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people to see other places in real time in a way that they have never before been exposed to and mass travel has resulted in the world becoming more multicultural. Clinicians currently hold more responsibility for working with culturally and linguistically diverse family constellations and increasingly non-traditional family constellations are being observed. Music describes openly how each culture presents challenges to observers trained elsewhere and in particular how cultural differences present a challenge in observing interactions between mothers and infants that may make the observer feel uncomfortable. He leaves to one side discussing the validity of trying to read affects across cultures, which infant research suggests do have some correspondence, as well as the broader issue of whether in defining a practice as part of a different culture means that one cannot sometimes take a stand in viewing it as wrong, if it touches on the rights of infants. (See the study researching motherhood in ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds in London noted in Part III.)

Reference

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Struggling with cultural prejudice while observing babies: socio-centric and egocentric positions

Graham Music

Introduction

A struggle I often have with myself whilst hearing observations of infants and families is how to manage and make sense of the inevitable feelings of judgement that both I and group members experience when hearing such emotionally powerful experiences. It is impossible at times not to cringe inside when hearing of something that seems particularly painful, or want to judge what we might see as harsh treatment, or be excited and thrilled by what we experience as a delightful interchange between a mother or father and their baby. Indeed, it is generally these very personal responses in ourselves that are the clues to what might be going on, whether a nagging sense of unease at the way a baby's subtle wishes are not understood, or an acute awareness that the newly weaned baby is desperately seeking out the breast while its mother seems oblivious to this fact. In fact, students often report that what particularly changed them in the course of attending seminars is how they were slowly able to notice and attend to subtle (and often painful) emotional nuances that they were not able to be in touch with at the start of their studies.

In this process, inevitably our values and heartfelt beliefs intrude. I noted recently how a mother's decision to give up breast-feeding and use the bottle when her firstborn was three weeks old led me to momentarily feel despondent. Similarly, I could not help a slight hint of disapproval from entering my voice when discussing a young child still breast-feeding at three years old. My reactions are based on a range of diverse factors, including my personal life experiences, theoretical understandings, personal analysis, psychotherapy trainings, supervisions and other learning. I believe, for example, that the baby weaned at three weeks was losing a potentially rich experience, as was her mother, and I am also aware of the lack of boundaries consistently displayed by the mother of the three-year-old boy. Yet there is a danger that I take

my views, values, and perceptions as possessing some kind of absolute validity whereas they are obviously the views of someone living in a particular time and place, whose thinking has been influenced by certain traditions, and who would have different beliefs if born into a quite other epoch or culture. While not wanting to take on questions of relativism or post-modern thinking head-on, I intend in this paper to ask something about how we manage dilemmas that are thrown up by the culturally influenced nature of our values, and how this intersects with what we think of as "emotional understanding".

Different cultural universes

Cultural and personal values inevitably influence perceptions, and ideas that might seem neutral on the surface but often contain disguised normative assumptions. There is of course a whole tradition of critical developmental psychology that has challenged or deconstructed many developmental concepts (Burman, 2007). We know that breast-feeding is natural for example, at least in the sense that human mothers are biologically primed to do it. However the term "natural" is a complex concept, which can be used in a value-laden way; would we say, for example, that not breast-feeding is "unnatural"? The very use of concepts such as "natural", as well as of "development", as used in developmental psychology, can risk assuming that there are universally expected and desired outcomes.

One of the problems I intend to pose in this paper is how we can grapple with what seems like an insoluble problem. We cannot escape our cultural heritage and personal beliefs, and yet also cannot give up the struggle to find a way of not letting these be an excuse for being critical of other ways of bringing up children. I often wonder with what emotional tones and hues might a twenty-first century observation student describe a baby brought up with a tough Truby King regime (King, 1937) who was rarely picked up, or an infant in mid-nineteenth century France who was sent away from home to a wet-nurse, a practice that was very common. Indeed, what would we say of a mother of a two-year-old who lets her new and frail baby die, knowing that she can only keep alive some of her children. This was an issue that confronted the anthropologist Scheper-Hughes (1992) who studied Brazilian shantytowns with extremely high infant mortality rates. Here some babies are labelled as "fighters" and receive more attention, and these generally are the ones who survive. Scheper-Hughes was so upset by the way these mothers withdrew from babies who were deemed unlikely to survive that she tried to help, only to be criticised by mothers whose value system led them to respond caringly only to the more hardy and demanding survivors. This is an extreme form of the kind of moral and emotional challenges observers, and indeed therapists, constantly face.

