Chapter 17
Social Dynamics in Complex Family Contexts and its Study

Nandita Chaudhary

In cultures where life-long intimate affiliations with and closeness towards the family are highly valued and actively encouraged, family relationships can be assumed as consequential, or even central, to the psychology of individuals. These orientations have (somewhat simply) been labelled as *inter-dependent*, *collectivistic* or *dependent* as opposed to the ideology of individualism and autonomy. The term 'dependence' here seems pejorative, as has been the case with academic views of the reliance on others in psychology (Bowlby, 1988/1997). Dependence is visualised as a facet of early childhood, something that we need to 'outgrow' in order to becoming optimally adaptive adults. The objective of accomplishing individuation-separation leading to differentiation (Mahler, and other ego psychologists) is argued as a critical milestone in the personal development of any individual towards maturity. The emergence of a child from the symbiotic relationship with the caregiver is believed to be decisive for healthy psychological development. This position is inextricably linked with cultural beliefs, since developmental readiness for emergence from symbiotic relationships and the persistence of sociality can be understood in many different ways and growing out of dependence is meaningless from a systemic standpoint. Every organism needs to have a dynamic arrangement between opposing forces, in this case of dependence and independence.

Every culture has its own unique explanations and recommendations for personal autonomy and social affiliations. Perhaps the theory of separation-individuation emerges from an ideology where the separate self seems to have teleological validity—as thinkers since Goethe have noted. From this perspective, practices where inter-dependence persists for longer durations (sleeping in the same bed as the mother and father, for example) can be argued as pathological. In the study of co-sleeping for instance, it was found that normative practices across cultures vary widely; and the customs of another society can be considered as harsh or pathological from an ethnocentric point of view (Shweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995). These

N. Chaudhary (✉)
Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies
Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi
New Delhi 110001, India
e-mail: nandita.chaudhary@gmail.com

J. Valsiner et al. (eds.), *Dynamic Process Methodology in the Social and Developmental Sciences,* 383
DOI 10.1007/978-0-387-95922-1_17,

evaluations exist despite the fact that we have not had any conclusive evidence for the universal favour for any one or other way of living, at least with reference to sleeping behaviour. Given the fact that reasonably adaptive adults develop in every system, preferring any one over and above another is unrealistic. Perhaps the closest one can come to an appraisal of sleeping patterns is to say that a particular practice may be disadvantageous for the family if it opposes the moral codes of that particular culture. For example, in American homes, the sacred status of co-sleeping for a married couple, and the earliest separation from their own children after birth, is an important moral code, which, when violated, generates much negative evaluation (Shweder et al., 1995). This contrasts with the normative sleeping patterns in other countries. In Japan for instance, a majority of children continue to co-sleep with parents well into maturity, even when space constraints were not there (Caudill & Plath, 1966).

There exist deeply divergent social orientations towards personal positions and interpersonal distance in different societies, whether it is with reference to sleeping patterns or interpersonal conversations. Since research settings are also instances of social interface, such features of cultural life are likely to impact the temporary inter-subjectivity created for the purpose of research. Mostly the researcher takes the role of questioning, observing, assessing or intervening at the site, and the participants are expected to cooperate with the procedure. How indeed are these dynamics played out on location? How does the researcher gain the confidence and cooperation of participants? Given the different orientations, perhaps the strategies that are effective in one place, may not be so in another.

Taking instances from Indian communities, both rural and urban, I shall draw from experiences with several research studies that I have witnessed and participated in, to suggest ways in which researchers have gained entry into and effectively handled encounters in the field. Most of these ideas are not new. Astute and effective strategies have been advanced in many research studies, but there have been as many (if not more) instances of indifference towards cultural detail. I see this more as a revisiting of ideas than a novel presentation.

With this objective, the chapter will focus on specific theoretical and methodological considerations needed to accommodate cultural patterns and their study. By taking specific instances from research projects I have encountered, I hope to instantiate the critical place that everyday culture has in the study of human behaviour, and how illusory it is to minimise its presence in research.

Ontology of the Research Encounter

The field of cultural psychology has attempted to integrate culture as a central phenomenon is the organisation of individual and group psychology. There remains, however, much debate about the orientation, method and movement in the field. Ratner (2008) argues that cultural psychology functions at two distinct levels, with

little agreement between scientists with separate affiliations: macro-cultural psychology and micro-cultural psychology. Macro-cultural psychology accepts the larger structures of cultural experience as formative and dominant in the psychology of individuals. On the other hand, micro-cultural approaches search for dynamic orientations in interpersonal interactions rather than accepting the hegemony of larger cultural-historic structures (Ratner, 2008). It is however possible to see that there is an inevitable connection between these two levels of activity, without necessarily aligning oneself with one or other approach, since the organisation of micro-cultural processes like speech, agency and behaviour can be attributed to large cultural factors (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The important issue is the ontological status of social phenomena in psychology. More specifically, since research is just another instance of a social phenomenon, like medical consultations, or teacher–student interface or parent–child relationships; what is the ontological construction of the research encounter? How is research understood? How are researchers and participants aligned with each other and with the larger community? An attempt will be made to address some of the questions raised here.

Persistent Patterns of Self-Orientation

In philosophical discourse, Levinas (1969) indicated that the preference granted to the individual case (as opposed to ethics, or ethical relationships with the 'other') was a limitation of Western thought, thereby himself granting a special significance on the quality of "otherness of things and men" (p. 78) or alterity. For a species where relationships with others facilitate survival, sustenance and well-being, the overemphasis on individuality is rather tendentious. Several cultural traditions have accord disapproval and discouragement of expressions of autonomy, and amplifying the regard for others and alterity is a fundamental learning in such settings. As many research studies have argued, these ideologies will have specific consequences for the appraisal, evaluation and promotion of specific ways of being, or pathways for developmental outcomes (Keller, 2007).

The positive valuation for autonomy and independence has found meaning in specific cultural traditions and assuming that these (importance of autonomy and independence) are universal and eternal smacks of academic parochialism (Danziger, 1997). Academic terms derive meaning from within specific world-views; in this instance of valuing individual autonomy and separation over and above otherness. Individualism as opposed to relationships with others, is fundamental and favoured only in certain cultural traditions arising from cultural historic ideologies as in the case of Puritanism and its impact on American individualism (Mead, 2001). However, otherness can also have different manifestations in different parts of the world as has been adequately demonstrated in recent research. Taking the example of Japan and India, both cultures emphasise relatedness albeit in fundamentally

different ways (Roland, 1988). Since much psychological research proceeds at the level of the individual, perhaps the cultural organisation of and orientations towards self processes has potential impact on the progress of research with any given group of people. The psychological orientation towards other people in the environment and correspondingly towards the self is not simply an outcome to be studied; this will also determine at least the extent to which self-reflection and/or inclusion of others will impinge upon the research situation and individual reactions. After all research is also an instance of a social association between two or more people (Beckstead & Valsiner, 2008). The way in which the interface is constructed, both by the researcher and the participant is thus important to reflect upon. When research is assumed to advance in circumstances independent of environmental 'noise', it is possible to arrive at conclusions that may not best reflect ground reality. This is especially critical to consider in studies where different social environments are being investigated.

