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## Cultural Views of Life Phases

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### **Abstract**

The knowledge base in the study of human development is built primarily from work with children from the modern, global, post-industrial population. This population is unrepresentative in many respects, not least in that childhood and adolescence is dominated by the experience of formal schooling—an experience missing from the lives of most of the world’s children until very recently. This entry will examine child development from the perspective of pre-modern societies as described in the ethnographic, archaeological and historic records. Specifically, we will review material indicative of cultural or indigenous models of development, phases and phase transitions, in particular.

Keywords: cultural models, life phases, development, rites-of-passage, cross-cultural variation, ethnography

### **Introduction**

Our goal is to convey the variability and commonality that exists in culturally constructed views of life phases. When examining these cases it becomes clear that societies differ in their models of development. However, nature provides predictable transitions (e.g. walking, speaking, theory of mind, puberty) upon which most societies build in constructing models of development. We describe these patterns and provide examples that best illustrate the variety and/or similarity found in culturally constructed views of life phases. An anthropological analysis of phases and transitions in children’s development takes into account three data sources. First, and most obviously, we consider nomenclature that is used to mark phases or transitions. Second, we take note of particular rites or ceremonies—aka Rites of Passage—associated with life phase transitions. Third, we draw on the ethnographic and historic records for evidence of changes in the behavior of children and their families that signal a shift in the child’s status. We utilize these data to construct broadly applicable cultural models of child development. These models coalesce around six phases in the life cycle, which, not coincidentally, corresponds to evolutionary biologists’ partitioning of the lifespan (Bogin and Smith 2012: 521 – Lifespan Development: Evolutionary Perspectives) This entry draws on a long-term project designed to develop an anthropological perspective on human development (Lancy 2007; 2008; 2010; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; Lancy and Grove 2011a; 2011b; Lancy et al 2010). Our database consists of archival accounts of childhood from nearly 1000 societies, ranging from the Paleolithic to the present and from every area of the world.

### **Phase Terminology**

The Bonerate are representative of the majority of societies that fail to name or identify transitions in the life course. They “cannot define precisely the onset of childhood...they have difficulty describing the boundaries between childhood and adolescence and between adolescence and adulthood (Broch 1990:15).” When we look at societies that do make such distinctions, we see great variability. At one extreme, the Busulu of E. Kalimantan name twenty-four distinct phases from *lemaub*, meaning to be able to roll over, to *nysagawan dungai lungud*, to carry a small bamboo water tube, to *timpun sinigod gegal*, the first appearance of breast buds (Appel-Warren 2012). By contrast, the Inuit of the Belcher Islands have only three named phases: (1) up to one year= *natarak*, (2) twelve-eighteen months= *qitungak* and (3) from three until they become betrothed they are= *tugusi* (Balicki 1970: 41).

The basis for named transitions also varies. For example, the Tukano of Brazil take note of physical features in designating phases. They have terms for twelve developmental transitions—birth through puberty. For example: *Soãgõákã* means “little red one,” noting a change in skin color after birth; *Duhigõ* means “one who sits down;” *Bõagõ* means “to creep;” *Syagõ* to walk and so on (Silva and Lillios 1962). The Igbo also use terms that note physical maturation: *ino odu* (be-sit) a child who sits at around three or four months; *igbe igbe* (crawl-crawl) when the child begins to crawl at seven or eight months; *iguzo mpe* (stand-up) when the child starts to walk; and *ifuteleze* (teething) when it begins to sprout teeth (Ottenberg 1989: 20).

The Baining [of New Britain Island] use mode of locomotion as the basis for phase naming conventions. A newborn baby is carried in an adult’s arms or in a sling tied across the chest. In answer to the question “how old is he [or she]?” a child of this age is described as *ta tal ka (ki)* or “they carry him [her].” After the age of five or six months, parents begin to carry their children on their shoulders. This form of transportation requires that the child have some sense of balance and support, and take some part in maintaining his or her posture. Children of this age are described as *ka (ki) kalak* or “he [she] sits on the shoulders.” An older child is identified by the phrase *ka (ki) tit* or “he [she] goes” which refers to crawling and, then, walking. An older child who has become even more independent (e.g., seven to nine years) is referred to as *ka (ki) tit mas* or “he [she] goes fully,” meaning that he or she goes for water, firewood or to gather in the bush (Fajans 1997: 86-7). In naming practices that focus on physical maturation and basic skills of locomotion and speech, the first three years are partitioned many more times than later in the life cycle.

