Universals of child rearing
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What is This?
Universals of child rearing

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Abstract
This article delineates four universal features of child rearing that together explain how child rearing everywhere so effectively turns children into valued adults. Cultural models for child rearing, so variable in the substance of what they teach, are all equally designed to make the child's experience of those important lessons constant, to link those lessons to emotional arousal, to connect them to evaluations of the child as approved or disapproved of, and to prime the child to be emotionally predisposed to learn them. This design insures that the child is receptive to these lessons, and that the lessons themselves are unmistakable, motivating, and memorable. The result, human adulthood, could not be accomplished otherwise.

Key Words
approval and disapproval • child rearing • culture and personality • emotional arousal • experiential constancy • predispositional priming • universals • valued adults

This may be a singularly unpropitious time, given a climate of ethnographic particularism and anti-psychologism in American cultural anthropology today, to propose cultural universals rooted in human psychology. Nevertheless, if one pursues the full implications of Bastian's and Boaz's dictum about the psychic unity of [hu]mankind, and if one takes seriously the comparative mission of anthropology, one cannot fail to discern seeming cross-cultural universals and cannot shirk from the attempt to explain them. Moreover, human universals and cultural variation are frequently two pieces of the same puzzle. The case of child rearing that I address here is such an instance.

The earliest program for the systematic study of child rearing cross-culturally was initiated by practitioners of the culture and personality school that dominated American cultural anthropology at the middle of the last century. Culture and personality represents one of those smart ideas that were ahead of their time. Its practitioners entertained the proposition that the child-training practices of a group shaped adult personality. The enterprise found inadequate support or downright misdirection in the knowledge base, the theoretical tools, and the disciplinary climate available in its day, and its results were consequently so flawed as to be prematurely dismissed. Under attack as well for the
essentialist, determinist, and functionalist formulation of culture that it shared with other theoretical schools of the era, and in particular for its initial characterization of personality as uniform across a culture, and eclipsed by one of the inevitable swings of fashion that have characterized cultural anthropology then and since, the field retreated and, by the 1960s, had been eclipsed. But such smart ideas deserve a second life. Today, I think, is a good time to restart the effort represented by the culture and personality school of the mid-20th century.

However, I must stress emphatically at the outset that the goal in this article is modest by comparison to the theoretical agenda set by anthropologists of the culture and personality school. Any speculation I allow myself about the causal link between particular child-rearing beliefs and practices and a corresponding adult personality is confined to a brief penultimate section of the article. My main effort is devoted to delineating what it is about child rearing universally that makes it such a crucible for the formation of adult personality. If we are ultimately to understand the key role that particular patterns of child rearing play in the formation of culturally distinctive adult selves or personalities, we must first understand how child rearing everywhere so effectively turns children into adults. This is the question I hope to answer in this article.

In addressing this question, I am the beneficiary of several recent developments in psychological anthropology and psychology. I take advantage of a new theory of culture, not as something monolithic and unchanging, but as shared cognitive schemas that arise out of shared experience (see e.g. Strauss and Quinn, 1997). I benefit, too, from an ongoing reconsideration, by psychoanalytic theorists, developmental psychologists, and psychological anthropologists, of which kinds of early child-rearing experiences might be expected to have lifelong influence on the resulting self – not, as culture and personality theorists assumed, isolated traits such as swaddling, or the timing and severity of certain practices such as toilet training, that were given such emphasis in the psychoanalytic theory of the day (see Ingham, 1996: 83–5), but more global features of child rearing – often, as I will argue in this article, value-laden child-rearing doctrines and deliberately engineered rearing strategies for inculcating these values. I also draw selectively on other approaches that have emerged since the mid-20th century: on connectionist modeling, the neurobiology of emotion, and attachment theory. I also work within a new post-cognitive-revolution disciplinary climate congenial to theorizing about culture as part of the human cognitive adaptation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I draw on some exceptionally fine-grained and meaning-attuned new cross-cultural field studies of child rearing – a tradition that, in both psychological anthropology and the anthropology of language socialization, has grown increasingly oriented to the cultural meanings embedded in child-rearing practices since mid-century. My argument depends upon, and integrates, all these late 20th-century developments in and influences on psychological anthropology.

**REARING CHILDREN TO BE CULTURALLY VALUED ADULTS**

What psychological anthropologists call cultural models are cognitive schemas that members of some group or class of people share. They are learned through experience, just as are other cognitive schemas (hence the alternative term *cultural schemas*), except that these experiences, and the cognitive schemas that result from them, are widespread in a group. That is all that ‘culture’ is: shared schemas, along with, of
course, the shared world of acts and artifacts that people holding common schemas collectively produce.

One common kind of cultural schema is a cultural solution to a task that members of a group must routinely perform, and that, once invented, is transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation. Cultural models of this kind evolve because culture and brain together can achieve shared solutions to human tasks that the individual brain alone is ill-suited to perform. Tasks that are likely candidates for such culturally assisted solutions are ones that are too recurrent and too vital for individuals to do without solutions to them, too complex to make it practical for individuals to reinvent their solutions independently, and widespread enough in a group to make a common solution attractive (see Rumelhart et al., 1986: 47; Clark, 1997: 194–200).

Paramount among such recurrent, vital, complex, widespread tasks requiring cultural solutions is the universal task of bringing up children. Tasks of this kind, that are so critical to human survival and community well being, are nowhere left to individuals to solve. In every community of child rearers, a cultural solution to this task evolves. Such a cultural model specifies the kind of adult that child rearers desire to raise, along with a set of practices, sometimes habitual and routinely enacted, sometimes more deliberate and strategically deployed, thought to most effectively raise a child to be such an adult. The vision of what kind of adult this should be, and local wisdom about how to raise a child to be one, vary, often dramatically, from child-rearing community to child-rearing community.

A proviso is in order. Here, when I refer to ‘cultural models for child rearing’ and the like, I mean this as shorthand for the cultural models all communities have for raising children to be the kind of adults that their rearers wish them to become, the kind of adults valued in that community. Not all child rearing, of course, is deliberately directed toward the goal of raising the kind of adults that parents and other socializers want to produce. Sometimes child rearing is just care-taking; sometimes it is instruction in knowledge that may be viewed as practical in nature and having little direct relationship to values. Often, also, it is dictated by external constraints, be they local environmental ones like keeping children out of the fire or away from the hot stove, or universal developmental ones like toilet training. To be sure, cultural values about the kind of adult parents strive to raise seep into even routine care-taking, instruction in practical knowledge, and the management of children’s security and development. For one simple example of the latter, all children everywhere learn to talk. In much of the world, children are expected to learn, and do learn, to talk without deliberate adult intercession (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984). American middle-class parents, though, are very proactive about encouraging their children to talk, and to talk early. Indeed, middle-class parental worries about late-talking children have spawned a whole speech therapy specialty in the United States today. We put such emphasis on talking early, presumably because we view this as a sign of intelligence, in turn a key indicator of future success in life. (By contrast, across much of Africa, methods thought to foster precocious sitting, standing, and walking are practiced; Super, 1980: 204–5.) That point made about the entanglement of all child rearing with parental values, this article will focus on those aspects of child rearing that are directed most explicitly at raising children to be culturally valued adults, with the assumption that cultural models for so doing everywhere exist.
The ethnographic picture of these cultural models for raising children that emerges from the cross-cultural studies of child development that I examine here is one of a quite specialized task solution. This task solution engineers the child's experience in four ways to make this teaching highly effective. Each of these four features of such models employs a different psychological mechanism, enhancing the developing child's capacity to learn in a different way. Together, these mechanisms appear to be so critical to the effective rearing of children to be valued adults that they are reinvented in every community. First, such models universally incorporate practices that maximize the constancy of the child's experience around the learning of important lessons about what is valued. Second, such models universally include practices that make the child's experience of learning these lessons emotionally arousing. Third, such models universally attach these lessons to more global evaluations of the child’s behavior, and of the child, as approved or disapproved. Fourth, and finally, such models universally train children first in some emotional pre-disposition, the strategic role of which is to prime the child for subsequent lessons about what is desired and expected of him or her as an adult. Child rearing depends upon constancy, emotional arousal, evaluation, and predispositional priming because these four features of experience are especially effective, psychologically, in imparting to children the values that their rearers desire to teach them, in motivating children to learn these lessons, and in making the lessons durable ones. Thus, I am arguing that culture, in the form of shared practices that engineer the child's experience, collaborates with brain in the universal human task of raising children to be adults. It should be clear that this is an argument about cultural evolution: Culture has everywhere evolved to enhance the child’s brain's capacity to learn in these ways.

Let me now explain what I mean by constancy, emotional arousal, evaluation, and predispositional priming, and how each figures in the rearing of children to be valued adults everywhere. Constancy of experience is meant both in the sense of that experience being repeated with regularity, and in the sense of it being undiluted by other, possibly contradictory or diverting experiences that might create confusion, uncertainty, or ambiguity. In neural terms, such experiential constancy translates, in the child's brain, into synaptic patterns (or, in another terminology, cognitive schemas) that may be characterized as highly resolved. I am using 'high resolution' to define a pattern of synaptic firing in which the synapses involved are strongly connected to one another while not being connected, even weakly, to other synapses. That is, when this group of synapses fire, they all fire without fail, and no others are activated. Such a synaptic pattern, not something that neurobiologists are yet in a position to isolate and investigate, has been best captured, to date, in the connectionist modeling of neural processes, and constitutes an especially strong, discrete ‘schema’ in connectionist terms (Rumelhart et al., 1986).

In both the sense of insuring regular repetition, and the sense of excluding the contradictory or the extraneous, constancy of experience is achieved in the way that important lessons about cultural values are characteristically conveyed. Children, of course, receive a plenitude of explicit injunctions, admonitions, lessons, and corrections of their behavior. These lessons are also, and much more frequently and continuously, conveyed in implicit messages about appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Because these messages, implicit in look, gesture, and other body language (including, of course, but hardly limited to, conventional verbalizations), are highly habituated, they shape what
the child experiences – and, equally importantly, what the child does not experience – with enormous regularity. Much more powerfully than could explicit teachings alone, these habitual, embodied practices converge to immerse the child in a cultural world of a certain constant shape, conveying their lessons repeatedly, redundantly, and unmistakably.⁵

To be sure, more generally speaking, our environment is profoundly culturally patterned, a patterning that is continuously impinging upon our experience and being reproduced in our behavior and in the artifacts we make. To appreciate the extent of this patterning one has only to think of the way people in any group walk, or the architecture of their domestic dwellings. But efforts to rear children to adhere to community values are exceptional in this regard, patterning the child’s experience deliberately, vigilantly, and persistently. The child’s immersion in this cultural world is fuller still because of wide consensus within a larger community of child rearers that these practices should be adhered to, and by the moral force with which the practices are imbued, reinforcing their enactment by members of this community. This patterning of their world is all the more effective because children, even the very youngest infants, attend avidly to, and learn from, what is going on in that world (Nelson, 1996: 256–7; Donald, 2001: 228–9).⁶

Further, to the degree that constancy means constant repetition of given experiences, the stronger and hence more memorable will be the synaptic pattern that results. Another feature of child rearing everywhere, emotional arousal – by various widespread techniques such as beating, frightening, teasing, shaming, or praising, each of which I will illustrate in this article – greatly heightens this effect, making the experience accompanied by arousal especially memorable over the long term. This happens for two reasons. Hormones released during emotional arousal actually strengthen synaptic connections, and emotional arousal organizes and coordinates brain activity, crowding all but the emotionally relevant experience out of consciousness (LeDoux, 2002: 200–34). The child subjected to such arousing experiences can be counted on not to forget the lessons so learned. Moreover, these lessons are indelibly associated, not only with the value they embody, but also with the emotional arousal itself, and with whatever motivation that this arousal entails – to act in such a way as to earn praise, for example, or so as to avoid being frightened. Children are highly motivated to enact lessons learned in the context of emotional arousal; they remember these lessons well and, remembering them in all their arousing, motivating fullness, they keep on re-enacting them.

A third characteristic of child-rearing practices everywhere also depends on emotional arousal, working similarly to frightening, praising, or other techniques specific to given cultural models for child rearing, to make lessons memorable and motivating – and, may indeed be coupled with these other emotion-arousing techniques, as well as with repetition, for maximum effect. This method is at once more general and more explicit than other techniques for arousing emotion, associating important lessons being taught with global evaluations of the child as approved or disapproved, loved or unloved.

To begin with, approval and disapproval are intrinsically emotionally arousing. This is because of their implications for care. Attachment theorists tell us that any threat to an infant’s attachment to their caretakers is experienced by the infant as a threat to survival and security. Such a threat is emotionally arousing, naturally, and especially so
to the very young, preverbal infant with limited ways of reading the gravity of environmental threats and responding to them. A caretaker's love and approval are reassurances to the infant that attachment to the caretaker is secure and the infant is safe; love withdrawal and disapproval arouse insecurity, signaling the possibility of neglect or even abandonment.

