

## **Vulnerable children? The heterogeneity of young children's experiences in Kenya and Brazil**

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### **Abstract:**

As we show in this chapter, much of the literature about children's experiences in Kenya focuses on children in rural areas, whose parents have little or no education. The literature on Brazil, on the other hand, has concentrated largely on children and adolescents living in urban areas, describing the lives of those who are living in poverty and/or existing on the streets. Although these portrayals are not inaccurate of the experiences of many children, they fail to take account of the wide diversity to be found in both countries. In this chapter, we redress the balance by discussing findings from the first author's study of everyday activities and interactions of 3-year-olds from middle-class and working-class families in a single city from each country. We also provide comparative data from cities in the United States, Russia, Estonia, Finland, and Korea.

**Keywords:** Children | Majority World | Minority World | Cultural-Ecological Theory

### **Chapter:**

The literature on young children's experiences in Kenya and Brazil provides a fairly clear picture. Kenyan children are characterized as growing up in rural areas and have minimally educated parents who rarely communicate or play with their children. Instead, young Kenyan children spend a good deal of time in the company of other children. Although they spend some time in play, they often do so while working. Children are quite heavily involved in work early in life; girls as young as age 5 work in and around the house and are responsible for their younger siblings, whereas boys work further from home, often looking after animals. In the case of Brazil, there has been more research on children in urban areas. However, much of this work has also focused on the very poor, including "street children" trying to make a living or simply surviving, and on families so poor that they make decisions about which of their children can be helped to survive and which will be allowed to die.

Indeed, many children in both Kenya and Brazil do experience childhood just as described, and it is highly appropriate to refer to them as "undefended" and certainly "vulnerable," and efforts

should be directed to defend them, their rights, and their futures. But we are not being fair to either Kenya or Brazil if we view those children, families, and groups who are the most vulnerable as somehow representative of the society as a whole. As Serpell (2008) has argued: “Despite the existence of real problems, to portray the general population ... as characterized by pervasive poverty, disease, or corruption ... is to commit the synecdochal error of representing the whole by one of its parts.” Kenya and Brazil, like many other nations, are too heterogeneous to be so easily described. In both societies, a wide variety of ethnic groups can be found living in both rural and urban areas, and although many people live in impoverished surroundings, many others are well educated, with professional occupations, and a clear middle-class or wealthy lifestyle. Between those living in poverty and those who are affluent, there are also others who have some education, are employed, and have regular incomes even if they do not make much money.

Given this within-society diversity, is it worth asking the question: why have scholars focused their attention on the poorest children of each of these countries or on children and families growing up in very different conditions than those typically found in many parts of the industrialized world? One reason is to cast doubt on the supposedly “universal” appropriate ways to raise children. If one can show that children are successfully raised to become competent adults in ways that look very different from those considered normal in the industrialized world, there can clearly be no single “measuring stick” with which to evaluate appropriate child-rearing techniques (Keller, 2007; LeVine, 1989). Therefore, a good deal of research has been conducted on child-rearing practices in different cultural groups. In order to show just how varied children’s experiences are, cross-cultural psychologists have largely been interested in “maximizing the differences” between the groups studied, often comparing White middle-class practices in some part of the industrialized world (typically North America) with practices from rural and/or poor areas of the “Majority” World (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Nsamenang, 2008; Rogoff, 2003; Whiting & Edwards, 1988).

Thus, it has become increasingly commonplace to distinguish between Majority World child-rearing practices and those from the Minority World (i.e., Anglo-American and European). Many scholars have noted the ways in which Minority World practices are treated as the norm, with Majority World practices viewed as deficient to the extent that they do not match up to the Minority World norm (Serpell, 2008; Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2008). As such, the Majority World is encouraged to adopt Minority World practices, as an example of what used to be considered colonization but now is often treated as globalization, an apparently hegemony-free spread of ideas around the world (for critiques of this position, see, e.g., Fler, Hedegaard, & Tudge, 2009; Nsamenang, 2004, 2005).

One problem with this dichotomy between Majority and Minority worlds is that it is too simplistic, as is common with most dichotomies. True, there is some justification for contrasting educational practices that are relatively formal and didactic in much of the Minority World with those that are relatively informal and based on close participation in much of the Majority World (Rogoff, 2003). But then what can one make of Islamic educational practices, well known for their didactic approach (Cole & Scribner, 1974; Wagner, 1993)? And what do Moroccan and Kenyan educational approaches have in common, though both are considered Majority World practices?

