

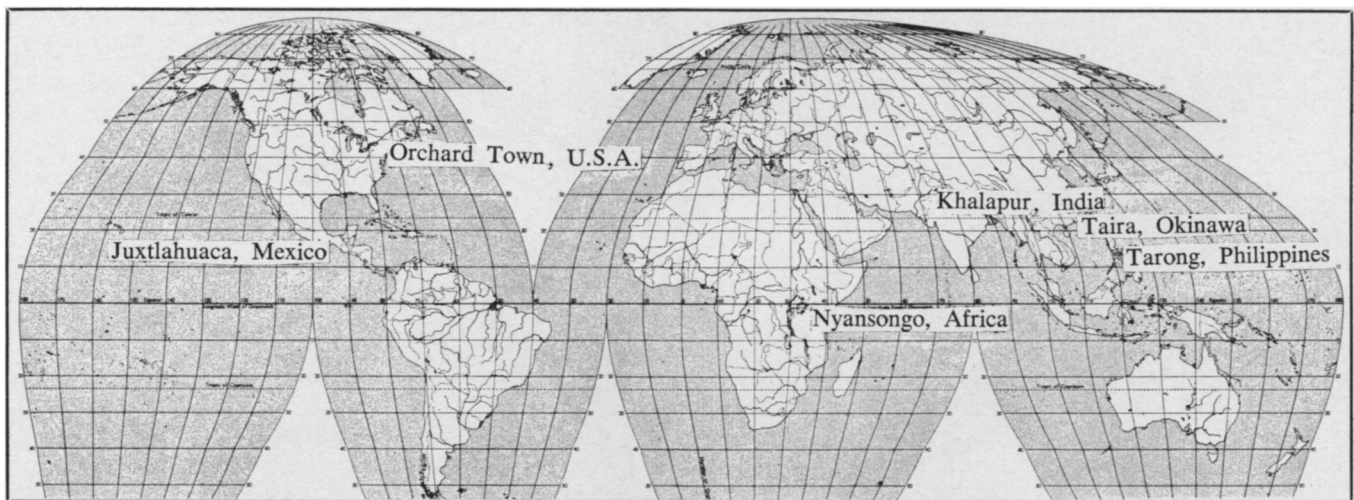
ANTHROPOLOGY

Children of Six Cultures

Forces shaping personality begin to emerge after a decade's work



by Patricia McBroom *Children care for younger ones in the altruistic Gusii culture.*



The six cultures chosen for study represent culturally homogeneous groups, not necessarily national character.

A Rajput boy grows up in a house full of relatives; his mother is cloistered in the back courtyard with other wives; he learns the values of the land-owning, warrior Rajput caste.

A New England-born Yankee boy, half-way round the world, grows up in a small family where the sexes are far more equal, the houses are widely spaced and everyone has more possessions than he can use.

Although their lives seem so different, a common thread runs through both boys' experiences. Both cultures are egoistic. The children would rather dominate others than give useful advice and they more often seek help and attention than offer it.

Why these children should share a pattern of egoism while others—from villages in Kenya, Mexico and the Philippines for example—are altruistic, was a question requiring years of pains-

taking, detailed research which is still going on.

Some cultural force had apparently been working on the raw human material in roughly the same way. But the anthropologist searching through culture for basic causes is like a neurotic searching through his life history for personal revelation. He can take any number of dead end streets and be misled by interference from extraneous issues. Only cross cultural projects in depth can cut through the confusion.

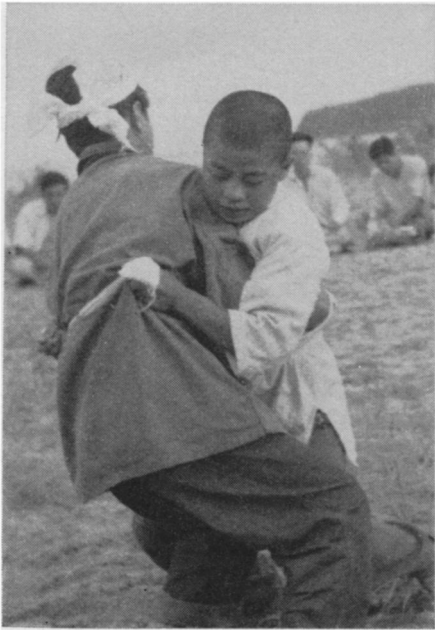
Such research has been undertaken on six cultures since the early 1950's by anthropologists at Harvard, Cornell and Yale Universities. Teams of scientists spent 6 to 14 months interviewing parents and children in six cultures, including a village in Okinawa as well as the Rajput, Kenyans, Yankees, Mexican Indians and Filipinos. In addition to personal data, they assem-

bled a comprehensive profile of each culture—its history, economy, class structure, family patterns, religion, child rearing habits and other features.

The object of this decade of research has been to isolate basic cultural forces shaping the emotional makeup of children. Assuming, for instance, that childrearing is a basic cultural force, they wanted to find out what circumstances mold the parents' treatment of children and what are the consequences.

