Conflict and coexistence: challenging interactions, expressions of agency and ways of relating in work with young people in the Minority World

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This paper draws on observations of challenging interactions in work with young people to show how relations between young people and youth workers rely on a process of sharing control. I explore what it means for individuals to exert agency in this process, when actions are inter-dependent and 'of the moment', and consider the relational dimensions of expressions of agency. I conclude by considering the implications for those working with young people perceived to be challenging and for conceptualising children's (and adults') agency in understandings of child-adult relations within childhood studies.

Keywords: agency, challenging behaviour; childhood; child-adult relations; youth work

Introduction

Graeme[i] intervened in the boys' pool game asking Tom to stop swearing. Tom didn't respond to Graeme and the boys continued to swear. After a while Graeme said that each time the boys swore he would take away a pool ball. Taking away a pool ball meant putting it down one of the pockets and therefore effectively potting the ball. Graeme went on to say that it would be the opponent's balls that would be taken off the table (this meant that if you swore you were helping your opponent to win as they would have one less ball to pot each time you swore). This additional, and crucial point, did not seem to communicate to other people in the room, as Tom looked confused and one of the female workers, Shona (who was sat at the board games table) shouted across to Tom that what Graeme had just said didn't make sense as he would only win faster if he swore as all his balls would be off the table. Tom latched onto this. He stood upright, with his pool cue at his side, and said loudly that Graeme was an idiot because if he took his balls away for swearing then swearing would help him to win. Tom stood there and said "fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck" before continuing with his game of pool. No-one said anything to him and I couldn't help smiling.

(Field notes, 19th visit)

Interactions, like the one above, between young people[ii] and youth workers in a youth club offer insight into expressions of agency and the way power 'weaves' through social relations in this setting. As the interaction unfolds, the actions of individuals are revealed as being intricately related to the actions of others, as those directly and indirectly involved enable and constrain what is possible. Actions are also related to material resources in the setting as power struggles occur over objects such as the pool table. The interaction is embedded in existing structural power relations such as

the youth worker's assumed 'authority' to regulate the swearing of the young person and existing personal relationships between those involved. The actions and reactions are all 'of the moment', open to multiple interpretations. For example, the interaction is for some humorous and, for others, frustrating. Such interactions are often challenging for those involved. It is likely that *Graeme* perceives Tom's behaviour as a 'challenge' to his authority but also that Tom perceives *Graeme's* attempts to control his behaviour as a 'challenge' to his autonomy. Whilst 'challenging behaviour' is potentially being displayed by the both the adult worker and young person, it is a term commonly, and often only, applied to the actions of children and young people (as opposed to adults[iii]).

In the UK, young people's challenging behaviour is commonly defined by adults as those behaviours that cause problems, difficulties, or specific challenges to those working with or charged with responsibility for the children and young people (Cooper 1999, Lyons and O'Connor 2006). Whilst research on young people's perceived challenging behaviour is multi-disciplinary, it is dominated by educational and psychological perspectives that seek to explain the cause of challenging behaviour. Such approaches aim to define how best to prevent, treat and/or manage it, contributing to calls for greater intervention in the lives of young people (Coppock 1997). Multi-factor causal models, incorporating both 'individual' and 'environmental' explanations of challenging behaviour, have become popular in recent years (see for example Cooper 1999, Bennett 2005, Hunter-Carsch *et al.* 2006). Of interest to this paper is how these models conceptualise young people's agency. Challenging behaviour is most often constructed as belonging to the young person (Tobbell and Lawthom 2005). When a young person is perceived to have challenging behaviour, this behaviour can also be conceptualised as an expression of agency,

agency that may make adults feel uncomfortable. At the same time such young people are often perceived to be victims of their circumstances, whether constructed as 'mad', 'bad' or 'sad' (Macleod 2006). As Macleod (2006) notes, their challenging behaviour is seen as biologically, psychologically and/or socially determined and thus their agency, and responsibility for the behaviour, is actually underplayed. Additionally, families may actively seek explanations that deny a young person's agency because certain labels shift the blame from the young person and their parents to something outside of their control, for example, a medical cause (Reid and Maag 1997, Lloyd and Norris 1999).

