

child's potential by developing his or her biological, educational, economic, moral, and religious potentials in the positive direction. Lastly, Jordon suggests that by developing each child's potential to its fullest, the society will better itself, and perhaps, lay a better foundation for world peace.

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# 1

## Significant Sociocultural Factors in Effective Parenting

**IRA J. GORDON**  
*Late Kenan Professor and Dean  
School of Education  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

When one is asked to define the most significant factors in effective parenting, it is obvious that the first question that might be raised is how to define "effective" in a cultural context. Does effective parenting depend on the society in which one lives? The anthropologists, for example, have shown us the hundreds of ways of child-rearing in societies ranging from the most simple to the most complex. In Africa, for example, the Bagand society considers smiling and sitting as important landmarks of development at six months of life. The infant, therefore, is conscientiously trained to sit. Mothers place the children in appropriate positions, wrap cloths around the infants to support the waist, and sit them in small basins so the babies' hands are able to hold on to the side. These behaviors are appropriate in this culture because the women are engaged in agricultural pursuits which require digging, and it is important that children sit rather than be strapped or held. Tests of infant motor development show these infants to be precocious in their sitting behavior (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1975). Several decades ago Margaret Mead's pictures illustrated the tremendous fluidity of movement of Balinese children when compared to the body movements of Gesell's New Englanders. Studies of parent-infant interactions of Japanese and Japanese-American children indicate that distance between the pair and the use of language relate to culture. For example, Japanese parents in the first three months hold their children more and communicate more through direct body contact than first generation Japanese-Americans. The latter more closely resemble American mothers who maintain some distance and establish relationships by means of voice (Caudill and Weinstein, 1969).

Given this diversity, one may question whether there are some universals which, in spite of particular techniques, seem to override and apply to all of us as humans. The first step would be to define the term effective and then to move on to particulars.

To define an effective parent requires some notion of the goals of parenting. What is it parents and their society would like children to be when they grow up? As one of those who spent the whole week watching *Roots*, I believe it contained a demonstration of goals. One might assume that the goals for effective parenting in that

situation were to instill in children self-respect, a sense of group pride, and the ability to overcome the terrible circumstances of daily life. One vehicle was the use of the oral tradition. The goals were not simply physical survival, but psychological survival as intact human beings with a sense of belonging, cohesion, and indeed, roots.

In my culture, faced with various forms of abuse and deprivation throughout the last three thousand years, one can detect the same goals. Originally there was the reliance on oral tradition, but a major survival technique was the utilization of the written word. In this culture the family is the center of life in which there is the continued effort to instill a sense of pride, of tradition, of belief, of "groupness" which enables not only physical but cultural survival. No doubt these two examples could be reproduced many times in the culturally pluralistic American society. Each group has its cultural goals and traditions, from which its patterns of child-rearing flow, and which determine its original definition of effectiveness. But all these cultures now live in a broader social context, with the inevitable cultural borrowing and merging as well as conflict and confusion over values.

In today's modern world, are these goals mentioned above important? Are they sufficient for either the child's or the culture's survival?

Effective parenting, although there may be universal elements which will be discussed below, has to be understood in a cultural context. It has to be related to the societal goals as well as to the families' goals and makeup. Figure 1.1, developed from articles by Brim (1975) and Bronfenbrenner (1976), presents a visual means of examining the system network which influences the family. It can be seen immediately that different systems in the outer square (economic, social, political, legal), which has been labelled the macro-system, will make completely different sets of demands on all the people and agencies in the squares going toward the center. It is noteworthy that neither Brim nor Bronfenbrenner included the religious system in their descriptions. I believe this to be a significant omission, since much of cultural identity, for many millions, is closely tied to religious identity.

If we turn back to the African illustration, an economic system dependent upon a certain means of agriculture influences the way work is carried out, which in turn influences the arrangements of people in the neighborhood or tribe for caring for infants, which in turn influences the activities and roles of mother and infant. Such a view places the family, and the individual within the family, in a position of being influenced by, but not influencing, the larger systems.

However, another way to look at this is to recognize that influences can flow from the center out. As a family seeks to change, or as members of a family change their activities and roles and concepts, they influence the reactions of the meso-system in their immediate face-to-face environment and the reverberations extend all the way out. Much of parent education, at least in the United States, makes that assumption.

