Developmental Psychology

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INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research in developmental psychology is no different in principle from other areas of psychology, although its specific focus highlights in stark form key issues for all psychological research. In particular its preoccupations with conceptualizing, measuring and evaluating change and with working with a vulnerable, low status population – with arguably limited, and certainly hard-to-interpret, repertoires of responses – have generated complex methodological and ethical debates (with the precise relationships between the attributions of limited capacity and difficulty of interpretation constituting much of both the conceptual and methodological literature). My aim here is to review more standard methodological treatments in developmental psychology and, beyond this, to indicate some more 'outlying' but innovative approaches that offer glimpses of the kinds of research that might usefully extend the current remit and approaches of developmental psychology. This involves taking a broad understanding of cross-disciplinary treatments of both method and childhood.

METHODOLOGICAL INVESTMENTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Developmental psychology, like the rest of psychology, is as much defined by its methodological procedures as its conceptual concerns. But since theory informs and inscribes all methods, we have to attend to the ways conceptual commitments structure and are structured by methodological designs, approaches and techniques. There are three key starting points for thinking about the role of methods in developmental psychology: (1) developmental psychology as method in psychology; (2) method as theory in developmental psychology; and (3) the constitutive relationship between technological developments and methodological approach.

Developmental psychology as method in psychology

Within the history of the discipline, developmental psychology has typically been accorded a particular methodological role, in the sense that questions about development are used to answer broader questions about the origin and nature of

psychological processes. The recapitulationist assumption formulated by Haeckel that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' (i.e. that the development of the individual repeats the development of its species) meant that the study of child development became the arena for posing a whole range of questions that were largely unrelated to concerns with specific children's development or welfare. Rather, from Locke to Rousseau (and if we include religious models of original sin or salvation, then much earlier), childhood was the arena for formulating, modelling and evaluating ideas of the subject and society that connect philosophy to political theory. Configurations of childhood methodologically structured and reflected wider concerns with the good (or bad) society, with methodological procedures as also their strategy. Indeed 'catching them young' (and its variants in 'headstart' or 'surestart' schemes) remains a key social policy assumption within national and international policies. For the child is understood as the methodological tool by which national and international development can be identified, organized and planned (Burman, 2008a).

Modern developmental psychology is largely conflated, for significant historical reasons, with both the domain of 'individual psychology' (via study of 'the child') and with the rise of psychological testing. Indeed, for significant historical reasons – to do with social policy imperatives of emerging nation states for tools to assess the capacities and behaviour of their populations – the history of 'individual psychology' (as with 'individual differences') is largely (but not entirely, as we shall see) the history of the development of psychometrics (Rose, N., 1985).

All this may seem obvious. But one of the precepts of interpretive analysis is that the obvious, the 'commonsense', can carry potent sets of assumptions precisely by virtue of seeming innocuous (Haug, 1992; Parker, 1992). A key paradox is that, despite concern over 'the' developing child, there is often little focus on the particular circumstances surrounding that child. (Note the singular here – indeed a key methodological

intervention has been to acknowledge, via research, that children usually grow up with at least one other sibling – thus challenging the cosy dyadic model[1] (Munn, 1990).) The focus is typically either on general epistemological questions (about the origin and development of 'knowledge' – as in Piaget's project) or on applied social policy imperatives to avoid stigmatized 'endpoints' of development (deviance, pathology, criminality, teenage pregnancy. etc.). The latter agenda gives rise to the well-known methodological flaw of retrospectively, and thereby selectively researching, the early experiences and backgrounds of groups that have already been identified as problematic, and so by this circular chain of reasoning ignoring those whose adverse early experiences did not lead to such outcomes (Clarke and Clarke, 1976)[2]. Either way, the study of the child arises out of other debates or concerns, not as a concern with the actual states and processes of how this child (or set of children) develops. A key effect of this individualist approach typically works to implicate families and especially (given prevailing gendered patterns of childcare) mothers as responsible for such outcomes, rather than socioeconomic conditions or state policies.

Hence – through the conjoint focus on developmental progress – the trope of the child produces an elision between individual and national development, and correspondingly naturalizes understandings of development. In this way developmental psychology has fulfilled a key role in the production of mainstream Anglo-US psychology's abstracted, asocial model of the subject, with class, gender and culture only appearing as variables to be grafted on to it (Burman, 1994a,b, 2008a,b), 'casting its object of inquiry – "the child" – in a predetermined (a priori after all) image of a situationally indifferent, naturally developing biological organism' (Code, 2000: 235–6).

It is precisely the awareness of such conceptual and methodological limitations that have generated new interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary methodological approaches

to the study of children and childhood that we will consider below.

Method as theory in developmental psychology

All too often in psychology questions of *how* something can be measured have substituted for an adequate model of *what* it is that is deemed to have developed. Indeed 'methods' sections in developmental psychology textbooks are either absent because they are subsumed within theories, or else offer only brief accounts of research designs. It is widely acknowledged that the most efficient and widely used design, cross-sectional study, measures only static states documented at a particular time. Moreover, taking age as the dependent variable privileges this over individual and cultural differences such that generational (or cohort) differences are also ignored. Such concerns have preoccupied some developmental researchers so as to render it an area of theory in itself, for example in proposing other designs that more adequately take account of the historically situated character of the emergence and development of activities and qualities (e.g. Baltes, Reese and Lipsett, 1980). Ancillary subdisciplines, such as cross-cultural research, similarly function as a site for the validation of generalized psychological models that usually rely almost entirely on quantitative forms of measurement (see Burman, 2007), and so are regularly cited as designs for developmental research. Indeed developmental psychology and cross-cultural psychology fulfil reciprocal functions as methodological devices of mutual legitimation[3].

Clearly theoretical assumptions (about the model of the psychological subject under investigation as much as the trajectory of its change under investigation) structure each design. All measures of development are indirect and inferential; they therefore provide a key site for the rehearsal of ideological presuppositions.

Indeed the very terms of investigation carry cultural-political assumptions that constitute an important topic for study.

As commentators on models of economic development have long noted (Crush, 1995; Rahnema with Bawtree, 1997), the metaphors by which we describe development are shot through with ideological assumptions that both reflect and perpetuate power inequalities. While change is usually understood as positive, 'development' is typically constituted as an unquestionable good - with its absence understood as deficit (undeveloped) or inferiority (underdeveloped) (Sachs, 1992). The epithet 'overdeveloped', now in circulation within post-development and critical development debates, works as an intervention precisely because it invites reflection on the presumed superiority and linearity of western models of economic development. Not only does this prompt reassessment of ecological, environmental and structural inequalities of development, but it also invites attention to who benefits and suffers from this (cf. Burman, 1995, 2005a,b, 2008b; Crewe and Harrison, 2000).