A second problem with this categorization is that it ignores the within-society variability that exists within any single representative of either the Majority or Minority World. Ignoring this variability means that some particular types of Majority World experiences are brought to the fore and treated as though they are the norms in the society or cultural group being studied (the synecdochal error noted above). Typically, these experiences are maximally different from those in the researcher's home culture. Cultural differences, in other words, are reduced to the exotic. An alternative approach—one that we espouse—is to take seriously the heterogeneity that exists within any cultural group and to identify variations even among groups that are not maximally different.

Kenya provides a good case in point. Child rearing in Nyansongo, featured as one of the Whittings' original *Six Cultures* studies (LeVine & LeVine, 1963; Whiting & Whiting, 1975), and data from several rural areas of Kenya were included in the follow-up book (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Whether discussing Gusii, Kikuyu, Kipsigis, Giriama, Embu, or Luo young children, the research (primarily from rural areas) showed young children spending a good deal of their time working (sometimes while playing), in the company primarily of other children rather than adults, who interacted with them primarily to give them tasks (Ember, 1981; Harkness & Super, 1985; LeVine et al., 1994; LeVine & LeVine, 1963; Sigman, Neumann, Carter, D'Souza, & Bwibo, 1988; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977; Wenger, 1989; Whiting, 1996; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Only Weisner (1979, 1989) studied the impact of Kenya's city life on young children's experiences, contrasting the lives of Abaluyia children living in Nairobi with those in rural areas.

For the most part, therefore, scholars have left the impression that Kenya is populated with non- or semi-educated parents who raise their children in rural areas. Kenya, however, has large and complex cities (e.g., Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa), in which some families are wealthy, others live in large slums and struggle to find work and bring in enough money, and many children live on the streets, either having been orphaned by the growing AIDS crisis or because their parents cannot afford to feed them (Swadener, 2000). So, one may ask, how do patterns of raising children in the city compare to those in rural areas of Kenya? Weisner's data suggest that there may be important differences. One also has to recognize the impact of the passage of time—ideas about raising children have changed since the days of the *Six Cultures* study, although this may not have been adequately accounted for (Edwards & Whiting, 2004; Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997; Whiting, 1996).

The situation is different in Brazil, where children's development in rural communities has been given far less attention than children's development within cities. An exception is the work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1990, 1992). However, there is an almost equal lack of concern with the huge heterogeneity of children's experiences in Brazil, at least on the part of non-Brazilian authors. Almost all of the focus has been on children living in poverty (Rebhun, 2005), with particular attention paid to children who spend a good deal (or all) of their time on the streets (Alves et al., 2002; Campos et al., 1994; D'Abreu, Mullis, & Cook, 1999; Hecht, 1998; Koller, 2004; Silva et al., 1998), to families with limited or no schooling who live in extreme poverty (Scheper-Hughes, 1985, 1990, 1992), or to the cognitive development, particularly the limited mathematical skills, of children who make a living on the streets (Guberman, 1996;

Nunes, Schliemann, & Carraher, 1993; Saxe, 1991; Schliemann, Carraher, & Ceci, 1997). This focus on the non- or barely schooled is particularly surprising given that in Brazil education to age 14 is compulsory, by law, and more than 95 % of children to this age attend school, with over half of Brazilian children, from both working- and middle-class backgrounds, attending some type of child care center before going to school (Freitas, Shelton, & Tudge, 2008).

Our goal was, therefore, to explore at least one part of the heterogeneity that exists within these two societies, by examining children from two types of families living in a single city in each society. Families were included in the study if they could be considered either middle class or working class by our criteria (educational background and current occupation). Middle-class families were those in which parents had higher education and professional occupations, and working-class families consisted of those in which parents had less than higher education and whose jobs were nonprofessional. Although we were interested in comparing the experiences of children in these different groups, the goal was not to judge on a single measuring stick (a way of assessing which groups do better or worse) or to look at what is standard across all children, but to study the ways in which culture and children's development are intertwined among groups that are not maximally different. In other words, rather than discuss those types of children who have commonly been studied, we focus in this chapter on less-studied groups of children, part of a large study examining the everyday lives of children in a range of societies (Tudge, 2008).

