

The Effect of Infant Rearing Practices on the Personalities of Children in Egypt

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Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: In a village in Egypt two patterns of infant and child rearing were observed. Uneducated mothers living in extended families used a high contact style of infant rearing and child nurses to produce children who were cooperative, family oriented and highly attached to their mother. Educated women living in nuclear families used a low contact style of infant rearing and adult caretakers to produce children who were ego oriented and able to achieve independently of their family. I hypothesize that these styles were adopted in order to produce children with the qualities necessary to fulfill their parents' expectations. For one and a half years I was a participant observer in a village in Giza that is an hour's drive from the city of Cairo. During my research I was struck by the difference between the child rearing patterns I was accustomed to in the United States and the behavior I observed in Egypt. The infant rearing technique which I observed is described as "indulgent" by Levine (1977), and "close contact" by John Whiting (Whiting 1981, p. 174). These infants live in extended families that are consistently loving and nurturing. Infants engaged in almost constant social interaction, at first primarily with the mother, and then increasingly with other adults, their older siblings and cousins. These infants are not put to bed, but fall asleep in their mothers' lap in the midst of family activity. They do not have toys to play with and do not form attachments to blankets or dolls. Their playthings are people, not inanimate objects. They are offered the breast at the slightest sign of distress or desire. I became even more interested in the infant rearing patterns in this village when I discovered that a minority of mothers, those who were educated and employed in modern occupations and who lived in nuclear families, raised their infants in a totally different style. That is, the style that people in industrialized nations such as the United States use, which Konner labeled "low physical contact" (1977, p. 295) and Blurton Jones described as "intermittent contact caching" (1972, p. 313). Infants are less likely to be held, are not nursed on demand, are weaned at an early age, do not sleep with the mother, and often interact with things rather than people. Table One summarizes some of the differences between the two types of mothers. I will refer to these two infant rearing styles as high contact and low contact. There is some physical evidence (primarily based on the amount of protein in human milk and the presence of the milk tread) to suggest that the high contact style of infant rearing is the pattern under which humans evolved (Blurton Jones, 1972 p. 316-320). The low contact style seems to be a relatively recent development, probably developed since the neolithic revolution (Eaton, 1988). What determines which style of infant rearing is adopted? Levine (1977, p. 26) suggests that an environment dangerous to infants would cause mothers to favor the high contact style, as they would be able to respond to their infants immediately thus ensuring their survival. He believes that over time this successful infant rearing strategy would become institutionalized and unconscious. Whiting (1981, p. 174), after mapping the occurrence of the two styles, also sees the styles as a response to the environment-in this case temperature. He found that in warm climates mothers prefer the high contact style while in colder climates infants spend much time in cribs, cradles and other carrying devices. While recognizing the value of these studies I think that the fact that both styles are found in the same village, that is, the same environment, means that there are other factors operating as well. I believe that infant rearing styles are not necessarily society wide or unconscious behaviors but can be patterns that mothers consciously choose. EFFECTS OF THE TWO STYLES ON INFANT BEHAVIOR Many researchers have been trying to establish what effect these styles of infant rearing have on the physical and cognitive development of infants. There is a lot of evidence that the high contact style provides more physical and social stimulation for infants and results in more advanced physical and motor development (Konner 1977,

p. 307, 311; Kilbride and Kilbride 1990, p. 134; Tulkin 1977, p. 551-4; Super, 1981; Ainsworth, 1977, p. 139; Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990a; Laughlin 1989, p. 277). High contact infants tend to have better visual acuity, increased attention span, greater control of the head and are able to sit at an earlier age than low contact infants. The consensus is, however, that these differences mean little in the long run as by the end of infancy all infants, no matter which style is used, score similarly on the sociomotor tests.

Table 1

Statistical Analysis of Educated and Uneducated Women

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Uneducated</i>	<i>Educated</i>
Number of children wanted	3	2.3
% Use birth control	45%	67%
Age married	14.5	21.1
Mean age at time of interview	33	30
% menopausal or sterilized	10%	1%
Number of living children	4.25	2.7
Range in age living children	0-10	1-4
Number of children died or miscarried	1.1	.3
Total pregnancies	5.35	3
Years married	17	11
% Effectively Discipline	26%	71%
Time in years breast feed	1.9	1.1
% Husbands high school or above	28%	93%
% believe girls educated	57%	100%
% Tolerate aggression from children	67%	0%
sample size	65	16

