

# Families, Relationships and Societies

## Adult-Child relations in neoliberal times: Insights from a dialogue across childhood and parenting culture studies

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Adult-Child relations in neoliberal times: Insights from a dialogue across childhood and parenting culture studies

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**Article abstract (up to 150 words):**

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**Key words/short phrases:**

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## **Adult-Child relations in neoliberal times: Insights from a dialogue across childhood and parenting culture studies**

The ‘intensive mother’ and the ‘vulnerable and at-risk child’ in need of protection are immediately recognisable tropes to scholars of childhood studies and parenting culture studies, as well as scholars of the family more broadly. These increasingly global imaginaries are readily apparent in policy, rhetoric, and everyday lives in sites ranging from health and education, to finance and household debt. These tropes function as global policy imperatives and professional measures of ‘quality’ provision, albeit that their possible attainment is highly stratified. Indeed, they are sites of struggle and transgression, in contestations over imposed, desired, and complex subject positions and the social practices that produce them. The impact of these tropes is neither straightforward nor assured, given the different historical legacies and socio-cultural, geo-political, and economic contexts in which they operate and their potential contradictions with diverse constructions of childhood and parenthood.

It is unsurprising then that the ‘intensive mother’ and the ‘vulnerable child’ have been the subject of extensive deconstruction and critique. For instance, parenting culture studies has traced the rise in intensive parenting to cultures of risk and responsabilisation, particularly as elaborated in European social theory (e.g., Beck 1992). Childhood studies has similarly pointed to the historically and geographically-specific construction of the vulnerable child, where ‘descriptions’ of middle-class childhoods in the global North become normalising ‘prescriptions’ for childhood everywhere (Burman 2017). They have argued that ‘the child’ remains one of the last bastions of essentialism in much social science research with detrimental effects for children’s lives and our understandings of the sites and modes these are lived, whether in education, labour, families, or beyond.

It would seem self-evident then that there is much affinity between childhood and parenting culture studies, both in terms of objects of study and analytic insights. For, as we discuss further below, the social constitution of childhood, parenthood or adulthood more broadly, and shifts therein necessarily means the (re)generation, subversion, or transformation of existing forms of adult-child relations. Yet, as we note in our editorial to this special issue, there has been very limited engagement between the two fields to date, a gap that the authors in this special issue seek to address. Working in parallel with the editorial, which provides a more traditional overview of the contents of this special issue, this introductory article begins by giving an overview of these fields of study by placing them in dialogue. We do so as a basis for drawing out themes emerging from the special issue, in order to explore potential synergies and open broader debates, both within these respective fields, and beyond.

A central goal of this collection is to open up dialogue about adult-child relations geographically, as well as in relation to multi-disciplinary academic fields. Both fields have been critiqued for un-reflexive Anglo/Eurocentric starting points. They have been pressed to take into account the complex ways that tropes of parenthood and childhood travel globally (Faircloth et al 2013), to theorise from everyday lives in the global South (Balagopalan 2019), and to thereby de-colonise research practice. As Rabello de Castro (2019) argues, this does not

mean reading outwards from a taken-for-granted centre to periphery. Instead, this requires an approach of “de-linking” (Mignolo, 2007) from knowledge assumed to be valid everywhere’ (Rabello de Castro 2019: 9). We are persuaded that this simultaneously requires consideration of how various sites, practices and social relations are connected, fractured and differentially effected by global processes (Katz 2001, Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). As such, the articles in this special issue are not simply read as exemplars for our introductory article. First, we take seriously their individual conceptual ambitions. Second, we make an effort to read across them, considering what they – together – have to say about the making and re-making adult-child relations and how these are conceptualised.

We begin by outlining childhood and parenting culture studies, exploring the bifurcation of these academic fields. We point out that this is based on underlying assumptions of the monadic, Western liberal subject which (inadvertently) reifies categorical understandings of social groups and an antagonism between children and adults. In response, we make three key arguments. We suggest that the growing attention to relational conceptualisations allows for circulations of childhood and parenting cultures to be contextualised and grounded within new and enduring forms of inequity and changing state-family-capital relations. This complicates existing conceptualisations of neoliberalisation, we argue, including by highlighting the contradictory ways in which ‘the family’ is mobilised in varying ways to individualise, responsabilise, and stratify the labour of social reproduction. Finally, we draw attention to the need for further interrogation of the transnational nature of adult-child relations, from the ways that everyday lives cross national borders and to nuanced and historically embedded investigations of the (im)mobilities of childhood and parenting cultures.<sup>i</sup>

#### [Framing the dialogue: From conceptual autonomy to relationality](#)

Over the past three decades childhood studies has come of age, albeit as a multidisciplinary field that is still ‘very much...in progress’ (Stryker and Yngvesson 2013: 304). Emerging in the 1980s as a challenge to the consignment of children to developmental psychology, paediatrics, and socialisation theory, childhood studies is premised on an understanding of children as social actors worthy of study in the ‘present tense’ (Mayall 2002: , see also Brannen, this issue), and indeed recognition as ‘human beings’ rather than as anticipatory ‘human becomings’ (Qvortrup 1994). Ontologically, scholarship in the field has sought to unsettle fixed notions of ‘the child’. An emphasis has been placed on interrogating the social constitution of childhood and, to a more limited extent (Punch 2019), to processes of ‘generationing’ (Alanen 2011), or the ways that particular people are made into children and ascribed ‘childish’ characteristics and social positions to act from.

Relatedly, parenting culture studies, a nascent field of interdisciplinary scholarship, emerged from the observation that something ‘has changed’ in the way both being a parent and raising children is conceptualised, particularly in last 40 years (Lee et al 2014). Largely based on empirical work in Euro-American settings (but subsequently elsewhere) this work has, like

childhood studies, been keen to move the framing of parent-child relationships beyond the developmental psychology model. In particular, it draws attention to the casual relationship between the emergence of this developmental paradigm and the understanding of 'parenting' as a much more complex task than it used to be in the past (Burman 2017, Macvarish 2016). In the face of dominant assumptions that what happens in infancy has life-long implications, it is easy to see why parenting is now routinely understood as a 'task' requiring expert guidance and supervision, notably for those in 'problem' families (Gillies 2011, 2005). To this end, parenting culture studies uses a social constructionist approach (Best 1993) to understand the emergence of the 'problem' of parenting, as understood at both micro and macro-levels as the source of, and solution to, a wide range of social issues. In a time where child-rearing has become mediated by a cultural narrative that provides parents with rules, albeit sometimes ambiguous ones, about how to realise and develop their 'skills' as parents, it is these 'rules' (and the categorical assumptions around adulthood and childhood upon which they are based) which might be said to constitute 'parenting culture'.

A key stimulus for childhood studies was a critique of the ways that childhood often slips from view within social theory except as a trope (e.g., with the figure of the child used to represent innocence, threat, creativity or vulnerability) and the ways that children are often considered easily and effectively represented by adult proxies. Through such formulations, complex flesh and blood children disappear from view, shadowed by their figurative representation as future longings and anxieties, or nostalgia for ostensibly carefree and innocent pasts lost forever. In response to such concerns, many have implicitly taken up Barrie Thorne's (1987) proposal to grant childhood 'conceptual autonomy', liberating it from the reduction of 'society' to 'adult society' (Qvortrup 2011), with a concomitant centring of children's experiences and perspectives in scholarship.

Without paying attention to the ways those humans that we make into children (or indeed parents) experience the world from such socially structured positions, social theory and empirical research is fundamentally impoverished. However, as the 'relational turn' and its uptake in childhood studies highlights, 'conceptual autonomy' is problematic if not impossible (Rosen and Twamley 2018, Thomson and Baraitser 2018). The constitution of subjects and subjectivities, as well as power, injustice and exploitation, are relational phenomenon, both in intimate and structural senses. In terms of the former, children's lives are entangled with those of adults, as contemporaries of social phenomenon and in potentially reciprocal relationships forged through common cause (Abebe 2007, Balagopalan 2019, Vitterbo 2012).