The feelings of being loved or being unloved retain their capacity to arouse strong emotion into later life. With this emotion, they carry the continuing motivation to seek love and avoid its withdrawal. On this emotionally arousing, motivating base, caretakers build the child's subsequent, more culturally shaped and elaborated, understandings of what behavior is approved and will earn adult love and other rewards, and what is disapproved and will bring love withdrawal and even punishment. Typically, in this process, what is approved and what is disapproved are labeled or otherwise clearly demarcated for the child.

One final characteristic of child rearing everywhere is the early training of the child in some suitable emotional predisposition, one that primes the child for the lessons to follow about the kind of adult he or she is expected to become. The engineering of the child's experience to be consistent, emotionally arousing, and subject to adult approval and disapproval is not adequate, it seems, to inculcate the lessons that are being coupled to this experience. Probably this has to do with the difficulty of teaching children lessons that are abstract, complex, demanding, and intrinsically non-gratifying. Indeed, abstract, complex, demanding and intrinsically non-gratifying is a good description of the task of learning to be a valued adult in any society. Difficult lessons such as these may well depend for their teaching on language, and the comprehension that language brings, to a much greater degree than does the learning of an emotional predisposition, which can thus begin earlier, even while the child is still pre-linguistic. For these reasons, child rearing everywhere first instills early in the child something more visceral – an emotional predisposition to learn the later, more difficult, and more language-dependent lessons.

Once instilled, this predisposition acts as a secondary gratification for learning and enacting desired behaviors and, equally, learning not to act in undesirable ways. As Jean Briggs (1982: 125) noted some time ago with regard to Inuit techniques of dramatizing values:

We should not rest satisfied with finding out what sanctions are imposed to enforce adherence to values, nor should we take for granted that people are ‘naturally’ vulnerable to the sanctions with which they are threatened. Instead, we should look for the ways in which these vulnerabilities are created, so that children become intensely sensitive to some sanctions and not to others.

Behaving in the expected and desired way may ultimately become rewarding, as behaving otherwise may become punitive, in its own right. It is likely, though, that the enactment of such desirable behavior, and the suppression of undesirable behavior, will continue into adulthood to be colored and, to varying degrees, reinforced, by the priming predisposition or ‘vulnerability’.

In the rest of this article, I will illustrate my four claims – about the deployment, in cultural models for child rearing everywhere, of experiential constancy, specific emotionally arousing techniques, evaluation in the form of approval and disapproval, and
predispositional priming – with cross-cultural studies of child rearing. My approach is the fine-grained examination of a small number of studies. These studies offer all the more compelling support for the universal features of cultural models for child rearing I argue that they demonstrate because the research they describe was conducted without any such claim in mind.7 This particular handful of studies came under my scrutiny when I had selected and used books and articles reporting on them in the syllabi of psychological anthropology courses I taught.8 It was my close and adjacent reading of these works that initially suggested to me the cross-cultural regularities that I am going to describe and explore in this article.9 This exploration is an exercise in theory-building, which must always come prior to hypothesis-testing, and which identifies and interprets patterns worth pursuing more systematically in a subsequent, hypothesis-testing phase of research.

The studies I consider here not only provide exceptionally nuanced accounts of child rearing; they are all distinguished by what Miller et al. (2001: 161) have characterized as ‘a concern with meaning’. This new concern with meaning owes itself to the general turn to cultural meaning beginning with mid-20th-century cultural anthropology. Cross-cultural child development researchers translated this new theoretical focus into ‘the recognition that socialization cannot be fully understood without taking into account parents’ “folk theories” or “ethnotheories”’ (Miller et al., 2001: 161; see also Harkness, 1992: 116).10 All the studies I draw upon, and the shorter examples I introduce, demonstrate this attention to the meaning that child rearers attach to their practices.

Two reminders, both qualified, need stating with regard to these studies. All were conducted among children and their rearers living in single on-the-ground communities or neighborhoods (or, in the case of the Taiwanese study, in one large city, Taipei), within which child-rearing beliefs and practices can be reasonably assumed to be substantially shared. When I refer to the participants in these studies as ‘(south) German’, ‘(middle-class) American’, ‘Taiwanese’ and so forth, I do so as a convenient way of identifying them within the larger set of studies I am examining. I do not mean, nor is it necessary for my argument, nor do the researchers themselves intend, to insist that child rearing in all American, German, Taiwanese or even Gusii, Ifaluk, Inuit, or Mfantsé communities perfectly mirror child rearing in each of the study sites. (It would be especially foolhardy not to expect differences in child rearing across regional, urban–rural, educational, and class divides in large post-industrial nations.)

On the other hand, I would not want to foreclose recognition of the common patterns that do pertain widely in the society beyond the study community, as a result of traditional cultural teachings or media exposure, for instance. For one case that I take up in this article, Cho et al. (n.d: 31) report, ‘there are indications that folk beliefs about childrearing, especially regarding a child’s early years, are consistent across much of Taiwan’. For another example, Briggs (1998: 7) remarks about the dramas we will consider, in which Inuit adults routinely tease children with dangerous questions, that ‘it is a striking fact that this model of socialization and the questions themselves were highly uniform across Inuit time and space – from Alaska to Greenland, among groups that had not been in contact for generations or centuries’.

The second reminder is this. Even within a single community, sharing is never complete, and for that reason culture is not monolithic. The schemas we learn depend upon the sum total of our experience. To the degree – and it is always a substantial degree
that a given person’s experience differs from that of others around them, that person will hold individually distinctive schemas. Thus, in terms of cultural schema theory, the problem of diversity within uniformity with which personality and culture theorists grappled evaporates. In this way of thinking, what was once described as ‘personality’ – and is increasingly now characterized as ‘selfhood’ – is not some mono-thematic and fax-like copy of a people’s ‘culture’, but is the characteristic kind of person – notwithstanding all its individual variability, complexity, inconsistency, and unexpected turns – that results from the experience of growing up and living in a given cultural community, and hence internalizing the cognitive schemas shared as a result of that experience.

The same is true for the child-rearing practices and the beliefs and values that underlie them and that are such a crucial part of that experience of growing up in a given community: These are not monolithic or always consistent or forever unchanging. In what follows I tease out from fuller descriptions of child rearing single strands, which I believe represent dominant values that are embodied in child-rearing models and enacted in child-rearing practices in the communities described. My argument about these values and how they are imparted to children does not preclude other emphases, even contradictory ones, in the same child-rearing models and practices, or reshapings of these models and practices over time. Nonetheless, cultural schemas for child rearing may be especially durable and especially widely shared. Briggs (1998: 7) concludes that ‘The durability of [the Inuit technique of teasing children] clearly indicates its emotional power and its importance to Inuit ways of being’. As indeed, the values, beliefs and practices surrounding child rearing everywhere tend to be central to a group’s ‘ways of being’, and hence emotionally and motivationally powerful – and for this reason not only especially durable, but also especially likely to be shared and enforced.

EXPERIENTIAL CONSTANCY

I now illustrate the characteristics of cultural models for raising children. First of all, the child’s environment is everywhere engineered in such a way that their experience of those most important child-rearing lessons, about the kind of person they are to become, is exceptionally constant. This constancy is heightened because it begins early in life, and because it is reinforced by the child’s experience, not just with a small set of primary caretakers, but with others within a broader community of shared opinion about child rearing, and by the moral force of such opinions. Given the moral force surrounding such child-rearing practices, child rearers are led not only to assiduously enact these practices themselves, but to monitor and enforce the practices of others. Of course, this experiential constancy is never perfectly maintained, in spite of rearers’ best efforts to do so; nor need it be perfect to be effective.

Constancy engineered

Several vignettes, taken from the cross-cultural study of child development, will illustrate how child-rearing practices are engineered to make the child’s experience constant.

First, Catherine Lutz tells the following anecdote about an incident that occurred while she was conducting field research on the Micronesian island of Ifaluk:

Whereas American approaches to child rearing and emotion elevate happiness to an important position, setting it out as an absolute necessity for the good or healthy
child (and adult), the Ifaluk view happiness/excitement [Lutz’s gloss of the Ifaluk word ker] as something that must be carefully monitored and sometimes halted in children. Taking the former cultural perspective in my approach to Ifaluk children, I watched one day with an amused smile as a five-year-old girl danced and made silly faces for me as I sat outside her house. A woman with me at the time noticed my grin and said, ‘Don’t smile at her – she’ll think that you’re not song’ [another emotion term, glossed by Lutz as ‘justifiable anger’]. The reasoning process behind this woman’s statement to me entailed some of the most central tenets of Ifaluk emotion theory . . . If I looked justifiably angry at the young girl, she would become afraid (metagu), lose her happiness/excitement, and then sit properly and quietly. In this case, the woman did not wait for ker to produce misbehavior but anticipated it. (Lutz, 1988: 167)

Lutz elsewhere (1983, 1987) explains the vital role that training in metagu – which she glosses as ‘fear/anxiety’ – plays in the socialization of an Ifaluk child, who is constantly reminded to be metagu, as the proper response to someone else’s song and in an array of other situations. Ifaluk Islanders put such stress on the learning of this emotion because, for one reason, they anticipate that the child who is metagu will perceive and avoid ubiquitous environmental dangers such as falling off cliffs or from trees and falling into open wells and lagoons. And, as we will later consider further, such a child will be pre-disposed to learn to be the kind of adult that Ifaluk Islanders strive to raise.

Robert LeVine and his co-workers (LeVine et al., 1994: 210–13) provide another striking cross-cultural example of the regularity of experience imposed by child rearing, this one drawn from the study they conducted among the Gusii, an agricultural people of western Kenya. Over a period of months, the researchers videotaped Gusii mothers interacting with their infants in the yards outside their homes, the infant in an American infant seat and the mother sitting or kneeling on the ground in front of her child.13 Following a laboratory design that had been used with American mothers, these mothers were instructed to ‘talk to your baby’, ‘play with your baby’, ‘get your baby’s attention’. Gusii mothers said it was of course silly to talk to a baby. They did comply, however, seeming relaxed and comfortable, although somewhat restrained:

Their speech to the infants consisted largely of repeated verbal formulas familiar in routine interaction, for example, ‘seka, seka, seka’ (smile); ‘kira, kira, kira’ (hush), or the making of attention-getting sounds. Though the situation of interacting with mother face-to-face without being held by her may have been unique in the experience of these babies (in the first session), they responded with evident pleasure vocally or motorically and sometimes moved their arms in a way that seemed to indicate the expectation of being picked up.

Some of the infants laughed, with much movement and vocalization. These peaks in affective display produced a mixed response in mothers: Some giggled nervously; others turned away, their faces suddenly devoid of expression. The infants usually responded with milder but still positive displays. The sessions seemed flat and monotonous to the observer in the field [an American] . . . but microanalysis of the videotapes showed that the mothers’ sudden gaze aversions were closely linked to the infants’ peaks of affective display and as such were important junctures in the interactions. (LeVine et al., 1994: 211)
The Gusii mothers’ pattern of gaze aversion, the researchers tell us, is in the interests of keeping interaction smooth and even.

The mothers’ response to these displays of positive affect is thus to dampen, diffuse, or diminish the affective level of the interaction. Among American mothers, by contrast, the goal is usually to build upon, amplify, or extend these infant behaviors; every effort is made to sustain Play and Talk episodes up to the limits of the infant’s capacities. (LeVine et al., 1994: 213)

Gaze aversion is a habitual Gusii style of maternal interaction with infants, and is to be understood in terms of several features of the Gusii cultural model for child rearing. Soothing and calming, rather than engaging and exciting, make for a quieter, less demanding infant, one easier to care for in combination with the agricultural tasks of these overworked mothers, and less likely to come to harm in a dangerous environment. In addition, looking fondly at one’s own child in front of others can invite jealousy and witchcraft. More, the mother’s averted gaze anticipates and habituates in the infant proper adult social interaction:

Adults rarely converse in the en face position but tend to speak side by side, back to back or at a 90-degree angle, in which one looks at the ground while the other speaks. Mutual gaze usually occurs at the moment of greeting and is avoided during the interaction that follows. Excessive eye contact is interpreted as disrespectful familiarity or improper intrusiveness with sexual or aggressive intent. (LeVine et al., 1994: 222)

Adult interaction ‘entails the avoidance of eye contact, particularly between those of unequal status, including parents and children’ (LeVine et al., 1994: 222). As well, we will later see, gaze aversion has a larger purpose in raising the Gusii infant to be a Gusii adult.

