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THE SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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The study of children and youth—or childhood studies—involves researchers from diverse disciplines who theorize and conduct research on children and adolescents. Woodhead (2004) aptly explains,

Interest in *Childhood Studies* is for many born out of frustration with the narrow versions of *the child* offered by traditional academic discourses and methods of inquiry, especially a rejection of the ways psychology, sociology, and anthropology traditionally partition and objectify *the child* as subject to processes of development, socialization or acculturation. (P. x)

Since the late 1980s, sociologists have made sizable contributions to the study of children and youth, and the field of childhood studies has become recognized as a legitimate field of academic enquiry. Increasingly, childhood is used as a social position or a conceptual category to study. Like women's studies, the study of children has emerged as an interdisciplinary field. Researchers of children from established disciplines, such as anthropology, education, history, psychology, and sociology, have found a meeting place in this emergent interdisciplinary field of childhood studies.

In the following sections, I will first outline the relative contributions of different approaches to the field of childhood studies. Some approaches find a home within one discipline, while other approaches are used by more than one discipline. Specifically, I will examine approaches outside sociology, such as historical, developmental psychological, and children's literature, and then I will discuss four perspectives used by sociologists, namely the cultural approach, the social structural approach, the demographic approach, and the general socialization approach. While

sociologists use these four perspectives, childhood scholars trained in other disciplines also use these perspectives. I will then consider the usefulness of childhood studies as an interdisciplinary area of study and present a vision for the future of childhood studies within sociology.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Historical Approaches to Childhood Studies

Historical research informs what the concept of childhood means. Ariès ([1960] 1962) made the first argument that childhood is socially and historically constructed. He did not view it as a *natural* state defined by biology. By examining works of art dating back 1,000 years, he noted a difference in the rendering of children prior to the 1700s, wherein children were depicted as little adults and not as a distinctive group. In agreement with Ariès, Demos (1970) put forth a similar argument using evidence gathered on the Puritans of the Plymouth Colony in the 1600s, noting that children were not considered a special group with shared needs or status. These researchers asserted that the shift from treating children as small adults to children as valuable individuals to be protected goes hand-in-hand with other societal shifts such as the spread of schooling and the decline of child mortality.

While Ariès's hypothesis has been challenged and criticized by historical research and empirical evidence (see Gittins 2004; Nelson 1994), his ideas have inspired social scientists to study ordinary children, and many studies have been produced as a result. As a dialogue with the

work of Ariès, De Mause ([1976] 1995:4) developed a *psychogenic theory of history*, which asserted that parent-child relations have evolved to create greater intimacy and higher emotional satisfaction over time. De Mause explained that parent-child relations evolve in a linear fashion and that parent-child relationships change incrementally and, in turn, fuel further historical change. In response to this, Pollock (1983) dismisses the findings of researchers such as Ariès, Demos, and De Mause, who assert the modern or incremental approach to childhood, arguing that “parents have always valued their children: we should not seize too eagerly upon theories of fundamental change in parental attitudes over time” (p. 17). While Pollock specifically counters the conclusions of Demos on children living in the 1700s in the Plymouth colony, his conclusions respond to all prior research positing that childhood is a modern concept.

Historical research documents that the idea of childhood emanates from the middle class as members of the middle class first advanced laws to limit child labor and promoted education and protection of children (Kehily 2004). The shift of children from economic to emotional contributors of the family after the seventeenth century took place first among middle-class boys and later became the expectation for all children, regardless of social class or gender (Zelizer 1985). A good example of this middle-class perspective is illustrated in the writing of Mayhew, a social commentator from the nineteenth century (1861, in Kehily 2004), who writes about a disadvantaged eight-year-old street vendor from the working class who has “lost all childish ways” in the *Watercress Girl* in *London Labour and the London Poor*.

While Mayhew calls attention to the plight of working-class children in the mid-nineteenth century, other research (Steedman 1990; Gittins 1988) indicates that it is not until the early twentieth century that the *childhood* concept is redefined for working-class children in the United Kingdom. Child poverty and ill health were viewed as social problems and resulted in a shift away from economic to increased emotional value of children and altered expectations that children should be protected and educated (Cunningham 1991).