In our society, which places such a theoretical importance on the individual as a decision maker, changes in the culture are assumed possible through the behavior of the individuals in the center. For example, the Head Start program focused heavily on parent involvement based on the view that if parents became involved in the education of their young children, this would have an impact on the learning of the child. But it also included the notion that as parents learned about and became involved in the education of their young children they would influence the neighborhood, the

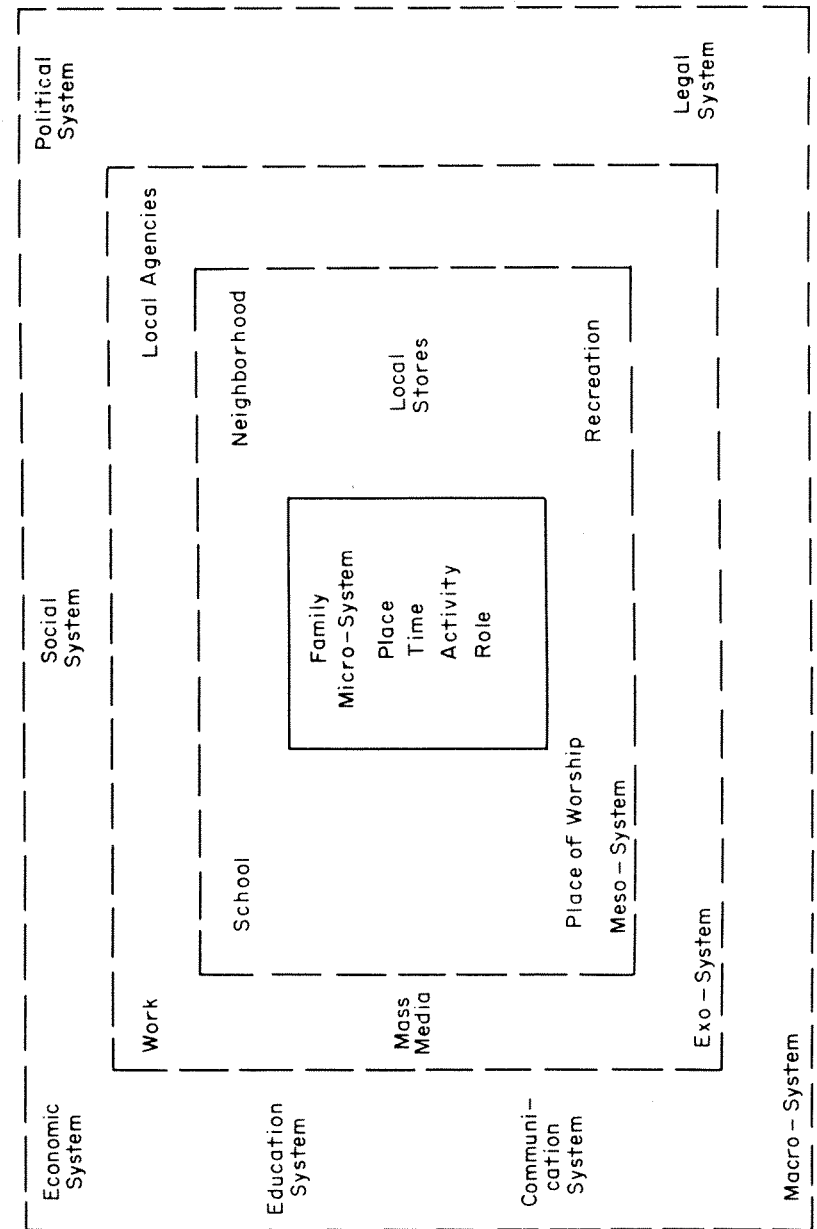


Figure 1.1 The system network influencing a child's development. [Source: Developed from O. Brim (1975) and U. Bronfenbrenner (1976)].

school, and the larger setting. This, indeed, proved to be true to some extent (Kirschner and Associates, 1970). Indeed, the evidence is clear that parent involvement led to political action in some ways which were not predicted by the originators (Moynihan, 1969).

