

Swings, Hammocks, and Rocking Chairs as Secure Bases During *A Day in the Life* in Diverse Cultures

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Abstract We explored a range of familial supports in the development of ‘strong’ young children. We videotaped one full *day in the life* of each of five 30-month-old girls in Thailand, Canada, Peru, Italy, and the United Kingdom. A social-interactional conceptual framework guided our interpretive methodology. The diverse cultural tools brought to bear by both the child and her caregivers that appeared to enhance robust responses to the vicissitudes of everyday life are illustrated and analyzed as developing foundations of thriving. Toddlers and their caregivers enlisted soothing resources that exemplify microsystemic support that promoted the autonomy and social maturity valued by the families. Such factors appear to be associated with developing psychosocial well-being and resilience.

Introduction

We participate in an international collaboration of scholars¹ that is exploring days in the lives of five little girls and their families in five diverse cultures in: Thailand, Canada, Peru,

¹ The *Day in the Life* project began under the umbrella of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Research Development Initiative: ‘Interdisciplinary examination of the role of culture on human development: an international project for the development of new methodologies’ based at the Center for Research on Culture and Human Development at St Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia

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Italy, and the United Kingdom. The privilege of being invited into the homes of these children, the challenge of seeking to understand the different contexts, and the joy of sharing the richness of this vast data set with colleagues around the globe, make this project unique in our experience of psychological research. We are involved in other investigations of the development of resiliency, such as the *International Resilience Project* for youth (see Ungar, 2005), and believe that a focus on assets during the early years provides opportunities both to gain insight into instances of healthy development, the emergence of a “strong child”, as well as to detect origins of limitations on thriving, were such to arise.

Social Interactionism as an Organizing Theoretical Perspective

Whether we are examining the children’s emergent symbol systems, their engagement with cultural artifacts, their musicality, or their techniques for self-regulation, we have taken a social-interactional perspective (Baltes & Staudinger, 1996). We are guided by Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) encouragement to see human development in ecological context, and by Cole’s (1996) focus on the necessity for a cultural–historical approach to human development. Concepts of cultural participation, exemplified by Gaskins (1999) Goodnow (1997), Rogoff (1997), and Shweder (1996) have spurred us to find ways not simply to observe the children in cultural context, but also to gather data in such a manner that we might interrogate them both in situ, by involving researchers indigenous to the context, as well as reflect with the families of the children as to the construction of the meaning we take from the interchanges observed during the *days* (Bruner, 1990). We further seek to engage in a process of mutual exchange and reflection between those local researchers and the rest of the international team regarding our understanding of the lives of the little girls as they engaged in their daily rounds. Our researcher collaborators served as key informants by way of their detailed field notes and their engagement in dialogues with families as well as with the collaborating team with respect to the interpretations of all aspects of the *day* as they observed them *in context*. (For a further discussion of the project’s methodological orientation see Gillen et al. [in press]).

The Strong Child

By way of explaining what we intended to promote with the use of the term, strong child, we chose this broad term purposefully as a starting point, an opportunity for participants in each location to self-define child strength according to their own lights. We chose to use this open term to provide as broad a scope as possible to inspect the roots families are helping their children to lay down for the most advantageous outcomes they can envision for their offspring.

(Footnote 1 Continued)

(directed by T. Callaghan). Primary investigators for the Day in the Life research project are Catherine Ann Cameron, University of British Columbia, Canada and Julia Gillen, the Open University, the United Kingdom. Support for the project has been received from the following sources: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Human Resource Development Canada, the British Council, The Open University, University of Exeter, and University of British Columbia. Additionally, the international collaborative team includes: Sombat Tapanya, Chiang Mai University, Thailand; Giuliana Pinto and Beatrice Accorti Gamannossi, University of Florence, Italy; Roger Hancock, the Open University, United Kingdom; and Susan Young, Exeter University, United Kingdom.

Resilience as a Conceptual Framework

Several decades of intensive psychological research has now been devoted to exploring the concept of resilience in both normative and psychopathological development (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar, 2003; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Resilience, or the capacity to surmount life adversities “against all odds”, has been seen as a multidimensional trait that should protect individuals from risks known to eventuate in negative psychological outcomes (Masten, 2001; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999; Werner & Smith, 1992, 2001). The concept has been criticized for circularity, but the findings have been unmistakable. Some individuals rise to circumstances or occasions of adversity with unprecedented skill, while others flounder under what might sometimes seem to be relatively minor challenges (Garbarino, 1999). What are the roots of these different responses to adversity, and what are the circumstances and major sources of life hardships? While the literature is not consensual on many details regarding psychological vulnerability and resilience, assets-based analyses of responses to adversity have become more prevalent in recent years (for example, the work of Lerner & Benson, 2003).

Attachment as a Heuristic

The father of the original attachment theory, the pediatric psychiatrist, John Bowlby (1988), observed that children, were they securely attached but separated from their accustomed caregivers, at first responded with a hearty protest. Bowlby was conversant with developments in the ethological theories of his time, and he therefore posited a biological propensity in humans to seek securely adaptive attachment relationships. These relations were assumed to protect children from trauma and promote healthy environmental engagement. Mary Ainsworth (1970), a Bowlby collaborator, proceeded while conducting research in Uganda and then in the United States, to produce a protocol for identifying differentially those infants who were more securely attached than those who were either ambivalent or anxiously attached to their caregivers.

