate any violation of this principle. Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity.”
Wednesday 2nd September
Constructing Childhood

We begin with an examination of the assumptions about the nature of childhood that are implicit in our own common-sensibilities, in academic disciplines such as psychology, and in the language of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. What are the cultural assumptions hidden within the UNDRC and does such a declaration create an infantilizing relationship between a paternalistic and moralistic global North and its South ‘Other.’

Gottlieb, Alma

United Nations

Additional Sources

Bluebond-Langner, Myra and Jill E. Korbin

Hirschfield, Lawrence A.,

Kessen, William

Valentin, Karen and Lotte Meinert
Monday 7th September
Centuries without Childhood?

In this class we further engage with the idea that the child is a cultural invention, focusing on Philippe Aries’ startling assertion that the medieval world was ignorant of childhood, and on Aries’ critics.

Lancy, David F.,

Additional Historical Sources

Aries, Philippe

Fletcher, Anthony

Heywood, Colin

Newman, Paul

Shahar, Shulamith
Wednesday 9th September
Why don’t Anthropologists like Children?

While childhood has been highly theorized in other disciplines, Gottlieb and Hirschfield suggest that anthropology has left childhood largely unexamined. We consider why this might be the case and ask what new perspectives could be offered by an anthropological engagement with childhood. We examine the difficulties of finding children within the archaeological record and trace the theoretical shift from children as ‘the first primitives,’ ‘savages in our own homes’ to current increasingly child-centered ethnographic approaches.

Montgomery, Helen

Additional Sources

LeVine, Robert

Schwartzman, Helen B.

Archaeological Accounts
Baxter, Jane Eva
Tate, Carolyn E.,

Tate, Carolyn E., and Gordon Bendersky

Ardren, Traci, and Scott. R. Hutson

Monday 14th September
Reproducing the Nation and Killing the Black Body

The easy availability of birth control is seen as one of the central achievements of the Women’s Movement. However, Dorothy Roberts suggests that there is a prejudice-ridden agenda behind the introduction and dissemination of contraception. We consider two particular cultural contexts. First, we examine the history of state control over the bodies of African American women, from the forced reproduction of slave women to the distribution of the long-term contraceptive norplant to inner-city African American communities. We then turn to Singapore, where eugenics drove government policy and reproducing the nation occurred at a denied intersection of race and class.

Roberts, Dorothy

Additional Sources


Ram, Kalpana, and Margaret Jolly, eds. 1998 Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Wednesday 16th September
Birth and Authoritative Knowledge

The US has the most wide-spread medical management of birth, so why does it also have the highest rates of infant and mother mortality of any industrialized nation? We begin with a comparison of two very different birth stories: Shostak’s account of Nisa’s recollection of her the birth of her first child, and Jordan’s account of a hospitalized birth in the US.

Jordan, Brigitte  

Shostak, Marjorie  

Wall, L. Lewis  

Additional Sources

Abu-Lughod, Lila  

Biesele, Megan  

Block, Jennifer  

Boddy, Janice  

Cartwright, Elizabeth  
1998  The Logic of Heartbeats: Electronic Fetal Monitoring and Biomedically Constructed Birth.

Davis-Floyd, Robbie E., 2004 Birth as an American Rite of Passage. Berkeley: University of California Press.


Monday 21\textsuperscript{st} September
Fetal Personhood and the Cyborg Baby

Today it is commonplace for human embryos and fetuses to ‘speak’ on all manner of social issues. Yet, the imagining and personification of the fetus is a recent and culturally particular process. The early embryologists regarded the embryo as ‘a bit of biological material, pure and simple, not as a political lightening rod, an emotion laden corpse, or a quintessential symbol of life.’ Who are those bottled babies in biology’s basement? What do imaginings of fetus tell us about issues of gender, race and subjectivity? How have technologies such as ultrasound, preimplantation diagnosis, and fetal surgery, personified the fetus and created the cyborg baby?

Mitchell, Lisa M., and Eugenia Georges

Morgan, Lynn

Taylor, Janelle S.