Regarding autonomy and relatedness, it is not necessary for there to be an either/or manifestation, since dichotomies are created more for heuristic purpose than for practical application. The emphasis on the ideology of individualism can itself be seen as a form of collectivism since the acceptance is pan-cultural. Further, the labelling of communities as one or other has been argued as a conflation (Sinha, 2002) or as Kagitcibasi (1996) has demonstrated, autonomy can and does coexist with an orientation towards close relationships with others, and considering the issue of autonomy in situations of isolation from others, for instance, carries little meaning. Also, there can be different orientations depending upon contextual demands, and the same person can be independent and individualistic in some settings and collectivistic in others (Chaudhary, 2004).

Cultures and Psychology

Cultural process and group orientations are arguably decisive for the construction of individual identity and personal conduct. There is thus sufficient ground for the inclusion of cultural processes in psychological investigations (Cole, 1996; Mistry & Saraswathi, 2003). The separation of culture and psychology has been detrimental to the comprehensive and consummate study of human conduct. Culture has proved to be an elusive quality for psychological research primarily because of the treatment of cultural processes as stimuli for the mind, which is considered as the response (Cole, 1996). A majority of methods in psychology depend on standardised procedures, experimental tasks, randomised assignments and quantification of data. As a contrast anthropological research was transacted through ethnographic study, characterised by flexibility, participation and socially acceptable techniques of study. In many ways, these two traditions were opposed. It is quite evident from recent considerations about methods, that a fruitful combination of different approaches, a strategic use of methods, and the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries and integrating multiple perspectives, borrowing from

other traditions to search for effective techniques, is the best way forward for the discipline (Cole, 1996; Jahoda, 2002; Valsiner & Rudolph, 2008; Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2008).

Cultural Organisation of Interpersonal Relationships

From the moment the idea of a child takes birth in any society, several critical processes are set in motion. These phenomena may be personal, interpersonal and/or collective in character. In societies where individuality is idealised, a child is seen predominantly as a symbol and product of the love between two adults, or a product of love of each parent towards the child. In socially dense cultures, the processes set in motion are framed by a reality that extends well beyond individual lives and choices. The place of an individual in society is deeply foundational for the development of the sense of self. Contrasting the notion of self in Western thought, Marriott (1989) comments that "individuals are seen as indivisible, integrated, self-developing units, not normally subject to disjunction or reconstitution" (p. 17). These same characteristics that denote positive features are likely to be interpreted as arrogant, alienating and aggressive from the stance of an ideology of an interdependent or indexical self (Mistry & Saraswathi, 2003). As contrasted by Sudhir Kakar:

> To members of socio-centric organic cultures, the concept of the autonomous individual, free to choose and mind his or her own business, must feel alien, a bizarre idea cutting the self off from the interdependent whole, dooming it to a life of isolation and loneliness (Kakar, 1981, p. 86).

For persons developing in cultures which value independence and referential selfways, the interdependent self is likely to be evaluated as passive, weak and unstable. Cultural process dynamically set-up contrasting perspectives, like individualism-collectivism to generate the positioning of individuals and groups towards each other, as in the instance of socially created groups like 'us' and 'them' (Berreby, 2005). These contrasting orientations have been repeatedly supported by research evidence and scholarly literature in cross-cultural psychology (Greenfield, Keller, Fulgini, & Maynard, 2003). The consequences for methodological procedures have been somewhat sparse in comparison. What are the adjustments in choice of methods or more specifically, tools and techniques of study that would be meaningful for different populations? The trouble is that if one creates a method that is applicable in different settings, it is likely to be differently understood. These differences can result from consequence of "semantic intuitions" (Shweder, 1984, p. 34), personal orientations, meaning-making and familiarity with the procedure. On the other hand if one assumes a culturally appropriate way of investigating phenomena, then comparisons may become elusive.

Children's developmental expressions are often the object of study in order to explore the manifestation of cultural differences and their antecedents. After much effort, researchers assemble methods that appear to be plausible in the different settings. Some domains of study are far more prioritised than others. For instance, the

times ‘When did the child start walking independently’ would be encountered far more frequently than an item on ‘When did the child start recognising an uncle in the family’. As an example, whether a behaviour will be labelled as ‘compliance’ or ‘conformity’ or ‘obedience’ demonstrates subtle (and not so subtle) shifts in the framing of everyday conduct of children (Tomar, 2009[1]). It is important to keep a watch on the research dynamics in order to assure the fair transfer of methods, analysis and interpretation. Persistent attention needs to be given to constraints and conditions to facilitate justified interpretations, since the framing of phenomena by the local meaning systems (D’Andrade, 1984).

Transacting Research Tasks in the Field in India

In my experience there are some critical features of the research process with Indian participants that can impinge upon the study in significant ways. I will attempt to present examples of these and also demonstrate how these may even interfere with the phenomenon under investigation.

- The local understanding of the ‘purpose’ of any study, ‘what are you doing here, and what do you want from us?’
- The attention and engagement of the local community and their involvement in the procedure: clustering and prompting by others and the inability to understand the requirement for private and individual opinion
- The construction of assessment procedures for children’s development, ‘how will they know unless we tell them?’
- The social dynamics of children’s conduct, laughter, play and teasing during testing
- Why mine and why not the neighbour’s child? The local perplexity with sampling procedures
- Standard play materials and their unfamiliarity, mirrors, dolls and other examples
- Challenges of rating opinion: ‘You write what you like, you know better than I do’
- Modifications of instructions to children

‘What are you doing here and what do you want from us?’

Having conducted research with Indian families and communities for the last three decades, I have found that one of the most challenging tasks is to establish an acceptable understanding of what we are doing. Usually researchers are faced with questions about their personal lives, like marital status, number of children, or salary (“You are getting money for roaming around like this?” was a frequent query). Once having established a reasonable description of social status, the researcher is

[1] In this Masters dissertation, the author debated on the use of the term ‘compliance’ in the study of Indian children’s ability to follow instructions and arrived at ‘conformity’ as a more culturally appropriate label than the more prevalent notion of ‘compliance’ borrowed from Western studies.

then faced with explaining the purpose of the study. I feel strongly that the participants need to have a reasonable idea of what you are doing with them or their child. Translating the objectives of the study can be trying, especially when the notion of research is not already known, where levels of education are low and the community does not have an idea about the purpose of research.