Like other judgements about the 'difficultness' of others, challenging behaviour is also argued to be a relational phenomenon (Duck 2007); for an action to be challenging, someone or something has to be challenged. This paper explores the potential in thinking more relationally about challenging behaviour in child-adult interactions. It suggests that thinking relationally, and including a conceptualisation of generational structures (Alanen 2001), when considering young people's perceived challenging behaviour allows for an important shift away from a purely practical concern of 'how to manage the challenging behaviour of young people' to a focus on theorising the social processes involved in negotiating challenging interactions in the context of child-adult relations. In doing so, it becomes important to consider the ways in which young people and adults manage the process of negotiating the boundaries around their own, and others, behaviour. It draws attention to how these processes are framed by notions of what a 'worker' should be doing and what a 'young person' should be doing as well as to the power relations between the two social groups.

Within the small body of literature on challenging behaviour in youth work, practice attention is given to the 'ethical dilemmas' youth workers face in managing the behaviour of young people they work with (see also Jeffs and Banks 1999, Banks 2004, Stuart 2004). Whilst the notion of 'ethical dilemmas' offers insight into the choice youth workers make when deciding whether or not to intervene, and if so how to do so in a way that does not compromise their professional values, power is assumed to be in the hands of the youth workers and there is little discussion about the process of negotiation that occurs (an exception to this is a short extract about daily power struggles in Spence *et al.* 2006). Whilst the discussion in this paper is drawn from a study of work with young people in the UK, themes within inter-generational relations (such as difference, unequal power relations and interdependency) have wider applicability across societies where adults and young people interact within a range of understandings of child-adult relations[iv].

In the next section I situate the themes introduced above within 'relational approaches' in childhood studies that emphasise interdependence as a framework for understanding agency, power, and childhood. The following section explores the usefulness of this approach in understanding inter-generational power struggles in a UK youth club.

Theoretical discussion: embedded relations, agency and power
Within the UK arena, the 'new' social studies of childhood[v] appears to be coming to a critical juncture in its understanding of childhood (James 2010). Internal and external critiques are emerging of childhood studies (Tisdall and Punch this volume) suggesting critical theoretical debate is necessary if we are to develop conceptual resources that can be employed across different societies to further understandings childhood (Prout 2005, Weller 2006, Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, Vanderbeck

2008, James 2010, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). The privileging of children's agency (within much UK-based literature[vi]) and the way in which this agency is conceptualised is a fundamental part of these recent critiques (see for example Prout 2005, Ryan 2008, Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, Alanen 2010, Holt 2011).

Although child-adult relations are the focus of much research within childhood studies, these studies are often approached from the standpoint of the child in recognition and promotion of their position as a politically marginalised but competent social actor. There are ethical and political reasons behind this 'epistemological privileging' of the child (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008), but the (over) emphasis and privileging of children's agency is argued to have led to an under-theorisation of the ways in which young lives are enabled and inhibited by structural constraints (Holt 2011) or by the web of relations, interactions and circumstances in which they are embedded (Bell and Payne 2009, Goh and Kuczynski 2009). Related to this, Vanderbeck (2008) notes there is a relative under- theorisation of adult authority and responsibility in the children's geographies' literature, which, he suggests, may reflect a reluctance to critically engage with the ways in which adult institutions limit children's agency. There is a need to explore, as Mayall (1994) notes, children's position and experience as not just 'actors' but also as 'negotiators' and the 'acted upon' and this requires an understanding of adults' as well as children's agency. Further, Hill (2005) draws attention to the paradox emerging in understanding childhood as, on the one hand, research illustrates more than ever before the agency of children but, on the other hand, it illustrates the increasing regulation of children's lives. This suggests childhood studies would benefit from further linkages between these two areas. Understanding the interplay between agency and structure is not a problem unique to childhood studies; there are ongoing debates in social theory about

how to overcome the problems of determinism and individualism in structure-agency thinking (King 2005).

