

## Revisualizing

*continued from page 17*

by Joseph Tobin, David Wu and Dana Davidson (1989). The method brings out reactions and explanations that are illuminating semiotically, sometimes confirming or modifying ethnographically based interpretations as when, in the original study, Japanese preschool teachers were highly critical of the low teacher to child ratio in a video of a US classroom, on the grounds that it would retard the children's formation of bonds with their peers. In addition to identifying points of contrast across cultures, the shock produced by the Tobin method elicits verbal explanations from informants that they might not ordinarily produce. In other words, it deepens our access to the cultural meanings guiding actors who shape children's environments.

### Using Video Archives for Analyses

The following questions suggest problems that we might use video

data collected in the field to address: Does the frequency or distribution of behaviors like *child striking adult* and *adult striking child* vary significantly across samples drawn from people like Samoans, Gusii and Japanese? Do cultures vary in the frequency with which mothers talk to their infants and praise or play with their young children? How do fathers interact with their infants and young children, and how often? How often do children engage in symbolic play and what forms does it take? Ethnographic vignettes alone cannot answer such questions, which require repeated and representative observations recorded on video that show similarities and differences in the same child across different age points and across individuals in the same and different populations. We need, in other words, to build a video archive that can be accessed, aggregated and quantitatively analyzed to reveal developmental trends and variations in central tendencies, and to identify possible determinants of child behavior with greater confidence

than previous naturalistic observations of children.

There are precedents for such an archive, including the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) at Carnegie Mellon University (<http://childes.psy.cmu.edu>), which stores and makes available to researchers audio and video data on children's language development from more than 60 countries. With these data it is possible to answer questions about the universality or cultural specificity of linguistic features and their age-relatedness during the years of language acquisition. An archive of this sort for visual records of children's environments and behavioral development would be challenging to create, but it could offer great rewards in comparative and developmental insights into children's acquisition of cultural meanings.

Another available resource is the Smithsonian Institution's Human Studies Film Archives, which Margaret Mead was instrumental in founding and which includes films of children in diverse cultures,

along with a great many other ethnographic films not focused on children. So far, however, there is no video equivalent to the Human Relations Area Files, which serves as the major archive for ethnographic texts and provides categories for written records of ideas and practices, including those related to childhood. The file-sharing capabilities of the Internet mean that field workers can now share their visual experiences of researching children and childhood as they have shared their written observations. This should lead to a wide variety of advances in the anthropological study of childhood.

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# Children and Families in Neighborhood Contexts

## Ethnography and a Multi-Method Approach

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A long and rich history of anthropological research on children and childhoods has contributed to understanding children's experiences and well-being across a range of contexts and circumstances. Neighborhood contexts afford rich opportunities to engage anthropological theory and methods to study and address child, adolescent and family well-being, and the neighborhood level of analysis is particularly relevant to practice and policy. Over the past few decades many services to children and families have been decentralized and relocated to neighborhoods, with the rationale that the neighborhood is more proximate and therefore more sensitive to the issues confronting children and families than are more centralized services and policies. Examining factors impacting the design and implementation of social policies enacted at the neighborhood level is complex, as not only do low income neighborhoods vary widely in rates of child maltreatment and other indica-

tors of child well-being, but even the basic child, parent and census definitions of what constitute a neighborhood can vary dramatically.

Why are child maltreatment and other adverse outcomes for children so unevenly distributed across poor neighborhoods in Cleveland, Ohio, a city that consistently has among the highest rates of child poverty in the US? Poverty is one of the major threats to child well-being globally and in US, and has been strongly associated with a range of negative outcomes, including child maltreatment. Many programs and approaches (for example, Weisner, this issue) have been applied to addressing poverty and its consequences for children and families, some more successfully than others. Mixed results reflect, in part, that not only are poor families diverse, but poor neighborhoods also vary, both in the conditions they provide for children and families and in outcome indicators of child well-being.

Our approach to understanding the impact of neighborhood conditions on child well-being is the close coordination of epidemiologic, or aggregate,

and ethnographic approaches. Aggregate statistical analyses of neighborhood conditions, in which a neighborhood is represented by census tracts, are powerful due to large sample sizes and generalizable findings. Census-defined areas (tracts and block groups) also make replication feasible. Ethnographic approaches offer a perspective on how neighborhood conditions are experienced and given meaning by children and families, shedding light on the processes by which neighborhood conditions translate into diverse outcomes. We sought to emphasize the value of combining the strengths of both approaches.

### Aggregate Analysis

We began with an epidemiological approach for assessing neighborhood conditions using data available through the decennial census and other administrative sources. We found that child maltreatment and other adverse outcome rates for children varied widely across Cleveland's neighborhoods, and that this variation could not be explained by poverty rates alone. That is, poor

neighborhoods differed significantly from one another in the conditions they offered to children and families, and in their rates of adverse outcomes for children, including rates of child maltreatment.

Our aggregate analyses used a principle components analysis to identify four factors that accounted for half the variance in child maltreatment rates across neighborhoods: "impoverishment" (poverty rate, unemployment rate, vacant housing, population loss, female headed households, percent African-American); "child care burden" (ratio of children to adults, ratio of males to females, percent of population over 65); "instability" (proportion of moves, length of time in current residence); and whether or not the census tract was adjacent to another concentrated poverty tract (Coulton, Korbin, Su and Chow's "Community Level Factors and Child Maltreatment Rates," *Child Development* 66:1262-76).

