

Ideological Constructions of Childhood

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical conceptualisation of children and childhood in the social sciences has traditionally been aligned to developmentalism and socialisation theory. It is essentially this theoretical orientation that has spawned contemporary social discourses on children and childhood. Within this framework, children are typically perceived as immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial and acultural and have consequently contributed to the social and political marginalisation of children. Recent theorists have shown, through a process of deconstructing dominant scientific discourses on childhood, how the concept functions ideologically to establish taken-for-granted meanings about children. The present study is attempting to explore the ways in which children themselves construct and mobilise meanings of childhood. Using the social constructionist theoretical framework as a point of departure, the primary aim of the study is to explore the extent to which the meanings that children assign to 'childhood' are ideologically configured. More specifically, using the concept of well-being as a hermeneutic key, the study examines how children use specific discursive resources and repertoires to assign meaning to 'childhood'. It is essentially offering an ideological analysis through an elucidation of the existing power relations between children and society and how these relations are perpetuated and manifested in children's discourses. At the methodological level, the study is premised on working from the perspectives of children, thereby advancing a child participation framework. Key epistemological and methodological questions are explored with specific reference to the role of the child participation model as the methodological point of departure. A qualitative methodological approach is followed using focus groups as the data collection method. A series of focus groups was conducted with 56 thirteen year old children, from urban and rural geographical locations in the Western Cape. Thompson's (1990) depth hermeneutics, which provides a critical and systematic interpretive framework for the analysis of ideological constructions, was utilised within a discourse analysis framework to analyze and interpret the findings. The key finding of the study was that the meanings that children assign to childhood are ideologically configured. The essence of this configuration is adult society's mobilization and control of the meanings of childhood, which functions to maintain relations of domination. The outcome of this on children's meaning assignation and constructions of childhood is characterized by a consensus/contestation dichotomy as

children appear to both accept and resist the ideology. This emerges at the intrapersonal level (within the consciousness of children), the interpersonal level (between children) and societal level (between children and adult society). The study concludes by advancing the notion that childhood should be conceived of as an ideological configured construction, and not merely as a discursive construction, functioning within various social contexts. Thus, the meanings of childhood, whether constructed by, or present in discourses, cannot be independent from the ideologically configured social, historical and material structures. It is believed that this theoretical maneuver will bring theories of childhood into better alignment with practical actions resulting in opportunities for intervention, services, monitoring and research initiatives, as well as policy development and implementation, aimed at improving child and youth wellness.



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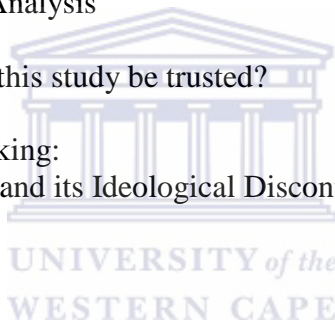
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Declaration

I declare that *Ideological Constructions of Childhood* is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references



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Dedication

To Layla, Mom and Dad



CHAPTER ONE: PROLOGUE

1.1 Background

The decades following the International Year of the Child in 1979, gave rise to considerable progress towards the improvement of children's lives. Ethical energy culminated into political commitment with the advancement of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. The near universal ratification of the UNCRC is testimony to the prevailing political will. National Plans of Action for children, developed by signatory countries, has advanced strategies for improved budgetary allocations, policy formulation and services for children. Internationally, some progress has also been made in the fields of child health, nutrition, education and social services. These developments have been advanced by an intensification of advocacy for children, most notably from civic organisations and the academic sector who aggrandised the political and social debate on children and childhood (Knutsson, 1997; September, 2002).

Despite these positive trends, the effects on the dominant discourses in disciplines such as the social sciences, economics and politics have been largely inconsequential (Knutsson, 1997; September, 2002). In addition, children remain socially and politically marginalised, a feature that is especially common in developing countries. Appended with poverty as the universal socio-economic reality, the well-being of children in these environments have been steadily declining. Commentators attribute these shortcomings to the dearth of relevant data on children (see e.g. Dawes, Bray & van der Merwe, 2007; Qvortrup, 1994, 1997; September, 2002) as well as the pervasive theoretical weaknesses that characterise

research on children and childhood (see e.g. James & Prout, 1997; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005; Knutsson, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994).

Qvortrup (1997) contends that children have been conceptually and numerically marginalised. He bases his contention on the absence of children both in conventional social statistics as well as other forms of social accounting. This lack of systematic approaches to understand childhood as a factor of social analysis, has led Qvortrup (1997) to sanction for providing children a voice at the aggregate level. This, he believes, will advance the elucidation of the life conditions of children as a population group. Commenting from a South African perspective, September (2002) believes that it is the lack of child¹ specific data that has been a significant variable in the exclusion of children in political, social and economic discourse. She contends that data and research that exists is relatively fragmented and largely obtained through secondary processes. Subsequently, the generation of knowledge on children's rights and well-being is under-resourced which impacts negatively on the development and implementation of effective policies and services for children (September, 2002). September's (2002) comments are apposite if one considers South Africa's *Children in 2001* report to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which reveals huge gaps in national and regional data on children.

However, there has been some improvement. In South Africa, regular General Household Surveys (Statistics South Africa), the Demographic and Health Survey (Department of Health) and the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (Medical Research

¹ In the context of this study, a 'child' will refer to any person between the ages of 0 – 18 as defined in the South African Constitution (1996), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005).

Council) amongst other national surveys, have made aggregate data on children and youth available. The Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town produces an annual publication, the *South African Child Gauge*, that collates available data on children and provides a good indication of the state of South Africa's children.

Theoretical weakness, as the second point of reference, contributed to what Qvortrup (1997) has termed the "invisibility of children". The traditional theoretical conceptualisation of children and childhood in the social sciences, has been aligned to developmentalism, i.e. natural maturation and socialisation theory (Jenks, 2005; Shildkrou, as cited in Prout & James, 1997) and has subsequently been the key elements in mainstream theories on children and childhood. Some researchers have adopted the practice of integrating the two approaches. Guelen (as cited in Alanen, 1988) and Alanen (1988) have demonstrated the inadequacy of this. Prout and James (1997) further argue that these theories were largely the result of uncritical absorption of positivist developmental psychology, constructed around the dual assumptions of naturalness and universality. The outcome of these dominant theories perpetuates everyday and scientific discourses of children and childhood. Walkerdine (1984) laments that this has created a conceptual framework outside which, society in general, cannot think. Similar sentiments are espoused by Qvortrup (2007) who points to the resulting 'conceptual homelessness' of childhood and more radically by Ingleby (1985) who coins the term 'psy complex' to explain the state's hegemonic use of psychological technology to mediate children's induction of culture and to guide their thinking, behaviour and development. From within this framework, set in place by scientific psychological and socialisation theory, children are typically perceived as immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial,

acultural (Lull, 1991; Mackay, 1973, as cited in Prout & James, 1997) as well as passive objects (Alanen, 1988), 'not yet's' and 'human becomings' (Qvortrup, 1994).

It is essentially this traditional theoretical orientation that has spawned contemporary social discourses on children. Recent theorists (see e.g. James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 2005) have shown, through a process of deconstruction, how scientific discourses have contributed to the establishment of taken-for-granted meanings about childhood. The present study, working from the perspectives of children, is essentially attempting to contribute to its reconstruction. Key epistemological and methodological questions are explored with specific reference to the role of social constructionism and the child participation framework. Consequently, the study envisages engaging at the epistemological level (*social constructionism*), with an underlying aim of *deconstructing* childhood (theoretical level), whilst advocating for the perspectives of children at the methodological level (*reconstruction*).

1.2 The Socio-Political Landscape of Children

1.2.1 Overview of the International Status

While there has been active public and political interest in the state and well-being of children since the early decades of the previous century, it only formally emerged in the political arena in 1979, spearheaded by UNICEF in its publication of the State of the World's Children Report. These reports were characterised by an analysis of basic indicators measuring the well-being and development of children. Ben-Arieh (1996) believes that these annual reviews were instrumental in creating an

international awareness of the need for the effective monitoring of children. Global interest in children's well-being increased immensely throughout the eighties culminating in the World Summit on Children in 1990. It was at this international gathering that countries formally committed to the development and protection of the world's children. The Summit was guided by the principle of a 'First Call for Children' declaring the highest political commitment to ensure that the essential needs of children are given priority.

The Summit is regarded as the first step in the global implementation of the UNCRC. The UNCRC, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 20 November 1989, and came into force on the 2nd September 1990, "contains a comprehensive set of international legal norms for the protection and well-being of children" (UNICEF: First Call for Children, 1990, p. 13). A ten-point plan of action was adopted focussing specific commitments on various critical domains of well-being.

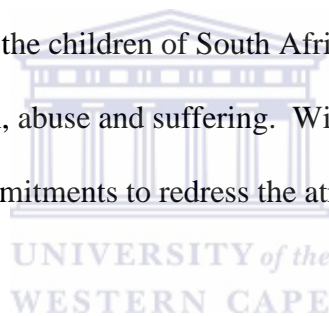
The implementation of this plan of action required specific States to adopt national plans of action. States were urged to encourage all government structures, NGOs and civil society to take responsibility for preparing the national plan of action. This would require the re-evaluation and prioritization of programmes, policies and budgets to comply with the national and universal action plan (UNICEF, First Call for Children, 1990).

The success of the World Summit for Children can be measured by the significant political priority afforded to children demonstrated by 192 countries ratifying,

acceding to, or signing the Convention and 155 countries preparing national programmes of action (UNICEF, A World Fit for Children, 2002). In September 2001, the General Assembly on Children convened a Special Session on Children wherein participating States reaffirmed their commitment to the Declaration and plan of action of the World Summit for Children. While many tangible results were reported over the past decade, critical challenges still remain which include malnutrition, AIDS, poverty, child labour, child trafficking, childhood disease and lack of education.

1.2.2 Overview of the status of South Africa's children

Under the Apartheid regime, the children of South Africa have a long history of political violence, oppression, abuse and suffering. With the advent of democracy in 1994 came a series of commitments to redress the atrocities that children had experienced in the past.



Former President Mandela made the first of these commitments, when he pledged that the plight of children would be prioritised. This was followed by a commitment to the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for children. A year later, on the 16th of June 1995, a significant landmark was reached for children's rights in South Africa, when the president ratified the UNCRC. This step placed the needs of children as paramount within all development strategies of the government. This is clearly reflected in Section 28 of the Bill of Rights of South Africa's Constitution which guarantees children's socio-economic rights as well as protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect. Also, in 2000, South Africa ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

The National Programme of Action (NPA), co-ordinated by the Office on the Rights of the Child, was put in place to carry out the above commitments. According to the Office on the Rights of the Child, the National Programme of Action “provides a holistic framework in which all government departments put children’s issues on their agendas. It provides a vehicle for co-ordinated action between NGOs, government and child related structures” (2001, p. 21). The ratification and legislative advancement of child specific instruments culminated in the development of the Children’s Act (No. 38 of 2005), the associated Children’s Amendment Act (No. 41 of 2007) as well as the recently promulgated Child Justice Act (2008).

However, while the will and commitment of civic and government institutions have advanced social transformation and legislative frameworks, the benefits have not reached all children and their state and well-being remains adverse (Barbarin, 2003). Even though the South African government has initiated a number of programmes to alleviate the legacy of social inequality and deprivation for children, recent statistics posit a grave situation with regard to poverty, access to primary health care services, safety and education.

The General Household Survey (2007) indicates that there are 18.3 million children in South Africa which constitutes nearly 40% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2008, as cited in Pendlebury, Lake & Smith, 2009). According to the World Health Organisation the infant mortality rate and the under-five mortality rate are key indicators of the level of child health in a country, and refer to the number of children per thousand live births who die before the age of one and five respectively. In South Africa the infant mortality rate is an alarming 59 deaths per 1000 live births

while the under-five mortality rate is even worse, at 95 deaths per 1000 live births (Bradshaw et al., 2004). A high proportion of children grow up in poverty with a lack of basic necessities such as proper housing, food and water. The General Household Survey (2007) indicates that 67.7% of children are living in households characterised by income poverty, i.e. households with a per monthly capita income of less than R350 (Statistics South Africa, 2008, as cited in Pendlebury et al., 2009). Approximately 40% of children are living without basic sanitation, only 37.3% have access to drinking water at their site of residence and 31.7% are living in informal housing (Statistics South Africa, 2008 as cited in Pendlebury et al., 2009). Access to health services is poor and children are enduring the brunt of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. AIDS accounts for 40% of deaths for children under the age of five years while the 30% is accounted for by preventable diseases of poverty (Bradshaw et al., 2004). Along with these economic and material hardships, children are significantly affected by various forms of violence and crime (Barbarin, 2003).

Practitioners locate the genesis of the problem in the roll-out and implementation of services for children. In other words, the practical realisation of the legislative frameworks needs to be concretised in implementation and service delivery initiatives. However, one cannot deliberate on the state of children independently from the cultural, political and pervasive socio-economic conditions of the broader society of which the children are part. Therefore, the state of children in South Africa is to a large extent consistent with the general socio-economic conditions. Of course, in South Africa, huge disparities exist with regard to these socio-economic conditions based to a large extent on past political race and class classifications.

This resonates with Coles (1986) who believes that the prevailing political reality is a child's everyday psychology.

This prevailing diversity adds a considerable level of complexity to understanding the well-being and quality of life of children but also has profound effects on how childhood is theoretically conceptualised. Therefore, regardless of whether one subscribes to the traditional notion of childhood as a generational period in life, a set of practices, a relational category, a social construction or a permanent structural feature of society, the diverse nature of childhood affects the way childhood is conceptualised and theorised. Noting the diversity, theorists such as Jenks (2004) and Frønes (1993) argue that research should focus on 'childhoods' rather than the unitary 'childhood'. However, while there is consensus that childhood is constituted by the prevailing socio-economic, political and cultural factors (Qvortrup, 2007), there is less agreement about what childhood actually is. Indeed it is to a large extent because of the proliferation of 'childhoods' that a consensual definition or an agreement about the meanings of childhood is not forthcoming.

Generally the law defines childhood as a period between the ages of 0 and 18 years, ostensibly taking its cue from the tendency of the social sciences to naturalise childhood. This naturalisation is especially deeply rooted in psychology, where childhood is conceptualised in terms of biological or cognitive growth epitomised by the use of concepts such as 'development' and 'maturity', and related to the attainment of competencies through a range of discipline-defined stages or phases (James & James, 2004). Some theorists question the nature of this relationship (see e.g. Hockney & James, as cited in James & James, 2004; Jenks, 2005) suggesting

that the period of childhood with its competency driven and linear staged-based progression towards the eventual attainment of adulthood at 18 years, has more to do with the social practices of the time and the ultimate manifestation in law, rather than biologically based ‘maturity’ and ‘development’. The chronologisation of childhood is somewhat arbitrary and not determined by the level of children’s physical or mental attributes, but somewhat artificially assigned through social practices and customs, and ultimately in law (James & James, 2004). This has in many ways further confounded the theoretical conceptualisation of childhood.

1.3 Theoretical Considerations

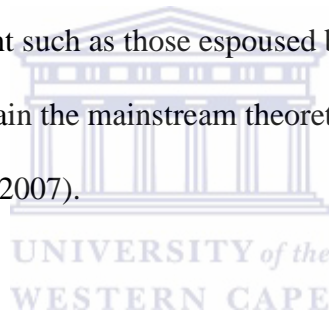
Within the last three decades there has been increasing consternation regarding the way in which the social sciences have traditionally conceptualised and dealt with children and childhood. Children and childhood are usually studied in terms of psychology (developmental) or socialisation theory (adult-child relations). Central to these approaches are children’s ‘incomplete’ or biologically immature status as defined by powerlessness and dependence (Lull, 1991) and perceptions of childhood as a “moratorium and preparatory phase” (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 2). Children’s ‘competence’ is not recognised simply because ‘competence’ is defined in terms of adults’ praxis (Qvortrup, 1994). Qvortrup (1994) argues that it is precisely the presence of these descriptions in media and scientific discourse that chronically confirms constructions of children as naturally incompetent. Furthermore, Prout and James (1997) argue that:

Within these discourses subject positions (such as ‘the child’) are created.

