I

Orienting Concepts
and Ways of Understanding
the Cultural Nature of Human Development

Human development is a cultural process. As a biological species, humans are defined in terms of our cultural participation. We are prepared by both our cultural and biological heritage to use language and other cultural tools and to learn from each other. Using such means as language and literacy, we can collectively remember events that we have not personally experienced —becoming involved vicariously in other people's experience over many generations.

Being human involves constraints and possibilities stemming from long histories of human practices. At the same time, each generation continues to revise and adapt its human cultural and biological heritage in the face of current circumstances.

My aim in this book is to contribute to the understanding of cultural patterns of human development by examining the regularities that make sense of differences and similarities in communities' practices and traditions. In referring to cultural processes, I want to draw attention to the configurations of routine ways of doing things in any community's approach to living. I focus on people's participation in their communities' cultural practices and traditions, rather than equating culture with the nationality or ethnicity of individuals.

For understanding cultural aspects of human development, a primary goal of this book is to develop the stance that *people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of*

the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities—which also change.

To date, the study of human development has been based largely on research and theory coming from middle-class communities in Europe and North America. Such research and theory often have been assumed to generalize to all people. Indeed, many researchers make conclusions from work done in a single group in overly general terms, claiming that "*the child* does such-and-so" rather than "these children did such-and-so."

For example, a great deal of research has attempted to determine at what age one should expect "the child" to be capable of certain skills. For the most part, the claims have been generic regarding the age at which children enter a stage or should be capable of a certain skill.

A cultural approach notes that different cultural communities may expect children to engage in activities at vastly different times in childhood, and may regard "timetables" of development in other communities as surprising or even dangerous. Consider these questions of when children can begin to do certain things, and reports of cultural variations in when they do:

When does children's intellectual development permit them to be responsible for others? When can they be trusted to take care of an infant?

In middle-class U.S. families, children are often not regarded as capable of caring for themselves or tending another child until perhaps age 10 (or later in some regions). In the U.K., it is an offense to leave a child under age 14 years without adult supervision (Subbotsky, 1995). However, in many other communities around the world, children begin to take on responsibility for tending other children at ages 5–7 (Rogoff et al., 1975; see figure 1.1), and in some places even younger children begin to assume this responsibility. For example, among the Kwara'ae of Oceania,

> Three year olds are skilled workers in the gardens and household, excellent caregivers of their younger siblings, and accomplished at social interaction. Although young children also have time to play, many of the functions of play seem to be met by work. For both adults and children, work is accompanied by singing, joking, verbal play and entertaining conversation. Instead of playing with dolls, children care for real babies. In addition to working in the family gardens, young children have their own garden plots. The latter may seem like play, but by three or four years of age many children are taking produce they have grown themselves to the market to sell, thereby making a significant and valued contribution to the family income. (Watson-Gegeo, 1990, p. 87)
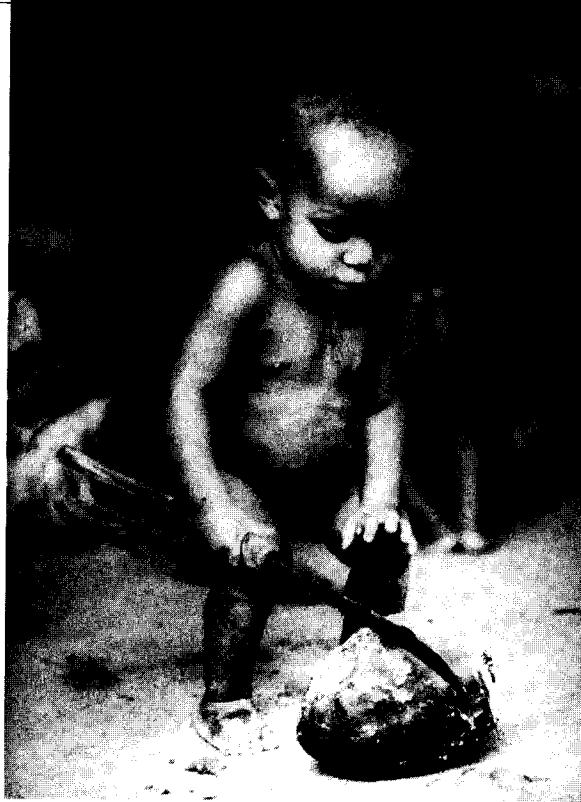
This 6-year-old Mayan (Guatemalan) girl is a skilled caregiver for her baby cousin.

When do children's judgment and coordination allow them to handle sharp knives safely?

Although U.S. middle-class adults often do not trust children below about age 5 with knives, among the Efe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, infants routinely use machetes safely (Wilkie, personal communication, 1989; see figure 1.2). Likewise, Fore (New Guinea) infants handle knives and fire safely by the time they are able to walk (Sorenson, 1979). Aka parents of Central Africa teach 8- to 10-month-old infants how to throw small spears and use small pointed digging sticks and miniature axes with sharp metal blades:

> Training for autonomy begins in infancy. Infants are allowed to crawl or walk to whatever they want in camp and allowed to use knives, machetes, digging sticks, and clay pots around camp. Only if an infant begins to crawl into a fire or hits another child do parents or others interfere with the infant's activity. It was not unusual, for instance, to see an eight month old with a six-inch knife chopping the branch frame of its family's house. By three or four years of age children can cook themselves a meal on the fire, and by ten years of age Aka children know enough subsistence skills to live in the forest alone if need be. (Hewlett, 1991, p. 34)

So, at what age do children develop responsibility for others or sufficient skill and judgment to handle dangerous implements? "Ah! Of course, it depends," readers may say, after making some guesses based on their own cultural experience.

Indeed. It depends.

Variations in expectations for children make sense once we take into account different circumstances and traditions. They make sense in the context of differences in what is involved in preparing "a meal" or "tending" a baby, what sources of support and danger are common, who else is nearby, what the roles of local adults are and how they live, what institutions people use to organize their lives, and what goals the community has for development to mature functioning in those institutions and cultural practices.

Whether the activity is an everyday chore or participation in a test or a laboratory experiment, people's performance depends in large part on the circumstances that are routine in their community and on the cultural practices they are used to. What they do depends in important ways on the cultural meaning given to the events and the social and institutional supports provided in their communities for learning and carrying out specific roles in the activities.

Cultural research has aided scholars in examining theories based on observations in European and European American communities for their applicability in other circumstances. Some of this work has provided crucial counterexamples demonstrating limitations or challenging basic assumptions of a theory that was assumed to apply to all people everywhere. Examples are Bronislaw Malinowski's (1927) research questioning the Oedipal complex in Sigmund Freud's theory and cross-cultural tests of cognitive development that led Jean Piaget to drop his claim that adolescents universally reach a "formal operational" stage of being able to systematically test hypotheses (1972; see Dasen & Heron, 1981).

The importance of understanding cultural processes has become clear in recent years. This has been spurred by demographic changes throughout North America and Europe, which bring everyone more in contact with cultural traditions differing from their own. Scholars now recognize that understanding cultural aspects of human development is important for resolving pressing practical problems as well as for progress in understanding the nature of human development in worldwide terms. Cultural research is necessary to move beyond overgeneralizations that assume that human development everywhere functions in the same ways as in researchers' own communities, and to be able to account for both similarities and differences across communities.