Moreover the equation of developmental psychology with individual development itself betrays how individualism relentlessly structures our models and methods:

> The tendency to assign personal responsibility for the successes and failures of development is an amalgam of the positivistic search for causes, of the older Western tradition of personal moral responsibility, and of the conviction that personal mastery and consequent personal responsibility are first among the goals of child-rearing. It is difficult to imagine an American child without a core commitment to the proposition that *someone* is responsible for what happens in development … The child – like the Pilgrim, the cowboy, and the detective on television – is invariably seen as a free-standing isolatable being who moves through development as a self-contained and complete individual.
>
> Kessen (1979: 819; emphasis in original)

Yet notwithstanding the broader crisis heralded by claims that modernity is in crisis (sometimes cast as 'the end of history'; Fukuyama, 1992), developmental psychological assumptions structured into the concept of 'progress' remain largely uninterrogated. Similarly the conflation of psychological with physical change within notions of

'growth' betrays not only the biological, but also the functionalist, agendas that structured the emergence of psychology, and developmental psychology in particular (Harris, 1987). Indeed feminist theory has generated critical scrutiny of the metaphors of development to highlight the cultural masculinity structured into models through notions of 'mastery' (equating to 'competence') (Walkerdine, 1988), and the privileging of the cognitive over the affective (Broughton, 1988). Even the seemingly innocuous 'arrow' of time can be critiqued for its cultural masculinity (i.e. asocial individualism):

> The arrow metaphor expresses three contemporary explanations of developmental change: (1) biology, which launches movements; (2) an ideal solution to a cognitive task, which serves as the target for development; and (3) linearity, which ensures continuity of travel. Arrows describe linear thought and linear development in a universal child. Arrows are also, of course, typically associated with aggression, domination, imposition of a view, and penetration of an influence. An arrow expresses development as a push towards change, not as a force that simultaneously transforms and is transformed.
>
> Kofsky Scholnick (2000: 34)

Kofsky Scholnick elaborates more feminist-friendly relational metaphors such as friendship, conversation, apprenticeship and narrative that usher in more socially-based understandings of contexts for and of development.

Methodology–technology relations in the construction of 'the child'

Technological change is the third key influence on methods of study in developmental psychology. Just as the invention of photography enabled Gesell to formulate his charts for age norms in development in the early twentieth century, so from the 1960s video allowed detailed frame by frame analysis of infant-caregiver interaction. These transformed understandings of the interactional attunement of very young babies (Condon, 1977; Trevarthen, 1977) – central to the relational shift in psychoanalysis (see especially Stern, 1985) – while virtual imaging allowed investigation of perceptual abilities (Bower, 1966).

As we will see later, technological developments have fostered methods of promoting children's self-representations (using photography and video), and we can anticipate future work attending to the varieties and textualities of these (via texting, internet use, etc.). Such methodological developments are also research topics in themselves, with the birth of the information revolution giving rise to new forms of communication, literacy and sociality – as well as offering spaces for culturally specific forms of childhood. Thus technology informs culture, and method becomes topic.

Overall, models of infancy have made a marked transition from attributions of lack (i.e. what the baby 'can't' do) to those of competence, as Stone et al.'s landmark (Stone, Smith and Murphy, 1973) collection indicated. This discourse of competence owes much to the technology that produces such rich descriptions of small children's expertise. But Kessen (1993) argued that locating previously undiscovered skills and qualities within the child serves other functions, in particular in warding off contemporary anxieties about the adequacy of the conditions in which we are rearing children:

> The assignment of cognitive capabilities to the new infant frees the baby of dependence on environmental – specifically cultural and parental – influences; his intellectual growth is safe regardless of variations in his surrounding context. Whether or not western culture is the epitome of historical evolution, whether or not American child-rearing patterns are optimal, the child contains shielded knowledge that will exist independently of his nation or handling … [P]art of the strength of a developmental psychology that stresses what the infant's tissue gives to his future lies in the freedom from responsibility it affords parents. Nor does the assignment of cognitive richness to the infant escape political implications; the new baby of current research is conservative, protected from the vagaries of an unpredictable environment, holding the truths steady in the winds of cultural change … The baby has become the guardian of stability in an uncertain life.
>
> Kessen (1993: 424–5)

Here theory and method remain integrally linked, invoked to cover the gaps in each.

For this 'full infant' (in Kessen's terms) 'may have been constructed to save us from the disorder of no longer having shared conceptual models, or even assured research procedures' (Kessen, 1993: 415).

A brief history of qualitative methods in developmental psychology

While debates about qualitative research are relatively recent in psychology, nevertheless such approaches have a long presence in developmental psychology, albeit overshadowed by the more recent quantitative emphasis (see Box 23.1). Most textbooks discuss Darwin and Preyer's mid-nineteenth century diary studies of their own children as important conceptual precursors to the emergence of modern developmental psychology, but they rarely discuss the wider child study movement that these prompted (Riley, 1983). Indeed the longitudinal single or small sample case study remains a key and powerful paradigm within child language research.

BOX 23.1   (A History of) Qualitative Research into 'Childhood'

Piaget (1919) The clinical method: semi-structured interviews designed to elicit the narrative structure and logical status of a child's belief system.

Hinde (1983) Observation (behavioural approach): detailed time- and event-sampled descriptions of children's activities and friendship groupings.

Vygotsky (1962) Cultural-historical approach: focus on what the learner can do with others ('zone of proximal development').

Rogoff (2003) Observation (children's everyday life model): focus on how cultural norms elaborated within specific communities facilitate and constrain children's developing capacities.

Alanen (1992) Cross-generational research: looks at systematic ways in which age coordinates and constrains social relationships ('generational order').

Newman and Holzman (1993) 'Tool and result' methodology: embeds activity within social and material conditions and focuses on 'performance'.

Trawick (1992) Anthropological methods: use of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and researcher reflexivity in order to investigate the everyday relationships, mundane practices and day-to-day struggles which structure children's beings.

Billington (1996) Textual analysis: analysis of the ways in which official records construct 'the child' and their consequences for children's lives.

James et al. (1998) Childhood studies approach: focus on childhood as a cultural arena and on child agency as elaborated within specific social practices and conditions.

Elias (2000) Historical analysis: study of the history of manners via analysis of manuals for the education and training of young people.

Rose (1985) Literary analysis: Study of fictional representations in order to understand the child as cultural product and the role played by children's literature in this process.

Marshall and Woollett (2000) Visual self-representation: production of video-diaries to facilitate young people's self-definition and self-exploration and to explore the role of culture and cultural identifications within this context.

Keller (2003) Parental ethno-theories: identification of parents' own theories of development and parenting, and their grounding in cultural and economic conditions.

Burman (1996) Analysis of media representations of childhood: discursive analysis of advertisements in order to identify the range of subject positions around children and their relationship with social and cultural practices.