## **The Cultural Ecology of Young Children Project**

### **Cultural-Ecological Theory**

The data we present in this chapter were collected as part of the Cultural Ecology of Young Children project, a cross-cultural and longitudinal study conducted in seven different societies, including Kenya and Brazil. The foundational theory for this project was based in large part on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky and Urie Bronfenbrenner (Tudge, 2008). According to this theory, to understand development one should focus on the typical everyday activities and interactions that occur among developing individuals and their social partners. Children and adolescents become part of their cultural world by engaging in the activities and interactions made available to them by others as well as those they initiate themselves. In the course of acting and interacting, one learns what is appropriate and inappropriate to do and say, one learns how to act and interact, and one learns how to deal with and respond to others.

The activities and interactions in which individuals engage are of paramount importance; however, the form that these practices take is highly influenced both by culture, as it has developed (and is currently developing) over historical time, and by the characteristics, inclinations, motivations, past experiences, and so on, of the individuals involved in these practices. Thus, if, as Weisner (1996) argued, the most important thing to know about how a child is likely to develop is the culture of which he or she is a part, the next most important thing is to examine the "interpretive" way in which children recreate the practices that their culture sanctions (Corsaro, 2005). Although the older generation may try hard to transmit their values, beliefs, and practices to the members of the younger generation, the latter do not always adopt or accept their parents' values and ways of doing things, and may either transform them creatively or choose different values and/or behaviors. In cultures where tradition is considered highly

important, there is greater pressure to follow the lead of the older generation, but in cultures where creativity and independence are valued, practices are likely to change faster. Cultural groups thus develop under the influence of the new generation, while at the same time members of the older generation help the young become competent in the ways of the group.

Culture has been defined (Tudge, 2008) as consisting of a group that shares a general set of values, beliefs, practices, institutions, and access to resources. The group may have a sense of shared identity (the recognition that people are in some way connected and feel themselves to be part of the group), and the adults of the group should attempt to pass on to younger members the same values, beliefs, practices, and so on. Members of different countries or societies clearly constitute different cultural groups. But the same can be said of groups within any given country or society, to the extent that their members share values, beliefs, practices, institutions, resources, etc.; have a shared sense of identity; and attempt to pass on to their young those shared values, beliefs, practices, and resources. Rather than think about people being part of just one culture, it makes more sense to think of them as being part of several cultures: their society, their ethnicity, their social class, perhaps their geographic region, and so on. The cultural group with which a person identifies at any one time is likely to be dependent on a relevant comparison group: someone who has grown up in Rio Grande do Sul is Brazilian when talking with a group of Europeans, a Gaucho when talking with people from other areas of the country, of Italian descent when talking with Gauchos of German descent, or a middle-class descendent of Italians when meeting working-class people from the same ethnic background.

The activities and interactions in which children engage are a complex function of the cultural groups of which they are a part, the personal characteristics of those people (particularly family members) with whom they interact, and their own personal characteristics. Culture does not determine activities and interactions any more than they are determined by the personal characteristics of the individuals involved, but both are heavily implicated in a synergistic fashion. In other words, cultural-ecological theory treats development as a complex interplay among cultural context, individual variability, and change over time, with the key aspect being activities and interactions, where context and individual variability intersect.

### The Cities and Participants

In this chapter, we focus on some of the everyday activities and interactions engaged in by young Kenyan and Brazilian children, from the cities of Kisumu and Porto Alegre, respectively, comparing them to the activities and interactions engaged in by children in a single city in the United States (Greensboro), Russia (Obninsk), Estonia (Tartu), Finland (Oulu), and Korea (Suwon) (Tudge, 2008). Each city is medium sized by the standards of the country, with at least one institution of higher education and a wide range of occupations. The children in the study were drawn from middle- and working-class families, with the parents' educational background and occupation being the criteria for social-class membership. When the children were 3 years of age, each child was observed for the equivalent of one complete day. Our focus was on the activities and interactions going on around the children, those they became involved in, their manner of involvement, their partners in those activities, and so on.