These instances from Micronesia and Kenya illustrate key features of child rearing everywhere. In each instance, the child rearer is confronted with a violation of the cultural model, a violation that, in both cases, has been introduced by American field researchers. In each instance, the child rearer’s reaction is to insist on, or persist in, enacting her own cultural model. The enactment – an Ifaluk woman unsmilingly regarding a child’s antics, withholding any sign of approval; a Gusii mother averting her gaze from her infant – is a highly embodied one. That is to say, the culturally significant message, in both cases, is conveyed implicitly in body language, as a matter of practiced habit, rather than being deliberately taught by explicit precept. The Ifaluk woman has occasion to explain to Lutz, the novice child rearer, why she, too, should not smile, but the woman does not tell the little girl why she should not dance and make faces. She merely conveys her lack of approval. Finally, it is easy to imagine both these embodied practices repeated multiple times daily, in their respective communities, along with the multiple daily enactment of other, coordinate practices equally embodied and habitual. Similarly, how many times a day does the American middle-class mother of a toddler reward her child’s little accomplishments with praise? It is this implicit, habitual nature of parenting that leads LeVine et al. (1994: 255) to refer to ‘the absolutism of conventional practice’ with which cultural models of infant care are imbued. It is practice that
creates considerable constancy of the child’s learning experience – as both the Ifaluk and
the Gusii cases illustrate well, constancy as much in what it excludes from this experi-
ence as in what it structures into it.

Here I cannot resist adding an illustration that comes from a recent visit of mine to
Hamburg, Germany. A student in one of my classes at home, having studied abroad in
Berlin, had shared with the class her amazement that Berliners would stand and wait for
red lights to turn green, even when there were no cars coming or, indeed, anywhere in
sight. In Hamburg, riding in a car with two of my German hosts, I felt compelled to ask
about this practice. The two Germans agreed unhesitatingly that, yes, they did that, one
explaining to me that they did it to set a good example for children. The other German
then told about the following interaction she had had with her boyfriend just a few days
ago: When he started to cross against a light, she stopped him from doing so. Walking
with him later the same day, however, she crossed against a light, and, bemused, he asked
her how she could be so inconsistent. She explained to him that on the first occasion
there had been a child nearby, and she didn’t want the child to see them violate the rule.14
This story brings home, once again, the attention and effort that adults put into the
constancy with which children experience the lessons they are being taught.15

An early start
Part of constancy is continuity over time. Lessons learned in infancy establish a pattern
of experience that makes child rearing all the more effective when these are continuous
with lessons learned later.16 Patterns established early are especially unambiguous
because the infant has not yet undergone other, complicating or possibly competing,
experience that might hold contradictory lessons. In addition, these patterns of
experience are more enduring because ultimately continued over a longer period of time,
and because earliest experience, associated as it is with the infant’s felt vulnerability with
regard to security and survival, is likely to be so very emotionally arousing. Child rearers
ensure that children’s experience is all the more constant and all the more arousing by
imposing lessons about values early, often beginning in infancy. This point is illustrated
in the Gusii example and, even more sharply, in this next example, provided by LeVine
and Norman (2001), from Karin Norman’s study of child rearing in a small south
German town outside Frankfurt. The example is taken from Norman’s field notes, which
describe an incident that happens while two-year-old Karl is being cared for by his
maternal uncle and the uncle’s wife while his parents are off on a two-week ski holiday.
The aunt and uncle are chatting with visiting friends. At one point,

The aunt tells of how early he wakes up in the morning, at six o’clock, ‘but I’m not
to take him out of bed, Sigrid [Karl’s mother] said, he’s to stay there until nine or
he’ll just get used to it and she won’t have it; she’s done that from when he was a
baby’. So Karl is kept in bed, he stays quiet, she doesn’t know what he does, hears
him move about in his bed, babbling to himself. Renate, her friend, thought it was
expecting a bit too much of him, keeping him in bed that long: ‘an hour maybe, but
three – that’s too long’. (LeVine and Norman, 2001: 93)

Karl’s mother, say the authors (LeVine and Norman, 2001: 93), ‘apparently trained her
son as an infant to comfort himself in his room alone. She considers herself entitled to
have a child who is self-reliant at an early age so as not to interfere with her other activities. More generally, the authors go on to explain, the infant’s toleration of isolation and ability to self-comfort are not just for the mother’s convenience, but represent a concern ‘about the danger that a young child will become “spoiled,” verwöhnt, by excessive attention and too much accommodation’ (LeVine and Norman, 2001: 92–3), which the authors (LeVine and Norman, 2001: 94) link to the important developmental goal of Selbständigkeit (glossed as ‘self-reliance’).\textsuperscript{17}

The discussion about this absent mother’s practice also illustrates that variation exists even within a community of child rearers. Practices begun in infancy, as is this one, are especially likely to come under scrutiny and to engender disagreement among members of such a community, just because they demand such perceived precocity on the part of the child. However, even in questioning the extremity of the mother’s practice, the aunt’s German friend Renate affirms the cultural principle behind it (as do north German parents I had an opportunity to quiz casually about this). What is in question is not \textit{that} this mother leaves her child alone in his bed, but \textit{how long} she does so. Moreover, this morning regime is only one of an array of typically German practices designed to teach infants and small children to stay alone and comfort themselves. Such practices, dictated by the local cultural model of child rearing, seem entirely natural to its subscribers, even as they may seem counter-intuitive, even harmful, to some outsiders.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{The community of child rearers}

The pattern of child rearing to which a child is exposed is even more regular because it extends beyond the primary caretakers and beyond the household to a larger community of child rearers, all of whom share, to a great extent, a common cultural model for child rearing and common strategies for its implementation. Within this community, the rearing that children receive from their mothers is also being received from their teachers at school, from their aunts, big sisters, and other relatives, and from neighbors and babysitters.\textsuperscript{19} Addressing an academic readership, I have to emphasize the extent to which each of us, as parent or surrogate parent, abides by the cultural model of child rearing shared in our community. Representing, as academics do, a highly educated, elite class, we tend to read, talk and think obsessively about child rearing during our parenting years, debating the pros and cons of different methods of rearing with relish. Also, living as we do in a highly complex society, we think of everything, including child rearing, as diverse (and, for Americans, as a matter of individual choice). Moreover, it is not easy to apprehend a model for child rearing in order to appreciate how shared it is. Our child-rearing model does not come to us articulated in its entirety as an explicit credo. Instead, like much cultural knowledge, it is largely tacit in our minds and often only implicit in our actions. As a result, we may not recognize how deeply ingrained, indeed embodied, in us is this model of child rearing. Even the child-rearing manuals middle-class American mothers are so fond of consulting focus on specific effective strategies for bringing up children (such as how to deal with a tantrum), or discuss aspects of child rearing that have become controversial (such as the pros and cons of daycare), leaving unquestioned the most fundamental tenets of the shared cultural model for raising a child to be a valued adult, that shapes and motivates these narrower concerns.\textsuperscript{20}
But Americans of the professional class do represent a child-rearing community, albeit a dispersed one. We have been brought up, ourselves, to value similar traits and qualities in people. When we become parents, we read the same, the latest, child-rearing manuals. We send our children to the same kinds of preschools and schools, whether private ones or high-end public schools in the professional middle-class towns and neighborhoods in which we reside. I will try to bring home the extent to which we share implicit assumptions about bringing up children, with one small but, I hope, telling example. The middle-class Americans I know are unlikely to question the practice, common in middle-class American preschools, of keeping portfolios containing samples of each child’s artwork, a record of the child’s chosen classroom activities, and written examples of things the child has said – often commentary on the pieces of artwork, elicited from the child by the teacher. Portfolios express the uniqueness of the child’s self, and we subscribe unthinkingly to the notion that this is a good thing for any child to learn.

As part of a fascinating study of individualism in three New York City communities differing by class, Adrie Kusserow (1996, 2004) tells the story of the Board of Education’s attempt to introduce upper-middle class teaching methods, including portfolios, into a lower-working class preschool where she was conducting research. Asked about his child’s artwork, one father there, a prison guard and construction worker, described to Kusserow how

I went over there they have a class, a school meeting and Miss Tarlin is telling me well we drew these pictures with finger paints, what do you see in them, I said I see a mess, what do you see I mean don’t try to read into it, I mean don’t even give me all this hogwash, I really don’t want to hear it, this is a four-year-old kid, don’t tell – I mean they have stacks of paper on a four-year-old kid.

Kusserow then asks him to tell her about his child’s portfolio.

Portfolio it’s how they get along, they put their pictures and try to analyze them, what do you see after this child paints a picture, what is it, how do you see your father here or where do you see the flower in this and then they’ll try to explain it to you.

She asks him, ‘Psychoanalysis?’ and he becomes more emphatic:

Psychoanalysis, yeah, I mean you’re psychoanalyzing a four-year-old kid that is standing there with their hand in paint, if you ask them draw a picture or a flower and they drew a weed, maybe you could figure something out there, but I don’t think you’re gonna figure out hand paintin’, so I told her it was just a little too much, and I said you’re gettin’ a little too serious with four-year-olds, she said well this is the Board of Education’s rules now so we have to do it, we have to explain it, and I said well I don’t want to hear it, this is bullshit, you know what I mean – I’m not – there are people I know in Manhattan who – I know people who have a two-year-old and the two-year-old says instead of da da, says ta ta and they fuckin’ analyze it and I mean shit! It’s unbelievable, you’re better lettin’ em go into a pile of mud and put it on the wall, it’s the same shit. (Kusserow, 1996: 200–1)
This father’s heated resistance to a new school practice reflects a clash of child-rearing models along the fault-line of class. The model on which this working-class man draws is very different than the one shared by middle-class Americans. Cultural models for child rearing are one likely locus of difference across class because these models engage profoundly important values, and values are one important way in which a class is defined for its members. In the case Kusserow (1996) describes, what is at stake are two different versions of individualism. For Americans like this working-class father, individualism means the value of toughening up your child in the ultimate interests of adult self-reliance; for Kusserow’s upper-middle class American parents, it means the value of encouraging the child’s self-expression in the ultimate interests of adult self-actualization. We who share the middle-class child-rearing model within which portfolios make sense, find them, at the least, unobjectionable, in contrast to this working-class dad’s resistance to them. Of course it’s good, we think, to encourage the child to express herself.

The moral force of child-rearing practices
LeVine and his colleagues have drawn attention to the degree to which cultural models for rearing children to be valued adults are everywhere invested with ‘moral direction’ or ‘moral rectitude’ (LeVine et al., 1994: 248, 255). The moral dimension to beliefs and practices surrounding child rearing should not be surprising, given that this task engages adults in the active consideration and reproduction of their dearest-held values. It is this moral force that is reflected in the proclivity, noted by LeVine et al. (1994: 255–6) and others (see Tobin et al., 1989: 188–221; Miller et al., 2001: 167–8), and exemplified in the reaction of the working-class preschool father interviewed by Kusserow, to be deeply critical of, and resistant to, other child-rearing regimes than one’s own. At the same time, this moral force makes child rearers insistent about their own child-rearing goals and practices, and hence persistent and consistent in enacting them. Adults may, for example, feel morally justified in imposing practices earlier in the child’s life than they otherwise might (LeVine and Norman, 2001: 84; Strauss and Quinn, 1997: 106). The German mother of our example is likely to be more willing to leave her infant son alone in his bed from the earliest age, and more assiduous in doing so, because she believes she is doing so not just for her convenience, but so that he will develop the virtue of Selbständigkeit.

In the examples I have given, maintaining a constant experience for children has the appearance of being the moral thing to do. The child is being taught a highly valued trait – to be fearful of justified anger in the Ifaluk case, quiet and undemanding in the Gusii case, or self-comforting and hence unspoiled in the south German case. The teaching and learning of such behaviors takes on an even greater moral import because the behavior is conceived of as instrumental to a larger goal of raising the child into a culturally desirable adult. In my German anecdote about not crossing against the light, the broad moral implication was not self-evident. The matter is a moral one to Germans, we might surmise, because it is perceived as crucial to children’s safety. The practice may partake, though, of an even deeper, more distinctive moral value that Germans tend to place on rule-following more generally – as LeVine and Norman (2001: 91–2) put it, the German virtue of ‘Ordnungsliebe, “love of order”, which means both self-control and learning to comply with the demands of existing regimes of schedule and discipline’. 

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Not crossing against the light seems to have become something of a symbol, to Germans, of such compliance. Those who explained this practice to me justified it with certitude and, it seemed to me, pride.

People are not only regular in their own enactment of child-rearing practices; like the German woman who stopped her boyfriend from crossing the street, they are willing to monitor and enforce other people's observance of these practices. Indeed, individuals enforce others' observance of child-rearing practices even, as in the case of the Ifaluk woman sitting beside Lutz, in foreigners and even, as in the case of Karl's mother, in their own absence. This assiduousness not just in enacting given child-rearing practices oneself, but in monitoring and enforcing others' enactment of them, has the effect of reinforcing and extending the constancy in the child's experience of those child-rearing practices deemed to carry morally important lessons.

The moral force with which adults imbue their child rearing is conveyed, along with the lessons infused with this morality, to the children they rear, making these lessons emotionally arousing to these learners because of the approval and disapproval that are inevitably attached to moral judgments. I have already suggested how approval and disapproval work effectively as very general-purpose techniques to recruit emotional arousal in the service of culture-specific child-rearing lessons. As will emerge later in this article, approval and disapproval are not mere side effects of the morality with which adults infuse the lessons they teach children, but are harnessed much more deliberately to the teaching of these lessons.