Moreover the history of the case study in psychology speaks to longstanding although now suppressed links with psychoanalysis, which was also reflected in the ways US methodological imperatives transformed Piaget's approach (see Burman, 1996a). Indeed Piaget was closely involved with psychoanalysis[4], and considered there to be close links between the two disciplines (Piaget, 1919). The methodological approach on which he based his studies of children (most fully discussed in Piaget, 1929) was what he called the 'clinical method' (or later the 'critical examination') which was a semi-structured interview designed to elicit the narrative structure and logical status of a child's belief system. While in its original formulation Piaget's concerns were with questions of certainty rather than 'knowledge', and with the classification of differently structured forms of reasoning, their transformation through translation and popularization across the Atlantic rendered this merely a question of whether and when children do or do not 'have' certain concepts. This question of concept acquisition or possession is a misreading of Piaget's conceptual framework, turning a qualitative investigation into a quantitative test (of 'conservation', for example). Hence the longstanding hostility and refusal on the part of Genevan researchers even to debate with their US counterparts on the basis of incommensurable work produced through incompatible methodological paradigms[5].

While observational approaches were clearly central also to the child study movement, a further tradition was developed in the 1970s by Robert Hinde and his colleagues derived from comparative psychology and anthropology, in particular ethology. Analogous to animal studies, which do not rely on verbal accounts from participants, this applied behavioural approaches to the observation of groups of children (Hinde, 1983). This body of research has tended to focus on middle childhood – including playground studies, with detailed time-and event-sampled descriptions of children's activities and friendship groupings. It provided quantitative and qualitative descriptions of children's activities – though clearly was suited more for particular kinds of contexts (such as schools).

A more recent development of these observational approaches is the 'children's everyday life' model that draws in particularly on Vygotsky's cultural-historical model. Developed by Rogoff (e.g. Rogoff, 2003) to research across diverse cultural contexts, with a focus on how cultural norms elaborated within specific communities facilitate and constrain the capacities children can display at a much more radical level that previously thought, the approach has been taken up in particular by Scandinavian developmental researchers (e.g. Solberg, 1990; Gulbrandsen et al., in preparation) to promote a different model of children's relations with their environments (see also Moss and Petrie, 2002). Here the model of the child as a competent social actor is used to explore specific children's roles within families, at home and at school. For example, Solberg (1990) analyses children's contributions to household labour, and their different orientations to being the primary 'homestayer' (when they are alone in the house). Observations are combined with diary accounts and questionnaires to arrive at comparisons of time spent at home, and time spent doing different forms of housework structured according to age (between parents and children) and by gender (mothers, fathers, girls and boys). This approach offers a good illustration of how qualitative observations can be assembled into and combined with some relatively simple quantitative analysis to formalize general and generative conclusions.

BEYOND DIFFERENCE AS DEFICIT: FEMINIST AND INTERPRETATIVE RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENTAL RESEARCH

A central dilemma motivating qualitative research in psychology has particular relevance for developmental psychology: how to

move beyond established patterns of representation, with their presences and absences, to inquire instead into what such patterns mean, and why and how they arise. In relation to developmental psychology the challenge is to find ways of interpreting change that do not presuppose the value of change or difference; to move away from the interpretation of difference as deviation, deficit or inferiority that is structured into statistical evaluations. Instead qualitative researchers elaborate ways of inquiring into the *meaning* of these differences, as understood by those identified with such qualities or statuses, and in relation to the construction of such qualities within contemporary conditions.

Qualitative methods in their diverse forms have major relevance to developmental research. The move away from reliance on quantitative measurement, with its conception of variation allowing a notion of difference only as deviation or inferiority, has enabled more thoughtful exploration of meanings, processes and interpretations of children and childhoods. As we will see, different models of the subject (humanist, discursive, etc.) are inscribed in specific research strategies.

Alongside such 'bridging disciplines' of Vygotskyan, cultural and narrative psychology and social constructionism noted by Miller and Kofsky Scholnick (2000: 10), the critical importance of feminist research should be noted as a resource for innovation and intervention in qualitative methods in psychology, and developmental psychology in particular. In particular, the differentiations made between epistemology, methodology and method (Harding, 1991) have clarified how theory pervades all methods so that no specific methodological device can be assumed to imply any particular moral-particular framework. Hence it is important not to essentialize methodological paradigms (qualitative *or* quantitative) by attributing particular moral-political qualities to them.

This point is important because feminist work has been influential but its feminist origins typically disavowed within discussions of qualitative methodology, critical

psychology or social constructionism (see Burman, 1999a,b, 2004). Yet feminist analyses are especially important in developmental psychology where women's and children's interests and positions are so often set against each other. Notwithstanding the emerging feminist engagement with developmental psychology (Miller and Kofsky Scholnick, 2000), the continuing reliance of much US feminist psychology on quantitative methods is reflected in Nagy Jacklin and McBride's (1991) discussion of the impact of feminist work on developmental psychology which, significantly, fails to mention anything about methodological paradigms or interventions.

This matter is of particular irony since debates in feminist research provide the most acute interpretive resources relevant for developmental research; namely, an attention to the ways power enters into the conduct as well as interpretation of research. For example, they have exposed the paternalism that can underlie the drive to conduct emancipatory research (whereby the very desire to 'give voice' to the disempowered paradoxically performs those very power relations, through the presumption of the power to bestow them; Bhavnani, 1990); how the claim to conduct egalitarian research always threatens to disguise the power relations always set up (though not in unidirectional ways) by research (Ribbens, 1989). In this sense feminist research builds on, but goes beyond, humanist approaches to qualitative research in psychology.

Yet beyond even specific methodological contributions, feminist analyses of gender relations – as constitutive of identities, status and role – are fruitful resources for childhood researchers, including investigation of relations between gender and age. Researching with women and with children poses particular methodological challenges since both are associated with the 'private', domestic sphere. This has particular consequences for the assessment of women's and children's labour, since household labour is necessary but usually not acknowledged as 'work'. Various feminist researchers of

childhood have highlighted the urgency and analytic utility of addressing the complex intersections between gender and childhood. For example, Nieuwenhuys (1991, 2000a,b) has highlighted how any adequate analysis of international child labour in relation to poverty not only has to take account of the invisiblized character of both women's and children's household work, but also how this remains the last key resource for poor families' survival. This has particular implications for girls who, positioned as both children and incipient women, do both more, and more unpaid, work – and consequently have less access to schooling – than their male counterparts. Nieuwenhuys argues that the International Labour Organization campaign to abolish the 'worst forms child labour' is unhelpful so long as 'the child' is taken as gender-neutral, so failing to address how work is constituted differently across the public–private divide.

