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Why Social Studies of Childhood? An Introduction to the Handbook

Jens Qvortrup, William A. Corsaro and Michael-Sebastian Honig

The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies signals recognition of a significant area of study which began to assert itself a quarter of a century ago. Its publication is a sign that childhood studies have both matured and experienced remarkable diversification; it is an indication that these studies, like childhood, have being and legitimacy in their own right. But even if these perspectives and approaches have gained ground, a handbook will be helpful in making them better known both in academia and among the broader public.

So far childhood and children as studied in sociology, anthropology and geography, for instance, have not had their own handbooks in the English language,[1] and in general they have been poorly represented among *oeuvres* intended to provide the public or a more focused readership with an overview, such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias and the like. The nature of this representation, or perhaps underrepresentation, is interesting in itself as a sociology-of-knowledge issue. Even if one might argue that during the twentieth century we achieved an improved and friendlier understanding of children, Ellen Key's prophecy in exactly 1900 about the emergent *century of the child* (Key, 1900) is hardly reflected or realized in the way childhood and children are represented in these kinds of reference work.[2]

In standard works like the three international encyclopaedias of the social sciences published during the twentieth century (see Seligman, 1930–1935; Sills, 1968–1979; Smelser and Baltes, 2001), childhood is represented very differently. In the 1968–1979 work by Sills, we dare say, childhood as a social phenomenon is not represented at all. On page 390 in volume two of this monumental work (18 volumes) one reads the following:

> CHILD DEVELOPMENT, *see* developmental psychology; educational psychology; intellectual development; moral development; sensory and motor development; *and the biographies of* Gesell; Hall; Montessori.
>
> CHILD PSYCHIATRY, *see under* psychiatry.

As these cross-references make perfectly clear, children are seen purely in psychological and pedagogical terms, and nothing at the time pointed to a change in

that, let alone to speculations about the failure to think of childhood in a broader social scientific context.

In a notable sense this was different in 1930–1935, when a 15-encyclopaedia volume was published. We find in this, under the entry 'Child', as many as 57 double-column pages. The entry is divided into 12 sections, which in addition to one about child psychology (written by Gesell) deal with what we might call social policy issues: child welfare, child hygiene, child mortality, child guidance, child marriage, dependent children, neglected children, delinquent children, institutions for the care of children, child labour, and child welfare legislation.

As to the most recent edition of the Encyclopaedia from 2001, technology has provided us with a search engine, which swiftly helps us with hits for 'childhood' or 'children'. Most of them, however, are about developmental or behavioural issues, or welfare issues; there is very little about what we in this volume present as social studies of childhood.[3]

These three different ways of presenting or representing children or childhood may to some degree reflect the time in which they were written. Even if in 1930 attitude changes towards sentimentalization (Zelizer, 1985) were in full swing, the problems facing children in the rich world between the two World Wars were still massive, and it is hardly a surprise that the Encyclopaedia at the time mirrored this reality.

In the late 1960s these countries were in the midst of welfare state development, where the social problems of children were less conspicuous, and thus it is perhaps less striking they were dealt with in merely psychological terms.

Though doubtless a coincidence, it is noteworthy that each of the three editions was published just a few years after the adoption of one of the three global children's rights documents. In 1924 the first international legal regulations were adopted by the League of Nations as the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child; in 1959 a new Declaration of the Rights of the Child was issued by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and then in 1989 the much more encompassing United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the General Assembly. While the two Declarations were rather brief assertions of intent with the purpose of underlining children's need for protection, the Convention added most importantly a section on children's rights to participate (see in this volume Freeman; Kaufman and Rizzini). The somehow parallel sequence might suggest the impact of changing attitudes to children in the agenda-setting western world.

Preludes

This handbook is called *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. The formulation is not intended to monopolize the concept of childhood, as some might object – in particular since not all disciplines preoccupied with children are equally well represented. We are well aware of this fact and we do not seek to disguise that the volume is primarily about children and childhood in a broader social scientific context. We are well aware also of the merits of not least child

psychology and the huge body of knowledge accrued from more than a century's study of the child. At the same time it was felt that a lack of potential new insights meant that sociology and anthropology – the two most obvious forerunners in the now interdisciplinary social studies of childhood – came to see difficulties in exploring children and childhood using their own disciplinary concepts and perspectives. It remains a predicament or at least a challenge (see Woodhead in this volume) to define the borders between sciences allegedly more focused on the individual, like psychology, and, for instance, sociology, anthropology, geography and law, which claim a much broader context as their remit.