Seen from this point of view, then different discourses on children

constitute childhood (and children) in different ways – not only as sets of academic knowledge but also in social practices and institutions. (p. 24)

Developmental psychology's contribution to the conceptualisation and understanding of children and childhood can be linearly perceived from the traditional theories of development, through social contexts approaches towards the more critical treatises of the social constructionist and critical theory approaches. Generally considered positivist, naturalistic and functionalist (Burman, 1994, Morss, 1996), the traditional theory of development, aims to identify a set of universal laws and processes which could explain infants' evolution into adulthood (Morss, 1996). Stage theories of development such as those espoused by Freud, Erikson and Piaget typify this approach and remain the mainstream theoretical strands in developmental psychology (Louw & Louw, 2007).

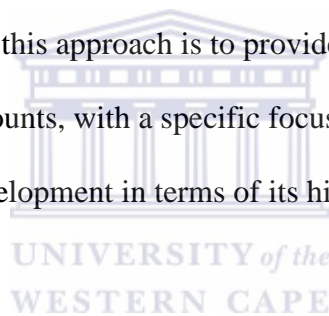


Emerging as a result of discontent towards traditional developmental accounts, the social context approach sanctioned social revisions to traditional accounts and as such, foregrounded social and interpersonal contexts. However, the biological influence is still seen as central, with the social environment perceived as providing a significant but secondary influence. Vygotsky is the key proponent of this approach (Morss, 1996).

Based on the social constructionist movement espoused by Harre, Shotter and Gergen, the social constructionist trend in developmental psychology views the social context approach to be theoretically inadequate (Morss, 1996). In particular, they were critical of its inherent cognitive focus arguing that development is a

product of these negotiated social processes. Furthermore, they argue for the historically relative status of childhood and development change.

The critical psychology of development is an emerging and significant trend in the human development discourse. Key contributions to this approach were put forward in the edited publications by Henriques, Holloway, Unwin, Ven and Walkerdine (1984), Broughton (1987) as well as individual contributions made by Burman (1994) and most notably by Morss (1996). This approach disputes the traditional approaches as well as more contemporary movements of social constructionism, essentially claiming that these approaches generate a hegemonic influence over society. The primary task of this approach is to provide alternative explanations for orthodox developmental accounts, with a specific focus on reconstructing knowledge about human development in terms of its historical, social and political manifestation.



The essence of socialisation theory, as the other point of departure, is that childhood is a preparatory phase where the child needs to gradually be equipped with the skills and competencies required for adult existence. Socialisation, therefore, ensures the sustainability of cultures through time. In this sense, children are then the key recipients of the process albeit not as active participants “but as beings who have the potentials for being slowly brought into contact with human beings” (Ritchie & Kollar, 1964, p. 117). This is the functionalist model of socialisation of which Parsons (1951) is the key proponent. With regard to childhood, this simply equates to the transmission of culture, essentially rendering the ‘child’ ontologically mute, with childhood existing merely as a residual social category (Jenks, 2005). The

model has no interest in how children are integrated into society, as long as they are sufficiently appropriated to fit in and no longer be a threat to society. In as much as the functionalist model is 'forward looking' (Inkeles, as cited in Corsaro, 2005), children are perceived as a threat to the functioning of society that is only overcome once they have, through training and preparation, internalised the elements of the system and are successfully functioning in it (Corsaro, 2005).

With developmental psychology and socialisation theory providing the 'scientific' basis, discursive constructions of children as incomplete persons in need of robust protection and guidance, have infiltrated common-sense perceptions of childhood and have thus become part of the everyday psychology of childhood. Ingleby (1985), however, is highly suspicious of this process and questions the identities and motives of the beneficiaries. He believes that the process is controlled by the State who has a vested interest in controlling the development of children. Whether this interest is aimed at protection or control is, however, debatable. Referring to the aforementioned 'psy complex', Ingleby (1985) asks:

What, then, are the values promoted by the 'psy complex'?...to guide the construction of the child's psyche itself... No longer can the formation of the infant self be left to the unknowing parents, there is too much danger that this crucial and sensitive process will go awry, resulting in a "failure of socialization."... Whereas in the late nineteenth century the danger to social order was seen as coming from criminals, mental defectives and vagabonds, the "dangerous classes" now seem to be the babies (pp. 103-104).

For Ingleby (1985) the ‘psy complex’ represents a major paradox in as much as parental values and family relations are sanctified, yet mediated and controlled by the State (John, 1995). In his highlighting of this paradox, Ingleby (1985) is essentially calling attention to issues of power and control and how the meaning and nature of childhood are configured through ideological agents and processes. This study is premised on the notion that these meanings are discursively constructed and mobilised. An epistemological and theoretical framework is therefore required that could accommodate this ontological position and foster a discursive examination of how the meanings of childhood are constructed.

1.3.1 Social Constructionism

Noting the diverse theoretical positions of childhood, it is important to point out that this study is framed within the broad social constructionist epistemological framework. It subsequently takes the social constructionist theoretical position of childhood as its point of departure, envisaging a notion of childhood that is divergent from the traditional stage based approaches. A social constructionist framework promotes the conception of children as valid social actors, as culture constructing and not culture receiving and asks one to suspend belief in traditional taken-for-granted assumptions and knowledge systems (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). It places emphasis on diverse perceptions and locations of childhood foregrounding the social, cultural and historical variability of childhood and subsequently disputes traditional approaches that focus on the child’s progression through developmental stages and phases. Childhood is thus regarded as “an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted” (Prout & James, 1997, p. 7), and not as a life phase

characterised by the linear progression from infancy through early and middle childhood to adolescence. A key premise of the present study is therefore that childhood does not exist in a finite and identifiable form (James et al., 1998).

While this new approach to understanding childhood has its genesis in dissenting but isolated and fragmented voices in the fields of sociology, developmental and social psychology, anthropology and interactionism (see, e.g. Stainton-Rogers 1989; Wartofsky, 1981), it formally arrived in James and Prout's (1990) landmark edited publication *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* and is often referred to as 'the new social studies, or sociology of childhood' (Thorne, 2007). The key features of the new approach are as follows:

- i) Childhood is perceived as a social construction, i.e. providing an interpretive framework for contextualising the early years of human life.
- ii) Childhood is a construct of social analysis.
- iii) Children should be the object of study in their own right.
- iv) Children should be seen as active social actors, responsible for the construction of their own lives.

James and Prout (1990) do not present these points as a comprehensive thesis, but rather as a rough outline. It does, however, offer a point of departure and presents possibilities to move forward conjecturally. They believe that at the heart of the deliberations lies the question 'what does it mean to be a child'. In keeping with a constructionist ethos, September's (2001): "what does it mean to be a child *in a world like this*" (p. 7, emphasis added) is perhaps more appropriate.

To add to the theoretical development, some of the key features need elaboration. The social constructionism component, for example, invites inquiry into the search for meaning. Applied to the constructs of children and childhood, constructionism however requires revision. The critical focus is not simply how children function in an adult constructed world, i.e. how children negotiate the institution of childhood, but rather how they construct their own reality and assign meaning to their lives. The concern is therefore not children as constructed by adults but rather the roles that children play and the meanings they themselves attach to their lives (Prout & James, 1997). In this respect a social constructionist position advocates the following:

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies they live in. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes. (Prout & James, 1997, p. 8)

This assignation of agency to children, can to a large extent, be seen as the manifesto of the 'new social studies of childhood'. Jenks (2004) however, warns of the inherent paradox and contradictions that emerges from this burgeoning sense of agency. Childhood can no longer be used as mitigation against irresponsible, precocious or improper conduct. A delicate balance needs to be achieved between agency and the logical limits of maturation and vulnerability.

A further point of deliberation is that within contemporary South Africa, the social, cultural and historical specificities demand primary recognition. As previously discussed, it is important to take cognisance of the diversity of childhood in terms of

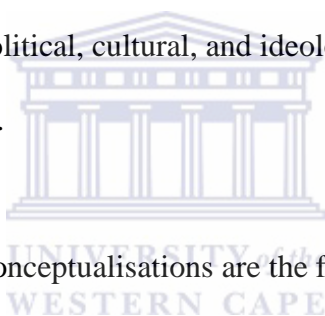
class, gender, ethnicity and culture especially if one appends the historical-political, along with the associated construct of race, to the equation. The diversity of childhood is further demonstrated by Jenks (2005) whose claim of 'childhoods' rather than 'childhood' and Frønes (1993) who contends that there is not one but many childhoods, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems. This resonates with Aries's (1962) thesis that childhood is a historical construction, Stephens (1995) and Dawes's (1999) notion that childhood is a cultural construction and Coles (1986) who sees childhood as a being constructed by the prevailing political context.

A closer reading of Prout and James's (1990) 'social' in their 'childhood as a social construction' thesis is formed by diverse cultural, political, historical and economic systems. Like Woodhead (1997), they acknowledge the universality of children in terms of the biological facts of maturation, but argue that it is embedded in social and cultural systems and can only be made sense of, and interpreted by consideration of these systems within a particular social and cultural system. James and James (2004) encapsulate the position poignantly:

...childhood is a developmental stage of the life course, common to all children and characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns. However, the way that this is interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised for children by adults varies considerably across and between cultures. (p. 13)

The idea is that different realities of constructions and experiences of childhood exist in a dialectical relationship, framed by the historical, cultural and social on the

one hand, and biological maturation on the other. Dawes (1999) similarly contends that a complex dialectic exists between physical and psychological maturation and the socio-cultural contexts within which children are immersed. A further critical point raised by James and James (2004) relates to the variation of childhood with regard to the means of how the concepts of 'needs', 'rights' and 'competencies' are articulated in law, social policy and everyday discursive realities. This study is arguing that these realities, whilst framed by the historical, political, cultural and social (as argued by others), are tempered and mediated by ideological imbrications and motivates. What is at stake here is not only the process of the social construction of childhood, but that the reality of the child is entrenched in an emphasis on the historical, political, cultural, and ideological specific instruments through which it is registered.



These and other theoretical conceptualisations are the focus of **Chapter Two**. Here the author uses an ideological analyst's lens to examine how childhood has been conceptualised from various theoretical perspectives. This chapter also constitutes the bulk of the literature review, and considering the nature of the topic under investigation, follows the format of a theoretical literature review. While no specific chapter was dedicated to the review of empirical literature, empirical findings were reported where relevant.

Since social constructionism's central focus would be the way children negotiate meanings within a particular social environment, it essentially makes possible an opportunity to engage at the level of discourse. The focus then shifts to the functional role of language in the constructions of meanings (see Durrheim, 1997;

Wittgenstein, 1978). If one examines the behaviour and actions of children, it is the shared social language of their behaviour that effectively determines the interpretation. The argument is therefore that much depends on society's discourse on children and the broad descriptions, explanations and representations of childhood. Gergen (1999) argues that these discourses contribute to the social or public reputation. He further argues that, as these reputations become shared, they invariably become taken-for-granted realities. It is these realities that ultimately inform social policy, intervention and educational practices and other public action. However, these external depictions are also internalised and inform those depicted. Here children learn what it is to be a child, or as Gergen (1999) states, "a mutually sustaining symmetry exists between self-knowledge and others knowledge of you" (p. 43). What this hegemonic process elucidates is the power² relationship between children and society. While the current study endeavours to examine the meanings of childhood, it ultimately aims to achieve this through an examination and deconstruction of discourses which sanction and maintain inequitable power relations. The study is thus working from the premise that this relationship between child and adult society is imbued with ideology and that emerging discourses and meanings of childhood would be ideologically configured. The study is, therefore, inextricably an exercise in ideological analysis³, with ideology conceptualised as the ways in which meaning is constructed and mobilised (through language) in the social world to establish and sustain relations of power (Thompson, 1990). The relationship between meaning and power is a critical factor of the present study. What ideological analysis generally offers is an elucidation of the power relations

² See Foucault (1980) for a more comprehensive discussion.

³ The method of analysis of the present study is consistent.

and how these relations are perpetuated and manifested in public discourse. This study is, however, not aimed at an analysis of public discourse, but rather at the children's own common-sense constructions and meaning assignment of these power relations.

Alanen (1988) contends that the notion of 'power' is enmeshed within the traditional conceptualisation of the socialisation process. Speier (1976) has referred to this power that adults exert over children within the socialisation process, as the 'adult ideological viewpoint' while Alanen (1988) has coined the term 'elitist perspective'. These viewpoints and perspectives often act in indiscriminate ways in that it "helps to model children as passive objects and victims of influences external to them, unable and unwilling to resist" (Alanen, 1988, p. 58). Institutional processes, advanced by adult society, act in a similar way in that they define children as a separate group, in opposition and often inferior to adulthood (James & James, 2004). This has led Mayall to conclude that "the study of children's lives...is essentially the study of adult child relations" (2002, p. 21). In the final analysis, the study places a question mark over how the interests of society select certain representation of children as opposed to others. What accounts are being suppressed? How is this silencing, exploiting and contributing to the current state of children? However, and even more importantly, given the focus of the current study, how is it manifested within children themselves? More specifically, the study aims to elucidate the extent to which children's discourses are imbued by ideology? In **Chapter Three** these epistemological variants are engaged with. The chapter opens with a consideration of the dynamics of ideology and the various historical conceptualisations and

contemporary notions of ideology. Thereafter, social constructionism as the key epistemological position of the current study is engaged with.

1.4 Child Participation

Along with the philosophical and epistemological changes in how children are conceived, a developing methodological trend in child research is the realisation of children's agency in research (Pole, Mizen & Bolton, 1999). This trend is based on the acknowledgement of children as valid informants and participants in the research process, and the subsequent shift towards soliciting their knowledge, opinions, attitudes and perceptions on matters that affect them. When applied to a developmental context or research strategy, this 'agency' is often referred to as child participation. **Chapter Four** details these and other methodological issues of the current study. Along with detailing the child participation protocol, the chapter also engages with the design, selection of participants, data collection techniques, procedure followed, and the analysis configurations. It is axiomatic that the aims and objectives of the current study demand a qualitative endeavour. Subsequently, the researcher has refrained from providing a discussion on what qualitative research is or the rationale behind its selection. The chapter concludes with an engagement with the concept of validity in qualitative research as well as a consideration of ethical principles in childhood research.

1.5 Discourse Analysis

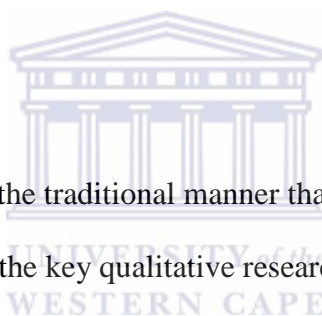
The past few years have witnessed a huge growth in the use of discourse analysis as a method of research (see e.g. Duncan, 1993; Kjørholt, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1992; Stevens, 1996; van Dijk, 1988). Discourse and discursive approaches in the

field of childhood studies have proliferated since the advent of the new social studies of childhood that have advanced the conception of childhood as a social and cultural construction. Alanen (1999) contends that it allows for the meanings of cultural images and practices of childhood to be deconstructed (as cited in Kjørholt, 2002). Discourse analysis, in particular, appears to be suited to the study of childhood for two reasons. Firstly, the transdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis engenders a comprehensive method that is more attune to the complex, multifaceted concept of childhood. The 'new social studies of childhood' with its genesis in history, sociology, psychology, politics and cultural studies demands a method that allows for flexibility both at the theoretical and methodological level. It is therefore argued that childhood cannot be examined from the confines of one specific discipline and that discourse analysis facilitates this transdisciplinary process. Secondly, as will be argued in the study, ideological conceptions of childhood are reproduced through discourse. Thus, it is axiomatic that it be analysed at the level of discourse itself. However, it must be pointed out that the discourses of the current study do not form the primary focus of scrutiny. Rather, it is the underlying ideological content and process manifested within the discourses that is the primary focus of the study.

In accordance with Thompson (1984, 1990) the study adopts a depth hermeneutic approach as the broad analytical framework. This approach provides a broad based opportunity to engage with symbolic forms and advances a discourse analytic strategy that includes both a focus on discursive practices as well as the imbrications of power and subjectivity in discourse. **Chapter Five** outlines the findings of the

discursive analysis and puts forward a range of key discourses that emerged from the discussions with the participants.

Following the discursive analysis, **Chapter Six** is aimed at theoretically contextualising the findings by providing a theoretical underpinning of the relationship between discourse and ideology. Thereafter, **Chapter Seven** is concerned with elucidating the various meanings of childhood that emerging discourses construct. More importantly, the chapter also explores the relationship between discursive constructions of childhood and the meanings assigned to childhood, with a specific focus on elucidating the extent to which these meanings are ideologically configured.



Chapter Eight departs from the traditional manner that studies of this nature are concluded. Operationalising the key qualitative research concept of reflexivity, the author details how key theoretical and methodological dilemmas that emerged were negotiated within the course of the study. The chapter concludes by considering indications for future research and limitations of the study.