From an American perspective, the goals of belonging and cohesion and psychological survival rest as much on the behavior of the people within the family micro-system as they do on the systems which surround it. It is influenced by the family arrangements for space, the amount of time members spend with each other, what they do and the quality of these transactions, and the roles they play. In a Marxist framework the behavior within that family is completely subject to and influenced by the arrangements at the outer rim. One's overall view of the relative influences of systems on each other will play a significant role in the decisions and policy judgments as to modes of attack and places of attack for improving a child's well-being. From a social science viewpoint, the most reasonable interpretation may be a transactional one, that is, that all systems impinge on each other. Influences go both out from the center and in from the outer rim. This means that policy decisions do not have to be strictly ideological. We can develop strategies for influencing each subsystem directly as well as influencing the relationships between and among them.

We are concerned with improving the relationships between home and school. States are legislating community school acts and various forms of parent involvement; federal legislation in compensatory education and education for the handicapped requires parental involvement. Involvement reflects the very often unstated assumption of both the American political and the social science position. This view is that by bringing home and school into a close relationship two things will happen. First, the school will be able to influence the internal environment of the home in ways which are predicted to enhance the child's learning. Second, the parents will be able to influence the school to be more understanding of not only the issues and problems that face that individual family, but also of the family's culture, particularly if it differs from that of the milieu in which the family lives.

*Pluralism in a Democratic Society* (Tumin and Plotch, 1977) includes a chapter by Nathan Glazer describing the social aspects of cultural pluralism. In his discussion of implications for education, he indicates that we all have as common goals in the American society such things as basic skills (reading, writing, calculating), a sense of history and socialization, that is teaching students "to work on their own and in groups, to respect the common rules in any social order, to regard achievement through their own efforts as possible and rewarding" (p. 17). Finally, the schools are still attempting to make a nation. I have previously defined the common goals that cover both life goals and educational goals as follows: Effective parenting is providing "the opportunities and climate that start the child toward becoming a person who is (1) competent in his relationships with others; (2) an inquiring, thinking, perceptive adult; (3) comfortable with himself; (4) open to the world around him; (5) able to adapt yet with a sense of balance; (6) with a sense of responsibility to others and for his own behavior" (Gordon, 1975, p. 124). Such goals, of course, are broad. Obviously, the broader you make them, the easier it is for varying groups to accept them.

The key question in our attempt to define effectiveness in the American culture is: What do we know about parental behaviors which enhance or retard the chances that children will attain those goals? This is to some degree the heart of the matter. If we wish to engage in programs for parents, what is it specifically we can suggest or recommend or call to their attention that, if their goals are similar or identical with

the ones above, would either encourage them to continue with what they are already doing, or suggest to them alternative parenting strategies or behavior?

We can attempt to answer this question in two ways. First, we can examine the general literature as it was reviewed by Robert Hess (1969) and in my own summary (Gordon, 1969), adding to it the British longitudinal work over the last two decades (Davie et al., 1972; Douglas et al., 1971; Kellmer Pringle et al., 1966; Miller, 1971), the reports from the International Educational Achievement Studies (Coffman and Lee, 1974; Coleman, 1975; Comber and Keeves, 1973; Keeves, 1972; Keeves, 1975; Purvis, 1973; Thorndike, 1973) and the reanalyses of the Coleman work (Coleman, 1966; Berger and Simon, 1974; Mayeske, 1975). The problem here, in addition to various methodological ones, is that family process and family structural variables have been correlated with academic achievement goals, and these academic achievement goals are much narrower than our general goals for children. The goals used in most of these research projects were primarily those of educational (academic) achievement. Nevertheless, since these studies were conducted in a number of countries it is important to note the common threads. If a major goal of parents is to enable the child to make it in the school system in which he or she will spend about twelve years, then we can say that: (1) engaging in direct face-to-face instruction with the child; (2) modeling by reading and discussing materials; (3) engaging in dinner conversations which move beyond description to planning; (4) providing the child with a consistent set of expectations for behavior, both as they apply to a single adult dealing with the child or to many adults, so that the child does not get different messages from different people; (5) utilizing not only the home but the neighborhood and the community as a resource; (6) spending time with the child; and (7) providing a secure and orderly home, all seem to be important variables. The amount of independence training may also be a factor. It seems that homes where thinking and freedom of discussion are valued and occur and where curiosity is encouraged, provide the background for success in school. It is clear that parental attitudes and ambitions are important and that the home must provide for stimulation.