Additional Sources

Casper, Monica J.
Franklin, Sarah and Celia Roberts

Han, Sallie

Landsman, Gail H.,

Morgan, Lynn M.,

Morgan, Lynn and Meredith W. Michaels, eds.,

Press, Nancy, Carole H. Browner, Diem Tran, Christine Morton, and Barbara Le Master

Rapp, Rayna


Wednesday 23rd September
New Reproductive Technologies, Same Old Fatherhood?

Do the new reproductive technologies require new theories of kinship? Are they merely new instruments that enforce old inequalities? How does an examination of in vitro fertilization, ova and sperm donation, and surrogacy illuminate what really matters about twenty-first century relatedness? How do they cause us to rethink parenthood, personhood and procreation?

Carsten, Janet

Modell, Judith

Stolcke, Verena

Additional Sources

Cannell, Fenella

Cussins, Charis

Davis-Floyd, Robbie E.
Edwards, Jeanette, Sarah Franklin, Eric Hirsch, Frances Pine and Marilyn Strathern

Franklin, Sarah

Franklin, Sarah and Susan McKinnon

Gallagher, Janet

Garcia, Sandra Anderson

Inhorn, Marcia and Frank van Balen, eds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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Monday 28th September
Outsourcing Fertility: The Political Economy of Surrogacy

In this class we further probe constructions of motherhood and relatedness via an examination of surrogacy. We consider the outsourcing of birth to India and to discuss how surrogacy appears at another unexamined intersection of race and class and is revelatory of very particular views of genetics and inheritance.

Ragone, Helena

Roberts, Elizabeth F. S.,

Vora, Kalindi

Additional Sources

Garcia, Sandra Anderson

Markens, Susan

Ragone, Helena


Roberts, Elizabeth F.S.,

Simpson, Robert
**Wednesday 30th September**

**The Circulation of Children and Kinship Beyond the ‘Heat of the Hearth’**

In this class we focus on adoption, particularly the highly varied culturally particular responses to it. We draw on contexts from Scotland to Malaysia to Andean Peru and also consider the politics of transnational adoption.

**Janet Carsten**


**Leinaweaver, Jessaca B.**


**Mamos, Laura**


**Additional Sources**

**Bowie, Fiona, ed.,**


**Carsten, Janet**


Dorow, Sarah K

Franklin, Sarah and Susan McKinnon

Leinaweaver, Jessaca B.,

Mamos, Laura

Schneider, David M.

Volkman, Tody, ed.,

Monday 5th October
Review Session
Wednesday 7th October
Creating Social Personhood

Each society must decide how its youngest members will become social persons. Here we examine the ritual mechanisms of feeding, toileting and sleeping. In the Euro-American context, the body is often imagined as the biological raw material on which culture operates. In this context the baby is often imagined as a tabula rasa, a mere ‘bio-bundle.’ In other cultural contexts, however, communities clearly articulate how social action creates social persons and makes their bodies. Rituals such as feeding, carrying, toileting and naming tether children to social universes. Throughout this section we will draw on ‘A World of Babies.’

Conklin, Beth and Lynn M. Morgan

Toileting: Leaky bodies and potty wars

Gottlieb suggests that, as much as Mary Douglas gave us creative ways of considering ‘matter out of place’ the very leakiness of babies’ bodies – as they defecate, urinate, dribble – is one reason why anthropologists considered them inappropriate research subjects. Indeed, in the Euro-American context, the gaining of bodily boundedness is one of the central signs of adult personhood. In this class we consider toileting. Why don’t Chinese babies wear diapers? Why are Americans obsessed with the potty?

Gottlieb, Alma
Additional Sources

de Vries, Martin W. & M. R. de Vries, M. R.,

Gottlieb, Alma
2004 The Afterlife is Where We Come From: The Culture of Infancy in West Africa. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (see videos from Chicago Press site for this topic and for cleaning/toileting)

Hewlett, Barry

Monday 12th October
The Cultural Politics of the Breast

Why is nursing a baby an ideologically charged act? What do contemporary controversies surrounding breast feeding tell us about the ways women view their bodies, nature and maternity?

