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Eliasian Perspectives

Edited by
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Victoria University of Wellington
Wellington, New Zealand

Philip Walsh
Department of Sociology
York University
Toronto, ON, Canada

Norman Gabriel
Plymouth Institute of Education
Plymouth University
Plymouth, Devon, UK

Jurandir Malerba
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul
Porto Alegre, Brazil

Jason Hughes
Department of Sociology
University of Leicester
Leicester, UK

Gina Zabludovsky Kuper
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
National Autonomous University of Mexico
Mexico City, Mexico

Despite growing, widespread appreciation for Norbert Elias's theoretical approach—often called figurational or processual sociology—there exist only a few, specialized publications on Eliasian social theory, and as of yet, no academic book series.

Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias will therefore fill a significant gap in the market, appealing to figurationalists across disciplines: Elias's social theory is used not only in Sociology, but also Sports, Psychoanalysis/Psychology and Social Psychology, Education, Criminology, International Relations, History, Humanities (Arts, Music, and Cultural Studies), Political Science, and Public Health. Respecting the multi-disciplinary Eliasian tradition, the series is open to receiving contributions from academics outside of Sociology departments, so long as the research is grounded on Elias's approach. Publications, which shall range from Palgrave Pivots to edited collections, can be expected to explore sports, habits and manners, criminology, violence, group relations, music and musicians, theory and methods, civilizing and decivilizing processes, involvement and detachment in social sciences, formation of the modern state, power relations, and the many dozens of other topics to which Eliasian theory has been applied.

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Editor

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Editor
Norman Gabriel
Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies
University of Essex
Essex, UK

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Thank you, Gina, Joseph and Jacob, as we grow up we learn together. Mum and Dad, Tessa and Henry Gabriel, you are always with me along each step.

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Notes on Contributors

Claudemir Dantes is a teacher in Early Childhood Education at the Municipal Education Network of Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. He is a member of the Research Group, Education and Civilising Processes, at Universidade Federal de Campina Grande and coordinator of the Study and Research Group on Early Childhood Education in Dourados. A researcher of early childhood education his research themes include power relations between teachers and children, pedagogical practices, and families and daycare centres. He has published with Magda Sarat, 'The Relational Power of Family Institutions and Early Childhood Education: Eliasian Approaches', Chapter 11, in A. F. B. Vieira and M. A. de Freitas Junior (eds.) *Norbert Elias in Debate: Uses and Research Possibilities in Brazil* (Camara Brasileira, 2020); and with N. R. Xavier and M. Sarat, 'Ethnic-Racial Relations: Notes and Reflections on Pedagogical Practice in Early Education', Chapter 8 in W. C. S. Nozu and G. de Souza Preussler (eds) *Education, Human Rights and Inclusion* (Íthala, 2019).

Florence Delmotte is Professor of Political Science at the University of Louvain in Brussels and a permanent researcher at the Belgian Scientific Research Fund (FNRS). She works on the political relevance of Norbert Elias and historical sociology to think about European integration and questions of legitimacy and identity at national and post-national levels. In 2021 with Barbara Górnicka she edited *Norbert Elias in Troubled Times: Figurational Approaches to the Problems of the Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias.

Sophie Duchesne is research director of the Centre national de la recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and head of the Emile Durkheim Centre at the Sciences Po in Bordeaux. She is also co-editor of the *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology*. As a political scientist, she works on political socialisation and politicisation, as well as on questions of citizenship and nationalism. She introduced and edited the French translation of Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995) (Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2019). Since 2020, she has directed the project *Enquête sur la transmission précoce des appartenances au sein de la famille* (ETPAF), a survey on the early transmission of belonging within the family.

Eliana Maria Ferreira works as a professor at the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul and as a pedagogical coordinator at SEMED, the Education Department of the municipality of Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. She is a member of the Research Group Education and Civilising Processes and the Group for Studies and Research in Early Childhood Education of Dourados. A researcher in the field of childhood, her publications in journals include Eliana M. Ferreira and Cindy Romualdo Souza Gomes (2021), 'Children's Turn and Voice: Protagonism in the Dynamics of Pedagogical Practices, Perspectives in Dialogue': *Review of Education and Society*, 8, 17: 286–301. She has co-written with Ariele Furtado dos Santos and Célia Regina Costa de Sousa (2023), 'Playful Activities: Games and Play in the 1st Year of Elementary School—The Teachers' Eyes', *Ensin@ UFMS Magazine*, 4: 204–219; and with Claudemir Dantes da Silva and Clovis Irala (2020), 'Your Vacancy Is for a Janitor, Right?—The Place of Men in Teaching Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Tensions', *Zera-a-Seis*, 22: 833–851.

Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira is Professor of the Postgraduate Programme in Education and the Education Sector (DEPLAE) at the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil. Her research themes and interests include Norbert Elias, children, young people and the city; management and pedagogical coordination of schools; school culture; school times and spaces. She has published the book: *Childhood and City: The Construction of a Boring Curriculum in Curitiba in the 1990s and Early 2000s* (Appris, 2021).

Stine Frydendal is a senior consultant at The Danish Evaluation Institute, or EVA, where she conducts analysis and evaluations of the Danish educational system. She has previously been employed as an

assistant professor at the University of Copenhagen at the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, where she has conducted research in the area of sports sociology, focusing on sport and exercise culture among children and youth in educational settings.

Norman Gabriel is Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Essex, where he is Director of the Centre for Childhood Studies. He has written one of the first books in childhood studies, *The Sociology of Early Childhood—Critical Perspectives* (Sage, 2017), to explore children's lives from a relational sociological perspective and co-edited a *Sociological Review* Monograph with Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual Thinking in Sociology* (Blackwell, 2011). With Lars Bo Kaspersen, he recently co-authored 'Warfare, Survival Units, National Habitus and Nationalism: Norbert Elias's Contribution to Political Sociology' in *The Anthem Companion to Norbert Elias*, edited by Alex Law and Stephen Mennell. His research interests are in relational and process sociology, child psychoanalysis and the sociology of childhood.

Laura Gilliam is an anthropologist and Associate Professor of Educational Anthropology at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her work includes research on ethnic minority children and schooling, masculinity, class and school strategies, Muslim identities and school secularities. With Eva Gulløv, she is the author of *Children of the Welfare State: Civilizing Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (Pluto, 2017). With Christa Markom, she is the co-editor of *Difference and Sameness in Schools. Perspectives from the European Anthropology of Education* (Berghahn, 2024).

Eva Gulløv is Professor of Educational Anthropology at the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark. She holds a PhD in Social Anthropology and has written extensively on childhood research. Her work includes theoretical and methodological reflections on the position of children in contemporary society, as well as numerous analyses of children's everyday lives, mainly in Denmark. Among her books is: L. Gilliam and E. Gulløv, *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (Pluto, 2017).

Tony Honorato is currently a professor in the Department of Education at the State University of Londrina (UEL), Brazil, working in the

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes in Education. He is the leader of the Civilizing Processes Research Group (GPROC), a member of the Teaching and Research Laboratory in the History of Education (LEPHE) and a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil (CNPq). His research themes include education in civilising processes, history of educational institutions and practices, history of teacher training and history of municipal actions in education and body education. He is the author of *Norbert Elias: Education, Politics and Social Processes* (EDUFES, 2022) and *Tiempos de cambio: diálogos desde Norbert Elias* (UBA-Argentina, 2022).

Lars Bo Kaspersen is a professor at Copenhagen Business School. He has published widely on sociological theory and political sociology and is the author of, among other publications, *Anthony Giddens: An Introduction to a Social Theorist* (Blackwell, 2000), *Denmark in the World* (Hans Reitzels, 2012), *Does War Make States*, co-edited with Jeppe Strandsbjerg (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and *War, Survival Units and Citizenship* (Routledge, 2020). With Norman Gabriel he recently co-authored 'Warfare, Survival Units, National Habitus and Nationalism: Norbert Elias's Contribution to Political Sociology' in *The Anthem Companion to Norbert Elias*, edited by Alex Law and Stephen Mennell. His research areas are state formation processes in Europe, the transformation of the welfare state, sociology of war, civil society (including the idea of associative democracy) and sociological theory, in particular relational theory.

Mark Mierzwinski is Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Sport at York St John University. His research focuses on social relations, power imbalances and identity management within sporting environments. Mark's current work applies a figurational sociological approach to language and discrimination in Secondary School Physical Education classes, specifically examining banter and bullying and the interplay between both behaviours. Mark is co-founder and director of the research group, Tackling Welfare in Sport Together. With Philippa Velija (2020) he has published 'Bullying in Male Physical Education: A Figurational Sociological Analysis', *Sport in Society*, 23(10): 1630–1644, and recently Green, M. J., Mierzwinski, M. F. and Haines Lyon, C. (2024), 'Conceptualising and Navigating Bullying in English Secondary Schools: A Figurational Analysis

of Power Imbalances in Physical Education', *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–13.

Raúl Sánchez-García is a professor at the Department of Social Sciences at Polytechnic University of Madrid (INEF-UPM). He is the secretary of the Sociology of Sports committee of the Spanish Federation of Sociology (FES). His main areas of research are the following: sport and social theory (including debates with cognitive sciences), martial arts/combat sports and violence, ethnographic studies of sports subcultures and children's games in urban environments. He has published numerous articles in national and international magazines and collaborated in various chapters of books on sociological topics. He co-edited with Dale Spencer *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports* (Anthem Press, 2013) and with Jan Haut, Paddy Dolan and Dieter Reicher, *Excitement Processes: Norbert Elias's Unpublished Works on Sports, Leisure, Body, Culture* (Springer, 2018). He published the book *The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts* (Routledge, 2019), which was awarded the 2020 Norbert Elias Book Prize.

Magda Sarat is a full professor at the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Grande Dourados and a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil (CNPq). As a researcher, she works primarily with the theoretical framework developed by Norbert Elias, using oral history as a research methodology. She is the leader of the Research Group Education and the Civilising Process and a member of the Brazilian Society for the History of Education and the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Education. Her publications in journals and books include *Readings by Norbert Elias: Education, Civilising Process and Borders* (UEM, 2014)*; Education and Civilization: Perspectives from the Work of Norbert Elias* (UFGD, 2016)*; Times of Change—Dialogues from Norbert Elias* (UBA, 2021)*; Norbert Elias: Education, Politics and Social Processes (*UFES, 2022*)*, and *Reflections from Norbert Elias, A Tribute to Johan Goudsblom* (UFAM, 2023).

Lone Friis Thing is a professor who specialises in promoting health and prevention in the context of sport and physical activity. Her work focuses on heart disease and lifestyle changes in the elderly, and she champions innovative cultural strategies for organisational change within the Danish Upper Secondary School system. Presently, Lone Thing serves as the Head of the Department of Sport and Social Sciences at the Norwegian

School of Sport Science (NIH) in Oslo. She has published several textbooks for teaching sports sociology in both Denmark and Norway and has also written various chapters in international books on sports and society, amongst others 'Sports, Nationalism and the Body: Gymnastic Culture and National Identity in Denmark', *The Business and Culture of Sports: Society, Politics, Economy, Environment: Sociocultural Perspectives.* Eds: Maguire, J., Falcous, M. and Liston, K. (Framingham Hill, 2019).

Philippa Velija is Professor of Sociology at the University of Roehampton and Deputy Dean in the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Philippa's research provides a critical sociological analysis of inequality and power in sports and leisure settings, particularly applying a figurational sociological approach to gender relations in sports. More recently, Philippa has explored the relationship between misogyny, gender and power in the curriculum and HE settings. She is leading the implementation of bystander workshops, evaluating school-based interventions on violence against women and girls and working with local charities and councils on challenging gender-based violence. Philippa is co-author with Dominic Malcolm of *Figurational Research in Sport, Leisure and Health* (Routledge, 2019).

Désirée Waterstradt is an interdisciplinary parenthood researcher and management consultant for strategic communication. Her main research interest is on parenthood. She has published the book *Process Sociology of Parenthood. Nation-Building, Figurative Ideals and Generative Power Architecture in Germany* (M and V, 2015). Her publications include 'Western (Business) Family Models in Historical Change: A Process–Sociological Sketch', in Heiko Kleve and Tobias Koellner (eds.), *Sociology of the Business Family. Foundations, Recent Developments, and Future Perspectives* (Springer, 2023) and 'Parenthood as a Blind Spot. Challenges on the Way to Critical Parenthood Research', *Soziologische Revue* 41(3): 400–418.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Norman Gabriel

This book is an international investigation of the different processes of learning and education in contemporary societies, drawing on theoretical and applied studies that examine the national habitus of Brazil, France, Germany, Denmark and England. It has two main goals: firstly, to discuss Norbert Elias´s processual contribution to contemporary childhood and educational practices that affect the lives of young and older children and secondly, to raise questions on how debates about learning processes can enrich our understanding of Elias´s contribution to process sociology. Although Norbert Elias did not explicitly address educational practices or the role of education in society, he was deeply interested in the development of the social learning processes of children and adults. For Elias, sociologists need to develop an approach that is relational and processual, investigating long-term historical processes of learning, which are dynamic and structured in different societies. He also argues that these processes need to be illuminated by comparative sociological enquiries into different societies. However, to conduct comparative research, a 'radical

N. Gabriel (✉)
Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, Essex, UK
e-mail: n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk

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reorientation of familiar habits of thought' was necessary, one that identified the universal features of human society:

> One may investigate how particular human societies differ from one another. One may also investigate how all human societies resemble one another. Strictly speaking, these two research efforts are inseparable. … For it to become anything, an empirically based conception of the *similarities* between all possible societies is essential, to provide a frame of reference within which particular investigations may be carried out. (Elias, 2012, p. 99)

In the book, each of the authors applies Elias's relational perspective to understand and explain learning processes in childhood and education, focusing on some of the long-term individual civilising processes that younger and older children undergo as they prepare for adulthood in complex societies. The historical development of processes of civilisation has had a dual impact on childhood: first, the distance between childhood and adulthood gradually increases as the requirements of societal membership become more demanding, so that childhood requires more time and effort in socialisation and education prior to the achievement of adult status through entry to the workforce. Second, adults' investment of time, skill, effort and emotions in young children also increases, making them both more 'precious' and demanding at the same time. The under-utilised potential of Elias's concept of learning processes can illuminate an integral aspect of this civilising process by explaining how children grow up through their own self-regulation to become civilised within society. Learning is both a cognitive and affective process, one that is fraught with a great deal of emotional anxieties that gradually require more and more self-control.

We explore in different chapters how these processes of learning relate to emerging and dynamic forms of figurations that children form with parents, teachers and friends. Each of these figurations is multi-layered and embedded within a range of institutions, referring to a large number of related aspects such as early childhood education and upbringing, the 'socialisation' of 'norms' and values', formal schooling, play, youth and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. In the first part of the book, we follow the movement of children as they navigate the different layers of social habitus in early year's institutions such as preschools, schools and the wider development of national habitus. In Chap. 2, Norman Gabriel sets the overall context for understanding the

early years of childhood and processes of learning by focusing on the dynamic 'unconscious' and ambivalent aspects of early socialisation. He argues that academics within childhood studies need to move beyond the established social constructionist approach that places an undue degree of emphasis on children's active construction of their own worlds. More specifically, his main contention is that sociologists of childhood could greatly benefit from an engagement with some of the key psychoanalytic concepts of child development used by Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott and Wilhelm Reich. These concepts help to explain the interwoven and hidden layers of each individual child's 'civilising' armour or learnt habitus that underpin their self-steering conduct in processes of civilisation.

In Chap. 3 Magda Sarat, Eliana Maria Ferreira and Claudemir Dantes draw on their empirical research to explore the education of children in early year's institutions in Brazil, focusing on public day care centres and preschools that serve children between 6 months and 5 years old. They investigate the interweaving of a specific figuration of teachers, young children and parents who are intimately linked together, tied to each other in dynamic mutual interdependencies. They suggest that the balance of power has now tilted more towards educational institutions in early childhood who have the legitimacy of determining the rules, routines and practices over children and their parents. One of their important findings is that early childhood education should be seen as a space where figurations between adults and young children are framed around specific pedagogic practices that favour the formal education of day care centres over families.

Chapter 4 by Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv offers an important alternative to traditional explanations of the 'socialising' role of schools (see, for example, Ball, 2012), exploring how an Eliasian approach can enhance our understanding of the schooling of children in contemporary societies. In an innovative way, they compare school classes to the courtly intrigues of social prestige displayed in figurations in Elias's explanation of court society (Elias, 2006), arguing that the habitus of children is shaped by the intensity of attention children need to have in navigating social relations and hierarchies in schools. However, the habitus of children is not only influenced by intensive negotiations of relationships with other children and teachers, but the complex ways in which each child is enmeshed in long chains of interdependence with parents, policy makers and the state. Schools thus become one of the main places for habitus formation and bringing up the next generation, legitimating their right to intervene and

correct children's behaviour in struggles over what counts as 'civilised' conduct.

Florence Delmotte and Sophie Duchesne continue this important theme of generational habitus in Chap. 5 by examining the early transmission of feelings of national belonging or 'nationalism' to children. In a novel way, they explore how Norbert Elias and Michael Billig's approach to national habitus and banal nationalism can be used together to explain generational processes of reproduction that French parents use to transmit forms of 'we' identity to their children. In their research project, designed to explore the intimate relation between collective discourses on belonging to the nation, they conducted a series of thirty interviews with parents of five and six-year-olds. By closely interpreting the words used by parents in their silences, hesitations and ambivalences, Delmotte and Duchesne demonstrate that parents are unaware of the strong feelings of superiority that tip the scale from feelings about a love of one's own nation to those that convey superiority over others.

In the second part of the book, we consider applications of informalising processes to children's lives and the persistence of social inequalities. Although informalising trends and their relation to long-term civilising processes are well known in Eliasian circles (see Wouters & Dunning, 2019), Chaps. 6 and 7 provide some of the first examples of using this sociological concept to understand the historical context for the development of children's play and changes in peer and teacher relations in the classroom. In Chap. 6, Raúl Sánchez García analyses the development of children's play and playgrounds in the second half of the twentieth century in Western countries, focusing on the shifting informalising/formalising trends of parent-child relationships. He identifies three different phases in the main features of children's play and changes to the design and implementation of playgrounds. The first informalisation phase of the 1960s–1970s featured a prevalence of more autonomy, free play and adventure where the design of playgrounds expressed values of 'freedom' and 'nature'. During the second phase, a long reformalisation period in the 1980–1990s led to an important transformation in the free/supervised play dynamic within the parent-child relationship. It tilted towards more control and 'risk averse' attitudes in parents and a standardisation of playgrounds. The last phase, an informalising trend that gained momentum since the mid-2000s, has led to a more moderate approach in the design of 'integrated playgrounds' in which autonomous, risky play and nature become key components.

Chapter 7 by Mark Mierzwinski and Philippa Velija explores a relatively neglected research area in education and childhood studies, how young people are socialised into using banter through formal schooling processes. While both males and females utilise banter, it tends to be a more prevalent form of communication among males and within male peer groups. Using empirical evidence from a male PE department, they apply an Eliasian analysis to understand the emergence of banter as an important form of communication in peer and teacher relations within an English secondary school. They argue that with the development of informalising processes, banter has become more complex due to the increasing sensitivities around people's need to use 'appropriate' language and communication styles that are based on greater levels of mutual identification and respect. Although this trend may be indicative of broader informalisation processes, they suggest that male banter could well be an unintended outcome of long-term equalising trends in gender relations, especially within certain male preserves such as sport.

In the last chapter on informalising processes, Tony Honorato and Magda Sarat discuss in Chap. 8 how some of the changing historical figurations in childhood in Brazil can help to explain some of the shifts in balances of power between adults and children. They focus on three figurations formed and shared by children with other children, young people and adults in processual and relational interdependencies, family, school and the world of work, drawing on paintings and photographs that were shown in an Art Exhibition on the History of Childhood that took place at the São Paulo Museum of Art in Brazil in 2016. They argue that these representations tend to 'naturalise' a popular understanding of a pure, naive and apolitical childhood, concealing and legitimising the production of class, gender and ethnic inequalities.

In the last part of the book, we explore some new forms of interdependencies that have emerged in different institutions and national forms of habitus, discussing the tensions and power relations in inter-generation relations. In Chap. 9 Désirée Waterstradt argues that child centring in Germany has been shaped by the development of a national habitus framed by changing dynamics of power in gender relations. Waterstradt suggests that the concept of the 'master emotion' of shame can help us to understand how a specific version of child-centeredness is intimately connected with the formation of shame spirals in oneself, in others and in networks of relationships. By exploring the infant fantasies of adult men who elevate childhood to an ideal state of paradise to which they long to return, she

uncovers the tabooing of shame. The long-term consequences for contemporary child centring is an unrealistic image of the mother that leads to hostility and forms of discrimination directed at mothers ('momism') and caring fathers.

Chapter 10 by Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira discusses how some of the methodological dilemmas in the sociology of childhood first raised by Prout (2011) can be overcome by using an Eliasian relational framework. With a group of researchers, Ferreira explored the influence of the spatial dimension of neighbourhood and city spaces on children's networks of interdependencies in Brazil. She argues that Elias's theoretical-empirical approach is more fruitful than Prout's sociological understanding of childhood because it investigates the multidimensional tensions and power relations involved in complex figurations, one that is more able to be 'relatively detached' to analyse the intense personal and group involvement of those involved. Therefore, there is no 'agency' of children that does not also include the dynamic tensions, possibilities and limits of the spatial figurations in which they find themselves.

In Chap. 11, Stine Frydendal and Lone Friis Thing discuss the research process of a democratic health promotion project in a Danish upper secondary school whose aim was to enable students to change the power-ratio between teachers and students. In their empirical study that combined participatory research methods with Elias's figurational sociology, they discuss the potential of action research to promote change in the sports and health culture of a school by constructing a teaching course based on democratic values. They used Elias's concepts of 'I-We' and 'they' identities and established-outsider groups to explain the changing balance of power that emerged amongst the students in sport classes. One important unintended consequence of their intervention was the development of tensions between some of the groups of students themselves—those wanting to belong to an active sports culture still felt the need to be part of an established youth culture that valued partying and alcohol.

In Chap. 12, the last chapter of the book, Lars Bo Kaspersen and Norman Gabriel address some of the institutional problems that now face universities in contemporary higher education. They highlight how neoliberalism and a new form of 'survival unit'—the 'competition state'—have been the main driving force behind the development of new educational policies in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. Inspired by Norbert Elias's key concept of a 'survival unit', they explain these changes as a shift in the balance of power between groups of survival units

in a global figuration of states. They draw on sources that are usually neglected in the debate about reforms in higher education, observing how transformational processes in the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester in the postwar years (1950–1975) led to a very successful department that became well known for producing knowledge and highly qualified teachers and researchers. To develop a new reinvigorated system of university education, Kaspersen and Gabriel point to some of the institutional policies that can be learnt from this department: they emphasise its governance, especially the hiring and promotions policies that promoted temporary and permanent staff with non-sociological backgrounds, and the strong interdependence between teaching and research.

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PART I

Early Years, Education and Schooling

CHAPTER 2

Sociology of Early Childhood: Why We Need Child Psychoanalysis

Norman Gabriel

Introduction

Childhood studies is now a well-established multi-disciplinary area that investigates contemporary problems that children face in their lives. However, in the last few years, researchers have continually questioned the feasibility of interdisciplinarity within this area, given that to date most disciplines have worked separately in exploring children's lives, bringing together disciplinary perspectives alongside each other rather than in a fully integrated manner (Thorne, 2007). In this chapter I will argue that the sociology of childhood could greatly benefit from an engagement with some of the major concepts of psychoanalysis which have largely been ignored by sociologists of childhood, apart from the idea of the child within or 'inner child' (see Gittins, 1998). Rustin and Armstrong (2019) have suggested that with the notable exception of the work of Norbert

N. Gabriel (✉)
Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, Essex, UK
e-mail: n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk

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Elias, British sociology's early quantitative and empiricist bias prevented psychoanalysis from taking root in the discipline as it developed in the UK. Although psychoanalysis had some degree of influence on cultural studies and feminism in the 1970s–1990s, British sociologists have never fully assimilated its ideas into the mainstream of their sociological perspectives. Kilminster (2023, p. 10) forcefully argues that what has been 'conspicuously lacking in contemporary social theory' is a 'systematic understanding of the *unconscious*', one that can be used to investigate 'the empirical structure of the *relations between* individuals'.

When the *Sociology of Early Childhood* was first published (Gabriel, 2017), I wrote that there was still a great deal of 'resistance' in recognising the important contribution of psychoanalytical approaches to early childhood, partly because adults (academics and early years professionals) find it extremely difficult to overcome barriers of shame and embarrassment, especially when discussing the sexuality of young children. In one of the seminal books that helped to establish the 'new' sociology of childhood James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p. 10) state in their introduction that psychoanalysis begins 'from a view of childhood outside of or uninformed by the social context within which the child resides'. Later they claim:

> It has done little to broaden our understanding of children. Freudian theory positions the child as no more than a state of unfinished business or becoming. Within this model, childhood is once again dispossessed of intentionality and agency. (James et al., 1998, pp. 20–21)

Such a simplistic critique of psychoanalysis reintroduces unhelpful philosophical dichotomies between 'action and structure' and 'being and becoming' and is a good illustration of academic specialists reproducing disciplinary boundaries between subject areas (Roseneil, 2019). Kilminster (2023, pp. 156–157) has pointed to the limitations of the social action perspective that underpins this type of sociological inquiry where the psychic structure is methodologically excluded, arguing that 'this stipulation becomes more firmly established in sociology than we always realise'. Sociologists working within the mainstream Anglo-American tradition (Parsons and Shils onwards, culminating in Giddens) have focused on people's capacity for rational adaptive action that makes it difficult to adopt a more layered model of psychic functioning, one that includes 'an understanding of the role played in society by socially controlled and regulated instincts and drives' (Kilminster, 2023, pp. 156; 192)

Craib (1994) detected similar resistance amongst sociology students who objected to what they saw as Freud's biological determinism and his emphasis on sexual characteristics. He argues that these views are partly a manifestation of a strand of modern culture that has difficulty accepting that human beings have bodies that affect what we can and cannot do. Moreover, it is a reminder of our embodied limitations, our separation from others and the impossibility of merging with others. Alas, little has changed—when we search the content of *Childhood*, one of the major academic journals in childhood studies, we notice that there are only approximately 16 articles that mention psychoanalysis since this journal was first published in 1993, but not one that begins to address its potential contribution to childhood studies.

This chapter will argue that it is important to investigate the contribution of different psychoanalysts,[1] apart from Sigmund Freud, to shed light on the way that Norbert Elias extended and integrated some of their theoretical concepts within his work. In the following discussion, I will examine some of the statements that Elias made in his writings about some of the key ideas in psychoanalysis, some more explicit than others, to uncover their important connection within his overall understanding and explanation of children's development. I will suggest that even though Elias does not usually refer to the author of a specific psychoanalytic concept, we can begin to trace some of its important genealogy by carefully following how he used it in his text to develop a particular argument. I will argue that Elias used these ideas as an important touchstone to help guide and frame his developing synthesis of the civilising process of young children, through such concepts as the social constraint towards self-constraint. I will also explore how some of the psychoanalytic models of childhood that Elias was less familiar with can be integrated within his overall perspective.

[1] Kilminster (2023, p. 138) notes, 'Several schools of psychoanalysis since Freud (notably the Object Relations School, Group Analysis and Ego Psychology) are compatible with sociological analysis. … Many concepts from these later schools lend themselves to being synthesised with sociology to provide systematic sociological insights into *affective bonding*' (author's emphasis).

A Critique of Social Constructionism

Childhood is 'socially constructed' according to the proponents of the 'new paradigm' of the sociology of childhood. The theoretical foundations of the new paradigm were originally laid out by Jenks (1996) and Allison and Prout (1997) and later developed by Qvortrup (2009), Prout (2011) and Wyness (2012). There are other important texts, but these books are some of the most important for the foundation of the 'new' sociology of childhood. In the last couple of decades social constructionism has become hugely influential in the international development of the sociology of childhood. Sociologists of childhood have tried to demonstrate the various ways childhood has been socially constructed with the idea that, by laying bare this dynamic, the unequal treatment of children would be exposed and ultimately could be used for social change (see Alanen, 2015). Nevertheless 'what often gets lost in this undertaking is the necessary recognition that social constructivism manifests, at base, as an undifferentiated ideological device. It will obey any master. It can be brandished in most any direction and used against most anyone' (Cook, 2020, p. 140).

Ba (2021) asks what exactly is being 'socially constructed' and who is the subject of the construction. He argues that sociologists of childhood have rejected the existence of human nature and do not explicitly define the categories through which the processes of turning children into adults become intelligible and open to critique. Similarly, Prout (2011) believes that the established sociology of childhood was situated in a binary logic that examines childhood through the lens of either culture or nature. The problems that this creates are usually dealt with in one of two ways. The first is reductionist: the attempt to explain all aspects of childhood in terms of a single principle, either biological or social. The second is additive: nature and culture remain as separate, incommensurable entities that are then seen as contributing a distinct proportion of the material that goes into the construction of childhood. Both reductionist and additive approaches encourage the study of childhood to proceed on separate social and biological tracks.

Norbert Elias (2006) can provide a very important way of moving beyond this impasse by providing a 'framework within which childhood can be seen as simultaneously part of culture and nature while not treating either as a distinct, autonomous or pure entity' (Prout, 2005, p. 3). Elias (2006) argues that we need to delineate the differences and relations between *biological evolution*, *social development* and *history*. These three

concepts form distinct but inseparable layers in a process encompassing the whole of humanity, but each level runs at a different speed. In biological evolution, ten thousand years is a very short period. The changes that have taken place in the biological constitution of our species are relatively slight. Although there were some evolutionary changes in the social relationships of our ancestors, we are always concerned with human beings, people like ourselves. However, in social development ten thousand years is a considerable period because the changes in social organisation that have taken place are enormous. What makes history possible is that the structure of our social life takes place without changes in our biological constitution—historical change is possible because the experiences gathered from one generation need to be transmitted to the next.

In every generation, young children need to learn from their elders how to survive and adults have to ensure the survival and care of biologically immature human beings. However, in terms of the time it takes for young children to grow into old men and women, long-term social developments take place so slowly that they seem to stand still. This gives the impression that developments in the relationship between adults and young children are static, rather than structured changes in social expectations and behaviour. Passed on from one generation to the next, young children need to learn and internalise an enormous social fund of knowledge about the world. I will now turn to the potential contribution that some of the key psychoanalytic concepts of childhood used by psychoanalysts[2] can make to processes of socialisation, arguing that the richly layered accounts of childhood that they offer can help to explain the complex and ambiguous aspects of civilising processes.

Anna Freud and Developmental Lines

In an interview, Elias (2013, p. 154) stated that one of the books that profoundly influenced him during his Weimar years in Germany was Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936). In this book, she explained how the mechanisms of defence were used in different ways across the lifespan, with some defences such as splitting or denial in fantasy

[2] I mainly focus on Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott and Wilhelm Reich because they all attempt in their perspectives to incorporate the way that children's relationships with others, parents, siblings, peers and teachers, influence the steering and self-regulation of children's drives in society.

associated specifically with very early stages of development and some such as sublimation more characteristic of later stages. One of the central questions that Anna Freud addresses in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* is what it is that we are defending against when the ego makes use of defence mechanisms. For young children, she suggests that the greatest threat to the ego's survival comes from 'objective anxiety' or 'justified fear', those real dangers that threaten the child, from the very earliest fear of losing the loved object, usually the parent or carer. However, Anna Freud suggested that whatever the source of the danger the ego's defensive mechanisms would be activated because it is *experienced* as something unpleasant or painful.

Looking back on her work towards the end of her life, Anna Freud commented that the emphasis she placed on the ego's response to affects and justified fear 'was a more or less heretical revolutionary idea' (Sandler & Freud, 1985, p. 264). Her theory was giving equal status to 'internal' or 'external' factors by focusing on the affect associated with a threat. In doing so, she refocused psychoanalysis on external realities,[3] such as parental abuse, trauma and neglect, alongside the dangers associated with internal conflict. This emphasis on the relation between 'internal' and 'external' has strong links with Elias's (2012a, p. 417) argument about the social moulding of individuals in accordance with the structure of the process of civilisation, where he emphasises the important relation between 'external' and 'internal' factors in the development and self-regulation of children. For Elias (2012a) the interrelation of the relative strength of drives and environmental influences on children's development can help to explain the 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' aspects of each individual child's civilising process.

Her attention later moved beyond the mechanisms of defence to what she called in one of her very last lectures 'the steps of the humanizing process which mark the child's path from immaturity to maturity' (Freud, 1982, p. 260). Anna Freud's concept of 'developmental lines' marked her attempt to create a set of useful markers of a child's progress across the whole spectrum of development. Throughout her writing, she returns to

[3] In marked contrast, Shapira (2013, p. 103) notes that 'Melanie Klein's ideas developed mostly out of her engagement with psychoanalytic theory. She rejected the emphasis on education for social norms, and as time went on she paid increasingly less attention to an unloving or cruel environment and more to the child's own psychological makeup, his or her inner fears and anxieties'.

one particular example of a developmental line that she suggests is a 'prototype' from which all others can be drawn—the line from dependency on the mother to emotional self-reliance and adult relationships. She considered this line the 'basic developmental line … the sequence which leads from the newborn's utter dependence on maternal care to the young adult's emotional and material self-reliance' (Freud, 1965, p. 61). She selects this as a prototypical line because this aspect of development best illustrates how progress depends on complex interactions between innate maturational processes that adapt to the environment. Her concern with the body, drives and the ego is central to her elaboration of other related lines. She identified three lines towards body independence: 'from suckling to rational eating', from 'wetting and soiling to bladder and bowel control', and from 'irresponsibility to responsibility in body management' (Freud, 1965, pp. 64–71). In each of these three lines, the child goes through several stages in the process of taking over from his or her mother the management of his/her own functioning or self-regulation.

While each of the lines focuses on one important aspect of development, Anna Freud believed that a child's psychological well-being ultimately depended on the interaction between them. For her, a 'harmonious personality' was where progress in one particular area would be synchronous with progress in others. Although she described a process of 'synchronization' and 'integration' that is an inherent part of psychological growth, she also recognised that every step on a developmental line is 'a compromise between conflicting forces'. This process of integration brings together all those contradictory features that are responsible for 'the numerous variations, deviations, quirks, and eccentricities displayed in the final personalities' (1981a, p. 129). For Anna Freud, 'normality' should not be characterised by steady progress along each of the developmental lines, temporary regressions along any one of the lines of development could well be an important aspect of a child's overall development.

Mayes and Cohen (1996, p. 124) have suggested that there are three main principles that are central to Anna Freud's thinking: the first is the idea that development proceeds not in a predominantly stage-based manner but more continuously with progressions and regressions, with personality being transformed and organised in more complex ways. Second is that development involves subtle interactions among various lines or functions and that progression can be either harmonious or imbalanced. Third, an understanding of the complexities of normal development is a way of understanding the presence or absence of psychopathology. Anna

Freud's view of the importance of harmonies and disharmonies between different lines of development suggests how development depends on the interplay of biological and psychological processes:

> In fact, progress on any line is subject to influence from three sides: the variation in innate givens, which provide the raw material out of which id and ego are differentiated; the environmental conditions and influences, which only too often differ widely from what is appropriate and favourable for normal growth; the interactions between internal and external forces, which constitute the individual experience of each child.… [W]hatever happens in the individual picture, we are left with the impression that it is this variety of progress on the lines, i.e. developmental failures and successes, which can be held responsible for the innumerable variations in human characters and personalities. (1981b, p. 69)

Anna Freud's concept of developmental line is therefore a highly complex multi-dimensional model that focuses on the interaction between id, ego and superego as they join into units and respond to environmental influences. It contains within it a heuristic framework for understanding and investigating mechanisms of the uneven, non-linear progressions and regressions in development. In a conference of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain, Anna Freud argued that learning something about the lines of development could help teachers make better judgements about 'which complexities in the external life experiences and the inner mental processes of the child determine success or failure in living up to the demands of the nursery school' (1969, p. 320). She considered what level the child would need to have attained in the different lines for the child to be able to make use of the opportunities that nursery school provides, rather than to experience them as demands beyond his or her current capacity.

Her non-linear model of child development also has strong and important similarities with Elias's conception of the 'curve of civilisation' that attempted to capture movement, direction and pace. According to Algazi (2008), Elias intended to capture the direction of movement itself in terms of processes, not as a succession of static situations when standards of conduct seem to have become relatively stable. In a key passage, Elias writes:

> It is not very easy to make this movement clearly visible precisely because it takes place so slowly—in very small steps, as it were—and because it also

> shows manifold fluctuations, following smaller and larger curves. It clearly does not suffice to consider in isolation each single stage to which this or that statement on customs and manners bears witness. We must attempt to see movement itself, or at least a large segment of it, as a whole, as if speeded up. Images must be placed next to each other in a series to give an overall view, from one particular aspect, of the process: the gradual transformation of behaviour and the emotions. (Elias, 2012a, p. 90)

Donald Winnicott and Processes of Civilisation

I now want to turn to Donald Winnicott to explore the relational processes that underpin the self-steering development of children in civilisation. In his explanation of human development, Winnicott tried to explain what makes possible the healthy development of a child through growing levels of independence and the way in which the early environment makes this possible:

> In health then children develop enough belief in themselves and in other people to hate external controls of all kinds; controls have changed over into self-control. In self-control the conflict has been worked through within the person in advance. So I see it this way: good conditions in the early stages lead to a sense of security, and a sense of security leads on to self-control, and when self-control is a fact, then security that is imposed is an insult. (Winnicott, 2016, p. 96)

This capacity for developing forms of self-restraint is central to Elias's argument in *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a): increasing social constraint towards self-constraint leads to more demanding standards of self-control, with the behaviour of individual people regulated 'in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner' (Elias, 2012a, p. 406). In *On the Process of Civilisation*, Elias (2012a, p. 570) observes that it should be clear to anyone familiar with psychoanalytic writing 'how much this study owes to the discoveries of Freud and the psychoanalytical school'. Although Elias's vision was a challenge to Freud, his aim was not to place society or groups as alternatives to the human individual but to study individuality more deeply. He wanted to show how individuality is a process embedded in society with a specific history and therefore every young child in society is 'thoroughly individualized and socialized at the same time' (quoted in Brown 1997). Kilminster (2007) argues that Elias profoundly sociologises Freud by providing a

multi-levelled model of the embodied human personality that derives its specific character from the complex self-steering activities of people.

In their influential text, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) argued that in different psychoanalytic theories the 'psyche' is formed by interpersonal relationships, not biological drives. One of the foremost object relations psychoanalysts[4] was Winnicott who emphasised that children's development is intimately connected with our early relationships with those who care for us. In his theory of emotional development, Winnicott claimed that 'there is no such thing as a baby … if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone. A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship' (Winnicott, 1987, p. 88). According to Phillips (2007), at the heart of Winnicott's developmental theory was the rapport between the mother and her infant: 'Id-relationships are only meaningful to the infant if they happen in a framework of ego-relatedness' (Winnicott, 1956). Winnicott (2005) argued that relationships precede individuality and are governed by the need to relate: intimate others are inherent to our identities as developing human beings, challenging any strict distinction between 'inside' and 'outside', 'self' and 'other', and 'relatedness' and 'separateness'.

It is therefore key to frame children's individual development as embedded in sociality and relationality. Winnicott rejects the naïve view that the human being can achieve an ideal autonomy and live his or her life in a community of separated independent individuals.[5] He conceives of the maturational process as an inherently precarious one, where the child is dependent on others and can achieve only a relative independence:

> Individual maturity implies a movement towards independence, but there is no such thing as independence. It would be unhealthy for an individual to

[4] One of the other foremost thinkers in the British object relations tradition was John Bowlby (1969). I have written elsewhere about some of the important similarities between Norbert Elias and Bowlby's theory of attachment (see Gabriel, 2011; Gabriel, 2017).

[5] Similarly, Sabina Spielrein (2003) argues that the infant is inherently social and needs to communicate and relate. She poses the question of whether the child makes his language or whether he simply inherits it: 'Does the child himself make his language, or is it simply handed down from adults? In my opinion this question should be formulated differently, thus: is the child by natural inclination a social being who has a need to communicate?' (Spielrein, 2003, p. 291).

> be so withdrawn as to feel independent and invulnerable. If such a person is alive, then there is dependence indeed! (Winnicott, 1986, p. 21)

Since human beings can develop in a healthy manner only initially in the area of dependent relationships, an adequate psychoanalytical explanation of development needs to understand the role and importance of these relationships that occur between children and their environment. Winnicott contends that 'a description of the emotional development of the individual cannot be made entirely in terms of the individual … the behaviour of the environment is part of the individual's own personal development and must therefore be included' (Winnicott, 2005, p. 72). Such relational environments differ according to the extent to which they are suitable for healthy personal development, one that has to be 'good enough' to enable a child to live through different experiences like conflicts without the feeling of an unbearable threat. These 'good enough' relational environments can help to develop the transitional space between relatedness and separateness where the child is able to begin to develop his or her 'true self' (Winnicott, 1965), a self-in-emergence that is trusting in the environment to develop new experiences and encounters with reality.

Winnicott (1965) argues that the capacity to experience oneself on one's own arises from the young child being able to play and explore in his or her mother's presence. In the course of personal development, a 'play area' (Winnicott, 2005) occurs between the child and his or her caregiver who provides the child with the initial feeling of security and trust: 'Confidence in the mother makes an intermediate playground here … I call this a playground because play starts here' (Winnicott, 2005, pp. 63–64). In this space, a child identifies something, a 'transitional' object', which is at the same time 'not me' and 'not mother'. Using that object is important since only by identifying it as non-self can it act as a transitional object that enables the child to relate his or her inner reality to what is outside. Within the play area, the child can easily explore and play out different aspects of the same event without any feeling of threat. Thus, playing is a 'secure' space that facilitates 'the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott, 2005, p. 3).

Through transitional objects and playing, the child learns to accept that the loved one who is the source of the child's security and confidence cannot fully meet and satisfy his or her needs. The mother or carer cannot achieve the infant's 'need for a *perfect* environment' (Winnicott, 1949,

p. 245). There are inevitable disturbances of the infant's 'continuity of being' that elicit defensive activity, the residues of which are inextricable parts of what makes us human (Ogden, 2023). This development leads to neither absolute autonomy nor a harmonious relationality, but a playful capacity for children's self-development. What makes playing exciting is that it brings children to the very edge of their precarious negotiation of the relationship between phantasy and reality, maintaining an engaged distance between themselves and the world. Winnicott's explanation of play as a way of becoming more healthy and independent therefore demonstrates his firm conviction that children's development is a relational process embedded in webs of relationships.

Wilhelm Reich and Character Armour

Although Elias does not explicitly refer to Wilhelm Reich, he used the concept of 'character armour' to explain important aspects of the civilising process. In tracing some of the possible intellectual connections, Kuzmics (2018) mentions that Elias's friend and co-founder of group psychoanalysis, Sigmund Foulkes, participated in a seminar with Reich in Vienna between 1928 and 1930. Foulkes also worked as an assistant to Kurt Goldstein at Frankfurt University between 1926 and 1928, introducing him to Gestalt psychology and the understanding of the nervous system as a network: 'The nervous system, in contrast to neuron theory, is considered as a network'. It cannot be considered 'without reference to the *whole* organism and to the *total* situation' (Foulkes, 1990, p. 43). According to Nitzgen (2010), Foulkes used Goldstein's neurobiological insights within a social-psychological context, acknowledging the sociological influence of Norbert Elias who conceived of the individual as 'a part of a social network, a little nodal point, as it were, in this network', that can 'only artificially be considered in isolation' (Foulkes, 1983, p. 14). Goldstein's 'network of neurons' is connected with the concept of a 'social network' first put forward by Elias (2010) in the *Society of Individuals*, where he developed and synthesised concepts using an innovative network language of interweaving, intermeshing relationships.

Given some of these important hidden historical legacies, Kuzmics (2018, p. 99) is therefore perhaps a little too tentative when he states that we can only 'speculate as to whether and how far Elias built upon Reich's

work' in *On the Process of Civilisation*. I will argue that though Elias never explicitly refers to Reich in this book and in other essays, it forms an important part of the way that he uncovered and explained the different complex layers of civilisation that affect the socialisation of young children. Elias uses the expression 'civilized armour' several times in an essay on 'Spontaneity and Self-consciousness'—for example:

> An unplanned civilising process has left us with an heritage of built-in self-controls, partly conscious, partly automatic, which are deceptively even and strong, which are, compared with those of earlier ages, more deeply and inescapably internalised; it has left us with an unplanned civilised armour containing within its walls the more elementary forces—many powerful impulses of people which, left to themselves, are springs of danger as well as of enjoyment and satisfaction. (Elias, 2018, p. 76)

And in Appendix XI of *On the Process of Civilisation*, he warns that the

> The armour of civilized conduct would crumble very rapidly if, through a change in society, the degree of insecurity that existed earlier were to break in upon us again, and if danger became as incalculable as it once was. Corresponding fears would soon burst the limits set to them today. (Elias, 2012a, p. 576)

Wilhelm Reich's (1897–1957) concept of 'character armour' and 'muscular armour' refers to habitual patterns of muscle tension and constricted breathing which keep strong feelings from conscious attention by blocking awareness and expression. Reich attempted to show that specific psychological processes were functionally identical to specific somatic processes (Sletvold, 2014). In *The Function of the Orgasm*, he explained the somatic aspect of the person in the psychotherapeutic process:

> Character armourings were now seen to be functionally identical with muscular hypertonia. The concept 'functional identity' which I had to introduce means nothing more than muscular attitudes and character attitudes have the same function in the psychic mechanism. They can replace one another and can be influenced by one another. Basically, they cannot be separated. They are identical in their function. (Reich, 1975, p. 243)

By regularly observing the patient's bodily behaviour, Reich noticed that our use of our bodies can become 'frozen' by defensive experiences that are maintained through various rigidities that are linked to unresolved, blocked emotions. Rage, fear, grief and sex are the main inhibited emotions: full expression of one of these strong feelings would activate the whole body. A child's rage at a parent, for example, could be blocked by the threat of punishment that becomes inhibited by clamping down on the muscles and constricted breathing. This clamping in time turns to habitual rigidity that he referred to as 'character armour'. Reich believed that these blocks develop gradually from a series of unresolved conflicts and suppressions that become chronic 'and so we begin to put on our suit of armour' (Mann & Hoffmann, 1980).

Moreover, it is highly significant that in the essay 'Spontaneity and Self-consciousness' Elias uses the term 'vegetative', a concept developed by Reich during the mid- to late 1930s in his physiological investigations:

> In the more developed industrial societies, human beings are trained for a fairly continuous and partly automatic control of changing moods, for suppression or delay of elementary cyclical or rhythmic impulses probably springing from the vegetative or autonomic levels of our nervous system, in favour of more cerebral, aim-directed, and in that sense unilinear activities. The more spontaneous, repetitive rhythmic activities of simpler people often appear to people trained in our manner as unbearably monotonous. Yet they are probably not unrelated to the even more spontaneous, repetitive and rhythmic movements which small children appear to find pleasurable or soothing in all societies, including our own. (Elias, 2018, p. 35)

Reich et al. (1984) have argued that body armouring occurs when the infant's sympathetic nervous system reacts to a lack of contact with his or her mother, a crucial foundation for healthy development and self-regulation. If a mother has poor contact with the infant as a newborn, the baby develops strong impulses for body contact that are unmet and life-sustaining energy is blocked (Wendelstadt, 1998). When the mother or carer is timid or inhibited, she is unable to understand and respond to the infant's emotional communication. The infant experiences anxiety, muscular contraction, lowering of body temperature, difficulty with full exhalation, disturbed sleep and increased mucus secretion that may lead to illness and somatic symptoms over a lifetime.

Elias's Theory of Learning Processes

In this section, I will argue that there has been insufficient attention given to the importance of Elias's explanation of social learning processes, one that underestimates its significance in his overall understanding of children's development. Atkinson (2018) argues that what is especially disappointing about the use of Elias's work in Western sociological circles is the collective under-appreciation of his analysis of the relationship between unlearned and socially learned mechanisms of control. He suggests Elias's work is a life-long attempt to emphasise not only how human beings are controlled, steered or self-regulated by biological factors irreducible to conscious thought, but also how such biological characteristics provide the groundwork for the development of new components of self-regulation. Elias writes:

> Within the framework of the broad unlearned self-control of the human process, there is wide scope for learned and extremely flexible self-control, which is shaped and facilitated by interaction with other human beings, and which is designed by nature for this social integration—because, without it, the organs, tongue, vocal chords or whatever would remain unused. It is not only the case that it can be developed through learning. It is the case that this self-control must be developed through social learning. Human nature, as we say in a rather personifying way, provides certain equipment in the cerebral cortex in which patterns of coordination of all the muscles involved can be integrated by learning. (Elias, 2018, p. 283)

Similarly, van Krieken (2022) seems to agree with König's (1993, p. 206) suggestion that Elias (2012a, pp. 415; 570) occasionally uses behaviourist concepts like 'learning' and 'imprinting' that run counter to the Freudian understanding of drives. According to van Krieken, this is also aligned with Elias's frequent inclination to overlook the continued active presence of drives after they have been socially processed or regulated. However, when we examine more carefully the overall context of Elias's discussion of learning, we notice that he is not arguing for an 'over-socialised' conception of human beings, but rather a continual process between controlling agencies and drives during early childhood:

> However, there is no end to the intertwining, for although the self-steering of a person, malleable during early childhood, solidifies and hardens as he or she grows up, it never ceases entirely to be affected by his or her *changing*

> relations with others throughout his or her life. The learning of self-controls, call them 'reason' or 'conscience', 'ego' or 'superego', and the consequent curbing of more animalic impulses and affects—in short the civilising of the human young—is never a process without pain; it always leaves scars. (Elias, 2012a, pp. 415–416, my italics)

Let us return to the concept of 'imprinting' that is often associated with Lorenz's theory (1957) about graylag geese where strong bonds to an individual mother can develop without any reference to food. Imprinting is a rapid form of learning in which familiarity with the specific characteristics of the mother hen is learned in a few hours after hatching by the baby chick. This early experience of following the mother enables young geese to bond by learning the specific visual characteristics of the mother. However, Elias was very well aware of the dangers of adopting an oversimplified behaviourist approach, criticising Lorenz for forgetting 'the simple distinction between human modes of behaviour that are largely learned, and the modes of behaviour of non-human organisms, which are to a large extent automatic and not learned' (Elias, 2012b, p. 217). This occurs in the context of Elias's discussion of the distinctive constitution of human beings that makes learning processes essential for the survival of the human infant. Significantly, within this discussion, he makes it clear that '"Behaviour" means adjustment to changing situations' (Elias, 2012b, p. 104).