Indeed in terms of research design, the feminist sociologist Lena Alanen has extended analyses of gender as a social category to childhood to advocate for the notion of a 'generational order' structuring adult–child relations. Like gender, adult–child relations are asymmetrical and structured by the public–private divide:

> Childhood orders children into the 'private' world of home and family and out of the world of economy and politics. It also orders a child's place within the family, in relation to and in difference from its adult members.
>
> Alanen (1992: 65)

She advocates a new methodological paradigm for cross-generational research that can address the systematic effects of social categories such as gender alongside how age 'coordinates and constrains' social relationships, whose rules become identified most clearly when they are transgressed:

> The working of such a generational order becomes usually apparent when its rules are violated, when e.g. children work for wages instead of going to school or when they disregard their obligations to their parents as a family child by taking to autonomous living. Such instances begin to make

visible a generational system in analogy to the gender system theorized in feminist analysis: a social order composed of, but also constraining and coordinating, children's relations in the social world in a systematic way.

> Alanen (1992: 65)

It is important to note that this approach fits well with an attention to children's agency. As with feminist analysis, the project here is to formulate an epistemological and methodological approach that investigates the possibilities and limits for actions in contexts of specific social constraints. Moreover this account is sensitive to the multidirectional character of power relations; children – like women – are positioned here as neither victims, nor as 'free' agents, as Code (2000: 235; emphasis in original) also highlights:

> Children – real, embodied, feeling and feeding children – are born into complexes of familial-social-cultural-affective meanings and expectations, and studied within disciplinary expectations, that shape, *even if they do not determine*, who the child can be, what she can know, how she can respond and negotiate with and within the material and affective circumstances in which she participates in constructing her becoming-adult subjectivity.

Specific methodological problems posed by developmental psychology

It is a moot question whether, why, and to what extent the challenges posed by researching with and about children are different in kind from researching with other populations, a question which is precisely at issue in much cross-disciplinary debate (see below). Formally speaking, childhood is a difficult-to-research area because it is relationally-defined, transient and asymmetrical. Two key methodological issues, as we shall see, also pose core theoretical questions.

What is the unit of development?

While developmental psychology technically could be concerned with investigating the development of any psychological process

(and still sometimes is within discussions of skills or qualities), more typically it makes the individualist move to map and be mapped onto child development. The methodological decision about the unit of measurement for developmental psychological research therefore has profound theoretical consequences, as we have already seen (and we have not yet even discussed competing definitions of what a 'child' is!). Yet not all models have started from this asocial, individualist point. The famous assertion by the psychoanalyst Winnicott (1947/1964: 88) that 'there is no such thing as a baby' drew attention to how psychological development begins with the (m)other–child *couple*. That is, it is impossible to conceptualize, let alone engage with, a baby without also addressing or presuming its care-giving context. Although as Riley (1983) points out, this analytical and methodological point does not necessarily ward off abstraction from the social, it is certainly a move in the right direction. Bronfenbrenner's (1977; 1979) much-cited 'ecological model' further embeds the mother–child unit within ever-widening familial, social, cultural and environmental systems. This key point has been overlooked by international child development policy where appropriations of Bronfenbrenner's model have, significantly, reverted to the individualist position and amended it to position the child alone at its centre (see Burman, 1996b).

Yet while individualist approaches clearly remain very influential, nevertheless other methodological and interpretive resources are receiving more attention, in particular those influenced by Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Holzman, 2006; Vianna and Stetsenko, 2006). Here it is what the learner can do with others, rather than – as in individualist approaches – stripped of support, that is deemed most important as 'the zone of proximal development'. This methodological intervention is theoretical, with notions of 'scaffolding' now central to models of teaching. This 'scaffolding' is simultaneously interpersonal, cultural-historical and physical-biological; it can be in the form of talk as narrative frames holding

and inducting children in language (Bruner, 1983, 1990), or (as particularly elaborated within northern and eastern European readings of soviet psychology) activity systems (Langemeyer and Nissen, 2005). Development is not the unfolding of some inner essence or quality, but rather the interiorization of external features and stimuli to generate specific (social and psychological) change (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

Indeed Vygotsky (1978: 65; emphasis in original) emphasized the absolutely intertwined, dialectical character of method and theory, and method as theory:

> The search for method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and result of the study.

In particular Newman and Holzman (1993) have taken up this 'tool and result' methodology as an explicit approach that counters (what they call) mentalism and dualism, and embeds activity within social and material conditions. They have further developed this methodology as a theory for the promotion of developmental (in their terms revolutionary) change in their focus on 'performance'. This focus therefore departs from deterministic approaches that privilege repetition over innovation. They extend the approach to Vygotsky's ideas beyond educational applications to therapy. Here they counter the more conservative focus of psychoanalytic approaches on the 'compulsion to repeat', by rather highlighting as a therapeutic tool (and result) how every action and interaction necessarily involves novel features and correspondingly new learning opportunities and outcomes (see also Newman and Holzman, 1997; Holzman, 1999, 2006).

We have all been children

A second key methodological issue posed by researching around children and childhoods is that we have all been children and experienced some kind of childhood.

This perhaps makes developmental research almost unique, in that in most cases the researchers are not, any longer, members of the group or social category about which they researching, but *they once were*. In this sense we are neither ethnographic 'natives' nor absolute 'outsiders'. How we recall or imagine our childhoods and early experiences is clearly important in structuring the models and topics, as well as the process, of developmental research. How can we avoid presuming childhood as a domain already known, imposing our own histories and so occluding and colonizing children's alterity? Equally, how can we attend to a child without treating its unintelligibility as something to be controlled, assimilated (as either deficit or deviance) or romanticized?

We should not underestimate the power of such desires and responses. While experimental research attempts to eschew subjectivity via its statistical tests and procedures, qualitative researchers acknowledge that their standpoint, history and preoccupations are always present. Indeed it is incumbent upon us as researchers to address the ways our prior commitments about children and childhoods may enter into the selection, conduct and interpretation of work with children. Otherwise we risk ignoring the actual condition of children and childhoods in favour of other – personal or social – agendas. Children who deviate from dominant conceptions of what children 'should' be and do – for example, children who work, who have sex, or who are violent – are typically expelled from the category of childhood and rendered monstrous (rather than, as would seem more appropriate, such issues prompting re-evaluating of our understandings of childhood). The vilification and demonization of the two Liverpool boys who murdered two-year-old Jamie Bulger in 1993 illustrated how deeply childhood is connected with prevailing idealizations of human nature[6].

Not only are we frightened of what children can do, and of acknowledging what it means to us that 'even children' can do such things but we are also frightened of engaging with children's own fear. Rowe

(2005) presents an analysis of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) as arising through the failure of adults to be able to tolerate children's anxieties and insecurities, because they highlight their own. The move to diagnosis and medication arises from the mismanaged struggles over our own feelings (as well as the increasing power of the pharmaceutical industry; Black 2003).