Additional Sources

Bartlett, Alison

Baumslag, Naomi

Giles, Fiona

Gottlieb, Alma
2004 The Afterlife is Where We Come From: The Culture of Infancy in West Africa. Chicago:
University of Chicago Press. (see videos from Chicago Press site for this topic and for cleaning/toileting)

Hausman, Bernice

Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer,

Khatib-Chahidi, Jane

Palmer, Gabrielle

Stuart-Macadam, P.,

Yalom, Naomi
Wednesday 14th October
Sleepy Babies

Sleep is a deeply cultural practice. In this class we examine how babies and their parents sleep and why babies in the US sleep alone.

Small, Meredith. F.,

Additional Sources

Morelli, G. A., et al.,

Shweder, R. A., L. A. Jensen, and W. M. Goldstein

Wolf, A. W., B. Lozoff, S. Latz, and R. Paludetto

McKenna J. and N. Bernshaw
Monday 19th October
NO CLASS: Fall Break

Wednesday 21st October
Child’s Play

UNICEF estimates that approximately 158 million children work to support their families. In this class we critically examine a variety of examples: from Dickensian chimney sweeps and the first child labor laws; to Indian children stitching footballs in sweatshops; Guatemalan children making fireworks; to Appalachian farm children kept out of school to bring in the harvest.

Lancy, David F.,

Additional Material

Bock, John and Sara E. Johnson

Lancy, David F.,

Jacquemin, Melanie Y

Majka, Linda C., and Theo Majka
Monday 26th October
Gendered Lives, Liminal Stages

In this class we consider the teenage years, focusing particularly on the rites of passage that transform children into adults. We also focus on the construction of gender, a key element of child and adult lived experience.

Lancy, David F.,

Additional Material

Gilmore, David

Chin, Elizabeth

Wednesday 28th October
FILM
Monday 2\textsuperscript{nd} November

Controversies of Innocence

The idea that childhood is a period of innocence is central to contemporary imaginings. However, Aries describes images of childhood from earlier periods which we might feel are disturbingly sexual. We compare these images with the photography of Sally Mann whose work *Immediate Family* was at the center of a controversy when it was described as pornographic. We also consider how sexuality and virginity are constructed in other cultural contexts.

Aries, Philippe
Mann, Sally
Rubenson, Birgitta Le Thi Hanh, Bengt Höjer, and Eva Johansson
2005 Young Sex-Workers in Ho Chi Minh City Telling Their Life Stories. Childhood12: 391-41.

Additional Sources

Baudrillard Jean
Herdt, Gilbert H. ed.,
Jankowiak, William R., ed.
Wednesday 4th November
Menacing Fetuses and Dangerous Children

Children are not always viewed as innocent cherubs. In many cultural contexts, the child is viewed as someone who is insecurely attached to society, much more like a corpse or a ghost than an adult. In Japan, new religious practices have appeared to assist women in placating the souls of menacing aborted fetuses. In some contexts, children, particularly those with disabilities, have been accused of witchcraft. We consider the political and economic contexts behind child witchcraft accusations and the reasons why children might be considered a social danger.

Diduk, Susan

Evans, Grant
Stafford, Charles  

Additional Sources

Hardacre, Helen  

LaFleur, William L. R.,  

Burke, Charlanne  

Sanders, Todd  

See also Ethnography 40 (1). Special Issue: Reviewing Twinship in Africa.
**Monday 9th November**  
**Colonial Childhoods: The Education of Desire**

In this class we consider the impact of colonialism on childhood, particularly in English and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia. In British Malaya, the colonial state was initially largely uninterested in the children who lived in the homosocial realms of port cities such as Singapore and Malacca. The existence of children, many of them born to prostitutes, was denied and the state’s only interest in their mothers was as ‘venereal vectors.’ However, when British woman began to join their husbands in the colonies, there was a distinct shift in attitude: the inappropriate mothering of local woman became a site on which the distinction on which the very existence of Empire rested, drawn on lines of race, sex and class, could be established. In the Dutch East Indies too, the governing of sexuality became a mechanism of state control, and concerns surrounding children born of unions between local woman and colonial officials grew.