It would be unacceptably arrogant to make it appear as if it was a complete novelty to talk about children or childhood as social phenomena. Numerous scholars within, for instance, philosophy and pedagogy have been fully aware of the impact of community and society on children's life worlds; individual gifted authors have persuasively demonstrated remarkable insight into childhood and society (Ariès, 1962; Mead, 1978; de Lone, 1979; Preuss-Lausitz et al., 1983; Zelizer, 1985; to mention just a few). In a Marxist and socialist tradition we find activists and thinkers like Key (1900), Kanitz (1925) and Bernfeld (1967), whom we would not perhaps count as traditional scholars, but who nevertheless contributed to our understanding of children's life and welfare. The same could be said about quite a few of the so-called child savers (like Jane Addams) who also produced significant thinking. At the same time it is in our view reasonable to argue that most of these people either were characterized by an enthusiasm and engagement on behalf of mostly poor and destitute children (like child savers, whether well understood or not; see Platt 1977, 'Introduction to Second Edition') or were lone riders who did not create a fashion, as it were.

We argue that it takes both ideas and organization to allow a take-off in setting new academic fashions or creating viable new paradigms. New ideas cropped up forcefully during the 1980s among individual scholars in different countries in the rich world, apparently independently of each other (for instance Jenks, 1982a; Corsaro, 1985; Qvortrup, 1985; and Thorne, 1987). Some of them were of course inspired by previous thinking, as mentioned above, but remarkably they also, without knowing each other, converged around some core ideas – in particular a criticism of socialization. Here it has to be said that they shared company with a few psychologists (see the collection by Dreitzel, 1973; see also Richards, 1974; Burman, 1994).

It is evident that social studies of childhood have become institutionalized in terms of professionalization, organization, public research programmes, teaching programmes and curricula at numerous universities and high schools, and in journals, book series and so on – in other words, they have caught the interest of more than a few farsighted scholars with alien ideas. Important has been the early establishment of a section on childhood under the International Sociological Association (Research Committee 53), which has given the field significant status among other research committees. Subsequently social studies of childhood under various names have found a place in several national disciplinary organizations – strongest perhaps in the United States of America and Germany.

While we argue that conditions in this sense were right for a take-off,[4] it is not easy, if possible at all, to make any definitive judgements about why social studies of childhood took off at that particular time in the early 1980s. Things were, however, on the move, as demonstrated by the UNCRC, the negotiations about which began in 1979. Social movements (Prout and James, 1990), and perhaps the women's movement in particular (Therborn, 1993), have also been mentioned as conducive to positive changes to the advantage of children, just as the continuous fertility decrease in Europe can be interpreted in terms of increased emotionality (family level) or as a sign of negative attitudes towards childhood in modern societies (society level). In general terms some sociologists of science, like Merton (1973), hold the view that no new directions in research are sustainable unless they reflect certain realities in the world (see also Adorno, 1973).

Social studies of childhood and their *raison d'être*

If one looks back it is possible to discern at least five characteristics of the 'new childhood paradigm', as it was called at the time: it aimed at studying childhood in its normality; it was critical of the conventional socialization perspective; it purported to give voice to or acknowledge agency in children; it tried to expose structural opportunities for and/or constraints on children; and it intended to use as far as possible ordinary sociological or anthropological methods in the study of children and childhood.

1. *The study of 'normal' childhood*: The impetus to set in motion social studies of childhood was not in the first place a social policy concern, even though there was resentment over adult society's offences towards children, anger over the way many children led their lives, or – as with all research – a hope that it would in the end be useful and serve humankind. We maintain that the new paradigm of childhood was one which did not primarily aim at responding to particular pressing social issues. The 'new childhood paradigm' was more than anything else directed at basic research with a primary interest in acquiring knowledge and insight about childhood and children as these notions and phenomena were understood in their normality and in seeing children as actors or agents on a number of stages and within many contexts.

In the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* from 1930 the focus was, as noted above, almost invariably on children who in one way or another deviated from normality or from what was seen as a desired condition in social, economic, behavioural or whichever other ways children encountered problems. The situation in the 1920s and 1930s clearly invited, indeed demanded, that political efforts and resources be devoted to coming to terms with such issues.

Currently, just as in the 1960s or 1970s, when new encyclopaedias were published, nobody can claim that social, economic or other problems have been overcome or are close to being solved – not in the rich world and particularly not in the large poor world, where problems abound. However, it is precisely in this large, problem-ridden world that one has the right to suggest that an

improvement of the daily lives of hundreds of millions of children presupposes as a minimum an understanding of problems of a larger order and children's place in them. Without denying the dire need to help individual children to overcome their subsistence or even their psychological problems, the new childhood paradigm would formulate its research questions in terms of socio-economic development of prosperous and healthy surroundings for children rather than child development.

