

The
SOCIOLOGY of
CHILDREN,
CHILDHOOD and
GENERATION

Madeleine
Leonard

 SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/1 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Chris Rojek
Editorial assistant: Delayna Spencer
Production editor: Katherine Haw
Copyeditor: Sharon Cawood
Proofreader: Camille Bramall
Indexer: Charmian Parkin
Marketing manager: Michael Ainsley
Cover designer: Shaun Mercier
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY



© Madeleine Leonard 2016

First published 2016

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015942702

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4462-5923-8
ISBN 978-1-4462-5924-5 (pbk)

At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the Egmont grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

2

BECOMING AND BEING: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

Chapter Aims

1. To explore the similarities and differences between psychological and sociological approaches to children and childhood.
2. To outline and critically evaluate the contribution of socialisation theory to sociological approaches to understanding children and childhood.
3. To set out the principles of the 'new' sociology of childhood.
4. To critically evaluate the 'newness' of the 'new' sociology of childhood.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand some of the core ways in which psychological and sociological approaches to children and childhood differ.
2. Understand the contribution of socialisation theory to the sociology of childhood and the criticisms the concept generated.
3. Describe and illustrate the six features of Prout and James' 'new paradigm for the sociology of childhood'.
4. Demonstrate awareness of the criticisms of the 'newness' of the 'new' sociology of childhood.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the similarities and differences between psychological and sociological approaches to children and childhood. This focus draws attention to some key dichotomies in the social sciences around the relationships between biology and society, nature and nurture and the individual and society. The chapter will commence by exploring how development psychology dominated the field of childhood studies for most of the 20th century. Childhood was considered as consisting of a set of predetermined stages, the end point of which is adulthood. Children were located along different age bands within this temporal journey and, for the most part, childhood was considered natural and universal. Child development was seen as ‘an inevitable and invariable process driven by a biologically rooted structure which the child inherits’ (Archard, 1993: 35). These concepts were incorporated into sociological theorising on childhood during the 1950s in the form of socialisation. Through socialisation, children acquire and internalise the norms and values of the society into which they are born. The early years of life were considered particularly important, hence the family was accorded a key role as a major agent of socialisation, with other key agents such as the education system playing an important role as children get older. The chapter will outline the contribution of socialisation theory to sociological understandings of children and childhood. Within this paradigm, children were largely viewed as passive objects unable or unwilling to respond actively to the range of influences external to them. This approach was challenged by the ‘new’ sociology of childhood which gained gradual academic legitimacy and influence from around the 1980s onwards. The chapter will outline this ‘new paradigm’ and explore its impact on the sociology of childhood. Central to this approach is an acknowledgement that children are active agents who are not simply shaped by the world around them but actively shape and change that world. The final part of the chapter will bring together the core themes explored throughout the chapter and question the extent to which a simple dichotomy exists between development psychology and sociology, and between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ sociological approaches to children and childhood.

Development Psychology

Child development psychologists are concerned with how certain behaviours develop, how and when they develop and to some extent the influence of the environment on development. Traditionally, development was seen as having typical or average components, hence children became incorporated into standard measures of development, with their progress continually contrasted against the yardstick of a ‘normal’ child. In this vein, a normal, all-encompassing

childhood was constructed even though in reality it was based on 'normal' expectations of childhood within western societies, particularly Europe and the United States (Woodhead, 1999). Moreover, adults were deemed to be experts on childhood. As Woodhead and Faulkner (2000: 11) put it: "Child Development" is a body of knowledge constructed by adults for other adults to use in order to make sense of, regulate and promote children's lives and learning. Most often, children's actions and thoughts are interpreted against models of psychological processes, stages of relative competence, and/or deviations from "normality". Hence, child development produced a body of adult experts on childhood. Woodhead (2011) outlines how this was facilitated by the introduction of universal birth registration and universal schooling whereby children were increasingly defined in terms of age-related competencies. Hence, age impacted on school starting and leaving age, when a person could legally have sex, marry, vote, commit crime and enter work, and while this varied slightly from one country to another, overall it was based on using age as an indicator of universal traits. A host of adult professionals charted children's journeys through age-specific periods and provided advice to parents, carers, teachers, lawyers, health workers and policy makers on 'normal' expectations and what to do in cases where children deviated from the norm.

This top-down approach produced a universal child against which individual children could be measured, assessed, praised or problematised if they deviated from what was considered 'normal'. While environmental influences were taken into consideration, the focus was on the positive or negative impact of wider forces in facilitating or interrupting 'normal' development and, in the case of the latter, the potential role of interventions in getting the child back on the proper path to development. Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) outline the research implications of this approach to child development, whereby children were seen as the objects of research and research was done to children rather than with children. They outline a range of experiments which had a significant influence on child psychology as a discipline. For example, the 'stranger situation' procedure observed infants' reactions (from behind a one-way screen) to a situation where mothers would leave the room and be replaced by a stranger who would proceed to interact with the infant while the child psychologists, hidden from view, measured the infants' reactions and subsequently categorised these reactions across four dimensions: 'secure', 'anxious/avoidant', 'anxious/ambivalent' and 'disorganised'. Woodhead and Faulkner state that, while this methodology is now seen as ethically unacceptable, in order to get published in leading journals, aspiring attachment researchers risk having their papers rejected if they do not make reference to these classic experiments or indeed include the methodology in their range of research tools. This has also resulted in a body of knowledge being constructed

around the importance of the mother as the primary carer of children and the psychological damage that could result from maternal deprivation. Sommer (2012) argues that developmental psychology was thus mother-centric, reducing the social world of the infant to the mother–child relationship and leaving little room for other significant adults.

Piaget (1932, 1936, 1957) also had a significant impact on the psychology of child development. He was the first influential psychologist to undertake a systematic study of cognitive development in childhood. Piaget sought to demonstrate how children think in different ways to adults. His goal was to describe the staged journey whereby reasoning becomes developed during childhood. He studied children from infancy to adolescence, and indeed his own three children and their peers were core research participants. He made detailed observations of young children's cognitive behaviour and carried out interviews in a clinical setting with older children. He identified four key, distinct stages in child development, each marked by shifts in how children understand the world. His work had a profound impact on educational policy, intelligence testing and teaching practice, particularly in Europe and the USA during the 1960s and 1970s (Walkerline, 1984). His theory of how intelligence develops through a series of progressive stages impacted on the standardised testing of children on the basis of age, even though his theory was more nuanced and emphasised that children's performance should not be equated with same-age peers but rather judged in relation to their own previous standard of development. Moreover, Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) argue that his methodology, which encouraged children to talk freely, albeit within clinical settings, was innovatory at the time and his core goal was to treat seriously young children's ways of thinking. Nonetheless, his focus on stages captured the imaginations of later psychologists, who tended to limit their studies to observing how the immature child performed against adult standards of thinking and reasoning.

