A World of Babies

Imagined Childcare Guides for Eight Societies

Fully Revised Second Edition

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CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107137295

First published 2017

Printed in (country) by (printer)

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Gottlieb, Alma, editor. | DeLoache, Judy S., editor.
Title: A world of babies : imagined childcare guides for eight societies / edited by Alma Gottlieb, Judy S. DeLoache.
Description: Fully revised second edition. | Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016014777| ISBN 9781107137295 (Hardback) | ISBN 9781316502570 (Paperback)
Subjects: | MESH: Child Rearing–ethnology | Socialization | Social Values | Cross-Cultural Comparison
Classification: LCC GN482 | NLM WS 105.5.C3 | DDC 649/.1–dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016014777

ISBN 978-1-107-13729-5 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-316-50257-0 Paperback

Note to the Reader

Before you read any of the chapters in this book other than the first one, it is important to understand two things about them.

First, each chapter is written in the style of a childcare manual from one of eight societies around the world. The "author" described in each chapter's "About the Author" section is semi-fictional; such a created persona (based, however, on individuals or composites of individuals from these societies) permits the creation of a "manual" in the style of famous authors of childrearing books such as those by Dr. Benjamin Spock, Berry Brazelton, Penelope Leach, and others. We hope this format provides information about infant care practices in different societies in a lively and memorable way.

Second, the chapters are solidly based on ethnographic field research conducted in the societies they discuss. You will learn what anthropologists and other scholars have written about what people in these communities believe about the nature of babies, and how best to care for them.

The book is thus a mix of scholarly research and literary narrative – quasi-fictional "authors" presenting factual information.

CHAPTER 1

Raising a World of Babies

Parenting in the Twenty-first Century

Alma Gottlieb and Judy S. DeLoache

- Should babies sleep alone in cribs, or in bed with their parents?
- What's the best way to bathe newborns?
- Should parents talk to babies, or is it a waste of time?

In this book, you'll find answers to these and many other questions about how to care for infants and young children. In fact, you'll find several different answers to each one, not only from different societies around the world but even within the same society as a result of both social complexity and social change. Whether the practices you read about here are longstanding or recent, and whether they are widely accepted or hotly contested, many differ significantly from what the majority of contemporary middle-class, White, North American or European parents do. Here are just a few examples of diverse views you'll encounter in these pages.

- In the Faroe Islands (an autonomous province of Denmark), babies always nap outdoors for a few hours every day – to avoid indoor germs, accustom the baby to cold

temperatures, develop the immune system, and toughen children for a difficult life. Elsewhere in Europe, babies of Muslim immigrant families from Guinea-Bissau now living in Portugal are always allowed to nap uninterrupted – in case Allah might be sending angels delivering messages to the dreaming infant.

- Most middle-class North Americans bathe their infants inside their homes on a daily basis – socializing them early into a life that values privacy. In the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians bathe their babies outside, with local children gathered around the basin in which the baby is bathed – socializing them early into a life that values the community.
- The Beng of West Africa talk regularly to their babies – who are cherished as reincarnations of ancestors and, as such, deemed to be able to understand all the languages of the world. In contrast, Somali adults in East Africa typically do not address babies and toddlers at all, because children in this authoritarian society are not permitted to respond to adult communications.

As these brief ethnographic summaries suggest, people in diverse communities hold dramatically different beliefs about the nature – and the nurturing – of infants. This book celebrates that diversity. At the same time, this book also addresses the challenges that violence, poverty, and rapid social change pose to parents in raising their children. For example, how should Israeli mothers answer questions about World War II that their children bring home from kindergarten after their teachers introduce a three-day unit for Holocaust Remembrance Day – inaugurated by a loud siren that disrupts their playful classroom at 10 a.m.? How should Palestinian mothers raise their sons to fight for statehood, while urging them to resist the call to throw stones at Israeli tanks or plan bomb attacks in Israeli cafés?

Attending simultaneously to the divergent goals of understanding cultural differences, as well as the larger political and economic contexts of globalization, poverty, and war facing so many families, calls for a creative approach. Accordingly, each of the eight chapters in this collection is

written as though it were an "advice manual" for new parents in a particular society. This approach offers two distinct advantages. For one thing, the advice manual format makes for engaging reading. For another, the combination of eight distinct and sometimes contradictory "manuals" undermines the universalist assumption that underlies the "manual" genre itself – as we explore later in this Introduction.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLDS OF BABIES

This book is an entirely revised edition of an earlier collection of essays written in the style of childrearing manuals (published in 2000). The new edition speaks directly to conversations gaining momentum across the US and elsewhere. In recent years, US interest in childrearing strategies has skyrocketed, with the proliferation of TED talks and popular books that have advocated "other" childrearing practices inspired by places as diverse as China and France. These books and talks have produced heated debates about whether mainstream, middle-class, Euro-American practices are too laid-back and forgiving compared to parenting practices elsewhere. Their authors' willingness to "parent in public" by airing personal thoughts and decisions about childrearing has encouraged a new generation of parents to consider both the virtues and the deficits of different parenting approaches.

With such texts and podcasts readily available, parents today increasingly realize that beliefs and behaviors differ substantially from one place to another. However, that awareness does not necessarily bring acceptance. Understanding and appreciating the ways of other people present a challenge precisely because our sense of how to do things we consider to be of great importance is so deeply ingrained. This is especially true for the task of raising children.

Every group thinks that its way of caring for infants and young children is the obvious, correct, and natural way – a simple matter of common sense. However, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once pointed out, what we complacently call "common

sense" is anything but common. Indeed, what people accept as "common sense" in one society is often considered odd, exotic, or even barbaric in another.

Oddity cuts both ways. Although our readers will no doubt be surprised, perhaps even shocked, by some of the ideas and practices described in these pages, many parents who follow those practices would find our readers' values and behavior – *your* values and behavior – equally surprising.