Agency in childhood studies is often conceptualised as something that children can possess independent of others and their social surroundings (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, Lee 2001, Prout 2005), with childhood research offering many examples of the ways in which children exercise this agency (Tisdall and Punch this volume). There are, however, alternative and more relational ways of viewing agency. Lee (2001) advocates 'Actor Network Theory', which suggests that whilst individuals may appear to possess agency, identification as an 'agent' is actually dependent on a number of 'networks' or 'assemblages'. He values this approach because:

> ... it opens agency up to empirical study and analysis. We can ask what a given person, whether adult or child, depends upon for their agency. So with this approach to agency, instead of asking whether children, like adults, possess agency or not, we can ask how agency is built or may be built for them by examining the extensions and supplements that are available to them. (Lee 2001, p. 130-131)

This is an understanding of children's agency that involves considering the 'heterogeneous assembly' of childhood through an analysis of the ways in which children form alliances with other entities such as people and objects to create their agentic powers (Prout 2005). It is an understanding of agency and subjectivity as emergent not fixed, theorising children (and adults) as being in a continual state of becoming (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008).

Such understandings of children and adults resonate with calls to move beyond dualisms in social analysis. James (2010, p. 490) argues that while dichotomies, such as structure-agency, child-adult, being-becoming are "valuable heuristic devices" they are always to some extent false; whilst they may hold some

explanatory power, they also serve to obscure the complexities of the social world and represent an over-simplified and reductionist account (Horton and Kraftl 2005). It is argued that it is necessary to consider not only the distinction between 'adult' and 'child' but to explore the ways boundaries between such dichotomies are blurred in everyday practices (Holloway and Valentine 2000 and for examples see Punch 2003, Bell and Payne 2009, Evans 2011) - "where adults and children disrupt stereotypes of what it means to be a child or an adult through 'alternative ways of being'" (Hopkins and Pain 2007, p. 292). This involves analysing not only the construction of binary categories such as 'child' and 'adult' but also the instability of these concepts (Horton and Kraftl 2005). It requires maintaining a focus on the 'continuity', the interrelations between children and adults as well as the disconnections (Vanderbeck 2007). Ryan (2008), however, warns that the push to move beyond binary thinking is problematic as it threatens the distinction necessary for studies of the construction of childhood to make sense. He argues that if childhood studies "purports to see children as actively participating in the construction of their own childhood [then it] cannot possibly transcend modern dualisms" (Ryan 2008, p. 556). For example, to explore how boundaries are blurred between 'adult-like' or 'child-like' practices it is necessary to have an idea of what 'adult-like' or 'child-like' practices are (see Alanen 2001). Can childhood be the object of study, if childhood has no fixed identity? What conceptual resources are available to do this?

A generational approach to understanding childhood is helpful here (see for example Alanen 2001, 2003, Mayall and Zeiher 2003). In this approach becoming a 'child' and becoming an 'adult' are "mutually and inextricably related" (Mannion 2007, p. 414) produced in an ongoing process of 'generationing' (Alanen 2003):

> ... the two generational categories of children and adult are recurrently
> produced through such practices; because of ongoing generationing practices
> they stand in relations of connection and interaction, and of interdependence.
> Neither category can exist without the other, and what each of them is (a child,
> an adult) is dependent on its relation to the other. (Alanen 2003, p. 41)

Through studying child-adult relations we can learn about the nature of these relationships and how they become imbued with generational meaning (Mannion 2007). The relational dimensions of children's agency are emphasised in this approach: for example Punch (2001, 2002) refers to the concept of 'negotiated interdependencies' to explain child-adult relations she observed in rural Bolivia as children sought to exert relative autonomy over their time and activities. She argues:

> ...adult-child relations should be explained in terms of interdependencies which
> are negotiated and renegotiated over time and space, and need to be understood
> in relation to the particular social and cultural context. (Punch 2001, p. 23)