As Donati (2018: 433) puts it in conceptualising relational sociology more broadly: "Every social phenomenon arises from a relational context and generates another relational context." By this he challenges substantialism, and instead suggests that society or social phenomenon *are* social relations, existing only because of particular relations. In other words, phenomenon emerge from interdependences and interactions between situated actors and are based on broader assumptions and relations. In this sense, he pushes against the assumption that

entities are bounded, given and *self*-sustaining, or that relationships are simply the result of *individual* interests or practices, as they appear in liberal theory. Instead, it becomes important to consider: “what is required to make that specific relationship exist” (436) between a parent and child, for instance, “its situated purpose, the means and norms to achieve it, and the latent value of the concrete relation”(436).

As such, childhood studies scholars are increasingly questioning the limits of conceptual autonomy. They note that this approach has constrained the field’s ability to speak with and to the concerns animating others (see also Brannen, this issue), including to bring insights from childhood studies to bear on understandings of contemporary processes of accumulation and dispossession, as well as movements for social justice. Indeed, such concerns have lead Spyrou (2017) to ask the provocative question: Is it ‘time to decenter childhood’ within childhood studies?

Whilst parenting culture studies did not emerge out of the same concerns as childhood studies, similar issues have been raised as to its potential towards categorical fetishism, separating and thereby reifying the subject that it seeks to interrogate (‘The Parent’) (Bristow 2014). Indeed, concerns with conceptual autonomy as an approach which fosters an intellectual separation of children from those with whom they live their lives rings true for scholars of parenting culture (albeit as an empirical phenomenon, rather than theoretical problematic). One of the earliest – and still most influential – observers of changes in parenting culture was the American sociologist Sharon Hays, whose influence can be seen in the papers in this special issue. She coined the term ‘intensive motherhood’ to describe an ideology that urges mothers (because the language and practice of parenting is highly gendered) to ‘spend a tremendous amount of time, energy and money in raising their children’ (Hays 1996: x). According to this ideology, ‘the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive’ (ibid).

This ‘child-centred’ intensification does not emerge solely as a product of parental anxieties, but is itself founded on a fetishized view of children and childhood – one which constitutes children as foundationally vulnerable and ‘at risk’. At least part of the reason for this was the rapid growth (and cultural visibility) of developmental psychology in the 1970s. But it also chimes with work done by modernisation theorists around risk and risk-consciousness (Beck 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, Giddens 1991) such that the early period of life is cast, and monetised by experts, as one which is subject to enormous risk (Burman 2017). In a ‘neoliberal’ era, discussed below, with its emphasis on self-management, ‘good’ parents (mothers) are child-centred, reflexive, informed consumers, able to ‘account’ for their parenting strategies to minimize any sort of risk to their children (Faircloth 2013, Wolf 2011). Here, parenting culture studies argues that the flipside of the ‘vulnerable child’ is the ‘risky parent’ (Lee et al 2014) with the developmental paradigm casting parents as *a* (or *the*) determining force in how their children turn out (Dermott 2012).

Conceptually at least, this pushes the interests of family members apart ever further, instead of

reflecting a more intimate, or relational ebb-and-flow of family life (Bristow 2014, Rosen and Twamley 2018: , see also Arzuk’s article in this issue on the historical emergence and specificity of this in the Turkish context). This has important implications for the way care and socialisation relations between and among adults and children are conceptualized, and it is perhaps no surprise that parents in the global North are increasingly positioned as conduits for a ‘toxic’ adult culture. Indeed, recently, their role has been positioned as keeping children *apart* from those aspects of adult culture that are seen as negative, often perceived in racially and class inflected ways as “those other” children and families (Valentine 1996), and continually checking their own behaviour to avoid imposing their own problematic expectations upon their children (Bristow 2014).

These fundamental assumptions around both parenthood and childhood are now almost unremarkable in Euro-American settings, and are travelling globally: as we discuss below, international development projects spread Euro-centric notions of child and national development (Penn 2011). Indeed, we might argue that the presumption of children as, *de facto*, vulnerable and at risk is one of the most distinctive social constructions of childhood (and parenthood) today. While discourses (public and academic) such as this are not straightforward reflection of what goes on in family life, nor are they simply taken on board as they come into contact with very different constructions of childhood, they have fundamentally re-shaped ideas of the parent-child relationship, with extensive implications for individual subjectivities, families and indeed societies. Some of the papers in this special issue look empirical examples of that, whilst others focus more conceptually on what this means. In terms of an empirical investigation of subject formation, Patico makes this point in relation to food practices in the US and the way in which children are glossed into a uniform category of ‘liking’ sugary, starchy and processed foods by adults, observing that the question of ‘what do children like’ is intimately connected to ‘what are children like?’ By contrast, in looking comparatively at the impact of these discourses, Faircloth looks more conceptually at the effect of changing parenting cultures across families, in considering notions of social solidarity and parent, non-parent relationships in the politically distinct settings of Norway and the UK.

Recent scholarship in childhood studies has highlighted concurrent imaginaries of the active, creative, and constructing child (Cook 2019). Here we see expectations for children to be active in their own development: choice-making, self-accruing neoliberal subjects who are, by corollary, held responsible for their own fates (Kjorholt and Seland 2012, Rosen 2015). To borrow from Brown Rosier (2011), the problems children face – ranging from what is rhetorically referred to as ‘low school achievement’ to ‘social immobility’ – often morph into views of ‘the child’ as *the* problem or risk. Indeed, in considering the pressures placed on Singaporean school children to ‘succeed’ in Chiong’s paper (this issue), we suggest that a form of ‘intensive childhood’ runs parallel to Hays’ ‘intensive motherhood’. Here we point to the expectations that children will labour on themselves in schools, and often extracurricular activity, guided by the expert intuitions of developmental psychology and educationalists (see also Patico, this issue). While this is arguably part and parcel of capitalist schooling more

broadly, the emphasis on the production of responsabilised, 'flexible souls' (Fendler 2001) qua 'human capital', represents a particularised form in a neoliberal era.

Insights about the concurrent, complex and contradictory demands of childhood and parenting cultures, and their implications for relationships between adults and children, are necessarily gained through a relational rather than autonomous approach. This is the broader point we wish to draw attention to here. Collections like this offer an opportunity to think about adult-child relations differently, in ways which build on both fields, not simply by adding insights together, but through productively challenging the gaps and assumptions of each field. Benda and Pells' paper provides another excellent example: in looking at notions of the state 'as parent' in the Rwandan context, they reflect on the conceptual shortcomings of both parenting culture and childhood studies in understanding their empirical case study, thereby (re)invigorating debates about 'the state' and temporality as they bear on theorisations of adult-child relations. Indeed, the papers in this special issue demonstrate how such efforts towards relationality can complicate, or even reconfigure, these fields of study, not least – as we note in our editorial – by providing more expansive understandings of childhood and parenting culture studies which take into account children, parents, non-parents, the state, and capital.

#### Neoliberalisation and inequalities

One of the legacies of conceptual autonomy or categorical approaches to a field of study is the potential to slip into antagonistic positionings, e.g., between 'children' and 'adults', or 'parents' and 'non-parents' (Burman 2008, Rosen and Twamley 2018). Rosen and Suissa pick up on this theme in their paper, exploring discursive claims that being a parent gives one a unique entitlement to speak for the future, in ways which inevitably ends up undercutting other agents' relationship to futures (see also Faircloth, this issue).

The rising rhetorical attention to children in policy, or more precisely to 'investing in children', is another case in point (see Gillies, this issue). Such a focus has arisen in the context of neoliberalism, where human capital development is treated as *the* route out of individual and countrywide poverty, regional development, and even national dominance on a global stage (Penn 2010: , see also Gillies, this issue). Here, neo-colonial assumptions about desirable developmental trajectories for nations dovetail with hegemonic Western ideas about child development (Burman 2018, Gagen 2007). This is clearly a very uncomfortable position for any parent or child to be in: constantly self-regulating and under pressure to 'invest in the child' by 'parenting optimally' or being a self-maximizing child, and thereby held responsible when the promised successes do not materialise.

This hints at the instrumentalisation of adult-child relations, akin to what Stefan Ramaekers and Judith Suissa (2012) discuss in their work on parenthood, shifting it from something intimate between 'a' parent and 'a' child to abstractions such as 'the' parent and 'the' child. But there are more pernicious implications too: this has the capacity to screen out the other kinds of pulls on a family's time as they go about trying to be 'good' parents or 'good' children, understood to



be not only 'child-centred' and incessantly developing, but seemingly immune to broader forms of social stratification. In light of such concerns, parenting culture literature (along with family and feminist studies) has provided trenchant critiques of the ways such imperatives have the effect of re-traditionalising gendered divisions of labour, entrenching class inequalities, and individualising issues of social and economic justice (Wall 2010, Wolf 2011).