This challenge is obviously greater in rural communities where access to schooling is lower and also very different from urban schooling. Here, the sight of women carrying equipment, going from home to home or to the local school, is not usual. Children of all ages usually form a procession behind the team, passing comments, teasing and requesting to be photographed (Fig. 17.1 around here).

Such encounters are to be handled delicately since it can become unmanageable on occasion. There is usually so much excitement in the village as groups of young children gather at a self-conscious distance to take a look at the team. The family usually begins to feel that an exceptional social visit is in progress for which one has to perhaps act accordingly. In such settings, it is essential to place a particular attention to the procedure of providing adequate and comprehensible overview of the work and its purpose. We need to highlight the ethical requirements of any research in the terminology that the local community can grasp. Our experience has been that this is a challenging, but not impossible task.

It is still likely that the entry can 'interfere' with 'play as you do' with the child, or 'please go on with what you were doing, we just want to watch what is going on'.

Fig. 17.1 Curious children, eager to be photographed!

Such instructions are strange, and participants handle them in different ways, but I can say with reasonable confidence, that they DO NOT 'play with the child as they usually do' or carry on with their tasks as they would on an ordinary day, because this day is NOT ordinary! Just as as a researcher would not conduct questioning in an interview as she would in a 'natural' setting. Any research encounter is an example of a dramatised encounter between the participant and the researcher, and needs to be recognised as such. The arrival of a research team, armed with video cameras and other equipment to ensure standard procedure, can actually be quite a special occasion, and this fact is likely to impinge upon the conduct or performance of the person, however young. Further, it is likely to impede ongoing interactions if that is the target of the study and also impact a person's responses to questions, if that is the method being used. In any case, how different the research setting is from the usual goings on the family must be recognised as a critical factor in influencing the degree of comfort of the participants. We cannot assume that these do not make a difference. Perhaps, the greater the distance between the 'culture of origin' and the 'culture of application' of any method, the more profound its interference or intrusiveness. Of course this distance can also be used productively in research since it results in greater sensitivity to the practices and views on account of the fact that they are unfamiliar. The essential thing is thus to be aware of these divergences and open them for discussion. There is also the factor of social desirability as being an important feature since there is an urge to present oneself in a culturally favoured manner, and that in and of itself is a reflection of cultural priorities.

Clustering and prompting by others, the puzzlement about individual opinion or performance.

In social settings that are guided by connectedness with other people and sociality, attempts to gather exclusively individual reaction or opinion is somewhat puzzling for the participants in research. The naive understanding of questions asked of others is to find answers that one does not know, particularly among people who have not been to school. In this case, it is clearly not the case (that the researcher is believed to ask something that they do not know), since the researchers are almost always better educated than the participants. Why else? The other option seems to be to 'test' the person's knowledge, as is done in school testing. The fact that a study attempts to arrive at one person's opinion in order to obtain an understanding of the views of a 'community' or population (in the statistical sense) does not itself carry meaning for many research participants. This is in dissonance with local social dynamics, and a person can feel rather embarrassed to be isolated for questioning while others watch and listen to what they have to say, especially if this is proceeding in the presence of older people.

If a person asks a question, usually the belief is that you want to know the answer. Asking for the sake of accessing one individual's knowledge of a certain phenomenon is rather unusual and unfamiliar, especially in rural communities. In the presentation of syllogisms to Uzbek peasants, for instance, Luria (1976) found that syllogisms were not comprehended and the respondents were unable to apply the condition "There are no camels in Germany" (p. 121) to the questions about whether there were camels in one particular city. The presentation of a theoretical

situation was unfamiliar to the peasants whose experiences were based primarily in practical observations rather than classroom dialogue. Usually persons are not alone when they are being interviewed or assessed, and even if they are, potential responses can also be silenced by fear of offending the memory or social standing of another. In such an event, the person will look for social support or affirmation from others around. This social referencing is commonly unacceptable or at least unfamiliar in psychological study that derives from the ideology of individualism. Additionally, in gatherings where there are socially senior persons (older or better educated), a person will hesitate to articulate personal opinion.

Interview responses are not simply explorations of a priori knowledge about phenomena, but are usually interactive reconstructions of opinion on the spot even for individuals, as we found during interviews of the concept of '*Mamta*', a Hindi term meaning 'mother's love' for a child in common usage (Chaudhary & Bhargava, 2006). In this case, requesting or asserting singular opinion can lead to feelings of discomfort and distaste for the research requirements. I have watched such transactions, and found that many researchers simply note down responses in the questionnaire even if this comes from others. Sometimes, personal opinion is adjudged from the mumblings of a respondent by giving several options to the question and seeing what the person somewhat agrees with. In the Social Axioms Scale, for example, we discovered a very high frequency of 'no opinion' in the pilot testing of the scale with Indian college students. Soon we discovered, the 'no opinion' was a safe category for respondents to enter all kinds of opinions that were later investigated through interviews. 'No opinion' was not just no declared direction of opinion, but a host of possible options: I am not sure, sometimes yes and sometimes no, or some people are and some not, or I really don't understand this item very well'! (Chaudhary, 2005). At other times, similar appearing responses can be markedly different in orientation. For instance, when Kaura (2008) first tried the FES (Moos & Moos, 1994) with her respondents, she placed the item 'We have very little privacy in our home' before adolescents and then their parents, she found both generations agreed with the item (Yes or No options). At this point, she marked the response, but sensed that there was something worth exploring here. She then introduced this as an interview question and found an opposing orientation of the answer 'Yes' that was the same for both parents and adolescents. 'Yes', the adolescents said with consternation and discussed how uncomfortable they sometimes felt. The parents communicated with pride, 'Of course! We do not have any privacy in our home, we all get along very well, and do things together'. In case Kaura had not entered further into the dialogue, this rather precious entry into the understanding of generational differences among these urban families would have been lost, and the results of the questionnaire would have shown an agreement between the two generations of respective parents and their children, indicating a higher consonance. However, these details do not usually enter into the data since there is no way of entering multiple opinions in single forms, or to go beyond the category of yes/no to investigate further.

The individual interview or questionnaire is fundamentally unfamiliar tools except in settings where it is possible to arrange private meetings without hesitation,

and where the participant is familiar with the notion of research and the purpose of gathering individual opinion. The rural family setting with several members is not the best place for such a task. In such settings, group discussions have proved to be an effective supplement to other techniques of data collection.