Along these lines of thought, two sensitive small volumes have been written that guided our thinking about the children we observed here. They both articulate characteristics of child–caregiver interactions that are seen to be associated with early affective well-being: Herbert Kaye (1982) and Daniel Stern (1977) each discussed in great detail interactional synchrony, which is an integrated and reciprocal systemic collaboration between child and carer. These integrated systems of interaction are seen to promote children’s confidence in both (a) the reliability of the world to respond in a timely and responsive fashion to their needs, and (b) the perception that they are deserving of such responsiveness.

These two perceptions are now articulated by researchers in the attachment field as mental models that guide not simply early experiential responses, but can be traced within peer relations and ultimately in romantic relationships; and researchers now even focus on relationships between parents’ attachment histories, their parenting styles, and their children’s attachment status (Cowan, Cohen, Cowan, & Pearson, 1996). Relationships during the early days are in no way seen as being unfixedly deterministic of later relations. As is the case later in life, according to recent attachment theorizing, it is not the nature of the early relationship that determines later affectional bonds, but rather what individuals make of those early experiences. Mary Main (1990) in her adult attachment research identified the stability and cohesion of the perspectives of older individuals as definitive of a state of mind pertaining to attachment, rather than assuming the direct effects of early experiences on later development.

Soothing Interactions

For this paper, after a careful reviewing of all 5 days in the lives of our 2-year-old children, we decided to explore contextually the soothing resources toddlers and their caregivers enlist that appear to support and promote the development of a strong child. While striving not to fall prey to applying either a universalistic perspective or to impose cross-cultural comparisons, we noted that in all of our five contexts, soothing, rocking, and swinging were apparently an enjoyable context both for calming ruffled feathers and/or for girding loins for activities that were to come during the *days* of our investigations in which the child was a notably active agent.

Our own predilections inclined us to examine these soothing activities from an attachment perspective. Again, not to assume either a single universally desirable pattern of caregiver–child interaction, nor to assume entire discontinuity between contexts, we quite simply observed the situations in which interactants sought and gained comfort within the busy give and take of each toddler's *day*. Very often these passages seemed as soothing to the caregivers as to the child, and so we kept ourselves open to the possibility of reciprocity in the various nurturing situations. As Rasmussen (2004) has observed, "Physical sensation allows a place to be encoded with meaning as special emotions arise . . ." (p. 166).

Young (2000) has described rhythmic play activities. We paraphrase her description, as it so well foreshadowed our swings, hammocks, and rocking chair observations. She observed children's continuous or repeated movements without pause or rest that set up a comfortable self-sustained momentum and created a multimodal coresonance of movement and tactility. Facial expressions might be as if a child were immersed; but if a second child joined the first and the two synchronized for a period of time, they might turn to one another to make eye contact and smile, demonstrating mutuality achieved through this synchronization. Synchronized playing demanded a simpler level of interaction on the part of the children than turn taking. Whilst children continued with their own playing, presumably, with awareness of synchronicity, the fine-tuning of their own playing to achieve coordination with another was not required when adults joined in by synchronizing.

Our ethnographic investigation of healthy toddlers in five cultures reported here was designed to examine the provision of a secure base from which the children ventured to explore their primary familial worlds, whether they resided within a nuclear or an extended family structure. Particularly notable in our search for instances of mutual responsiveness between child and caregiver was the ubiquity of such soothing activities as swinging and rocking, singing and dancing, quietly poring over pictures and texts, and of the very great care taken by caregivers to ensure well-balanced nutritional intake.

We could have chosen to explore resilience by following in such footsteps as those of Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995), who explored attachment security through the lens of family literacy practice. Activities that provide for the development of symbol system knowledge, family musical activities, exploring eating events, and many other mundane familial phenomena are also prolific sites for exploration when one wishes to observe interactions that enhance resiliency in a small child. We have reported on these topics at two recent international conferences (Gillen, 2005; Tapanya & Cameron, 2004). So we focus in this paper primarily on the soothing of the rocking chairs, swings, and hammocks, leaving our colleagues to address the other contexts, though not necessarily from the perspective of security affordances.

Methods

We sought to correct the paucity of research that focuses on strength-based analysis of early female resilience (Cameron, 2004). Interpretive research of the kind in this project does not seek to pose narrow and precise research questions, by which the scope of the project is defined in advance (often a shaping of project definition and measurement that is desirable in certain empirical studies, of course), but is rather an opening up of rich empirical data to interpretation. In a sense, our project is cross-cultural although we hesitate to make direct comparisons across cultures. As we have worked on this project, we have come to prefer the term *cultural* to *cross-cultural* despite the breadth of the first term. We have developed a range of methods that are designed to explore data from a number of perspectives: to feature close observations, and for analysis to be “precise, in the sense of being close to the thing discussed and thus being ready to take account of matters not anticipated...” (Becker, 1996, p. 53).