Often implied in such critiques, however, are that children are the *fortunate* recipients of parents' time, energy, and resources. Others more explicitly claim that children have become the *privileged* subjects of policy, with women 'out' and children 'in' as Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004: 166) put it. Our concern here is that whilst such critiques helpfully turn personal troubles to public matters they can simultaneously have the consequences of positioning 'overburdened' parents against 'privileged children', and naturalising childhood at the same time as contesting reified assumptions about 'good' parenthood (Rosen 2019). Similarly, work by scholars of intimacy and relationships point to the emergence of competing individual demands (or 'me time') as the most prominent framing for everyday family life in advanced capitalist countries (Giddens 1991, Illouz 2007). This antagonism is then one which becomes solved by practices such as 'love bombing', as a specialised and singular event, rather than through the quotidian, and even banal and messy, aspects of everyday life (Suissa and Ramaekers 2016).

Thus, there is also recognition that an intensive, 'child-centred' approach to parenting is not necessarily 'best' for either adults or children (Bristow 2014). But when childhood experience (positive or negative) is framed in the language of competing risks, this presents little scope for discussions about the kind of world we envisage for ourselves (where ourselves includes both children and adults, see Rosen and Suissa this issue), and how we might shape it. In staging a dialogue between parenting culture and childhood studies, we join the growing efforts to interrogate such antagonistic framings by considering both what this produces and what it obscures, as well as opening up other ways to theorise adult-child, adult-adult and child-child relations along more 'braided' lines (Newberry and Pace-Crosschild, this issue).

One way the papers in this special issue challenge antagonistic framings is by questioning the ways such tropes can wind up homogenising 'the adult' or 'the child', such that underpinning social relations (e.g., class, 'race', gender, generation, and power more generally) become opaque. Arzuk, in her review of Turkish media, argues that the parent-child relations increasingly depicted from the 1990s onwards were founded on a class-specific form of childhood, one which required intensive time and resources only available to middle class parents. The effects, she suggests, were that childhood became an exclusive status, with all other childhoods rendered deviant or unchildlike. Along similar lines, Patico (this issue) demonstrates that rooting a perceived 'immoderation' in food choices in childhood has enabled liberally-oriented middle class families in the United States to evade the class values embedded in such claims, thereby reproducing privileged compartments in relation to food (e.g., 'being a foodie' or choosing organic products).

In this sense, the papers refuse to accept adult-child relations as de-contextualised phenomenon. Read together, they suggest that circulations of childhood and parenting cultures need to be understood in relation to new and enduring forms of inequity and changing state-family-capital relations, including rising ethno-nationalism and neoliberalisation.

Certainly, neoliberalism is a central theme in many of the papers in the special issue, with a particular focus on responsabilisation. Countering the positioning of ‘overburdened’ parents against ‘privileged children’ by working across childhood and parenting culture studies, the papers demonstrate more complex and nuanced relationships within families. Whether the ‘intensive childhood’ evident in the Singaporean context (Chiong) or sharing the emotional and material labour of debt management in Chile (Vergara del Solar et al), it becomes clear that no neoliberal subjects – be they young or old – are immune from responsabilisation (although see Patino, this issue, for the way the childhood functions as an ‘imaginative contrast’ in a more hedonic relationship to food choices in the United States). This is not to suggest that responsabilisation affects everyone equally or that there aren’t very real antagonisms between adults and children, within families or as social groups. Instead, these papers refocus attention on to the processes whereby such antagonisms are produced, mediated, or transgressed.

In taking such a perspective, these papers also contribute to theorisations of neoliberalisation. They contest the notion that neoliberalism implies a simple shift from social responsibility (e.g., of the welfare state) to an *individualistic* contractual notion of responsibility. Instead, they note, with Cooper (2017: 24), the centrality of ‘the family’ and familial responsabilisation for neoliberalism or a “post-Keynesian capitalist order”. Cooper makes a convincing case that, in the United States, neoliberals sought to contain civil rights movements of the 1960s and the welfare state gains they had achieved. A neoliberal discourse ‘the family’ in ‘crisis’ presented family responsibility as a way to rationalise privatisation, and a shifting of the cost and labour of social reproduction to families. Arguably, the emergence of the ‘parenting apps’ described by Ramaekers and Hodgson (this issue) is one example of this highly individualised responsabilisation of social reproduction, re-imagined for an increasingly technologized, data-driven, globalised era.

Interestingly the original book *Parenting Culture Studies* (Lee et al 2014) did not engage with ‘neo-liberalism’ per se, in part as a reaction against the assumption that this implies a *retreat* of the state from family life, and devolvement of responsibilities of the welfare state onto families. In fact, for scholars of parenting culture, the opposite could be said to be true, such that the explicit formulation of ‘parenting’ as an object of policy making represents an ever greater entrenchment of state forces into intimate life (and arguably how many critics interpret the ‘neoliberal’ agenda of individualised responsabilisation in any case).

As the papers in this special issue make clear, neoliberalism does not represent a simple ‘refamilisation’, as is commonly suggested in discussions of its privatising impulses. Accordingly, the shift from social to family responsibility that Cooper discusses may more of a rhetorical than material shift. For instance, in the Chilean case discussed in Vergara del Solar et al’s paper,

neoliberalisation was driven through via the neo-colonial interventions of the ‘Chicago Boys’ (see Gillies, this issue) in partnership with Pinochet’s brutal dictatorship. This occurred in a context largely absent of state redistribution schemes typically associated with Keynesian welfarism, with social policy primarily directed at the urban working class despite a largely agrarian population (Draibe and Riesco 2007). In short, families – especially those from agrarian communities – experienced a continued familisation of responsibility, albeit within changing political-economic and governance conditions. Newberry and Pace-Crosschild’s (this issue) evocative photo essay speaks to complexities of ‘refamilisation’ within what has conventionally been understood as a liberal welfare regime. They address the impact of Canadian state colonialism which both forcibly separated indigenous families by placing children in residential schools at the same time as denying indigenous communities many of the rights and entitlements available to settlers from the Canadian welfare state.

While the state has retrenched or simply continued to be absent in relation to social provision, it has also intensified its intervention into the family. Neoliberal familisation often rhetorically incorporates non-normative family forms (Cooper 2017), as authors in this special issue demonstrate in relation to non-parents and children conceived through new reproductive technologies (see Faircloth) and extended families (Newberry and Pace-Crosschild). To this extent, whilst the *form* of contemporary families may be less of a concern for the neoliberal state, the *content* of their relationships, or what goes on within families, is ever more scrutinised and politicised. Certainly, the state is involved in the neoliberal remaking of families as we see across multiple contexts in this special issue, from Norway and the UK (Faircloth) to Rwanda (Benda and Pells) to Turkey (Arzuk). Nevertheless, familisation is not equally distributed. We see – for example – the ways that migrant families who are constituted as outsiders of the ethno-nation are both held responsible and denied the right to speak for the future (Rosen and Suissa, this issue), while class inequalities mean that working class families face greater challenges in sustaining and providing for themselves (Patino, Vergara del Solar et al).

The papers also complicate any easy child-adult antagonism by considering the shared or interdependent nature of human life, and the efforts that adults and children undertake to not only to make lives but make lives ‘worth living across generations’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014). As Gillies (this issue) puts it: ‘[The] lived and experienced interdependency is the last refuge from economic colonisation; it cannot be captured by the logic of capital and it never will.’ The papers in this SI offer a variety of hopeful impulses intended to move us away from the neoliberal frames of instrumentalization, reduction of action to cost-benefit analysis, responsabilisation, and competition at play in relationships between parents and children, and in adult-child relations more broadly. We take heart in the ethical reciprocity and care between parents and children in Chile (Vergara del Solar et al); renewed notions of social solidarity (Faircloth); and the power of everyday utopian thinking between generations to challenge inequities of today (Rosen and Suissa).