In the case where a child's conduct has to be assessed, similar 'interjections' by others is a regular feature. When separation is requested, the members take it to imply some sort of examination. We have sometimes falsely asserted that we are not 'testing' the child, and just let the child do what he or she wants; but I now wondered if that was a justified description of a task. Even if the mother accedes to the procedure by keeping a studied distance in such settings, you will have a grandmother or other member enter at some point and make a blatant intervention that may be unacceptable to the procedure. Insistence on private, uninterrupted and individual responses can lead to diffidence and suspicion of the intentions of the researcher. It is thus very difficult (if not impossible) to attain similar conditions for conducting such procedures in Indian homes, and comparisons made on the basis of such studies must attempt to integrate these observations into the analysis, interpretation and reporting.

'How will he know unless we tell him?'

In a recent study of mirror self recognition among Indian children,[2] we followed a cross-sequential design to investigate the emergence of mirror self recognition using the rouge task for 6 weeks in a row (1-day in the week). The equipment was carried to each family in rural and urban homes (N = 80). One of the important instructions to the family members was not to 'practice' the task with the child over the week before the next recording. I particularly remember one grandmother's response in this regard. She looked rather disconcerted at this instruction and said to us simply, 'How will he know if we don't tell him?'

Similar problems are also confronted when adults sit with children during assessments. As far back as 1978, when I used the Bayley's tasks for infant developmental assessment, mothers were often annoyed by the insistence on not intervening in the child's successful completion of simple tasks. They could just not understand why we were insisting that they should not help the child. After all, that is the most natural reaction that they have, namely to assist the child with a difficult task.[3] There are many occasions when the standard procedure was violated and the task was omitted from the analysis, even when it is likely that the child could perform the same on his or her own (Sindhu, 1978). How do such social dynamics play out in the representation of ground reality? Perhaps it could work either way depending on the researchers' positioning, openness and perspective. This position of a child's performance in testing is at odds with the child's learning in reality. In any case, perhaps what is clear is that it is not without impact, and if assessments are being done, specific attention to these eventualities must be accorded.

[2] This research was conducted with funds from the German Research Council in collaboration with Prof. Heidi Keller and Joscha Kaertner, University of Osnabrueck, Germany.

[3] This is a process so well understood in Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, but does not find space in standardised testing.

Talk, Play and Teasing of the Target Child

In studies where children are involved especially, the local construction of childhood is another feature to consider. As in rural Indian (and also to some extent in urban homes) families, the child is believed to belong to the family and community. Anyone can interact with, play with or carry the child around. Homes are not the bounded spaces that urban neighbourhoods are familiar with. Oftentimes, even young children are found to be playing on the street or with another family. Requests to bring the child or target person into the home for a 'special' personal interaction is an imposition on the free-flowing spaces in villages. Thus even when we are in a child's home, the restriction of the child to a given space would amount to an alteration of the clause of 'naturalistic conditions'. There is no denying that dyadic interactions exclusive of social supervision and intervention are hard to structure and difficult to explain. It is effective in such environments to conduct observations in open spaces where children are much more likely to be comfortable and free to move around as they usually do, despite the fact that data collection would take longer.

In the study of mirror self recognition mentioned earlier, we found that there were some households in which the child's initial reactions to the mirror caused a lot of response from others. For instance, when the child peered behind the mirror to search for the elusive playmate, the audience (otherwise requested not to intervene) would break into laughter, sometimes commenting on the child teasingly. Children were to a lesser or greater extent conscious of these dynamics (Gupta, Shukla, & Chaudhary, 2008). Here, we found it useful to wait until the family was reasonably comfortable with the equipment before starting the procedure, to ensure an appropriate assessment of the child's reactions to the mirror.

The Local Perplexity with Sampling Procedures

Sample and population are preliminary concepts in research and statistical analysis. The research participants are most often only the limited group whom we access in order to speak about a larger reality, the population. The notion of the average is central (and sacred) to the process of quantification (Valsiner & Rudolph, 2008). Sampling strategies are critical to this endeavour, and researchers struggle hard to find ways of accessing reasonably representative or 'illustrative' participants (Chaudhary, 2004). However, even with our best intentions, sampling is an unfathomable phenomenon for the community, and sometimes even for academic study, as has been demonstrated by Valsiner and Sato (2006) since procedures of random sampling from a population overlooks the dimension of person-environment interface critical to the study of a cultural psychology. 'Why did you pick my child'? Parents and family members want to know about the reasons why such a choice was made over another family in the neighbourhood. Answering them with a reply saying that it is 'incidental' or random does not go down well. In such matters, it has worked to sample people for the objective of socio-cultural similar-

ity. We attempted also to proceed through sampling using the strategy of 'contact sampling' (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2008), where entry into and confirmation about the research and the researchers can be provided through a contact person, known by the community (a teacher, respected member, or doctor), provides the researcher with a legitimate entry and authenticity in communities where informal social verification is more effective than identity cards which can be forged, or cannot be read by many. This is perhaps better than giving the participants extenuate reasons for the selection, since they can mislead their understanding of the objectives of the research. Another strategy that has worked well in cultural research is conducting the procedures with all children who are keen to participate, with communities in Cameroon for instance (H. Keller, personal communication, September 12, 2008). In this manner, the research procedure is seen as a friendly game for children rather than a testing of a selected few.

'Standard' Materials

The use of standard play or testing materials for assessing children's orientation, performance or development is common in research, especially with children. Much effort is invested in making these materials familiar and friendly to the cultural environment. I wish to suggest here, that however familiar a toy may be, the appearance of a material for manipulation, task completion or spontaneous play, can never mean the same thing in different environments, especially when economic status is considered. For a child who has little access to play material outside of household objects, the entry of a doll to play with and talk about and to do things with, will have an element of novelty that must have consequences on the child's manifested reactions, whether it makes the child reticent or exuberant is a matter of individual reaction, and hard to determine a priori. It can work either way. It is outside of the scope of research to ensure that children have equal or even comparable access to play material. However, attempt can be made to ensure that children are comfortable with the material chosen.

