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International Roots of Minority Child Development Introduction to the Special Issue

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International Roots of Minority Child Development
Introduction to the Special Issue

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The field of development psychology is an ethnocentric one, dominated by a Euro-American perspective. Interaction with a wider international community can provide perspectives on goals, conditions, and paths of development that differ from those we too often take for granted. Only in this way will our field be decentred and our collegial relationships internationalised.

As with most contemporary psychology, the methodological ideology of psychology is objectivity. Yet, when one studies development in one's own culture, in fact, one has an insider's cultural perspective. Partly because this fact runs counter to the very ideological assumptions of psychological science, the insider's perspective almost always goes unacknowledged. A basic assumption of these papers is that the insider's perspective is valuable for studying developmental issues in every culture and every subculture in the world.

Recently, mainstream developmental psychology has begun to recognise that a key aspect of development is the acquisition of culture. Because most developmental psychologists are not trained in the study of culture, they fall back on their unacknowledged insider's perspective when studying development and socialisation issues. However, the dominant knowledge

base of current development psychology comes from Euro-American researchers studying the development of children from their own cultural experience. Significantly, a largely unacknowledged consequence is that our knowledge is primarily knowledge of the acquisition of Euro-American culture as this process transpires in the United States. These papers seek to redress this situation by enlisting insiders' perspectives on socialisation and development in a broader sampling of the world's cultures, focusing on two developing regions, Mexico and West Africa, that often lack the means to speak for themselves in the arena of international social science. We also redressed the balance by including insiders' perspectives on the socialisation and development of Mexican Americans and African Americans in the United States.

Because of the limitations of psychology in dealing with the conceptual and empirical study of culture, it was necessary and desirable to include anthropological perspectives on our subject. Cultural anthropologists, such as those who have contributed to this special issue, take a broader sociocultural perspective on what we as psychologists often look upon quite narrowly—most frequently at the level of the individual or, occasionally, the dyad. A number of consequences follow:

1. Anthropologists often use methods different from those of psychologists. For example, qualitative ethnographies rather than quantitative indices are used both by Delgado-Gaitan and by Ogbu. The former shares the detail of ethnographic case studies with the reader; the latter recounts the theoretical perspective that has emerged from long-term ethnographic studies in a number of different communities.

Ogbu and his colleagues spend a year in each community to learn how to ask questions in a way familiar to that particular community. Subsequent data collection comes from visits to homes, schools, and community organisations, from observing and talking to people in both formal and informal situations over many months. Delgado-Gaitan uses similar methods. In addition, she moved from observer to participant in forming the community organisation whose effects she discusses in her article. These ways of working and the data they yield are very different from those of the psychologist who gives a test to a sample of strangers or carries out a single study.

2. Different kinds of information count as data in anthropology and psychology. For example, public health statistics and census data are linked to maternal caregiving in the argument of Tapia Uribe, R.A. LeVine, and S.E. LeVine; psychologists are not accustomed to using societal statistics to formulate a psychological theory.

3. Whereas we in psychology are trained to set up our studies in terms of

"truly" independent variables, anthropologists (and sociologists) acknowledge and study the structural dependencies and interrelations of social and cultural variables. This type of analysis is found in the articles by Delgado-Gaitan, Tapia Uribe et al., and Oloko.

4. Anthropological theorising, unlike psychological, often goes beyond the individual and the dyad to incorporate historical (Ogbu, Oloko, Tapia Uribe et al.), economic (Oloko, Tapia Uribe et al.), sociological (Delgado-Gaitan, Oloko, Tapia Uribe et al.), and political (Delgado-Gaitan, Ogbu, & Oloko) factors.

Psychologists must keep these disciplinary differences in mind, if they are to benefit to the maximum from the perspective on sociocultural influences on development brought to us from the anthropological perspective. Although basic concepts concerning the relationship between human culture and human development are elucidated by these anthropologists, in a number of cases their research can serve as inspiration for developmental psychologists to revisit issues they identify, using more familiar psychological methods. The stimulation of future psychological research may be an important function of the anthropological articles contained within this special issue.