Other societies use terms that call attention to the child’s accomplishments: Among the Giriama (Kenya), a two- to three-year-old is labeled, in effect, “water carrier.” An eight-year old girl is defined as a “maize pounder,” a boy of the same age is *muho ho murisa* “herd boy” (Wenger 1989: 98). In pre-modern Russia “our plowboy,” “our herd boy,” and “our nanny girl” were habitual terms parents used to address their children (Gorshkov 2009: 15). Ages sixteen to twenty in post-Inkan Peru were collectively designated *cocapalla* or coca harvester because youth of this age were expected to reap the state-owned *cocoa* crop (Dean 2002: 43). The Savras [India] recognize five phases in human development and name them according to the primary chores carried out at that age (Mohammad 1997).

## Rites of Passage

Life phase transitions may also be marked by a Rite of Passage. These celebrations denote the transition between one life phase and the next. Most rites include a separation from the previous life phase, a period of transformation, followed by a ceremony marking integration into the next phase (van Gennep 1908). As with naming conventions, rites of passage center around milestones in physical maturation or mark achievements or 'firsts.' These Rites are rarely tied to precise dates such as the birthday because pre-literate societies don't keep track of birth-dates or the passage of years.

### *Naming Ceremony*

Although birth would seem an obvious candidate for a rite of passage, it is interesting to note just how few societies treat this as worthy of such a celebration. We discuss below how early infancy is characterized, but the main reason that the birth is not seen as cause for celebration is that both mother and baby are in an extremely precarious state. Once it is clear that the infant has a good grasp on life and paternity acknowledged, the infant is introduced to the community via the naming ceremony, which can occur days, weeks or even months after birth. During this liminal period, there is a clear sense that the infant is still in the process of becoming a human being (Lancy 2013). This is conveyed by the timing of the naming practices. For example, in Brazil, Wari' babies usually do not receive a personal name until they are about six-weeks old. Until then, babies of both sexes are called *arawet*, which translates literally as "still being made" (Conklin and Morgan 1996: 672). The confirmation of personhood is delayed on Gau Island in Fiji, Melanesia until the infant is four days old after which a celebration called the "falling of the umbilical cord (*lutu na nona i vicovico*) occurs (Toren 1990: 169)." In the Himalayas, the Lepcha of Sikkim, continue to refer to the newborn as a "rat child" as if it were still inside the mother's womb. After three days and a thorough cleansing, the infant is welcomed into the community with a feast (Gorer 1967). Among the Masai of East Africa, the first name is given on the fourth day after birth, when the child is brought outside to be shown the sun. The child is named in the presence of the father, mother and three elders (Huntingford 1953: 116-17). Among the Azande of north-central Africa, the midwife is not paid and the infant is not named until they are sure that it will survive. When survival seems likely the whole community takes part in a ceremony in which the infant is removed from the birthing hut and passed through the smoke of a greenwood fire (Baxter 1953: 72).

### *First Haircut*

The First Haircut can occur with the Naming Ceremony, but usually happens some time after. The First Haircut doesn't necessarily correlate with a particular age as concerns about viability are not easily set aside. Rather, the First Haircut seems to commemorate the child's successful survival during a very difficult period. The Rite may also be used to signal a weakening of the child's exclusive ties to its mother and the establishment of ties to its father and extended kin network (Fricke 1994: 133). With the First Haircut we also see the beginning of differentiation between the sexes. The Kurds of Rawanduz give the First Haircut after the child has survived a year (Masters 1953: 159). The equivalent Balinese rite occurs at about the same age and until the First Haircut the child is not allowed to touch the ground and must be carried at all times (Geertz 1961: 104). In Northwestern Africa, the Bambara of Mali shave only part of the child's head. Some locks are kept in a container, some thrown into the river as a sacrifice and elders examine

the remaining hair to determine the child's *téré* or character (Paques and Turner 1954: 119). The Navajo see the First Haircut as a necessary step on the path to Navajo personhood, attained only after the child speaks its first words demonstrating that it has control over its thought and voice (Schwarz 1997: 146-47).