TECHNIQUES FOR EMOTIONAL AROUSAL

First, consider other, more specific, techniques for arousing emotion, with one or another of which cultural models for child rearing everywhere come equipped. Since arousal of emotion is highly effective in motivating the child learner to behave in desired ways, and in making this learning memorable, and since these are results that socializers seek, it is not surprising that emotion-arousing techniques are relied upon again and again cross-culturally, being adapted to achieve very different child-rearing goals in different communities. As in the examples I give next, these techniques are often a good bit more contrived than the habitual, embodied practices already discussed. Nevertheless, they may, like other practices, have highly habitual, embodied components, and they are likely to be, like other practices, repeated with frequency, by many different adults in the child's world, beginning early in the child's life – so that they contribute to the constancy of the child's experience at the same time that they make that experience arousing. For one example, that will be introduced at the end of this section, Jean Briggs (1998: 6) tells of the playful but dangerous questioning that is such a big part of the teasing to which Inuit adults submit young children. Briggs mentions that it began 'in infancy, long before the baby understood speech' and is a prominent feature of Inuit child rearing thereafter, 'delivered with great consistency in many contexts and in many forms' (Briggs, 1982: 120) and 'received from many quarters' (1982: 126).

There seem to be a limited number of strategies in use worldwide. One of the more obvious and common of these, for getting through to transgressive children, is the practice of frightening them with attack by spirits and other animate beings, natural or supernatural. A good description of frightening as a conventional practice comes, once again, from Lutz's Ifaluk material:
The most striking way in which *metagu* is socialized is through the use of a special type of ghost (*tarita*) which is said to kidnap and eat children. This ghost is impersonated by one of the women of the child's household, who covers and disguises herself with cloths. The ghost, which normally resides in the wooded interior of the island, is called by parents to come take the child if she or he misbehaves. The ghost is most frequently called if the child has aggressed against a peer, or if the child begins to wander away from the house. Appearing menacingly at the edge of the house compound, the ghost causes young children to leap into the arms of any nearby adult. The label *metagu* is used in profusion to describe the child's reaction, and the ghost is then told by one of the adults present that 'the child will no longer misbehave' and that it should therefore go away. (Lutz, 1983: 255)

This practice, of frightening children with adults dressed up as apparitions, is common worldwide, but the same effect is often also obtained without benefit of such elaborate staging. Ghanaian adults, for example, seem willing to exploit any potentially frightening being – supernatural, human, or animal – that happens to be at hand. A Ghanaian woman told me that she had a lifelong fear of chickens because, when she transgressed as a small child, her mother used to threaten her that the courtyard chickens (which must have been fully half her height when she was two or three) were going to attack and eat her. Working in a Mfantse fishing community on the central coast of Ghana, West Africa, in the 1960s and 1970s, I found myself unwittingly serving as an impromptu apparition. My 'costume' was my white skin, my European features, and my strange, light, blow-away hair. When I entered a courtyard, some woman would typically shout to the toddlers playing there, 'Here comes the foreigner (*bronyi*), she's going to take you away'. The children would run screaming from the sight of me. Pretty soon, no admonition was necessary: They saw me, they ran. I imagine that mothers were lining me up as a bogeyman in anticipation of their children's future misbehavior. Then, I suppose, even when I wasn't around they could scare children into obedience by reminding them of the threat to send them away with me. Uniformed policemen, who occasionally visited households on police business, were equally as effective.

I returned to this community to observe child rearing in 2003. Fortunately for my new project, I was able to make residents in the eight sample households understand my concern, and they refrained from telling their children that the *bronyi* was going to take them away (though I sometimes heard this threat as I walked through town). What I did witness repeatedly was another, and the primary, Mfantse technique for getting children's attention: beating. Beatings are administered with the hand and with the stick (the same verb, *hwe*, is used in either case). The stick (*abae*) is translated into English in all of Ghana as the 'cane', but is actually a length of tree branch cut for the purpose and kept handy. If a child is small and the infraction slight, he is likely to be hit with a cupped hand to deaden the blow (but adults were disapproving of those who spoiled their children by not beating them hard enough when called for). Even an infant might be lightly cuffed for crying for no good reason. On the other hand, an older child who misbehaves will be beaten repeatedly and with some vigor. On one occasion, a boy of about 10 or 11 had thrown a stone at a younger girl, hit her in the face, and drawn blood. His mother was not at home, but four young men resting nearby reacted. Each one took a turn at beating the boy, quite severely, by hand, on his back, chest, arms and
legs. He howled piteously. At one point he escaped and ran away, but two of the fisher-
men ran after him and retrieved him, whereupon the beatings resumed until all the men
had taken their turns.

The arousal attendant on a beating is obvious, but it is not only the child being beaten
who is emotionally aroused; while the beating of this boy was going on, I noticed a girl
from the same household, perhaps 11 or 12, who had shortly earlier been playing in a
group of children with the hapless boy, standing pressed against a wall of the house and
making anxious little mewling sounds. Caning was ever present in these households even
when it was not actually being administered. In some households, the cane was left on
prominent display, and sometimes called attention to or brandished by one of the
women working or sitting in the courtyard. Women had special and unmistakable voices
that they used to threaten caning or to otherwise warn misbehaving children to desist
and, sometimes, to head off anticipated misbehavior before it happened. They could also
send these messages with a certain sidelong stare. The occasion of an angry look or a
raised voice, loud and accusatory in tone, was surely associated in children's minds with
the possibility of a caning.

Another emotion-arousing technique is shaming. Heidi Fung, Peggy Miller and their
colleagues (Fung, 1999; Fung and Chen, 2001; Miller et al., 1996; Miller et al., 1997;
Miller et al., 2001) have provided a series of analyses of shaming as a Chinese socializa-
tion practice, in the context of a comparative study of stories co-narrated to the
researcher, in two middle-class locales – a white American neighborhood in Chicago and
Chinese households in Taipei. A co-narrated story is one in which an adult incorporates
the child into the telling. The children in this case were two-year-olds. In both the
Taiwanese and the American communities, mothers regularly co-narrate stories with
their children of events in which the child has taken part. However, the Taiwanese and
American stories differ sharply.

Here is a typical Taiwanese story co-narrated with a two-year-old boy, Didi:

Mother: [Looks at child] Eh, eh, you that day with Mama, with younger sister [pats
sister's back], with older sister went to the music class. Was that fun?
Child: It was fun.
Mother: What didn't the teacher give you?
Child: Didn't, didn't give me a sticker.
Mother: Didn't give you a sticker. Then you, then what did you do?
Child: I then cried.
Sister: Cried loudly, 'Waah! Waah! Waah!'
Mother: Oh, you then cried? Yeah, you constantly went, 'Waah, didn't . . . [gestures
wiping eyes, makes staccato gesture of fists away from body], why didn't
you give me a sticker? [whines] Why didn't you give me a sticker? [whines]',
didn't you?
[Child looks up from book, gazes at mother, smiles, and looks down at
book again.]
Sister: [To mother] Yes, 'Why didn't you give me a sticker?' [claps hands].
Mother: [To child] Sticker [sighs]. Ai, you made Mama lose face [hao mei-you
mianzi]. That, that, I wanted to dig my head into the ground. Right?
[Smiles, shakes head, smiles again.]
The Taiwanese stories are not infrequently organized, as this one is, around the child's past transgressions. Sometimes, as in this story, the loss of face that a transgression has precipitated is referred to explicitly. Sometimes story-telling is an occasion for reasoning with the child about their misdeed. Frequently, a confession is extracted from them, or the story ends with a didactic coda that summarizes its moral – for example, ‘Now I don't cry at all’; or, ‘Saying dirty words is not good’ – or a tag question that demands concurrence from the child – for example ‘right or not right?’ or ‘understand or not understand?’ Outsiders present, including the researcher, are invited by the caregiver to evaluate, criticize, and judge the child, and the imputed negative opinion of absent others is invoked – in one especially amusing example, of future boyfriends who, it was said, would not marry the girl after watching her tape-recorded misdeeds (Fung and Chen, 2001: 430).

Committed to a moral ideology in which shame is positively valued, the parents felt that they would be remiss if they did not raise their children to know shame and, consequently, to abide by the rules of appropriate conduct. These researchers (Miller et al., 1996: 266) report that personal storytelling ‘is a major means by which the socialization of shame is accomplished’. The Taiwanese parents viewed the co-narration of transgression stories as an enactment of the concept of ‘opportunity education’ (jihui jiaoyu; Fung, 1999), a cultural task solution the twin principles of which are ‘that it is more effective to situate a moral lesson in the child’s concrete experience than to preach in the abstract and that parents should take every opportunity to provide such concrete lessons’ (Miller et al., 2001: 167). The immediate moment of transgression itself is the ideal opportunity for education through shaming. However, co-narratives also allow parents to ‘create an opportunity where none existed’ (Fung, 1999: 201), most frequently by piggybacking recollections of previous transgressions on accounts of present ones (Fung and Chen, 2001: 428). ‘Thus, the child may hear particular misdeeds narrated, and may confess to those misdeeds, again and again. Being able to face one’s own misdeeds honestly, and repeatedly if necessary, is crucial to this proactive self-corrective process’ (Miller et al., 2001: 167).

Shaming of this kind is unquestionably emotionally arousing. Miller and her co-authors (Miller et al., 2001: 167) are concerned that Chinese shaming tactics will seem unduly harsh to American readers. They point out, ‘The very fact that children's misdeeds are narrated so often may serve to normalize them. That is, these Taipei parents seem to take for granted, and perhaps their children come to take for granted, that it is natural for young children to make mistakes’. A child is expected to be able to bear and handle a reasonable amount of shame (Fung, 1999: 191). In the particular co-narration I reproduced, and in most others, we learn, shaming is mitigated by smiles, laughter, and the mother’s playful tone of voice. On the other hand, Fung (1999: 201) tells us, children labeled as ‘recidivists’ (rather than ‘first offenders’), because either they have repeatedly violated a specific rule, or they have exhibited a more general pattern of not paying attention to what they are told, are treated to more serious shaming (just as are Mfantse repeat offenders to more serious beating). Fung (1999: 190) reports that most
of the Taiwanese parents in her study said that it was important that children feel ashamed when they transgressed, and, to this end, socializers’ efforts were directed, not just to putting an end to the transgression, but to eliciting these feelings of shame from the child (Fung, 1999: 192). Thus, even when the transgressing child complied with the adult’s demands, ‘[i]n more than 80% of those instances, the shaming still proceeded after the compliance’ (Fung, 1999: 194). In the co-narrative about Didi’s disruption of the music class, the public (for the benefit of the researcher in this case) and graphic retelling of Didi’s babyish, demanding behavior and how it made his mother lose face must have been somewhat arousing for the child. Throughout this retelling, he seems to be trying to ignore the situation by burying himself in his picture book, possible evidence of his discomfort. Suggestively, also, we learn from Fung (1999: 196) that later in the same episode the boy ‘appropriated, exaggerated, and played with his mother’s metaphor, “faint”, by pointing to his cheek, indicating that it was he who fainted, and by throwing his head and body back against the sofa’.

For a final illustration of emotion-arousing child-rearing techniques, Jean Briggs (1998) has given us a gorgeous study, unparalleled for its fine-grained focus, of the Baffin Island Inuit practice of teasing children. Briggs demonstrates in full how Inuit teasing, like Chinese shaming, quite deliberately arouses emotion in its toddler targets. She followed the socialization of a three-year-old girl, Chubby Maata, for a number of months. During this time Briggs recorded numerous episodes in which Chubby Maata was badgered and questioned in a characteristic teasing manner. Her analysis of the teasing received by Chubby Maata is much closer and richer than can be conveyed here.

One common topic of teasing, reflected in the following segment of a recorded episode, is the mock threat of taking away something belonging to the child, or even the child herself. As in this episode, people outside their immediate family circle routinely ask children, ‘Want to come live with me?’ (Briggs, 1998: 94):

Maata [a teenaged relative paying an evening visit] began to suggest to Chubby Maata that she and Papi [Chubby Maata’s puppy] come to live in their house. Her voice was soft, persuasive, seductive – a voice that was often used by adults in speaking to small children when they wanted a child to do something. Chubby Maata consistently wrinkled her nose: ‘No.’ After a while, Maata called Papi to her, petted him, picked him up, and turned toward the door, with Papi in her arms. Chubby Maata let out a cry, rushed to the puppy, grabbed him around his neck with such force that I feared she would choke him, and pulled him strenuously away from Maata. She was half-laughing, but the laugh sounded anxious, too, and she exerted a great deal of energy. This drama was repeated several times during the first part of the visit, each time initiated by Maata. Once, Chubby Maata, tugging at Papi, trying hard to separate him from Maata, protested, ‘He’s all shitty!’ Maata ignored this argument; she didn’t let go of Papi – but she didn’t take him out of the house, either.