Understanding regularities in the cultural nature of human development is a primary aim of this book. Observations made in Bora Bora or Cincinnati can form interesting cultural portraits and reveal intriguing differences in custom, but more important, they can help us to discern regularities in the diverse patterns of human development in different communities.

Looking for Cultural Regularities

Beyond demonstrating that "culture matters," my aim in this book is to integrate the available ideas and research to contribute to a greater understanding of *how* culture matters in human development. What regularities can help us make sense of the cultural aspects of human development? To understand the processes that characterize the dynamic development of individual people as well as their changing cultural communities, we need to identify regularities that make sense of the variations across communities as well as the impressive commonalities across our human species. Although research on cultural aspects of human development is still relatively sparse, it is time to go beyond saying "It depends" to articulate patterns in the variations and similarities of cultural practices.

The process of looking across cultural traditions can help us become aware of cultural regularities in our own as well as other people's lives, no matter which communities are most familiar to us. Cultural research can help us understand cultural aspects of our own lives that we take for granted as natural, as well as those that surprise us elsewhere.

For example, the importance given to paying attention to chronological age and age of developmental achievements is unquestioned by many who study human development. However, questions about age of transitions are themselves based on a cultural perspective. They fit with cultural institutions that use elapsed time since birth as a measure of development.

One Set of Patterns: Children's Age-Grading and Segregation from Community Endeavors or Participation in Mature Activities

It was not until the last half of the 1800s in the United States and some other nations that age became a criterion for ordering lives, and this intensified in the early 1900s (Chudacoff, 1989). With the rise of industrialization and efforts to systematize human services such as education and medical care, age became a measure of development and a criterion for sorting people. Specialized institutions were designed around age groups. Developmental psychology and pediatrics began at this time, along with old-age institutions and age-graded schools.

Before then in the United States (and still, in many places), people rarely knew their age, and students advanced in their education as they learned. Both expert and popular writing in the United States rarely referred to specific ages, although of course infancy, childhood, and adulthood were distinguished. Over the past century and a half, the cultural concept of age and associated practices relying on age-grading have come to play a central, though often unnoticed role in ordering lives in some cultural communities —those of almost all contemporary readers of this book.

Age-grading accompanied the increasing segregation of children from the full range of activities in their community as school became compulsory and industrialization separated workplace from home. Instead of joining with the adult world, young children became more engaged in specialized child-focused institutions and practices, preparing children for later entry into the community.

I argue that child-focused settings and ways in which middle-class parents now interact with their children are closely connected with age-grading and segregation of children. Child-focused settings and middle-class child-rearing practices are also prominent in developmental psychology, connecting with ideas about stages of life, thinking and learning processes, motivation, relations with peers and parents, disciplinary practices at home and school, competition and cooperation. I examine these cultural regularities throughout this book, as they are crucial to understanding development in many communities.

An alternative pattern involves integration of children in the everyday activities of their communities. This pattern involves very different concepts and cultural practices in human development (Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003). The opportunities to observe and pitch in allow children to learn through keen attention to ongoing activities, rather than relying on lessons out of the context of using the knowledge and skills taught. In this pattern, children's relationships often involve multiparty collaboration in groups rather than interactions with one person at a time. I examine these and related regularities throughout this book.

Other Patterns

Because cultural research is still quite new, the work of figuring out what regularities can make sense of the similarities and variations across communities is not yet very far along. However, there are several other areas that appear to involve important regularities in cultural practices.

One set of regularities has to do with a pattern in which human relations are assumed to require hierarchical organization, with someone in charge who controls the others. An alternative pattern is more horizontal in structure, with individuals being responsible together to the group. In this pattern, individuals are not controlled by others—individual autonomy of decision making is respected—but individuals are also expected to coordinate with the group direction. As I discuss in later chapters, issues of cultural differences in sleeping arrangements, discipline, cooperation, gender roles, moral development, and forms of assistance in learning all connect with this set of patterns.

Other patterns have to do with strategies for managing survival. Infant and adult mortality issues, shortage or abundance of food and other resources, and settled living or nomadic life seem to connect with cultural similarities and variations in infant care and attachment, family roles, stages and goals of development, children's responsibilities, gender roles, cooperation and competition, and intellectual priorities.

I develop these suggestions of patterns of regularity and some others throughout the book. Although the search for regularities in cultural systems has barely begun, it has great promise for helping us understand the surprising as well as the taken-for-granted ways of cultural communities worldwide, including one's own.

To look for cultural patterns, it is important to examine how we can

think about the roles of cultural processes and individual development. In the first three chapters, I focus on how we can conceptualize the interrelated roles of individual and cultural processes. In the next section of this chapter, I introduce some important orienting concepts for how we can think about the roles of cultural processes in human development.

Orienting Concepts for Understanding Cultural Processes

The orienting concepts for understanding cultural processes that I develop in this book stem from the sociocultural (or cultural-historical) perspective. This approach has become prominent in recent decades in the study of how cultural practices relate to the development of ways of thinking, remembering, reasoning, and solving problems (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Lev Vygotsky, a leader of this approach from early in the twentieth century, pointed out that children in all communities are cultural participants, living in a particular community at a specific time in history. Vygotsky (1987) argued that rather than trying to "reveal the eternal child," the goal is to discover "the historical child."

Understanding development from a sociocultural-historical perspective requires examination of the cultural nature of everyday life. This includes studying people's use and transformation of cultural tools and technologies and their involvement in cultural traditions in the structures and institutions of family life and community practices.

A coherent understanding of the cultural, historical nature of human development is emerging from an interdisciplinary approach involving psychology, anthropology, history, sociolinguistics, education, sociology, and other fields. It builds on a variety of traditions of research, including participant observation of everyday life from an anthropological perspective, psychological research in naturalistic or constrained "laboratory" situations, historical accounts, and fine-grained analyses of videotaped events. Together, the research and scholarly traditions across fields are sparking a new conception of human development as a cultural process.

To understand regularities in the variations and similarities of cultural processes of human development across widespread communities it is important to examine how we think about cultural processes and their relation to individual development. What do we mean by cultural processes? How do people come to understand their own as well as others' cultural practices and traditions? How can we think about the ways that individuals both participate in and contribute to cultural processes? How do we approach understanding the relation among cultural communities and how cultural communities themselves transform?

This section outlines what I call *orienting concepts* for understanding cultural processes. These are concepts to guide thinking about how cultural processes contribute to human development.

The *overarching orienting concept* for understanding cultural processes is my version of the sociocultural-historical perspective:

Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.

This overarching orienting concept provides the basis for the other orienting concepts for understanding cultural processes:

Culture isn't just what other people do. It is common for people to think of themselves as having no culture ("Who, me? I don't have an accent") or to take for granted the circumstances of their historical period, unless they have contact with several cultural communities. Broad cultural experience gives us the opportunity to see the extent of cultural processes in everyday human activities and development, which relate to the technologies we use and our institutional and community values and traditions. The practices of researchers, students, journalists, and professors are cultural, as are the practices of oral historians, midwives, and shamans.

