Anthropology 585/MBC 700: The Evolution of Childhood

Instructor: M. Konner, Ph.D., M.D., 106 Anthropology, 7-4195. My assistant is Kathy Mote, 404-377-5614, klmote111@aol.com Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6 or by appointment (contact Kathy and me) You can email me at antmk@emory.edu

My website may interest you: www.melvinkonner.com Scroll back through old blogs if you want to get a sense of my concerns and leave comments if you like. I’m on Twitter @TangledWing.

Time: Thurs 6-9 pm.

Content: This course will cover the evolutionary and anatomical foundations of behavioral and psychological, especially social and emotional, development, as well as comparative socialization and cross-cultural varieties of enculturation. We will read the instructor’s 2010 book on the subject, plus more recent research articles. The course, like the book, has four major sections (evolution, maturation, socialization, enculturation) and a concluding section. Among the topics covered will be relevant parts of: life history theory, evolution of ontogeny, evolutionary developmental psychology, neural and neuroendocrine development from fetal life through puberty and parenthood, comparative socialization with an emphasis on primates and other mammals, early experience effects, stress responses in animal models and children, hunter-gatherer childhood as the human cultural baseline, cross-cultural comparisons of childhood and childrearing, theories of culture and personality, cultural evolution, human universals, and a proposed “culture acquisition device” common to all (normal) human brains and minds. Among the questions we will consider are: How did parent-offspring conflict figure in human evolution? What is social and emotional development depends as much or more on “postnatal neuroembryology” as on experience? How do socialization and enculturation differ? What are our legacies from mammalian, primate, ape, and earlier hominin development? Is “maternal sentiment” a human universal? Is culture unique to humans? How do genetic and cultural evolution interact? Are there commonalities of process at varied levels of analysis such as evolution, brain development, learning, socialization, and enculturation? And, finally, what are the unique features of human childhood?


Additional Weekly readings: Journal articles as indicated below; all will be uploaded to Canvas if they aren’t already. The text of the book was completed in 2009, and one key goal of the course will be to read newer papers bringing each topic up to date. My rule of thumb for undergraduate courses is two hours of reading for each hour of class time. That would be a minimum of six hours for graduate students. I believe these weekly assignments can easily be read in six hours. Don’t expect to understand everything you read in these articles. I don’t. Do the best you can and get the most you can out of them.
**Requirements:** Class participation, oral presentations, and a final paper. Written work should look critically at topics in the book and even argue with it.

**Text:** Konner, Melvin. *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Harvard University Press, 2010) [Please note: I am aware of the potential conflict of interest involved in assigning my own book. I try to resolve this by calculating the royalties that I would receive if all the students in the class purchased the book at full price and I donate that amount to the general anthropology department fund that supports student activities. The paperback costs $25 or less on Amazon.com. No other book would make sense for this course.]

I highly recommend the January 2017 issue of *National Geographic*, “Gender Revolution,” which consists mostly of pictures. I have assigned a few excerpts. I would have urged you to buy the back issue, but NGM charges $53.8 (!), while all other back issues are $9.97. I guess it’s in demand. The above link gets you to it electronically. A few copies are on Amazon and eBay at reasonable prices. Parts of the issue are assigned with links below. The link will take you to the EbscoHost front page for that article. Click on PDF to see the pictures, which are the best part. These are also uploaded to Canvas.

**Requirements (see below for details):** Class participation, oral presentations, and a seminar paper. Reading should be completed before the class meeting under which it is listed, as indicated below. Written work should look critically at topics in the book and even argue with it. Oral presentations should get the class involved.

**Course Requirements:**

(1) **Active Learning.** All students are expected to read and think about all the assigned sections of the book before each class meeting. This is an interdisciplinary graduate seminar. I assume all participants are grown-ups (even me) and that we respect each other enough to be prepared. No two people in this class have the same backgrounds, and I don’t expect you to end up in the same place. I expect you to grow in knowledge, especially outside your comfort zone, and I expect the same of myself. We are all learning all the time. In my case, although I wrote a 963-page book on this subject, I expect to learn a lot that is new.

