

CULTURE COMPONENTS AS A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

SYMPOSIUM, 1960

3. THE EFFECT OF CHILD REARING ON BEHAVIOR IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

ANNA S. ELONEN, PH.D.

*Professor of Psychology, Departments of Psychology, Pediatrics
and Psychiatry, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*

THE opportunity to observe a great many children in various circumstances in different parts of Finland was afforded on visits made over a ten-year span. Informal and formal visits were made to homes, playgrounds and both small and large institutions. There were many opportunities to observe children at play in recreation areas during both winter and summer. Children who had been hospitalized for a long time were seen on weekly visits over a nine-month period. Participation as a team member in a test construction project in 1958-59 permitted closer contacts with school children in rural and urban centers in the variety of communities only possible on a standardization. Workshops with the child guidance workers made comparisons with our clinical material possible. One thus gradually began to note the similarities and differences in the behavior of the Finnish children in contrast to that of American children in comparable situations. None of the observations to be reported, however, were made as the result of a specific controlled research study; rather they are the result of gradually accrued general observations. In writing this paper one had to fall back on these experiences since there were so few studies one could consult (2, 3). Few investigations about this area have been completed although several are under way.

In some instances the differences were sufficiently great to make one question to what extent they were related to the child-rearing practices of the respective countries. The following is, therefore, an attempt to examine these impressions more closely. It is apparent that casual observations or explanations do not adequately account for the behavioral variations within a country, let alone for the differences between two countries. The observations, however, are extremely provocative and suggest a tremendously rich area for cross-cultural comparisons between many more countries than have been made to date.

Any generalizations about a country immediately bring up exceptions. This is particularly true of any general statement one may make about Finland. The country can be divided into five distinct regions, each with its circumscribed cultural pattern which has devolved from the *heimo*, or tribe. These differ very drastically from each other in a great many ways. In

Karjala there is a very verbally facile group, who show their emotions readily, that is, more readily than is common in Finland. They are known for their sociability and love of music. The people in Savo are almost equally social but are without equal at getting in the last word. In Pohjanmaa the people are extremely volatile, with extremely quick tempers. The people in Satakunta characteristically speak in a rapid and clipped fashion, while in Häme the people are dour and are well known for their silence. Among the many anecdotes told about this group is one which relates how a boy of six ran home and announced breathlessly that the horse had fallen into a ditch. Hearing this, the mother turned to the father and asked, "Did you know that Johnnie could speak?"

In making a comparison between American and Finnish cultures, it is necessary to give equal consideration to social class, and rural versus urban influences. A team of psychologists, headed by the Takalas (2, 3), has shown clearly that these factors are important determinants of behavior in Finnish culture. For example, rural peoples were found to rely more upon traditional child-rearing patterns and to be less influenced by more recent innovations.

With these limitations in mind, some generalizations concerning the Finnish culture as a whole will be attempted. We shall first consider some of the ways in which the average Finnish parent differs from the average American parent. Probably the most striking difference is in the demonstration of love shown the Finnish child by his parents in contrast to that given the American child by his parents. The Finnish infant is subject to far less fondling and kissing than is usually accorded an infant in the United States. Although he is not prized or loved less, far less demonstrativeness is shown toward the infant in Finland. For there the tone of voice, the glance of the eye, the more instructive play with the child are more characteristically used to convey parental regard. It would appear that the Finns have a natural acceptance of the human body which eliminates the need for the socially condoned and implicitly seductive contact with a child's body. In the parent-child relationship, therefore, fondling of the infant is unnecessary. There the kissing of babies by politicians is completely unknown, nor have the cutest baby competitions invaded their fairs.

As the child develops, one detects much less overprotection and indulgence but a far greater stress on the child's gaining independence at an early age. Many factors probably contribute to this. One reason for urging self-sufficiency early is that a far greater percentage of mothers work there than here. Another, perhaps, is that the environment itself is far from indulgent; therefore, the struggle for survival in the past did not favor pampering. The fact remains that today, even in the homes where the standard of living is high, the children are not indulged to the extent that they are here when one compares families of equivalent social class. Much less is done for the child.

Again, according to the studies made by the Takalas the children who come from large families or the rural areas are more independent. As the child grows up and gives evidence of being ready to assume the responsibilities of the next stage of development, he is expected to do so without much fuss. One saw far fewer immature children or children with infantile behavior patterns than are encountered here, if the number of referrals to clinics or the reports of kindergarten or first-grade teachers are any criteria. Thus, generally the Finnish child gave evidence of much earlier independence, especially in assuming responsibility.