This connects with the concerns of classical social theorist Georg Simmel. Simmel is described by Poggi (2005) as focusing attention on how individuals "negotiate their existence in any social context, according to the patterns of interactions they weave in encountering each other" (p. 84). As Poggi (2005) discusses, Simmel highlights that all relations are subject to a process of negotiation and compromise and, although that negotiation may not always be on equal terms (due to the differing power status of the individuals involved), all of those concerned have some degree of self-determination. Poggi (2005) also notes that Simmel draws on the notion of reciprocity suggesting that all social relations involve some kind of exchange/reciprocal effect: see for example Punch's (2007) research where the children and adults are described as having certain 'bargaining power' over one another. How, then, may we suggest this power operates?

Power is an important issue to those studying child-adult relations (Weller 2006), as it is widely accepted that within the generational order those categorised as children have an inferior social status wielding less economic and political power (Mayall 2000). It has, however, been observed that "practices of generationing involve a two-way flow of power where children and adults can significantly influence each other" (Punch 2007, p. 151). Thus, whilst it is common to hear of the 'unequal power relations' between children and adults, it is too simplistic to conceptualise adults as inherently more powerful than children. For example, Mayall (1994) suggests that, whilst in many social settings adults have organisational control, children's level of powerlessness will vary depending on the conceptualisation of childhood and the nature of child-adult relations in that setting.

Conceptualising power in child-adult relations also depends on how power is understood. Punch *et al*. (2007) and Bell and Payne (2009) argue that power is often conceptualised in two contrasting ways: as an individual commodity – an object or possession (material aspects of power) - and as a relational phenomenon (relational and discursive aspects of power). It is observed that within childhood studies power is most often conceptualised as a commodity – something that adults have and are thus able to give to children (Gallagher 2008, Holland *et al*. 2010). Punch *et al.* (2007) critique this approach as overlooking the micro-scale power relations and negotiations that play out in face-to-face interaction. Gallagher (2008), through interpretations of Michael Foucault's notion of power, suggests that power should be viewed not as something that can be owned and redistributed but as a "form of action, and thus something that is exercised rather than possessed" (p. 144). Power is differentiated from other forms of actions because "it acts *upon* actions" (Gallagher 2008, p. 144); its effects can be seen as it transforms and influences other actions. Therefore, whilst

agency is inextricably linked to power (Bell and Payne 2009), it is also something different, as it is a more 'intense' form of agency, agency that can transform the agency of others. So whilst agency may be seen as the ability to produce a particular effect, power may be seen as the ability to produce an effect on the agency of others.

It is also argued that power should not be viewed as a wholly negative force, used by the powerful to oppress the less powerful (Gallagher 2008). Rather power is to be viewed as 'weaving' in and out of everyday social relations between children and adults, theorized as both a productive and repressive force (Holland *et al.* 2010). This review has highlighted the salience of relational dimensions of agency and power and intergenerational relations in understanding childhood. This has certain implications for how we study childhood. It suggests we need to theorise childhood within understandings of child-adult relations and that these understandings will need to take account of the wider social, economic, political and cultural forces that shape those understandings. Whilst the concepts of 'generationing' and 'negotiated interdependencies' should translate across societies, the complexities of these processes will vary; thus it is important to consider how these relational processes operate in practice and in context. How might a study of challenging behaviour in work with young people in the Minority World benefit from, and contribute to, 'relational approaches' to understanding childhood?

Challenging interactions in context: youth work and child-adult relations
The data discussed are drawn from an ethnographic study of social interaction in a youth club, with a particular focus on challenging behaviour and how the young people and workers negotiate the boundaries around such behaviour in practice. The research was conducted with ethical approval from the appropriate University ethics committee and the researcher operated within the ethical guidelines produced by the

Social Research Association. Ethical issues were viewed as requiring ongoing reflection throughout the research process (Sime 2008). The research aimed to avoid physical and emotional harm to any research participant as a result of the research practice and to interact with all of the research participants respectfully and transparently. Particular ethical dilemmas arose in this research around gaining consent in an open-access youth club and intervening (or not) to manage young people's behaviour[vii].

