Chapter 3

Cultural and Historical Constructions of Childhood

Socialization is essential to human development. We develop as we learn the ways of a given society or social group. The language that we speak and how we speak it, the ways we think and feel, and even what pleases and repulses us are largely products of our socialization. Yet, what we learn and when and how we learn it depend on the society into which we are born. Socialization and, therefore, human development are as varied as human societies and their respective cultures are and have been. Although social scientists define the concept of *culture* in a variety of ways, it most generally refers to the way of life developed by a people in adaptation to the environmental and social conditions that they collectively face. Culture consists of conventional understandings that guide peoples' interpretations, actions, and interactions. The process of socialization transmits those understandings from one generation to the next, while at the same time those understandings shape the process of socialization. Moreover, cultures are not static but change as people adapt to changing circumstances. As culture changes, so does the process of socialization. This chapter examines different ways that culture shapes people's conceptions and treatment of children, and historical changes in cultural conceptions of children and in their socialization in Western societies. It thereby documents the remarkable plasticity of human nature and its varied social development.

Socialization in Cross-Cultural Perspective

As noted in the introduction, all societies divide the human life course into stages. They define and treat individuals in those different stages of life differently. Although this is now often called *age grading*, contemporary Western societies place far more emphasis on chronological age than many other societies did and do. People in many past and present societies had and have only a vague notion of their age. Those people often attached or attach some importance to the order in which children are born but ignore birthdays. In many past and present societies, physical size and capability rather than chronological age determine transitions from one stage of life to another. For example, in eighteenth-century North America, a "great boy" of 14 was expected to assume the work of a man, and a sexually mature girl was considered ready for marriage whether she was 14 or 18 (Kett 1977, 13).

Not only are the boundaries of socially defined developmental stages cross-culturally and historically variable but so too are their character and tim-

ing. For example, we treat walking as an important developmental milestone that distinguishes dependent "infants" from increasingly independent "toddlers." In contrast, Taria villagers of Okinawa carry infants on their backs for the first two to three years of life so as to prevent them from walking and being underfoot (Broude 1995, 348). To the Taria, allowing children under 2 or 3 independent mobility is uncaring because it invites injury. On the other hand, parents in some societies grant children considerable independence at what many of us would consider too tender an age. Among the Chewong people of the Malay rain forest, for example, children begin the transition from childhood to what the Chewong consider adolescence around 7 years of age. At that age, Chewong children "gradually shift away from parents in order to join a peer group consisting of older children of the same sex. . . . When the transition is fully accomplished, the youngsters spend most of their time together with the peer group sleeping with them in a special corner of the [communal] house." At that point, they are no longer called children but maidens and bachelors (Howell 1988, 160).

Such cross-cultural variation in the character and timing of developmental stages reflects very different expectations—very different norms—about what people of different ages can and should do, learn, and know. For example, Mayan children in Central America start working when they are about 3 years of age and gradually assume more and more responsibility for hauling water, caring for younger children, preparing food, and planting, weeding, and harvesting corn (Small 2001, 25). Many of us in more industrialized societies may consider such heavy labor developmentally inappropriate for young children, but Mayan adults believe it is a natural part of and necessary to children's development. Although we believe that young children should be free from work, we burden them with extensive training and formal instruction that we consider necessary to their development. In many other societies, adults give children virtually no instruction and may even discourage them from asking questions or seeking explanations. They believe children's "natural" curiosity and desire for mastery will lead them to closely watch and mimic adults, learning through trial and error and practice (Lancy 1996; Nicolaisen 1988, 205; Small 2001, 128).

Such variation in the definition, treatment, and training of children reminds us that human development is at least as much a social as a biological or natural process. Socialization varies in relation to the knowledge and skills required to function in a given society or social group. The extensive instruction we give our own children in reading, writing, and mathematics may prepare them for life in our own society but leaves them ill prepared to survive in a primarily agricultural society like the Mayan. Cultural beliefs about the nature of individuals and their maturation also shape how different human societies define and treat their young. Some think of children as balls of clay that must be carefully shaped, while others consider them unripe fruit that naturally ripen (Nicolaisen 1988, 202). Societies that believe children must be carefully shaped, like our own, tend to prolong children's dependency upon adults, while those that believe they naturally ripen tend to grant children more autonomy earlier in life and, in many cases, more responsibilities.

Consideration of cross-cultural and historical variations in conceptions of children and in their socialization helps put contemporary socialization in societies like our own into perspective. The way we raise our children is neither natural nor inevitable. It is one among a variety of ways that produce very different childhoods, children, and, eventually adults. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, 45) observes, humans "all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one." Socialization largely determines the kind of life out of those thousand possibilities that we end up living. It completes our vague and highly plastic biological nature, providing us with our socially and culturally peculiar human natures.

Children in Non-Western Societies

Human infants' relatively long dependency on others for survival shapes how they are cared for in all societies, but those of us who live in more affluent societies can easily forget how fragile their lives can be. Although only four to seven out of every 1,000 newborns die before their first birthdays in more affluent contemporary societies, 200 to 300 did and do die during the first year of life in the past and in many societies still. People who live in societies with such high *infant mortality rates* (the number of infants out of every 1,000 live births who die before their first birthday) know that no matter how well they care for newborns, many will perish. That knowledge often colors how they think about infants and their early development. For example, the Punan Bah of the Bornean rain forest believe that newborns' true souls do not enter them at birth but take refuge in their mothers' breast. They believe that these true souls only enter children when they get their first tooth, around five to eight months of age. Only then are children named, and "only then is the child considered a proper human being" (Nicolaisen 1988, 198).

Like the appearance of the first tooth among the Punan Bah, the acquisition of motor skills such as crawling and walking may signal the transition from one socially defined stage of development to another. Yet, that developmental transition is sometimes purposefully delayed, as it is among the previously discussed Taria villagers of Okinawa, or otherwise socially scheduled. For example, the Piaora of the Venezuelan jungle constantly carry their infants and never place them on the ground until their parents decide that they can walk, usually around 18 months of age or older. The parents then call all the members of their communal household together to celebrate as they place their child on the ground, and he or she takes his or her first step. After that ceremony, children spend more and more time away from the house, playing with the group of free-roaming small children who populate the village plaza during the day (Overing 1988, 178).

Weaning may also mark an important developmental transition, although its timing varies widely among societies. In many societies, infants and what we would consider young children are almost constantly near their mothers and breastfeed whenever they desire. This often includes sleeping in their mothers' or parents' beds so that they can conveniently nurse and be quickly calmed during the night. People in these societies consider such *co-sleeping* an integral part of infants' and young children's proper care. Mayan mothers, for

instance, who co-sleep with their infants, were shocked and highly disapproving when told that North American infants sleep in a different bed and often a different room from their mothers. To them, such sleeping arrangements are a form of child neglect (Small 1998, 113).