In infant observations we often aim to be in touch with, rather than defend against, a difficult emotional experience, such as a baby's loss of the breast. However, we can also defend against, the difficult idea that other ways of bringing up babies are not wrong, but simply alternative ways, even if the two ways of bringing up babies are incommensurable. Heidi Keller has undertaken fascinating cross-cultural studies, comparing for example Nso mothers (from rural areas in the Cameroons) with German mother-infant pairs. She has shown videos to mothers in one culture of interactions between mothers and babies in another culture and asked them to respond. As one typical example, Nso mothers watching videos of German mothers trying to

comfort their children without breast-feeding could barely believe what they saw, and several wondered if German mothers were forbidden to hold their babies, even questioning whether they were really watching the actual mothers. They were similarly aghast when shown videos of German infants sleeping alone. The Nso mothers offered to go to Germany to teach these women how to be "proper mothers"! By the same token, in many cultures it is also common for mothers to indulge in quite rigorous bodily stimulation and massage. German mothers watching such practices on video suggested that these mothers were being intrusive and insensitive in not matching the infant's own tempo.

These various beliefs have arisen from different cultural universes. While it may be possible in theory for Nso and German mothers to eventually find a way of accepting each other's ways, their initial appalled and bewildered reactions suggested incommensurable disagreements and resulted in judgments of the other party's parenting practices. This is maybe unsurprising, and is not dissimilar to the kind of judgments that we often experience in infant observations.

Socio-centric and egocentric values

In order to think further about such cultural differences I make use of a distinction between cultures "that are more or less egocentric or socio-centric," a distinction that has been common in anthropology and cultural theory (Geertz, 2000). Interdependent or socio-centric cultures are geared to ensuring that the child grows up as part of its community, and people are seen very much as enmeshed within a social context without which they cannot be understood, as opposed to more autonomous cultures, seen in more industrial societies, where the development of the child as an autonomous individual is prized more. These distinctions are by no means absolute and also these terms are not intended to imply any judgment but rather denote different sets of values. For example a central Western assumption is that the development of an "autonomous" self is natural, an assumption not shared in all cultures. Shand (1985) writes:

In Japan the infant is seen more as a separate biological organism who, from the beginning, in order to develop, needs to be drawn into increasingly interdependent relations with others. In America, the infant is seen more as a dependent biological organism who in order to develop, needs to be made increasingly independent of others.

In fact in traditional Japanese society there was a concept, *amae*, which is not even really translatable into Western languages but seems to mean partly an "expectation to be loved", a fine attunement between mother and infant, a wish to love and be loved, the wish to be cared for and to care.

A typical example of how socio-centric or egocentric practices are expressed is in infant sleeping arrangements. We read about sleep training regimes, in which babies are taught to expect no comfort when they cry. In most societies in human history infant survival might well have depended on babies and mothers sleeping together. Morelli, Oppenheim, Rogoff, and Goldsmith (1992) compared American and Highland Mayan sleeping arrangements, finding that few US babies slept with their mothers, although some slept nearby, whereas in the Mayan culture it was unthinkable for babies to sleep separately, and adult Mayans, too, almost never slept alone. Some Japanese believe that co-sleeping aids children's transformation from separate beings to

being members of the wider community (Caudill & Plath, 1966). The language we use is telling. Many Western parents talk of the need to train infants to be "self-reliant", "independent", and worry about "dependency", while Mayan mothers emphasise qualities of "interdependence". Where we think a child should sleep is linked to our most central views about being human.

Babies in cultures that value either "independence" or "interdependence" have very different experiences. In Heidi Keller's studies (2007) three-month-old German babies spent forty per cent of their time out of physical reach of their mothers, whereas infants in interdependent farming communities were never alone (p. 92). In Western families the mother often does the lion's share of childcare, and maybe only a few other adults help, whereas in rural African and Indian cultures many other adults and young people are at hand to participate in childcare. A Nso (rural Cameroonian) saying is, "A child belongs to a single person when in the womb, but after birth he or she belongs to everybody" (Keller, 2007, p. 105), and in such interdependent cultures social adaptation is highly valued, but not independence and autonomy.

Indeed, close bodily contact, and immediate bodily comfort (often by breastfeeding) is more taken for granted in interdependent cultures, and there is less verbal dyadic interaction, whereas there is more distal, face-to-face communication between Western mothers and babies. Similar differences are also seen in language use, with Western mothers vocalising more with their infants, who in turn become more vocal. Mothers in cultures that value more interdependent ways of being use less language, and use it differently, less to encourage autonomy and more to support social and moral codes.

In much of Europe and America the assumption is that dyadic, mother-child relationships are "natural", and indeed many theories, including psychoanalytic ones, emphasise the importance of the father being an external presence who helps to "break-up" a symbiotic mother-infant bond by facilitating a more triadic form of interaction. This, of course, is true only in certain cultures. For example, in the Aka forager communities in Central Africa, a father does not come in as a "third" but rather is holding or within arm's reach of an infant for about half of a twenty-four-hour period, is near the baby eighty-eight per cent of their waking time, and holding an infant for about a quarter of the time (Hewlett, 1991). An Aka father is expected to be physically affectionate to his child, and very supportive of the mother, and Aka males can slip into more traditionally female roles with no loss of status. By the same token, in other more matrilineal cultures the biological fathers often have little role to play, and the most important males in a child's life can be a mother's brother. Yet we can maybe too quickly use concepts such as "paternal function", albeit in a symbolic way, as if they denoted universal rather than culturally specific traits.