The idea of *lost or stolen childhood* continues to be prominent in popular discussions of childhood (Kehily 2004:3). With this, historical approaches offer a great deal to the field of childhood studies because they allow us to view the concept of *childhood* as malleable. The childhood concept does not have the same meaning today as it did 300 years ago in a given culture, and it does not have the same meaning from culture to culture or even across social classes during a historical moment. Most historical research focuses on Western forms of childhood, yet these constructs may be useful for understanding certain aspects of childhood in non-Western contexts, especially when similar socioeconomic factors, such as industrialization, and a shift from an agrarian to a cash economy, may frame conditions.

Ideas about how childhood is bound by culture, political economy, and epoch continue to be played out today in many non-Western contexts. For example, Hollos (2002) found that a new partnership family type emerged alongside the lineage-based system as a small Tanzanian community underwent a shift from subsistence agriculture with hoe cultivation to wage labor. These family types exhibited two distinct parental perspectives on what childhood should be and how children should spend their time. Partnership families emerging with a cash economy tend to view their children as a means of enjoyment and pleasure, whereas lineage-based families typically see their children as necessary for labor needs in the near term and as investments and old-age insurance in the long term.

In this way, historical perspectives have the potential to inform contemporary cultural and social constructive theories on children and childhood studies. The next step is to move beyond Ariès and the dialogue he created to address the persistence of current social issues that involve children such as child poverty, child labor, and disparities across childhoods worldwide (see Cunningham 1991).

Developmental Psychological Approaches to Childhood Studies

Sully’s *Studies of Childhood* (Sully [1895] 2000, quoted in Woodhead 2003) notes, “We now speak of the beginning of a careful and methodological investigation of child nature.” By the early twentieth century, developmental psychology became the dominant paradigm for studying children (Woodhead 2003). Developmental psychology has studied and marked the stages and transitions of Western childhood. Piaget’s (1926) model of developmental stages stands as the foundation. Within the developmental psychology framework, children are adults in training and their age is linked to physical and cognitive developments. Children travel a developmental path taking them in due time to a state of being adult members of the society in which they live (Kehily 2004). Children are therefore viewed as learners with potential at a certain position or stage in a journey to child to an adult status (Verhellen 1997; Walkerdine 2004).

Social and cultural researchers have critiqued the developmental psychological approach, largely faulting its treatment of children as *potential subjects* who can only be understood along the child-to-adult continuum (Buckingham 2000; Castenada 2002; James and Prout [1990] 1997; Jenks 2004; Lee 2001; Stainton Rogers et al. 1991). Qvortrup (1994) notes that developmental psychology frames children as *human becomings* rather than *human beings*. Adding to this, Walkerdine (2004) suggests that while psychology is useful in understanding children, this usefulness may be bound to Western democratic societies at a specific historical moment.

Still, Lee (2001) cautions that we should not give developmental psychology a wholesale toss, noting, “What could *growing up* mean once we have distanced ourselves

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from the dominant frameworks' account of socialization and development?" (p. 54). Likewise, Kehily (2004) notes that considering differences between sociology and developmental psychology is useful, yet it is also useful to consider what is shared or complementary across the two.

Developmental psychologists have not reached consensus on the relative importance of physical, psychological, social, and cultural factors in shaping children's development (Boocock and Scott 2005). Gittins (1988:22) urges social scientists studying children to bear in mind the *nature versus nurture* debate. Bruner (2000) explains that both biological and social factors are important because babies are born with start-up knowledge, which they then add and amend with life experiences. Concurring with this approach, Chomsky (1996) explains that a child's biological makeup is "awakened by experience" and "sharpened and enriched" through interactions with other humans and objects.

Walkerdine (2004) considers developmental psychology as limited because of its deterministic trajectory and sociology as limited because of its omission of psychological factors alongside sociological or cultural factors. Walkerdine (2004) points to several developmental psychological approaches to consider the social production of children as subjects, namely situated learning (Cole and Scribner 1990; Haraway 1991), acquiring knowledge through practice or apprenticeship (Lave and Wenger 1991), actor network theory (Law and Moser 2002), and the idea of assemblages as children learn to fill a child role in society (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). These approaches allow the researcher to include children's internal and external learning practices and processes.