*Kenya.* Kisumu is the third largest urban area in Kenya (with a municipal population of a little over 200,000) and is situated about 300 miles (500 km) from Nairobi on the shores of Lake Victoria. It is the major administrative, commercial, and industrial center for Western Kenya. Agriculture is the primary industry, but tourism also plays an important role (Odero, 1998), and Maseno University is situated there. A number of different ethnic groups live in Kisumu, but the large majority (85 %) is Luo, the second largest ethnic group in Kenya. Kisumu is divided into “estates” (housing compounds) approximately 1 km<sup>2</sup> in size, clearly differentiated by social class. Those for middle-class families feature houses and apartments that are clearly larger and better appointed than those for working-class or poor families. Given the movement away from the rural areas, one can increasingly also find large slums, with families living in very crowded conditions as well as individuals, including children, who have no fixed residence and live on the streets (Swadener, 2000).

The families in this study were recruited in the mid 1990s, primarily through the local office of birth records. We initially tried to contact the parents of all 30 children who had been born 2–3 years earlier in five different estates (three middle-class estates and two working-class estates). Six of the nine families were still residing in the middle-class estates, and all five of those living in the working-class estates agreed to participate, and the remaining nine families were recruited by “snowballing” techniques. A total of 20 Luo families from Kisumu, equally divided by social class, were included in the study.

*Brazil.* Porto Alegre has over a million and a half inhabitants and is the capital city of the southernmost state in Brazil. Although the state as a whole has a strong agricultural base, Porto Alegre has a wide range of industries, a full range of cultural and educational opportunities, and one of the foremost federal (public) universities in the country. A few descendants of the indigenous population are still found in Porto Alegre, although they constitute a very small proportion of the population. The large majority of the population is descended from Portuguese, German, and Italian families who moved to the area in the nineteenth century or earlier. Although a small minority can trace their roots to Africa, there has been a huge amount of mixing across different ethnic groups, and the range of skin colors and other combinations of features that characterize racial groups is far greater than the range found in the United States.

As in Kisumu, middle-class and working-class families live in very different circumstances. Middle-class people tend to live in large houses or apartment buildings (all surrounded by tall metal fencing and typically with a porter or night watchman on duty around the clock) that are sometimes situated in fairly close proximity to poor neighborhoods, known as *vilas*, distinguished by large numbers of small houses.

The families from Porto Alegre were recruited in a different manner from those from any of the other cities. We originally recruited 81 first-time mothers-to-be (Piccinini, Tudge, Lopes, & Sperb, 1998). When their children had reached 3 years of age, we selected 20 of the families (9 middle class and 11 working class) who met the same educational and occupational criteria as families in the other cities, and data were collected in the same manner as elsewhere (Tudge, 2008).

In both cities, all middle-class mothers and fathers had had at least some college education, and some had a graduate degree. Fathers' occupations in Kisumu included university lecturer, sales manager, public administrator, and owner of a travel agency, and in Porto Alegre, they included a teacher, a businessman, and a doctor. All of the middle-class mothers in Kisumu worked outside the home, with occupations such as high school teacher, registered nurse, and nutritionist, as did most of the Porto Alegre mothers whose occupations included teacher, dentist, and jeweler.

By contrast, the working-class fathers in Kisumu were primarily skilled and semiskilled manual laborers and had jobs such as plumber, pipe fitter, store clerk, and messenger. None of the mothers worked outside the home, with the exception of one who had a job as clerk, but all of them engaged in some type of subsistence selling (vegetables, fruit, bread, etc.) to supplement the family income. In Porto Alegre, working-class fathers' jobs included gardener, painter, guard, and messenger, and the mothers worked as maids, a typist, a cleaner in a hospital, and so on. Some of the mothers and fathers were not employed.

As for the children, the settings in which they spent their time were different in the two cities. In Kisumu, all the middle-class children attended some type of private preschool, each of which was well equipped with commercially made learning and play equipment. By contrast, most of the working-class children did not attend preschool, consistent with the fact that fewer than 30 % of Kenyan 3- to 6-year-olds attended preschool at the time we collected our data (Swadener, 2000). Those who did go attended community schools, where the equipment and play materials were of much lower quality or were objects made by hand from local materials (such as a car made from juice cans and bottle tops for wheels). In Porto Alegre, the majority of the children from both social classes attended preschool, reflecting the nationwide proportion of preschool-aged children from urban areas who attended. As in Kisumu, a good deal more money had been spent both on the environment and materials used by the middle-class children than those used by the working-class children.