One might suggest that these are not universals, but somewhat culture bound. At least they seem to apply in Western-oriented industrialized societies of which we, of course, are a major example. But given these answers, with what reasonable expectation can we assume that information to parents alone might influence the family micro-system? Here we need to examine what is happening to families. Although the statistics are American, similar data most likely can be organized in most of the Western industrialized world. Two reports, *The Status of Children, 1975* (Snapper et al., 1975) developed by the Social Research Group from George Washington University, and *America's Children, 1976*, a fact book developed by the National Council for Organizations for Children and Youth, contain the data.

We can examine the realities of the American family versus the mythology of the typical American family. If the family micro-system consists of time people spend with each other, the activities they perform and the roles played, it is obvious that the demographic trends in the 1970's show that the amount of time parents, particularly mothers, spend in the home, the activities in which they engage, and their role relationship with partners and their children are going through dramatic and dynamic change. "Changes in the size of families have been accompanied by changes in the structure of families and the roles of parents. For example, there was an 18 percent increase in the number of female family heads between 1970 and 1973, compared with a 24 percent increase in the entire preceding decade. . . . Overall, 12.4 percent of

American families were headed by females. . . . Overall, 60 percent of female-headed families have children under 18 and about 24 percent of the female-headed families had children under 6” (Snapper et al., 1975, p. 5–7). Contrast this with the fact that only 26 percent of husband and wife families in March 1974 had children under six. Today, about half the families rearing children under six are single-parent families. Further, there is a sharp rise in the number of divorces involving children. We have had fundamental changes in the relationship between the family micro-system and the world of work. “In March 1974, 43 percent of all married women were in the labor force . . . about 34 percent of women with children under 6 were in the labor force . . . labor force participation for women with preschool children (under 6) rose between 1970 and 1974 with the sharpest rise (26 percent to 31 percent) for mothers with children under 3” (Snapper et al., 1975, p. 8). The data are portrayed graphically in *America’s Children* (Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

The number of teen-age pregnancies in the United States is also on the rise and represents a significant problem not only for the teen-agers but also for their families, their children, and society at large. Similarly, the number of births to unwed mothers is increasing. For example, in 1976 in the city of Washington, D.C., there were more abortions than live births and more illegitimate births than legitimate ones. Such statistics make it difficult to preserve an image of the American family to which our children, not many years ago, were exposed to when they learned to read with books such as *Fun with Dick and Jane*. Here the family was portrayed as suburban, two parents, two children, two pets, and two cars.

Any examination of policy development for strengthening the American family must include some redefinitions as to what constitutes the family, as well as what constitutes effective parenting within the family. To assume that many of the parents now bringing children into the world can be easily reached, have the attitudes, or the time, or the wherewithal to provide the above seven patterns of effectiveness is to presume, indeed, more than reality permits.

A long-term study of the effects of growing up in one-parent families was recently completed in Great Britain (Ferri, 1976). The conclusions indicate that the