As such, developmental psychology can continue to contribute to childhood studies. In the 1990s, sociologists helped cull and identify useful concepts and tools for childhood studies by criticizing developmental psychology. As the field of childhood studies continues to grow into a defined and recognized discipline, useful tools and concepts from developmental psychology should be included. Likewise, Woodhead (2003) asserts that several concepts and tools from developmental psychology—notably *scaffolding*, *zone of proximal development*, *guided participation*, *cultural tools*, *communities of practice*—are also relevant for childhood studies (see Lave and Wenger 1991; Mercer 1995; Rogoff 1990; Wood 1988). Psychologists' concern with the individual child can complement sociological research that considers children as they interact within their environment.

Children's Literature as an Approach to Childhood Studies

Childhood as a separate stage of life is portrayed in children's books, and the medium of books represents a substantial part of the material culture of childhood. Books may be viewed as a window onto children's lives and a useful tool for comprehending how and why children's

worlds are created. Hunt (2004) notes that children's literature may be unreliable for understanding childhood because children's books typically reflect the aspirations of adults for children of a particular epoch. Hunt (2004) holds however that children's literature remains a meeting place for adults and children where different visions of childhood can be entertained and negotiated. In agreement with historical research on the concept of childhood, children's books were first produced for middle-class children and had moralizing purposes. Later, children's books were produced for all children, filled with middle-class values to be spread to all.

There is agreement and disagreement on the definition of childhood when examining the children's literature of different time periods and different cultures. For example, several books of the 1950s and 1960s—including *The Borrowers*, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, and *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*—depicted adults looking back while children are looking forward (Hunt 2004). Likewise, Spufford (2002:18) notes that the 1960s and 1970s produced a *second golden age* of children's literature that presented a coherent, agreed-on idea of childhood. Furthermore, an examination of children's literature indicates different childhoods were being offered to children in the United States and Britain during the nineteenth century. British children were depicted as being restrained, while American children were described as independent and having boundless opportunity (Hunt 2004). In this way, culture and children's material world coalesce to offer very different outlooks on life to children.

The goal of books may change, from moralizing to idealistic, yet across epochs and cultures they teach children acceptable roles, rules, and expectations. Children's literature is a powerful platform of interaction wherein children and adults can come together to discuss and negotiate childhood.

Cultural and Social Construction Approaches to Childhood Studies

Anthropological cultural studies have laid important groundwork for research on children, and sociologists have extended these initial boundaries to develop a social construction of childhood. Anthropological research (Opie and Opie 1969) first noted that children should be recognized as an autonomous community free of adult concerns and filled with its own stories, rules, rituals, and social norms. Sociologists then have used the social construction approach, which draws on social interaction theory, to include children's agency and daily activities to interpret children's lives (see James and Prout [1990] 1997; Jenks 2004; Maybin and Woodhead 2003; Qvortrup 1993; Stainton Rogers et al. 1991; Woodhead 1999). Childhood is viewed as a *social phenomenon* (Qvortrup 1994). With this perspective, meaning is interpreted through the experiences of children and the networks within which

they are embedded (Corsaro 1988). Researchers generally use ethnographic methods to attain reflexivity and include children's voices. In this section, I will first discuss the social constructivist approach of childhood research in two areas, children's lives within institutional settings such as day care centers and schools, and children's worlds as they are constructed through material culture.

Evidence suggests that young children actively add meaning and create peer cultures within institutional settings. For example, observations of toddler peer groups show preferences for sex emerge by two years of age and race can be distinguished by three years of age (Thompson, Grace, and Cohen 2001; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Research also indicates that play builds on itself and across playgroups or peer groups. Even when the composition of children's groups changes, children develop rules and rituals that regulate the continuation of the play activity as well as who may join an existing group. Knowledge is sustained within the peer group even when there is fluctuation.

