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Introduction

Setting the scene

My intention in this book is to provide readers with a reliable guide
to the growing literature on the history of children and childhood
over the period from 1880 to 1990. By children, I mean the age
range from babyhood up to thirteen/fourteen years; the survey has
little to say about adolescents – fourteen to eighteen year olds –
except in passing. Over the last twenty years or so historians have
come to accept the legitimacy of young people's history. This is not
to say that a large number of monographs are devoted *entirely* to
children for, as a quick glance at the bibliography will make clear,
there are relatively few such volumes. Rather it is that scholars have
begun to pay attention to the historical presence of children as part
of their wider concerns with, for example, the family, social policy,
maternal welfare, women, demography and public health.
However, as the subject area has yet to become a major focus of
research, either in terms of prestige or of popularity, there is not that
surfeit of historical controversy which surrounds so many other
topics in this series. Consequently, although due attention is paid
to scholarly dispute where it exists, the emphasis in what follows will
be on describing and interpreting the results of recent research.

The theme under review here is amorphous, its discourse lacks
theoretical rigour, and it has no well-established historiographical
tradition which could be used to structure the survey. There is a risk
that the information presented will be confusing and ungovernable.
In order to avoid this situation, and by way of making each chapter
more than a simple, self-contained entity, much of the material has
been shaped into a form that can be described as 'age relations',

meaning those sets of relationships existing between adults, in whatever capacity, and children. My hope is that this will provide a lens through which some of the most important changes, as well as continuities, in the relationships between 'children' and 'society' may be observed and understood.

Sources

There are no particularly distinctive sources to which scholars of the modern (post-1800) period in this subject area automatically gravitate, unlike, say, those available to economic, demographic or diplomatic historians. In general, researchers draw upon a body of materials that are widely used throughout the discipline of social history. Particular mention should be made of oral testimonies, which in recent years have become very popular in certain circles. The main division is between primary and secondary matter, with primary being subdivided into printed and manuscript items. The greater number of modern scholars have tended to use a vast array of printed primary sources, such as parliamentary papers, national and local government reports, contemporary books and pamphlets, the publications of professional associations and philanthropic societies, newspapers and specialist journals, and autobiographies. (The last can be especially important for the historian of childhood since many writers give full accounts 'recognizing this as a period when character and personality are formed' [1: *10–11*]). Turning to the principal manuscript sources, these include: government papers in the Public Record Office – those relating to education, juvenile delinquency, child protection, the School Medical Service and the wartime evacuation process; case and minute books of philan-thropic bodies, such as the NSPCC; and local authority archival material on education, health and social welfare. Regardless of whether historians emphasize either printed or manuscript primary records, they always draw upon a range of secondary evidence taken from books, articles and biographies.

   Almost all of these sources raise at least two difficulties for schol-ars. First, the majority were composed by the professional middle classes representing religious, philanthropic, medical, educational and governmental interests. This class bias is important since it is

usually working-class children who have proved to be the most interesting subjects for research purposes, and yet few of the documents originate from within their social class. But this may not necessarily be much of an obstacle, for despite their outlook middle-class observers can make 'shrewd remarks' about social conditions and collect masses of factual material [2: *313*], which are open to interpretation by authors of opposing political persuasions. On the other hand, the fact that it is middle-class adults who make decisions concerning the contents of the collection does have to be borne in mind. Working-class children, were they to have the opportunity, might well make very different decisions.

Second, given that the sources have been written and compiled by *adults* – regardless of class – not only is the voice of the child more or less absent, but also there is always the related likelihood that the historian will be tempted to omit any representation of the child's viewpoint or, as frequently happens, even fail to recognize that such a perspective exists. Oral accounts are a partial exception to this exclusion in so far as something of the child's authentic voice may reach us via whispers and muted articulations, albeit that these are in the form of adult recollections.

Methodologies (concepts, techniques and 'forms of thought')

Since, as we have already noted, relatively few textbooks are devoted solely to the history of children, there has been almost no opportunity for scholars to develop specific methodological approaches and to debate associated issues. But why are children so neglected by historians? In order to answer this question it is worth remembering that in the past historians ignored the working class, women, black people, and lesbians and gay men. Since the 1960s, and much earlier in the case of the working class, each of these groups has begun to have a recorded history, largely as a result of their political struggles.