Generally speaking, the Finnish child is also much hardier, for, except in the southernmost portion, the climate is extremely cold; if the child is to play at all, he must be able to take the vicissitudes of the weather. The fairly recent dissemination of hygienic information which emphasizes the importance of fresh air no doubt has contributed its share. The Finnish child becomes quite inured to the weather, for from the wee tot stage he is placed outdoors to play for a prescribed portion of the day, be it fair or foul. The school also follows the same regime; for fifteen minutes of every hour that they are in school the children are sent outdoors.

Other factors have influenced the comparative independence of the Finnish child. Among these is the "park auntie," who is in charge at a public park or playground and is an important part of the culture. She is usually an older woman who casually supervises the care of the small children, not entering actively into their play activity. The children therefore play by themselves, busily digging sand or snow, making snowmen or doing something similar. The child is so well bundled that he looks as if he could not bend for the layers of clothes on him; but rosy checked like wee Santas the children play outside no matter how cold. They seem to pick out their own companions and the play is suggested more by the tools they have brought with them from home than by the supervising aunt. Whereas here only an extremely small percentage of children are known to learn the special skills of some particular sport at the preschool age, there it would seem that some of the children learn, for instance, to ski as soon as they learn to walk. Also the play of both boys and girls, possibly more particularly of the boys, is in direct imitation of the more active adult sports. Their games are openly competitive from a very early stage. Interestingly enough, the emphasis seems to be more on sports which require individual rather than group participation.

The interaction between parents and children within the family unit, while it is, on the whole, fairly free, nevertheless follows a more formal pattern than can be observed here. The various regions differ from each other in regard to the degree to which parent-child interaction is formalized. It should be noted, however, that the Takalas' investigation found communication to increase from the lower to the upper social class, as well as from the rural to the in-

dustrialized centers. They also found that a more domineering-directive attitude was more common in the lower social class as well as in those living in the rural areas. No matter in what part of the country the family lives, the impact of that culture is felt early. Throughout Scandinavia the very formalized training in the relationship of the child to the adult begins very early. The American visitor is impressed by the fact that the child remains a child under the control of the adult much longer in the European culture than here, while the European visitor in America is struck by the early assumption of mature ways in social interaction and the seeming equality between adult and child. In fact some of the Europeans have stated that the ease of the American child in social situations resembles that of a small adult rather than that of a child.

In Finland the manner in which a child addresses an adult is dictated by language usage. The familiar "thou" form is generally used between family members, but not with strangers or adults. Although some parents permit the use of "thou," there are a great many families where the more formal second person plural is used with parents. Small children while learning to speak are not required to address adults formally, but after a child reaches the age of about six, the use of "thou" is no longer sanctioned except within the family circle. The very handy title of addressing all adults as "auntie" or "uncle" also counteracts the apparent formalism. This form of address is used toward any adult although no relationship is implied. The variety of aunts possible can be tremendous. Usually by the time he reaches school age, the child knows exactly how he must address adults. Spontaneous free and easy encounter with the adult is not encouraged. Certainly at no time have I been able to observe a Finnish child addressing an adult by his first name, be it the parent or a friend of the family; this is certainly contrary to what happens in the United States. The one exception to the above is in the case of the Karelians, who dispense completely with the formal manner of address.

Another difference to be observed in behavior is the curtsying of the girls on meeting an adult either indoors or on the street. The boys also click their heels and bow. The boys and girls continue to do these things until they are accepted as adults. These types of formalized behavioral patterns tend to have an inhibiting effect on spontaneous casual behavior. As a result the American child seems to be much more ready to meet new situations and behave more freely in a social situation, as has been implied. Actually in some cases the European considers the American's behavior as downright rude. As elsewhere, in the rural areas the children are shy in contrast to the urban children; but in Finland they are painfully so. To a certain extent the very formalized behavior of the Finnish child resembles the behavior of the child of our upper social class, especially of sometime back. At that time the child was brought in to greet the visitors, then either properly withdrew or re-

mained silent. Thus the child was seen but not heard, and this was particularly true at the dining table.