Each of the eight childrearing "manuals" we present here is intended as a "common sense guide to baby and childcare" – echoing the title of the original edition of the best-selling childcare guide by "the world's most famous baby doctor," pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. Since 1946, seven editions of that book have sold over 50 million copies – second in sales only to the Bible. Unlike the advice offered in that and other "how to" guides, however, the nature of the advice contained between the covers of this book varies dramatically from one chapter to another, underscoring the variability of how children are understood and raised in different communities.

Our primary aim is to illustrate how the childrearing customs of any community, however peculiar or unnatural they may appear to an outsider, make sense when understood within the context of that society, as well as within its broader geopolitical context. Childcare practices vary so much across time and space precisely because they are firmly embedded in divergent physical, economic, and cultural realities.

Challenges of Caring for Children

The remarkable diversity of infant and childcare practices is all the more remarkable when we consider that, to a substantial degree, these diverse practices largely represent strategies for dealing with similar challenges. Human infants are distinguished from many other animals by, among other things, extreme helplessness at birth and a very long period of dependence on others for survival and development. A crucial role undertaken by their parents is ensuring their survival, health, and safety. Parents or other caregivers furthermore typically assume a major

role in encouraging their children to develop desirable personal characteristics and social relationships, acquire technical skills, and adopt the values and beliefs that will enable them to participate fully in their society. In the following pages, we focus first on the general challenges involved in keeping infants alive and healthy and then on the practices that promote cultural learning.

Helping Babies Survive and Thrive

The first challenge to rearing children is successfully navigating pregnancy and childbirth. People in the communities represented in the chapters that follow posit culturally distinctive models and practices of conception and pregnancy to enhance the likelihood of a successful birth.

Infant Mortality

The likelihood of surviving infancy depends on basic economic resources. In industrialized societies throughout the world today, the rate of infant mortality is very low – only two to five children of every thousand die, making it likely that few of these parents worry constantly about their children perishing. Parents in many areas of the world today face a far more grim reality. As of 2015, many countries in the global south have very high infant mortality rates, including three countries in which fully 10–11 percent of all babies die. A great majority of these deaths could be averted by access to professional medical care. Here, we address the more proximate causes, while reminding the reader of the geopolitics of the past half-millennium of European colonizing of the world that contributed to the current tragic state.

Nutrition

Economic factors play a major role in whether infants have a diet sufficient to promote their survival and development. Medical researchers assess the incidence of "undernutrition," and the more serious condition of "malnutrition," by measuring the

proportion of children who are significantly below the standard height ("stunting") and weight for their age. Although these statistics have improved significantly over the preceding twenty-five years, in 2013, 161 million children under five years of age were estimated to be "stunted." That same year, 99 million children under five years were classified as "underweight." In both cases, nearly all of these children lived in Asia and Africa.

Such nutritional deficits frequently take a fatal toll. As of this writing (2015), approximately 3.1 million children die from hunger each year, even though the world's farmers produce enough food to feed the world's population. The unequal distribution of global resources that causes tragic inequities in food availability remains a major political issue of our planet.

Adequate maternal nutrition is necessary for the development of the fetus, and most societies encourage pregnant women to pay attention to their diets for the sake of their unborn children. Yet the specific rules and recommendations for expectant mothers about which foods they should seek out and which they should avoid vary greatly around the globe.

In many places, traditional reasons for forbidding certain foods based on various symbolic notions have now been replaced by practical considerations. For example, in the Faroe Islands (an autonomous province of Denmark), industrial pollution from fertilizers, distant mining, and fossil fuel combustion has contaminated the local waters with high levels of mercury and PCBs. These poisons accumulate in the fatty parts of fish and whales – and in the bodies of pregnant and nursing women who eat them, posing a particular threat to healthy fetal brain development. Pregnant Faroese women are now advised by government-sponsored maternity nurses to avoid eating these traditionally rich sources of protein.

People in societies around the world adopt a wide variety of strategies for providing adequate nutrition to developing infants. Throughout human history until the last few decades, breastfeeding was the *only* way to supply young infants with a reliable source of sustenance. Although their biological mothers have most often provided infants' primary source of breastmilk, "wet nursing" – the practice of having an infant breastfed by

someone other than his or her own biological mother – has been practiced in both Western and non-Western settings, and in both ancient and modern times. In the ancient world, from Mesopotamia and Egypt to Greece and Rome, wet nurses commonly fed wealthy women's babies. In western Europe, the practice became common in elite families in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and lasted through the eighteenth century: infants of wealthy mothers were nursed by peasant women, who in turn handed their own babies to others for their sustenance. In 1780, this practice was so common in Paris that, of the 21,000 infants born in the city, only about 700 were breastfed by their own mothers. In some European countries, wet nursing did not cease entirely until World War I, when poor women could, for the first time, make more money working in factories than from serving as wet nurses.

Elsewhere, infants who are breastfed primarily by their mothers may occasionally be nursed by other women as well. In many Muslim societies, infants who are breastfed by the same woman become "milk kin." Having suckled at the same breast is considered to create a bond between children as strong as that between biologically related siblings. In these societies, a marriage between "milk kin" would be considered incestuous.

Before the relatively recent introduction of "infant formula," there were several disastrous attempts to substitute something for breastmilk as infants' main source of nourishment. For example, in seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Iceland, infants were typically fed cow's milk rather than human breastmilk. So many babies died that women bore as many children as they could, in an effort to offset the shockingly high losses.

In the current era, breastfeeding occupies an increasingly contradictory space in the public imagination. On the one hand, scientific research overwhelmingly testifies to the nutritional superiority of breastmilk over any other substance for the human infant. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization both recommend exclusive breastfeeding, with no supplements, for virtually all infants for the first six months of their lives. These two organizations also recommend

continuing to breastfeed (supplemented by solid foods) for another six months or eighteen months, respectively.

Yet the proven nutritional superiority and health benefits of breastmilk have come to be ignored in many places. In the United States, while the percentage of infants who begin breastfeeding at birth has increased significantly from recent public health campaigns, only 49 percent of all infants are still breastfed at six months – although there is substantial variation by region, economic status, educational level, and ethnic background. For example, 71 percent of six-month-old infants are still breastfeeding in California and Oregon compared to only 2 percent in Mississippi. Beyond the US, the figures are even lower: globally, fewer than 40 percent of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed.