Children, however, lack a political significance: they do not have the vote nor do they have a political movement like feminism or socialism to represent their interests. Children are usually viewed from the perspective of *becoming* (growing to adult maturity), rather

than *being* (children as their own persons). Similarly, 'childhood' as a stage in the life-cycle represents a wide range of physical and mental degrees of competence and knowledge: infancy, under five, primary school, secondary school, early adolescence. In this respect, 'childhood' is a fragmented experience. Moreover, individuals experience childhood for no more than a small part of their lives before growing out of it, unlike the members of other 'oppressed' classes. Thus only indirectly can it be said that there is a continuing children's constituency pressing for change. All this means that the political, social and legal status of children is very low on the agendas of political parties and in the academic writings of political and legal theorists. As children do not have overt political identities, historians tend not to be very interested in them as historical subjects, and certainly not as people in their own right.

For those of us who see ourselves as historians of childhood (and youth), one way forward is to draw two lessons (at least) from the methodologies and programmes of feminist historians [3–9]. First should be the giving to history of an 'age' dimension – as a 'fundamental category of analysis' – just as it now has a 'woman' and, in some areas, a 'gender' (meaning the binding together of men and women in the same historical story) dimension. This means putting 'children's history' into 'history'; the former cannot simply be 'added on' to the latter as if to fill in a gap. Moreover, since 'gender' brings together women and men, so 'age' must treat children in relation to adults, for conceptions of 'child' are never completely separate from those of 'adult'. Second, as women's history has been defined as 'critical history', so, too, should be that of children. The omission of children is ideological: it is a consequence of a set of attitudes and power structures. Writing the history of children, then, will involve confronting the politics of age relations.

Alternatively, numerous social scientific authors [10–20] have drawn upon the work of Michel Foucault, the French polymath, who in recent years has become very influential in a number of disciplines. The relevance of Foucault for our purposes is that whereas conventional liberal histories have tended to emphasize progress in the fields of child social and legal welfare and public health [2; 21–4], and other scholars have seen the whole process of 'reform' in social welfare, health and education in either Marxist and/or patriarchal terms [25–8], Foucauldian accounts examine what is

called the 'regulatory impact' of these practices. This means that through welfare, health, education and legal provisions, children are 'monitored', 'surveyed' 'calculated' – nearly always in relation to their families – and that their health and welfare is fused with the broader political health of the nation.

Foucault rejects overarching structural theories of class and patriarchy to explain power and domination in favour of an approach that focuses on 'power' as 'knowledge', with the former being dispersed through, for example, science, law and education. He maintains that via the process of children being submitted to scrutiny, new forms of 'knowledge' are produced, primarily in the social sciences, which are then used to further regulate the children (and their families). This is accomplished via infant welfare schemes, school medical inspections, juvenile courts, child guidance clinics and social work with neglected and abused children. Thus regulation and control is imposed not by physical force but by the ability of those possessing 'knowledge' – doctors, teachers, lawyers, psychiatrists, probation officers, social workers – to determine what is acceptable, respectable and, above all, normal. By and large, those children who disobey, who are abnormal, are deemed to require 'treatment' (medical, psychological, social, educational) – sometimes together with their families – rather than punishment. Once successfully 'treated', they can be returned to the 'normality' of the normal family, so that they may have the opportunity of realizing their potential as future adults.

Of course, none of these methodologies – liberal, feminist, Marxist, Foucauldian – is mutually exclusive and, in practice, they often overlap with one another. Irrespective of which approach is drawn upon, however, we have surely reached the point where, with respect to children, the terms, standards and assumptions of what has passed for objective, neutral and universal history will have to be recast.