In many cultures, particularly more socio-centric ones, parents remain the most central carers, but are much more part of a matrix of communal care in which interaction is based on complex group dynamics and not dyadic ones, and in which webs of social bonds are more valued. In schools in Alaska, teachers have tended to facilitate *group* processes and communal rather than individual learning, with students helping each other to build knowledge and teachers fostering group speaking. However, in one example a supply teacher caused disarray when, on arrival, she turned all the desks to face her, insisting that all speaking was directed through her (Lipka, 1994). The students' hitherto encouraged practices, such as openly helping each other in lessons, was seen as insubordination and "wrong."

As Rothbaum and Morelli (2005) show, in Western cultures autonomy, self-esteem, and self-assertion are particularly valued. Yet from some Asian perspectives an assertive, autonomous person is seen as immature and uncultivated (Kitayama, Matsumoto, Markus, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Socio-centric cultures emphasise parental control, social cohesion, interdependence, and community expectations. A Cameroonian Nso mother will normally respond very quickly to an infant's signs of distress, whereas a German mother will respond more to positive signals (Keller, 2007). Nso mothers are shocked when American mothers leave their babies to cry. Gusii mothers do not amplify interactive excitement, but rather turn away from excited infants to calm them down, as they do not want to produce individualistic or expressive children. Such differences are not about one way being "better", nor about some parents loving their children more or less. However, they do present a challenge to us if we are observing interactions between mothers and babies that make us either feel uncomfortable or make our hearts "zing".

For example, we all have ideas about how much control a parent should dispense (not too much or too little, according to our own criteria). Strong social control is highly valued in socio-centric cultures yet has quite negative connotations for many American or Western European parents. Many rural Chinese mothers actively discourage individuality in their children and encourage compliance, co-cooperativeness, and interdependent ways of behaving (Chen et al., 1998). Yet as the influence of education, industrial development, and urban life increases, parenting tends to move to a more independent egocentric model. Generally cultures seem to be moving in a more individualistic and egocentric direction, and recent research (Hofstede, 2001) examining cultural attributes in fifty countries, showed that the US, Australia, Britain, and Canada ranked highest in individualism. Furthermore, as Heidi Keller's extensive interviews of mothers across the world showed, irrespective of what the beliefs are, mothers tend to feel certainty in *their own* belief systems.

Mind-mindedness, attachment theory, and culture

I think we have to strive not to be too judgmental of other childcare practices, even if at some level that is not truly possible. I am helped in this when I think of what an extraordinary adaptive species humans are, which may be why we have survived so successfully. We can survive in arctic snow, in Saharan deserts, and in high altitudes. By the same token, we can survive and thrive in a variety of different emotional atmospheres. This has always been an essential tenet of attachment theory. Infants develop a different attachment style depending on the responses they become used to, as their primary aim is to retain proximity to their attachment figures. If their parents tend to reject shows of emotion and withdraw in the face of clinginess, then an infant might well develop an avoidant attachment style. If an infant has parents who are inconsistent and unpredictable, then they might develop a clingy form of ambivalent attachment. Secure children tend to have had an experience of their emotional signals responded to and have the confidence that there is a secure base to return to when needed. It is maybe worth noting that attachment theory has fallen into the trap of using normative terms such as "secure" and "insecure" which tend to assume that secure is "better", rather than these simply being a different strategy. It makes no sense to cry out to a parent if that were likely to lead to rejection, and in some societies or social groups, being very aware of one's emotions would not aid survival.

We know that attachment styles get transmitted from parent to child, but one of the continuing puzzles of attachment theory is exactly how this occurs, a question that is sometimes called the "transmission gap." One of the best candidates to explain this is the concept of "mind-mindedness" developed by Elizabeth Meins and colleagues (2001). This measures how much parents make mind-related comments to their children, and seems to predict a whole host of outcomes, including how early children develop Theory of Mind, language skills, and also whether a child will be securely attached or not. Parents who show mind-minded skills tend to focus on their children's subjective states, on what they are feeling, thinking, and experiencing. Such parents treat their children as having minds and feelings, rather than focussing more on physical needs or external behaviours. If a pre-verbal infant shows distress, then the mind-minded parent might speculate aloud about why they are upset, maybe saying, "Oh yes, you have missed mummy" or, "Well, that was a frightening loud noise." Meins showed that repeated experience of one's mental states being noted and reflected upon helps children become aware of their own and other people's mental states and processes. Mothers of avoidantly attached children tend to make relatively few mind-minded comments, whereas mothers of securely attached children make many more, and mothers of ambivalent children might make some mental state statements, but these are often an inaccurate reading of the child's internal state.

A typical moment in a recent infant observation that I think illustrates mind-mindedness was a moment when the mother had gone to make a cup of tea, leaving the observer with baby Martin.