### Globalizing childhood and parenting cultures

Both fields of study have increasingly highlighted the globalizing aspects of childhood and parenting cultures, drawing attention to the ways that, in diverse global contexts, childhood is increasingly constituted as a time of playful, happy innocence (Bendo et al 2019) on the one hand and intense vulnerability on the other and to the ways ‘intensive motherhood’ is given meaning and life. As Hays (1996: 9) explains: ‘The ideas [of intensive motherhood] are certainly not followed in practice in every mother [in the US], but they are, implicitly or explicitly, understood as the *proper* approach to the raising of a child by the majority of mothers’. So an ideology of intensive parenting does not affect all parents equally – class, gender and geography have significant implications – and certainly not all parents today are ‘intensive parents’. However, it remains an important ‘cultural script’ or ‘ideal’ to which parents respond in negotiating their own practices, and much scholarship has shown how ‘intensive motherhood’ is acquiring a global significance as it diffuses and interacts with constructions of childhood (Faircloth et al 2013, Rosen and Twamley 2018).

In seeking to conceptualise globalizing cultures of childhood and parenthood, researchers are increasingly critical of depictions of local and global scales as distinct (e.g., as in local and global childhoods), rather than indivisible and mutually constitutive, as the slightly unwieldy portmanteau ‘glocal’ suggests. Perhaps the more important point to draw out for our purposes here, however, is the critique that the ‘global’ often acts as a stand in for hegemonic Western views that, with Hays, we might say serve as powerful normalizing forces in unequal geopolitical contexts. Care, a core aspect of parent-child relations, is a case in point. As Robert Ame and Afua Twum-Danso Imoh (2012: 191) suggest: ‘Southern childhoods and childrearing practices relating to feeding and play are pathologized, deemed as deficient and in need of “fixing”’. This is not to reject care provision for children but as a remedy for the alternative. Glossing this point can make the rise in “child protection institutions” (Gillis 2011) or intensive parenting in the capitalist North come to be seen as natural necessity rather than a manifestation of a particular social, political, and economic conjuncture. Yet, Rosen and Newberry (Newberry and Rosen 2019, Rosen and Newberry 2018) demonstrate that shifting forms of children’s social reproductive labour, whether as low cost labourers or ‘quality enhanced’ labour power, can be understood (in part at least) as ‘fixes’ for capital’s chronic crises rather than any essential nature of adults or children.

Such critiques also point to the conceptual shortcomings of theory and history embedded in Eurocentric thought. As Balagopalan (2019) argues convincingly, the global North is often used as the site of theory building, in effect masking specificity as universality, while the South acts as an exemplar of empirical difference, something we hope to avoid in this collection. To return to the example of ‘care’, a growing body of work on Southern childhoods highlights children’s active participation in caring labour, not only out of necessity, but because they are expected, and often want, to do so (Abebe 2007, Katz 2004, Robson 2004). Theorising on the basis of this empirical evidence highlights children have the capacity to care and often are involved in the multifaceted set of emotional, physical, and practical activities which go into making lives. More

fundamentally, these insights challenge any unidirectional notions of parent-child relations. While care needs may be differentiated across the life-course and context, children *and* adults (Sayer 2011) are existentially and potentially socially vulnerable, reliant on others for sustenance and survival. Indeed, as others have pointed out, the move to relational thinking we describe above, enables an epistemic de-centering of western liberal thought in order to both re-think and re-construct social theory (see, for example, Bhambra 2014: , on "connected sociologies"). As Vergara del Solar, Galeas, and Agoglia (this issue) demonstrate, in the context of rising indebtedness, Chilean children are neither unaware nor unaffected by the debts their parents incur to ensure the sustenance and care of the family. In response, they theorise care as a reciprocal act between parents and children. This involves intensive political and ethical reflexivity to both ensure material and emotional needs are met and to bolster a sense of being a 'good' parent or child in the context of pressures of a neo-liberal debt economy.

Balagopalan (2019) urges us to place temporality centrally in any conceptualisation of childhood (and we extend the point to parenting cultures), pointing specifically to the long *duree* of colonialism. (See Benda and Pells, Newberry and Pace-Crosschild in this issue who most directly take up this challenge in their discussion of colonialism's legacy and present). She also calls for 'integrating a more comparative analysis of the working of the state and transnational capital on the lives of marginalized populations of children across the world' (Hanson et al 2018: 276). It is here, in this gesture towards transnational and globalizing forces, that we believe some of the richest avenues of exploration lie for the dialogue between childhood and parenting culture studies. Indeed, taken as a whole, the papers in this special issue expose both continuities and differences in adult-child relations in a globalized age. We begin to get an idea of the ways that hegemonic ideas of parenthood and childhood emerge, circulate, shape, and generate resistances in different social and cultural contexts. For instance, we see the way that parenting apps operate across seemingly frictionless global spaces to remake the parent (and indeed the child) as at once de-personalised and stripped of any pedagogical dimension, ironically in a bid to optimise developmental outcomes for children (Ramaekers and Hodgson, this issue).

Reading the papers together also brings to the surface and challenges some of the assumptions of the two fields, for example that 'intensive parenting' has become the globalized ideal. As Benda and Pells demonstrate (this issue), contra European and North American neoliberal welfare regimes, parenting is being transformed and valorised in Rwanda in a very different manner. They argue that parenthood is embodied by the state, rather than by responsibilised neoliberal subjects. In figuring the 'state as parent', they argue, the Rwandan government utilizes tropes of benevolent authority in the social engineering of the post-genocide nation-state. By reading this paper alongside Chiong's (this issue) presentation of the 'caring' Singaporean state, and critiques of state retrenchment in many of the other contributions (e.g., Gillies), the hybrid and even contradictory aspects of childhood and parenting cultures in different contexts come into relief.

The insights from the papers certainly suggest the need for a closer and more refined inquiry into how adults and children navigate such contradictory pressures in the context of heterogeneous state-familial-capital relations. They raise questions, as Brannen (this issue) points out, about the seeming neutrality of the state in much contemporary parenting culture or childhood literature (especially in the realm of children's rights where the state is held as the duty bearer, a sort of benign arbitrator including of any rights violations it may be implicated in).

Many of the papers in this special issue – like those in the fields of study from which they emerge – take the nation-state as their unit of analysis. While recognising the necessity of focused study and careful contextualisation in order to counter critiques of the Euro-centric specificity masquerading in abstracted and universalist terms, we simultaneously recognise the problematic of methodological nationalism. National boundaries are social productions, generated by borders and bordering practices (Yuval-Davis et al 2017) including decisions about which families are 'our families' and therefore deserving of social protections and entitlements (as Rosen and Suissa discuss, this issue). In practice, such boundaries are regularly remade, transgressed, and used to control flows of ideas, policies, capital, people, and relationships.

We suggest, then, that a fruitful area for development indicated by the special issue is to take 'globalizing' or 'transnational' cultures of parenting and childhood as a starting point. This can provide new insights into mobilities of childhood and parenting ideologies by prompting investigation into the historical relations between spaces, political economic contexts, social networks, and power structures that make certain ideologies more dominant or allow them to interpellate their subjects. Likewise, this would allow for consideration of the ways that transgressions of borders – such as transnational families – both practically and theoretically complicate ideas about proximity, childhood sendentarium, and the nation-state (a utopian urge highlighted in the paper by Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

### Conclusion

This special issue takes forward the connections between childhood studies and parenting culture studies not only empirically but conceptually. In drawing attention to the similarities and differences in framings and meanings of parenting and childhood in complex societies, this kind of work articulates the need for a closer and more refined inquiry into the *ideologies* and *practices* which serve to maintain, reconfigure, and transform adult-child relations and the broader communities and societies they are part of. Together, these papers urge us to keep the multi-directional and transnational engagements which characterise adult-child relations in neoliberal times at the centre of scholarship, and to maintain hope in the possibility that such attention can also lead to improving the lives of children and adults.

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## Adult-Child relations in neoliberal times: Insights from a dialogue across childhood and parenting culture studies

The 'intensive mother' and the 'vulnerable and at-risk child' in need of protection are immediately recognisable tropes to scholars of childhood studies and parenting culture studies, as well as scholars of the family more broadly. ~~The social effects of these~~ These increasingly global imaginaries are readily apparent in policy, rhetoric, and everyday lives in sites ranging from health and education, to finance and household debt. These tropes function as global policy imperatives and professional measures of 'quality' provision, albeit that their possible attainment is highly stratified. Indeed, they are and sites of resistance-struggle and transgression, in contestations over imposed, desired, and complex subject positions and the social practices ~~which~~ that produce them. The impact of these tropes is neither straightforward nor assured, given the different historical legacies and socio-cultural, geo-political, and economic contexts in which they operate and their potential contradictions with ~~(Rosen and Twamley 2018)~~. diverse constructions of childhood and parenthood.