For Norbert Elias (2009), it was crucial for sociologists to determine the relation between nature, culture and society and the unique characteristics that distinguish human beings from other animal species. He made an important conceptual distinction between the term 'evolution', which refers to biological processes that are genetic and largely irreversible, and social 'development', processes which are malleable and potentially subject to change. In the evolutionary process, the biological propensity for learning is one of the main differences between animal and human societies, providing a framework for social development to take place without any biological changes. To identify the universal features of social life that make society possible, the adaptation of a distinctive biological organisation of human beings for learning needs to be explained. In terms of social-evolutionary development, the distinguishing, evolutionary breakthrough for human beings was that learned ways of steering behaviour became dominant in relation to unlearned forms.

Elias (2011) argued that the capacity of young human beings to steer their conduct by means of learned knowledge gave them a great evolutionary advantage over other species that were unable to accomplish this at all or only to a very limited extent. He refers to this important process as humankind's 'symbol emancipation'. For example, in the development of language, a young child develops into a human being and is integrated into a particular society by learning to produce words and sentences that are understood by others. For Elias (2009, p. 147), there are 'natural human structures which remain dispositions and cannot fully function unless they are stimulated by a person's "love and learning" relationship with other persons'. This important relational concept of love and learning aptly summarises a great deal of previous psychological research on young children's development, bringing together specialised areas within psychology (particularly the separation between cognitive, social and developmental psychology).

According to Elias (2012a), one of the indispensable keys to the problems posed by the steering of human conduct is that the child never learns to control his or her behaviour without the fears instilled by grown-ups consciously or unconsciously. The malleable personality of the child is so fashioned by parental fears that it learns to act automatically in accord with the prevailing standard of behaviour by blindly instilled anxieties. Elias (2012a) argues that these fears add fuel to the 'fiery circle of inner anxieties' which hold the behaviour and feelings of the growing child permanently within definite limits, binding him or her to a certain standard of shame and embarrassment, for example, to a specific accent, to particular manners, whether he or she wishes it or not. Some of these parental anxieties may sometimes bring about what they are supposed to prevent by making the child incapable of, for example, succeeding in the struggle for attaining social prestige: the tensions of their society are projected by parental gestures, prohibitions and fears on to the child.

An integral aspect of the civilising process is that young children should eventually grow up through their own self-regulation. Elias mentions a unique human capacity 'for controlling and modifying drives and affects in a great variety of ways as part of a learning process' (Elias, 2007, p. 125). He argues that though there is a great deal of psychological and physiological literature on learning there is very little on the structuring of the habitus through learning (Elias & Dunning, 2008). What remains unexplored is the establishment of controlling impulses that interpose themselves between the recurrent upsurge of drives from lower biological levels

and skeletal apparatus towards which they are directed. For small children, feeling and acting, moving one's skeletal muscles, one's arms and legs and one's whole body are not yet divorced. It only later appears in adults as 'emotions' when they gradually learn to do what small children are never able to do, not to move their muscles, not to act in accordance with their emotional impulses. However, this process is largely forgotten as adults, where a high level of civilising restraint forms part of their social habitus. This restraint appears to grown-ups as 'automatic', a part of their 'second nature' that is treated as something with which they were born.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that sociologists of childhood need to move beyond the dominant social constructionist approach that continues to place such a great deal of emphasis on children's active construction of their own worlds. For too long they have marginalised and ignored any potential contribution that key thinkers within psychoanalysis can make to processes of socialisation that affect children in unconscious, affect-laden and non-linguistic ways from birth (Chodorow, 2014). I have suggested that some of the key psychoanalytic concepts of childhood used by Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott and Wilhelm Reich can help to explain the complex, dynamic and ambivalent aspects of child development, focusing on the way that Elias adapted and integrated some of these concepts within his work.

I began by discussing the importance of Anna Freud's book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936) for Elias's development of *On the Process of Civilisation*, emphasising the important relation between 'external' and 'internal' factors in the development and self-regulation of children. In 'Social Constraint Towards Self-Constraint', Elias draws attention to the painfulness of civilising the human young, using words like 'wounds', 'scars' and 'pain'. He was well aware of the complexities of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' patterns of conduct in each individual civilising process as 'the personally gratifying and frustrating tendencies mingle in them in varying proportions' (Elias, 2012a, pp. 416–417). In a similar way, Anna Freud's non-linear model of developmental lines provides a detailed explanation of the variation and patterns in child development, avoiding an exclusive focus on one aspect of development to the neglect of others. She synthesised observational data with the reconstruction of childhood events to produce a more suitable explanation of child

development, one that was used by both analysts and other workers involved in the care of young children.

I then turned to Donald Winnicott to explore the relational processes that underpin the self-steering conduct of children or the development of more mature interdependence (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 223) in processes of civilisation. For Winnicott, the process of child development is one that moves from dependence to independence, focusing on the ways in which needs change as degrees of independence are met. Although he emphasises this ongoing relational dynamic between 'dependence and 'independence', he also insists on the significance of social environments of care in shaping early relationships. A child who experiences 'good enough' care is always related to the environment in an interdependent way. A 'good enough' environment (initially a mother or carer) will ensure that the baby can develop as he or she transitions from the womb to the world, from merger towards gradual and relative independence.

As part of the civilising process, I argued that Elias uses Wilhelm Reich's concept of character armour to uncover the many layers of highly self-controlled behaviour that stem from our upbringing as children. According to Lowen (1976), armouring refers to the patterns of chronic muscular tensions in the body that serve to protect an individual against painful and threatening emotional experiences. They shield a person from dangerous impulses within his or her own personality as well as attack from others. Kilminster (2007) argues that Elias is trying to recover something lost, unconscious, hidden, known but not reflected upon in the process of civilisation: adults have internalised an array of psychological defences to protect their own deepest feelings and fundamental beliefs on what is or is not civilised behaviour. In a letter to his son, Ted Hughes (2007, p. 513) beautifully captures the armoured layers of civilisation and the way we try to cope with situations that can overwhelm our 'inner' childhood:

> So everybody develops a whole armour of secondary self, the artificially constructed being that deals with the outer world, and the crush of circumstances. And when we meet people this is what we usually meet …
>
> But when you develop a strong divining sense for the child behind that armour, and you make your dealings and negotiations only with that child, you find that everybody becomes, in a way, like your own child. … But since that artificial secondary self took over the control of life around the age of eight, and relegated the real, vulnerable, supersensitive, suffering self back into its nursery, it has lacked training, this inner prisoner.

I then contended that underlying all these interwoven and hidden layers of each individual child's 'civilising' armour or learnt habitus is Norbert Elias's underestimated and innovative understanding and explanation of social learning processes. These processes are 'automatic and self-steering' but include levels and layers that are less automatic—'layers of self-control grounded not in a pre-determined biological mechanism, but in the absorption of knowledge through learning' (Elias, 2018, p. 282). According to Elias (2009), all young children need to experience 'love and learning' relationships: in every society, children are distinguished from adults in order to ensure the survival of and care for biologically immature human beings. These relationships are vital for understanding the ways in which young children grow up to become members of their different communities.

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CHAPTER 3

Early Childhood Education in Brazil: Interdependent Relationships Between Young children and Adults

Magda Sarat, Eliana Maria Ferreira, and Claudemir Dantes

Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on public institutions in Early Childhood Education in Brazil, day care centres and preschools that serve children between six months and five years old. We apply the figurational theory of Norbert Elias, specifically the relational concepts of figuration, interdependence and power (Elias, 2008, 2009) to understand the relationships between different social figurations embedded in early year's institutions,

M. Sarat (✉)
Faculty of Education, Federal University of Grande Dourados, Dourados, Brazil

E. M. Ferreira
State University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil

C. Dantes
Municipal Education Network of Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil

N. Gabriel (ed.), *International Comparisons in Learning and Education*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias,
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and the ways in which adults and children relate to their educational environments (Ferreira, 2012, 2019; Silva, 2015, 2021). Our research was developed in the city of Dourados in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, the Center-West region of Brazil that has approximately 220 thousand inhabitants with 43 educational institutions called CEIMs (Municipal Child Education Centers), day care centres that serve the population of children and families from lower social classes in the city. We draw upon our empirical research to argue that the balance of power has tilted towards the educational institutions in Early Childhood in Brazil that have the legitimacy of determining the rules, routines and practices over children and their parents.

In day care centres and preschools, the policies of care and education are regulated by Brazilian educational laws, enacted by teachers with degrees in pedagogy who are hired through simplified selection processes or through public contest in order to become part of the permanent staff of professionals. The education of children under five years old is regulated by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education. Article 29 states that 'Childhood Education, the first stage of basic education, has as its purpose the integral development of children up to five years of age, in their physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community'. This article provides us with an important opportunity to reflect upon our understanding of childhood and the extent to which young children can be supported as active people who think, experiment and develop their own knowledge and culture (Brasil., 2009).

We use the work of Elias to understand the changing dynamics of relations between teachers, parents and young children, arguing that they connect to each other in mutual interdependencies of different figurations. According to Elias's theory of figurations, we can understand and explain networks of relationships between people who 'constitute webs of interdependencies or configurations of many types, such as the family, schools, cities, social strata or states' (Elias, 2008: 15). These figurations produce unstable power relations that are dependent on actions, circumstances, beliefs and convictions, where 'the coercive power is greater on one side than the other' (Elias, 2008: 85). We explore the changing balance of power of certain groups that make up early years institutions, discussing the professionals, teachers and managers who organize the day care centre and the environment in which the child stays during the period when he or she is away from the family.

Early Childhood Education in Brazil

In Brazil, during the last decades of the twentieth century and in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, debates about the education of young children and their forms of participation have increased. The development of a field of research in Early Childhood Education is constituted as a place for specific social groups seeking to legitimize their social and legal existence. To understand this changing contemporary context, we locate the space of Early Childhood Education for Brazilian children within legal rights supported by state documents. Among these, we highlight the Federal Constitution (CF) of 1988, which guarantees institutionalized education for all children from birth to five years in day care centres and preschool children from four to five years as a citizen's right that includes day care at the municipal level (Brasil., 1988). The Document states: 'The State's duty to education will be carried out by guaranteeing […] attendance in day care centers and preschool for children from zero to six years of age', which was changed in a constitutional amendment in 2006 to 'child education, in day care and preschool, for children up to 5 years old'.

Early childhood education therefore currently serves children from birth to five years old and is the responsibility of the municipalities in education departments. Before the implementation of education legislation in 1996, Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, 1996], this level of education was administered by social assistance. However, Article 18 in this legislation changed its administration – Item I states: 'Municipal education systems comprise: I – elementary, secondary and early childhood education institutions maintained by the municipal government' – day care and preschools now started to be coordinated, supervised and guided by the Municipal Education Departments. Moreover, this law further supports the right to Early Childhood Education in Article 29, encouraging practitioners to reflect on the concept of integrality, where an understanding of the holistic aspects of young children is important. This document moves towards a particular concept of childhood that is associated with the opinions and expressions of children, the construction and enhancement of their identity and their autonomy as individuals who constitute and form an integral part of society.

Another important mandatory document that we wish to emphasize is the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education

(DCNEI, 2009). The main goal of the DCNEI is to guide public policies in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of pedagogical and curricular activities for early childhood education. The document outlines the basic parameters and key ECE learning experiences to be included in the development of pedagogical plans by ECE institutions, including teaching strategies, organization of physical space and a general calendar (Raikes et al., 2023). It represents a great advance for Early Childhood Education, constructing a particular conception of the child in Article 4:

> A historical and rights person who, in the interactions, relationships and daily practices he experiences, builds his personal and collective identity, plays, imagines, fantasises, desires, learns, observes, experiences, narrates, questions and creates meanings about nature and society, producing culture. (DCNEI, 2009: 1)

Therefore, the child as a historical person has rights to a particular form of childhood, a specific period where he or she can develop socially, historically and culturally. By participating in this process, the child is constituted in the relationship with others as a person and citizen. This document emphasizes the importance of the legal apparatus for Early Childhood Education institutions since the Federal Constitution of 1988, which changed the way of understanding children and their childhoods. However, there are still deep-rooted misconceptions that are influenced by changing conceptions of childhood, marked by perceptions that still see children's education only as a care activity associated with health-related issues such as hygiene and nutrition. For example, in the professional qualifications of people who work with children in different parts of the country, there are still two main types of professionals, one with higher education training and another without training, or only with secondary education. These people care for the same child but with different conceptions of childhood. While those with less teaching training are more concerned with activities linked to meeting basic needs such as food, sleep, protection and care, professionals with higher education qualifications perceive children's holistic development as the centre of a pedagogical process. These changing perceptions about children's care are intimately connected with important concerns about young children's well-being and have led to the large-scale investment in child welfare by European states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Hendrick, 2003).

Such concerns are also related to key debates about the changing historical constructions of childhood (see, for example, Gabriel, 2010) and rights of children to live in the present with a high standard of education (Silva, 2015; Ferreira, 2019).

Research in Early Childhood Education: Methodological Considerations

In a series of different investigations on early childhood education institutions, part of a teacher training project developed at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Grande Dourados, Ferreira (2012) carried out research with 14 children aged between 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 4 months in a Municipal Child Education Centre. She chose a room where the children in this space were cared for and educated by three adults, a teacher with a degree in pedagogy, an educational assistant with a secondary education, and a woman who, at that time, was studying for a degree in mathematics. In this research, she addressed the way in which the Education Centre was organized to serve children and their families, and how people, including the researcher, act and interpret social situations (May, 2004). As Elias (2008:13) comments:

> the one who studies and thinks about society is himself one of its members. … Society, which is often placed in opposition to the person, is entirely formed by people, being ourselves a being among others.

To develop this research, she remained at the institution for a period of seven months, visiting two to three times a week, both in the morning and in the afternoon. During this period of observation and participation, she used films, photography and videos, recording notes in a field diary to explore the situations experienced by young children, teachers and pedagogical assistants. These notes recorded the nature of the relationships and the order and context in which events took place and her reflections on observed events. By attending the institution in two shifts, it was possible for her to participate and observe a wide range of children's experiences: in the living room, in the park, on the patio, during the bath, at meals, and at the entrance and exit of the institution. In addition to arrival times, she conducted research at adaptation periods (at the beginning of the school year) and even during the teachers' vacation period when some of the children remained at the institution. In a second research project, Ferreira

(2019) investigated the children of a Nursery Class 1, aged two years and two months to three years and eleven months, at another Municipal Centre for Childhood Education where there were twelve children, two pedagogue teachers and two teachers in the process of initial training. This field investigation lasted for three months and sought to understand the experiences of children and teachers within the dynamics of pedagogical work. She used unstructured interviews with teachers as it enabled her to prepare questions or a list of topics to clarify what she had already observed.

In another empirical investigation conducted with fathers, mothers, grandparents, teachers and administrators, Silva (2015) explored the changing interdependent relationships between families and schools. Family interviews were organized in two stages: first, visits were made to the families with prescheduled meetings in which groups answered a questionnaire about their perceptions about the institution and the relationships established between families and day care. This initial document allowed her to make a socioeconomic profile of the families as well as gather information about the Early Childhood Education Centre and their way of working with the community, based on the ways in which they perceived the institution. All families were invited to participate in the research, with 19 responding to the questionnaire.

In the second stage, researcher Claudemir Dantes, pedagogical and administrative coordinator of the Vittório Fedrizzi Municipal Children's Education Center in Dourados, conducted semi-structured interviews with this group of families who had answered the initial questionnaire. From nineteen families, eight families participated as well as six teachers and two coordinators from day care centres. Our objective was to raise issues related to the participation of families in these centres and the ways in which institutions favoured such participation and sought ways to bring closer relations between families, teachers and coordinators. Although the questions were pre-set, during the interviews other questions emerged that allowed for a deeper exploration of the relationship of interdependence between families and teachers. All interviews were carried out in a private room at the institution, with families choosing the time and place that would be most appropriate.

Documents produced in the institution such as internal regulations, pedagogical projects and minutes relating to parental meetings were also analysed. We did not have access to minutes that were specific for parental meetings, so we searched in the Minutes Books together with others that recorded the entire legislative routine of the institution. These books

contained different themes, for example, the institutional assessment of day care centres, and when reading it, we found there was little information related to our specific research theme on actions that showed the participation of the family. Other minutes revolved around events promoted by the institutional issues related to guidelines on institutional rules, such as entry and exit times, explanations about the importance of sending additional pieces of clothing because the activities in kindergarten often involve paints, earth, water where the children get dirty and need to be bathed and changed.

According to Corsaro (2009), one of the important advantages of ethnographic research with children is its ability to capture more accurately the context of the behaviour of specific social groups. Our research with young children allowed us to conduct a sociological analysis of the numerous relationships that have been established in educational institutions, to focus on groups with generational differences who are constantly engaged in individual and collective learning processes. Based on qualitative research, we used Norbert Elias's figurational sociology in combination with the contributions of childhood sociology (Sarat, 2008, 2009, 2014a, b, 2023). Such theoretical dialogue made it possible to examine the daily lives of young children and teachers, identifying and recognizing the possibilities of suitable methodological approaches that would contribute to ways of researching spaces for children's learning and educational development. We believe that it is fundamental in research with children to understand the contemporary societies in which they live because, although they form a particular social group, 'we still do not know very well how we can help children adjust to such complex and unchildlike societies as ours, which demand a high measure of foresight and self-control' (Elias, 2012: 470).

Changing Balances of Power Between Families and Day Care Institutions

Young children and adults are interconnected in social relationships, a functional interdependence necessary for the survival of all human groups in societies. What makes human history possible is that the structure of our social life takes place without changes in our biological constitution—historical change is possible because the experiences gathered from one generation need to be transmitted to the next. This intergenerational

learning process between young children and adults passes on the growth of people's stock of knowledge and experiences from one generation to another (Elias, 2007). The concept of generational location (Mayall, 2002) is very helpful here because it turns our attention to the relational processes between adulthood and childhood, how adults use their positions of power to define differences between adults and young children. Childhood is defined as a separate generational space, where young children are set aside from adults. In each generation, adults establish relationships with children that are permeated by relations of power:

> Power is not an amulet that one people possesses and another does not; it is a structural characteristic of human relations—of all human relations […] whether the differences in power are large or small, the balance of power is always present wherever there is a functional interdependence between people. (Elias, 2008: 80)

For parents and young children, the centre of power has oscillated between parties, changing the configuration of the authority of some over others, as well as in the relationships that children establish with other adults. In clashes between family and the day care institution, we observed that the power-ratio between adults, young children and families finds many spaces of convergence, but also of divergence. Young children are at the mercy of a 'floating and elastic balance, a balance of power, which moves back and forth, leaning first to one side and then to the other. This type of fluctuating equilibrium is a structural characteristic of the flow of each configuration' (Elias, 2008: 143). By using Elias's (2008) concept of the 'balance of power', we can begin to understand the tensions in this particular institution: we have professionals and families who are both concerned with the education and development of the child but have different perceptions of education and care. The interviews we conducted with families exposed these conflicting relationships and the ways in which the institution was organized.

One of our important findings was that the 'balance of power' has tilted more towards these institutions, as they can manage care according to their own resources and interests. This supported our hypothesis that, to a large extent, the figurations, represented by educational institutions, 'in different historical moments operated in a civilizing perspective and, as they were immersed in certain social figurations, they intended to guarantee training and maintenance of social habits that determine those

figurations' (Silva, 2021: 21). In other words, institutions occupy a place of privileged power because they routinely have the legitimacy of making rules and norms without consulting family groups or young children, procedurally guaranteeing and consolidating practices with those people who make up day care. This leads to the subordination of parents in families to rules and standards they did not create, but which they need to accept when they leave their sons and daughters in these institutions:

> The interdependent relationships between CEIMs (Municipal Child Education Centers) and the family, or rather, between the people who make up these institutions and who are involved in the daily relationship of care and education of children, are configured in a tense and sometimes contradictory way. Characterized by ambiguities, meetings and mismatches that reveals how complex is the discussion surrounding this theme. By saying there is ambiguity in these relationships, we refer to the fact that our research led us to the perception that relationships are sometimes marked by complicity, sometimes by conflict. (Silva, 2015: 77)

In this sense, it is necessary to seek a balance that meets all the requirements of both groups, families and the day care institution, considering that both sides have interests for the same child. For example, when interviewing the day care coordinator and a person from the family responsible for the child, we asked about the issue of the time dedicated to the participation of the family in the monitoring of activities related to the child's education. We obtained the following answers:

> when you talk about participating, or that they say they don't have time, they're in a hurry, so there's never time for that. (Fatima, Coordinator, 2014)

> I think it's really lack of time. I think like me, there are many others. Sometimes people demand a lot from their parents, if we could, we would be just with the children. (Nair, Grandmother 2014)

The mismatches, ambiguities and small conflicts occur in these spaces of power that both sides need to steer in favour of the child. These two fragments from the interviews highlight that this conflict guides daily behaviour on a regular basis. Most of the time, adults attempt to control their time and forget that they should listen to children and let them participate directly in the decisions that affect processes of learning in their education. In the historical development of childhood, young children now have

more opportunities for decision-making processes: they can influence the relationships they establish with other generational groups—parents, families, early years' professionals and teachers in day care centres and preschools.

The Education of Young Children in Institutional Spaces of Power

The institutional space is where relationships are located between adults and children, teachers and children and children with children. If we consider the concept of figuration as a network of relationships between people, the institution establishes such spaces in a complex way in various directions 'in this network, many insulated wires connect to each other. However, neither the totality of the network nor the form assumed by each of its wires can be understood in terms of a single wire, or even all of them, considered in isolation' (Elias, 1994: 35). Human relations are therefore constituted by means of interdependent networks or figurations of many kinds, such as the family, schools, cities, social strata, or states.

In the day care centres, this social organization has administrative, pedagogical, social and cultural aspects that need to be handled daily by different groups that ultimately 'steer' everyone to the same common interests and goal, the care of young children. From our research we observed that these interests are constituted in harmonious, hostile and tense ways, developing through a fluid mobility that groups of adults and children form within institutions in Early Childhood Education that have been constituted over a long historical period. Although it is possible to move through different social figurations, when we refer to the institution of Early Childhood Education, the way in which it is organized ends up being, more or less, practised and accepted by everyone and, in an important way, structures and influences the relations that occur within these spaces (Silva, 2021). Therefore, the interdependent relationships between children and adults in the Child Education Center are formed from different figurations in which everyone is immersed. These figurations, formed in interrelationships, are continuously transformed because 'singular human beings transform themselves. The figurations they form with each other are also transformed' (Elias, 1994: 26). Adults and young children are in constant relationships with one another in the daily life of pedagogical practices.

In the research carried out by Ferreira (2012) inside a public day care centre with children aged between three and four years old, she observed that there still exist important limitations when it comes to the teacher allowing spaces of power for children to express themselves more freely. According to Ferreira (2012),

> I realized the existence of previously systematized situations that prevented children revealing their experiences, talking about what they think in the conversation circle or exposing their curiosities, their fears, expanding their imagination.

In pedagogical practice, it was vital for the teacher to be the 'oldest and most powerful' person, the adult responsible for pedagogical practice. In these spaces of changing relational power, everyone is subject to and dependent on a shared institutional habitus, the beliefs, actions, and of all the people who form the figuration, the 'people or groups that perform reciprocal functions exercise mutual coercion. Its potential is generally uneven, which means that the coercive power is greater on one side than on the other' (Elias, 2008: 85). Therefore, in the Early Childhood Education institution, the teacher is able to exercise more power than the children by not recognizing the value of their achievements or denying their participation in the pedagogic process.

We also observed in educational practices the restrictions on young children made by teachers who expressed, 'evident disrespect for children regarding their participation in moments when adults, for example, use television indefinitely, providing empty situations, limiting their autonomy, their gestures, their speeches and their interactions' (Ferreira, 2012: 144). The teacher demonstrates here 'empty' pedagogical practices without any meaning or purpose: leaving the children in front of the television, she exercised a greater degree of power. Elias (2008) explains how one with a greater degree of power can direct the other's activities:

> who has greater potential to retain what the other needs? Who, as a consequence, is more or less dependent on the other? Who, therefore, has to submit or adapt more to the demands of the other? […] who has a higher proportion of power and can, therefore, direct the other group's activities more than their own, can exert more pressure on them than be pressured? (Elias, 2008: 85–86)

However, it is important to note that the degree of interdependence between adults and children is never fixed or static, it can sometimes move from one group to another, that is, some children can on occasions subvert order and do not accept to obey peacefully—they question, discuss, react, propose, and try to circumvent the teacher's imposed rules. A good illustration of the challenge to these rules is children's humour. Despite a considerable volume of psychological-based research investigating the pedagogical prominence of young children's humour (see, for example, Raskin, 2009), it has not enjoyed the attention it warrants within educational research. Of the wide range of studies of humour in education over the last four decades, few have explored humour within early childhood education, focusing instead on school-aged children (Banas et al., 2011).

An important explanation for practitioners not 'seeing' or valuing the pedagogic aspects of humorous play is because it enables young children to explore the power boundaries that lie beyond the gaze of adults. Young children exercise an element of control over their underground world by finding opportunities to engage in humour that explores forbidden territory. Gabriel (2010, 2016), for example, has argued that Elias's theory of established-outsider relations can be used to explain how young children can undermine the authoritative discourses of teachers in preschool classrooms. He discusses the playful mockery that young children display within their peer-groups to challenge teaching authority, arguing that many of the humorous events produced by young children should be viewed as an attempt to challenge their teachers' expectations.

Early childhood education can therefore be understood as a space in which figurations between adults and young children with unequal power gradients can be articulated around specific rituals of civility, marked by pedagogic practices where everyone has a particular interest. To conduct educational research, researchers need to focus on groups of educational practitioners and children's different positions and relations with one another in fields of power. This approach emphasizes the *social interdependence* between young children and adults (teachers and carers), focusing attention on the changing power balances that characterize these relationships. In Brazil, this part of the educational system is the result of a long-lasting movement and struggle for children to be part of and be considered as producers of history, knowledge and culture in preschools, at schools and in all places where children's cultures are present. Young children should be seen as producers of culture where they experience everyday activities in social life in small groups.

In his theory of interpretive reproduction, Corsaro (2005, 2011) has argued that children's participation is a process where culturally mediated knowledge is activated as every new generation strives to understand its own meaning in relation to its specific circumstances. Children are part of cultural production and change as they appropriate information from the adult world and use it in a creative and interpretive way. When groups of young children are the focus, their participation in a peer culture contributes to their construction of shared social knowledge about being together. Corsaro's theory is therefore important for overcoming the individualistic bias of traditional theories by emphasising the importance of collective action and social structure. His emphasis on the collective aspect of children's peer culture can be related to Elias's argument that children are an integral part of families, formed in mutual relationships:

> We talk about people and their environment, the child and the family, the person and society or the person and the object, without being clearly aware that people are part of their environment, their family, their society. Looking more closely at what we call the child's "environment", we see that it consists primarily of other human beings, father, mother, brothers and sisters. What we conceptualize as the "family" would not be a family at all if there were no children. Society, often placed in opposition to the person, is entirely formed by people, being ourselves a being among others. (Elias, 2008: 13)

In the production of daily life, adults need to understand the participation of children in all stages of their learning process and development. This move towards greater child participation is part of a historical trajectory that inserted young people and their education into the demands of adult society. Although in previous centuries there were always children, the concept of childhood as a generational category, separate from adulthood, was formed from the seventeenth century onwards (see Aries, 1981). Notions of children's special nature and needs called for special attention to their emotional development in the home and for formal education in the school aimed at preparing children for the transition to an adult world. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the figurations composed by adults and children in generational and intergenerational terms as 'part of a process of the constitution of individual and collective conduct and behaviors that can be learned' (Sarat, 2014a, b). In the complex relationships young children established with each other in the day care centre, it

was possible to observe how power is negotiated between them and their peers:

> I noticed that they build their relationships based on experience, sometimes conflicting, highlighting the opposition of interests and disputes, sometimes peacefully, approaching each other, as a form of balance or need. (Ferreira, 2012: 142)

Vuorisalo (2011) also argues that contemporary day care should be considered as a relational space in which children carve out positions for themselves in relation to their peers. She analysed the primary habitus of 5–7-year-old children during their interactions in a day care centre and preschool in a small Finnish town, where each child participates in a network of relationships, struggling for recognition in a rapidly changing field. Within these relational networks, young children utilize a range of resources, transforming them into valued capital that makes a difference to their relationships. A distinctive aspect of the preschool field is that the evaluation of resources are more arbitrary among young children than adults where 'changes may be quick and values often instable' (Vuorisalo, 2011: 43). They use a great deal of energy and attention to become aware of the currency of various resources in a given field and orient themselves to maximum exchange.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have emphasized the changing structural relations in early childhood education in a particular region of Brazil. As a generational category, we have argued that childhood is part of a continuous and unplanned process, advances and setbacks, achievements and failures, 'relationships that intertwine in a friendly or hostile way' (Elias, 1993: 194). In his explanation of civilized behaviour in complex societies, Elias asks 'How can we help children to adjust to societies as complex and not childish as ours, which demand a high measure of foresight and self-control?' (Elias, 2012: 469). For survival, children are dependent on the accumulated stocks of knowledge they learn from older generations of adults. According to Elias (2009), young children need to experience 'love and learning' relationships to ensure their survival. It is therefore vital to develop a suitable form of early years education for the first years of life. The Brazilian Constitution (1988) states in Article 227:

> It is the duty of the family, society and the State to ensure children, teenagers and young people with absolute priority have the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, family and community coexistence, in addition to keeping them safe from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Constitutional Amendment Number, 65, 2010)

We have argued that the increasing societal expectations about the fulfilment of children's rights need to be explained through the interweaving of a specific figuration of teachers, young children and parents, tied to each other in dynamic functional interdependencies. Elias (2008) has argued that figurations can be compared to models where there are changing balances of power and functional interdependencies between players. A figuration can be understood as 'the result of interdependent processes, it cannot be understood as something in itself, which exists before and independent of interrelations' (Sobrinho, 2009: 14). Even though we highlighted the relational concepts of power and interdependence in relationships between adults and young children in early years institutions, the balance of power was tilted in favour of the formal education of day care centres over families. To address this uneven balance of power, young children should be able to participate in their education, shaping their processes of learning:

> dialectically, the child also actively participates in the elaboration of the *modus vivendi* of each place: he or she is therefore able to tie some stitches and cross some lines in the embroidery of a canvas whose design he or she does not have previously in his or her head and whose final format is not presupposed in each of his or her acts. Social structures modify childhood and the child remakes himself or herself with his or her peers in each process of re-accommodating forces. (de Freitas, 2007: 89)

There are a series of reciprocal actions that can change the course of social processes that are continually being structured and re-structured in the learning experiences of young children, leading to the possibility of a new 'structuring of their daily lives and worlds of life and, especially, in the constitution of social organizations' (Sarmento, 2005: 3). Young children need to have access to a range of educational opportunities that can enable them to be actively involved in their own learning. Whenever possible, they should be encouraged to participate, not just passively watch their educational futures being shaped and organized by adults.

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CHAPTER 4

Bringing Norbert Elias to School: Education and the Civilising Process

Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv

Introduction

Although Norbert Elias did not conduct any specific analyses of childrearing and education, childhood and children were important themes in his discussions of the civilising process. He draws some of his main analytical points about changes in human conduct from his exploration of the inculcation of manners presented in etiquette books for young boys, and he describes childhood as the main period for the formation of habitus (Elias, 2012a). While mainly interested in larger unintended processes, he emphasises that the civilising process has led to a growing preoccupation with teaching children how to behave according to established manners. As the standards for acceptable behaviour have gradually extended, the 'civilising of the human young' has become increasingly prolonged and comprehensive and the focus of still more planned interventions (Elias, 2012a: 415–416).

L. Gilliam (✉) • E. Gulløv
Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: lagi@edu.au.dk; evag@edu.au.dk

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According to Elias, the civilising process in Western Europe has thus gradually changed the conceptualisation, treatment and rearing of children. One key aspect is a classificatory distinction between children and adults and an increased distance between generations. In a similar way to the French historian Philippe Ariès (1962), he sees this as a process accelerated by schooling but also by the industrialisation and urbanisation of Western Europe, which through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gradually reduced the former economic function of the child and thus altered the pattern of interdependency within the family figuration (Elias, 2008). Consequently, children were gradually moved from homes and public life into schools and other rearing institutions.

Despite this acknowledgement of the changes brought about by children's schooling and his interest in the impact of the modern state and its increasing monopoly of violence and taxation, Elias did not give much focus to schools, that is, the modern state's main tool for intervention in the civilising of children and citizens. In this chapter, we will explore how, on the one hand, an Eliasian figurational approach can enhance our knowledge of the schooling of children and childhood in contemporary societies, and how, on the other hand, exploring children in schools and the effects of mass education on social relations can give us new insights into the dynamics of civilising processes. Concerning the first point, the role of school and its civilising practices have been studied from a range of different theoretical approaches, mainly describing its reproductive and disciplining functions (see, e.g., Althusser, Bourdieu, Foucault). However, we will argue that the figurational approach offers other important tools to understand the social norms, everyday sociality and social relationships in schools and their complex connections to historical processes and broader society. By seeing schools and school classes as social figurations akin to Elias's court society (Elias, 2006), we can understand the intense social theatre of the classroom, the negotiations of relationships, conduct, status and how this shapes the habitus of children. It also allows us to focus on school children's long chains of interdependence outside school to parents, policy makers and the state, which are dependent on their learning and conduct in schools. Therefore, in schools children are not just moulded by teachers' discipline and inculcation of the right behaviour, but by webs of interdependence within and outside the classroom.

This brings us to our second point where we argue that this shaping of children's habitus in schools plays a key role in processes of civilisation. The state tends to have monopolised not only taxation and violence but also education by defining and controlling its content and institutional

form. Elias argued that the monopolisation of taxation and violence has made certain previous social strifes redundant and bound people in closer integration and interdependence. In line with this, we will argue that also the state's monopolisation of education has altered social life in significant ways. The almost universal compulsory mass education has fundamentally affected not only the relationship within the family but also relations in the labour-market, between the public and private sphere of society, and between parents and the state.

As it gradually gained control over children's time and education the state acquired a central role in the civilising of children and tied parents to socialising institutions and one another, thereby influencing wider norms of civilised behaviour. The fact that the upbringing of children in today's state societies takes place in schools and families closely dependent on these institutions has a standardising effect on codes of conduct (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2014, 2017). Yet it also means that the kind of sociality that children learn in school, their negotiations of social norms and the collective habitus shaped by their experiences in the social figuration of school have a great impact on the norms and conduct prevalent in society.

This chapter will explore this dialectic by focusing on children's interactions, the social dynamics taking place in and around school and the role of schools in the civilising process. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Danish schools, we will illuminate the importance of educational institutions in the transmissions of values over generations. We will also consider the active part children themselves play as they negotiate and react to the expectations they meet and how they come to identify with some of these values, acts and categories of people and distance themselves from others. Understanding these processes by looking at children in a figurational perspective offers an important contribution to the sociological understanding of how social standards of behaviour are not only transmitted from one generation to the next but also transformed, negotiated and re-configured.

A Short Note on the Process of Civilisation

In his long and complex work, *On the Process of Civilisation*, Elias presents a sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of the gradual changes in manners and relations in Western Europe from the Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century. We will not discuss his complex argument in detail, but in order to understand the rest of our chapter it is necessary to present a brief outline of his main understanding of the civilising process, 'the

connections between changes in the structure of society and changes in the structure of people's behaviour and psychological habitus' (Elias, 2012a: 7). Using France and Germany as his empirical cases, he describes a lengthy historical development from the establishment of small and isolated castle communities towards increasingly integrated state societies holding a monopoly over taxation and use of violence. The gradual development and consolidation of the state reflects a long process of change not only in organisational structures but also in the social bonding between members of society. Increasing population density, changing modes of production and division in work functions gradually altered the ways individuals related to one another. The 'chains of interdependency' between individuals became longer and more differentiated over the centuries, integrating more people in more complex networks or, in Elias's terms, 'social figurations'.

This changed the social organisation but also the way people feel, think and behave. Being dependent on other people requires a constant consideration of what is proper and convenient in specific situations and relations, particularly when power-balances are uneven or changing. As the social dependency but also hierarchical links and status-dynamics became more complex, the awareness of other people's acts and motives also increased as did the attention to how one's own behaviour appeared in the eyes of others. Self-reflection and self-constraint became an integral part of people's psychological structure (Elias, 2012a). So what interests Elias is how the ever-changing power dynamics over the centuries formed the conditions of what was possible and acceptable in social interactions and shaped the social habitus of individuals and groups (Loyal & Quilley, 2004). Yet he emphasises that what initially might have been intentional efforts to behave in accordance with the expectations given by specific relations gradually became internalised in habits of interaction; a routinised pattern of manners and self-restraints associated with feelings of shame or disgust when not observed (Elias, 2012a). In this process thresholds for feelings of shame were raised whenever established social norms and cultural taboos were challenged as a result of changes in power dynamics (Elias, 2012a; Engebrigtsen, 2006; Scheff, 2004). In this way Elias systematically links people's innermost feelings to changes in the power-balances between social groupings or what he terms 'psychogenesis' and 'sociogenesis'. Thus, we cannot understand the changes in norms of behaviour or in personality structures without considering the organisation of society. As he writes:

> The denser becomes the web of interdependence in which the individual is enmeshed with the advancing division of functions, the larger the social spaces over which this network extends, and the more they become inte-

> grated into functional or institutional units—so correspondingly the more threatened is the social existence of the individual who gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions, the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects, and the more strongly is each individual constrained from an early age to take account of the effects of his or her own or other people's actions on a whole series of links in the social chain. (Elias, 2012a: 408)

This general theoretical point becomes even more pressing in contemporary state-societies. As Elias emphasises, the changes in the standards of behaviour in what he terms 'the modern age' are inextricably linked to the emergence and consolidation of modern states, which gradually gained power to mediate, judge and punish as well as redistribute resources and sanction norms. Although the nation-state consists of numerous organisational agencies and individuals with various competing interests, it is still perceived as a unified organ that has gained increasing symbolic legitimacy and influence in most of the Western European societies over the last 150 years. This chapter will not explain the complex process of state-formation in Western Europe but it is necessary to underline a few points in this process. Elias stresses how more efficient ways of controlling the means of violence and collection of taxes interweave and facilitate growing urbanisation, the increasing division of labour, the growth of trade and increasing population, all of which strengthen the need to form and enlarge a more effective and calculable administrative structure (Mennell, 2004). These processes enmesh individuals in still more complex webs of interdependencies, which become necessary for the state apparatus to control to ensure internal peace and be able to work effectively. This fact plays an important role when discussing the upbringing of children. The efforts to establish and ensure socially stable societies and consolidate peaceful coexistence have resulted in increased requirements and efforts to assure that citizens, including children, know how to behave. We will now turn to Elias's perspective on children, showing how his theory provides us with insights and tools to explore the role of schools in the civilising process.

Elias's Perspective on Childhood

Although none of his works are dedicated to exploring children or childhood, the processes of socialisation and person-formation in childhood are fundamental issues throughout Elias's entire oeuvre. Already in the foreword to '*On the Process of Civilisation*' (first published in 1939), he

emphasises how the development of the individual is connected with the broader civilising processes of society:

> [E]very human being is exposed from the first moment of life to the influence and the moulding intervention of civilized grown-ups, they must indeed pass through a process of civilisation in order to reach the standard attained by their society in the course of its history. (Elias, 2012a, 5: footnote 2)

Even though he stresses that person-formation is an ongoing process and not restricted to childhood, he regards childhood and youth as a particular important phase in the life-course: 'the web of social relations in which individuals live during their most impressionable phase, that is during childhood and youth, which imprints itself upon their unfolding personality' (Elias, 2012a: 415). Their complete dependency on close-by adults makes children particularly affected by the norms and requirements of social life. He uses the concept of 'habitus' to explain the dispositions, sentiments, attitudes and preferences that individuals develop through consistent patterns of childhood socialisation. Gradually what is learned through social interaction becomes 'second nature', incorporated in the individual's embodied schemes of perception (Elias, 2012a; Wouters, 2011). Such unacknowledged preferences and dispositions will often be shared with other members of the social figuration, a fact that explains the persistency and emotionality of early established understanding. Thus, it is through the upbringing of children that values and norms are passed on from one generation to the next, at once explaining continuity and gradual change. Therefore, the processes of socialisation are at the heart of the social sciences and that is why Elias himself devoted so much of his early work to the study of manuals on teaching young people the relevant codes of conduct. In extension of this, it is in the analysis of the ever-changing webs of interdependencies and power-balances between social strata, groups and generations that we come to understand the specific demands and efforts in upbringing that leaves its mark on children at a given historical time.

The Functional Democratisation of the Parent-Child Relationship

An important point made by Elias when looking at the changing conceptualisations of children in Western Europe is the growing preoccupation with teaching children how to behave properly. The longer and increasingly more complicated webs of social interdependencies that develop

over the centuries in these societies entail still more social competition and thereby greater worry for the loss of privilege, prestige and status, particularly in middle and upper strata. This again fuels a

> continuous concern of parents whether their child will attain the standard of conduct of their own or even a higher stratum, whether it will maintain or increase the prestige of the family, whether it will hold its own in the competition within their own stratum. … Fears of this kind play a considerable part in the control to which the child is subject from the beginning, in the prohibitions placed on him or her. (…) The hereditary character of monopolised chances and of social prestige finds direct expression in the parents' attitude to their child; and so the child is made to feel the dangers threatening these chances and this prestige, to feel the entire tensions of his or her society, even before he or she knows anything about them. (Elias, 2012a: 487–488)

In short, as social ties become more and more intertwined social attention and self-inspection also increase, affecting children who are seen as bearers of their family's social status and therefore in need of control and education. This increased interest in the child and perceived need of control is also related to a rising classificatory division between children and adults. In a similar way to the French historian Phillip Ariès (1962) and American psychoanalyst Lloyd de Mause (1974), Elias discusses the fundamental changes in children's way of participating in adult life, though in contrast to them he sees this as testimony to the longer-term changes in human relations he identifies in Western European societies. Where children in medieval society participated extensively in adult life outside as well as at home, the generations gradually separated spatially, practically and conceptually during the following centuries. 'Slowly during the early modern period, children were removed from the adult world and their lives isolated on their own island of youth within society' (Elias, 2008: 24).

With variations between Western European countries, this process became particularly evident during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and democratisation gradually altered the pattern of interdependency between social strata as well as within family figurations (Elias, 2008). It is worth noting, however, that this development did not mean that children and parents became less interdependent, but schooling and the decreased economic function of the child fundamentally altered the nature of this relationship. 'Today', Elias writes, 'the family has lost to other institutions, especially the state, many functions that helped determine its character and

especially its authority structure. All the stronger, then, appear those functions left to it today, above all the affective and emotional functions for each other of the people who compose families for each other' (Elias, 2008: 37).

Moreover, the growing perception that adults and children are different raised a new consciousness about children's needs and vulnerabilities. The child gradually became seen as relatively autonomous (Elias, 2008), altering the view on the means of upbringing from one of unconditional authority to a 'child-sensitive' form dependent on knowledge and systematic reflections on methods of upbringing. This changed the power-ratio in families leading to a more egalitarian and informal relationship between parents and children or what Elias terms a 'functional democratisation' of the relationship (Elias, 2008). Despite this interest in the some of the causes and consequences of the increasing division between parents and children, Elias only hints about the central role of school by quoting Ariès's discussion of childhood and education:

> Henceforth it was recognised that the child was not ready for life, and that he had to be subjected to special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the adults. This new concern about education would gradually be firmly established in the heart of society and transform it from top to bottom. (Ariès cited in Elias, 2008: 24)

However, Elias's main concern was not on how formal education gradually transformed society 'from top to bottom' but rather on how the removal of children to educational institutions outside the family changed the function of the family and the relationship between parents and children. Pinpointing this, he described the school as 'a symptom of the partial defunctionalisation of the parents' (Elias, 2008: 31). Nevertheless, we will argue that it is also useful to employ his theoretical framework to analyse how it affected larger societal dynamics. As children gradually were required to spend more and more of their time in school where their socialisation and education was provided by state-authorised educators, it shifted the power-balance between parents and the state, altered expectations about interactional norms and changed the perception of the child, who now appeared as an autonomous individual.

Although Elias was mainly occupied with unintended civilising processes that 'result from many single plans and actions of people (…) (which) give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person had planned or created' (Elias, 2012a: 404), he was not blind to deliberate

interventions, or what scholars elaborating his work call 'civilising offensives', directed towards those deemed 'uncivilised' (Powell, 2013; Van Krieken, 1999). He wrote:

> For it is precisely in conjunction with the process of civilisation that the blind dynamics of people intertwining in their deeds and aims gradually lead towards greater scope for planned intervention into both the social and individual structures—intervention based on a growing knowledge of the unplanned dynamics of these structures. (Elias, 2012a: 405)

The school and the state's engagement in the whole project of formal compulsory education is a clear example of this. State societies require an increasing division of labour, denser and longer webs of interdependence between individuals, yet also a stronger administration striving to maintain social order. As such, it is in line with Elias's point that the state as well as influential members of society become more interested in the raising and education of 'other people's children' and in 'the children of society' as a whole (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2022). It is through the school that the norms and behaviour of the upcoming generation can be controlled. Despite this, Elias did not give much attention to the civilising project of the school and its intended civilising project and how this influenced the civilising process. This might have been caused by his focus on unplanned processes, yet as we will discuss the development of school institutions and their channelling of children's time, energy and sociality have both planned and unplanned outcomes significantly influencing the civilizing process.

The Role of Mass-Schooling in the Civilising Process

As noted by Durkheim (1956), the need for social order and cultural reproduction means that society cannot risk leaving the raising of children to their parents. Yet the increasing integration of state societies—and especially emergent nation-states with their ideology about 'the nation' as a social body—gave this involvement a new urgency and pushed ahead a more systematic intervention. While education previously had not been for all, but mainly for the children or rather the boys of upper classes and city dwellers, a slow wave of mass education developed in Europe from the first part of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century throughout the world. Scholars have pointed to a number of societal developments to explain this development. Among them are the newly

industrialised countries' need for a skilled and educated workforce, the need for literate soldiers revealed in the wars fought in the eighteenth century, and the new nation-states' requirement for loyal and patriotic citizens who would be willing to pay their taxes and die for their country (Carl, 2009; Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Zinkina et al., 2016).

Ramirez and Boli (1987: 3) have argued that Europe's state systems of education were developed in response to external challenges in the inter-state system such as 'military defeat or failure to keep pace with industrial development in rival countries', and slowly became the sine qua non in the 'West-European model of a national society' later to be adopted by new nations. These factors reveal how extended webs of interdependence within and between increasingly integrated state societies move societies to organise and expand planned civilising efforts in the form of compulsory education for its citizenry. It also demonstrates how the new perception of children, childhood and civilised conduct became part of the emerging nation-state's strategies.

In 1776, at the beginning of the industrial revolution, Adam Smith argued for a broad public education of 'the common people', writing: 'An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one' (Carl, 2009; Smith, 1994/1776). In the early nineteenth century and onwards, groups of influential people throughout Europe such as groups of clergymen, philanthropists, factory reformers, educational reformers and penologists all advocated for the expansion of education to children. The increased division of labour and the spread of industrialisation in the young nations required a workforce with specialised skills, and the more densely populated towns demanded people who could behave in more 'urban' ways to avoid turmoil and riots. However, there was also a new form of morality behind these initiatives. Demonstrating the overall rise of the sensitivity threshold and the individualisation of the child, their efforts were especially directed towards steering the working-class child away from exposure to adult life on the streets, including its violence, crime and sexuality, and from the exploitation and child labour in the factories (Hendrick, 1990). The 'true nature' of 'innocent' childhood and in the words of a contemporary English enquirer 'the habits of order, punctuality, industry and self-respect' should be ensured (quoted by Hendrick, 1990: 45). Moreover, as their working-class parents were not trusted to accomplish this, compulsory and universal education was the answer.