Phase 1: Selection and Preparation

Participants were selected by the local research partners who located an appropriate family willing to engage in the project, with an apparently thriving two-and-a-half-year-old girl. We worked with families whose attitudes towards the project were those of positive interest rather than neutrality. Two researchers (either the local researcher and a Canadian intern or two local researchers) visited the family to establish initial rapport and collect basic demographic, health, and lifestyle information through a semistructured interview. The project aims, extents of commitment, confidentiality, and rights, were fully discussed with the families. There was also a 1-hour session of filming to accustom the child and her interactants to the experience of being captured by a video camera and field-note recorder for an entire waking day.

Phase 2: The Actual *Day in the Life*

During this central phase of the research, the children spent a full day in the company of our researchers (at least one of whom was culturally indigenous to the context, thus serving to enhance our interpretive reflections on the interactions of the children in context). The two researchers arrived at the family home soon after the child awoke and stayed for as much of the day as possible. Video recording, usually using a small digital camcorder, was halted while the child was asleep or engaged in toilet activities. At least 6 hours of film was obtained in each location. The researcher present who was not shooting film, quietly observed, making notes on a spreadsheet on a clipboard, identifying the times the child changed her activity or location and people present at the scene. She or he also wrote explanatory notes about other activities or features of the environment to assist the distal project researchers with their understandings, and drew plans of the environment. Transcripts of the interactions in the situations were made, translated into English, and interpreted by individuals indigenous to the context. Tapes of each *DITL* were digitized and the CDs of these were shared among research sites.

Phase 3: Creation of Compilation Tape

Whereas a primary site of study for our international team has been the *Day in the Life* videos, we also sought to involve the original families in an iterative stage of analysis; of course, viewing the full day was out of the question. Therefore we decided that an

additional resource could be created, a short video compilation. The full *Day* tapes were collected and perused individually and then together by the primary investigators (Cameron & Gillen). The focus was on real time viewing and reviewing by the investigators who are from two different cultures and disciplines. While viewing the videos we were very dependent for understanding upon the field notes and layout drawings to gain a sense of attunement with each *Day*. Consensus was reached relatively readily, however, on selection of passages, but perhaps the cultures represented by the investigators (Canada and the UK) were rather too closely allied for distances in perspectives to emerge. We interrogated these strong children's navigation of variously quite sophisticated sociocultural contexts, and with relatively few words, as they negotiated the safe, stimulating environments within which they thrive. Working together, the principal investigators edited the half hour compilation video of around six approximately 5-minute clips that in collaboration were considered to display a variety of the activities and kinds of interactions the child had engaged in over the day, and which seemed to tap into the family's striving to support the healthy development of their child.

Phase 4: Family Reflections on the *Day*

After scrutinizing the compilation video, the local investigators returned to the target family with the tape. They filmed an interview during which the participants together watched the compilation video, pausing between sections for reflexive discussions. These half hour compilation tapes of each family proved an appropriate and timely elicitor of family discussion.

Phase 5: Projected Intercultural Exchanges

A fifth projected step in this research process would be to involve witnessing exchanges of tapes between these families so that we might interrogate varying parental reactions to other cultural approaches to the development of a strong young child, much as Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) accomplished with their videotapes of preschools in three cultures. This iteration, in which participants respond to the composites of the other locations, has not yet been effected. At the conclusion of this paper, we will raise a range of issues including the question of replication of these data.

Phase 6: Analysis

For this current strand of the investigation, we first identified instances of the establishment of respites from the "busy give and take" of ongoing activities that seemed to us to be establishing the child's "secure base" for confident exploration. We then identified the contexts in which respites occurred, the interlocutors associated with those respites, and associated artifacts (in this case, rocking chairs, swings, and hammocks predominated for us). Again, from Rasmussen (2004), "... swings are frequently the locus of a world of physical activity, imagination, songs and dreams for children" (p. 163). We then inferred the goals of the caregiver and child within the contexts. One final preamble to our observations: Notable was the aplomb with which these five children engaged in their daily rounds. Identifying sources of this ease with engagement made sense when we separated proaction from respite opportunities. Self-efficacy seemed to come from both exploratory/agentive (proactive) activity and withdrawing/self-nurturing (respite) activities.

Management of transitions and emotional regulation also seemed associated with the soothing we documented.

Results

A Day in Thailand

Thailand, the first of our locations for exploring contexts for the developing strong child, was where “our” two-and-one-half-year-old lived in a family residential compound near a major northern city (please see Fig. 1). She lived with two parents, one older sibling, two maternal grandparents together with an aunt and uncle and several cousins. The compound and its many amenities seemed to be shared in common by the entire family, although the large house of the aunt and uncle looked more prosperous financially than the other adjacent homes. The television set in the uncle and aunt’s home seemed available to all, at least on the day we visited, and a naptime was observed in that house as well. Actually, the house of S, our participating child, and her parents just adjoined the compound, but the boundaries seemed quite permeable. Of significant note to this paper is the extensive number of swings and hammocks on the property: There were six, partly sheltered by several tropical fruit-bearing trees—mango, coconut, jackfruit, and longan.