Source: Brink in press

I believe that there may be long lasting differences as a result of differing infant experiences but that they are not the kind of differences that show up on formal tests. These infant rearing practices have the effect of producing a personality which would best equip the infants to succeed in the goals set by their parents. I believe that high contact child rearing produces infants who are highly attached to their mothers, develop a strong identity with the family and a personality that is more likely to be compliant and obedient. I believe that it is no coincidence that the mothers in my sample who used high contact techniques wanted highly attached and obedient children whose first priority was the extended family. Most women in the village live in extended families and expect to maintain intimate ties with their children after they are adults. They expect that their sons will continue to live with them after they marry and that their daughters will marry men who live nearby. Their main concern in training children is to instill in them loyalty to the family and more specifically loyalty to themselves. Their expectations for their children are not related to their children's success in school. Most women want their daughters to make a good marriage at an early age and regard education as unnecessary and even dangerous for girls. They train their daughters for their future role by teaching them household skills and ensuring that they have virtuous reputations. They aspire for their sons to have a well-paying job near the village so that they can afford to marry and bring a daughter-in-law and grandchildren into the family. A high school education is considered desirable for boys, but not necessary, as men can make high wages without an education. These women are not concerned with their children's success in school, rather they raise their children in such a way as to insure that their children are loyal family members (Brink, in press) Low contact infant rearing is more likely to produce infants who are less attached to their mothers, have a stronger and more separate ego, and who become children who are achievement oriented rather than family oriented. Again, this is the type of personality that parents in my low contact sample said they most desired for their children. The educated women in the village were not "typical" village women. All had a high school or college education and most were born in urban areas and had moved to the village and married village men. Most of the women were employed full time as teachers in the village's primary school or as secretaries in nearby factories. These

women are unusual in that they are the only women in the village who are able to establish nuclear families at the beginning of their marriages (Brink, 1985). They also are unusual in that most of them work full time at government jobs which provide them with such benefits as health insurance and old-age pensions. Most of these women were not raised in extended families and do not expect that their children will live with them after they marry; therefore they are not primarily concerned with training their children to be loyal to the family. Their major concern is that their children excel in school. They are very ambitious for both their sons and daughters and want their children to go to college and become professionals. They train their children to be more ego-oriented at an early age rather than family-oriented. As one mother put it "it is not good enough for my daughter to get 48 or 49 out of 50 on an exam, she must get 50 out of 50." (Brink, in press). What is it about the two styles which could cause these personality differences? John Whiting (1981, p. 175) believes that the greater identification with the mother among high contact infants is because low contact infants are detached from their mothers at birth while high contact infants are not detached until they are weaned, or a younger sibling is born—usually about two years of age. Mothers who constantly carry their infants can respond to subvocal cues for attention such as "moving, gurgling, fretting or changing of breathing rhythm" (Trevathan 1990, p. 277) and do not wait until the infant's need is so acute that it cries. As Brazelton (1977, p. 176) puts it "The mother then sets up a mode of immediate contingent responsiveness to the infant's needs before he can build up to express a need, feel the importance of it, make a demand, and then find it gratified. There is no experience in early infancy that could contribute the framework for self-motivated demand, frustration and then gratification—a cycle that must be important in setting up a model for self-initiated and reinforced independence in our U.S. culture." Other studies indicate that high contact infants are more likely to be highly attached to their mothers and that the most important quality in forming attachment is being highly attentive to infant's needs (Matas, 1978; Schaffer 1973, p. 60; Ainsworth 1967, p. 450). There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that highly attached infants develop into more cooperative children who are more likely to accept parental commands, respond to parental teaching, enter into joint activities; and be less achievement oriented (Maccoby 1984 p. 321; Levine 1980, p. 82; Seymour 1981, p. 732; Londerville 1981 p. 289; Matas 1978, p. 553). Thus the infant rearing style which I observed among uneducated women living in extended families seems to be one which is ideal in producing the personality characteristics that are most adaptive to living in a close cooperative household. And it is found cross culturally that the high contact style is associated with extended families (Whiting, 1961; Munroe and Munroe, 1971). The low contact style of child rearing produces an infant who is less securely attached to the mother, develops a greater sense of individuality and whom is allowed to explore his or her environment more autonomously and develop more individual goals (Londerville 1981, p. 299; Goldberg 1977, p. 236). These, of course, are precisely the kinds of qualities children need in order to achieve in school, which is a highly desired goal of the mothers in my sample who used the low contact style of infant rearing. And cross culturally it is found that low contact infants are more likely to have more educated and Westernized parents (Goldberg 1977, p. 236) who would be anxious for their children to achieve in school.