School-based studies (see Adler and Adler 1988; Corsaro 1988; Hardman 1973; LaReau 2002; Thorne 1993; Van Ausdale and Feagin) have added a great deal to our understandings of childhood. Stephens (1995) examined pictures drawn by Sami School children of Norway to learn how the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and its nuclear fallout affected their lives. The children expressed themselves through their drawings to show how the depleted environment affected their health, diet, work, daily routines, and cultural identity. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) explain how racism is created among preschool children's play patterns and speak. They find that children experiment and learn from one another how to identify with their race and learn the privileges and behaviors of their race in comparison with other races.

Using participant observation of children in a primary school setting, Hardman (1973) advanced the idea that children should be studied in their own right and treated as having agency. She found that children represent one level of a society's beliefs, values, and social interactions. The children's level interacts as *muted voices* with other levels of society's beliefs, values, and social interactions, shaping them and being shaped by them (Hardman 1973). Corsaro (1988) used participant observations of children at play in a nursery school setting to augment Hardman's idea of a children's level. He observed and described children as active makers of meaning through social interaction. Likewise, Corsaro and Eder (1990) conceptualize children as observing the adult world but using elements of it to create a unique child culture.

A few studies (see *Peer Power* by Adler and Adler 1988 and *Gender Play* by Thorne 1993) show how the cultural world of children creates a stratification structure similar to that of the adult world in a way that makes sense for children. Thorne's (1993) study of children's culture is set in an elementary school setting, wherein children have little say in making the rules and structure. Still, she finds

children create meaning through playground games that use *pollution rituals* to reconstruct larger social patterns of inequality as they occur through gender, social class, and race (Thorne 1993:75). Similarly, other studies show how behaviors within peer cultures—such as racism, masculinity, or sexism (see Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002; Hey 1997; James, Jenks, and Prout 1998) and physical and emotional abuse (Ambert 1995)—are taught and negotiated within children's peer groups.

In addition, childhood can be interpreted through the material makeup of children's worlds, generally taking the form of toys (see Lamb 2001; Reynolds 1989; Zelizer 2002). Zelizer (2002) argues that children are producers, consumers, and distributors. Lamb (2001) explains that children use Barbie dolls to share and communicate sexual knowledge within a peer group producing a secretive child culture.

Cook (2004) contends that the concept of *child* has been constructed through the market. Through a social history of the children's clothing industry, Cook explains how childhood became associated with commodities. He contends that childhood began to be *commodified* with the publication of the first children's clothing trade journal in 1917. By the early 1960s, the child had become a legitimate consumer with its own needs and motivations. The consuming child has over time been provided a separate children's clothing department stratified by age and gender.

As in Cook's thesis, others (e.g., Buckingham 2004; Jing 2000; Postman 1982) provide evidence to add support to the idea that children's consumption defines childhood. Jing (2000) explains how the marketing of snack foods and fast foods to children has dramatically affected childhood in China. Likewise, television (Postman 1982) and computers (Buckingham 2004) reshape what we think of as childhood. Children are argued to have a reversed power relationship with adults in terms of computers because children are more comfortable with this technology (Tapscott 1998). In addition, access to the Internet has created a new space for peer culture that is quite separate from adults. Through chat rooms and e-mail, children can communicate and share information among peers without face-to-face interaction. As a result, the stage on which children's culture is created is altered.

Social Structural Approaches to Childhood Studies

Social structural approaches to childhood studies can be divided into two areas, those that distinguish children's experience by age status and those that distinguish children's experience by generational status. Because age is the primary criterion for defining childhood, sociologists who study children have found aging and life course theories that focus on generation to be useful. Thorne (1993) argues for the use of age and gender constructs in understanding children's lives as well as considering

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children as social agents. Therefore, it is how children actively construct their worlds as a response to the constraints of age and gender. Passuth (1987) asserts that age is the salient factor for understanding childhood based on her study of how children 5 to 10 years old define themselves as little and big kids in a summer camp setting. Passuth found that age was more important than other stratification markers such as race, social class, and gender. Likewise, Bass (2004) finds that children are active agents but also that age should be considered first as it may structure the opportunities open to children who work in an open market in sub-Saharan Africa; however, other secondary factors such as economic status and gender also structure the life chances of these children. Studies based on children in the United States suggest that age should be considered along with race, gender, and social class to explain how children negotiate power and prestige within their peer groups (Goodwin 1990; Scott 2002).

