

A SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN CANADA

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Former CSA President Dr. Patrizia Albanese (2009) observed ten years ago that sociology in Canada has been relatively and comparatively slow to jump to action when it comes to its own distinct contributions to childhood studies... Canadian sociology has seemingly ‘given up’ children as social subjects, worthy of study in their own right, to developmental psychologists, instead focusing on socialization and the inter-generational transmission of culture and roles. For the most part, Canadian sociologists treat children as objects that are being acted upon by parents and society. In mainstream Canadian sociology, children remain undefined, a homogenous lump to be sculpted and acted upon, either virtually invisible or in need of protection (2009: 138).

Meanwhile, sociologists elsewhere, for example, those involved in the International Sociological Association’s Sociology of Childhood group and/or in the American Sociological Association section on the Sociology of Children and Youth, have participated since the 1980s in creating a “new” sociology of childhood. In this approach, childhood is viewed as a social construction, and children are viewed as active agents and social actors within their everyday lives, lives that are worthy of study (Corsaro, 1985; Thorne, 1993; Prout & James, 1997). While sustained interest from Canadian scholars in re-thinking children, childhood and youth has been much more recent, movement has occurred. The first book in Canada on the sociology of childhood and youth was published in 2017 (Chen, Raby, & Albanese, 2017), and the recently established cluster on Childhood and Youth of the Canadian Sociological Association continues to expand, with six dedicated sessions at Congress in 2019, and with innumerable papers on childhood and youth also presented, which were not connected with the research cluster. Nevertheless, there remains a lacuna regarding sociological study of and with children and youth in Canada. This special issue will examine, from

various theoretical perspectives, the intersections of place and space in relation to childhood and youth.

This special issue includes four original research papers. First, in a paper that pays close to the often hybridized notion of 'space' and 'place', Cory Jobb's qualitative study of Ontario Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) examines "how power is enacted within their interactions with young children and the material environment." Jobb draws from both Foucault and a reconceptualist theoretical framework in order to mine how ECEs interpret both classroom space and place linked to children's geographies. Power is central to his arguments throughout the paper. While space is most frequently associated with the physicality and locality, place, on the other hand, "emphasizes an emotional connection that is produced and potentially put into conflict," Jobb argues, "through socio-material-political structures." Jobb pays particular attention to the divide between theory and practice, which he states "has resulted in uncertainty in classroom practice, where educators may espouse child-centred pedagogy while enacting teacher-directed practices." The paper offers an original push away from studies examining "researcher-child practice," emphasizing instead "researcher-place practice." Interestingly, the ECEs in the study associated classroom space with social control and limitations from above, i.e., rules and regulations from the Ministry of Education impinging on their agency to act upon their conceptualizations of the classroom as a place to negotiate meaning and pedagogical connections with children. There emerged a bifurcated interpretation of the classroom as simultaneously a 'space' under regulative control, and as a 'place' associated with the more front line intentions of the educators, which sometimes clash with administrative directives. Jobb argues that it is important for studies of place-based education "to ask who has power in determining what makes a space a place."

Dan Cui and Frank Worrell's paper examines the perceptions of male and female Chinese Canadian youth towards media racial representations, underscoring the 'symbolic violence' related to their experiences. Most of the youth have parents who came from mainland China, with the majority others from Hong Kong. Participants were asked their views of the mainstream media's depictions of Chinese people, and the ways in which they feel affected by these depictions, specifically "in the ways that they perceive who they are or are not." While many studies of media representations understandably focus on the discourses of media itself, Cui and Worrell contribute to under-researched knowledge regarding how "racialized minorities perceive media representations and how those perceptions are related to their specific ways of thinking, doing and being." Media representations matter, they argue, to the extent that they

act detrimentally on racialized minority immigrants' sense of belonging to the place they live – in this Canada. The value of a Bourdieusean framework here, is that individuals' experiences are critically linked up to wider, hegemonic structures of social hierarchy and classification (Bourdieu, 1989, Bourdieu, 1984). As they describe, "social agents internalize the social structures as habitus, a system of schemes of perception and appreciation, which takes the dominant classification and the social order based on that as natural and legitimate." Specifically, the interviews projected three broad themes salient to Chinese Canadian youth: 'absence/inauthentic presence', 'racialized bodies' and 'social-threat discourses'. For instance, the participants identified a lack of Chinese reporters in news programs and, more broadly, a lack of Chinese role models in the media (the paper briefly discusses the significance of the new movie *Crazy Rich Asians*). Participants expressed that these limited and constrained representations (i.e., stereotypical roles such as martial arts masters or historical figures) lead to feelings of low self-esteem "associated with an inferior Chinese identity". Exacerbating this on a broader social level is the silent adjustment to this situation as taken-for-granted and normal. Significantly, Cui and Worrell underscore in several places how participants presented a range of stances to this discursive context, with some more critical and others more acquiescent, for instance in relation to stereotypical depictions of Chinese physical features (e.g., caricaturing Asian eyes), and the desire to undergo plastic surgery to acquire larger 'Western' eyes. They argue, drawing from Bourdieu, that "these racialized body features become devalued symbolic capital, which may disadvantage Chinese youth in the field of competition, particularly given that social agents' symbolic capital and economic capital can be exchangeable and convertible." The paper also highlights media stories representing Chinese Canadians as a social threat, i.e., as "foreign competitors/invasers" taking claim to usurp social resources from the local economy. Again, such depictions made some participants feel that they did not want to associate with their Chinese identity while in Canada. As Cui and Worrell argue, "in accepting the legitimacy of devalued cultural capital assessed by the media, [such participants] are subject to media-initiated symbolic violence, consequently reproducing a belief in their own racial inferiority." The paper's care in reflecting the range of responses of participants (i.e., from more 'aware' of hegemonically mediated social contexts and those less critical) is important, suggesting not isomorphic effects of racialized hierarchies. Nevertheless, the paper makes a strong case for all Chinese Canadian youth being affected by the representations that mediate their social identity and the legitimacy of their citizenship.