Martin at six weeks

Martin lay there quietly and looked around, reaching for and patting the tiger on the baby gym. Out of the blue came the continued loud honking of a lorry just outside the house. Martin seemed to jump and quiver, as if momentarily freezing, scrunching up his face and tensing up, seeming to look around and then closing and opening his eyes and grimacing, and he then looked up at me, and on seeing my face looked distressed and began to cry. I felt awful on his behalf. Mother briskly returned to the room calling out, "Oh Martin, mummy's here, what a big loud noise." He looked around and seemed not to know whether to smile and then suddenly his sobbing became a huge outpouring of upset and desperate crying. Mother picked him up and talked aloud to him continuously, "Oh dear, that was so frightening, horrible, horrible, mummy is here now, everything is ok." Mother continued like this for several minutes and slowly Martin's breathing begun to ease, his crying subsided, and he lay his head on her shoulder, whimpered a little and then fell deeply asleep.

Here was a mother who showed exactly what Meins meant by mind-mindedness. She was able to be in touch with Martin's psychological state, talk to him about his feelings, not try to jolly him out of them, but simply stay with him and show that she could bear what he was going through.

As a comparison I briefly describe another baby, eight-month-old Ricky. He was physically a very well cared for baby but both parents struggled to be in touch with his emotional state. This was particularly apparent at the point when mother was returning to work.

Ricky at eight weeks

As we entered the front room Ricky was placed back in his high chair and turned to his mother in anticipation of more food, lifting his arms aloft and seemingly clenching them, making his face go slightly red. I remarked to Fiona that she looked tired; she stated that she had been ill for a few days and that today was one of her better days. She had recently returned to work and I wondered if that was a factor. She said that it was not and that she really enjoyed going to work, as it gave her an outlet that was her own. Ricky was now moving his arms up and down more vigorously at the same time looking towards his mother.

I asked what Ricky's response to being collected from the child minder, and also seeing his mother leave home in the morning had been. Fiona stated that there had been no real marked difference and that she normally receives the greeting that I get when he is collected. However, she said that last week he had been somewhat indifferent to her presence upon her arrival and that she had to move towards him as opposed to Ricky normally offering himself for close contact. I could not help but think about how Ricky's being left had maybe been taken for granted by his parents, given that he had settled so well.

Fiona mentioned to me that Ricky was now not sleeping throughout the night. They were unsure as to why at first and consulted a friend who stated that Ricky might be having a growth spurt. They had been advised to feed him more. She stated that she had had a scare last week as she had read that the Department of Health had removed goat's milk from the shelves, as it did not give babies the necessary vitamins and protein that cow's milk did. She said that he was due to go to the clinic for weighing next week and so she would double check then.

Ricky was a loved and cared for baby, but both parents had a greater propensity to be aware of his physical than his emotional needs. They often struggled to be in touch with painful feelings in him, or indeed in themselves, and this had become particularly marked around the time of mother's return to work. It is easy of course to see how painful this was for the observer who was extremely identified with Ricky, and was struggling to bear in herself what she was witnessing, becoming somewhat judgemental of the mother.

It was hard for all of us in the group not to respond in this way. Several in the group had sided with the observer in stating strongly that the sleep issues were *obviously* linked to the day-care and mother's return to work, and the group experience of upset had at times been palpable. Indeed, I think it was this group process that helped the observer to stay with her feelings more in the future and become less judgemental. One feature that marked out this observation from the one briefly described before was that the parents, while still very caring, showed less of what Meins called mind-mindedness, that lack of awareness of Ricky's mental and emotional states.

Most students or teachers of infant observation would probably have similar responses to these observational narratives. I had taken such ideas for granted until I came across an example of Meins' ideas being used in a research paradigm. In this, mothers were being measured for their levels of mind-mindedness, and in this research study one of the tasks that the mothers were set was to simply be with their child and play with them. The mothers who received the highest scores were those who displayed the most mind-minded input. I was struck by one interview that was shown to me. In this, an African mother who had been in the country for

about five years and her three-year-old son were given this task to perform. In the room were a lot of toys and books and the mother and child were alone, although they were aware that they were being filmed.

Three-year-old observed

The boy made to grab the toy cars and as he did so the mother took another car. She asked him, "What colour is the car?" and he looked at her and mumbled something rather hard to distinguish. She then moved in close to him and said that they should play a certain game. From looking pleased and interested he suddenly looked rather compliant.

The mother then went to get the toy people and began to play with them in the toy house more or less by herself. He joined in, on her suggestion, and she told him where to put the people, and was directing him, and asking him things like where does the baby sleep, and in reply saying things like, "Yes that's right." He lost interest and for a few minutes she was playing on her own. Eventually she realised what had happened and tried to encourage him to play with her again. When his response was rather half-hearted she picked up a book and began to read to him, and asked him various questions, such as what a particular letter was, and what the name of the animals were.