2. *A critique of the conventional socialization perspective*: It is in retrospect clear that one significant feature of the new childhood paradigm was, negatively formulated, a reluctance to accept the socialization model understood as a functionalist understanding of child development. In positive terms the demand was to enhance the visibility of children here and now, while they are children, and to understand, accept and recognize children and their life worlds *in their own right*. Children are not here merely or first of all to become adults, though, of course, we all expect and hope that they will become adults. However, this expectation and hope had, in lore and science, gained so much attention and conveyed so much significance that it was more or less forgotten that children also have a life while they are children. To insist that this life has a worth in its own right amounts to saying that it should not necessarily be formed according to criteria for a successful later adult life. This important perspective has been very influential, whether one is studying children's agency or childhood in structural terms.

3. *Agency and voice for children*: Among those who embarked on the study of children within the framework of the new paradigm of childhood it was a common observation that children were largely appreciated as people who were on the receiving end in terms of provision and knowledge. Children were reduced to vulnerable people to be protected without being seen also as participants – in any case, not participants in the larger social fabric, which was an adult privilege and prerogative. Therefore it became imperative for social studies of childhood to look into these charges or prejudices. Was it 'naturally' or necessarily the case that children lacked qualities and capacities for participation? If this proved not to be so, were these qualities and capacities merely useful or applicable in a childhood context – because nobody would deny, of course, that children did possess resources, creativity and inventiveness.

Against this background it is interesting that the UNCRC was formulate during the same period as the breakthrough in childhood studies, because this momentous document also granted children participatory potential and endowed them with participatory rights, even though they were restricted compared to those held by adults.

Social studies of childhood have made available numerous studies about children's agency in circumstances and surroundings far beyond the more narrow vicinities in which children have so far been seen as victims conceptually and empirically.

PROOF

4. *Structural constraints on childhood*: It followed from the new understanding of children and childhood as being part of not merely the particularistic world of family and locality, but also of the larger society, that they encountered new opportunities and constraints. The limited space so far allotted to them in research had not found much reason to explore these opportunities and constraints. Social studies of childhood found that parameters in terms of economics, technology, urbanization and even globalization are on many occasions highly relevant to the study of childhood – and these new perspectives and horizons are a great revelation. In fact, even within these large-scale frameworks children have been found to be not only victims but also actors and participants, for better or worse (see Bailey in this volume).

This commonality implies an opportunity to compare childhoods in various contexts, historically and interculturally. The historical perspective has been and remains an inspiration and an interest in itself, and it is of clear significance also in accounting for what childhood is like in other parts of the world, outside the most developed and rich nations. One the one hand, studies of childhood under various circumstances occasion variegated views of what children's life worlds are like. On the other hand, they also invite us to speculate about what these many life worlds have in common. To this end, our Handbook gives significance to a generational perspective in the sense that a relationship to adults is a reality for each and every child, just as there has always been a relationship between childhood and other generational segments, notably adulthood.

5. *The use of ordinary social scientific methods to study children and childhood:* Our suggestion above that childhood and children as research objects do not in principle deviate from other sociological or anthropological research objects implies that children are in fact humans and therefore also can and should be studied as such. They do not belong to another species requiring particular methods. Social studies of childhood do not deny, of course, that children are 'small' people, but this fact does not make them less human. Sometimes one gets the impression that the fact of their smallness is conducive to including them or conceptually incarcerating them in a micro world or a world of particularism; children are seldom studied as people who are part of a universal, cosmopolitan or global orbit. However, children are present in all societies and in most contexts and must therefore be accounted for in all these times and places. Indeed, childhood and children must be accounted for also in terms of influence from distant factors: even if children are not present at most adult work places, for instance, they are obviously impacted by parents' employment; even if children are far away from places where political and economic decisions are made, we still need to study the influence such decisions have on children's life worlds; children are obviously impacted heavily by environmental and climatic changes; what we do not know is whether, how and to what extent they are differently impacted than adults.

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The structure and contents of the Handbook

A handbook is, as we understand it, a book whose chapters as far as possible give a state-of-the-art overview of their respective subjects. Its aim is to collect and present significant knowledge and to provide an overview on which the reader can rely. At the same time it must not lose the personal style and perspective of each chapter's author. It has been the intention of this Handbook to faithfully represent new insight and perspectives without necessarily concealing our own position. As a field develops, it will inevitably experience a proliferation of both subject areas and ways of seeing the subject at issue and its context. To remain an up-to-date and living document a handbook cannot and should not hide productive disagreements, and it is hardly a surprise that the epistemological debates found elsewhere are also represented among scholars of social studies of childhood.

A handbook is a book which can be used by scholars, students and the interested public. Each chapter should make the reader wiser and inspired; it must be a rounded piece in itself as well as one which generates interest in and references to further study. Such an ambitious aim is of course variously approached by the book's many authors, and we as editors have made no efforts to streamline the chapters theoretically or methodologically.

The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies contains 28 chapters distributed over six sections: I: Concepts of childhood studies; II: Historical and socio-economic contexts of childhood; III: Generational relations; IV: Children's everyday lives/ the local framework; V: Children's practice – children as participants; and VI: Children's rights and place in the world.