## Methods

As the goal of our project was to discover the types of typical activities and interactions in which young children engaged, we simply observed the children wherever they were situated, alone or interacting with whichever people were in that setting. We followed each of the children for 20 hours, spread over a week, covering the equivalent of one complete day. On one day, each child was observed when he or she woke up, on another day in the hours before going to sleep, and on other days during the hours in between. There were no restrictions, other than the fact that an observer was present. Data were systematically gathered during a 30-second period every 6 minutes. The rest of the time the observer spent coding and writing field notes, while continually tracking what the participants were doing. Time was signaled in such a way that the participants were unaware of when their behaviors were being coded, and the child who was the focus of attention wore a wireless microphone so that the observer could hear what was being said, even when at a distance from the child's activity.

We observed for enough time, we believe, to get a reasonable sense of the types of activities that typically occurred in these children's lives. The approach also allowed us to examine the types of

activities the children did not participate in or those in which they would have liked to participate but were discouraged from so doing. The major activities of interest are displayed in Table 1 and are divided into five major groups (with multiple subgroups), comprising lessons, work, play, conversation, and “other.” Lessons and conversation necessarily involved some type of interaction with one or more other people; play and work, by contrast, were activities that did not necessarily involve interaction. For more details about the coding scheme, see Tudge (2008).

**Table 1.** Definitions of major activities of interest

Lessons	Deliberate attempts to impart or elicit information relating to:
Academic	School (spelling, counting, learning shapes, comparing quantities, colors, etc.)
World	How things work, why things happen, safety
Interpersonal	Appropriate behavior with others, etiquette etc.
Religious	Religious or spiritual matters
Work	Household activities (cooking, cleaning, repairing, etc.), shopping, etc.
Play, entertainment	Activities engaged in for their own enjoyment, including:
Toys	Play with objects designed specifically for play or manipulation by children
Natural objects	Play with objects from the natural world, such as rocks, mud, leaves, sand, sticks, etc.
No object	Play that does not feature any type of object, such as rough and tumble play, chase, word games, singing, etc.
Adult objects	Play with objects that were not designed for children, such as household objects, games designed for adolescents, etc.
Pretend play	Play involving evidence that a role is being assumed, whether part of the normal adult world (a mother shopping, a teacher) or purely fantasy (being a super-hero, fantasy figure, or baby)
Academic object	Play with an object designed with school in mind, such as looking at a book, playing with shapes or numbers, etc., with no lesson involved
Entertainment	Listening to radio, going to a ball-game, circus, etc.
TV	Watching television, video, or DVD, whether school-related, child-focused, or not designed with children in mind
Conversation	Talk with a sustained or focused topic about things not the current focus of engagement
Other	Activities such as sleeping, eating, bathing, and those that were uncodable

## Results

### Engagement in Activities

One of the questions of interest was the extent to which the children in these two cities engaged in similar or different types of activities. However, to put these data into context, we also provide relevant information from the other five cities from which we collected data (Tudge, 2008; Tudge et al., 2006). Looking first at the broadest categories, the children in Kisumu and Porto Alegre were almost as likely to spend their time in play (just under 60 % of the observations), similar to their counterparts in Greensboro (United States) and Tartu (Estonia). They spent less time in play than did children in Suwon (Korea) and Oulu (Finland) but were more than did children in Obninsk (Russia).

There was a good deal more variability across cities in the extent to which the children were observed in lessons, with those in Kisumu observed in this type of activity almost three times as often as were children in Porto Alegre (6 % vs. 2 %). To put these figures into a broader context, children in Obninsk and Tartu were involved in lessons in about 10 % of their observations,



those in Greensboro in about 6 % of their observations, and those in Oulu and Suwon in 3–4 % of their observations. Children in Kisumu were involved in conversation in 7 % of their observations, less than those in Porto Alegre (9 %), Greensboro (9 %), Obninsk (10 %), Tartu (11 %), and Oulu (17 %), but more than the children in Suwon (6 %).