To recap, a number of implications stemmed from psychological approaches to child development, such as child development being seen as essentially biologically based. Children's cognitive abilities were linked to a set of stages which served as a set of benchmarks to determine 'normal' childhood and, while individual differences were observable in the rate at which children progressed through these stages, the overall process was considered universal, linear and based on age, hence where children differed, these were seen as deviations from the norm. Development therefore represented a ladder-type progression with each step being seen as qualitatively unique. The child starts at the bottom rung of the ladder and progresses through a series of fixed, universal stages to the top rung. Childhood was therefore viewed as a transitional period. Throughout this journey, childhood was defined as an age-specific period of life and children were seen to possess distinct characteristics which separated them from the adult world.

Adulthood was seen as the end point of childhood and, since the child had not yet reached adulthood, she/he was seen as not fully developed, as incomplete, as not fully 'being', but rather subject to a set of processes whereby she/he would learn and internalise how to become an adult. Drawing on these insights, sociology sought to bring in the wider environmental impact of this journey through the concept of socialisation.

Socialisation

By the 1950s, underlying themes in development psychology around the natural, universal, irrational, immature child had fed into sociological accounts of childhood in the form of theories of socialisation. Sociologists argue that what is important in becoming an adult is not our biological nature but the process of learning, whereby society teaches the young the norms and values crucial to maintaining social order. The dominant paradigm was functionalism, which emerged in the USA after the Second World War. Talcott Parsons (1954) was one of the most influential exponents of this paradigm, and he viewed the family and the educational system as two of the most significant sites for socialising the young into adult norms and values. The implication here was that the child was somehow non-social or not fully social and had therefore to be moulded into a social person through interaction with influential adults through the process of primary and secondary socialisation. In order to elaborate on this approach, the chapter turns to briefly examine socialisation processes within the family and the school. The intention here is not to reduce socialisation to these two spheres as socialisation (whether accepted or rejected) is part and parcel of all social relationships and therefore operates across multiple social domains. However, a focus on the family and the educational system enables us to see how accounts of societal institutions were largely adult focused with little attention being paid to how these institutions were experienced by children.

Successful Socialisation within the Family

The family is the first human group that an individual usually belongs to, hence it was seen to clearly play a key role in socialisation. However, the approach was based on a particular family type – that is, a traditional nuclear family – which was thought to be prevalent at the height of the dominance of socialisation theory during the 1950s and 1960s. Within this family type, the child would see how adults have learned distinctive patterns of behaviour and Parsons illustrated this

through his focus on the expressive traits of mothers concerned with the personal and intimate aspects of social life, compared to the instrumental traits of fathers concerned with aspects outside the family, such as politics and work. We can see here how during this period, human characteristics were seen as partly driven by biology and were gender specific. Indeed, feminists such as Mitchell (1971), who criticised this male-focused view of the family and sex roles, went further, suggesting that some sociologists seem to imply that 'biology is destiny'. Marxists also criticised the consensus view of social order outlined by Parsons. They argued that the shared societal values outlined by Parsons were little more than a smoke screen for inculcating individuals into accepting patterns of authority and power. However, they also focused on how children learn obedience within the family and how this obedience is fundamental to maintaining the status quo and unequal relationships on which capitalism depends. Althusser (1988), for example, argued that through socialisation, the family was one of the best institutions for encouraging individuals to think and behave in ways conducive to the continuation of the capitalist system. Hence, while Marxists and functionalists had different views on family life, none of them paid much attention to the actual internalisation of norms and values by children themselves. Instead, the family was seen, particularly by functionalists, as the *sine qua non* for the child's socialisation, with socialisation being largely seen as a one-way process.

Successful Socialisation within School

The school takes over from the family as a key site for socialisation. Young people spend a considerable amount of their childhood in educational institutions and indeed become defined in relation to their status as school pupils. Within school, children meet a wider circle of people and learn not just formal subjects such as English and History but also the importance of competition and reward – values crucial for wider society. Testing is a fundamental aspect of school organisation and children come to accept that, while ability is partly natural, it can be developed and strengthened through hard work. Parsons (1954) argued that within school, children learn to accept the unequal distribution of reward and status in wider society. Within school, children learn to accept the authority of adults and, for Parsons, this ensures the smooth functioning of present and future society. Children learn to view adults as superior and to accept this superiority. In all these ways, education becomes part of the process of preparing children for their adult roles, particularly for their lives as future workers. Continuing this theme of passive children, Marxists argued that within school children are divided into specific categories essential to the needs of capitalism. Children gradually internalise

the view that they have different ‘natural’ traits, making them suited to one type of work rather than another, and of course with these different types of work being differently rewarded so that people who work with their hands will be paid less than people who work with their heads. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) put it, education is little more than a ‘giant myth-making machine’ whose core purpose is to encourage the oppressed to accept their inferior position within society. Through sites of secondary socialisation such as the school, children begin to develop a sense of wider social structures and their place within them. While there was some recognition of class impacting on structural positions, children’s capacities to engage with and negotiate wider social structures were largely muted in these discourses, and in the case of functionalism their resistance was often interpreted as evidence of faulty socialisation.

Faulty Socialisation

While there was some consideration given to conflict in the socialisation process and to the idea that competing ideologies may be at play, there was little interest in children as actual social beings and in how they might accept, resist or challenge whatever norms and values were on offer. Where socialisation was seen as going wrong, this often involved constructing new categories of ‘children’, particularly around juvenile delinquents and youth subculture. Hence, most introductory textbooks throughout the 1950s to 1970s limited discussions of children and childhood to specific chapters on the family or school, mainly centring on successful socialisation, or juvenile delinquency and youth subculture as examples of unsuccessful socialisation. Referring to American sociology, Johnson (2001) argues that sociological studies of children up until the 1970s were dominated by a focus on deviancy and delinquency. Pearson (1983) also articulated how older generations often view young generations with suspicion and how each existing adult generation looks back to a ‘golden age’ of well-behaved young people with whom to compare the ‘hooligans’ of the present.

