

# **Continuity and Discontinuity in Cultural Conditioning Ruth Benedict**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In our culture, the human growth cycle is a constant, from vulnerable infants to adults. Ruth Benedict underscores the physiological contrast between the two, as well as the roles that change over time. While these facts of nature underlie discussions of humans, the anthropologist's role is to analyze the interaction between "nature" and human behavior, and how culture influences it. In this context, Benedict highlights the concepts of continuity and discontinuity, describing variations in child training in different cultures and differences in roles between children and adults. She points out that although physiological differences exist, the process of transitioning from child to adult varies significantly between societies. In her paper, Benedict analyzes three contracts that are prominent in culture, namely non-responsive responsible status, compliance dominance, and limited sexual roles. This research helps to understand how culture plays an important role in the formation of the human life cycle, highlighting the continuities and discontinuities that exist across different cultures.

**Keywords:** Continuity ; Discontinuity ; Ruth Benedict Culture

## **INTRODUCTION**

Culture has always dealt with the cycle of human growth from newborn to adult (Liliweri, 2019). For example, nature has presented this situation dramatically: on the one hand the newborn is physiologically vulnerable, not yet able to take care of himself or herself, or participate on his or her own initiative in group life, and on the other hand the adult male or female. Everyone who fulfills his or her human potential will inevitably become a boy first and then a father and the two roles are physiologically contrasting. The boy first has to depend on others for his own existence and then he takes on the task of providing that security for others. This discontinuity in the life cycle is an unavoidable fact of nature. This fact of nature, however, in any discussion of human problems, is usually read not at its minimal level, but surrounded by all the accretions of local behavior that students of humanities have become accustomed to in their own culture. However, the role of the anthropologist is not to question these facts of nature, but to emphasize the interpositional position of the middle term between "nature" and "human behavior"; his role is to analyze that term, to document the man-made doctorate of nature and to insist that this doctorate should not be read in any culture as nature itself. Although it is a natural fact that the child becomes a man, the way this transition is implemented varies from one society to another.

From a comparative point of view, our culture is particularly extreme in emphasizing the contrast between children and adults. Apart from the physiological differences between children and adults, this is a cultural accretion. It will make the point clearer if we consider one custom in our own culture that is not incompatible with this conditioning. With the greatest

clarity of purpose and economy of training, Ruth Benedict achieved the goal of conditioning everyone to eat three meals a day.

The training of the infant in then regular periods began at birth and there was no crying of the child and no discomfort to disturb the mother. Ruth measured the physiological makeup of the child initially giving more frequent meals than adults, but because the goal was firmly set and the training was consistent, before the child was two years old, it had reached the adult schedule. From the point of view of other cultures, this is as shocking as the fact that a three-year-old baby is perfectly at home in deep water for us. Simplicity is another area where training the child to be consistent and economical. In these aspects of behavior there is no need for an individual in our culture to start before puberty, at puberty or later in life on an action that has been taught by all previous training. He is spared the uncertainty that is inevitable in such a transition. Because of the great variety of child training in different families in our society, Ruth Benedict was able to describe the conditioning continuity of the individual's life history within the culture. The childhood situation provides an excellent field for illustrating the various cultural adjustments possible within a universally given, but not so drastic, set of physiological facts. The main discontinuity in the life-cycle is of course that the child who at some point becomes a boy must later become a father. This role in our society is highly differentiated: a good son is submissive and does not assume adult responsibilities, while a good father provides for his children and should allow his authority to be infringed upon. In addition, the child should be sexless to the family, but the father's sexual role is primary in the family. The individual in one role must revise his behavior from almost all points of view as he assumes the second role.

Bendict's explanation above seeks to give us knowledge about the differences in child training in each culture. In addition, it also wants to provide knowledge about the differences between the two roles of children and adults in a culture. Continuity and Discontinuity are very much the focus of this article by Ruth Benedict. Therefore, in her writing, Ruth explains the following points: Responsible non-responsible status roles, Dominance of compliance, and Limited sexual roles, as well as Termination in conditions.