For other sociologists, *generation* provides the most useful concept to explain the lives of children (Mayall 2000:120). Other researchers (Alanen 2001; Qvortrup 2000) assert that generational relationships are more meaningful than analyses focusing on gender, social class, or ethnicity. While the concept of childhood is not universal, the dichotomy of adult and child is universal and differentiated by age status. This age status patterns differential power relations wherein adults have more power than children and adults typically regulate children's lives. Childhood is produced as a response to the power of adults over children even when children are viewed as actively shaping their childhoods (Walkerdine 2004). Adults write children's books, create children's toys and activities, and often speak on behalf of children (e.g., the law). In this way, the generational divide and unequal authority between adults and children define childhood.

Mayall (2002) uses the generational approach to explain how children contribute to social interaction through their position in the larger social order, wherein they hold a child status. The perspective of children remains meaningful even through the disadvantaged power relationship they hold vis-à-vis adults in the larger social order. It can therefore become a balancing act between considering structural factors or the agency of children in understanding childhood.

The life course perspective holds that individuals of each generation will experience life in a unique way because these individuals share a particular epoch, political economy, and sociocultural context. Foner (1978) explains, "Each cohort bears the stamp of the historical context through which it flows [so that] no two cohorts age in exactly the same way" (p. 343). For example, those who entered adulthood during the Depression have different work, educational, and family experiences compared with individuals who entered adulthood during the affluent 1950s. Those of each cohort face the same larger social and political milieu and therefore may develop similar attitudes.

The *social structural* child posits that childhood may be identified structurally by societal factors that are larger

than age status but help create age status in a childhood process (Qvortrup 1994). Children can be treated by researchers as having the same standing as adult research subjects but also may be handled differently based on features of the social structure. The resulting *social structural* child has a set of universal traits that are related to the institutional structure of societies (Qvortrup 1993). Changes in social norms or values regarding children are tied to universal traits as well as related to the social institutions within a particular society.

Demographic Approaches to Childhood Studies

Much of American sociology takes a top-down approach to the study of children and views children as being interlinked with the larger family structure. It is in this vein that family instability leading to divorce, family poverty, and family employment may affect children's experiences. For example, Hernandez (1993) examines the American family using U.S. Census data from the twentieth century and notes a series of *revolutions* in the family—such as in decreased family size and the emergence of the two-earner family—that in turn affected children's well-being and childhood experiences. Children from smaller families and higher incomes typically attain more education and take higher-paid employment. Hernandez (1993) contends that mothers' increased participation in work outside the home led to a labor force revolution, which in turn initiated a child care revolution, as the proportion of preschoolers with two working parents increased from 13 percent in 1940 to 50 percent in 1987. More recent data indicate that about 70 percent of the mothers of preschoolers work outside the home (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). This child care revolution changes the structure of childhood for most American children. Time diary data indicate that the amount of children's household chores increased from 1981 to 1997 (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001). Lee, Schneider, and Waite (2003) further note that when mothers work in the United States, children do more than their fathers to make up for the household labor gap caused when mothers work. Hence, expectations for children and childhood are altered because of a larger family framework of considerations and expectations.

Family life structures children's well-being. When marriages break up, there are real consequences in terms of transitions and loss of income that children experience. The structural effects on children of living in smaller, more diverse, and less stable families are still being investigated. Moore, Jekielek, and Emig (2002) assert that family structure does matter in children's lives and that children fare better in families headed by two biological, married parents in a low-conflict marriage. Some research indicates that financial support from fathers after a divorce is low (Crowell and Leaper 1994). Coontz (1997) maintains that divorce and single parenthood generally exacerbate preexisting financial uncertainty. These impoverished conditions may diminish children's physical and emotional

development and adversely affect school performance and social behaviors.

However, this is not in all cases. Research (Cherlin et al. 1991) shows that children of separated or divorced families have usually experienced parental conflict and behavioral and educational problems before the family broke up. Hernandez (1993) suggests that the parental conflict and not the divorce or separation may provide more insight into children's disadvantages. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) found that about three-fourths of children whose parents divorced adjusted within six years and ranked the same on behavioral and educational outcomes as children from intact families. Another study (Smart, Neale, and Wade 2001) finds positive attributes of children of divorce as children reported that they were more independent than friends who had not experienced divorce.