In industrialized countries, commercially produced "infant formula" can support healthy growth and development, although with a somewhat higher rate of infections and other medical problems, both short and long term. In many countries in the global south, however, formula-feeding presents far graver health risks. Some 750 million people around the world – approximately one in eight people – lack access to safe water. In such places, infant formula is inevitably mixed with polluted water in unsanitary containers. Furthermore, impoverished parents often dilute the formula, to make the expensive powder last longer. Under such circumstances, parents' sincere efforts to promote the health and well-being of their babies can be tragically undermined.

The decision of when to introduce solid food – and what, and how – differs greatly from one society to another, for reasons including both local availability of alternatives to breastmilk, and cultural norms. In Palestinian communities detailed in this book, for example, infants from three months on receive food pre-chewed by their mothers and other female relatives. With this practice, the decision to introduce solid food becomes a social one shared among women.

Weaning decisions are not just individual or even community-based; government policies can also have an enormous impact on when a mother weans her child from the breast. In northern

European nations that offer generous, paid maternity leaves, women have the luxury of exclusively breastfeeding their infants for four to six months. In this volume, our manual for the Faroe Islands of Denmark chronicles such a case:

> From between four and six months of age, you should start introducing solid foods to your infant. Most families make their own food for their infants – for instance, by putting cooked vegetables in a blender. Because you have long maternity leave and will therefore be home more than your husband, you'll probably be the one to make this food most of the time.

In nations lacking such government support, many working mothers may find it impossible to continue breastfeeding their babies exclusively (or at all) once they return to their jobs. Some women in industrialized settings may also find it impossible to continue breastfeeding because of lack of workplace facilities to pump breastmilk. From local norms (and, sometimes, laws) that assume that women's breasts should never be bared in public, scolding and other shaming practices further discourage many women from breastfeeding in restaurants, shops, parks, and other public spaces. Frustration over such constraints led one American journalist to call for a return of wet nurses, to help working mothers continue their working lives.

Broader issues of global import also affect micro-level feeding decisions. In this volume, our chapter on China discusses dangerous levels of food contamination due to lack of government oversight, with accompanying risks to infants. Chinese mothers who prefer to use infant formula are cautioned to buy or import formula from the West. Such scenarios underscore the extent to which globalization also includes fatal flows of poisonous substances.

Illness

Whether or not an infant survives also depends on the resources that are locally available for treating disease. Strategies and resources to prevent, diagnose, and cure illness vary dramatically around the globe. At the pragmatic level, they depend on whether medical clinics are available and affordable. At the

cultural level, they also depend on what parents believe are the underlying causes of given ailments. What you do for a case of diarrhea may differ depending on whether you think your baby has "caught a bug" or has been "caught by a spirit."

In many societies today, including those featured in this book, parents have exposure to both traditional healers and modern medicine. If they can afford it – a big *if* – many will use both. For example, if she can pay for transportation to the closest clinic, a Beng mother of a sick child in Ivory Coast might consult not only a village diviner but also a clinic nurse or doctor. As insurance against medical risks, she might secure for her baby both a cowry shell bracelet and – if she can find the money for it, and if it is available locally – a tetanus shot.

Yet modernity not only offers beneficial new treatments for disease, it also brings new exposure to sickness. One of the bitter ironies facing many immigrants to the US is a general decline in health and an uptick in dangerous conditions such as obesity and diabetes due to changes for the worse in their diet – as chronicled in our chapter on Somali-Americans in Minneapolis.

Supervision

Babies also need protection from mishap and accidents. Strategies for safeguarding children depend on the nature of local risks. Cars whizzing by on a busy street, an open cooking fire in the middle of the family compound, and poisonous snakes all require different approaches to keeping babies and toddlers safe. Very different strategies are needed to protect against risks that are less visible but still perilous, such as the machinations of witches or malicious spirits who are said to harm or steal babies – or the equally mysterious workings of bacteria that might be killed by vaccines. Ideas about such invisible risks do not necessarily fade in modern, industrialized settings. In the Faroe Islands of Denmark, for example, mothers who are addressed in our imagined manual receive mixed messages about the relevance of such folk beliefs:

> You might . . . teach your child about our traditional belief in the "hidden people," or *huldufólk*. Most young people do not believe in these supernatural beings any more, but older people still share

stories in which they claim to have seen them . . . [and] people are still careful not to move large boulders in which they reportedly live. But you don't want to scare your children when you tell them these stories: they should be entertaining and are important to remember only as a part of our history.

Other risks to babies' health and survival may depend on the work that their mothers perform to earn a living, and how the infants are supervised. In societies in which all healthy adults work in the fields, tend livestock, or engage in hunting and gathering, babies are typically cared for during the day by older siblings, cousins, or other children (Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). As long as the child babysitter can bring the baby along to the mother's workplace to be nursed, the infant can thrive (Figure 1.1).

However, this caretaking arrangement is less viable in other settings, where extreme poverty makes it difficult or even impossible for working mothers to care effectively for their

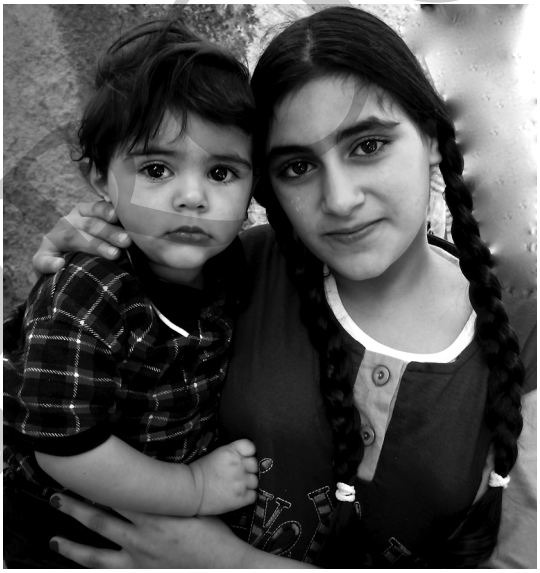

Figure 1.1 In many communities around the world, older siblings commonly take responsibility for younger siblings. In this Balata refugee camp in Nablus (West Bank), a Palestinian baby is being well cared for by an older sister.
Photograph by Bree Akesson.

infants. Such is the case in the *favelas* of northeastern Brazil, for example, where many mothers perform domestic work for wealthy families. Because their employers see the house cleaners' children as dirty and contagious, young infants often remain at home with an older child, or even alone in a hammock. Deprived of their nursing mothers' milk, these babies do not get adequate nourishment; some eat nothing all day, and an alarming number die.