This historical overview demonstrates how the spread of mass education was not only driven by societal developments such as industrialisation or urbanisation but also promoted by dominant groups who launched new ideals about civilised childhood and civilised—well-behaved and accountable—citizens. As Foucault has argued, the school institution is especially well-equipped for this dual project, directed at once towards the individual subject and the society as a whole (Foucault, 1977). Reminiscent of Elias's ideas, Boli et al. (1985: 146, 157) look across and examine the specific details of how 'all sorts of elites mobilised their societies for improvement' and argue that it is, in fact, the modern idea of 'the individual and the expanded linkages between the individual and newly emerging, more inclusive social units—the rationalised society and the rational state' that lies behind the universal spread of mass education.

Yet this expansion of education and the summoning of children into schools did not happen without struggle. Elias depicts how new developments and changes in behaviour are always outcomes of struggles between various social groups with different power-ratios. In this situation, influential groups in and outside the state had to fight for the time of the child with parents as well as their employers. At the time, in most European societies, children were part of the family workforce on the farm, in family businesses, employed by craftsmen and traders or as cheap workers in industry, and both parents and employers only let go of their right to the child's labour gradually and through continuous battles. For example, following prolonged strife, the British Factory Act of 1833 forbid child workers below nine years of age in the textile industry and stated that 9–13 years old children should work no more than nine hours a day (the maximum working hours for 13–18 year old children was 12 hours), and they should have two daily hours of schooling. In 1901, the minimum working age was raised to 12 years (The National Archives, accessed 2022). In Denmark, which is considered to be the first country that introduced a government-controlled system of compulsory mass education in 1789 (finalising this work in 1814), children's amount of time in school differed according to the seasons, between the genders and between countryside and the cities and only became full time in 1958 (de Coninck-Smith, 2002).

We will argue that this historical process resembles what Elias described as 'the monopoly mechanism' (Elias, 2012a) in which groups compete for the same scarce resources—here the time, labour force and minds of children—and one group slowly wins more and more of this resource, tying

the others in webs of interdependence. One can thus argue that alongside tax and violence in most societies the state has also won the monopoly of time over the child and education of its citizens and that this is a vital component of its strength. The state may allow other social units—such as religious organisations—to organise this education and it might not be involved in all practical or financial aspects, but a major process of centralisation, standardisation and investment has led to the seizure of children's time from their parents, making their schooling compulsory, securing the state the right to regulate and largely design their education. This has had a significant impact not only on children's lives and the social figurations of society but also on the civilising process, as it is from then on characterised by a large element of state-enforced planned intervention. Yet in accordance with Elias's thinking, this does not mean that things go as planned, but it means that we need to explain intended projects as part of the civilising process, and how they interplay with the social dynamics within the figurations and their chains of interdependence.

The Impact of Schools on Children and Parents

As children came to spend more and more of their time in special institutions designed for them and their learning, the school gradually became the locus of childhood. The school tied children into interdependent relations to other people in society—other children, other children's parents, teachers, priests and other people of authority as well as the more abstract figure of the state—with consequences for their social behaviour and role in society. As discussed by historian Harry Hendrick, their removal from the workforce reduced their economic value and changed their social significance in broader society. They became regarded as dependent, ignorant and innocent and therefore in need of learning a range of skills before they could enter society (Hendrick, 1990).

As Ariès has noted, in this way, children lost their previous degree of freedom, status and influence in the adult world and became subordinated to a predefined structure of upbringing (Ariès, 1962). However, in other important ways they also gained in significance, increasingly so in the last decades of the twentieth century. The more they were seen as objects of investment by their parents as well as by the state, the more they gained in symbolic value: they became vessels of parental ambitions and societal ideals. Moreover, as the main provider of this investment, the school became a more influential institution in society. To ensure the right process of

formation, a whole industry of professionals developed to address more aspects and nuances of the growing child, supporting and guiding not only children and their parents but also the teachers who were responsible for this process. Teacher specialisation developed and the school itself was divided into age-specific types of institutions encompassing an increasing number of children from nursery to higher education, covering more and more of the daily time and years of childhood.

All of this led to longer and complex chains of dependencies between groups of individuals involved in education and child-rearing. On the one hand, the child became more and more incapacitated in that process, as he or she was subjected to an increasingly comprehensive educational regime. On the other hand, this same complexity also led to a greater attention being placed on the individual child's feelings and well-being. Thus, it was not just the child who became dependent on more and more professional efforts and initiatives, but also the professionals and parents who became dependent on the child because their own social reputation was tied to the child's behaviour and well-being. Therefore, the emerging complexity of this social figuration gradually moved the child from a position on the periphery of society's interest to being at the centre today.

The role of parents also changed with the establishment of regular compulsory schooling as it institutionalised a contractual interdependence between parents and the state whereby they were expected to entrust their children to the school's project of citizen formation in exchange for formal education and cultivation. Parents agreed to leave the education of their children to dominant groups in society. As indicated above, the idea of formal mass education was from the outset an expression of the vested interests of dominant groups—such as the upper classes, academics and religious leaders, disseminating their ideas about knowledge, skills and civilised conduct to the broader public, especially the lower classes. While always an object of struggle, in European countries dominant groups, at first priests and later, after decades of struggles, state-authorised teachers, have thus attempted to transmit and inculcate acknowledged cultural forms into new generations of citizens. In this process the broad variety of parents' perceptions of skills and appropriate behaviour were sidestepped and subdued though with time they came to accept the arrangement as the 'natural' order of things.

However, as Elias has emphasised this process is not just a result of the state's exercise of authority. It would not be possible to exercise this regulatory function without the acceptance by many individuals who

acknowledge and internalise the core values of education. Due to the webs of interdependence within social figurationsmost parents are fully aware of their need for support in processes of child-rearing and have come to value, strive and acquire the cultural capital offered by the education system in both its embodied forms and as educational diplomas (Bourdieu, 2011/1986). Thus, parents not only send their children to school because it is compulsory, but because they feel that this is the right and necessary thing to do for their children to develop into civilised and successful adults. Furthermore, and reflecting the integrating function of the school of today, failing to do so would draw attention to your family, spark worries about child mistreatment and potentially bring the parents into disrepute. In the Eliasian perspective, societal order cannot be reduced to supra-individual functionality or external regulation; it is upheld by a pronounced moral dimension and influenced by psychosocial mechanisms, such as shame and trust, a sense of appropriate behaviour, a striving for respectability and a recognition and fear of social degradation.

This illustrates how parents' lives are altered by the historical establishment of compulsory education: the school gradually took away the child as an economic contributor to previously dependent families and postponed this contribution to sometime in the future. Although Elias may be right that parents initially were 'defunctionalised' as the main educators, with time this function came back to them in a different form. They had to put more time and effort into their children's future education and were consequently dependent on the school and teachers in new bonds of interdependence. While the time children spend in school is mainly out of the hands of parents, schools have increasingly involved parents in the disciplining project to enhance the effect though also to disseminate their norms and criteria for success. This also reflects how the efficiency of schools and the work of teachers depend on parents to support and extend their authority over children outside the school. As webs of interdependencehave become denser over time, parents have become more and more involved in the 'civilising' project of the school and in the fine-tuning of their children's upbringing within the last 50 years.

Researchers have described how a cross-national culture of 'intensive parenting' has evolved (Bach, 2017a; Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2020; Dannesboe et al., 2018; Faircloth, 2014; Faircloth et al., 2013; Furedi, 2002; Gilliam, 2022; Lee et al., 2014). One can say that perceptions of children as 'vulnerable' and 'impressionable', which were enhanced by their removal from the public and family world into the role of pupils in schools, with an irony of its own increased parents' responsibility for their

well-being. Furedi (2002) refers to this as 'parental determinism' and explores how it was promoted by politicians, psychological experts and 'the education industry' who blame parents for all the social ills that happen to their children. However, from an Eliasian perspective, it displays how increasingly stronger webs of interdependence between parents, children and professionals in the larger society have evolved, placing an intense responsibility on parents to ensure a civilised and educatable child through an equally civilised upbringing.

Over time this has created a cultural script of the 'good parent' and especially the 'good mother' (Hays, 1996) who invests a large amount of their time and energy in child-centred nurturing of their children, but also 'act as pseudo teachers, optimizing their children's intelligence through a range of extra-curricular activities' (Faircloth, 2014: 31–32). Central to this is a vigilant attention to the demands of the school, engagement in children's homework and support of and participation in all its activities, as well as a strong condemnation of 'neglectful' and 'unengaged' parents. The intensive attention to parenting styles reveals how not only children's own behaviour but also their treatment has become markers of distinction. In this process parents have become increasingly dependent on specialists, advisers, teachers and pedagogues to ensure their children's 'sound' development and proper teaching as well as to maintain their own social respectability (Donzelot, 1979; Rose, 1999; Turmel, 2008). While these parenting ideals and practices have been especially developed among middle-class parents, it seems to have spread to parents of all social backgrounds, and thus can be seen as a further extension of the 'civilising of parents' (Dannesboe et al., 2018; Elias, 2008).

These changes demonstrate how the expansion of the school institution through compulsory mass education has had a strong influence on the civilising ideals and practices in families, tying non-related citizens to each other through their children and their co-parenthood in schools. This demonstrates how planned interventions also have unplanned consequences, and in accordance with Elias' ideas, how small acts of intended practices can lead to larger changes without any master plan behind them. Another central example of this is what goes on inside the social figuration of the school and school class. We will argue that the fact that children are summoned to school each day and thus spend the vast amount of their waking hours in relatively small, confined spaces in close interaction with each other in an institution with certain projects, practices, and logics has a huge influence on the social behaviour they need to learn, and which they later spread out into larger society.

The School as a Court

While Elias did not analyse the process of schooling, we will argue that his work can greatly contribute to our understanding of the impact of schools on children's lives and on the wider society. One of his main contributions is the analysis of the characteristics of the habits, constraints, and norms developed in figurations of people in close proximity and interdependence, and how they move into other sectors of society moulding norms and social conduct. The concept of 'figuration', which we have already used in this chapter, was suggested by Elias to break with the ideas of 'the individual' and 'society' as two distinct phenomena and challenge the idea of the individual as homo clausus, an independent and disconnected being (Elias, 2012b). His argument was that people are interdependent and connected to each other in figurations of human beings that shape their social habitus and behaviour. These figurations are constantly changing according to the movements of individual people, and to their wider webs of interdependence to other and broader figurations. To describe this formation of interconnected individuals he compares a figuration to a dance:

> The image of the mobile figurations of interdependent people on a dance floor perhaps makes it easier to imagine states, cities, families and also capitalist, communist and feudal systems as figurations (…). The same dance figurations can certainly be danced by different people; but without a plurality of reciprocally oriented and dependent individuals, there is no dance. (Elias, 2012a: 526)

A highly influential case of these figurations is described in his analysis of 'the Court Society' of the French court during absolutism and especially the reign of Louis XIV (1638–1715) (Elias, 2006). Elias argues that the French court society is of central importance in the civilising process, as it became a 'style-setting' centre for all other European courts and through these for the upper stratum of the bourgeoisie and the broader layers of the middle classes (Elias, 2012a). As part of this state-formation process, decades of conflicts between the nobility, the church and the princes meant that power and land were gradually centralised in the hands of fewer princes, until it was concentrated in the hands of a single supreme figure—the sovereign kings in France, England and the territorial rulers in Germany and Italy. Part of this power concentration was gained through an increasing monopoly of violence and taxation that had made the sovereigns extremely wealthy.

In France, Louis XIV gathered the nobility around him in the castle at Versailles where tens of thousands of people lived in close proximity, engaged in 'conspicuous consumption' and internal competition (Elias, 2006). While Louis XIV was the centre of attention as he could grant prestige to and divert it from any individual member of court society, all members including the king himself were dependent on each other, as they were constantly in each other's company and isolated from the outside world. In this social figuration a specific code of conduct—etiquette—developed, which was directed towards establishing and maintaining one's own prestige and status and distinguishing oneself from others and especially those of lower rank. This included refined and elaborated manners of dress, speech and conduct to gain the favour of the king. As one's prestige always depended on the respect of others, the members had to 'observe extreme caution at each encounter with each other' (Elias, 2006, 119–120). They thus developed fine skills in observing each other and for self-observation, presenting themselves in ways that would keep or improve their position in the internal hierarchy. For the same reason they were careful not to show any emotions. In the words of Elias:

> Affective outputs are difficult to control and calculate. They reveal the true feelings of the person concerned to a degree that, because not calculated, can be damaging; they hand over trump cards to rivals for favour and prestige. Above all, they are a sign of weakness; and that is the position the court person fears most of all. *In this way the competition of court life enforces a curbing of the affects in favour of calculated and finely shaded behaviour in dealing with people.* (Elias, 2006: 121, italics by Elias)

Elias contends that this elaborated contest for prestige and especially the curbing of affects that developed in the French court not only had a large impact on other contemporary courts, but through them also influenced ideas about good conduct far beyond the courts and into our times. He notes that it is 'in the same centuries in which the king or prince acquired absolutist status, the restraint and moderation of the affects (…), the "civilising of behaviour, was noticeably increased"' (Elias, 2012a: 216).

> Here were created the models of more pacified social intercourse. … The pressure of court life, the vying for the favour of the prince or the 'great', then, more generally, the necessity to distinguish oneself from others and to fight for opportunities by relatively peaceful means, through intrigue and diplomacy, enforced a constraint on the affects, a self-discipline and self-control, a peculiarly courtly rationality. (Elias, 2006: 218–219)

Our point is that there are important resemblances between this court society and children in schools in contemporary societies. We find that Elias's analysis of the court, the idea of civilised behaviour, the conditions under which these ideas and social intercourse developed, its influence on the outside world, can help us understand the social 'games' taking place in classrooms and school-yards. Elias himself stressed that the social and psychological structure of the court 'illustrates peculiarities of the compulsions that interdependent people exert on each other within a figuration of a kind to be found in many other societies' (Elias, 2006: 95). In line with this, the anthropologist Dil Bach (2017a, b) has argued that Elias's analysis of the court society is particularly well-suited to understand life in a residential institution or what Erving Goffman (1961) called a 'total institution'—that is a place where a large group of people live and sleep under the same roof and thus are together in the totality of their existence. While the school is not a French court of aristocrats or a total institution per se, it has many conditions and qualities in common with these. It is here that children and young people spend the main part of their waken hours obliged to relate to their peers and staff and therefore the school in many ways works as a social world in itself (Gilliam, 2009).

In some schools the community of children changes across subjects or from year to year, but in others the same group of children stay together for years and years (except for individual children leaving or entering the school class over the years). In all cases they spend most of their time in close proximity to classmates and teachers, a fact which means that these people become some of their main sources of recognition of personal value and status (in terms of skills, intelligence, personal qualities and social prestige). Furthermore, due to their status as minors and scarce experience of the larger world, children are socially constrained to these small communities and thus the school tends to become their main social reality outside the private world of family.

Of course, there are important differences between the social figurations of courts and schools. In contrast to the members of the French court who to some extent were isolated from the outside world, elevated above all other groups of society, children are also part of social figurations outside school, they are a relatively dominated, although as we shall stress, not a powerless group, and they have strong allies in their parents. As a result, they and the school are part of wider webs of interdependence that have an impact on the sociality and status-ideas moulded in schools. Even more importantly there is no absolute sovereign 'king' whose favour is to

strive for in schools, but often changing figures of authority and power—teachers, inspectors, influential children and, in the background, parents. Yet the intensity of attention and the amount of time most children invest in navigating social relations and hierarchies in school and in gaining other's recognition, especially that of influential figures, bear witness to a court-like fetish of social prestige in the highly interdependent societies of schools and classes.

What the distant observer or related adults may see as insignificant and trivial fuss, gossip, scheming or the worries of children may therefore be better understood as engaged efforts in the pursuit of status, recognition and high positions. Elias argues that in court society the pursuit of prestige, detailed meticulous etiquette and conspicuous consumption that ruined many noblemen might make the courtly life seem irrational to outsiders. Yet he argues that we need to understand these manners in their own terms so that we see 'behaviour with a view to gaining power *as it was understood at the time, that is, in accordance with the figuration of people existing then*' (Elias, 2006: 101 italics by Elias). In a similar way we can understand children's obsessions with relations, friendships and hierarchies and the kind of control of emotions they demand within their social groups in schools as rational moves for the kind of power that is at play in school, or in Bourdieu's terms, the capital that is at stake (Bourdieu, 2011/1986). Or to phrase it in even more dramatic terms: it seems that their very social existence is at play in these confined social settings. To cope socially and gain the status and friendships that secure your social identity and position within the figuration of a school class, each child must cautiously observe the relations and navigate the constant movement of the terrain around him or her (see Vigh, 2006). As most observers of children's intense social relations in school classes will probably agree, it is thus plausible to exchange 'court' with 'school' or 'class' in the following quote from Elias:

> The actual order of rank within court society constantly fluctuated. The balance within this society was, as we have said, very precarious. Now small, almost imperceptible tremors, now large-scale convulsions incessantly changed the positions of people and the distance between them. To keep abreast of these upheavals was vitally important to court people. (Elias, 2006: 100)

The 'Civilising' School Class

Seeing the school as similar to a court figuration also provides us with a framework to understand peer group sociality and the larger social figuration of schools in relation to broader society. We need to take into account the intentional organisation of children that is a specific feature of schools. The social control of children's time, the gathering of large groups of children into a limited physical space and into smaller social units in even smaller physical spaces, is primarily a practical arrangement directed towards the efficient teaching and control of children's bodies and attention. Yet what we usually observe is that such practical arrangements tend to achieve their own 'normative superstructure', partly through the reasons people give for organising education this way, partly because the conduct afforded by the arrangements is gradually perceived as 'normal' and 'proper' (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Thus, the design, construction and organisation of the school have a normative influence on the formative processes, educational priorities and content of the social interactions taking place.

This is also the case for the school class. What initially was just a functional way to organise a large group of undisciplined children has gradually become an active part of the school's civilising project. Though schools differ in organisation and priorities from one country to the next, it is a common feature that children are grouped according to age or ability, and that this organisational structure has become an important socialising tool. It appears as an important feature that children are instructed to behave in specific ways towards their classmates and to handle the close proximity and interdependence within the classroom in culturally acceptable ways. This often includes the curbing of drives and emotional expressions in the presence of others, as well as polite, reliable and punctual conduct.

Taking a closer look, the sociality that is taught here for the specific organisational design and practical arrangements of the school is intimately connected with the ideological aspects of becoming a good citizen in society. In the case of the Danish school, this connection is very explicit. Teachers emphasise how the social conduct they teach children is required if a group of 20–30 individuals shall spend hours on end in each other's company in a small space. Yet they also state that being together in a restricted place, with children of various personalities, social and ethnic backgrounds, teaches children how to be good citizens in the world

outside school. Being considerate of other people's individuality and needs, forming relations across social boundaries and contributing to harmony, the common good and productivity of the community in class, they say, are skills needed in Danish welfare society (Gilliam, 2017). Consequently, teachers use a considerable amount of time and effort on training and supporting the right social sentiment and conduct in class. Thus we see that the social figuration of the school class has become an object of civilising efforts where teachers try to mould children to meet the practical requirements of school as well as the ideals of the inclusive harmonious welfare society (Gilliam, 2017).

In our historical and empirical studies of upbringing ideals and civilising practices in Danish schools, we discovered that the social dynamics of the school class and the civilising efforts of teachers, which increasingly involve parents, not only incorporate specific forms of behaviour in children but also have an impact on the conduct of civilised behaviour beyond the school. Just as the conduct required in the court society gradually became second nature to people who lived their whole lives within the social bonds and pressures of this social figuration, the habitus of children is moulded by the many formative years they spend in the intense social world of schooling and under their teachers' moral orchestration of their social behaviour. This has important consequences for social conduct and expectations in larger society as new citizens must all pass through these formative experiences in schools and carry the ideas and practices in an embodied form into wider areas of society.

Therefore we have argued that in a similar way in which the court's influence on ideas about good conduct lies far beyond the courts, the dissemination and influence of school institutions has over time 'institutionalised' ideals of civilised behaviour (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2014). The ideals of civilised behaviour that children practice in society and which their parents learn to support and cultivate in order to promote their children's and their own status are not just the cultural forms of dominant groups in charge of formal education, but also the social forms required of children in school institutions. In this way, the school is part of a continuous dialectic with society on what counts as civilised standards. As a central socialising institution, the school should not just be viewed as a transmitter of dominant values but must be recognised as a producer of what is seen as the proper way to behave and interact, that is, a significant player in the progress of the civilising process.

Children's Role in Processes of Civilisation

Children's perceptions of behavioural standards and who they are as individuals are shaped by their relations with teachers, peers and family members in and outside schools. In this process, norms and values are not only transmitted but also transformed, negotiated and re-configured, shaping the habitus of individual children as well as their understanding of ideals that they later disseminate into broader society. This fact makes it important for studies of civilising processes to take into account the complex role of children as well as the influential role the school has gained as a central socialising institution in most contemporary societies. This is significant, as children do not passively comply with requirements, but actively interpret and influence their world (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1990; Toren, 1993). They use available knowledge and resources to understand and draw out a social and moral map of their world and their own position within it. They internalise and adapt to ideas and moral guidelines but they also analyse, more or less consciously, what utterings and judgements imply about different social categories, relations and hierarchies and which room for manoeuvre this gives them. Thus, to understand the outcome of civilising projects, we have to acknowledge children's subjectivities and see how ideas, norms, and practices that the older generation try to inculcate in the new generation are processed according to children's situated experiences, logics and purposes (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2022).

As Willard Waller (1961/1932) has emphasised, the school is not merely an educational institution, but a social world for children in which they are engaged in forming relations with other children. In these worlds, children have other projects and ambitions than learning about civilised norms of behaviour. They develop other norms and values and other criteria for status and hierarchy than those acknowledged by caretakers and professionals, and though their views might change over the years and eventually become more aligned with established requirements, they also individually and collectively form their own opinions of what and who is 'cool' or 'dull', appropriate or not. What is evident when observing children in school classes is thus the amount of energy and effort children spend building up their own hierarchies and understandings, and how this influences the more formalised, planned activities and instructions they encounter. Furthermore, it is noteworthy how children themselves act as active civilisers, nurturing and disciplining one another, sanctioning and encouraging various types of conduct sometimes but not always referring

to the dominant norms presented by teachers. They seem very aware of which norms apply in different situations; of what is expected of them; which adults value or condone which kinds of behaviour; and how adults and other children see them in terms of their conduct.

In this way, the identities, communities and distinctions children create are both closely related to the civilising process of adults and to their own sense-making and purposes in different situations. Children react to their subordinate position and the discipline required of them in different ways and often create communities around these positions, either accommodating, opposing or adjusting the norms presented to them. Children from different genders, class, religion, ethnicity or racialised identities often have different possibilities of acquiring a good position in school—challenging the ideal of educated and civilised behaviour through oppositional conduct is a common strategy of those who feel they are failing or come from a stigmatised group. This is intensified by the civilising efforts of instructions, reprimands and scolding that emphasise what is deemed unacceptable behaviour by 'uncivilised' categories of people, and this is yet again picked up by children, who use it in their own challenges of school, group dynamics or in the social exclusion of others. We have called this a 'civilising paradox': that the socialising efforts designed to civilise also have excluding effects which might again enhance the strategic use of 'uncivilised' conduct by those who feel outsiders to 'the civilised community' (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017).

These social dynamics not only give us a hint of the complex relationship between planned upbringing and unplanned outcomes but also indicate how important it is to take children as the upcoming generation into consideration when analysing civilising processes, in particular in societies where children spend a huge amount of childhood in the enclosed settings of schools. For in these institutions, children as a collective perceive and process the norms presented to them. They negotiate their understanding of hierarchies and values, and individually begin to identify with some groups more than others. They accept some and transform other aspects of what they meet and over time this might have an impact on the generational transmission as they move to other institutions and workplaces. Thus, we have argued that not only are children's habitus formed in everyday interactions within their families—in Elias's perspective the main locus of socialisation—but also in schools and this formation is important also for the civilising process in wider society. The norms and values incorporated through the years children spend in schools are subsequently disseminated into wider society when they leave these confined spaces (see

also Gilliam & Gulløv, 2014). In this way, schools not only reflect and transmit the dominant notions of what count as civilised behaviour through the teaching and socialising efforts of teachers. They are also highly influential in shaping these notions through the continuous interactions, negotiations and interpretation among children, as well as through the long webs of interdependency children become part of within and outside the classroom.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have argued that schools now occupy a central position in the civilising processes in contemporary societies. We showed how the school developed from a small-scale institution targeting a few selected children from a specific class or gender to becoming a mass phenomenon covering all children in society and thereby one of the most influential institutions of our time. In order to understand this process, the theories of Norbert Elias enable us to see historical change as a matter of long-term shifts in human interdependencies. We explored the way that schools gradually became the pivotal point of a still more complex web of interdependencies reaching from the private home of children and parents to the public authority of state administrations. Thus, the figurational approach, looking at power dynamics over time, gives us a tool to analyse changing generational relations, especially the increased symbolic significance of the child that has fundamentally altered the relationship between family and school, making them still more dependent on one other.

Furthermore, it enables us to better understand relations between small-scale social interactions within schools and broader complex changes in society. We have argued that the habitus of children is shaped not only by the intensive work of parents and teachers but also by the everyday interactions in schools as more and more of the time of childhood is spent in these confined places. In these daily negotiations of relationships, conduct and status with other children and teachers, children come to understand what is valued and respected, and what constitutes the social hierarchies they form with one another. These values are not only determined by internal processes in school, but by the complex ways each child and school class are enmeshed in long chains of interdependence with parents, policy makers and the state, who on their side are dependent on their learning and conduct in schools. Children are therefore not just moulded by teachers' discipline and inculcation of the right behaviour, but by power

dynamics in webs of interdependence within and outside of the classroom reflecting historical as well as contemporary social power-dynamics.

Yet we also argued that a more explicit focus on children and education helps to contribute to our understanding of the civilisation process, as it brings to the fore the fundamental dimension of generational transmission. As the education system—and the school institution in particular—has become an indispensable part of contemporary society's socialising processes, social life has been changed in important ways. It has changed the relationship between family members and between the family and the state, making parents and schools mutually dependent. However, it has also standardised norms of behaviour to an unprecedented degree. When all children go through the same type of institution over many years, their behaviour is gradually adapted to the sociality of that specific place. This applies to not only explicit expectations and requirements, but to the demands entailed by institutional functionality, as well as the behaviour established in daily interactions.

Moreover, with its increasing involvement in schools, the state extended its authority, much akin to the consolidating effect it had achieved through the monopoly of tax and means of violence. Through the spread of mass education the state won the monopoly of the time of the child and was able to control the nature and means of upbringing of the next generation.. This monopoly has given the school a defining role in the struggles over the norms and values that count as civilised conduct. However, we have also emphasised that children are not passive recipients of the upbringing pressures they face. They interpret, act and thereby create their own understanding of values and hierarchies, which in turn has an influence on the behavioural standards incorporated in their habitus, and in a wider perspective on the values and norms which they later disseminate into broader society. The school has thus become the central place for habitus formation in contemporary society, but in ways over which the school does not have full control.

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CHAPTER 5

Banal Nationalism for Babies: The Early Transmission of National Habitus to Children in the Family

Florence Delmotte and Sophie Duchesne

Introduction

This chapter is about an encounter, or rather a hub of encounters. The hub is a research project on the transmission of feelings of belonging to young children within their family (hereafter referred to by its French

F. Delmotte (✉)
Institut de recherches interdisciplinaires Saint-Louis (IRIS-L), Université catholique de Louvain & Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS), Brussels, Belgium

Sciences Po Bordeaux, Université de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France
e-mail: florence.delmotte@uclouvain.be

S. Duchesne
Centre Emile Durkheim, Sciences Po Bordeaux & Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Bordeaux, France

Université catholique de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: s.duchesne@sciencespobordeaux.fr

N. Gabriel (ed.), *International Comparisons in Learning and Education*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias,
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acronym ETPAF[1]). In our research we try to understand how children learn in their familial everyday life to engage with the polities they are told they belong to. We have a particular interest in how young children are socialised into a world divided into nations. A qualitative survey was conducted with a sample of 30 families living in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region (France), each comprising at least one five- to six-year-old child.

As researchers we came to this project with different theoretical and methodological assumptions. To start with, our perspectives on nationalism are fuelled by our respective readings of two authors, Norbert Elias and Michael Billig, who do not appear to have been particularly acquainted with each other's writings. So we arranged their meeting. As for us, we do not make use of the theory the same ways and we tend to formulate hypotheses nourished by our different sources of inspiration which do not perfectly overlap. Therefore, working on the empirical implementation of our theoretical canvas has been an invaluable opportunity to bridge various conceptions of research design. As in all encounters, it is a story of enriching our perspectives by the diversity and unexpectedness of what we are not used to thinking about.

At the same time, it is a story of struggling to actually build something that holds together even though the builders have been socialised in different ways. At any rate, they are moments of translation, which require that all parts of the encounter clarify what they have come up with and make room for what has been brought by others. This chapter is the result of this collegiate work of translation. It first sets up the theoretical dialogue that Elias and Billig never really had on nationalism and children in their writings. A pity, we argue, because they offer approaches that are mainly compatible and complementary, so we have made them talk to each other and, ultimately, to us. Then we expose what we have made, and make (since this is work in progress) of these theoretical inputs for the survey ETPAF.

[1] It stands for *Enquête sur la Transmission Précoce des Appartenances au sein de la Famille* (Survey on the Early Transmission of Belongings Within the Family). https://www.centreemiledurkheim.fr/projets-de-recherche/etpaf/. This project was conceived by Sophie Duchesne and Maylis Ferry, who designed the fieldwork. It was carried out by them as well as Louisa McDonald and Morgane Dirion. Florence Delmotte and Sophie Duchesne are currently analysing the data. Maylis Ferry contributed an initial version of this chapter, and we would like to thank her for that.

On Nationalism Taught to Children: When Elias Meets Billig

Nationalism, which we could define loosely (for now) as how people assume that they both 'belong' to a nation and are socialised to a nationalised world, is a shared interest of Elias and Billig. Actually, nationalism has a special place in their respective works. Both Elias and Billig were personally affected by the horror of nationalism throughout the twentieth century: Elias as a German Jew was very directly affected by the two World Wars where his parents did not survive, his mother being murdered in the Holocaust. Billig, a social psychologist (born in 1947), came from a London Jewish family. Thus, they both had an acute sensibility to nationalism's harmful potential, even when looking at some of its most benign forms. What distinguishes the study of nationalism in Elias's work is that he attempted to explain the roots of its historical formation. It hence requires sharpened analytical tools to understand it with some distance as this is the only way to escape the affects attached to any particular position in a social figuration. As for Billig, he is no specialist of nationalism: when working on how people in England talked of the royal family at the beginning of the 1990s (Billig, 1992), he was struck by the nationalist aspects of their discourses. He developed an original perspective on nationalism because it is not so much a study of how people speak (or don't) about nationalism than an analysis of what constantly reminds them in public discourses to be nationalists.

Their work is also original as it swims against the tide of what was written about nationalism since the 1980s (see Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Thiesse, 1999, 2005), another point of similarity between Billig and Elias. At a time when social scientists were predominantly announcing the twilight of nationalism and the coming of a globalised world (Hobsbawm, 1992), Billig argues that we are so wrapped up in nationalist representations of who we are, individually and collectively, that we are no longer capable of imagining a world without nations. Sometime earlier, in the 1980s, Elias (2010) insisted on the tenacity of national habitus and feelings even in a globalised world. Another important factor that distinguishes Elias and Billig's approaches to nationalism from mainstream perspectives on the subject is that they both understand nationalism in a broader sense than its violent manifestations. They emphasise that soft forms of attachment to one's nation (often referred to as 'belonging' or 'patriotism') are no different by nature from exclusive ones that nourish

wars. More than that, Billig claims that it is because patriotism exists, unnoticed and uncensored, that exclusive and expansionist nationalism keeps prospering. As for Elias, he suggests that there is at least some continuity between these different forms. Their arguments, however, are built on different kinds of observation in their respective writings, leading to theoretical propositions that do not completely overlap. In the next sections we discuss how Elias's concept of national habitus complements Billig's views on banal nationalism.

Banal Nationalism

While most of the existing work on nationalism in the 1980s and early 1990s focused on the part it played in the genesis of nations, Billig investigates in *Banal Nationalism* how it is daily reproduced (Billig, 1995; Duchesne, 2019). Nationalism here is referred to as the idea that the world is 'naturally' divided into nations. Billig argues that there needs to be a shift from the historians' debate on the origins of nations: although the modernists have convincingly demonstrated that nationalism was invented by the elites that rose from the industrial revolution, the question that remains unanswered is how nationalism has managed to outlive its specific historical context.

Banal Nationalism as Flagging

The answer Billig proposes to this puzzling question is that we are constantly reminded that the world is divided into nations and that, in order to be someone, one must be a nationalist. He calls these reminder systems 'flagging'. In the streets we walk, the news we read or watch, the food and objects we buy, the entertainment we consume, there are flags—be they actual national flags or symbolic (such as a 'buy British' flashy sticker on a portion of strawberries). A striking example of this is the weather forecast. It is almost systematically presented to us within national borders. This setting is particularly absurd for Billig: the weather is meaningful in itself only on a global scale (contrary to what French news said after Chernobyl, clouds do not stop at borders) and to individuals on a very local level (we want to know how to dress and what we can or cannot do outside the place we live in).

Banal Nationalism as a Limitation of Our Political Imagination

There is so much of this flagging that it is hardly conceivable that we do not notice it. And yet most of the time we do not, which is one of the

reasons why Billig calls this nationalism 'banal'. In *Banal Nationalism*, Billig argues that it is because we are so exposed to this flagging that nations, and with them the very idea that the world is naturally broken up into separate nations, are so unescapable. In a way, these reminders also act as the gravediggers of all the other ways in which we could politically imagine the world we live in, our place and the place of other human beings within it. Our political imagination is thus confined to a national setting. And we are socially constrained in this way.

In *Freudian Repression*, Billig (1999) proposed a typology of repressed thoughts. Critically discussing Freud's theories on the unconscious, he argues that there are at least two types of repression: pre-conscious ones and unconscious ones. In the second type, we silence thoughts because of the social costs associated with their revelation; we avoid them because they are taboo and breaking taboos comes at a price. In the first case, however, we do not talk about things because there is no need to utter them: they are expected to be part of a shared (and indisputable) frame of understanding we can unconsciously (and comfortably) rely on when interacting. For Billig, banal nationalism, or the nationalised canvas within which we understand the world, is therefore the archetypal form of pre-conscious repression. This implies two things. First, the constant nationalist flagging we are exposed to indeed makes nationalism the only available language for us to think and talk (for Billig argues we think in talking) about the world and our place within it. Second, there are other ways of thinking that we could have invested in if only we had not *learnt* to remove them from our political imagination. Billig insists on this point: repression is fundamentally social rather than cognitive. The feeling of being part of a world divided into nations is acquired and maintained through language which is fundamentally social: it is not a mental process, but a rhetorical one (Billig, 1996, 2009). For Billig, the best way to grasp this is to look at children when they are in the process of acquiring their skills of repression. They regularly make slips of the tongue and people around them remind them that there is no need to argue the obvious (pre-conscious repression) or that it is untactful to speak about taboos (unconscious repression). However, here again, as in *Banal Nationalism*, the argument is not based on empirical observations of how people talk (or do not talk) about the nation; it is rather a theoretical proposition illustrating his discussion of Freudian categories.

Banal Nationalism as an International Ideology

The scarcity of argumentative resources we have on the subject at our disposal living in a nationalised world makes it difficult to imagine it

differently, let alone contest its national pervasiveness. This is what makes Billig emphasise that nationalism is an ideology (Billig, 2022). Like other ideologies (Billig, 1991) we can recognise them as social representations that 'make the contingent world appear "natural"' (Billig, 1995: 183). And since there is no alternative to this 'natural' representation we must simply accept them this way. In the family of ideologies, nationalism is deemed particularly overarching for Billig: other ideologies coexist with repertoires of arguments which allow us to contest them, however powerful their grip may be (he gives the example of liberalism), but nationalism has conquered the entire world. Except from Antarctica, the globe is covered by nation-states. And 'if the globe is covered by nation-states, then so will it be filled with discourses, representations and habits of thought which reproduce the nation-state as the accepted, and generally desired, form of community today' (Billig, 1995: 182).

Banal Nationalism as a Problem

The very fact that nationalism is a 'winner-takes-it-all' type of ideology makes it a particularly serious problem in Billig's eyes. His development of a rhetorical approach to psychology emphasised that human thinking is never one-dimensional: for every representation we hold true, there are (partially) contradicting other ones that are accessible. Thinking is the rhetorical process by which we elaborate ideas with a plurality of representations that do not all point in the same direction. An example of this is Billig's analysis of categorisation. Some highly influential experimental psychologists (Turner et al., 1987) have suggested that human beings are bound to categorise, because cutting up reality in small comprehensible pieces, even though it involves 'distortion and simplification' (Billig, 1985: 81), is the only way we can grasp it.

For human beings, categorisation has been very effective, presented in countless manuals as a 'natural' and inescapable outcome of the development of human brains. There will always be prejudices. However, Billig (1985: 82) argues that it is important to 'seek[ing] a way out of the depressing dilemma' that if humans categorise, so they particularise, which leads to a questioning of the accuracy of our categories. For Billig, it is very important to bear in mind that we can do both because we should not renounce the richness and plurality of human thinking (Billig, 1996). Acknowledging a one-sided version of reality as the sole and natural one sometimes leads—as is the case for categorisation and nationalism—to politically disastrous situations.

In a similar way, nationalism is problematic and dangerous. One of the key arguments of *Banal Nationalism* (Billig called it 'banal' in reference to Hannah Arendt's book on the Banality of Evil, 1963) is that there is no difference in nature between what Billig calls nationalism (its banal version, the simple belief in the natural character of the division of the world into nations of solidarity with one's compatriots, sometimes referred to as 'patriotism', which appears to many as a gentle, normal and positive way of being attached to the national community we belong to) and what is usually understood by 'nationalism', that is extreme-right movements or separatist movements. He argues that there is rather a continuum between unnoticed, accepted patriotism and vindictive forms of nationalism. Moreover, the latter exists because the former does: violent versions of nationalism are nurtured by the banal nationalism we all tend to accept.

National Habitus

Elias's process sociology seems to complement well the analysis of 'banal nationalism' by exploring questions that Billig neglects: why does flagging work so well on individuals? For those who want to study nationalism from an Eliasian perspective, 'national habitus' is the core concept. Briefly, national habitus is a particular kind of habitus, a part of every socialised individual, a layer of the 'filo pastry' of identities (Mennell, 1994) which has become a very important one from the nineteenth century (Delmotte, 2022). We find the concept of habitus at the beginning of Elias's most well-known book, *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a), in a discussion about the difference between 'civilisation' for French (and English) people, and '*Kultur*' for Germans. From this book, Elias demonstrates that habitus has important historical, comparative and political dimensions. Habitus is not far from what Max Weber calls 'habit' or 'second nature'. But it is processual, always transforming even when it seems fixed and unchanging. Habitus is 'embodied social knowledge' (Dunning & Mennell, 1996: ix) that concerns ways of representing the world (we, us, others, the environment) but also ways of experiencing it, of behaving, feeling and talking. Most of us have a familial habitus, a survival unit habitus and a professional habitus. In each case, habitus is what is more or less common to individuals in a group, even if they are not aware or especially 'proud' of it. And as each individual 'belongs' to several groups, each person adopts and develops several habitus. But one came to dominate at both an individual and collective level, which is the case for national habitus in a particular historical context.

The concept of national habitus is central in at least two of Elias's texts: *Studies on the Germans* (2013) and 'Changes in the "we–I" Balance' (1987), in *The Society of Individuals* (2010). In the first book, the concept is connected to the analysis and criticism of nationalism. One can also find such critical analysis in other texts, such as *Involvement and Detachment* (2007), partly written against the backdrop of the Cold War, and in Elias's autobiography and interviews (Elias, 2014). A main aim of *Studies on the Germans*, the last book Elias authorised before he died, is to understand and explain what happened in Germany that made Nazism, World War Two and the concentration camps possible. But it is not first and foremost a condemnation and even less a condemnation of the German people. It is a matter of understanding and explaining national habitus, the German one among other ones, in a comparative perspective. Elias writes:

> It would be, I think, a rather nice task to write the 'biography' of a state society, for instance Germany. For just as in the development of an individual person the experiences of earlier times continue to have an effect in the present, so, too, do earlier experiences in the development of a nation. (Elias, 2013: 192)

The idea is that

> [t]he fortunes of a nation become crystallised in institutions which are responsible for ensuring that the most different people of a society acquire the same characteristics, possess the same national habitus. The common language is an immediate example. But there are many others. (Elias, 2013: 23)

Therefore institutions need to be understood in the broadest sense. Schools and parliaments are connected with national habitus, but there are many other ones, less formal and more intimate.

National Habitus, Democratisation and Paradoxes

In 'Changes in the "we–I" Balance' (Elias, 2010), Elias suggests that national habitus became the main habitus that dominates in contemporary society over others, making groups of people feel that they 'belong'. Why? Because (modern) states and then nation-states progressively replaced tribes, clans, villages as survival units. How? First by wars, then by processes of democratisation, although lately and only in certain contexts. The following passage is very significant in this respect:

> The emergence of the European states as we-units happened gradually and in stages. […] Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries parts of the population, the peasants in the first place and then above all the industrial proletariat, were still excluded from the citizens' we-identity by the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie and nobility. […] Only in conjunction with the parliamentary representation of all classes did all members of the state begin to perceive it more as a we-unit and less as a they-group. Only in the course of the two great wars of this century did the populations of more developed industrial states take on the character of nation states. Nation states, one might say, are born in wars and for wars. Here we find the explanation for why, among the various layers of we-identity, the state level of integration today carries special weight and a special emotional charge. (Elias, 2010: 185–186)

In this argument, Elias does not reduce (or rather 'elevate') national habitus to democracy. He only affirms it is quite recent and specific. He does not idealise it either. The particularity of the national habitus is its polysemy and ambiguity, its paradoxical character: it refers at the same time to long installed unconscious habits, to identity politics and to discourses and symbols. It is archaic and modern at the same time, partly based on rationality (on citizenship and nationality that confer rights) but still very emotional, with both an obvious collective dimension and a very individualistic one. Finally, national habitus continues to carry 'myths', which is in itself problematic: 'People do need myths, but not in order to arrange their social life. It is my conviction that people would live together better without myths', Elias says in an interview (2014: 115). Elsewhere, Elias points out the dangers of a nationalism with 'high fantasy content' (Elias, 2013: 236) but also that all nationalism refers to different forms of beliefs. From this point of view, National Socialism can be understood as an extreme but characteristic form (Elias, 2013: 238).

National Habitus: Changes and Resistances

Another aspect of habitus is its changing nature and its resistance to change. Indeed, the national habitus appears to be particularly resistant to change. In 'Changes in the "we–I" Balance' (2010), Elias focuses on the 'drag' effect of national habitus in the second half of the twentieth century. A majority of people, he observes, continue to feel 'attached' to the nation-state to which they 'belong', although the latter is no longer the effective unit of survival, given, above all, the invention of nuclear weapons and ecological risks that ignore all borders (Elias, 2010: 194–195).

Elias then tries to explain the resistance of the development of a more 'reality congruent' habitus which would be based on a 'sense of responsibility for imperilled humanity' (Elias, 2010: 203) at the planetary level. The fact that the world remains divided into nations in a way that has remained almost unchanged for centuries—diplomacy and inter-state relations attest to this—is an important element to be taken into account (Elias, 2010: 205). This reality, and the evidence of the discourses and practices that accompany it, perpetuates a mode of identification with the political community based on the existence of an enemy or threatening other. Humanity has no enemy but itself and is threatened only by groups that are part of itself (Elias, 2010: 204). In the end, the sense of belonging to humanity could not fulfil the affective need of individuals in the same way as national belonging and the beliefs that are sustained by it.

That is why a shift beyond the national level (see Delmotte, 2012), if it should finally occur (for instance at the European level), would take time:

> One has the impression that the solidity, the resistance, the deep-rootedness of the social habitus of individuals in a survival unit is greater the longer and more continuous the chain of generations within which a certain social habitus has been transmitted from parents to children. (Elias, 2010: 189)

In other words: 'Habitus is congealed history, absorbed into our bodies' (Kuypers, 2012). But national habitus can change (or might de-congeal):

> The constraints of *habitus* are created by human beings. At one time in the past they were adjusted in all people to suit the integration level of the clan. […] The we-image of human beings has changed; it can change again. Such changes do not take place overnight. They involve processes that often take many generations. (Elias, 2010: 204)

National Habitus: Common and Particular/Diverse Features

In *The Society of Individuals* (2010), Elias addresses national habitus in general, as a common feature (in a similar way as banal nationalism), and the diversity of particular national habitus:

> A process sociological study, and a familiarity with the investigation of long-term processes, are needed to explain the differences of individual habitus in Latin America or Europe, Africa or Asia. But if we are looking for examples of the reality-congruence of the concept of habitus, we could hardly find a more cogent example than the persistent way in which the national habitus

> of the European nation states impedes their closer political union. (Elias, 2010: 188)

Therefore, are some national habitus 'worst' or more dangerous than other ones? Although they all share some common features, Elias argues in *The Germans* that we can partly explain what happened in the middle of the twentieth century in Europe to particular features of a German national habitus that turned towards the past and sought revenge with a high fantasy content, deeply attached to an aristocratic code of honour (Elias, 2013). But as pointed out by Mennell and Dunning (1996), '[T]he concept of (national) habitus is "not in any way essentialist"; […] habitus changes over time precisely because "the fortunes and experiences of a nation (or of its constituting groupings) continue to change and accumulate"' (Preface, in Elias, 1996: ix).

To conclude this section, the first of the few 'universals of human society', the first 'social constant' is 'humankind's natural changeability' (Elias, 2012b: 99 ff.). At least we are not condemned 'by nature' to nationalism. *Each* national habitus is subject to change, and what is more, the strength and features of national habitus *in general* are subject to change, which does not mean subject to 'progress'. This is probably an important difference with Billig's perspective on 'banal' nationalism. National habitus is not only made of discourse—they are not ideologies although nationalist discourses and practices inform them. As 'embodied social knowledge' that is actually learned, national habitus can change although not necessarily in a desirable direction. Habitus may strengthen rather than weaken, radicalise rather than moderate, depending on the historical context—for example, diverse 'crises' and the 'moral panics' they entail (Reicher, 2020)—and on the long development of each habitus.

Towards the Study of National Socialisation of Children in Families

If there are similarities in the ways Elias and Billig deal with the issue of nationalism, their theoretical propositions do not necessarily point in the same direction. In some respect they are complementary but their potential integration also requires more articulation. Driven as he is by questions of long-term processual dynamics, Elias is far more sensitive to the socio-historical contingencies of specific survival units than Billig. Billig is more insistent on how a nationalist grammar has conquered the entire world, becoming the centre of a political imagination that has smothered

alternative ones. They also approach the problem of nationalism in a different way. Billig argues that there are no such things as individual interiorities that can be empirically investigated. Whereas Elias is interested in how the social habitus is internalised (embedded) within individuals and the way people identify themselves with the nation.

Putting into dialogue what Billig and Elias have written on nationalism also points to issues that have yet to be addressed. The cross-reading of the two authors reveals an area that requires further research, namely the transmission of nationalism to young children. The issue of childhood socialisation was already discussed in Elias's *On the Process of Civilisation*, at least in the first part on the civilising of manners, more specifically changes towards natural functions, and in the discussion of Erasmus's *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (Elias, 2012a: 134–141; 171–184). Later in *The Civilising of Parents*, Elias (2008) insists that a society is never composed only of adults and that they are never 'finished' in their development but change all their life. One cannot know and understand one's own society without studying children. This is especially the case in contemporary societies where parent–child relations and relations between generations have become more democratic with a reduction in the power-ratios between groups. In comparison with other societies or periods of time ('earlier stages'), children have relatively more autonomy and freedom. They are not small adults and now tend to be fully recognised in their identity as children (with their own personality and rights), but they have more responsibility and social 'pressure' on their behaviour and learning. Elias also emphasises that in today's societies, families more than ever have become the main place for the socialising of children (although not the only place), and for a longer period of their life. The processes of socialisation and individualisation of children in contemporary societies therefore take place at the same time and mainly in families.

In the family, though, the learning of a large range of 'self-restraints' (potty training, eating properly, how to behave correctly, to become polite, 'civil' or 'civilised') operates from very early childhood through relationships that remain rather unbalanced compared to other ones. Children are materially and emotionally highly dependent on other members of the family and especially their parents who protect, feed, learn and educate but first and foremost 'love' them. Elias highlights the concept of 'love and learning relationships' (see Gabriel, 2017), through which children learn at a very early age, and continuously throughout their development, to become attached to and identify with many other people. In this way

processes of children's socialisation and individualisation in the family (and particularly through parent–child relationships) may be linked to the transgenerational process of transmission of national belonging, habitus and banal nationalism. It then becomes a question of studying to what extent, how and why the building of oneself, the building of I-, we-, they-identities, crystallises more or less consciously around what children experience and define as 'French', for example, and what each child has learnt to love, hate, reject, respect, tolerate or suffer.