In contrast to the child's behavior toward the adult, the child's behavior among his peers resembles that of our own children very closely. The children on the playground or by themselves seem to be as free and as noisy as they are here. The interesting thing noted was, however, that the freedom displayed in the child-to-child relationship could tone down so rapidly the moment an adult intervened. The actual defiance sometimes seen in the attitudes of the children here seemed to be a much rarer phenomenon there.

Some of the different practices in the care of the infant will be taken up next. Outside of the metropolitan area, infant foods as such are practically unknown. In the rural areas the child is breast fed rather than bottle fed for a fairly long time, usually between nine months and a year. Later, eating between meals is not considered to be good form. Generally, toilet training practices seem to be somewhat affected by the more modern trends of the health programs. The Finnish training seems to be somewhat stricter than the American and there is a somewhat greater lag in the adoption of the latest child-rearing practices. It has been noted in the studies made by the Takalas that the upper social classes tend to be more aware of, and more apt to follow out, the latest recommendations in regard to child-rearing practices. One very interesting fact reported by the child guidance clinics was that they have a greater number of referrals for enuresis and encopresis than is reported here.

As was noted, the Finnish child is encouraged to begin to learn specific skills very early. Whether it is this marked or early emphasis on physical fitness or whether other factors account for their rapid reaction time, certainly the Finnish child and adult are famous for their speed in physical competition. This speed phenomenon carried over to psychological tests. In the standardization of a performance test it was noted that the Finnish child's reaction time was generally faster than one would have expected from the norms obtained on these particular types of tests in both the American and English standardizations. Another notation made of their test behavior was the great amount of thinking out loud that was done by the Finnish children. As far as my experience in the United States is concerned, only the very occasional child thinks out loud—and not very consistently at that. In Finland, although the tasks presented were performance tests, as the child warmed to the task, he was talking out loud about practically all the moves he made. One of the Finnish psychologists reaffirmed this observation by stating that the same phenomenon could be observed also among adults.

The children's reactions on the projective tests were also interesting. In teaching a course on projectives to psychologists, it was found that they were

very dubious that they could get the Finnish child to give stories as readily as was implied in the books. Certainly a great many of them reported some difficulty in getting the child to verbalize. In another instance, when I had seen children regularly once a week and they had been extremely free verbally and physically, they became almost silent when presented with the Children's Apperception Test cards. Instead of being able to project their fantasies as directed, they functioned almost completely at a descriptive level and even these descriptions were extremely brief. One could not help but wonder, therefore, to what extent the cultural pattern contributed to this result. The children and adults generally inhibited any show of emotion and apparently reserved it for the more formalized and channelized forms of expression, such as is seen in the recitation of poems, acting in plays, and singing in groups. The role-playing opportunities provided by these media seem to serve as an accepted but controlled and formalized outlet. There seems to be a great deal more of recitation of poems, for it is seen at the most casual of social situations and at most public events. Training for this thus earns a very definite place in the school curriculum. In general, drama groups are almost universal in Finland, and even very small communities have their own dramatic groups. They are so well established that the professional groups in small towns receive state support. It would seem that acting in plays provides an opportunity for "role playing" which permits a freer expression of emotion than is acceptable in day-to-day situations.

This same trend also was seen in the schoolroom, for recitation of learned material was generally the favored form of teaching. The active control by the teacher in the grade schools and in the lectures at the universities is in marked contrast to our discussion-group teaching method. They are as uncomfortable in such a discussion as is the American professor who has the completely silent Finnish audience in front of him.

Although the consumption of alcohol for Finland as a whole is not particularly high, nevertheless, alcoholism is a serious problem because of the fact that many of those who do drink, do so to excess. For this reason many studies have been made on the use of alcohol in Finland (1, 4). These have failed to clarify completely the reason for this pattern. It would be most interesting to know definitely to what extent the child-rearing practices and the cultural patterns contribute to the problem. But there is no question of the striking difference in the behavior of the individual before and after the use of alcohol. The most silent individual becomes a bubbling fountain of words. The amount consumed, of course, would account for some of the difference, for outside of the metropolitan centers social drinking as such seems to be for the direct purpose of getting drunk, perhaps as an escape. The violence accompanying drunkenness is also a great national problem. In this

connection it might be noted that in the past, several areas of Finland were rather notorious for the violence of the acts which occurred. Not only was the violence frequent, but it was also actually accepted and sanctioned. The individual who committed a deed of violence became a local hero whose deeds were eulogized in song for future generations. The forceful counteraction of a very strong religious movement was needed to change this pattern so that approval of the violence no longer exists.