Relationships

Right from birth, forging satisfying emotional attachments is a fundamental part of the human condition. In many Western societies, it is generally assumed that infants will form close attachments to their parents, but not with many others – possibly only with immediate family members. By contrast, adults in many other societies place a premium on integrating infants into a larger group. In Beng villages in Côte d'Ivoire, this effort begins right away: A member of every household in the village is expected to call on a newborn baby within hours after the birth to welcome the tiny person into the community.

Elsewhere, the expectation that a child will be cared for by a group of people beyond the biological parents supports a variety of adoption practices. On the Micronesian island of Ifaluk, the adoption of infants is very common. Because they retain close ties with their biological parents, the adoptees feel they are an integral part of two families.

Such an "additive" approach can work well in a small community. Yet with globalization, adoptions now occur well beyond the local community. Increasingly, children are being adopted outside their racial, ethnic, and national boundaries. The challenges of such interracial and international adoptions are just beginning to be charted, with the most vexing cases involving unwitting participation in human trafficking schemes. For example, some children from impoverished families in countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, and Guatemala are misidentified as "orphans" to be put up for adoption by international agencies, with parents misunderstanding the structure and outcome of the process.

Raising a World of Babies

The caretaking arrangements of many rural African societies foster a different set of ties. Older siblings (who may be as young as six or seven) typically care for their infant and toddler siblings for much of the day while their mothers work, resulting in a strong bond between the siblings. In industrialized societies, young children who attend formal daycare programs often develop strong relationships with their daycare teachers, as well as with a number of other unrelated children.

Beyond connections with relatives and neighbors, many societies also encourage ties with the departed. Those who view infants as reincarnated ancestors may endeavor to maintain a relationship between their flesh-and-blood child and the ancestor's spirit. In Kenya, the Baganda naming ceremony for an infant features someone calling out a series of names belonging to various deceased relatives of the baby. When the child smiles, it is taken as a sign that he or she is a reincarnation of the ancestor just mentioned and wishes to be called by that name.

Elsewhere, connections with spiritual beings may continue actively throughout life. For instance, in Australia, pregnant Warlpiri women may dream that they conceived their child in a place associated with a certain spirit that has given life to the baby. Once born, the child has a lifelong tie to the land associated with that spirit and, as an adult, can always have a say in matters relating to that piece of land. With current movements of people well beyond their homelands, will such spiritual ties continue to have meaning? Will they serve as sources of comfort, longing, or distress? Perhaps the Portuguese concept of *saudade*, that complex notion of regret, desire, and nostalgia for a place or time, may become the clarion call of our age.

Meanwhile, as the world grows more interconnected, developmental psychologists have increasingly considered the implications of cultural differences for children's lives. For example, early advocates of "attachment theory" assumed the model to have universal relevance regardless of local family structure or parenting practices. Now, psychologists acknowledge "the different faces of attachment" that are produced by the variety of cultural values and political institutions (local and global alike) that structure parents' ideas of what sorts of

emotional attachments *should* be sought for their children – and what sorts *may be possible*, given constraints.

In this volume, Shirdon poignantly chronicles the ways that, in Somali-American households in Minneapolis, apartment living results in a much smaller group of people to interact with infants and toddlers than would have been the case back in Somali villages or urban neighborhoods. This new American setting, with its restricted linguistic and social interactions, is now resulting in diagnoses of autism in twice as many young Somali-American children as in the general US population. As the Somali-American case suggests, models of attachments need updating to take into consideration the global flows of people to new living spaces that often create new contexts for social interaction – sometimes enriched, but all too often impoverished.

Life Skills

Most parents have clear ideas about how to prepare their children for successful lives as adults. Children everywhere need opportunities to acquire life skills that will enable them to become fully functioning members of their particular society. In traditional societies, young children typically learn how to do work by serving, in effect, as apprentices – whether watching a parent weave at the loom, washing laundry and cooking, hunting, or weeding, hoeing, and harvesting on the farm (Figure 1.2).

In the contemporary world, the life skills that many children must learn for a successful life have changed drastically. In Lisbon, migrant Mandinga and Fula parents from Guinea-Bissau have adapted a traditional naming ritual for infants in ways that acknowledge these changes. In our imagined manual for these parents, a Guinean mother living in Portugal advises:

> Back home [in Guinea-Bissau] on this special day, babies are shown those things that will be important throughout their lives, depending on their gender and caste: a cooking pot or hoe for a girl, for example, or leatherworking tools for a baby from a leatherworking family. But . . . this part of the ritual . . . doesn't make sense in Lisbon, where children have so many options available to them. Which objects will be important to your child depends entirely on what he or she ends up doing in life. Who are we to make assumptions about that in this new country?

Figure 1.2 In Côte d'Ivoire, this Beng toddler and young girl are already proficient at pounding food in a large mortar. Beng girls play an important role helping their mothers prepare meals for their large families.
Photograph by Alma Gottlieb.

Implied in this set of comments about new work opportunities is the set of broad-ranging, literacy-based skills offered by a modern education. Whereas earlier generations were educated by their communities for a life path that was narrowly delimited, current generations are exposed to myriad job options. Our chapter on a Quechua community living in a small town in rural Peru highlights the difference that schooling can make for newly educated peasants. "Study hard!" becomes the rallying cry

motivating young people to get ahead, not just for themselves, but to improve the quality of life of their families.