Underlying these discourses are notions of children and young people as needing strong discipline from adults to ensure that they don’t stray from the path of acceptable behaviour. This approach found expression in the case of the murder of James Bulger in the UK in the early 1990s. Bulger, a 2-year-old child, was led away from a shopping centre, where he had been with his mother, by two 10-year-old children who were truanting from school. He was subsequently brutally murdered. Security cameras captured images of the 2-year-old being led away by the two 10-year-old boys who were holding his hands. The incident confronted society’s privileging of childhood as a period of innocence, although

attempts to keep this image intact were secured by treating the boys as adults in the ensuing court hearings. Dominant discourses of contemporary childhood were severely challenged by this incident, and exiling these children from childhood and according them adult culpability allowed the dominant images to co-exist. However, Franklin and Petley (1996) outline how media reporting of the case gradually became generalised into the notion that all children had the dangerous potential to be 'evil'. Ensuing debates on the need to protect children from society were extended to suggest that society needed to be protected from children. These conflicting images are presented by Jenks (1996) as the Dionysian and Apollonian models of childhood, positioning children as naturally evil or naturally innocent. These natural traits could be encouraged or suppressed through interaction with significant adults. Children were largely viewed as separate from adults but subject to adults determining their nature through socialisation processes.

Moving beyond Socialisation

The concept of socialisation dominated theory and research about children and their childhoods. Speier (1976) argued that this perspective highlighted the power of adults to define children. It reflected an 'adult ideological viewpoint', whereby children were regarded as dependents in a range of adult structures, rather than being considered as individuals in their own right. Childhood was regarded as a period of dependency and indeed subordination and children were thus rarely considered as a distinct social entity. In relation to North American sociology, Johnson (2001) outlines how children and their childhoods received scant and indirect attention. Where they were included in mainstream theoretical or empirical research, it was usually to demonstrate other social processes such as the family, schooling or deviance. In a similar vein, Ambert, writing in 1986, outlined the 'near absence' of studies of children in mainstream sociology. She briefly reviewed the work of Comte, Marx, Pareto, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Mead, Merton and Parsons, who either ignored childhood altogether or discussed the concept in a highly limited way. Likewise, Jenks (1982), in an introduction to a collection of articles from influential sociologists, suggests that the child was considered only in relation to adults. The child was a person devoid of adult competencies and traits. Hence, as Alanen (1988: 56) put it, 'a conception of the child is reached only by leaving the child side of the relationship empty'. Mainstream sociology journals, such as *The American Journal of Sociology*, reflected the marginalisation of children and childhood, with only 5% of the articles published from 1895 to 1980 referencing children (Shanahan, 2007).

Ambert (1986) argued that sociology textbooks by the mid-1980s did not fare much better, with children and childhood still relegated to the margins of the discipline. Where children were included, it was under the framework of socialisation. This future-looking perspective continued to consider children as passive recipients of a homogeneous adult culture and sought to unpack how the key agents of socialisation, such as the family or educational system, were charged with transmitting the core norms and values of mainstream society to children, who were, as yet, incomplete members. While resistance to socialisation, particularly in relation to youth subcultures and deviancy, was at times articulated, along with other examples of faulty socialisation, the child, for the most part, was not considered a fully active co-constructor of this process.

In an influential collection of readings on socialisation, Waksler (1991) discusses the need to move beyond socialisation. The collection brings together a number of core sociological readings on socialisation theory, with Waksler providing commentaries on the various chapters. At the outset, Waksler acknowledges the huge contribution socialisation makes to the study of childhood and suggests that 'studies of socialization are certainly worthy of serious attention by anyone interested in understanding the social worlds that children inhabit' (1991: 1). However, she identifies a number of core problems with the concept. First, she questions whether socialisation is a recognisable process. What is it that distinguishes socialisation from other processes? How, for example, would one set out to empirically study socialisation? What would be considered as evidence? Second, rather than a binary focus on adults socialising children, Waksler asks, are adults also socialised and if so, how and by whom? Are there similar processes at work or are the processes different? Returning the attention to children, Waksler asks what the child is doing when she/he is being socialised. This brings to the fore her fourth criticism, around whether or not the child should be viewed as a 'blank slate', existing as a kind of sponge, soaking up the attitudes and experiences of others. If not, and the child has some prior knowledge of society, how does this existing knowledge impact on what is being undertaken during any particular incident of socialisation? For example, the concept of secondary socialisation implies that some socialisation has already taken place. How does primary socialisation impact on secondary socialisation? These questions were rarely asked or even contemplated. Following on from this, Waksler considers whether socialisation is a one-way process or a reciprocal process. This involves returning to her earlier criticism and asking not just what is happening to children during socialisation but also what is happening to adults. There is an implicit assumption that socialisation ends with adulthood. However, socialisation exists throughout the life course. Adults are constantly and continuously socialised into the ongoing acceptance of established roles, changing rules associated with these roles or new roles that come into play during adulthood,

such as grandparenthood. This locates both children and adults as recipients and agents of socialisation. How then and in what ways are these agents successful in their endeavours and how do we judge success?

Throughout this critique, Waksler underlines the need to illustrate socialisation as an 'empirical feat' rather than a statement of 'fact'. By emphasising the need for an empirical basis for understanding socialisation, Waksler argues that questions need to be asked around who it is that commonly socialises children. Traditionally, the focus has been limited to a set of influential primary and secondary agents of socialisation, such as the family and school, as outlined above. But transforming socialisation into a more serious empirical question may uncover a whole range of additional relationships at work. Indeed, Waksler, reiterating Speier, argues that socialisation theory is often little more than adult perspectives on childhood. Hence, the concept of socialisation produces 'data' rather than 'theory' about children. Moreover, if one considers the myriad activities that adults and children engage in together, is it sufficient to label all these interactions as aspects of socialisation? Might other processes be taking place? If this seems a reasonable assumption, how then do we identify what kinds of activities involve socialisation and which activities are immune? In other words, should every single interaction between adults and children be seen through the lens of socialisation, and indeed is there only one group (society) into which children are socialised? Reducing everything to socialisation is likely to produce 'an over-socialised conception of man' (Wrong, 1961). If socialisation is likely to be a messier process, a non-linear process, a reciprocal process, indeed one process among many, then how are we to study socialisation? By asking these questions, Waksler moves beyond considering socialisation as the 'be all and end all' underpinning all parent-child relationships. Her critique views socialisation as a far less certain set of processes than is commonly envisaged. Understanding these broader processes might involve suspending the concept of socialisation (which implies suspending adult beliefs about children) and at the very least subjecting the assumed processes involved to empirical investigation, rather than reducing the concept to a singular, taken-for-granted accomplishment.