Our research is both interested in the way parents want to contribute to building the we–I identity of their children and what their educational practices reveal about their own process of identity construction and nationalism. With specific reference to the first aspect, Elias suggests that we should pay greatest attention to the strong interdependence between affective and learning dimensions, particularly in family relationships. In *The Symbol Theory* (2011), he further emphasises the importance of symbolic functions, which are learned, like imagining, remembering, forgetting and fantasizing, and of 'symbolic resources that frame and maintain the national habitus as an 'affective household of nations' (see Bucholc, 2020; Kuzmics & Axtmann, 2007).

As for Billig, in *Banal Nationalism*, he looks at the flagging we are exposed to rather than how we receive it or what we do with it. But in his work on repression, he suggests that childhood is the best empirical observatory for commonplaces that are so obviously consensual that no one bothers about speaking them out loud (Billig, 1999). Indeed, as children are learning to deem natural the division of the world into nationalities, they may talk about the nation (and the nationalised world) in explicit ways adults would not. However, Billig did not himself emphasise early socialisation as an element to be investigated in order to better understand the functioning of banal nationalism, but others did in reference to his work. For example, Katharine Throssell (2015), who approached banal nationalism as a process of socialisation so early that the mechanism for understanding the nation escapes us. It is buried deep in our memories, so that constant reminders of flagging work without noticing it. Jon Fox, one of Billig's most thoughtful critics, underlines the evidence problem of banal nationalism and suggests that we follow Throssell's path by investigating the nation at its edges, at the edge of our awareness of it (Fox, 2017). He proposes that we focus on the people who pass it on, the parents of young children.

How Do Parents Contribute to the Reproduction of National Habitus and Banal Nationalism? A Survey

The reflections we have just presented on the articulation of the thoughts of Norbert Elias and Michael Billig on the persistence of nationalism today did not, as the method books would suggest, precede the implementation of the ETPAF project. They accompany it. More precisely, they come at the end of the exploratory survey, when we were trying to draw lessons and consolidate the research protocol. The two authors did inspire the project as a whole, but in a less elaborate way. Elias is the source of our interest in how a sense of nationhood is transmitted in early childhood. More precisely, we are pursuing the way in which Katharine Throssell drew on him to carry out her investigation in *Child and Nation* (Throssell, 2015). And it is indeed to Billig that we owe our desire to more fully understand—the better to combat—the omnipotence of nationalism today (Duchesne et al., 2018).

The Test System: Principles and Procedures

ETPAF is a project driven initially by political inquires. We have translated Elias's and Billig's influences quite simply. To begin with, we chose to survey families with children aged five or six, that is to say young children who have not yet been strongly influenced by school, which is known to be a powerful transmitter of the nation, notably in France. Then we tried to develop a survey design that allowed us to reconstruct the way in which parents transmitted to young children their beliefs in the 'natural' character of the division of the world into nations. This design is based on three interviews per family during which two female social scientists interviewed parents as well as their five- to six-year-old child, most of the time in parallel. With the children, many exercises were designed, again following Throssell's (2018) example; what would become of this material was uncertain. The interviews with the parents also used numerous projective stimuli, open-ended forms of questioning which provide little structure to the answers and thus give the interviewees the space to express what is important to them (Duchesne & Ferry, 2021).

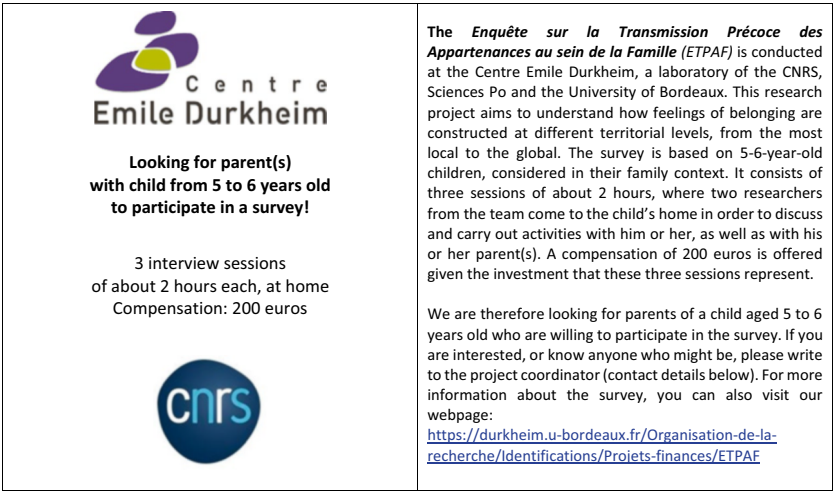
On the parents' side, the first interview is mainly aimed at getting to know the family by having them recount the child's genealogy and daily life. The knowledge acquired on this occasion is sociological, since the

data produced provides very detailed information on the social characteristics of the family, but is also personal. This sequence is the first in the system and sets the tone. By talking about their loved ones, their families and their own lives, the parents reveal a little about themselves. It is not uncommon for emotions to surface and even tears to flow at the mention of lost relatives. The way in which the interviewer accompanies the story and welcomes these emotions reflects the attention she gives to them and the quality of the listening that is necessary. The parents respond to this with the care they take with their story. This exchange establishes a relationship that will last for the duration of the investigation and is anchored in the trust that parents show towards the interviewer by offering their family's story.

The second interview focuses on the family's cultural practices, particularly those concerning the child, while the third focuses on the objective of the research, namely the parents' relationship to nationalism and its transmission. On this occasion, to conclude the exchanges with the family, the interviewer tries to explain to parents how banal nationalism works (for more details on this aspect of the survey, see Duchesne & Ferry, 2021). Finally, it should be noted that the parents and the child met once or twice during each interview to watch and comment on the content of different videos.

We started by validating the feasibility of our survey scenario with a family of a colleague at the end of the first lockdown (spring–summer 2020) by checking that the questions and activities planned were well adapted to a five-year-old child and that the length of each session corresponded to our target of a two-hour interview per session. Then we took advantage of the loosening of Covid restrictions in July 2020 to test our survey design with three families unknown to us. The contact with each of these families was made indirectly, *via* a teacher known to one of our friends, and *via* a doctoral student from our laboratory (the Centre Emile Durkheim). They sent a small advertisement (see Picture 5.1) and the voluntary families contacted us by email or telephone. The compensation of 200 euros per family attempts to make possible the sociological representativeness of our sample. Participation in the survey is costly since it requires the equivalent of a day's work from the family (six hours of meetings and two preparation exercises). Without this financial incentive, we would have had little opportunity of meeting families with no particular interest in the university and the social sciences involved in our research.

One of the characteristics of our survey protocol is that we chose to use projective rather than ethnographic methods to collect our material.



Picture 5.1 Survey presentation flyer (translated from French into English)

Ethnographic surveys, which may seem to be the most appropriate way of understanding practices, are difficult to mobilise when working on objects that are obvious, 'natural', 'without alternative', as is the case with banal nationalism. In contrast, our research uses projective methods that aim to bring out 'poorly' controlled discourse in respondents about the division of humanity into political communities of belonging, encouraging them to react to various stimuli (images, short films, books, 'vignettes') (Lavabre, 2002). Another reason to prefer projective methods to ethnographic ones is that observation time is measured in years, something that the research funding of methods of surveys hardly allows us in the landscape of today's political science and sociology. Also, Billig nor Elias fully investigates how individual relations to nationalism are articulated with other dimensions of their social life, for example their gender, class or race. And given the weight that such factors have on how children are growing up, we cannot just ignore them if we are to empirically investigate Elias's understanding of national habitus or Billig's persistence about the reproduction of nationalism. Therefore, in our project we aim to include as much as possible the social positions of the parents interviewed in order to reveal how it influences their relationships to the nation.

The general tone of the interviews is not very directive. We asked each family similar questions to find out what they thought of the materials we present to them, but most of the discussion consisted of follow-up questions based on their initial responses. Interviewing the parents together further limits the directive nature of the questioning, since the dynamics of the discussion are largely based on the way in which they themselves follow up our discussion. Interviewing a couple is already a form of collective interview and gives the interviewees more power to control the evolution of the discussion (Dolez, 2023; Duchesne, 2017; Kamberelis & Dimitriatis, 2014). The interviews with the parents were recorded from start to finish and the sessions with the parents are transcribed by a professional. Table 5.1 reproduces the scenario of the exploratory interviews we conducted.

Gender is also a dimension of the relationship to national belonging that we explored in our interviews. The hetero-parental composition of the test interviews led us to take an interest in this aspect because it would seem that even in families that are careful to avoid reproducing gendered behaviour, forms of unequal role attribution emerge in its transmission. Pride in sport competition is expressed by the father while the mother seems to display some of the permanent links with the family. These are, however, hypotheses hastily drawn from these interviews and fuelled by our readings on the entanglements between gender and nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997) which we seek to explore in the light of all the interviews.

Adjustments

At the end of the exploratory phase, we proceeded to an evaluation of the overall study. The general economy of the protocol seemed to us very rich. First, the fact that we came to the family home three times, deepening the questioning as we went along, enabled us to establish a relationship of trust with our respondents and encouraged the parents to become increasingly involved as the sessions progressed. Second, it allowed us to observe changes in the ways in which our interviewees saw the meanings of our survey, changes that are themselves full of lessons about their ways of thinking about belonging. Finally, it allowed us to collect a variety of material throughout the three sessions, each of which has an overall thematic coherence.

We have therefore retained the overall structure of the interviews with the parents—knowledge of the family, cultural activities and

Table 5.1 Exploratory interview scenario

Parent interview	*Child maintenance*	*Duration (minutes)*
First session: getting to know each other		*120*
Presentations and collection of informed consents (in accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation)		15
Family trees of both parents and presentation of their educational and professional background	• Family drawing of the child	25
• Commentary on the drawing the child has made and the selected photos • Viewing of Disney's *It's a Small World* and *Titounis Kids* • Collection of the parents' and the child's impressions on these two contents – Questions about the child: – Organisation of daily life; – Emotional environment; – Family life habits; – Things that parents want to pass on to their children.	• Reading of *Mr. and Mrs.* that the child chooses among: – *Mr. and Mrs. in China*; – *Mr. and Mrs. in Scotland*; – *Mr. and Mrs. in the United States*; – *Mr. and Mrs. in Great Britain*. • Reading of other books brought by the researchers.	35 40
• Instructions for next time: with the help of the parents, the child should write a letter to an imaginary pen pal to make him/her want to come and visit. • A voucher (60 euros) will be given.		5
Session Two: identifying cultural practices		*120*
Opening the letter to the correspondent and commenting on it		5

(*continued*)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Session Two: identifying cultural practices		*120*
• Questions about the cultural and artistic practices of the family and the child. Which practices are supervised, which are not (cartoons, books, food, sports, travel, artistic practices). • The parents comment on the *Mr. and Mrs.* book that the child had chosen in the previous session.	• Association game: children are shown objects and cultural practices and asked which country they are from. • *Folklore Memory* Game: during the game, children are asked to describe the characters.	40
Viewing of television extracts: *Tchoupi fait le marché; Saturnin le pompier; Asterix and Cleopatra* (subtitling of hieroglyphs).		20
Commentary on 3 'vignettes': – It is necessary to hold for France: frictions during the 1998 World Cup; – Carmen does not know 'chorizo'; – Children damage a flag of France one day after the 14/07 (national day).	• Suggest that the child dress up or put on make-up with the colours blue-white-red. • Playing with the child in everyday situations.	45
• The researcher and the child return to the parents wearing red-white- and-blue make-up. We observe the parents' reaction. • Instructions for next time: the child should write a letter in which he/she imagines what the pen pal's 'home' looks like and asks questions to find out more before visiting. • Gift voucher (60 euros)		10
Third session: the relationship to belonging		*120*
• Opening of the letter and collective commentary. • Presentation of Maslow's pyramid. The parents explain the principle to the child and if they do not know it, the researchers explain. Collective commentary of the pyramid.		20
• *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) questionnaire: parents complete the questionnaire together on a single copy. http://www.issp-france.fr/enquete/identite-nationale-2013/)	Activity based on the principle of the 'Symbol task card' that Katharine Throssell imagined for her thesis (the child has images containing various national symbols in the order of his or her preferences).	30
• Discussion around the thesis of banal nationalism. The child does what s/he wants during this time. Discussion support: – Video clip on the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral fire (15/04/2019); – Video clip of French president Emmanuel Macron speaking during the first lockdown (March 2020); – Image of a weather sequence on television. • Proposal to keep in touch and get feedback on our work • Thank you and a gift voucher (80 euros)		70

affiliations—but have changed some of the proposed activities. We eliminated what seemed to us to produce the 'poorest' discourse, namely the joint viewing of children's videos, the reading of books in the 'Mr. and Mrs.' series and the writing of letters to the imaginary pen pal (see Table 5.1). In each case, these activities created a situation in which parents explicitly wanted their child to behave towards the interviewers in a way that would, if not honour them, at least respond effectively to what they expected. And the children resisted through silence. While the interviews between the interviewer and the child gave rise to some very interesting discussions, the parent–child interactions in front of the interviewers appeared of limited interest for the survey.

We have kept as video support only the excerpts presented in the third interview when the interviewer explained to parents how banal nationalism works. We also replaced the two exercises of writing a letter to an imaginary pen pal with a request to watch the film *Moana* (between the first and second interviews) and to read a book *The Wolf Who Wanted to Travel the World* (between the second and third interviews), two widely distributed cultural products for children. We wanted to conduct some activity between each interview in order to maintain the link between the family and the interviewers and to prolong the presence of the interviewers in the family between visits. However, we did not attend the viewing or reading with the family because of the artificial nature of the situation—see Guilluy (2018) for an account of the difficulty of watching people watching a film.

Instead, we chose to focus our investigation on what the child says about the film or reading during the next interview. We used the time freed up to extend the 'vignette' activity proposed to the parents. The vignette is a short story that is presented to the subjects of the survey so that they can comment on it. In our adjustments we proposed four vignettes, two in the second interview and two in the third one. They dealt with nationalism in sport (see below), with typical national food and what children should know about it, with the preference for national producers and with the use of a national language in the family and at school. Finally, we have kept the discussion conceived in a quasi 'participative' way around the thesis of banal nationalism. This allowed ourselves the possibility of changing the video extracts and other documents proposed to the parents from one interview to the next in order to adapt ourselves to current events and the evolution of our investigation.

Working with 'vignettes': A Foretaste

There are many forms of vignettes with varying degrees of interaction (see Jenkins et al., 2010, for some examples). In the survey, we invited parents to respond to several vignettes by asking if the stories could happen in their family and if parents had any opinion about the situations and characters. Here is the vignette of the first of the stories told, called 'The World Cup':

> *The story takes place a few years ago, at the time of the 1998 World Cup. It's the day of the final and a family is gathered in the country to celebrate a series of birthdays. In the early afternoon, the atmosphere starts to warm up, the television is set up outside and the meal is prepared for the evening. The family comes from Pas-de-Calais, they are football fans. Only one of the sisters-in-law doesn't like it. She suddenly realises that everyone is dressed in blue-white-red, including her two children (Caroline, 8, and Jean, 6). Their faces disappear under the national colours. At first, she tries to laugh it off and wants to convince her children that it's better when not everyone supports the same team. When they don't listen to her, she declares loud and clear that she is for Brazil. From that moment on, her children refuse to speak to her.*

In the interviews, 'The World Cup' generated a great deal of criticism of the sister-in-law, who is almost always seen as a killjoy and someone who likes to make troubles. The exercise provides a raw, unvarnished expression of the obvious legitimacy of national preference, clearly highlighted from the interview of Jeanne's parents (January 2022):

Mother *This is about football. Well, she can tell me what she wants, but if I'm French and I want to support the French team, I support the French team. And um, it doesn't shock me that a whole family of French people support the French team and don't wear the Brazil jersey, um … That's it. Everyone should support their team. After that, to say that it's good that we support other teams too, yes, of course. But in the end, if it had been a match….*

Father *Not for this match.*

Mother *I don't know, Germany, Croatia for example, where everyone chooses sides, why not. But France–Brazil, erm, it's normal that we support our country. After that, if she wants to support Brazil, she has the right to do so, but she shouldn't have to. After that, um, the reaction of the children, maybe they saw her as a killjoy, too. We're*

having a party, we're all supporting the same team and then you come along and tell us we've got to support Brazil. No, I don't agree.

Father *First of all, she's probably not at all. … She doesn't like football, she probably doesn't give football any importance at all, but … But we're showing that she doesn't seem to be attached to her nation. I mean, she chooses Brazil … Like France doesn't matter to her. OK, let's say it's because it's football and she doesn't really care about football, but um, it's strange not to be patriotic for such an event. It's very strange.*

Beyond the example of Jeanne's parents, almost all of the parents in the 30 families were genuinely concerned about the sister-in-law's attitude, unable to imagine that anyone could not feel committed to their national team on World Cup night. They differ on the degree of disapproval, but not on the substance: her behaviour is inevitably dictated by the desire to disrupt the harmony of this family and national day, by the pleasure of making a fuss. However, the story allows us to discuss the universal preference for one's country's team. The interview then moves on to recall memories of that afternoon in 1998, which are still very vivid for most of the interviewees.

Originally, each story was written on the basis of real stories that happened to interviewers. The idea was to give a little something back to the parents, who had provided a great deal of their personal stories and thoughts. As we enter the final part of the last interview, where the interviewer tries to explain the theory of banal nationalism to the interviewees in order to get their reactions, the fact that the sister-in-law is part of the team (if not, most of the time, the interviewer herself) facilitates the change of tone, the transition from projective inquiry to the discussion of scientific arguments.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have argued that Elias and Billig share a common theoretical approach that does not separate the sense of belonging to the nation from nationalism. Belonging is not without a sense of superiority for oneself (Elias, 2007: 8), nor without the risk of violence towards the other. For both, nationalism begins with the fact of considering national anchorage as a more or less 'given identity', making the relationship to

'one's' nation an indisputable primary dimension in one's relationship to others. In our research, we have tried to identify how parents' contradictory educational priorities are articulated, ways of conceiving the world that preclude more universalist forms of thinking, for example when parents say they want to open their children up to the world while inscribing them in their family and national habitus. Whereas they seek to value differences, parents more often than not find themselves confirming stereotypes that promote a hierarchy between nations. African countries, for example, are most often populated by animals, while European countries are full of celebrated buildings.

We explained how we designed a research project to give full empirical expression to this theoretical—which is politically not 'neutral'—perspective. Our fieldwork is now complete. We have conducted thirty series of interviews with parents of five and six year olds, who are as sociologically and politically as diverse as possible, and we have now entered the analytical phase. In particular, we are analysing the notion of 'preference', which we see as the tipping point from a love of one's own nation to the feeling that only (or almost only) the national destiny matters. By closely studying the words used by parents and interpreting their silences, hesitations and ambivalences, we try to show how they are caught up, in spite of themselves, in strong feelings of superiority (or aspirations to superiority) that are conveyed through national habitus and banal nationalism. Our aim is then to determine in a more precise way how Elias and Billig's approaches can be used together to explain the intimate relation between collective discourses on the inseparability of belonging and nation, and those that defend the superiority of one nation over others.

A final aspect we wish to explore is the identification of some of the similarities and differences in the development of national habitus. Can we claim in this survey of nationalism in France to be dealing with some of the general features of banal nationalism? This claim generated a lively debate within our research team. In the course of our discussions, it appeared as a form of imperialist pretension, blind to the historicity of the French national habitus and its close connection with colonial domination. We therefore think it is important to integrate into our analysis of banal nationalism an understanding of imperialist and postcolonial nationalism. In doing so, we reintroduce the long view into our approach that emphasises generational processes of reproduction that French parents use to transmit 'we' forms of identity to their children. This perspective can pave the way for an even more ambitious and challenging comparative project.

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PART II

Informalising Processes and Social Inequalities

CHAPTER 6

Changes in Play and Playgrounds Within Recent Informalising and Reformalising Cycles of Parent-Child Relationships (1950–2020)

Raúl Sánchez-García

Introduction

This chapter analyses the recent development of children's play and playgrounds in relation to changing parent-child relationships since the second half of the twentieth century. It aims to test and further develop Elias's analyses of the civilising of parents by introducing Cas Wouters's (2007, 2020; Wouters & Dunning, 2019) ideas on the shifting informalising/formalising trends of parent-child relationships in Western developed countries. It is structured around three sections to address the different phases in the conditions of play and changes in the design and implementation of playgrounds. The first section presents the informalisation phase

R. Sánchez-García (✉)
Research Centre in Sports Science, King Juan Carlos University, Madrid, Spain
e-mail: raul.sanchezg@upm.es

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from the 1960s to mid-1970s in which free play and adventure became key features; the second section deals with the reformalisation phase of the 1980s–1990s where risk averse attitudes and standardisation of playgrounds became the norm; the last section presents the informalisation phase in the mid-2000s that reclaimed the importance of risky play and nature in the design proposals of integrated playgrounds.

Historical Changes in Play and Playgrounds

Childhood, as a social category or status, is historically constituted (Ariès, 1962; Cunningham, 2006; see Gabriel, 2014, for an Eliasian appraisal of studies of childhood). Ariès (1962) pointed out that before the twelfth century several games were common to all members of society, regardless of class (aristocracy and common folks) and age (adults and infants played together in the same games). During the long period of transformation from medieval warriors to courtiers that Elias (2012) studied in his work on the civilising process in Western Europe, not only the games of upper and lower classes became differentiated but also the games for children and adults became separated (Vicente & Rodríguez, 2008). Afterwards, bourgeois philanthropists of the eighteenth century would transform child's play into a pedagogical tool for an appropriate education (Elschenbroich, 1979); the relationship between play and infancy would grow stronger until becoming perceived as an essential aspect of childhood in relation to adulthood.

During long-term development, the activities of children's play games also changed within these periods. The play activity of children in preindustrial societies corresponded to a higher degree with adult reality; the structure of self-control for adults was less distant from children's play behaviour. During the twentieth century, especially in the second half, children's play became a constituent part of their mental, physical, and emotional development and not just a preparatory activity for adult life. According to Elias, 'this is a manifestation of the relative autonomy of childhood in our society.' (2008, p. 30). Such a degree of autonomy unfolded within the changes in parent-child relationships during the twentieth century, which Elias (2008) characterised by the loosening of traditional taboos (e.g. towards children's sexuality). His essay 'The Civilising of Parents' analysed the civilising process of the parent-child relationship in the West from a long-term perspective.

In this essay Elias argued that power balances and functional interdependencies between parents and children became more even, a trend greatly accelerated during the twentieth century. It was during this century (especially since the second half) that the child became acknowledged as a distinctive important part of society who needed specific forms of education and held specific rights of his or her own. In 1924, the Fifth Assembly of the League of Nations declared the Rights of the Child. In the first part of that century, educational laws were issued in Western countries to enhance the quality and amount of schooling for children. In Britain, for example, the Education Acts of 1902, 1918 and 1944 expanded the opportunities to attend school from elementary schools to compulsory secondary education (Cunningham, 2006, p. 196).

State investment in education also grew steadily (apart from the two World Wars) since 1900 in Western countries. For instance, in the USA it went from 1 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the peak of 5.7 per cent in 1976 before declining to 4.7 per cent of GDP in 1984, flat-lining at about 5.3 per cent of GDP in the 1990s (Chantrill, 2022). Nevertheless, despite the more even power balances and greater functional interdependence among parents and children, such patterns did not mean a return to less civilised societies. On the contrary, the informalisation of manners and behaviour expressed in these relations was taking place in highly complex societies with higher demands on the degree of self-control on both parents and children (Elias, 2008, p. 35). In fact, this is precisely the main idea of Wouters' (2007, 2020) theory of informalisation: a wider variety of behaviours expressed in more moderate, flexible and controlled forms implies an even more complex form of civilising process. He considered that Elias's analysis of the civilising process had only identified the formalising tendency that was predominant between the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. According to Wouters (2007), at the turn of the twentieth century, the pattern changed to an informalising tendency of the civilising process, which gained predominance from then on. The main waves or spurts of informalisation occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Roaring Twenties and the permissive society of the 1960s and 1970s.

This general trend of informalisation unfolded in a spiralling fashion through a complex shifting balance of formalising-informalising trends (Sánchez-García, 2018) that resulted in predominant (not exclusive) informalising and reformalising phases. During the latter, many earlier informalised social codes were integrated and became formalised. During

informalising phases, a rising social constraint to unconstraint and more flexible social relations was set in motion. This implied a more conscious decision to change the social code depending on the context. Wouters (2007, p. 212) coined the term 'third nature'[1] to refer to a psychological structure characterised by a greater permeation of affects by the intellect and a tendency towards speaking more openly about affections and emotional life. The advance was from conscience, which is more superego directed, to consciousness which is more ego directed (Wouters, 2004, p. 208). During these waves of informalisation, parents experienced a heightening of the taboos against violence in relations between parents and children. According to Wouters (2019: 57):

> Since about the 1880s, the traditional emphasis in child rearing, which emphasised subservience to institutional and adult authority sanctioned by corporal and other punishments, shifted to an emphasis on qualities linked to the self-regulation of children, sanctioned by reasoning and differentiations in affective warmth and permissiveness. Relations between children and parents gained intimacy and warmth as well as sensitivity and reflexive thoughtfulness.

Informalisation also brought an increasing sensitivity towards risks in pacified societies (Wouters, 2020, p. 328). The civilising of parents meant less use of physical punishment but, at the same time, a greater control over potential physical or mental harm to children. In a nutshell, more protection. This became especially acute during the reformalisation phase of the 1980s with more rigid control over children (Wouters, 2020, p. 326). Nonetheless, such 'risk averse' attitudes of parents in terms of potential harm for children began to be questioned in the mid-2000s, opening the debate towards a more positive approach to risk management of children within a predominantly informalising phase.

The development of playgrounds[2] can therefore be seen as part of the relative autonomy that was granted to childhood during the changing

[1] In contrast to the Eliasian concept of habitus as second nature which implies a self-regulated conscience functioning automatically.

[2] During the nineteenth century, the German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) designed pedagogical institutions for children called 'kindergartens' that mainly consisted of a playground with pedagogical material for kids to explore freely. Froebel recognised the pedagogical implications of the environment, promoting the value of free play in contact with natural materials such as water and sand. Based on Froebel's ideas, piles of sand were

conditions of parent-child relationships. As play became considered crucial for the well-being and development of children, suitable areas for play started to be considered paramount for providing the nurture children needed for growth as well-balanced individuals. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, playgrounds in Europe and the USA emerged as secure spaces for children, with equipment manufacturers adding new play equipment such as swings, slides, see-saws and climbing walls (Frost, 2012). Playgrounds protected children from the dangers of the increasing numbers of motor vehicles and the moral decay of street life. Streets and alleys became perceived as a dangerous environment for children, especially in poor, overcrowded and unhealthy areas of working-class neighbourhoods. As US President Theodore Roosevelt stated:

> City streets are unsatisfactory playgrounds for children because of the danger, because most good games are against the law, because they are too hot in summer, and because in crowded sections of the city they are apt to be schools of crime. … Since play is a fundamental need, playgrounds should be provided for every child as much as schools. (quoted in Gill, 2021, p. 18)

The spread of playgrounds in the urban landscape increased enormously during the second half of the twentieth century. Their design mirrored the predominant informalising and reformalising trends in each historical phase.

Informalisation Phase (1960s to Mid-1970s): Free Play and Adventure

After World War II, intergenerational equilibrium increased, the teenager as an active consumer emerged and infancy gained greater importance in what Viviana Zelizer (1994) referred to as the 'sacralization of childhood'. Scientific interest in childhood, mainly from psychology, grew dramatically: Benjamin Spock's (1946) *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* led to a turning point in the way adults saw children. Anna Freud established child therapy training courses in 1947 and Erik Erikson wrote *Childhood and Society* in 1950. Family life started to revolve around the emotional and material care of children, helping them to access happiness

placed in Berlin's public parks in the 1850s. During the 1880s, copying the policy of public parks in Berlin, cities such as Boston incorporated supervised sand gardens.

and success. Communication between parents and children evolved towards a more considerate, intimate and loving approach in comparison to previous generations in which corporeal punishment was a common tool for rearing children who were supposed to be quiet and only speak when spoken to (Cunningham, 2006, p. 216). A more flexible and cautious form of parental control was set in motion. As Wouters (2019, p. 57) claims: 'Thus, more and more children in warmer and more intimate family relations have experienced a type of discipline or social control that is less directed at obedience than towards self-control and self-steering—that is, towards learning to think and decide for themselves.'[3]

The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Children was adopted unanimously by all 78 Member States in 1959. Children became perceived as needing not only protection but appropriate conditions for development. The 'progressive' education of the era stood against rote learning, strict discipline and punishment. The novel character Pippi Longstocking, invented in 1945 by Astrid Lindgren, embodied the free, anti-authoritarian spirit of childhood that would find echoes in the anti-institutional pedagogical environment of the 1960s and 1970s with the development of the 'free school movement'. This movement was informed by works such as A.S. Neill's *Summerhill* (Neill, 1960) and advocates of 'children's liberation' (see Adams, 1971) who contested the supposedly positive effect of the family and state protection of children (via education and justice systems). Within this context, the work of Holt (1964, 1974), Kohl (1968) and Kozol (1967) critically discussed the school system which considered young children as objects but also failed to teach them basic skills (Margolin, 1978, p. 445).

Innovative Playspaces and Adventure Playgrounds

The post-war baby boom offered a greater visibility to the importance of childhood. Interest in play as part of children's folklore found classical works such as Opie and Opie's *Children's Games in Street and Playground*

[3] This is not to say that the novel situation did not generate anxiety and bafflement for the parents. For instance, Cunningham quotes an English mother of the era talking about the behaviour of her little seven-year-old daughter: 'Well, it is a sort kind of rudeness—*disrespectful* rudeness - and I find it hard to cope with, because I would have never *dreamt* of talking to my mother like that, you know; not even thinking that way. … This relationship with parents, it's completely different and I'm not sure which is best' (Cunningham, 2006, p. 218).

(Opie & Opie, 1969), Sutton-Smith's *The Folkgames of Children* (Sutton-Smith, 1972) or Knapp and Knapp's *One Potato, Two Potato* (Knapp & Knapp, 1976). Child's art became an object of imitation among artists of the post-war period such as Jean Dubuffet, Miró, Pollock and the COBRA group[4] (Lefaivre, 2007, p. 46). It also affected the view of urban theorists: Lewis Mumford pleaded for the creation of playscapes in cities in 1949; American urban theorists such as Kevin Lynch explored the child's perception of urban spaces throughout the 1950s. Moreover, the relevance of childhood led some great architects and artists to design playgrounds as part of the post-war phenomenon of 'child empowerment' (Lefaivre, 2007, p. 45). Pierre Jeanneret designed a play sculpture for kids in the city of Chandigarh (India) and Le Corbusier designed a playground area in the roof of the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille (France) between 1946 and 1952. Dimitris Pikionis designed a playground in the suburbs of Athens called Philotei. Isamu Noguchi, who had already designed playgrounds in the 1930s (e.g. Play Mountain) also presented in the 1950s innovative designs for playgrounds that could not be finally made. In 1954, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) organised a playground competition. That same year, Princeton professor Joe Brown designed a playground incorporating an element of unpredictability to prepare children for the struggles of maturity.

In the USA the so-called novelty playgrounds of the 1950s–1960s favoured the development of imagination and dramatic play through the design of fantastic shapes and cartoonist figs. A prototypical example was the *Dennis the Menace* playground in Monterey (California), which opened in 1956. In Europe, the building of playgrounds accelerated a part of the reconstruction process of cities after the war. For instance, in Amsterdam, there were only 30 playgrounds in 1929, the same as in 1947. But by 1968, the city had over 1000 playgrounds due to the designs of Aldo van Eyck (1918–1999) within the Municipal Department of Public Works commissioned by Cornelis van Eesteren and Jacoba Mulder (Lefaivre, 2007, pp. 44–45). Van Eyck talked not about equipment but 'tools of imagination', favouring simple, elemental forms, avoiding symmetrical distribution in the space to convey a rhythm of flow. There was no fence and benches and bushes acted as natural barriers. The idea was to

[4] The COBRA group was an avant-garde movement of the mid-twentieth century. The name refers to the initials of the members' home countries' capital cities: Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam.

introduce play and children's lives within the urban texture, favouring the sociability of different age groups in the same area. Children could experience the city in a direct manner through their own experiences of play.

The importance of children's own experience was further developed through proposals such as the 'junk playground' and the 'adventure playground', favouring children's autonomous play. The Danish landscape artist Carl Theodor Sørensen (1893–1979) invented the concept of junk playground, the first one introduced in 1943 in the Emdrup district of Copenhagen. A junk playground consisted of an empty lot in which waste and building materials were available for children to play. The idea was taken up by Lady Allen of Hurtwood (1897–1976), who introduced junk playgrounds to the UK in 1945, coining the term 'adventure playground' instead. Adventure playgrounds favoured children's autonomous play, direct experience, creativity and invention, as well as cooperative work. Such playgrounds acknowledged the formative value of self-organised play by children on their own. Adult playworkers were on the premises, but they only acted as facilitators or assistants in case of need, not as leaders of play activities. Thus, the pedagogical intervention of adults was not needed as a prerequisite for play to be useful for the development of children.[5]

The importance of nature, of being outdoors in the different seasons was also a crucial element of adventure playgrounds. Hurtwood wrote several influential books such as *Design for Play* (Hurtwood, 1961), *New Playgrounds* (Hurtwood, 1965) and *Planning for Play* (Hurtwood, 1968). She also established several adventure playgrounds for handicapped children, having an impact on the notion of accessibility. Soon, adventure playgrounds would cross the Atlantic to arrive in the USA. In 1950, *McCall's* Magazine sponsored the first adventure playground in Minneapolis. In 1976, Bill Vance founded the American Adventure Playground Association (AAPA), and in 1977, the AAPA identified 16 adventure playgrounds in the country. During the 1970s, adventure playgrounds (called playparks) also had an important development in Japan.

[5] The debate about the adequate degree of adult intervention in children's play is still a major topic among specialists (see, for instance, Weisberg et al., 2016). Nonetheless, it is not something that can be solved just within the pedagogical realm. As in any other cultural aspect, it is immersed in broader socio-historical patterns and is influenced by the shifting power balances and interdependencies between adults and children in each epoch.

In summary, the attitude towards the design of the playgrounds was changing. As Jay Beckwith, co-author with Jeremy J. Hewes of the classic *Build Your Own Playground* in 1975, commented: 'A creative playground is only half a creative space; it's also a creative attitude. And we're changing attitudes as much as we're changing spaces' (Beckwith, 1973). All these influences crystallised during the 1960s and 1970s in integrated proposals such as M. Paul Friedberg's 'empyric playgrounds', Richard Dattner's 'adventure playgrounds' in the USA or Alfred Trachsel's 'Robinson Crusoe playground' in Europe. In such integrated proposals, natural environments were essential. There was no isolated play element. Discovery, exploration, creativity and cooperation were enhanced and interaction between children of different ages helped learning and skill development.

According to Solomon (2014, p. 25): 'Their designs were complicated assemblages that indicated faith in children's ability to exercise sound judgements, or, at least, to take limited risks and learn from their mistakes.' That is to say, children were acknowledged as responsible agents for taking risks, indicating a shift towards a more even power balance between adults and infants. Nonetheless, during this era we find some formalising aspects that would become predominant in the next phase. For instance, a piece by Morton Golding called 'Bruise-Proofing Your Playground' (Golding, 1963) appeared in the magazine *Popular Mechanics* in September 1963. The text presented a sensationalistic portrayal of dangers and injuries in playgrounds, calling for more safety measures to be implemented, something that would become a crucial concern during the 1980s.

Reformalisation Phase (1980s–1990s): Risk Aversion and Standardised Playgrounds

During this phase, an abandonment of welfare state policies towards neoliberal policies brought to the fore notions of personal responsibility and risk management in most aspects of life, from health to jobs and economic issues and, of course, family matters, including the caring of children. According to Ulrich Beck (1992), the late modern capitalist societies of the last third of the twentieth century witnessed an increase in the management of risks by individuals conceived as neoliberal monads in political and economic realms. Acting as 'rational' actors, subjects had to deal with risks (controllable/calculable) and dangers (non-controllable/

non-calculable) that were previously assumed to be systematically managed (Luhmann, 1993). Nonetheless, the situation for adults and children differed. As intergenerational power balances widened again during this era, children lost some autonomy and a degree of responsibility. An increase in the sensitivity towards risks and a greater demand for control of children's play expressed what Tim Gill (2007) dubbed 'risk averse societies', characterising an overprotective attitude towards children.

Thus, parent-child relationships followed the broader reformalisation trend. Children were not controlled through authoritarian models as in previous eras; they were controlled by overprotection once sensitivity towards risks had heightened in well-pacified societies (Wouters, 2020, p. 328). In a nutshell, the civilising of parents during this period led to less use of corporeal punishment but a greater control over potential physical and/or psychic harm to children. The school system also reflected such concerns and schoolyards started to display growing worries about safety measures in their design. As an overall result, children's time to experience on their own was reduced. Gill provides some telling comparisons:

> In 1971 eight out of ten children aged seven or eight years went to school on their own in the UK. By 1990 this figure had dropped to less than one in ten. Again, in 1971 the average seven-year-old was making trips to their friends or the shops on their own. By 1990 that freedom was being withheld until the age of ten, meaning that in just 19 years children had 'lost' up to three years of freedom of movement. (2007, p. 12)

During the 1990s, this trend continued but several voices started to denounce the situation. Cline and Fay (1990) coined the label 'helicopter parenting' to describe parent-child overprotective relationships. Chaput Waksler (1996) published *The Little Trials of Childhood and Children's Strategies for Dealing with Them* which described various ways that young children were denied the right to participate in decisions relating to their daily lives; Furedi (2001, 2002) denounced the harmful effects of 'paranoid parenting' on children's development. This pro-autonomy movement for children sowed the seeds for the informalising trend that would emerge as the dominant one in the next phase.

Standardised Playgrounds

During this phase, a more restrictive approach to children's play was predominant. What Joe Frost named the 'standardized playground' era (Frost, 2010; Frost et al., 2004) reflected the design and redesign of manufactured playground equipment, primarily the four S's (swings, slides, see-saws and superstructures), and the prevalence of surrounding hard surfaces. Especially during the 1980s, standardised playground equipment developed simultaneously with concerns about playground injuries, increasing lawsuits and the publishing of national standards for playground equipment safety (Kutska, 2011). To avoid legal issues, designers tended towards standardised playgrounds instead of creative and unique solutions. Already in 1980, we find reports about the fact that traditional equipment was too safe so children were avoiding it (Wilkinson, 1985). In 1981, the Consumer Product Safety Commission published the *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*, applicable in the USA. The Handbook favoured the use of safety materials, including hard plastic or splinter-free wood equipment, vinyl coating, rounded edges and rubber safety surfaces. Size and height of the equipment were reduced and more guard rails appeared on playgrounds. In 1988, the Consumers Association published in the UK a report on playground safety that raised concerns about design, maintenance and access, including a call for greater use of safety surfacing (Gill, 2007, p. 25). The message was amplified by the BBC TV consumer programme *That's Life*, bringing the question of safety to the public forefront.

Overall, playground design reinforced risk aversion values, transplanting principles from workplace health and safety to a safety-conscious design of playgrounds (Verstrate & Karsten, 2011). As a consequence, 'they reinforced the idea that playgrounds should be free of risk, and that any accidents or injuries were a sign of failure' (Gill, 2007, pp. 37–38), embracing the view that children were essentially 'vulnerable' rather than 'resilient' (Kozlovsky, 2008). Nonetheless, during the 1990s some reaction towards the excessive concern on safety in the design of playgrounds emerged. For instance, the Play Safety Forum (PSF) began to take a stand against excessive safety and to argue for a more balanced approach (Solomon, 2014, p. 149). Moreover, the excessive standardisation based on safety measures provoked a decline in the use of such spaces and the development of public criticism. In the 1990s, play research took a novel angle to try to redefine the goals of the modern playground in order to

develop inclusive playgrounds for all ages and abilities, including natural elements again into the designs.

Informalisation Phase (Since Mid-2000s): Flexible Control and Integrated Playgrounds

This phase featured a more balanced intergenerational power ratio with a more flexible control of children's behaviour. Parents spent more time taking care of their offspring. According to a 2006 report from the *Future Foundation* in the UK, the time parents spent looking after their children each day quadrupled from 25 minutes in 1975 to 99 minutes in 2000 (Gill, 2007, p. 62). This fact paralleled an increase in parents' anxiety and tension due to the difficult balance in maintaining such flexible control of their children. As Cunningham (2006, p. 244) remarks: 'there have probably been no previous generation of parents that has been quite so constantly concerned for their children and their future as our own.' The acceptance of risk in children's play became a topic of debate since the mid-2000s, for instance, through best-sellers such as Iggulden and Iggulden's (2007) *The Dangerous Book for Boys*; Davis and Eppler-Wolff's (2009) *Raising Children Who Soar*; and Tulley and Spiegler's (2011) *50 Dangerous Things (You Should Let Your Children Do)*. Academics also placed risk in children's play as a relevant research topic, several papers acknowledging the relevance of risky play for the development of children (Brussoni et al., 2012, 2015). Sandseter (2009, p. 3) defined risky play as 'thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury,' which related to 'physically and emotionally stimulating and challenging environments' (Sandseter, 2007, p. 237). She also differentiated between six categories of risky play: great heights (e.g. climbing a tower), high speed (e.g. riding a bike in a fast manner), near dangerous elements (e.g. playing next to a fire), where children can disappear/get lost (e.g. hidden in the bushes), with dangerous tools (e.g. playing with a hammer), and rough-and-tumble play (e.g. fencing with sticks) (Sandseter, 2007, p. 243).

The importance of risk in children's play gained legitimacy when the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013 stated: 'A balance is needed between, on the one hand, taking action to reduce the unacceptable hazards in the children's environment … and on the other hand, informing, equipping and empowering children to take the

necessary precautions to enhance their own safety' (quoted in Gill, 2018, p. 26). The balance between risk and safety highlighted some important differences among Western countries[6] and contrasts between greater concerns in the USA compared to Europe (New et al., 2005). Within Europe, some variations exist too, ranging in a continuum from the Scandinavian model (more permissive) to the Anglo model (more controlling) (Little et al., 2012), and the Mediterranean model, the latter still maintaining a risk averse attitude and overprotection (Bento, 2017; Sánchez-García, 2021).

Related to the question of risk management and freedom was the nostalgic, 'romantic' crave for a return to natural environments, not in the sense of 'becoming wild' and 'uncivilised', but in the sense of bringing educational advantages provided by nature as a way to compensate overcrowded and polluted urban spaces. Richard Louv's best-selling book of 2005, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, introduced the term 'nature-deficit disorder'. The book denounced the negative effects of the modern child's disconnection from nature which lead to attention and sensorial difficulties, higher risks of obesity and higher rates of emotional and physical illnesses. In 2006, the UK's *Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto* set out a vision to enable every young person to experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of their learning and personal development. Forest Schools, which involve children having regular contact with woodland over an extended period of time, are increasing in the UK (Cree, 2009). In the USA, Robin C. Moore, Director of the Natural Learning Initiative and a Professor of Landscape Architecture at North Carolina State University, advocates for the inclusion of nature as an important part of children's play environment, collecting these ideas in the National Guidelines for Nature Play and Learning Places (Moore & Cooper, 2014).

Integrated Playgrounds

In 2007, the architecture firm Döll denounced the restrictive design of playgrounds in the following terms:

[6] Studies from Central Africa describe common child-rearing practices with risk levels that would be unacceptable in the present Western context, such as eight-month-old infants playing with knives, helping to chop tinder for the household fire (Hewlett, 1991), or two-year-olds independently roaming the village and the surrounding forests and fields (Gottlieb, 2004).

> Playgrounds offer little playing space. As demarcated areas that are exclusively intended for child's games, they restrict the essence of play as a part of human nature. Expanding regulations have replaced spontaneous discovery by putting the emphasis on—apparent—safety. Instead of stimulating spontaneity and creativity, most playgrounds offer a configuration of prescriptive items that only hinder a child's imagination. There is a need for an inspiring alternative that cultivates the potential *homo ludens* in an urban context. A small change in a word, from playground to play space, opens the door to a new perspective. Play space represents mental freedom, and leeway to deviate from the rules (…) Play space is something that is for all ages and all places. (Döll, 2007, p. 28)

A crave for less control and the acknowledgement of risk and natural environments (characteristic of an informalising trend) since the mid-2000s led to a moderate approach in the design of 'integrated playgrounds', or what Frost (2012) dubbed 'Integrated Playscapes for Play, Health, and Learning'. The concept of playground became inclusive for people of all ages (intergenerational playgrounds) and abilities (accessible playgrounds), blending natural and built environments, integrated playgrounds providing experiential learning and connecting schools, neighbourhoods and cityscapes. Such contemporary playgrounds were distinguished from traditional playgrounds and adventure playgrounds in that they contained 'composite play structures that comprise various apparati and types of equipment inter-connected in a way that they form a unity' (Stoiljković, 2006, p. 116). Peter Heuken's works such as Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Playground in Kensington Gardens (UK); Madrid Río Salón de Pinos and Arganzuela Park in Madrid (Spain); and the Gathering Place of Tulsa (USA) are good examples of current integrated playgrounds. Heuken is the director of special projects for the German playground designing and building company Richter, founded in 1967 by Hilde Richter who considered the use of wooden play equipment a key defining feature of children's play areas.

Integrated playgrounds therefore continued the proposals from Friedberg, Dattner and Trachsel in the 1960s and 1970s, acknowledging the importance of children's autonomy in their (1) risk management and experiential learning and (2) natural environments.

(1) The importance of risky play in playgrounds' design:

In 2002, the Play Safety Forum (PSF) in the UK issued the paper 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' that became a framework for a system of assessment of 'risk-benefit analysis' which was implemented as a guide in 2008 by Play England (Ball et al., 2008). In the same year, the government published 'Staying Safe, the Government's Safeguarding Strategy', stating: 'Wrapping children in cotton wool', or minimizing all risks, however small, for fear of litigation, was having a negative impact on children's play opportunities and their more general freedom to explore and encounter the world appropriate to their age' (quoted in Solomon, 2014, p. 150). Robin Sutcliffe (chair of the Play Safety Forum) and Adrian Voce (former director of Play England) considered that such documents had an impact on the revised European standards and the creation of the European Play Safety Forum (Solomon, 2014, p. 188, note 14). Such impact was noticeable in the introduction to the 2008 version of the playground equipment standard EN1176/7 by the European Committee for standardisation which included the following statement:

> Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm … In play provision exposure to some degree of risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequences in a controlled environment. Respecting the characteristics of children's play and the way children benefit from playing on the playground with regard to development, children need to learn to cope with risk and this may lead to bumps and bruises and even occasionally a broken limb. (quoted in Gill, 2018, pp. 26–7)

A more moderate approach to the balance between risk and safety was not limited to the European region. For instance, Australia adopted in 2017 a new set of playground equipment standards that followed the 2014 European standards closely, resulting in a significant relaxation of key elements concerning safety measures. Nonetheless, in the USA, such a moderate approach lagged behind concerns about safety and liability maintaining standardisation in designs (Solomon, 2014). For instance, the US Consumer Product Safety Commission stated in the *Public Playground Safety Handbook* (2010, p. 5):

> In recent years, it is estimated that there were more than 200,000 injuries annually on public playgrounds across the country that required emergency room treatment. By following the recommendation guidelines in this handbook, you and your community can create a safer playground environment for all children and contribute to the reduction of playground-related deaths and injuries.

Even so, some US municipalities started taking some initiatives away from 'only safety concerns' regarding children's play. For instance, in 2009 the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, published in 2009 the 'Healthy Parks and Playgrounds' report in which play is considered to be 'experimental, challenging and sometimes risky' (quoted in Solomon, 2014, p. 153). Overall, the awareness of the potential benefits of risk-taking within play activities is growing at a global scale. The 2017 Ubud-Höör declaration on 'Risk in Play and Learning' (ISGA, 2017) was endorsed by all 54 of International School Grounds Alliance's Leadership Council members, representing 38 organisations from 16 countries and 6 continents.

(2) The importance of natural environments:

The importance of playing outdoors, of engaging with nature, led to the design of 'natural playgrounds', intentionally designed playgrounds in which elements of nature are naturally occurring or have been placed to enhance play spaces (Fjørtoft, 2004). They contain natural elements like wood, rocks and forest. In a typical informalising fashion, the romantic craving expressed in nature playgrounds is not about going back to wilderness as a state of savagery for children. Instead, as Verstrate and Karsten (2016, p. 190) remind us:

> Nature playgrounds offer a compromise between traditional neighbourhood playgrounds and the dominant nostalgic image of playing in nature: a safe, structured, supervised, twenty-first century interpretation of 'wilderness,' where children can reconnect with the natural environment, away from the concrete jungle indeed, but not quite as 'free-range' as some protagonists would like.