Yet for too many, this equal-opportunity model remains more a dream than a reality. The combination of class, race, religion, immigrant status, and national origin puts refugees such as the Somali-Americans profiled in this book at an enormous disadvantage. In this context, those Somali-Americans who become successful business owners in the face of such long odds seem especially remarkable, whereas those who fail to overcome the enormous obstacles often become, troublingly, stigmatized with designations ranging from "autistic" to "terrorist."

We now consider an extended example illustrating many of the points we have made about childcare and culture.

Where Should the Baby Sleep?

Although sleeping is a necessity for everyone, never do we spend so much time asleep as when we are babies. People in all societies accommodate infants' need for sleep, but they do so in very different ways – and sometimes for different reasons.

Across most of the world today, and throughout most of human history, infants have spent the night in the company of others. In early childhood (and sometimes into the later childhood years), sleeping has been a social, not a solitary, affair. Most commonly, infants sleep with their mothers, although others might play this role. In many contemporary urban, middle-class families in China, a baby sleeps with his or her paternal grandmother, who serves as the primary caretaker and brings the baby to her daughter-in-law to nurse.

Co-sleeping is rarely motivated by lack of space. Even when families live in multi-room dwellings, parents in co-sleeping societies take their infants into bed with them. One virtue is that the mother can easily breastfeed whenever the baby awakens – often without fully awakening herself. Children continue to sleep with their mothers or other older relatives for varying lengths of time – from one or two years for Mayan babies in

Guatemala to, until recently, into the teen years in Japanese families.

A very different practice characterizes the sleeping pattern in North America (and some other Western nations). In middle-class, Euro-American families, the most common pattern is for infants to sleep in their own beds, and often in their own rooms – a practice long approved and recommended by the vast majority of American pediatricians. In fact, recent public health campaigns in US cities have warned against the risks of unexplained deaths (sudden infant death syndrome, or "SIDS") from infant–parent co-sleeping – the concern being that a parent might accidentally roll over onto the infant and smother it (Figure 1.3).

However, members of some groups in the US prefer other sleeping arrangements. In a recent study, 28 percent of Asian parents reported sleeping in the same room with their children, compared to 8 percent of White parents. Moreover, despite recent critiques of how "attachment theory" has been mischaracterized in popular discussions, a recent trend in "attachment parenting" has taken hold in some slices of urban, educated Euro-America, for whom it is now fashionable for infants and parents to co-sleep (among other "attachment"-promoting practices). However, it remains difficult to estimate the extent of this trend, since infant/parent bed-sharing remains stigmatized in mainstream discourses (both medical and popular) – a situation that, doubtless, leads some parents to conceal their bed-sharing habits, making it likely that bed-sharing is under-reported in the US.

To make matters even more confusing, the above-mentioned public health campaigns against co-sleeping rely on warnings by US-based pediatricians that bed-sharing increases the risk of SIDS – yet, other scientific researchers have reached the opposite conclusion. For example, biological anthropologist James McKenna has concluded that the risk of SIDS is actually lower for infants who share their parents' bed, so long as the parents are non-smokers unimpaired by alcohol or medication, and in safe circumstances (without loose pillows or blankets). This stark contrast between models of bed-sharing as both *increasing and*

Figure 1.3 In New York City, a public health campaign launched in 2008 put posters in subways to urge parents not to sleep with their babies.
Photograph by Alma Gottlieb.

decreasing the likelihood of SIDS, as interpreted by pediatricians versus biological anthropologists (respectively), gives us pause.

In effect, these divergent beliefs and practices belie different values on the part of parents. In a study comparing attitudes of middle-class Euro-American mothers and Mayan mothers, for example, the American mothers viewed co-sleeping as, at best, strange and impractical – at worst, suspicious or even immoral. In contrast, the Mayan mothers regarded physical closeness at night as part of normal caring for children. When told

of the middle-class American practice of infants sleeping alone, the Mayan mothers were shocked at what they considered mistreatment and felt sorry for the babies – echoing adults in many other societies who view the nightly isolation of many middle-class American infants as parental neglect.

Why do so many people disapprove so deeply of where other people choose to have their babies sleep? Co-sleeping strengthens ties between baby and mother, but parents evaluate this result differently: as a benefit in the eyes of co-sleepers, but a source of concern by others, who worry that co-sleeping will make their infants overly dependent. Societal goals of **interdependence** are well served by parent–infant co-sleeping, whereas those of **independence** are not.

In short, a question so seemingly simple as where to put a baby to sleep conceals layers of cultural beliefs. And unlike some other childcare practices, sleeping decisions seem fairly stable. In the US, some of the most devoted bed-sharing families are found in immigrant communities hailing from bed-sharing societies, as we have learned from over three decades of conversations with Indian-American students. Sleeping decisions may be one form of "cultural intimacy" that has a great deal of staying power even in the face of globalization and social change.

LEARNING TO CREATE THE WORLDS OF BABIES

As we have been suggesting, the care and raising of infants are generally considered far too important to leave to personal preference. In every society, new generations of parents are expected to follow a set of practices that replicate basic values that are widely approved, while adapting to new conditions. How do parents acquire these culturally approved caretaking practices?

Advice for Parents

Part of what every one of us knows about being a parent comes from our own early experiences. For better or worse, we all

acquire at least a good chunk of our model of how parents behave toward their children from how we were cared for. Even those who deliberately reject aspects of their parents' (or other caretakers') childrearing style in raising their children nevertheless find themselves basing their behavior on their own childhood experiences. After having children, many of us have had the sudden, sometimes disquieting insight, "Oh, no, I sound just like my parents!"

In most societies until recently, children also learned about childrearing not only through what their parents did with them, but also from observing other adults. Living in close proximity to others – whether in extended family groups, small bands, or villages – children could observe at first hand how other adults treated their children. What they mostly saw was other people behaving pretty much as their own parents had acted – that is, following common cultural norms. Such daily observations become part of children's knowledge base. Seeing mothers carrying their babies around in homemade cloth slings all the time, a child forms the idea that carrying babies is a natural part of mothering. Another child, seeing mothers transport their infants in a succession of backpacks and front packs, strollers, and car seats assumes the naturalness of manufactured baby carriers. When these children eventually become parents, they simply "know" how these things are done and rarely reflect critically upon that knowledge.