1.6 The Aims and Objectives of the Study

As per the above discussion, the primary aim of the study is to explore the extent to which the meanings that children assign to ‘childhood’⁴ are ideologically configured. Within this process, the concept of well-being is used as a hermeneutic key to access the meanings that children assign to childhood. The concept of

⁴ In this study these meanings will be limited to the psychological, social and political-historical dimensions of childhood. These dimensions were identified, in a previous study, by child participants as being the most pertinent (See Willenberg, September & Savahl, 2006)

hermeneutic key, put forward by Gadamer (1995), refers to a conceptual trigger that allows access to deeper embedded meanings or ‘horizon’s of understanding’. It is important to note that well-being is merely used as a hermeneutic key to access the meanings of childhood and is not the focus of the study.

The key objectives of the study are to:

- (i) examine how children use specific discursive resources and repertoires to construct childhood well-being
- (ii) examine how these constructions are manifested in their discourses
- (iii) examine how these discourses construct various meanings of childhood
- (iv) examine the extent to which these meanings are ideologically configured

1.7 Concluding Remarks

The study is located within the ‘new social studies of childhood’ and endeavours to engage with the current theoretical debates within this tradition. Using social constructionism as the point of departure, the study argues for an ideological orientation of social constructionism. It is hoped that this engagement will stimulate more fruitful dialogue between traditional approaches to childhood studies and the ‘new social studies of childhood’ through engendering an approach to understanding childhood that ascribes meaningful attention to the complex relationship between culture, social structure, history, policy development, law, biology and development. However, it is not intended as a historical treatise, or an examination of child development or childhoods in South Africa.

While it is firmly entrenched within the post-modern tradition, it envisages reconstituting some of the modernist virtues that could advance the study of

childhood. The constructionist vehicle makes this possible, allowing one to move beyond deconstruction, essentially endeavouring to offer reconstituted perceptions of vulnerable groups such as children and youth. Combined with child participation as the methodological base, opportunities are created that allow for the examination of various dimensions of childhood that are historical, political and practical in implication. Hence, the move from deconstruction to reconstruction. The impact of this on the theoretical advancement of childhood as well as lay and scientific discourses on children and youth is relevant especially if one appends the practical opportunities in terms of intervention, monitoring and research initiatives as well as policy development and implementation, aimed at improving child and youth



CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING CHILDHOOD

2.1 Introduction

It is at this point in an orthodox academic treatise that one would be compelled to offer the definitions or conceptual understanding of the concepts, constructs or phenomenon under investigation. Some of these phenomena, by their very nature, would be contentious with a range of definitions, some complementary and others quite contradictory and contentious. Indeed the more contentious, the more exciting for the student when entering the foray. Some would argue that it is in fact the student's duty to participate actively in the debate, sometimes offering critical commentary, while at other times advocating for one approach over the other, and endeavouring to generate new knowledge or a unique perspective. With the concept of 'childhood' under investigation this task becomes a sisyphian endeavour. To put this in perspective it may be useful to revisit Jenks's (2005) oft quoted postulation on the central paradox of childhood.

...the child is familiar to us and yet strange; he or she inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another; he or she is essentially of ourselves and yet appears to display a systematically different order of being. (p. 2-3)

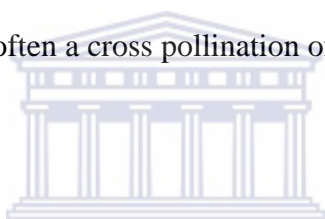
Strangely, the multitude of theoretical positions which have over the years endeavoured to provide a consistent theoretical framework of childhood, have merely contributed to advancing this paradox. Thus, after years of debate and engagement, "we have still not achieved any consensus over the issue of childhood" (Jenks, 2005, p. 2). Further complexity is presented by James et al. (1998) who aptly allude to a new wave of theoretical engagement with contemporary childhood.

Once childhood was a feature of parental (or maybe just maternal) discourse, the currency of educators and the sole theoretical property of developmental psychology. Now with an intensity perhaps unprecedented, childhood has become popularised, politicised, scrutinised and analysed in a series of interlocking spaces in which the traditional confidence and certainty about childhood and children's social status are being radically undermined. (p. 3)

While the author has, in the previous chapter, alluded to the recentness of this preoccupation, one of the first and most radical dissenting voices was that of Aries (1962) who presented the concept of childhood as a historical construction. Traditional theories of developmental psychology have also come under critical scrutiny with an increasing notion that social aspects should be regarded as critical determinants of human development. Sociological approaches have similarly experienced radical transformation, with functionalist socialisation theories becoming less fashionable than constructionist, structural, class and cultural theories (see James et al., 1998). This collection of theories is often referred to as the 'new social studies of childhood'.

The influence of political discourse on contemporary theories of childhood is a significant one. The proliferation of political discourse, most notably in the ratification of political instruments, increased recognition of children in statistical processes and dedicated institutional arrangements have made significant inroads into combating the invisibility of childhood.

In this chapter the author intends to outline the various theoretical conceptualisations of childhood, starting with more traditional understandings and progressing towards the more contemporary theses. As the common theme throughout the dissertation is to provide an ideological exploration, in this chapter the author will use the lens of an ideological analyst to explore the various conceptualisations. The underlying goal of this chapter would be to examine its historical development with a strong focus on the theories that constitute the new social science of childhood. It is, however, important to take cognisance that these approaches do not function within an intellectual vacuum or in isolation from one another. It is also not entirely accurate to present the theories as existing on a continuum as there exists a delicate boundary between them and often a cross pollination of elements and ideas transpires.



2.2 The Historical Child

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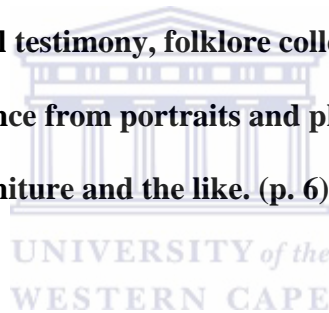
An historical analysis of childhood is an exceptionally difficult task, fraught with theoretical and methodological obstacles which confound the development of a chronological thesis. While neither children nor childhood has been specifically ignored by history, the discipline lacks a methodological understanding of childhood (Hendrick, 2000). This has resulted in a number of accounts characterised by oversimplified generalisations, often remiss of social, cultural and economic diversities. This methodological impediment can be attributed to a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of empirical source material on past childhoods. As Cunningham (2003) aptly states:

The historical study of childhood in any period except the very recent past suffers from the irreversible difficulty that you cannot ask questions of

people who are dead – you are dependent on what they may have happened to have left behind. (p. 83)

Similarly Heywood (2001) contends:

Children themselves leave few records, and even artefacts designed for them, such as books and toys, have a poor survival rate. Historians have displayed considerable ingenuity in their use of sources, turning to official reports such as those produced by factory and schools inspectors, polemical works generated by debates concerning childhood, literary accounts in novels and poetry, ‘ego documents’ in the form of diaries, autobiographies and oral testimony, folklore collections, advice manuals for parents, visual evidence from portraits and photographs, not to mention toys, games furniture and the like. (p. 6)



However, ingenuity does not necessarily translate into empirical accuracy and the methods cited as source material by historians involved in a historical analysis of childhood, are at best, secondary or even partial. In relation, the historical invisibility of children and the subsequent lack of acknowledgement as historical actors mean that it will be difficult for researchers to find reference to children in records (Hendrick, 2000). Hendrick (2000) then correctly questions the viability of evaluating sources, considering the general invisibility of children. He highlights this as an important consideration since “the questions asked not only help to determine the choices of sources, but also affect the way in which they are interpreted” (p. 43).

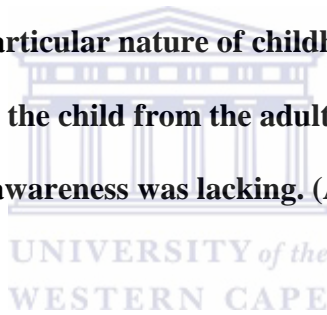
This leads to the second reason, that of children's silence, or as Hendrick (2000) contends, that children are without an authorial voice and have no power to contest adult accounts. Herein exists the power of the ideological machine as children are perceived by historians to have no voice and are seen only as passive actors in the social community. The outcome is that historians fail to pose relevant questions regarding children's human identity and role in society and hence their exclusion from history (Hendrick, 2000). It would then be true to contend that children's visibility in historical record is contingent, to some degree, on the ideological position of the historian. This means that at any instance in history there existed a certain dominant or overarching perception of childhood and children that both defined and determined the relations of adult society's power over children.

Subsequently, the third reason is that of the politics of age relations, or adultism (Alanen, 1988), where children's accounts are seldom valued and their life course is documented through adult conversations instead of an interpretation of their perspectives. In close relation, Qvortrup (1994) highlights the problem of objectivity and interpretation. He argues that objectivity in the interpretation of childhood is not possible, since the group doing the analysis (adults) often have disparate and incongruent interests to that of children. Besides the ideological obfuscation in historical method, an historical analysis of childhood is crucial, both in itself, as well as a conceptual base for the development of contemporary theories of childhood. The following section details the historical theories of childhood that have had the most considerable impact on contemporary notions of children and childhood.

2.2.1 Aries's Centuries of Childhood

“And in the beginning there was Aries” (Heywood, 2001, p. 11). The allure of Aries's postulation was its timing. It came at a time when childhood was owned by the universal-biological child and provided a provocative alternative to those who doubted the appropriateness of the traditional paradigm. He essentially asserted that the concept of childhood is a recent construction and that medieval society had no awareness of the ‘concept’ of childhood.

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature that distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. (Aries, 1962, p. 128)



Aries did not claim that there was no awareness or acknowledgement of children. Rather, the essence of his thesis is that there was a lack of awareness (or sentiment de l'enfance⁵) of the nature of childhood i.e. an awareness of the features that distinguish adults from children (Corsaro, 2005; Heywood, 2001).

Aries (1962) further contended that in medieval society no intermediate phase between adulthood and infancy existed. So as soon as children possessed basic functions that allowed them to negotiate basic aspects of life, they were cast into general society.

⁵ A phrase which conveys both an awareness of and feeling for childhood.

He predominantly used iconographic sources as his empirical evidence on which he based his inferences. His use and interpretation of this data was the major source of criticism against Aries. Based on an analysis of the iconographic data, Aries postulated that since there was a conspicuous absence of the portrayal of childhood, recognition of childhood did not exist. When children were evident, they were portrayed with adult characteristics. In various forms of artwork, children were portrayed as miniature adults with no representative acknowledgment of the differences in physical attributes between adults and children (Archard, 2004). In these historical periods, they were miniature adults.

Aries's thesis enjoyed a mixed reception in the academic community. While some, especially sociologists and (to some extent) psychologists enthusiastically embraced his postulations, others were openly hostile in their criticism claiming gross methodological flaws and naïve interpretation (Heywood, 2001).

The first obvious methodological flaw was the limitations of his sources of empirical data i.e. almost the exclusive use of iconographic sources. His analysis of the data has also been questioned. Heywood (2001), for example, contends that Aries's assertion, that the artists created what everyone else observed, was naïve and misleading and ignored the complexity of artists' portrayal of reality. Furthermore, as Burton (1972) notes, medieval art had a distinct bias towards religious themes, with a notable lack of depictions of secular life (as cited in Heywood, 2001). What one can deduce, is that children were most likely not regarded very highly, as artists generally had an upper class bias. This, along with the lack of written records, suggests the probability of a low status in society rather than a complete lack of

awareness. The fact that the concept childhood was present in early Graeco-Roman discourse⁶ is even more damaging to Aries's claim (Heywood, 2001). Medieval Latin, for example, followed the Hippocratic tradition in the recognition of three distinct periods of childhood⁷. Commenting on the work of Aries, Archard (2004) claims that it is important to distinguish between the concept of childhood and conceptions of children. He argues that while previous societies had a concept of childhood, they were unable to distinguish in certain ways between adults and children. In other words, they had different conceptions of childhood which refers to the actual ways of distinguishing between the two. Archard (2004) explains:

I have a *concept* of childhood if, in my behaviour towards children and the way I talk about them, I display a clear recognition that they are at a distinct and interestingly different stage of their lives from adults. I have a particular *conception* of childhood in so far as my treatment of children and discourse concerning them reveals a particular view of what specifically distinguishes adults from children. (p. 28)

One could extend, or confuse, the argument even further and suggest that previous societies could have been aware of children, but had no linguistic mechanism, or term to construct the concept.

Beyond the systematic criticism, Aries's contribution to a historical analysis of childhood was paramount as it elucidated two key themes, that of the variability of childhood and the experiences of childhood. With regard to an ideological

⁶ Evidence has been found in records of sermons, moral treatises, encyclopaedias and medical handbooks (Heywood, 2001).

⁷ Infancia from birth to age 7; pueritia from 7 to 12 -14; and adolescentia from 12-14 to 21.

understanding of childhood, Aries's contribution is similarly significant and can be linked to two key propositions, as outlined by James and James (2004). Firstly, it is incorrect to consider childhood as a mere descriptor of a natural biological phase. "Rather the idea of childhood must be seen as a particular cultural phrasing of the early part of the life course, historically and politically contingent and subject to change" (James & James, 2004, p. 13). Secondly, the perception and subsequent nature of adults' treatment of children in fact determines children's experience of childhood as well as their response and engagement with the adult world.

Considering the above, Aries's most critical contribution to an ideological understanding of childhood is his elucidation of how the schooling system, as an age-dependent institution, acts to polarise the life-worlds of adults and children whilst simultaneously subjecting them to a new and profound form of social control.

2.2.2 The Epigenic Theory of de Mause

The most disparaging criticism against Aries is presented in the work of de Mause (1973). de Mause proffered a grand-stage theory on the historical development of the child. Influenced to some degree by psychodynamic theory, de Mause argued that the "history of humanity is founded upon the abuse of children" (1988, p. 1) and that childhood was characterised as consisting of endless physical and sexual abuse. He argued that the further back one goes in history, the worse the abuse and treatment of children. This treatment of children was a direct result of adults attempting to overcome certain psychological problems and obtaining psychological integrity. As he famously asserted:

...the routine assault of children has been society's most effective way of maintaining its collective emotional homeostasis...The main psychological

mechanism that operates in all child abuse involves using children as what I have termed poison containers-receptacles into which adults project disowned parts of their psyches, so they can control these feelings in another body without danger to themselves. (de Mause, 1973, p. 1)

de Mause's spectacular thesis, first published in the edited book *The history of childhood* (1973), evoked severe criticism from the majority of the academic community. Criticism was even evident from the other authors who published in the same book, with some refusing to appear in the same volume as him. A cursory look at the initial criticism, however, revealed that it appears to be based exclusively on sentiment rather than historical evidence or a systematic and rigorous scientific inquiry. Over the following years, de Mause's theory endured a range of systematic studies, e.g. Davis, Langer, Trexler, Kellum, Helmholz, Lorenee, Puhar, Nyssen, Ende, Scheck, Byman, Taylor, Finkelstein, Masters, Pleck, Thompson, Illick, Ebel, Petschauer, Kutschky, Miller and Pollack (as cited in de Mause, 1988), primarily aimed at testing the tenets of his theory. It seems that his theory successfully endured these assessments, with the only serious evidence-based criticism emerging ten years later in the work of Pollock (1983)⁸.

2.2.3 Pollock's Theory

Pollock directed most of her criticism towards the indirect sources of evidence used by de Mause⁹. She argues that a history of childhood should be based on the use of

⁸ See also Shahar (1990) and Hannawalt (1993).

⁹ She was similarly critical of Aries.

more direct sources of data such as diaries, newspaper reports and court cases and autobiographies.

During her systematic and rigorous investigation of over 500 direct sources, Pollock (1983) found little evidence supporting the contentions of Aries or de Mause. She reported emotional attachment of parents to children, interest in the developmental stages of children and concern for their well-being. She further noted that her inquiry revealed that the abuse and maltreatment of children was not widespread. In conclusion of her work, Pollock posed the following challenges to historians:

“instead of trying to explain the supposed changes in the parent child relationship, historians would do well to ponder just why parental care as a variable is so curiously resistant to change” (1983, p. 271).

Even though Pollock’s theory was well received, prompting reviews that claimed that it was the “turning point in the study of the history of childhood”, a closer look at her method revealed critical methodological flaws. As previously pointed out, she argued that only diaries and autobiographies constituted valid data sources.