The factor "child care burden" can be used to illustrate the value of employing multiple methods. In the aggregate analyses, child care burden

indicated that neighborhoods with a higher proportion of children relative to adults, fewer adult males and fewer elders showed a higher likelihood of child maltreatment and other adverse outcomes. The most obvious explanation is that these neighborhoods have more households with single mothers with multiple children and without other adults around to help care for them, but that is not the only explanation

### Ethnographic Analysis

The ethnographic analysis pointed to another dimension of child care burden that reflected collective efficacy—neighbors' sense that there is local obligation and responsibility for each other and for one another's children (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls' "Neighborhoods and violent crime," *Science* 277:918-24). In the ethnographic interviews, the issue of supervision of and intervention with neighborhood children emerged as an important concern of neighborhood residents and amplified the findings related to child care burden from the aggregate analysis. Neighborhood residents expressed concerns that if they intervened in the behavior of other people's children, they could expect retaliation not just from other parents but from children, even young children. For example, one woman reported:

Just a few days ago, there was a woman walking down the sidewalk by our house. She had a little boy with her who was throwing rocks at our dogs. I told the boy to stop it, and the mother turned around and said all kinds of words I can't repeat. Then the little kid repeated exactly what she said.

These two perspectives, one from an aggregate and one from an ethno-

graphic approach, suggest different policy and practice solutions, one engaged with overburdened mothers isolated from assistance with household management and child care and the other engaged with the importance of collective efficacy and children's socialization within a wider neighborhood context. Solutions, of course, lie in both interpretations, and it is the combination of approaches that offers the greater potential.

The combination of epidemiologic and ethnographic methods also can

gave ethnographers the opportunity to informally observe the neighborhood contexts.

### Children's Perspectives

An additional component of our neighborhood research was a study of children's perceptions of their neighborhoods. Most conceptualizations of neighborhood social capital rely on adults providing assistance to children in need of intervention. Children must contend with sometimes conflicting messages that

necessarily matching the boundaries of their own census tracts! Children also were asked to identify their neighborhoods' boundaries, which varied from boundaries identified by both the census and their parents.

For addressing the many problems facing children and families, the neighborhoods in which children and families reside provide a potentially useful entry point for understanding contextual influences on child well-being. That poor neighborhoods vary from one another in the conditions they provide for children and in indicators of child well-being offers an opportunity for anthropology to be engaged in efforts to improve children's lives through ethnographic and multi-method collaborations.

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## COMMENTARY

be advantageous for ethnographic sampling strategies. In large urban areas, how does one know where to start an ethnographic study? The epidemiological analyses identified neighborhoods with variation in rates of child indicators, including child maltreatment, and different profiles of neighborhood conditions. This provided a systematic way to construct ethnographic samples that allowed for meaningful comparisons and addressed questions of representativeness and generalizability. We first selected neighborhoods (census-defined tracts or block groups) based on profiles of neighborhood characteristics and indicators of child well-being, and then randomly ordered addresses within those neighborhoods. Members of the ethnographic research team (mostly anthropology graduate students) approached eligible household addresses until the sample was recruited. While systematic, this sampling strategy was labor intensive. For example, to recruit one of our samples of 400 parents or guardians, ethnographers approached 2448 occupied housing units, speaking with an adult in 2098 households. Although labor intensive, this sampling strategy

adults in their neighborhoods can both help and hurt them. Children suggested that certain categories of adults were preferred should the child be in need of assistance. Women, particularly mothers, and preferably mothers with strollers (as a signifier of maternal status) were the favored adults from whom children sought help. Just as adults expressed fears of children, children expressed fears that adults might kidnap them or otherwise do them harm. What results is an ongoing mental appraisal and initial negotiation in which both children and adults gauge the risk of offering, seeking and accepting help.

Neighborhood research using census data by necessity defines "neighborhood" using aggregate statistical categories. To better understand the meaning of neighborhood to its residents, we asked parents to draw maps of their neighborhood boundaries. We speculated that the smaller census-defined block group category, rather than the larger census tract category, might more closely approximate how parents would describe their neighborhoods. However, residents did in fact identify census-tract sized geographic areas, though not

# Understanding New Hope

## A Successful Antipoverty Program for Working Poor Adults and Their Children

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Anthropological theory and methods can provide important evidence on how to support US working poor families and their children. Anthropologists are representing the voices, stories, experiences and local contexts of working poor families; describing the political and structural contexts of family and child

policies and supports; and advocating for social justice and political change. Morgan and Maskovsky (2003) review work on US poverty and emphasize the political context and effects of recent policy changes (*Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:315-38). Newman's *No Shame in My Game* (1999), Edin and Lein's *Making Ends Meet* (1997) and Strauss' work on US cultural models of poverty ("Not-so-rugged Individualists" in Piven et al's

*Work, Welfare and Politics*, 2002) are recent examples of excellent empirical work in this field.

We also can unite with other disciplines to better understand whether, how and why working poor families and children might benefit from improved supports. The New Hope study, published in Duncan, Huston and Weisner's *Higher Ground* (2007; www.newhopebook.com) is such an effort.

### New Hope: A Positive Social Contract

The New Hope Project (www.newhopeproject.org) was an antipoverty program initiated by community activists and business leaders in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that improved the lives of working families and their children. New Hope was a *positive social contract*, not a

See *Hope* on page 20