Section I of the Handbook is devoted to the conceptual and theoretical foundations of childhood studies. The first two chapters deal with two concepts which have simultaneously become signature themes in childhood studies. Through an understanding of childhood as a structural form, the field of childhood studies distinguishes itself from socialization research. Jens Qvortrup develops this idea in the context of the conceptual dualism of structure vs. agency (Chapter 1), which plays a significant role in the theoretical history of the social sciences. Conceiving childhood as a unit in the social structure makes it possible to distinguish the individual development of children from the historical and cultural history of childhood. Childhood as a structural form functions as a framework within which children lead their lives. This approach opens up childhood studies as a new and fruitful field of research.

Just as significant as the concept of childhood as a structural form is the idea of children's agency. Allison James (Chapter 2) anchors the idea of children's agency in the general shifts in social theory which took place in the 1970s and 1980s, which have both an epistemological and a political significance. James examines the concept of the social actor and its relationship to the concept of agency. Agency constitutes an individual competence of children, not a sign of their subordinate status in relation to adults. As agents, children make their own

contribution to social and cultural reproduction. This thesis is supported with the research results of a variety of studies.

Agency as competence – this raises the question of how childhood studies approach the psychology of individual developmental processes. Martin Woodhead provides, in Chapter 3, a detailed and differentiated overview of the origins and extension of the development paradigm of childhood since the late nineteenth century. It will surprise some readers that many of the critiques of developmentalism were raised in the many controversial debates in developmental psychology itself. For example, William Kessen put forward the thesis of 'the child as a cultural invention' in the American Psychological Association's house journal as early as 1979. Woodhead shows that a strong research agenda on change and transition in children's growth, learning and well-being is essential for childhood studies.

This warning against too hasty a rejection of the developmental paradigm carries over correspondingly to the problem of socialization. Michael-Sebastian Honig puts forward, in Chapter 4, the proposition that childhood studies are to be based not on a demarcation from developmental psychology and socialization research, but on the ways and means by which they gain access to the reality of children's lives. He reminds us that one of the roots of childhood studies is the critique of the adult ideological viewpoint. Childhood studies can only move beyond this viewpoint when they make a distinction between children and childhood and ask: how is the child possible? This question can be answered not with an alternative image of the child, but through the analysis of the social conditions for making children observable.

This is followed by a brief critical evaluation of the empirical research practice of childhood studies. Andreas Lange and Johanna Mierendorff provide in their contribution (Chapter 5) an overview of the methodology and methods of childhood research. It revolves around the question of how the new epistemological agenda of childhood studies can be realized with the standards of social scientific research. The authors show that this question cannot ultimately be answered in a technical way; rather, we need to resolve the substantial problems of 'object adequacy'. They begin by identifying four methodological shifts which are characteristic of childhood studies, and link these to a discussion of tools for childhood research. In this way the methodological discussion turns into an overview of exemplary qualitative and quantitative projects in international childhood research.

Section II of the Handbook is devoted to the historical and social transformation of childhood. The first two chapters identify two historical focuses: Harry Hendrick examines the evolution of childhood in Western Europe; John Gillis concentrates on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the emergence of 'modern childhood'. In the two following chapters, Helga Zeiher and An-Magritt Jensen engage with the institutional and demographic aspects of the transformation.

Setting out from Ariès' famous thesis, Harry Hendrick first provides in Chapter 6 a clearly structured account of the various theoretical approaches in family historiography and the controversies surrounding the parent–child relationship. In the

late middle ages, children and childhood were embedded in the familial household and the family economy. Hendrick examines the cultural and economic changes which took place in European modernity as a process of 'dis-embedding'. He places this in five contexts: the rise of science, the transformation of religiosity, poverty and its consequences, children's work and children's education. Fundamental changes took place in the meaning of 'childhood'. The evolution of childhood, according to Hendrick, is the evolution of an idea of childhood. Childhood had achieved at the beginning of the nineteenth century the status of a representation of the self in which a person's essence is expressed.

Like Harry Hendrick, John Gillis warns against the fiction of continuity (Chapter 7). Gillis sees the nineteenth century as constituting a historical break. Modernity means a comprehensive mobilization in time and space; it transforms children from 'beings' into 'becomings'. Development becomes the metaphor for childhood; age-group membership becomes the principle underpinning the social organization of the improvement and disciplining of the rising generation. On the one hand, children's space and time is placed under supervision; on the other, space and time become the most meaningful representation of childhood. Gillis examines as a key example the meaning of the child's birthday, which was almost non-existent before the nineteenth century; he discusses the ubiquity of children's photographs and draws attention to the stylization of past childhood as the most meaningful phase of life, the 'paradise lost' of adulthood. The costs of this sacralization (Zelizer) are high: children pay with their autonomy; for adults, having children gains a significance which is difficult to live up to – certainly an important reason for the epochal decline in fertility in Western Europe.