As the task was for the mother to play with her child in whatever way they wanted, she had in effect not done anything that needed to be judged as in any way inappropriate. Watching the film, though, was something of an affront to my own values, as I longed for her to be empathic to him, and let him lead the play a bit. Maybe not surprisingly, this mother was given a very low score on the mind-mindedness scale. Yet in the group I facilitated an interesting discussion ensued as we realised that this mother was acting exactly as would have been expected in her own culture. Apart from the over-valuation of educational tasks, and the likely possibility that she felt that she would be judged by Western professionals in terms of how well she was "teaching" her son, this mother was acting in a way that is very common in more socio-centric cultures.

The anthropological literature provides a fascinating account of how children play differently in different societies. In most pre-industrial societies children spend much of their lives in cross-age groups, learning from the older ones, and play is not something that is often done between parent and child in the way we expect in the West. In a study of a poor rural Turkish community, where children had to contribute to the workforce at an early age, play was less highly valued, and adults did not join in, but rather left children to get on with it (Göncü & Gaskins, 2007). The same is true of many other cultures, such as Yucatan Maya children, where play is actively curtailed to encourage more "productive" activity and many cultures do not highly value symbolic play.

The rationale behind symbolic play differs across cultures. Japanese infants are likely to be encouraged in play which has a socio-centric emphasis, with more "other directed" attention, such as "feed the dolly", whereas US mothers might be more likely to stress play that promotes individual autonomy or assertiveness ("Yes, you can do that if you try"). In Taiwanese middle-class families influenced by Confucian values, the roles children were expected to take in play involved "proper conduct" and addressing elders appropriately (Göncü & Gaskins, 2007). In

many societies, one sees less fantasy play and more exploration of real life roles and scripts. Western societies encourage learning in which ideas are thought about more abstractly, in a de-contextualised way, so allowing more "playing around" with realities (Harris, 2007).

Indeed, differences in how language is used and valued are an important aspect of the socio-centric—egocentric distinction. I have often found members of infant observation groups expressing surprise, or even disapproval, that a mother does not talk aloud more to her baby. Yet in many cultures the kind of dyadic, "motherese" (Bateson, 1971) we often value so much in mothers and babies is simply not culturally appropriate. For example, the Gusii of Kenya believe that if you talk too much to your children then they end up self-centred (LeVine, 1994). Gusii children are immersed in adult conversation but are not talked to or taught to talk. The Western middle-class ideal of lots of dyadic mother–infant communication again does not pertain. Similarly the Kaluli, a tribe in New Guinea, have no lilting "motherese" (Fernald, 1985) with its soft, high-pitched tones, and infants and children are not even addressed directly. Rather they are taught to speak clearly through adults modelling correct speech. Mothers might turn a baby towards someone and speak for the baby, demonstrating correct language. Linguistic skills are important to the Kaluli, but infants learn by observing adults or older children speak to each other, neither through motherese, nor the dyadic interactions we in the West might assume to be "natural". The Kaluli expect children to fit into adult speech patterns and barely attempt to understand what a child might be thinking, believing that one can never know what is in another's mind.

Such considerations have a bearing on how we can think about and understand the families we observe, and in particular how we teach infant observation of, and within, cultures other than our own. This exercise I mentioned earlier, of watching the African mother play with her children, and then realising the cultural bias in the methodology used to measure her "mind-mindedness", was in fact a profoundly shocking one for us all in the group. I had up until that moment not suspected the extent to which the concept of mind-mindedness contained cultural norms against which members of other cultures might be judged. In the next section I take up further some of the other normative assumptions that can creep into related areas of attachment theory, particularly in relation to the socio-centric—egocentric distinction.

Attachment theory and culture

Whilst attachment might be a universal biological system, like all theories it developed in a particular time and within a specific cultural framework. It is possible to apply the concepts of attachment theory across cultures. Doing so reveals that secure attachment is the most common form of attachment, although there are definite cultural variations. For example the Grossmans (Grossmann, Grossman, & Waters, 2005) found that in a German sample, in North German (but not South German) children avoidant attachment was most common. Similarly, in Israeli Kibbutz children with communal sleeping arrangements, ambivalent patterns were predominant (Sagi et al., 1995) for children not sleeping with their mothers. Some cultures simply do not seem to have children who fall into certain categories. For example in the Dogon people in Mali (True, Pisani, & Oumar, 2001), where the mother is the main attachment figure and sleeps with her infants, eighty-seven per cent of the children were categorised as secure,

and none at all as avoidant or ambivalent, whilst about thirteen per cent were disorganised. The mother's constant presence and responsiveness meant that avoidance did not develop, although a disorganised response was seen when mothers were frightened or frightening. Attachment categories, such as "secure" or "avoidant", themselves are relatively broad, which is a strength, as they can be so widely applied, but also a weakness in understanding more subtle nuances. All secure children are not the same. For example Japanese secure children cry less when leaving their mother's arms than secure German children, yet both groups of children have the same secure classification.