The relatively early age at which North American infants are weaned, typically by their first birthday (Broude 1995, 349), would probably also shock mothers in many societies. In those societies, mothers do not discourage young children from nursing until they are three years old or older. For example, !Kung mothers of the Kalahari Desert nurse children until they are three or four. They even take children under that age with them when they gather food, despite the fact that they travel from two to twelve miles on those journeys and carry from 15 to 30 pounds of vegetables back on the return trip. All the while they dig roots, gather nuts, and travel from spot to spot, they carry their infants and young children in slings that rest on their hips so that the children can nurse whenever they please (Broude 1995, 61).

In all known societies, mothers are the primary caretakers of children during infancy, whatever its socially defined duration and character. Yet, in many societies, older sisters and other female kin are also deeply involved in the care of infants. In contrast to !Kung mothers, for example, Jivaro mothers of Ecuador leave infants at home when they go to work in their gardens, often for hours at a time. During these routine absences, an older sister or female cousin cares for the infant (Broude 1995, 177). This is the case in many primarily agricultural societies where mothers spend most of their day in the fields or at markets. Girls as young as six years of age serve as "surrogate mothers" and often spend more waking hours with their younger siblings or cousins than those children's mothers do. In some societies, fathers also help care for infants, especially when the mother is busy, but, in most, fathers rarely or only occasionally interact with babies (Broude 1995, 135).

Whatever its defining event and timing, the end of what different societies consider infancy often brings an abrupt change in children's treatment and experiences. In Indonesia, for example, Javanese fathers carry infants only occasionally when the mother is busy, but after children begin walking, these fathers regularly feed, bathe, play with, and supervise their children and often cuddle them until they fall asleep at night (Broude 1995, 136). In other societies, the end of infancy brings an abrupt end to earlier indulgence. For example, among the Tarong of the Philippines, adults immediately respond to infants' cries and go to great lengths to keep them happy. Yet, when children are weaned at around two years of age, they are "abruptly deprived" of not only their mother's breasts but also her lap. From that point forward, their cries provoke stern scolding rather than solicitous attempts to relieve or distract them (Broude 1995, 116).

It seems that in all known human societies, greater self-reliance is expected of children who are no longer considered infants. For example, upon weaning at around 3 to 4 years of age, !Kung mothers no longer carry their children with them on gathering expeditions but leave them behind in camp. Although adults are always present in the camp because !Kung adults only need to gather or hunt three days a week, they leave the play of the 4- to 14-year-olds

who remain in camp with them largely unsupervised. From the time they are weaned until girls start to gather around 14 years of age and boys begin to hunt after they turn 16, !Kung children spend almost all of their time playing with one another virtually free from adult interference (Small 2001, 21).

Children gain increasing independence with increased age in most societies, but those in many are also subject to increasing demands and responsibilities. !Kung children's lengthy exemption from work is somewhat unusual. Like the previously mentioned Mayan, adults in many societies expect children as young as three to perform important work and to assume ever greater responsibility as they grow. Among the Kpelle of Liberia, for instance, adults start commanding children to "fetch and carry" various things when they are around 3 years of age. By 5 years of age, boys fetch and carry all the firewood for their family's household, and girls the water. Around the age of 6, girls also assume primary responsibility for the care of their 2- to 4-year-old siblings, freeing their mothers for other work (Lancy 1996, 145). From that age on, both girls and boys accompany adults to outlying rice fields where they weed, carry rice stalk bundles, chase birds away from newly planted fields, and help in the cutting and burning of brush (Lancy 1996, 146).

In general, the timing and number of chores assigned to children vary in relation to societies' principal form of subsistence. Children in settled agricultural societies like the Mayan and Kpelle tend to work the hardest. In comparison, children in hunting and gathering societies like the !Kung and in more industrialized societies like our own do little work. However, cultural beliefs about children and their development also independently influence the amount of work expected of children. For example, like the !Kung, the Hadza of northern Tanzania hunt and gather, leaving children behind in the village camp while they do. Yet, unlike the !Kung, Hadza adults regularly give children tasks and chores to do in their absence. Moreover, Hadza children do not always stay in camp playing as do !Kung children but often wander from the camp on gathering expeditions of their own, collecting enough food to feed themselves (Small 2001, 22–23). The recent adoption of farming and animal husbandry by some !Kung also illustrates the influence of culture on the treatment and socialization of children quite apart from the demands of different forms of subsistence. !Kung adults in settled agricultural villages work far more and harder than their hunting and gathering counterparts. Yet, despite the increased demands on their time, they have not put their children to work. Like hunting and gathering !Kung, they also do not expect older girls to assume responsibility for the care of younger children so common in other settled agricultural societies (Draper and Cashdan 1988). Perhaps the agricultural !Kung will eventually change their beliefs about children and appropriate activities for them as they adapt to the demands of their newly adopted form of subsistence. For the time being, however, their conventional understanding that children should be free to play remains more influential than the possible contributions of their children's labor.

The relative importance of different agents and agencies of socialization (see Part II) also varies widely across societies and across stages of life within particular societies. Some of that variation reflects societies' varied allocations

of child care responsibilities. In all societies, the family, whatever its form, is centrally important to childhood socialization, especially during children's earliest years. However, the influence of different family members on children's socialization varies widely across societies and during different periods of children's lives. As previously suggested, mothers are influential figures in infants' early socialization in all known human societies. Yet, in many, older sisters who care for younger siblings may play as important a part as mothers in infants' and young children's socialization. Fathers are less commonly involved in the care and socialization of infants but often become important figures in children's, especially boys', lives and socialization when they are older. North American Hopi boys, for example, traditionally stayed at home, helping female relatives with chores, until around the age of 8. They then typically killed their first rabbit and were initiated as hunters. After that initiation, they would accompany their father and grandfathers to the fields and sheep camps, where they learned to plant and harvest crops and to herd (Broude 1995, 136).

The importance of peers, both same aged and older, to children's socialization also varies widely cross-culturally and across developmental stages within societies. Peers obviously play a more important part in children's socialization in societies like the !Kung, where children are left to play largely unsupervised by adults, than in societies where children start to work alongside adults at an early age. Like !Kung children, for example, Mbuti pygmy children between 2 and approximately 14 years of age spend most of their time playing with one another in a designated area of the forest where they live called the *bopi*. The Mbuti abhor aggression and avoid competition and conflict. Children first learn that aggression and competition are not tolerated and how to settle disputes and avoid conflict on the *bopi*. They teach and learn these centrally important lessons of Mbuti social life from one another (Small 2001: 149–150). In other societies, same-sexed, most commonly male, peer groups are centrally important to children's socialization. Among the Cubeo of the Northwest Amazon, for instance, boys between approximately 6 and 16 years of age form an autonomous group that chooses its own leaders who enforce rules and discipline members who violate them. These peer leaders are the principal disciplinarians of boys given that Cubeo adults only rarely punish children of either sex (Broude 1995, 319).