What Hendrick and Gillis describe as a historical phenomenon is represented by Helga Zeiher as a social process. The theme of Chapter 8 is the origin and transformation of childhood as an institution. Processes of institutionalization are many-sided and contradictory. Modern childhood is constituted by 'scholarization' and 'familialization', which bring about a differential organization of children's space and time. The 'chronologization' of the life course revolutionizes childhood in modernity: it makes it possible to subject childhood to an ultimate goal, and to direct children over a period of time towards this goal through pedagogy. The process of institutionalization liberates children structurally from their parents' personal power over resources, but subjects them to the rules and goals of both state and market organizations. In this respect all children are equal, but there are also new opportunities for the development of children's agency: individualization and institutionalization are complementary. Zeiher observes a trend towards de-standardization of contemporary childhood. She thus warns against also seeing that as a form of 'de-institutionalization' and misunderstanding it as 'liberation of the child'.

Since the nineteenth century industrialization has disrupted children's position within the family. Individual wage labour replaces the familial household as the basis for securing existence. Marriage correspondingly loses its significance for the legitimation of one's offspring. The lost monopoly of marriage at the birth of a child leads to a pluralization of family forms. An-Magritt Jensen

describes in Chapter 9 this secular tendency of modern societies in the industrialized West from children's perspective. Children who grow up with their biological, married dual-earner parents are the winners in this change; children who grow up in consensual unions are the losers. They run a greater risk that their parents will separate, that they will experience poverty and that they will lose their relationship to their father. Jensen also draws attention to the frequently overlooked consequences of familial 'pluralization' for children's everyday life. She draws her discussion together in the thesis that adults, not children, stand at the centre of the freedom of choice manifested in the transformation of the family – which provokes the question: Why should people have children?

Section III contains contributions on generational relations and perspectives, which for many childhood scholars are pivotal to the whole area and include in principle a family and a societal level as well as a cross-sectional and a life course perspective.

Although a generational perspective on childhood is not completely new, Leena Alanen assumes in Chapter 10 the task of theoretically consolidating it while including useful comparisons to class and in particular gender studies. It is thus plausibly argued that just as studies of women are impossible without considering men, one cannot imagine a study of childhood without also having adulthood in mind as an *internal* (necessary) relation. This is to say that we must expect that there exists a generational order in society that pertains to children, adults and other generational segments, just as one finds class and gender orders which exist beyond face-to-face relations. This implies that generational relations must include not only parent–child relationships, as in families, but also, in a macro perspective, adult–minor relations that are pervasive and valid in many contexts. Alanen introduces and draws on Mannheim's classic article on generation from 1928 (see also Hengst in this volume) and thus suggests that childhood studies have a bearing on studies of social structure in general.

Berry Mayall in Chapter 11 suggests generational perspectives at a family level. Her main focuses are socialization, changing families and interdependencies. First, socialization has always been with us but has changed towards having the nuclear family as our main child socialization agency. At the same time the state has realized that children are too precious a good to be left to parents' discretion and thus intervenes – although with highly different energy and intensity from country to country. Schooling has become the undisputed arena for public intervention, whereas preschool day care remains a contested terrain, the more so the younger children are. Second, Mayall points to the significance of family changes, not least due to an increasing incidence of family breakdown. Furthermore and due to low fertility rates, even smaller families alter children's daily lives in terms of decreasing opportunities for sibling relations, although children might wish exactly this because their parents are working more and more outside the home. Third, intergenerational interdependencies come more frequently to include three generational relations, due to increased longevity.

These relationships have different meanings when they are seen from children's perspective or from a parental or grandparental perspective, and quite often children's activities and agency are not, in this development, taken into account.

Like Alanen and Mayall, Thomas Olk (in Chapter 12) also suggests a generational perspective, but first of all from a macrosociological perspective, the relations between generational groups in terms of, for instance, access to scarce resources, and how changes in relative positions between generations develop historically and possibly also in the future. While largely affirming Alanen's presentation, Olk presents the reader with various interpretations of the idea and concept of generational justice and shows how claims and duties of children are constructed accordingly. Even if children in general terms tend to share parents' welfare it does not follow that their claims on resources are the same as those of other generations. It is suggested that children have become marginalized: it is far from a matter of course that they are represented in philosophical and political discourses, and despite the UNCRC they are typically an at-risk group in terms of distributive justice. Whether children's position is a result of 'a conspiracy of the elderly', a consequence of a demographic logic and/or a reflection of changing ideological views is debatable, but in any case we are now confronted with historically new questions as to who carries responsibility and the financial burdens of the young and the old.