However, opportunities to observe and learn about traditional childcare practices in stable communities have recently been diminishing. In many nations across the global south, parenting practices are changing – sometimes gradually, sometimes dramatically. As a result of global capitalism, some groups are gaining new access to economic resources and are experiencing upward mobility, while many more are experiencing the opposite. In yet other places, long-term political strife and unrelenting poverty are causing tremendous upheaval and suffering. In extreme cases, refugee camps created to accommodate those fleeing unrest in Syria, Afghanistan, and other unstable places are creating new social forms whose parenting challenges are just beginning to be charted. In this

book, the chapter on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza focuses on one case of this troubling scenario.

For their part, urban industrialized societies also offer fewer opportunities for learning early in life about parenting by directly observing other people and interacting with infants. Nowhere is this more evident than in the US. With high levels of occupational and geographical mobility, family members are increasingly isolated from one another. Young couples may have no mothers, grandmothers, or aunts close by to advise them about the birth process, or what to do when the baby cries or is ill, or when one can expect the infant to begin walking and talking. Advice communicated by telephone or, increasingly, via the Web is useful, but a poor substitute for on-the-spot assistance.

The high value placed on family privacy, combined with the modern pattern of newly married couples moving into their own homes, further diminishes the possibilities (for both children and parents) of directly observing and learning from how others care for their infants. Moreover, the smaller size of today's families in many places around the globe makes it likely that a new parent will have less experience with babies than did new parents of previous generations.

Over the past century, North Americans and western Europeans have made up for this decreased level of hands-on experience with children in a variety of ways. Many parents sought advice about child behavior and development from pediatricians. The second most common source of information was books.

A massive amount of information is now available for Western parents to answer their questions and allay their concerns about children and childrearing. Bookstores in the US and the UK typically boast shelf after shelf of books devoted to advice on parenting. In addition to manuals covering child development in general, a wealth of books – as well as magazine and newspaper articles – offer advice on specific topics targeted to specialized audiences. A pregnant woman can easily find books and articles on the benefits of sound nutrition and yoga, as well as programs for communicating with her unborn baby. Books abound to help new parents learn how to encourage

their babies to sleep through the night, how to succeed in breastfeeding, or even how to accomplish toilet training in twenty-four hours. New terms proliferate to describe (or criticize) parenting styles – current ones being "helicopter parents" and "free-range parents." One blogger dubs the current glut of childcare advice, the "Parenting Industrial Complex." The fact that advice for parents is such big business suggests the existence of a very eager readership.

With any popular literary genre, there must be a good fit between the basic cultural orientation of author and reader – a shared set of assumptions about the nature of the world that facilitates communication. Childcare manuals are very much cultural products that reflect the dominant values and beliefs of their authors and intended audience. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise: No parenting manual that flies in the face of the locally accepted cultural beliefs and practices of its target audience could possibly achieve great success and influence.

At the same time, some of these best-selling parenting manuals have also served as agents of change. For example, Dr. Benjamin Spock is credited with relaxing the emphasis on rigid scheduling that was so pervasive in American infant care when he began writing in the 1940s. In the next generation of pediatrician advice givers, Berry Brazelton was acknowledged for drawing attention to the active role that infants play in their own development. Currently, many parents appreciate Penelope Leach's sensitive efforts to examine parenting from the perspective of children, even infants.

How can these manuals both reinforce common cultural practices and in some cases transform them? Some of the more influential books have proven influential in subtle ways – by first appealing to what readers already know, while playing down the revolutionary aspects of the advice to come. The opening lines of Dr. Spock's best-selling childcare guide read: "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do."

Although parents today continue to consult childrearing books, an even greater assortment of childrearing advice is now readily available to anyone with an Internet connection. Shortly before completing this book, we asked a student assistant to

estimate how many websites and blogs offer discussions about parenting. She reported the impossibility of the request, as thousands of such sites have proliferated. Our own daughters-in-law may be typical of their generation in that, when confronted with a new parenting challenge, their first impulse is to check the Web.

Despite the dizzying array of perspectives on childrearing offered online, many bloggers communicate confidence that whatever works for their child should work for others. That confidence – like that of book authors before them – is itself rooted in largely unconscious assumptions about the nature of children and the goals of parenting.

Now, imagine a childrearing manual from another part of the world. A Berry Brazelton who had been born in a Beng village in Côte d'Ivoire and had become a diviner (rather than a pediatrician) would emphasize how critical it is for babies to form close and loving ties with their grandparents. Indeed, he would advise parents to teach their children how to dish out ribald insults to their grandparents as a sure-fire way to help the children feel free and familiar with their much older relatives.

Or suppose Penelope Leach were a Palestinian resident of the West Bank instead of a Cambridge University-educated psychologist. Would she still suggest that mothers be content whether they have boys or girls? Or would she instead advise mothers to keep trying to have a boy in order to gain greater respect in their community?

And so we come to this book.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The First Edition

The first edition of this volume developed from a seminar on cross-cultural views of infancy and young childhood that we co-taught at the University of Illinois several years ago. Our interest in designing this course sprang from our shared fascination with the nature and challenges of childhood,

coupled with our perception of the contrasting strengths and weaknesses of our two disciplines – psychology and cultural anthropology.

A revolution in psychological research on infants during the previous two decades had produced a burst of new knowledge about development in the first years of life. However, until relatively recently, the majority of this research had been conducted with Euro-American infants. For their part, cultural anthropologists were keenly aware of the enormous diversity in human behavior; however, most had paid relatively little attention to parenthood and even less to infancy. Joining forces to co-teach a course meant putting our two disciplines into active conversation.