The youth club involved in this research is located within the grounds and building of a secondary school in a relatively deprived neighbourhood of a Scottish city. It was developed following concern from local shop keepers about the perceived anti-social behaviour of young people in their school lunch break. Managed and staffed by a youth development group, the youth club is 'open-access' – the young people attend voluntarily (coming and going during the session), there is no register and no formal programme of activities. The two main social groups in this setting are identifiable on the basis of age, their role in the youth club and their relationship to each other. These are the 'young people' (the 'clients' in this setting, aged between 11-14 years old) and the 'youth workers' (paid staff and volunteers, aged between 16-50 years old). The youth club operates from one room, which has a range of games (pool table, table football, table tennis, games console) on offer and spaces to sit, run, jump and hide amongst other things. It is a busy environment, with on average 31 young people (the majority are boys) attending daily, where people are often 'doing things'. The workers pride themselves on being able to build relations and work with what they consider to be some of the 'most challenging' young people in the local area.

The youth club offers an interesting (and relatively unexplored) opportunity to study extra-familial intergenerational relations. 'Youth work' as a particular form of child-adult interaction relies on and reproduces certain discursive constructions of 'youth'. A feature of 'youth work' in the Minority World is that it serves to construct youth as "other" to adults (Banks 2004, Skott-Myhre 2006), "in deficit and in need of training and control" (Jeffs and Smith 1999, p. 2). This reflects persistent historical and contemporary (adult) concerns about 'problem youth' and the 'problems of youth' (particularly working class youth) (Jeffs and Smith 1999). 'Youth work', however, occupies an ambiguous position between empowering and constraining young lives (Hall *et al.* 1999). Youth workers are simultaneously seen as both agents of control (regulating the spaces, activities and development of the young) and as facilitating the empowerment of young people (favouring participatory approaches and facilitating a positive profile of young people in the community). UK 'youth work' also has a long tradition of 'professionalisation' (Williamson 2009, p. 137) that frame child-adult interactions in youth work practice, creating boundaries around the role of youth work, behaviour of youth workers and child-adult relations. Any consideration, then, of 'youth work' as a form of child-adult relations in the Majority or Minority World must take account of these wider socio-economic and cultural forces.

For the young people and youth workers to co-exist within the parameters of understanding noted in the previous paragraphs, the boundaries around behaviour are flexible[viii]. This is important because much of the social interaction in the youth club involves rules and testing the boundaries of other people. These interactions serve an important social function in the setting, as it is through them that people work out ways of relating to and being with each other. Conflict and confrontations are

important in understanding the relationships between the young people and the youth workers, and the positioning of some people in the youth club as 'youth' and others as 'worker'. In the youth club certain factors -- such as the voluntary participation of the young people, the young people's (apparent) desire to access the resources in this setting/their limited options in their lunch break, the control the youth workers have over access to the space and resources, and the youth workers' reliance on the attendance of the young people for their role to be meaningful -- mean not only do 'youth workers' and 'young people' exist in relation to each other at a conceptual level but their actions are interdependent in everyday practice. This interdependency is explored in more detail in the next section as an influencing factor in their negotiations around behaviour.

Challenging interactions in practice: control, conflict and co-existence
The youth workers have a certain degree of authority to manage young people's behaviour in the youth club. Their potential power to do this is dependent on the youth workers' ability to implement sanctions (such as closing the tuck shop, excluding individual or groups of young people, withholding the pool cues) and because they can call to a higher authority figure 'the teachers' to help manage behaviour they find difficult to deal with. Their power to exert control over the young people is also dependent on their relationships with the young people, the workers' personalities and other individual characteristics. In other words being a 'youth worker' does not automatically grant them 'power over' the young people (Spence *et al.* 2006) – power is not something they can be said to possess; it is something developed through interaction and relationships. A conversation with one of the youth workers reveals this in the extract below:

M: Well I don't think they have any relationship to me [M: laughs] erm I think most of them have a good relationship to *Kelsey* and she's the one, and *Shona* as well, and *Dave* [Author: okay] because they know them very well and they are the ones that have respect, and well get most respect so I tried really hard to, for example to try them, to make them not go into the corridor or something, but they just don't listen to me and then erm so I just stopped trying [Author: okay] and I gave up after a while.(*Miya,* Interview data)

A youth worker can feel a sense of 'powerlessness' in the youth club if a young person refuses to comply with his or her request to do something. For example, during one session a worker asked two young people to put down the table tennis bats after they each threatened to "batter" each other with the bats. One young person complied and the other did not, leading to complaints of unfairness from the former. In response the worker said "there isn't much else they could do if she [the young person] didn't do it" (Field notes, 19th visit). The youth workers, then, are in a structural position of power over the young people but they need 'cooperation' from the young people for this power to materialise in practice.

So how does control operate in practice in the youth club? A regular feature of child-adult interaction in this setting is a request to a young person, by a youth worker, to change their behaviour in some way, for example to stop swearing, to play pool properly, to put their litter in the bin, to come down off the radiator, or to stop pushing someone else, amongst a myriad of other actions. Such requests are attempts by the youth worker to control the behaviour of the young person or young people. These requests create a 'conflict' (however momentary) that unfolds in what is labelled here as a 'challenging interaction'. These interactions involve the negotiation of power and control, as the young people can choose to 'comply with' or 'defy' the youth worker's demands and, if they defy, the youth worker has to then choose whether to 'desist' or 'persist' in their attempts to control the behaviour of the young person . Whilst this all occurs 'in the moment', the actions of those involved are

situated in the context of, amongst other things, their social role and status in the youth club, the usually very public nature of these interactions (the 'gaze' of others is an important aspect in face-to-face interaction), their existing, past and imagined future relationships with each other, an individual's desire for autonomy, control over others or resources, and, for the youth workers, their professional ethics and code of practice. The 'potential' agency of both the young people and the youth workers is enmeshed in these relations, emerging as the conflict unfolds.

Exerting and Relinquishing Control

It is helpful to think about the actions of the youth workers and the young people, within a challenging interaction, as operating along a continuum of exerting and relinquishing control. Within this continuum, what a young person does will influence the actions of the youth worker, which in turn will influence the actions of the young person, which in turn will influence the actions of the youth worker and so on – their actions are interdependent. Observations from the youth club reveal that the most common action from a young person to a request to change their behaviour was a form of 'measured compliance/defiance'. This involves the young people, on the one hand, complying with a worker's authority whilst, on the other hand, resisting complete control by the workers. Thus, the young people are able both to comply with and defy the youth worker – they re-assert an element of control over the interaction. The young person may appear to do as directed but they do so on her/his terms. For example, on a visit to the school gym one of the boys used the climbing frame to reach the basketball hoop and 'dangle' from it. On being asked to 'come down' by a worker, the boy did so by simply letting go and dropping to the floor (Field notes, 18th visit). In literal terms the boy fully complied with the worker and 'came down'; however, it is fairly safe to assume that the worker would have preferred him to come

down the 'safer' way via the climbing frame. Maintaining control of when they do something is another process by which the young people display a form of 'measured compliance/defiance'. This is illustrated by Stephen when, on *Sarah's* request to return the fire exit sign he was leaving the youth club with, he looked at her and paused for a few seconds before handing the sign back (Field notes, 42nd visit). This non-verbal action allowed Stephen to maintain a (public) sense of agency in the interaction. Other forms include when a young person replies 'no' to a worker's request but then does as he or she was asked, or doing as asked but doing so sarcastically or with a display of anger. These may also be conceptualised as a form of 'coping strategy' (Punch 2001), a coping strategy that is also displayed by the workers both through the use of sarcasm in their interactions with young people they find particularly challenging and also in the jokes they make about the young people's behaviour when the young people are not around.