Peers' influence over children's socialization obviously depends upon the opportunities children have to interact with one another apart from adults. Children who begin to work alongside adults at an early age clearly have fewer opportunities to do so than children, like the !Kung and Mbuti, who spend most of their waking hours playing with one another. The opportunities for peer interaction among children who regularly attend school probably fall somewhere between these extremes. Although subject to adult direction and supervision while at school, they are in close contact with many similarly aged peers and are often able to avoid adults' direct interference in their peer interactions on playgrounds, during their trips to and from school, and even in classrooms (see Chapter 7).

There is, of course, no formal schooling in preliterate societies, although schools are being introduced into an increasing number of societies where they were previously unknown. Although lacking formal schooling, some societies do have specially designated teachers, such as a village wizard, who instructs the young in cultural traditions and beliefs. However, as already noted, children in many societies receive little formal instruction. For example, Kpelle children learn not only various techniques of rice farming but also such skilled crafts as weaving fish nets and making traps with little instruction. They learn such skills by watching adults, by working alongside them, and from their own mistakes. Adults only rarely correct their largely self-taught students. Kpelle adults consider it a waste of time and energy to teach children what adults are convinced the young will learn "naturally" (Lancy 1996, 146). When Kpelle children reach puberty, they do attend so-called bush school for three or four years, but even then they receive little formal instruction. Instead, they participate in various ceremonies that reinforce Kpelle beliefs and values with which they are already quite familiar (Lancy 1996, 173–176).

The conclusion of childhood across human societies is as varied as its character. In almost all societies, the onset of puberty signals the end of childhood and the transition into either adulthood or a transitional stage similar to what we call *adolescence*. That transition is gradual in some societies and simply occurs as young people increasingly take on adult tasks and responsibilities. These societies do not explicitly mark this transition with special ceremonies or initiation rites, but simply recognize young people as full-fledged adults when they marry. For example, the Punan Bah of Borneo refer to their offspring from the time they start walking until the first physical signs of puberty as *kolovi*, or children. With the onset of puberty, they are called either *kolovi-oro*, child-women, or *kolovi elei*, child-men. Only when they marry do they become *oro* or *elei*, women and men. Those who do not marry remain, and those who later divorce again become child-women and child-men (Nicolaisen 1988, 201).

In contrast, many societies take special note of young peoples' movement out of childhood with prescribed initiation ceremonies. Girls' first menstruation or menarche commonly signals the end of their childhood in those societies and is the occasion for initiation rites. These rites often include a period of seclusion in a separate dwelling and restrictions on with whom and what the initiate can have contact. During this period of seclusion, a girl may receive instruction from her mother or other adult women in how to conduct herself as a woman (Broude 1995, 184–185). In some societies, these initiation rites conclude with elaborate feasts and celebrations. They sometimes also include the controversial practice of clitoridectomy, the partial or complete removal of the clitoris, sometimes called female circumcision but condemned by many as female genital mutilation. The Kpelle, for example, believe that this procedure "cuts the friskiness" out of the girl, a trait they disapprove of in both adult men and women (Broude 1995, 185).

Many societies also have initiation rites for pubescent boys, although fewer than have such rites for girls. These rites sometimes also include a period of seclusion that may include "bush school," when groups of boys within

a certain age range live in the bush and receive instruction in secret knowledge that only men possess (Broude 1995, 201). In many societies, boys' initiation into manhood or a transitional stage like adolescence also includes body modification such as tattooing, scarification, and/or circumcision, the removal of the foreskin of the penis, that serves as visible signs of their changed status.

Initiation rites in many societies signal an abrupt change in status from child to adult man or woman. Upon the completion of their initiation, girls are considered marriageable women and boys self-sufficient, marriageable men. In other societies, pubescent boys and girls spend two to three years either after or before their initiation rites in a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood similar to what we call adolescence. In most of these societies, adolescents do the same work as adults and dress like them, but spend most of their leisure time with similarly aged peers (Schlegel and Barry 1991, 41). In a few societies, adolescent males, and less commonly females, spend almost all of their time with one another, working, playing, and even eating and sleeping together in separate quarters from both children and adults. Although some societies consider adolescence a time for sexual flirtation and courtship, few societies allow young people to choose their own marital partners. Instead, adults arrange marriages so as to build alliances and enhance cooperation between families (Schlegel and Barry 1991, 93).

Even a cursory review like this of human societies' different definitions, treatment, and socialization of children exposes the peculiarities of the definitions, treatment, and socialization of the young in societies like our own. Infants and young children in societies like ours are not in almost constant contact with their mothers as those in many societies are. In our society, infants sleep in separate beds and often separate rooms from their parents and are weaned at a comparatively early age. Few have older sisters or other female kin to care for them when their parents are busy. Both younger and older children in Western European and North American societies have little contact with adults, other than parents, compared to children in many societies who freely roam around villages interacting with a variety of adults daily. They even have comparatively little contact with peers much older or younger than they are, spending much of their time in age-graded daycare facilities, schools, and recreational activities. They receive intensive and extensive formal instruction at school and elsewhere, but have almost no opportunity to observe adults engaged in their daily tasks and to learn informally from them. What they see of the adult world is usually filtered through the distorting lens of television, movies, and other mass media of communication (see Chapter 8). They endure a comparatively lengthy adolescence without a clearly defined or ritually celebrated end.

Those of us who live in affluent, highly industrialized societies may decry certain aspects of contemporary childhood and adolescence, but consider their general contours only natural and right. We believe that children everywhere should be exempted from work and free to play, be thoroughly schooled, and be insulated from adults' concerns and responsibilities until they reach adulthood. What we often fail to appreciate is that this conception of childhood and corresponding treatment of the young are of relatively recent

historical origin in our own societies. A brief review of the history of Western childhood reveals how contemporary socialization was historically shaped by varied social and cultural changes in Western history that radically altered and continue to alter childhood around the globe.

The History of Western Childhood

The French social historian Philippe Ariès (1962, 128) caused a bit of a sensation in the early 1960s when he claimed that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist." That claim provoked a great deal of interest in the previously unexplored history of childhood in Western societies, much of it directed at refuting Ariès' bold claim. It is now clear that Ariès overstated his case, but his more general and important point is beyond dispute. In the past, childhood and children's socialization in Western societies were radically different from what they are today. Children were, in Ariès' (1962, 329) words, "absorbed into the world of adults" at a much earlier age than they are today. The socialization of most was more informal than it is today. And, children and youth participated in many activities that are considered developmentally inappropriate for them today.

Yet, contrary to Ariès' claim, people of Medieval Europe did have an idea of childhood, although not perhaps the same as in later centuries (Cunningham 1995, 30). Much was written during those times about so-called ages of man that divided the human life course into something like developmental stages. Although not in perfect agreement about specific stages and their timing, that extensive literature did recognize childhood in some form, usually in two stages. *Infantia*, Latin for infancy, generally lasted from birth to what was considered the "age of reason" at around 7 years of age (Bidon and Lett 1999, 107). There were conflicting ideas about the nature of infants and, therefore, about their proper treatment. These ideas mirrored the fifth-century debate between Pelagius, who argued that infants were born with a clean slate, and St. Augustine, who argued that humans are born with original sin and must be subjected to corporal punishment at an early age to curb their evil tendencies (Cunningham 1995, 29). However, available evidence suggests that in everyday life Pelagius's more positive image of the young child usually prevailed and that children under 7 "generally enjoyed freedom" from strict discipline (Shahar 1990, 102). Those years of relative freedom were followed by *pueritia*, Latin for boyhood (girls were typically ignored in this literature), and usually lasted until age 14. This was considered the time of education, although for most children education did not mean schooling but a gradual initiation into the work of adults. *Adolescentia*, or adolescence, followed and lasted until the mid- to late twenties, the usual age at which most European men of the time married (Stearns 1975, 36).