Yet even if attachment concepts can be applied across cultures, we can also ask if they have cultural biases. Concepts that are used to measure parental capacities in relation to attachment such as "timely responsiveness" or "maternal sensitivity" might mean something different in different cultures. Rothbaum and Morelli (2005) have argued that attachment theory overly values autonomy, exploration, and independence, capacities more prized in the West. Puerto Rican mothers, for example, are on average more concerned with calm, respectful attentiveness than autonomy. Physical control of children might be associated with insecure attachment in American families, but with secure children in Puerto Rican families (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). Similarly, maternal interference predicts attachment insecurity in America but not in Colombia, where the opposite is true (Posada & Jacobs, 2001). Indeed, in many cultures it is the ability to anticipate the infant's needs that is prized. Attachment research does not measure this, but measures a child's response to an anxiety-inducing situation that has already occurred rather than an anticipated one. It might well be that much psychoanalytically informed infant observation can similarly place more emphasis or value on managing anxiety than on preventing it in the first place, possibly revealing subtle cultural presuppositions.

Observations of more socio-centric families

I now present one very brief episode from an observation undertaken in a primarily Muslim country, and then a more extended sequence of observations taken from an observation in a slightly more socio-centric culture in Britain.

Cemal at eleven months

Cemal is seated on a high chair at the edge of the room. The rest of the family are starting to eat. Today father's parents are there, so there are both sets of grandparents. There is much noise, colour, shouting and laughter. Cemal is alert, looking around, watchful. His oldest sister places his bottle in front of him, and he looks at it, and back at her and then away. He then lifts it and takes a few sips. He seems slightly dreamy, watching life around him take place, not flat, more as if carried along on a tide. His cousin, Erkin, comes back from the toilet and on his way past pats him on the shoulder. Cemal smiles slightly and Erkin exaggerates the movement and Cemal smiles slightly more broadly. Erkin looks at his mother who seems to display slight disapproval and Erkin goes to sit down. Cemal takes his bottle again, and shows no emotion. The adults are having a discussion about local issues, a kind of cross between politics and gossip. The seven children are all sitting quietly, occasionally glancing at each other and making faces. None of them ask for anything or make much noise.

This was a typical moment in this family. The children do not expect to get very much attention from adults and indeed are expected to contribute to family life and be fairly unobtrusive. Particularly striking in this culture is the fear of the "evil eye". This family is typical in having the traditional amulet around the house that is said to protect from the effects of the evil eye. Boastfulness is rare as there is a terrible fear of envy, and a worry that envy can cause all manner of damage and difficulties. If a new baby is born, and neighbours come round and shower the baby with compliments, this would worry the mother who would fear that the baby might get ill as a result of the evil eye. This particular belief seems to add another layer to the idea that children should not get too much special attention. Erkin's mother's response was typical, in that not only should he have been sitting at the table and not "playing", but also Cemal and babies in general should not be made too much the centre of attention.

A challenge for me in observations in such cultures is trying to apply the psychological understanding we have gained without asserting our own cultural assumptions. For example, it often seemed to me that Cemal looked somewhat forlorn, and I longed for his latent liveliness to be responded to and enhanced.

Each culture presents its own challenges to observers trained elsewhere. For several years I have taught in Sicily where it is hard not to be somewhat taken aback at the different treatment first-born boys get, as opposed to girls, the boys often treated as a somewhat regal centre of the universe and gaining a quality of attention that daughters rarely get. In such situations I have often had to try to restrain my personal feelings, not always successfully.

Example from another culture

Next I describe an observation of a baby born into an orthodox Jewish family in Britain. The observer comes from the same culture as the family, and one of the striking features of this observational experience was how he began to realise the differences between his own cultural assumptions and those of the families of the other babies in the group. He writes:

I am pleased that I had the opportunity to observe a baby from within my community as this afforded me the opportunity to learn about my own culture. It was through observations and subsequent discussions in the seminars, that I became aware that in my and my baby's culture the new baby has to fit in with the existing family. It was interesting to observe how my baby responded to the system. From a young age, Chloe had to learn to blend into the family's routine and needs, which would mean that she had different experiences from children of other cultures.

In Chloe's early months Mother was reported as saying, "During school term, as I am busy in the morning dressing and giving breakfast to Shelley, Jane, and Isaac, and I then have school rotas, Chloe doesn't get much for breakfast, and for lunch a bottle and a little more, but rather eats a massive dinner in the evening." Following breakfast there might not have been time to dress Chloe, who would anyway remain in the car when they were dropped off outside school, and it seemed that this is what many of her friends do, for the same reasons as her.

In an observation when Chloe was just six days old, and sleeping in her bouncer, her older siblings, of just two, three, and nearly five years old, Shelley, Jane and Isaac, sat nearby at the

dining room table waiting impatiently for dinner to be served. They began to bang their cups on the table.

Chloe at six days

I was surprised that no one worried that this would awaken Chloe. I carefully observed Chloe and noticed that for the first few bangs, Chloe jumped slightly, seeming startled, and blinked her eyes a little. The children continued their racket and interestingly enough after a few bangs Chloe, didn't seem to react at all, but went on sleeping peacefully. In this first observation it was clear that Chloe was joining an existing family; they would continue as before. It would be Chloe who would have to learn how to accommodate to the system.