Heinz Hengst (in Chapter 13) like Alanen draws on Mannheim in an effort to come to terms with generation, but first of all with the notion of and what constitutes collective identities. The idea from Mannheim's 1928 essay about understanding generation in cultural terms is brought together with Margaret Mead's observation from the 1970s about a possible reversal of competencies between generations due to rapid modernization conditions which were internalized faster by the young than adults, not to mention the elderly, thus depriving the latter of advisory competencies. Hengst uses in particular Mannheim's notion from later writings of 'conjunctive experiential space' to denote similar experiences and thus similar basic awareness, which is not necessarily acquired consciously but rather as a result of 'structurally identical experiences'. Hengst uses as examples well-known media and consumption experiences which put youth and children ahead of their elders. It is suggested also that experience at an early stage (childhood, youth), and furthermore its deliberate and authentic nature, is stronger compared both to what is internalized later and to school experiences that are imposed on children.

Section IV considers the nature of children's everyday lives, including the activities and settings within which children live and construct their life worlds. The section also examines how children's everyday lives are perceived by peers and adults and how children's lives are enabled and constrained by specific aspects of the wider adult culture. The various chapters consider issues of children's bodies in their everyday lives, their experiences in early institutions like child care and preschool programs, constraints and opportunities in the localities in which they live, the nature and range of their use of time in leisure activities, and how their

lives are affected by adult perceptions and actions that define the proper ways children are to participate in and are affected by the adult world.

In Chapter 14, Laura Fingerson discusses children's bodies. She argues that bodies are not static, but continually change through processes of aging, puberty and illness. Children's bodies change more dramatically and quickly than adults, and bodily change such as increased height (literally getting bigger) is an important marker of age and status for children and youth. Fingerson adds important insights to a growing interest in the body in the social sciences from the perspective of children and youth. She argues that the body is drawn on as a source of agency and power by children and concludes that to truly understand children's social lives we must understand their embodied lives.

Gunilla Dahlberg in Chapter 15 examines how the early institutionalization of children's lives has occurred through the rise in early childhood education and care brought about by increases in women's labour market participation and recognition of the learning potential and agency of preschool children. Dahlberg examines progressive social policies regarding early education and care primarily in Europe and the positive aspects of children's experiences and participation as they create and participate in the local school and peer cultures in these institutions. At the same time, Dahlberg also reflects on the merits and limitations of these policies from a critical poststructuralist and feminist perspective. Here she reviews the work of scholars of early education who eschew the view of children as unified, coherent and relatively static selves and instead propose and explore the perspective of young children as complex, changing and contradictory creatures.

In Chapter 16 John McKendrick considers the localities or sociocultural spaces in which children live their lives. He focuses on the neighbourhood and argues it is the primary realm within which most children undertake activity independent of adults. He considers the debates about problem neighbourhoods and neighbourhood problems which are symptomatic of dual conceptions of children as social problems and the social problems of children – the topic of Chapter 17 by Rosier, discussed below. For McKendrick well-designed neighbourhoods can facilitate children's independence with, for example, safe traffic-free pathways between significant sites in the neighbourhood (home, school, play space, shops, etc.). However, he argues further that design is only one component of successful neighbourhoods, maintaining that neighbourhoods must exude a culture of participation for children in which their presence, opinions and needs are equal to those of adults.

In Chapter 17 Katherine Brown Rosier argues that in the United States and many Western societies children and social problems have come to be seen in two interrelated ways. First, children are often seen *as problems* – as a nuisance and disruptive to respectable adult life, as a source of extreme worry and anxiety for adults, or as irresponsible by engaging in uncivil behaviours like using drugs, getting pregnant, dropping out of school, or committing property or violent crimes. This first perception, which Rosier argues is often exaggerated and unfair to children, draws attention away from the second perception, that children *have problems* and

are very vulnerable to structural inequalities in Western societies (see Olk in this volume) and to the power of adults to mistreat and abuse them. Rosier addresses these two sides of the problematization of children and childhood, and considers the implications of the various ways that adults see children as problematic.

Ivar Frønes addresses children's leisure time and cultural activities in Chapter 18. He argues that leisure can be seen both within the framework of a child's life in the present and within the child's life course development or socialization. According to Frønes the perception and functions of children's leisure and cultural activities vary with children's cultural backgrounds and within and over historical periods. Frønes maintains that the amount of leisure, and the categorization of leisure activities, do not emerge from the activities as such, but from cultural framing. He argues that the culture of leisure activities is reflected in social structures, social change and cultural variations, but it also provides a sphere of autonomy, positioning the leisure activities of young people as indicators of social change and arenas of social tension.

Section V focuses on children's practices and their active participation in their societies and cultures. All of the chapters in this section see children as active agents and contributors to adult society, as discussed by James in Chapter 2. The various chapters address children's work, children's creation of and participation in their own peer cultures, children's participation in and transformation of play and games, children as active consumers of a wide range of societal goods and resources, children's active use and interpretation of visual media (especially television and films), and children's use and creative production of electronic or digital media.