Then as now (see Chapter 9), children's experience and socialization varied greatly depending on their families' social status and class. Medieval European society was divided into what were considered divinely ordained estates ranging from the lowly peasantry to the exalted nobility or aristocracy. With few exceptions, individuals remained in the inherited estate into which they

were born throughout their lives. It shaped their childhood socialization and the adult life for which it prepared them.

Although children of the nobility were born into luxury and distinction, they eventually had to demonstrate the grace and honor befitting their exalted station in life. Mothers, nursemaids, and other female attendants raised young noble children in the nursery and women's quarters of the castle or manor during the first few years of their lives. Girls continued to reside in the women's quarters until marriage, learning social graces, needlework, how to sing and play musical instruments, and how to read and write under the guidance of a governess or private tutor (Shahar 1990, 221–223). In contrast, boys left the women's quarters and their mothers at around 7 to 9 years of age. Noble fathers sent sons designated for the knighthood to the court of another feudal lord when they reached the age of reason. There they became court pages and trained for the knighthood. Although they commonly learned to read and write, most of their training was devoted to horsemanship and military skills like fencing. They generally completed their military training by age 15 and served as squires to knights before being knighted themselves between 17 and 19 years of age. However, some were knighted at 15 and immediately joined battles (Shahar 1990, 210–211).

Noble fathers also permanently turned some of their young sons and daughters over to religious orders through a ritual called *oblation*, or the act of offering. This was commonly the fate of noble boys considered too frail for the knighthood and aristocratic girls not destined for marriage (Shahar 1990, 183–184). When such a child was 6 or 7, her or his father took a public vow to give him or her over to a monastery or convent, often along with a payment of money or real estate. The understanding was that the child would eventually become a monk or nun and spend the rest of his or her life in the monastery or convent. Some of these so-called *oblates* did ask to be released from this obligation when they reached their teens or early 20s, but those requests were almost always denied. Although officially banned by the Church in the fifteenth century, the practice of oblation continued informally for some time later in many parts of Europe (Bidon and Lett 1999, 49–50).

The lives of artisans' and merchants' children, most of whom lived in towns and cities, were much different. In Medieval Europe, skilled crafts, such as weaving, baking, carpentry, and metalworking, were governed by monopolistic guilds that had the legal authority to admit people into the trade and strictly controlled how the craft was practiced (Stearns 1975, 49). Those who wanted to enter a trade had to serve an apprenticeship of a specified length that varied among crafts. Fathers contractually apprenticed their sons to a master artisan, often paying him a fee. Those contracts guaranteed the artisan the boy's services for a specified number of years in return for the boy's training; room, board, and clothing; and moral supervision. The age at which apprenticeships began ranged from 7 to as old as 20, but the most typical age was 11 to 13 (Shahar 1990, 232). After apprenticeship, at around 21 years of age, the aspiring artisan became a journeyman who worked in a master's shop for wages but continued to live in the master's home along with apprentices. Only

after some years as journeymen did artisans inherit or accumulate enough savings to buy a shop and themselves become master artisans (Stearns 1975, 49).

Children of artisans played and worked around their father's shop from the beginning of their lives. A single building housed the shop and the family's living quarters. Because artisans housed and fed both apprentices and journeymen, their children grew up around a number of unrelated people of varying ages in a family-like atmosphere (Stearns 1975, 48). Sons of artisans generally apprenticed in their fathers' or another trade. Daughters informally learned how to manage a shop household by helping their mothers, who often also taught their daughters basic arithmetic because artisans' wives commonly sold goods and kept the shop's accounts. Artisans' daughters typically became artisans' wives, often marrying journeymen in their fathers' shops (Stearns 1975, 48). Merchants, a separate estate in Medieval Europe, sometimes also apprenticed their sons but more often started to teach them their own business soon after they achieved the "age of reason" at 7 years of age. By the age of 14, these merchants' sons were actively involved in their fathers' business. For example, at that age, the son of one Italian merchant became "his father's representative in the buying and selling of wine, which he tasted with professional skill before announcing his intention to purchase it" (Bidon and Lett 1999, 83). Little is known about the lives of merchants' daughters, although their socialization probably centered on learning how to manage a household and staff of servants. Beginning in the second half of the twelfth century, many children of artisans and merchants, mostly boys, also briefly attended small parish schools where they learned to read, write, and do simple arithmetic because their fathers considered those skills indispensable to their trade or business (Bidon and Lett 1999, 121).

However, most children were born to peasants, who made up at least 60 percent of the population of Medieval Europe (Stearns 1975, 32). Peasant children were incorporated into adult society at an early age, and, as in most agricultural societies, peasant parents put them to work around the age of 7. Peasant households provided no privacy for adults or children, and people of different ages freely mixed at play as well as at work in peasant villages. When children were around 7 years of age, they began to run errands, look after younger siblings, scare birds off crops, and tend animals such as geese, pigs, and cattle (Shahar 1990, 243). With increasing age, they gradually took on more demanding tasks. In the sixteenth century, for example, the former peasant boy Jean de Brie reported that he was "appointed" to tend the geese when he was 8 years old, then to tend the pigs, and, at around 9 or 10, to lead the horses that pulled the plow (Bidon and Didier 1999, 79). By 14 years of age, most peasant children were doing the same and as much work as adults. Their preparation for their adult roles was direct and gradual without acute transitions or rites of passage (Shahar 1990, 247). Although a few peasant children did learn to read from the local parish priest, most remained illiterate, having little time to acquire such an impractical skill.

According to Ariès (1962, 412), a surge of interest in the education and training of children that began in the later fifteenth century initiated a profound transformation of Western childhood. Both the Renaissance and

Protestant Reformation helped stimulate that interest. The Renaissance revival of classical Greek and Roman thought included ideas about the need to mold children—or boys, more specifically—into good citizens. Many Renaissance writers advised parents to begin the education of their children early, teaching them "their letters soon after weaning" (Cunningham 1995, 43). The most influential of those writers, Erasmus of Rotterdam, likened the young child to soft wax that had to be molded into the desired form before it hardened (Cunningham 1995, 44). Yet, the influence of writers like Erasmus was limited to the literate aristocracy and wealthy merchants. The influence of the Protestant Reformation was more widespread. Unlike Catholics, the new Protestants of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries did not believe infant baptism insured children's salvation until they reached the age of reason. Because they believed that faith alone could save an individual's soul, Protestant parents were anxious to bring their children quickly to that faith. For many, that necessitated breaking the obstinate will of the child born with original sin and sinful desires. It also required early religious instruction so that children would understand the faith that could save their immortal souls. Protestant denominations published numerous catechisms for that purpose, and many Protestant churches established parish schools to teach children as young as 2 or 3 how to read those catechisms along with the Bible (Cunningham 1995, 47–50). Among Protestants, methodical training of the young became a concern of parents of all ranks, from the most exalted nobles to the lowliest peasants.