One cannot help but speculate on this phenomenon. To what extent do the strong controls from without contribute to, or prevent, the incorporation of the controls within the individual? Would less formalized behavioral patterns permit or even force the individual to assume more mature control? Is alcohol used as a protest against the outer demands? Finally, would the individual be less likely to lose control to the extent now observed if the controls came more from within?

In the manifestations of lack of social control, delinquency has not developed in Finland to the extent that it has in American metropolitan centers. In fact, the average Finn is appalled at the thought that the police cannot control mere children.

The Finn is famous for his love of solitude and lack of dependence on social groups. This, no doubt, can be traced back to the fact that he did have to live in isolated small communities often containing only the extended family group. Social intercourse was thus extremely difficult because of both distance and weather. In fact, so established is the Finn's acceptance of solitude that when American investigation directed attention to the effects of isolation, the Finns could not quite believe that any individual could break under this type of stress. They could not understand that such breakdowns could be caused by isolation alone. The Finn has been able to use his liking for isolation and individual effort very well through the years. A Finnish soldier in contrast to the soldiers of other countries fights much better alone than they do. In fact, the Finn's fighting is reminiscent of the type of fighting seen in our own frontier wars. That he has been very effective in this no doubt accounts for the fact that Finland has been able to survive.

In this paper one cannot omit mentioning something which strikes the average tourist forcibly. In most of the northern countries small children do not don bathing apparel until around the age of six, and in isolated communities not even then. Nudity as such is not reacted to as it is in our culture. Probably to some extent the Finnish institution known as *sauna* (or bath) influences this. There people bathe in family groups or groups of individuals of the same sex, and have done so from infancy. The occasion can be a prolonged and a social event as well. It is well for the visitor to Finland to know that no matter how much his soul may squirm within him, he will be initiated in the

rites of the *sauna*. It is the greatest honor the Finn can bestow upon the visitor. The Finn simply cannot comprehend that an individual from another culture will react so very differently than he himself does.

When small children are at play at a lake shore, they usually separate spontaneously by sexes; and each group is concerned only with its own activity and no curiosity regarding the other sex is evidenced. Possibly the long dark winters made a sun bather of the Finn long before it became so fashionable elsewhere. But regardless of its origin, the Scandinavians disappear from their town homes for the summer in order to be able to enjoy every moment the summer affords. Such experiences in childhood undoubtedly contribute to the simple acceptance of the human body which was referred to earlier.

In summary then, on the basis of informal observations made during a number of visits to Finland it became apparent that differences exist between Finnish and American cultural patterns. They could well be related to differences in child-rearing practices. Although social class, regional and ethnographic differences exist within the culture, the similarities between various subcultures are greater than the differences and their divergence from the American behavioral pattern is marked. It appears that child-rearing practices which emphasize more formalistic relationships and which play down or obviate the necessity for physical contact have fostered a quiet independence and have limited the number of socially acceptable channels for the expression of emotion in its various forms. One of the favored channels is the role playing provided by their indulgence in dramatic forms. It has also led to the paradox of there being a few Finns not only capable of, but admiring, extreme violence when their regard for external control is diminished, as in the use of alcohol, while the majority of Finns are usually most restrained in their behavior. It seems also to have encouraged the expression of personal needs through physical activity, as in competitive sports. Since these speculations are based on personal observations rather than on a controlled study it is suggested that there is a need for a more precise scientific inquiry into these factors.

REFERENCES

1. ALLARDT, E., T. MARKKANEN, and M. TAKALA. *Drinking and Drinkers*. Helsinki: Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies, 1957.
2. TAKALA, M., T. NUMMENMAA, and U. KAURANNE. *Child Rearing Practices and Attitudes as Measured by Different Techniques*. University Coll. Jyväskylä Publ., 19: 9-75, 1960.
3. TAKALA, ANNIKA. *Child Rearing Practices and Attitudes in Different Social Environments*. University Coll. Jyväskylä Publ., 19: 76-152, 1960.
4. TAKALA, M., T. A. PIHKANEN, and T. MARKKANEN. *The Effects of Distilled and Brewed Beverages*. Helsinki: Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies, 1957.