### *Accomplishments*

Once the child is free and clear of threats to its existence, the next major milestones are related to puberty and marriage. However, it is not uncommon to make a minor rite of passage out of the child's accomplishments or "Firsts." These celebrations mark the child's developmental progression as a contributing member of the family. For example the Kaoka of the Solomon Islands allocate small plots of land to their sons and boast of the yams they will grow (Hogbin 1969: 39). In Central Africa a Mbuti boy bringing home his first "real animal" is immediately proclaimed a hunter and receives scars (cicatrization) incised by one of the "great hunters" indicating his changed status (Turnbull 1965: 257). In North America, Hopi girls who have mastered grinding corn are "shown off" to visitors (Hough 1915: 63). Among the Saami of northern Europe there are no rites of passage or acknowledgement of any kind for a growing girl until she completes her first pair of reindeer shoes or some other complex needlework (Pelto 1962). Other examples of the marking of "Firsts" with rites of passage are: a Netsilik girl's first caught salmon or a Netsilik boy's first goose (Balicki 1970: 45), a young Kaoka boy's first pig (Hogbin 1969: 39), a Wogeo child given his or her first garden plot (Hogbin 1970: 139-40), the first shepherd's crook given to a Vlach six-year-old (Campbell 1964: 156) and the first bow and arrow provided a Kutenai Indian boy (Grinnel 1923: 115).

### *Adolescent Initiation*

The timing of the most commonly employed rite of passage is dependent on the appearance of the first signs of puberty. Once the growth spurt, deepening of the voice, menses, breast buds or pubic hair become visible, a rite of passage may follow. On the island of Vanatinai in Papua New Guinea, at approximately fourteen years of age, the first signs of puberty become apparent. "For a girl that is when her breast buds are 'the size of betel nuts,' and for a boy when his voice begins to change (Lepowsky 1998: 128)." Physiological change and emerging sexuality are often one of the foci of initiation. Among the Tamil of southern India, a girl at first menstruation must avoid 'hot' foods and mature men for both would inflame her already heightened state of passion. The best cure for the state of heightened passion among nubile young Tamil women is "marriage and frequent sexual intercourse (Reynolds 1991: 40)." Among the Dogon of north-central Africa, parents keep a watchful eye on the formation of their daughter's breasts and other signs of sexual maturity. They are concerned that, if the necessary puberty rite is not performed before her first menses, when she finally becomes pregnant, her first child may die (Calame-Griaule 1986). Among the Muria of India children are initiated (scarification on the chest and upper arms of the body) after the onset of heterosexual relations to acknowledge this important phase in their transition into adulthood (Elwin 1943).

Rites for girls emphasize fecundity, subservience to senior women and obedience to one's future husband (Richards 1956: 103) and those for boys, subservience to senior men and dominance over women (Tuzin 1980: 26). The youth is forcibly weaned from the "bad influence" of the peer

group (Rao 2006: 59). Didactic instruction in the “lore” of the society is not evident. On the contrary, the initiation rite is an opportunity to impress upon young people their ignorance and powerlessness. “In Kpelle society secrecy...supports the elders’ political and economic control of the youth (Murphy 1980: 193).” Children entering puberty may need to prove to the larger community that they are ready for adulthood and so are tested. They may be sequestered, go without food and forced to withstand physically challenging or painful ordeals. Among the Mapuche, at first menses a girl is segregated in a corner of the *toldo*. For the next two days she is made to run long distances as fast as she can. On the third day she is told to go and gather three bundles of firewood leaving them at three different locations. After she completes these tasks there is a celebration of the girl’s newly achieved status (Cooper 1946). In northwestern New Guinea sexual maturation or menses in Kwoma girls occurs without public recognition, but puberty in Kwoma boys must be induced by imitating menstruation. During their rite of passage, older men repeatedly scrape a boy’s penis to induce bleeding. The boys are encouraged to continually bleed themselves after their rite of passage is complete to ensure proper growth and to keep themselves fit (Williamson 1983).

Puberty rites may commence at the first signs of puberty or later and they may be quite short in duration or last several years. Hence the completion of the rites may not automatically confer adult status. There may be further, subtler tests of an adolescent’s preparedness for marriage and family formation. Gusii parents may withhold approval and resources from the aspirant bride, demanding “evidence of *okongainia*...which means...being willing and able to do the work of an adult woman...and perform these duties without having to be ordered (LeVine and Lloyd 1966: 167).” As we will discuss shortly, there are multiple pathways, cross-culturally, to full adult status. Consequently, marriage is often treated as only a very minor rite of passage.