The same can be applied to the spread of today's adventure playgrounds. Authors such as Staempfli (2009) have argued that adventure

playgrounds are not just a way for children to 'go wild' for the sake of it, but a way to experience outdoor play environments that have the potential to offer an abundance of developmental opportunities for children to grow emotionally, socially and physically. The proliferation of adventure playgrounds is a reality nowadays. The Adventure Playground Association estimated the existence of approximately 1000 adventure playgrounds within Europe in 2006 (Adventure Playground Association, 2006). According to Play England, 127 adventure playgrounds existed in the UK in 2021 (Play England, 2021).

Conclusion

I have argued that changes in the balance between the supervised free-risky play of children and the design of playgrounds since the second half of the twentieth century in Western developed countries were part of shifting power balances between parents and children in what Wouters has referred to as cycles of informalisation-reformalisation. These phases are similar to the periodisation identified in previous studies that tested the informalisation theory in the development of sports such as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) (Sánchez García, 2019a) and running (Sánchez García, 2019b).

This chapter has established three main phases in children's play: the first informalising phase of the 1960s–1970s, where a more even balance between generations led to the prevalence of more autonomy in children's play and the design of playgrounds that expressed values of freedom and nature. The second phase, a long reformalisation period (especially during the 1980s), brought about an important transformation in the free/supervised play balance of children in the parent-child relationship. It tilted play towards more control and the development of 'risk averse' attitudes by parents, promoting a more conservative design of 'standardised playgrounds' to avoid liability issues. During the 1990s, some voices started denouncing overprotective parental care which led to the third phase, a rising informalisation trend that gained momentum since the mid-2000s. In this phase, there developed a moderate approach in the design of 'integrated playgrounds' in which autonomous, risky play and nature became key components again. This approach can be characterised by differences among countries, ranging in a continuum from the

Scandinavian model (more permissive) to the Anglo model (more controlling), with the Mediterranean model representing a more controversial and overprotective approach to risky play.

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CHAPTER 7

Young People's Use of School-Based Banter

Mark Mierzwinski and Philippa Velija

Introduction

Banter is a term used to refer to communication styles typically associated with aspects of British culture (Clark, 2018). In this chapter we apply an Eliasian analysis to our empirical findings to understand banter as a form of communication in peer and teacher relations within an English secondary-school setting. Whilst both males and females may utilise banter, it tends to be a more prevalent form of communication among males and within male peer groups (Nichols, 2020). Perhaps because of the association of sport with masculinity, sport is often one such setting whereby banter has become an 'overly lifestyled soundtrack' (Ronay, 2011). Due to its commonality within various aspects of British culture, many young people are familiar with banter as a form of communication

M. Mierzwinski (✉)
York St John University, York, UK
e-mail: m.mierwinski@yorksj.ac.uk

P. Velija
University of Roehampton, London, UK
e-mail: philippa.velija@roehampton.ac.uk

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in contemporary social relations, although little research focuses on how young people are socialised into using banter in peer relations through formal schooling processes.

We start this chapter by adopting a processual approach to banter, considering how it became a common form of communication across many aspects of British society by drawing on Elias's notions of civilising and informalising processes. This approach informs the second half of the chapter where we discuss ethnographic data from a male Physical Education (PE) department in a secondary school in the North-East of England. In this section we provide an Eliasian analysis of how young people come to learn, understand and use banter, how male Physical Education departments can foster competitive forms of *male* banter and how banter can be weaponised as an effective power resource within social relations. Finally, we discuss the concept of banter and why a sociological analysis of this form of communication is necessary. We conclude with a discussion on why an Eliasian approach to this form of communication helps us to understand the complexity of contemporary peer and teacher relations.

What Is 'banter' and Why Is It Worthy of a Sociological Analysis?

Banter is worthy of sociological focus as it has become a central form of communication across many aspects of British society, particularly within specific groups (Clark, 2018; Nichols, 2020). There is a need to study banter because it can be a strong marker of both inclusion and exclusion within modern social relations, involving supportive *and* contestive humour (Holmes, 2006; Plester & Sayers, 2007). *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2023) traces the etymology of the term 'banter' to the seventeenth century where it was referred to as an 'attack with good-humoured jokes and jests', with one of the leading seventeenth-century writers Jonathan Swift using the term 'banter' and attributing its origins to London street slang. This appearance highlights how the term banter is not new, nor is it a new form of twenty-first-century communication as occasionally portrayed (Bland, 2017), though it may be that the term has now become more popularised within twenty-first-century vocabulary. This suggestion is somewhat supported by Google Books Ngram Viewer data, a search engine that charts word frequencies from a large corpus of books that were printed between 1500 and 2018. Ngram data traces how the term became more readily published in the eighteenth century, dipped

in usage over the nineteenth century and became more commonly used in the later part of the twentieth century. Whilst an etymological overview is useful, like all words, what the term banter constitutes has evolved over time. Now, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2023) defines banter as 'the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks', with common synonyms including to joke, jest, pun, quip, wisecrack and tease.

Some scholars have argued that banter is a light-hearted form of dark humour that involves mocking or ridiculing through a back-and-forth interaction that can be competitive in nature and often requires quick wit (see, e.g., Cleland et al., 2021; Nichols, 2020; Plester & Sayers, 2007). Leech (1983) defines banter as 'offensive repartees that are genuinely polite and thus appear to be in concord with the paradigm of *mock impoliteness*' (Dynel, 2008, p. 246). This definition reflects the way banter is considered to be reciprocal, involving people entering a jocular frame by exchanging consecutive retorts, akin to verbal pin-pong. In this sense, banter is democratic because those involved have a right to, and are often expected to, reply until one person(s) stops engaging in the duel (Dynel, 2008; Plester & Sayers, 2007). Therefore, as a communicative process, banter can be labelled as a form of 'conjoint' and 'collaborative' humour (Holmes, 2006).

From a sociological perspective, it is useful to see the ways in which banter is enabled and constrained by social and cultural conventions. Banter is culturally specific and reflects current norms and expectations in society, a process Davies (2012) refers to as a 'barometer thesis'. The way banter is used, understood and adapted demonstrates the complexity of current relations between groups of people. This social communicative process has developed and changed over centuries, making a long-term analysis of how banter developed in twenty-first-century social relations an important endeavour.

Banter and the Civilising Process

Whilst Zijderveld (1982, p. 52) claimed that 'playful banter became characteristic of the Renaissance period', not all forms of humorous expression were accepted by social elites during this period. As Kuipers (2015, p. 33) states, '[I]n the sixteenth century, the clergy, humanists and other moralists began a civilising offensive against the laugh'. As laughter was considered a 'wild lack of restraint', 'unrefined' and 'amoral' (Verberckmoes, 1999, cited in Kuipers, 2005, p. 33), measures were taken to increasingly restrain, refine and ultimately civilise behaviours such as joking and jesting

(Kuipers, 2005). Stigma, alongside jesting and raillery, increasingly became labelled as low status forms of communication, not befitting 'persons of breeding' who frequented gentleman's clubs (Campbell, 1856, cited in Billig, 2005, p. 76). This historical snapshot illustrates the gendered aspects of early forms of banter and how 'refinement and restraint are criteria easily applied' to communication styles such as banter (Kuipers, 2005, p. 70), a process that we now further discuss through Elias's (2012) analysis of court societies and his concept of a civilising spurt.

During the Renaissance period, royal courts became spectacles of power, where previous warlords and aspirational citizens flocked to become distinguished courtiers (Elias, 2012). Whilst monarchs employed court jesters, courtiers were increasingly expected to exercise self-restraints when bantering, as spontaneous and/or misjudged vulgar comments carried some potential for reputational damage (Elias, 2012). Male courtiers could no longer use violence to gain or wield power, but instead sought symbolic power from their intellectual wit, good humour and appropriate raillery (Elias, 2012). To do this within an intensely competitive environment in accordance with court decorum required courtiers to exercise greater degrees of self-restraint over their emotional impulses and a greater level of foresight on the potential outcomes of their actions. This shift in banter as a symbolic form of power and legitimate communication style is significant when one considers the 'civilising spurt' and 'trickle-down effect' of court societies (Elias, 2012).

Elias's (2012) analysis of court societies within a civilising spurt can be used to understand the emergence of banter as a term. The 'Age of Reason' in Western societies led to the adoption of more democratically elected governments that presided over common laws, a police force and prison systems. Within public spheres, more pacified social relations led to processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, where different social groups mixed more 'freely' through living and working arrangements. Elias (2012) argued that the emergence of this social figuration contributed to processes of functional democratisation, whereby more equalising trends took place between members within and across different social groups. As England overcame a century of bloody civil wars and began the process of parliamentarisation, following the Act of Union 1707, parliamentary etiquette replaced physical duels with competitive back-and-forth verbal duels between male Whigs and Tories. In these more pacified political contests, the use of quick wit, wise puns and articulate raillery served a powerful function, which could carry damaging consequences for those less

skilled. Indeed, the effective use of wit and good-natured banter became a central form of communication in parliament (Graham et al., 2018).

However, we should be careful not to simply equate male politicians' 'weaponising' of banter to a broader trickle-down effect. Without greater empirical insight, this seems too reductionist and, perhaps, not in keeping with Jonathan Swift's street slang origins of banter and the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s (2023) reference to how banter was deprecated as vulgar by commentators during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Instead, we will consider the role that processes of urbanisation and functional democratisation may have played in banter becoming more widely used and increasingly legitimised as a communication style. Elias (2012) has argued that processes of urbanisation and functional democratisation enabled, and were enabled by, diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties in people's psyches and behaviours, altering social relations between members from different groups (e.g., between children and parents and between males and females). Therefore, we consider if the more widespread use of the term 'banter' was an unintended outcome, a blind social process of an increasingly pacified Britain whereby more and more people from different social groups were interacting: bantering could be used to form social bonds, share increasingly common forms of communication or alternatively distinguish and exclude some social groups from others. In this sense, banter has come to serve as an effective power resource within social relations in multi-functional ways. Our thinking is similar to Elias and Scotson's (2008) empirical findings that illustrated how within social groups, 'gossip' served to foster ties of social bonding and contribute to a sense of group charisma within an 'established group' by simultaneously dividing and stigmatising an 'outsider' group.

As Elias and Scotson's (2008) study has shown it is important to note the long-term psychological shifts that may have taken place for banter, like gossip, to be considered as an effective power resource within people's social relationships. In Western Europe from the fifteenth to the late nineteenth century, Elias (2012) argued that long-term civilising processes have taken place. These processes have largely been underpinned by formalisation processes, which signify a trend towards more refined behaviours, such as manners, and disciplined emotional expressions, such as exercising greater foresight before responding to conflict. From this, we suggest that people could only more commonly engage in banter within and between social groups once they had reached necessary levels of self-restraint over their emotional impulses and responses. For people to

successfully engage in 'appropriate', 'good-natured' and 'respectful' banter, they needed to exercise increasing levels of empathy and identification with others, a process Elias (2012) referred to as psychologisation. At its extremities, a failure to successfully mutually identify with others could lead to what de Swaan (1997) has termed 'disidentification', a cognitive and emotional process where people increasingly struggle to identify with or deny similarities with other people at a personal and/or group level, repressing emotions such as sympathy. This theoretical explanation helps to explain people's use of (*mock*) polite and well-intended banter, a form of banter used for social bonding purposes or to subtly exert power over others in a less physically oppressive manner.

However, some banter can be crude, vulgar and designed to hurt (Phipps & Young, 2015); it 'combines badly with sympathy or feelings of tenderness, anger, embarrassment and indignation' (Billig, 2005, cited in Kuipers, 2015, p. 70). The use of this type of banter does not reflect people's gradual shift towards more refined, mutually identifiable and empathetic behaviour, but instead illustrates how some types of banter can momentary suspend expected moral standards. Apart from de Swaan's (1997) concept of disidentification, another way to explain this would be to more closely consider where banter is more likely to take place, drawing upon Elias and Dunning's (2008) concept of a quest for excitement offered in certain social spheres such as sport. They explain how many modern sports serve as a necessary antidote to the mundanity of everyday life by offering de-routinising experiences centred on mimesis, motility and sociality. Such experiences often included socially permitting forms of aggression and violence, celebrating machoism and embracing gendered (often sexist) attitudes, behaviours increasingly unattainable across many other spheres of society.

In England, Dunning and Sheard (1973) explored a macho subculture within rugby union that involved mocking, vilifying and objectifying females and homosexuals through obscene songs, exclusionary male spaces (e.g., the clubhouse bar), and demeaning peripheral roles within clubs. Dunning (2008) explained such ritualised behaviours, which often involved bantering and gesturing, as responses to the threats to traditional forms of masculinity posed by shifts towards greater equality between males and females that took place within an urban-industrial British nation-state. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the continued prevalence of gendered banter, albeit with less explicit rituals, in many male-centred sport subcultures today (Hylton, 2018; Lawless & Magrath, 2021; Nichols, 2020). More broadly, the *Oxford English Dictionary*

(2023) refers to how in recent use, the word 'banter' is sometimes characterised as a means of justifying or excusing humourous behaviour considered boorish or chauvinistic.

Another important way to explain the emergence of the term 'banter' and its increasing use as a form of communication within twenty-first-century social relations is to consider formality within public life in relative degrees of a formality-informality span (Elias, 2013). Wouters (2007) empirically documented how from the latter part of the nineteenth century social constraints loosened, enabling people to experiment with how they spoke, what they wore and how they expressed their emotions and identity. This informalisation process allowed people to increasingly become conceived as 'autonomous individuals, possessing enduring characteristics of individuality' (Billig, 2005, p. 12). Wouters (2007) argued that these emancipatory opportunities, particularly for women and children, became particularly heightened during the 1880s, 1920s, 1960s and 1990s. Therefore, one outcome of the gradual long-term shift towards informalising trends is that, compared with previous generations, people today are less constrained by strict codes about how individuals should behave (Billig, 2005). Such trends may help us to understand why banter becomes synonymous with 'lad culture' (Phipps & Young, 2015), becoming more readily acceptable between people from different social groups, for example, teachers and pupils, as will be discussed in our study, and within certain social spheres such as sport.

According to Elias (2012) such processes of informalisation are developed when a high degree of individual self-restraint has become taken for granted. In this sense, the loosening of strict social constraints placed increasingly differentiated demands on people's levels of self-restraint, requiring people to exercise what both Elias and Wouters referred to as 'a highly controlled decontrolling of emotional controls'. Wouters (1998, p. 139) argued that such psychological controls foster a 'third-nature psyche', which involves 'a level of consciousness and calculation in which all types of constraints and possibilities are taken into account'. Elias considered a first-nature psyche to refer to people's more instinctive animalistic impulses and behaviours, whereas a second-nature 'psyche' refers to a 'highly automatic functioning of conscience and self-regulation' over such first-nature impulses (Wouters, 1998, p. 139). Wouters's (1998, p. 139) concept of a third-nature 'psyche' involves 'psychic pulls and pushes of both first and second nature impulses and restraints alongside more calculated assessments of the dangers and chances within a social situation'. Whilst not explored in great depth by Eliasian-inspired scholars, a third-nature psyche

could provide an additional theoretical tool to analyse people's more planned, goal-orientated and manipulative use of banter, further illustrating the increasing complexity within contemporary social relations.

To conclude this section, whilst from the seventeenth century the meaning of the term may have changed, banter has shared common characteristics, namely its political, moral and aesthetic nature. The intellectualising and weaponising of banter support our suggestion that the emergence of the term 'banter' and its widespread use are in some respects indicative of broader civilising processes, which include formalisation/informalisation processes and those related processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and functional democratisation. Similarly, the concept of a quest for excitement also explains banter's de-routinising features, lightheartedness and popularity within some social groups, particularly young people and 'sporty' males. These changes in the development of affective processes in people's multi-functional use of banter can provide a suitable context for exploring our ethnographic research, to which we now turn.

Study and Key Empirical Findings

In 2015, one of the authors, Mark Mierzwinski, spent six months within a male PE department in one secondary school, referred to here as Colbeck High School (CHS). CHS, a pseudonym, was a religious-affiliated school in the North-East of England, located in a working-class region with over 1500 pupils aged 11–18 years. Seventy-five per cent of its pupils were Catholic, 25% were eligible for pupil-premiums (funds given to schools by the government to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children), 12% of pupils were registered as belonging to black and minority ethnic communities, 10% were registered as having English as a second language and 7% were registered as having special educational needs. CHS had received a 'good' rating across all components in its most recent Ofsted report, the United Kingdom's government's office for standards in education that inspects schools. In the male PE department, there were five PE teachers and each young male took part in two one-hour compulsory PE classes per week in a single-sex environment.

His study examined relationships, identities and behavioural norms and how young males expressed their masculinity within a competitive single-sex sporting setting. Data was collected from eighty-four lesson observations, interviews with four PE teachers and nine focus groups with young males in years seven, eight and nine (aged 11–14 years). It was analysed

from a figurational sociological framework and key findings were related to gendered social processes, the role of masculine embodiment and emotional self-restraint within young males' peer relations and power dynamics within teacher-pupil authority-based relations. Banter was observed as a first and lasting impression; therefore, teachers were asked the following interview questions: 'What are your thoughts on young males when they banter with each other?' 'Where does this happen?' 'What types of things do they joke about/mock each other about?' Outside of these responses, teachers often referred to banter in answering other questions. Similarly, vignettes were used in focus groups to gain young males' interpretation of the (in)appropriateness of common verbal exchanges observed as taking place in male PE.

By way of example, the following vignette was used with year nine males (13–14 years of age)—all names have been anonymised. 'What's up with you?', Mr Sharp asks. George replies, 'I have a bad back', '[Y]ou're always injured you', says Jake. '[N]o, I'm not', responds George. 'You are, if it's not your glass back, you're whinging about a broken finger nail or summat', Jake says jokingly. George snaps back, '[G]ive up Jake, you're doing my head in, you always say stuff like that'. 'What's up sick note, have I hit a nerve? I hope it is not one in your back', Jake sarcastically comments. 'You don't understand Jake, you just don't', George pleads. Bluntly, Jake responds with, 'I tell you what I don't understand is that you just pick and choose PE when you want. Why don't you just man up and get on with it?' As illustrated here, short stories deliberately did not use the term 'banter', although young males often interpreted aspects within such exchanges as banter. Collectively this data enabled Mark to gain an insight into how young males and teachers socially constructed banter in male PE at CHS, to which we now turn.

Young males often spoke fondly of banter, but some felt it could be negative, as year nine Alfie explained:

> Banter is having a laugh. It can be good, and it can be bad, it has its sides. Sometimes banter can go too far. Like someone calls me ginger, something like that. Something daft like that, I would just have a laugh with them. But, if it was like constant, adding things onto it, it gets too much, and you say 'oh away? It's old now'. It's like an expiry date. You have the certain amount of banter for a certain week and it just stops.

Repetition and context helped determine intent and degrees of appropriateness, both of which year nine Tom bemoaned, '[F]or some people,

it is just in their nature to go around and just cross the line'. However, young males' ability to determine intent was clouded by another common communication style, *chewing*. Year nine Oliver described how chewing was, '[W]hen you are getting on their nerves and you are trying to aggravate them', to which his peer Hugo added to 'try and get a reaction'. For year eight James, '[I]t's [chewing] actually halfway between bullying and banter. You are chewing, and it goes on too long, so you are bullying someone'. Young males constructed banter by comparing and seeking to distinguish it from other similar forms of communication, such as teasing. Whilst they felt good banter was funny and chewing involved a deliberate attempt to test a peer's temperament, they could perceive persistent bantering or chewing as bad banter and/or bullying. The actual and interpretative nuances of similar forms of communication illustrate the complexity and potential blurred lines at play within young males' everyday verbal peer interactions.

Whilst well versed in the term 'banter', how frequently young males engaged in and styled their banter differed with age. Older males (13 years plus) engaged more in banter and bantered more with their teachers. Within focus groups numerous young males alluded to this difference, but it is best articulated in the following two teacher responses to the interview question, '[W]hat is your favourite year group to teach and why? Mr Parker replied, '[M]y year ten GCSE class, the banter is brilliant. I would say more banter with the older ones, and the younger ones more silly jokey behaviour, so where they are not the butt of it'. Offering further insight into this difference Mr Hatton responded:

> I love teaching year nine lads because I think that you get quite a bit of entertainment out of them, you can have a bit of banter with them. Year sevens you can't have much banter because they don't really understand what is going on to be honest. Whereas year nines they are growing up a bit and they understand what good craic is and they can kind of bounce off each other and you can get a good group dynamic through that.

For these teachers, older males had the capacity to engage in more directed, confrontational and competitive banter without taking it too personally. These teachers felt that this style was amicable, entertaining and aided positive social bonds, whilst their engagement legitimised this style amongst young males in their peer-group interactions. However, not having full capacity to engage in this particular style, banter with younger males was adapted in order to be less sophisticated and more immature.

This stylistic differentiation suggests that engaging in competitive banter involves a certain level of maturity about understanding the intention of sometimes provocative and targeted banter, whilst being able to respond in kind within the unwritten social codes of banter, that is, not 'crossing the line'.

This finding is indicative of broader civilising processes which increasingly expect young people to exercise greater self-controls over their behaviour and emotional reactions, a point illustrated in the following example. Not all older males were observed as being able to successfully engage in this perceived more mature form of banter without taking offence and reacting inappropriately. When interviewed, Mr Hatton offered the example of year eleven Justin, who during fitness suite classes repeatedly reacted in a verbally aggressive way to being the butt of his peers' banter, which further provoked their banter. Mr Hatton stated how he intervened by regularly chatting with Justin to explain how he needed to learn to control his temper, particularly given his desired career path into the Navy. From this case, the interviewer posed the question to what extent is being able to banter a life-skill—Mr Hatton responded:

> I think the more you are exposed to it the more you understand it. […] I have got a year eight who cannot take banter at all, none whatsoever, or sorry couldn't take banter at all until recently, and he has started to improve slightly […] it is all about character I think and personally I would say that I am a strong character in the sense that I can give it and I can take it banter. […] I just think it makes you stronger as a person.

This example re-emphasises the perceived maturity needed to successfully engage in this complex form of banter, whereby not being able to is considered a character flaw, one that can be exposed repeatedly by peers. This exposure was not stopped by Mr Hatton, who instead sought to address Justin's perceived weakness—in this case his inability to exercise the expected levels of emotional self-restraint—by educating him on how to successfully engage, and conform to, the cognitive and affective processes involved in this perceived normalised form of communication within teenage social relations. Mr Hatton seemed to legitimise his intervention on the grounds that it was in Justin's best interest that he learned the unwritten social codes and art of bantering in order to embody civilising and mature behaviours.

Given the legitimacy that teachers granted banter within this competitive setting, it was observed as being rife within social relations between

male PE teachers, teachers and older pupils and within young male peer groups. Referring to this, Mr Glovers commented, '[I]t's [banter] par for the course isn't it', whilst Mr Hatton acknowledged how: '[A] lot of us in PE are very banterful. […] I would say we do like rip each other'. When further probing why male PE teachers were very 'banterful', Mr Parker responded, 'I know teachers who have banter who aren't PE teachers, but they are sporting, they have a sporting background'. Indeed, during the first week of ethnography, Mr Parker expressed how banter boosted camaraderie and togetherness, which he believed made his department relatively unique across the school.

Similarly, during focus groups, many young males acknowledged how banter was much more prevalent in PE compared with classroom-based lessons, with some young males suggesting that the style of banter differed in PE. Year nine Charlie claimed, '[I]n PE it is like *sport* banter'. With competitive banter being deemed appropriate, banter was a popular form of *sporting* communication in male PE. This normalisation and acceptance seemed partially based on beliefs that banter mimicked a verbal sporting contest and therefore, by extension, was part of the sporting process. Aligning this perception to a perceived fundamental value within sport, banter was *fair game*, but also perceived as being valuable as a form of social bonding, despite being often harsh, crude or ripping. Tracing this sporting attitude to our previous discussion, successfully engaging in banter appeared to require an emotional resilience, a form of stoicism so often lauded within particularly male athletic communities, whilst simultaneously having the potential to offer gains in terms of the power balances between young males.

The relative uniqueness of the normalisation, acceptance and competitiveness of banter also needs to be considered within the gendered dynamics within this single-sex environment. During interview Mr Hatton considered how:

> In PE, because most of the time it is single sex, the lads will have banter about the performance as well. I don't think they would take the mickey out of someone for not being able to read well. Whereas, in PE if someone can't pass a ball straight there is a different kind of mentality.

Performance-based banter was observed daily, particularly amongst older males who enjoyed providing running commentary on their peers' actions. On one level, due to its regularity and apparent randomness, there appeared to be very little pattern in who or how frequently a young male

was commented on, making the banter process appear quite inclusive in that most young males engaged in it in some way, shape or form. On another level, commentary often carried gendered identity connotations and could subtly or blatantly involve gendered shaming attempts. For instance, re-visiting the case of Justin, when peers bantered him about his 'spaghetti legs', he struggled to control his temper, but Mr Hatton knew that such comments would be common within male-dominated and often 'hyper-masculine' military professions, such as the Navy.

Aware of such gendered social dynamics within male PE, Mr Parker felt it necessary to explain the unwritten social codes of sporting banter to new arrivals at the school. During interview, Mr Parker explained:

> I said (to year sevens), me having a bit of banter with you is saying, 'oh well we got beat by you or you beat us etc'. That is banter. But, as soon as I start being nasty and not about football, and getting personal, then that is bullying. I was trying to define it [banter] to them.

Mr Parker's intervention sought to ensure that sporting banter fell within the realms of appropriateness in PE and did not get too personal. However, because much of performance-based banter was based on personal characteristics, and because many male PE-based sports carry such inherent attitudes towards desirable forms of masculinity, banter could easily be received by young males as being a personal attack on their gendered identity, on their developing sense of self. As Justin found out, the darker humorous elements of banter must be understood as being 'par for the course' within a sporting mentality, whereby emotional reactions needed to involve high levels of self-restraint, for example, 'be the bigger man'. However, perhaps Justin just thought that his verbally aggressive responses symbolised a desirable form of masculinity that his lack of physical prowess failed to embody.

Whilst it is difficult to fully gauge if such levels of foresight or rationalising was present within older males' reactions, like that of Justin's, it is possible to present another strategy some older males adopted to deflect from their sporting incompetence or 'unpopular' body shape. Seemingly aware of the connection between sporting banter and performance within male PE, some older males were observed using self-deprecation. For instance, during a football match, Luke, a year eleven male, repeatedly referred to himself as 'Fat Messi', in reference to the world-class male footballer Lionel Messi, much to the amusement of his peers. Acknowledging this strategy during interview Mr Hatton recalled:

> So, him [referring to Will, a year eleven male], for example, is absolutely horrific at sports, hates sports, when he was here in year seven, he was the biggest geek I have ever seen, I thought he is going to be absolute bait here for all these lot. And then he kind of [...] because he didn't care [...] because he was good at French for example, he kind of took the mickey out of himself and people would say what is the answer for this Will and he would torture them for not knowing the answer, and they would be like, yeh I am a bit stupid, there's my weakness, he's got his strength, but also, he has his weakness in PE like.

Seemingly aware of the prevailing unwritten social codes and preempting forthcoming banter, Luke and Will appeared to initiate the banter process. In doing so, they successfully engaged in banter by better controlling a process that finds them at the butt of any peer comments by illustrating how any gender shaming attempts would not lead to affective outbursts or offence. The fact that only older males were observed using this deflecting tactic perhaps illustrates at least three things: (a) that banter was an effective power resource within male teenagers' relations, (b) that young males like Luke and Will understood prevailing gendered relations involved within sport and, in doing so, (c) demonstrated their self-awareness and self-confidence to poke fun at their identities.

Young males were not the only people to strategically use banter for their own gains. Teachers often weaponised banter in their relations with young males, as seen during an interview with Mr South: '[I]t [banter] is one of my favourite weapons because it gets other kids onside if you are taking the mickey out of a kid that you know can take it'. Whilst banter could erode traditional teacher-pupil boundaries and develop closer social bonds, it could also be used to discipline a young male who crossed the line of appropriateness, as described by Mr Parker during interview:

> Sometimes it can be, 'hey, there you go, keep your mouth shut', but I think they also respect that type of thing. The kids that you deal with they respect that and maybe they are used to it, maybe who they knock around with you know, that type of banter or that type of approach to things. I think that does help; quick wit helps you a lot. You can diffuse a situation just like that [clicks his fingers].

Qualifying his comment, Mr Parker disclosed how a year ten male, Dominic, shouted out in a GCSE PE theory lesson, 'Sir, did you do that Strictly Come Dancing Show? That's right gay, are you gay Sir', to which

Mr Parker reported swiftly replying, '[Y]ou what? I am not gay, but my boyfriend is', much to the apparent amusement of the class, which caused Dominic momentary embarrassment. Teachers saw banter as an appropriate, effective teaching aid to develop or reinforce authority-based social relations with young males. Part of banter's effectiveness was its subtle approach, as opposed to screaming or sanctions, designed to momentary shift their perception of the situation or confrontation. In this sense, teachers were relating to young males' perceived preferences, illustrating and seeking to maintain mutual respect, all be it on heteronormative grounds. This strategy was based on teachers', like Mr Parker, understanding of how banter can be used as an effective power resource and their mutual identification with young males concerning good and appropriate sporting banter.

Elias's (2012) explanation of civilising processes was concerned with how people gradually became more mutually orientated and dependent, a greater mutual identification with others through long-term shifts in diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties at a psychological and behavioural level, a process Elias (2012) referred to psychologisation. However, it is necessary to view psychologisation as a process and mutuality in terms of degrees, because using banter as an effective teaching aid was observed to have some potential flaws. During interview Mr Glover reflected how 'they are not clever enough to come back, but you do get the odd one who is, and you think jeez he is clever'. Being outwitted risked undermining the authority relations teachers wished to reinforce through weaponising banter. Another potential flaw was that some young males misinterpreted teachers' attempts at bantering, as Mr South recalled during interview:

> There are some throw away comments I have said to other kids, I have been asked by the Senior Leadership Team to apologise because they [young males] have taken it seriously. It was a throw away comment like, 'oh sit down or I am going to kick you outside', and he took it seriously and he said, 'Sir you made me scared'. And I was like, 'blinking heck Philip, do you think I would really give you a kicking?' I just thought it was a throw away comment from me, banter, and all that. He was only in year eight at the time, it was earlier this year and I didn't teach him last year. Our relationship has got better, but I am wary of how I speak to him now and what I say.

Clearly, whilst many young males were well versed in teachers' banter, perhaps not expecting it from teachers, Philip struggled to identify with

Mr South's comment in a humorous way and took it seriously. Conversely, this momentary lack of mutuality was observed when young males' attempts at bantering teachers would not be identified as such, as described by year nine Alfie during a focus group:

> I remember someone ages ago, they said something to a teacher as well. They were having fun and they said something back and the teacher didn't like it. Because the teacher had riled him up to have banter back, but the teacher had not taken it as banter, so they gave him [the boy] a sanction or detention, [to which Charlie commented], it gets personal something like that.

These ill-directed or misconceived attempts at banter remind us of banter's potential ambiguous and nuanced nature, which can have adverse and detrimental effects on social relations, unlike processes of social bonding. It seemed ambiguity was based on the perceived appropriateness of the banter in the teacher-pupil authority-based relationship, one that was sometimes blurred for young males when their teachers frequently used banter with them. In this case, whilst young males could and did misinterpret banter with peers, their momentary lack of mutual identification concerning banter with people from a different social group (adult teachers) could carry much greater social consequences for both parties.

Young Males, Banter and Male PE: An Eliasian Analysis

The above section outlines several key empirical findings, namely, young males' social construction of banter and how they differentiated it from other similar forms of communication; the relationship between prevalence, style of banter and age primarily based on perceived maturity and young males' ability to 'successfully' engage in banter without taking offence or reacting 'inappropriately'; banter as a normalised and popular form of sporting communication within male PE, mainly due to its strong affiliation with a sporting 'mentality' viewed in terms of fair game and stoicism; sporting banters gendered connotations due to its competitive nature and its inherent links to desirable forms of masculine identity; self-deprecation as a strategy to better control the banter process and deflect any peer attempts at gender shaming; teachers weaponising of banter to more effectively exert their authority over young males in terms of

obedience; and issues of appropriateness within teacher-pupil banter. Whilst these findings were presented with figurational sensitivities in mind, in this last section we will provide a more detailed Eliasian analysis. We will focus our attention on the following three overarching themes: young males' socialisation into and ability to successfully engage in banter, competitive banter as part of a gendered sporting mentality and the weaponising of banter as an effective power resource.

Most 11-year-old males were able to describe what banter is and what it entails. By 13 years of age, many used it regularly as a form of communication within the male PE environment at the school. From an Eliasian perspective, young children are biologically equipped to acquire language as a form of communication, but their ability to do so is based on important processes of social learning (Elias, 2010). From birth, in order to survive and thrive within their family, community and school, young people have to acquire a stock of language that has been transmitted from generation to generation. Part of this socialisation process involves children undergoing 'an individual social civilising process' before they become considered (largely by adults) as full members of society (Elias, 2012, p. xi).

To 'successfully' banter, young males needed to display high degrees of mutual identification with and respect for peers and teachers by exercising appropriate levels of emotional self-restraint and foresight over its consequences. Such degrees of mutuality represent a shift from a 'me' to a more 'I-we' centred approach in social relations which many young people experience during infancy and adolescence. Using this approach, most 13 and 14 year olds had a common understanding of verbal norms and prevailing school standards, interpreting moralised banter on good and bad grounds, believing that by this age their peers should know what constitutes 'appropriate' banter. Therefore, when bantering, those not able to adhere to such expectations were suspiciously evaluated in terms of their 'true' intent, bringing their 'moral standards' and/or levels of maturity into question.

When being bantered those who were either not able to mutually identify with attempts of polite mocking or reacting inappropriately to banter tended to be deemed immature by their peers and teachers. However, young males' ability to understand 'appropriate' banter could be blurred by their peers' attempt to deliberately provoke them through 'chewing', a process which intentionally sought to test their emotional self-restraint. Irrespective of the degree to which these psychological processes were at

play, we suggest that banter should be considered as a sophisticated form of communication, one which required young males to have reached a certain stage of their individual civilising process. This civilising requirement may help explain the trend for older males to engage more and differently in banter than their younger peers, whilst also illustrating some of the complexities young people face understanding 'appropriateness' when engaging in verbal interactions in developed societies.

Prior to entering school most young males were aware of banter as a form of communication, but it was during their time at CHS that many developed their ability to 'successfully' engage in 'complex' banter with their peers and teachers. To understand the role that the male PE department, and CHS more broadly, may have played within this learning process it is useful to consider some of the key figurations that young males belong to. Elias coined the term 'figuration' to refer to 'the network of interdependences formed among human beings is what binds them together. Such interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called the figuration, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people' (Elias, 2012, p. 525). From birth, babies are born into a particular family figuration and during infancy many are enrolled into nurseries or pre-schools. In England, nursery can start from as early as three months old and for some infants involves up to ten hours of care per day. Family and early years educational figurations are a key part of young people's individual civilising process, which includes acquiring elementary forms of communication and understanding how to socially interact with others in an appropriate manner (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2014; Olwig, 2011).

Gabriel (2016, p. 374) has highlighted how in the Communication and Language Development section of the English Early Years Foundation Stage Non-Statutory Guidance it stipulates that 'it is desirable that a child between 40 and 60 months, understands humour, e.g. nonsense rhymes and jokes'. When young people enter primary school (4/5 years) the learning process becomes mandatory and more formal in terms of subjects studied such as PE and English and, more broadly, they are expected and taught how to display greater emotional self-restraints and behavioural refinements. The primary school figuration involves young people relating to greater numbers of people and teachers, both of whom may come from diverse family figurations that involve different processes of socialisation.

During these formative years, young people will also enter community-based figurations through religious groups or organised leisure activities. Collectively, it is through these leading figurations, alongside consuming

popular culture (e.g., TV, social media and the Internet), that young people develop an individual habitus that enables them to more often than not communicate with each other in a 'civilised' manner that fits the prevailing social norms and behavioural expectations. However, not all young people master such communications skills nor wish to simply conform to broader societal standards as cultural dupes. Indeed, the individual civilising process that takes place within schools, homes and community clubs often involves tension balances between young people's wishes, habits and emotions, and the demands of parents who expect 'a degree of caution and restraint (Elias, 2008, p. 191, cited in Olwig, 2011, p. 122). It is from these figurational relations from which young males entered the school and developed their ability, or not, to engage in 'appropriate' forms of banter.

The transition from nursery to primary school and from primary to secondary school (at 11 years of age in England) also involves young people entering a larger and diverse school figuration with a more formalised and routinised figuration in terms of the school day, structured lessons and refined behavioural expectations. Concerning the latter, the school's website stresses how 'each individual in it is on a pilgrimage of growth', whilst detailing core values such as 'integrity', 'mercy', 'compassion', 'fairness' and 'equality', noting how 'curriculum and relationships will be based on these values'. Like many schools in England, CHS had an anti-bullying policy and took part in the Anti-Bullying Alliance's 'Anti-bullying Week' campaign in November 2015. This illustrates the expected role that secondary schools play in young people's individual civilising process, offering some policy-based context for our analysis of the degree to which banter was enabled, constrained and deemed appropriate within the schooling process.

Banter was observed as occurring across many aspects of the school, but given the perceived 'sporting banter', we consider it useful to consider male PE as a 'sub-figuration' within the broader CHS figuration. We are therefore arguing that competitive banter was more developed due to the distinctive structural and social characteristics within male PE, as well as the legitimacy of banter accepted by male PE teachers. As banter was attributed to a male sporting shared habitus, most banter was trivialised, endorsed and even celebrated by male PE teachers, so that older teenagers entering male PE expected to be able to banter with each other and their teachers. However, as banter was often based on perceived differences or performance, it could be harsh and received negatively. Thus it could be

construed as countering the school's broader civilising mission. This helps to explain why some schools feel the need to clearly differentiate between banter and bullying, or why some have contemplated banning or constraining the frequency and types of banter young people engage in (Adams, 2017; Buchanan, 2014; Evans, 2018).

It is also worth noting that the figurational dynamics of certain behavioural norms and attitudes towards verbal conflict may be more relaxed or condoned compared with other dynamics across the school. In viewing the banter permitted in male PE along the formality-informality span, there were many formal aspects within male PE, but it was within certain activities (competitive team games) and informal spaces (changing rooms and transitions) where banter was allowed to develop. Significantly, young males were not merely passive recipients, but actively contributed to the figurational dynamics within male PE. However, in one sense, their ability to understand when they could be formal or informal before successfully engaging in 'appropriate' banter further illustrates the complexities involved in this form of communication.

We conclude this section by considering the role of banter in teacher-pupil relations in terms of young males' individual civilising process. As young people entered the school and the male PE department they were at an impressionable phase of their gendered identity development. Male PE teachers felt the need to use their professional status as a position of authority to educate young males on the appropriate ways to use or react to banter, to civilise them in communication styles. However, these explicit interventions were also supplemented by more implicit role modelling of how banter could be an effective power resource within social relations. In a broader sense, the use of banter in a more informal, subtle and less confrontational way to discipline young males in an competitive, social and loud environment is indicative of long-term shifts towards more informalised teacher-pupil relations that are based less on traditional authoritative methods, such as corporeal punishments or shouting (Wouters, 2007). This informalising approach is based on teachers' greater level of mutual identification with young males' preferences for subtle discipline as opposed to intimidating fear-based tactics such as screaming, illustrating some of the long-term equalising trends in teacher-pupil relations (Wouters, 2007).

As a pedagogic approach banter formed a key part of the formation of male PE teachers' habitus, making it a 'natural' and well-versed tool. Teachers' weaponising of banter as a disciplinary tool served to convey to

young males how banter can be used to exert or maintain power over others. This was something that some young males tried to replicate, but often faced social reprisals from suspicious peers or teachers, the latter seemingly unaware of the contradictions in their regulation of certain forms of oppressive banter. Perhaps that is why you rarely, if ever, see mockery, sarcasm or banter feature in teaching manuals. Indeed, in a *Times Educational Supplement*, Featherstone (2019) wrote an article titled, 'Why Teachers Should Never Use "banter"'.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have demonstrated the theoretical strengths of applying an Eliasian approach to understanding the emergence of banter as an important form of communication within school settings, contextualised within the wider relation of longer-term trends in informalising processes in twenty-first-century England. We have used empirical evidence from a male PE department to provide an Eliasian analysis of the role banter plays in peer and teacher relations within a secondary-school setting. A recurring theme throughout our analysis was that banter has become an increasingly *complex* form of communication in school relations, one that does not seem to carry the same 'civilising' constraints as in Renaissance times.

Whilst this trend may be indicative of broader informalisation processes, to 'successfully' engage in 'appropriate' banter young people are still required to have undergone a long process of social learning in key institutions. The longer amount of time younger people spend in nurseries and mandatory schooling demonstrates the complex communicative processes children are expected to attain before entering 'adulthood', highlighting the central role of schools in the civilising process. Within the formality-informality span that young people now experience across these different figurations, banter has become more complex due to the increasing sensitivities around people's need to use 'appropriate' communication styles that are based on greater levels of mutual identification and respect.

In viewing the school as a civilising institution, we discussed how male PE provided a distinctive social environment that enabled young people to foster competitive banter for a variety of purposes, including the use of weaponising banter as an effective power resource. We discovered that banter was developed within one of the few single-sex school environments young males can enter, where many sports carry inherent links to traditional and desirable forms of masculinity. Those entering male PE at

CHS became aware of and contributed to the prevailing social norms that banter is a gendered form of communication, one that is legitimised within sporting environments, forming a key part of their gendered identities. Whilst further theoretical-empirical exploration is needed in this area, we have suggested that male banter could well be an unintended outcome of long-term equalising trends in gender relations, particularly within previous male preserves such as sport.

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CHAPTER 8

Childhood Figurations and Processes of Social Inequality in Brazil

Tony Honorato and Magda Sarat

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the figurational processes of childhood in Brazil as a generational category, using the long-term relational approach developed by the theories of Norbert Elias (1980, 1993, 1994a, b, 2001, 2012). Although there has been an increasing recognition of children's social rights in Brazil through legal frameworks, such as the Law of Guidelines and Basis of National Education No. 9394 (Brasil, 1996), these rights are not always implemented in public policies, highlighting a historical process that has led to the production of social inequalities between children and adults. In this adverse context, the social inequalities experienced by children in human figurations can be explained through the interdependent relationships within which adults attempt to control

T. Honorato (✉)
Department of Education, State University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina, Brazil
e-mail: tony@uel.br

M. Sarat
Faculty of Education, Federal University of Grande Dourados, Dourados, Brazil

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and regulate children's behaviour as they are growing up in society. Children's social behavior and processes of self-control are oriented towards adults within the context of their overall affections, frustrations and achievements, the tensions and ambivalences faced by children in long-term unplanned historical processes. Elias writes about the importance of these interdependencies:

> Every person is born into a group of people that existed before. And that's not all: every person is constituted in such a way, by nature, that he needs other people who exist before he can grow. One of the fundamental conditions of human existence is the simultaneous presence of several interrelated people. (Elias, 1994a: 27)

Childhood is therefore key to understanding how society develops and there is no zero degree of social attachment: the person has always existed at a fundamental level in relationships with others and these form a specific structure in their group. Childhood acquires its own meanings within the social development of relationships and thus in a broader context in the history of the entire human network in which the child is born, grows and dies. In Brazil, childhood is regulated by law from birth to 12 years of age. During this period, the psychological standards of the social group is internalised by each child through what is taught to them and expected in their adult behaviour in the norms and rules that must be learned during a short period. Children 'have in the space of a few years to reach the advanced level of shame and disgust that took centuries to develop' (Elias, 1994b: 139).

For the child to become a person in society he or she needs to form and establish relationships with more 'powerful' adults who have assimilated certain social models of behaviour and self-regulation. The child 'needs to be adapted by the other, it needs society to become physically an adult' (Elias, 1994a: 30). In every generation, adults need to ensure the survival and care for biologically immature human beings: children are continually subjected to the impositions of standards of behaviour in the different figurations of which they form part, though they do not always accept these without transgressing and disobeying rules. This long-term intergenerational process is intimately connected with changes in power-ratios or balances of power with adults: by learning about the changing 'balances of power' and knowing that its gradient can potentially change from their

participation, children can begin to alter the pendulum in their favour. Their political participation can be part of a learning process that encourages them to break the structural circles of social inequality among the various generational groups, acting as an incentive for future processes of change.

We will now discuss how some of the social figurations in which adults represent childhood in Brazil can shed light on some of the production of inequalities, humiliation and embarrassment, making childhood vulnerable in specific historical figurations. We will focus on three figurations: family, school and the world of work. The empirical basis of our analysis are pictures that were available in an Art Exhibition entitled History of Childhood, which took place in Brazil in 2016 at the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP). Our empirical choice is based on the understanding that pictures are, as Burke (2004) emphasizes, historical evidence for evoking the invisibility of the visual, sensibilities and representations of life witnessed in an ocular way. The interpretation of these pictures can provide us with a visual panorama of different, changing versions of Brazilian childhoods in different historical periods.

Images of Childhood

In 2016, an exhibition took place in Brazil at the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) between March and July, accompanied by a poster entitled Stories of Childhood. As soon as you entered the art hall, right on the first panel, visitors were faced with three panels with different images described as follows (Images 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3).

These images can help us to think about the existence of multiple and diverse representations of childhood. We adopt the concept of representation from Chartier's (1991) historical approach as we uncover and interpret meanings for the images based on our own cultural sensitivities. We explore the pictorial representation of childhoods in different temporalities, territories and artistic movements, represented by social contexts experienced by children in marginalized worlds, during historical periods where there was still little appreciation of childhood for the vast majority who lived at this early stage of life. For poor and enslaved Brazilian children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the perception of their existence and social and emotional value was negligible for the

Image 8.1 Pink and Blue—The Cahen d'Anvers Girls, 1881. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Limoges, France, 1841—Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, 1919). Oil on canvas, 119 × 75.5 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of the people of São Paulo, 1952, MASP.00099, Photo: João Musa]

wealthier classes. The three images depicted above suggest that adults seem to enjoy portraying different representational forms of a 'staged' childhood—their scenes evoke a particular way of seeing and living different historical childhoods.

Image 8.2 Untitled, from the Series *Brasília Teimosa*, 2005. Bárbara Wagner (Brasília, Brazil, 1980–present). Digital photograph, digital print on cotton paper, 59.5 × 42 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 2009. MASP.02678]

In Brazilian newspapers, we are also faced daily with representations that there is an ongoing social crisis of childhood in contemporary society. These are produced in reports that deal with drug use, physical and sexual violence, malnutrition, child labour, homeless children, paternal/maternal abandonment, paedophilia, the 'bombed' children in the Middle East,

Image 8.3 Fascination, 1909. Pedro Peres (Lisbon, Portugal, 1850—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1923). Oil on wood, 31.2 × 35.7. Collection of Pinacoteca de São Paulo. [Gift of Suzana Camará Moreira, 2005]

microcephaly, among the many other tragedies broadcast by the mainstream press. In fact, there has never been so much discussion about childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century, yet so little is known about children and their many problems:

> children represent, individually, very often, a whole mystery for parents—because, to a certain extent, they need to be discovered by them—but, above all, because the social state of knowledge about childhood problems, even today, is quite fragmented. (Elias, 2012: 469)

Thus, there are strong ambivalent attitudes towards children and the problems of childhood: on the one hand, we see images that focus on a childhood crisis anchored in exclusion and inequality, pointing to the way in which social conditions make it increasingly difficult for children to live in unequal societies marked by human exploitation. On the other hand, there is a scarcity of images that refer to a child's degree of power as active agents who have a relative degree of autonomy to control and participate in certain aspects of their lives in different social, cultural, economic and political contexts.

In Image 8.4, pictured below, we can observe the production of images of children that do not seem to match the prospect of a promising future, but seem closer to injustice, misery, abandonment, illness, death, in short, a reality of repugnant feelings in the current stage of civilization. As an imaginary representation, Candido Portinari's modernist painting, 'The Dead Child', from the series 'Retreats', denounces a sad scene of the child dehumanized by a historical and concrete reality that occurs in Brazil in certain regions of arid, almost desert climate. This has led to the internal migration of people (in Portuguese 'retreatant') to other regions of the country.

In this macabre and stony image, the life of a child is interrupted, dead, while the other child looks into the future and sheds tears. Survival in childhood merges with the arid landscape, indicating the need for greater resistance by migrants accustomed to crossing long distances on foot without water and enough food in search of better living conditions elsewhere. This depiction crucially violates children's rights, taking away their future prospects for a better life. It directly contradicts some of the dominant adult representations of an innocent childhood, standing in marked contrast to the world of the humanised child with rights and citizenship, advocated in national legislation that exists to protect and safeguard their rights against all forms of violence. We see the portrayal of the degraded daily lives of children and adults who are part 'of the history of the entire human network which grows and lives. This history and this human network are present in them and are represented by them, whether they are actually in relationship with other people or alone' (Elias, 1994a: 31).

However, as adults we are in danger of becoming so 'obsessed' with the tragedies about childhood that we naturalize certain problems of inequalities and social exclusion, producing an alternative model that obscures reality by exulting childhood as the imaginary time of purity, ingenuity, beauty, cleanliness, uncommitted joy, in short, an image that we could

Image 8.4 Dead Child, 1944. (Source: Candido Portinari (Brodowski, Brazil, 1903—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1962). Oil on canvas, 182 × 190 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Assis Chateaubriand, 1948, MASP.00326, Photo: Pedro Campos/ Elizabeth Kajiya/ Marcia Rizzuto—IFUSP])

express in the following representation of the 'margarine family' (Image 8.5).