However, only 27 of the 500 sources she examined can be classified as autobiographies. This implies that she based the majority of her conclusions on parents’ diaries. Furthermore, her sources are limited to the members of the literate upper class who could have an underlying agenda of presenting themselves favourably. As it is axiomatic that perpetrators are unlikely to document their indiscretions, her results are more than likely compromised. As de Mause contends concerning Pollock’s theory: “A similar methodology would construct a statistical history of crime by ignoring all police reports and relying solely on the diaries of

criminals to establish crime rate statistics” (1988, p. 17). Even more damaging to Pollock’s theory, was her practice of deducing (and counting) positive affect by the absence of any mention of child maltreatment and abuse. In other words, where parents refrained from mentioning the treatment of children, she counted these omissions as evidence of no abuse. Pollock’s use of the *argumentum ex silentio* (argument from silence) is a typical practice of childhood historians and one that is routinely criticised by de Mause (1988) who insisted that historical theories of childhood be empirically based. As previously intimated, this task is extremely complex. For as de Mause aptly contends: “both our sources and our personal resistances work against us” (1988, p. 18). To a large extent this contention holds true, creating methodological flaws for the most rigorous attempts and subsequently rendering any historical theory of childhood subject to some form of criticism.



2.3 The Political/Legal Child

Enter into the foray, the *political child*. One might be initially tempted to include the *political child* as a subsidiary of the social and indeed many theorists might argue for this practice on pragmatic grounds. However, in an ideological analysis, the *political child* becomes paramount and warrants a dedicated category of its own. The following section examines the merits of the *political child*.

The *political child*, by its very nature, implies an explication of policy, and essentially elucidates the ideological means by which political instruments, such as legislation and policy, impacts on the nature of childhood. A cursory look at political instruments that govern children in South Africa denotes three major instruments: the Constitution, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

Child and the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005). However, before we review these instruments, it might be prudent to outline important theoretical concepts that govern these instruments.

In an ideological analysis of childhood, the 'political' is key. However, in the political arena, the issue of children has historically been marginalised, often relegated to discussions around family or education. Similarly, the idea of childhood as a structural feature in society was largely ignored. Even though some voices have engendered childhood and children as constituting valid and permanent social categories and valid citizens, the pervading discourses in contemporary societies have advanced the perception of childhood as apolitical. The most obvious reason for children's apolitical status is that they do not possess the voting privilege and are subsequently considered to have no political rights of citizenship. Another reason is that children are not generally perceived to be current economic entities, in the sense that they are not economically active participants of society. The author will engage with this notion later in the chapter. It is for these reasons that children find themselves politically marginalised. However, initial commentary by Coles (1986) and the influential volume by Stephens (1995) together with social constructionist theses (see e.g. James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1990; James et al 1998, Stainton-Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992) appears to have rescued childhood from its political exclusion by arguing that children both experience and impact on the political process. This is consistent with a key feature of Qvortrup's (1994) structural approach (discussed in the following section), wherein he argues that children are fully integrated members of society in as much that they, like adults, are active co-constructors of social, economic, historical and political

processes and consequently both affect and are affected by these forces. The influence of children in the political arena is best understood in conjunction with James and James's (2004) notion of cultural politics. This theoretical explication is now considered in an attempt to elucidate the viability of children in the political arena.

James and James's cultural politics of childhood "aims to explore the links between theories, policies and practices through which childhood unfolds for children" (2004, p. 60). The approach is characterised by three key features. Firstly, it attempts to identify and understand the cultural determinants of childhood which entails an analysis of the social status assigned to children, which includes an examination of children as social agents, i.e., the possible influences that children themselves may exert over their position in society. These will include social factors, such as family structure, nature of kin, gender relations, structure and conceptions of the education system, religious discourses, common sense perceptions of childhood, etc, in various combinations that are unique to different cultural contexts.

The second feature is the explication of the processes and mechanisms that determine how these cultural determinants and pervading discourses are applied in society. Here, James and James (2004) claim that the key mechanism is the law, which they conceive as the process of social ordering, ranging from compliance to custom and tradition through to social policies and other formal legal systems. Of particular interest is an explication of the way in which social policy regulates the relations between the cultural determinants and discourses. James and James (2004)

regard this as the small “p” which they contrast with the large “P” representing national politics¹⁰.

The third feature is an examination of how children experience childhood, i.e. an examination of the ways in which they experience these cultural determinants, and the social control of who they are. Of importance here, is a determination of the extent to which children can themselves influence their experience. Of further significance, is the recognition that their cultural realities will ultimately determine the extent of their influence. As James and James (2004) contend:

That this will occur differentially amongst children, and be experienced variously by children in different cultural contexts as well as within a single setting, underlines the extent to which ‘childhood’ is both united by a set of common and shared experiences and yet, at the same time, is fragmented by the diversities of children’s everyday lives. (p. 7-8)

A closer look at this feature, in fact depicts similarities with the aims of the current study. Using cultural politics to reiterate the aim of the current study, one could argue that it is attempting to reveal how the ideological nature of the cultural determinants of childhood influences children’s experience of childhood and how it emerges within children’s discursive construction of childhood.

For the current explication of the political child, the discussion will centre around the second element, viz. the role of the law in the regulation and production of

¹⁰ Representing the particular persuasions and vested interests of political parties

childhood. It would be prudent to take cognisance from the outset of the ways in which social policy could function to produce and maintain certain depictions of childhood and children's position in society, by controlling the space and time of children. As James and James (2004) state: "Once incorporated into a formal and explicit system of rules and regulatory mechanisms, the law therefore represents a highly specialised system of thinking about social realities and their regulation" (p. 64). Similarly Freeman (1998) has postulated on the capacity of the law to act as a symbol of legitimacy, with the power of determining the standards of what is right and wrong. In this way the law creates, maintains and indeed sanctions certain discourses of childhood; discourses that in fact serve the interests of those in power, or James and James's (2004) large 'P'. These contentions outlined above are significant as it provides baseline knowledge on a powerful ideological agent (the law) that could potentially determine the nature and experience of childhood. An obvious example, is the authority that the law has in determining individuals' progression from childhood to adulthood. In South Africa, and other countries, for example, it is the law that formally affirms an individuals' advancement from childhood into adulthood and the subsequent attainment of citizenship.

The citizenship status of children is an integral component of the current thinking around childhood which in effect assigns permanent and full membership to a specific society. Citizenship implies the existence of three types of rights: viz. political, civil and social (Marshall, 1950). It might be useful to evaluate the extent that children conform to the above. With regard to political rights, children do not have the right to vote, enjoy any political affiliation or strike. Civil rights, generally referring to the right to free speech, personal freedom, property ownership etc, and social rights, including the rights to education, welfare and other basic services are

to a large extent a limited experience for children. In fact, the partial recognition of children's social and civil rights can be attributed to the UNCRC, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. It follows then that the citizenship status of children is at best tenuous, with a lack of evidential proof of tangible benefits for children.

2.3.1 Children's Rights

The discourse on children's rights can be traced back to as early as 1852 with the publication of the article entitled *The Rights of Children* (Freeman, 1992).

Thereafter, other significant milestones were the adoption of the Geneva Declaration by the fifth Assembly of the League of Nations in 1924, followed by the United Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959. From 1959 onwards there was a proliferation of child rights discourse culminating in the year of the child in 1979 and significantly in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (Freeman, 1992). The UNCRC essentially "concretised the moral obligations enshrined in the 1924 Geneva Declaration and the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child, in so-called 'hard law'. The children's rights movement of the 1960's focussed on two key concerns, viz. the rights of children with respect to the exercise of state power, and rights of children with respect to the exercise of parental authority. (Guggenheim, 2005). The UNCRC appeared to be the turning point in how children were officially regarded in the law, whilst simultaneously engendering a formal acknowledgement of the role of parents and family in the development of the child. The protection rights for example, were presented in much more practical terms and children were generally referred to as subjects and not as objects. A more

in-depth discussion on the UNCRC follows shortly. Firstly, however, it would be useful to elucidate the nature and key constituents of children's rights.

A requisite for engaging in any rhetoric concerning children's rights is to take special cognisance of the fundamental distinction between children's moral rights and legal rights. Archard (2004) points out that the distinction is not between two different sets of rights but rather in how rights are understood. In other words, that children are morally entitled to certain rights does not necessarily translate into a legally granted entitlement. Similarly the converse is also true, i.e. what is recognised as a right according to the law need not be a moral right. Hence, contemplating whether children have rights, needs to be considered from both a moral and legal perspective – either by pointing to the facts of the law or considering the moral foundation. Commenting on the distinction between the two, Archard (2004) points out:

It is, normally, a matter of fact whether or not a right is legally recognised... Determining whether or not there is a moral right is not a factual matter. Rather, it is a question of moral argument as to whether or not individuals ought to have the right in question. (p. 54)

While the significance of children's rights finds its starting point in the moral discourse, it is the legal ramifications of rights that impart a telling contribution on the lives of children. Therefore, independent of what the moral discourse stipulates, the law provides enforceable entitlements. It is axiomatic that the prevailing legal discourse on children's rights would then impact on the ideological relationship between children and adult society. Archard (2004) points out that it "is hard to see

children as moral incompetents if our laws, consistently and persistently, do not” (p. 56 – 57). To ponder the truth or falsity of Archard’s (2004) contention makes for a thought provoking exercise. On the one hand the contention is a logical one, in the sense that persistent discourses invariably construct truths. However, on the other hand, the question is whether the discourse created by law can overcome the common sense understandings of childhood as a period of incompetence, a discourse that has been a common feature of society for centuries.

Controversy still exists between children’s competence to exercise these rights independently. The competence debate is based on the argument that children are not sufficiently physically, emotionally and intellectually equipped to effect rational decisions in their best interest. Verhellen (1992) outlines the three key trends or ensuing positions. The first, the reformist trend, supports the notion of children as incompetent but does acknowledge that children’s capacities are grossly underestimated by general society. They favour a position of the gradual acquisition of rights by children. Secondly, the radical trend, considers discrimination based on age as morally wrong and subsequently insists that all children should be granted full human rights and the agency to exercise these rights. Thirdly, supporters of the radical trend believe that children should be granted autonomy to exercise all rights unless they are proven to be incompetent. This increasingly popular view then places the burden of proof with the adults and not the children.

Another key dichotomy in children’s rights discourse is that of “liberation or protection”, colloquially referred to as the ‘kiddie libbers’ and the ‘child savers’.

The children’s liberation movement, encapsulated in the works of Farson (1974) and

Holt (1974), was generally aligned to the movement for human emancipation and more specifically to the women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 1970's. The movement was primarily concerned with the attainment and recognition of children's rights to self-determination and self expression (Melton, 2000).

Essentially, the movement argued that:

the modern separation of child's and adult's world is an unwanted and oppressive discrimination; that this segregation is accompanied and reinforced by a false ideology of 'childishness'; and that children are entitled to all the rights and privileges possessed by adults. (Archard, 2004, p. 70)

Archard (2004) points out the ensuing irony in that the liberation movement identified both the nuclear family and the school as key institutions of oppression, yet it was the emergence of these two institutions that created an awareness of childhood in the first place (see e.g. Aries, 1962).

It is important to distinguish between rights that guarantee children basic levels of treatment and protection, and rights that grant children self-determination and freedom. The concept of self determination is critical to the liberation argument. Farson states that "the issue of self-determination is at the heart of the children's liberation... The acceptance of the child's right to self-determination is fundamental to all the rights to which children are entitled" (1974, p. 27). While the protection rights are afforded to children, the self-determination notion requires that children consciously exercise them. Possessing self-determination rights then means that children themselves determine how to live their lives. Of course, subscribing to the

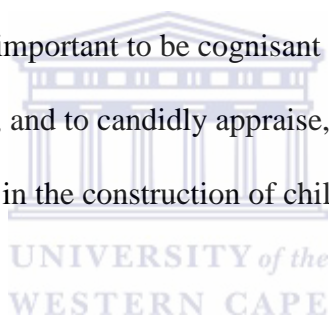
'self-determination thesis' means contesting the 'incompetence thesis' and the 'arbitrariness of age thesis'. In fact, the proponents of the self-determination thesis argue that the concept of incompetence has an ideological motive in the modern depiction of childhood. In other words, the characteristics of children as frail, helpless, dependent, etc are not natural but rather ideological constructions which function to maintain the domination of children by adults. Archard explains: "We want children to be helpless so that we can help them, we need them to be dependent so that we can exercise authority over them...it is a self-confirming ideology" (2004, p. 74).

The caretaker or the protection thesis states that children need protection and should not be granted self-determination rights. It works from the premise that self-determination rights stunt development and that children who are granted too much liberties will develop into unproductive adults. In practical application, the caretaker thesis espouses that children's rights should be vested to an adult member of society, usually the parents. This essentially implies that the adult member acts as a trustee to the child until such time that the child comes of age (turns 18).

The concept of children's rights is often touted as the panacea of children's social problems. Guggenheim (2005) cautions against this assertion, arguing that the concept has essentially been hijacked to provide rhetorical advantage and propaganda to a number of adult interests in a variety of contexts. Guggenheim (2005) further claims that concept only presents with significant standing because it serves adults' interests too. He cogently argues:

Children's rights is often more deeper and more shallow than is often recognised...adults gain in a number of ways by presenting themselves as caring about children... Sometimes it serves as a useful subterfuge for the adult's actual motive...it can be an effective diverter of attention, shifting the focus to a more sympathetic party than the adult... it is used to assuage guilt for the adult's bad behaviour or intentions... Children's rights can be useful for masking selfishness by invoking a language of altruism... it can also provide a legal basis to achieve a result that would be difficult to achieve otherwise. (Guggenheim, 2005, p. xii – xiii)

For this study, it is therefore important to be cognisant of the meanings and functions of children's rights, and to candidly appraise, both its historical genesis as well as its ideological role in the construction of childhood.



2.3.2 Children's Rights in South Africa

The rights of children in South Africa are enshrined in the South African Constitution, the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) and two child specific human rights treaties that have been ratified by the government of South Africa viz., the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child¹¹.

2.3.2.1 The South African Constitution

Streak and Wehner (2003) believe that it is essential to take cognisance of the historical context of the development of the Constitution. That is, it needs to be

¹¹ These instruments define a child as a person between the ages of 0 to 18.

understood in relation to the racially based political regime that propagated socio-economic exclusion, human rights abuses and severe and chronic poverty. Taking this into consideration, the Constitution was specifically drafted to address the legacy of poverty by providing everyone (including children) with a comprehensive set of socio-economic rights with regard to education, nutrition, housing, social services and healthcare. Within the Constitution, Section 28 and 29 deals specifically with children's rights. Section 28 refers to four basic socio-economic rights viz., nutrition, shelter, health care, and social services, while Section 29 refers to the right to basic education.

It is important to note that these rights are justiciable, i.e. the state is legally liable to effect these rights as they are enforceable through the court system. The socio-economic rights are hence linked to state obligations in terms of the realisation of those rights. Of even greater importance, is the fact that the state has a higher level delivery obligation when effecting children's socio-economic rights than other members of the population. This is so since the Constitution allows for the progressive realisation of rights based on available resources, whilst no such limitations are placed on the realisation of children's socio-economic rights (Streak & Wehner, 2003).

While most commentators regard the Constitution as making positive strides towards uplifting the quality of life of all South African children, especially the poor and disadvantaged, some commentators engender a more cautious approach. September (2002), for example, questions if the rights afforded to children only need to be met to a very basic level, since the Constitution fails to specify the exact scope

of the rights of children (Streak & Wehner, 2003). Similarly, others such as Proudlock (2002) (as cited in Streak & Wehner, 2003), have highlighted the importance of clarifying the nature and scope of the state obligations. As Streak and Wehner (2003) aptly state:

A lack of clarity around the level of entitlements implied by the rights is dangerous: it leaves room for government to arbitrarily decide on what level of services to provide to children in order to give effect to their rights. (p. 54)

2.3.2.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The historical progression of nearly a century of child rights discourse culminated in the development of an international treaty to provide children with a holistic set of social, economic, political, civil and environmental rights. The UNCRC was adopted without a vote in November 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The UNCRC can be regarded as a historical milestone, formally granting children fundamental human rights and representing the plight of improving children's condition in society, ushering in a new way of dealing with children and a new paradigm of children's position in society. This also initiated a new way of perceiving children in society which has effectively changed the image of the child in society (Lopatka, 1992; Verhellen, 1992). While a strong moral imperative is implicit in the content of the UNCRC, its strength lies in the legal nature that it now certifies to children. This point is cogently conveyed by Lopatka (1992):

The rights of the child specified in the Convention are not merely an expression of a moral belief. They express first and foremost the legislative will of the States-parties to the Convention. (p. 51)

With children as right-holders and eligible to certain entitlements, the ideological nature of the relationship between children and adults has now changed.