Aside from this issue, we need to be clear about the nature of the history of childhood which is advanced in subsequent chapters. Given that my brief is to come up to the 1980s, understandably much of what is said about the latter years cannot be based on 'historical research' because the written works have yet to appear and, therefore, this part of the review must be derived from other sources. To put it plainly, the period from 1880 to 1914 is fairly well

covered in historical accounts, while the years between the First World War and 1945 have been much less discussed. None the less, there are a sufficient number of books and articles to warrant being included in this survey. When we come to the post-war era, however, with the exception of educational history, we are increasingly in the hands of social scientists, albeit that several have also written broad sweeping historical studies. This means that for the more recent times I have drawn upon methodologies and tractates culled from the work of child and social psychologists on patterns of childrearing [29–31]; social policy analysts on child care policy [16, 32–4]; health care specialists [11, 35, 36]; and anthropological and sociological theory and practice [37–41].

In the material presented here, which begins in 'the past' and ends in the 1980s, there is no clear division between 'history' and 'the present'. There are many historians who, quite properly, feel uneasy about this sort of thing, and they are especially uneasy about the forced coming together in such circumstances of historical data with those of social scientific research. Many historians are also often deeply suspicious of the language used by social scientists, which they see not as a specialist language, as in physics or chemistry, but as 'jargon'; so wherever sociological writings have been used in this book, I have translated many of the technical terms and phrases into my own words. For my part, however, provided the usual professional integrity with sources is maintained, I do not see a problem with the blurring of past and present in this context. This is not to say that I subscribe to a 'Whig' view of history, whereby the past is viewed through present-day categories. But it seems to me to be perfectly reasonable, after having made the usual caveats about the inadequacy of very contemporary sources, to present students with an essentially historical survey that concludes with references to our own time, so that they may see at a glance the broad pattern of change and continuity.

Notwithstanding the pros and cons of any particular methodology, in the following chapters, broadly speaking, five main 'languages' will be found, together with their associated forms of thought. First, the 'common-sense' view that by and large things have improved for children during the period. Secondly, an oral history perspective that is much more complex and very often acutely conscious of gender. Thirdly, a conventional social scientific

viewpoint, dealing mainly with matters of child care policy.
Fourthly, the Foucauldian method: critical and nuanced. And,
finally, my own voice, which tries to look at things not from the
viewpoint of class, gender or 'knowledge' but, informed by the
different methodologies, from that of the children themselves or, as
I like to put it, a voice that insists on the significance of 'age' in
general and, in particular, on the lack of power that children expe-
rience in the age relationship.

The contents

Chapter 2 considers the new ideas concerning children and child-
hood in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. The emphasis is
on changes in the ways in which contemporaries were thinking
about the nature of childhood, what it was, its significance, how it
related to human evolution and, in a more directly political sense,
how it should be defined in order to protect it for the benefit of the
race. This was not the first time that ideas concerning children had
been discussed but, given the new role of post-Darwinian science,
the introduction of compulsory schooling and the pressing eco-
nomic and political problems of these years, such ideas achieved a
high profile and proved to have an enormous influence on succes-
sive generations of adults.

Chapter 3 looks at parent–child consanguinity. The first section
examines four main issues around which an informed view of the
topic has been produced for the decades between 1880 and 1920:
family size and family economy, attitudes towards children's health
and infant deaths, demands for obedience and methods of disci-
pline and demonstrative affection coupled with parental interest in
the child's world. The second section discusses relationships in a
general manner, while focusing on child-rearing advice and social
surveys of child-rearing practices. The reason for what might
appear to be a somewhat arbitrary division lies in the previously
mentioned relative neglect by historians of nearly all features of
children's lives (especially their family lives) during the inter-war
years and from 1945 onwards. In the absence of historical sec-
ondary sources, a range of social scientific matter has been
employed.

Chapter 4 is a fairly substantial account of social policies involving children. There is a simple explanation for the length of the treatment given here: more has been written about this area of the history of children and childhood than any other. It is easy to see that, given the wide range of topics included in the term 'social policy', there is much to describe and discuss. Moreover, it is a particularly important subject for this book since it can be very revealing of the value placed upon children by 'society': parents, educationalists, health and welfare personnel, politicians, churchmen and assorted moralists. Reform programmes enacted in the name of children have rarely been as altruistic as the sponsors have claimed and yet, somewhat paradoxically, children have often been beneficiaries. The chapter begins by highlighting the work of several scholars as a way of introducing the most important overarching understandings of child welfare. It then moves on to illustrate these approaches through a chronological survey of legislation and developments.