In parallel with the young people's actions, a youth worker's response to a young person's perceived challenging behaviour or defiance is a form of 'measured persistence/desistence', a process that usually involves watching and waiting. This can be seen in an example when Lewis, having taken a basketball from the (out of bounds) resources cupboard, is asked by *Kelsey* to put the ball back. Lewis ignored her request, pointedly asking "does anyone want a game of basketball". *Kelsey* remained in close proximity to Lewis but did not say anything further. After a few moments, Lewis then kicked the ball into the resources cupboard and walked off. After this, one of the workers shut the resources cupboard door and it remained closed for the rest of the session (Field notes, 32nd visit). This example illustrates the interconnected nature of expressions of agency. In the flow of this relatively 'silent' challenging interaction, a form of strategic interaction is captured. The action of

waiting and watching provides space for the workers to decide what their next action will be as well as space for the young people to decide whether to continue with what they are doing or alter their behaviour. This all happens without exchange of words; it is a process of negotiation but it is tacitly conducted through non-verbal communication rather than overt verbal bargaining strategies. Those involved are enabled by the creation of this space and time to 'save face' when backing down from the confrontation, a process that means it is less likely the interaction will escalate further. Here we see how a combination of entities (material, spatial, temporal and human) creates options in an interaction for those involved and how agency comes into being through non-verbal communication as well as through 'voice'.

Sharing Control

The young people and youth workers are found to be involved in a process not only of conflict but of co-operation as they negotiate a means to share control – 'control with' rather than 'control over' (Stuart 2004) – and coexist in this setting. The process of sharing control can only occur in practice with the cooperation of both the worker and the young person. As in any process of negotiation, if one person opts out of the negotiation process then the negotiation breaks down. The process of sharing control is dependent upon the interdependency of the young people and youth workers. This interdependency is the mechanism that enables the majority of challenging interactions in the youth club to be contained within the 'everyday' and ongoing process of co-existence. It was unusual for a young person to be excluded or repeatedly to defy a youth worker until the interaction reached a 'crisis' point. It was also unusual for a worker to pursue control, often 'letting go' of incidents of defiance. 'Backing down', in the form of compliance or desistance in the youth club, is a display of agency. In these interactions, there are choices of how to respond and, as

Punch (2001) argues, agency can be displayed through compliance as well as through resistance, compromise and negotiation. Whilst intergenerational relations are the focus of this paper, the agency of both the youth workers and the young people is shown to be negotiated not just in relation to the other but also in their intragenerational relations[ix]. Whilst there is not the space to explore this fully here, it can be seen where the youth workers compare themselves to other youth workers, and the young people involve their peers (as actor and/or audience) in 'performing' defiance and compliance.

Intergenerational Power Struggles

In considering intergenerational power struggles in the youth club, we can see parallels in the actions of the young people and of the workers; both social groups exert and relinquish control through similar practices. Yet we tend to refer to young people in terms of their 'resistance' or 'compliance' and adults (in this case youth workers) in terms of their 'control' or 'power'. I would argue this is linked to assumptions about child-adult relations and the meaning of children's and adults' agency within this. Often when a young person expresses his or her agency seeking to exert control in an interaction with an adult, this is seen as 'challenging behaviour' but when a youth worker expresses agency seeking to exert control in an interaction with a young person this is viewed as 'managing behaviour', even though a young person is likely to find those attempts at control 'challenging'. We can see, then, that interpretations of young people's and youth workers' actions are influenced by wider societal ideas about who should be in control in intergenerational relations. Whilst it is difficult to move away from conceptualising child-adult interactions in this framework, these assumptions can be challenged through a focus on the relational nature of both power and agency.