## **Life Phases**

Our survey of the ethnographic literature shows that one cannot rely on semantically or ritually marked transitions in the life course as a guide to the cultural construction of child development. This is because phases are rarely specified in full by formal means; rather, one must construct them from descriptions of the child’s behavior and the behavior of others towards the child (Mead 1947: 234). For example, in an earlier and widely cited survey, the authors identified a widespread but un-named phenomenon they referred to as “toddler rejection” (Weisner and Gallimore 1977: 177), which defines conceptually how many societies view the post-weaning period. Anthropologists consistently note a significant shift in the status and treatment of the child between 2 and 3 but this phase is rarely labeled as such.

### *Phase One: Birth and the External Womb*

As noted earlier, the child’s birth may be shrouded in secrecy. Pregnancy itself is rarely acknowledged publicly because there are many factors that might adversely affect the outcome. A wait-and-see attitude is adopted as the mother may not be physically able to carry the pregnancy to full term due to poor health or she may choose to terminate it due to lack of support from family or the community. This wait-and-see attitude is carried into the birthing process and post-partum seclusion provides a curtain of secrecy and security behind which the fate of the infant is decided. After birth an infant may be seen as still intimately linked with its mother for

survival and in mortal danger. “[The Somali] conception is that the newborn child for a certain time after birth is still...part of the flesh and blood of the mother (Cerulli 1959: 25).” “[Wari] mother and infant are treated as a unit; for about six weeks after birth they remain secluded together inside their house...babies of both sexes are called *arawet*, which translates literally as ‘still being made’ (Conklin and Morgan 1996: 672).” The newborn is not fully human: it’s bones are soft (Helander 1988: 150); it is pale and lacks the proper human color (Childs 1949: 120); it has no mind or thoughts other than the breast (Shostak 1981: 113); it can’t speak and is as yet, empty (DuBois et al: 1944, 76). And these folk beliefs are consistent with most theories of human ontogeny that suggest the infant is “born three months too early (Bogin and Smith 2012).”

The post-partum womb is a key component of the way the infant is conceptualized and cared for. So tight is the bond, the Japanese infant is looked upon as part of the mother’s body (Lebra 1994: 260). The use of swaddling and severely confining cradles or cradleboards is widespread. In the high Andes, babies are almost constantly confined to a “manta pouch,” which functions to reduce the baby’s metabolism and need for energy (Tronick et al 1994: 1009–10). Nurzay women explained that “the newborn baby’s flesh is *oma* (lit. unripe) like uncooked meat, and that only by swaddling will it become strong (*chakahosi*) and solid like cooked (*pokh*) meat (Casimir 2010: 16).” [Navajo babies are kept] “in the cradleboard to make them straight and strong. Some women let their children lie on sheepskins and roll about, but they are always weak, sick children (Leighton and Kluckhohn 1948: 23).”

Even more common, is the practice of attaching the baby to its mother via a length of cloth or sling. The nursing mother shifts the baby quickly to the breast at the first sign of movement (Broch 1990: 31). The infant remains within a cloth envelope throughout and the nursing process passes completely unnoted by others. A baby should be invisible (Lancy and Grove 2011a: 283) to protect it from many threats including witchcraft and the supernatural. Even the father may be seen as dangerous (Gray 1994: 67) and the post-partum taboo prohibiting contact between the nursing mother and her husband is widespread (Lloyd 1970: 81).

Another component of this phase is the widely distributed notion that the infant is in a liminal state suspended between the human and spirit worlds (Razy 2007). There is the idea that the soul and body are only loosely connected and that, if the infant is not closely confined, its soul will escape back to the world of spirits and ancestors (Arden 2011; Leavitt 1989). Care must be taken to prevent the infant from moving its limbs vigorously or becoming agitated (Nicolaisen 1988; Lancy 2013 – Infant and Child Development Theories).