Children were now regarded, in law, as being entitled to human rights but also increasingly regarded as valid competent citizens. The UNCRC then essentially allows the redistribution of social power (James & James, 2004) with a potential inverse effect on ideological control. As Roche (1996) points out:

Once we genuinely allow children to exercise their right to speak and be heard, we might have to participate in different conversations... any commitment to children's rights... is part of a larger project regarding citizenship. (p. 33)

The importance of the Convention can be seen as it essentially enshrined moral obligations of governments in hard law (Verhellen, 1992). Governments who ratified the Convention were bound by legal obligation to develop and execute legislative, administrative and delivery measures to ensure the implementation of the UNCRC. Article 4 of the Convention states:

State Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, State Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation. (UNICEF, 1990, p. 46)

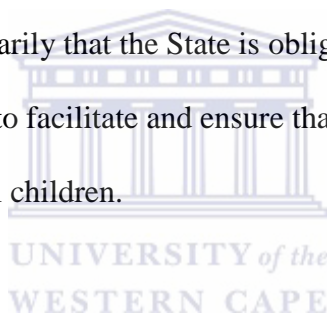
The variability of childhood and the fact that childhood is often constructed differently in various social, economic and cultural contexts complicates the

execution of the above obligation. Both Dawes (1999) and James and James (2004) therefore believe that, even though the UNCRC makes significant contributions to the advancement of children's rights, it may not transcend cultural boundaries, or be able to be implemented in a non-western context, hindering its implementation to a significant degree. In that sense it may not hold up against common sense constructions of children's role in society. Stated differently, the cultural and ideological constructions of childhood, and the subsequent prevailing discourses, may hinder the efficacy of the UNCRC.

2.3.2.3 Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005)

With the onset of the democratically elected government in 1994, many new laws have been drafted, and old laws amended, to address the challenges and social realities of South Africa's population. The Child Care Act (1983) was one of the few policies still in force and provided an inadequate legislative framework to effect the new policies and address the needs of children. The key shortcoming, according to Proudlock and Jamieson (2008), was that it failed to make provision for preventative and intervention strategies in the care for children and only addressed these issues once abuse and maltreatment had already taken place. This, together with the concern that no legislative obligation was placed on the State to ensure services for children, necessitated the need for new legislation. Subsequently, the new Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) and the associated Children's Amendment Act (No. 41 of 2007) were drafted. It endured a tumultuous progression through ten years of extensive consultation with civil societies, Parliament, and the various provincial legislatures and government departments.

The Children's Act provides the primary legislative framework for formalising a range of social services that are essentially aimed at promoting the protection, development, care and well-being of children, as well as providing support to families and communities to facilitate and ensure the achievement thereof. Using the baseline principles of the 'best interests of the child' and acknowledging children's right to participation, the Act was developed to be in line with the UNCRC and the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. Proudlock and Jamieson (2008) believe that the Act "shifts the country from a charity model to an approach that recognises that children have a constitutional right to social services and that the State bears the primary duty to ensure that these services are delivered" (p. 36-37). The implication is not necessarily that the State is obligated to ensure delivery of all the services itself, but rather to facilitate and ensure that the services are actually provided and accessible to all children.



2.4 The Social Child

The attempts by James et al. (1998) and James and Prout (1997) to outline sociology's engagement with childhood are rather comprehensive. James et al's. (1998) account in particular, is impressive, as it not only provides a historical treatise on the pre-sociological theories, but also shows how the conceptualisation process has progressed from pre-sociological theories through the transitional phase to contemporary understandings. Their identification of four approaches is helpful to delineate the discussions of this section. These approaches constitute the typology of the contemporary theories of childhood and are referred to as the socially constructed child, the tribal child, the minority group child and the social structural child (James et al., 1998). In keeping with the ideological preoccupation

of the current dissertation, the author has, albeit cautiously, endeavoured to combine the tenets of the tribal and minority child and add to that the dimension of class. This approach will be referred to as the ideological child. The following section provides an analytical taxonomy of the three approaches, with particular attention on the socially constructed and ideological child.

In keeping with the epistemological strand of this study, the reader will note that the author is intent on discussion that falls within the overlap of the socially constructed and ideological child. Firstly, however, it might be prudent to outline the traditional conceptualisation of childhood and demonstrate the genesis of the theoretical position adopted in this paper. The author will also attempt, as far as possible, to locate the exposition within the historical progression of the social sciences.

2.4.1 The Traditional Conceptualisation of Childhood

Socialisation is a concept that generally refers to the process through which human beings acquire social skills to understand and navigate the social world. It is through this process that they learn to conform to social norms. As this involves the generational transmission of cultures, James et al. (1998) believe that the motive behind socialisation theory is to ensure the sustainability of cultures through time. In this sense, children are then the key recipients of the process albeit not as active participants “but as beings who have the potentials for being slowly brought into contact with human beings” (Ritchie & Kollar, 1964, p. 117) or “something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functioning member” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 7). Child culture is thus seen as a precursory phase of personhood (Shildkrout, as cited in Prout & James, 1997) with

socialisation as the vehicle or instrument of transition from child to adult through the assimilation of, and conformity to, social and cultural norms. This is the functionalist view of socialisation.

Corsaro (2005) identified two models of socialisation viz. constructivism and determinism. Constructivism, which refers to Piagetian and Vygotskian theories are outlined in the “psychological child”. The deterministic model consists of two subsidiary models viz. the functionalist and the reproductive. The functionalist model, with Talcot Parsons (1951) as its key proponent, is primarily concerned with the child’s internalisation of social aspects, a process enforced and regulated by parental training. The model has no interest in how children are integrated into society as long as they are sufficiently appropriated to fit in and no longer be a threat to society. In as much as the functionalist model is ‘forward looking’ (Inkeles, as cited in Corsaro, 2005), children are perceived as a threat to the functioning of society that is only overcome once they have, through training and preparation, internalised the elements of the system and are successfully functioning in it (Corsaro, 2005).

Critical of the functionalist model as advancing as a form of ideological control, reproduction theorists (see e.g. Bernstein, 1981, as cited in Corsaro, 2005; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) focussed on the unequal class systems where certain social classes benefit from greater access to resources and enjoy privileges due to their status within the class system (Corsaro, 2005).

James et al. (1998) contend that the socialisation process has been conceived in two ways, which they refer to as the “hard” and the “soft” variations. The ‘hard’ way, which is consistent with Cosaro’s (2005) understanding of the functionalist model, is perceived as “the internalisation of social constraints, a process occurring through external regulation” (James et al., 1998). The child’s personality is thus shaped by the endeavour to attain the goals as prescribed by society. Furthermore, this needs to be achieved by adhering to, and operating within, the framework of society’s given rules and regulations. The soft way is essentially related to the dynamics of inter and intra group relations or as James et al. (1998) argue “a transactional negotiation that occurs when individuals strive to become group members” (p. 25).

Both these methods are key tenets in what James et al. (1998) refer to as the socially developing child. However, while this approach should ideally foreground the social aspects of personhood, or more specifically, how individuals acquire personhood, it fails to do so. The key reason is that the psychological model, with its key tenets of irrationality, universality and naturalness has been uncritically assimilated into theories of socialisation in the 1950’s (James et al., 1998; Jenks, 2005; Mackay, 1973; Prout & James, 1997). With strong roots in the epistemology of positivism, these theories functioned to maintain a functionalist world view. The result is a failure of socialisation theory to adequately explain how children acquire knowledge of their social roles. Tonkin (1982, as cited in Prout & James, 1997) demonstrates the genesis and mechanics of this failure. The essence of her argument is that the confluence of the psychological and social accounts of personhood is engendered without apparent consideration of the fundamental differences that are

inherent to each. But it is not only the dichotomous notions of each conceptualisation that has resulted in the mismatch between theory and practice.

The conceptualisations have in fact created a cyclical outcome, with perceptions of children as passive future members of society, fuelling and being fuelled by the juxtaposition of developmental and socialisation theory. The impact on everyday life and societal norms is astronomical, with a range of practices and institutions set-up and itself maintaining the status quo. These institutions function to ideologically justify the relegated role of children in society. Again, the relationship is mutually influencing or crudely dialectical. Adherence to scientific theory and conceptualisation of childhood sets up the scope and nature of the institution. These institutions then function to both create and support the common sense understandings, whilst simultaneously propagating the notions of the scientific theory. This contributes to everyday and common sense understandings of the nature of childhood. It is the role of the ideological state apparatuses to sustain these conceptualisations.

The concept of ideological state apparatuses was put forward by Althusser (1971) to explain how the state used various institutions to maintain ideological control over the population. These institutions included the church, school, the media, etc. If one takes it a step further it is not inaccurate to perceive these institutions as agents of socialisation and thus socialisation as an instrument to perpetuate ideology.

Socialisation theory, however, omitted enquiry into the nature of these institutions and the meaning in shaping children's lives. In fact, no mainstream theoretical

interest existed in addressing these issues because due to their now ‘universal’ relegated role in society, children as a social category did not warrant research consideration.

2.4.2 Challenge to Orthodoxy: The Socially Constructed Child

It goes without saying that the intellectual trend that characterised the studies of childhood, as outlined above, followed the contemporary (philosophical) paradigm of the time. Located in a context operating within the structuralist-functionalist tradition and gripped by positivism, alternate conceptualisations of childhood emerged more or less simultaneously with the emergence of a new alternative paradigm in the social sciences. Social constructionism has a diverse genetic evolution and shows hereditary links to the symbolic interactionism of Mead (see Reck, 1981 for a selection of Mead’s essays) and Blumer (1969), Berger and Luckman’s (1966) theory of reality and Wittgenstein’s (1978) theory of language. It emerged as a result of general displeasure to the dominant paradigm at the time. A similar displeasure was present in the field of childhood studies and with the emergence of social constructionism as a new paradigm for childhood studies was put forward. While the new paradigm, informally referred to as the new sociology (or social studies) of childhood, has its genesis in dissenting but isolated and fragmented voices in the fields of sociology, social psychology, anthropology and interactionism (see e.g. Stainton-Rogers, 1989; Wartofsky, 1981), it formally arrived in James and Prout’s (1990) landmark publication *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*.

James and Prout's (1990) radical contention was that childhood should be perceived as a social construction. By this they mean that childhood does not exist in a finite and identifiable form and that an emphasis should be placed on diverse perceptions and locations of childhood (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1990). In this way the social, cultural and historical variability of childhood is foregrounded.

Childhood is thus regarded as “an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted” (James & Prout, 1997, p. 7).

Following is a synopsis of the key features of the ‘new social studies of childhood’:

- i. Childhood is perceived as a social construction, i.e. providing an interpretive framework for contextualising the early years of human life.
- ii. Childhood is a construct of social analysis.
- iii. Children should be the object of study in their own right.
- iv. Children should be seen as active social actors, responsible for the construction of their own lives.

Based on the tenets of the epistemological tradition of social constructionism, the socially constructed child refers to the cessation or termination of taken-for-granted meanings (Gergen, 1985) of childhood (James et al., 1998). Thus, social constructionism brings into question conventional understandings of childhood, sanctioning an understanding of childhood that is based on the specific social context. An ideal starting point for the socially constructed child will be an explication of how the social context influences the creation of meaning. With a divergent number of social contexts, multiple realities of childhood, or many childhoods (Frønes, 1993, 1994) are created. As Frønes (1993) argues:

There is not one childhood, but many formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences. (p. 18)

With the social constructionist approach, the initial thrust is to campaign for the inclusion of the search for meaning in social inquiry about childhood, and an ultimate understanding of the ways children both create and negotiate existing meanings in their life. Shotter (1998) however, argues that the meanings constructionism sanctions are not those that are explicit, predictive, cognitive and representational, but rather meanings that are implicit in people's unique interpretative experiences and responsive reaction to their social environment. The reality of childhood is embedded in an emphasis on the historical, cultural and politically specific instruments through which it is registered. This emphasis on culture, politics and history is a fundamental feature of contemporary constructionism. Gergen (1985), for example, states that the "terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (p. 267). Similarly Bayer (1998) claims that social constructionism "cannot claim any special residency outside of culture, history, movements, technology or politics" (p. 3). The historical account together with the political and the ideological, in the context of this study, make up the social.

The critical thrust of social constructionism is not how children function in an adult constructed world, i.e. how children negotiate the institution of childhood, but rather how they construct their own reality and assign meaning to their lives. The concern

is, therefore, not children as constructed by adults, but rather the roles that children play and the meanings they themselves attach to their lives (Prout & James, 1997).

In this respect a social constructionist position advocates the following:

Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies they live in. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes. (Prout & James, 1997, p. 8)

This assignation of agency to children can to a large extent be seen as the manifesto of the 'new social studies of childhood'. Jenks (2004) however, warns of the inherent paradox and contradictions that emerges from this burgeoning sense of agency. Childhood can no longer be used as mitigation against irresponsible, precocious or improper conduct. A delicate balance needs to be struck between agency and the logical limits of maturation and vulnerability.

A further point of deliberation is that within contemporary South Africa, the social, cultural and historical specificities demand primary recognition. As previously discussed, it is important to take cognisance of the diversity of childhood in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and culture especially if one appends the historical-political, along with the associated construct of race, to the equation. This resonates with Aries's (1962) thesis that childhood is a historical construction, Stephens (1995) and Dawes's (1999) notion that childhood is a cultural construction and Coles (1986) who sees childhood as a being constructed by the prevailing political context.

A closer reading of Prout and James's (1990) 'social' in their 'childhood as a social construction' thesis is formed by diverse cultural, political, historical and economic systems. Like Woodhead (1997) they acknowledge the universality of children in terms of the biological facts of maturation, but argue that it is embedded in social and cultural systems and can only be made sense of, and interpreted by consideration of these systems within a particular social and cultural system.

The idea is that different realities of constructions and experiences of childhood exist in a dialectical relationship, framed by the historical, cultural and social on the one hand, and biological maturation on the other. Thus social constructionism is interested in how these realities of childhood are discursively articulated in law, social policy and everyday activities.



2.5 The Ideological Child

The ideological child refers to the amalgamation of the tribal, minority, social class and social structural (James et al., 1998). The essence of the ideological child is that it elucidates conceptions of childhood where the relations between childhood and the adult society is characterised by domination and exploitation.

The *tribal child* is premised on the notion that children's social worlds are legitimate places and spheres of meaning (James et al., 1998) in their own right. This approach essentially provides an explication of the child's negotiation of the social space, i.e. how ideological forces external to the child impact on the actual physical space. Simultaneously, there is a profound acknowledgement of children as valid social actors and a subsequent respect for their social worlds as real locations. The role of

the researcher is a difficult one, as an outsider attempting entry into a social sphere and not meeting the criteria for entry. Working from the premise that children's social action is structured and operating within a social sphere the aim of research in this tradition is then to elucidate the actions, rules, regulation and traditions of the system. The Opies (1969, 1977) are the key proponents of this theoretical strand.

Likened to Alanen's (1988) feminisation of childhood, the *minority child* ascribes to childhood a politicised social category based on the assumption of an "unequal and discriminatory society" (James et al., 1998, p. 30). The discourse of minority child challenges the power relations between children and adults that is inherent in contemporary society. The approach advances notions of powerlessness and helplessness and expounds the role of dominant ideology in creating and maintaining unequal relations of power. Empirical support can be found in the work of Savahl et al. (2006) who identified helplessness and powerlessness as key discursive themes present in children's discourses.

A theoretical slant to the *minority child* approach is the contention of conceptualising childhood as a *social class* (see e.g. Oldman, 1994). This approach perceives children as constituting classes, which "exist principally by their economic opposition to each other and in the ability of the dominant class (adults) to economically exploit the activities of the subordinate class (children)" (Oldman, 1994, p. 44). Economic exploitation, however, entails and even necessitates ideological dominance through both ideological apparatuses as well as the discursive construction of children as unsocialised and therefore incomplete beings. The two

in fact exist in a dialectical relationship that maintains the hegemonic nature of the relationship.