Stoler, Ann Laura  

Manderson, Leonore  

**Additional Sources**

Ram, Kalpna and Margaret Jolly, eds.,  
Turner Strong, Pauline  

**Wednesday 11th November**  
**Infanticide: Mother Nature and the ‘Nature’ of Motherhood**

In much popular discourse a mother’s love is regarded as ‘natural’ and automatic. What drives mothers to kill?

Korbin, Jill E.,  

**Additional Sources**

Daly, Martin and Margo Wilson  

Dyhouse, C  

Fletcher, Anthony  
Monday 16th November
Poverty, Hunger, and Death Without Weeping

In *Death Without Weeping*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes a Brazilian shanty town where weak infants are left to die. Poverty, hunger, the influence of folk-Catholicism, and a history of colonialism oppressions shape the practice of passive infanticide. Does this material prompt us to reconsider the nature of mother-child attachment?

**Scheper-Hughes, Nancy**

**Lere, Leonard B.,**

**Additional Sources**

**Dettwyler, Katherine A.,**


Wednesday 18th November
Race, Class, and Poverty in the US.

In this class we consider the lives of children living in poverty in the US. We discuss the controversy surrounding ‘crack babies’ and compare the lives of children in Spanish Harlem to the ‘priceless’ protected children of those growing up under conditions of affluent hyper-vigilance. Why are US childhoods so different and what does race have to do with it?

Bourgois, Philippe 1998 Families and Children in Pain in the US Inner City. In Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of

Additional Sources

Katz, Cindy

Kincheloe, J.,

Kusserow, Adrie

Lareau, Annette

Polakow, V.,

Reese, Ellen

Zelizer, Vivianna A.
Monday 23rd November and Wednesday 25th November: No Class – Thanksgiving Vacation

Monday 30th November
War Child

What is the impact of war on children? We consider how child soldiers challenge the social category of ideal childhood and the imaginings of nation. Drawing on examples from Uganda and Sierra Leone, we consider how war becomes a context in which disparate notions of childhood are negotiated.

Aduaka, Newton I.

Cheney, Kristen E.

Additional Sources

Honwana, Alcinda

Olujic, Maria B.,
Rosen, Charles

West, Harry G.,

**Wednesday 2nd December**

I am away at the AAA

Fine, Sean and Andrea Nix Fine
2008  War/dance. ThinkFilm.

**Monday 7th December: Evaluations**

**Street Child**

Where are the families of children who live on the street? How do they create homes and kinship in the most difficult conditions?

Schepers-Hughes, Nancy and Daniel Hoffman

**Additional Sources**

Evans, R. M. C.

Glauser, Benno
1997  Street Children: Deconstructing a Construct. In Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of

Hecht, Tobias  

Kilbride, Philip, Collette Suda, and Enos Njeru  

Panter-Brick, Catherine  

Schepers-Hughes, Nancy, and Daniel Hoffman  

Theis, Jonathan  
Wednesday 9th December
The Rights of the Child

Throughout the course we have focused on the very different things it means to be a child in various cultural contexts and time periods. This makes it difficult to establish a set of universal rights of the child without those statements being impossible to achieve, paternalistic or patronizing. However, where does this leave us if we are committed to applying anthropology or to working within development, social services, the legal system, or education? How can we find a position between cultural relativism and moral opprobrium? What can we do? What next?

United Nations

Valentin, Karen and Lotte Meinert

Additional Sources

Black, Maggie

Boyden, Jo
Ensalaco, Mark and Linda C. Majka

Mason, Mary A.,

Pupavac, Vanessa

Reynolds, Pamela, Olga Nieuwenhuys and Karl Hanson

Monday 14th December
Concluding Remarks