### *Phase Two: Joining the Community*

As we’ve indicated in Phase One, the infant doesn’t exist as a distinct entity. The likelihood of death or infanticide are so great that the infant’s passing goes unmarked and there will be no formal funeral, burial or mourning (Becker 2007: 282). In effect, gestation continues beyond birth. The infant must exit from this metaphorical womb and enjoy a second birth. This second or social birth (Fabian 1990) may be marked by a rite of passage such as naming or the first haircut or nail-trimming (Masters 1953) as discussed earlier. An important element in the construction of personhood is the child’s acquisition of kin and linkages to her father, his clan and extended

family (Blanchy 2007). “Many Hubeer... post-natal practices [involve the] shedding of the symbols for maternal ties [and establishment of] agnatic links (Helander 1988: 150).” The transition from crawling (which is animal-like) to walking (human) may be highlighted. The child is now acknowledged as human or at least as potentially human.

Another very important attribute of the baby’s “coming out” is a very sharp spike in the involvement of allomothers. Humans are cooperative breeders and, within a few months of birth, the baby is increasingly under the care of grandmothers, older siblings and fathers (Hrdy 2006: 25) so that mothers can return to their labors full-time. Mothers may be so eager to attract the assistance of allomothers that they market their babies in interesting ways to neighbors and kin (Ochs and Schiefflin 1984: 279; Gottlieb 2004). A thriving infant will attract the caring attention of many, as well as threats from those who might be envious of the fertile mother so steps must be taken to protect the now very public baby from malevolence (Einarsdottir 2006: 116-17; Friedl 1997: 88; Jenkins et al 1985: 43). The nursling enjoys a kind of honeymoon of affection and care from all sides but as weaning approaches, a change is evident.

### *Phase Three: Separation*

This phase corresponds to our Western notion of “early childhood” (Historical Change and Human Development). As noted earlier, a prominent feature of this phase is “toddler rejection” (Weisner and Gallimore 1977: 176). Weaning, sometimes early—long before the child might wean itself—and severe, is widely reported. “A [Luo] woman who is pregnant is supposed to stop breastfeeding, since it is believed that “the milk will be poisonous to the nursing baby and will cause it to get the illness *ledho* (Cosminsky 1985: 38).” Numerous ethnographic accounts show mothers imposing early and abrupt termination of breastfeeding. Extended nursing may be condemned as prolonging the infancy phase, resulting in a “weak, simpering” adult (Turner 1987: 107). The mother is also eager to wean the child from her back which may be just as tearfully resisted as weaning from the breast (Maretzki et al 1963: 447). The Yoruba are quite typical in averring “mothers and grandmothers [prefer] wiry and agile babies who learn to walk early (Zeitlin 1996: 412).” The Nso of the Cameroons believe that: “A standing baby... makes less work for the mother (Keller 2007: 124).”

Aside from the attentions of allomothers (often a grandmother at this phase), separation from the mother is aided by the child’s powerful attraction to the neighborhood playgroup. “With the arrival of the next sibling, *dénanola* (infancy) is over. Now, play begins... and membership in a social group of [Mandinka] peers is taken to be critical to... the forgetting of the breast” (Whittemore 1989: 92).” The locus of the play group may be in a space that the Kpelle label the “mother ground” as it lies in the vicinity of at least a few working but attentive adults (Lancy 1996: 85). Aside from freeing up the mother for other pursuits, sending toddlers off in the company of sibling caretakers and playmates is seen as an essential component of their socialization. For example, in rural Bengal “Little girls accompany older girls in gathering, and they gradually learn the needed skills (Rohner and Chaki-Sircar 1988: 33).” Marquesan mothers see toddlers as developing skills because they *want* to hang out with and emulate their older siblings. By imitating their sib-caretakers “toddlers learn to run, feed and dress themselves, go outside to urinate and defecate and help with household chores (Martini and Kirkpatrick 1992: 124).”



Once the child has accepted its separation from the mother's breast and back, it is readmitted into the family circle, so to speak. The behaviors and conversations of those older constitute a kind of classroom where the child rapidly learns its culture. Matsigenka "infants and young children are embedded in the middle of quotidian activities where they are positioned to quietly observe and learn what others are doing (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009: 395)." "At the age of three he chooses his own place at the [Wolof] family meal, and here he is encouraged to acquire social norms (Zempleni-Rabain 1973: 222)."