The demographic study of children has taken place predominantly from the policy or public family vantage point with the assumption that there are consequences for children. Childhoods are typically framed with a perspective that views children's worlds as being derivative of larger social forces and structures. Very little agency is noted or measured in these studies. While the demographic approach does not offer detailed explanation like research put forth by social constructivist childhood scholars (see James and Prout 1990), this approach provides a valuable perspective for framing and interpreting children's lives.

Socialization Approaches to Childhood Studies

Research indicates that socialization may affect both children and parents. Developmental psychology allows us to consider how children are affected by the socialization provided by parents, and more recent research put forth by psychologists and sociologists suggests that this exchange of information may be a two-way process.

LaReau (2002) puts forth a more traditional model of socialization as she details how American families of different races and classes provide different childhoods for their children. In her research, the focus is on how children and parents actively construct childhood even as they are possibly constrained by race and class. She found evidence for two types of child rearing, concerted cultivation among middle- and upper-middle-class children, and the emergence of natural growth among working- and lower-class children. LaReau's study describes the process that puts lower- and higher-class children on different roads in childhood that translate into vastly different opportunities in adulthood.

Rossi and Rossi (1990) studied parent-child relationships across the life course and found that parents shape their children as well as their grandchildren through parenting styles, shared genes, social status, and belief systems. Alwin (2001) asserts that while rearing children is both a public and private matter, the daily teaching of children the rules and roles in society largely falls to parents. Furthermore, Alwin (2001) explains how American parental expectations for their children have changed over the last half-century, noting an increased emphasis on

self-discipline through children's activities that help develop autonomy and self-reliance. Zinnecker (2001) notes a parallel trend in Europe toward individualism and negotiation, and away from coercion in parenting styles.

In contrast, Ambert's (1992) *The Effect of Children on Parents* questions the assumptions of the socialization perspective and posits that socialization is a two-way process. Ambert argues that having children can influence one's health, income, career opportunities, values and attitudes, feelings of control, life plans, and the quality of interpersonal relations. She questions the causality of certain problematic children's behaviors, such as clinginess among some young children or frequent crying among premature babies. Ambert contends that children's behavior socializes parents in a patterned way, which agrees with the sentiment of de Winter (1997) regarding autistic children and that Skolnick (1978) regarding harsh child-rearing methods.

Likewise, psychologist Harris (1998) argues that the parental nurture or *socialization* fails to ground the direction of causation with empirical data. She explains that parenting styles are the effect of a child's temperament and that parents' socialization has little influence compared with other influences such as heredity and children's peer groups. Harris's approach, known as group socialization theory, posits that after controlling for differences in heredity, little variance can be explained by children's socialization in the home environment. Harris provides evidence that most children develop one behavioral system that they use at home and a different behavioral system for use elsewhere by middle childhood. Group socialization theory can then explain why immigrant children learn one language in the home and another language outside the home, and their native language is the one they speak with their peers (Harris 1998).

Likewise, other studies (Galinski 1999; Smart et al. 2001) find evidence that children play a supportive role and nurture their parents. In a parallel but opposing direction, other studies suggest that having children negatively affects parents' lifestyles and standards of living (Boocock 1976) and disproportionately and negatively affects women's career and income potentials (Crittenden 2001). Indeed, research indicates that socialization may affect both children and parents. While most research concentrates on the socialization of children by parents and societal institutions, more research should focus on the socialization of parents. In this way, children may be viewed as affecting the worlds of their parents, which in turn may affect children.

Interdisciplinary Involvement and Implications

Childhood research benefits from the involvement of a diverse range of disciplines. On the surface these approaches appear to have disagreement in terms of methods and theoretical underpinnings, yet these approaches challenge more traditional disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology to consider what best interprets children's lives. In some cases, the interaction across

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disciplines creates new approaches, such as those of sociologists who use general socialization theory from developmental psychology. Similarly, historical research on the value of children being tied to a certain epoch with a specific level of political economy can inform the valuation of children and their labor in poorer countries around the globe today.