An even more profound transformation of Western ideas about children and childhood occurred in the eighteenth century. At the beginning of that century, the philosopher John Locke's influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* advised that the central task of child rearing was to teach the child to subject his or her will to reason. However, he argued that doing so did not require harsh punishment to break the child's will but methodical education that turned learning into the child's play and recreation (Cunningham 1995, 64–65). In the middle part of the century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau countered Locke's arguments in his widely read story of the fictional boy *Emile*. For Rousseau, explicit instruction detracted from children's natural play and recreation, which were their best teachers. He suggested that, up to the age of 12, children should be as free as possible to learn from nature on their own (Cunningham 1995, 66–68). Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Romantic poets and writers fortified the link between nature and childhood that Rousseau first forged. They depicted children as naturally innocent, imaginative, and virtuous. They implied that children must be protected from the corruption of adult society so as to preserve those precious qualities. For Romantic writers, childhood was less a preparation for adult life than "the spring which should nourish the whole life" (Cunningham 1995, 73).

Taken together, these discordant eighteenth-century ideas left a confusing image of the child upon which subsequent Western conceptions of children and childhood built. Children must be carefully and extensively educated so as to develop their powers of reasoning and strong moral character. Yet, children must be free to play and naturally learn through the exercise of their own creative imaginations. Their future success and happiness depend on the early

formation of good habits, yet their natural innocence and virtue are sources of inspiration that must be protected from the crushing demands and corruption of adult society. Childhood was thereby set apart from the rest of life as a privileged time of learning and play, freedom and supervision, and protective dependency. However, it would take a century before most children in Western Europe and North America experienced anything close to this ideal childhood.

The experience of the European children who first arrived on North American shores resembled that of their counterparts in Europe at the time, but with the added rigors of settling a new land. For example, many settlers continued to recognize 7 years of age as the "age of reason," as indicated by the common practice of "breeching" boys when they reached that age. Only then were they dressed in their first pair of breeches rather than the gowns worn by all children before that age (Fass and Mason 2000, 82). In contrast, like more radical Protestants in Europe, the Puritan settlers of New England sternly disciplined young children and schooled them early to read the Bible and other religious literature (Vinovskis 1996, 102). South of New England, many children arrived in the New World as parentless indentured servants, following the well-established European custom of placing poor children with a master who was obliged to provide ordinary sustenance and some training in return for services (Mason 1994, 30).

As the European settlement of North America continued, the lives of North American children came more closely to resemble those of European children at the time. Many, although probably not most, of those who lived in the developing towns and cities received rudimentary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic at private academies. Sons of merchants started learning their father's business at an early age, and those of artisans apprenticed for a trade when they reached 10 to 13 years of age. Like their European counterparts, girls informally learned how to manage a household by helping their mothers.

The lives of rural North American children were similar to those of European peasant children with one notable exception. Outside of New England, agricultural settlement did not follow the European village pattern but one of single-family homesteads some distance from one another. The social lives of many rural North American children were consequently more circumscribed than those of their European counterparts. Like their European counterparts, rural North American children started working at an early age, scaring birds from crops, weeding fields, and tending crops, but that work, unlike children's work in rural European villages, seldom brought them into contact with neighbors of varied ages. With the Western expansion of European settlement, homesteads became even farther apart, and rural children's relative social isolation often grew along with their independence. For example, when 9-year-old Marvin Powe was sent to round up some runaway horses, he rode and lived off the land for a week before finding them. His father was only starting to ride out to look for Marvin when he returned home with the horses (West 1992, 36). Although rural children everywhere labored for the communal benefit of their families, the work of many North American children, like

Marvin Powe, taught them to be self-reliant and independent at an early age. Growing up on the Western frontier of North America could be even more confusing for girls, who often did the same work as their brothers—"plowing, planting, harvesting, hunting, herding"—until they reached adolescence (West 1992, 36). Most were then "told, quite literally, to come indoors" and perform the domestic tasks assigned to women (West 1992, 38).

Of course, African American slave children never experienced such independence, not because they were young but because they were born slaves. In the early years of life, they either were carried to the fields where their mothers labored throughout the daylight hours or were left behind in often overcrowded slave nurseries where either young slave girls or elderly slaves cared for them (King 1995, 13–14). Like other rural American children, most began working at a young age, performing domestic duties and other chores around the living quarters or working on so-called trash gangs in the fields alongside pregnant women and the elderly (King 1995, 30). Many were impatient to work in the fields, given that such work often entitled them to additional food allowances (King 1995, 22). Although a few slaveholders did maintain schools for slave children, most thought it ill-advised to educate "Negroes." Hence, few slave children learned to read and write, and the few who did so were often secretly taught by literate slaves or their white masters' children (King 1995, 77).

Much of African American slave children's socialization involved harsh lessons about their place in the brutal hierarchy of American slavery. Many routinely saw their parents beaten or otherwise humiliated, and were often harshly punished themselves. Many were "hired out" to other whites on yearly contracts and separated from their families for a year at a time. Others were permanently separated from parents and siblings because of their own or other family members' sale to new owners. More than a few younger slave children were close companions and friends of their white masters' children, but then were abruptly "put in their proper place" by those friends when they reached 10 to 12 years of age. Perhaps as taxing, they had to learn to hide their deep resentment about such treatment behind a mask of deference and humility (King 1995, 91–114). Unfortunately, the end of slavery in the United States did not put an end to many of these humiliations for African American children. For example, a few years after the end of the Civil War, many of the former Confederate states passed legislation giving former slave owners control over apprenticeships of "Negro" minors and "orphans" on their lands, effectively reestablishing their slavery until they reached 18 to 21 years of age (King 1995, 151).

The westward expansion of the European settlement of North America and the formal end of slavery in the United States were both aspects of a deep transformation of Western societies during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and into the twentieth centuries. After centuries of relative stability, the population of Europe exploded during the eighteenth century (Stearns 1975, 63–65). Immigration to North America was spurred by the lack of economic opportunities for that expanding European population, but that expanding population also created economic opportunities in Europe. Demand for all variety of

products grew along with the population. Enterprising merchants and artisans attempted to profit from the growing demand by adopting more efficient techniques of production, and thereby undermined the authority of the craft guilds. Innovative landowners introduced new agricultural methods such as crop rotation, specialized in crops best suited to local conditions, and drove peasants from their lands. By the time the French Revolution of 1789 formally overthrew the old feudal order of Europe, its foundations had already crumbled. The Industrial Revolution that spread from England across Western societies during the nineteenth century swept away what remained of it and profoundly transformed childhood and children's socialization in the process (Stearns 1975, 67–82).