When Chloe moaned or even cried, there usually was not a spontaneous response, and she had to learn how to manage and soothe herself. Soon after this, at only thirteen days old, her dummy fell out and no one noticed; she crunched her brow and began crying, kicking her legs, and moving her hands. Her hands rubbed against her face, ears and eyes. She put both hands together over her mouth and sucked furiously for a few moments.

At seven weeks old, Chloe moaned whilst mother was serving dinner to her three siblings, and Mother ignored Chloe. After a few minutes Mother said, "Once I've fed and changed baby's nappy, if she cries, it's too bad. I must give the others attention too." We might speculate how Chloe may have felt. She could see and wanted her mother, but was unable to evoke a response from her by showing distress by moaning. She continued moaning for a number of minutes and eventually just fell asleep.

Through the observations and subsequent discussions in the seminar, the observer gained a better understanding and awareness of how Chloe's experiences differed from the other babies in the group. Hers was not necessarily a more positive or negative experience, but she had a different set of experiences from that of other infants.

Chloe at eighteen weeks

Chloe unsuccessfully tried to get her mother's attention, turning towards Mother and "talking" to her, but Mother didn't seem to realise. It was painful for the observer watching as Chloe then raised her feet and banged them on the carpet hard, even though Mother had already walked past, and she then banged her feet a few more times. Later during that observation, Mother was serving dinner to the older children, put Chloe on the floor and put a toy arch over her and gave her a dummy, and then said to the observer, "I know what you're thinking, that I just want to switch off the noise, but I know that I can't give her proper attention now, but will give her proper time once the others are in bed."

Chloe at about forty-four weeks

Chloe was able to play and interact more but she was playful only with people who she had learnt would respond to her. When her brother and sisters turned buttons on a farm game and

music begun to play, Chloe became extremely excited and shrieked loudly with delight. She sat up with her left foot sticking forward, and sitting on her right foot, and rocked back and forth with a smile of satisfaction on her face and a glint in her eyes. The contrast between her interactions with her siblings and with her parents was stark. Her parents were most definitely sensitive and thoughtful, and the children were happy and very well cared for, but the parents simply did not see it as an adult's job to interact playfully with their children.

A few weeks later at a year old, Chloe was sitting in her booster chair, unsmiling. Mother came in with the other two children, and Father went into the kitchen and came back, carrying a pizza box that Mother had bought. The two older ones sat on chairs around the table. Mother tied a towel bib around Chloe and she immediately cried, turned her head to her left hand side, pushed her feet against the underneath part of the booster tray, and gave long drawn-out moans. Her sister Shelley got off her chair and stood next to Chloe and said, "Ahhhh, ahhhh" to comfort her and at the same time put her arms around her and patted her stomach, chest and back. This seemed to sooth her. Chloe then put her pointing finger into her mouth and sucked on it, soothing herself.

She seemed rather forlorn and forgotten. When Father entered with a bowl of chips, Chloe looked up expectantly at the chips, and watched whilst they were given to her sisters. This often happened at mealtimes and contrasted with the lively time she had playing with her brother and sister.

Chloe at sixteen months

Chloe was in the garden running and screeching after a football, throwing it into the house with a wide smile. However, once they sat down to eat the atmosphere changed. Mother gave them all plates of pasta, and Chloe sat in her chair quietly, having eaten half a banana, and was rather ignored. The adults were busy with the other children. Chloe did not make a sound, and hardly moved. At first she looked around observing, and after a while her eyes took on a glazed look. When Mother went around with a bag of cheese, Chloe tried to reach it, but did not manage to get Mother's attention. Chloe did not talk or try to engage. There was little sign of the lively young girl who had been running around excitedly early on, and the observer remarked that it was as if he had observed two different children in one hour.

Chloe was loved and well cared for, yet her experiences were a little different from the other children in the group, mostly in that she had learnt from the start that she had to find a place in the family system and was unlikely to get very much individual attention. She was born into a culture where families often have very large numbers of children, and she will soon be learning new roles in relation to her as yet unborn successors. While the observations at times were painful for group members, it became clear that she was not unhappy, nor having a bad experience, just a slightly different one, and was learning just what it takes to be a child in a family like hers whose values were more socio-centric than most in Britain today.

Different cultures, different values, and psychological worlds

Different cultures inevitably raise their children differently, and people in most societies have strong beliefs about how to rear children. Sufficient cultural understanding is necessary to

understand the appropriateness of the various practices we come across, whether in infant observations or as practitioners. *In utero* we imbibe the tastes and sounds of the culture we are likely to live in, and from birth onwards an infant responds to a bath of culturally influenced movements, rhythms, and ways of being. To grow into a socially competent adult people must learn the expectations of their cultural context. The sociological concept of a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) describes how external cultural and social arrangements and influences become "lived" through the subjective life of an individual, mostly non-consciously.