There is a need for continued interdisciplinary collaboration, and thought is being given to how children and childhood studies could emerge as a recognized interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Woodhead (2003) offers three models for interdisciplinary effort for advancing the study of children and childhoods: (1) a *clearinghouse* model, (2) a *pick 'n' mix* model, and (3) a *rebranding* model. The *clearinghouse model* (Woodhead 2003) would include all studies of children and childhood, all research questions and methodologies, and all disciplines that are interested. This clearinghouse model would view different approaches to the study of children for their complementary value and would encourage researchers to ask "different but equally valid questions" (James et al. 1998:188).

The *pick 'n' mix model* (Woodhead 2003) envisions that an array of child-centered approaches would be selectively included in the study of children. If this were to happen, the process of selection could complicate and hamper the field of childhood studies in general. Fences may be useful in terms of demarcating the path for childhood scholars but also may obstruct the vista on the other side.

The *rebranding model* (Woodhead 2003) would involve researchers collaborating across disciplines on research involving children while informing and remaining housed within more traditional disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology. In this scenario, children and childhood scholars remain within sociology while also being committed to interdisciplinary involvement. This scenario has served to strengthen sociological research in general. For example, James and Prout (1990) coined the term *sociological study of childhood*, and later James et al. (1998) developed the concept of *sociological child*. More recently, Mayall (2002) has suggested the use of the term *sociology of childhood* to move children and childhood studies to a more central place within sociology. In turn, this strengthens children and childhood studies across disciplines by forging a place for children in the traditional discipline.

The field of interdisciplinary childhood studies has the potential to widen its reach by creating constituencies across older disciplines. Additionally, childhood studies can learn from the development experience of other interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies or gerontology. Oakley (1994:13) asserts the shared concerns across the academic study of women and children because women and children are socially linked and represent social minority groups. In a similar vein, Bluebond-Langner (2000) notes a parallel in scholarly potential for childhood studies of the magnitude of women's studies, predicting that childhood studies will affect the twenty-first century in much the same way as women's studies has the twentieth century.

Weighing the contributions across disciplines, it is clear that developmental psychology has laid the groundwork for the field of childhood studies, yet the resulting conversation across scholars and disciplines has produced a field that is much greater than the contributions of any one contributing discipline. Therefore, childhood scholars have much to gain through conversation and collaboration.

CONSIDERING SOCIOLOGY AND CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Within sociology, scholars approach the study of children in many ways. Some sociologists take a strict social constructivist approach, while others meld this approach to a prism that considers social structures that are imposed on children. Some sociologists focus on demographic change, while others continue to focus on aspects of socialization as childhoods are constructed through forces such as consumer goods, child labor, children's rights, and public policy. All these scholars add to the research vitality and breadth of childhood studies. In addition, children and childhood studies research centers, degree programs, and courses began to be established in the 1990s, most of which have benefited from the contributions of sociologists and the theories and methods of sociology.

Childhood studies gained firm ground in 1992 in the United States when members of the American Sociological Association (ASA) formed the Section on the Sociology of Children. Later, the section name was changed to the Section on the Sociology of Children and Youth to promote inclusiveness with scholars who research the lives of adolescents. In addition to including adolescents, American sociologists are also explicitly open to all methods and theories that focus on children. The agenda of the Children and Youth Section has been furthered by its members' initiation and continued publication of the annual volume *Sociological Studies of Children* since 1986. In agreement with the ASA section name addition, the volume recently augmented the volume name with *and Youth* and became formalized as the annual volume of ASA Children and Youth Section. The volume was initially developed and edited by Patricia and Peter Adler and later edited by Nancy Mandell, David Kinney, and Katherine Brown Rosier.

Outside the United States, the study of children by sociologists has gained considerable ground through the International Sociological Association Research Group 53 on Childhood, which was established in 1994. Two successful international journals, *Childhood* and *Children and Society*, promote scholarly research on children from many disciplines and approaches. In particular, British childhood researchers have brought considerable steam to the development of childhood studies through curriculum development. Specifically, childhood researchers wrote four introductory textbooks published by Wiley for a target

class on childhood offered by the Open University in 2003. The books are *Understanding Childhood* by Woodhead and Montgomery (2003), *Childhoods in Context* by Maybin and Woodhead (2003), *Children's Cultural Worlds* by Kehily and Swann (2003), and *Changing Childhoods* by Montgomery, Burr, and Woodhead (2003).