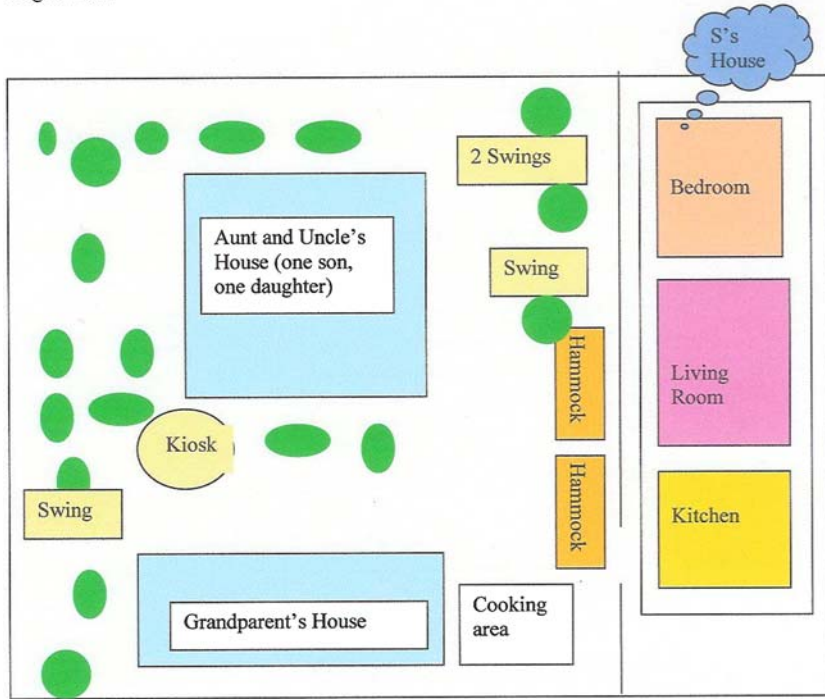
It was tempting to select passages of S’s day when she peacefully rode round on her tricycle, as she seemed reflectively to enjoy her own company in that activity (and her grandmother confirmed that she seemed particularly happy at those times). However, during the hurly-burly of the day, it was the downtime that she spent in swings and hammocks that most frequently seemed to sustain her. She swung alongside mother, grandmother, aunt, and cousins as the day progressed, but when tired, she seemed to find most particular comfort in the company of her mother. One can hardly avoid the additional observation that it was perhaps the swinging time when her mother seemed most at rest, a theme to which we will return.

The child and her parent seemed to achieve particular synchrony while swinging together. Often these respites succeeded a stormy passage of events that were, in turn, usually succeeded by renewed vigorous activity, but for a few moments, the rest achieved a common space of mutual alliance. Now this child’s day was in no way sedentary. She rode the aforementioned tricycle, no small feat for a 2-year-old. She followed cousins in cooking, shopkeeping games, pretence play, television viewing, kept active watch on a frog found in grandfather’s shoe, and so forth. Many of the playthings she engaged with were natural artifacts of her environment. There were few plastic purpose-built toys in this situation. The day’s activities were varied and full until her father’s return from work, when the immediate family’s television set was turned on, and S’s close relatives all sat down together to watch it.

When interviewed, S’s mother and grandmother identified their major goals in socializing this little child to be that of obedience, compliance, confidence, and of maintaining family connections. Much mention was made of parents not having enough time with children these days, but it was also admitted that the grandparents had worked long hours in their day, so they had not seen much of their parents in times past either. The child’s developing autonomy was a very high priority for this little girl’s primary caregivers. However, the theme of compliance to family needs and norms was also a strong factor in the discussion.

S's Family Compound

Chiang Mai, Thailand
August 2002



S's home is outside of the family compound, separated by a wall and connected through a small gate. S's mother told us that her parents and older sister (with husband) moved here first from the city and then she came afterward when she became married. It looks as if it was because there was no more space in the compound for another house, so S's house was built outside the wall.

The whole compound is filled with fruit trees (longan, mango, olive, coconut, jackfruit, etc.). S has free access of all the houses and she could run around or play anywhere. There are also rice fields outside and around.


 = tree

Fig. 1 Secure context for *day* in Thailand

A Day in Canada

By very great environmental contrast, we spent a day in the company of a nuclear Canadian family in a rural Maritime community. The child lived in a detached house with her mother, father, and younger sibling. The child's day was spent almost entirely in the company of her mother and baby sister. N, at two and one-half, was an accomplished child. Her graphic representational skills seemed advanced for her age. Her family provided her

with a drawing easel in response to this talent, and she seemed very much to take pleasure in the painting and drawing she did at it. She enjoyed colors and shapes, and requested opportunities to explore them.

In this home, there were many child-scaled, purpose-built children's artifacts, from small chairs, tables and sofas, children's toys, to even a play slide in the family sitting room. It is notable, then, that within this context, the most extended game engaged in that day was one created by the child in the kitchen in which she stepped into cooking pots and insisted she was "stuck in the mud". This activity, repeated many, many times, over more than 20 minutes, involved her mother's "rescuing" her from the "mud" until she once again found herself "stuck".