## **DISCUSSION**

The techniques adopted by societies that achieve continuity over the life cycle in this area are not at all different from those we apply in our uniform conditioning to three meals a

day. They are simply applied to other areas of life: the child wants to play and the adults have to work, but in many societies the mother carries her baby every day in a scarf or carries a mosquito net to the garden or to collect roots, and adult labor is seen even in infancy since the pleasant security of its position in close contact with its mother. When the child is still able to run, he still accompanies his parents, performing tasks that are essential but within his authority, and his dichotomy between work and play is not different from that recognized by his parents, that is, the distinction between busy days and free days. The tasks he is asked to perform are adapted to his strengths and the elders wait quietly, not offering to perform the task in the child's place. Anyone familiar with such a society is in stark contrast to our child's training. Dr. Ruth Underhill told Ruth Benedict about sitting with a group of Papago elders in Arizona when the house officer turned to her little three-year-old granddaughter and asked her to close the door. The door was heavy and hard to close. The child tried, but it didn't move. Several times the grandfather repeated, "Yes, close the door." No one jumped to the child's aid. No one took responsibility from him. On the other hand, there was no impatience, because after all the child was small. They sat sadly waiting until the boy succeeded and his grandfather thanked him profusely. It is assumed that the task will not be asked of her unless she can carry it out, and once asked the responsibility is her own as if she were a grown woman. The essential point of such child training is that the child from infancy is continuously conditioned into responsible social participation at the same time as the tasks expected are adapted to his capacity. The contrast with our society is huge. A child makes no labor contribution to our industrial society except as a competitor to an adult. His work is not measured against his own strengths and skills, but against the requirements of a highly developed industry.

Dominance-compliance is the most striking category of behavior where like does not respond to like but where one type of behavior stimulates the opposite response. It is one of the most prominent ways in which behavior is patterned within our culture. When acquired between classes, it may be maintained by continuous experience, the difficulty in its use between children and adults lies in the fact that an individual conditioned to one set of behaviors in childhood must adopt the opposite as an adult. The reverse is a more or less identical pattern of reciprocal behavior, and societies that rely on continuous conditioning characteristically give rise to this pattern. In some primitive cultures the terminology of address between father and son, and more commonly, between grandson and granddaughter or uncle and nephew, reflects this attitude. In such kinship terminology, one reciprocity expresses each of these relationships so that son and father, for example, exchange the same terms with each other, just as we

exchange the same terms with cousins. The son will later exchange it with his son. "Father-son" is therefore a continuous relationship that he enjoys throughout life. The same continuity, supported by a reciprocal relationship, occurs much more frequently in the relationship of a grandson or with the son of a brother's mother's brother. When these are "joking" relationships, as is often the case, Wellerr reports with wonder about the freedom and pretentiousness of little toddlers when dealing with these family elders. In place of our dogma of respecting elders, such societies in this case practice an almost identical reciprocity. The teasing and practical jokes that the grandfather visits on his grandson, cause his grandson to return like a coin, i.e. he will be led to believe that he is failing in politeness if he does not give a like. If the sister's son is entitled to unauthorized access to his mother's brother's property, the mother's brother is also entitled to the child's property. They share reciprocal privileges and obligations that in our society can only develop between spouses of age. From the point of view of our present discussion, such kinship conventions allow the child to practice from infancy the same forms of behavior that he will rely on as an adult; non-polarized behavior becomes the general requirement of obedience for the child and dominance for the adult. It is clear from the techniques described above whereby the child is conditioned to responsible status roles that this relies primarily on arousing the child's desire to share responsibility in adult life. To achieve this little stress is laid on obedience but much stress on approval and praise. Punishment is very often considered beyond possibility, and natives in many parts of the world have drawn the conclusion from our usual methods of discipline that white parents do not love their children. However, if the child is not required to submit, many opportunities for punishment melt away, various situations that require it do not occur. Many American Indian tribes explicitly reject the ideal of the obedient or submissive child. Prince Maximilian von Wied who visited the Crow Indians over a hundred years ago described a father's boast about his young son's hard nature even as it was his own father who was being abused, "He will be a man," his father said. He would be puzzled by the idea that his son should exhibit behavior that would obviously make him seem like a wretched creature in the eyes of his peers if he used it as an adult. Dr. George Devereaux told Ruth about a special case of such attitudes among *Mohaves* today. The child's mother was white and protested to her father that he should take action if the child did not obey and beat him, as the little boy could not possibly reform her. She is unaware of the dichotomy according to which adults expect obedience and a child must conform. If the child is docile, she will only judge that it will be a docile adult, a possibility she would not approve of. Child training that brings the same results is also common in other areas of life apart from the obligations of reciprocal kinship between child and adult. There is