REINFORCING DESIRED PERSONALITY IN CHILDHOOD

It would be a mistake, I believe, to over-estimate the long lasting effects of infant raising styles on personality. I found in my Egyptian village that the early lessons learned in infancy were reinforced in childhood with differing styles of maternal discipline and different childhood activities which were encouraged by mothers. Typically among uneducated mothers when an infant is weaned the mother is busy with a new infant and the child becomes the responsibility of an older sibling or cousin. Educated mothers, however, did not use child caretakers. There seems to be agreement in the literature that the use of child caretakers has a profound effect on both the infants and the children who are caring for them. Research indicates that children who have young caretakers perform lower on cognitive tests and that children who act as caretakers become more nurturing, more loyal to the family, have reduced sibling rivalry and are not as achievement oriented (Werner 1979, p. 311-313; Whiting and Edwards, 1988; Ember, 1973; Munroe and Munroe, 1984; Leiderman and Leiderman, 1977). The experience of child tending prepares a child well for life as an adult in an extended

family where personal achievement and independence are not common options (Weisner 1977, p. 179). As educated mothers do not expect that their children will live with them when they are adults and family loyalty is less important to them than achievement, it seems that the use of child caretakers is less functional for educated women. And in fact, none of them regularly used children as babysitters. Educated employed mothers use a variety of child tenders. Some mothers leave their children with their mothers-in-law, some take their children to work with them or leave them in a day care center at work and some women leave their children with their mother in the city and only see their children on the weekends. In all cases children are cared for by adults and not by children. Older children in these families are encouraged to play quietly at home or study and are not expected to engage in child tending. There is also a great difference in the discipline style of educated versus uneducated mothers. I was quite astounded to see the uneducated mothers who had been so careful never to frustrate their infants goading their children into terrific rages which resulted in temper tantrums. I was quite at a loss to explain this behavior until I became familiar with what Whiting and Edwards (1988, p. 142) call "inconsistent nurturance" where mothers "respond intermittently to their children's demands for comfort, care and attention and often only after delays and persistent crying". This type of nurturing "reinforces seeking behavior and encourages an active insistent almost aggressive style of dependency" (Whiting and Edwards 1988, p. 142). Kuczynski (1984, p. 1063) characterizes the child rearing style described above as a short term disciplinary style where the mother uses power to gain compliance. This type of discipline promotes dependence of children and produces negative verbal reactions such as whining, crying or tantrums. Although this type of discipline requires less effort and thought, since the child does not internalize norms and simply is forced to comply, this means that the same battles must be fought repeatedly. A typical reaction after the child has been punished is to show aggression toward the mother, both physical and verbal. I have seen children hit their mothers, threaten to and actually throw rocks at their mothers. Typically mothers react to the aggression with amusement. The end result of this type of discipline style is that mothers are unable to effectively discipline their children and they must rely on the father or an older son for effective discipline. The threat of "I will tell your father" is the most effective disciplinary technique these mothers wield. The role of father as disciplinarian is very strongly ingrained in most village families and the father's anger is feared by children, therefore these threats are usually sufficient to insure good behavior. Egyptian fathers are effective as disciplinarians because, while they are loving and affectionate with infants and very young children, they assume a more stern and authoritative relationship with older children. A man's power and authority in the home is unquestioned by both his wife and children (Brink, in press). Mothers who raise their infants in the close contact style still identify strongly with their children and this results in a family dynamic where the mother and children are seen as a unit in opposition to the husband/father who has authority over them both. Thus the infant rearing style which is associated with extended families is also associated with a more traditional sex role relationship of the parents. I believe that all of these factors have an impact on children's personality. Educated mothers are not "inconsistent nurturers". Their child rearing style can be characterized as highly verbal using positive reinforcement to gain children's compliance. According to Kuczynski (1984) this kind of discipline encourages children to internalize norms and values that promote independence. At this point I think an anecdote can best characterize the differences between the two mothering styles. An uneducated mother who notices that her toddler has a runny nose would be most likely to grab the child and without saying anything attempt to wipe the child's nose. This usually results in a struggle and the child will begin to whine or cry. At this point the mother either uses physical force to overcome the child's resistance or gives in and lets the child remain dirty. Most mothers are inconsistent sometimes enforcing their will and sometimes letting the child win the struggle. In either case no effort will be made on the mother's part to teach the child to wipe their own nose. Educated women in the same situation will say something like "Look at how dirty your face is! Go over to the table and get a tissue and wipe your nose." The mother will then verbally coach her child through the task and then praise the child when the task is completed. One of the most striking differences between the two groups of women is that educated