The last time Maata asked Chubby Maata if she and Papi would like to come and live with them, Chubby Maata said something that I didn’t hear before she said no; then, after refusing, she commented, as if cheerfully surprised at herself, ‘Ih! I almost agreed!’ Maata’s ear was quick. She exclaimed, ‘Oh, you agree!’ And this time she picked up Chubby Maata instead of Papi and started toward the door. Chubby Maata struggled and cried out in protest, and after a few minutes, Maata put her down.
Chubby Maata ran first to her mother, who ignored her, and then to Juupi [a visiting uncle], who picked her up and set her on his lap. From that protected position, she looked over her shoulder, laughing with a triumphant gleam at Maata (Briggs, 1998: 91).

But Juupi, too, began to tease Chubby Maata, hitting her bottom lightly, then pretending that someone else, the anthropologist, had done the hitting, and then shortly joining Maata in a new game, on another common theme, of ‘Who do you like?’ ‘Do you like me?’ asked Juupi. ‘Yes.’ ‘Just me alone, yes?’ he asked in a soft, confidential voice. This time Chubby Maata avoided answering, returning instead to a game she had been playing with herself. (Briggs, 1998: 92)

Briggs thinks that Maata is testing the limits of Chubby Maata’s attachments, testing ‘whether she knows what is hers and how determined she is to keep those possessions. And, in testing, she may create or heighten Chubby Maata’s emotional awareness that she has a home and wants to stay there and that she has a puppy and wants to keep him’ (Briggs, 1998: 95). It is, says Briggs, ‘a highly charged moment, a moment when loving and being loved by one object, Maata, has become associated with the possibility of losing other loved objects: home, mother, puppy’ (Briggs, 1998: 110). Briggs interprets this segment as being about attachment – ‘To whom does she belong? To whom does she want to belong? Who are her friends and allies? Whom does she like? And whom should she like? Whom can she trust? And closely related to these questions: What does she own? And can she keep her possessions?’ (Briggs, 1998: 108). ‘In the long run’, concludes Briggs (1998: 114), ‘one of the lessons of dramas like this will be that the two extremes of attachment are both inappropriate. It is dangerous to respond indiscriminately to offers of affection. Such a response might cause one to lose the most important and legitimate source of love and nurturance: one's home’. On the other hand, such dramas teach that exclusive relationships can be dangerous too, as Juupi illustrates by hitting Chubby Maata and later trying to coax her into agreeing that she likes only him.

In other episodes, other themes carry other lessons, adding considerable complexity to Chubby Maata’s upbringing. Occasionally the teasing escalates quite far. In another episode Chubby Maata is told repeatedly by Arnaqjuak, her grandmother, ‘Your father is VERY BAAAD (piungngit’UUQ)! Your mother is VERY BAAAD!’ . . . and then asked, ‘You are bad, aren't you? Your father is bad, isn't that so?’ and so on and on in a stream of words that the anthropologist describes as ‘unremitting and inexorable’ (Briggs, 1998: 127). The episode climaxes in ‘Your genitals are bad. Aaq! They stink! [poking a finger between the little girl’s legs] Are you aware of your horrid little (-ruluk) genitals? THERE they are! [pretending to pull down Chubby Maata’s trousers from behind]’.

From earliest infancy, Chubby Maata has been treated as, and encouraged to think of herself as, an adorable little baby (babykuluk). Briggs (1998: 134) interprets dramas like this one as teaching her that she is not so perfect (‘It’s dangerous to think you’re perfectly good’, one Inuit woman tells Briggs, 1998: 256, fn. 16) and that, in her imperfection, she is vulnerable to the sometimes dangerously critical gaze and the sanctions of others. Another, more complex, lesson, though, of this drama is the necessity of protecting others as a means of protecting oneself. Her grandmother’s attacks on her parents ‘will make Chubby Maata feel the absolute necessity of protective, loving nurturance, nallik-',
the highest Inuit value’ (Briggs, 1998: 141). Adults teach moral behavior not simply by modeling it, then, but ‘by pretending to attack it and by creating, in the dramatization of both values and antivalues, appropriate and compelling emotions to support the approved behavior’ (Briggs, 1998: 141).

During these familiar rounds of teasing, Chubby Maata often refuses to answer the provocative questions, sometimes tries to hide her face, or blatantly ignores the teasing. In the episode with the puppy, for example, she initiates a game of running between the door and Juupi, chanting a refrain of nonsense words instead of responding to the adult’s questions – reminiscent of the way Didi, the Taiwanese child, tries to weather his mother’s shaming by keeping his eyes on his picture book. Sometimes, as when her grandmother teases her about her genitals and pretends to pull down her trousers, Chubby Maata bursts briefly into tears. More often, as she does during the BAAAD drama, she becomes wide-eyed, motionless and watchful. Briggs (1998: 131) interprets these episodes of teasing as being partly about making Chubby Maata educable and open to sanction. The wide-eyed, motionless, watchful pose suggests to her rearers, as do signs of shyness such as acting subdued and talking in a whisper (Briggs, 1998: 59), that she is feeling *ilina-*; ‘a mixture of respect and the fear of being scolded or treated unkindly’.

The adults smile with their eyes when they tease, and use characteristic dramatic voices, speaking softly and confidentially or chanting emphatically and rhythmically, alternating a seductive, ‘saccharine-persuasive tone’ (Briggs, 1998: 181) with one of mock-hostility, a ‘throaty timbre used to dramatize mild threat when speaking to a child’ (Briggs, 1998: 121). Sometimes, when they do not seem to be getting a rise out of Chubby Maata, adults escalate their teasing, as Maata does when she grabs the child and pretends to take her out the door, and the grandmother does when she tells her that her genitals stink. Other times, when they appear to have gone too far, they de-escalate or desist, and sometimes seem to console. Until the drama has been played out, however, the adults present insist that she pay attention, staring at her intently, ordering her to ‘Look at me’, removing her hands from her face, persisting with their questions. Tellingly, Briggs (1998: 133) observes about the BAAAD episode that the mother and grandmother ‘present a united front and won’t countenance withdrawal or distraction until the drama has caused pain – a sign that some message has been received with emotional force’. This arousal is heightened further by the emotionally dangerous nature of the issues typically raised, and by the way in which they are depicted, Briggs (1998: 206) says,

in exaggerated and personally relevant form by blowing up the alternatives monstrously – not ‘Would you like to come visit me?’ but ‘Would you like to come live with me?’, not ‘Look, Saali’s wearing the shirt you gave him’ but ‘He’s stolen your shirt!’; not merely ‘Your mother’s hurt her finger’ but ‘She’s going to die!’; not [in an episode of teasing directed at another little child, a boy] ‘May I admire your penis?’ but ‘Shall the puppy bite it off?’.

Briggs attests to the durability and continued motivational force of lessons taught by such an emotionally arousing technique. She sees Inuit culture, she says (Briggs, 1998: 208),
as a mosaic of dilemmas which echo, cross-cut, confirm, and negate one another; dilemmas that are never totally resolved but have to be juggled and rearranged time after time. The fact that the Inuit adults I know are continually watchful, constantly testing the responses of others, argues that a habit of living with dilemmas – continually constructed and reconstructed as experience changes – carries over into adulthood and lasts a lifetime.

While these techniques of teasing, shaming, beating, and frightening with supernaturals and other beings are certainly widespread, they are used selectively across communities. Not all techniques fit equally well with the overall values that motivate a given cultural model of child rearing. As LeVine et al. (1994: 254) tell us, the technique of choice for middle-class American parents – praise – is rarely used by Gusii parents. Within the context of values that stresses obedience and respect training, the authors report (1994: 254), ‘praise is explicitly rejected by Gusii mothers as a verbal device that would encourage conceit and make even a good child rude and disobedient, meaning disruptive of the hierarchy’. Chinese parents, too, would be wary of too much positive reinforcement, lest it undermine the moral reflectiveness that they strive to cultivate in their children, or the moral authority of the caregiver (Cho et al. n.d.: 26–7). Inuit socializers, on the other hand, would never frighten, shame, or beat their children. As Briggs (1998: 142) explains, they accomplish in teasing ‘play’ what they cannot do by means of punishment, because Inuit strongly disapprove of scolding or punishing in serious mode, as they strongly disapprove of all shows of aggression. Mfantse told me, in certain terms, that shaming a child publicly would never happen. They regarded public awareness of beatings (which ordinarily occurred within houses or courtyards, but within earshot and sometimes eyeshot of those outside the household) as redounding positively on the reputation of whoever administered the beating, showing that the child was being properly socialized. But to publicly air the nature of the child’s infraction, in order to shame the child, would be to violate local notions of what was a household’s private business.

In turn, contemporary middle-class Americans might be surprised to learn how common the use of these various techniques of frightening, beating, shaming, and teasing is elsewhere. Judging them overly and perhaps unnaturally harsh, we are led to underestimate their typicality. We would be wrong to assume, however, that these methods are abusive. Both Briggs (1998: 131) and the Taiwanese research team (Fung, 1999: 203) are careful to emphasize that Inuit teasing and Chinese shaming, respectively, occur within a context in which the child is well-loved and secure in that love, and are modulated so that they are always kept within reasonable limits. One Taiwanese aunt pointed out to Fung (1999: 190) that ‘too much shame would only risk harming the child’s self-esteem, excluding them from interaction, and making them escape from their own responsibilities to amend and improve’. Mfantse adults, as well, recognized that too frequent or severe beatings would ultimately inure the child to their effects. Indeed, apart from the universal impulse to treat children lovingly and compassionately, adults everywhere seem to recognize that emotional arousal must be modulated if it is to be effective in making the lessons being taught memorable ones. There is a neuro-biological basis to this understanding. As LeDoux (2002: 222) summarizes, ‘As long as the degree of emotional arousal is moderate during memory
formation, memory is strengthened. But if the arousal is strong, especially if it is highly stressful, memory is often impaired.’

Nevertheless, most contemporary American middle-class parents and teachers could not imagine frightening children with a bogeyman for bad behavior (although that term belongs to a Euro-American past, a past recent enough that at least some living Americans can remember being deliberately frightened in this way), for fear of encouraging children’s timidity and squelching their highly desired assertiveness.25 For similar reasons, they would be critical of the shaming that Taiwanese and other Chinese adults routinely heap on their children, as well as the teasing to which Inuit adults routinely subject theirs. As Miller et al. (2001: 167) point out, the American parents would be concerned that such shaming would damage children’s self-esteem and sense of efficacy. So, it happens, American middle-class child rearing precludes the use of some of the most tried and true techniques for emotion arousal.26 Perhaps we ourselves use praise so lavishly and unstintingly just because we are denied these other methods. And perhaps part of the unruliness (by world standards) of our children is due to the unwillingness of American middle-class parents to resort to some of the most highly effective techniques of child rearing available because, in our eyes, they are potentially damaging to the child.

APPROVAL AND DISAPPROVAL

Because of the way child-rearing lessons are taught and learned, the self-knowledge that children gain from exposure to child-rearing practices is largely implicit knowledge. We have seen, for instance, how these lessons are so often embodied in the disapproving glance or the habitual aversion of gaze, or remain tacit in repeated practices such as leaving an infant alone in his bed in the morning, or teasing a child about her relatives. In this article I have been intent on making a case for the prevalence of such practices, which, by their daily repetition, lend such constancy to the child’s experience. However, as central as these implicit lessons are to cultural models for child rearing everywhere, they are augmented with practices of another sort. Child rearers also do have occasion to label children’s behavior for them, or otherwise call attention to it, explicitly.

What rearers are most likely to call children’s attention to explicitly are their good and, even more commonly, their bad behavior. This is because, as I have noted, parents and other socializers everywhere exploit the child’s desire for love and approval in the interests of their own agendas for molding the child into a culturally desirable adult. The most effective way child rearers have to discourage what is culturally defined as bad behavior, and encourage what is culturally defined as good behavior, is to couple their approval or disapproval of the given behaviors with labeling or other markers of that which is approved or disapproved. Recall, for one good example, Lutz’s (1983: 255) description of how ‘the label metagu is used in profusion to describe the child’s reaction’ to the ghost who has been called to frighten an especially recalcitrant child. For another, more general, example of labeling, Mfantse beatings are often accompanied by the admonition, ‘bad child’ (abofra bon); the assertion that the child has ‘hard ears’ (aso dzεn), meaning that he hasn’t heard what has been taught him; the accusation that he fears nothing (nsuro adze); or the mock allegation that he is a witch (anεn),27 because witches, with their supernatural powers, are considered to be unafraid of the consequences of their acts (all leavened with various derogatory if less didactic insults – ugly,
ugly head, ugly mouth, big ears, dirty body, useless person, you look like a thread, your father is a drunkard, and so forth). For still another, contrasting, example of such labeling closer to home, we need only think of the exaggeratedly happy cry of ‘Good girl!’ or ‘Good boy!’ (see Wierzbicka, 2004) that rings out in middle-class American households, said in a special praise-giving voice and accompanied by an exaggerated expression of delight and often by a little clap, to mark parents’ extravagant praise for the toddler's every new accomplishment, such as going to the potty without prompting, or learning to tie their own shoes. In these examples, the emotional arousal of being frightened, beaten or praised is coupled, for good measure, with explicit labeling of the approved or disapproved behavior.