The gradual realisation that the categories of children and childhood might have social and cultural significance and are likely to differ across time and space paved the way for a renewed concern with how children themselves might experience their childhood in the here and now and how their experiences might impact on both childhood and adulthood. This is reflected in James' (2013) recent work where she outlines a child-centred perspective on socialisation. Her work draws on children's narratives on their everyday lives at home, at school and in their neighbourhood, and she illustrates how children participate in, contribute to and shape their experiences of socialisation. This focus on how children conceptualise and experience the process of becoming social is central to the so-called 'new sociology of childhood'. It is to this 'new' paradigm that we now turn.

New Paradigms? A Childhood Psychology and a New Sociology of Childhood

Paradigms provide frameworks for observing and understanding the world we live in. They shape both what we see and how we understand and interpret what we see. They rely on shared preconceptions made prior to and impacting (often unconsciously) on the collection of evidence. Kuhn (1962) discusses how paradigms reflect a set of practices that define a scientific discipline at a particular time, based on often untested assumptions about the nature and behaviour of individuals. Paradigms provide ‘convincing’ accounts of social reality that close off alternative versions. Development psychology and socialisation theory positioned children in particular ways with reference to how they were viewed and how they related to the world around them. They were seen as passive dupes of biology and/or socialisation. While their lives in the present were subject to a great deal of research, the frameworks for interpreting their attitudes and responses were future-orientated, based on a specific understanding of the adult society into which they would eventually become incorporated. The limitations of this approach became increasingly apparent as childhood researchers turned their attention to uncovering the myriad ways in which children’s everyday lives seemed to produce anomalous results. Simplistic unidirectional models of biological and social development seemed unable to capture the diversity of children’s everyday lives and the ways in which they responded to such taken-for-granted overarching frameworks, ways which at times supported and at other times challenged, contested, negotiated and reworked these existing taken-for-granted paradigms. This led to what Kuhn (1962) called a paradigm shift, whereby conceptual frameworks and basic assumptions for understanding a phenomenon go through a crisis, resulting in a call for a re-examination and re-conceptualisation of the existing paradigm. Central to this shift was an increasing awareness that children were social actors in their own right, and both disciplines sought to address and explore the subsequent theoretical implications of this shift in how children were traditionally viewed. This involved a reassessment of previous positions and it is to this issue that the chapter now turns.

A Childhood Psychology

By the latter end of the 20th century, the universal psychological principles that shaped children’s development towards adulthood were being increasingly questioned. The ‘normality’ of the child’s journey to fully developed adulthood seemed ill equipped to deal with actual children’s progression or

to capture the widespread societal changes within which movement took place. Rather than child development being seen as universal and static, there was an acknowledgement that childhood could be perceived and experienced differently across time and space. While Woodhead (2011) argues that the wide range of diverse theories and perspectives that characterised child development make it misleading to condense into a single paradigm, Sommer (2012: 231–2) outlines what he calls a pre-paradigm psychology of childhood with a post-paradigm position termed ‘a childhood psychology’. This paradigm shift has a number of elements. First, there is a move away from universal top-down knowledge drawing on grand theories relating to human development towards an approach which recognises that knowledge is culturally and historically situated and that inter-disciplinary approaches may more aptly capture the diversity of children’s childhoods. This also involves acknowledging that child psychologists are part of the world they are researching. As Woodhead (1999: 12) points out, ‘they are subject to the same psychological processes they seek to describe; there may be a connection between the “inner” child of their own autobiography and the “outer” child they seek to describe ... their scientific claims to objectivity rest on assumptions that their own theories of human cognition cannot sustain’. The early simplistic focus on socialisation as a one-way process was also challenged and the notion that socialisation could operate in both directions became acknowledged. Alongside this was a move away from the mother as the centre of the child’s personal world towards the notion that the child resides in an increasingly complex and changing world which involves a range of multi-personal and inter-personal relationships. Sommer (2012), for example, outlines how wider societal changes make top-down general, universal psychological theories more difficult to apply. He outlines how widespread changes in female employment outside the household, the rise in the number of children in out-of-home care, falling birth rates, rising divorce rates, coupled with myriad changes to family types, fundamentally transform the context within which children live their early, everyday lives. Focusing in particular on women’s increasing role as waged employees, Sommer argues that this has led to an increased separation of young children’s daily lives into family time and childcare time. He argues that approximately 80% of 3–5-year-old children in the developed world are subject to some form of childcare. This means that families are less and less likely to act as key sites for children’s primary socialisation. Instead, a diverse range of adults are likely to routinely and repeatedly interact with young children. Hence, growing up in today’s changed world is qualitatively different from the experience of previous generations, necessitating an unpacking of the taken-for-granted assumptions on which the previous paradigm rested.

Rather than the typical child living their early years in mother-dominated contexts, modern children interact with a whole range of adults including fathers (with fatherhood being seen as a more active role), peers, siblings, grandparents and childcare staff, each contributing to the socialisation context in which the child is located. Socialisation is therefore seen as being more than a simple one-way process and is rather the result of reciprocal interactions, occurring between these various agents and the child, with the child playing an active part in this process. The fragile, incompetent, passive child was increasingly called into question by a range of studies on how children accomplish their everyday lives and this promoted more nuanced conceptions of childhood, whereby children exhibit resilience and competency and in myriad ways are active meaning makers. These new insights underlined the need to reassess previous paradigms. As Sommer (2012: 35) succinctly articulates, 'altered living conditions for children not only challenge old paradigms but require new ones'. This revolution in thinking also impacted on sociology, where a similar process of questioning old paradigms and rethinking new ones began to take shape.

The 'New' Sociology of Childhood

The emergence of the so-called 'new' sociology of childhood sought to unpack children's experiences of childhood in the here and now rather than in terms of the future adults they would become. It sought to give 'conceptual autonomy' (Thorne, 1987: 103) to children, to see them in their own right without reference to adulthood. Hence, the perspective moved beyond seeing children as the 'cultural dupes' of socialisation theory. Prout and James (1997) have been at the forefront in articulating what they call 'a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood'. This paradigm fundamentally challenged the notion of a 'natural' or 'universal' child. It sought to illustrate how childhood is socially constructed and therefore varies across time and space. This 'new' paradigm had a significant impact on the development and theorising of childhood studies. It forced a reassessment of previous understandings and it is therefore worth outlining the core tenets of the 'new' sociology of childhood, as outlined by Prout and James.

There are six core aspects of the new paradigm (1997: 8):

1. Childhood is a social construction.
2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis.
3. Children's everyday lives are worthy of study in their own right.

4. Children are not passive subjects of social structures but active actors.
5. Ethnography may be the most useful methodological approach to understanding children and childhood.
6. Childhood theorists and researchers also play a role in reconstructing childhood.

It is worth unpacking these six features in more detail.