Most of us feel challenged by practices alien to our own. Our language is replete with words implying that things that are different are "foreign" or "alien". For a long time Western thought was suffused with ideas about "civilised" people being different from "savages", sometimes simplistically grafting evolutionary ideas onto beliefs about the superiority of its way of life. Those of us working in multicultural communities are constantly challenged by practices that we might not have been brought up with, whether of arranged marriages, children working in a family business from very young, or parents inhibiting individual expressiveness in children.

Those of us working with children can be helped by remembering that current psychological ideas in the West either overtly or covertly contain a specific view of developmental "stages" which "should" be achieved at clearly defined ages, and children are often judged as being either "behind" or "ahead". This, though, differs across cultures. In India, children learn their left from their right far earlier than in the West, and for good reason; their right hand is the "clean" hand, used for eating, or shaking hands, whilst the left is used for cleaning oneself after defecation. Children as young as one-and-a-half years know this. In many societies physical skills, maybe to do with hunting or setting fires, would be learnt very early, whilst the kind of learning valued in the Western school system might never occur.

There are large cultural variations in the ages that children manage the developmental achievements cited in child development texts. Children in cultures that value more socio-centric ways tend, for example, to achieve self-recognition later than their Western counterparts, and tend to recognise themselves in mirrors later, and also to receive more bodily contact in early infancy, less face-to-face interaction, and less encouragement in object manipulation (Keller et al., 2004). Yet when it comes to self-regulation, the opposite is true. Cultures that value close bodily contact and quick response to signals of distress, and where there are clear imperatives for children to abide by rules, are also the cultures where self-regulation develops earlier and more fully. Children in more interdependent cultures are also quicker to respond to adult requests and to develop skills in compliance.

Autobiographical memory is another example. This is highly prized in Western cultures, and in attachment theory. Parents with good autobiographical skills are likely to have children who are securely attached. In the West, parents tend to use more elaborative styles of talking about their own and their children's lives, spinning narratives about what has or might happen. Western children can develop such skills as much as sixteen months earlier than some other children, and for example, Nso Cameroonian children's first memories are of considerably later experiences than those of Western children. Similarly, Theory of Mind (the ability to understand what is in someone else's mind, and to know that another person might perceive things differently from oneself) also comes on stream at different ages depending on which culture one is raised in (Chasiotis, Kiessling, Hofer, & Campos, 2006).

Culture influences everyone in profound ways—biologically, neuronally and psychologically. We know from neuroscientists such as Siegel (1999) and Schore (2005) how the brain circuitry for attachment is altered by different experiences, and that "cells that wire together, fire together". Different cultural experiences also lead to different brain development. A typical example comes from the Moken society, often called sea gypsies, (Travis, 2003) who have made a living for centuries by diving thirty feet under water and harvesting sea cucumbers and clams. Few could believe that Moken children could see clearly at that depth without goggles, something that most humans cannot manage due to the way sunlight is refracted under water, so not falling on the retina in the usual way. The Moken, though, learn to control the size of their pupils and the shape of their lenses. This is not a genetic capacity, as an experiment was done with Swedish children, who were able to learn this if they were taught early enough. Here what were assumed to be hardwired circuits in the brain were changed through cultural influences.

It seems that people in different cultures might have very different cognitive architecture, and in some respects people from socio-centric and egocentric cultures perceive a slightly different reality (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). Americans and Japanese people were shown animations of coloured fish swimming, and in each animation there was one "focal" fish, which was larger, more brightly coloured and faster. Afterwards, the Americans usually remembered the focal fish whilst the Japanese referred far more to the less prominent fish, and to background features such as rocks, Americans recognised the focal fish whether shown with its original background or not, whereas the Japanese only recognised it in its original context. Such experiments suggest that people reared in socio-centric societies perceive things more "holistically" whilst Westerners might see things more analytically, with a sharper but more focussed vision. Interestingly, children of Asian immigrants to America tend to have both capacities. To survive in a Western post-industrial world one might need a sharp analytical focus. In other contexts it might not be such an advantage.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to think about some issues that have preoccupied me both in my experience as an infant observation teacher, and as a clinician, to do with how the very different beliefs and values of other cultures challenge us. I have used many anthropological examples and in many ways the task of observation has much in common with the participant-observer stance of the anthropologist. In both one might see practices which are hard to bear, which conflict with one's own values, but which one has to struggle to accept. When faced with a crying baby, often new members of groups show less sympathy than those who have been studying for longer. I find that new students might be more likely to report, for example, that a crying baby is maybe spoilt or being manipulative. By the end they often have learnt to be more able to be in touch with and bear painful affects. Most of us tend to assume that such developments are a sign of increased emotional understanding, but of course it also is a form of socialisation into a particular cultural value system, albeit one very close to most of our hearts. In this paper I have aimed to flag up issues that I often find myself struggling with in relation to cultural variation, the difference between more socio-centric and egocentric values, and how,

different cultural values can inadvertently lead to judgements about parenting styles. The pull from cultural values is hard to resist and makes undertaking and teaching observation, as well as much clinical work, a particular challenge.

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