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### **BOOK REVIEW**

The sociology of children, childhood and generation, by Madeleine Leonard, London, Sage, 2016, 184 pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781446259238 / £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781446259245

For those of us involved in teaching childhood studies at the higher level, there is now a range of texts available to help support students better understand the various issues and debates they are introduced to in the classroom. This new book by Madeleine Leonard seeks to make a worthwhile addition to this collection by highlighting the distinctive contribution that Sociology as a discipline has made and continues to make to the wider field. The author achieves this through a theoretically grounded but empirically rich focus on the relationship between structure and agency and its relevance for childhood studies more generally. As someone with a rather interdisciplinary background, I am sometimes a little wary of projects that seek to prioritise one discipline at the expense of others, but I actually found this book to be extremely helpful and interesting and am convinced it makes a very valuable contribution to the literature.

The book begins with an introductory chapter, outlining the main focus of the text, key definitions and chapter contents. It then progresses on to Chapter 2, which explores developments in sociological approaches to childhood. Taking the dualism of 'becoming and being' as a main reference point, this chapter provides a comprehensive account of the ways in which sociological thinking about childhood has changed over the last 60 years. The section on recent critiques of, and developments in, the 'new' sociology of childhood is particularly useful, and it was nice to see a rather more nuanced approach to the role of developmental psychology in these debates than is sometimes the case in works of this kind.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the issues of structure and agency, respectively, through a common focus on four substantive areas of research: work, family, education and play and leisure. Whilst Chapter 3 addresses these themes with reference to wider social, economic, political and cultural processes such as the industrial revolution, the advent of mass schooling, changing family types and consumerism, Chapter 4 foregrounds children's own experiences of these spheres of social life, including their active roles in constructing meaning, decision-making and negotiating relationships. Both chapters survey a good range of empirical research in these areas, with the key sociological concerns of identity and social difference, and the role of new technologies, emerging as important crosscutting themes.

Next, Chapter 5 deviates somewhat from the otherwise tight focus on structure and agency, to consider children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with some of the tensions that it gives rise to. These include potential contradictions between judgements regarding children's 'best interests' and children's own views about matters affecting them, as well as instances where the rights of children and their parents

may clash. Citizenship in the context of childhood is also explored, both in terms of political processes and institutions, such as school councils and youth parliaments, but also through children's everyday lived experiences and relationships, offering a subtle link to the next chapter.

Chapter 6 begins by introducing theories of generation, connecting these to recent critical debates about the problematic ways that agency has often been conceptualised in the sociology of childhood. This leads to a discussion about the author's own concept of 'generagency', which is described and defined in the following way:

The 'gener' aspect of the concept involves acknowledging the ongoing relevance of generation for understanding the location of childhood and adulthood and the implications of this positioning for both parties. Both children and adults are part of a wider social order based on generation that permeates and demarcates everyday life. The 'agency' aspect of the concept recognises children as agents who actively construct their own everyday lives and the everyday lives of those around them, while emphasising the importance of locating children's agency within the positioning of childhood relative to adulthood. Hence, the term encapsulates the structural positioning of childhood while simultaneously acknowledging children's active agency in generational relationships. (Leonard 2016,132)

This idea is further articulated through the terms 'inter-generagency', relating to how agency is experienced and practiced through adult-child intergenerational interactions and relations, and 'intra-generagency', emphasising the heterogeneous nature of childhoods and the influence of variables such as gender, class and ethnicity on the aforementioned processes. Although rather clunky terms, the concepts nevertheless offer a useful starting point for thinking about the relationship between structure and agency in children's lives. They are illustrated in more depth in this chapter through reference to the author's own empirical research on children's involvement in work, and then further explored in the concluding chapter, along with a summary of the main themes of the book.

Overall, the book is clearly written in an accessible style that would appeal to a variety of audiences, particularly undergraduates taking specialist courses in the latter part of their degree programmes, and postgraduates requiring a brief but high level introduction to the sociology of childhood. Each chapter includes a set of aims and learning outcomes, along with helpful questions for discussion, which would also work well as essay titles. The main weaknesses of the book include its limited breadth of coverage of empirical topics and its predominant focus on minority world childhoods and research, but this is more than offset by its comprehensive and adept treatment of sociological approaches to childhood. As such, the book is likely to make an excellent core or complementary text for sociology of childhood courses, as well as a key supporting text for interdisciplinary childhood studies courses.

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