In the mirror self recognition study in rural Indian communities, the researchers would carry the standard-sized mirror on their person through the narrow streets from home to home. Placing the mirror on the ground at the child's home was often seen to be the child's first encounter with a mirror of this size. The curiosity value of this encounter can certainly be argued as important if not decisive in determining a child's reactions to images of the self. In the analysis of data, we found that familiarity with the mirror did not have an effect on performance within the study since there was so specific rise in children's performance over the 6 weeks over and above expected age changes (Gupta et al., 2008). Such clarifications are important to make through the process of data analysis to ensure that the element of unfamiliarity has been evaluated appropriately. In the data analysis does not proceed in a manner that is sensitive to the cultural reality and situational details, the research findings can be somewhat superficial. In this study, for instance, care was taken to ensure that the element of familiarity with the mirror was analysed by looking at the performance

of the children who had no mirrors in their homes to see if repeated exposure to the mirror significantly improved their performance in an unexpected direction.

Similarly, the experiences with a stuffed toy in another study[4] where a child's empathic reactions were being observed when the arm of the toy the researcher was playing with came off (staged) to generate empathy and its manifestation in young children, provided an interesting challenge. During pre-testing the material, it was found that several children reacted with fear to stuffed toys as well as dolls. This was especially true of the eyes of the selected toys. Even after many trials, the material did generate fearful reactions among children in the pre-testing phase. We had to abandon many choices of locally available toys and dolls before we could arrive at one that did not seem scary for the children. How does research recover from these divergences in social settings? One important point is an extended and repeated pre-testing procedure, as in the above study, where many toys (despite having been purchased from the local markets, another important clause) were rejected since the children were afraid of them. Only those equipment that do not cause discomfort to the child should be included, and there is no way of knowing this unless these are thoroughly tried out in the pre-testing phase.

In an urban home, even within India, toys are common, and sometimes even plentiful. This familiarity with the idea of playing with something outside of real life objects is special and different in different cultures (see Edwards, 2005) where it has even been linked to the presence or absence of those particular activities in the real lives of children. For instance, the appearance of dolls to care for is more frequently among societies where care of younger children is not a routine expectation for older ones.

This brings me to the point about familiarity with material and its likely impact on assessments of children. It is important that we conduct research, analyse data and publish findings with the clause explaining the different orientations of communities and their children towards play materials, since otherwise we would (always) place the less familiar communities at a disadvantage.

Challenges of Rating One's Opinion

I have written about the challenges of rating scales in several other places as well (Chaudhary, 2004, 2005), however, some points are important to repeat to complete the ideas introduced here. Techniques that are smoothly transacted in literate cultures where answering questions to gather opinion is commonplace are fiercely inappropriate among unschooled communities. Some difficulties I have encountered over the years include meanings of words, and translations of culturally embedded concepts, and rating one's opinion on a scale. I have also begun to realise that the asking of questions in the field are also not fully understood. The participant usually

[4] This study was funded by the German Research Council in collaboration with Prof. Heidi Keller, University of Osnabrueck, Germany.

fails to grasp the sense of eliciting 'individual' opinion as mentioned earlier. Mothers are often happy to abjure the responsibility for the final opinion on something. Further, if the task is a bit more challenging, namely to locate the appropriate point on the scaling of opinion, for example, 'Old people are stubborn and biased', from disagree to agree, the task becomes even more unfamiliar, and we have repeatedly struggled with the scaling of opinion. Many mothers try to avoid the task, some others have said to the researcher, 'you know better, why don't you fill up the answer?' Others have simply asked a child or other adult to answer the question. Often a questions needs to be reworded and explained to such an extent that the task itself is perhaps transformed.

Modifications of Instructions to Children

As part of a longitudinal study of parenting beliefs and children's development, 40 Delhi families were part of a cross-cultural study.[5] The cultural settings were set up to the comparisons of cultures with different socialisation strategies in order to establish links between beliefs, early experiences and children's development. The purpose was to investigate selected child outcomes at 19 months, 3 years and 4 years by following up the same group of 40 children who had been selected at 3 months of age. In the first round of field work, the children were visited to gather data about socio-demographic information, socialisation goals and maternal-child interactions. The families were then followed up at each of the given ages and studied for different dimensions of their development (like language, empathy, theory of mind, deception, inhibitory control and autobiographical memory) with the purpose of linking these with the socialisation goals and also making cross-cultural comparisons. One of the dimensions of children's behaviour at 19 months included the study of compliance in children. This task required the mother, as instructed by the researcher) to ask the child to perform three tasks, namely to hand over a familiar object to her, to do the same with the researcher, and to take a familiar object from the present location to another room. Mothers in all the settings were given the same guidelines for instructing the child with simple requests. The responses in this report refer to the findings from the third task (to take an object from one room to another) for 14 German and 16 Indian families (Bhargava & Chaudhary, 2006).

The idea for this analysis came to us when we were viewing the videos. In the Indian families, it was noticed that the mothers consistently made subtle (and not so subtle) modifications in the instructions despite repeated reminders to keep it simple. The mothers and other adults in the room treated the compliance task with seriousness and were eager for the children to 'obey' in the presence of the researcher, since it is considered an important social learning. Perhaps one could also argue, that there was a greater cultural value placed on compliance in the Indian family in comparison with the German.

[5] Research study conducted in collaboration with Prof. Heidi Keller, University of Osnabrück, funded by the German Research Council.

Using the transcripts from the observations, we divided the instructions of the adults into four categories, namely, standard (as described in the task presentation, take familiar object O to another room), Modification-person (take O to a person sitting in another room), Modification-object (take O and put it next to X, a known object in another room), and Mixed (combination of the two modifications). We found similar results regarding the number of instructions given by adults in both settings, a total of 180 instructions (Mean = 11.3) in Indian families and 167 (Mean = 11.9) in German families. Figure 17.2 demonstrates the clear difference that we found regarding the strategies used by adults to get children to complete a given task. Perhaps the presence of many adults in the home as well as the importance placed on other people in the home (whether these were grandparents, siblings or helpers) was clearly demonstrated in this data set.

The findings were unambiguous, German mothers used standard instructions and object related modifications (go put this object on the table in the other room) significantly more frequently than Indian mothers (and adults) who tended to modify the instructions by referring to people in order to encourage task completion (Chi square = 137.25, $p < .001$). Another interesting detail that emerged from the transcripts was the mean number of encouragements provided to the child. In Germany there were a total of 132 encouragements (Mean = 9.4) and in India, the same was 306 (Mean = 19.1). In the quality of encouragements, it was found that there are clear differences between German and Indian adults. Whereas Indians tend to prompt the child more often, Germans frequently make it into a game or request the child to complete the task.