The relationship between the discipline of sociology and childhood studies appears to be symbiotic. Even as sociologists assert that the study of children is its own field, this does not preclude the development of childhood studies across disciplinary boundaries. Sociologists capture the social position or status of children and have the methods for examining how childhood is socially constructed or situated within a given society. Sociologists can also continue to find common ground with other childhood scholars from other disciplines to develop better methods and refine theories that explain children's lives. Advances in the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies serves to strengthen the research of sociologists who focus their work on children. Likewise, sociological challenges to the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies since the 1990s have provided useful points of critique and improvement to the study of children's behavior and children's lives.

CURRENT AND FUTURE RESEARCH: SOCIAL POLICY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Current and future research on children falls into two main areas, social policy and children's rights. Arguably, there is some overlap between these two large themes. Indeed, Stainton Rogers (2004) maintains that social policy is motivated by a concern for children, yet children have very little to no political or legal voice. Children do not vote or decide what is in their best interests or what children's rights are. Social policy requires us to consider the intersection of children as dependents or *not yet adults* and children as having certain rights. It has previously been noted that children are citizens and should be treated as citizens but with their own concerns (James and Prout 1997), yet there is still much to be clarified.

Public policy can be used to improve the lives of children. Research has established that poverty matters in the lives of children, as measured in child well-being indicators, and public policies have been enacted to help families rise out of poverty (Hernandez 1993). Research on the impact of increased income after a casino opened on a Cherokee reservation indicates that Native-American children who were raised out of poverty had a decreased incidence of behavior disorders (Costello et al. 2003).

At other times, public policies affect children as a byproduct or consequence. One example is the 1996 Welfare Reform Law (or PRWORA), which made work mandatory for able-bodied, American adults and put time limits of five years and a day on receiving public assistance. Still, much is to be learned as to the effect, if any, of

this legislation on children (Bass and Mosley 2001; Casper and Bianchi 2002). In addition to income, public policy shapes the experience of family life by recognizing some forms while ignoring others. A substantial number of children will experience many family structures and environments as they pass through childhood, regardless of whether the government legitimates all these forms (Clarke 1996). Likewise, examining children's experiences in various family forms is a useful area of current and future study.

Children's rights can be examined in terms of protecting children from an adult vantage point or in terms of providing children civil rights (or having a legal voice). The view of protecting children is a top-down approach positing that children are immature, and so legal protections should be accorded to keep children safe from harm and abuse and offer children a basic level of developmental opportunities. In contrast, the civil rights approach asserts that children have the right to participate fully in decisions that may affect them and should be allowed the same freedoms of other citizens (Landsdown 1994; Saporiti et al. 2005). In addition, the framing of children's rights takes different forms in richer and poorer countries around the globe. For richer countries, granting children rights may involve allowing children civil and political voice, whereas in poorer countries, basic human rights bear out as more important. Child labor is an issue that has been examined in terms of the right of children to learn and be developed and the right of children to provide for oneself (see Bass 2004; Neiwenuhuys 1994; Zelizer 1985).

Future studies will also need to consider the relationship between children's rights as children become study subjects. Innovative approaches are being used to include children's voices and input in the research process (Leonard 2005), yet there is still much to be done in this area in terms of developing methodologies that allow children to participate in the research process. Indeed, incorporating children in the research process is a next logical step for childhood studies. However, childhood scholars are adults and therefore not on an equal footing with children (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). Furthermore, there is momentum to include children's perspectives in the research process at the same time that there is a growing concern for children's well-being, which may be adversely affected by their participation as subjects in the research process.

Future research on children should focus on the children's issues through social policies yet also consider children's rights in tandem or as follow-up studies. It is generally the matter of course to take *children* or *youth* as a definitive given and then seek to solve their problems or create policies for them. Future research should focus on practical children's issues and use empirical research projects to increase our knowledge of the nature of childhood. The last 15 years provide evidence to support the idea that childhood researchers should continue to bridge disciplines and even continents to find common ground.