Another contributor to this special issue, Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah, also incorporates elements of Bourdieu in order to understand belonging, identity and sense of place among youth living in two ‘priority’ neighbourhoods in Toronto’s east-end. Drawing from Yuval-Davis (2006), her aim is to “re-scale belonging from attachment to the nation . . . to the role of neighbourhoods in the experiences of belonging.” In line with Cui and Worrell’s study, Sriskandarajah treats space and not as a taken-for-granted objective reality acting *sui generis* on individuals, but one that is actively interpreted and with variable response, including adherence and resistance. In the two neighbourhoods she spent time ethnographically researching, visible minority youth include South Asians, Caribbean Blacks and Afro-Caribbean, Filipino, Chinese, Arab Muslim and Somali. Ethno-racial identities can be productive, her interviews show. For instance, participants express pride in their identities, and significantly, draw a sense of belonging from them. At the same time some participants reflected on their parents’ disavowal identifying as Black, given the lack of meaning this identity had in their country of origin (e.g., those originally from Ethiopia). Interestingly, the youth interviewed indicate their own identification with Black identity, despite recognition of its being an “artificial, socially constructed category”. Sriskandarajah observes the “category was so pervasive that [some participants] could not escape it in its entirety, nor did [they] desire to completely resist it.” This liminal space evidenced the processes through which youth, “living with diversity cultivated their ability to simultaneously traverse different groups.” While participants expressed awareness of a dominant ‘White’ Canadian identity in general terms, they also revealed intercultural distancing: i.e., locating themselves in a social-racial hierarchy that possesses complex representations of identities linked to ethno-racial background. East Asians were perceived by other ethnic minorities to be more naturally inclined to mathematical skill, while others rendered associations of Black youth linked to crime, drugs and school failure. The paper thus highlights “the minute ways youth policed each other’s identities and what they deemed possible based on racial thinking in everyday interactions.” ‘Race’ discourses could be appropriated for benefit, but also were “markers of difference” not only in relation to White youth but in relation to other ethno-racial youth as well, the “intergroup dynamics” of which Sriskandarajah’s paper centers on.

Finally, examining the intersections of place and space with childhood and youth, Nicole Power and Moss Norman’s paper “focuses on how place-specific gender relations enable the employment-related geographical mobilities (ERGMs) of rural young men in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.” The paper centers on focus groups con-

ducted with male and female youth aged between 16 to 29, and highlights the context of rural Atlantic Canada, specifically coastal fishing communities, where “rigid gender divisions of labour persist.” Power and Norman link the understandings of youth with wider and historically rooted norms associated with rural masculinity, specifically the “frontier masculinity” (Connell, 1993), which examines the intersections of place and gender. They explain “the frontiersman is the epitome of the ‘manly man,’” a term used by one of the young participants, “characterized by romanticized ideals of being physically powerful, courageous, fiercely independent and self-reliant.” Mediated understandings of place and space are also heteronormative and geared to reinforcing the “family-work nexus... with women’s care and domestic work freeing men for mobile employment.” Female participants, for instance, speak of the challenges of child care responsibilities resting with themselves and not their male partners; challenges further undergirded by gendered norms “valorizing” outdoor working environments as “masculine space,” while indoor spaces are “feminized” (Kenway et al., 2006). Importantly, Power and Norman illustrate how understandings of place and space are “stretched out” (Farrugia, 2014) in regard to young men seeking employment in labour markets outside of Atlantic Canada, especially in the oil fields of northern Alberta. These working environments are ones that both male and female participants describe as “communal homosocial” male domains, where women do not belong, and moreover, where “women’s mobility dependent on men’s.” Power and Norman conclude that “rather than operating to disembed the traditional gender order of rural Newfoundland, ERGM related to resource extraction actually works to stabilize and re-embed the gender order.” The paper effectively illustrates how “individual preferences” are hegemonically linked up to wider social contexts, gendered norms and organizational logics which mediate and direct both spatial and temporal dimensions of rural youth lives.

As a whole, our goal is for this special issue to (re)-vitalize Canadian sociological research on childhood and youth, which is arguably less cohesive a research onus than in other parts of the world. Questions of place and space are good starting points, but only the beginning of a rich area for further consideration.

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