This 'happy' and perfect 'bourgeois' family is used in advertisements by the mass consumer market to sell the idea of a comfortable, safe, well-organized life according to certain 'moral' standards. Such standards of morality are based on a 'normal' life in conservative, white, heterosexual and religious couples, but do not reflect the majority of families. These

Image 8.5 The happy family. (Source: https://jacquesmiranda.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/adote-um-infeliz/. Accessed on: September 8, 2021)

representations exclude the diversities and family models which children identify with, ignoring the complex reality of family relationships in contemporary society. Dantes and Sarat (2020) have argued that in the relationship between family and childcare institutions there is a discrepancy between models that do not match the reality of most of what occurs in schools because a large number of family units are made up of blended and single-parent families. Their survey indicated that most families are single-parent ones where women, mothers and grandmothers raise their children alone and face countless problems living in conditions of extreme poverty which affects the quality of life of their children. This social context leads to 'family problems such as alcohol consumption, prostitution, involvement with illegal drugs, domestic violence, among other crimes, changing the family organization' (Dantes & Sarat, 2020: 288).

Based on the above considerations, it is vital to try to understand the lives and contexts of children in a way that is much closer to the social reality experienced by a large part of the child population. When we do this we observe that in the relations between children and adults there is a high degree of mutual interdependence between both groups. As Elias states (1994a: 19), 'each human being is created by others who existed before; without a doubt, it grows and lives as part of an association of people, of a social whole—whatever it may be'. The relations of interdependence between adults and children need to be understood in order

that the social world that we refer to as 'childhood' is not seen as a separate and unrelated space from 'adulthood', but one where the changing balance of power between children and adults is executed. If we observe these models and change our ways of representing them we may be able to develop relational spaces for collective processes of learning, helping to reduce or ameliorate some of the intergenerational tensions that exist between children and adults. We need to discover children, which means that they 'are not simply small adults. They are becoming adults, individually, through a civilizing social process that varies according to the state of development of social models of civilization' (Elias, 2012: 469).

In this context, we emphasize that each individual trajectory in the world of the social discovery of childhood is concerned with the singularities, communities, locations and regionalities experienced by each child. Such spaces have different dimensions and contribute to the production of social inequalities and exclusionary practices that lead to ethnic, gendered and class-based differences between groups of individual children. In the rest of our chapter, we will discuss these differences by focusing on three human figurations that are represented by issues of inclusion/exclusion and inequality in the treatment of children: the figuration of the world of work, the figuration of the family order and the school figuration. Each of these figurations

> …can be understood as the organization of mutually interdependent groups of people and part of a process in which interrelated people are intertwined in an emergent structure of numerous properties such as power relations, tension axes, institutions…. (Elias, 1980: 140–145)

Childhood: Figuration of the World of Work

'Children don't work, children are work'. This phrase from the lyrics of a song by the Brazilian group 'Palavra Cantada' emphasises how children should be cared for and looked after, rather than engage in work in contemporary society. Advocates argue that they need to be guaranteed the rights set out in Article 227 of the Federal Constitution of Brazil of 1988:

> It is the duty of the family, society and the state to ensure children, adolescents and young people with absolute priority the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community coexistence, in addition to keeping them safe

> from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Constitutional Amendment No. 65, 2010)

If these legal aspects were put into practice in public policy, there would be no need for children to work. According to Hendrick (1997), the campaign to prevent young children from working in factories was one of the first steps in the construction of a universal childhood. Children were seen by adults to be innately innocent and therefore needed to be protected from the harsh world of labour. They were considered to be too vulnerable to engage in production, so in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the central place of work in children's lives was changed by the introduction of compulsory education and child labour legislation that made it illegal for them to work long hours in factories. Nevertheless in some developing countries, child labour still takes place—the exploitation of children in production is still used to increase and maximize profitability despite bringing a great deal of harm to children's health and well-being.

The Image 8.6 used above highlights the precarious jobs of young people and one of the degrading experiences that many children still face in capitalist societies in the twenty-first century. Data from PNAD/IBGE (Brazilian National Household Sample Survey) show that in 2014 approximately 554 thousand young people, between 5 and 13 years old, were in child labour, which indicates an increase of 9.3% compared to 2013. This fact can be explained by the increase in unemployment, the ongoing national and global economic crisis and the inhumane opportunistic actions of businesses in specific labour market segments within the economy. Instead of providing opportunities for the eradication of work for young people, employers, in the name of progress and capital accumulation, prefer to improve their competition in the market based on low production costs that are offered by the use of children's cheap wage labour. Therefore, employers have exploited the early and illegal inclusion of children in the labour market in rural production and in the urban commercial and industrial sector.

The practice of the early inclusion of children in the figuration of the world of work therefore excludes them from their childhood, drawing attention to the way that children are being exploited in the same economic system of production as adults. This harsh reality is driven by growing economic inequality, lack of improvement in living conditions, a decline in children's rights, reduction in levels of citizenship and in the overall dehumanization of their childhood. Work, which is usually one of

Image 8.6 Forest zone (Alagoas), 1993. (Source: Paula Simas (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1959–). Printing on silver gelatin paper, 23.8 × 30.3 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 1998, Photo: MASP])

the defining features of adulthood, has increasingly led to a deterioration in the social conditions of Brazilian children. The precariousness of their childhood and the abandonment of public policies that are designed to care and look after their well-being make it virtually impossible for children to move out of these unequal contexts. Children should not be forced to work in the labour force before they reach adulthood: their childhood should be one of play, creative leisure, enjoyment and living in the present in all its moments.

Childhood: Figurations of the Family Order

The family desired by middle-class groups in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century Brazilian society was based on representations that idealized formal marriage between white, religious, conservative men and women. The 'good' education of children and the image of a bourgeois

family that has been prevalent since the twentieth century are represented below in the canvas 'Family scene' by José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior (Image 8.7).

This scene represents a figuration of the family that was the 'ideal of civilization' in the late nineteenth century: in front there is the well-dressed man, a leader responsible for supporting everyone—in this case Adolfo A. Pinto, an engineer of high professional social status. The woman who is the mother is monitoring her children's domestic education (teaching her daughter embroidery); the eldest son is reading, while the other white children play with a black baby included/excluded in the social scene. In the background the scenery indicates the cultural capital that is seen as important by the artist—paintings and musical instruments. We thus have a phantasmagoria of civilization, one that was only available to

Image 8.7 Family scene by José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior, 1891. (Source: José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior (Itu, Brazil, 1850—Piracicaba, Brazil, 1899). Oil on canvas, 182 × 190 cm. Collection of Pinacoteca de São Paulo. [Gift of Vera Hermanny de Oliveira Coutinho, 1981])

some groups and not to others in Brazilian society even though the government had recently signed legislation for the abolition of slavery.

In stark contrast, we have witnessed in the last four decades a profound redefinition of family structures that have broken with the traditional patriarchal family, though in recent decades there has been an increase in some conservative movements affecting sexual and family relations. For example, research by Horst (2020), who analysed legislation proposed between 1995 and 2013, shows that the speeches of parliamentarians of the Brazilian national congress attributed to same-sex families the 'blame' for a supposed 'crisis' or 'disruption' of the nuclear family. There has also been a reduction in the rates of formal marriages, increases in the number of divorces, the birth of children outside of marriage, single parent families and reconstituted families (couples living a new marital relationship and raising children from other marriages). Stable unions in gay couples, and those that recognize themselves in alternative sexual orientations, for example, transsexual couples or queer couples, need to be socially recognized as alternative family models.

The ideal image of the nuclear family, consisting of a white, heterosexual co-residential married couple with their children who are economically supported by a husband, therefore no longer fits with the rich diversity of ways in which family members live their lives. In the twenty-first century, there is no longer one dominant family form that could provide a model for all others. All these models of family units are distinct and different from the concept of 'the family', highlighting the changing relational aspects of family relationships and the ways in which these relationships are lived and seen. The concept of family has become decentred, especially in research that draws from broader notions of intimacy and personal life (Edwards & Gillies, 2012). Ribbens McCarthy (2012) argues that researchers need to be more sensitive to people's everyday discourses of family, the 'language of family' that provides insights into the interweaving of autonomy and connection in the context of close-knit relationships that persist over time. The use of such language acts as 'a repository and expression for deep but ambivalent desire for—and sometimes, fears of—belonging and connection' (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012: 70). In initial family spaces all experiences form and transform the person, as Elias (2001: 12) reflected on his own childhood:

> men carry within themselves, with regard to their lives, an intuition whose origin is related to the first moments spent in their family. I have an intuition

> that gives me the assurance that everything will be fine, in short, I attribute this to the enormous sense of security I enjoyed during my childhood.

Although families have been the initial space for learning, young children from an early age now spend most of their day in institutions for early childhood education and care: nurseries, day care centres and kindergartens are settings that provide a range of different resources for the construction of identities that previously could only be established within families. These institutional settings set the tone for relationships between individual children, dyads (child–caregiver), peer–peer (friendships and playmates) and group interactions between young children and their caregivers. (In this context, it is important to note that educational institutions only receive children from 6 months of age and maternity leave in Brazil is not a right for all women.) Families have therefore lost their status of being the only institution for child socialization. As more young children enter childcare and early education, the issue of transition from their immediate families to group care settings has grown in importance. Those responsible for the care and education of children work all day and at night parents and children can be exhausted with the daily routine outside the household unit. They have less time to be together, especially when a growing number of women have a third shift of domestic work to do when they arrive home. This experience is becoming the familiar figuration in the capitalist division of labour:

> Currently, children are socialised in the relationships they establish with many people and in the concrete experiences of a differentiated life, with a great presence of the means of social communication that bring distant worlds into their homes. This opens up perspectives for learning in settings and for other means of socialization. Children, with expanded experiences, learn to live and get to know a world permeated by plurality from an early age. In this way, the socialisation of children takes place through the construction of multiple identity(ies) with expanded possibilities of belonging. (Barbosa, 2009: 15)

This changing historical context has been developing since the nineteenth century when the defunctionalization of families for children in the domestic space began, and there is now a greater role for schools in these processes of initial socialization, to which we now turn our attention.

Childhood: School Figurations

In the first half of the nineteenth century in Brazil compulsory and free schooling was introduced to universalize elementary education for children. The promulgation of imperial legal provisions—the Additional Act to the Constitution of 1824, the Law of October 15, 1827, and the Additional Act of 1834—occurred simultaneously with the constitutional structuring of the monarchic state and later officially in 1889 with the formation of the Brazilian republican state. In the constitution of the Brazilian state, the nineteenth-century public elementary school was a state monopoly designed to instruct those children who most needed to learn about self-regulation and the habits of civilization. Such state investment was due to the civilizing discourse of the period that advocated education as an important value of civilized nations and a response to other countries' models of civilization:

> The framework of educational institutions was reconfigured during the second half of the 19th century, comprising the day care and the kindergarten, alongside the primary school, professional education, special needs education and other modalities. The absorption of these models of civilization and progress combined references from European and North American propagation centers. (Kuhlmann Jr., 2001: 13)

However, the Brazilian public school has excluded the less favoured and 'marginalized' child since the beginning of its inception, promoting exclusions that were justified by the disqualification of those who could be its most important beneficiaries: poor, black and mestizo children. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, places at public schools that were considered excellent teaching establishments were obtained by competitive exams that benefited children from the most favoured socio-economic groups. Although it was supposed to be inclusive in the dissemination of civilities and the promotion of social cohesion (Veiga, 2008), public education became an exclusionary model of education for a small number of children. One important consequence was that the development of state funding of public schools in Brazil was not able to meet the demands of the whole population. Even in the mid-twentieth century the illiteracy rate of pupils remained high: in 1950 the illiterate population, aged 15 or over, represented 50.6% of the total of 30,188 million inhabitants (Brasil, 2003).

In the history of twentieth century Brazilian education there have been various educational political movements proposing solutions to the problems of social exclusion in public schools and the democratization of access to free education regardless of religion—for example, the Nationalist League movement in the decade of 1910, the 1932 Pioneers Manifesto, the Campaign in Defense of the Public School in the 1950s and the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) between 1967 and 1985. High-quality public schools have now become a mandatory right of children, young people and adults from different ethnicities and social classes. However, the Image 8.8 highlights contradictions within the state sector because not everyone has access to this free public space.

This picture of indigenous children studying in a non-indigenous school represents the mismatch between children's bodies and the school's material culture: notice the disproportionately sized chairs, the teaching space in a closed room with a small window, similar to the closed models

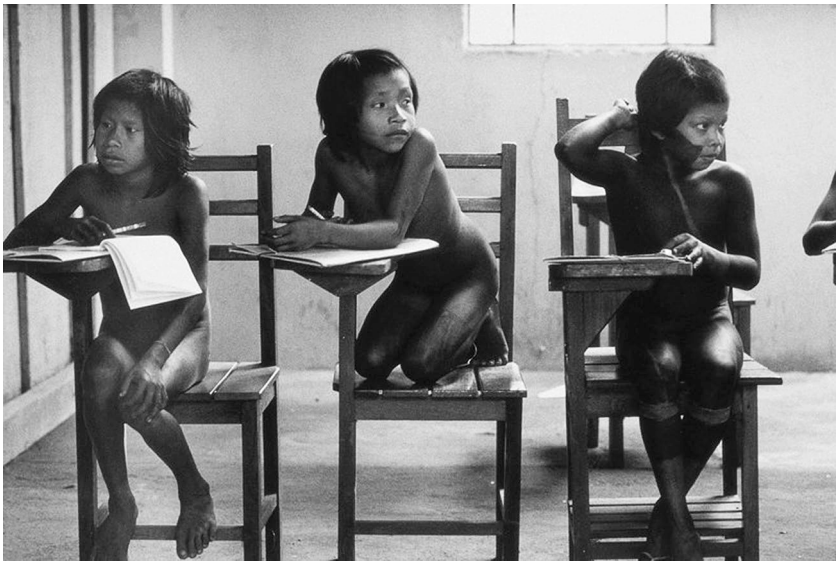

Image 8.8 Kayapó School, Djetuktire Village, 1991. (Source: Milton Guran (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1948 –). Printing on silver gelatin paper, 23.8 × 30.3 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 1993, MASP.01827, Photo: MASP])

of non-indigenous schools. It is not enough to numerically include disadvantaged children in schools. For, as highlighted by Bourdieu and Passeron (1982), the 'inclusive' school also excludes when it reproduces and maintains the cultural privilege of those more favoured by the cultural capital inherited from their parents. Cultural capital has particular currency in the field of education, comprising embodied (dispositions, sets of meaning and modes of thinking), objectified (access to cultural goods such as art and literature) and institutionalised forms (educational or academic qualifications), which are given recognition by those already dominant within a particular field. Those with the 'recognised' cultural capital are deemed competent in their knowledge and confident in their capacity to generate long-term benefits from their investment in education.

Serre and Wagner (2015) have argued that the concept of cultural capital is mainly intended to make us think about mechanisms for legitimation. They claim that schools have the function of legitimating power and keeping social order. The cultural capital that Bourdieu identified is less defined by its content (legitimate practices, educational qualifications) than by how it is acquired, which naturalises domination and makes it invisible. This is why it is so important to explain all the different aspects of cultural capital—incorporation, institutionalization, objectification—as they relate to distinct and complementary mechanisms of domination. Incorporation presupposes a long period of invisible inculcation work from the youngest age, characteristic of incorporated cultural capital as it appears in language, knowledge and habits. Institutionalization is tied to the power of guarantee vested in institutions of learning. Objectification, through the ownership of cultural goods, manifests capital's patrimonial dimension.

These mechanisms guarantee cultural capital's effectiveness when it is 'used as a weapon and as a stake in struggles' (Bourdieu, 1979: 5). In the case of the Brazilian public school, we can see how different discourses of legitimation operate together: the discourse of a quality school for all children to remedy their ignorance; the discourse of individualism and meritocracy for personal success in the world of work; the discourse of the nation-state as the solution for social differences and inequalities; the discourse of national progress through education that is a recurrent topic for politicians; and the discourse of the state as the guardian of moral, civic and political values. However, in practice none of these discourses have so far led to a more effective long-term policy that would begin to reduce the inequalities in education that affect so many children. The contemporary

school crisis in Brazil is also fuelled by the propagation of these legitimizing discourses: being enrolled does not reduce social inequalities experienced by children and young people, but produces and reproduces an unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources. With the COVID-19 pandemic the school crisis has accelerated, amplifying its problems in different territories (Honorato & Nery, 2020).

As an institution the public school in Brazil is facing a deep structural crisis that requires levels of participation that would lead to its transformation (Sarmento, 2002). There are political, cultural and social dimensions related to specific domains of the school institution that could act in its rehabilitation and allow the emergence of new networks of involvement between groups that constitute the school, promoting citizenship and democratic practice across the whole school community. One of these very important levels of involvement would be to facilitate and enable the participation of children and young people:

> Mobilizing this participation for the public space, without this effect generating the colonization of the worlds of children's and youth's life, is today an important dimension in the insertion of young people and a central point of democratic renewal. This issue involves the recognition of children's participation rights in the constitution of the public space and the expressive mobilization of their opinion, according to imaginative and diversified modalities and formulas. (Sarmento, 2002: 275–276)

Children and young people need to be encouraged to organize themselves as part of a necessary change that is directly linked to their participation and political inclusion in decision-making processes. A democratic space where this potential could be developed can already be found in the curriculum guidelines for children that legislate for the education of children in child care institutions, entitled the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brazil, 2009). In Brazil the education of children is part of a Basic Education that starts at 6 months and continues to 5 in day care centres and preschools. After this period, they attend the initial years of elementary school until the final completed year at age 12. The entire planning of pedagogical practices with children in educational institutions is guided by principles highlighted in article 6, which states that 'the pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education must respect the following principles: I Ethical, II Political and III Aesthetic'.

Let us now turn our attention to the second principle 'Political II: citizenship rights, the exercise of criticality and respect for the democratic order' (Brasil, 2009). This is a fundamental right that should be taught and debated with children from an early age in institutions where they can learn about growing levels of autonomy in their interdependent relationships with adults. Children can begin to change the pendulum in their favour by learning how power relations operate in 'balances of power' which can change direction from their participation. While they are young, older generations still hold a greater power-ratio over children and young people, but their political participation can be part of a learning process that can encourage them to break the structural circles of social inequality among the various generational groups, acting as an incentive for future change.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued that selected images of children can provide useful historical evidence for reflections on marginalized children (mute and silenced witnesses), allowing us to think about the problems of social inequalities in changing figurations of childhood in Brazil, from the nineteenth century to the present day. Our interpretation of these images enabled us to question some of the dominant ideological assumptions that inform contemporary childhood. Such assumptions tend to naturalize a popular understanding of childhood in a short-term perspective, idealising a model of a pure, naive and apolitical childhood, one that minimizes or ignores the way that other important factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity are experienced by children in changing historical figurations.

We have argued that childhood needs to be explained by relational interdependencies formed and shared by children with other children and adults, applying the socio-historical contributions of Norbert Elias to focus on figurations of schools, work and families. The different layers of institutional complexity within these figurations can help us to explain the changing 'balance of power' between adults and children that produce social inequalities in Brazilian childhoods. However, we suggested that children's participation in decision-making processes that affects their lives offers the possibility of 'tilting' the balance of power in their favour. Their participation can become part of a learning process that encourages them to break the structural reproduction of social inequality, paving the way for future change.

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PART III

Inter-generational Processes: New Forms of Interdependencies

CHAPTER 9

Down Mom! The Development of Unacknowledged Shame, Child Centering, and Gender Relations in Germany

Désirée Waterstradt

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development of child centering and shame in the process of civilization (Elias, 2012). I will discuss how a child centering habitus emerged in Germany in families and child-centered institutions (Waterstradt, 2015, 2017), addressing why mothers are credited with the ability to civilize children as unscathed as possible through intensive mothering in the family and care work. In the 'Process of Civilisation', Elias (2012) emphasized how unacknowledged feelings of shame can lead to 'chain reactions' and uncontrollable 'shame-rage spirals' that continue over generations (Scheff, 1987, 1988). I will suggest that the concept of the 'master emotion' of shame (Scheff, 2003a) can be used to understand the intersectional dynamics of power relations, explaining the destructive

D. Waterstradt (✉)
Independent Consultant, Munich, Germany
e-mail: Waterstradt@waterstradt.com

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effects of modern 'spirals of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). By viewing shame as a master emotion with a fundamental biopsychosocial character (Lewis, 1971), power dynamics can be identified as uncontrollable chain reactions that are closely connected with the formation of shame spirals in oneself, in others, and in networks of relationships.

This chapter begins by summarizing the main theoretical assumptions behind the biopsychosocial master emotion of shame, the modern shame taboo, and the psychological development of shame competencies and gendered aspects of shame. I discuss why the German habitus is particularly suitable for the study of power dynamics of shame and changes in child centering, examining shame and gender polarization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then the long-term consequences of contemporary child centering, tabooing of shame, and polarization of gender relations are explored. In conclusion, I discuss why hostility towards mothers or momism can be identified as a form of discrimination and group-based hostility which has not yet been fully investigated.

Shame, Shame Taboos, and Gender Relations

The ability to feel shame is a major characteristic of human beings. Shame is a social or collective emotion which has the function of 'signaling' threats to the social bond or self. Therefore, shame can be classified as a 'master emotion' (Scheff, 2003b). Scheff (2000, p. 98f.) defines shame as 'a large family of emotions that includes cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that involve reactions to rejection or feelings of inadequacy. What unites all these cognates is that they involve the feeling of a threat to the social bond'. Feelings of shame are group specific and depend on position and status within a network of relationships.

In evolutionarily terms, shame seems to have developed in humans as a moral emotion to stabilize human relational networks and regulate interaction. In survival units of a manageable size, it was about balancing group dynamics. On the one hand, feelings of shame ensure that resources are shared and that group members are not hurt. On the other hand, they ensure that members submit to the social rules and the social order of a group (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & McGuire, 1998; Fessler, 2007; Sznycer et al., 2012; Sznycer et al., 2016).

Shame is also a cross-level emotion that connects and regulates biological, individual, and collective levels of human relationships. It is

indispensable for understanding 'biopsychosocial' processes (Lewis, 1971; Scheff, 2003b). According to Lewis (1971), feelings of shame are caused by a breakdown of the internalized ego-ideal and the failure to meet self-expectations or the standards of people who are important to oneself. While feelings of guilt only devalue certain actions of a person, shame devalues the entire self. It leads to a splitting of perception into self and 'other' and a division of cognition and affect. The self feels overwhelmed, at the mercy of others, without control and paralyzed. Feelings of autonomy and independence are replaced by feelings of dependence and vulnerability due to rejection. One feels small, helpless, and childlike. Shame is thus felt as a hostile attack on the whole self.

On a physical level, shame leads to an implosion of the self and a flooding of impressions, which may cause a loss of control of bodily functions: excessive automated bodily reactions (sweating, blushing, paling, diffuse anger), changes in facial expressions, gestures, posture and behavior, loss of cognitive and rational abilities as well as impairment of verbal expressiveness including speechlessness. Because feelings of shame are experienced physically, psychologically, and socially as a hostile attack, they often have important consequences. These include the need to hide or run away. Feelings of shame can lead to aggression, hostility, and the need to humiliate others. Distancing from oneself, one's feelings, and others or the situation is a preventive attempt to avoid feelings of shame. These feelings of shame usually remain unconscious for the affected person as well as for those involved (Lewis, 1971).

In contrast, social relationships and the self are strengthened by feelings of honor, pride, recognition, respect, and love. They function as a 'deference-emotion system' (Scheff, 1988), forming the antithesis of shame. In this respect, shame is the 'punishment of unfulfilled honor' (Neckel, 1993). This can also be explained as an unstable 'honor-shame balance' (Waterstradt, 2015). When feelings of shame are triggered, the balance tips towards shame and shame spirals develop. In the case of a two-party relationship, there are three spirals: in the first and second spiral, there is one within each of the two individuals and in the third spiral one between them (Scheff, 2003b). These three spirals are interrelated. To avoid shame one or both parties can ward off feelings of shame in two main ways by withdrawal, emptiness and silence, or by anger, aggression, or violence (Scheff, 1987).

At the group level these chain reactions and collective shame defense spirals can continue for generations (Elias, 2013; Scheff, 1987). Due to

the tabooing of shame in contemporary society, shame becomes obscured and therefore power relations are perceived as an independent, remote, and abstract mechanism (Elias, 2012). This abstraction of shame and power dynamics complicate their analysis and their control, as Elias has argued throughout his work. Research on feelings of shame is also especially challenging because researchers cannot be sure of handling their own defensive feelings in a productive way. Shame taboos undermine the reception of shame research and its understanding, often causing exploration and reception to break down (Scheff, 2000, 2003b).

Shame episodes are particularly observable from puberty onwards. Although the results of escalating conflicts in young men receive public attention, spirals of shame and rage are very rarely discussed (Scheff, 2003a; Kersten, 2011). The spirals of silence and shame in gender relations were first systematically analyzed by the second women's movement. This was achieved primarily through the innovative format of the 'Consciousness Raising Groups', which was developed by the New York Radical Women at the end of the 1960s (Firestone & Koedt, 1968, 1970; Sarachild, 1978). It spread rapidly throughout the Western world and led to numerous innovative and highly effective protest activities (Chira, 2017).

This format promoted the systematic critique of femininity, motherhood, and masculinity (Ruck, 2018; Whittier, 2017; Blevins, 2018). Women and men now have more opportunities in tracing and understanding what generates the unbearable feelings of shame that are usually unconsciously warded off through 'bashful patriarchalism' (Mies, 1991, p. 43) or 'chafing masculinities' (Gottzén, 2019). Men must no longer ward off triggered feelings of embarrassment in spirals of silence or shame and rage, thereby blocking change. Instead, by displaying their feelings of shame, they can show that they do not completely disregard social rules and reveal their desire of belonging to the social community (Gottzén, 2016).

Spirals of Shame, German Habitus, and Child Centering

Germany is a country with a discontinuous, often fractured history (see Fig. 9.1). Over the centuries, the process of German nation-building has been characterized by multi-layered conflicts which have led to countless splits, ruptures, and discontinuities. The inter-related processes of

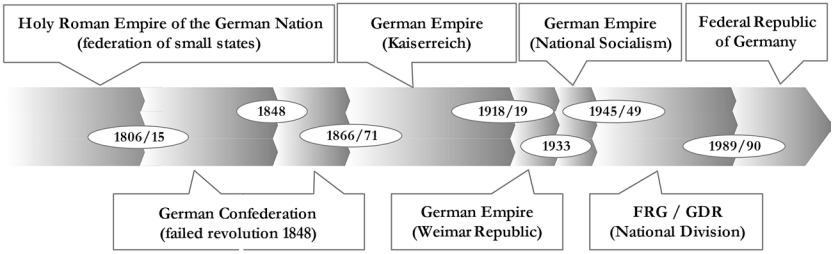

Fig. 9.1 Fractures and transformational changes as discontinuities in the modern German nation-building process (Waterstradt, 2015, p. 444)

psychogenesis and sociogenesis have shaped the distinctive German social habitus—the German I-we identities fluctuate between national obsession and national forgetfulness, between excessive narcissism and a profound depression that ranges from self-rejection, self-esteem, self-hatred, and self-denial (Waterstradt, 2015). National Socialism also further reinforced the unstable, highly ambivalent mixture of acknowledgement and repulsion of guilt and shame in the German habitus and inscribed it deeply into German national identity. After 1949 this was aggravated by the division of Germany which led to very different ways of dealing with guilt and shame regarding German history, National Socialism, the German-German division, reunification, the development of German unity, and its current situation.

In the German habitus collective memory has proven an ever-challenging balancing act in the shadow of historical guilt and shame which can be observed over generations. Anyone who grew up in Germany, currently lives in Germany, or has German roots, who deals with this historical guilt and shame and does not ward it off, feels and understands that it can be acknowledged, but even the most trivial event can trigger and activate shame repulsion, speechlessness, and spirals of silence. In trying to deal consciously with individual and collective shame repulsion—in oneself and others—one becomes more sensitive to the wide range of shame emotions and their consequences.

These changing spirals of shame can be further illustrated by discussing the historical development of child-centering in Germany (Waterstradt, 2015, 2017). von Trotha (1999) points out that the change from a father-centered to a child-centered family took place in Germany with a 'historically unique radicality'. He attributes this to the ideology of German

Romanticism that placed the family under a certain claim of order and perfection that was directed at the child, the mother-child dyad, and above all, to the mother.

An important feature of the child-centered family was the ideal of romantic love between parents which was transferred to the relationship between parents and child (von Trotha, 1999). What is particularly significant are the radical consequences of a German habitus that promotes very intensive mothering: the primary responsibility, self-sacrifice, and invisibility of mothers not only continue to be largely taken for granted but are protected by excessive shame taboos. A shame spiral has arisen between all those involved, which they will only be able to reduce if they can loosen the modern pattern of taboos about shame. It would no longer be women or mothers who would have to assume the task as shepherdesses of shame, family, and civilization, but all people.

Changing Figurations in Masculinity, Gendering of (Im)morality, and Female Child Centering

The house in the Middle Ages and early modern period was centered around husbands or parents with an emphasis on the housefather. His authority derived directly from God the Father, just like that of the father of the land or ecclesiastical father figures. During the Reformation, the authority of the housefather rose to the position of priest of the house. Thus, his authority was legitimized even more directly and even more strongly through faith and religion. However, the transition to modernity increasingly changed the way people lived and worked (Waterstradt, 2019).

The figuration of the father-centered European house that had existed since antiquity began to dissolve and develop into the *bürgerliche Familie* (figuration of the German middle/upper-class family), where the father was now largely absent and became marginal. The servants no longer belonged to the 'we-identity' of the house but dropped out or were relegated to the position of nannies, wet nurses, gardeners, or cooks. Boys could no longer grow into the working world of their fathers but needed a separate education.

This change in the figurational dynamics was also reflected in language. The word for this way of life in the house was adopted from French and now became *Familie* (family), increasingly replacing the earlier term *Haus* (house). The economy of the Middle Ages was morally organized,

oriented towards the common good, and characterized by strong restrictions on competition. After the transition to modern times, self-interest and competition were legitimized. But it took centuries for these previously rejected principles to become socially legitimate categories, legitimizing the psychological development of the rising male elites of the *Bürgertum* (Wischermann & Nieberding, 2004, p. 45).

In this new public world of self-interest and competition, the *bürgerliche Familie* formed a counter-world and was sacralized into a 'family religion' (Nipperdey, 1990, p. 44)—including father, mother, and child as a sacred and holy ideal. The mother was the shepherdess of this sacred counter-world and thus at the same time 'guardian of civilization and culture' (Kranz, 2008, p. 126). Schiller's (1799) 'Song of the Bell' of 1798 shows this new figuration:

> The man must go out
> In hostile life living,
> Be working and striving
> And planting and making,
> Be scheming and taking,
> Through hazard and daring,
> His fortune ensnaring.
> Then streams in the wealth in an unending measure,
> The silo is filled thus with valuable treasure,
> The rooms are growing, the house stretches out.
> And indoors ruleth
> The housewife so modest,
> The mother of children,
> And governs wisely
> In matters of family,
> And maidens she traineth
> And boys she restraineth,
> And goes without ending
> Her diligent handling,
> And gains increase hence
> With ordering sense.
> And treasure on sweet-smelling presses is spreading,
> And turns round the tightening spindle the threading,
> And gathers in chests polished cleanly and bright
> The shimmering wool, and the linen snow-white,
> And joins to the goods, both their splendor and shimmer,
> And resteth never.

Since antiquity, the father had been regarded as the 'wise and legitimate government of the house' (Rousseau, 1755). Socially, the change in his position from housefather to father of the family led to an increase in his economic and social status. But his moral status and self-image were profoundly undermined. During the Enlightenment, a historically revolutionary reversal occurred in the attribution of moral judgment and agency in gender relations. This novel 'polarization of gender characters' (Hausen, 2012) was about character and personality. At the core of these gendered relations was the division of the human 'psyche' and its capacity for morality or immorality.

As Kucklick (2008) suggests, leading male thinkers of the Enlightenment and the *Bürgertum* started to describe masculinity as highly problematic and men as 'the immoral gender'. For example men like Adam Smith (1723–1790), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). They experienced their professional tasks as a deep shock—as dehumanization, self-alienation, and depersonalization. This was especially evident in comparison to women and children. It led to a critical examination of masculinity in their own and other societies without historical precedent. What they saw was a humiliating picture. The man now appeared to them only as a dangerous animal of society, driven by instinctive self-interest and incapable of humanity—callous, egoistic, crude, libidinous, irresponsible, violent, tyrannical, and destructive. Even reason offered no way out, as abstract thinking proved to be cold-hearted and narrow-minded (Kucklick, 2008, 2011). The civilizing aspiration and reality of the *Bürgertum*-project of the Enlightenment were therefore far apart.

The formerly sacred authority of the housefather was subjected to new terms of blame gossip indicating a change in social relations and power balances (Elias, 2008). From 1720, bad fathers were first reviled as *Rabenvater* (raven father), that is, as insufficiently caring and irresponsible. Somewhat later and more slowly, the German devaluation of mothers as *Rabenmutter* (raven mother) became popular and common. From 1740 on, the father was also reviled as *Haustyrann* (tyrant of the house/family), who does not use his central position in the interest of his charges but tyrannizes them (DWDS, 2021). The biblical commandment to honor your father and mother was therefore visibly eroded. Women of the *Bürgertum*, on the other hand, were described by men of the

Bürgertum as 'the moral gender' (Steinbrügge, 1987), their humanity and morality responsible for the project of civilization (Kucklick, 2011).

The father or husband sank to the same developmental level as the child and was considered equally in need of education. Marriage was declared the indispensable key aspect of male civilization, in which the man could only become civilized and capable of love through the self-sacrificing love of the woman. Before that, he was considered thoroughly immoral and incapable of love, which is why women should beware of his sexual instincts and selfishness. The female gaze, especially the gaze of the good mother, was not only supposed to analyze souls, but also to discipline them through her self-sacrifice and indulgent shamefulness, humanity, and morality. Mother invocation became a kind of worship and urged mothers into the position that previously belonged to God (Kucklick, 2008). The abilities that were attributed to 'good' mothers presented them as superhuman, sacred, and omnipotent. It paved the way for the *geistliche Mütterlichkeit* (spiritual motherliness) of the future, working in non-beneficial occupations: in social work, childcare, school, therapy, or as secretaries in companies (Peters, 1984; Rerrich, 2010).

The fundamental doubt about masculinity shows how significant the distancing from feelings of shame became during this transformational period. The critique of masculinity by male thinkers apparently did not lead to any self-critical reflection of their own participation in changing gender relations: instead, male distancing from feelings of shame was inscribed deeply into their gendered habitus. The revolutionary but abstract critique of masculinity got lost again or hushed up later and forgotten. Moreover, the pattern of defense against shame established by the thinkers of the Enlightenment prevailed: the sacralizing exaltation of the child as the holy power of innocence and the woman or mother as the holy power of shamefulness and self-sacrifice.

Scherl (2016) argues that the concept of shame was the key aspect of gender relations for one of the most influential pioneers of the Enlightenment and pedagogy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Rousseau was an inspiration for the German *Bürgertum*. For him, it is shame that gives women authority over men and thus reverses the asymmetry of power in gender relations. Nevertheless, both sexes are already caught in the shame taboo, as Rousseau describes. The man lives completely in his mask and feels alien and uncomfortable as soon as he is forced to return to himself; the woman does not live in herself either, but as a performer of herself only for the external appearance and judgment of

others (Scherl, 2016). Only children are yet able to know about patterns of shame and their taboos are therefore innocent of the spirals of shame.

The way in which Rousseau's view reflects the generational and gender relations of his time can be seen through an analysis of German-language encyclopedias of the eighteenth century (Hausen, 2012). Here a polarization of the gender characters becomes recognizable in the framework where the master emotion of shame and associated competencies are located in the female gender character (see Fig. 9.2). Women are thus assigned the main responsibility for social bonding and the regulation of shame spirals:

Therefore, it was no longer the housefather who had the skills to unify the household community (Kucklick, 2008). Instead, the mother was seen as the shepherdess of family, modesty, and civility. It was the men of the *Bürgertum* who rejected shame competencies and assigned the main moral responsibility for civilization, national education, and pedagogy to women, especially to mothers. This functioned through their shamefulness in the internal sphere of the family and the civilization of their children. This important historical change in the figuration led to the main moral responsibility for partnership, family, and children being assigned to the mother. She became the feel-good manager for all family members and civilization, yet she is nevertheless supposed to act invisibly, sacrificing herself in secret.

Down Mom: On the Shame of Being a Mother in Contemporary Germany

To come to terms with Germany's past, Klaus Theweleit examined German Freicorps literature from the period between World War I and World War II. His two-volume study was published in 1977/1978 and became a pioneering work of critical men's studies. It was inspired by Elias's study on the process of civilization and self-distancing, masking taboos about feelings of shame. He discussed how deep time-typical imprints and the reality of World War I were inscribed in the bodies and 'psyches' of men, continuing to dominate them inwardly in the post-war period. Male fantasies led men to self-alienation, made them blind to the needs of others, produced an ice-clear consciousness, and resulted in lustful acts of combat and terror where people were turned into bloody pulp. They were particularly directed against women and reflected the extent to which men of the *Bürgertum* had developed an armor against women (Theweleit, 1987, 1988).

Man	Woman
Virtue	**Virtues**
Dignity	Shamefulness, chastity
	Propriety
	Kindness
	Tact
	Beautification gift
	Grace, beauty
Do	**Be**
Independent	Dependent
Striving, purposeful, effective	Busy, industrious
Acquiring	Preserving
Giving	Receiving
Assertiveness	Self-denial, conformity
Violence	Love, benevolence
Antagonism	Sympathy
Destination for	**Destination for**
Outside	Inside
Wide	Closeness
Public life	Domestic life
Activity	**Passivity**
Energy, strength, willpower	Weakness, elevation, devotion
Strength	Fickleness
Bravery, boldness	Modesty
Rationality	**Emotionality**
Mind	Feeling, emotion
Reason	Sensation
Intellect	Receptivity
Thinking	Receivability
Knowledge	Religiousness
Abstracting, judging	Understanding

Fig. 9.2 Polarization of gender characters in German-language encyclopedias of the eighteenth century (Hausen, 2012, p. 164f)

Van Schaik and Michel (2020) also attribute the emergence of hostility towards women to 'patriarchal phantasms' in relation to evolutionary biology and cultural history. They explain the figuration that develops as a 'patriarchal matrix' or 'patrix', one that forms an important foundation for

male bonding. Their concept of 'patrix' refers to the very influential fictional movie 'The Matrix' (1999), and to the much earlier group-analytic term, 'group matrix' (*matrix* being derived from mother animal, breeding animal, and later womb), initially coined by Foulkes (1948) who was strongly influenced by his close cooperation with Norbert Elias and his concept of figuration (Gfäller, 1993; Lavie, 2005). Foulkes' concept of matrix was further developed by the group analytic term 'patrix' (Wilke, 2014; Weimer, 2015; Wuhrmann, 2016). Van Schaik and Michel (2020) have characterized motherhood as the central and most powerful phantasy of patrix, where women are isolated from their previous social networks, sacrificing themselves as 'breeding machines for male heirs in the service of their husbands' and their children.

Moeller-Gambaroff (1977) has also discussed how hostility towards the mother can be explained by the intertwining of reality and early childhood fantasies: repression and unconscious resistance prove to be 'particularly safe hiding places'. For young children, their adult caregivers appear strong and all-powerful. In order not to experience themselves as helpless and dependent, children develop fantasies of 'symbiotic' fusion with them. These symbiotic fantasies focus almost exclusively on the mother-child dyad, operating throughout adulthood and supported by cultural processes in the national habitus. In the model of the *bürgerliche Familie,* mothers are supposed to be primarily responsible for the care of the child. However, this generates unconscious fears of one's own inner dependence on the mother.

For psychical relief, shameful feelings of helplessness are projected onto the mother. She becomes an 'evil external enemy' who can be 'fiercely fought' and upon whom one can vent and satisfy one's 'aggressive impulses' (Moeller-Gambaroff, 1977). The child's helplessness activates fantasies of an omnipotent mother with whom one connives, thus allowing the child to cope with its own excessive demands. The increasing idealization of the mother-child dyad shapes how mothers become the enemy image: the regressive fantasies of adults are promoted to elevate childhood retrospectively, an ideal state of paradise to which they long to return. This results is an unrealistic exaggeration of the image of the mother that leads to a dichotomy between the 'ideal' image and the 'enemy' image.

Rohde-Dachser (1991) argues that this 'splitting' of the mother into 'all good' and 'all bad' does not lead to a balanced relationship between mother, child, and other relational partners. It is the omnipotent mother who is supposed to create the ideal state of childhood, and if she fails, she

bears the blame for loss, separation, pain, vulnerability, dependence, and powerlessness. The mother thus becomes the new 'scapegoat' of modernity (Rohde-Dachser, 1991, pp. 207–211). In these regressive fantasies the father, in turn, is imagined as a 'savior and liberator' from the danger of the devouring omnipotent mother (Rohde-Dachser, 1991).

In his study on the 'Feindbild Frau' (Enemy Image of Woman), Pohl (2004) describes these processes of human interdependency as an insoluble 'sexual dilemma', which in modern, male-dominated societies becomes a 'masculinity dilemma'. When masculinity and autonomy are equated, dependency is perceived as humiliating and shameful, especially on women or mothers. However, men are dependent on women in three central aspects. In birth and growing up they are dependent on mothers or women. After sexual maturity heterosexual men are dependent on women as objects of sexual desire. In their own reproduction, men are dependent on the childbearing capacity of women (Pohl, 2004).

The result of these different levels of dependencies is hostility towards mothers, leading to an unconscious defense mechanism against shame that targets those who are responsible for social bonds: mothers. As the fantasized mother becomes an enemy image, the real mother remains unrecognized as 'the true target object'. The invisibility of mothers turns out to be the main ingredient of misogyny that leads to discomfort, embarrassment, and fear. It is not just some lack of friendliness towards children or parents, but the unconscious spirals of shame that are triggered when children, fathers, and mothers fail to live up to social ideals. When these ideals about children, parenting, or childcare are not fulfilled, it is primarily the mothers who are held responsible and become scapegoats.

Some important difficulties therefore arise in thinking about, let alone talking about, the full range of one's own experiences with being a mother. If mothers do talk about it, they violate the sense of shame of others and thus identify themselves as bad mothers. It is no coincidence that there was a great deal of attention and upset in Germany over the study 'Regretting Motherhood' by Orna Donath (2017) (Heffernan & Stone, 2021). In the introduction to the German edition, Donath (2016, p. 14) suggests that bad feelings about motherhood should be understood as 'a kind of alarm bell' that calls on society to 'make it easier for mothers' to rethink their attitudes on motherhood. However, it is precisely this 'alarm bell' of the master emotion of shame and its associated feelings—such as remorse in this case—which women are expected to make inaudible to themselves and to others.

To discuss negative experiences in motherhood would mean that one's existence as a child was the trigger for making one's mother feel bad. As long as mothers adhere to this shame taboo around motherhood, it can remain part of the climate of opinion that only a bad mother experiences negative aspects of motherhood and dares to talk about it privately or publicly. Aspects of such shamefulness are still present today: female morality for care and commitment, and male (un)morality for self-assertion, independence, instrumental action, and lack of care. This shame barrier becomes apparent when fathers speak openly about what it means to take on the tasks that have historically been considered exclusively maternal or feminine. Overwhelming feelings of shame arise, which can turn into fear, insecurity, and threats to masculinity (König, 2013; Winter, 2016).

These irresolvable contradictions between the desire for autonomy and the fear of dependency lead to a gendered spiral of shame. If mothers do not want to draw the force of shame upon themselves, their only option is to retreat into silence, emptiness, and a life for others. This is one of the major factors why even emancipated mothers are nudged into humility, self-sacrifice, and self-abasement until they have reliably internalized the voice of the collective conscience. Their omnipresent superego unconsciously and relentlessly whispers to them, Down Mom!

Momism and Hostility Towards Mothers: An Overlooked Form of Social Discrimination

There are many forms of discrimination, such as racism, anti-Semitism, or sexism. In Germany, these have been systematically surveyed since 2001, where it became apparent that people cannot easily resist 'authoritarian temptations' (Heitmeyer, 2018), especially since they remain mainly unconscious. This dynamic leads to a growing 'group-based hostility' (Küpper & Zick, 2015) which can escalate into 'authoritarian national radicalism' (Heitmeyer, 2018; Heitmeyer et al., 2020). Authoritarianism, discrimination, and group-based misanthropy are precisely not phenomena that can be reduced to psychically ill individuals, they permeate the national habitus of a society. Reality and I-We-ideals (Elias, 2010) are far apart, yet they are protected by the modern shame taboo. They not only envelop power processes and national habitus in a spiral of silence, but also threaten to escalate into a spiral of shame and rage, even to the point of breaking social ties or killing.

Hostility towards mothers has not yet been named and studied as a form of discrimination because it is a highly shameful and taboo subject. Yet precisely because the mother is the first Other, the first subject, and thus the first stranger in the life of every human being, the discomfort with culture does not seem to lie only in gender relations (Benjamin, 1988). Rather, it seems to be anchored in a society's relationship to its natality, its generativity, its parents, and especially its mothers. Hostility towards mothers could therefore be the unacknowledged nucleus of group-focused hostility. When hostility towards mothers is gradually brought into light and reflected in its countless shadows, the major factors for the development of spirals of shame and silence can be better understood.

Hostility towards mothers can not only be directed against women or against people who have given birth to children, but also towards men who as fathers or caretakers take on the main responsibility for children in the family or at work. If they do not position themselves in a distant way to caring or mothering, but behave in a caring or mothering way themselves, they break through the male bonding or patrix and are often affected by similar discrimination, excessive demands, and invisibility. This can lead to a special form of sexism: 'momism' (Wylie, 1942; Strecker, 1945/1946; Heller, 1995; van den Oever, 2012; Patriarca, 2018; Gibson, 2019; Sahlar & Üstündağ-Budak, 2020).

Just as with sexism or racism, there is a traditional variant of momism and a modernized version in New Momism or Neo Momism. Like sexism or racism, it has a polite, well-meaning side and a hostile side that are inseparable and mutually dependent. The polite, well-meaning side of momism is the elevation and idealization of mothers. Since mothers are portrayed as superhuman beings and the ideals associated with them are unattainable and contradictory, they can only fail. In doing so, they individually internalize guilt, shame, and disgrace themselves, and in this way, become part of the collective guilt, shame, and disgrace of modern motherhood.

The hostile side of momism consists in the humiliation of mothers and the development of images of horror, a consequence of an idealization which is generated through failure to achieve unattainable ideals. When resistance to idealization is shown, humiliation emerges in a wide range of covert resentments and overt hostility, such as the exclusion of mothers, the accusation of mothers (mother blaming), economic violence against mothers or verbal violence, for example, through belittling or hurtful words. Moreover, the boundaries do not run along gendered or

generational lines. Not only fathers, men, or boys can behave in a way that is hostile to mothers, but also girls, women, and mothers. The humiliation damages the mother's self-image to such an extent that instead of self-respect often only self-doubt or self-contempt remains.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that since the Enlightenment child centering in Germany has been decisively shaped by the development of a national habitus framed by changing gender relations. I focused on the tabooing of the master emotion of shame in the process of child centeredness, examining the regressive fantasies of adults, who when looking back elevate childhood as an ideal state and paradise to which they long to return. In their imagination, adult men identify with their infant fantasies, dissolving generational differences.

This leads to an unrealistic exaggeration of the image of the mother, a division between its ideal and enemy image. Since mothers cannot meet the expectations produced by these images, they become scapegoats in modern societies. I have argued that hostility towards mothers and sexism aimed at mothers and caring fathers develops into an important form of social discrimination. Such hostility can be explained as a central aspect of an important shift in human history towards greater gendered inequality (van Schaik & Michel, 2020).

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CHAPTER 10

The Contribution of Norbert Elias's Theoretical-Empirical Framework to the Sociology of Childhood: Some Tensions and Research Experiences

Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira

Introduction

This chapter discusses how some of the theoretical-methodological dilemmas in the sociology of childhood identified by Prout (2010) can be analysed from Norbert Elias's perspective. After analysing research studies in the sociology of childhood Prout writes: 'despite the strong development and the high productivity in the last years, the field of sociology of childhood seems to be currently aimless' (Prout, 2010, p. 729). Although he made this statement more than ten years ago, several dilemmas discussed by him still seem to be confronted by researchers who are conducting research with children. We will highlight some of these dilemmas by drawing on our studies of children's spatial mobility that have been developed

V. M. R. Ferreira (✉)
Federal University of Paraná, Paraná, Brazil

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by a research group interested in understanding the influence of the spatial dimension—especially the neighbourhood and city spaces—on children's networks of interdependencies. This group of researchers has been working since 2010 on a project entitled 'Living childhood in the city: tensions and contradictions in networks of interdependencies of children who socialize in urban configurations in the twenty-first century' (our research group can be found on TECI's (Territory, Education and City) website: https://teciufpr.wixsite.com/teci and on Observatory of Cultures and Political-Pedagogical Processes, Brazil).