It is unsurprising then that the 'intensive mother' and the 'vulnerable child' have ~~They have also~~ been the subject of extensive deconstruction and critique. For instance, pParenting culture studies has traced the rise in intensive parenting to modernity's cultures of risk and responsabilisation, particularly as elaborated in European social theory (e.g., Beck 1992). Childhood studies has similarly pointed to the historically and geographically-specific construction of the vulnerable child, where 'descriptions' of middle-class childhoods in the global North become normalising 'prescriptions' for childhood everywhere (Burman 2017). ~~Researchers~~ They have argued that 'the child' remains one of the last bastions of essentialism in much social science research with detrimental effects for children's lives and our understandings of the sites and modes these are experienced/lived, whether in education, labour, families, or beyond.

It would seem self-evident then that there is much affinity between childhood and parenting culture studies, both in terms of objects of study and analytic insights. For, as we discuss further below, the social constitution of childhood, parenthood or adulthood more broadly and shifts therein necessarily means the (re)generation, subversion, or transformation of existing forms of adult-child relations. Yet, as we note in our editorial to this special issue, there has been very limited engagement between the two fields to date, a gap that the authors in this special issue seek to address. Working in parallel with ~~our~~ the editorial, which provides a more traditional overview of the contents of this special issue, this introductory article begins by -aims to ~~give~~ an overview of these-our fields of study ~~(childhood studies and parenting culture studies)~~ by placing them in dialogue. We do so as a basis for drawing out themes emerging from the special issue, in order to explore potential synergies and open broader debates, both within these respective fields, and beyond.<sup>‡</sup>

A central goal of this collection is to open up dialogue about adult-child relations geographically, as well as in relation to multi-disciplinary academic fields. Both fields have been critiqued for un-reflexive Anglo/Eurocentric starting points. They have been pressed to take

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into account the complex ways that tropes of parenthood and childhood travel globally (Faircloth et al 2013), to theorise from everyday lives in the global South (Balagopalan 2019), and to thereby de-colonise research practice. As Rabello de Castro- (2019) argues, this does not mean reading outwards from a taken-for-granted centre to periphery. Instead, this requires an approach of “de-linking” (Mignolo, 2007) from knowledge assumed to be valid everywhere’ (Rabello de Castro 2019: 9). We are persuaded that this simultaneously requires consideration of how various sites, practices and social relations are connected, fractured and differentially effected by global processes (Katz 2001, Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). As such, the articles in this special issue are not simply read as exemplars for our introductory article. First, we take seriously their individual conceptual ambitions. Second, we make an effort to read across them, considering what they – together – have to say about the making and re-making adult-child relations and how these are conceptualised.

We begin by outlining childhood and parenting culture studies, exploring the bifurcation of these academic fields. We point out that this is based on underlying assumptions of the monadic, Western liberal subject which (inadvertently) reifies categorical understandings of social groups and an antagonism between children and adults. In response, we make three key arguments. We suggest that the growing attention to relational conceptualisations allows for circulations of childhood and parenting cultures to be contextualised and grounded within new and enduring forms of inequity and changing state-family-capital relations. This complicates existing conceptualisations of neoliberalisation, we argue, including by highlighting the contradictory ways in which ‘the family’ is mobilised in varying ways to individualise, responsabilise, and stratify the labour of social reproduction. Finally, we draw attention to the need for further interrogation of the transnational nature of adult-child relations, from the ways that everyday lives cross national borders and to nuanced and historically embedded investigations of the (im)mobilities of childhood and parenting cultures.<sup>ii</sup>

~~(Cheney 2019)~~

#### Framing the dialogue: From conceptual autonomy to relationality

Over the past three decades childhood studies has come of age, albeit as a multidisciplinary field that is still ‘very much...in progress’ (Stryker and Yngvesson 2013: 304). Emerging in the 1980s as a challenge to the consignment of children to developmental psychology, paediatrics, and socialisation theory, childhood studies is premised on an understanding of children as social actors worthy of study in the ‘present tense’ (Mayall 2002: , see also Brannen, this issue), and indeed recognition as ‘human beings’ rather than as anticipatory ‘human becomings’ (Qvortrup 1994). Ontologically, scholarship in the field has sought to unsettle fixed notions of ‘the child’. An emphasis has been placed on interrogating the social constitution of childhood and, to a more limited extent (Punch 2019), to processes of ‘generating’ (Alanen 2011), or

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the ways that particular ~~bodies-people~~ are made into children and ascribed 'childish' characteristics and social positions to act from.

Relatedly, parenting culture studies, a nascent field of interdisciplinary scholarship, emerged from the observation that something 'has changed' in the way both being a parent and raising children is conceptualised, particularly in last 40 years (Lee et al 2014). Largely based on empirical work in Euro-American settings (but subsequently elsewhere) this work has, like childhood studies, been keen to move the framing of parent-child relationships beyond the developmental psychology model. In particular, it draws attention to the casual relationship between the emergence of this developmental paradigm and the understanding of 'parenting' as a much more complex task than it used to be in the past (Burman 2017, Macvarish 2016). In the face of dominant assumptions that what happens in infancy has life-long implications, it is easy to see why parenting is now routinely understood as a 'task' requiring expert guidance and supervision, notably for those in 'problem' families (Gillies 2011, 2005). To this end, parenting culture studies uses a social constructionist approach (Best 1993) to understand the emergence of the 'problem' of parenting, as understood at both micro and macro-levels as the source of, and solution to, a wide range of social issues. In a time where child-rearing has become mediated by a cultural narrative that provides parents with rules, albeit sometimes ambiguous ones, about how to realise and develop their 'skills' as parents, it is these 'rules' (and the categorical assumptions around adulthood and childhood, upon which they are based) which might be said to constitute 'parenting culture.'

A key stimulus for childhood studies was a critique of the ways that childhood often slips from view within social theory except as a trope (e.g., ~~with the figure of the child used to represent for the~~ innocence, threat, creativity or vulnerability ~~that the figure of the child can be used to represent~~) and the ways that children are often considered easily and effectively represented by adult proxies. Through such formulations, complex flesh and blood children disappear from view, shadowed by their figurative representation as future longings and anxieties, or nostalgia for ostensibly carefree and innocent pasts lost forever. In response to such concerns, many have implicitly taken up Barrie Thorne's (1987) proposal to grant childhood 'conceptual autonomy', liberating it from ~~the reduction of an assumed~~ 'society' ~~to qua~~ 'adult society' (Qvortrup 2011), with a concomitant centring of children's experiences and perspectives in scholarship.

Without paying attention to the ways those humans that we make into children (or indeed parents) experience the world from such socially structured positions, social theory and empirical research is fundamentally impoverished. However, as the 'relational turn' and its uptake in childhood studies highlights, 'conceptual autonomy' is problematic if not impossible (Rosen and Twamley 2018, Thomson and Baraitser 2018). The constitution of subjects and subjectivities, as well as power, injustice and exploitation, are relational phenomenon, both in intimate and structural senses. In terms of the former, children's lives are entangled with those

of adults, as contemporaries of social phenomenon and in potentially reciprocal relationships forged through common cause (Abebe 2007, Balagopalan 2019, Vitterbo 2012).

As Donati (2018: 433) puts it in conceptualising relational sociology more broadly: “Every social phenomenon arises from a relational context and generates another relational context.” By this he challenges substantialism, and instead suggests that society or social phenomenon *are* social relations, existing only because of ~~the~~ particular ~~set of~~ relations. In other words, phenomenon e.g., emerging from interdependences and interactions between situated actors and but which are based on broader assumptions and relations. In this sense, he pushes against the assumption that entities are bounded, given and *self*-sustaining, or that relationships are simply the result of *individual* interests or practices, as they appear in liberal theory. Instead, it becomes important to consider: “what is required to make that specific relationship exist” (436) between a parent and child, for instance, “its situated purpose, the means and norms to achieve it, and the latent value of the concrete relation”(436).