Understanding one's own cultural heritage, as well as other cultural communities, requires taking the perspective of people of contrasting backgrounds. The most difficult cultural processes to examine are the ones that are based on confident and unquestioned assumptions stemming from one's own community's practices. Cultural processes surround all of us and often involve subtle, tacit, taken-for-granted events and ways of doing things that require open eyes, ears, and minds to notice and understand. (Children are very alert to learning from these taken-for-granted ways of doing things.)

Cultural practices fit together and are connected. Each needs to be understood in relation to other aspects of the cultural approach. Cultural processes involve multifaceted relations among many aspects of community functioning; they are not just a collection of variables that operate independently. Rather, they vary together in patterned ways. Cultural processes have a coherence beyond "elements" such as economic resources, family size, modernization, and urbanization. It is impossible to reduce differences between communities to a single variable or two (or even a dozen or two); to do so would destroy the coherence among the constellations of features that make it useful to refer to cultural

processes. What is done one way in one community may be done another way in another community, with the same effect, and a practice done the same way in both communities may serve different ends. An understanding of how cultural practices fit together is essential.

Cultural communities continue to change, as do individuals. A community's history and relations with other communities are part of cultural processes. In addition, variations among members of communities are to be expected, because individuals connect in various ways with other communities and experiences. Variation across and within communities is a resource for humanity, allowing us to be prepared for varied and unknowable futures.

There is not likely to be One Best Way. Understanding different cultural practices does not require determining which *one* way is "right" (which does not mean that *all* ways are fine). With an understanding of what is done in different circumstances, we can be open to possibilities that do not necessarily exclude each other. Learning from other communities does not require giving up one's own ways. It does require suspending one's own assumptions temporarily to consider others and carefully separating efforts to understand cultural phenomena from efforts to judge their value. It is essential to make some guesses as to what the patterns are, while continually testing and open-mindedly revising one's guesses. *There is **always** more to learn.*

The rest of this chapter examines how we can move beyond the inevitable assumptions that we each bring from our own experience, to expand our understanding of human development to encompass other cultural approaches. This process involves building on local perspectives to develop more informed ideas about regular patterns, by:

- Moving beyond ethnocentrism to consider different perspectives
- Considering diverse goals of development
- Recognizing the value of the knowledge of both insiders and outsiders of specific cultural communities
- Systematically and open-mindedly revising our inevitably local understandings so that they become more encompassing

The next two chapters take up related questions of ways to conceive of the relation between individual and cultural processes, the relation of culture and biology (arguing that humans are biologically cultural), and how to think about participation in changing cultural communities.

The remaining chapters examine regularities in the cultural nature of such aspects of development as children's relations with other children and with parents, the development of thinking and remembering and reading skills, gender roles, and ways that communities arrange for children to learn. The research literature that I draw on in these chapters is wide-ranging, involving methods from psychology, anthropology, history, sociolinguistics, education, sociology, and related fields. The different research methods enhance each other, helping us gain broader and deeper views of the cultural nature of human development. In choosing which research to include, I emphasize investigations that appear to be based on some close involvement with everyday life in the communities studied, to facilitate understanding phenomena as they play out.

The book's concluding chapter focuses on the continually changing nature of cultural traditions as well as of people's involvement in and creation of them. The chapter focuses particularly on changes related to Western schooling—increasingly pervasive in the lives of children and adults worldwide—to examine dynamic cultural processes that build new ways as well as building on cultural traditions.

Moving Beyond Initial Assumptions

It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water.
—*Kluckhohn, 1949, p. 11*

Like the fish that is unaware of water until it has left the water, people often take their own community's ways of doing things for granted. Engaging with people whose practices differ from those of one's own community can make one aware of aspects of human functioning that are not noticeable until they are missing or differently arranged (LeVine, 1966). "The most valuable part of comparative work in another culture [is] the chance to be shaken by it, and the experience of struggling to understand it" (Goldberg, 1977, p. 239).

People who have immersed themselves in communities other than their own frequently experience "culture shock." Their new setting works in ways that conflict with what they have always assumed, and it may be unsettling to reflect on their own cultural ways as an option rather than the "natural" way. An essay on culture shock illustrates this notion by describing discoveries of assumptions by travelers from the Northern Hemisphere:

Assumptions are the things you don't know you're making, which is why it is so disorienting the first time you take the plug out of a washbasin in Australia and see the water spiraling down the hole the other way around. The very laws of physics are telling you how far you are from home.

In New Zealand even the telephone dials are numbered anti-clockwise. This has nothing to do with the laws of physics—they just do it differently there. The shock is that it had never occurred to you that there was any other way of doing it. In fact, you had never even thought about it at all, and suddenly here it is—different. The ground slips. (Adams & Carwardine, 1990, p. 141)

Even without being *immersed* in another cultural system, comparisons of cultural ways may create discomfort among people who have never before considered the assumptions of their own cultural practices. Many individuals feel that their own community's ways are being questioned when they begin to learn about the diverse ways of other groups.

An indigenous American author pointed out that comparisons of cultural ways—necessary to achieve understanding of cultural processes—can be experienced as an uncomfortable challenge by people who are used to only one cultural system:

Such contrasts and comparisons tend to polarize people, making them feel either attacked or excluded, because all of us tend to think of comparisons as judgmental. . . . Comparisons are inevitable and so too is the important cultural bias that all of us foster as part of our heritage. (Highwater, 1995, p. 214)

One of my aims in this book is to separate value judgments from understanding of the various ways that cultural processes function in human development. The need to avoid jumping to conclusions about the appropriateness of other people's ways has become quite clear in cultural research, and is the topic of the next section.

Suspending judgment is also often needed for understanding one's own cultural ways. People sometimes assume that respect for other ways implies criticism of or problems with their own familiar ways. Therefore, I want to stress that the aim is to understand the patterns of different cultural communities, *separating understanding of the patterns from judgments of their value*. If judgments of value are necessary, as they often are, they will thereby be much better informed if they are suspended long enough to gain some understanding of the patterns involved in one's own familiar ways as well as in the sometimes surprising ways of other communities.

Beyond Ethnocentrism and Deficit Models

People often view the practices of other communities as barbaric. They assume that their community's perspective on reality is the only proper or sensible or civilized one (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Campbell & LeVine, 1961; Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). For example, the ancient Greeks facilitated their own cultural identity by devaluing people with different languages, customs, and conceptions of human nature (Riegel, 1973). Indeed, the word *barbarous* derives from the Greek term for "foreign," "rude," and "ignorant" (Skeat, 1974; it is also the derivation of the name Barbara!). The term barbarian was applied to neighboring tribes who spoke languages unintelligible to the Greeks, who heard only "bar-bar" when they spoke:

Beyond the civilizational core areas lay the lands of the barbarians, clad in skins, rude in manner, gluttonous, unpredictable, and aggressive in disposition, unwilling to submit to law, rule, and religious guidance . . . not quite human because they did not live in cities, where the only true and beautiful life could be lived, and because they appeared to lack articulate language. They were *barbaraphonoi*, bar-bar-speakers [Homer, *Iliad* 2.867], and in Aristotle's view this made them natural slaves and outcasts. (Wolf, 1994, p. 2)

To impose a value judgment from one's own community on the cultural practices of another—without understanding how those practices make sense in that community—is ethnocentric. *Ethnocentrism* involves making judgments that another cultural community's ways are immoral, unwise, or inappropriate based on one's own cultural background *without taking into account the meaning and circumstances of events in that community*. Another community's practices and beliefs are evaluated as inferior without considering their origins, meaning, and functions from the perspective of that community. It is a question of prejudging without appropriate knowledge.