Cross-cultural Roots of Development

Although cultures sometimes coincide with national borders, conquest and immigration have made this state of affairs the exception rather than the rule. At the end of the twentieth century, the mixture of cultures *within* nation-states is a fact that is gaining increasing recognition and importance in both national and international affairs. The United States is far from unique in representing a confluence of voluntary immigrants, involuntary immigrants, and conquered indigenous peoples. In the United States, as in many countries in Europe, this mixture has left subcultural groups termed minorites. Importantly, each minority group has its own cultural history and roots. Moreover, except for Native Americans, the cultural background of each minority in the United States comes from another part of the world.

These facts raise critical issues for understanding the development and socialisation of minority children. To what extent can the development and socialisation of minority children be seen as continuous with their ancestral cultures? To what extent have cultural and political conditions in the United States (or other countries) modified developmental and socialisation processes, yielding discontinuities with ancestral cultures? To what extent have the ancestral cultures themselves changed, yielding cross-

generational discontinuities in the development and socialisation of immigrants from the very same countries? These questions provide unifying themes for the articles that follow.

We invite the reader to consider the connections between socialisation patterns and values in Mexican (Tapia Uribe et al.) and Mexican American (Delgado-Gaitan) settings, between African (Nsamenang, Oloko) and African American (Blake) settings. We hope that this kind of comparative reading of separately conceived studies using different methods will stimulate co-ordinated comparative research in the future.

West African, African American, Mexican, and Mexican American patterns of socialisation are the focus of this special section. The same approach is applied to Asian, Asian American, and Native American socialisation in Greenfield and Cocking (1994). This approach, which considers the historical origins of ethnic socialisation values, is of great potential value for understanding socialisation patterns of any group in the world, dominant majority as well as ethnic minority.

Development and socialisation in different cultures may originate as adaptations to different ecological/economic conditions, the material side of culture. However, the need to create meaning, intrinsic to human culture, means that these differing adaptations are reflected and rationalised in different value orientations, the idealistic side of culture. Most important for the articles that follow, these value orientations incorporate different goals or endpoints of development. Although both materialistic and idealistic levels are seen as part and parcel of both culture and human development, value orientations were selected as our theoretical starting point. The material circumstances of minority children in the United States (or other Western countries) are very different from those of children growing up in the cultures of their ancestral origin. It therefore seemed that value orientations, with their attendant goals of development, would be more likely than ecologically adaptive behaviours to provide evidence of ancestral cultural roots as a source of continuity in the developmental processes of minority children. In addition, only by viewing behaviour and thought processes in relation to people's goals and values, is it possible to go beyond the identification of cultural or other group differences and understand the adaptive function and meaning of those differences for the actors themselves.

Value Orientations, Socialisation, and Development

A major focus was the learning consequences of two value themes that characterise and contrast Euro-American culture in North America and much of Western Europe with that in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and

Native American societies. The first theme is an individualistic, personal, or independent orientation (Western) vs. a collective, social, or inter-dependent orientation (Africa, Asia, Latin America). Our inspiration here was the conceptualisation by Mundy-Castle (1968, 1974) of technological and social intelligences; the former is linked with individualism, the latter with collectivism. A second theme is the contrast between the early socialisation goal of maximising education development (modern) vs. the socialisation goal of survival (subsistence societies) (LeVine, 1977, 1987). It was thought that these contrasting cultural adaptations would also have implications for the child's learning styles and cognitive development.

Exemplifying a social orientation, Nsamenang and Lamb tell us that, despite intergenerational modernisation and urbanisation, the Nso people of Cameroon, West Africa, expect children to obey and show respect to their elders, just as children are expected to do in Mexican and Mexican American society (Delgado-Gaitan). Also, related to this theme, Blake examines the communicational aspects of a social orientation in her study of early mother-child communication and language development in Afri-can American children, and finds, in the context of overall similarities in African American and Euro-American child language, a greater emphasis on interpersonal and emotional themes in African American children, an emphasis that reflects their mothers' communication to them.

In Mexico, Tapia Uribe et al., describe an historical transition from adaptation to a society in which infant survival depends on maternal care to one in which it depends on use of medical facilities and medical knowledge. At the same time, this is also a transition from adaptation to a society in which adult economic survival and reproductive success depend on subsist-ence skills learned in everyday life to one in which success increasingly depends on the skills acquired in school. As Oloko notes, this is at the same time a transition from child as subsistence worker and economic asset to child as economic liability because of his/her need for educational resources. Oloko discusses this latter transition in West Africa, through her studies of children's street trading and schooling in urban Nigeria.