Individuals in Relation

The first aspect pointed out by Prout is that the sociology of childhood established itself 'within, but not beyond the dichotomized oppositions of modern sociology' (2010, p. 734). Among several oppositions, the structure versus action (or structure versus agency) is one of them. According to Prout, the field seems to oppose childhood as a part of social structure to children's actions, seen as actors. In general, the first case is referred to as the sociology of childhood and the second, sociology of children. About this issue, he comments:

> At the very time when social theory was coming to terms with late modernity by decentering the subject, the sociology of childhood was valorising it through an intense focus on the subjectivity of children. Again, whilst sociology was searching for metaphors of mobility, fluidity and complexity, the sociology of childhood was raising the edifice of childhood as a structure. The sociology of childhood arrived on the cusp of modernity when the social theory adequate to the transformations under way in modernity was itself in the process of being constituted. (Prout, 2011, p. 6)

Prout suggests that researchers who focus their analyses more on the social structure usually opt to analyse the standardisation of childhood in a specific society from a large scale. However,

> … such an approach is most concerned with what it takes to maintain stable and bounded entities, most commonly in the context of the nation state, and with the variations in the comparative patterns of childhood found within and between them. (Prout, 2011, p. 6)

For Prout, this type of analysis ends up homogenising childhood, because it focuses on the 'standard' childhood and does not consider the

way in which this standard is produced, or how scale and stability are obtained. How this standard childhood achieves a large scale, or the way it maintains its implicit stability in the 'structure of childhood' is never fully explained. In a parallel way 'studies of children as agents are the mirror image of the childhood-as-structure approach' (Prout, 2011, p. 7). However, according to Prout (2011, p. 7) 'The agency of children as actors is often glossed over, taken to be an essential, virtually unmediated characteristic of humans that does not require much explanation'.

Prout observes that one of the ways out of these dichotomies has been found in a post-structuralist research, where action and structure are seen in a similar way: 'adulthood and childhood are both treated as effects produced within discursive acts' (2011, p. 7)—'it decentres both, demanding to know how they mutually produce each other and under what conditions' (2011, p. 7). However, he also notices problems in this approach:

> It grants discourse (for example, narrative, representation, and symbolizations) a monopoly as the medium through which social life, and therefore childhood, is constructed. Accounts of the socially constructed child always privilege discourse. Some versions are distinctly idealist about childhood, whilst others are simply silent about the material components of social life. At best there is an equivocal and uneasy evasiveness about materiality, whether this is thought of as nature, bodies, technologies, artefacts or architectures. (Prout, 2011, p. 7)

Among the possible ways out of these problems, Prout cites Latour's actor-network theory (1993) and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizome (1988). Against the structure-action opposition he proposes the idea of an 'included middle' which 'attempts to find its own space between two opposites and, although it inserts itself between them, it does not eliminate them' (Bobbio, 1996, p. 7).

These are the criticisms that Prout makes about the structure-action dualism and the possible solutions he identifies. We will now examine how Norbert Elias (1893–1990) addressed and tried to overcome them. For Elias, when a specific social arrangement is analysed we sometimes rely on an explanation that draws on the concept of isolated individuals or on a generic and abstract entity called 'society'. In the first case, it is not possible to relate the individual's actions to the production of social arrangements. Everything happens as if the individual is a *homo clausus* (human being as a closed system) and at the centre of the world, how he or she 'from within', 'subjectively', acts towards the ones 'from outside',

'the social', towards the people who would be around, similar to a geocentric view of the world (Elias, 2012, pp. 210–11).[1]

In the second case, influenced by the natural sciences, the individuals themselves would not have any role in a given social event. Society would be the result of either anonymous and pantheist supra-individual forces comparable to 'the spirit of ancient Greece or of France' or an *anima collectiva*, that is, a 'group mind' (Elias, 2010, pp. 11–12), composed of an additive accumulation of individuals. The 'objective', 'social' side or the 'whole' (and not the parts) would be the most appropriate explanation for social issues.[2] For Elias, the individual and society are inseparable; therefore, there should not be an abyss between these two concepts. Nobody doubts that individuals form society, or that the entire society is a society of individuals. However, it is necessary to create conceptual models by which we can understand how human beings experience reality:

> how a large number of individuals form with each other something that is more and other than a collection of separate individuals—how they form a 'society', and how it comes about that this society can change in specific ways, that it has a history which takes a course which has not been intended nor planned by any of the individuals making it up. (Elias, 2010, p. 12)

Elias worked with a series of examples to illustrate and overcome these opposing divisions between the individual and society. From Aristotle, he explained that it was neither possible to understand a house by adding its stones nor by analysing each stone in isolation, 'many individual elements together form a unity, the structure of which cannot be inferred from its separate elements' (Elias, 2010, p. 13). From Gestalt theory, he emphasised that it was not possible to elucidate the whole by examining its individual elements: 'a whole is different to the sum of its parts' (Elias, 2010, p. 13). Elias gave other elucidating examples: it is not possible to

[1] According to Elias, one of the representatives of this first polarity in favour of the individual is Max Weber. Elias (2012, pp. 112–113) writes 'in his theory, Weber broke "society" down into a more or less disorderly mass of actions by separate, completely independent, self-reliant adult individuals. This attitude forced him into a position from which all observable social structures, types, and regularities had to appear unreal. … In his theoretical work, Max Weber was thus one of the great representatives of sociological nominalism; to those inclined to his way of thinking, human society appears to be merely a *flatus vocis*'.

[2] For Elias (2012, p. 113), Durkheim did the opposite from Weber by struggling to find a way out of the opposition between the individual and society.

understand the melody of a song from its individual notes; it is not possible to understand a book from its isolated sentences; a dance cannot be understood from the single moves of its dancers. Neither 'whole' nor 'parts' are more important than one another, and the word 'whole', if understood as a spatially closed static structure, is also not a good option to explain the issue.

Thus, it is not possible to analyse isolated parts, regardless of the 'relationships' they form. In order to explain this idea of relationship, Elias also worked with different metaphors: people are not like billiard balls that collide and roll apart; they are not isolated lampposts in which wires of relationships are subsequently hung. Living in a web of changing relationships, people produce networks of relations that are not purely additive, such as a conversation between two people:

> The peculiarity of such a pattern of interweaving is that, in the course of it, each of the partners forms ideas that were not there before, or pursues further ideas already present. But the direction and the order followed by this formation and transformation of ideas are not explained solely by the structure of one partner or the other, but by the relation between the two. (Elias, 2010, p. 28)

Elias argued that people live in relation with one another once they are born. They do not emerge, as in creation myths, as an original unitary human being, an Adam who arises as an adult:

> Each individual is born into a group of people who were there before him or her. Not only that: each individual is by nature so constituted that he or she needs other people who were there before him or her in order to be able to grow up. One of the basic conditions of human existence is the simultaneous presence of a number of interrelated people. (Elias, 2010, pp. 24–25)

But what connects individuals with each other? For Elias, what counts are different emotional and intellectual valencies[3] towards other people,

[3] The term valency which in chemistry means the capacity of an element to combine with others has the following meaning for Elias: 'the concept of "valency" agrees better than the term libido in its present form with the fact that normally people's emotional bonds have a group character; they take a variety of forms, from maternal and paternal affection to the various sexual and affectionate bonds between men and women, to occupational or leisure-time friendships and pet enmities, and many others' (Elias, 2009, p. 176).

not just sexual ones: 'people look to others for the fulfilment of a whole gamut of emotional needs' (Elias, 2012, p. 130).

In order to fulfil this 'deeply rooted emotional need of every human being for the society of other members of his species' (Elias, 2012, p. 131) each individual throughout his or her life has 'open valences ready to connect with those of other individuals according to a schema whose groundwork has been laid by early childhood experiences in the family' (Elias, 2009, p. 170). These connections and interdependencies happen for different reasons, from affection to economy, politics or status. Such relationships may be either more personal, from concrete people (or even imaginary or deceased), or impersonal, linked to professional activities, hobbies, social ideals or symbols (flags or guns, for example).

From what I have discussed so far, some issues arise for researchers who wish to develop an Eliasian sociology of childhood. For Elias, what seems to be a relatively straightforward discussion—the impossibility that the individual and society are considered separately—is actually much more complex. Of course some ideas were not considered by Elias, such as the 'included middle' proposed by Prout, hybridism or 'mediation' between these two poles. However, even though Prout (2011) argues that it is not only about simply finding 'a middle way', the very idea of trying to find your 'own space between two opposites', inserting yourself between them but not eliminating them, is an idea that nevertheless accepts the existence of two totalities, and is therefore far removed from an Eliasian perspective.

Another important aspect about this action-structure dichotomy in relation to childhood studies is that, for Elias, it does not make much sense to talk about childhood on the one hand and children on the other. Childhood is always related to the study of children in social figurations. When we analyse a figuration, it is about the analysis of the same human beings or, in the case of children, the same children. Elias explains:

> We have reached a stage in the development of language and thought where it is possible to classify in general terms the different levels focused on by a different adjustment of the lens, distinguishing them by different expressions. It is always the same people that are seen, but one setting of the lens shows them as individuals, while a larger or smaller setting shows them as social units—as families, nations, or perhaps as firms, professional associations and social strata. (Elias, 2010, p. 80)

Nature, Society and History

Elias observed that the type of antithetic analysis between 'the interior' and 'the external', between action and structure also expresses itself in different scientific fields. The 'interior side', this 'pure self' of human beings is analysed both by psychology, analysis of the structure of the individual's psychological functions in relation to who or what comes from the outside and biology. Elias (2006) argued that we need to clearly define the difference and relationship between *biological evolution*, *social development* and *history*. These three concepts form distinct but inseparable layers in a process encompassing the whole of humanity, but each level runs at a different speed. In biological evolution, ten thousand years is a very short period. The changes that have taken place in the biological constitution of our species are relatively slight.

However, in social development ten thousand years is a considerable period of time because the changes in social organisation that have taken place are relatively enormous. What makes history possible is that the structure of our social life takes place without changes in our biological constitution—historical change is possible because the experiences gathered from one generation need to be transmitted to the next. In every generation, young children need to learn from their elders and adults need to ensure the survival and care for biologically immature human beings, though the particular form of childhood is historically specific.

Prout (2011) also observed how this dichotomy between 'nature' and 'society' presents itself in the field of childhood:

> Childhood's hybrid character, part natural and part social, feels distinctly uncomfortable to the modernist mentality with its concern to dichotomize phenomena. The partial solution found—that of ceding childhood to nature (that is, to the biological and medical sciences or their extensions)—held until the latter part of the twentieth century. This was encoded in sociology as the idea of *socialization*: becoming social. Children were thought of as part of nature until made part of social. The foundation of the sociology of childhood on the idea that childhood is a social construction is, from this point of view, revealed as a reverse discourse. It turns biological reductionism on its head and replaces it with sociological reductionism, it is ultimately an overstatement. (Prout, 2011, pp. 7–8)

Elias argued about how unproductive it was to think of the structure of human societies in opposition to human nature: '… one hardly does

justice to the relationship between "nature" and "culture" if one stops at the purely additive formula represented by the word "and"—that is, reasoning in terms of "nature" and "culture" … the material is the same: "nature"' (Elias, 2014, p. 46). In addition, he said:

> It is an anthropocentric caricature, and moreover, quite false, to represent the universe or nature as humanity's *environment*. The levels of integration explored by physicists do not exist externally to human beings: they are integrally part of human beings. They are one element in the hierarchy of inseparable levels of integration that make human beings what they are. (Elias, 2014, p. 48)

In order to further understand this relationship between nature and society, another important aspect of Elias's theory needs to be considered: long-term historical processes. Working empirically with data from societies at different historical periods, Elias observes that the structures of human networks and individuals change at the same time and in a certain way, that is, the socio-psychological functions of an individual are modified according to the structure of the networks of interdependencies he or she is living in. The social habitus of individuals forms the type of individuality that will emerge in each specific society during different historical periods. Through this, Elias breaks decisively with the possibility of an analysis of the individual (and his or her biological 'nature' and 'psyche') without considering his or her networks of interdependencies. He emphasises the necessity of relating the fields of psychology, biology, history and sociology to carry out interdisciplinary analysis.

Social Figurations

For Elias the analysis of the social must stem from connections, networks, reticular forces among individuals which are flexible and constantly changing. However, these relationships among people have a structure and regularity that need to be studied. The flexibility in the networks of interdependencies, for instance, cannot be understood as if the individual

made choices regardless of the context in which he or she is located.[4] An analysis of networks needs to take into consideration that, on the one hand, an individual lives, ever since he or she is born, in a weave of relations that shapes, conforms, teaches him or her, and, on the other hand, leaves spaces for change. Therefore, in order to study the tensions related to this structure of networks and the degree of 'freedom' an individual has, it is necessary to analyse what kind of functions individuals have in these networks and their changing power relations.

An individual constantly depends on other people and these interdependencies are related to a structure of specific functions existing in a given society at a given historical moment. A person has, for instance, the function of a friend, a daughter, a worker, a mother, a business person or a husband. Each person is the link in the chains that bind them to other people, but, 'These chains are not visible and tangible in the same way as iron chains. They are more elastic, more variable and more changeable; but they are no less real, and certainly no less firm' (Elias, 2010, p. 20). Nevertheless, individuals cannot change their functions at their own whim. It will be too difficult for a servant to become a king, and the greatest tribal chief cannot make choices without considering his or her function in relation to other functions in his or her network. 'We can only speak of social functions when referring to interdependencies which constrain people to a greater or lesser extent' (Elias, 2012, p. 73). In this way, the concept of function is a 'concept of relation' and may only be analysed in networks that allow the observation of the 'perspectival character of human relationships' (Elias, 2012, p. 121).

Elias explores this perspectival issue with what he called the 'theory of personal pronouns':

> The function of the pronoun 'I' in human communication can only be understood in the context of all the other positions to which the other terms in the series refer. The six positions are absolutely inseparable, for one cannot imagine an 'I' without a 'you' (singular) or a 'he' or 'she' without a 'we', 'you' (plural) or 'they'. (2012, p. 118)

[4] In discussion of the idea of being/becoming, Prout draws on Lee's (1999) analysis and ends up highlighting that he may also be thinking about similar aspects as Elias. Prout comments: 'by emphasizing children as beings "in their own right", the new sociology of childhood risks endorsing the *myth of the autonomous and independent person, as if it were possible to be human without belonging to a complex web of interdependencies* [emphasis added]' (Prout, 2011, p. 8).

Thus, pronouns are relational and functional, expressing the position of one who speaks within the weave of relations (social positions such as the role of a mother or son; or the subaltern position of a corporal or a sergeant). The person in the singular cannot be separated from the person in the plural. The concept of power for Elias is also a concept of relation. 'Power is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another; it is a structural characteristic of human relationships—of *all* human relationships' (2012, p. 70). It cannot be used as if it referred to an isolated object, 'in a state of rest', and changes in power are more or less fluctuating. Never will someone have total power over another who has none. For example, a baby has some degree of power over his or her parents, when he or she cries they need to be assisted by their parents who need their children's affection. However, on a scale, the distribution of power may weigh more heavily to one or more side than others. Due to its relational character, power is always in a relationship, daily, even when the opportunities are distributed unevenly. This balance can be bipolar for example, between lord and servant or multipolar, for instance, between king, aristocracy and bourgeoisie.

Concerning these gradients of power and an individual's freedom, Elias discusses how a long-term perspective can enable us to adopt a certain degree of detachment to investigate the development of historical change within human networks. When one has the view of 'the swimmer', someone within the flow, it is possible to see one of the reticular characteristics of networks, its elasticity, and we might notice a wider freedom for the subject to act and change the courses of a given figuration:

> … the person acting within the flow may have a better chance to see how much can depend on individual people in individual situations, despite the fixed general direction. (Elias, 2010, pp. 48–49)

Both these observations—far from contradicting each other—yield, if properly linked, a more revealing, more adequate picture. Thus, for Elias, it would not make much sense to speak of a global childhood detached from a local one, or to speak of childhood detached from concrete children. The comprehension of a given childhood, either in the past or in the present, needs to be considered from children in figurations. Every childhood is a childhood of children. The concept of social figurations serves, for Elias, 'as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if "the individual" and "society" were distinct as well as

antagonistic' (2012, p. 125). In order to understand this concept better, Elias visualises players sitting around a table playing cards. Together, they constitute a game that no individual player is able to control, and the different turns and plans, the players' perspectives are influenced by the game. These players form a figuration because their actions are interdependent and the course of the game is the result of the actions of this group of interdependent individuals. However, at the same time the course of the game is relatively autonomous in relation to an individual player, it is not detached from the players:

> By figuration we mean the changing pattern created by the players as a whole—not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other. It can be seen that this figuration forms a flexible lattice-work of tensions. The interdependence of the players, which is a prerequisite of their forming a figuration, may be an interdependence of allies or of opponents. (Elias, 2012, pp. 125–126)

Family Plasticity and Generational Ties

One more tension observed by Prout (2011) is related to the standardised conception of childhood and family which intensified in the 1970s and 1980s:

> the proportion of children living in 'non-standard' family situations was reaching a size when they could no longer be seen as mere aberrations from the normative picture. What is more, these new family forms became highly diverse and difficult to categorize into a neat picture of just two or three variants. (Prout, 2011, p. 5)

I now want to argue that this historical change in family structure was analysed well before by Elias in the 1980s. Elias gave a lecture in 1979, 'Parents and children: yesterday, today and tomorrow' on the occasion of the International Year of the Child. The written version from 1980 was entitled 'The civilizing of parents'. In this essay, Elias argues that the interdependencies between parents and children have changed since the Middle Ages, accelerating since the twentieth century. He also begins to offer an important critique of Aries' thesis on the 'discovery' of childhood where children were initially considered 'little adults' who later became valued

for their special innocence. He contends that Aries has romanticised a 'better past':

> As is so often the case in romantic orientations, Aries sees above all what was good in the past, which can be set against what is bad in one's own time, and forgets the connections between these good aspects and that which—if one perceives it—even people at the time regarded as unbearably bad. (Elias, 2008, p. 25)

Elias discusses how the parent-child relationship was often one of domination, where there was usually an extremely unequal distribution of power chances between parents and children, one group giving orders and the other obeying. Over the centuries, this has changed and parents' absolute authority as well as children's unconditional obedience began to be questioned. Children are now given a larger degree of autonomy when compared to the past (even if in practice parents still maintain a higher degree of power). It is about a period of transition '… in which older, strictly authoritarian, and newer, more egalitarian parent-child relations exist alongside each other, and which often coexist in one and the same family' (Elias, 2008, p. 16).

That being so, when comparing rural and urban societies, Elias notices that this relationship has moved in a specific direction. For instance, beds for children start being introduced to houses (they used to sleep with adults before) and over the twentieth century even separate bedrooms become popular (one for each child in wealthier families). Physical contact between adults and children was therefore reduced: sexuality starts becoming more and more hidden from children; everyone who used to sleep naked before starts using clothes to sleep; physiological needs start being executed in more and more 'private' places. Standards of decency start being taught as soon as possible, and the learning process of this advanced degree of individual self-regulation is carried out over a longer period of time.

There is a tendency towards the greater separation of children from adults (in their own room, at schools, at student clubs) and less physical contact between parents and children. This separation is part of other

multidimensional changes[5] related to changing parent-child relationships during this period but Elias draws particular attention to waves of informalisation:

> What are disappearing are many of the symbols of authority and formal indications of respect, which in earlier times served as symbols of authority, and also as a means of securing parental authority. The slow decline of the ostentatious attitudes and symbols of respect in relations between children and parents is clearly symptomatic of the reduction of parental authority, of a lessening of inequality in relations between parents and children. (Elias, 2008, p. 35)

This informalisation of relationships also came along with the pressure of reducing the use of violence in children's education by both parents and schools. Pacified societies increasingly demand a high degree of differentiated self-control that deeply modifies children's and parents' personality structure: parents develop a high degree of self-control in not using violence and children more and more learn to restrain themselves.

Among other changes, family functions were also modified. The state increasingly appropriates old family functions: in previous times, peasants and craftspeople lived at home while today they largely make their income outside of the family unit; children's education that happened in the family now occurs in institutions such as schools; sick and old people's assistance takes place in public institutions, particularly state insurance companies and hospitals. By losing these multiple functions, the family loses its structure of domination, but significantly conserves its affective and emotional ones: 'In optimal cases the family represents a stable focus for the continual satisfaction of drives and the need for affection, the reliable social location of people's social anchoring; and, wherever this is the case, one can speak of a civilising of family relations' (Elias, 2008, p. 37).

Therefore the balance of power between parents and children has moved more in favour of children at the end of the twentieth century. Parents have to exercise a relatively high degree of self-control and to

[5] Elias reminds us that there was also a reduction of sexual taboos, as well as anxiety and anguish taboos that had increased in the eighteenth century with the rising bourgeoisie and its puritan moral canon of bourgeois respectability where parents had absolute control over their children's bodies (for example, the 'dangers of masturbation'). After the great wars, there was a campaign against the excessive number of sexual taboos and young people started experimenting with other forms of sexual relationships.

understand that children have their own needs. A high degree of individualisation has accelerated, more than ever before: mothers and fathers work outside the home, each family member lives his or her own life and establishes contacts that are relatively independent from other family members. Children also have a higher degree of autonomy to follow their own path. All of these aspects demonstrate that it is not possible to understand the family as 'an autonomous configuration within the surrounding figuration of the state society' (Elias, 2008, p. 36).

Unfortunately, an extremely unrealistic image of family is still disseminated: traditional clichés propagate the notion of the human family as 'a simply unchangeable and eternally identical human figuration' (Elias, 2008, p. 38). Even though there still exists a Romantic image of the family in many different sectors in society, as well as an idealistic conception of the parent-child relationship, family relationships now depend on an extraordinary degree of plasticity. For Elias 'every family relationship is a process and ever changing' (Elias, 2008, p. 40). His understanding of the family as a process helps us to understand and explain the changing interdependencies between parents and children which is intimately connected with the importance of intra and intergenerational analyses: the different arrangements in which children live, and how these might develop in the twenty-first century (families composed of a mother and an only son or daughter, extended families with grandparents and grandchildren, families of a one parent mother or father with children, families with two mothers or two fathers and reconstituted families).

One further reflection on the growing level of criticism in the field of childhood studies on the way that children are disadvantaged from adult-centric approaches (see, for example, Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015). It is still very common, for example, for an adult to ask a family member how his son or daughter is doing when the child in question is right in front of him; countless times the adult also responds for the child when someone asks the child something; no one considers what children think about social problems. This type of analysis would greatly benefit if it was investigated through Elias's networks of interdependencies. By using his analysis, there would not be a 'generalised' adultcentrism, but an examination of figurations where adult-child tensions and the changes in the balance of power can sometimes move towards adults who act in a more strict and formalised way.

Spatial Mobility: Some Research Studies from Brazil

One last aspect that was mentioned by Prout (2010) which will be discussed is children's spatial mobility in the contemporary world. For Prout, whilst many children move freely within national borders, others are confined. In addition, 'transnational mobilities also involve flows of products, information, values and images that with which some children are able to engage routinely' (Prout, 2011, p. 10). People and products, ideas, experiences, values and material resources circulate as well. It is known that people who have the possibility of moving to the workplace, leisure or cultural places easily, of moving throughout the neighbourhood safely, or of traveling and moving to further places by choice would have certain capital in their favour. In a world characterised by inequalities, this culture of mobility (Viard, 2011) is not available for everyone and many people have isolated themselves on the outskirts, feeling in the 'last line' (Castells, 1999). The research studies in the study group TECI have focused on children (aged between 7–11), their movement in the neighbourhood and city in which they live. These studies have demonstrated children have shorter spatial networks of interdependencies when they live in or closer to the outskirts of the neighbourhood and city, whereas denser, more moving and elastic networks when they live in or closer to the central areas of the neighbourhood and city. Our research group used an Eliasian theoretical-methodological framework to understand the influence of the spatial dimension—especially the neighbourhood and the city—in networks of interdependencies of children.

Fonseca (2019), for instance, analysed the displacement of children and families from various regions in the city to a popular housing complex located in a region on the border of the city which did not have any infrastructure when the families were resettled: there were no nearby grocery stores, public health clinics or full time schools, which made children walk kilometres to school or the nearest public health clinic (until sometime after, when the city hall started to send buses and launched the health clinic). In this study, even though Fonseca had spent almost one year observing children play in the small sports field in the housing complex (a place in which they played football, Chinese hacky sack, jumpsies or made sand castles), talking with them in the neighbourhood where they lived and used to live, his findings could only be understood if the tensions and power relations involved in children's networks were explained.

Looking at networks of interdependencies in the past (Rolnik, in Fonseca, 2019) analysed how the housing system operating in many countries has a strong influence on the real estate system in programs of popular housing. In Brazil, housing policies have made it difficult for poor families to pay their rent or to purchase their own houses. In the country's recent history, there are tensions between groups that defend the right to housing (popular movements, trade unions) and groups from public and private sectors that monopolise lands in regions of the city with high economic value, raising financial prices, dictating the places in the city and neighbourhood where certain classes will be able to live. In this whole narrative, researched children told Fonseca how they and their families were pressurised by the real estate system to leave their houses in order 'to be able to get the key to the new house'. They also reported the violence that occurred both in the neighbourhoods they used to live in and the ones in which they were resettled, how the 'old' neighbourhoods were better located, more urbanised and had several important pieces of equipment, so the children had more spatial mobility than they now do.

Fonseca observed that before being resettled in new homes, families were already exhausted of moving to different houses due to renting problems, lack of property deeds or family members involved in drug dealing. The affective ties in the networks were produced and reproduced several times in their lives (one of the children had already changed houses five times). The children had their extended families and friendship ties broken apart and the relatives' network in the neighbourhood became more and more distant—various connections were simply terminated or undermined. In this way, not only did Fonseca suggest that families are not nuclear because only in rare cases did children have the traditional model of family composition, but she also highlighted that these differentiated family compositions were related to economic, political and spatial dimensions.

Similar to a chess game, she observed how children interacted with different people who were in their networks: the city councillor who capitalised on his political knowledge, promising to acquire houses for the families (and later land for the small soccer field); workers from Cohab (Curitiba's Popular Housing Company) who convinced the families to move to other houses, little by little; the apartment manager—often condemned by the children—who dictated 'civilised' rules, indicating where children were supposed to play (out of the condominium); grandmothers

who turned out to be central figures in children's support (in a visible relationship of interdependencies, the children—mainly girls—also took care of them); the church pastor who took and brought children from church to home; several attentive mothers who 'kept an eye' on children from apartment windows, supervising children's playing and making it safe in a border territory such as the 'small soccer field'. Another tension also emerged in this playing space. One of the researched girls, for instance, had to bring her younger niece with her in order to be able to play, revealing strong gender issues; the researcher also found several girls taking care of younger children, but no boys had this function.

The relations of interdependencies that Fonseca captured were intra-generational (between children) and intergenerational (between children and adults). Children's movement, sometimes running from parents' attentive eyes, sneaking through the bushes to eat fruit in the neighbour's land, choosing to go to a specific church and not to another one, making an improvised candy stand to make money to help at home, and helping to build the beach sports field were all choices that needed to be understood within some of the tensions in children's networks of interdependencies. Other research studies in the group also pointed to children's movement in the networks. Fiorese (2018), for example, highlighted that the more dissonant and diverse children's interdependencies were in the networks, the more children tended to deeply position themselves in neighbourhood problems. This was the case of one of the researched boys who was involved in a complex diverse social configuration, having two mothers and practicing a more 'open' religion in terms of LGBTQIA+ relationships.

One last example, children's speech, demonstrates that children's relationships need to be understood from their networks of interdependencies. The isolated listening of their opinions on the neighbourhood and the city is not sufficient. Freschi and Yano (2019, p. 47), when questioning children and youngsters about the places they visited in the neighbourhood, obtained the following comment from one of them:

> There was a time that we went to the theatre with the teacher [from Sesc—Social Service of Commerce]. It was a theatre, you know? For people who had more conditions, very rich people! Then we went to not understand nothing. The women were like this, wore a devil's thingy and stayed like this:—'*Control room eeeeeee* [strident scream]'. The rich kids, cute over

> there, didn't even blink the eye, even got amazed. We, only laughing at the crazy ladies. Then the teacher: 'Did you like it?' and we—"*We did!*" (Jenifer).[6]

The answer given to the teacher ('We did!') said in an almost ironic intonation, the theatre description as a place for some who had 'more conditions' ('very rich people!') and the word choice of 'didn't blink *the* eye' and 'crazy ladies' can only be understood in all their complexity when children's position in their networks is taken into consideration. A girl in the theatre narrative was fully aware of her lower position towards people and groups in political, economic and cultural fields and demonstrated how to 'play with the social places' (Freschi & Yano, 2019, p. 47). She capitalised as much as she could on the interactions with people who moved around buildings in the Occupation (a popular movement for housing that occupies buildings that are empty), visiting interesting places in the neighbourhood. Ultimately, the irony of her description was a complaint about the social inequality in which she lived.

Freschi and Yano (2019) also studied the use of a central neighbourhood by children who lived in a Vertical Occupation in the city of São Paulo. The families and children from this occupation had already gone through many incidents ever since they occupied this old hotel in the city that had been empty for years. Children and youngsters told the researchers the different tactics created by the families to occupy the place and circumvent the police siege until they had established themselves completely there. They spoke about the constant fear of fires (because the building is old) and different types of violence; they mentioned the affection they had both for the place itself and for the movement for fighting for housing. The children also said that on the one hand they 'felt home', but on the other, had a constant fear of being evicted. They were always ready for any eventuality, cleverly using the spaces in their neighbourhood to their own advantage: for instance, visiting the neighbourhood stores saying that they would come back later when they had money, even though they knew they would never have the money to go back and buy.

[6] This excerpt is full of informal vocabulary and slang. The translation has tried to convey the meaning as closely as possible, but there are some linguistic characteristics that are not possible to translate.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that some of the theoretical dilemmas in the sociology of childhood identified by Prout (2010) can be overcome by using Elias's perspective. I have suggested that it is productive not to try to dichotomise the child (seen in isolation) and childhood (perceived as a generic category). In this sense, the multidimensional and procedural network of Eliasian analysis is more fruitful as it studies the complex networks of interdependent groups of individual children. It is also necessary to take 'a step back' (Elias, 1998) to better understand the tensions and power relations involved in a figuration, while still considering the intense personal and group involvement of those involved (Ferreira, 2023). Drawing on our research studies, we have argued that Elias's theoretical-empirical approach is highly suitable for the study of the spatial dimension of children's lives in contemporary society. Their agency can only be interpreted within the possibilities and limits of the spatial figurations in which they find themselves.

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CHAPTER 11

Upper Secondary School as an Innovative Health Laboratory: A Process Study About Exercise, Sport and Democracy in a Youth Culture

Stine Frydendal and Lone Friis Thing

Introduction

This chapter discusses how we have applied process sociology in a health promotion intervention initiated by a Danish upper secondary school from 2010 to 2014, based on a democratic, participatory approach (Frydendal Nielsen, 2015, Frydendal Nielsen et al., 2018, Frydendal Nielsenet al., 2016; Frydendal Nielsen & Thing 2017a, 2017b; Frydendal

S. Frydendal (✉)
The Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, Copenhagen, Denmark
e-mail: ssf@eva.dk

L. F. Thing
Department of Sport and Social Sciences, Norwegian School of Sport Science, Oslo, Norway
e-mail: loneft@nih.no

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& Thing, 2019). There has been very little sociological research conducted in Denmark about health promotion at the upper secondary school level as the focus has mainly been on primary schools. The perspective of democracy and participation is also not particularly well researched in a Danish upper secondary school context. We have employed Baur and Ernst's (2011) notion of an interpretive process-oriented methodology, as we studied the health promotion process from a macro-micro perspective, as well as connecting these two levels in a sociogenetic discussion of the processual development at the school.

Our study therefore opens up a relatively unexplored area: democratic health promotion processes in the Danish upper secondary school, with a theoretical perspective not previously used, figurational sociology. We combined participatory research with Norbert Elias's figurational sociology, which enabled an analysis at both a macro and a micro level. We applied Elias's conceptualization of civilizing processes, focusing especially on his concepts of figuration, interdependencies and power, to discuss how the school was positioned in a health promotion context on a macro level. Elias's concept of the balance between I-, We- and They- identities as well as the distinction between established and outsider groups was employed as a way to understand the power struggles between individuals and groups within the figuration on a micro level. We also consider the use of process sociology in relation to the participatory paradigm in a health promotion intervention for young people in schools, arguing why we believe the two traditions can be fruitfully combined.

School as a Civilizing Institution in Health Promotion

In Denmark, the practice of democracy is taken to be part of institutional life in ways similar to other Scandinavian countries and characterizes decision-making procedures in the workplace, voluntary associations such as sports clubs and educational institutions at different levels (Thing & Ottesen, 2010; Kaspersen, 2014). A particular feature of physical participation in Denmark that was important to the intervention and the democratic ethos in which it was conceived is the traditional organization of sport through voluntary associations and sports clubs. This form of organization is quite unique for Scandinavian societies (Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010; Skille, 2011). The sports organizations are founded on democracy

and based on annual general assemblies where members discuss and vote on priority areas (Thing & Ottesen, 2010). This non-commercial, broadly orientated political context of sport is a vital element in Danish democratic practice. If the students were to understand this, our intervention would involve students in promoting health and physical activity in a participatory, democratic manner. Wright et al. (2018) argue that a critical inquiry approach to health education can educate students to develop their capacity to engage critically in problem-solving activities about their own lives.

The school therefore took an active part in deciding that the intervention should provide students with knowledge on how to practice, understand and be able to participate in society, tackling issues related to health, sport or physical activity in their own lives. Gilliam and Gulløv (2012) argue that raising a child is no longer a matter only for parents, but a societal matter that involves community welfare institutions. According to Elias, it is in childhood and adolescence that we are most vulnerable to societal influences: he argues that a child will always be 'scarred' by the social bonds he or she has formed (Elias, 2012a, p. 416). Educational institutions in Denmark are a place where we look after our children and teenagers, subjecting them to the state's ambition to make them become 'good' citizens who can contribute to society. This is an example of the institutionalization of childhood and youth (Gilliam & Gulløv 2012, p. 42). Through reform policy, greater focus has been placed on the democratic formation process, responsibility, co-determination and social competences, where children and young people become acquainted with democracy by being part of a democratic environment in schools.

Doing Action Research in a Figurational Perspective

Action research originates from Kurt Lewin's studies from the 1940s. Lewin argued that the motivation to create change is strongly linked to action. If people take an active part in decisions that concern their own lives, they are more likely to change their way of life (Lewin, 1946). Action research is therefore about social change, and more specifically, permanent social change. It has a complex history because it cannot be defined as single-disciplinary, but has emerged over time from a wide range of different research approaches (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003) that have formulated this widely used definition of action research:

> A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4)

The essence of action research is that scientific value can involve a change in the participants, who in the research process become more reflective and better able to direct their relationship to a group or an organization. The main task of action research is therefore to be critical of positivistic research, where it is assumed that a neutral researcher controls the direction of the experiment (Nielsen, 2004, p. 517). The purpose of this research approach is not to move beyond an understanding and interpretation of specific issues in modern society, but to add action and change to the problems society has already produced (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

According to Kemmis (2009) action research is based upon three issues: practitioners' practices, their understanding of their own practices and the circumstances under which they practice. The ties between these three issues are not stable, but changing and fluid. They are constantly forming each other and therefore cannot be analysed separately. This connects to Elias's (1997) way of looking at all social processes where nothing is constant but always linked to changing figurations. The focal point of action research is that the knowledge that we as researchers want to generate is not about the measurability of increased health, but of creating a framework in which the students themselves can decide what they want to change. We have tried to illustrate this process by using figurational sociology. Change is therefore influenced by interactions between the school's practice, how the school understands its own practice as well as the circumstances of the health-promoting practice.

Kemmis (2009) suggests that sustainable change of practice is dependent on changing our *sayings, doings and relatings*. He writes that if we want to change practice, we have to change our *doings*. If we wish to change the understanding of practice, we have to change our *sayings*—the way we speak about our practice. And if we want to change the circumstances for practice, we must change the way we *relate* to others as well as our surroundings. Kemmis links this notion to Jürgen Habermas's understanding of social life as dependent on language (understanding), work

(practice) and power (circumstances) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1986; Kemmis, 2009). This perspective formed the basis of our approach to the understanding of change processes in an upper secondary school. As researchers we cooperated with teachers in designing a course with the purpose of creating a space where students could participate in changing the *sayings, doings and relatings* related to physical activity and health in their own school. Thus, action research has a dual goal: to change—but also create knowledge about the world. According to Laursen (2012), these two goals are mutually supportive, as knowledge about the world is created through an attempt to change it, in a direction that participants want.

This is in line with Elias's own perspectives on processual change, as he regarded the static subject-object relationship of sociology of little value. His argument was that in the knowledge-generating process, knowledge changes, the subject itself changes and people change simultaneously as more knowledge is produced (Baur & Ernst, 2011). Elias, like Kurt Lewin, was inspired by Ernst Cassirer, who demonstrated that researchers have moved away from viewing the world as substances, instead looking at the dynamic relationships they contain (Van Krieken, 1998). However, Elias developed Cassirer's understanding of relationalism, exploring in further depth its historical and social context—it was from Cassirer's point of view that he developed the idea that one must study the structure of the whole in order to understand specific parts (Van Krieken, 1998). Elias is therefore linked to many of the theories that also inspired the first thoughts in action research as figurational sociology recognizes that all social research is, to some extent, participatory. Social scientists must recognize that they are part of the social process they are investigating (Elias, 1956, p. 227). As researchers, we have to be receptive to the observation and analysis of an ever-changing world (Van Krieken, 1998). Elias referred to this as the balance between involvement and detachment (Elias, 1956), which we will now discuss.

A Relational Approach to the World: Between Involvement and Detachment

For Elias, the relationship between people is both the research object and the analytical starting point (Olufson, 2005). He discussed the position of modern science within the civilizing process (Elias, 1956, 2007), as well as

how it is a product of competition and power relations between scientific disciplines, especially between natural science, humanities and social science. His theory of involvement and detachment was designed to break away from dichotomies such as free will/determinism and individual/society. Van Krieken (1998) suggests that Elias's argument for a relational sociology is an attempt to distance himself from the self-appointed monopoly on truth within social sciences, which can help researchers to clarify their relationship to the research field.

In the paper 'Problems of Involvement and Detachment', first published in 1956, which later became a part of the book *Involvement and Detachment* (2007), Elias develops his approach to understanding the development of scientific knowledge. Despite his claim that scientific knowledge can be separated from ideology due to its 'relative autonomy', he also argued that scientists can never obtain absolute autonomy from their social context. In principal, however, Elias was strongly against action research. Elias, who conceives himself as a challenger of myths, makes a strong point against partiality—he rejects the theoretical concepts of action research and system theory for their ideological content and for ultimately obscuring their biases by employing inflated levels of abstraction, preconceived assumptions and secret codes (Baur & Ernst, 2011, p. 121).

However, what we find particularly useful about the connection between these two traditions is based on the argument that social sciences are always to some extent participatory; all social scientists are part of the social process they study.[1] According to Elias involvement and detachment do not refer to two separate classes of objects; 'used as universals they are, at best, marginal concepts' (Elias, 1956, p. 227). This perspective can be connected to the participatory research tradition, where knowledge about people is contextual and therefore always emergent and fluid (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Elias's point is that certain situations demand certain ways of weighing the balance between involvement and detachment: knowledge is therefore a product of the situation within which it is produced and the role it plays within the power relations that frame it.

[1] We find common ground with Elias's critical attitude towards action research. He argued that in developing a 'reality-congruent' theory of knowledge it is important to keep the balance between involvement and detachment (Elias, 1956). We do this by applying his own theoretical framework when studying the action process, thereby trying to avoid problems of normativity.

Moreover, Baur and Ernst (2011) argue that the question is not *whether* the subject influences the situation—this is a given. The question is *how* the subject frames the perception.

The Case Study: Creating Action in Schools

The following section is an outline of the democratic health promotion process. In 2008 the research team was approached by the principal of a local upper secondary school to assist them in their endeavour to address physical activity and health among the students. In 2007, a 'think tank' consisting of all students, teachers and management at the school was established to envisage the first steps towards a new future vision for the school. Health became one of three strategic strands that students, teachers and management wanted to develop over the coming years. As part of this plan, and in cooperation with a nearby sports facility centre, free access to fitness and swimming facilities were provided for all students and employees at the school. Two hours were reserved in all classes' weekly schedule for using these facilities (voluntarily). The students were also offered voluntary after-school sports every Friday afternoon. These initiatives were organized to involve more students in physical activity without making it compulsory. However, the school discovered that the students using the facilities were the ones who were already physically active (Frydendal Nielsen et al., 2011, 2018). At this point the school contacted researchers in order to explore how to proceed in the future.

During the fall of 2008 the principal, teachers, researchers and voluntary students met several times to discuss how this issue could be approached, and we agreed that an active involvement of the students themselves would be the best way to understand physical activity and healthy lifestyle connected to youth life in the school. Several core elements of democratic governance were apparent in the values of the school. The decision-making structure of the school and Danish upper secondary schools are usually democratic, through an atmosphere that encourages influence and dialogue, but also responsibility for the school as a community. Inspired by this we found that an intervention using the democratic values already embedded in the school was a useful basis for designing an intervention to increase students' interest and participation in physical activity. In line with the school's own values and in collaboration with teachers and students, we designed a course with the purpose of investigating, discussing and reflecting upon health and body culture.

The AT-Course: A Democratic, Interdisciplinary Teaching Process in PE and Social Sciences

The project team, consisting of teachers, researchers and students, decided that a way to initiate the development and promotion of health and physical activity at the school would be to work with the topic as a part of the students' curriculum, thereby integrating an authentic problem in the students' own learning processes. Therefore, we designed a thematic part of an already existing course called the AT-course, where the students worked in an interdisciplinary way, using a combination of their subjects to study a specific problem. This thematic part of the AT-course, designed for this intervention, combined PE and Social Sciences. The AT-course was repeated with one new first year class each year for a period of five years. The classes involved in the AT-courses had a subject combination with more PE in their weekly schedule than the rest of the students in their year. These classes were selected on the assumption that these students would have a stronger wish to engage in promoting physical activity and health at their own school. The hope was that they would then find it valuable and interesting (with help from teachers and researchers) to involve the rest of the school in a democratic student-based health promotion process.

Figure 11.1 is a timeline that illustrates how the intervention developed over the years. Teachers, researchers and students met several times during 2009 to plan and organize the AT-course. Below are the first components of the designed AT-course:

1. Teaching in PE and Social Science:
   For a period of 8 weeks the lessons in PE and Social Sciences evolved around the topic 'Health and Physical Activity at Our School'; the students worked from a critical perspective, both theoretically and practically in PE and Social Sciences. They covered definitions of health; distinctions between physical activity, sport and exercise; qualitative and quantitative methods; developing a research question; physical fitness testing; sports preferences among different groups in society.
2. Knowledge days:
   The students were invited to two theme days at the University of Copenhagen, Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports:

   (a) A sociology theme day, with an entry point in sports and health sociology.

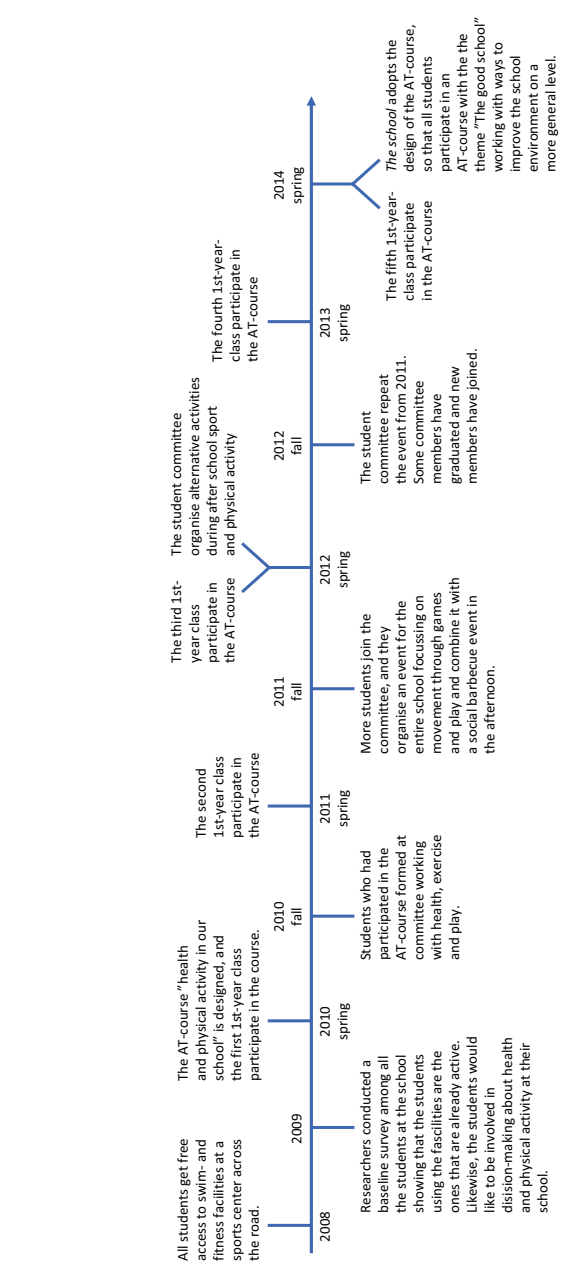

Fig. 11.1 Timeline of the intervention process

(b) A physiology theme day in cooperation with our colleagues in human physiology.

The above outlines how the students were provided with knowledge and encouraged to critically discuss and debate how the issue of health and physical activity is understood among young people broadly and within their school. They reflected upon these issues and how they have developed over time. Both lessons from their own teachers as well as lectures from researchers provided a knowledge base on which it was possible to develop visions for health and physical activity in their own school.

Developing a Vision for Health Promotion at the School

Following the knowledge and capacity-building phase, the students participated in workshops where they were encouraged to develop ideas and visions which they could imagine putting into practice. The workshops were all led by researchers from the University of Copenhagen for the full five years.

Workshops as Future Scenarios

Four workshops were organized, during which the students were involved in developing a strategy of change regarding 'Health and Physical Activity at Our School'. This was to encourage their creativity and innovative skills in order to view their school and themselves in new ways. Each workshop had a duration of 3½ hours. They are each described below:

(a) Self-assessment—who am I and how do I control my body?
The objective of this workshop was to obtain knowledge of one's own preferences regarding sport, body and health as well as reflection and discussion in relation to others' preferences. The methods were interviews and dialogue groups.

(b) Studies on space and location—discovering the school's sports facilities.
This workshop evolved around the students' observation studies of the school environment. The purpose was to analyse what opportunities the school had for sport, health and physical activity, with students mapping the physical environment through their own observational studies.

(c) Democracy and involvement.
The workshop aimed at encouraging debate and reflection on the 'Health and Physical Activity' policies in order to raise awareness of the societal frameworks influencing the organization of sports and voluntary organizations in Denmark. In groups the students discussed how power is distributed in their school, what affects power distributions and whether or not change was needed.

(d) Go create
The final workshop focused more concretely on what ideas young people themselves have in order to solve problems regarding physical activity and health in their own school. Using the knowledge they had obtained during the AT-course, the students worked proactively with change and innovation in relation to lifestyle, physical education, recreational sports and environmental significance. The focus was not just on the individual student, but in a broader sense on the organizational change for the school. In groups the students created specific suggestions for a concrete proposal.

Based on the knowledge-building phase and the development of visions through the workshops the students wrote a synopsis as part of the general curriculum for the AT-course and were assessed orally on that synopsis. The students collected empirical data by questionnaires, interviews or through observations, and reflected on what alternatives were possible within their school context and what alternatives they would prefer.

Action and Change

After the first class completed the AT-course in 2010, some of the students wanted to keep on working with some of the ideas they came up with through the workshops, in their assessment papers and from the discussions during the AT-course. Therefore, with help from researchers and teachers, the students founded a committee in the school, working with health promotion: the SMIL-committee. SMIL is an abbreviation of four Danish words—Sundhed (Health), Motion (Exercise), Idræt (Nordic word for physical activity, leisure and sport) and Leg (Play) ('smil' means 'smile' in English). The committee acted as a key stakeholder in the first major student-based health initiative—the SMIL-day, the purpose of which was to provide an alternative event to promote physical activity and health. In 2011, 600 students participated in the event. The students themselves were responsible for keeping track of student attendance, for

organizing activities in a public park area for all the students at the school and for a social barbecue event in the schoolyard after the activities had finished.

The event was centred on traditional old games that do not require any specific skills. This, according to the students, makes participation more equal and appealing for all. The event was repeated by the SMIL-committee for two consecutive years. Students who participated in the AT-course in the following years joined the committee and were also able to recruit other students at the school. Another initiative from the committee was organizing alternative activities during voluntary after-school sport (Zumba, Yoga, Jump style), which was usually dominated by traditional sporting disciplines such as football, volleyball and basketball. A significant change in the school, based on this intervention, was when the school adopted the design of this specific thematic part of the AT-course. From the spring of 2014 all students participated in an AT-course based on this course design, dealing with the theme: 'The Good School', and all students worked with ways to improve the school environment.