1. *Childhood is a social construction*

Of primary importance to the new paradigm is the need to underline the point that childhood is a social construction. Indeed, the book in which James and Prout (1997) outline the 'new' paradigm is entitled *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. This position challenges the notion of childhood as a universal, biological stage of life by emphasising that biology may be played out differently in different contexts and across different time periods. It suggests instead that childhood may be shaped and constructed by historical, cultural and social factors. This means that everyday structures such as the family, education, what is meant by work and play, and so on, may differ across and within different contexts. Indeed, a global focus on childhood suggests that childhoods rather than childhood may be a more accurate term to capture this diversity. While the focus of this book is limited to 'western childhoods', these are also characterised and shaped by widespread diversity. Within specific cultures, there may be a multiplicity of childhoods leading to huge differences in how individual children experience family, school, play and work, and some of this diversity will be outlined in subsequent chapters.

2. *Childhood is a variable of social analysis*

The second aspect of the paradigm seeks to articulate the importance of age as a serious dimension of analysis. However, while childhood is a variable of social analysis, it is by no means the only variable. It does not exist independently of other variables such as class, gender and ethnicity, and the interplay between these variables and age may play out differently for different groups. It is therefore up to sociologists to explore these intersections and their implications for children and their childhoods. This necessitates questioning childhood as a homogeneous stage of life and challenging interpretations of childhood as an 'undifferentiated category' (Morrow, 1996). Gender, class and ethnicity, among other variables, impact on how childhood is experienced.

3. Children's everyday lives are worthy of study in their own right

The move from becoming to being led to a renewed focus on children's lives in the here and now. Understanding childhood in the present necessitates talking to children about their everyday lives, acknowledging their expertise in articulating their everyday experiences and prioritising areas deemed important by children themselves rather than imposing adults' interpretations and concerns on their everyday lives. Hence, this necessitates conceptualising childhood, both theoretically and methodologically, as independent of adulthood. This has led to a burgeoning amount of research on previously hidden aspects of childhood and on topics prioritised by children themselves as important to them in their daily lives.

4. Children are not passive subjects of social structures but active actors

While childhood may be constructed for children, it is also constructed by children. Children do not merely replicate and perpetuate the social processes they are subjected to, but actively make sense of these processes, which may result in these processes being contested, negotiated, challenged and reinterpreted. Lee (1982) charts the evolution towards considering the child as a person capable of acting at some level independently of the adult generation. He identifies 'three paradigms of childhood'. In the first, children were considered the property of adults. In the second, children were located as dependents in need of protection by and from adults, while, in the third, the child emerges as an active actor. This latter component is one of the most significant contributions of the Prout and James' paradigm as it relocates children as persons in their own right with the ability to act in and influence the world around them. This notion of the child as an active agent underpins all the components of the new paradigm.

5. Ethnography may be the most useful methodological approach to understanding children and childhood

While a discussion on methodology lies outside the remit of this book, it is worth emphasising here the enormous impact that the 'new' sociology of childhood has had on research methods. Prout and James made a case for ethnographic

methods having the ability to get closer to the ‘truth’ about what childhood is like and how it is experienced. Ethnographers are concerned with seeing the social world from the point of view of research participants. Hence, they seek an insider’s perspective. This means that rather than start out with a clear idea of what the research is about, ethnographers learn what is important and significant by talking to research participants. It then follows that this is a potentially useful approach to adopt when researching children and their childhoods. It allows children a more direct voice in research and privileges the insider’s point of view.

6. Childhood theorists and researchers also play a role in reconstructing childhood

Prout and James (1997: 9) also remind us that ‘childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is present ... that is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society’. In other words, sociologists are not neutral, impartial observers of society but are products of their own environment. Through their theorising, they also contribute to recreating the categories they set out to deconstruct. Indeed, Prout (2005), in reflecting on the contribution of the ‘new’ paradigm, suggests that in retrospect the social construction of childhood was over-emphasised to the extent that it allowed no scope for biological or psychological factors and thus narrowed rather than expanded the field of childhood studies. This will be returned to at the end of the chapter.

What’s So New?

Of course, the ‘newness’ of the ‘new’ sociology of childhood can be questioned. Indeed, Prout and James (1997) admit that their paradigm, rather than being a radical break from the past, drew on insights from interactionism and phenomenology where the child was located not just as a product of social processes but also as an active agent capable of impacting on wider structures. Mead (1934), for example, attributed to children a core role in creating and developing their own social identity. On this view, socialisation, rather than being a one-way process, is seen as a site of negotiation between adults and children, whereby the child interprets and actively, rather than passively, responds to the attitudes and actions of adults. Similarly, within childhood

psychology Vygotsky (1962) was influential in highlighting how culture and social context play a fundamental role in cognitive development and stressed the importance of interaction in the development of cognitive abilities in children. Since the main purpose of this book is highlighting sociology's contribution to these debates, the discussion will now centre on unpacking the 'newness' of the 'new' sociology of childhood. While a paradigm shift may be too great a claim, nonetheless the 'new' sociology of childhood brought together the arguments of a range of researchers working across a variety of countries, including Qvortrup in Norway, Alanen in Finland, Jenks in the UK and Thorne and Corsaro in the USA. Their work was groundbreaking in terms of underscoring the importance of studying children/childhood as a subject in its own right. Their criticisms of influential theories in psychology and sociology around child development and socialisation led to more attention being paid to how childhood is shaped by wider historical, social, economic and cultural factors. Hence, childhood is not a universal age-specific period with children possessing general traits that separate them from adults. Rather, childhood is perceived and experienced differently not only across but within specific societies. Uncovering these wider processes and their impact on how children live their childhoods spearheaded a host of empirical research that provided an evidence-based body of work that made the traditional paradigms no longer tenable.

However, the question remains: to what extent does the 'new' sociology of childhood represent a significant change in theorising about children and their childhoods? A number of recent commentators have questioned the 'newness' implied by recent childhood sociologists. Ryan (2008) argues that every single issue of the journal *Childhood*, ever since its origin in 1993, outlines the 'new' sociology of childhood as the overarching theoretical framework to which the journal is committed, while King (2007) states that the 'new' sociology of childhood has established itself, particularly in the English-speaking world, as the dominant theoretical framework underpinning sociological understandings of children and childhood. Yet in unpacking this framework, Ryan (2008: 553) exposes what he sees as 'the myth of a paradigm shift'. What Ryan views as particularly problematic is the claim embedded in the 'new' sociology of childhood of moving beyond the dualism of the adult-child distinction. In order to demonstrate the shift away from this dualism, Ryan argues that 'new' childhood theorists make two further claims. The first is to view childhood as a permanent structural feature of modern western societies and the second is to consider children as active agents operating within this wider structure. However, Ryan argues that these two principles only make sense within the framework of adult-child distinctions.