women will not tolerate either physical or verbal aggression from their children and will punish children who demonstrate even mild verbal aggression. It was in fact quite extraordinary how compliant the children of educated women were, especially given the fact that they are kept inside all the time and have no opportunity to run and play. Fathers are not used as symbols of authority in these families as women are quite capable of effectively disciplining their children themselves. These women have a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands than do other women in the village. Most of the educated women met their husbands at their place of work and moved to the village when they married. An authoritarian relationship between husband and wife did not develop because the couple are close together in age and because they often continue at home the egalitarian relationship which they established at work. The more egalitarian relationship between these couples is demonstrated in several ways, but the most important in this context is that husbands do not believe they have the right to physically or verbally chastise their wives as if they were children. In these families husbands and wives are a parenting team who keep a common budget and make financial decisions and decisions about the children jointly. In the uneducated women's families, however, wives and children are both in a subservient position to the father/husband and both are physically and verbally punished by the father/husband (Brink, 1985). McClelland (1976, p. 352) has found that children with less authoritative fathers have greater ability to achieve. The more egalitarian relationship between educated spouses means that both parents share in disciplining their children and that the father can be less authoritative. This may help their children to be high achievers in school, a primary goal for these parents. These disciplining styles of children makes sense when you consider the infant rearing styles with which the children were raised. The high contact children are secure in their mother's love and so the most effective way to discipline them is to withdraw love, which mothers do by the negative reinforcement of hitting or ignoring children. For the low contact children, who are not as secure in their mother's love, positive reinforcement in the form of praise is the most effective disciplining style. As Burton and Ries put it, "If an individual is in a deprived state of a desired resource, giving that resource is an effective reward for shaping behavior. The corollary is that if the individual is used to a high level of the desired resource, the withdrawal of the resource is effective as a punishment for undesirable behavior." (1981, p. 681).

CONCLUSION I hypothesize that the infant and child rearing styles which I observed among women in a village in Egypt were adopted in order to produce children with the qualities necessary to fulfill their parents' expectations. Uneducated mothers living in extended families used a high contact style of infant rearing and child nurses to produce children who were cooperative, family oriented and highly attached to their mother. Educated women living in nuclear families used a low contact style of infant rearing and adult caretakers to produce children who were ego oriented and able to achieve independently of their family. It is clear to me that these differing child rearing styles were to some extent a conscious effort on the part of mothers to mold their children. Certainly educated and uneducated mothers were aware of the differences in their infant and child care styles and each did not approve of the other's methods. Cross culturally how typical are these two styles of infant and child rearing? There is some evidence in the literature that the patterns I have found in Egypt are also found in Lebanon, Nigeria, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Mexico, Indonesia, Puerto Rico and Guatemala (Clignet, 1967; McClelland, 1976; Prothro, 1961; Super, 1986; Werner, 1979; Lloyd, 1978). To gain a more representative perspective I looked at infant and child rearing patterns using published Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) codes (Barry and Paxson, 1971) and identified six infant and child rearing styles. The style of uneducated Egyptian women-high contact during infancy and then child caretakers is found in 31% of the HRAF standard sample. The educated women's style of low contact during infancy and adult caretakers is found in only 6% of the HRAF societies which included no industrial societies in the sample. More research needs to be done to determine if the correlations of child rearing style and parental expectations which I found in Egypt are also found in the other societies who have this style. We also need to determine what effect the other four styles have on infants and children and how they may help children to cope in their societies.

Table 2
Correlation of Infant and Child Rearing Styles

<i>Infant Rearing Style</i>	<i>Principal Relationship Ages 1-4</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Peer</i>	<i>Older Child</i>	<i>Adult</i>	
High Contact	34 (31%)	34 (31%)	16 (15%)	84
Low Contact	7 (6%)	12 (11%)	7 (6%)	26
Total	41	46	23	110

Source: codes 15b and 16a (1-3 = low contact, 4-5 = high contact) in Barry and Paxson 1971, p. 474-481).

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