Each student chose a society to research throughout the semester and wrote a series of short papers about specific aspects of infant care in that society. Along with many readings in anthropology and psychology, we assigned an excerpt from one of the editions of Dr. Spock's classic parenting guide, as well as a short anthropological article that playfully spoofed Spock's book by purporting to offer childrearing advice for West African parents. Throughout the semester, as we discussed various societies around the world, the "Spock model" sparked many stimulating class discussions: What advice would an infant-rearing manual from another society offer parents?

For their final papers, our students drew from their research about their target society to write an imagined childcare guide for the society they had investigated. The papers proved brilliant, and we resolved to work with their authors to expand them for publication. And so, the first edition of *A World of Babies* was born. This new edition substantially updates the content of the original edition while retaining the fundamental structure and "advice manual" approach of the book.

The Creative Approach

Not coincidentally, the original idea for *A World of Babies* as a set of imagined childcare guides came from a writer (Philip Graham). Both the original and the current editions offer a

set of imagined childcare manuals that use the writer's narrative techniques to chronicle actual parenting practices. The advice offered in each manual is based on extensive ethnographic research conducted by the chapters' authors, each drawing on the rich fund of data that they have gathered (supplemented by historical background and other reliable ethnographic accounts).

Most importantly, each manual purports to have been written by a member of the society that is the focus of the chapter. The invented "authors" that the real authors have created are the sorts of persons who actually give advice to parents in these societies – ranging from a grandmother and a diviner to a schoolteacher, a refugee mother, and a maternity nurse. In some cases, the actual authors of the chapters have modeled the manual's fictional author on a single individual they have known. In other cases, our contributors have created a composite persona combining aspects of several individuals they have known. In all cases, the imagined manual authors are based on a type of actual member of the society in question. These individuals are realistically portrayed by our chapter authors, all of whom are seasoned fieldworkers who have conducted at least a full year, and in many cases several years, of field research with members of the communities they profile here, mostly working in one or more local language(s). Moreover, one of our authors (Sirad Shirdon) is a member of the Somali-American community that she writes about here.

Complementing this research base, four additional fictions are necessary to appreciate the manuals. First, the reader must imagine that each society contains a childrearing expert who would be motivated to write such a manual. For the societies represented in this collection that have a long tradition of literacy, this is already likely. For example, many Chinese mothers now actively seek out parenting books written by foreign authors whose titles are recommended on Chinese websites, and many European governments now provide parenting brochures to all women who give birth in state-sponsored hospitals or birthing centers, or who use the services of state-sponsored nurse-midwives. For societies less steeped in literacy, childcare advice is typically dispensed by older female

relatives. In all cases, the choice of a fictional manual author for our chapters is based on how advice is actually communicated to parents in these societies.

A related fiction is that the majority of the members of the eight societies we explore would have any need or desire for a written childcare guide, or would be able to read them even if they did. All these societies are undergoing rapid social change, and our manuals are directed to that subset of literate new mothers in these societies who might especially appreciate guidance in raising their babies. Such social change can come from several forces, including migration; political, economic, and military upheavals; demographic shifts; and religious challenges. Our manuals take such changes into account for their impact on raising children.

For example, in our chapter on Israel, with its manual fictively authored by a kindergarten teacher, new Russian immigrant mothers are advised on how to raise their young children so they will be able to integrate easily into Israeli society. In our chapter on Peru, an imagined mother–daughter duo advises new mothers how to raise their children for a life organized around formal schooling conducted in Spanish, rather than farming activities conducted in Quechua. In our chapter on Somali-Americans, a refugee mother advises pregnant Somali-American women to use a birthing ball during labor, both to ease childbirth and to avoid the obstetric complications that often result from the severe form of female circumcision (infibulation) that many women undergo in Somalia.

A third assumption we made in producing this book is that the fictive authors of our "manuals" would be aware of the cultural logic underlying their societies' practices. Yet, as anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and others have long observed, few people have such conscious insights regarding their own daily habits. Think about why American mothers nowadays routinely dress their baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink (although the opposite pattern prevailed in the early twentieth century), or why European and American parents devote little effort to encouraging their young infants to sit

upright. If you cannot immediately give the reasons for these preferences, we've made our point.

Finally, from the series of fictions we have just identified, it should be clear that the eight imagined childcare guides presented here are in no way intended to advise actual members of these societies. Rather, our manuals are intentionally directed to Western-educated readers who are interested in learning about childcare practices elsewhere. The success of the first edition of the book offers evidence that the creative format of the book can communicate information in a particularly compelling and immediate way.

Our writing experiment, while unique in its particular invention of a new genre, has ample precedent in other experimental writing by scholars. In creating this genre, we chose the childcare guide format to communicate information about the numerous cultural differences in childrearing around the globe because it permitted our authors to use narrative techniques while accurately describing the beliefs and practices of the societies they profiled. Moreover, childrearing advice manuals have existed in other times and places, from Renaissance-era Italy to ancient and modern China. And over the course of the past century, Western parents turned increasingly to the infant and childcare manuals that became a veritable growth industry.

We offer our imagined childcare guides, then, as ethnographic/literary constructions that rely on the very common genre of the *How to* manual to present some very uncommon *How to*'s. In juxtaposing a familiar format with a set of decidedly unfamiliar information, we hope to demonstrate a simple but powerful truth: that many models of childhood exist, and that every such model is shaped, albeit invisibly, by a combination of deeply held values and widely varying social, political, and economic contexts.

The *faux*-authoritative tone of our "manuals" directly addresses an imagined indigenous reader looking for helpful advice. The eight guides presented here playfully mimic the authoritative tone of parenting guides dispensing advice as if it were universally applicable. By adopting this approach in the

manuals that follow, we hope to dispel any assumption of an Everybaby – or an Everyparent – who somehow exists outside culture. As we hope the foregoing has made clear, the "world of babies" is truly many different worlds.

What's New in this Edition, Updated for the Twenty-first Century

In the fifteen years since the first edition of *A World of Babies*, children's lives have changed dramatically in many places around the world. Some changes such as general health indicators are positive, while others such as the recruitment of child soldiers have proven catastrophic. We have highlighted both types of changes in this collection. For readers familiar with the first edition, we point out three basic differences between it and the current version.