In a similar vein, King (2007) outlines how the 'new' sociology of childhood's *raison d'être* is to uncover and illuminate how similar children are to adults. Hence, like adults, children are competent. Like adults, children have agency, although they are often denied opportunities to practise their agency, because of adults' misguided focus on their child-like attributes. Counter claims such as those coming from psychology which outline children's biological and psychological immaturity are subsequently dismissed as being adultist. To legitimate these claims, King argues that 'new' sociology of childhood theorists select evidence to support this perspective and communicate findings to other enlightened followers. The elevation of the child to the status of active agent is core to the 'new' sociology of childhood. However, the child as an active agent fundamentally depends on an adult-child distinction being brought into play in the first place. If modern society is structured around legitimating differences between the adult and the child, and if the child is to move to the status of active agent who accepts, rejects, challenges or negotiates these wider processes, it is clear that the status of the child as active agent depends on the existence of these boundaries.

King (2007) is also critical of the methodological implications of this 'new' perspective. He argues that 'new' sociology of childhood researchers have developed a toolkit of methods which claim to get closer to the truth of what childhood really means for children themselves. They do this by emphasising the artificial divisions that exist between adulthood and childhood and how these divisions endorse power differentials between adults and children so that research on children reflects adults' concerns and priorities around what to research and indeed how to research. King questions the extent to which a reliance on the perceptions and beliefs of children themselves is any more capable of producing a reality of modern children than other versions. He outlines how the 'new' sociology of childhood is premised on the assumption that it is possible to capture the authenticity of childhood by prioritising children's voices. Through developing a range of supportive methodologies that enable children to articulate their attitudes and experiences, childhood researchers seek to demonstrate children's competency. The validity of the evidence produced depends on an acceptance of the basic assumptions outlined in the 'new' sociology of childhood's creation of a 'new' paradigm. Hence, the communications produced are those by adults working in adult institutions and communicating their 'authentic' knowledge of children to other adults. The upshot, according to King, is that childhood theorists produce 'information' rather than 'facts' about children and their childhoods.

Likewise, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) question the superiority of the participatory research methods advocated by 'new' sociology of childhood thinkers as the best

way of capturing and understanding children's everyday lives while simultaneously empowering them and enabling them to practise agency. Here, agency appears limited to merely taking part in research. The epistemological framework for this approach rests on children being considered as experts on their own lives, knowing more about childhood in the present than adults, and with this self-knowledge producing 'authentic' accounts of childhood. However, Gallacher and Gallagher argue that, in practice, most participatory methods are adult designed. While advocates claim to empower children, for the most part children are empowered by adults to create knowledge about their lives which is subsequently used to further regulate them, with the altruistic aim of improving their circumstances. Drawing on Lancaster and Broadbent (2003), Gallacher and Gallagher question whether children are the only experts. In doing this, they are not advocating that adults (including researchers) are mature and knowledgeable while children are immature and amateurish. On the contrary, they call for 'methodological immaturity' in research. Such an approach acknowledges that there is no 'real' world out there waiting to be discovered by the utilisation of the right techniques. It recognises that all humans and not just children are in a process of becoming, and the role of research is to capture the complex, messy, contradictory ways in which adults and children move through stages of becoming. By extending and challenging the binary between becoming and being to adults, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) blur distinctions between maturity and immaturity and force a rethink of the binary frameworks on which distinctions between adult and child research rest.

This reflects Lee's (1998) call for an 'immature sociology' based on what he identified as limits to 'new' theorising on children and childhood. He argues that at the outset, the discipline of sociology has to decide on children's ontology. Indeed, to decide on children's ontology also involves deciding on adults' ontology, as outlining in theoretical terms that there are children and there are adults implies that passing from one stage to another is to pass from one ontological order to another (Mackay, 1991: 29). Ontology refers to the subject of existence. It relates to the nature of being. Hence, a decision must be taken in relation to whether children are 'becomings' or 'beings' (the decision has already been made on behalf of adults). As outlined earlier, traditional theories of socialisation positioned children as in a process of becoming, while the 'new' sociology of childhood sought to reposition children as beings in their own right. To move to this position, 'new' childhood theorists have to reconceptualise children as interpretative agents. Indeed, as outlined earlier, the focus on agency is one of the most significant distinguishing features of the 'new' sociology of childhood. However, Lee questions the substance of this re-conceptualisation. According to Lee (1998: 460):

To enter the world of sociology, unaccompanied by an adult, the image of children must be 'matured'. This tells us that sociological theory presents us with a model of the social world that is peculiarly 'mature'. The young cannot figure in their own right in sociological theory unless they are understood as 'mature' in their possession of agency.

By emphasising the competency, the rationality, the agentic being of the child, 'new' sociology of childhood theorists, in Lee's view, continue to privilege rather than challenge completeness and maturity over incompleteness and immaturity. Lee points to other consequences of this framework. He argues that it tends to result in childhood theorists and researchers fitting children into existing forms of sociological theory rather than advancing a sociological theory that is fit for children. To make children fit for sociological theory, as outlined above, decisions have to be made concerning their ontology. While considering children as beings rather than becomings may be considered an advance, the new conceptualisation necessitates taking as given a theory based on a world of 'completed beings' (1998: 458). To respond to this fallacy, Lee calls for an 'immature' sociology. This immature sociology should move beyond binary states of becoming and being to recognise that all persons, whether adults or children, are likely to move between and across these dimensions. This means that both children and adults move in and out of states of competency, maturity and rationality. These are not fixed states possessed by persons located in a particular age hierarchy. Immature sociology moves children and adults into an incomplete world but an unfinished world for both, and one in which the grounds on which difference is based no longer hold up. This creates new possibilities for theorising. It necessitates acknowledging that independent action often occurs within dependent relationships. The implications of this in terms of how agency is defined will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Competing or Complementary Perspectives

In its early stages, development psychology and sociology conceptualised children as 'incomplete – immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, acultural' compared to adults who were regarded as 'complete – mature, rational, competent, social and autonomous' (Mackay, 1991: 28). However, the growing recognition that childhood is socially constructed led to an increased emphasis on the social context in which child development takes place. This led to a new awareness of wider social processes within which psychological and social development occurs, although Ingelby (1986) argues that much more work is needed to critically

unpack the links between the psychological and social contexts. Nonetheless, progress has been made in terms of an increasing recognition and acceptance of the fact that dependency cannot be reduced to biology but needs to take account of the ways in which dependency is socially determined, hence attention needs to be paid to the structurally dependent relationships involving differential access to power within which children are placed and the social, economic and political policies which uphold the dependency of children on adults and adult structures. These debates will form the core of Chapter 6 where children's agency will be critically unpacked.