As such, childhood studies scholars are increasingly questioning the limits of conceptual autonomy. They note that this approach has constrained the field’s ability to speak with and to the concerns animating others (see also Brannen, this issue), including to bring insights from childhood studies to bear on understandings of contemporary processes of accumulation and dispossession, as well as movements for social justice. Indeed, such concerns have lead Spyrou (2017) to ask the provocative question: Is it ‘time to decenter childhood’ within childhood studies?

Whilst parenting culture studies did not emerge out of the same concerns as childhood studies, similar issues have been raised as to its potential towards categorical fetishism, separating and thereby reifying the subject that it seeks to interrogate (‘The Parent’) (Bristow 2014). Indeed, concerns with conceptual autonomy as an approach which fosters an intellectual separation of children from those with whom they live their lives rings true for scholars of parenting culture as well (albeit as an empirical phenomenon, rather than theoretical problematic). One of the earliest – and still most influential – observers of changes in parenting culture was the US American sociologist Sharon Hays, whose influence can be seen in the papers in this special issue. She coined the term ‘intensive motherhood’ to describe an ideology that urges mothers (because the language and practice of parenting is highly gendered) to ‘spend a tremendous amount of time, energy and money in raising their children’ (Hays 1996: x). According to this ideology, ‘the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive’ (ibid).

This ‘child-centred’ intensification does not emerge solely as a product of parental anxieties, but is itself founded on a fetishized view of children and childhood – one which constitutes children as foundationally vulnerable and ‘at risk’. At least part of the reason for this was the rapid growth (and cultural visibility) of developmental psychology in the 1970s. But it also chimes with work done by modernisation theorists around risk and risk-consciousness (Beck 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, Giddens 1991) such that the early period of life is cast,

and monetised by experts, as one which is subject to enormous risk (Burman 2017). In a 'neoliberal' era, discussed below, with its emphasis on self-management, 'good' parents (mothers) are child-centred, reflexive, informed consumers, able to 'account' for their parenting strategies to minimize any sort of risk to their children (Faircloth 2013, Wolf 2011). Here, parenting culture studies argues that, the flipside of the 'vulnerable child' is the 'risky parent' (Lee et al 2014) with the developmental paradigm casting parents as *a (or the)* determining force in how their children turn out (Dermott 2012).

Conceptually at least, this pushes the interests of family members apart ever further, instead of reflecting a more intimate, or relational ebb-and-flow of family life (Bristow 2014, Rosen and Twamley 2018: , see also Arzuk's article in this issue on the historical emergence and specificity of this in the Turkish context). This has important implications for the way care and socialisation relations between and among adults and children are conceptualized, and it is perhaps no surprise that parents in the global North are increasingly positioned as conduits for a 'toxic' adult culture. Indeed, recently, their role has been positioned as keeping children *apart* from those aspects of adult culture that are seen as negative, often perceived in racially and class inflected ways as "those other" children and families (Valentine 1996), and continually checking their own behaviour to avoid imposing their own problematic expectations upon their children (Bristow 2014).

These fundamental assumptions around both parenthood and childhood are now almost unremarkable in Euro-American settings, and are travelling globally: as we discuss below, international development projects spread Euro-centric notions of child and national development (Penn 2011). Indeed, we might argue that the presumption of children as, *de facto*, vulnerable and at risk is one of the most distinctive social constructions of childhood (and parenthood) today. While discourses (public and academic) such as this are not straightforward reflection of what goes on in family life, nor are they simply taken on board as they come into contact with very different constructions of childhood, they have fundamentally re-shaped ideas of the parent-child relationship, with extensive implications for individual subjectivities, families and indeed societies. Some of the papers in this special issue look empirical examples of that, whilst others focus more conceptually on what this means. In terms of an empirical investigation of subject formation, Patino makes this point in relation to food practices in the US and the way in which children are glossed into a uniform category of 'liking' sugary, starchy and processed foods by adults, observing that the question of 'what do children like' is intimately connected to 'what are children like?' By contrast, in looking comparatively at the impact of these discourses, Faircloth looks more conceptually at the effect of changing parenting cultures across families, in considering notions of social solidarity and parent, non-parent relationships in the politically distinct settings of Norway and the UK.

Recent scholarship in childhood studies has highlighted concurrent imaginaries of the active, creative, and constructing child (Cook 2019). Here we see expectations for children to be active in their own development: choice-making, self-accruing neoliberal subjects who are, by

corollary, held responsible for their own fates (Kjorholt and Seland 2012, Rosen 2015). To borrow from Brown Rosier (2011), the problems children face – ranging from what is rhetorically referred to as ‘low school achievement’ to ‘social immobility’ – often morph into views of ‘the child’ as *the* problem or risk. Indeed, in considering the pressures placed on Singaporean school children to ‘succeed’ in Chiong’s paper (this issue), we suggest that a form of ‘intensive childhood’ runs parallel to Hays’ ‘intensive motherhood’. Here we point to the expectations that children will labour on themselves in schools, and often extracurricular activity, guided by the expert intuitions of developmental psychology and educationalists (see also Patco, this issue). While this is arguably part and parcel of capitalist schooling more broadly, the emphasis on the production of responsabilised, ‘flexible souls’ (Fendler 2001) qua ‘human capital’, represents a particularised form in a neoliberal era.

Insights about the concurrent, complex and contradictory demands of childhood and parenting cultures, and their implications for relationships between adults and children, are necessarily gained through a relational rather than autonomous approach. This is the broader point we wish to draw attention to here. Collections like this offer an opportunity to think about adult-child relations differently, in ways which build on both fields, not simply by adding insights together, but through productively challenging the gaps and assumptions of each field. Benda and Pells’ paper provides another excellent example: in looking at notions of the state ‘as parent’ in the Rwandan context, they reflect on the conceptual shortcomings of both parenting culture and childhood studies in understanding their empirical case study, thereby (re)invigorating debates about ‘the state’ and temporality as they bear on theorisations of adult-child relations. Indeed, the papers in this special issue demonstrate how such efforts towards relationality can complicate, or even reconfigure, these fields of study, not least – as we note in our editorial – by providing more expansive understandings of childhood and parenting culture studies which take into account children, parents, ~~and non-parents, the state, and capital.~~ Benda and Pells’ paper provides another excellent example: in looking at notions of the state ‘as parent’ in the Rwandan context, they reflect on the conceptual shortcomings of both parenting culture and childhood studies in understanding their empirical case study, thereby (re)invigorating debates about ‘the state’ and temporality as they bear on theorisations of adult-child relations.

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#### Neoliberalisation and inequalities

One of the legacies of conceptual autonomy or categorical approaches to a field of study is the potential to slip into antagonistic positionings, e.g., between ‘children’ and ‘adults’, or ‘parents’ and ‘non-parents’ (Burman 2008, Rosen and Twamley 2018). Rosen and Suissa pick up on this theme in their paper, exploring discursive claims that being a parent gives one a unique entitlement to speak for the future, in ways which inevitably ends up undercutting other agents’ relationship to futures (see also Faircloth, this issue).

The rising rhetorical attention to children in policy, or more precisely to ‘investing in children’, is another case in point (see Gillies, this issue). Such a focus has arisen in the context of

neoliberalism, where human capital development is treated as *the* route out of individual and countrywide poverty, regional development, and even national dominance on a global stage (Penn 2010: , see also Gillies, this issue). Here, neo-colonial assumptions about desirable developmental trajectories for nations dovetail with hegemonic Western ideas about child development (Burman 2018, Gagen 2007). This is clearly a very uncomfortable position for any parent or child to be in: constantly self-regulating and under pressure to 'invest in the child' by 'parenting optimally' or being a self-maximizing child, and thereby held responsible when the promised successes do not materialise.

This hints at the instrumentalisation of adult-child relations, akin to what Stefan Ramaekers and Judith Suissa (2012) discuss in their work on parenthood, shifting it from something intimate between 'a' parent and 'a' child to abstractions such as 'the' parent and 'the' child. But there are more pernicious implications too: this has the capacity to screen out the other kinds of pulls on a family's time as they go about trying to be 'good' parents or 'good' children, understood to be not only 'child-centred' and incessantly developing, but seemingly immune to broader forms of social stratification. In light of such concerns, parenting culture literature (along with family and feminist studies) has provided trenchant critiques of the ways such imperatives have the effect of re-traditionalising gendered divisions of labour, entrenching class inequalities, and individualising issues of social and economic justice (Wall 2010, Wolf 2011).