In addition to learning social graces, this period constitutes the child's induction into the family economy (Lancy 2012a). Margaret Mead offered one of the earliest descriptions of a phenomenon often recorded since. [On Samoa], "the tiniest little stagerer has tasks to perform—to carry water, to borrow fire brands, to fetch leaves to stuff the pig....learning to run errands tactfully is one of the first lessons of childhood (Mead 1928: 633)." Often the child is overeager to emulate those older and they will be reined in. In Botswana, toddlers may be prevented from handling grain for fear they'll let it spill on the ground (Bock and Johnson 2004). Bamana children are prevented from messing up planted rows in the garden (Polak 2003: 126) and little Inuit boys are kept some distance from the prey during a hunt so they won't scare it off (Matthiasson 1979: 74). Around five-seven, a shift in expectations occurs. Tolerance for the child's helpful but clumsy and inconsistent contributions wanes.

#### *Phase Four: Getting Noticed*

Around five, children become "useful." They are expected to contribute to the household, by helping with chores and taking care of siblings, as examples (Broch 1990: 28). Although children may participate in household chores from an early age, they may not be trusted with more serious responsibilities until they "gain sense" (Harkness and Super 1986). The child's lack of sense is also cited to excuse them from misdemeanors that would be chastised in an older child (Maretzki et al 1963: 481; Read 1960: 89). Pashtun girls in middle childhood are sent by their mothers to discreetly scout out and give voluminous reports on the latest events in the village or on a recent scandal (Lindholm 1982: 181). The workload and responsibility grows with the child's size, strength and competency. Javanese and Nepalese children work about four hours a day as six- to eight-year-olds, this rises to ten hours or more by age fifteen (Nag et al 1978). By age twelve, Aka and Hadza children are already self-supporting in terms of foraging ability (Hewlett and Cavalli-Sforza 1986: 930; Hill and Hurtado 1996: 223). Twelve-year-old Bakgalagadi girls can run an entire household (Lancaster 1984: 86).

Gender differentiation becomes much more pronounced in middle childhood (Lancy and Grove 2011a). Girls become more closely associated with the domestic sphere. Conversely, boys may actually gain more freedom from the home and their mother's control (Pope-Edwards 2005: 87), especially if they are relocated to an all-male domicile (Morton 1996: 112). There are limits placed on interaction with the opposite sex and clothing reflects heightened modesty requirements (Lawton 2007: 46). At this age, the Berber boy will have "only limited contact with their mothers and are given a pair of under garments (*serwal*) to wear under the *jelloba* and also a skullcap (Hatt 1974: 139)." Dusun call boys, "without loincloth" and girls "without a skirt" until about 5 years old when they are then called "child man" or "virgin" and given appropriate

clothing to wear (Williams 1969: 86). A gap opens between the relative workloads of girls and boys and relative freedom to roam (Nag et al 1978). Girls are expected to help with the care of siblings and the daily routine work of their mothers (Nerlove et al 1974: 275). But in an Iranian village, boys are “turned out in the morning like cows,” coming home for nourishment and sleep (Friedl 1997: 148; Watson-Franke 1976: 194).

#### *Phase Five: Youth in Limbo*

No phase in the life cycle is a variable, cross-culturally, as adolescence. In the most thorough review of the literature Schlegel and Barry assert that adolescence is discernible in all societies (1991: 18). However, puberty, and the onset of adolescence may be evident as young as twelve in well-nourished populations and as late as seventeen where nutrition is poor (Eveleth and Tanner 1990: 170). Marriage, child-bearing and the establishment of an independent household mark the end of adolescence. In Kau Sai, a traditional Chinese fishing village, marriage and household formation begin at sixteen, immediately following the first menses (Ward 1970: 115) while Masai males aren't permitted to marry before thirty (Spencer 1970: 137). In the first case development into adulthood proceeds seamlessly as children reliably acquire the skills appropriate to adults of the same gender and are fully competent at an early age. In the second, a rigid hierarchy among males diverts pubertal males from sex to warrior status—a role they can only fulfill by avoiding women and living at the outer perimeter of the group's territory. Pubescent girls join the polygynous households of much older, senior men as junior wives (Plasticity in Human Behavior across the Lifespan).