A feature of this approach is the institutionalisation of childhood, i.e. the creation and control of social spaces that children inhabit. When we engage in class analysis, we are by implication talking about economic exploitation. It is therefore incumbent to prove two things. Firstly, it would be necessary to demonstrate how children actually contribute to the economy. This will be addressed later in this chapter. And secondly, that the exploited (children) would be better off and the exploiters (adults) worse off, if the children were to withdraw their productive assets from the relationship. The irony is that, in this instance, it is children themselves, their mere existence and being that is the productive asset. Indeed Oldman (1994) claims all 'normal' children's activities are in the short term economic interests of adults who supervise them. An approach to childhood that is based on a class analysis would therefore need to focus on the exploitative nature of adult-child relations, working from the premise that children's activities are structured so as to ameliorate the economic interests of adults (Oldman, 1994). This essentially means that the quality of adults' lives is enhanced and that of children's lives diminished due to the nature of the relationship (Oldman, 1994). While Oldman (1994) acknowledges the difficulty of proving this quantitatively, he nonetheless offers a treatise based on three empirical features of adult-child relations.

Firstly, children are the objects of childwork¹² with no due regard afforded to the relevance of their activities. This claim is premised on the observation that there is no significant impact (gain or loss) on children's attainment of human capital with any related increase in childwork. Secondly, a claim by childworkers to higher income or status is based on the results of a selected group of children who are often members of a superior social class that in fact assures self-capitalisation, and actually require less childwork. The final feature relates to the observation that the dynamics of parental employment is becoming increasingly contingent on the self-maintaining domestic labour of children, which has modest, if any, self-capitalising value for the children.

The *social structural* child put forward by Qvortrup (1994) is based on three key tenets. Firstly, childhood constitutes a structural form, i.e. childhood constitutes a permanent, normative and constant structure in society and therefore warrants consideration as such. Secondly, childhood and adulthood are exposed to and affected by the same societal forces. The approach specifically notes the interrelationship of societal structures on childhood and further acknowledges that childhood is determined by the specific characteristics of the particular society that they are in. Childhood is thus instanced as a social phenomenon dependent on the institutional structure of society (James et al., 1998). Qvortrup (1994) in fact argues for the axiom 'the childhood', claiming the following:

**...children who live within a defined area – whether in terms of time,
space, economics or other relevant criteria – have a number of**

¹² Childwork refers to the work done by adults 'on' children, while children's work refers to the actual work done by children.

characteristics in common. This preference (the childhood) enables us to characterise not only childhood, but also the society in which this childhood is situated as mutually both independent and indispensable constructions; ... (p. 5)

Thirdly, children are regarded as active co-constructors (Qvortrup, 1994) of childhood and complementary participants (Corsaro, 2005) in society. The activities that they engage in, as well as their specific structural location, all play a specific role in the functioning of society. Thus, children both impact on and are impacted on by society. While the emotional benefit afforded by children is axiomatic, it is important to elucidate the role that children play as an economic entity in society.

More of this anon.



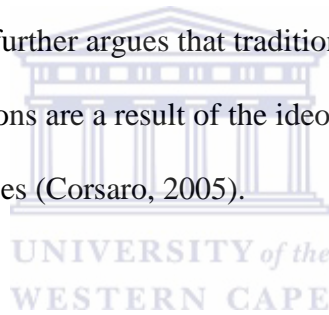
The four subsidiaries of the ideological child have a number of common threads. Firstly, these approaches acknowledge children as valid social actors and citizens. Secondly, their views are considered valuable and an essential starting point for any research or intervention strategy. Thirdly, childhood constitutes a legitimate social category and derives its meaning from membership to that specific social category. Finally, there is an absolute dedication to children's interests and purposes, or as James et al. (1998) argue "a sociology for, rather than of children" (p. 31).

The essence of the ideological child is that children are valid, active and their contributions and activities in the school, family, workplace and other institutions are requisite for the effective functioning of the social system. The process of proving the above contention is particularly complex, just as the notion of proving that children's activities constitute valid work is especially contentious – most likely

emerging from traditional socialisation theories of children. The above, together with the notion that children are bona fide economic entities requires elaboration. Following is a brief explication of children's economic contribution.

Schoolwork

Qvortrup (2004) claims that schooling is essentially an investment in the economic well-being of society. Qvortrup and Kjørholt (2000) question the blasé perception of children's school attendance. They suggest that school attendance "represents a considerable effort, without which the society would not be able to continue economically and culturally" (p. 7). It should be perceived as work, the product of which is human capital. He further argues that traditional constructions of schools solely as accrediting institutions are a result of the ideological and bureaucratic nature of the controlling bodies (Corsaro, 2005).



Contrary to Qvortrup's contention, Oldman (1994) believes that the value of schooling is based on the fact that children's scholastic labour necessitates childwork by the teachers, support staff, educational administrators etc. It further advances commercial enterprise in the retail sector, as books, stationary, educational and sporting equipment, and uniforms need to be purchased; in the construction industry as schools need to be built and maintained; and in the information and telecommunications industry as schools move further into the information age. The point is that for the institution of schooling to exist, children's presence is needed. Moreover, children and indeed the parents need to buy into the system. The 'clever', the 'hardworking' and the 'disciplined' child along with the 'concerned' parent maintains the system, while some 'naughty' children work against it. The

former, which more often than not belongs to the middle class, is then important in attracting other similar children to the school with the attainment of good grades. These new recruits bring along their ‘concerned’ middle class parents and their money. This sequence of events is ultimately dependent on children’s labour within the school. Children’s labour participation in schools therefore has both short-term (childwork) and long-term (human capital gain) benefits (Oldman, 1994).

The question then arises: should the educational institution be perceived as an ideological ‘state’ apparatus (Althusser, 1971), or rather ideological ‘social’ apparatus, as it does not only serve state interests but more importantly the social sequencing of the life course.

Domestic Housework

Oldman (1994) commenting on the national reports of the Childhood as Social Phenomenon Project, notes that children’s domestic labour is primarily located around their own maintenance and not the general maintenance of the household. His argument is based on the contention that adults’ increased economic interest and the subsequent time investment are “polarising the child’s experience into formally supervised time and unsupervised time”, resulting in the latter containing a considerable degree of self-maintaining labour (Oldman, 1994, p. 52). Contrasting the current observation with children’s domestic labour in earlier historical periods, Oldman (1994) notes that children’s labour was characterised by servant-type labour, with older girls primarily responsible for childcare and domestic chores. This reflection of the child labour experience of early industrial periods, in fact mirrors the current realities of childhood in South Africa, and indeed it would not be



inaccurate to extend this experience to children in other developing countries as well.

Clacherty and Budlender (2004), reporting on their qualitative work with children in various locations in South Africa, found that children were involved in excessive housework both in their own homes as well as a source of paid labour in other households. The participants claimed that excessive housework limited the amount of time that they could dedicate to schoolwork and perpetuated feelings of anxiety. They attributed this to parents' erroneous belief that excessive work would prepare them for the future and emphasized the need to educate parents on the potential harmful effects of excessive housework. The main concern arising from these claims is that children are not allowed any free time, as the following extract from Clacherty and Budlender (2004) aptly demonstrates:

To me working is sometimes not fun. Sometimes when I come back from school the house is still dirty it still needs to be cleaned. Sometimes I clean until it is late. Then I have to cook immediately after finishing. By the time I finish it is after six and I am not able to go and play. My heart becomes so sore because I have not played. (p. 39)

The impact of the responsibility of housework is evident in the above quotation, especially the impact on children's activities in general. It is worth noting that the diversity of locations or socio-economic environments gives rise to diverse or disparate experiences of housework. This is aptly demonstrated by Bray (2003) who reported that children displayed a positive sentiment towards household chores perceiving it as an integral part of life. Furthermore, Bray (2003), in contrast to

Oldman (1994), noted that children's domestic housework was geared towards the general maintenance of the household and appeared to evoke a sentiment of responsibility from the children. She does however point out that children may be burdened with too much responsibility. Bray (2003) further noted the impact of the family structure on household chores:

Children's participation in domestic chores occurs within broader patterns of role division within households, and we can therefore expect the nature and extent of their participation to be affected by both household structure and internal relationships.

(p. 112)

This specifically refers to the presence of economically active and physically able family members and household type (in terms of the household head). For example the presence of young adults (often female) between the ages of 18 – 25 will probably reduce the amount of work done by the younger children. Furthermore in a female headed household where the mother is the sole breadwinner, the domestic responsibilities, including care of the younger siblings will fall to the older children. Whatever the social context or circumstance, it is apparent that children make an integral contribution towards the household economy in the sense that their domestic activities¹³ provide a support structure for the well-being of the income generators in a family. In this instance children's domestic roles can be likened to the support staff of any commercial enterprise who do not directly acquire revenue but still play

¹³ Budlender introduced the term "reproductive work" to capture children's role in the household economy (as cited in Bray, 2003)

an integral role in the successful functioning of the system in terms of the administrative support and back-up that they provide.

Part of the problem of acknowledging children's economic role is that even when children are engaged in work activities, they are relabelled as play, chores, learning, or taking responsibility (Woodhead, 1997). This relabelling then essentially acts as an ideological mechanism by reconstructing the significance of children's economic contribution and presenting it as standard tasks that are important for development.

Other activities

Children's extra-curricular activities are increasingly expending free-time.

Engaging in sporting and cultural activities outside school hours are typical of pursuits of the urban child. These activities are usually formalised and represents a considerable amount of childwork (Oldman, 1994). Oldman particularly notes the commercial potential of these formal activities for the leisure industry, as sports coaches, music and dance instructors, youth club leaders etc draw an income from their participation. It appears then that children's predilection for 'extra-mural' activities subjects them to economic exploitation albeit a rather passive form of exploitation.

2.6 The Psychological Child

Psychology's contribution is developmental psychology or developmentalism. Generally, developmentalism refers to a set of assumptions that emerged in the nineteenth century (Morss, 1996) that advanced the notion of biological determinism as the key factor in human development. More specifically, it refers to regulated

and natural change (Walkerdine, 1993) typically following a set series of sequential stages or phases through which humans progress during their lifetime (Frønes, 2005).

Arguing from an anti-developmental perspective Morss (1996) claims that the problem with developmentalism is that it has become the prime constructor of common-sense knowledge and understanding of children and their behaviour, often rendering other accounts and explanations unconsidered. As Walkerdine (1993) cogently argues:

The very idea of development is not natural and universal, but extremely specific, and in its specificity, occludes other marginalised stories, subsumed as they are within the bigger story. (p. 455)

Similarly, Burman (1994) postulates that developmental psychology has generally portrayed development as an inevitable and natural progression or regulation, and in fact uses the 'natural' argument as a kind of explanation.

The explanations it offers for child behaviour is then internalised into lay understandings and discourses which transcend generations. These discourses are the essential constituents of our cultural narratives that define our identity and status in society. It may even be construed as hegemonic. Morss (1996) sees the creation of credible explanations of human development as being the essence of developmentalism. He argues that developmentalism "consists of the production of, and reliance on, explanatory statements concerning general natural regulation of changes in the human life-span" (1996, p. 51).

He, however, points out that these explanations are not always negative, but rather effected to serve a purpose within varied social and moral contexts. In other words, if developmental accounts are treated as discourses, then it becomes imperative to consider the functional use of the account. One conspicuous function, is that it can be used to perpetuate ideological control of children, further adults' gain (see Guggenheim, 2005) or protect children from abuse or prosecution. This, in essence, is developmental psychology's contribution to the production and maintenance of the ideology of childhood.

However, developmentalism, even in its hegemony, failed to suppress a number of dissenting voices; voices that emerged in the distant past and have continued to steadily increase both in volume as well as substance. This theoretical strand is currently referred to as the critical psychology of development, or anti-developmentalism. Morss (1996) delineates four broad approaches to development. The key tenets of the four broad approaches to development will now be briefly considered. This exercise will be useful as it would elucidate the changing nature of developmental discourse and the varying potency of its ideological influence.

2.6.1 Traditional Psychology of Development

Embedded within the positivistic epistemological framework, the traditional psychology of development espouses three key principles. Firstly, it maintains a commitment to the experimental method whereby methods of generating knowledge were modelled on the physical sciences. Secondly, it advances the notion of physics of development, i.e. naturalism and biology. Thirdly, it is aligned to the functionalist arguments that perceive children as a constituent of society. Here

development is seen as goal directed (i.e. becoming a functioning adult and hence maintaining the system) and the activity of children seen as an adaptation to a stable and functioning environment to ultimately advance the child's integration into society. This orthodox theory of development can essentially be considered to be positivist, naturalist and functionalist (Burman, 1994; Morss, 1996). Morss (1996) further contends that traditional developmental psychology "sets itself the task of uncovering the universal and natural processes by which human infants are transformed into fully adapted adults" (p. 5).

This theoretical strand is most clearly represented by stage theories of development, such as Freud and Erikson. The greatest impact on contemporary notions of development is however typified in the work of Jean Piaget. Piaget's cognitive theory of child development is widely considered to be the most influential theory of development psychology, profoundly affecting contemporary understandings of child development. Based on empirical work spanning six decades, his theory is essentially an integration of his two primary interests, that of biology and genetic epistemology, hence he specifically aimed his work at developing a theory of knowledge about cognitive development (Sternberg, 1999).

2.6.2 The Social Context Approach

The social context approach essentially emerged as a result of a measure of discontent towards traditional developmental accounts. This progressive trend (Rogoff, 1990) advances social revisions to traditional accounts and as such acknowledges social and interpersonal contexts. However, the developing biological child is still seen as central, with the social environment perceived as

providing a significant but secondary influence. In other words, “the social nature of childhood is based on biological foundations” (Morss, 1996, p. 5). The social context approach is exemplified in the work of the soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Morss, 1996).

2.6.3 The Social Construction Approach

The author has previously outlined the social constructionist approach in the discussion of the ‘social child’. With regard to the psychology of development, those from a social constructionist persuasion, held the social context approach to be theoretically inadequate (Morss, 1996). They were especially critical of its inherent cognitive focus. The social constructionist approach to development essentially foregrounded the interpersonal process through which meaning is negotiated, arguing that development is a product of these negotiated social processes. Furthermore, they argue for the historically relative status of childhood and development change. Various works by Harre, Shotter and Gergen typify this approach (Morss, 1996). As discussed earlier, the recent collection of theories referred to as the ‘new social science of childhood’ has made significant developments based on the social constructionist approach.

2.6.4 Critical Psychology of Development

The critical psychology of development is an emerging and significant trend in the human development discourse. Key contributions to this approach were put forward in the edited publications by Henriques et al. (1984) and Broughton (1987) as well as individual contributions made by Burman (1994) and most notably by Morss (1996). The critical psychology of development positions itself as a critical voice of

orthodox developmental explanation, essentially providing alternative explanations for orthodox developmental accounts.

Henriques et al. (1984) initially set out to challenge the individual-society dichotomy. They argued that such a dualistic analysis is unsatisfactory and that traditional psychology neglected society in favour of individualism. The social context approach was also dismissed as inadequate since even their focus on the social context failed to challenge individualism. The social construction approach experienced similar criticism, as they, even foregrounding negotiated interpersonal constructions still privileged the individual over society. They were, however, cautious in adopting an approach that over invests in the direction of society.

Henriques et al. (1984) essentially aspired to redefine the relations between individual and society. To this end they advocate for a Marxist take on human development, a theoretical manoeuvre fully supported by Morss (1996).

Broughton's (1987) edited volume, *Critical theories of psychological development*, provides a systematic critique of the traditional developmental psychology based on the Marxist, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist arguments. In the opening chapter of the volume, Broughton (1987) herself launches a scathing attack against traditional development psychology and makes a strong case for the need for critical developmental psychology. Like Burman (1994), Broughton contends that development is more than an academic discipline and has a hegemonic effect over society. Key to her argument, is that she sees developmental psychology as a self-confirming ideology devoid of any tradition of self-critique or critical self-awareness. She argues that critical developmental psychology strives to address the

unreflective world view of what constitutes development, with the primary task of reconstructing knowledge about human development in terms of its historical, social and political manifestation.

It is not so much that developmental psychology is apolitical, asocial, or ahistorical, but rather that it is a discipline that has traditionally been political, social and historical in a presumptuous, self-deceptive, and oppressive way. (Broughton, 1987, p. 11)

Morss's (1996) contribution to the discussion is iconic. His seminal publication, *Growing Critical*, examines contemporary development psychology from the vantage point of a critical analyst. His treatise elucidates a number of epistemological dilemmas and theoretical inadequacies of both orthodox development accounts and contemporary alternatives such as social constructionism. Like Henriques et al., Morss (1996) suggests a turn to Marx, Foucault and Lacan as viable considerations for addressing the challenges precipitated by orthodox developmental psychology. While Morss's focus was initially on critical alternatives to developmental psychology, he inadvertently engages with, and elucidates critical issues in the theory of childhood and childhood studies in general. Epistemologically, his contentions, applied broadly, make a profound impact on contemporary notions of childhood.