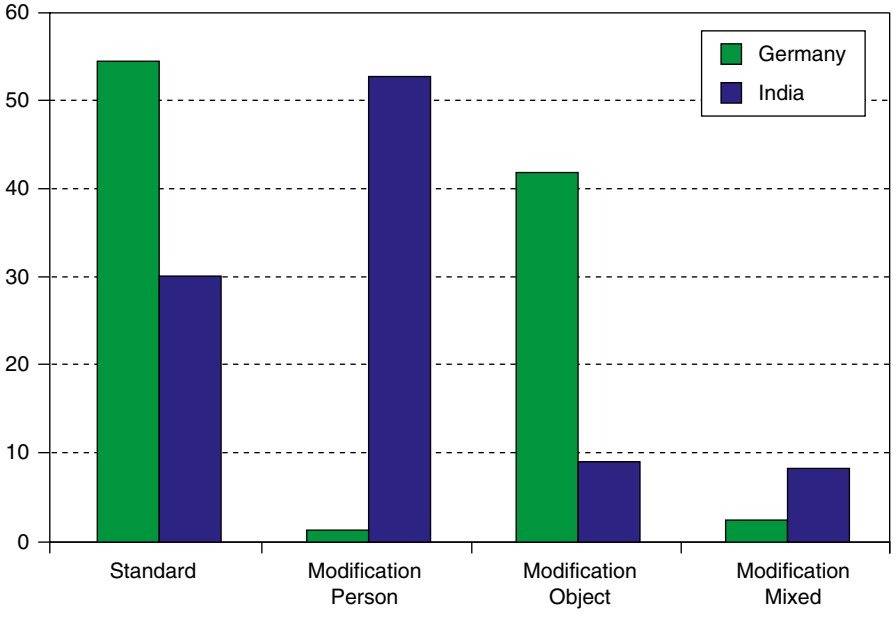

Fig. 17.2 Data of percentages of adult instructions to children on compliance task in India and Germany

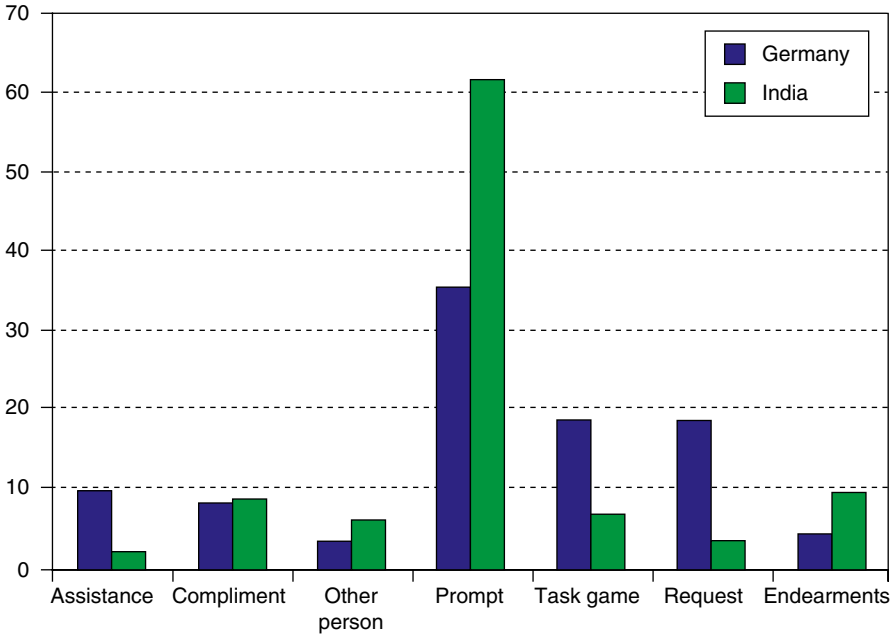

Fig. 17.3 Types of encouragements (percentages) provided by Indian and German adults to children during the compliance task

Another dramatic difference in the two settings had to do with the number of 'others' that were present during the data collection. A head count of the number of people around indicated the following contrast. In the Indian sample, there were a total of 55 'others' who interacted with the child during the sessions in all the families. Of these, there were 32 fathers, 5 grandmothers, 4 grandfathers, 12 helpers and 2 siblings. Not surprisingly, in German homes, there were only 2 fathers who intervened with suggestions or instructions to the child. This difference is profound and perhaps not without impact on the research situation. Interestingly, the findings of the study indicate towards a significantly higher rate of compliance in Indian children in comparison with the German.

Again this reflects differences between cultures in the conditions under which a task is completed. It is true that the modifications are an integral part of the context and children's socialisation. The moot point is that research investigations need to be alert to the process of data collection and not just the outcome to have a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics.

Approaches to the Research: Experiments, Ethnography and Observation

Experiments for investigating cultural differences in cognition have had discrepant conclusions from different disciplines. For instance, Psychology experiments

have found that adults in pre-literate societies fail to perform at expected levels, whereas anthropologists have discovered many advanced methods of reasoning among pre-technological societies. These differences appear primarily on account of the methodological divergence between the two disciplines, and the specific difficulties related to the use of the experiment in cultures where carrying experimental tools to maintain 'identical' testing materials is in fact a misplaced exercise since it is comparability and not sameness that needs to proceed (Scribner, 1976). The response of an individual to any experimental situation is determined not simply by the task set up by the researcher, but also by the respondent's appraisal of the task. Glick (cited in Scribner, 1976) has proved that the subject's appraisal and evaluation of the 'purpose' of a task is critical to their performance.

Isn't all experimental instantiation of human behaviour illustrative of a 'supplement' in the Derridean sense? That it is always secondary to, a substitute for, or a reconstruction of a natural or original phenomenon, and NOT the phenomenon itself (Derrida & Spivak, 1976). If it is, then we need to recognise that experimental and to some extent even observational study is at best a substitute for the real thing and not the real thing itself. When an attempt is made to go beyond the experiment and continue to ask questions from everyday experiences of respondents to investigate practical understanding, intercultural differences in remembering items were greatly reduced when the task involved strategies for recall that were 'normal' for the given population (Cole, 1996). For instance, remembering randomly arranged objects versus recalling objects with some culturally bound connectivity. After reviewing a range of studies in Psychology and Anthropology, Scribner (1976) argues for a range of research strategies to investigate phenomena in cultural contexts ranging from ethnographic study to quasi experimental studies since in her opinion, "Field work gives the research access to the natural phenomenon" (p. 321).

When studies are conducted in different cultures, many local decisions need to be taken. One important step is to have culturally familiar equipment, preferably purchased from local markets. Another strategy that we have found to be very productive is to have local research teams scrutinise the materials and methods, and also participate in the analysis and interpretation and dissemination of data so that one can arrive at representative and reasonable conclusions from the study of children, families and communities.