Often implied in such critiques, however, are that children are the *fortunate* recipients of parents' time, energy, and resources. Others more explicitly claim that children have become the *privileged* subjects of policy, with women 'out' and children 'in' as Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004: 166) put it. Our concern here is that whilst such critiques helpfully turn personal troubles to public matters they can simultaneously have the consequences of positioning 'overburdened' parents against 'privileged children', and naturalising childhood at the same time as contesting reified assumptions about 'good' parenthood (Rosen 2019). Similarly, work by scholars of intimacy and relationships point to the emergence of competing individual demands (or 'me time') as the most prominent framing for everyday family life [in advanced capitalist countries](#) (Giddens 1991, Illouz 2007). This antagonism is then one which becomes solved by practices such as 'love bombing', as a specialised and singular event, rather than through the quotidian, and even banal and messy, aspects of everyday life (Suissa and Ramaekers 2016).

Thus, there is also recognition that an intensive, 'child-centred' approach to parenting is not necessarily 'best' for either adults or children (Bristow 2014). But when childhood experience (positive or negative) is framed in the language of competing risks, this presents little scope for discussions about the kind of world we envisage for ourselves (where ourselves includes both children and adults, see Rosen and Suissa this issue), and how we might shape it. In staging a dialogue between parenting culture and childhood studies, we join the growing efforts to interrogate such antagonistic framings by considering both what this produces and what it



obscures, as well as opening up other ways to theorise adult-child, adult-adult and child-child relations along more 'braided' lines (Newberry and Pace-Crosschild, this issue).

One way the papers in this special issue challenge antagonistic framings is by questioning the ways such tropes can wind up homogenising 'the adult' or 'the child', such that underpinning social relations (e.g., class, 'race', gender, generation, and power more generally) become opaque. Arzuk, in her review of Turkish media, argues that the parent-child relations increasingly depicted from the 1990s onwards were founded on a class-specific form of childhood—e.g., one which required intensive time and resources only available to middle class parents. The effects, she suggests, were that childhood became an exclusive status, with all other childhoods rendered deviant or unchildlike. ~~Such efforts are also central to. Along similar lines, Patico (this issue)'s argument, where she demonstrates the way that~~ rooting a perceived 'immoderation' in food choices in childhood ~~has~~ enabled liberally-oriented middle class families ~~in the United States~~ to evade the class values embedded in such claims, ~~thereby~~ reproducing privileged compartments in relation to food (e.g., 'being a foodie' or choosing organic products).

In this sense, the papers refuse to accept adult-child relations as de-contextualised phenomenon. Read together, they suggest that circulations of childhood and parenting cultures need to be understood in relation to new and enduring forms of inequity and changing state-family-capital relations, including rising ethno-nationalism and neoliberalisation.

Certainly, neoliberalism is a central theme in many of the papers in the special issue, with a particular focus on responsabilisation. Countering the positioning of 'overburdened' parents against 'privileged children' by working across childhood and parenting culture studies, the papers demonstrate more complex and nuanced relationships within families. Whether the 'intensive childhood' evident in the Singaporean context (Chiong) or sharing the emotional and material labour of debt management in Chile (Vergara del Solar et al), it becomes clear that no neoliberal subjects – be they young or old – are immune from responsabilisation (although see Patico, this issue, for the way the childhood functions as an 'imaginative contrast' in a more hedonic relationship to food choices in the United States). This is not to suggest that ~~responsibilisation affects everyone equally or that~~ there aren't very real antagonisms between adults and children, within families or as social groups. ~~Instead, these papers, but to~~ refocus attention on to the processes whereby such antagonisms are produced, mediated, or transgressed.

In taking such a perspective, these papers also contribute to theorisations of neoliberalisation. They contest the notion that neoliberalism implies a simple shift from social responsibility (e.g., of the welfare state) to an *individualistic* contractual notion of responsibility. Instead, they note, with Cooper (2017: 24), the centrality of 'the family' and familial responsabilisation for neoliberalism or a "post-Keynesian capitalist order". Cooper makes a convincing case that, in the United States, neoliberals ~~wanted-sought~~ to contain civil rights movements of the 1960s, and the welfare state gains they had achieved. ~~They~~ A neoliberal discourse 'the family' in

~~mobilised a 'crisis' of 'the family' perpetuating discourses presented of 'family values' and family responsibility as a ways to rationalise privatisation, and a the shifting of the cost and labour of social reproduction to families. Arguably, the emergence of the 'parenting apps' described by Ramaekers and Hodgson (this issue) is one example of this highly individualised responsabilisation of social reproduction, re-imagined for an increasingly technologized, data-driven, globalised era.~~

Interestingly the original book *Parenting Culture Studies* (Lee et al 2014) did not engage with 'neo-liberalism' per se, in part as a reaction against the assumption that this implies a *retreat* of the state from family life, and devolvement of responsibilities of the welfare state onto families. In fact, for scholars of parenting culture, the opposite could be said to be true, such that the explicit formulation of 'parenting' as an object of policy making represents an ever greater entrenchment of state forces into intimate life (and arguably how many critics interpret the 'neoliberal' agenda of individualised responsabilisation in any case).

~~Indeed, A~~ as the papers in this special issue make clear, neoliberalism does not represent a simple 'refamilisation', as is commonly suggested in discussions of its privatising impulses. ~~As such, t~~Accordingly, the shift from social to family responsibility that Cooper discusses may more of a rhetorical ~~shift~~ than material shift. For instance, in the Chilean case discussed in Vergara del Solar et al's paper, neoliberalisation was driven through via the neo-colonial interventions of the 'Chicago Boys' (see Gillies, this issue) in partnership with Pinochet's brutal dictatorship. This occurred in a context largely absent of state redistribution schemes typically associated with Keynesian welfarism, with social policy primarily directed at the urban working class despite a largely agrarian population (Draibe and Riesco 2007). In short, families – especially those from agrarian communities – experienced a continued familisation of responsibility, albeit within changing political-economic and governance conditions. Newberry and Pace-Crosschild's (this issue) evocative photo essay speaks to complexities of 'refamilisation' within what has conventionally been understood as a liberal welfare regime. They address the impact of Canadian state colonialism which both forcibly separated indigenous families by placing children in residential schools at the same time as denying indigenous communities many of the rights and entitlements available to settlers from the Canadian welfare state.

~~At the same time that~~While the state has retrenched (or simply continued to be absent in relation to social provision), it has also intensified sd its intervention into the family. Neoliberal familisation often rhetorically incorporates non-normative family forms (Cooper 2017) ~~including~~, as authors in this special issue demonstrate in relation to non-parents and children conceived through new reproductive technologies (see Faircloth) and extended families (Newberry and Pace-Crosschild). To this extent, whilst the *form* of contemporary families may be less of a concern for the neoliberal state, the *content* of their relationships, or what goes on within families, is ever more scrutinised and politicised. Certainly, the state is involved in the neoliberal remaking of families as we see across multiple contexts in this special issue, from Norway and the UK (Faircloth) to Rwanda (Benda and Pells) to Turkey (Arzuk). Nevertheless, familisation is not equally distributed, ~~particularly for non-normative families.~~ So wWe see – for

example – the ways that migrant families who are constituted as outsiders of the ethno-nation are both held responsible and denied the right to speak for the future (Rosen and Suissa, this issue), while class inequalities mean that working class families face greater challenges in sustaining and providing for themselves (Patino, Vergara del Solar et al).

The papers also complicate any easy child-~~vs.~~ adult antagonism by considering the shared or interdependent nature of human life, and the efforts that adults and children undertake to not only to make lives but make lives ‘worth living across generations’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014). As Gillies puts it, in her Open Space commentary (this issue): puts it: ‘[The] lived and experienced interdependency is the last refuge from economic colonisation; it cannot be captured by the logic of capital and it never will.’ These papers in this SI offer a variety of hopeful impulses intended to move us away from the neoliberal frames of instrumentalization, reduction of action to cost-benefit analysis, responsabilisation, and competition at play in relationships between parents and children, and in adult-child relations more broadly. We take heart in the ethical reciprocity and care between parents and children in Chile (Vergara del Solar et al); renewed notions of social solidarity (Faircloth); and the power of everyday utopian thinking between generations to challenge inequities of today (Rosen and Suissa).