Prior to these changes, economic and personal relationships were intertwined. Peasants owed their lord a proportion of their crops in tribute for the use of the land, and the lord owed his peasants a church and priest, military protection, and relief in times of dire need. Apprentices owed their masters their services, and masters owed their apprentices training and a place at their tables and in their households. And, children owed their parents their labor, and parents owed their children spiritual and material support, including an inheritance or dowry to insure their futures. However, as the market economy expanded, economic relationships were increasingly commercialized and severed from personal ties. Work gradually moved from family households to removed shops and factories where people worked for cash wages rather than personal services and provisions. More and more men, women, and children left their homes daily to work for wages, transforming family homes from sites of work into retreats from it. Many families continued to work together on their farms but increasingly raised crops and livestock for the cash market rather than their own subsistence. Wages often provided a more reliable source of income and lured many young people from farms to mills and factories, in many cases with their families' blessing (Cancian 1987, 16–18).

However, most people, especially among the working and lower classes, *continued to believe that children owed their family their labor and its fruits*, including wages. Even the son of a Massachusetts mill owner, Baxter Whitney, was put to work in his father's mill in 1823 at the age of 6. He worked there full-time, except for two weeks each summer and winter that he spent in school, until he was 13 and was sent to another firm to help machinists construct looms for his father's mill (Kett 1977, 25). Less affluent parents often had little choice but to send their children to work in mills, mines, and factories, requiring their wages to support the family (Clement 1997, 57). For example, surveys of Belgian families revealed that wages of children under 14 accounted for 22 percent of their families' total income in 1853 and a full 31 percent in 1891 (Cunningham 1995, 89).

Yet, many parents sent their children to labor in mines and factories reluctantly. Industrialization was changing the character of work and, in the eyes of many, for the worse. Although most children had worked hard from an early age before industrialization, that work was often irregular and combined with recreation. For example, rural children often worked from dawn to dusk during planting and harvesting season but much less other times of the year.

Singing, storytelling, and other amusements also periodically interrupted work on farms and in shops. In contrast, industrialized labor was unrelenting, especially in its early years, usually taking up 10 or more hours a day, six days a week, throughout the year. Second, children's introduction to work was no longer gradual but abrupt. After industrialization, one day the working-class child had no job, and the next day, usually around the age of 10, she or he did. Third, children employed in mines and factories no longer worked under the supervision of family members or employers personally obliged to care for them (Cunningham 1995, 88). In the earliest years of industrialization, employers sometimes did hire entire families to work in mills and factories under the father's supervision, but that practice was short-lived (Cancian 1987, 17). They increasingly recruited children individually to work in their mills and factories, often preferring them to adult workers who demanded higher wages than children were willing to accept (Cunningham 1995, 142).

The changed character of children's work under industrial conditions provoked outcries against child labor. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, social commentators worried about the idleness of poor children, often echoing Locke's advice that they should be put to work at the age of 3 with a "bellyful of bread daily" (Cunningham 1995, 138). However, by the end of the century, social reformers were more concerned about the detrimental effects of poor children's industrial labor than about their idleness. Describing children who worked in factories as "our poor little White-Slaves" (Cunningham 1995, 139), these reformers campaigned for legislation to limit and regulate children's paid employment. They achieved some early success in Britain with the passage of the Labor Act of 1819 that banned work in factories by children under 9 and limited children under 14 years old to eight hours of work per day (Cunningham 1995, 140). It would take until the end of the nineteenth century, and even longer in some countries like the United States (which did not pass the Fair Labor Relations Act limiting child labor until 1938) for the reformers to accomplish their ultimate goal of legally prohibiting child labor in manufacturing and mining.

Many of those nineteenth-century social reformers were opposed not so much to children working as to their industrial labors. Under the spell of the Romantic linkage of childhood and nature, they continued to believe that agricultural labor in the fresh country air was healthy for children's developing bodies, minds, and characters. Many of these reformers worried more about the corrupting influences of growing industrial cities on their young inhabitants than about exempting them from work, and committed themselves to saving poor urban children from city streets. For example, in 1853, the New York Children's Aid Society started relocating poor children from the city to rural communities in the Midwest and West, and similar societies in other Eastern cities soon followed their lead. The children traveled westward along with a couple of agents of the society on so-called orphan trains, although aid workers considered just about any unsupervised child on the city streets an orphan and made little effort to locate his or her parents. When the children arrived at their destination, they paraded before community meetings of local adults willing to take one or more of the children into their homes in return for

the children's services or labor. The aid societies did take various measures to help insure that the children were well cared for and treated in their new homes, but with mixed results. Many were treated as little more than servants, and some quickly ran away from their new homes and back to the cities from which they had come. Yet, such embarrassments did not deter the reformers. Between 1853 and 1929, the New York society alone "placed out," as the practice was then called, 150,000 city children (Holt 1992). Similarly, between 1869 and 1930, British philanthropic agencies sent around 80,000 children from impoverished urban families to Canada, where they were "placed out" with families in return for their agricultural and domestic services (Rooke and Schnell 1991, 190–191). To the British philanthropists who organized these efforts, the still sparsely populated Canada represented the "happy home of childhood" in comparison to the teeming industrial cities of Britain (Rooke and Schnell 1991, 190).

Nineteenth-century reformers campaigned not only to get children out of factories and cities but also to get them into schools. Most children in Western societies did receive some schooling prior to the nineteenth century, but very little by contemporary standards. Few attended for more than three years, and, during those few years, their attendance was commonly intermittent and irregular. The vast majority of parents had to pay for their children's schooling and saw little need to continue doing so once the children had learned to read and, in some cases, write. The family's well-being also depended on children's labors, so work responsibilities took precedence over school attendance even when the children were enrolled in school (Cunningham 1995, 103).

However, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, governments in many Western countries devised plans of universal education to instill a common national identity and patriotism among the population (Cunningham 1995, 121–122). Those plans called for the establishment of a system of primary schools with attendance compulsory for children between specified ages. The results of these early efforts commonly fell far short of their goals. Localities resisted attempts to make them bear the cost of running the schools, and compulsory attendance laws were difficult to enforce and widely ignored (Cunningham 1995, 123). Yet, during the nineteenth century the movement toward universal, compulsory schooling gained strength. One effect of the industrial transformation of the economies of Western societies was that children's futures increasingly came to depend on education and character rather than the inheritance of land or a craft (Cancian 1987, 19). Support for public education consequently grew among middle-class parents who could not afford the expense of sending their children to private academies for a number of years. Many also agreed with reformers that universal schooling could also help counter the supposedly inadequate family life of working- and lower-class children. Working- and lower-class parents who desperately needed the income of their working children resisted compulsory schooling laws but were fighting a losing battle. At the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century, all Western societies established systems of public schools at which attendance was compulsory from the time children were 5 to 7 years of age until they reached repeatedly increased ages. In Brit-

ain, for example, the minimum age for leaving school was set at 10 in 1870, raised to 11 in 1893, then to 12 in 1899, and finally to 14 in 1918 (Hendrick 1997, 63). That same year, all the states in the United States had compulsory schooling laws, and 31 of them required attendance until age 16 (Macleod 1998, 75).