Children's work from a historical and global perspective is explored by Olga Nieuwenhuys in Chapter 19. Nieuwenhuys reviews the changing nature of adults' perceptions of and the actual types of children's labour in both the developed North and the developing South. She points out how the importance of children's school work is often overlooked in the developed world and how concern for the protection of children by adults in the developed world often blunts our understanding of the complexity of and need for children's labour in developing countries. In the South many children combine schooling and work, and their labour (directly for their families and for others) is an economic necessity. She argues that those who wish to protect children from exploitation must recognize working children's movements as organizing for the right to work in dignity and to fight for their rights.

In Chapter 20 William A. Corsaro argues that children create their own peer cultures from very early in childhood. He maintains that these peer cultures are not separate from the adult world, but rather children's and adults' cultures are intricately interwoven in different ways across space and over time. Corsaro discusses two basic themes in children's peer cultures: communal sharing (as seen in children's sharing, participation and friendships) and resistance of adult authority (as seen in children's autonomy, control, conflict and differentiation). Corsaro explores a wide range of routines in peer culture in line with these two themes across historical time and in different parts of the world. He makes a

strong argument for the diversity and universality of features of children's peer cultures.

Children's play and games are the topic of Chapter 21 by Ann-Carita Evaldsson. She considers play and games as social action with a focus on children's play and game participation in situated activities across various settings. Evaldsson's examination of children's play activities *in situ* provides a conceptualization for rethinking a whole set of binaries that consistently reappear in childhood studies, such as children's play as separate from the adult world; play and games as different activities; gender differentiation in play; the distinction of play and seriousness; and play and work. Evaldsson presents a review of approaches to children's play from developmental psychology and folklore, and more recent multidisciplinary approaches represented in anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics. Overall, Evaldsson's analysis of play and games captures the importance of understanding children as active contributors to the complex process of cultural continuity and change within the peer group and in society at large.

In Chapter 22 Daniel Thomas Cook presents a comparative-historical analysis of children as consumers. Cook argues that for the better part of a century, merchants, marketers and advertisers have recognized, attended to and engaged with children as active consumers. Children's consumption, according to Cook, goes beyond singular purchases and into meaningful engagement with the world and, as such, needs to be understood not simply as individual acts but in reference to an encompassing consumer culture of childhood. Cook illustrates key themes in the consumer culture of childhood over time and across culture, class and gender. He concludes that the issue of children's place in consumer culture must be confronted in ways that take note of the hand of corporate power in the hyper-commercialization of childhoods while also granting that children's stake in commercial life is something other than exploitation

David Buckingham in Chapter 23 presents a detailed review of themes in research on children and television. He argues that children are singled out as a special audience for television even though they do not watch television any more than many adults. Further, he notes that as with many aspects of conceptions of childhood there is a dual concern regarding children and television: how television may have positive (e.g., educational) and negative (e.g., exposure to harmful material) effects on children. Buckingham reviews psychological and cultural studies research on children and television, noting how the two approaches differ in regard to their focus on the nature of television as a cultural medium of communication and their perspectives of children as individual and relatively passive rather than collective and active viewers or consumers. In discussions of the cultural studies approach Buckingham points to some of his own research which stresses how children define and construct their social identities through talk about television and other media. However, while favouring a 'child-centred' approach to television, Buckingham cautions against the view that if children are active they are somehow not influenced by what they watch. Here he argues that activity should not be equated with agency or social power and calls for a position

in which children and television are best understood in the context of a wider analysis in which both are constructed and defined.

In Chapter 24, Kirsten Drotner considers the discourses of concern and discourses of celebration surrounding children's digital media practices (including computer gaming, the internet, mobile phones, and other features of the digital age). She notes that both optimists and pessimists take a normative stance in their descriptions and evaluations, but give more attention to emotionally charged issues like sex, violence and bodily harm associated with the digital world than to more insidious aspects of the power and control of large media conglomerates. Drotner goes beyond the discourses of concern and celebration to examine the intricate and complex nature of children's digital media practices in terms of semiotic codes, time, place and social relations. These media practices are in a state of continual development and flux. Drotner concludes that technology developers, content producers and avid young users will lead the way in the future of digital media practices, but is optimistic that 'level-headed' researchers will follow closely on their heels.

Section VI contains chapters about rights, interests and responsibilities, which are universal and enduring issues that assume various manifestations depending on time and place. The relations between them are not straightforward, and it remains a problem to establish connections between individualism and collectivism. This is not least pertinent as far as children are concerned: even if the UNCRC underlines *the child* as a rights subject, most parents, politicians and professionals would hesitate not to give substantial weight to the family and the public.