Kisumu children were much more involved in work (15 % of their observations) than were their counterparts in Porto Alegre (5 %). However, the children in the remaining cities were observed being involved in work between 8 and 13 % of the observations. Thus, it is difficult to argue that the children in Kisumu were engaged in work to a much greater extent than those in other cities, a finding that does not fit well with what scholars of child rearing in Kenya have traditionally portrayed. Moreover, children in Porto Alegre were less likely to be involved in work than in any city where we collected data, hardly supporting the idea that Majority World children are more likely than those in the Minority World to be involved in work.

On the basis of these data, one might be tempted to say that children in these Kenyan and Brazilian cities engaged in similar types of everyday activities and interactions as did children in cities in other parts of the world and thus hardly seem “vulnerable” or in need of “defending.” After all, they spent the majority of their time in play and were involved in the other activities to similar extents as their counterparts elsewhere. However, before yielding to this temptation, we need to consider (a) variations in the subcategories of each of these activities and (b) within-city variations, as a function of social class.

Across-group differences were seen most clearly in the play objects of Kisumu children (from both social-class groups). They were the only children who played to a similar extent with toys (13 %), objects from the natural world (8 %), with no object at all (9 %), and, most frequently, with objects from the adult world (16 %). For example, children in Kisumu were seen playing with Vaseline containers, bottle tops, an old oil bottle, a tube of toothpaste, old cassette tapes, a spice container, a box of cookies, a walking stick, an abandoned wheel, and innumerable other objects from the adult world. The Kisumu children also played far more with objects from the natural world (leaves, branches, clay) or with no objects at all than did other children (Tudge, 2008; Tudge et al., 2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, they watched television less often, both among the middle-class children (3 % of observations), whose families owned televisions, and working-class children (2 %).

By contrast, middle- and working-class children from Porto Alegre played with similar types of objects as did children elsewhere. For example, they played with toys in about a quarter of our observations and also watched television a lot, in 8 % (middle-class children) and 12 % (working-class children) of our observations. They were far less likely to play with objects from the natural world (1 %), with objects from the adult world (7 %), or with no object at all (4 %).

We were also interested in the extent to which children played with objects that were designed to be relevant to school and learning (looking at books, playing with things that had numbers on them, geometric shapes, etc.). Middle-class children in Kisumu engaged in these activities in almost 7 % of their observations, twice as often as their working-class counterparts and almost twice as often as their middle-class counterparts in Porto Alegre (3.5 %). The working-class children in Porto Alegre, however, were almost never observed in this type of play (0.3 %), less

often than any other group of children. To put these data into broader perspective, middle-class children in Suwon (Korea) were by far the most likely to have been observed engaged in this type of play (over 14 % of their observations), but their middle-class counterparts in Kisumu played with school-relevant objects more than children from any other group.

A similar pattern was observed when looking at the lessons in which children were involved—particularly school-relevant lessons (providing information or asking questions about numbers, letters or words, time, etc.). The middle-class children in Kisumu were observed more than those in any other group in this type of lesson (4.5 %), whereas the children in Porto Alegre were among the fewest engaged in such lessons (1 % and 0.4 % for the middle-class and working-class children, respectively). To put these data into broader perspective, White middle-class children in the United States are portrayed as being regularly engaged in rather didactic lessons (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Tudge, 2008). Not only did the middle-class children in Kisumu engage in twice as many such lessons as did children from White middle-class families in Greensboro (2.2 %), they also did so almost twice as often as their middle-class counterparts in Suwon (2.6 %) and Obninsk in Russia (2.3 %). Middle-class children in each city were involved in more of these types of lessons than were their working-class counterparts.

Conversations, like all types of lessons, necessarily involve interaction with someone else. The Kisumu children were involved in relatively little conversation with adults, although still more so than the literature on Kenyan child-rearing practices has suggested (around 3 % for both the middle- and working-class Kisumu children). The Porto Alegre children, by comparison, conversed twice as much with adults (8 and 6 %), which was about the median across all groups. However, the Kisumu children were involved in more child-to-child conversation (around 2 %) than were children in any other group, more than twice as often as their Porto Alegre counterparts.

Young middle-class White children in the United States are said to converse a lot with adults, particularly with their mothers (Rogoff, 2003). We found that this group of children from Greensboro was involved in far more conversation with one or more adults (over 11 % of our observations) than were their working-class counterparts (6 %) and more than the two equivalent groups of Black children (3 % and 4 %, respectively). However, this amount of conversation pales by comparison with the Finnish children (almost 12 and 16 % of observations of the middle- and working-class Oulu children).