For example, it is common to regard good parenting in terms deriving from the practices of one's own cultural community. Carolyn Edwards characterized contemporary middle-class North American child-rearing values (of parents and child-rearing experts) in the following terms:

Hierarchy is anathema, bigger children emphatically should not be allowed to dominate smaller ones, verbal reasoning and negotiation should prevail, children should always be presented choices, and physical punishment is seen as the first step to child abuse. All of the ideas woven together represent a meaning system. (1994, p. 6)

Edwards pointed out that in other communities, not all components of this meaning system are found. If a Kenyan mother says, "Stop doing that or I will beat you," it does not mean the same thing as if the statement came from a middle-class European American mother. In an environment in which people need a certain physical and mental toughness to thrive (for heavy physical work, preparedness for warfare, long marches with cycles of hunger), the occasional use of physical discipline has a very different meaning than in an environment where physical comfort is often taken for granted. In contrast, a Kenyan mother would not consider withholding food from her children as punishment: "To her, what American mothers do (in the best interests of their children), namely, restrict children's food intake and deprive them of delicious, available, wanted food, would be terrible, unthinkable, the next thing to child abuse!" (pp. 6–7). Viewed from outside each system of meaning, both sets of practices might be judged as inappropriate, whereas from within each system they make sense.

From the 1700s, scholars have oscillated between the *deficit model*—that "savages" are without reason and social order—and a *romantic view* of the "noble savage" living in a harmonious natural state unspoiled by the constraints of society (Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). Both of these extremes treat people of cultural communities other than those of the observer as alien, to be reviled (or pitied) on the one hand, or to be wistfully revered on the other.

These models are still with us. An illustration of the deficit model appears in a report based on *one week* of fieldwork among the Yolngu, an Aboriginal community in Australia, which concluded:

> Humans can continue to exist at very low levels of cognitive development. All they have to do is reproduce. The Yolngu are, self evidently to me, not a terribly advanced group.
> But there is not much question that Euro-American culture is vastly superior in its flexibility, tolerance for variety, scientific thought and interest in emergent possibilities from *any* primitive society extant. (Hippler, quoted and critiqued by Reser, 1982, p. 403)

For many years, researchers have compared U.S. people of color with European American people using a deficit model in which European American skills and upbringing have been considered "normal." Variations in other communities have been considered aberrations or deficits, and intervention programs have been designed to compensate for the children's "cultural deprivation." (See discussions of these issues in Cole & Bruner, 1971; Cole & Means, 1981; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; García Coll, Lamberty, Jenkins, McAdoo, Crnic, Wasik, & García, 1996; Hays & Mindel, 1973; Hilliard & Vaughn-Scott, 1982; Howard & Scott, 1981; McLoyd & Ran-

dolph, 1985; McShane & Berry, 1986; Moreno, 1991; Ogbu, 1982; Valentine, 1971.)

> Children and adolescents of color have often been portrayed as "problems" which we dissect and analyze using the purportedly objective and dispassionate tools of our trade. . . . With a white sample serving as the "control," [the research] proceeds to conducting comparative analyses. . . . Beginning with the assumption of a problem, we search for differences, which, when found, serve as proof that the problem exists. (Cauce & Gonzales, 1993, p. 8)

Separating Value Judgments from Explanations

To understand development, it is helpful to separate value judgments from observations of events. It is important to examine the meaning and function of events for the local cultural framework and goals, conscientiously avoiding the *arbitrary* imposition of one's own values on another group.

Interpreting the activity of people without regard for *their* meaning system and goals renders observations meaningless. We need to understand the coherence of what people from different communities *do*, rather than simply determining that some other group of people do *not* do what "we" do, or do not do it as well or in the way that we do it, or jumping to conclusions that their practices are barbaric.

Reducing ethnocentrism does not require avoidance of (informed) value judgments or efforts to make changes. It does not require us to give up our own ways to become like people in another community, nor imply a need to protect communities from change. If we can get beyond the idea that *one* way is necessarily best, we can consider the possibilities of other ways, seeking to understand how they work and respecting them in their time and place. This does not imply that *all* ways are fine—many community practices are objectionable. My point is that value judgments should be well informed.

Ordinary people are constantly making decisions that impact others; if they come from different communities it is essential for judgment *to be informed* by the meaning of people's actions within their own community's goals and practices. A tragic example of the consequences of ethnocentric misunderstanding—making uninformed judgments—is provided in an account of the medical ordeal of a Hmong child in California, when the assumptions and communication patterns of the U.S. health system were incompatible with those of the family and their familiar community (Fadiman, 1997). The unquestioned cultural assumptions of the health workers contributed to the deteriorating care of the child.

The diversity of cultural ways within a nation and around the world is a resource for the creativity and future of humanity. As with the importance of supporting species diversity for the continued adaptation of life to changing circumstances, the diversity of cultural ways is a resource protecting humanity from rigidity of practices that could jeopardize the species in the future (see Cajete, 1994). We are unable to foresee the issues that humanity must face in the future, so we cannot be certain that any one way of approaching human issues will continue to be effective. Within the practices and worldviews of different communities are ideas and practices that may be important for dealing with the challenges ahead. A uniform human culture would limit the possibilities for effectively addressing future needs. Just as the cure for some dread disease may lie in a concoction made with leaves in a rain forest, the knowledge and skills of a small community far away (or next door) may provide a solution to other ills of the present or future. Although bureaucracies are challenged by variety and comfortable with uniformity, life and learning rely on the presence of diverse improvisations.

Diverse Goals of Development

Key to moving beyond one's own system of assumptions is recognizing that goals of human development—what is regarded as mature or desirable—vary considerably according to the cultural traditions and circumstances of different communities.

Theories and research in human development commonly reveal an assumption that development proceeds (and should proceed) toward a unique desirable endpoint of maturity. Almost all of the well-known "grand theories" of development have specified a single developmental trajectory, moving toward a pinnacle that resembles the values of the theorist's own community or indeed of the theorist's own life course. For example, theorists who are extremely literate and have spent many years in school often regard literacy and Euro-American school ways of thinking and acting as central to the goals of successful development, and even as defining "higher" cultural evolution of whole societies.