#### Globalizing childhood and parenting cultures

Both fields of study have increasingly highlighted the globalizing aspects of childhood and parenting cultures, drawing attention to the ways that, in diverse global contexts, childhood is increasingly constituted as a time of playful, happy innocence (Bendo et al 2019) on the one hand and intense vulnerability on the other and to the ways ‘intensive motherhood’ is given meaning and life. As Hays (1996: 9) explains: ‘The ideas [of intensive motherhood] are certainly not followed in practice in every mother [in the US], but they are, implicitly or explicitly, understood as the *proper* approach to the raising of a child by the majority of mothers’. So an ideology of intensive parenting does not affect all parents equally – class, gender and geography have significant implications – and certainly not all parents today are ‘intensive parents’. However, it remains an important ‘cultural script’ or ‘ideal’ to which parents respond in negotiating their own practices, and much scholarship has shown how they ‘intensive motherhood’ is are currently acquiring a global significance as they it diffuses and interacts with constructions of childhood (Faircloth et al 2013, Rosen and Twamley 2018).

In seeking to conceptualise globalizing cultures of childhood and parenthood, researchers are increasingly critical of depictions of local and global scales as distinct (e.g., as in local and global childhoods), rather than indivisible and mutually constitutive, as the slightly unwieldy portmanteau ‘glocal’ suggests. Perhaps the more important point to draw out for our purposes here, however, is the critique that the ‘global’ often acts as a stand in for hegemonic Western views that, with Hays, we might say serve as powerful normalizing forces in unequal geo-political contexts. Care, a core aspect of parent-child relations, is a case in point. To borrow

~~from Burman (2017), 'descriptions' of the care of children by adults based on essentialised ideas about children's fundamental dependence which have arisen in the capitalist North become 'prescriptions' for normal, even 'good', childhoods. Indeed, one result, As~~ Robert Ame and Afua Twum-Danso Imoh (2012: 191) suggest, ~~is that:~~ 'Southern childhoods and childrearing practices relating to feeding and play are pathologized, deemed as deficient and in need of "fixing"'. This is not to reject care provision for children but as a remedy for the alternative. Glossing this point can make the rise in "child protection institutions" (Gillis 2011) or intensive parenting in the capitalist North come to be seen as natural necessity rather than a manifestation of a particular social, political, and economic conjuncture. Yet, Rosen and Newberry (Newberry and Rosen 2019, Rosen and Newberry 2018) demonstrate that shifting forms of children's social reproductive labour, whether as ~~cheap-low cost~~ labourers or 'quality enhanced' labour power, can be understood (in part at least) as 'fixes' for capital's chronic crises rather than any essential nature of adults or children.

Such critiques also point to the conceptual shortcomings of theory and history embedded in Eurocentric thought. As Balagopalan (2019) argues convincingly, the global North is often used as the site of theory building, in effect masking specificity as universality, while the South acts as an exemplar of empirical difference, something we hope to avoid in this collection. To return to the example of 'care', a growing body of work on Southern childhoods highlights children's active participation in caring labour, not only out of necessity, but because they are expected, and often want, to do so (Abebe 2007, Katz 2004, Robson 2004). Theorising on the basis of this empirical evidence highlights children have the capacity to care and often are involved in the multifaceted set of emotional, physical, and practical activities which go into making lives. More fundamentally, these insights challenge any unidirectional notions of parent-child relations. While care needs may be differentiated across the life-course and context, children *and* adults (Sayer 2011) are existentially and potentially socially vulnerable, reliant on others for sustenance and survival. Indeed, as others have pointed out, the move to relational thinking we describe above, enables an epistemic de-centering of western liberal thought in order to both re-think and re-construct social theory (see, for example, Bhambra 2014: , on "connected sociologies"). As Vergara del Solar, Galeas, and Agoglia ~~demonstrate~~ (this issue), ~~demonstrate~~, in the context of rising indebtedness, Chilean children are neither unaware nor unaffected by the debts their parents incur to ensure the sustenance and care of the family. In response, they theorise care as a reciprocal act between parents and children. This involves intensive political and ethical reflexivity to both ensure material and emotional needs are met and to bolster a sense of being a 'good' parent or child in the context of pressures of a neo-liberal debt economy.

Balagopalan (2019) urges us to place temporality centrally in any conceptualisation of childhood (and we extend the point to parenting cultures), pointing specifically to the long *duree* of colonialism. (See Benda and Pells, Newberry and Pace-Crosschild in this issue who most directly take up this challenge in their discussion of colonialism's legacy and present). She also calls for 'integrating a more comparative analysis of the working of the state and

transnational capital on the lives of marginalized populations of children across the world' (Hanson et al 2018: 276). It is here, in this gesture towards transnational and globalizing forces, that we believe some of the richest avenues of exploration lie for the dialogue between childhood and parenting culture studies. Indeed, taken as a whole, the papers in this special issue expose both continuities and differences in adult-child relations in a globalized age. We begin to get an idea of the ways that hegemonic ideas of parenthood and childhood emerge, circulate, shape, and generate resistances in different social and cultural contexts. For instance, we see the way that parenting apps operate across seemingly frictionless global spaces to remake the parent (and indeed the child) as at once de-personalised and stripped of any pedagogical dimension, ironically in a bid to optimise developmental outcomes for children (Ramaekers and Hodgson, this issue).

Reading the papers together also brings to the surface and challenges some of the assumptions of the two fields, for example that 'intensive parenting' has become the globalized ideal. As Benda and Pells demonstrate (this issue), contra European and North American neoliberal welfare regimes, parenting is being transformed and valorised in Rwanda in a very different manner. They argue that parenthood is embodied by the state, rather than by responsabilised neoliberal subjects. In figuring the 'state as parent', they argue, the Rwandan government utilizes tropes of benevolent authority in the social engineering of the post-genocide nation-state. By reading this paper alongside Chiong's (this issue) presentation of the 'caring' Singaporean state, and critiques of state retrenchment in many of the other contributions (e.g., Gillies), the hybrid and even contradictory aspects of childhood and parenting cultures in different contexts come into relief.

The insights from the papers certainly suggest the need for a closer and more refined inquiry into how adults and children navigate such contradictory pressures in the context of heterogeneous state-familial-capital relations. They raise questions, as Brannen (this issue) points out, about the seeming neutrality of the state in much contemporary parenting culture or childhood literature (especially in the realm of children's rights where the state is held as the duty bearer, a sort of benign arbitrator including of any rights violations it may be implicated in).

Indeed, many of the papers in this special issue – like those in the fields of study from which they emerge – take the nation-state as their unit of analysis. While recognising the necessity of focused study and careful contextualisation in order to counter critiques of the Euro-centric specificity masquerading in abstracted and universalist terms, we simultaneously recognise the problematic of methodological nationalism. National boundaries are social productions, generated by borders and bordering practices (Yuval-Davis et al 2017) including decisions about which families are 'our families' and therefore deserving of social protections and entitlements (as Rosen and Suissa discuss, this issue). In practice, such boundaries are regularly remade, transgressed, and used to control flows of ideas, policies, capital, people, and relationships.

We suggest, then, that a fruitful area for development indicated by the special issue is to take 'globalizing' or 'transnational' cultures of parenting and childhood as a starting point. This can provide new insights into mobilities of childhood and parenting ideologies by prompting investigation into the historical relations between spaces, political economic contexts, social networks, and power structures that make certain ideologies more dominant or allow them to interpellate their subjects. Likewise, this would allow for consideration of the ways that transgressions of borders – such as transnational families – both practically and theoretically complicate ideas about proximity, childhood sedentarism, and the nation-state (a utopian urge highlighted in the paper by Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

#### Conclusion

This special issue takes forward the connections between childhood studies and parenting culture studies not only empirically but conceptually. In drawing attention to the similarities and differences in framings and meanings of parenting and childhood in complex societies, this kind of work articulates the need for a closer and more refined inquiry into the *ideologies* and *practices* which serve to maintain, reconfigure, and transform adult-child relations and the broader communities and societies they are part of. Together, these papers urge us to keep the multi-directional and transnational engagements which characterise adult-child relations in neoliberal times at the centre of scholarship, and to maintain hope in the possibility that such attention can also lead to improving the lives of children and adults.

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