Schooling not only spread throughout Western societies during the nineteenth century but also radically changed. Prior to that time, schools consisted of one or more large, ungraded classrooms with students as young as 3 or 4 and as old as 17 or more. Children started their schooling at widely different ages, so a classroom might have a 6-year-old who could already read and write as well as an illiterate 14-year-old who was just beginning his or her schooling. Under the teacher's guidance, children progressed through increasingly difficult primers and other instructional texts at their own pace and without regard to age. Although age-graded schooling was first proposed in the seventeenth century, that proposal was not fully implemented until 1817 with the establishment of the Prussian school system in what is now Germany (Chudacoff 1989, 31). Other Western countries soon followed Prussia's lead. For example, urban schools in the United States started to adopt age grading in the 1850s, and by the 1880s it was standard practice in urban schools (Clement 1997, 107). Although rural schools still often had only one classroom, even in those schools students were divided into grades according to age and given grade-appropriate instruction. With the adoption of age-graded schooling, children started school at approximately the same age and moved together through grades of progressively more complex instruction on a yearly basis. Age-graded schooling thereby imposed a previously unknown age consciousness on children's education that gradually became the general model for their development. Childhood development was increasingly seen as composed of discrete, age-related stages.

Compulsory schooling also transformed Western children from working contributors to their family's economic well-being into dependent schoolchildren, but not without struggles. As mentioned above, many working-class parents desperately needed their children's labor at home or their wages, and resisted compulsory schooling, as they did legal restrictions on child labor (Cunningham 1995, 158). In America, educational reformers often promoted public education as the best means to Americanize the children of immigrant workers, and immigrant parents often opposed it for exactly that reason (Berrol 1995). During the earliest years of compulsory schooling, truancy from school was rampant among working-class and poor children, often with their parents' knowledge, if not blessing. In England and Wales, for example, "there were nearly 100,000 prosecutions a year for truancy in the 1880s" (Cunningham 1995, 158). Over time, however, working-class parents became convinced, as their middle-class counterparts already had, that the longer their children spent in school, the better their chances for landing a decent job in the future (Nasaw 1985, 46). They also came to recognize that working, either at home or for money, and going to school need not be mutually exclusive (Nasaw 1985, 47).

School, unlike work, "let out at three o'clock, leaving the new working class students with free time in the afternoon" (Nasaw 1985, 117), time often

filled by work. Many were expected to do various chores around the home and farm during that time, and urban children could also use that time to earn money. Some worked for local shopkeepers, and others as messengers. Many more were self-employed, taking advantage of the many business opportunities on busy city streets. Some sold shoe shines, while others "peddled whatever they could buy cheaply, fit into their pockets or the canvas bag slung over their shoulders, and sell for a profit," such as chewing gum, matches, and peanuts (Nasaw 1985, 52). Perhaps the most visible of these young street traders were the "newsies," who bought newspapers from publishers after school and sold them for a profit on the streets in the evening to workers heading home from their jobs. The newsies also went to entertainment districts on Saturday nights to sell the early edition of the Sunday papers, sometimes employing devious schemes. For example, late one Saturday night in Chicago, a juvenile protection officer found a crying 7-year-old boy begging passersby to buy his last paper so that he could go home. In the meantime, his 13-year-old brother concealed himself in a doorway with the rest of their supply of newspapers, handing his brother another copy after each successful transaction (Nasaw 1985, 84). Although parents expected such enterprising young street traders to contribute their earnings to the family, it was impossible for parents to know exactly how much they were earning. Unlike children who earned a regular wage, it was easy for these children to keep a little of their earnings for their own use to buy hamburgers, candy, or a ticket to the balcony of a vaudeville theater or a nickelodeon showing the new silent movies (Nasaw 1985, 131).

Social reformers were appalled. They had hoped that, where child labor legislation had failed, compulsory schooling would put an end to working children. Even more worrisome was that the work, and play, of urban children exposed them to what the reformers considered the most corrupting influences of the city. On its streets, they freely mingled with all variety of adults but were largely unsupervised by them. The reformers tried to lure the children off the streets and into recreation centers and playgrounds, but with little success. Most working-class kids preferred the freedom of the streets, not to mention the opportunity to make some money, to the heavy adult supervision of recreation centers and playgrounds (Nasaw 1985, 36). The reformers also adopted various strategies to police street children, only to be thwarted by the children's cooperative evasion of such control (Nasaw 1985, 148–151).

However, where the reformers failed, technological and economic changed prevailed. Trolleys brought more people to downtown shopping and entertainment districts, making the street trades more lucrative and attracting adults to trades that children had long monopolized (Nasaw 1985, 187). Messengers and errand boys fell victim to the telephone (Nasaw 1985, 191), and the newsies, the last of the street traders to go, fell victim to the new practice of home newspaper delivery (Nasaw 1985, 192). To add injury to insult, automobiles started killing and maiming more and more children in the early twentieth century, effectively evicting them from city streets (Zelizer 1985, 33). Compelled to attend school, prevented from working, and driven from the streets and many other public places, children in Western societies became increasingly dependent upon adults and subject to their supervision.

An array of social, cultural, and technological changes, some of which had been building for years, came together at the close of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth that profoundly transformed Western conceptions of children and childhood. Viviana Zelizer (1985, 209) describes the American case, but something similar occurred or soon did occur throughout other Western societies.

> Between the 1870s and 1930s, the value of American children was transformed. The twentieth-century economically useless but emotionally priceless child displaced the nineteenth-century useful child. To be sure, the most dramatic changes took place among the working class. . . . But the sentimentalization of childhood intensified regardless of class. The new sacred child occupied a special and separate world, regulated by affection and education, not work and profit.

The new sacred child of the twentieth century and beyond was endearingly innocent, dependent, vulnerable, and incompetent. Unlike their counterparts in earlier centuries, such children were considered not so much preadult as nonadult (Fass and Mason 2000, 5), requiring years of special protection and treatment, "a sort of quarantine" (Ariès 1962, 412), before they were ready to join adult society. Their proper place was not the field, factory, or street, but the loving family home, age-graded school, or supervised playground.

Legislation regulating and prohibiting child labor, compulsory schooling laws, and the establishment of juvenile courts (Macleod 1998, 141) institutionalized this new conception of childhood, and the new child science of the twentieth century gave it legitimacy. Children no longer worked around and informally learned from adults. They spent the better part of the day and year in school around peers no more than a year older or younger than they. They no longer committed crimes but youthful indiscretions due to their moral immaturity and allegedly inadequate upbringing. All this had the blessing of child and developmental psychologists, who were gaining increasing acceptance as the final arbiters of developmental truth (Hawes 1997, 63). And, the length of this protected, sequestered, and much studied stage of life continued to grow in the twentieth century. The labor of older and older children was restricted and regulated. The age at which the young were no longer subject to compulsory schooling laws was repeatedly raised, as already noted, and they were strongly encouraged and informally coerced into spending more and more years in school. In the United States, moreover, the legal age of sexual consent for girls increased from an average of a little over 10 years old across the various states in 1885 to over 17 in 1920 (Odem 1995, 20). The ideal childhood of eighteenth-century thought, with all its inconsistencies, had become reality for most children in Western societies and was subsequently exported to other societies.