The Second Person Approach to Research

I want to introduce the notion of first person, second person and third person approaches to the study of human beings to explore the possible ways in which intersubjectivity in research (between the researcher and participant) can be addressed (Rao, 2008). By and large, Psychological research in the past has progressed from a third person stance, that the researcher maintains neutrality, objectivity and distance from the subject, respondent or participant in a study. However, in other traditions, in more recent innovations in Psychology (Hermans's self-confrontation method, 2001, Dialogical self theory, for instance) and in specific traditions even in the West

(Psychoanalysis, for example), the recognition of the study of the self (first person approach) is recognised and even recommended as a procedure in clinical study (as is the analysis of one's own dreams in Psychoanalytic study). I shall focus on the use of second person methodology as a possible strategy for integrating the peculiarity of the human condition, namely, the feature of being a subject to oneself, and the inevitability of being 'human' as a researcher.

The second person approach has certain important features (Reddy, 2008) that need discussion. This approach does not accept the 'gap' in the understanding of another person's mind, allowing the researcher to utilise the interactive resources that are invoked in everyday conduct. The assumption is that through "active, engaged perception" (p. 27), we are able to access a reasonable understanding about other people, here, the participants in research. Traditionally, researchers are trained to minimise these perspectives. Further, this approach acknowledges the emotional engagement of people in research (as in other social settings), not constructing the research experience simply as an opportunity to 'gather' information from another person. Research is seen as a social interaction, with procedures and rules and objectives, but a social situation, first and foremost. This way the transformations in the researcher are also possible to address without violating any fundamental principle. The second person approach, in my understanding, acknowledges the 'human' element in the researcher and the participant.

Fig. 17.4 A typical scene, the clustering of onlookers during field work

Conclusions

The attempt in research to minimise contextual influences and to create methods that are assumed to be applicable in all settings is a frequent objective in studies of cultural differences. Standard research studies attempt to eliminate contextual influences to arrive at an assessment of behaviour independent of "familial, cultural and societal" bias (Beckstead & Valsiner, 2008, p. 1). However, people generally rely on familiar cues in situations that are unusual. This disparity produces an interesting problem in research, and one that may be argued as profoundly influencing the outcome of a study. Rather than dismissing such encounters, it becomes essential for researchers to inform themselves about local realities and culturally familiar patterns of behaviour so that meaningful research can be initiated. The discipline of cultural psychology has acknowledged the definition of culture as meaning systems, symbols and interactions that mediate the interpretation of experiences (D'Andrade, 1984); and human psyche as "social in its ontogeny and constructive in its microgenesis" (Valsiner & Sato, 2006, p. 216). Much recent research in cultural psychology has moved beyond traditional limitations to look into the lives of real people from a wide-angle lens, thereby reaching forward into newer ways of understanding people's lives.

Regarding the positioning of a researcher, it is fascinating to read the distinct avoidance of personal experiences in official accounts of any research study, this is not usually done. This is despite the fact that such versions provide researchers and audience with deep insights about the progress of research on the ground (Gunther, 1998). These stories are not usually told to others, despite the fact that they may be deeply impacting the individual researcher (Anandalakshmy, Chaudhary, & Sharma, 2008). Why is there a resistance or reticence among researchers to write about their subjective experiences? Is it not true that we have to rely on the honesty of a researcher even when a mathematical finding is being reported? Why is the feeling of inadequacy intensified where qualitative procedures and personal experiences are concerned? In one conference (here the names are not being disclosed to protect the identity of the concerned individuals) where we were presenting a paper on 'motherhood' in India using qualitative methodology and women's narratives, the adjective 'seductive' was used to comment on the presentation. Since the person was an invited expert, with obvious affiliations to quantitative traditions in research, we maintained our silence.[6] But I recall that the young researcher was deeply shaken by the comment. For her, the implication was that she had somehow made a fallacious or unsound presentation of what she had spent months to unravel. Clearly the suggestion is that qualitative research study is attractive, enticing, but also potentially misleading! Perhaps there may have been some scope for improvement in the paper, but I am certain that there were no false claims there. This is the sort of reaction that clearly destabilises young researchers presenting

[6] I am hoping that the readers take my word for this account since I am not providing a scientific third person reference, but a first person account!

months and years of hard work with a conviction of purpose, attempting to integrate cultural phenomena with academic study. We also need to recognise that qualitative approaches also need consolidation and rigour; but the adjective of 'seductive' implied something very different from what could have been a legitimate criticism. I just consoled the presenter by saying that it meant that her presentation was very effective (which I thought it was)! In such comments, there is a clear indication that research that takes this sort of descriptive stance with a closer perspective, is second rate, and thus not worthy of scholarly attention. First person accounts of researchers are clearly considered to be 'unscientific' by the majority. Regarding second person approaches and the use of empathic engagement with the participant (Reddy, 2008), the research encounter is treated as a social event, thereby allowing the entry of empathic and interpersonal inter-subjectivity to arrive at assessments and meaning of events. This shift in position, the closing on the research event, would necessarily entail becoming involved with ideas and people in a manner that would inform rather than bias a researcher. Additionally, using techniques like data triangulation (Weisner, 2005), multiple methods for study (Yoshikawa et al., 2008), using different strategies (see Gould, 2003, for an excellent essay), being open to inter-disciplinary dialogue (Spivak, 2004) and relying actively on field work and quasi-experimental studies (Scribner, 1976), are some of the ways to bring research efforts closer to the lives of people they wish to speak about.

Thus, some of the simple ways of engaging with people and ideas can be achieved by keeping intuitive reactions intact and engaging with participants as partners in and not objects of research. Creating and following mythical rituals (like random sampling, or standardised testing) over and above the personal reality that is critical to meaningful social experiences, provides research with a sacred status; but it also distances science from everyday life, consequently defeating the very purpose for which the efforts have been undertaken!

Acknowledgements I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by Prof. Heidi Keller (University of Osnabrueck, Germany) and Prof. Jaan Valsiner (Clark University Worcester, USA) for their perceptive and pertinent reactions to earlier versions of this chapter. These comments helped me to become self-conscious of my occasional imprudence in discussing issues of theory and method.

References

Anandalakshmy, A., Sharma, N., & Chaudhary, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Constructing research methods: Insights from the field.* New Delhi: Sage.

Beckstead, Z., & Valsiner, J. (2008, August 28). *The dialogical self of the researcher-as-person who enters into a dialogue with the dialogical self of the research participant-as-person*. Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Dialogical Self, Symposium titled, Dialogical selves in developmental research practice, Queens College, Cambridge, UK.