We are forced to modify the original value theme concerning survival, for we learn that it is not a question of an orientation toward survival vs. an orientation toward educational development; instead it is much more a question of changing the definition of survival skills to move from a subsistence economy to an urban, industrialised ecology. In Nigeria, for example, mothers do not all agree as to what the most adaptive skills are. Oloko notes that some busy Nigerian mothers criticise their children's attempt to study, demanding that children terminate "abstract studies" and attend to "sustenance matters"; this view comes out of a subsistence perspective and does not at all agree with the official view of the modernising nation-state. The treatment of Mexico and Nigeria in historical perspective

makes another important point: Ancestral cultures do not stand still; the immigrants of today are not necessarily coming with the same cultural background as their compatriots did in past generations, a particularly compelling point for African-Americans, whose ancestors were brought to the United States as slaves hundreds of years ago.

There is an important connection between our two themes. As Beatrice and John Whiting pointed out in a seminar at Harvard, schooling entails and engenders individualism, for in school assessment, co-operation receives powerful negative sanctions as cheating. There seems to be a link between school-based skill development and individualism on the one hand vs. subsistence skill, socialisation, and an interdependent or collective value orientation on the other.

Delgado-Gaitan's observations point to other ways in which the development of school skills may undermine the requirements of culturally defined social skills. For example, she shows that the development of critical thinking, which requires children to articulate and even argue their views with older family members, may be in conflict with, and therefore undermine, respect for elders, an important value in the culture of Mexican immigrants to the United States. She also shows how, in the parenting style of the first generation of Mexican Americans, raised and educated in the United States, critical thinking expands its sphere of influence as respect becomes correlatively more restricted in its contexts of socially required operation. This issue is relevant to people of the Bamenda Grassfields of Northwest Cameroon. As Nsamenang and Lamb show, the ideology of respect endures across two generations, despite schooling and other influences of European origin, just as it does across the two generations of Mexican Americans studied by Delgado-Gaitan.

Oloko articulates an important paradox with her data, one that must also be operative for a large number of Mexican Americans, particularly immigrants: Although schooling becomes increasingly important to survival in an urban, industrial society, schooling by itself decreases a person's willingness to share formal education's economic rewards with an extended family group. Schooling thus reduces the size of the functional social unit from the extended family to the nuclear family and perhaps, ultimately, to the individual. Oloko found that Nigerian children's subsistence street-trading activities counteracted this tendency: Highly educated adults who had been street traders as children more consistently maintained that rewards from professional progress should be used to fulfil obligations to the extended family than did other professional adults who lacked the trading experience.

At the same time. Oloko finds that, under modern urban conditions, street trading may undermine the school progress of child traders. Hence, it may be impossible to attain the rewards of formal schooling while

retaining the willingness to share these rewards broadly. For minority families who view a child's education as an investment for the whole extended family, this conclusion points up a paradox: The very process of becoming highly educated may make the recipient of the investment much less willing to share his/her fruits with the collectivity.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

By examining the roots of cognitive socialisation in their cultures of origin, it is hoped that these articles will contribute to our knowledge of cultural sources of learning styles in African American and Mexican American children. It is further hoped that this understanding will help society and research move: (1) away from a *deficit model* of minority child development in which differences are seen as deficiencies (Cole & Bruner, 1971); and (2) beyond a *coping model* of minority child development, in which differences are seen simply as adaptations to unfavourable conditions in the dominant society (McLloyd, 1990). Even more fundamental is a *diversity model* (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989) in which learning differences are viewed as rooted in historic cultural values that need not be assimilated out of existence but, instead, can make an important contribution to a diverse society.

In terms of minority education, an understanding of the positive sources of learning and cognitive development fostered by diverse cultural groups can help schools to better appreciate, utilise, and adapt to the strengths that children from various minority groups bring with them to their education. From the perspective of minority child mental health, an understanding of positive cultural sources of learning and cognitive styles has the potential to improve self-esteem. In more general terms, an understanding of cultural roots creates pride in oneself and one's group. Indeed, this is the importance of Jesse Jackson's suggestion that the term "Black" be replaced by "African American", a term that emphasises the relevance of the African roots.