For most societies, adolescence, especially if it lasts longer than a year or two, is somewhat problematic. First there is the challenge of adolescent sexuality. Youth are typically interested in sex well before society thinks they are capable of managing a family. We earlier discussed the initiation rite as a means to enforce emotional maturity and deference to one's elders. Other tactics include seclusion. The Khmer seclude daughters after first menses in a state referred to as *coul plup*, or “entering the shade.” The period varies but a longer period of seclusion provokes a more generous bride price (Smith-Hefner 1993: 145-46). While the primary purpose of seclusion seems to be to preserve the girl's virtue to insure a successful marriage, a secondary purpose may be to shape the girl's outlook to more closely match that of the older women. A high ranking Tlingit girl spends two years in seclusion during which she is informed of her clan's history and provided with homilies and more forceful reminders to maintain behavior consonant with her rank, such as avoiding gossip (Markstrom 2008: 145). Following seclusion, the Tlingit girl was considered marriageable and “prudent...parents took pains to marry her off promptly (De Laguna 1965: 21).” Even in the absence of seclusion or initiation, pubertal girls are sheltered by the distaff side of the household. Their association with and close ties to the mother begin quite early as they assist with their younger sibs and with work in the house, garden, with livestock and craft production. So while adolescent males enjoy a wider compass for their activities, adolescent girls rarely leave their mother's orbit.

The parallel process for boys—to girls' seclusion—is removal to a dormitory or men's house. An Igbo boy moves out of his natal home to an all-male compound (Ottenberg 2006: 118). This men's sanctuary is the *haus tambaran* in the Sepik River area of Papua New Guinea (Tuzin 1980). *Tapirapé* adolescent boys are moved into the *takana* or men's house where their

proximity to men affords them the opportunity to observe and replicate typically male behaviors (Wagley 1977: 149). Boys are sequestered to erase the taint of femininity acquired during years of association (primarily) with women while becoming imprinted with the male ethos. Around the world societies that devote attention to masculinizing youth are often quite war-like and male adolescence may be synonymous with warriorhood. Creating a cohort of new warriors is not the only means societies have of taming the adolescent male “gang.” They can be conscripted to serve in work details that benefit the village as a whole. Temne living in the young men’s house “*kabankalo* served as a cooperative work group for the chief, their fathers and other big men of the chiefdom (Dorjahn 1982: 41).” Not so subtly, they will be reminded of their subservient status vis-à-vis the village elite.

Aside from physical and social maturity and the acquisition of critical survival skills, the portal from adolescence to adulthood is usually opened only when the requisite property is available. This may include payment of a bride-price or dowry, the construction of a home for the new couple, the provision of critical resources such as tools or livestock. When the traditional pathways to adulthood break down through the abandonment of these traditional practices and customs or their suppression by church or government authorities, adolescents can’t become social adults (Biersack 1998). Instead, they become “insurgents” (Honwana 2006; Rosen 2005) or village bikhets (Leavitt 1998).

### *Phase Six: Adulthood*

The most important thing to understand about adulthood is that, outside the contemporary bourgeoisie, societies are organized as a gerontocracy (Lancy 1996: 13; 2008: 11). One’s status is governed by age and fertility. Marriage per se may carry little weight and children of ten may already be capable of the full range of “adult” subsistence tasks (Lancy 2012a); hence, it may take many years after marriage to become accepted as an adult. The Javanese marry their daughters as early as nine or ten to stave off any hint of premarital sex and illegitimacy. They become a woman under the guise of their mother-in-law (Geertz 1961: 56). A Bagisu bride is given a “woman’s” skirt, but she can’t wear it until the birth of her first child (La Fontaine 1959: 47). In Sumatra, a married Malay woman is dependent on her father, much like her unmarried sisters, until she gives birth to her first child (Swift 1965: 124). The same criterion is often applied to young males (Leavitt 1998: 186). For the Sambia, adulthood status is denied the young couple until they have successfully conceived and birthed at least two children (Herdt 2001: 164). Progeny are so important to the Akan that a man without children may be called “wax penis” and upon death, childless adults may have thorns driven into the soles of their feet (Warren 1986: 11). A Chukchee man will take an additional wife if his first wife does not give him children; his first wife, if she is a “good” wife will gladly encourage him to do so (Bogoraz-Tan 1924: 600).