The acknowledgement of approval or disapproval very often also includes para-linguistic cues, notably a characteristic tone of voice, like the special dramatic voices in which Inuit adults tease their toddlers, or the loud, accusatory voice with which Mfantse adults berate theirs, or the voice dripping with approval in which middle-class American parents praise theirs. But evaluation markers need not be linguistic. Other likely components of these explicit teaching episodes are facial expressions – think of the Ifaluk woman’s unsmiling face and the Inuit adults’ smiling eyes and the Mfantse’s sidelong stare – or gesture – think of the American middle-class parents’ clapping, or the Gusii mothers’ averted gaze.

The study of Taiwanese opportunity education offers an especially full and detailed example of how child rearers signal to the child that his or her behavior is, in this case, disapproved. The construction of such signals is especially productive. The shaming that accompanies a transgression, or stories about the transgression, Fung (1999: 192) explains, is marked in varied ways ranging from referring directly to the child as disobedient (e.g. \textit{bu guai de xiaohaizi}) or his misbehavior as shameful (e.g. \textit{xiuxiu lian}, meaning ‘shame on you’); or indicating shame with either a conventional gesture (e.g. striking the index finger on the cheek), or an idiomatic expression (recall the mother’s comments about losing face, and wanting to bury her head in the ground); through a wonderfully inventive array of more subtle linguistic, paralinguistic, or bodily cues. These include sighing, turning away, a more extended silent treatment, name-calling (e.g. ‘ugly monster’), love withdrawal (e.g. ‘We don't want you’), and sarcastic comments like ‘How come I have such a child?’ or ‘No spanking for a few days, your skin has become itchy’. (One of my favorites is, ‘By the time he's five, I bet I'll have to move into a mental institution'; Fung and Chen, 2001: 425.) The Taiwanese child encounters ample clearly demarcated instances of shaming, and becomes adept, as well, at reading this message across the full array of more subtle embodied or paralinguistic markers.

But shaming itself is ‘to be used only as a means of achieving the goal of teaching the child right from wrong’ (Fung, 1999: 190). To fully accomplish this end, the exact nature of the shameful wrongdoing itself must also be specified, and this is accomplished in the reasoning about the child's behavior that often accompanies Taiwanese transgression stories, or in the coda that sometimes closes these stories and summarizes what the child has done wrong or, perhaps most effectively, in the practice of making the child confess to his own transgression (Fung, 1999: 202). Remember how the mother of our example pressed her son, ‘Then you, then what did you do?’ and the boy replied, ‘I then cried’.

The whole idea of Chinese opportunity education is to use the infraction as an
opportunity for the education, making the child's association between infraction and shamefulness as immediate and unmistakable as possible. Even when this practice seems to dwell exceedingly upon current and past transgressions, it does so in the interests of self-correction, so that the children will learn from their misdeeds and will do better in the future (Miller et al., 2001: 167). Inuit teasing takes a quite different tack. Rather than exploiting a child's infractions as these occur, teasing games intentionally provoke or seduce the child into missteps – for example, wanting what she can't have, expressing anti-social feelings toward people, thinking of herself as perfect, acting babyish – so that these missteps can then serve as object lessons. By stark contrast to the Taiwanese case, too, these lessons themselves are often indirect and ambiguous, and deliberately so. Briggs (1998: 64) tells us, ‘clarity for the children is not an immediate aim of the adult players’. Indeed, a meta-message of the play is about the uncertainty inherent in social relationships – that ‘no communication can ever be trusted to be what it seems to be’ (Briggs, 1998: 67). The pedagogic tenet of this cultural model of child rearing is *isummaksaiyuq*, or ‘causing someone to think’ (Briggs, 1998: 5, 66) about the possible consequences of a hypothetical dilemma.

Yet, in the course of these lessons, the Inuit child, too, receives dramatically clear signals of adult approval or disapproval. Remember how Chubby Maata’s grandmother tells her that her ‘horrid little genitals’ stink, as a means of getting across to her that she is not entirely the darling little baby (*babykuluk*) that, up until now, she has been encouraged to think herself. Oblique as this metonymic lesson may be, as puzzled as it may leave Chubby Maata as to why she is suddenly and unexpectedly being disparaged, it is powerfully disapproving. Other lessons are phrased as tests – comments, questions, or requests that, depending on the child’s response, may lead to criticism (Briggs, 1998: 76). For example, one common test of the child’s ability to be even-handedly pro-social – which, along with protective, loving nurturance, is another important Inuit value – is the recurrent game of ‘Who do you like (*piugi-*)? literally, consider good)?’ We saw her uncle Juupi initiate this game with Chubby Maata. On another occasion,

Arnaqjuaq [Chubby Maata’s grandmother] bent down and said to Chubby Maata, ‘Do you like (*puigi-*) her [referring to the anthropologist]?’ Chubby Maata wrinkled her nose: ‘No’. Arnaqjuaq double-checked: ‘Do you dislike her?’ Chubby Maata raised her brows, confirming that she did. Arnaqjuak persisted, ‘Do you dislike me?’ Chubby Maata wrinkled her nose, and Arnaqjuaq laughed: ‘How little understanding she has (she is *silait-*)! Do you dislike Aita [Chubby Maata’s infant sister, also present]?’ Chubby Maata wrinkled her nose. Arnaqjuaq laughed again and repeated, ‘Silait-!’

I asked Chubby Maata, ‘Am I the only one (you don’t like)?’ I didn’t see her answer, but Arnaqjuaq said to me, ‘She’s silait- (she has no understanding). Sometimes she likes (*piusaq-*) and sometimes she can’t like at all’. (Briggs, 1998: 124)

Another gambit, the daily, ‘Because you’re a baby’, ‘Are you a baby?’ and ‘Say “ungaa”’ (make the cry of a baby), plays with the two sides of babyhood, teaching the child that, as much as she is loved and celebrated for her adorable babyish charm, she increasingly attracts disapproval for mindless babyish lack of understanding (and approval for ways in which she demonstrates she has outgrown it). This criticism, like others, may be
explicitly labeled, as when Chubby Maata is called a ‘foolish little baby’ (*silait*) – usually ambiguously, though, because spoken in the same tender tone as she is other times called a ‘darling little baby’ (*-kuluk*). Or, the criticism may be unlabeled, but just as clearly marked – as when, tested by a game her mother instigates to see whether she can be seduced into serious aggression, Chubby Maata is made to look foolish and laughed at when she does aggress against her sister (Briggs, 1998: 70). As different as the Inuit style of teaching children is from the Chinese, both exhibit the universal strategy of recruiting adult approval and disapproval to the task of making children’s lessons motivating and memorable.

**PREDISPOSITIONAL PRIMING**

A final commonality across all models for child rearing, a feature that can be discerned in many of the examples already given, is what I am calling the predispositional priming of the child. Instead of directly heightening, in one way or another, the child’s receptivity to the lessons being learned, as experiential constancy, emotional arousal, and approval or disapproval seem designed to do, predispositional priming would seem to have the effect of moderating the difficulty of learning these lessons. It does so by breaking socialization into a two-step process. First, the child is predispositionally prepared to be socialized; and only then is further socialization effective. Child rearers can be quite explicit about how this works. The predisposition that they seek to instill in the child may vary widely cross-culturally, depending upon the larger model of child rearing on which the theory of predispositional priming is premised. But all systems of child rearing appear to rely on some kind of priming of this nature.

The Taiwanese case is perhaps the most obvious, because this socializing strategy is made so explicit. For example, it is spelled out plainly in this sixth-grade textbook explication of a well-known text in Confucius’ *The Doctrine of the Mean* that reads, in translation, ‘To process the feeling of shame is to be near to courage’. The textbook was published by the government and used, before 1996, in schools throughout Taiwan:

When one says or does something wrong, if he is able to reflect on his own behavior and won’t repeat the same mistake again, this is ‘having a sense of shame’. When one has a sense of shame, he would know what to say and what to do, and after self-reflection, he is able to truly repent, amend his wrongdoings, and proceed towards his ideals without any fear of difficulties. Someone like this not only knows shame but also has the courage to confront hardship; he is also a courageous person . . . After all ordinary people are not saints or sages, so that one can hardly avoid transgressing. However, when saying or doing something wrong, if one is not willing to reflect and mend his behavior, he does not seek ways to improve himself. If he is able to truly reflect and truly repent, he will have the courage to make changes and improvements, leading to the rebirth of a new person. (quoted in Fung, 2005: 13)

A sense of shame is, as Fung (2005: 13) concludes from this passage, ‘a tool to teach right and wrong, which motivates one to repent and strive upward for improvement’. Thus, only a person who has been raised to be sensitive to shame – to other people’s opinions, evaluations, and judgments (Fung, 1999: 183) – will be motivated to strive for improvement, and only through such striving will that person exhibit ‘upright
conduct’, and ‘stick to the right and proper path in life’ (Miller et al., 2001: 173). This, upright conduct, is the larger goal of the Chinese cultural model of child rearing, and the purpose of teaching children to know shame.

As I have suggested about predispositional learning more generally, shaming begins, and begins to have its effect on the child, long before the child is able to appreciate the relationship of the feeling of shame to right conduct, or understands how to act in order to avoid or ameliorate the experience of being shamed. Think of the prompting that two-year-old Didi’s mother and older sister must do to elicit even a minimal response to their shaming from him. And so with learning the predispositions discussed next, the Ifaluk child’s metagu, the Inuit child’s ilira-, the Mfantse child’s inclination to suro adze, the Gusii child’s propensity to be undemanding, and the middle-class American child’s positive sense of self. These predispositions can be taught early, even before the child knows how to talk or can be reasoned with, even beginning in infancy. They are all the more enduring for being learned early. And they ready the child for the harder lessons to come.

A different, and equally compelling, example of this feature of child-rearing models is that of the emotion metagu, the fearfulness in which, as we saw, Ifaluk children are so assiduously trained and, when all else has failed, which they are frightened into feeling. As Lutz (1983; 1987) explains, the metagu child will not only be likely to avoid danger. Such a child will also prefer the company of others and hence be inclined to participate in cooperative food-accumulating activities, which Lutz remarks are critical to this island community facing limited land and periodic severe food shortages due to typhoons. Moreover, such a child will grow up to be an adult who exhibits the trait, so highly valued in this densely populated world, of malewelu, or ‘calmness’, a hyperawareness of the consequences of one’s own wrong behavior that leads a person to behave non-aggressively and non-disruptively. Specifically, metagu being the reciprocal of song or ‘justifiable anger’, a child who has learned to be metagu will anticipate the song or ‘justifiable anger’ of others, especially elders, and will therefore be vigilant about their own potential for wrongdoing.

An interesting analog to Ifaluk metagu is the feeling of ilira- that Inuit adults attempt to elicit from their children when they tease them. This, remember, is a feeling that motivates proper behavior, ‘a mixture of respect and the fear of being scolded or treated unkindly’. Briggs (1998: 119) adds, ‘A person who does not feel ilira- is not, and cannot be, socialized’. Of course, the two emotions, metagu and ilira-, are founded on fear of very different adult reactions, and embedded in very different models of child rearing overall. But they seem to work in not dissimilar ways.

The predisposition that Mfantse cultivate in their children, a fearfulness founded on the threat of physical punishment, is equally plainly articulated by these adults. As has been noted, one of the things that Mfante adults can be heard to say to children when they beat them is, ‘You don’t fear anything’. The idea that children must first learn to ‘fear something’ (suro adze) in order to make them teachable is the proffered rationale for beating them. I was told that there were even more drastic measures that could be taken with the most recalcitrant of children, who did not respond to beating, though I never heard of actual cases of their use: inserting pounded ginger up the child’s anus, or, even worse, rubbing crushed pepper in the child’s eyes. (And, of course, children can be taught to fear the anthropologist.) But the something to be feared is generally taken to
be the stick. And if children don’t learn to fear something, they cannot be trained to have
the good character (suban pa) that Mfantse value in adults. This character is distin-
guished by a coolness (bɔkɔɔ or suban dwe) superficially reminiscent of the Ifaluk ideal,
but with an emphasis on not talking harshly or responding to others’ provocation –
quarrels and resulting cases of litigation being a centerpiece of Mfantse village life.