2.7. Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlined the various theoretical conceptualisations of childhood starting with more traditional understandings and progressing towards the more contemporary theses. Presented more or less as a historical treatise the chapter

tracked the conceptualisation of children from incomplete and invalid citizens to active co-constructors of society. Key to the initiation of this progression was the dissatisfaction among theorists regarding the uncritical absorption of traditional developmental theory into classic socialisation understandings of childhood. An interesting conceptual move by Corsaro (2005), was to replace the troubled concept of socialisation with that of ‘interpretive reproduction’. Interpretive reproduction explains children’s participation in society as active and innovative. He argues that “children are not simply internalising society and culture, but are actively *contributing to cultural production and change*” (2005, p. 19, emphasis in original). This conceptual move is typical of the new direction of childhood studies and is epitomised in Prout and James’s (1997) radical contention that childhood should be perceived as a social construction. Adopting a social constructionist position meant that childhood was no longer perceived in a finite form but rather as a set of actively negotiated social relationships determined by social, historical and cultural forces. These conceptual adjustments favour an understanding that move beyond constructions of children as passive recipients of socialisation and sets the epistemological tone and participatory methodological agenda moving forward. This is considered in Chapter Three and Chapter Four respectively.

CHAPTER THREE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two detailed the available literature relevant to the current study. Throughout the chapter a number of epistemological dilemmas emerged, initially implicitly, and thereafter rather explicitly. It is not without prior design and contemplation that this chapter is a critical extension of the previous chapter, engaging with the various emerging epistemological dilemmas and considering appropriate epistemological vantage points. Therefore, in this chapter, the epistemological positioning of the study is considered.

Critical to this task, is engaging with the concept of ideology, which serves as the focal point of the epistemological positioning. This chapter therefore proceeds with the theoretical consideration of the concept of ideology. This will be followed by an engagement with appropriate epistemologies. Whilst this chapter plots the route, and details the navigational protocol of the epistemological position, it is essentially a chapter on method and although philosophical tenets are engaged with, it is written with an ethos of pragmatism.

3.2 Theorising Ideology

Cognisant of the essence and ethos of this chapter, this section will not be an exercise in concept deconstruction, definition generation or a historical treatise. It is important to note that the current study is premised on the bold supposition that the constructions of childhood are configured by ideology.

Even though there are a number of different views on the constituents and nature of ideology it is, however, necessary to theorise on which conception best helps us elucidate the ideological nature of childhood. To this end, it is necessary to briefly review the most popular viewpoints. The author is resisting the challenging temptation of attempting an integration of various viewpoints with the aim of producing a synthesis.

The term ideology can be traced back to 1796 when Destutt de Tracy coined the term to refer literally to the science of ideas. Since then, the term has enjoyed a somewhat circuitous journey, characterised by a vast array of interpretations and misinterpretations, to emerge in contemporary society with a multitude of meanings, undoubtedly inspired by its historical past.

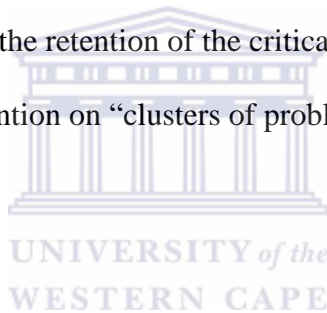
Therefore, when it comes to ideology, it is customary to offer a word of warning and to suggest a certain degree of caution. McLellan (1986), for example warns that: “Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social science...it is an essentially contested concept, that is, a concept about the very definition (and therefore application) of which is acute controversy” (p. 1). Similarly, Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1980) contend that the concept of ideology “has given rise to more analytical and conceptual difficulties than almost any other in the social sciences” (1980, p. 187). The inherent complexity of the concept is further outlined by Billig et al. (1988):

Most social scientific concepts lack clear and precise definitions which are accepted by all theorists, and the concept of ideology has been particularly troublesome in this respect. Different theorists have used this

concept in very different ways, whilst disputing each other's intellectual right to do so; moreover the same theorists have often found themselves slipping into different meanings as they talk about ideology. (p. 25)

Thompson (1990) further comments on the inherently ambiguous nature of ideology claiming that its multiplicity of meaning is related to its historical heritage as well as function. The latter point refers to whether it is used descriptively (to describe a state of affairs) or prescriptively (to evaluate a state of affairs). Recent attempts to reduce the ambiguity have seen the cessation of the prescriptive function. This essentially means that the critical nature of the concept has been sacrificed.

Thompson (1990) argues for the retention of the critical edge claiming that this serves to sustain focused attention on “clusters of problems” which ideology initially aims to elucidate.



3.2.1 Billig

Unlike Thompson (1990) Billig (see Billig, 1982; Billig, 1991; Billig et al., 1988) advocates for the disposal of the negative connotation of ideology. They argue instead, that in order to reduce the complexity and ambiguity, it would be useful to elucidate the relationship between formal ideological systems and common sense.

They make the distinction between ‘lived ideology’ and ‘intellectual ideology’.

‘Lived ideology’ refers to the common sense representations incorporating the common-sense beliefs, values and social and cultural practices typical of society.

‘Intellectual ideology’, refers to the formalised philosophical, political and religious systems which is the product of intellectuals. Following Moscovici’s theory of how scientific discourse diffuses into common-sense social representations, Billig et al.

(1988) suggest that 'intellectual' ideology can in fact diffuse into 'lived' ideology. As the current study is merely interested in providing a commentary on the nature of ideology, documenting the entire path from 'intellectual' to 'lived' is beyond the scope of this study. It is however prudent to consider, at a rudimentary level, how it is achieved. Billig et al. (1988) put forward the dilemmatic conception of ideology which they distinguish from the 'internal consistency' conception. It is the internal consistency theory which is typically subscribed to, with ideology conceived of as a mould which shapes the thoughts of its bearers. As Billig et al. (1988) explains:

Ideology is often seen to provide an internally consistent pattern so that thoughts, beliefs, values and so on fit together into the total mental structure. There is a similarity between this conception of ideology and the psychological notion of cognitive schema... Accordingly, ideology is conceived to be some sort of giant, socially shared schema, through which the world is experienced. (p. 29)

The dilemmatic conception, by contrast, foregrounds the contrary themes within and between 'lived' and 'intellectual' ideology.

By assuming that there are contrary themes, a different image of the thinker can emerge. The person is not necessarily pushed into unthinking obedience, in which conformity to ritual has replaced deliberation. Ideology may produce such conformity, but it can also provide the dilemmatic elements which enable deliberation to occur. (Billig et al., 1988, p. 31).

Epitomised in the Marxist tradition of ideology, the internal consistency thesis has proved a popular conceptual point of departure. Following is a brief explication of the Marxist take on ideology.

3.2.2 Marx

It is rather peculiar that even though Marx's influence on ideology is profound, there is no widely accepted Marxist definition of ideology. Throughout Marxist writings one could identify diverse, and sometimes contradictory, conceptualisations¹⁴. A starting point would be to elucidate Marx's conceptualisation of society. Marx proposed a base-superstructure model of society, with the base referring to the means of production and the superstructure, which is formed above the base, comprising the legal system, political system and religion. The superstructure also houses the ideology. Marx theorised that the base determines the superstructure. This effectively means that since the base is controlled by the ruling class, the superstructure including the ideology is controlled by the ruling class. As Marx argues, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas". Ideology in this sense is used as an instrument to maintain social production by acting as a mechanism to legitimise society's rules.

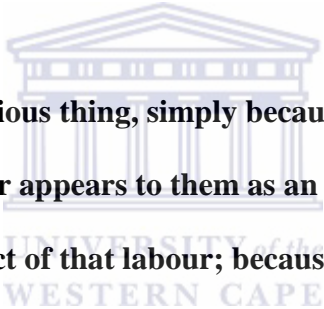
It serves to obfuscate the exploitation of the disempowered groups, by advocating a common-sense belief that the ruling class's interest is in everyone's best interest, as well as by presenting the social relationships between classes and the production process as a natural state of affairs. It is critical when reading ideology from a Marxist perspective to be acutely and continually aware of the base-superstructure

¹⁴ For example, see Barret (1991) who has identified six.

model of society. In this sense, we are reminded that it is the materiality of human production that determines ideology, or as the now famous quote contends “consciousness can never be anything else but conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process...Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life”.

Another way of reading the concept of ideology in Marxism is to perceive it as concealing the contradictions between the essence and appearance of society (see e.g. James, 2006). Marx uses the concept of commodity fetishism to explain that there is a marked difference between the appearance and the essence of society.

Marx argues thus:



A commodity is a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (as cited in Mclellan, 1996, p. 14)

What Marx is postulating, is that the cause of the fetishism is the nature of the production process. What this means is that the actual value of the employees is worth more than the wage that they receive, as the employer is able to extract a surplus when the commodity is sold. Thus in this instance, ideology is seen as “deriving from the (real) surface relations of capitalist society which served to conceal the fundamental relations of production” (Mclellan, 1996, p. 13). Marx argues:

Everything appears reverse in competition. The final pattern of economic relations as seen on the surface, in their real existence and consequently in the conceptions by which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to understand them, is very much different from, and indeed quite the reverse of their inner but concealed essential pattern and the conception corresponding to it. (as cited in Mclellan, 1996, p. 15)

There is general, if not popular, consensus that Marx's materialist conception of history is difficult to explicate. It is subsequently axiomatic that Marx's treatment of ideology that is concealed inside his materialist treatise is difficult to define precisely (Mclellan, 1996). Furthermore, his notion of the concept was born within a number of crude manuscripts that outlined his broader social views. It is therefore not entirely surprising that his treatment of the concept is not well-rounded and synthesised. In that sense, Mclellan makes the very salient point that "Marx's treatment of ideology amounts much more to a cluster of brilliant insights than to a fully worked out theory" (1996, p. 17).

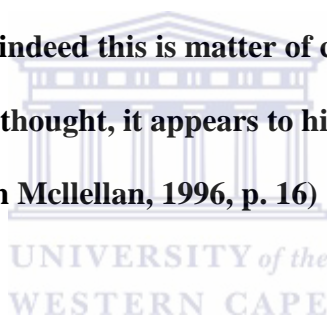
The legacy of Marx's influence on ideology is further outlined by the revision and additions to his conceptualisation effected by a range of other theorists who used his basic premises as their conceptual point of departure.

3.2.3 Engels

After Marx it was Engels that took up the mantle of further developing the materialist conception of history. It was during this process that he advanced the concept of ideology. It is in fact Engels who equated ideology with false

consciousness and not Marx as is commonly thought (McLellan, 1996). Engels wrote:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces compelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces. Because it is a process of thought he derives its form as well as its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material, which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, and does not investigate further for a more remote source independent of thought; indeed this is matter of course to him because, as all action is mediated by thought, it appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought. (as cited in McLellan, 1996, p. 16)



As Engels quite obviously related thought as detached from reality, he retained the negative conception of ideology inspired by Marx. He further expanded on Marx's base-superstructure notion of society by constructing a hierarchy of ideologies.

McLellan (1996) states that Engels considered ideologies such as religion and philosophy to operate at a much higher realm than, for example, politics and the law. In fact it appeared that the more removed they were from the base and the more they approached the superstructure, the more Engels considered them to be ideological (McLellan, 1996).

Marx's popularisation of the concept of ideology spurned a great interest, both within Marxism as well as within the social sciences in general. However, while

Marx's conception of ideology favoured the critical, negative thrust of the concept, some theorists subsequent to Marx favoured a neutral conception of ideology.

3.2.4 Gramsci

Marx's theory of ideology was further advanced through the work of Gramsci (1971). Gramsci essentially accepted Marx's analysis of capitalism, focussing on the ideological relations between the working and ruling class. Gramsci's theoretical contributions can be seen to operate at Marx's level of the superstructure which he divided into two categories, which he referred to as coercive institutions and non-coercive institutions. The former consists of the government, legal system etc, whilst the latter consists of the education system and schools, religious institutions, trade unions, cultural groups, political parties, the family, etc.

Having considered and subsequently rejected Marx's negative view of ideology, Gramsci's conception of ideology can best be described as neutral. He was specifically interested in expounding the nature of the differential power relationship, i.e. how it was formed, maintained and justified. Gramsci was unconvinced about the Marxist conception of how the ruling class ruled. He believed that no regime could sustain itself through coercive forces and that an understanding of subtle and pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation served to perpetuate the dominant ideas (Burke, 1999). In reaction, he put forward the notion of 'hegemony' which he used to explain how a system of values, attitudes and beliefs becomes shared and accepted within a society and justifies the status quo in power relations. Burke (1999), citing (Boggs, 1976), subsequently defines hegemony as:

an organising principle that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that his prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called common sense so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things. (p. 3)

The concept of hegemony therefore explains the ideological relationship between the ruling class and the working class masses in terms of generating a sense of socially shared understanding of how society should work. Gramsci (1971) was however cognisant of the effort required in maintaining the ideologies. He wrote: “The problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and unify” (1971, p. 328). Thus, Gramsci’s theory also suggested a struggle and conflict over ideologies. He argued that ideological domination was mediated by the fact that the working class had a dual consciousness reflecting both the ideas of the ruling class as well as common sense knowledge about the workers lived experience (Thompson, 1992). This dual consciousness is the genesis of the hegemonic wars, where it now becomes possible for the working class to put forward their own ideologies. It was essentially the roles of intellectuals within each class structure to do battle and build the ideologies. As Gramsci states:

The intellectuals of the historically progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the last analysis, they end up by subjugating the intellectuals of the other social groups; they thereby create a system of solidarity between all the intellectuals,

**with the bonds of a psychological nature and often of a cast character
(1971, p. 60).**

With Gramsci, Marx's conception of ideology reaches its pinnacle, and an answer is provided to the conundrum of how capitalism has been able to rule and survive (Mclellan, 1996).

3.2.5 Althusser

With the work of the French philosopher, Althusser, the Marxist concept of ideology once again returns to its negative or critical roots¹⁵. Using Marx, Althusser (1969, 1971) located ideology within the Marxist base-superstructure model. He however, proposed a conception of ideology as a set of dynamic practices wherein all classes actively contribute and participate (Gray, 2005). Subsequently, Althusser rejected the notion of ideology as false consciousness, as well as any concept of ideology as a product of consciousness rather opting to foreground its function in society. The essence of his approach is then functionally linking ideology to institutional contexts and everyday practices. Ideology therefore, according to Althusser, is not an illusionary representation of reality but rather the means through which people relate to reality (Mclellan, 1996). As Althusser argues:

In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between themselves and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence. This supposes both a real relation and an imaginary lived relation (1969, p. 233)

¹⁵ Generally speaking this point is true. However, Lorraine (1983) has shown how Althusser oscillates between a negative and positive conception.

He proposes that ideology has a material existence, located in material practices and apparatuses (Lorraine, 1983).

A key feature of Althusser's (1971) approach is his concept of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) which he uses to explain how domination is developed, perpetuated and sustained in society. The ISAs which include institutions such as the church, education system, political parties, legal system and the media, function to secure hegemony by assimilating the various classes in society within a dominant ideology (Thompson, 1992). They function through a process called interpellation which is a functional term used to describe how people are addressed in society and given a particular identity, subjectivity or position in society (Thompson, 1992).

Althusser believed that people are born into a particular ideology. The individuals born within a particular ideology are, through the process of interpellation (in particular hailing), recruited as subjects of that ideology. As Althusser cogently states "Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (1971, p. 299). It is through interpellation that people are hailed into participating in a form of ideology. In the final analysis one can identify Althusser's contribution to the theory of ideology as critical in exposing how hegemonic discourses, institutions and social practices function in a complex way to perpetuate consent and ultimately maintain domination. As Fiske (1988) explains:

For Althusser ideology is not a static set of ideas imposed upon the subordinate by the dominant classes, but rather a set of dynamic processes constantly reproduced and reconstituted in practice (p. 306)

3.2.6 Lenin

From the outset, Lenin's conceptualisation of ideology was decidedly neutral. His conceptualisation was rooted in the dynamic between class interests and ideologies. In his analysis of the polarised political struggle in Russia, Lenin distinguished between the socialist ideology and the bourgeois ideology. It was Lenin's view that the critique of the dominant ideology of the ruling class appears as ideology too. Lenin focused on the ideology generated by the dominated. He made further distinctions within the socialist ideology, identifying the working class consciousness on one level and the socio-democratic class consciousness of intellectuals on the other. Lenin believed that the working class on its own are unable to develop an authentic socialist ideology and would remain trapped within the ideologies of the dominant group. Following this logic, it is inaccurate to speculate that the ideas produced by the class are in the interest of the class. Taking it a step further, the spontaneous consciousness of the working class does not necessary serve the interests of the working class. Lenin argues that the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its becoming subordinated to the bourgeois ideology. This is the classic definition of ideology emphasized in Marx's epiphenomenal model. However, the key distinction is that the ideologies are generated by competing classes. Ideology, then refers to the ideas which delineate and advance the interests of the major classes engaged in conflict.