Commitments to children's innocence, protection or autonomy, or proposals addressing child welfare or neglect, inevitably evoke reference to our own childhoods, whether as lived, or as we would have wished them to have been (Burman, 2003). Various strategies to address this have been put forward by researchers. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy trainings include at least year long child observations not only to ensure that trainees gain intimate knowledge of developmental trajectories, but also to facilitate exploration of the trainees' responses and identifications: 'to see what is there to be seen and not to look for what they think should be there' (Reid, 1997: 1; see also Miller, Rustin, Rustin and Shuttleworth, 1989). As Reid points out:

> To observe in this way is like having scales removed from one's eyes – exciting and terrifying at the same time. It allows for the possibility of generating new ideas and hypotheses, rather than looking for evidence to substantiate existing theories. It is an enormous shock for any observer to discover how little we really see, in ordinary situations … for any professional working in the caring professions, the capacity for close and detailed observations (called upon in many different professional settings) makes us more effective in the service of our clients, pupils and patients.
>
> Reid (1997: 4)

Walkerdine (1997) explicitly advocates drawing on autobiography, including fantasy, as a resource for investigating the meanings and investments in gendered childhoods. Using a more explicitly psychoanalytic framework, Marks (1995) analyses how her identifications with the children within the education case conferences she was researching entered into her impressions and interpretations. Reflection upon her 'countertransferential' responses not only helped her to

disentangle her own history and preoccupations from those of her participants, but also became an added resource for generating interpretations of other professionals' responses and dilemmas. In both these accounts, biographical material is situated within axes of gender and class relations and so is more than, rather then merely, 'personal'.

These issues become more stark in contexts of intercultural exploration. In her anthropological study of sacred texts and household life in Tamil Nadu, Trawick (1992: xvii) explicitly espouses the 'boundless, ragged and plural' as methodological principles:

> One advantage of taking plurality as the way things are is that it makes us realize that the ethnographic situation (confrontation between 'fieldworker' and 'native') is not really all that strange, and it may make us more comfortable about focusing on that situation for what it is and playing it as it lays … We may not feel so inclined to pretend in our monographs that we don't exist. We may be able to act upon the faith that 'culture' is created only in the confrontation between cultures, as 'self' is created only in the confrontation between selves.
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> Trawick (1992: xix)

While Trawick includes (in a 'methodology' section) description of the range of methodological devices she used (including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, etc.), she also writes of other aspects of the research process; in particular, the importance of having to recognize that she was no longer in control of the project. This is a key feature of qualitative research; for when the conditions for and practice of research are explicitly negotiated with participants we have to be able to cope with the unexpected:

> Learning a culture, like learning a language, is largely an unconscious process, which means that one cannot control it. Plain waiting, listening and hoping seem to be the most useful things one can do most of the time.
>
> Trawick (1992: 50–1)

Trawick documents how she came to appreciate that her study of Tamil sacred poetry was actually bound to, and played out within, the household life and activity in which she was participating. Moreover, the central concepts she was investigating (of love, conflict, loyalty and hierarchy) were present within the everyday relationships between the adults, and the adults and children around her. Reading her ethnography as a study of children and childhoods is instructive not only because she brings the reader face to face with his or her own positions and identifications, but also because we cannot learn about the children without also learning about specific and mundane cultural practices of food preparation, kinship relations and day-to-day struggles that structure their lives and relationships, their very beings. Thus her account is not only a tale of orientalist admiration alongside grinding worry about child malnutrition – including the struggle to curb a western impulse to intervene and 'know best' (although it is also that). Above all, Trawick's account challenges and exposes what is at stake in the comfortable abstraction of childhood.

THE 'VALUES' PROBLEM

We have already noted contests and investments structuring how development is described and evaluated, and indeed whether it is considered desirable. Here I will address three key debates concerning major 'value issues' prompted by research with and about children. These are: children's trustworthiness as informants; the question of who speaks for children; and 'ethics'.

Children's trustworthiness as research informants

This question is typically cast as a debate over 'reliability', generated in particular by abuse investigations, and fuelled by false/recovered memory debates. A key difficulty in the psychological research is that the process of determining children's reliability threatens to recapitulate the very difficulties it sets out to investigate in terms of attempting to manipulate memorial accounts (Burman, 1997). Here the quantitative research has at least

demonstrated that adults can under some conditions be susceptible to the same kinds of influences and effects noted in relation to children (e.g. Poole and White, 1991). This poses the question of what exactly marks the difference (if any) between adults and children – is it a question of competence, or confidence and sense of social power?

Motzkau (2005) wryly highlights the logical circularity structuring the 'suggestibility' debate, which in the end always returns to the evaluator's own commitments and predilections (about the credibility of children, and how each particular child 'fits' in relation to his or her view of this). In turn Motzkau suggests that this realization generates so much discomfort on the part of the evaluators (whether judges, psychologists or social workers) that they enter another round of the circle … .

Who speaks for the child?

While the politics of representation is a constant preoccupation for qualitative researchers, this takes particularly acute and practical form in relation to research with children, where questions of competence become confounded with those of status (Burman, 1992). The ethical requirement for 'informed consent' clearly recapitulates most developmental questions: how do we differentiate consent from compliance? Indeed it is instructive to ask how the rights endowed by research practice confirm or transgress typical norms around adult-child relations which often rely upon some degree of persuasion or coercion – in the name of enlistment or even 'scaffolding' (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001; Gillies and Alldred, 2002).

While some approaches focus on documenting children's accounts, and where possible would seek to solicit representation via children (seen especially in relation to consultation over the development of child rights policies), others prioritize facilitating adults to advocate for the child (a position sometimes adopted by educational psychologists; Billington, 2000, 2006; Billington and Pomerantz, 2003). Yet formally within typical ethics procedures there are requirements to gain adult permission for any research intervention involving children, either from parents/guardians or from teachers (depending on the nature and, more typically, the setting for the intervention). These tensions surrounding adult permission/protection vs. child rights take on particularly stark form in relation to matters involving the child's body – whether of consent to surgery (Alderson, 2002) or access to contraception (Hayden, 2002). They also map onto disciplinary differences and intra-disciplinary debates (e.g. between structural and relational sociologies of childhood, for example), which are reflected in different research strategies: research by children, with children, about children, or about representations of children and childhoods.

Perhaps one of the key contributions of qualitative research is to be able to enquire into and interpret absences, as where children are not present or included in their representation. For example, children are often (literally) absent from education case conferences, which are supposedly collaborative multi-disciplinary decision-making arenas whose conclusions are usually of material relevance to children's lives. The frequent fact of children's (and often also parents') literal absence of self-representation in this arena may well speak volumes about the extent to which they regard this process as actually involving them in any meaningful way (cf. Marks, 1993; Burman, 1996c).