At the same time, new knowledge of cultural roots will enable members of the majority society to understand and appreciate the distinctive styles of cognitive socialisation and learning in minority groups, as well as view their own cultural value orientations less ethnocentrically. Finally, the contrasts between the sociocultural roots of different minority groups in the United States should offer insight into the different cognitive and learning adaptations they have made to the majority culture in the United States. The articles by Oloko, Blake, and Nsamenang and Lamb will contribute to an understanding of the African roots of African American child development, and the articles by Delgado-Gaitan and Tapia Uribe,

R.A. LeVine, and S.E. LeVine will elucidate the Mexican roots of Mexican American child development.

The juxtaposition of development in ethnic groups in the United States and in their regions of origin suggests a new strategy for studying development and socialisation in minority groups: Begin with knowledge of values and cognitive socialisation in the cultures of origin. The papers that follow should suggest many specific hypotheses to which this strategy can be applied. It is hoped that research carried out in this perspective will in itself be a force for social change in the relations between majority and minority groups.

The article by Ogbu, in contrast, points out the role of an entirely different factor in minority between child development—the history and nature of power relations between minority and majority.

Study of the cultural roots of minority child development must add to *but not replace* an appreciation of the importance of the power relations between minority and majority groups, the theme of Ogbu's provocative article. Even with an appreciation of diverse cultural roots, minority children must still cope with the effects of varying sorts of sociopolitical relations with the dominant majority group. As Ogbu points out, the origin and therefore nature of these relations varies with each minority-majority group pair. For example, immigrant West Indians have one relationship with majority culture in the United States, a quite different one in the United Kingdom. Coping with these unequal power relations, whatever their precise nature, exerts a tremendous influence on minority child development. If a more accurate picture of cultural roots succeeds in changing the way members of culturally dominant majorities view members of less powerful minority groups, at the same time modifying the way that members of both majority and minority groups view themselves, then we will also have changed the evaluation and definition of each minority group's worth in the dominant society.

As Ogbu points out, involuntary minority groups (those who enter a country through conquest, slavery, or colonisation) tend to define themselves and their culture in opposition to the cultural values of the majority. Hence, they cannot adopt any of the majority's ways without losing their own identity. In this they differ from voluntary minorities, who enter the country of their immigration with a pre-existing cultural identity. African Americans (through slavery) and, to some extent, Mexican Americans (through conquest of the American Southwest from Mexico) fall under the definition of involuntary minorities.

Increased knowledge of their cultural roots on the part of both members of the minorities and members of the dominant society is a possible way out of the impasse of an oppositional identity, a step toward the recognition of underlying cultural identities. It is hoped that the exploration of

cultural roots in the countries of ancestral origin contained in this issue will support African Americans and Mexican Americans in developing sources of positive cultural identity that can ultimately replace the oppositional identities that currently hold so much power. This exploration of cultural roots should also help researchers build positive models of cultural factors in minority child development, factors that are protective even when development takes place in an unfavourable or hostile milieu of the dominant majority.

When one group, the majority, has the exclusive power, through science, to define the nature of themselves and all the other groups in a society, all minority groups are *ipso facto* disempowered. When members of minority groups gain the power to define themselves and the broader society in which they live, they are *ipso facto* empowered. With reference to his or her own group, the insider understands the meanings and motives behind in-group behaviours that may be misinterpreted or devalued by outsiders looking through the lens of their own cultural values. With reference to the dominant majority, an out-group member can see, and therefore study, aspects of the dominant culture that insiders have taken for granted or even repressed. The outsider can also serve as a cultural intermediary in making one culture more understandable to members of another.

The issues of insider and outsider perspectives that reflect and influence relations between less powerful and more powerful groups in a single society also reflect and influence the relations between less powerful and more powerful nations in the world. This special issue of the *International Journal of Behavioral Development* provides an opportunity for the development of Africans, African Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans to be studied through the lenses of insiders (Nsamenang, Oloko, Tapia Uribe, and Delgado-Gaitan), sometimes in collaboration with Euro-American outsiders (Lamb, R.A. LeVine, and S. E. LeVine). It also provides an opportunity for Euro-American society and its impact on minority child development to be studied through the lens of an outsider whose origin is neither American nor European (Ogbu, a Nigerian immigrant to the United States). These multiple perspectives bring us several steps closer to a truly multicultural model of development, one in which the acquisition and construction of culture is a primary component.

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