Through socialisation, sociologists sought to theorise how children gradually internalise and reproduce the norms and values of society. This concern with the reproduction of social order rendered children as little more than passive recipients of adult norms and values (which were also universalised). When norms and values were unreflectively reproduced, this was referred to as successful socialisation, whereas instances where these processes were challenged were considered failed socialisation, with the children concerned being labelled as deviants. Moreover, while adults' role as agents of socialisation received extensive coverage, how children accept, reject, resist or transform processes of socialisation remained under-theorised and under-researched. This necessitates understanding socialisation as a process involving both adults and children. It is a process which is continually challenged and negotiated, rather than a simple process of internalisation. Moreover, socialisation occurs throughout the life course. It is not a process that ends in adulthood. Adults experience various life transitions as they pass through adulthood such as getting jobs, losing jobs, buying houses, relocating, getting married, divorced and re-married, becoming parents and grandparents. All these life events introduce new norms and values and involve adult and child adaptations.

The divisions between psychology and sociology and indeed between the 'traditional' and 'new' sociology of childhood may have been to some extent overstated. Indeed, according to Woodhead (2011), development psychology has always been messier, more complex and nuanced than some childhood sociologists imply in their often simplistic critiques. At the same time, Woodhead (1997) cautions against ignoring the 'fact' that children do indeed have specific needs and hence calls on development psychology to reframe rather than reject this position by situating needs within the particular social, political, cultural and economic contexts in which they are defined and responded to. In a similar vein, Boyden (1997) argues that the trend towards establishing global standards for children's rights, while needing to pay more attention to the local, regional and national contexts, also needs to incorporate some acknowledgement of the roles of biology and psychology in child development. As outlined earlier, this leads Sommer (2012: 4)

to argue for a childhood psychology rather than a psychology of children. He argues that while child psychology can no longer be simply equated with stage development, 'elements of traditional stage theories may be adapted and incorporated into a comprehensive understanding of children's everyday life in society and culture'. However, he warns against paying so much attention to wider historical, social, cultural and economic factors that the child's actual psychological development is rendered invisible and meaningless.

The separation of the biological child of development psychology from the social child of sociology remains largely intact. Lee and Motzkau (2011) use the term 'bio-social dualism' to refer to the continuing inability of childhood researchers to bridge the gap between psychological and sociological explanations relating to children. Each views childhood either through the lens of nature or of culture. In reflecting on 'The Future of Childhood', Prout (2005: 3) argues that we need to move away from reducing childhood to either biological or social factors. Modern childhood is too complex, in his view, to be reduced to a single overarching framework. His solution is to regard childhood as a 'hybrid form' which transcends both nature and culture. Drawing on Foucault's notion of bio-politics, Lee and Motzkau (2011) introduce the notion of 'multiplicities' as a way of negotiating the bio-social divide. Rather than childhood being reduced to either nature or culture, they suggest that a multiplicity of childhoods exist or are possible. In particular, they argue that the pervasive capacity of technology to intervene in life processes dismantles and merges traditional biological and social boundaries. To illustrate the bridge between technology, biology and culture, Lee and Motzkau discuss the application of a gadget called the 'Mosquito Teen Deterrent' in the UK. The device is aimed at disrupting the possibility of young people congregating in public places and potentially acting in an anti-social manner. The contraption can be placed on exterior walls and emanates a high-pitched noise that can be heard by teenagers but not by adults. In other words, the device provides a technological response to real, biological differences between adults and children in terms of hearing ability.

Lee and Motzkau employ the concept of multiplicity as a navigational tool to enable the crossing of disciplinary boundaries for researching the deployment of Mosquito devices, and suggest this example could pave the way for a more comprehensive and fruitful adaptation of the concept in theory and research in childhood. The usage of Mosquito appliances brings into play different conceptions of childhood, merging together different interests from biological to psychological to technological to social and cultural. Core customers for Mosquito devices are local government departments and shopkeepers. However, using Mosquito devices is problematic as children are a valuable resource, providing the rationale for the setting up of leisure facilities by local government agencies or

providing customers for retailers. The Mosquito device provides a solution in that it doesn't deter children from using public premises all of the time but only some of the time, as with the press of a button the device can be activated. This enables local government departments and shopkeepers to merge two competing accounts of children's potential – that is, their economic potential as customers with their cultural potential for perceived, peer-influenced anti-social behaviour. No verbal exchanges come into play here, rather interaction is shaped remotely through the device. Users merely press a button while recipients engage with the device through their age-specific, biological, hearing ability. Lee and Motzkau point out that usage of the device brought other voices into play, in that the mechanism created a backlash from children's advocacy groups opposed to use of the device and to the treatment of children as non-social beings. This reflects social and cultural challenges to the notion of children as a species apart and also reflects the growing cultural trend of seeing children as rights holders. Hence, the device is an example of where biology meets technology meets the social child. For Lee and Motzkau, examining the impact and significance of Mosquito devices needs collective input from across various disciplines, stretching from the biological to the social, but from the starting point of multiplicity, rather than emanating from the interests of specific disciplines. The concepts of 'hybridity', used by Prout (2005), and 'multiplicity', used by Lee and Motzkau (2011), are presented by Ryan (2012) as a move from a 'new paradigm' to a 'new wave'. However, Ryan (2012) questions whether this 'new wave' presents anything radically new and is suspicious of whether these recent approaches have the capacity to dismantle ongoing boundaries between psychology and sociology. Thorne (2007: 150), for example, laments what she sees as the 'continuing wall of silence' between the two disciplines and appeals to both to engage in more fruitful mutual dialogue to transcend the ongoing divide, although she acknowledges that conceptual difficulties around ontology render this a difficult task.