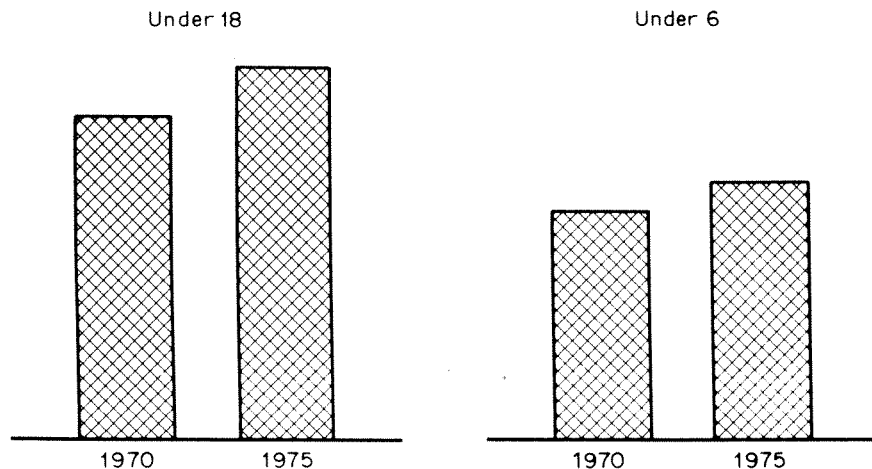
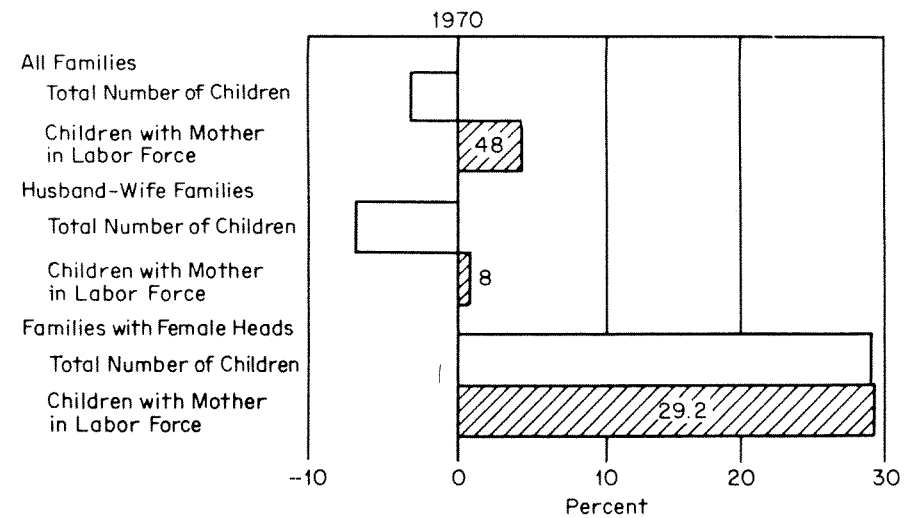
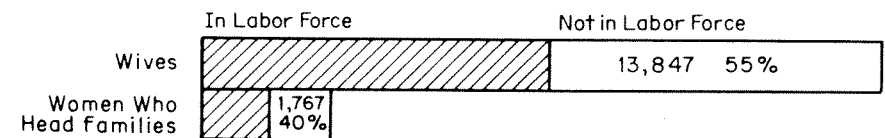


Figure 1.2 Children with mothers in the labor force, 1970 and 1975. (Source: *America’s Children*, p. 54).



(a)



(b)

Figure 1.3 (a) Percent changes in children and labor-force status of others, 1970 and 1974; (b) women in the labor force, 1975 (in thousands). (Source: *America’s Children*, p. 55).

child growing up in a one-parent home is at risk. Some of the risk, however, or a major portion of the risk, may be due to social class and family size factors, as well as limited parental aspirations. But Ferri concludes that "the attitudes which the family meets, and the treatment it receives in the wider social context will play a crucial role in its ability to recover from the unhappy experience of losing a parent, and to come to terms with its changed circumstances" (Ferri, 1976, p. 148). She indicates that it is the societal attitudes which isolate the family and increase its difficulties. The final paragraph is worth reporting:

Bringing up children single-handedly is an arduous task, both physically and mentally. Help is needed, not only in providing for the family's material welfare which is so gravely threatened by the loss of a parent, but also in offering guidance, assurance, and moral support to unsupported parents in their lonely role of bringing up children without another adult to share the responsibility. If such help is not forthcoming, the strains and pressures on some lone parents may become so intolerable that they are finally forced to relinquish their burden, resulting in perhaps the worst of all possible outcomes—a no-parent family [p. 149].

The English study does not deal with the problems faced in the United States of the high rate of illegitimacy and the high number of teenage mothers. Her study is a part of the British longitudinal studies and concerns children who were born into two-parent families, but who by the age of seven or eleven were living in one-parent families.

A second way to develop an empirical definition of effective which can be used for policy determination is to examine the variety of studies which have been and are being done with infants and their relationships with their parents. Again, unfortunately, the usual dependent variable is some measure of intellectual performance. We lack the tools for measuring those very important variables indicated in the first paragraphs of this paper, especially for measuring them in the early years of the child's life.