a tendency in our culture to assume every situation has the seeds of a dominance-compliance relationship. Even where the submission of dominance is manifestly irrelevant, we read in dichotomies, assuming that in every situation there must be one person who dominates the other. On the other hand, some cultures, even when the situation calls for leadership do not see it in terms of submission of dominance. To be fair to these attitudes it is necessary to explain their political order and especially their economic order, because such a defensive attitude must of course be supported by economic mechanisms that are compatible with it. But it must also be supported by, or what happens to be the same thing, expressing itself in child training and family situations. even when the situation calls for leadership, do not see it in terms of surrendering dominance.

### **Limited Sexual Roles**

Continuity of conditioning in training the child to assume responsibility and behave no more submissively than adults is quite possible in terms of the child's physiological endowment if his participation is in accordance with his strengths. Due to the late development of the child's reproductive organs, continuity of conditioning in sexual experiences presents a difficult problem. As far as their belief that the child is not a sexless being is concerned, they are probably more nearly right than we are with the opposite dogma. But the great breakthrough is presented by unions that are universally sterile before puberty and that may be fertile after maturation. This physiological fact, no amount of cultural manipulation can minimize or alter, and therefore societies that strongly emphasize constant conditioning sometimes do not expect children to be interested in the experience of sex until they are physically mature. This is striking among American Indian tribes such as the Dakota, where adults observe great privacy in certain acts and in no way stimulate children's sexual activity. There is no need for discontinuity, in the sense in which I have used the term, in such programs, if the child is not taught anything, he does not have to forget it later. In such cultures, adults view children's experimentation as in no way evil or harmful, but simply as harmless play that has no serious consequences. In some societies, such play is minimal and children show little interest in it. But the same attitude can be taken by adults in societies where such play is encouraged and is a major activity among young children. This is true among most Melanesian cultures in Southeast New Guinea, i.e. adults go so far as to ridicule sexual intercourse within the forbidden class if the children are not mature, saying that since they cannot marry then no harm is done. It is this physiological fact of the difference between the sterile union of children and

the sex of presumably fertile adults that must be kept in mind to understand the different customs that almost always govern sexual expression in children and in adults within the same culture.

### **Termination in Conditions**

Despite the obvious advantages, however, there are difficulties in the way. Many primitive societies expect different behavior from individuals as children and adults like us, and such discontinuities involve a presumption of tension. However, many societies of this type minimize tensions by the techniques they use, and some techniques are more successful than others in ensuring individual functioning without conflict. It is from this point of view that agegrade societies reveal their fundamental significance. Age-graded cultures characteristically demand different behaviors from individuals at different times in their lives and people of the same age class are grouped into societies whose activities are all oriented toward the desired behaviors of that age. Individuals "graduate" openly and respectfully from one of these groups to another. Where community members are ordered to be loyal and supportive of each other, and are drawn not only from the local group but from across tribes as among the Arapaho, or even from other tribes as among the Wagawaga in Southeast New Guinea, such an institution has many advantages in eliminating conflicts between local groups and promoting intertribal peace. It also seems to be a factor in similar tribal military solidarity. Organizing the Masai of the East such institutions have many advantages in eliminating local inter-group conflict and promoting inter-tribal peace in Africa. However, the point of primary concern for our present discussion is that in this way an individual who at any time takes on a new set of duties and virtues is supported not only by a solid line of age mates but by the traditional prestige of the community. organizing the "secret" societies to which he has now graduated. Fortified in this way, individuals in such cultures often swing between extreme opposite behaviors without any real psychic threat. For example, most exhibit arrogant and non-conflicted behavior at every stage in the life cycle even when the peak of a life devoted to passionate and aggressive headhunting must be followed by a later life dedicated to gentle and peaceful rituals and civic virtues. Our main interest here, however, is in discontinuities that primarily affect children. In many primitive societies, such discontinuities are fostered not because of economic or political necessity or because they provide a socially valuable division of labor, but because of some conceptual dogma. Most striking are the Australian and Papuan cultures where "Man-Making" ceremonies flourish. In such societies, it is believed that men