Ideas of Linear Cultural Evolution

The idea that societies develop along a dimension from primitive to "us" has long plagued thinking regarding cultural processes. A clear example appears in a letter to a friend that Thomas Jefferson wrote in the early 1800s:

Let a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly towards our sea-coast. These he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day. (Pearce, quoted in Adams, 1996, p. 41)

The assumption that societal evolution progresses toward increasing differentiation of social life—from the "backward" simplicity of "primitive" peoples—is the legacy of the intellectual thought of the late 1800s and early 1900s (Cole, 1996; Jahoda, 2000; Shore, 1996). For example, in 1877, cultural evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan proposed seven stages of human progress: lower savagery, middle savagery, upper savagery, lower barbarism, middle barbarism, upper barbarism, and civilization. Societies were placed on the scale according to a variety of attributes. Especially important to his idea of the path to civilization were monogamy and the nuclear family, agriculture, and private property as the basis of economic and social organization (Adams, 1996).

The scholarly elaboration of the idea of linear cultural evolution occurred during the same era that the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history arose, subdividing the topics of the broader inquiry. As Michael Cole (1996) noted, it was also the period in which large bureaucratic structures were growing to handle education (in schools) and economic activity (in factories and industrial organizations). Also during this time, European influence was at its peak in Africa, Asia, and South America; in North America, large influxes of immigrants from Europe inundated the growing cities, fleeing poverty in their homelands and joining rural Americans seeking the promises of U.S. cities.

The European-based system of formal "Western" schooling was seen as a key tool for civilizing those who had not yet "progressed to this stage." Politicians spoke of school as a way to hasten the evolutionary process (Adams, 1996). In the words of U.S. Commissioner of Education William Torrey Harris in the 1890s:

But shall we say to the tribal people that they shall not come to these higher things unless they pass through all the intermediate stages, or can we teach them directly these higher things, and save them from

the slow progress of the ages? In the light of Christian civilization we say there is a method of rapid progress. Education has become of great potency in our hands, and we believe that we can now vicariously save them very much that the white race has had to go through. Look at feudalism. Look at the village community stage. . . . We have had our tribulation with them. But we say to lower races: we can help you out of these things. We can help you avoid the imperfect stages that follow them on the way to our level. Give us your children and we will educate them in the Kindergarten and in the schools. We will give them letters, and make them acquainted with the printed page. (quoted in Adams, 1996, p. 43)

The assumption that societies develop along one dimension from primitive to advanced survived into the second half of the 1900s (Cole, 1996; see also Latouche, 1996). When, after World War II, the United Nations planned economic and political "development" for newly independent colonial empires, the goal was to make them more "developed" (in a unidirectional sense, like earlier attempts to make them more "civilized"). Formal schooling was a key tool. Schooling modeled on European or North American schools spread throughout the former colonial empires to "raise" people out of poverty and ignorance and bring them into "modern" ways.

Moving Beyond Assumptions of a Single Goal of Human Development

Assumptions based on one's own life about what is desirable for human development have been very difficult for researchers and theorists to detect because of their similarity of backgrounds (being, until recently, almost exclusively highly schooled men from Europe and North America). As Ulric Neisser pointed out, self-centered definitions of intelligence form the basis of intelligence tests:

> Academic people are among the stoutest defenders of the notion of intelligence . . . the tests seem so obviously valid to us who are members of the academic community. . . . There is no doubt that Academic Intelligence is really important for the kind of work that we do. We readily slip into believing that it is important for *every* kind of significant work. . . . Thus, academic people are in the position of having focused their professional activities around a particular personal quality, as instantiated in a certain set of skills. We have then gone on to *define* the quality in terms of this skill set, and ended by asserting that persons who lack these special skills are unintelligent altogether. (1976, p. 138)

FIGURE 1.3

Eastern European Jewish teacher and young students examining a religious text.

Forays of researchers and theorists outside their own cultural communities and growing communication among individuals raised with more than one community's traditions have helped the field move beyond these ethnocentric assumptions. Research and theory now pay closer attention to the ways that distinct community goals relate to ideals for the development of children (see Super & Harkness, 1997).

For example, cultural research has drawn attention to variations in the relevance of literacy and preliteracy skills in different communities. In a community in which literacy is key to communication and economic success in adulthood, preschoolers may need to learn to distinguish between the colors and shapes of small ink marks. However, if literacy is not central in a community's practices, young children's skill in detecting variations in ink squiggles might have little import.

Similarly, if literacy serves important religious functions, adults may impress its importance on young children (see figure 1.3). For example, in Jewish communities of early twentieth-century Europe, a boy's first day at school involved a major ceremony that communicated the holiness and attractiveness of studying (Wozniak, 1993). The boy's father would carry him to school covered by a prayer shawl so that he would not see anything unholy along the way, and at school the rabbi would write the alphabet in honey on a slate while other adults showered the boy with candies, telling him that angels threw them down so that he would want to study.

School-like ways of speaking are valued in some communities but not others, and children become skilled in using the narrative style valued in their community (Minami & McCabe, 1995; Mistry, 1993a; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Wolf & Heath, 1992). For example, the narrative style used in "sharing time" (show-and-tell) by African American children often involves developing themes in connected episodes, whereas the narrative style used by European American children may employ tightly structured accounts centered on a single topic, which more closely resemble the literate styles that U.S. teachers aim to foster (Michaels & Cazden, 1986). When presented with narratives from which information regarding children's group membership was removed, European American adults judged the European American children's style as more skillful and indicating a greater chance of success in reading. In contrast, African American adults found the African American children's narratives to be better formed and indicating language skill and likelihood of success in reading. The adults' judgments reflected their appreciation of the children's use of shared cultural scripts that specify what is interesting to tell and how to structure it (Michaels & Cazden, 1986).

A focus on literacy or on the discourse styles promoted in schools may not hold such importance in some cultural settings, where it may be more important for young children to learn to attend to the nuances of weather patterns or of social cues of people around them, to use words cleverly to joust, or to understand the relation between human and supernatural events. The reply of the Indians of the Five Nations to an invitation in 1744 by the commissioners from Virginia to send boys to William and Mary College illustrates the differences in their goals:

> You who are wise must know, that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it: several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us . . . [they were] ignorant of every means of living in the woods . . . neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer . . . and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make *men* of them. (quoted in Drake, 1834)

A more contemporary example of differences in goals comes from West African mothers who had recently immigrated to Paris. They criti-

cized the French use of toys to get infants to learn something for the future as tiring out the babies, and preferred to just let babies play without fatiguing them (Rabain Jamin, 1994). Part of their criticism also related to a concern that such focus on objects may lead to impoverished communication and isolation (in much the same way that a U.S. middle-class parent might express concern about the negative impact of video games). These African mothers seemed to prioritize social intelligence over technological intelligence (Rabain Jamin, 1994). They more often responded to their 10- to 15-month-old infants' social action and were less responsive to the infants' initiatives regarding objects than were French mothers. The African mothers often structured interaction with their infants around other people, whereas the French mothers often focused interaction on exploration of inanimate objects (see also Seymour, 1999). When interactions did focus on objects, the African mothers stressed the social functions of the objects, such as enhancement of social relationships through sharing, rather than object use or action schemes.

Prioritization of social relationships also occurs in Appalachian communities in the United States, where commitments to other people frequently take precedence over completion of schooling. When hard times arise for family members or neighbors, Appalachian youth often leave junior high or high school to help hold things together (Timm & Borman, 1997). Social solidarity is valued above individual accomplishment. The pull of kin and neighbors generally prevails, and has for generations.