Here the intervention studies yield a number of clues from studies in which homes were observed and then relationships drawn between what was seen and the performance of children on various intellectual measures. Gordon and Jester (1972) and Gordon (1974) used videotapes and recorded the behavior of the mother, the infant, and the home visitor in a somewhat structured teaching situation, beginning when the baby was thirteen weeks old and every six weeks thereafter until the baby was forty-nine weeks old. This taping was embedded inside a home-intervention project in which the parent educator or home visitor spent an hour a week in the parent's home demonstrating ideas about activities, using materials that could be found in the home. Analysis of those tapes, using as a standard the child's performance on the Bayley Mental Development Index and various types of Piagetian activities at age one, clearly indicated four patterns of infant-adult interactions which were related to child performance. The first of these we labeled "Ping-Pong" because it is a fairly rapid interchange of parent doing something followed by child doing something followed by parent doing something, focused around some particular task. It has a gamelike quality and may not last very long at any one time. Indeed, it occurred less than 10 percent of the time, on the average, for the taped episodes over the nine-month period of the program. It is similar to what Escalona (1973; 1974) found in her studies in natural observations in the homes and also to Jean Carew Watts's

(1973) findings in the Harvard preschool project. The pattern begins early. There was variability in the amount of the pattern displayed by families as early as our earliest tapes (thirteen weeks of age). It probably begins before that. We know also that by as early as nineteen weeks of age, the amount of Ping-Pong is predictive of cognitive development by age one as measured by Piagetian activities. We believe that this is not culture bound. A little pamphlet by Haimen (1972) called "Soul Mother" states that Soul is playing with your child, singing or talking to your child, baby is smiling and cooing at the sound of his mother's voice. Our thirteen-week activity was the encouragement of baby cooing and sounding followed by the mother cooing and sounding back.

A second pattern was mutual gaze. This was an item we developed from Escalona's work. There is a power in looking into each other's eyes. Adult lovers know it, but it is also very potent at very early ages. We found it seemed to be particularly relevant for boy babies. The amount of mutual gazing as early as nineteen weeks of age is predictive of language and Piagetian performance at age one. Beckwith et al. (1971) found that there was a relationship between caregiver-infant gazing at one month and sensory motor scores at nine months for a group of premature babies observed at home. We labeled that pattern "passion."

A third pattern is persistence. This is shown when a parent begins an activity with a child, or engages with a child in an activity and then steps back so that the child himself or herself carries on and plays and explores the activity on his/her own. The amount of child sustained behavior, like the other two patterns, related positively to performance at age one. In addition, we found one pattern that was strongly related in a negative way. This was the pattern of an adult talking away at a child without attending to or being responsive to the cues the child may be giving. It was a one-way street. Because we are academicians very familiar with this pattern, we labeled it "professor."

None of these are uncommon behaviors. It is quite clear from our research that parents, even within a subculture, differ sufficiently in their use of these four patterns to make reliable differences in their babies' performances on intellectual measures at age one. We are currently replicating this study with middle-class families and attempting to examine the behavior of the father especially. As I look at both sets of tapes, I realize our coding inadequacies, because there are qualitative parenting behaviors we are not capturing.

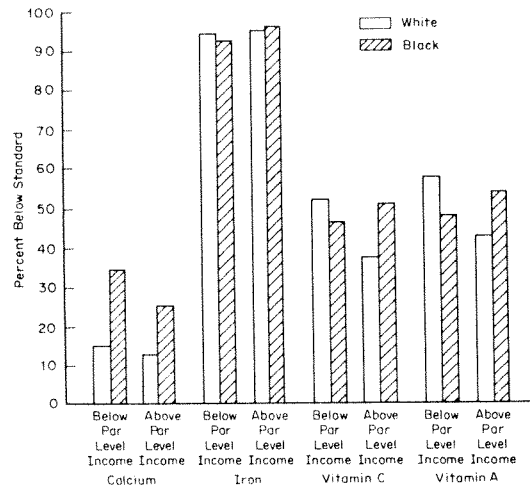
I would add that a most important parenting pattern is responsiveness to the individuality of the child. If I can turn back again to a cultural example, in my tradition we read the Hagadah at Passover. We are instructed as a part of the ritual, and you will remember my point about the written word as our survival technique, to read how to handle the behavior of different children as they sit around the Passover dinner table. The parent is instructed as to how to respond to the questions of the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child, and the child who doesn't have the wits to ask. We are again becoming aware of the tremendous individuality in the child at birth. Effective parenting requires an understanding by the parent of the child's own activity rate, sensitivity to the environment, moods, biorhythms, alertness, and the like so that expectations are matched and communicated in ways which are not stereotypic.