N's mother spent the majority of the day seeking to achieve her housekeeping goals in the presence of her two young children. This was a challenge for this mother. She at one point got out a large piece of plywood from which to construct a birdhouse, and struggled to make progress in its creation. Given both her own and her daughter's graphic arts skills, we assumed that the mother at least in part conceived of this as an instructional activity, but in our Phase 2 iterative interview, the mother denied this, saying the only reason she started the project was that she had decided to take the opportunity that particular day to do something she had wanted to do for some time.

In the sitting room there was a rocking chair that the mother and both daughters shared on several occasions. However, in each instance, it did not seem to be the quality of rocking and sharing that gave sustenance to either the target child or to the mother. The younger child was always in the middle that day. It would be interesting to know if, on other days, N and her mother took advantage of the rocker for mutual comfort and realignment, perhaps while the baby had her nap.

A most comfortable section of this child's day with her mother was a passage of time when her sister was indeed in bed for a nap. Mother and older daughter put on sunscreen and went to an outdoor slide and swing set in the backyard of their home (Fig. 2). Here, after the child ensured that her mother was on the swing she wanted her to be on, and after the two of them got in harmony swinging side-by-side, both partners at last seemed to find a synchrony that allowed them idle chat and a mutuality not readily achieved earlier in the day. Much of the previous hours of the day felt pent-up and not very relaxed by comparison, perhaps due to the relative isolation of their situation.²

A priority for this mother was for her child to be kind, independent, and sociable. Mother additionally identified that a critical aspiration in N's socialization was for her capacity for self-protection. Her mother was very concerned about US media reports of a child's, threatened by her sibling's kidnapper, not reporting the kidnapping until significantly after the event. She wanted her daughter to think independently and protect herself from older children or even adults who might take advantage of her. She secondarily wished for her daughter to be a kind older sibling and to develop good quality peer relationships.

I think the thing we are dealing with ... right now is her friends and learning how to deal with difficult things and her friends. [S]he has to learn to say, 'No, I'm not comfortable with that.' ... To be able to say, 'I don't want to play with you because you don't treat me properly'. Now the one child that she plays with is 2 years older than her so there is a lot of disadvantage there, so I do a lot of rule-setting—this is the

² My [CAC's] personal feeling of tension watching this *day* might well have been colored by my own personal recollections of being a new mother in a similarly isolated situation that afforded little social support. Perhaps this mother did not feel the same claustrophobia that I felt for her, and perhaps even savoured the peace of the context.

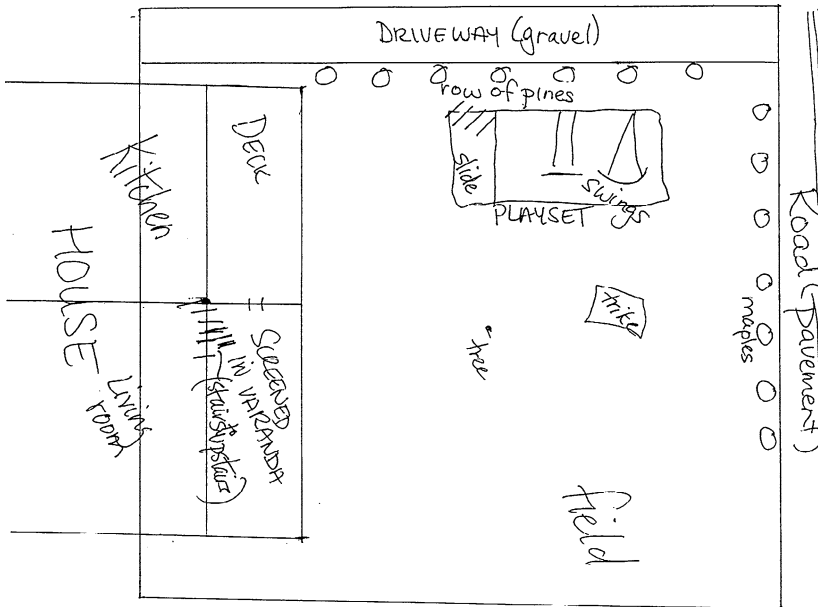


Fig. 2 Secure context for *day* in Canada

kind of behavior I want to see—and she is excellent at following rules. So I never really worry about her doing anything too serious because she has always been good at listening. I just set the expectations and usually they follow them.

The parental value placed upon autonomy striving was a very powerful influence on this parent's discussion of her socialization practices with her 30-month-old. This autonomy seemed to the mother to best be reinforced by the social skills she strove to encourage in her child.