In each community, human development is guided by local goals, which prioritize learning to function within the community's cultural institutions and technologies. Adults prioritize the adult roles and practices of their communities, or of the communities they foresee in the future, and the personal characteristics regarded as befitting mature roles (Ogbu, 1982). (Of course, different groups may benefit from learning from each other, and often people participate in more than one cultural community—topics taken up later in this book.)

Although cultural variation in goals of development needs to be recognized, this does not mean that each community has a unique set of values and goals. There are regularities among the variations. My point is that the idea of a *single* desirable "outcome" of development needs to be discarded as ethnocentric.

Indeed, the idea of an "outcome" of development comes from a particular way of viewing childhood: as *preparation* for life. It may relate to the separation of children from the important activities of their community, which has occurred since industrialization in some societies (discussed in later chapters). The treatment of childhood as a time of preparation for life differs from ways of communities in which children *participate* in the local

mature activities, not segregated from adult life and placed in specialized preparatory settings such as schools.

To learn from and about communities other than our own, we need to go beyond the ethnocentric assumptions from which we each begin. Often, the first and most difficult step is to recognize that our original views are generally a function of our own cultural experience, rather than the only right or possible way. This can be an uncomfortable realization, because people sometimes assume that a respectful understanding of others' ways implies criticism of their own ways. A learning attitude, with suspended judgment of one's own as well as others' ways, is necessary for coming to understand how people both at home and elsewhere function in their local traditions and circumstances and for developing a general understanding of human development, with universal features built on local variations. The prospects of learning in cultural research are enhanced by communication between insiders and outsiders of particular communities, which I address in the next section.

Learning through Insider/Outsider Communication

To move our understanding of human development beyond assumptions and include the perspective of other communities, communication between community "insiders" and "outsiders" is essential. It is not a matter of which perspective is correct—both have an angle on the phenomena that helps to build understanding.

However, social science discussions often question whether the insider's or the outsider's perspective should be taken as representing the truth (see Clifford, 1988; LeVine, 1966). Arguments involve whether insiders or outsiders of particular communities have exclusive access to understanding, or whether the views of insiders or of outsiders are more trustworthy (Merton, 1972; Paul, 1953; Wilson, 1974).

Some have even argued that, given the variety of perspectives, there is no such thing as truth, so we should give up the effort to understand social life. But this view seems too pessimistic to me. If we adopted it, we would be paralyzed not only in social science research but in daily life, where such understanding is constantly required.

The argument that only members of a community have access to the real meaning of events in that community, so outsiders' opinions should be discarded, runs into difficulty when one notes the great variations in opinions among members of a community and the difficulties in determining who is qualified to represent the group. In addition, members of a community often have difficulty noticing their own practices because they take their own ways for granted, like the fish not being aware of the water.

Furthermore, as I discuss more fully in Chapter 3, individuals often participate simultaneously in several different communities. Increasingly, the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred as people spend time in various communities (see Clifford, 1997; Walker, 2001). For example, people of Mexican descent living in what is now the United States are not entirely outsiders to European American communities; the practices and policies of the two communities interrelate. Similarly, an anthropologist who spends 10 or 50 years working in a community participates in some manner and gains some local understanding. Youngsters who grow up in a family with several cultural heritages, as is increasingly common, have some insider and some outsider understandings of each of their communities. Overlaps across communities also come from the media, daily contacts, and shared endeavors— collaborative, complementary, or contested (see figure 1.4).

Hence, it is often a simplification to refer to individuals as being "in" or out.

FIGURE 1.4

Leonor, Virginia, and Angelica Lozano (left to right), seated around the family's first television in their home, about 1953 (Mexican American).

"out" of particular communities; many communities do not have strict boundaries or homogeneity that clearly allow determination of what it takes to be "in" or "out" of them. (In Chapter 3, I argue that we need to go beyond thinking solely of *membership* in a single static group and instead focus on people's *participation* in cultural practices of dynamically related communities whose salience to participants may vary.)

To come to a greater understanding of human functioning, people familiar with different communities need to combine their varied observations. What is referred to as "truth" is simply our current agreement on what seems to be a useful way to understand things; it is always under revision. These revisions of understanding build on constructive exchanges between people with different perspectives. Progress in understanding, then, is a matter of continually attempting to make sense of the different perspectives, taking into account the backgrounds and positions of the viewers.

Differences in perspective are necessary for seeing and for understanding. Visual perception requires imperceptible movements of the eyes relative to the image. If the image moves in coordination with the eye movements, the resulting uniformity of position makes it so the image cannot be seen. Likewise, if we close one eye and thus lose the second viewpoint supplied by binocular vision, our depth perception is dramatically reduced. In the same way, both people with intense identification within a community (insiders) and those with little contact in a community (outsiders) run into difficulties in making and interpreting observations. However, working together, insiders and outsiders can contribute to a more edifying account than either perspective would allow by itself.

Outsiders' Position

In seeking to understand a community's practices, outsiders encounter difficulties due to people's reactions to their presence (fear, interest, politeness) as well as their own unfamiliarity with the local web of meaning of events. Outsiders are newcomers to the meaning system, with limited understanding of how practices fit together and how they have developed from prior events. At the same time, they are faced with the assumptions of community members who invariably attempt to figure out what the outsider's role is in the community, using their everyday categories of how to treat the newcomer.

The outsider's identity is not neutral; it allows access to only some situations and elicits specific reactions when the outsider is present. For example, among the Zinacantecos, a Mayan group in Mexico, Berry Brazelton (1977) noted fear of observers among both adults and infants in his study of infant development: "We were automatically endowed with 'the evil eye' . . . the effects of stranger anxiety in the baby were powerfully reinforced by his parents' constant anxiety about our presence. We were unable to relate to babies after nine months of age because the effect was so powerful" (p. 174).

On the other hand, an observer may elicit interest and hospitality, which may be more comfortable but also becomes a part of the events observed. Ruth Munroe and Lee Munroe (1971) reported that in Logoli households in Africa, as soon as an observer arrived to study everyday caregiving practices with infants, the infant was readied for display. The Logoli mothers were very cooperative, picking up their infants and bringing them to the observer for inspection. Under such circumstances, observations would have to be interpreted as an aspect of a public greeting. Similarly, Mary Ainsworth (1977) reported that she was categorized as a visitor among the Ganda of Uganda; the mothers insisted that she observe during the afternoon, a time generally allocated to leisure and entertaining visitors.

In a study in four different communities, parents varied in their perception of the purpose of a home visit interview and observation of mother-toddler interactions (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993). In some communities, parents saw it as a friendly visit of an acquaintance interested in child development and skills; in others, it was a pleasant social obligation to help the local schoolteacher or the researcher by answering questions or an opportunity to show off their children's skills and newest clothes. With humor in her voice, one Turkish woman asked the researcher, who had grown up locally but studied abroad, "This is an international contest . . . Isn't it?"