The final type of activity in which we were interested was work. Although the children we observed were only 3 years old, many of them were involved in little tasks around the home, and some went on small errands to nearby shops. The literature on child rearing in Kenya suggests that children there are quite heavily involved in work, and, as noted earlier, these Luo children were more involved in work than were children in any other city. However, when looking separately by the social-class background of their families, only the working-class children were heavily involved in work.

Our measure of work included both participation in and close observation of others working. When we examined only participation in work (doing chores, going to fetch something from a local shop, etc.), we found that the working-class Kisumu children did indeed participate more in

work (8 % of their observations) than did children from any other group, but not greatly more so than did children from Obninsk and Tartu (around 6–7 % of their observations). In other words, these Luo children did work, but not to a much greater extent than children from parts of northeast Europe. More interestingly, their middle-class counterparts in Kisumu participated in work in just 2 % of their observations, a proportion that was lower than that of the children in Greensboro and Suwon and very similar to the extent to which children in Porto Alegre participated in work.

*The impact of child care.* We can understand better why it was that the Kisumu children (but not those from Porto Alegre) engaged in the activities in which they did by looking at where they spent their time. As mentioned earlier, the children were observed everywhere they spent time, and one of the settings in which some of the children were found was a formal child care center.

However, there were some clear social-class differences in both attendance and in child care facilities. Six of the ten Kisumu children from middle-class backgrounds spent more than 20 % of their time in a formal child care setting, whereas only one of the working-class children did so (and his child care setting had materials that were either old or locally constructed). By contrast, in both social-class groups in Porto Alegre, eight of the ten children spent at least this proportion of their time in child care, although the facilities, again, differed greatly by social class. Examining just those children who spent a significant proportion (20 % or more) of their time in child care, those in Kisumu engaged in very different proportions of activities when at child care compared to elsewhere. For example, they spent a much smaller proportion of their time engaged in play when in child care. By contrast, the children in Porto Alegre spent a greater proportion of their time playing while at child care than they did elsewhere (as was also the case for the White children in Greensboro).

Virtually all of the children from each group who were often in child care spent more time playing with school-relevant objects (looking at books, playing with mathematically shaped blocks, etc.) inside child care than outside. In Kisumu, however, the differences were dramatic; the middle-class Luo children were observed in some type of school-relevant play in 15 % of their observations in child care, compared to just 5 % when not in child care. The one working-class Luo child who spent much time in child care was actually observed in this type of play in 25 % of his observations there, but virtually never outside of it. To put these findings into perspective, children in the other groups were typically observed playing with school-relevant objects in less than 5 % of their observations within child care. Children from middle-class homes in Porto Alegre engaged in this type of play in a little over 4 % of their observations; their working-class counterparts were almost never seen playing with school-relevant objects (0.4 % of their observations).

The findings were even more striking when looking at school-relevant lessons. In all other groups, the proportion of these types of lessons observed within child care was similar to the proportion observed when the children were in other settings. The children in Kisumu (middle class and working class alike) were engaged in school-relevant lessons in approximately 20 % of their observations within child care and 1–2 % elsewhere. By contrast, the middle-class children in Porto Alegre were involved in school-relevant lessons in just over 2 % of their observations and their working-class peers in just 0.2 % of their observations. To put these percentages into a

wider perspective (Tudge, 2008; Tudge et al., 2006), it is worth noting that the White Greensboro children from both social classes were involved in these types of lessons in approximately 1 % of their child care observations and the Black children from Greensboro in over 2 % (middle class) and almost 4 % (working class) of their child care observations. In other words, the Kisumu children who attended formal child care spent a large proportion of their time engaged in either play with school-related objects or in school-relevant lessons. By contrast, the working-class children in Porto Alegre were almost never involved in these types of activities, although their middle-class peers were more likely to be observed in these activities than were White children in Greensboro.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The data that we have reported here look different from much that has been reported in the existing literature about children's experiences in both Kenya and Brazil. The middle-class children in Porto Alegre were typically involved in similar activities and interactions as were their counterparts in other parts of the world. This was also true, with the exception of school-relevant activities and interactions, of the middle-class children in Kisumu. The experiences of the working-class children in both cities were different from those of their middle-class counterparts, although in neither case were these experiences much like what has been reported in the literature. The only similarity with the literature was that the working-class children in Kisumu were involved in somewhat more work than was true for children in any other group. They were observed helping their older siblings clean the house, taking laundry to be cleaned, helping chop vegetables for dinner, and going on errands to nearby shops.