Studying an Action Research Process with Process Sociology

Our approach to the study is based on Norbert Elias's own methodological work, which is to combine an outsider perspective, where the researcher tries to refrain from bringing their values into the field of research, and an insider perspective, where active involvement is necessary to fully understand what is being explored. It is the balance between these two parameters that is crucial for any research investigation. Baur and Ernst (2011) have put this into a more systematized and application-oriented methodological framework, developing a proposal on how to use Elias's methodology. We are inspired by their suggestions on how it is possible to study an action research process with a process-oriented methodological approach. Baur and Ernst (2011, pp. 123–126) set out three steps in an interpretive process-oriented methodology:

1. Reconstruction of the macro level: rules and social structure in the figuration
2. Reconstruction of the micro level: the individual's placement in, perception of and ability to change the figuration
3. Reconstruction of the sociogenesis of the figuration

Reconstructing the Macro Level: Rules and Social Structure Within the School Figuration

Baur and Ernst (2011) define this part of the analytical process as the clarification of the framework of the figuration. This is necessary as the framework is crucial for the actions of groups and individuals, regulating and orienting their behaviour and communication. That is, making visible the positions that frame and connect groups of individuals within a figuration (Baur & Ernst 2011, p. 124). It is through a reconstruction of the macro level of a figuration that we can create an understanding of the interdependencies between individuals and groups at the school. We will discuss which rules and structural conditions help to maintain the school figuration, as well as how this contributes to inadvertently creating the ethos of the school. For example, it can be useful to understand why the school was built and what opportunities the building has for learning within the school community. We have compared this with different historical documents ranging from students assignments, meeting minutes, homepage texts, working documents from the student committee, strategic documents from the school, ministerial orders and consolidation acts from 1987 to 2013.

The school can also be seen as a figuration that changes and develops over time in accordance with both internal and external requirements. According to Elias, this development is not planned, but is an important part of the processual character of the figuration. The physical environment at the school therefore has an impact on how and where the members of the figuration move around. At school, you belong, as both a student and a teacher, in certain domains depending on your educational standards. The PE facilities are, for example, the domain of the PE teachers, just as the music room and the science rooms are also inhabited by certain educational groups. Thus, one moves around according to certain regulations. The expansion and specialization of the facilities at the school can be seen in connection with the development that the upper secondary school in Denmark has undergone. Today, there are higher demands for project work and interdisciplinarity, but also a more academic approach to learning which should prepare the students for higher education (Ministry of Education, 2017). As such, the physical environment changes alongside the political requirements for learning in upper secondary schools.

This development has also had an impact on PE, which today has a much greater focus on health and physical capacities (Ministry of Education, 2017). Thus, PE must be able to take on other tasks than before, which

shows how the subject enters a project culture which the regulation of upper secondary school requires. This health promotion project and its incorporation into the teaching at the school was part of many years of work based on integrated values at the school. However, these socially planned actions are a product of a longer historical process of unplanned events (Elias, 2012a). These have helped to model the school physically and are a major reason why the school looks the way it does today. The work with health promotion is therefore part of a dynamic process, where power ratios change and influence in an unintended way how the school develops: there are new sports facilities where the members of the figuration have free access to training and several specialized classrooms have developed around the local area. The school project can thus be placed in a larger figurative context, where youth preferences, areas of interest of the teaching staff, school policies and social economy are highly interdependent.

Reconstructing the Micro Level: Students' Understanding of and Ability to Change the School Figuration

As the figuration influences certain power relations, and thus sets the framework for individuals' actions, Baur and Ernst (2011) argue that it is important to analyse how individuals perceive the figuration they are part of. One must study the position of the individuals within the figuration: how their actions are embedded in the actions of other members and how and why they either enter or leave the figuration. It is also important to examine how their position in a figuration changes through life, as well as how they either manage or fail to change the figuration (Baur & Ernst, 2011). Therefore, we have studied how students perceive their school and how the members of the school figuration influence and are influenced by each other's actions. We have closely examined the interdependence between members of the figuration, how their position or status changes and whether they are able to change the culture around sport, body and health at the school.

When working with health-promoting strategies in a school, the target group varies. The composition of students changes year by year and their positions within the figuration can change constantly and rapidly. Thus, it is important when the figurative constellation significantly changes from year to year that the approach to students' wishes and interests also follows this dynamic development. Our study showed that the young students at the school live in a world of interdependence where they have to participate in

many areas. Youth life has many dimensions such as homework, friends, parties, spare-time jobs, family and hobbies (Frydendal Nielsen & Thing, 2017a, 2017b; Frydendal Nielsen et al., 2016). It can be difficult for the students to continue to find time for sports in their lives, as there are other areas that are considered more valuable. Life as an upper secondary school student therefore places great demands on their ability to prioritize. It is not always easy to connect a sporting lifestyle with the drinking and party culture in an upper secondary school, but the students believe it is important that they can be part of both areas. Here is an example of how the students negotiated and debated this tension between their I we and they identities:

Vilda: At least in the beginning, many people thought that we were hard hitters who did nothing but sport all the time, and I think it took half a year before they realized that we actually took social science at the A-level … (laughs) … (…). I don't know … 3.z were social but 2.z were the ones who just played around with balls all the time and hung out only with themselves. I just think that people believe that we are some kind of sports idiots who just run around and are stupid ….

Emilie: I really agree with Vilda, I actually think it was really shitty at the beginning, because it was as if people looked at us a bit like; 'Ooooh you're into sports' and it took a really long time before they found out that we were normal people (laughs) … no but, I experienced people being like 'Well, you're in Z' … 'yeah, what's weird about that? …'. And no-one knew we had social science at the A-level, they just thought we had PE every day … 'they don't do anything else but that' … and I think that was really annoying, because we are active, but we're just like them … so I think that was the downside, but now it's starting to dawn on people that we're normal, that we also do some of the same things that they do, funnily enough. But I still think there can be a little … 'Are you going to the gym? (…) It is almost looked down on. And I think that really sucks ….

I: How can that be, do you think?

Emilie: It probably has something to do with a guilty conscience. (…). They may not even know that it is a guilty conscience … that must be what they are reacting to … well I mean, what else could they be wound up about?

As the example shows, there is a tension between different 'we' identities at the school that can seem stressful to the students. This tension between cultural expectations and the demands of the sports class creates some conflicts in the balance between 'I', 'we' and 'they' identities among the sports students (Elias, 2010). Sports students find security in the 'we' identity that is constructed in their own class because it supports an 'I' identity that falls outside the youth cultural expectations centred around partying and alcohol. At the same time, a 'they' identity is constructed about the rest of the school, who, according to the sports students, are afraid of missing social activities if they engage in sports. The 'they' construction helps to justify the sports students' own lifestyle in the classroom.

Students were also not so concerned about the negative aspects of the health discourse such as risk factors and lifestyle diseases. Instead, what was meaningful to them was that health messages were communicated in a positive way and revolved around 'fun' and 'playfulness'. The students placed a great deal of emphasis on linking sports and health to the existing values in the youth culture, such as partying and socialization. A democratic health promotion process therefore requires a middle ground in the dialectic between 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' approaches. The students wanted to be involved in health promotion work, but they are mutually dependent on management and teachers in a future anchoring of a new habitus about sports and health. Their work, in their own view, has a universal function at the school so it is vital that they receive recognition from school management. The democratic debate thus emphasizes the balance between letting students decide for themselves, but at the same time providing them with some tools to become involved in health promotion.

Sociogenesis Within the School Figuration

The micro level and the macro level are not static, although it may seem so when studied separately. On the contrary, Baur and Ernst (2011) argue that both individuals and their figurations change constantly over time and are intertwined with each other. Sociological analysis is therefore always process-oriented with the purpose of explaining social processes, which are influenced by both individuals in the figuration (micro) and the framework of the figuration (macro). According to Baur and Ernst, sociological methods have not yet been sufficiently developed to analyse the relationship between micro and macro levels, but a compromise may be to study the sociogenesis of a figuration. This involves looking at the past or history in

order to understand the relationship between the micro and macro levels, where the figuration's *becoming*, *changing* and *ending* are made visible (Baur & Ernst, 2011). We will now discuss the sociogenetic development at the school based on the figuration's *becoming, changing* and *ending*.

Becoming a Democratic Health Promotion Process

Elias argued consistently against what he regarded as a dualism between the individual and the environment (Elias, 2012a). To overcome this dualism, Elias developed the concept of figuration which conceptualizes people in functional interdependencies. These networks of interdependent individuals are characterized by fluid balances of power which create a constant tension in a continuum between cooperation and conflict (Elias, 2012b). According to Elias, the concept of power should not be seen as something substantive, but as relational (Elias, 2012b). In a figurative process, power is elastic, moving back and forth between members of a figuration. All social units can be characterized as figurations (Elias & Dunning, 2008), and in a relatively small figuration like this school, the balance of power is changing and fluid.

An important finding in this study was that the students felt that teachers had too much power in relation to what the understanding of sports and health should be. By working with health promotion as an integral part of teaching, the balance of power in the figuration had shifted. The students had become relatively more powerful and were now considered as a serious stakeholder in health promotion processes in their school. Connolly and Dolan (2012) argue that changes in organizations (in this case the incorporation of health as part of a school organization) are part of long-term figurative dynamics in which 'we' and 'they' identities are developed. They suggest that the development of organizations can be explained by the changing identity formations and the balances of power associated with groups and individuals at different levels of integration (Elias & Scotson, 2008). These processes also occur between organizations, what Kaspersen and Gabriel (2008) refer to as the relationship between internal and external tensions, their intertwining explaining the degree of organizational change (Connolly & Dolan, 2012). The students explained how it can be difficult to continue to find time for sports in their lives as they consider other areas in the upper secondary school to be more valuable. They were therefore part of several figurative contexts that constitute and continue to shape the social habitus of the school.

Changing a Democratic Health Promotion Process

A central principle of Elias is that all social life is in motion or in process (Elias, 2012b). This includes social structures, organizations, attitudes, values, norms, identities and even what could be loosely termed 'psychological' mentalities. Elias preferred to use the term 'habitus' (Elias, 2010), which refers to embodied social learning. Therefore, in order to have an adequate (Elias, 1956) understanding and explanation of social life, we must refrain from reducing social processes to states or substances. Figurations are not ideal types, which the researcher imposes on the people being studied. They are as real as the people who inhabit them (Elias, 1998). This study has shown that trends and currents within a school figuration change as fast as its target group, which differs from year to year, as one-third of it is new and one-third of the students who were part of the context the year before have left the figuration. The upper secondary school culture is thus a good example of a dynamic and processual figuration, where the social habitus is always changing.

Connolly and Dolan (2012) suggest that figurations help to better capture the complex and contradictory nature of this dynamic process, and are therefore a valuable tool when analysing an action research project. By studying the strength of the 'we' feelings and the restrained compulsions they generate, comparing them to the shifts in power relations in one figuration relative to other overlapping figurations, we can more clearly identify how and why specific changes occur. It is important to point out that Elias's conceptualization of *interdependence* and *power* differs significantly from how these concepts are understood within other theoretical frameworks. For Elias, there is an implicit, relational aspect of function and power in the understanding of interdependence: where there is functional interdependence between people, there are always balances of power (Dopson & Waddington, 1996, p. 535).

Power and interdependence are processual and characteristic of all human relationships. From this perspective, no one is completely powerless, but this does not imply that extremely unequal power relations do not exist. When social organizations and individuals are interdependent and possess a function in relation to each other, they are forced to moderate their actions to some degree. Change is thus created by virtue of the interdependence that applies to the figuration. If we want to understand how a health promotion process driven by young people themselves can develop, this understanding of power relations is crucial. Young people

found it enabling, but also restricting to be part of the health promotion process at school. Enabling because they felt they were being heard, but also restricting because they occasionally felt looked down upon by other students because they advocated a health message. This reflection about the action research process would not have emerged without the application of process sociology.

Here it may be useful to draw attention to Elias's conceptualization of game models and discuss how these can help to better understand the complex interweaving of actions and planned or unplanned processes among a large number of people. According to Dopson and Waddington (1996), Elias (2012b) uses game models to understand how organizations change, acting as simplified analogies to more complex social processes. The models contribute to a more pictorial explanation of the processual nature of relationships between interdependent individuals. They emphasize the changing balance of power as a central aspect in networks of mutually dependent individuals. In the organization of health changes within the school figuration, the 'game' is about shaping the understanding of body, sports and health, implementing frameworks that provide space for the development of new health and cultural norms. The creation of change in the sports and health culture at the school can thus be seen as an expression of a game of power between stronger and weaker players within the figurative context.

Within this organizational context, the students are weaker players than teachers and management, but with a democratic approach to health promotion they can have an impact on the 'game' itself as the balance of power between the players becomes more equal. Elias described several different types of game models and highlights as a final example, *Game models on two levels: simplified increasingly democratic type* (Elias, 1978 pp. 84–87). This type of game model can be useful in understanding a democratic process of change regarding health promotion at a school level. The game model exemplifies players at two different levels, a high and low level. When the difference in power between the two levels is large, there is a low degree of dependency between the two levels. One could imagine teachers and management as the high level with the greater degree of power, and the students as players on the low level with a lesser degree of power. Elias (1978) writes that when power becomes more equal, the interdependence between the two levels becomes stronger and the players will be more aware of each other.

When the democratic health promotion process at school is seen as such a model, it becomes easier to understand why solutions and answers to health promotion, sport and exercise in a youth culture are difficult to predict. The result of a democratic health promotion process where the balance of power is moved from the higher level of the figuration to a lower level—by virtue of the students' involvement in the health promotion process—is not able to be predicted from year to year, but will always be a product of the power relations which at the given time are established within the figuration. This study showed how it is possible to construct such a game with the AT-course. Thus, rules that apply to the 'players' involved at the school have been set. Such a game can be played in several places, but, just as in two football matches, they are never the same. The outcome of such an AT-course will always be different because the players are mutually dependent on each other.

Ending the Democratic Health Promotion Process

According to Baur and Ernst (2011), the third step in the reconstruction of the sociogenesis is to study the resolution of the figuration. It may seem exaggerated to claim that the figuration has been resolved during the years we followed the democratic health promotion process at the school. But there was a development where some of the initiatives disappeared and the enthusiasm from the students declined. In this section, we will discuss how this could be and what could be the reason for this 'resolution'. Velija (2012) highlights three important characteristics in Elias and Scotson's (2008) theory of established and outsiders: (1) there is fragmentation within outsider groups and so there is often a greater unity in established groups as opposed to outsider groups. (2) Another characteristic of outsider groups is that they often identify more with established groups than with other outsiders. (3) A third central aspect is the nature of power between the two groups, the extent to which power between the groups shifts through *functional democratization*, where the differences in power are reduced but not necessarily equalized. This corresponds to Elias's 'increasingly democratic type' of game model. Hence, functional democratization is the process in which the chains of interdependence between groups are lengthened, where the differences in power are reduced as individuals or groups become more dependent on each other.

1. Fragmentation in the Outsider Group

Elias's understanding of I, we and they identities (Elias, 2010) can show that there was a unity within the sports classes, but at the same time the students felt divided between the sports culture and the wider school culture. The sports culture was seen as an outsider culture at the school: students felt that sports classes were not status-giving in the same way as the party culture. They emphasized that it was important to combine both if more young people at the school would become physically active. A development we also noticed over the years was the division between wanting to belong to a sports culture where it is 'okay' to be active, downgrading parties and social events, but at the same time needing to be part of the youth culture where parties and a drinking culture are dominant. This development is an expression of the internal dynamics of the power struggle within the sports classes, where there is a division in the perception of where it is important to be and what gives value in life.

2. How the Outsider Group Identifies with the Established Group

In relation to the second characteristic, Elias and Scotson (2008) have argued that the strong unity in established groups arises primarily from increasing forms of interdependence characterized by an unequal balance of power that does not necessarily function in other social contexts. The increasing interdependence between the sports students and other students which was created by this project led to a stronger unity among the established student groups and a greater division among the sports students. Despite more or less similar behaviour the established group, according to Elias and Scotson, manages to create a self-image based on its 'best citizens' through greater social cohesion and control, whereas the outsider group's identity is created based on their 'worst citizens' (Elias & Scotson, 2008).

Being part of this project was both enabling and constraining for the students if they are taken seriously in the AT-course and given the opportunity to influence the culture of their own school. For those students who are comfortable in this power relationship, it is possible to create change. But their position can also constrain them because they believe that the rest of the school think they are behaving as if they are better than them. It is therefore important for the students that health and sports can be reconciled with the dominant youth culture, where partying and alcohol play a large part—in some contexts they need to identify more with this

established culture than the sports culture (Velija, 2012). This division between these two groups has, as Elias and Scotson (2008) pointed out, very little to do with social class, gender or race but arises because the dominant established group has greater access to power resources than the 'outsider' group.

3. Functional Democratization

The third characteristic concerns the extent to which power between groups shifts through what Elias (2012b) calls *functional democratization* where differences in power are reduced but not necessarily equalized. Velija (2012) argues that it is important as a figurational sociologist to have a critical approach to the theory of established and outsiders. She questions which processes help to maintain a position as an established person or outsider, especially when the power relationship between groups undergoes functional democratization. She writes that first, it is important to focus on what enables people to be established in one figuration and outsiders in another. Second, she believes it is important to consider under what circumstances a lack of unity helps to characterize an outsider group, and to what extent it is possible to understand complex power relations between established groups and outsider groups. We observed how the democratically anchored health promotion project in some contexts gave young people a feeling of being outsiders in such a process, illuminating established attitudes towards the development of a sports culture.

In this connection, the students began to question why not all students should complete the AT-course: they wouldn't have to act as the '*health police*' at school (this is how some of them put it) but through their involvement they believed that all students could help to influence the sports culture. Since then, this has been noted at the school and now all 1st year classes participate in a similar course. When developing health promotion it is therefore important to keep up to date with what is happening among the students because the composition of the school figuration is constantly changing. This continual change complicates the unity of the outsider group (Velija, 2012) as established-outsider group relations are part of a dynamic and changing figuration. The sport students' position became even more visible, but this visibility and their increasing power-ratio also contributed to a stigmatizing process as they were perceived as dictating to other students. Thus, it was possible for them to become relatively more 'established' in one context but 'outsiders' in another.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Norbert Elias's process sociology provides us with a critical tool in understanding how participatory democratic health interventions in schools are both enabling and constraining. We demonstrated that it is possible to promote change in the sports and health culture of a school by creating a structural, democratic framework that enabled students to set the agenda and change the power differentials between teachers and students. This was achieved by constructing a teaching course based on the values at the school. In the development of such a health promotion process a distribution of power-balances between the various participants in the school emerged, one that made it difficult to ascertain certain results. Using Norbert Elias's sociology to understand such a process shed light on the importance of recognizing that a school organization consists of groups of individuals who constantly influence each other. It is also important to be aware that, as an unintended consequence, such an approach can create an uneven balance of power amongst students themselves.

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CHAPTER 12

Back to the Future: Education, Education, and Education

Lars Bo Kaspersen and Norman Gabriel

Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that important practices in higher education institutions in contemporary Western societies are leading to a deep crisis as human beings face major world challenges such as climate 'emergency', environmental degradation, social inequalities, wars, and conflicts. We suggest that these challenges can only be addressed if we develop a stronger and more ambitious education system that will be accessible to people throughout the world. Our focus is mainly on universities in the Western world, though we recognize that research is becoming more interdependent: Western countries need to invest in education globally, developing a

L. B. Kaspersen (✉)
Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Denmark
e-mail: lbk.bhl@cbs.dk

N. Gabriel
Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, Essex, UK
e-mail: n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk

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division of labour between different regions and countries in research and higher education. Despite these global trends, we are aware that the historical formation of 'state-centrism' in the university sector makes it difficult to develop educational and research institutions that are able to become a source for civilizing states, their people, and their societies across the world.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: first, we present an argument based upon Elias's core concept—the survival unit. We argue that no matter which sociological problem Elias discusses, he will usually include within his analysis an understanding of the survival unit or the figuration of survival units to explain the current 'structures' or interdependencies of the world. In the next section, we present some of the key features of the world today, highlighting some of the changes in the Western world since the end of the Cold War. Then we discuss some of the important consequences that these changes have had on higher educational institutions and practices—consequences with such a deep impact on universities, teachers, and students in the Western world.

Our next sections discuss what we can do to improve universities and develop some well-functioning institutions. Of course, it is far beyond our chapter to present a developed model for the higher education sector—a model serving as a foundation for an improved form of higher education that can provide the knowledge and creativity urgently needed to address these major problems and challenges. At best, it is our hope that we can come up with some suggestions. Inspired by some of the ideas Elias developed during his time at the University of Leicester, we offer some contributions to a discussion about some modest reforms of universities that are vital if we want our higher education institutions to be able to address important contemporary challenges that face humankind.

Norbert Elias and Survival Units

In this section, we apply Elias's key sociological concept of a survival unit to discuss how education operates with a high degree of complexity in modern human societies. Elias (2012a) argued that human societies have always been organized into a multiple number of demarcated 'units'. Ever since human beings developed bipedalism, erected and walked out of Africa, they have always been born into already existing 'societies' or what Elias called survival units. During human history, these survival units have competed and/or cooperated, but always needed to be recognized by

other survival units. Once a survival unit has demonstrated a capacity to avoid encroachment by other survival units, it becomes a sovereign unit recognized by others. This interdependence between survival units ties parts of the world together as they grow and become more mutually dependent on each other, developing a greater exchange of commodities and sophisticated division of labour that is dependent on a low level of conflict and a strong incentive to collaborate. In other words, it becomes a high-risk strategy to start violent conflicts. These conflicts will often create a backlash—the economy will decline, a new ratio of power will develop between old superpowers (e.g. France and Germany in the nineteenth century), and interdependent countries might quickly move back to becoming relatively more independent.

Elias investigated various civilizing processes in European countries in order to understand and explain how and why particular European survival units (nation-states) turned out to be democratic nation-states in the post-war period. He mainly focused on Germany, the UK, and France, investigating the civilizing processes of these 'old' European great powers and the way these merged into a new global figuration that after 1945 was determined by the hegemonic blocks of the USA and USSR (see Elias, 2013; Elias, 2007a; Elias, 2012b). During the post-war period, Elias lived in a Europe undergoing great transformation where many of the Western European countries had to survive in a new world 'order' where two superpowers shaped the development of the modern world. In the late 1950s, he obtained his first academic appointment as a lecturer at the University of Leicester, contributing to the building of strong national higher educational institutions where economic growth was crucial. In England, he published his first work on the distinctiveness of the British survival unit, 'Studies in the Genesis of the Naval Profession' (Elias, 1950); this essay and related manuscripts were published after Elias's death (2007b).

When we understand the necessity of states and other survival units, we can begin to identify what is most central to education. Education is vital to survival. States struggling for recognition need educational institutions that provide people with a common 'we' identity, a shared habitus with a similar language, history, and values. Education at many different levels is the precondition for survival units to develop an ability to defend themselves, providing a necessary set of institutions and processes needed to uphold a survival unit. It provides a country with skills, innovation and most often a nationalist ideology needed to mobilize the population

against its enemies. When a survival unit such as the European states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is part of a global figuration of states where competition and war are necessary for survival, then education becomes more and more a vital instrument. Educational issues are always relational processes that lead to the formation of particular educational figurations that produce and reproduce educational institutions and different forms of socialization.

When states in Europe after the Second World War were part of a figuration with a high degree of cooperation and peace, education became an instrument for collaboration, a mechanism for inclusion, human rights, exchange of ideas, and transnational institutions. People in these institutions worked towards a wealthy and prosperous humanity, fighting for democracy, equality and defending the principle of the rule of law. Thus, the new world 'order' provided space for another way of understanding education, which was no longer considered an instrument to mobilize the population against foreign enemies, but became a means to produce the 'good' citizen, equality, mutual recognition, and democratic civil societies. Educational institutions therefore developed not only to serve the interests of the state, but became a pathway for developing democratic citizens and democratic forms of government that supported people.

Nevertheless, it is important to draw attention to a major tension between, on the one hand, education to support states in competition and, on the other hand, education to create a more equal and prosperous world where educational institutions are strong cultural institutions producing ideas for the future of humanity. Elias (2008a: 268–269) explains this tension:

> [T]he traditional focus of education within a national horizon needs to be supplemented more and more by a multinational orientation of education and knowledge-transfer, with humanity as its horizon, in both schools and universities. It is the misfortune of our times that the education policy of many governments is moving in exactly the opposite direction. It tends to narrow the knowledge-horizon of the coming generations to areas such as computers, practical economic expertise and nationally limited knowledge. All that is useful, but it also testifies to the degree to which governments, over-burdened with the short-term tasks of the present, lose sight of the long-term future of their own people. The future demands that the coming generations have a broad horizon and a balanced understanding of the problems of the emerging world society.

In the next section, we will discuss competitiveness among states today and the way this has effected contemporary education.

Post–Cold War: The Competition State, Education, and the Third Way

The modern state (which is the dominant form of survival unit in the contemporary world) has been transformed in several crucial ways—first during the Cold War and then again during the last 30 years—the post–Cold War period. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European nation-states went from being national 'competition states' to becoming more interdependent and cooperating states embedded in processes of de-territorialization and strong waves of internationalization. Nation-states fighting for their independence and sovereignty invested in educating the population to become 'national citizens' who identified themselves with a particular national identity, for example, French or German. Conscription, taxation, schools and higher education, public media, transport systems, a strong national bureaucracy, and national health systems were all important aspects of the development of the nation-state. A further development took place in the democratic nation-states in Western Europe during the second half of the twentieth century. Western societies developed strong international institutions such as the EU that facilitated a strong process of integration. Education became a necessary means to promote cooperation and internationalization and various organizations such as UNESCO also played a key role.

However, in the post–Cold War world, we have seen an intensified and sophisticated competition between the most advanced economies in the world. When the Iron Curtain disappeared, economic internationalization (trade, foreign direct investments and labour migration) intensified and reinforced investments across national borders. Processes of deregulation speeded up internationalization and states were involved in an even more competitive economy. This process was reinforced by the advent of new economies, China and East Asia in particular but also Brazil, South Africa, and Russia (e.g. Krieger, 2005; Opello Jr & Rosow, 1999; Sweeney, 2005; King & Kendall, 2004). Some scholars (e.g. Sørensen 2004, Cerny, 2005, Levi-Faur, 1998) claim that a new state form (a new survival unit) has emerged and replaced the nation-state. This new state is named the *competition state* or *the post-mercantilist state* (Cerny, 1997, 2005; Levi-Faur,

1998). A new form of politics developed and, in particular, education and employment policies became high politics. These new policies appeared almost simultaneously in several countries, for example, in Blair's New Labour government in Britain, in Clinton's Democratic government in the USA, and in Denmark, Germany, and Sweden. In the 1990s, it was called the third way strategy (Giddens, 1998). Even before Tony Blair's New Labour government came to power in 1997, the previous British Prime Minister John Major said in a speech in 1993:

> We cannot stop the world changing. And Britain must always be alive to change—ready to compete with the best in the world. Inventing, manufacturing and selling. Just as we always have.

Influential political leaders in Western European countries suggested that the only way to survive in this competitive climate was to attract 'foreign' capital that would be invested in their economies; if a country wanted to become a successful competition state, it required a well-educated population. It was in this context that Tony Blair clearly stated that New Labour's priority was 'education, education, and education'. Education had become the key instrument to generate innovation and competitiveness, but the very education activities themselves were subjected to benchmark processes, measured in global comparative terms. The development of the 'competition state' has thus led to a radical transformation of our society in a very few decades. There is a strong focus by governments on education and careers and therefore the development of labour market policies has become a key priority, especially over the efficient supply of labour. Most governments in Western Europe now pursue labour policies that emphasize the need for labour power in order to stay competitive.

These changes have transformed societies in the direction of the 'instrumental' state that needs to prioritize production, innovation, and competitiveness in order to survive in the global race. Every citizen becomes an instrument for the state: the schoolteacher no longer serves as a person with the primary aim of creating democratic citizens. He or she is increasingly expected to provide the next generation with competences (not knowledge, skills, or values) to ensure the state can continue to compete. Graduates including teachers have become the soldiers of the modern army of the competition state. Teachers and pupils in Western, developed societies are subjected to an array of comparative tests or indicators, for example, pupils are measured by PISA, the OECD's Programme for

International Student Assessment, which looks at 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics, science, knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. In 2022, recent PISA results show that Singapore scored significantly higher than all other countries in mathematics, reading, and science. If some countries are lagging behind, school reforms are introduced by governments.

Sahlberg (2014) has similarly pointed to an important debate about 'standardization' in a worldwide trend referred to as the 'Global Educational Reform Movement' (GERM). Although GERM is not a formal policy programme, there are some common features that have been adopted in predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the USA, England, Australia, and New Zealand. Through international funding organizations, such as the World Bank, elements of this reform have also spread to other countries, especially in the less developed parts of the world (Sahlberg, 2014). These elements include, for example, the standardization of teaching for predetermined learning outcomes by using prescribed curricula. This is attempted by detailing the delivery of lessons and evaluating predetermined measures, with very little consideration of local, cultural, or individual differences (e.g. see Robertson, 2015). We can summarize this contemporary worldwide trend by referring to terms such as 'standards', 'accountability', and 'effectiveness', which are now dominant in education policy discourse and have replaced 'autonomy', 'trust', and 'pedagogy' (Sahlberg, 2014). Professional autonomy is increasingly replaced by the standardization of schooling and education; standards, pre-defined learning outcomes, prescribed curricula, testing, and accountability are more and more shaping early childhood education and care. According to Moss (2014), there is little space for uncertainty, experimentation, surprise, or amazement.

One of the problems that emerges with the development of the competitive state is the attempt to compare specific characteristics of different states by statistical measurement. When the OECD tries to measure innovation or entrepreneurial creativity in order to compare member states, the comparison is entirely dependent on the ability to measure some features or 'isolate' properties of a similar kind. However, in most cases, there are no 'real variables' available from which we can compare and therefore they often need to redefine the variables in order to make them comparable. The problem is that we are analysing entirely different variables. By removing some of the differences only then does it become possible to compare them. If, for example, we want to 'measure' innovation in a large

number of countries, we need to understand that these have very different innovation processes. Comparing these different processes requires that we can find some similarities. Often these comparative statistics end up removing the uniqueness of each of the different countries so we cannot see their real competitive advantage.

Elias and Scotson summarize some of the key differences between statistical enquiry and sociological analysis:

> In both cases analysing means focusing attention on one element of a configuration at a time—'factor', 'variable', 'aspect' or whatever what one may call it. But in a purely statistical analysis the study of such elements in isolation is treated as the primary and often as the principal task: 'factors' or 'variables' and their quantitative properties are treated as if they were in actual fact independent of their place and function within that configuration, and statistical correlations, including statistical correlations of relationships, never cease to be correlations of isolates. Sociological analysis is based on the supposition that every element of a configuration and its properties are what they are only by virtue of their position and function within a configuration. (Elias and Scotson, 2008: 51)

Another problem with the competition state concerns the rapid and intensified rationalization that is the outcome of continual competition. Weber (1978) argued that a new form of rationality was spreading and penetrating every aspect of the modern world. Now people were behaving more 'purposeful' and rational than ever before (see also Kalberg, 1980). This purposeful rationality helped people to reflect upon the different means and instruments to achieve specific goals and targets. The implications of these deep structural changes include a structural instrumentalization of all citizens and institutions towards competitiveness. Previously, the core of the welfare state was the set of fundamental rights providing its citizens with some sort of income if they experienced difficult social or economic circumstances. However, the population are now even more exposed to competitive pressures without a shield, leading to a rapid increase in mental health problems, loneliness, and many other societal problems that have become major challenges to states. Such transformation has led some scholars (e.g. see Jessop, 1999; King, 1992; Knotz & Lindvall, 2015; Kvist, 1998; Lindvall, 2017; Oesch & Bauman, 2015; Peck, 2002, and Peck, 2003) to argue that the welfare state has now been replaced with the workfare state that emphasizes work as a

duty, an obligation, where people need to demonstrate responsibility in actively seeking employment.

The Crisis in Higher Education: Universities Today

An unintended and important consequence of the emergence of competition states in the post–Cold War years was that national education systems went through a deep structural change that brought about an attack on universities, knowledge production, and creativity. Since the late 1980s, the public sector in the Western world has gone through several reforms framed by neo-liberalism in order to increase efficiency and quality. The current system gradually undermined and replaced the national education system, preventing innovation and growth in the accumulation of the scientific stock of knowledge. The following quotation by Paul Hirst (1995) identifies the decline of the production of knowledge in higher education, offering a succinct and cogent criticism of the development of universities in the last four or five decades:

> [H]igher education throughout the developed world is in a state of institutional and intellectual crisis. It is threatened institutionally by political pressures and social development that will if unchallenged, rapidly turn it into a machine of mass mediocrity. In Britain, but also elsewhere, politicians and managers are relentlessly bureaucratizing the production and distribution of knowledge in the pursuit of "quality" and "accountability". Conformity to administrative procedure is the supreme good, and its pursuit will strip teachers of the capacity to be innovative and creative. Politicians are satisfying public demand in promoting mass higher education, but without any conception of what this is supposed to accomplish other than to create a certified mass workforce. Higher education is threatened intellectually by a mindless perspectivalism that reduces all culture and knowledge claims to the same level, by a politics of equality and identity that threatens both to balkanize knowledge and to silence universalistic and dissenting voices, and by a growth of hidebound specialism that displaces broad intellectual curiosity and replaces it with narrowly-focused academic industry. Universities are in danger of ceasing to be *cultural* institutions. (Hirst, 1995: 1)

We are witnessing a growing number of scientific disciplines investigating small, present-day problems while the long-term questions for humanity receive less attention and remain unanswered. Kilminster (2023: 200) suggests that by 'pursuing the immediately modish, today-centered policy

options as the sole vehicle for individual reputation', the present generation risk that they will be not able to pass on the collective substantive achievements of the past onto the next one. He argues that the generational fault line that emerged in the 1960s led many sociologists to believe that they can achieve fulfilment and meaning in their lives as individuals in the here-and-now, disregarding the lessons of the past. Elias (2008) also contended that a chain of generations has been 'broken' by the growth of individualism, where the individual search for meaning can have a 'strange form of forgetfulness', because it encourages us to treat personal achievements as if they were not dependent on others, but existed in isolation. This form of forgetfulness is also increasingly evident in the sociological profession where the pursuit of short-term impact research and institutional pressures to develop a strong media profile are driven by funding imperatives (Gabriel & Mennell, 2011: 18–19). Significantly, Elias notes that being a scholar gave him fulfilment and satisfaction, 'only if it is continued critically by the following generations' (2008b: 264–265).

Similarly, Hirst (1995: 3) emphasizes the key function of intellectuals in the generation and transmission of ideas:

> If universities have a vital function it is to form intellectuals. If intellectuals have a function, it is to generate 'ideas'. Ideas are forms of political and cultural imagination that can guide societies as they seek to manage change. Modern societies are too complex, too enmeshed in elaborate divisions of labour and too subject to technological change for traditions (that is, existing ways of doing things sanctioned by long usage) to provide their ideals or their ways of coping with the future. For the same reasons, because they are complex and subject to rapid technological change, societies cannot rely for their guidance on technical knowledges … Technicians—and politicians and managers can be included in this category—thus have very little capacity to imagine or anticipate the future. They are poor guides for modern societies because, as part of an elaborate division of labour, they find it difficult to rise above their specialized role.

In the next section, we will suggest various reforms as the first step towards a set of responses to the current crisis. We need to work at different levels at a relatively high speed if we want to contribute to potential change. We need reforms that can reshape and rebuild some of the key values in the European tradition of learning or innovation. Our objective is not to come up with ideas and plans for solving 'grand challenges' but in a more modest way to suggest some changes in the current education and research

system which in many respects seem to have run into some deep-rooted problems. A reformed education and research system is a necessity if we want to introduce important changes to address some of the major challenges for the survival of humanity.

Leicester, Elias, Neustadt: The Rise of a New Sociology

If we want universities to rejuvenate themselves as the most important intellectual and cultural institutions, we must reinvigorate them. One way to improve the system, however, is to look for inspiration from the past. To the best of our knowledge, nobody has looked for inspiration from the development of the Department of Sociology at Leicester University in the three decades during which it was established (approximately 1950–1975). Five decades ago, Marshall (1982) noted that a 'remarkably high proportion' of teachers of sociology in British universities began their careers in the Leicester Department of Sociology. Since Marshall's acknowledgement, a growing list of authors have added new pieces to the puzzle of how and why this particular department became, within less than two decades of its creation, a flagship of British sociology (see Brown, 1987; Banks, 1989; Rojek, 2004; Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006).

The first remarkable feature of Leicester Sociology was an alternative form of governance that probably played an important role in its rapid expansion from the late 1950s onwards. With the two founding members of the department forming an alliance, the constitutive power ratio of the department in the early years was that of Neustadt and Elias, effectively acting as a unit. This dual leadership with a particular governance structure was an outcome of planned and unplanned processes, with this 'structure' continuously undergoing changes. When it comes to the future governance of higher education, we suggest that we experiment with different forms of legitimate governance practices. The Elias-Neustadt 'model' can serve as a starting point for a discussion. Governance is an art that only succeeds if we experiment with different forms and always remind ourselves that we must keep the democratic aspect alive. Goodwin and Hughes (2011) have argued that the close working relationship, based on emotional co-support, between two extraordinary individuals, the Odessa-born Ilya Neustadt (1915–1993) as the undisputed organizational leader and the Breslau-born Norbert Elias (1897–1990) as a preeminent

intellectual source of inspiration, was an unusual constellation (Goodwin & Hughes, 2011: 677)

In 1954, a new Department of Sociology was established in what was then the University College of Leicester. During the first three years, two individuals made up this department: Ilya Neustadt, who had been employed as a lecturer at the Department of Economics, from 1949 as head of department, and Norbert Elias, who Neustadt brought in as a lecturer. In 1957 the Faculty of Social Science welcomed the first cohort of students to a new BA degree.[1]

The history of sociology at Leicester from 1954 to 1968 is essentially the story of a two-man leadership (Ilya Neustadt and Norbert Elias as equal partners) being gradually replaced by a one-man leadership (Ilya Neustadt as the preeminent figure). Interviews carried out by Kaspersen and Mulvad (2017) suggest that this alliance had already formed as early as 1956. One interviewee (INT 12),[2] an early connoisseur of Norbert Elias's works, recalls from the Third Congress of the International Sociological Association, held in Amsterdam in 1956, that the two men formed a symbiotic unit, capable of making an impression on the outside world:

> At that conference, in my recollection, they were always together. Like twins. And they were a very talkative couple. Always ready for talks and conversation (…) [T]hey seemed to agree on everything.

However, this leadership model based on an equal partnership (and an academic division of labour) between Elias and Neustadt did not last long into the 1960s. Gradually, Neustadt's position as an absolute figure of authority became consolidated, whilst Norbert Elias became more marginal, as new members of staff increasingly set their mark on the culture of the department. On the one hand, Neustadt increased his organizational influence in the department. On the other, Elias became less of a

[1] This degree consisted of a common first year introduction to five different disciplines—politics, economics, sociology, economic history, and geography. Thereafter the students specialized in one discipline. Similar degree programmes developed elsewhere but it could be interesting to see if this programme would strengthen the social science graduates today because there seems to be a better balance between a general knowledge of social science and the specialization of one of the five disciplines.

[2] Overall, Kaspersen and Mulvad (2017) interviewed 42 individuals with expert knowledge on, or personal experience from, the department.

towering figure in terms of outlining the department's intellectual agenda: the growing number of academically ambitious new staff members meant that Elias's views of sociology would no longer go uncontested. Elias's privileged position within the figuration slowly began to shift in 1960, when Percy Cohen was brought in as a lecturer. Cohen was a flamboyant, eloquent, and intellectually self-assured figure who was clear about his inclination towards structural functionalism as a competing paradigm to the historical-comparative approach favoured by Elias (INT 7). Furthermore, in 1961, Anthony Giddens joined the department and gradually developed his own intellectual position, which also did not always converge with the views expressed by Elias. In 1962, Elias took up an offer to become Professor of Sociology in Ghana. Elias returned to Leicester in 1964, but it is clear from our data that the partnership between the two never recovered after his return. Elias did play a role in the department for at least another decade, but none of our interviewees remember him as nearly as central as Neustadt. Indeed, most remember him as a quite marginal figure, both socially and intellectually (INT 3; 7; 19). In contrast, Neustadt very much became a figure of authority. From the mid-1960s onwards, 'Leicester Sociology' increasingly became synonymous with him as its undisputed leader (INT 14; 18).

This governance structure seemed to have functioned quite efficiently and most students, colleagues, and University of Leicester managers gave it a high level of legitimacy. To govern is difficult but to govern democratically is even more difficult. Governance must also be efficient and timely. Sometimes efficiency and democracy do not go together—democratic decisions require time for deliberation. In certain moments, legitimacy can replace democracy. Thus, a governance 'model' as the one Elias and Neustadt established might not be as democratic as many of the reforms developed during the 1960s and 1970s in response to the challenges posed by the political left and student movements. However, it is important to remember that only with the right 'context' can an effective democratic model of governance be established—people must be ready for dismantling hierarchal institutions in society such as universities. This was not the case when Elias and Neustadt began to develop the Leicester Sociology department. In marked contrast, new universities like Essex were deliberately established on a democratic basis: there was no senior common room or separate facilities for staff and students and narrow corridors in buildings were deliberately designed to encourage greater interaction. Nevertheless, Kilminster (2023: 205) reflects that students like

himself were 'neither psychologically nor culturally fully prepared' for the demands that the Essex experiment in dehierarchization imposed. The younger members of staff were similarly affected—without a senior common room, they were unable to collectively mix as a generation with the more established staff, hindering the development of master-apprentice relations.

Another important aspect of governing a university department concerns hiring and promotion. Interviews from the study by Kaspersen and Mulvad (2017) indicate that the institutional arrangements of the department—which was shaped collaboratively by Elias and Neustadt—significantly shaped the patterns of sociological behaviour, defined as the specific set of predominant intellectual adherences and social codes, which became institutionalized during the 1960s. In terms of recruitment of teachers, Neustadt and Elias made a point of creating an academic-melting pot of people representing many educational backgrounds in different disciplines such as history and social psychology. When Neustadt and Elias were about to hire, there was a shortage of sociology teachers. Consequently, a history graduate from the University of London—John Goldthorpe—was hired as an assistant lecturer. Thus, Goldthorpe was the first of some 50 individuals to join the department in permanent staff positions within the next 20 years. It turned out that the lack of sociologists was not the only reason for hiring a historian. The hiring of Goldthorpe and others (e.g. Keith Hopkins—later professor of ancient history at Cambridge) was significant and demonstrated how committed Elias and Neustadt were to developing a particular version of what they referred to as 'developmental sociology'.

In terms of the kind of sociology taught, Leicester pioneered the take-up of a 'thorough exegesis' of the great classical European sociologists. Many interviewees recall that the teaching of theory was taken much more seriously than research methods (INT 8; 12; 25). The acquisition of theoretical skills was enforced by a structure of weekly seminars where two or three students would meet with their tutor—a task shared by all members of staff—to go over assignments and discuss texts. If this set-up had an impact on generations of students, it influenced the younger members of staff even more, as they needed to keep ahead of students and were often asked by Neustadt to teach in fields they had not worked with before (INT 6; 13).

The Weekly Staff Seminar: Shaping the Sociological Habitus

As for the social aspects, daily lunchtime conversations about sociological issues (see Dunning in Rojek, 2004), as well as frequent house parties—often in Neustadt's house where he would personally cook dinner (INT 11)—are remembered by many former staff members as very important in the Leicester environment in the 1960s (INT 28; 32). In the following, however, we highlight one institutional mechanism, which, according to the interviews, more than anything else contributed to maintaining particular dominant standards of intellectual behaviour in the figuration: the mandatory Friday afternoon staff seminar.

The weekly staff seminar served as the key 'intellectual interaction ritual' (Collins, 2004) for the figuration, in the double sense of shoring up social cohesion around a collective professional endeavour imbued with a specific intellectual vision and of confirming (or adjusting) power balances within the department. Applying this understanding to the weekly staff seminars, we can see how 'Leicester Sociology' was in practice reproduced as a cohesive figuration. As (INT 2) recalls:

> It was almost like an unwritten contract of employment that you attend the staff seminar on a Friday. And that in a sense was the core of the place, I thought (…) The seminar became an affirmation of Leicester sociology.

This sums up the central qualities of the staff seminar as an institution as remembered by several interviewees (e.g. INT-25; 33). On the one hand, it was an interaction ritual designed for regenerating deep emotional commitment to sociology as a form of professional life. However, on the other, the seminar was an arena for consolidating solidarity among insiders, those fortunate enough to represent 'Leicester Sociology', to the detriment of those outsiders who were often invited to give papers. 'We've started the staff seminars, and will also have a few outsiders'. Neustadt's choice of words here, 'outsiders', is perhaps still further evidence of how distinctive he and Elias felt sociology at Leicester to be (Goodwin, 2010: 11). The seminars are remembered with equal amounts of fondness and displeasure by members of the department from that time (see Brown, 1987; Goodwin & Hughes, 2011) and were perhaps not always supportive of those presenting. A presentation on the 'Young Worker Project' was described as being:

> It was all over the place, and for someone who knew nothing about the research, or very little, it was far from being clear what it was all about. He thinks that he can make up by fast reading and masses of quotations for the absence of incisiveness and focus. (in Goodwin, 2010: 26)

Yet the seminars did provide a focus for sociological discussion and, for some, represented the basis of a developing sociological research culture. Neustadt had carved out a clearly defined role for himself in staff seminars: several interviewees (e.g. INT 4; 9; 10; 35) vividly recall his catchphrase question that he would invariably in his distinctive Eastern European accent ask speakers, whether visiting or members of staff: but what is your sociological problem? With this provocative question, Neustadt ensured collective attention remained focused on understanding the particularity of the sociological problem under investigation, emphasized by compulsory attendance that 'forced' staff members to find their own position. They became thoughtful sociologists, more able to uncover some of their assumptions about what sociological research should be about: the highly ambitious 'developmental sociology' required a great deal of challenging intellectual work and self-reflection, irrespective of whether they approved or disapproved of particular educational approaches.

Teaching and Research

In the department, there was also a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching: opening the eyes of students to sociology was not something that staff just had to do so they could concentrate on research. Although Elias and Neustadt were both very committed teachers, Neustadt even called his inaugural professorial speech 'Teaching Sociology', there is a small but significant difference between them. We claim that compared to Elias, Neustadt conceived teaching as a relatively separate activity from research. Elias, on the contrary, did not view teaching and research as separate activities: for example, in *What Is Sociology*, which is based on his lectures at Leicester, Elias (2012a: 55) argued that the relative autonomy of a science is bound to three pre-conditions, the last one being the institutional structure of 'conducting teaching and research'.

For Elias, the purpose of research and teaching was to contribute to the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. At the university level, students and teachers are not two distinct sets of people but form interdependent relationships in dynamic figurations. Groups of different people—students, researchers, and teachers—join the university and start

to form relationships with each other, constantly shifting their positions and roles. Their roles and identities are not 'fixed', but become produced in relational processes in changing figurations. The development of mass higher education in the competitive state has driven the consolidation of 'fixed' academic roles; more and more academics in universities are now on teacher-only or research-only contracts that further erode the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research. When students, teachers, and researchers see themselves as different with different tasks and aims, then students become mass consumers, taught by teachers with power points—chunks of information with no (pedagogic) power and no points. In higher education, we are in danger of losing hope for the future:

> If there is no major war, the peaceful global competition between nations will intensify. The only nations that will have a chance of maintaining their positions in the competition will be those whose future generations have the advantages of a far-sighted education which is rich in knowledge and close to reality. Governments which give their young people and their teachers a lower place in their national priorities indicate thereby that they have lost their hope in the future and therefore their vision of it. (Elias, 2008a: 269)

Concluding Remarks: Hope for the Future

This chapter has attempted to address some of the severe problems we now face in contemporary higher education. We have argued that many planned and even more unplanned changes characterize the university sector in the last few decades. We have highlighted how neo-liberalism and a new form of 'survival unit'—the 'competition state'—have been the driving forces behind the development of new educational policies in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. This type of competitive state has been further strengthened by recent crises in the world economy, energy and the emergence of war in Europe. Inspired by Norbert Elias, we conceptualized these changes as a shift in the balance of power between groups of survival units. We claim that structural changes took place in the relations between states ('external relations') as well as in the relations between state and civil society ('internal relations'), a shift in the power ratio among states in the global figuration of states.

We drew upon sources usually neglected in the debate about reforms in higher education, observing how different transformational processes at a British university (Leicester) in the post-war years (1950–1975) brought about a dynamic department providing teaching in the new discipline of

sociology, one that became enormously successful in producing knowledge and highly qualified teachers and researchers. In our reflections on the rapid development of sociology at Leicester, we highlighted some innovative institutional procedures, practices, and processes that can provide a good starting point for addressing some of the deep-rooted problems in higher education. We drew attention to the governance of the department, especially some of the hiring and promotions policies that promoted temporary and permanent staff with non-sociological backgrounds, and the strong interdependence between teaching and research. For the future of education, with humanity as its horizon, we have suggested that we can learn from some of the practices that emerged during these three decades, incorporating these to develop a new reinvigorated higher educational system.

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