A *Day* in Italy

In Italy, “our” nuclear family, a mother, father, and B, a single child, lived in a small apartment in a major Italian city (see Fig. 3). Extensive contact with extended family members was not apparent during the *day*. The father was centrally involved in the activities of this weekend day and, in fact, took the child to a park before our arrival, while the mother was out. When mother returned, it was getting near to midday mealtime and both parents were involved in various aspects of its preparation. After our arrival this hot day, the child exclusively spent time indoors or on a deck outside the kitchen, tending a set of miniature toy animals and materials for water play. As in Canada, purpose-made toys abounded in this family's sitting room. Much time was spent in joint play, especially with father. Some of that play involved soothing rhythmic dancing movements to music, but the portion of the day immediately following a nap, as she awakened, involved the most extended period of mutual synchrony between the child and one of her parents. The child sat on her mother's lap for an extended period of time, rocking, playing little games, and pretending telephone talk. Interactional synchrony was clearly achieved during this almost half hour of mutual comfort giving.

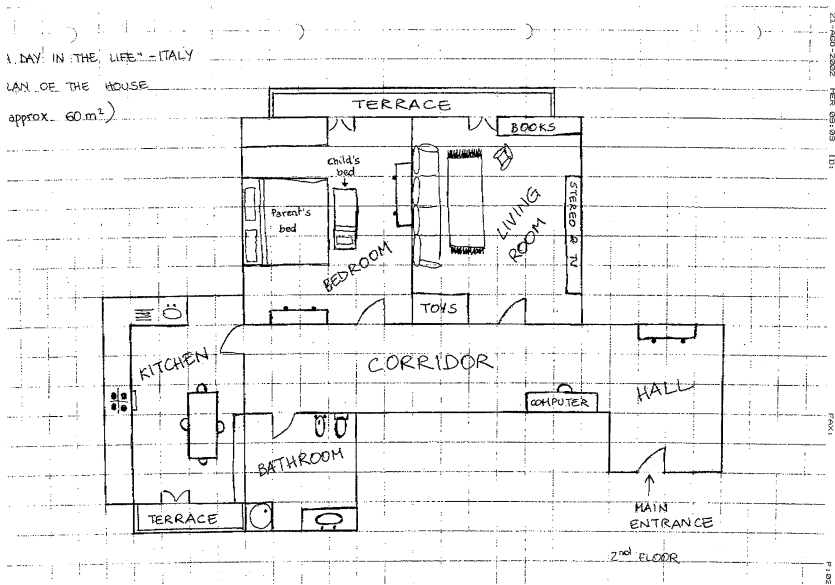


Fig. 3 Secure context for *day* in Italy

Asked the makings of a “*bambino in gamba*,” with its connotations of thriving health, strength, or resilience, the parents responded that the ability to act on her own initiative, self-confidence, security, etc. were priorities. The child’s father said, “I am convinced that our presence is fundamental.... We think we are able to give her our good principles and for me this is a good starting point.” B’s parents identified their presence in her life for moral grounding as the greatest gift they could give her when they highlighted the values they wished to pass on to her. These parents endorsed autonomy strivings as well, and ethical principles were strongly endorsed.

A *Day* in Peru

In the mountains of Peru, this rural family also inhabited a compound that includes residences for the child, and her mother, father, one much older sibling, aunt, uncle, cousin, and grandparents (Fig. 4). There were numerous opportunities for attachment security to be observed in their interactions with little T. Almost every member of her family fed her lunch on the day of our visit. Her musical prowess was a source of contentment for her as well as pride for her family, while quiet times with books with her grandmother, her aunt, and her young cousin served as respites during the day. She also was notable for her propensity to amuse herself with rhythmic, solitary dancing to radio-broadcast music playing in her mother’s shop interspersed with her use of an empty candy box as a play cell phone.

In the iterative stage of the research, when interviewed regarding the promotion of a strong child, her grandparents opined that families provided more strength in times past, and that there is something missing now: The belief in God keeps families united, the grandfather said. Homes and schools were seen as no longer promoting these values. Even though schools taught religion, this was not as in earlier times. The family also suggested that courses to help children with their emotions, and not only the intellect, were missing