and women have opposite and conflicting forces, and boys, whose status is undetermined, must be initiated into male roles. In Central Australia, boys are on the side of girls and women are taboo at the final stage of the adult tribal ritual. The elaborate and protracted Arunta therefore snatches the boy away from his mother, dramatizing her gradual rejection of him. In the final ceremony, he is reborn as a man from the "baby bag" of the male ceremony. The male ceremony is a ritualized assertion of masculine solidarity, performed by caressing each other's churinga, the material symbol of each man's life, and by bleeding each other with blood drawn from their veins. Once this warm bond between men has been established through the ceremony, the boy joins the men in the men's house and participates in the tribal ceremony. The four commanded stops have been tribally bridged. West of the Fly River in southern New Guinea there is a striking development of the Making of Men cult involving a childhood period of passive homosexuality. Among the Keraki 5, it is thought that no boy can grow to manhood without playing a role for several years. Slightly older men take an active role, and older men are jealous partners. The life cycle of the Keraki Indians includes, therefore, successively, passive homosexuality, active homosexuality, and heterosexuality. The Keraki believed that pregnancy would result from post-pubertal passive homosexuality and saw evidence of such practices in any fat male who even as parents, they could kill or expel from the tribe for their fears. The ceremony of interest in connection with the present discussion takes place at the end of the period of passive homosexuality. This ceremony consists of removing the possibility of pregnancy from the boy by pouring an alkaline solution down his throat, after which he has no further protection if he gives way to the practice. There is no technique to end active homosexuality, but this is not explicitly taboo for older men; heterosexuality and children are in any case highly valued. In contrast to their Marindanim neighbors who share homosexual practices, Keraki's husband and wife share a same house and work together in the garden. I have chosen an illustration of continuous conditioning where it is not too much to say that cultural institutions provide adequate support to the individual as he or she progresses from role to role or prohibit previous behaviors in summary. The contrast with the order in our culture is striking, and against this background of social order in other cultures, the Sturm und Drang adolescent period with which we are so familiar becomes comprehensible in terms of cultural institutions and discontinuous dogma rather than in terms of physiological need. It is even more relevant to consider these comparative facts in relation to maladjusted people in our culture who are said to be fixated on one or another level of pre-adulthood.

## CONCLUSION

From the explanation of Ruth Benedict above, we can understand that every culture always deals with the cycle of human growth. Here Ruth Benedict tries to explain about the different roles between children and adults. Here children or babies are physiologically vulnerable, unable to take care of themselves, or participate on their own initiative in group life. In contrast to adults who can take care of themselves and must provide protection for others, or who are referred to as children. But before becoming an adult, a person must complete his potential first starting from childhood. This process of continuity is a fact of nature that cannot be avoided.

The role of the anthropologist is not to question the facts of nature, but to emphasize the interposition of a middle term between "nature" and "human behavior"; his role is to analyze that term, to document the man-made doctrine of nature and to insist that this doctrine should not be read in anyone's culture as nature itself. Although it is a natural fact that the child becomes a man, the way this transition is implemented varies from one society to another. Here Ruth Benedict conducts research to determine the continuities and discontinuities by discussing the three contracts that occur in our culture between the roles of the individual as a son and as a father, namely looking at the status roles of non-responsible responsibility, dominance of obedience, and limited sexual roles. And we can clearly see that the training of children in each culture varies.

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