Berreby, D. (2005). *Us and them: Understanding our tribal minds*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Bhargava P., & Chaudhary, N. (2006, July 11–15). *Cultural reconstruction of methods in Indian families*. Paper presented at the International conference of the IACCP, Spetses, Greece.

Bowlby, J. (1988/1997). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory*. New York: Routledge.
Caudill, W., & Plath, D. W. (1966). Who sleeps by whom? Parent-child involvement in urban Japanese families. *Psychiatry, 29*(2), 344–366.
Chaudhary, N. (2004). *Listening to culture: Constructing reality from everyday talk*. New Delhi: Sage.
Chaudhary, N. (2005). Researching communities: Travails of working with Indian communities. *Cross-cultural Psychology Bulletin. International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology*, *43*(4), 5–13.
Chaudhary, N., & Bhargava, P. (2006). Mamta: The transformation of meaning in everyday usage. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 40*(3), 343–375.
Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard.
D'Andrade, R. G. (1984). Cultural meaning systems. In R. A. Shweder & R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory: Essays on mind, self and emotion* (pp 88–122). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
Danziger, K. (1997). *Naming the mind: How psychology found its language*. London: Sage.
Derrida, J., & Spivak, G. C. (1976). *Grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Edwards, C. P. (2005). *Children's play in cross-cultural perspective: A new look at the six cultures study.* Faculty publications, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Nebraska.
Gould, S. J. (2003). *The fox, the hedgehog and the magister's pox*. New York: Three rivers press.
Greenfield, P. M., Keller, H., Fulgini, A., & Maynard, A. (2003). Cultural pathways through universal development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54,* 461–490.
Gunther, I. A. (1998). Contacting subjects: The untold story. *Culture and Psychology, 4*(1), 65–74.
Gupta, D., Shukla, S., & Chaudhary, N. (2008, July). *Intra-cultural variation in mirror-self-recognition among young Indian children*. Paper presented at International conference of the International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology, Bremen, Germany.
Hermans, H. H. (2001). The dialogical self: Towards a theory of cultural and personal positioning. *Culture and Psychology, 7*(3), 243–281.
Jahoda, G. (2002). The shifting sands of 'culture'. In P. Boski, F. J. R. Van der Vijver, & A. M. Chodynicka (Eds.), *New directions in cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 91–106). Warsaw: Polish Psychological Association.
Kagitcibasi, C. (1996). The autonomous—relational self: A new synthesis. *European Psychologist, 1*(3), 180–186.
Kakar, S. (1981). *The inner world: A psycho-analytic study of childhood and society in India*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
Kaura, I. (2008). Making sense of what they say. In S. Anandalakshmy, N. Chaudhary, & N. Sharma (Eds.), *Researching families and children: Culturally appropriate methods* (pp. 156–163). New Delhi: Sage.
Keller, H. (2007). *Cultures of infancy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Luria, A. R. (1976). *Cognitive development: Its cultural and social foundations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Marriott, M. (1989). Constructing an Indian ethnosociology. In M. Marriott (Ed.), *India through Hindu categories*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Mead, G. H. (2001). The philosophies of Royce, James and Dewey in their American setting. *Culture and Psychology, 7*(1), 49–54.
Mistry, J., & Saraswathi, T. S. (2003). Culture and child development. In I. Siegel (Series Ed.) & R. L. Lerner, A. Easterbrooks, & J. Mistry (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Vol.6. Developmental Psychology*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Moos, R. H., & Moos, B. S. (1994). *Family environment scale manual* (3rd ed). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Rao, K. R. (2008). Prologue: Introducing Indian psychology. In K. R. Rao, A. C. Paranjpe, & A. K. Dalal (Eds.), *Handbook of Indian psychology* (pp. 1–19). New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Ratner, C. (2008). Cultural psychology and qualitative methodology. Scientific and political considerations. *Culture and Psychology, 14*(3), 259–288.

Reddy, V. (2008). *How infants know minds.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Roland, A. (1988). *In search of self in India and Japan: Towards a cross-cultural psychology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sinha, D. (2002). Culture and psychology: Perspective of cross-cultural psychology. *Psychology and Developing Societies, 14,* 11–26.

Scribner, S. (1976). Situating the experiment in cross-cultural research. In K. E. Reigel & J. A. Meancham (Eds.), *The developing individual in a changing world* (Vol. 1, pp. 310–321). Montana: Hague.

Shweder, R. A. (1984). Anthropology's romantic rebellion against enlightenment, or there's more to thinking than reason and evidence. In R. A. Shweder & R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory: Essays on mind, self and emotion* (pp. 27–66). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Shweder, R. A., Jensen, L. A., & Goldstein, W. M. (1995). Who sleeps by whom revisited: A method for extracting the moral goods implicit in practice. In J. J. Goodnow, P. J. Miller, & F. Kessel (Eds.), *Cultural practices as contexts for development. New directions for child development, 76*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Sindhu, N. (1978). *Cognitive development in infancy: Maternal and nutritional correlates*. Unpublished masters dissertation. Department of Child Development, Lady Irwin College. University of Delhi—New Delhi.

Spivak, G. C. (2004). *Death of a discipline.* Calcutta: Seagull Books.

Tomar, R. (2009). *Pre-school children's conformity and its relation to selected factors: Authority, reciprocity, reasoning and majority opinion*. Ongoing masters dissertation. Department of Human Development and Childhood Studies. Lady Irwin College. University of Delhi—New Delhi.

Tuli, M., & Chaudhary, N. (2008). Cultural networks, social research and contact sampling. In S. Anandalakshmy, N. Chaudhary, & N. Sharma (Eds.), *Researching families and children: Culturally appropriate methods* (pp. 53–66). New Delhi: Sage.

Valsiner, J., & Rudolph, L. (2008, July 21). *Who will survive? Psychology that replaces quantification with qualitative mathematics*. Paper presented at the symposium entitled 'Why psychology moves towards qualitative epistemological foundations?' International Congress of Psychology, Berlin, Germany.

Valsiner, J., & Sato, T. (2006). Historically structured sampling (HSS): How can Psychology's methodology become tuned into the reality and the historical nature of cultural psychology. In J. Straub, D. Weidemenn, C. Koelbl, & B. Zeilke (Eds.), *Pursuit of meaning: Advances in cultural and cross-cultural Psychology* (pp. 215–251). Bielefeld: Verlag.

Weisner, T. S. (2005). *Discovering successful pathways in children's development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimisation of exploitation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Yoshikawa, H., Weisner, T. S., Kalil, A., & Way, N. (2008). Mixing qualitative and quantitative research in developmental science: Uses and methodological choices. *Developmental Psychology, 44*(2), 344–354.