(2) **Class Participation.** All students are expected to contribute to class discussion of the issues raised in the reading; class participation together constitutes 33.3% of the final grade. If you are shy, you will either have to learn to speak up in class or take a different course. Quality of verbal contributions is more important than quantity, but there has to be *some* quantity! A good rule of thumb would be to speak at least once a week. On the other hand, if you are very comfortable contributing, don’t be surprised (or, certainly, insulted) if I occasionally ask you to hold back so others can speak.

(3) **Presentations.** The entire class is required to read all of the book sections assigned. However, beginning Thursday, Jan. 28, students will present the reading by 1) briefly summarizing it; 2) commenting on it from your own perspective, perhaps with your own
evidence; and 3) asking the class questions designed to provoke thoughtful discussion about the reading. PowerPoints are probably a good idea, although handouts could be used instead. Two students will sign up for each class session, one for each topic listed. These presentations can include handouts, graphics, PowerPoint, and video, but they don’t have to. I will occasionally supply something in advance that you may want to use. These presentations constitute 33.3% of your final grade. The number of presentations that each student will make depends on the number of students enrolled. Wherever you see this symbol § in front of a numbered segment, I need a volunteer. (Most sessions will have two segments of 80 minutes each with a 15-minute break. I will handle the first meeting and will take 30 minutes on 2/8, 3/8, 4/12, and 4/26, as indicated by my name in bold after the reading assignment. Plan to speak for about 30 minutes.)

(4) Research and Writing. Students will write a major research paper on a topic relevant to the course. This may be a research literature review, an examination of a controversy in the research literature, or an empirical research proposal. Papers that cover only theory are not appropriate. I will be happy to talk with each of you about your topic at any point. It may overlap with one of your presentation topics but should not overlap with papers for other courses. A proposal for the paper is due Thursday, Apr 12 at class time. Papers should be written in the style of an academic journal of your choice and should be rich in recent (last 5 years) empirical sources. The neighborhood of 15-20 pages is the goal. Be clear, factual, thoughtful, critical, and creative. The paper constitutes 33.3% of the final grade and is due Wednesday, May 9 at 11:59 p.m. Submissions must be digital copies in MS Word format submitted by email.

Plan of the Course, Reading Assignments

Th Jan. 25

First meeting; introductions, getting acquainted; introduction to the course.

Prologue & Ch. 1: Introduction (pp. 1-29); Ch. 2: Paradigms in the Evolution of Development (pp. 31-74) (Konner)

Ember, Carol R., and Erik J. Ringen. 2017. “Childhood.” In the series Explaining Human Culture, edited by Carol Ember. Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), Yale University; http://hraf.yale.edu/ehc/assets/summaries/pdfs/childhood.pdf. This is an easy-to-read overview of cross-cultural studies of childhood, co-authored by a class member, who will lead the discussion. (Erik Ringen)

Th Feb. 1

1. Interlude 1: Thinking About Birdsong & Ch. 3: Brains Evolving (pp. 75-99) (Megan Beney)

2. Ch. 4: Ape Foundations, Human Revolution (pp. 100-123) (Megan Beney)


Th Feb. 8

1. Ch. 5: Evolution of Human Brain Growth (pp. 124-144) (Erik Ringen)


2. Ch. 6: Paradigms in the Study of Psychosocial Growth (pp. 157-201) (Konner)

§3. Ch. 7: Interlude 2: Thinking about Bipedal Walking (pp. 202-205) & The Growth of Sociality (pp. 206-226) (Konner)


Th Feb. 15

1. Ch. 8: The Growth of Attachment and the Social Fears (pp. 227-240) (Minwoo Lee)


2. Ch. 9: The Growth of Language (pp. 241-259) (Sharon Hsieh)


**Th Feb. 22**

1. Ch. 10: The Growth of Sex and Gender Differences (pp. 260-276) (Sharon Hsieh)


§2. Ch. 11: The Transition to Middle Childhood (pp. 277-295)