Beyond this, it is possible to trace the textual construction of the child via analysis of official records and the contests played out within these. Billington (1996, 2000) offers a close analysis of the subtle transformations and substitutions between the 'statement' of special educational needs he submitted and the version finally adopted by the local education authority. He traces the origins and insertions of particular phrases transposed from different professionals' reports made at much earlier points in the child's educational career, and analyses how these worked to change his recommendations against diagnosis and segregation.

'Ethics'

Major ethical issues are posed by researching with and about children (not least – but sometimes forgotten – the issues posed for adults in their engagement with children and childhoods, as real or remembered). There is now a vast apparatus of legislation surrounding children, such that any intervention is accompanied by industries of checklists, policies and committees seeking to minimize harm and ensure informed consent. But it is important that this bureaucracy does not evacuate the genuinely critical thinking that motivated such procedures. Ethical practice is a process, not an absolute state. There is a danger that researchers imagine that ethical issues are resolved by the successful negotiation of the paperwork. But while they should be anticipated, not all ethical dilemmas can be resolved in advance. A genuinely consultative and relational approach cannot specify all eventualities.

Clearly the inequality of the adult–child research relationship imposes some limits on levels of consultation and relationship. But if we are not merely either to pre-empt or to re-state all the problems composing the topic of developmental psychology in attempting to characterize ethical research relationships with and about children, we should perhaps take as a guiding principle that all research safeguards applying to adults should be considered applicable to children, with possible extra ones surrounding clarity of information and reflection on possible consequences; that is adopting as a methodological principle a theoretical position that goes beyond the 'special' status of the child. Rather, the analytical position that children imply and are implicated in relationships with others (including determining, as well as being determined by, the positions of mothers, fathers, teachers, professionals, etc.) also extends to an understanding of ethics. Ethical practice is not a part of the research process, as an additional or separable element, but *is* the research process.

Ethical concerns expose the wider social investments developmental psychological discourses can inadvertently support. Alongside all the focus on child protection (and its struggle with more libertarian approaches) we might ask: is protectionism winning in an era of defensive practice and 'risk'? Protecting children can function as a way of pre-empting answers/silencing children/closing down questions (since parents/guardians required to be present) (see also Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992). More generally, the flow of the paradigm of abuse between the social and the familial seems to involve the projection of societal anxieties about personal, environmental and national safety onto children. It has been suggested that the undermining of parental authority reflected in current child rights legislation arises from a model of society that is disillusioned and disempowered, that is thereby positioned as in need of support from professional experts (Pupavac, 2002). In a context where the global 'war against terror' comes to be reflected in the insecurity of personal and familial relations, does this herald a return to new, but less confident, individualism that is all the more intent on regulating children? As Moss and Petrie (2002) point out, such wider crises appear to enter into our models of services such that – especially in the UK – we have come to think of services *for* children, with children positioned as passive consumers in need of being contained and protected, instead of creating spaces for children to explore and interact with each other and with others.

DISCIPLINING CHILDHOOD

While psychology is typically rather parochial and inward-looking in its debates and resources, qualitative methods have wide cross-disciplinary connections. Developmental psychology – so often constituted as child development – has many intersections with other disciplines. While often dismissed as merely providing a deficit model of children, developmental psychologists claim to investigate what is often presumed or ignored: what it is that develops or changes between

children and adults. Nevertheless there are many useful research and analytical strategies offered by other disciplines, in particular in relativizing, or specifically situating, psychological knowledge claims.

The childhood studies approach, formulated from within sociology, portrays childhood as a social category. Its model of the child as competent social actor emphasizes the importance of the child as researcher or co-researcher, with a particular focus on child agency as elaborated within specific social practices and conditions (James, Jencks and Prout, 1998). As Alanen (2003: 42) noted of generational relations: 'the socially determined source of individuals' agency in their capacity as children is therefore to be found by investigating the particular social organization of generational relations existing in the society under study'.

Overlapping in methodology somewhat, anthropology invites exploration of cultural perspectives on children and childhoods. Is childhood another culture? Such questions go in two directions: one concerns how the settings and approaches surrounding children constitute particular cultural environments worthy of study. Thus nurseries, schools, toys and games become cultural sites for investigation that tell us about the practices and positions elaborated for participants[7]. The second trend analyses how children in different contexts live different childhoods. Both approaches understand childhood as a cultural construct – a position which has powerful consequences for developmental psychologists' predilections towards naturalized, universal explanations (see Burman, 2008a,b). I have already shown how discussions of working children, for example, offer key challenges to dominant conceptions of modern western childhood as a period of innocence, play and freedom from responsibilities. Such work is methodologically important in revealing the limits of developmental psychological knowledge and its cultural presumptions. Similarly, the study of child soldiers and child-headed households are both urgent and important in themselves at the level of policy and practice, but

also they prompt re-evaluation of the meanings and expectations surrounding dominant notions of childhood. An anthropological approach works with a model of the child as informant; that is, as expert on their own culture capable of alerting the researcher to salient aspects of its rules.

Historical treatments of childhood are also vital in attending to variations of and conditions for understandings of children and childhood. These include far-reaching debates over the status of childhood as itself a historically specific construct emerging in the modern period (Aries, 1962), while Elias' (2000) analysis of the history of manners devotes especial attention to manuals for the education and training of young people as key sources to identify social norms. Methodological debates here focus on the interpretation of sources; for example, Pollack (1983) disputed Aries' claims of lesser affective involvement on the part of parents on the basis of pictorial representations using analysis of other kinds of (written) historical records.

A further key methodological point emerges from attention to the selectivity of records. Since children, like other most relatively powerless groups, do not typically author the kinds of records that are preserved, children's political involvement gets written out of history. For example, it is impossible to evaluate the role of children and young people in the protests against exploitative conditions in the early European factories because age was simply not recorded (de Wilde, 2000). Currently the role of children as 'freedom fighters' within the struggle against apartheid in South Africa is rapidly being forgotten (Seekings, 1993; Marks, 2001).

Perhaps most significant for evaluating the status of developmental psychology is historical research that investigates the interwoven character of constructions of childhood with the emergence of specific understandings of human nature. Steedman (1995) traces the historical and cultural conditions by which 'the child' became the signifier of interiority, a trope now so structured within contemporary western culture that it is difficult to

even to reflect upon it as such. Yet the child as personification of the inner self owes its origins to the emerging theories of science (including cellular development), psycho-analysis and popular culture from the eighteenth century onwards, as well as broader social shifts in the organization of family and labour via industrialization.

The question of sources ties historical work to literary analysis. Here once again we have a model of the child as cultural product, but with an attention to the literary forms and the relations structuring their production and reception. A key relevant methodological intervention here is that fictional representations can be as analytically important as any 'real' historical record (Lesnik Oberstein, 1998a). Indeed that idealized representations can be constitutive as well as reflective of children and childhoods is well illustrated by Rose, J.'s (1984, 1985) analysis of how the preparation of *Peter Pan* for distribution as a school text in early twentieth century England was explicitly oriented to creating and organizing age and class differences, as reflected in the regulation of its form, narrative voice and lexical complexity. Here particular ideologies of childhood and child development entered into the forms of language deemed appropriate for children.