Conclusion

I have drawn on child-adult interactions within a youth club, in a Minority World setting, to explore the process of negotiation involved in extra-familial relations. In doing so, I have argued for an approach to understanding childhood that focuses on the relational dimensions of both agency and power, and on the interdependencies involved in child-adult interactions. The paper began with an example of a 'challenging interaction' between a youth worker and a young person, from which key themes emerged for further analysis: power relations, positioning child/adult behaviours, and expressions and limitations of agency. The following section reviewed theoretical resources in childhood studies that consider agency and power and advocated a move away from the dichotomies of child-adult, agency-structure to a focus on child-adult relations, 'generationing' practices (Alanen 2003) and 'negotiated interdependencies' (Punch 2001). This theoretical framework was applied to 'youth work' as a form of child-adult interaction to illustrate the processes of negotiation that occurred between young people and youth workers in a youth club setting. This demonstrated how both children's and adults' agency are dependent on each other, conceptually and in practice, and agency is brought into being through interaction. The research questions why the actions of young people and the actions of adults within intergenerational power struggles are often represented in dichotomous terms (e.g. young people's resistance/adults' control) when the actions are part of the same process of negotiating agency and sharing control. This has implications, not only in understanding childhood and adulthood, but in the theorisation of young people's challenging behaviour and for those working with young people perceived to be challenging. These implications include a need to further theorise power relations when considering young people's challenging behaviour and to explore what kind of

power relationships are possible (and desirable) in child-adult interactions in varying contexts.

It is important to take account of the wider societal context when exploring intergenerational relations and inter-dependencies and doing so will also help to further our understanding of these concepts (Mayall afterword this volume). My discussion of child-adult interactions is situated in the context of the Minority World, in UK youth work and constructions of youth as 'problem'. So what, if any, are the implications from this paper for learning across the Majority and Minority World? Saliently, this paper provides an example of how a theoretical perspective developed to explain child-adult relations in rural Bolivia in the Majority World can be used to understand child-adult interactions in urban Scotland in the Minority World. Although further research is required, we can perhaps suggest that a focus on the relational dimensions of childhood and children's experiences creates a space for dialogue about both the similarities and differences in childhood and children's experiences across different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Using 'negotiated interdependencies' to analyse children's experiences requires attention to the specific context and structural constraints the child are acting within and produces a 'local' understanding of childhood and children's actions. However, this framework also encourages us to look at these local understandings relationally, that is to compare and contrast the ways in which 'negotiated interdependencies' play out in different contexts and to consider how these contexts are related and inter-dependent on one another. Thus a relational approach has the potential to make connections between childhood research in the Majority and Minority World and to understand both the universal and specific features of children's experiences.

Acknowledgements

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[i] Names of the youth workers are in italics to distinguish them from the young people. All names used are pseudonyms.

[ii] The term 'young people' is used in this paper to refer to the younger research participants (aged 11-14). Whilst this social group could also be classified as 'children', the use of 'young people' reflects the terminology used in the UK youth club where the research study was based.

iiiAside from adults considered to have an intellectual disability, it is rare to hear the phrase 'adults with challenging behaviour'.

iv I am grateful to the first anonymous reviewer for this observation

vThe new social studies of childhood is "a catch-all term for research from different disciplines in the social sciences and humanities" (Wells 2009, p. 4) and its establishment is usually accredited to the sociological work of James and Prout (1990) and James *et al*. (1998). In this paper the term childhood studies is used to refer to work that spans those different disciplines in particular those who would position their work within the sociology of childhood and/or children's geographies.

viThe childhood studies' literature referred to in this paper is mostly UK based. As Mayall (afterword this volume) notes, European contributions to the sociology of childhood do not emphasise agency to the same extent as UK research and there is a much wider set of concerns in their work.

vii For a fuller discussion of these issues and for further information on the methodology and ethics in this study see Plows (2010).

viiiThis is similar to the notion of 'rubber boundaries' used in the literature on teaching challenging pupils and refers to the "structures, routines and systems for all which bend to meet and absorb individual needs but never break" (O'Regan 2006, p. 48). In the youth club, these flexible boundaries emerge and evolve in interaction.

ix I am grateful to the second anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.