Continuing Cultural Contrasts: Japan and the United States

Children's experience and socialization in the affluent, highly industrialized societies of North America, Western Europe, and Japan are broadly simi-

lar, especially in comparison to those of children in the not so distant past and in less affluent societies today. Ideally at least, childhood is a time of play and education, unhindered by work or other demanding responsibilities. Children are largely segregated from adult society and uninformed about a variety of adults' concerns and activities. They spend years in age-graded schools and remain economically dependent during those years. Most do not start working until they reach their teen years, and then only for limited hours and in a narrow range of jobs. Yet, despite these similarities, there are numerous cultural differences among affluent industrialized societies that influence how children are thought about and socialized.

Contrasts between Japan and the United States are particularly instructive for demonstrating the influence of cultural understandings on children's experience and socialization. Both countries are highly advanced technologically and exceptionally affluent in comparison to most societies, yet are culturally quite distinct. Although the contrast can be overdrawn, Americans tend to place a higher value on personal autonomy and self-reliance than do the Japanese, while the Japanese tend to place a higher value on social relationships and group cooperation than do Americans (Small 1998, 99). That and other differences in cultural values and beliefs influence how children are socialized in the two countries from early in their lives onward.

Infants' and young children's sleeping arrangements provide one telling example of the cultural differences between the two societies. As previously noted, American infants and young children commonly sleep in a separate bed and often in a separate room from their mothers. In contrast, Japanese parents place a newborn's bed directly next to their own bed, on the mother's side. Around their first birthday, Japanese children start sleeping in their parents' bed and usually continue to do so until they are 5 or 6 years of age (Johnson 1993, 111). For the Japanese, such co-sleeping is essential to young children's proper development. Most Japanese believe that infants' and young children's dependency on their mothers is an expression of what they consider one of the strongest human emotions, *amae*, or the desire "to depend and presume upon another's benevolence" (Johnson 1993, 156). They consequently do not believe that young children's dependency must be "handled" and gradually broken, as do many North Americans, but that it must be fostered and developed (Small 1998, 102). The Japanese believe that behavioral problems result when young children fail to learn how to properly express their wish for care and attention (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 27). According to the Japanese, co-sleeping helps children learn that centrally important lesson.

Japanese mothers also commonly indulge their young children's wishes so as to foster their healthy expression of *amae* to an extent many North Americans would consider spoiling. However, the Japanese draw a clear distinction between "inside" and "outside" (Johnson 1993, 160), and Japanese parents teach children early on that they should act differently in public, on the outside, than they do at home, on the inside. They start teaching their children at an early age not to cry or otherwise draw attention to themselves, to politely bow to others, to use proper terms of address, and to maintain proper postures in public (Johnson 1993, 119). Western observers are often baffled by how un-

disciplined and demanding young Japanese toddlers are at home but how well behaved they are in public. To the Japanese, that is just a normal part of their development.

The Japanese often liken children's development to a journey outward from the nuclear family into the world (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 58–59). That journey involves learning not only proper public etiquette but an important psychological transition as well. The Japanese believe that children's healthy development requires the transfer of their *amae*, or wish for care and attention, from their parents to social groups (Johnson 1993, 123). In order to do so, they must learn to cooperate and feel part of a social group. In contemporary Japan, preschools are principally responsible for teaching children this vitally important developmental lesson. Over 90 percent of 3- to 5-year-old Japanese children attend one or another kind of preschool (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989 46), where the emphasis is on group activities and participation.

North American observers are often surprised by how little time is devoted to academic preparation in Japanese preschools and are shocked at what they consider their inexcusably high student-teacher ratios, commonly 30 or more students per teacher. However, to the Japanese, too much emphasis on academic preparation and lower student-teacher ratios would detract from preschools' most important purpose of giving children experience being a member of a group (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 192). The Japanese believe that young children can (and most Japanese children do) learn to read at home. What they cannot learn at home is how to feel part of a larger group, and higher student-teacher ratios increase their opportunities to do so. Japanese preschool teachers and administrators believe that the lower student-teacher or caretaker ratios in American preschools and daycare centers emphasize teacher-student over student-student interaction, and that American preschool teachers are far too quick to intervene in children's disputes and relations (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 37). Japanese preschool teachers seldom intervene in their students' disputes but encourage them to handle their own interpersonal troubles (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 23). They seldom lecture or scold their students, and believe that American preschool teachers' more interventionist approach is "a bit too heavy, too adultlike, too severe and controlled for young children" (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, 53). In contrast, many North American observers find Japanese preschool classrooms chaotic and out of control. That contrast reflects a basic cultural difference between Japanese and North American ideas about the primary purpose of early childhood socialization. While the Japanese stress the importance of children's acquisition of cooperative skills and group identification, North Americans place primary emphasis on their development of independence and self-control.

Japanese and North Americans also have very different ideas about children's subsequent development. For example, a comparative study of middle schools in the United States and Japan found that Japanese and American teachers had very different conceptions of puberty and its effects on their students. The American teachers believed that puberty brought on "raging hor-

mones" that made adolescents "difficult to control and prone to dangerous behavior" (Letendre 2000, 73). In contrast, Japanese teachers never mentioned "raging hormones" and believed that puberty brought a burst of energy that enabled their students to study with a new intensity (Letendre 2000, 74). The classroom practices of American and Japanese middle-school teachers reflect these different cultural understandings. Japanese teachers quickly establish classroom routine and spend little classroom time disciplining students, often ignoring minor disruptions or simply directing students back to their academic task. In contrast, American teachers tend to lay down explicit rules and spend much time enforcing them, what they call "classroom management" (Letendre 2000).

These are only a few of the differences between conceptions of children and their socialization in Japan and the United States. However few, they illustrate just how much cultural understandings shape children's socialization and experience independently of societies' relative affluence and technological development. On the other hand, cultural understandings change as people collectively adapt to changing environmental, economic, and social conditions, as the example of the changing conception and treatment of children in Western history illustrates. Complex combinations of interrelated factors influence how children are thought of and treated in different societies and by different groups within a society. What is clear is that children's lives are as varied as the societies and social groups into which they are born.

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Childhood is as much a socially constructed as a natural stage of life, and child development is as much a social process as one of individual maturation. That realization should make us suspicious of broad generalizations about children and their development based on evidence from a particular society or group of societies. Whenever we read or hear such broad generalizations about what children of different ages think, feel, and can learn, we should always ask, at least to ourselves, which children, when, and where.

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