Via analysis of educational policy documents, Rose, J. (1985: 94) traces how particular conceptions of language teaching (derived from emerging models of childhood – as closer to nature; Singer, 1992) informed the selection and abridging of literature for schools:

> The language of the elementary school child was to be natural – which meant a vocabulary based on concrete objects and written composition constructed on the basis of speech … It meant literature based on physical actions and on facts which could be added to the child's stock of information.

This example indicates a clear illustration of the circularity between the cultural representation of and children's actual development, since of course children's lives are shaped by the cultural conditions to which they have been exposed. Indeed as Lesnik

Oberstein (1998b) points out, unreflective accounts of children's literature and theories of child development play a merry-go-round game of mutual citation and legitimation. Further, Rose's account is methodologically informative because she shows how ideas about language are constructed according to contingent social agendas, in this case class (indicated by 'cultured', Latinate-inflected prose):

> As educational policy at the turn of the century makes clear, the most natural of languages only has a meaning against that most stylistic form against which it is set. There is no natural language (least of all *for* children): there is elementary English and cultured prose, evoking each other, confronting each other, or else coming together as here [in Barrie's text] only to be carefully orchestrated apart.
>
> Rose, J. (1985: 100; emphasis in original)

Significantly, this process of rendering *Peter Pan* into a form deemed appropriate for young children removes all traces of its sexuality and violence. Further, its very form was changed to remove moments of self-referentiality, where language itself is glimpsed as a construction, from the text. The narrator becomes disembodied, and comments about the protagonists' grammar and vocabulary (and class position) disappear. Reading policy thus warrants the naturalization of class privilege.

In addition to the disciplinary perspectives discussed above – all of which function methodologically as interpretive/analytic checks and commentaries upon the status and construction of psychological accounts – we have already also discussed how psychoanalytic and feminist approaches offer techniques for studying and interpreting children, and responses to children and childhoods.

INNOVATIVE SOURCES/TECHNIQUES

I will now take three examples of research to illustrate some recently emerging forms of qualitative developmental research, focusing on technologies of self-representation, ethno-theories of childrearing, and analysis of media representations.

Visual self-representation

New forms of technology make available possibilities for children and young people to actively create their own research material. Indeed visual culture has increasingly been seen as a participative tool of inquiry that allows for flexibility and self-representation (and even action; e.g. Mitchell, DeLange, Moletsane, Stuart and Buthelezi, 2005). As Marshall and Woollett (2000: 121) comment:

> Video diaries have been hailed as a democratic methodology, in part because of their ready public access but also because representational issues reside largely with the diarist rather than being professionally mediated through, for example, voice-over narration. Similarly when a video diary is used as a social scientific tool, the agenda for its content and contextualisation resides largely with participants.

Reflecting on their analysis of a young British Asian woman's video diary, they claim that this medium facilitates opportunities for self-definition and exploration, with

> culture and cultural identifications as variably expressed, and cultural referents as changeable and affording the potential for innovation [to] problematize notions that culture is a variable that is similarly experienced by all those designated as belonging to that culture.
>
> Marshall and Wollet (2000:129)

This methodological approach therefore opens up for inquiry key debates that other methods have closed down. Nevertheless, as the authors point out (Marshall and Woollett, 2000: 130), questions of ambiguity of interpretation and politics of representation still remain since – through their re-presentation – the young person's 'voice' is now framed by theirs. As we have seen, no mere technology can guarantee democracy or egalitarianism. Rather such commitments must be structured into the epistemological framework guiding the research.

Parental ethno-theories

Also drawing on anthropological contributions and turning the tables from prescribing to, to learning from, parents recent developmental research has positioned parents as worthy informants of their own theories of development. As mediators and moulders of development, parental accounts indicate sociocultural norms and standards. Keller's (2003) study documents how parental evaluations of care-giving practices are structured by distinct cultural norms related to particular economic and cultural conditions. She observed and videotaped both rural traditional subsistence-based community vs. urban (post)industrial cultures. These two groups were considered to have different socialization goals, and so corresponding notions of competence. She then presented to groups of 7–10 women extracts of the videos showing typical interactional situations with three month old babies from each cultural environment, inviting comments from each woman on 'what they had seen (what they find good or bad, or whatever comes to their mind' (Keller, 2003: 293). Not surprisingly, the mothers from each cultural group could offer clear analysis and justification for the practices from their 'own' group. More interesting was their emphatically negative view of the other group. Irrespective of possible over-polarization of cultural differences (through selection of two opposing cultural practices, rather than researching across contrasts of class and region intra-culturally; see Gjerde, 2004), this approach highlights the importance of situating the evaluation of childrearing practices within locally-defined norms.

Analysing media representations of childhood

Rather like the historical analysis of texts produced for children, and the discussion of ethno-theories above, we can see media representations of and about children as providing a valuable methodological arena for investigating the discursive resources informing understandings of children and childhoods; understandings that undoubtedly have acquired the status of (at least popular) psychological theories and that function

materially in performing children and childhoods. Methodologically, media texts – in their myriad forms – offer a rich array of representations of children and childhoods. Their diversity can be overwhelming, nevertheless a structured approach can usefully address these as resources. There are of course now many approaches to analysing written and visual texts (see, for example, Chapters 5, 6 and 17 in this volume). Here I offer two examples.

In Burman (1996c) I take charity advertisements as a forum to investigate contemporary discourses of North–South relations as played out through representations of international aid for children. By analysing these I explicitly challenge the abstraction of the child from culture/community and rather reverse this to read dominant cultural representations through the portrayal of children. In particular, this approach is useful to explicate the range of subject positions around children (helping, saving, etc.) as well as how these become recruited into the paternalist discourse of donor-recipient relations[8].

A similar approach taken to social work training advertisements (discussed in Bradbury and Burman, 2004) highlights how the discourse of 'care' and personal involvement take priority over the regulatory and bureaucratic duties social workers perform within welfare state apparatus. While gender, class and cultural themes are mobilized to emphasize childhood vulnerability and need for protection, psychological theories concerning cycles of abuse (or intergenerational transmission) and attachment disorders are visually invoked as resources informing professional understandings and intervention. Thus we see the practice of developmental psychological theories as a cultural resource drawn upon to interpellate the professional as concerned, engaged and as a saviour of damaged children (see also Burman, 2003, 2008b). Such discursive approaches enable investigation of the crucial link between theory and its popularization, that otherwise would stay inadequately theorized only in terms of decontextualized and asocial individual beliefs.