A problem with using the survey and observational research is that it might give parents the idea that if they behave in a specific way they will get a specific result. Nothing could be more dangerous. Effective parenting is an art form. We can pro-

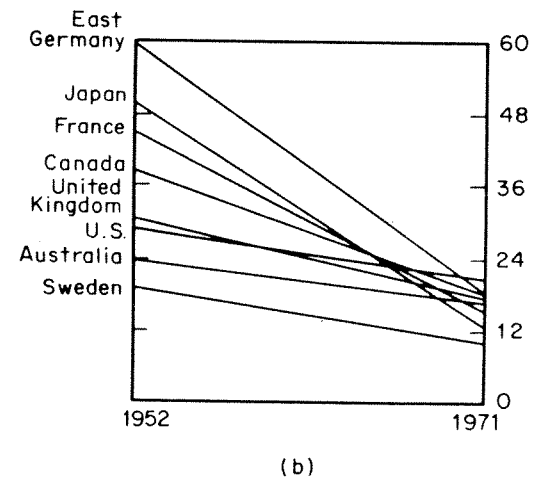
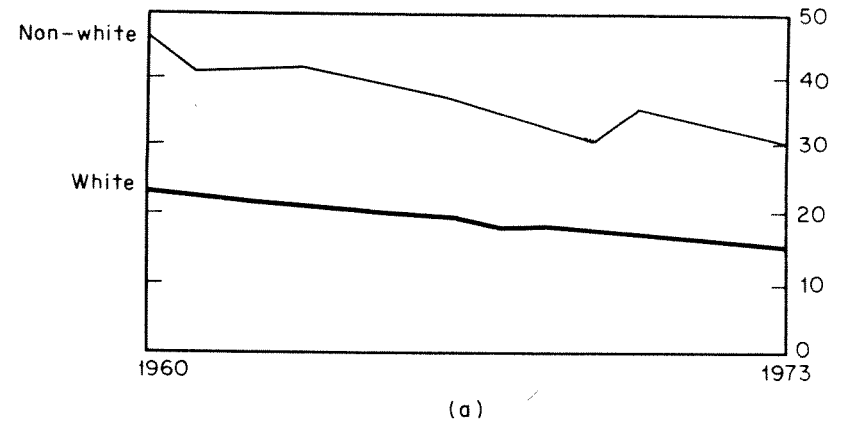
vide clues and ideas: we can suggest and demonstrate that one should talk with his child; that if you read and talk about books or magazines, your child will get the idea this is good, that if you promote consistency, your child will get a sense of security. Many of the particulars as to how to do this, and what “dosages” to use rest upon the particular individual biological make-up of the child and the parents. For example, given a highly active baby and a tired, energy-drained mother, it does little good to suggest that she should play with her baby. We may have to embed such suggestions in both the realities of individual biology and the social context.

This raises a broader question. Can effective parenting only be sustained well in a society which provides a structure for encouraging the family to be effective? What does it take in the systems which surround the family, and in the family’s transactions with those systems, so that the patterns of effectiveness found thus far in the research can occur in the home? If there are problems of income, jobs, time, food, housing, then we may be asking more of a parent than a parent can provide. For example, a worn-out parent may only be effective if we can provide temporary parental substitutes. In a multiadult home we may have to encourage all to share so that no one is worn out, and the load is distributed, especially as far as the infant is concerned. This would then create time and emotional quality for playful interaction.

It is a common belief that the family is the first and major learning environment and parents are the child’s first and most important teachers. We have seen above that there are some patterns of interaction within the family micro-system which relate to the performance of the child in the next system, the school. We have also seen, however, that the relationships between the family and the world of work and the social system are undergoing rapid change. Using the systems viewpoint and the emerging social data on demographic changes in our society, suggests that any defini-



**Figure 1.4** Percent population aged 1–5 years below nutritional standard: 1971–1972. (Source: K. Snapper et al., *The Status of Children*, 1975, Figure 2-7, p.25).



