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Parental Investment Strategies among Aka Foragers, Ngandu Farmers, and Euro-American Urban-Industrialists

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In this chapter, we examine characterizations and explanations of parental investment strategies in forager, farmer, and urban-industrial (also called Western, modern, and global-scale) cultures. Observational data on 20 Aka forager families and 21 Ngandu farming families in the Central African Republic and 21 upper-middle-class Euro-American families in Washington, D.C. are utilized to evaluate models developed by evolutionary ecologists and psychological anthropologists to explain differing parental investment strategies in these communities. These groups are not necessarily representative of their respective modes of production and live in quite different ecologies, but they afforded an opportunity to evaluate evolutionary models of parental investment in these different settings. As far as we know, we are the first researchers to use observational methods to compare parental investment strategies in populations with three markedly different modes of production. Systematic behavioral comparisons have been made between foragers and urban-industrialists (e.g., Kung vs. U.S.; Konner 1976), and between farmers and urban-industrialists (e.g., Gusii vs. U.S.; LeVine et al. 1994; Richman et al. 1988, 1992), but no researchers have directly compared foragers, farmers, and urban-industrialists (urban-industrialists will be referred to as Euro-Americans in the rest of the chapter).

Table 8.1 summarizes "adaptationist" models of parental investment proposed by Draper and Harpending (1982), LeVine (1994), and Blurton Jones (1993). By developing a model focused on the effects of family context on individual reproductive strategies, Draper and Harpending (1982) were among the first to explain differences in parental investment using evolutionary theory. Draper and Harpending were influenced by the Whittings' (1975) cross-cultural research on aloof as opposed to intimate husband-wife relationships. The Whittings proposed that aloof husband-wife relationships (husband and wife eat, sleep, and have leisure activities apart) led to lower paternal involvement and hypermasculine males