The children, 134 in each society, were tested in nine dimensions, among them altruism, egoism and aggression. More is known at the moment about the first two than about aggression, but it is already clear that while egoism and altruism are in fact opposite traits, aggression bears no easy relationship to either one.

For whatever comfort it may be to Americans concerned about violence,



Wrestling Okinawan boys.



Secluded Rajput women.

the Yankee tradition of egoism does not appear to be an important cause of aggression. Yankee children lack both altruism and aggressiveness and, according to the data collected in field studies, score below all the other cultures on these two traits.

"I was surprised," says Dr. John W. M. Whiting, director of the six-culture study at Harvard. "I thought that egoistic people would be the more aggressive, but it's not true." Insofar as American society reflects Yankee culture, "dependency is our problem, not aggression," says Dr. Whiting.

Yankee children score particularly high on seeking attention. Even girls, who are throughout all six cultures more altruistic than boys, break the norm in New England, showing a high need for attention. "Yankee children boast so much, they haven't much time left for other things," says Dr. Whiting.

Egoism poses particular problems to Yankees because the society lacks the rich adult resources characteristic of extended families in India and Okinawa (another egoistic culture). The child can't easily turn to relatives when he wears out his parents with demands.

"No wonder we in the West have been preoccupied with dependency," says Dr. William M. Lambert, Cornell's project director. "Ours tend to be exactly the conditions of family life where such behavior does occur to a high degree. America and Europe should worry about this behavior system."

Solving the dependency problem, however, would be rather difficult. According to Dr. Whiting's analysis, egoism is the product of social complexity and altruism its victim.

"The more complex societies are the egoistic ones," he says. Yankee, Rajput and Okinawan cultures are, among the six, the three most complex, as measured by such things as the presence of social classes, a full time priesthood and the division of labor into occupations. People of the three altruistic cultures in Kenya, Mexico and the Philippines are subsistence farmers whose survival depends on the entire family working. Discipline in such societies tends to be very strict and it is apparently this strictness, plus heavy responsibility placed on children, that creates altruism.

As societies grow in complexity, women and children become relatively useless in an economic sense, and mothers loosen their discipline. The children as a result develop egoistic rather than altruistic traits.

Rajput mothers are by far the most permissive. They often treat disobedience with indulgence and their children are more egoistic than any others, even than the Yankees.

By contrast the African mothers in a Gusii village in the highlands of Kenya keep children in line with unvarnished physical force. They must be taught to give, freeing women to work in the fields.

Asked what she would do if her child shows anger toward her, a Gusii mother replies: "I refuse her food for that. I tell her 'You're my child. Do you realize the difficulties in raising you?' I can refuse her food for five days until she realizes."

To the same question, a Rajput mother answers: "I console her and take her in my lap. I say, 'What is wrong? Why are you angry?'"

The Yankee mother probably will walk away and let the child sputter.

Of all six groups, Gusii mothers are the most severely authoritarian and their children are the most altruistic.

But similar patterns hold for Mixtec Indians living in a section of the Mexican town, Juxtlahuaca, and for the people of a Philippine barrio on Luzon, where mothers are by necessity bosses, in charge of a work force.

On the crucial question of aggression and its relationship to discipline, there are so far no clear answers. In some societies such as the Mixtec, children who fight are severely punished, but the anthropologists do not know how successful this training is. Neither Mixtec nor Yankee children show much physical aggression, and in Yankee society there is almost no attempt to control it.

According to the Yankee attitude, if the kid can't get along with some child, he can always play with someone else. Mixtec parents cannot afford to be so aloof, says Dr. Lambert, because the man of the family next door is likely to be someone's brother, so closely are households interrelated.

Nevertheless, says Dr. Lambert, the anthropologist cannot predict a child's aggressiveness by the way he has been disciplined. "There is no relation, either way, that has been discovered so far, neither within any culture, nor across the cultures."

But a subtle thread does emerge from the aggression material. Since fighting between children is highly devalued in Mixtec society, and ignored or even encouraged in Yankee society, these values must reflect themselves somehow in child behavior.

Dr. Lambert believes they are reflected in the children who tend to be leaders. That is, in Mexico the aggressive child will be shunned, while in the United States, "He will be valued and made a leader."

Support for this theory seems to be coming from the body of data which suggests that it is the socially active, confident, lively child who most reflects the attitude of his society toward aggression.

"In egoistic cultures, the leaders are more apt to be aggressive in one form or another," says Dr. Richard Longabaugh, Harvard psychologist who has worked on the aggression data. In Rajput and Yankee societies this takes the form of verbal aggression, while in Okinawa it takes physical form.

In altruistic societies, however, there is no such relationship between a child's aggressiveness and his standing in the group.

When the children are ranked according to how much they fight, excluding verbal aggression and playful assaults, Gusii and Okinawan children come out as most aggressive, followed by Rajputs, Mexican Indians, Filipinos and Yankees. ◇