STRATEGIES

The above techniques rely on distinctly different orientations to knowledge-claims and production. Now I will highlight two distinct interpretive positions according to which material generated from research with children can be analysed.

'Giving voice'

A first strategy for researching children and childhoods that emphasizes the child as author of their account often makes claims to 'give voice' (Cullingford, 1991). Such claims underlay the video diary as a research tool, but are subject to limits as indicated above. We need to ask: whose voice is privileged in such accounts (the researcher or the researched)? For such work still cannot escape the work of interpretation. Instead of remaining complicit with how unequal power relations outside the research relationship structure access to representational arenas, this kind of research attempts to use the power of legitimation that research is accorded to re-present the accounts of and so advocate for a relatively marginalized and disempowered group. This approach also extends to collaborative and action research with children and families (Billington and Pomerantz, 2003).

Documenting children's accounts

Nevertheless we should not romanticize or essentialize this 'voice', or treat it as somehow authentic or anterior to socio-cultural conditions and relations. Here discursive analysis is useful to address the forms of talk and frameworks of meaning mobilized by speakers. Such approaches are useful to help researchers working with children grapple with the interpretive complexity of the accounts they generate (Alldred and Burman, 2005). For example, in her study investigating children's accounts of being excluded from school Marks (1996) was surprised to find that, instead of generating accounts of defiance or indignation, many of the young

people's (mainly boys') accounts apparently concurred with their detractors as to the reasons and justification for their exclusion. How was she to make sense of this?

Rather than invoking claims about the young people's beliefs or self-images, she attempted to analyse further the broader cultural contexts mobilized within the interviewing situation. So, elaborating this discursive analysis, it became clear that it is not unusual for those subject to a regulatory practice to position themselves accordingly. This 'confession' is surely the expected framework within which the participants had likely rehearsed, and perhaps had to rehearse, their account of what had happened. By close attention to the forms of question she asked and comparison between the affective tone in the group and individual interviews, Marks identified what she called 'co-operative', 'resistant' and 'disengaged' accounts, all of which conveyed quite distinct relations: between the child and the school; the child and the (mis)deed/precipitating event; and the child and the interviewer. As much as giving 'voice', through her research she was *producing* a subject; a subject constituted in forms of talk as institutional practice (see also Alldred and Gillies, 2002). Further, such strategies can be consciously deployed by children, as was highlighted by Silverman, Baker and Keogh's (1998) conversational analysis of children's silence in parent–teacher consultations about them. In such contexts, rather than signifying incompetence, silence can work to successfully resist enlistment into a moral discourse children want to avoid.

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY BEYOND THE CHILD?

Rather than offering conclusions to round off or close this account, I will indicate where else it might go. I will finish by offering two possibilities that span technical and analytical intervention, as methodological investigations inevitably do. Both address the central theoretical and methodological limitations that have been highlighted as pervading developmental psychological investigations – how the focus on 'the child' has produced an asocial account of individual development, abstracted from socioeconomic and political conditions. To disrupt this tendency we can: (1) displace the focus on the child; or (2) use the focus on the child to open up wider questions.

Displacing the child

Rather than indulging the prevailing sentimentalization surrounding children (with its attendant lack of engagement with actual children), we can ask: is it helpful to think about 'children' at all? The very term seems to occlude constitutive axes of class, culture, gender and even age in a meaningful way, let alone sexuality. 'Children' and 'childhood' as blanket categories typically get in the way of genuine intellectual inquiry and sensitive intervention. Indeed much current research is designed to explore the constitutive ways gender, 'race' and class inequalities structure specific forms of childhood, rather than privileging the category of childhood over these (as in Frosh et al.'s work (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002) on 'young masculinities', for example).

Moreover we can take apparently problematic cases as revealing methodological limit cases identifying the analytical tensions structured within conceptualizations of childhood. So, for example, are 'teenage mothers' children? And how do we determine which 'voice' to privilege when mothers and children's views diverge – in a context of a mother in a refuge refusing to allow her child to have therapy (see Bravo, 2005). But we should take care when we look at the following issues: women as mothers, especially that problematic category of 'teenage mothers'; or at the contests that service providers have with women in shelters – about how they discipline children or whether the children should have therapy. These specific and seemingly exceptional circumstances offer crucial glimpses of the structurally ambiguous and unstable parameters of relationships posed by and

around children. Above all, the question that has reverberated around women's studies of 'which women?' applies equally to how we construct developmental psychological investigations: *which* children?

Widening the focus

An alternative strategy is to use the focus on the child to open up broader issues of democracy, contested power relations and societal values. This is the approach used by Dahlberg and Moss (2005) in their cross-national comparative analysis of early childcare and educational provision. Their analyses highlight the different conceptualizations of citizenship, societal relationships and political participation discernable through the study of policies and practices around children in different countries. From this they generate specific proposals for facilitating models of childhood that emphasize and enable engagement, autonomy and resilience rather than the isolated, privatized and protected childhoods currently being configured in Anglo-US contexts. Hence acknowledging the wider agendas mobilized around work with children, including the political tensions involved, can inform investigations that combine methodological attentiveness with political transformativity.

NOTES

1 The portrayal of the caregiver–child relation as a mother–child dyad, with the child pronominalized in English as masculine, does – as various commentators have pointed out – avoid acknowledging the homoerotic connection between mother and daughter which thus prefigures and privileges heterosexuality.

2 Models of 'cycles of abuse' typically rely on this kind of reasoning and so should be approached with caution.

3 The emergence (from the 1970s onwards – significantly from US psychologists) of life span developmental perspectives arose from the acknowledgement that developmental models, in particular with their recent focus on cognitive development, had largely portrayed post-adolescent life in terms of stasis or even decline. Notwithstanding this, the main body of developmental psychological work tends to

be equated with the study of childhood – hence my focus here.

4 Piaget was an early member of the International Psychoanalytic Association, and both underwent and conducted analysis himself for a period (Schepeler, 1993). Discussing processes of symbolization, he describes presenting a paper 'in which Freud had been interested' to the 1922 International Conference on Psychoanalysis held in Berlin (Piaget, 1951: 170–1).

5 Notwithstanding his other critiques, Vygotsky was favourable about Piaget's clinical method. See later for an account of his cultural-historical approach – a method as much as a theory.

6 Indeed Franklin (2002) treats the media treatment and public response to this case as emblematic of a shift in the English conceptualisation of children from victims to villains which is currently more receptive to authoritarian measures to control and punish children than empower them through 'rights'.

7 Children's geographies is now a burgeoning area, for example – with a journal now published of that title.

8 Elsewhere I extend this analysis to draw on psychoanalytic theorizing to account for dis/engagement with such campaigns (Burman, 1999), and consider the wider North–South relations recapitulated in such representations (Burman, 1994b, 2007, 2008b).

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