



Universals & their Connection to  
Limited Anthropologic Insight on  
“Childhood” Perspectives

ANP 489 – Senior Capstone – Sara Burnosky

# Individuals in Argument

- - Robert V. Levine, a Professor of Psychology and Social Psychology
- - Christina Toren, Social Anthropologist.
- - Allison James, Professor of Sociology at the University of Sheffield where she has worked in the anthropology and sociology of childhood.
- - David M Rosen, Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Illinois. Currently working as an Anthropology Professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University.
- - Jill E. Korbin, Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles. She is a cultural and medical anthropologist.
- - Myra Bluebond-Langner, Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University-Camden.

# Should Children be Exposed to Ethnographic Research?

- “The emerging anthropology of children & childhoods must of necessity take into account the rights of children as set forth in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNCRC; see UNICEFF)”
  - Three interlocking principles: Protection, Provision, & *Participation*.
- “Participation has stimulated a research & policy agenda that includes children’s views & perspectives. This expanded research interest is interdisciplinary & falls under the rubric of “Childhood Studies.”
- “Anthropology’s long-standing orientations towards an emic view & multivocality dovetails with these emerging interests in studies of children & childhoods.”
- How should anthropology go about including children in ethnographic works? How should the [child(s)] perspective ethically accessed?
- IRB Minor Protection laws

# “Bright Lines”

- “The ethnography of childhood, is based on the premise-constantly reexamined in empirical research-that the conditions & shape of childhood tend to vary in central tendency from one population to another, are sensitive to population-specific contexts, and are not comprehensible without detailed knowledge of the socially & culturally organized contexts that give them meaning” - Robert V. Levine, a Professor of Psychology and Social Psychology
- Anthropologists are now lead to resist universals. However the UNCRC, other treaties, & statutes feature a “bright line” of age: years lived. Minors are anyone under the age of 18. These bright lines are immediately problematic for anthropologists.
  - Variation by culture, ethnicity, gender, history, & location found in the cross-cultural record are no longer considered as factors regarding minors.
- “Children, like adults, do not escape structural constraints.”

# How to Represent?

- “Like the rest of us, each of these children were born into a world in the making that was already rendered meaningful in all its material aspects, and with time they are making these meanings anew. - Christina Toren, Social Anthropologist
- Children are no longer being readily accepted as passive recipients of action but as actors in their own right.
- Allison James explains the complexities that involve trying to give voice to children.
  - Authenticity
  - Children’s perspectives
  - The nature of their participation in the research process
  - “...dilemmas raised by the politics of representations are by now well rehearsed; for anthropologists of childhood, however, these have yet to be fully articulated, and they remain a very present and pressing concern given the rhetorical power that “the voice of the child” wields.”

# Fears with Ascribing Meaning

- When we move away from a view of children as passive recipients of action and ascribe them agency and competency, or even when we shift weight to agency and away from children as developing beings in need of protection, what happens to vulnerability?
  - Underscores the tension between conceptions of children as developing beings who are vulnerable and in need of protections and of children as in possession of agency, capable and able to make interpretations of their worlds and act on them. Rosen points out there are thousands of youth caught up in horrible crimes. How should they be viewed?
    - As innocent victims of political circumstance who should be protected and forgiven?
    - Or as moral agents who should be held responsible for their actions?
  - Rosen states to fail in acknowledging children's decisions to take conscious action in violence would fail to respect children and to recognize their agency.
  - "The desire to protect children is strong in various professional organizations, including anthropology."

# What Should be Done Next

- Studying further guides of structuring ethnographic text like the book *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* by anthropologists should be focused upon. Representing members meanings and writing literature that does not sanitize OR villainize a demographic is the goal of the anthropologist/ethnographer.

## Village Perspective: Navigating of Sexuality in Adolescents

### CHARACTERS AND DESCRIPTORS

Complex dynamics, including gender, class, and race, during the adolescent stage of life, contribute to the navigation of their sexuality.

Women are innately tied to the next generation through their ability to give birth. For this reason, it is imperative to understand the social influences parents provide during a child's development.

### EVIDENCE

#### PARENT PERSPECTIVE

- Communication
- Difficult to approach conversation
- Technology
- Less face to face time
- Girls get frustrated, uncomfortable, embarrassed

*"We get them at their worst. When we have to wake them up in the morning and put them to bed at night."*

#### TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

- Navigating
- Aware of the validity of child's actions
- Consistently approaching emotional boundary lines
- Understand emotional responsibility

*"It's conversing and it's listening and it's making a lot of choices to not overstep boundaries."*

### CRITIQUE

- Western World Approach: structure of American culture
- Layers of our own experiences influence our biases: white, middle-class, women

**Each individual behind an anthropological theory brings implicit biases.**

### Witnessing Crush-Like Feelings

	BOYS	GIRLS
Parents	instinctive	responsible
Teachers	physical outlet → internalize feelings	emotional outlet → become consumed by feelings

### PARTS AND COMPONENTS OF

#### Practice Theory

#### VILLAGE PERSPECTIVE

#### Feminist Sociology:

Sherry Ortner 1941-present: Transformation in society  
There is a relationship between gender and power. The status of women is second-class behind men.

#### Functionalist Perspective:

Alfred Radcliffe-Brown 1881-1955: Institutions in society  
A social structure is an arrangement of institutionalized relationships and roles. If these relationships and roles change, the social structure changes.

#### Cultural Production Theory:

Pierre Bourdieu 1930-2002: Power in society  
"Theories working at the intersection of the fields of education, anthropology, and sociology, have built a body of literature-sometimes called Cultural Production theory-to document the way teachers unconsciously process subliminally class and cultural message to hierarchize their students." (Borgois)

#### Sources:

Shapeshifters, Cox  
In Search of Respect, Borgois (176)  
Readings for History of Anthropological Theory, Erickson & Murphy  
Liberation Ecologies, Peet & Watts  
Case Study, Burmosky August 2016

# Going Forward:

Based off of my own experience in a case study concerning minors & the struggle to find continued access I believe this is a crucial insight we are missing.

# Works Cited

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\*Unsure how to quote. Would like to use my case study currently being concluded as a source for this project.