Issues of how to interpret observations are connected with restrictions in outsiders' access. For example:

> Among Hausa mothers, the custom is not to show affection for their infants in public. Now those psychologists who are concerned with nurturance and dependency will go astray on their frequency counts if they do not realize this. A casual [observer] is likely to witness only public interaction; only when much further inquiry is made is the absence of the event put into its proper perspective. (Price-Williams, 1975, p. 17)

There are only a few situations in which the presence of outside observers does not transform ongoing events into public ones: if the event is already public, if their presence is undetected, or if they are so familiar that their presence goes without note. Of course, their presence as a familiar member of a household would require interpretation in that light, just as the presence of other familiar people would be necessary to consider in interpreting the scene.

Insiders' Position

The issues faced by both insiders and outsiders have to do with the fact that people are always functioning in a sociocultural context. One's interpretation of the situation is necessarily that of a person from a particular time and constellation of background experiences. And if one's presence is detected in a situation, one is a participant. There is no escape from interpretation and social presentation.

Differences in how people act when they think they are being observed or not illustrate how the simple presence of an observer (or a video camera) influences behavior. For example, U.S. middle-class mothers varied their interactions with their toddlers when they thought they were being observed in a research study (video equipment was conspicuously running) versus when they thought they were simply waiting in an observation room (repairs were "being made" on the video equipment, but observers watched from behind a one-way mirror). The mothers' behavior when they thought they were being observed reflected middle-class U.S. concepts of "good mothering" (Graves & Glick, 1978). The amount of speech to their children doubled, and they used more indirect requests, engaged in more naming and action routines, and asked more questions than when they thought they were not being observed.

Insiders also may have limited access to situations on the basis of their social identity. For example, their family's standing in the community and their personal reputation are not matters that are easily suspended. When entering others' homes, insiders carry with them the roles that they and their family customarily play. It may be difficult for people of one gender to enter situations that are customary for the other gender without arousing suspicions. A person's marital status often makes a difference in the situations and manner in which he or she engages with other people. For example, it could be complicated for a local young man to interview a family if he used to be a suitor of one of the daughters in the family, or if the grandfather in the family long ago was accused of cheating the young man's grandfather out of some property. An insider, like an outsider, has far from a neutral position in the community.

In addition, an insider in a relatively homogeneous community is unlikely to have reflected on or even noticed phenomena that would be of interest to an outsider. As was mentioned in the section on ethnocentrism, people with experience in only one community often assume that the way things are done in their own community is the only reasonable way. This is such a deep assumption that we are often unaware of our own practices unless we have the opportunity to see that others do things differently. Even if contrasting practices have raised insiders' awareness of their own prac-

tices, they still may interpret them in ways that fit with unquestioned assumptions:

> We rarely recognize the extent in which our conscious estimates of what is worthwhile and what is not, are due to standards of which we are not conscious at all. But in general it may be said that the things which we take for granted without inquiry or reflection are just the things which determine our conscious thinking and decide our conclusions. And these habitudes which lie below the level of reflection are just those which have been formed in the constant give and take of relationship with others. (Dewey, 1916, p. 22)

The next section examines how varying interpretations can be used and then modified in the effort to reach more satisfactory accounts of human development in different cultural communities. Understanding across cultural groups requires adopting

> a mode of encounter that I call learning for self-transformation: that is, to place oneself and the other in a privileged space of learning, where the desire [is] not just to acquire "information" or to "represent," but to recognize and welcome transformation in the inner self through the encounter. While Geertz claims that it's not necessary (or even possible) to adopt the other's world view in order to understand it . . . I also think that authentic understanding must be grounded in the sense of genuine humility that being a learner requires: the sense that what's going on with the other has, perhaps, some lessons for me. (Hoffman, 1997, p. 17)

Moving between Local and Global Understandings

Researchers working as outsiders to the community they are studying have grappled with how they can make inferences based on what they observe. (The concepts cultural researchers have developed are important for any research in which an investigator is attempting to make sense of people different from themselves, including work with people of an age or gender different from the researcher's.) The dilemma is that for research to be valuable, it needs both to reflect the phenomena from a perspective that makes sense locally and to go beyond simply presenting the details of a particular locale. The issue is one of effectively combining depth of understanding of the people and settings studied and going beyond the particularities to make a more general statement about the phenomena. Two approaches to move from local to more global understandings are discussed next. The first

distinguishes rounds of interpretation that seek open-minded improvement of understanding. The second considers the role of meaning in attempts to compare "similar" situations across communities.

Revising Understanding in Derived Etic Approaches

The process of carefully testing assumptions and open-mindedly revising one's understanding in the light of new information is essential for learning about cultural ways. The distinctions offered by John Berry (1969; 1999) among *emic*, *imposed etic*, and *derived etic* approaches to cultural research are useful for thinking about this process of revision.

In an *emic* approach, an investigator attempts to represent cultural insiders' perspective on a particular community, usually by means of extensive observation and participation in the activities of the community. Emic research produces in-depth analyses of one community and can often be useful as such.

The imposed and derived etic approaches attempt to generalize or compare beyond one group and differ in their sensitivity to emic information. The imposed etic approach can be seen as a preliminary step on the way to a more adequate derived etic understanding.

In an *imposed etic* approach, an investigator makes general statements about human functioning across communities based on imposing a culturally inappropriate understanding. This involves uncritically applying theory, assumptions, and measures from research or everyday life from the researcher's own community. The ideas and procedures are not sufficiently adapted to the community or phenomenon being studied, and although the researcher may "get data," the results are not interpreted in a way that is sufficiently congruent with the situation in the community being studied.

For example, an imposed etic approach could involve administering questionnaires, coding behavior, or testing people without considering the need to modify the procedures or their interpretation to fit the perspective of the research participants. An imposed etic approach proceeds without sufficient evidence that the phenomenon is being interpreted as the researcher assumes. Even when a researcher is interested in studying something that seems very concrete and involves very little inference (such as whether people are touching), some understanding of local practices and meanings is necessary to decide when and where to observe and how to interpret the behavior (for example, whether to consider touching as evidence of stimulation or sensitivity to an infant). Mary Ainsworth critiqued the use of preconceived variables in imposed etic research: "Let us not blind ourselves to the unusual features of the unfamiliar society by limiting ourselves to variables or to procedures based on the familiar society—our own" (1977, p. 145).

In a *derived etic* approach, the researcher adapts ways of questioning, observing, and interpreting to fit the perspective of the participants. The resulting research is informed by emic approaches in each group studied and by seeking to understand the meaning of phenomena to the research participants.

Cultural researchers usually aspire to use both the emic and the derived etic approaches. They seek to understand the communities studied, adapt procedures and interpretations in light of what they learn, and modify theories to reflect the similarities and variations sensitively observed. The derived etic approach is essential to discerning cultural patterns in the variety of human practices and traditions.

It may be helpful to think of the starting point of any attempt to understand something new as stemming from an imposed etic approach. We all start with what we know already. If this is informed by emic observations accompanied by efforts to move beyond the starting assumptions, we may move closer to derived etic understanding. But derived etic understanding is a continually moving target: The new understanding becomes the current imposed etic understanding that forms the starting point of the next line of study, in a process of continual refinement and revision.