Chapter 25 by Michael Freeman is concerned with children, their rights and the background for the development of children's rights and the current situation since the UNCRC was adopted in 1989. The chapter is a defence of the principal importance of rights, despite attacks on this view; at the same time it is demonstrated that we still have a long way to go until it is taken for granted that children are rights subjects – for various reasons many different groups remain strongly against the view that children should be rights holders. The question is, though, whether there are – compared to other groups – good reasons for depriving children of rights – and that holds for welfare rights as well as for agency rights. Freeman guides us through what might be called a children's rights movement in an international context – from declarations in 1924 and 1959 to the pathbreaking Convention in 1989. Obviously, its nature as an international document immediately raises questions about its claim to be a universal document. The chapter, in terms of examples from the Convention's coming into existence and discussions about the ways in which articles were formulated, makes it clear that many compromises had to be made. At the end, however, an agreement was reached, but discussions are likely to continue about this important document and significant problems, such as the contents of rights versus the interests of children.

Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Heinz Sünker explore in Chapter 26 how interests in children and responsibilities for children have changed over time. They

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provide the reader with examples from European history, in particular France and Germany. The overall conclusion is that it is difficult to discern a clear interest in children that is not at the same time an interest in the family, in the society or in general terms an interest in the social order. This interest is thus paralleled by fitting responsibilities in terms of appropriate preventive measures and interventions and can be followed through to the present time under different names – from disciplining to building of human capital. As such, interest in children was largely dictated by the perceived benefits that were to be expected in adulthood from investing in them – economically, pedagogically, morally and/or ideologically. The chapter nevertheless ends with an optimistic note after considering the UNCRC and what it has signified. Even if this document also extends the protective mood from previous historical eras, it is likely to be less instrumental in its protective measures and in any case more emphatic about children's legitimate rights as participants.

In Chapter 27 Adrian Bailey addresses an important issue about children's mobility. Conventionally we think of children as living and staying more or less in the same place, but at any time some children have been moving in the sense of migrating with their parents. This has been accentuated over recent decades, with repercussions that need attention, theoretical and empirical. Migrating children have experiences and face problems that differ from those complying with 'sedentarist' ideals, and norms around mobility and sedentarism may collide. The various forms of staying together or being separated make networking difficult and complicated. Children may stay back while mothers live abroad, or alone or most often with parents they may meet a new community in a foreign country or continent with all that this implies in terms of coping with new life situations. The analysis of migrant children encounters a further problem: are they first of all children or migrants? The response to this question partly determines whether parents or the state assume the main responsibility for them or the extent to which tensions between parents and children are addressed. This again differs according to cultural background.

The last chapter, by Natalie Hevener Kaufman and Irene Rizzini (Chapter 28), presents and discusses on a global scale the children's rights situation and the indispensability of such rights in a world in which large numbers of children are troubled. Despite reluctance in some countries and cultures to regard children fully as humans, the authors demonstrate that much movement has taken place over recent decades to place children firmly on the legal map. We are in this respect not talking merely about the UNCRC as perhaps the most prominent document, but about a number of other documents containing articles in support of children's rights and well-being, among them the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child. As Freeman also makes clear, Kaufman and Rizzini underline the significance of having rights documents, if for no other reason than that it makes it difficult to move back from a given signature. Even if progress has been made, an appalling number of children live under unacceptable conditions and it cannot be denied that many hurdles remain before the written rights are brought to bear on all children. One hurdle is the extent to which

the countries of the world are willing to endorse statutes which may be seen as reflecting the values of Western societies, even if practically all countries have in fact ratified the UNCRC. Another and much more difficult hurdle to overcome is the fact that the economic, social, and political realities are still too often counter the legal promises given in these texts.

Notes

1. In the German language, see Markefka and Nauck, 1993; Krüger and Grunert, 2002; in English, for an encyclopaedia from a historical perspective, see Fass, 2003; recently a handbook about children and the media was published in English; see Drotner and Livingstone, 2008.
2. No notice is taken here of the numerous handbooks of psychological child development and of pedagogy, which are beyond the scope of this handbook.
3. For instance, the entries on disorder, anti-social behaviour, therapy, cognitive development and many other entries dealing with psychological and social order problems; there are admittedly entries closer to this handbook's area, but they are few and far between, such as entries on anthropology of childhood and infant mortality.
4. It is something of a reckless act to mention particular influential works in these formative years, but if we nevertheless were to do so we believe that Jenks (1982b) deserves to be mentioned as the first collection with the title *Sociology of Childhood* and a symptomatic introduction by the author (Jenks, 1982a); we would also cite James and Prout's collection of chapters (1990) that (although not unequivocally) set the agenda for a *social constructionist approach*, and finally the volume *Childhood Matters* (Qvortrup et al., 1994), which (again not consistently) pursued the idea of perceiving childhood in a *structural perspective*.

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