The Sociology of Childhood and Sociology

It is worth briefly outlining the contribution that the 'new' sociology of childhood has made to sociology more generally. In the journal *Current Sociology* in 2010, various childhood researchers from a number of different countries, including the USA, Australia, the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Finland, were asked to reflect on the relationship between childhood sociology and 'mainstream' sociology. I want to draw on their reflections to illustrate the significant contribution of childhood sociology to the discipline, but also to call attention to the ongoing marginalisation of the study of children and childhood and how it continues to

exist at the peripheral edges of the discipline. Buhler-Niederberger (2010: 155) argues that childhood remains a 'young branch of the discipline' and, while there is now a wealth of studies on previously neglected aspects of young people's lives, nonetheless, at the level of sociological theory, children remain largely invisible. This is despite the range of theoretical advances that the 'new' sociology of childhood has brought to our attention. For example, the location of childhood as a permanent structural feature of society opened up interest in the generational order, and theorists such as Qvortrup and Alanen argue that this generational order is as important as other structural variables, such as class and gender, and should be subject to a similar level of scrutiny. At the same time, the acknowledgement that childhood is socially constructed called for a comparative framework which would illuminate how childhoods are experienced across time and across different societies rather than existing as a fixed universal state. The location of the child as social actor necessitated detaching the child from mainstream sociological interest in the family or education system and considering children in their own right, living their lives in the here and now. This led to a renewed focus on how daily life is accomplished in the present, thus challenging the often overwhelming focus on the child in terms of future potential. All these observations opened up space for new questions and new perspectives to emerge but the impact across different societies has been variable. Reflecting on Italian sociology, Baraldi (2010: 285) argues that children still tend to be seen through the primary lens of socialisation theory, with sociological interest in children's agency remaining 'weak in Italy compared to other European countries'. In the UK, Moran-Ellis (2010) argues that mainstream sociology has yet to engage in any systematic way with many aspects of children's lives. For example, the sociology of work continues to marginalise the formal and informal work activities of children. The sociology of sexuality is guilty of a similar neglect, while mainstream research on class and gender still tends to position children in terms of socialisation theory, albeit within frameworks outlining socialisation as a messier process. In relation to France, Sirota (2010) argues that much French sociology continues to see children through the lens of socialisation and in terms of their location in family and educational systems. She cautions against the danger of 'a sociological field closing in upon itself' and argues that more mainstream sociological engagement is necessary to 'consider the child in socially structured relations such as social classes, gender or generation relationships' (2010: 263). These relationships are central to mainstream sociology.

Hence, while the burgeoning field of childhood studies has significantly contributed to challenging the invisibility of children, and children within sociology, its impact remains piecemeal. Childhood sociology has emerged as a new, somewhat trendy, sub-discipline, leading to a range of special options within sociology degree programmes, rather than being integrated into the mainstream concerns of the discipline.

For example, in relation to Germany, Zeiher (2010: 293) argues that childhood sociology can be seen as a 'progressively developing sub-discipline' but one that exists on the fringes of mainstream sociology rather than being viewed as an integral part of the discipline. The major sociological associations have special thematic groups in the field of childhood sociology. For example, the International Sociological Association's Research Committee, RC53, specifically relates to The Sociology of Childhood. The European Sociological Association has a similar thematic group relating specifically to children – Research Network 4. While, of course, both these organisations arrange and classify the divergent interests of members around specific themes, a review of plenary and semi-plenary sessions and keynote speakers during the annual/biannual conferences aimed at showcasing central sociological debates and concerns would suggest that childhood remains low on overall agendas and in their identification of the important overarching themes that sociology currently needs to engage with and debate. The American Sociological Association had a Children's Section from 1992 to 2000 but since then, childhood has been merged with youth studies to form a children and youth section of the organisation (Bass, 2010), while The Australian Sociological Association has a section on youth but none on childhood (van Krieken, 2010). This brief review suggests that childhood sociology still has some way to go towards establishing itself as core to the mainstream discipline.

The move within universities to promote inter-disciplinary research units and centres, together with an increasing need to demonstrate research 'impact', has led to a mushrooming of inter-disciplinary perspectives on childhood, and this has further weakened the potential of childhood sociology to impact significantly on core sociological theorising. Indeed, Strandell (2010) suggests that there has been more commitment to adopting core sociological concepts and approaches to children and childhood by other disciplines rather than within sociology itself. Within sociology, as outlined above, childhood is often conceived as a separate, narrow, specific theoretical and empirical research topic rather than a core component of the overall discipline. Efforts to illustrate 'impact' often lead to a narrow focus on 'problem children and children's problems' (Qvortrup, 1994), and funding opportunities often become reduced to identifying the necessary inputs to produce successful outcomes for children, particularly those from disadvantaged or problem backgrounds, to enable their effective inclusion in future society. In the process, how 'ordinary', 'everyday' children live out their 'ordinary', 'everyday' childhoods gets somewhat lost. It is against this background that this book centres on sociology's contribution to understanding 'ordinary', 'everyday' children and their childhoods by demonstrating the importance of generation as an overarching concept and subsequently applying this framework to the core sociological themes of structure and agency.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to critically unpack the neat binary divisions between psychology and sociology and between traditional and newer versions of each. The debates raised in this chapter are central to the core arguments that will subsequently be developed throughout the remainder of the book. The discussion thus far suggests the ongoing importance of dualisms in understanding children's and adults' attitudes and experiences and the relationships between them, although, as the chapter demonstrates, these dualisms are messy and overlapping rather than distinct. The next two chapters bring to the fore additional dualisms between the macro and micro contexts within which adults and children live out their daily lives. While the division of the macro and micro into separate chapters could be considered as reinforcing a false dualism, the intention is to explore these two positionings of childhood and children in detail to set the scene for Chapter 6, which brings to the fore the messy relationship between structure and agency that emerges from and operates within the boundaries of the macro and the micro and the border between adulthood and childhood. The relationship between structure and agency underpins these divisions and remains an unresolved tension within the 'new' sociology of childhood. Chapter 6 will put forward the concepts of inter-generacy and intra-generacy as a potential framework for illuminating but not resolving these ongoing debates.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. Outline and critically evaluate the main differences between psychological and sociological approaches to children and childhood.
2. Discuss and critically evaluate the contribution of socialisation theory to sociological accounts of children and childhood.
3. To what extent is childhood a social construction?
4. Outline and discuss the contribution of the 'new' sociology of childhood to promoting new ways of thinking about children and childhood.
5. Have divisions between the traditional and the 'new' sociology of childhood been overstated? Give the reasons for your answer.
6. Evaluate the arguments put forward by Lee and Motzkau (2011) to bridge the gap between technology, biology and culture.

Recommended Reading

- Ambert, A. (1986) 'Sociology of Sociology: The Place of Children in North American Sociology', in Adler, P. and Adler, P. (eds) *Sociological Studies of Child Development*, 1, 11–31.
- Lee, N. and Motzkau, J. (2011) 'Navigating the Bio-politics of Childhood', *Childhood*, 18, 1, 7–19.
- Prout, A. and James, A. (1997) 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems', in James, A. and Prout, A. (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Falmer Press.
- Ryan, P. J. (2008) 'How New is the "New" Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXVIII, 4, 553–76.
- Waksler, F. C. (1991) *Studying the Social Worlds of Children: Sociological Readings*, London: Falmer Press.