**Th Mar. 1**

1. Ch. 12: Reproductive Behavior and the Onset of Parenting (pp. 296-328) (Jordan Martin)


2. Interlude 3: Thinking about Growing Up Gay (pp. 329-334) *(Jorge Lizarzaburu)*


**Th Mar. 8**

1. Transition 2: Plasticity Evolving (pp. 335-345) *(Jorge Lizarzaburu)*


2. Ch. 13: Paradigms in the Study of Socialization (pp. 347-362) *(Konner)*

3. Ch. 14: Early Social Experience (pp. 363-380) *(Sharon Hsieh)*


***SPRING BREAK***
Th Mar. 22

1. Ch. 15: The Evolution of the Mother-Infant Bond & Interlude 4: Thinking about Maternal Sentiment (pp. 381-425) (Minwoo Lee)


2. Ch. 16: Cooperative Breeding in the Extended Family (pp. 426-451) (Jorge Lizarzaburu)


Th Mar. 29

1. Ch. 17: Male Parental Care & Interlude 5: Thinking about “Oedipal” Conflicts (pp. 452-483) (Luisa Rivera)


2. Ch. 18: Relations among Juveniles (pp. 484-499) (Jordan Martin)

Boose, K., and others 2018/in press. Infant handling in bonobos (Pan paniscus): oxytocin and support for the Learning-to-Mother hypothesis. Physiology & Behavior. (Dr. Boose has given me her permission to use this pre-print; the latest version will be available soon.)


Th Apr. 5

1. Ch. 19: Play, Social Learning, and Teaching (pp. 500-517) (Minwoo Lee)


Pratt, Louise. 2013. "Play, Pathos & Precocity-The Three P's of Greek Literary Childhood." In The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World, ed. by J. E. Grubbs, T. Parkin and R. Bell, 227-245. Oxford, UK: Oxford University. (Prof. Pratt will lead the discussion on her chapter)

2. Ch. 20: The Contexts of Emerging Reproductive Behavior & Interlude 6: Thinking about Incest Avoidance and Taboos (pp. 518-536) (Luisa Rivera)

Malina, R. M., B. B. Little, and M. E. P. Reyes. 2018. "Secular trends are associated with the demographic and epidemiologic transitions in an indigenous


**PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN DAY, DATE & TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING. IT WILL BE ON MONDAY APRIL 9TH, NOT THURSDAY APRIL 12TH; IT WILL MEET FROM 6:30 TO 9:30, NOT 6 TO 9**

**MONDAY APR. 9 (Note: Final paper proposal is due)**

1. Ch. 21: Stress and Resilience in the Changing Family (pp. 537-563) (*Luisa Rivera*)


2. Ch. 22: Hunter-Gatherer Childhood—The Cultural Baseline (*Erik Ringen*)


**Th Apr. 19**

1. Transition 3: Does Nonhuman Culture Exist? (pp. 579-592) *(Jordan Martin)*


2. Ch. 23: Paradigms in the Study of Enculturation & Interlude 7: Thinking about the Question “How?” (pp. 593-623) *(Konner)*

3. Ch. 24: The Culture of Infancy and Early Childhood (pp. 624-635) *(Megan Beney)*


**Th Apr. 26**

1. Ch. 25: The Culture of Subsistence (pp. 636-650) *(Erik Ringen)*


2. Ch. 26: The Culture of Middle Childhood (pp. 651-674) *(Megan Beney)*


**Th May 3 (extra session)**

**1. Ch. 27: The Culture of Gender in Childhood and Adolescence (pp. 675-686) (Luisa Rivera)**


**2. Interlude 8: Thinking about Boys at War & Ch. 29: Universals, Adaptation, Enculturation, and Culture (pp. 708-727) (Jordan Martin)**


**3. Conclusion. Part V: Ch. 30, Reprise, Epilogue (pp. 729-53) (Konner)**

**Wednesday May 9, 11:59 PM: Final paper due.**

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**Deleted segments, FYI:**

**Transition 1: Neurological Models of Psychosocial Function (pp. 145-156):**


**Ch. 28: Evolutionary Culture Theory (pp. 687-707):**