When Gusii mothers avert their gaze from their infants, they are not only training
despite little ones to be quiet and undemanding, warding off potential witchcraft against
them, and habituating them to indirect gaze in social interaction. Gaze aversion is also
a piece of a larger design. Gusii observe marked restraint, avoidance, and social distanc-
ing, including sexual embarrassment/modesty/restraint (ensoni), in intergenerational
and marital relationships (LeVine et al., 1994: 60). It is a code of prescribed conduct for
everyday life of which Gusii are proud, seeing themselves as morally superior to their
Nilotic-speaking neighbors because of it (LeVine et al., 1994: 60). Gaze aversion
becomes, in adult social interaction, an expression, and embodiment, of this code.

Further, Gusii enactment of this code of conduct serves to maintain the unquestion-
ing obedience to those of higher status, personified by the homestead head, and
exemplified in the obedience of sons to fathers and wives to husbands. LeVine et al.
(1994: 254) report on one way in which obedience training is directly administered:
‘Deliberate training in respect and obedience can be traced back into the first year of
life, in the prevalence of maternal commands even at 3 months, or more firmly after 9
months, when positive utterances have declined and negative utterances (largely
commands) are rising’. One can suppose that the three-month-old infant, too young to
comprehend the verbal command itself, is learning to recognize the message in a
commanding tone of voice. Gaze aversion, too, has its role to play in this pre-linguistic
training. Mothers avert their gazes away from their infants as a first step in rearing a
compliant subordinate in a markedly hierarchical household. An undemanding infant
will become a docile toddler who will acquire respect and obedience easily and naturally.

Like Mfantse, Gusii also cane their children, described as ‘the frequent use of physical
punishment and fear control in discipline’ (LeVine and LeVine, 1966: 192). ‘If you want
to teach a child anything, you must cane him’, one Gusii mother says (LeVine and
LeVine, 1966: 148). Much as in the West African community, too, this method of instill-
ing fear is combined with frightening, described by the ethnographers as ‘the direct and
explicit inculcation of fear of others, beginning in infancy with domestic animals labeled
“ekuku” and extended to the father, imaginary hyenas, and witches, all of whom are
presented as waiting to devour or injure the child for misbehavior or even for simply
approaching them’ (LeVine and LeVine, 1966: 196). There seems to be a greater relative
emphasis on frightening than physical punishment in the East African case, but the
objective of instilling fear seems quite similar, and may be characteristic of sub-Saharan
Africa.

However, Gusii caning and frightening is distinctive in some respects. Beatings are
said to be conducted almost exclusively by parents, especially the father, so that ‘[t]he
child becomes fearful of persons in authority whose severe punishments are anticipated
by him’ (LeVine and LeVine, 1966: 192). As well, caning is linked to crying. Gusii
mothers are angered most, and cane children severely, when they cry for no reason or
refuse to stop crying in spite of attempts at comfort or offers of food (LeVine and
Thus, teaching a child to be fearful appears to be subsumed under the larger Gusii purpose of raising a child who is obedient to authority and generally compliant. Caning and frightening do not seem to have such a broad or acute outcome for Mfantse children and young adults, who are certainly respectful of their elders, but not notably quiet, passive, compliant, or emotionally expressionless. It is the larger cultural lessons in which child-rearing techniques are embedded, not the techniques, by themselves, that leave their mark.

The south German case of Karl, the two-year-old who amuses himself in his crib for three hours in the morning, has already been offered as an illustration of how early training in important values begins. But it also illustrates the predispositional priming I am describing in this section. In this case, earlier, relatively undemanding training in ‘self-reliance’ readies the child for later, more demanding training along the same lines. As LeVine and Norman (2001: 98) tell it, ‘German parents expect more self-reliance of their children in the post-infancy years, building on the child’s initial acquisition of a culturally appropriate sense of interpersonal distance and self-control’. Certainly, middle-class American parents employ the same strategy of gradually preparing children for greater and greater self-reliance, American style. For example, daycare is likely to be viewed by these parents as priming their children for school; overnight camp as preparing them for eventually going away to college.

There is another element to American middle-class predispositional priming. The emotional predisposition cultivated through praise and other shows of appreciation for the child and their achievements is self-esteem. Small American children bask in their parent’s, often public, praise long before they comprehend what feats of accomplishment will be required of them if they are to continue gaining approval from others and feeling good about themselves. American mothers in a mid-western town, interviewed by Miller and her colleagues, expressed the view that self-esteem provides an essential foundation for a wide array of psychological strengths. Children who have high self-esteem are able to learn and grow with ease; they are not afraid to achieve or compete; and they interact well with others and form healthy relationships. When they encounter criticism or unkindness, they do not take these evaluations to heart but are able to bounce back. An especially strong theme in these interviews is that self-esteem leads to happiness, persistence in attaining one’s goals, and willingness to try new things. These mothers also saw a powerful link between self-esteem and general mental health. (Miller et al., 2002: 230–1)

High self-esteem was also said by several of these mothers to lead to success, even as the experience of success increased self-esteem. Thus self-esteem was thought to be a considerable advantage to a child in that it enabled a variety of strengths that, in
turn, ensured the ultimate attainment of the twin American values of success and happiness.

FROM UNIVERSALS OF CHILD REARING TO CULTURAL SELVES

We have seen that cross-cultural approaches to child rearing, all similarly designed, to be sure, are at the same time immensely variable as to the substance of what they teach. What results, as a side effect of the experiential constancy and emotional arousal and evaluative messages and predispositional priming that characterize the way children are everywhere reared, is a lifelong, culturally distinctive self, one shared with others who have been raised according to the same cultural model. Not only are you your synapses, as Joseph LeDoux (2002: 324) puts it, but you are the cultural shape of these synaptic connections. Most profoundly, you are who your synaptic connections have been engineered to be, from infancy onward.

This was the core insight of the culture and personality school, of course – that cross-cultural differences in adult personality, to a substantial degree, could be attributed to differences in child rearing. As I stressed at the outset, I have not set out here to explain distinctive patterns of personality as these differ cross-culturally. My contribution is rather to explain why, as culture and personality theorists assumed, the cultural practices, beliefs and values surrounding child rearing everywhere are key to who we become. It is the task of ethnographers of individual societies to trace these distinctive patterns in adult personality and explain them in terms of child rearing and other experience. Various of the individual studies on which I have drawn here, although most are primarily studies of child rearing, do provide clues to causal connection between the cultural models of child rearing they describe and the patterns of adult personality that result. I will just draw together these observations here and provide them with a very brief context.

The culturally distinctive aspects of the self that can be traced to child rearing have two sides. To the degree, and it is a substantial degree, that cultural practices engineer the child’s learning of important lessons while leaving these lessons unmarked, the culturally-patterned selves that result do not become the objects of conscious self-reflection. They are, rather, what LeDoux (2002: 27–9) has called ‘implicit’ selves. (It often takes foreigners to notice, and celebrate – or, perhaps more often, disparage – these culturally distinctive selves, so invisible are they to those who so unthinkingly and effortlessly enact them.) Even one’s enduring sense of oneself as a valued or a disvalued person, emerging from cumulative but unmarked experiences of being loved or unloved, approved or disapproved, need not be well-articulated or readily accessible for examination.

Yet, we do also come to have explicit ideas about who we are – selves that are based, in part at least, on conscious self-reflection. It should now be obvious how this explicit cultural self arises. It arises because rearers often do mark approved and disapproved behaviors, for didactic purposes. Labeling and otherwise explicitly marking the goodness or badness of one’s acts, and – generalized as character traits or simply repeated over and over again – the approval or disapproval of oneself as an actor, have the effect of crystallizing a conscious, self-reflective sense of oneself. The actual process by which this explicit knowledge of oneself as a moral actor is internalized is nowhere better captured than in a brief episode in Chubby Maata’s three-year-old life. The little girl, having just been mildly scolded by her mother,
began to chant, over and over again in a happy-sounding singsong, ‘Because I’m not gooood; I’m not gooood’.

Liila [her mother] cooed at her little daughter, tenderly, ‘Because you’re not a baby?’ Chubby Maata raised her brows, agreeing that she was not a baby, but her mother nevertheless snuffed her warmly and in the same tender voice assured her, ‘You’re a darling little good one’.

Chubby Maata began to chant again, ‘I am gooood, I am not gooood, I am gooood, I am not gooood’. (Briggs, 1998: 143)

Similarly, other children elsewhere must rehearse to themselves, I am (or am not) appropriately fearful (metagu); I was (or was not) a disobedient child (bu guai de xiaohaizi); I was a good girl (or a bad girl) today. To be sure, it is hard to imagine any better window into this learning by rehearsal than that opened by Inuit adults’ penchant for making moral lessons ambiguous, Inuit children’s habit of chanting these lessons aloud, and Briggs’s close description of both.

These explicit ideas about ourselves lay the basis for what becomes, over time and repeated experience of the same kind, a more or less stable, more or less coherent, more or less context-independent element of one’s identity: the knowledge that I am this or that kind of person. Because of the way it is learned, through approval and disapproval, this identity is infused with evaluative meaning. We not only grow up to be the kind of adult that our rearers want us to be, and so assiduously raise us to be; we ourselves come to recognize, and desire to be, that kind of person. We may always crave others’ praise, or fear ghosts or chickens, or feel acutely uncomfortable under another’s direct gaze. Much more generally – and drawing on those scattered clues as to the effect of particular patterns of child rearing on adult personality that are provided by the various studies I have consulted in this article – we come to want to be successful, happy Americans; Germans who observe the two virtues of Selbständigkeit (‘self-reliance’) and Ordnungsliebe (love of order); Gusii who are morally superior because emotionally restrained; Chinese who, knowing shame, follow the path of right conduct; Ifaluk Islanders who, hyper-aware of their own potential for wrongdoing, behave in such a way as to be considered malewelu (calm and non-aggressive); watchful, vigilant Inuit who continually test social relationships and take care themselves to be pro-social and to practice nallik-, or loving nurturance, toward everyone; and Mfantse who, because they are suro adze (afraid of something), learn the suban pa, or good character, best characterized by exhibiting coolness and avoiding quarrels in their interactions with others.

**CONCLUSION**

Across these various ethnographic examples – American, Chinese, German, Gusii, Ifaluk, Inuit, Mfantse – we have seen how cultural models for child rearing, so variable in the substance of what they teach, are all equally designed to make the child’s experience of those important lessons constant, to link those lessons to emotional arousal, to connect them to evaluations of the child as being approved or disapproved, and to prime the child to be emotionally predisposed to learn them. My argument has been that the four universal features I have described are all adaptations to the specialized task of child rearing. Their effectiveness in accomplishing this task owes itself to a variety of processes.
To summarize: Constancy of experience, starting in infancy and enforced vigilantly by parents and other child rearers, alters synaptic connections to accord especially highly resolution to the pattern of their firing, so that the lessons to be learned are unmistakable ones. Accompanied by techniques for emotional arousal, these lessons are especially motivating and especially unforgettable. Brought home with evaluations of the learner’s behavior and, hence, approval or disapproval of the learner, these lessons are even more motivating and even more unforgettable. Having been predispositionally primed, the learner is receptive to later lessons that might otherwise be unlearnable or only imperfectly learned. Child rearing must ensure that children are predisposed to learn the lesson, learn it unequivocally, enact it once they get it, remember it, and continue to be motivated to enact it. Cultural models for child rearing have evolved to suit this task. These models enhance the effects of rearing on human children to achieve a result, human adulthood, that could not have been accomplished otherwise. This universal perspective should prompt us to further comparative analysis and thinking as much as it does to the further intensive ethnographic studies of child rearing on which such comparison depends.

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Notes

1 Summarizing much evidence, Ingham (1996: 85) concludes that

Some child-rearing practices (e.g. age of weaning or toilet training) may have little or no effect on personality. The acceptance or rejection of children, the availability of role models during gender identity formation, and socialization for moral and ethical behavior, meanwhile, may well be consequential for particular components of personality . . . What may matter . . . is not appearances but the children's subjective experience of being accepted or rejected. Altogether, the data suggest that emotional disposition, object relations, and core features of self-representation and moral reasoning may have stronger roots in childhood experience, whereas social values and attitudes, social identities, and styles of presenting the self are more apt to reflect social expectations.
2 Of course, cultural models for child rearing evolve to match given social and economic conditions. For examples to be detailed later in this article, the ethnographers whose respective descriptions of Ifaluk and Gusii child rearing I will be considering provide socio-economic explanations for the child-rearing practices they describe; many other studies of child rearing also address this linkage. At the same time, cultural values about the kind of adults that child rearers hope to raise come to have a force of their own, and there is much room for their cultural elaboration and independent effect.