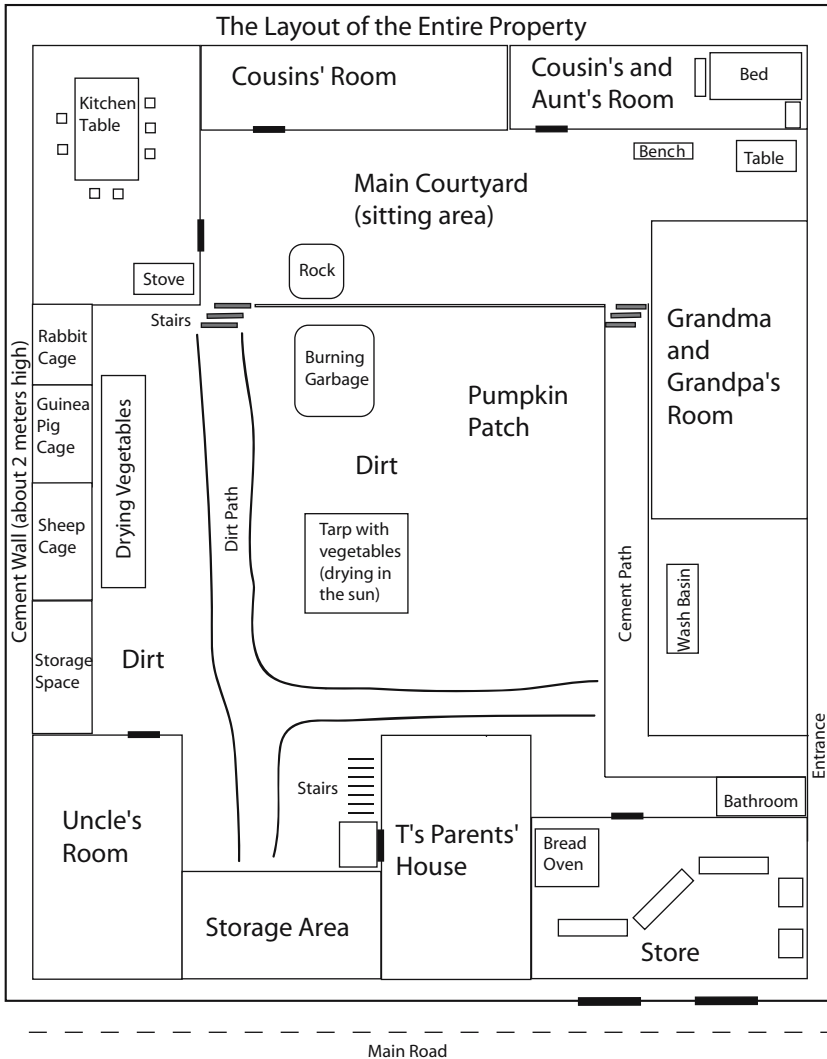


Fig. 4 Secure context for *day* in Peru

and were very much needed. Spiritual values were strongly endorsed by the extended family as was pride in the developing independent skill sets of the child.

A *Day* in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the family constellation of the target child consisted of a mother, father, twin sibling, and baby sister, with two sets of grandparents. The grandparents apparently treated the birth of the twins, plus a closely spaced younger sibling, as a natural disaster, so, as each set of grandparents was retired, they made themselves freely available for service in child care. Although the grandparents did not live permanently in the commodious home of the nuclear family (see Fig. 5 for a plan

of the ground floor), one set of grandparents stayed in the family home from Monday to Friday every other week. Interspersed were weekly stays by the other set of grandparents, such that one or the other set was consistently at hand for assistance with the children. They read, rocked, played, and accompanied the children and their mother to malls, children’s attractions, and were an intimate part not simply of activities, but also were very actively engaged in discussions of the socialization and rearing of their grandchildren.

This child’s *day* was impressively active. The family read stories, played drawing games, and sang songs; explored a shopping mall, visiting toy stores, and mastering planter-box walkways; had extensive rituals while eating; and visited a children’s farm, where our target child spent what seemed like unlimited time exploring an indoor playground. One parent and two grandparents ensured the safety and support of the three young children over the course of the entire day.

Although it was tempting to highlight for this paper the repeated reading of story books on grandmother’s lap in a rocking chair, the most soothing passages that seemed equally ubiquitous were quite lengthy passages while riding in the family car to one location or another during the day, and especially the ride home from the children’s farm at the end of the day. Companionable singing occurred periodically, but the rhythmic movement of the automobile seemed to sooth all, especially at the end of a long day. Mutual casual

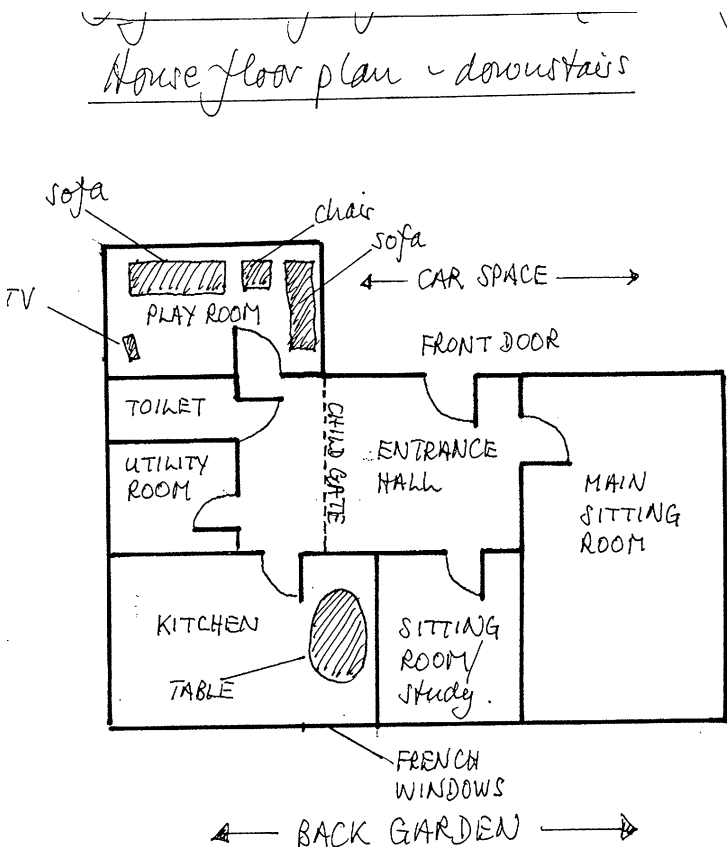


Fig. 5 Secure context for *day* in the UK

observations out the window, singing nursery songs, the hum of the passage of time, and the lack of complaints on any side made this ride seem particularly grounding for all concerned and turned the vehicle into a virtual family hammock.