The clearest difference between the activities and interactions of children in Kisumu and Porto Alegre and those of children in the other cities related to their experiences within child care. Clearly, the function of child care centers in Kisumu is to give children experience with school-relevant objects and concepts—almost half of the time that children spent in child care was devoted to explicit or implicit preparation for school. By contrast, in Porto Alegre (as in many other groups), the function of child care seemed to be more related to allowing children to play. This is not to say that the child care teachers were not interested in preparing children for school, but perhaps believed that children learn in the course of their play. At least, this may be the case for the teachers of middle-class children in Porto Alegre. Given the history of a two-tiered system of early care and education in Brazil (care for the children of poor and working-class families; education for the children of the wealthy—see Freitas, Shelton, & Sperb, 2009), teachers in child care centers that can be afforded by working-class parents may have seen their role as simply providing a secure place for children to play while their parents were working.

Although these data are merely a sketch of the types of activities in which children in Kisumu and Porto Alegre are involved (Tudge, 2008), they provide a different picture of children's lives than that provided by the existing literature on children's lives in Kenya and Brazil. We are not trying to deny, by any means, the poverty that can be found in both countries, where many children go hungry on the streets of large cities, and others spend more time engaged in work than attending school. These children are vulnerable and clearly would benefit from being protected from hunger, from too much labor, and from many other social inequities.

But we cannot talk about the Majority World experience as though it is simply of one type, as these data clearly demonstrate. Both Kenya and Brazil are large, complex, and highly diverse societies (Freitas et al., 2009; Swadener, 2000); we would be equally guilty of committing the synecdochal error (Serpell, 2008) were we to describe Kenyan or Brazilian childhood as exemplified by the children in our study (whether from middle-class or working-class backgrounds) as would those who focus exclusively on children of non-schooled parents living in rural areas or on children living on the streets of Kenya or Brazil.

But by the same token, it would be a mistake to view the Minority World experiences as uniform. Concerns about the ways in which the Minority World has exported its views regarding “appropriate” values and practices to the rest of the world are not misguided, but should be expressed in a more subtle form, as being reflective of the current values and practices of particular groups (dominant groups, needless to say) within some Anglo-European Minority World societies. In fact, precisely the same argument about the impact of the Minority World on the Majority World could be made about the attempts on the part of middle-class educators and psychologists to impose their particular sets of values and practices onto members of nondominant groups within their societies (e.g., on working-class families and children or on racial or ethnic minorities).

Both Kenya and Brazil are considered part of the Majority World, but children’s child care experiences in Kisumu and Porto Alegre could not look much more different. In one case children are being prepared for formal schooling, and in the other they are being given opportunities to play in a safe environment. We make no claims that one approach is “better” than another—such a judgment surely depends on the society’s current values, beliefs, and expectations about child development.

Moreover, even within these two countries can be seen different approaches to child care. In Kenya and Brazil, when children of the poor spend time in a child care center, they are much more likely to be cared for rather than educated. As Swadener (2000) has documented, the major goal behind providing child care settings for young children in Kenyan tea and coffee plantations is to make it easier for mothers to work. Children of middle-class or wealthy Kenyan families, however, go to a child care center in order to ensure that they will later be able to enter one of the more prestigious schools. A very similar claim can be made for both the United States and Brazil (Freitas et al., 2008), with two parallel systems of care and education being developed.

If we want policy makers to use resources wisely and help those children and families who really are in need of assistance because of the difficult, dangerous, and poverty-stricken conditions they are in, we, as researchers, have to do a better job of showing that heterogeneity exists in any society. It is insufficient to rail at the nefarious impact of the Minority World on the families and children of the Majority World. Instead, we need to show the ways in which the values, beliefs, and practices of some groups in the Minority World are exported to some parts of the Majority World (and to some parts of the Minority World, as well) and how they are welcomed by some groups in the Majority World at the expense of other groups. Only then can we begin to consider appropriate ways of combining both local and global policies and practices relating to raising children (Fleer et al., 2009).

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