**Figure 1.5** (a) U.S. infant mortality rates by race, 1960–1973; (b) infant mortality rates of industrialized countries, 1952–1971. (Source: *America’s Children*, p. 32.)

tion of effective parenting requires changes in the nonfamilial system which will enable a family, however constituted and defined, to provide the simple survival basics of life before it can be expected that the family can make a major effort to deal with the psychological processes.

The demographic statistics are again revealing. For example, American children of all races and classes suffer major nutritional deficits (see Figure 1.4). Infant mortality in the United States is higher than that in other industrial societies regardless of their social system (Figure 1.5). This means that the medical system, which is at the outer fringe and is part of the economic and social system, has to be modified in some fashion and function in the neighborhood (the meso-system) in ways which enable a family to provide adequate nutrition and adequate health care.

With the changing picture of the world of work, the increasing flow of parents with young children into the work force, and the lack of adequate caring facilities, part of the definition of an effective parent is being able to locate and place one's child in a developmental situation for those hours when one is at work. This requires adjustments between the family and the school and local agencies so that spots exist for children which are not simply garage locations for parking the baby for the day. They must be places in which the caretakers function in the psychological ways that parents formerly functioned, and which match the list of interpersonal variables found to be important in development.

Housing too becomes part of the picture. If one has to work away from the neighborhood in which one lives, or if housing is available in such fashion that extended family networks which used to provide support systems (particularly for the single-parent family and the teenage parent) are destroyed because of small units or project rules, then although a "decent" place to live may be achieved, the social and psychological costs may be more destructive than the attainment of the housing goal.

We cannot examine programs for creating or enabling parents to be effective without dealing with all of the other factors involved. We require a comprehensive approach. We can attack each variable or each agency, to some degree, in isolation. But when we do, we have to be aware and measure and provide for the effects that such narrow programs will have on all of the other variables in the system.

I began on a cultural note and end on the same. There are those who will be effective parents enabling their children to survive physically and psychologically under the most adverse conditions. But it would be far better for the society as well as for the child if we found ways to provide that family with what it needs, in addition to parent education via television, home visitors, or group meetings. The family needs the social necessities for the effective physical and psychological survival of the parent and of the family structure. In the long run, the location of the family at the center of Figure 1.1 is symbolic of its real place in society.

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## 2

## A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Parenting

ROBERT A. LEVINE

*Roy E. Larsen Professor of Education and Human Development  
Graduate School of Education  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

An intelligent consideration of “effective parenting” in our own society requires an understanding of cultural diversity in parental goals, values, and behavior among human societies past and present. Parenthood is at once a universal and highly variable aspect of human behavior. In all human societies, as in infrahuman populations, sexually mature adults protect, nurture, and educate the young, but among humans the patterns of child-rearing are not uniform. In the last forty years, anthropologists have shown, with increasingly convincing evidence, that the environments of infancy and early childhood are shaped by cultural values. These values vary widely among ethnic groups and become firmly established in the personal preferences and inner regulations of individuals who seek to reestablish them in the next generation. Some of the best studies in this area have been conducted by Caudill, comparing middle-class Japanese and Americans (Caudill and Plath, 1966; Caudill and Weinstein, 1969) and by Whiting et al. (1966), comparing Zuni, Texans, and Mormons in New Mexico. It is clear from these studies that parents of different cultural backgrounds define the universal situation of child-rearing differently and attempt to organize the lives of their children accordingly from birth onward. In this chapter, I try to identify and illustrate both universal and culturally variable aspects of parenting and bring that cross-cultural perspective to bear on issues of parental effectiveness in contemporary American society.

Human parents everywhere can be seen as sharing a common set of goals in their role as parents:

1. The physical survival and health of the child, including (implicitly) the normal development of his reproductive capacity during puberty.
2. The development of the child’s behavioral capacity for economic self-maintenance in maturity.
3. The development of the child’s behavioral capacities for maximizing other cultural values—for example, morality, prestige, wealth, religious piety, intellectual achievement, personal satisfaction, self-realization—as formulated and symbolically elaborated in culturally distinctive beliefs, norms, and ideologies.