Because observations can never be freed from the observers' assumptions, interests, and perspective, some scholars conclude that there should be no attempt to understand cross-community regularities of phenomena. However, with sensitive observation and interpretation, we can come to a more satisfactory understanding of the phenomena that interest us, which can help guide our actions with each other. That this process of learning never ends is not a reason to avoid it.

Indeed, the process of trying to understand other people is essential for daily functioning as well as for scholarly work. The different perspectives brought to bear on interpreting phenomena by different observers are of interest in their own right, particularly now that research participants in many parts of the world contribute to the design and interpretation of research, not just responding to the questionnaires or tests of foreign visitors.

Research on issues of culture inherently requires an effort to examine the meaning of one system in terms of another. Some research is explicitly comparative across cultural communities. But even in emic research, in which the aim is to describe the ways of a cultural community in its own terms, a description that makes sense to people within the community needs to be stated in terms that also make sense outside the system. Often,

descriptions are in a language different from that of the community members, whether the shift is from one national language to another or from folk terms to academic terms. All languages refer to concepts of local importance in ways somewhat different from others, reflecting cultural concepts in the effort to communicate. Therefore, the issue of "translation"—and consideration of the meaning and comparability of situations and ideas across communities—is inescapable.

The Meaning of the "Same" Situation across Communities

An issue for any comparison or discussion across communities is the similarity of meaning or the comparability of the situations observed (Cole & Means, 1981). Simply ensuring that the same categories of people are present or the same instructions used does not ensure comparability, because the meaning of the particular cast of characters or instructions is likely to vary across communities.

For example, in collecting data with American and Micronesian caregivers and infants, researchers had a difficult choice. They could examine caregiver-infant interactions in the most prevalent social context in which caregivers and infants are found in each community: The American caregivers and children were usually alone with each other; the Micronesian caregivers and infants were usually in the presence of a group. Or they could hold social context constant in the two communities (Sostek et al., 1981). The researchers decided to observe in both circumstances and compare the findings; they found that the social context of their observations differentiated caregiver-infant interaction in each community.

Following identical procedures in two communities, such as limiting observations to times that mothers and infants are alone together, clearly does not ensure comparability of observations. Studies examining mother-infant interaction across communities need to reflect the varying prevalence of this situation. For example, several decades ago in a study in the United States, mothers usually or always cared for their infants, whereas in an East African agricultural society, 38% of mothers were the usual caregivers (Leiderman & Leiderman, 1974). A study that compared mother-child interactions in these two cultural communities would need to interpret the findings in the light of the different purposes and prevalence of mother-child interaction in each.

In addition to considering who is present, comparisons need to attend to what people are doing together, for what purposes, and how their activity fits with the practices and traditions of their community. Inevitably, the meaning of what is observed must be considered.

Serious doubts have been raised as to whether situations are ever strictly comparable in cross-cultural research, as the idea of comparability may assume that everything except the aspect of interest is held constant. In an evaluation of personality research, Rick Shweder (1979) concluded that situations cannot be comparable across cultural communities:

> To talk of personality differences one must observe behavior differences in equivalent situations. . . . The crucial question then becomes, How are we to decide that the differential responses we observe are in fact differential responses to an equivalent set of stimuli. . . . *With respect to which particular descriptive components must stimuli (situations, contexts, environments) be shown to be equivalent? . . .* A situation (environment, context, setting) is more than its physical properties as defined by an outside observer. . . . It is a situated activity defined in part by its goal *from the point of view of the actor.* "What any rational person would do under the circumstances" depends upon what the person is trying to accomplish. (pp. 282–284)

Shweder argued that because local norms for the appropriate means of reaching a goal must be written into the very definition of the behavioral situation, "two actors are in 'comparable' or 'equivalent' situations *only to the extent that they are members of the same culture!*" (p. 285).

Perhaps the most crucial issue in the question of comparability is deciding how to interpret what is observed. It cannot be assumed that the same behavior has identical meaning in different communities. For example, native Hawaiian children were observed to make fewer verbal requests for help than Caucasian children in Hawaiian classrooms (Gallimore, Boggs, & Jordan, 1974; cited in Price-Williams, 1975). However, before concluding that this group was making fewer requests for assistance, the researchers considered the possibility that the children made requests for assistance differently. Indeed, they discovered that the Hawaiian children were requesting assistance nonverbally: steadily watching the teacher from a distance or approaching, standing nearby, or briefly touching her. These nonverbal requests may be directly related to the cultural background of the children, in which verbal requests for help from adults are considered inappropriate but nonverbal requests are acceptable.

Identical behavior may have different connotations and functions in different communities (Frijda & Jahoda, 1966). Some researchers have proposed that phenomena be compared in terms of what people are trying to accomplish rather than in terms of specific behaviors. Robert Sears (1961) argued for distinguishing goals or motives (such as help seeking in the Hawaiian study) from instrumental means used to reach the goals (such as whether children request assistance verbally or nonverbally). In his view, although instrumental means vary across communities, goals themselves

may be considered transcultural. John Berry proposed that aspects of behavior be compared "only when they can be shown to be *functionally equivalent*, in the sense that the aspect of behavior in question is an attempted solution" to a recurrent problem shared by the different groups (1969, p. 122; see figure 1.5).

A focus on the function (or purpose or goal) of people's behavior facilitates understanding how different ways of doing things may be used to accomplish similar goals, or how similar ways of doing things may serve different goals. Although all cultural communities address issues that are common to human development worldwide, due to our specieswide cultural and biological heritage, different communities may apply similar means to different goals and different means to similar goals.

The next two chapters focus in more depth on how we can conceive of the cultural nature of human development. They examine the idea that human development is biologically cultural and discuss ways of thinking

FIGURE 1.5

John Collier and Malcolm Collier suggested that family mealtimes could provide a basis for comparisons that would help define relationships within families in different communities. The first picture shows an evening meal in a home in Vicos, Peru; the second shows supper in a Spanish American home in New Mexico; the third picture shows breakfast in the home of an advertising executive's family in Connecticut.

about similarities and differences across cultural communities in how people learn and develop. They discuss concepts to relate individual and cultural processes, expanding on the overarching orienting concept: that humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.

Development as Transformation of Participation in Cultural Activities

Some decades ago, psychologists interested in how cultural processes contributed to human thinking were puzzled by what they observed. Their puzzlement came from trying to make sense of the everyday lives of the people they visited by using the prevailing concepts of human development and culture. Many of these researchers began to search for more useful ways to think about the relation of culture and individual functioning.

In this chapter, I discuss why then-current ideas of the relation between individual and cultural processes made these researchers' observations puzzling. A key issue was that "the individual" was assumed to be separate from the world, equipped with basic, general characteristics that might be secondarily "influenced" by culture. An accompanying problem was that "culture" was often thought of as a static collection of characteristics. After examining these assumptions, I discuss the cultural-historical theory that helped to resolve the researchers' puzzle, focusing on my own version of it. In my view, human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations.

Together, Chapters 2 and 3 argue for conceiving of people and cultural communities as mutually creating each other. Chapter 2 focuses on concepts for relating cultural processes to the development of individuals. Chapter 3 addresses the companion issue of how we can think of cultural