Having twins has convinced their mother that children are “their own little people”, and also highlighted for her the impacts of nurturance on their differences. Observations of the target child, the twin girl, included, “She knows where she is, knows where she’s going.” She was seen as very mobile, with good physical awareness. She smiles; she is exuberant. Her family encourages her independence: “When you’ve got three of them the more they do themselves the better...She wants to do everything herself.” All family members seemed to value most highly the inputs of grandparents in young children’s lives. Again, autonomy striving was the highest of priorities with this family for their little girl.

Discussion

In conclusion, we have seen the soothing movements we have identified by our metaphor of swings and hammocks as a very functional aspect of the *days* of all of the little girls. The rest and relaxation that inserted itself into the families’ days provided opportunities to renew vigor for the challenges of negotiating an active day. The ascribed roles of these toddlers are ones of mastering the complexities of learning their living within their familial microcosms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The soothing activities appeared to fertilize emotional roots and to function as agentive wings that take flight at a moment’s notice in these young lives. The active engagement in the affordances of their surroundings seemed fuelled by the reduction in engagement that the soothing episodes provided. The rocking chairs, swings, and hammocks were more children and parents’ places, than simply places *for* children and carers (Rasmussen, 2004). The day seemed to be better for the rockers, swings, and hammocks. The attunement achieved in the interactional alignment between interactants is money in the bank for security strivings that Bowlby (1988) insisted is a universal need. It is certainly the case that in varied circumstances, these children all had access to reliable, responsive, and sensitive support. It seems possible that without rockers, swings, and hammocks, carers as well as children would have been the poorer. Their families’ foci upon autonomy and independence were one side of the resilience coin, the other side of which was provision of mutually satisfying soothing and dependency. Whilst the families differed somewhat in their articulation of goals for their little girls, and autonomy and compliance priorities varied, common themes of personal integrity and actualization were mentioned in all contexts. It is clear that at 30 months these children were seen as well on their way to becoming integrated into the cultural expectations of their parents.

We have not yet succeeded in developing the most appropriate questioning procedure for the iterative cycles of the research. A modification of Eyre (1997) and Milbrath and Eyre’s (2005) vernacular interview with the intention of exploring more fully the meaning of the terms parents use when discussing their socialization practices could be a generative avenue to pursue. With such an interview, caregivers would be asked to respond to a brief set of questions about child care, and then the interviewer could pursue the terms used in order to identify participants’ conceptual models of child rearing and associated socialization practices within the context of a *day in the life* of their child.

We struggle with the challenge of moving beyond an etic approach to our research question (Goodnow, 1997). No matter how well the research is configured to avoid stereotyping, we are to one degree or another bound by our conceptual origins, such that our

own emotional, cultural, and intellectual or professional backgrounds color our observations. This became most evident in reviewing the Canadian, Thai and United Kingdom *days*. There are distinct limitations as well as strengths in observers' interpretations based on both internal and external perspectives. The Canadian mother, when viewing her own family's tape made a similar point:

It's pretty straightforward... the thing I thought was neat was that it seemed so slow paced and my life doesn't feel like that EVER! You know, its like, 'Oh my God! I always feel like I am just running and I just find watching this kind of boring. God, there's just nothing going on- its like Stop! I can't believe this girly girl on tape is doing the same thing.' It is just more slow paced, I guess, than it is in my head.

Furthermore, as investigators, we have all been professionally trained in the west. Our heterogeneity of professional perspectives enhances collaborations but also limits divergence of analytic scope.

We would very much like to see our families' reactions to the children in the other contexts in order to give us a contrastive view of the values and practices of the children's caregivers (similarly to Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). The cultural perspectives of the collaborators and the participants themselves can be put in interesting relief with the provision of contrastive perspectives.

Several further technical methodological issues deserve at least brief mention. First, filming in an intimate home environment clearly potentially excludes a segment of any community who would be unwilling to participate in that sort of familial exposure. It was apparent that a running camera made an impact upon some older family members, but it appeared unlikely to us that the target young children were so significantly affected by our presence. The introduction of the request for a floor plan of the home and, when appropriate, the family compound, was critical to an appreciation of the context in which each child operated for those researchers distal to the family's context. Otherwise, our understanding of the *days* would have been significantly more impoverished.

Finally, we have not experienced a large enough sample of participants in each location to afford with any confidence any generality in our observations beyond the contexts that we have investigated to date. We would be delighted to see days in lives of more little girls and also, perhaps, some little boys. But this in itself would not satisfy all uncertainty. However, a larger number of instances could afford a sense of stability within our rich data set. We might not be able to interrogate these replication data as intensely as with the present cohort, but we could test our observations and intuitions against repeated opportunities for observation and analysis. We would also like to follow children annually through their early childhood years to understand more extensively the nature of the interactions we observed at just one point in time.

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