3 While I am arguing that child rearing achieves constancy by the pervasiveness and persistence of habitual practices, there can be a more deliberate dimension to the creation of constancy that deserves mention. Child rearers sometimes contrive to focus attention, directing and motivating the learner to think about what is being taught and isolating the learner from distraction, so that what is being taught will in fact be attended to and hence experienced. An example of such attention focusing is provided later in this article, by the case of Inuit adults who, teasing a child, stare at her intently, remove her hands from her face, and repeat their questions multiple times until she gives evidence of having received their message. In this instance, the child is actively trying to resist the lesson; in other cases there may be surrounding distractions that compete for the child's attention. Schools, western and non-western, represent perhaps the most formally elaborated of techniques for focusing attention, typically in the service of teaching specialized knowledge and task performance rather than the moral lessons that are the focus of this article. Socializers often also lead a child in repeated practice of what they are being taught, intervening to guide and correct this practice when deemed necessary. Practicing is likely to be used when tasks require children to learn new skills or put skills together in newly complex ways. A different form of practicing, rehearsal, is used when the child's task is to commit a reasonably large body of knowledge to memory. (See Strauss, 1984: 209–16 for a useful discussion of attention focusing and rehearsal as educational strategies cross-culturally.) Incidentally to their main purposes of teaching particular skills or knowledge, practicing and rehearsal all contribute to the constancy of the child's experience. Again, however, the focus of this article is elsewhere. This focus is on child-rearing practices that are much more pervasive, contributing much more massively to the constancy of the child's experience.

4 This special-purpose cultural model is captured well by Markus, Mullally and Kitayama's (1997: 16) concept of *selfways*, which they say ‘include key cultural ideas and values, including understandings of what a person is, as well as senses of how to be a “good”, “appropriate”, or “moral” person’. Mine can be thought of as an attempt to specify how selfways are taught.

5 While I stress the embodied and unspoken in this article, the verbal surround must also be recognized as containing implicit messages for children. Peggy Miller (1994), for example, has called attention to ‘the narrative environment that children inhabit’ (1994: 164), arguing that cultural variation in the narrative genre is crucial to the construction of selves cross-culturally. Storytelling can be ubiquitous; in her South Baltimore study, for example, stories around the child occurred at an overall average rate of 8.5 per hour (1994: 166).
6 An especially clever and striking demonstration of early attention and learning is Maya Gratier’s (2003) comparison of the expressive non-verbal interaction – including kinesic and tactile modes of interaction as well as vocalizations – between two-month-old infants and their mothers in India, France, and the United States. Acoustic analysis of recordings of these interactions shows that infants at this age have already absorbed cultural specificities of timing, prosody and intensity with regard to both vocal and bodily expressions.

7 Of those on which I will draw, Catherine Lutz’s (1988) study is intent on highlighting the cultural constructedness of emotion, and, in particular, on showing that Ifaluk Islanders’ ethnotheory of the person does not separate the emotional from the cognitive, moral, and social dimensions of personhood as does our American ethnotheory. Robert LeVine and his colleagues (1994) use the Gusii case to argue that each system of child rearing must be understood and valued in its own terms, and in terms of the socioeconomic circumstances to which it is adapted – the Gusii model being a ‘pediatric’ one in contrast to our own American ‘pedagogic’ model. Peggy Miller and her colleagues (Miller et al., 1996; Fung, 1999; Miller et al., 2001) aim to show, in their comparative study, how Taiwanese middle-class parents’ shaming of their children, in co-narrated stories of the children’s misbehavior, must be understood in the context of a larger theory of child rearing as ‘opportunity education’, and in contrast to co-narrations by middle-class Chicagoans, whose different concern is to protect their children’s self-esteem. Jean Briggs’s (1998) study shows how one child is taught, and internalizes, subtle but emotionally powerful interpersonal lessons distinctive of Inuit culture. LeVine and Norman (2001) draw on Karin Norman’s south German fieldwork to critique attachment theory – interpreting and valuing south German child-rearing practices in their own terms, and resisting their definition in terms of insecure attachment. Adrie Kusserow’s (1996) study demonstrates that there are decidedly different, class-based versions of American ‘individualism’, and shows how these are reproduced within the family and the neighborhood preschool. Finally, I myself was conducting my observations in the Mfantse community preliminary to a study of cross-cultural variation in the meanings of attachment and separation. Of course, these sentence-long descriptions do not begin to do justice to this body of work.

8 I chose to assign these studies because of their quality as well as their topical focus. I do not have space here to detail the research design and methods of each. I ask readers who have questions about methodological matters such as sample size, generalizability of results, researcher bias, observer effect, interview response validity, linguistic translation, paralinguistic interpretation, and the like, to consult the original studies.

9 While most of the researchers upon whose work I draw are anthropologists, not all are. Robert LeVine worked with an interdisciplinary team including developmental psychologists in Kenya. Peggy Miller, who headed the US-Taiwan comparative study, is also a developmental psychologist, as are some of the other members of her team.

10 One strand of this new concern with meaning came from the aforementioned cultural models approach that entered psychological anthropology beginning in the 1980s (see Harkness, 1992: 115–16). Another, independent, strand is attributed by Peggy Miller to the application to the study of language and culture of ‘several closely
allied practice theories’ from anthropology and cultural psychology (Miller et al., 2001: 160). These were approaches that surged in the 1990s, and include perspectives represented by, for example, practice theories of social life such as Bourdieu’s, practice and performance approaches to language and verbal art, and Vygotsky’s theory of mediated action. Miller et al. (2001: 160–1) explain, ‘Although the notion of practice implies a focus on what people do – that is, on recurrent actions – it is no less attuned to meaning. Cultural practices are invested with normative expectations and with a whole host of significances that go beyond the immediate goals of the action’. These authors go on to connect the two strands, saying, ‘It is this concern with meaning that links practice approaches to another important theoretical advance in psychological anthropology and cultural psychology’, that is, the realization that child rearing cross-culturally had to be understood in terms of parental ethnotheories. See Goodnow and Collins (1990: 1–7) for a history of psychologists’ interest in parents’ ideas about parenting.

11 I use the two terms personality and self or selfhood interchangeably (see Quinn n.d.).
12 See, for one documented example of change in child-rearing beliefs, the comparison of grandmothers and mothers in Taiwan and the United States by Cho et al. (n.d.).
13 The infant seat was used, apparently, to make this experiment comparable to one done with the American mothers in Boston. But it must have felt as strange to the Gusii mothers as the experimental instructions that followed, since Gusii mothers carry their babies against their bodies, rather than, as do middle-class American parents, putting them in devices specially designed for infant containment.
14 The traffic light stories continued to be a topic of conversation and, the next day, another German contributed the following true story that had just recently happened to a friend of hers. Biking across the street against the light, he heard a shout behind him. He turned and went back, to be berated by an older gentleman with a dog. ‘Can’t you see’, said the man, ‘that I’m trying to teach my dog to wait for the light’.
15 It also suggests that one good way to get adults to follow a rule is to make them think they are doing so to set a good example for their children.
16 To say that child rearing imposes temporal constancy on a child’s experience is emphatically not to say that this experience is seamless and uninterrupted. While some child-rearing goals and strategies are continuous over long periods of time, experienced even into adolescence and adulthood, others, notably surrounding separation and socialization into adulthood, can be quite discontinuous. One has only to think of the transition, in many societies, between being a ‘lap child’ and being a ‘yard child’, that comes with the birth of the next sibling. The point is, rather, that much other experience, both bridging that transition and on either side of it, is highly regular – the emphasis and coloration given to feeding, for instance; or the way an infant is carried, nursed, otherwise attended to, responded to when he cries, spoken to, incorporated into the social scene, played with, ignored, and so forth; and the different way a toddler is fed, otherwise attended to, responded to, spoken to, incorporated into the social scene, ignored, taught, and so forth.
17 Anna Wierzbicka (personal communication) has pointed out to me that ‘self-reliance’ is probably a misleading gloss, since it is likely to be equated with the
self-reliance for which Americans are known. German *Selbstandigkeit* and American self-reliance are not the same thing.

18 Susan Seymour (personal communication) relates that, in India, this German practice would be interpreted as child abuse.

19 Difficulties may surround the employment of nannies from a different class, or *au pairs* from other countries, just because these surrogate caretakers do not share the parents’ child-rearing values and strategies.

20 Illustrated, for example, in the tone of accepted wisdom that permeates the passage about the importance of self-esteem from earliest infancy, quoted by Miller, Wang, Sandel and Cho (2002: 209–10) from the widely-used child-rearing manual by Penelope Leach.

21 Ethnographies of horticultural societies are full of accounts of male initiation rites, which serve to reverse boys’ early feminine identification and establish their masculinity. These rites, which typically occur around early adolescence, are notable for their fear-inducing practices, such as circumcision, isolation, and tests of bravery. Presumably, the arousal of fear reinforces the reversal of gender identity that is being learned.

22 Beating is another technique not infrequently used by Chinese parents, I am told.

23 In an early article, Briggs (1982) anticipated my argument that it is the emotional arousal elicited by this teasing that makes its lessons so indelible. She argued that the questions pose contradictory values, and that the conflictual feelings that are pointed up or even created by the questioning, along with the accompanying sense of danger, cause the arousal. And, as she put it (1982: 115), ‘intrapsychic conflict about a value can create allegiance to it’.

24 In a footnote to this sentence (fn. 13, p. 317), the authors add, ‘This is paraphrased from a Gusii mother in the Nyansongo study of the 1950s’. In their 1966 monograph on that study, they enlarge,

> Praise is extremely rare, as mothers believe it can make even a good child ‘rude and disobedient’. Over half the women who were asked what they do when a child is very obedient answered that they feel happy about it but neither say nor do anything to the child, though some indicated they praised him to others in his absence. Another one third of the mothers reported they give extra food or other material goods or that they promised the child such things. Only two out of 24 mothers said they praised their children for good behavior. (LeVine and LeVine, 1966: 147)

I include these details because of Anna Wierzbicka’s (personal communication) caution that praise is likely a uniquely American concept, not a universal concern in child rearing. The Gusii concept of this avoided practice may differ from praise as Americans know it, but Robert LeVine (personal communication) assures me that Gusii parents indeed talked explicitly about their unwillingness to praise their children for good behavior. On the other hand, Gusii mothers do reward children with food and other goods, a practice that is likely to have an arousing effect not dissimilar to praising. That is, the food carries a silent message of approval, making the child feel singled out for the approved behavior. (In addition, of course, the
reward of food or some material thing is a tangible benefit of such behavior.)
American praise is often publicly administered, while the Gusii reward of food may
be concealed from others so that the child does not experience public recognition.

25 A notable exception to this middle-class American aversion to techniques for fright-
ening children is found in those fundamentalist Christian communities in which
children are taught to fear eternal hell. This is a case of an exception proving the
rule. Those among this presumably non-fundamentalist readership who saw the
documentary *Hellhouse*, about the Christian fundamentalist ‘Halloween’ house
composed of vignettes set in hell to illustrate to children what could happen to them,
were likely to have been discomfited by it.

26 A caveat is in order here. African-American parents widely favor beating, called
‘switching’ in the United States, as a technique of child rearing. (It is interesting to
consider whether a preference for this style of discipline may be West African in
origin, though, of course, it is not exclusive to African-Americans.) On the testi-
mony of African-American students in my classes at Duke University, use of switch-
ing extends to middle-class African-American families, and it is a matter of pride
among many of these students that they were brought up right by being so disci-
plined. This may be changing. An African-American student in one of my recent
classes told a wonderful story of how, at the age of 12 or so, he challenged his
mother’s right to beat him. Having seen a public interest anti-child-abuse advertise-
ment on television, he told his mother that, if she beat him again, he would turn
her in for child abuse. She beat him for it. Now himself an advocate of physical
punishment as a form of discipline, he was troubled by the thought that he would
probably not dare to switch his own children, because of growing public concern
about child abuse, and the misconstrual of switching as tantamount to abuse.

27 The sounds of ɔ and e are equivalent to those in the English words ‘ought’ and ‘left’,
respectively.

28 Here and elsewhere (e.g. ‘right conduct’, ‘the right path in life’, ‘wrongdoing’), Fung
and her colleagues use the English terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ to gloss Chinese
concepts that I am not in a position to interpret. Wierzbicka (2002) argues that *right*
and *wrong* are uniquely Anglo concepts with a particular history in the British
Enlightenment and Puritanism. What these authors are calling ‘right and wrong’
may have to do with sensitivity to, specifically potential shame in light of, other
people’s assessment of one’s conduct – rather than involving consultation with one’s
individual conscience. I should add that Wierzbicka (personal communication) also
raises the possibility of ethnocentric bias in two other English glosses used by these
authors – namely, *self-esteem*, as in ‘too much shame would only risk harming the
child’s self-esteem’; and *honesty*, as in ‘being able to face one’s own misdeeds
honestly’. Elsewhere Miller and her colleagues (Miller et al., 2002: 228) clarify the
use of ‘self-esteem’, reporting that its meaning is approximated by two related
terms in Taiwanese and Mandarin – literally translated as ‘self-respect-heart/mind’
(*zi zun xin* in Mandarin; *chu chun sim* in Taiwanese), and self-confidence-heart/
mind’ (*zi xin xin* in Mandarin; *chu sin sim* in Taiwanese).
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