### **Conclusion**

Cultural models of human development (Strauss 1992) vary cross-culturally but shared patterns can be detected in the ethnographic record. Clues to discerning such patterns can be sought in milestones of biological development such as first menses and in indigenous nomenclature and rites of passage. One must also examine child care, dress, patterns of residence, selection of care

takers, assignment of chores and other culturally sanctioned practices that change reliably over the life cycle. These broadly applicable cultural models coalesce into six life phases in the life cycle. Phase I includes the birth of the infant and early infancy. Unacknowledged by society, the newborn is still seen as part of the mother and therefore still being made. Its survival not guaranteed, the infant is kept tucked away in some form of an external womb, until its survival is sure. Phase II occurs when it is clear that the infant will survive. The infant is introduced to the community, usually through a rite of passage that may include a first haircut, and/or a naming ceremony. Alloparents join the mother in caring for the child. Phase III removes the child from the mother's breast and provides a push toward independence with weaning, walking and toilet training. Toddler Rejection, as this is often called, is mitigated by the lure of the playgroup. In Phase IV children become useful. Younger children are expected to do chores and, as they gain common sense, are entrusted with ever more difficult tasks. Gender differentiation is expressed as girls become tied to the domestic sphere and boys are allowed more freedom from the domestic sphere. Phase V or adolescence is highly variable and elastic across and within cultures. Passage into or out of this phase may be marked by an initiation rite. In some cases, adolescence is short as youth begin cohabitation leading eventually to family formation. Lengthening this phase often creates a social problem with youth aggregating into gangs and behaving anti-socially and we discussed a suite of culturally constructed responses. Phase VI commences with marriage, but marriage is not the key to adulthood. It is rather successfully siring/bearing children and raising them.

## **Outlook**

The ethnographic record—with well over a thousand discrete reports of childhood from hundreds of societies—has proven a rich source of ideas for reconsidering child development. We have drawn on such sources in constructing this brief overview of Life Phases. However, we can identify a number of additional issues and questions that might be pursued. For example, in the ethnographic record, infant and child mortality is very high. This tragedy has been largely eliminated in post-industrial society. On the other hand, children in economically developed societies suffer from emotional stress, depression and disorders like ADHD—all completely unknown in indigenous societies. Are genotypes now preserved that would not have survived prior to the development of modern neonatal medical care? Here's another paradox. Children in small-scale societies are eagerly involved in daily routines and eagerly help out with chores. This contribution to family life continues throughout childhood. Such predilections have almost completely disappeared in contemporary bourgeoisie society and parents lament their children's selfish, self-centered attitudes. Could there be a critical period at 18 months to 2 years where the child's pro-social attempts are rebuffed because letting them help "makes extra work" or is too dangerous and the motive is extinguished? Or are contemporary parents so concerned about raising unique individuals that they give little thought to pro-sociality whereas traditional economies are dependent on cooperative, sociocentric children? In the ethnographic record, we see that children are rarely pushed to learn or develop; they progress at their own pace. Recognition of achievement or celebrating a child's birthdays and other milestones is rare to non-existent. Praise and gifts are offered rarely. In contrast, we track age and many other milestones, carefully calibrating progress against a "standard." In contemporary societies a child can be identified as failing or "developmentally challenged" almost from birth. At the same time we lavish praise on our children, all of whom are "special." So, one minute they're perfect, the

next flawed. Could this be the source for the epidemic of emotional disorders? In indigenous societies adolescence varies in length but, in most societies, children have mastered the full suite of adult subsistence skills and are self-sufficient not long after puberty. In contemporary society, preparation to become employed and self-sufficient and then “get established” in a career may prolong the adolescent phase for a decade or more. Are there social consequences of this drastic increase in the period of juvenility? Until quite recently, formal education affected a tiny minority. In traditional societies children are primarily social learners and parents rarely see the need to teach. Children learn largely through observation, imitation and practice. It is our impression that we are witnessing the rapid spread of a form of learned helplessness. Youth in bourgeoisie society seem unable to learn without guidance from a teacher. The belief that children’s activities require the careful guidance of an adult extends to play, an activity formerly the exclusive domain of children. Are we undermining our children’s very powerful abilities (the basis of human culture) to learn socially? Analysis of the ethnographic record provides numerous examples of the incongruity between how indigenous and bourgeoisie societies view and structure childhood. This contrast sheds light on the lives of all the world’s children, enriching conversations about the course of development.

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