In chapter 5 the connections between children, schooling and the classroom are discussed. There is a veritable mountain of literature on the history of education, the great majority of texts having little or nothing to do with children themselves. I have chosen to look at those areas that more directly involve children's experiences: the transition from wage earning and home-helping to school work in the late Victorian period, the early development of secondary education, mental testing and the 11+ examination, and classroom discipline. These subjects focus more overtly and less institutionally on the age relationship between children and society as mediated through schooling.

The subject matter of chapter 6 is children's leisure. This is a difficult subject to categorize. Although there are numerous studies of specific forms of recreation, the culture of children's leisure has barely begun to be examined. Consequently, this chapter simply surveys those activities provided by schools and by religious, voluntary and municipal organizations, as well as outdoor play, the cinema, literature, games, toys and television.

The conclusion, chapter 7, is a brief description of two issues currently the subject of much debate: 'disappearing' childhood and children's rights.

2
New ideas of childhood: the 1880s to the 1920s

There is a broad consensus among historians that during the late Victorian and Edwardian years new ideas or, in the language of social science, 'social constructions' of children and childhood gained currency and became widely acceptable social truths. The emphasis is on the word 'new', for this was not the first time that such ideas, perceptions, concepts – call them what you will – had undergone change. Classical scholars and medieval and early modern historians have also discussed the meanings and understandings of childhood for their respective periods [42–6]. And it is equally true that definitions of childhood, along with the relationships between children and society, changed repeatedly from the early 1700s through to the mid-nineteenth century under the following influences: the Enlightenment, the Rousseauian theory of Nature, the Industrial Revolution, the Romantics and the Evangelical revival [47, 48]. Consequently, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments were further stages in what was a continually shifting process.

But let us be clear as to the meaning of 'social construction'. This is an important term because much of what has been written about the history of children and childhood is the work of historians whose methodological framework, such as it is, has been influenced by social scientific writings, and of practising scholars in the social sciences. Put simply, the term refers to the way in which our lives and our institutions are *socially* produced, i.e. by ourselves, rather than naturally or divinely given. Childhood, then, 'as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies'. In other words, though biological

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immaturity may be natural and universal, what particular societies make of such immaturity differs throughout time and between different cultures. So we say that it is socially constructed. Moreover, it 'is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity' [49: 8]. This means that if we are to understand the nature of, and the relationships involving, childhood, we have to consider these other variables. None of this is to suggest that the condition of children is ever completely free of the biological dimension; nor is it to deny the effects of physical being, though the nature of the relationships that exist between the social, the psychological and the biological is extraordinarily problematic.

Whatever the difficulties, most scholars agree with Michael Anderson that 'ideas like parenthood and childhood are socially constructed and thus can be put together in [a] diverse set of ways' [50: 60]. This is the view taken here. Acceptance of this premise means that the fresh concepts were the product of their particular historical situation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a selective and mainly historiographical account of the emerging notions and, where possible, briefly indicate the reasons for, and the means by which, the 'diverse sets of ways' were 'put together'.

Viviana Zelizer, an American sociologist, has described what she calls the 'sacralization' (investing objects with sentimental or religious meaning) of American children between 1870 and 1930 [51]. During these years, the economic and sentimental value of children was transformed, and the emergence of this economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child became what she calls the 'essential condition of contemporary childhood'. Her focus is on the way in which cultural factors have an independent effect on redefining the value of children. While not disputing that the 'expulsion of children from the "cash nexus"' was 'shaped by profound changes in the economic, occupational, and family structures', Zelizer claims that it was also part of 'a cultural process of "sacralization" of children's lives'. In the nineteenth century, the market value of children had been culturally acceptable (this refers to child labour); later, however, the new ideal of the child became that of an 'emotional and affective' asset which, regardless of social class, properly belonged in a world of cosy domesticity, school and play. Zelizer argues that where economic criteria had previously