First, this edition contains seven entirely new chapters and one updated chapter from the first edition in order to focus on challenges of parenting in the twenty-first century. Our eight case studies sample a good cross-section of the world's societies: two in **Europe (**southern Europe – Portugal; northern Europe – Faroe Islands/Denmark); two in the **Middle East (**Israel; Palestinian Territories – West Bank/Gaza); one from **Asia** (People's Republic of China); one from **North America (**US); one from **Latin America (**Peru); and one in **Africa (**Côte d'Ivoire – West Africa; as well as immigrants from the West African nation of Guinea-Bissau now living in Portugal, and immigrants from the East African nation of Somalia now living in the US).

A good cross-section of the world's religions also appears in these new chapters, including Confucianism (People's Republic of China), Christianity (Catholicism – Quechua/Peru, Portugal; Protestantism Faroe Islands/Denmark), Islam (Somali-Americans; immigrants from Guinea-Bissau; Palestinians), Judaism (Israel), and an indigenous religion (Beng/Côte d'Ivoire). By design, Muslims are heavily represented in the new edition. In our post-September 11th world, Islam has become a primary focus for thinking about global issues by public policy makers, political leaders, journalists, and ordinary citizens alike. Representing a diverse set of Muslim families' childrearing

practices is a considered decision on our part, aimed to counter the essentialist Othering that occurs all too easily by non-Muslims concerning Muslim families' lives. At the same time, we present a chapter on Israeli Jewish childrearing practices to provide a more balanced perspective on the fraught region that is the Middle East.

The residents of our chosen societies support themselves in a variety of ways, from hunting/gathering, fishing, and farming, to teaching school, operating small businesses, and providing in-home health care. Most importantly for our purposes, these eight societies represent a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices with respect to infants, and members of each are forging new ways to raise children while accommodating the demands of life in industrialized and globalized societies. Together, these chapters suggest that childrearing is always conducted in a cauldron of religious, economic, and political contexts.

That said, our selection of eight societies is just that – a selection motivated by a variety of factors, prominent among them being the availability of scholarly investigation.

Second, parents living in the societies we highlight here engage in multiple ways with the contemporary challenges of modernity. The first edition of the book had a largely "indigenous" orientation, with most chapters chronicling local, small-scale groups. This new edition instead mostly emphasizes larger-scale societies and/or groups located in urban or semi-urban settings, from China to Europe. More specifically, the chapters especially address the following issues that (among others) confront families aiming to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century:

- What impact do globalization and migration have on parents' and children's lives?
- How can parents raise stable, healthy children in extraordinary contexts of violence and war?
- What are the particular childrearing challenges for Muslim and Jewish families living in the twin shadows of post-September 11th Islamophobia and anti-Semitism?

- How should new parents and grandparents manage intergenerational conflicts over childrearing agendas in contexts of rapid social change?
- What difference does systematic government support of families, via family-friendly policies and services, make for the well-being of parents and children?

Third, as noted above, all authors of this new edition's chapters are ethnographic specialists who undertook extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the communities about which they are writing. There, they conducted research conversing in one or more local language(s), using research methods ranging from formal questionnaires to immersion in everyday life in a particular society.

As we have engaged actively with the globalizing forces that partly (but by no means fully) mitigate cultural difference, the field of developmental psychology has itself engaged with cultural difference far more systematically than was the case when we published the first edition of this book. Indeed, some psychologists have recently coined the ironically oriented acronym WEIRD, to refer to the fact that, until recently, the majority of their research subjects have been overwhelmingly **W**estern, **E**ducated, from **I**ndustrialized societies, **R**ich, and living in **D**emocratic nations. The ironic use of "weird" to refer to precisely the group of people who were previously taken as normative reminds psychologists of the statistically unrepresentative nature of their earlier research pool when compared to the world's diverse populations. This critique is transforming the field with unprecedented cross-cultural studies of childhood that will account more realistically for human diversity. For its part, since the first edition of *A World of Babies*, the field of cultural anthropology has attracted many scholars interested in children's lives. We feel gratified if the first edition of *A World of Babies* contributed in some small way to these two welcome disciplinary changes to our respective fields. We offer this new edition as a further continuation of the very fruitful conversation that we see our two disciplines now enjoying.

Organization of the Book

Eight chapters chronicling particular childrearing regimes follow this Introduction. Each chapter begins with brief background information on the community in question, to provide some context for the childcare practices described. Our authors discuss local cultural routines as well as major historical events, basic economic and political structures (micro and macro), urban landscapes, and legal challenges.

A brief biography of the fictive author of a childcare "manual" for that community or nation follows each introduction. That manual then offers advice to (imagined) prospective and new parents (especially mothers) on a wide range of topics. Some, but not all, parenting issues cut across all chapters; the variability arises partly from differences in local contexts of childcare in these societies, and partly from the nature of the research conducted by each author. For example, some chapters focus on the first two years of life; where circumstances compel, and scholarly data allow, others extend the discussion into the middle years of childhood.

Each chapter also emphasizes particular themes that are especially relevant in local contexts. For example, our chapter on Peru has much to say about bilingualism (in Quechua and Spanish), while our chapter on the People's Republic of China focuses on sometimes competing, sometimes complementary childrearing agendas endorsed by two generations of women who are negotiating rapid social change, as the mother-in-law joins the household to care for the soon-to-be-born child of her pregnant daughter-in-law – a member of the urban middle class who works full-time as a teacher.

Beyond such particularities lies the unifying fact that members of all eight societies featured in this volume have undergone, and are continuing to experience, major social changes. Some of the values and practices recorded in earlier published ethnographic work are barely discernible. Our fictive manuals address imagined modern readers who want to raise

their children in ways that partly follow the ways of their grandparents and ancestors, and that partly accommodate the radically new circumstances of the twenty-first century that earlier generations could not have anticipated.

We invite you now to discover eight worlds of babies.