3.2.7 Mannheim

In Karl Mannheim we have the first systematic attempt, outside the Marxist tradition to advance a neutral conception of ideology. Mannheim's (1936) focus was not on theoretical Marxism, but rather on the interplay between social conditions and

knowledge production. Mannheim acknowledges the multitude of meanings associated with ideology but suggests that if one peels away the layers two distinct forms of ideology emerge. He distinguished between the particular and total conception of ideology. The particular conception of ideology conceives of it as a concept that operates at the level of conscious disguises¹⁶, deception and lies, whereas the total conception is concerned with collective thought systems which are related to social contexts. Longhurst (1989) further points out, that with the particular conception, only certain aspects of what the other is saying is doubted, depending in part on their social position, whilst with the total conception, the 'other's' entire conceptual framework is cast in doubt. The total conception develops over time from the particular conception. Mannheim believed that Marxist theory was critical in the transformation from the particular to the total conception of ideology. The influence of the bourgeoisie is crucial (Longhurst, 1989). As Mannheim (1936) contends:

At first in the course of ever deepening disintegration naïve distrust becomes transformed into a systematic particular notion of ideology... the rising bourgeoisie which brought with it a new set of values was not content with merely being a circumscribed place within the old feudal order. (pp. 57 – 58)

However, Mannheim believed that Marx' total conception still retained some elements of the particular conception in as much as he focused on exposing and

¹⁶ Mannheim (1936) refers to the disguises existing on a continuum between conscious and what he refers to as half-conscious disguises. While it is unclear if Mannheim is actually referring to the unconscious, the point is made that the particular conception is closely related to the common sense conception of a lie.

discrediting bourgeois expression. Furthermore, Marx failed to subject his own theory to the critical process that he used for others. Mannheim subsequently draws a further distinction within the total conception which he refers to as the special formulation and the general formulation. Marx's approach epitomises the special formulation in as much as he "does not call his own position into question but regards it as absolute, while interpreting his opponents ideas as a mere function of the social positions they occupy" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 68). In contrast, "the general form of the total conception of ideology is being used by the analyst when he has the courage to subject not just the adversary's point of view but all points of view, including his own, to the ideological analysis" (Mannheim, 1936, pp. 68-69). Once the transition to the general formulation is achieved ideological analysis will no longer be viewed as an intellectual weapon but rather as method for social research which will allow for the indiscriminate analysis of all forms of thought. Mannheim (1936) called this the sociology of knowledge.

3.2.8 The Turn to Thompson: Towards the Critical and the Discursive

It is at this point in the academic exercise that the researcher is faced with a theoretical dilemma. It would appear prudent not to conceptualise and operationalise the concept too narrowly, as one could then draw on various conceptualisations which subsequently allow for greater range and depth of theoretical explanations of the empirical data.

A cursory reading of the above conceptualisations of ideology, lends support to the opening statement regarding the highly contested nature of the concept of ideology. Also, if one considers that the various conceptualisations are rooted in opposing

epistemological positions, it is axiomatic that attempting to provide an all encompassing definition of ideology would be an exercise in futility. Even attempting to synthesise various conceptualisations may be construed as theoretically improbable. Foster (1991) however, attempts an integration of the various conceptualisations. Unfortunately his integration reads more like a list of key premises of the various theorists than theoretical integration. As intimated previously, this can be expected. Foster (1991) does, however, manage to provide a taxonomy of the theoretical commonalities. He states that:

Ideology is not merely a system of beliefs, values or ideas...is not merely a form of false consciousness of the real...is relatively autonomous terrain...involves or is closely interlinked with practice...and has a powerful emotional component. (p. 362)

While integration will not be attempted in the current study, it is, however, necessary to operationalise the concept. As an initial step, it would be useful to revisit typical delineations of the concept. From the literature, it seems that ideology usually follows one of the following delineations. The distinction could be made between Marxist and non-Marxist traditions. This delineation includes various revisions of Marx's original thesis, including but not restricted to Engels, Lukacs, Gramsci and Althusser and non-Marxist approaches as put forward by, for example, Mannheim.

Alternatively, the distinction could be made according to whether the concept is conceived as positive, negative or neutral. Whilst Marx was the key proponent of the negative or critical conceptualisation, the neutral conception was put forward by

Mannheim (1936), while Billig et al. (1988), Gramsci (1971) van Dijk (1990), and others, further conceived ideology in a positive sense in as much as it could be functionally positive. Billig et al. (1988) strongly favour a positive notion of ideology. As previously intimated they argue for the dilemmatic approach, in contrast to an internal consistency approach, wherein a number of contrary themes create the possibility of ideology producing dilemmatic elements which induces deliberation.

It is abundantly clear that the inherent complexity of the concept of ideology and the varied conceptualisations demands that one follows a particular theoretical strand, or risk losing the way. The essence of the dilemma is that each version poses pertinent questions regarding the ideological status of childhood. The decision ultimately determines how childhood is conceptualised. If, for example, the inner consistency thesis is adopted, then childhood can be conceptualised as a structural category wherein the social actors of that category, i.e. children, helplessly conform to the dictates of that structure. From a schema theory perspective, it would then be the child's mental structure that is systematically biased to achieve this conformity.

Following Althusser (1971), this conformity will be enhanced by the ideological state apparatuses which ensure that the social actors abide by the socially accepted values and belief systems. However, it is not merely the act of acceptance that is significant. If one looks at childhood for example, the child is not only the carrier of the belief system etc, but also acquires a set of associated behaviours, such as how to act in public, in school, with strangers etc. The obvious result is a mutually influencing system between cognition and behaviours. Important questions then

arise regarding whether these beliefs are socially shared or have they been actually socially constructed. If they are found to be socially constructed, then what role does ideology play in its construction? How is it internalised, or how does it become part of the cognitive structure?

For the purpose of the current study and considering the broader epistemological framework of social constructionism, it was decided to adopt Thompson's (1984; 1990) formulation of the concept. Thompson's reformulation not only finds congruence with social constructionism but also with the methodological slant that the study works from.

Thompson (1984) initially distinguishes between neutral and critical conceptions of ideology, which he then uses as a point of departure for the development of his view. As previously stipulated, the neutral conception is characterised as merely one aspect of social life, not necessarily illusionary or associated with furthering the interests of one group at the expense of another. By contrast, the critical conception conveys a critical or negative ethos typically associated with Marxist versions of ideology.

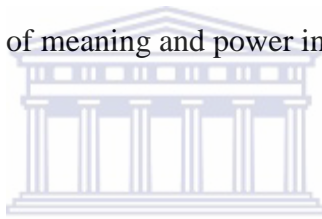
Thompson (1984, 1990) is a strong proponent of the critical thrust, favouring an approach that foregrounds the negativity of ideology. Subsequently, his conceptualisation of ideology draws strongly from the critical treatises. He rejects the notions of ideology as a form of social cement and false consciousness, and subsequently puts forward the idea that ideology operates through language.

Thompson's focus is on how symbolic forms intersect with relations of power. In

other words, he is concerned with how meaning is constructed and mobilised in the social world to establish and sustain relations of domination (for both individuals and groups). Thompson (1990) contends:

...the concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are symmetrically asymmetrical... ideology broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power (p. 7)

In order to understand Thompson's reformulation of ideology, four aspects require elaboration: the notion of meaning, the notion of symbolic forms, the concept of domination, and the interplay of meaning and power in the establishment and maintenance of domination.



Meaning is concerned with the meaning of symbolic forms which are entrenched in a diverse range of social-historical contexts. Symbolic forms refer to:

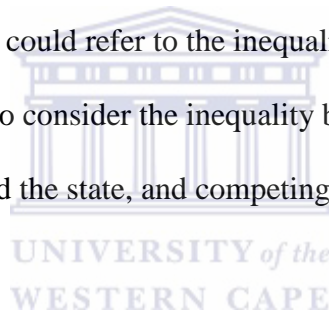
a broad range of actions and utterances, images and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognised by them and others as meaningful constructs. Linguistic utterances and expressions, whether spoken or inscribed, are crucial in this regard, but symbolic forms can also be non-linguistic or quasi-linguistic in nature (e.g. a visual image, or a construct which combines images and words). (Thompson, 1990, p. 59)

For Thompson, symbolic phenomena can be perceived as ideological phenomena. However, two conditions need to be met. Firstly, they need to function to maintain relations of domination, and secondly, they need to operate within particular social-

historical circumstances. Thompson's (1990) conceptualisation of domination refers to:

when established relations of power are symmetrically asymmetrical, that is, when particular agents or groups of agents are endowed with power in a durable way which excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to, other agents or groups of agents, irrespective of the basis upon which such exclusion is carried out (p. 59).

In an important diversion from classic Marxist conception of ideology, Thompson (1990) rejects the notion that domination exclusively refers to class relations. He argues that while domination could refer to the inequality and exploitation between classes, it is paramount to also consider the inequality between sexes, cultures, ethnic groups, individuals and the state, and competing states.



The fourth aspect, how does meaning function to establish and maintain relations of domination, is an important aspect of the current study. Thompson proposes five strategies or 'modes' through which meaning functions, viz. legitimization, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation and reification. In the context of the current study, it is paramount to detail each of these modes as well as provide an account of the strategies of symbolic construction that encompass these strategies. This task is embarked on below.

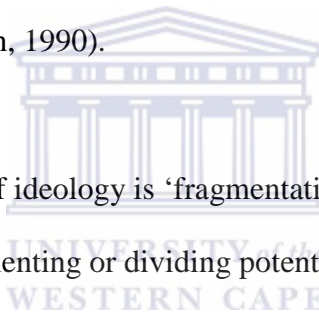
Drawing extensively from the work of Max Weber, 'legitimation' refers to the representation of relations of domination as being inherently just and subsequently worthy of support. Thompson's (1984) focus is on how the symbolic forms lay

claim to legitimacy of these relations. Thompson (1984), further citing Weber distinguished between three types of grounds on which these claims to legitimacy may be based: rational grounds (appealing to the legality of societal rules), traditional grounds (appealing to the sanctity of cultural traditions), and charismatic grounds (appealing to the character of the individual who exercises power and authority). Claims based on the latter may be expressed in symbolic forms by using a range of symbolic strategies (Thompson, 1990). One such strategy is referred to as 'rationalisation', whereby social actors construct a symbolic form which follows a line of reasoning that ultimately legitimates and rationalises the nature of social relations. Another strategy, 'legitimation', suggests that institutional arrangements which serve the interests of certain individuals or groups are presented as serving the interests of all groups and individuals. Finally, in narrativisation, claims are embedded in stories as well as cultural and historical narratives which serve to justify and legitimise the use of power by those who own and wield it and confirm subservience by those who do not (Thompson, 1990).

The second method through which ideology operates is 'dissimulation', which refers to the way relations of domination are hidden, repudiated or obscured. In this instance, ideology functions to avert the focus away from relations of domination. Dissimulation is achieved through three strategies viz. displacement, euphemization and trope. Displacement refers to the strategy when a characterisation of one object or individual is used to refer to another, thereby transferring the negative or positive connotation of the one to the other. In euphemization, actions, social actions and process, institutions or objects are redefined to elicit a positive sentiment. Trope

refers to a cluster of terms that denotes the figurative use of language and symbolic forms (Thompson, 1990).

The third unit of operation is 'unification' which refers to the symbolic construction of attributes, the foregrounding of common aspects and the denigration of differences with the aim of creating a collective identity amongst individuals. Unification is achieved through the strategies of 'standardisation' and 'symbolisation of unity'. 'Standardisation' involves the adaptation of symbolic forms to a standard framework, which then become the socially accepted framework. 'Symbolisation of unity' refers to the construction of symbols, which foster a sense of unity and collective identity (Thompson, 1990).



The fourth modus operandi of ideology is 'fragmentation'. Contrary to unification, fragmentation involves fragmenting or dividing potential opposition or refocusing their gaze and energy towards a fabricated mutual enemy. Here, the strategies of 'differentiation' and 'expurgation of the other' are relevant. 'Differentiation' implies foregrounding the distinctions and divisions between individuals and groups, perpetuating disunity and creating in-group and out-group symbolic forms. 'Expurgation of the other' involves the creation of a false common enemy that requires collective resistance (Thompson, 1990).

The fifth and final mode of operation of ideology is 'reification' which involves the representation of society as permanent and natural, but ahistorical. Strategies of naturalisation, which involves representing social processes and characteristics as the outcome of natural progression, and eternalisation whereby phenomenon are relived

of the socio-historical essence and presented as permanent unchanging state of affairs, are pertinent (Thompson, 1990).

3.3 Epistemological positioning

It is axiomatic that this study lends itself rather closely to a social constructionist framework. As a key position in contemporary (anti)developmental theory and the principal thrust within the sociological domain it would be appropriate to reiterate James and Prout's (1997) contention that social constructionism has advanced into the most influential framework in contemporary studies of childhood.

The social construction of childhood followed a trajectory similar to that of the general epistemological tradition of social constructionism, albeit at different times. However, it would not be inaccurate to lay claim that it received more widespread acceptance amongst theorists of childhood than it did in general circles of knowledge production. In this section, the use of social constructionism as an overarching epistemological framework is considered.

3.3.1 Social Constructionism: The obvious choice

The term social constructionism, although a recent addition to the epistemological debate, with roots in postmodernism, has a myriad of theoretical sources, and can be traced back to Berger and Luckman's (1966) "Social construction of reality" and Mead's (see Reck, 1981) and Blumer's symbolic interactionism. In psychology, Gergen's *Social Psychology as History* (1973) and the *Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology* (1985) are usually credited as the initiation of the movement in the field.

Generally, social constructionism's key concern was to provide an alternative to the positivist-empirical philosophy that characterised the knowledge production in the social sciences in the 1960's and 1970's. In his seminal works, Gergen (1973, 1985) challenged that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge, are social and culturally situated, and that psychological inquiry should take social, historical, political and cultural life as its focus of investigation rather than the individual. He argues that psychology should therefore cease its quest for 'objective' knowledge and its pursuit of elucidating the laws that determine experience and behaviour. In lieu of the above, Gergen (1985) proposes that psychology should focus on the discursive practices that are used to construct the world. While Gergen was leading the line in the US, others such as Harre, Secord and Shotter were initiating the European renaissance, similarly developing arguments that opposed positivistic and experimental based positions in social psychology (as cited in Burr, 2003).

With its varied genesis, attempting to provide a single all encompassing definition is an extremely complex task. While it is often referred to as a movement, others see it as a theory, a position, a theoretical orientation, an epistemology or a general movement (Stam, 2001). Stam (2001) contends that at best it can be referred to as a general label denoting a series of positions with a diverse influence. As there is clearly no single constructionist position, social constructionism is a difficult target for its critics, while simultaneously being a difficult movement for its followers and enthusiasts. Hibberd (2005) probably provides the most general formulation of the function of social constructionism.

...social constructionism emphasises the historicity, the context-dependence, and the socio-linguistically constituted character of all matters involving human activity. The psychological process of human

beings are...essentially social, and are acquired through public practice of conversation. (p. viii)

Contemporary notions of social constructionism have often been simplified and differentiated into two broad dichotomous versions or schools of thought, often referred to as light/dark (Danzinger, 1997), weak/strong (Schwandt, 2003) or micro/macro (Burr, 2003) social constructionism.

On the one end of the spectrum light, weak or micro-social constructionism, characterised by the work of Gergen, Harre, Shotter, Potter, Wetherell and Billig, focuses on the micro-structures of language use and favour a multiple reality version of the world where the constructive and situated function of language and discourse is foregrounded (Burr, 2003). In this version, power is seen merely as an effect of discourse (Burr, 2003; Danzinger, 1997). However, even within the micro-social constructionists, there are subtle and more profound differences between the proponents with some, most notably Gergen, favouring a more relativistic position than others. Relativism asserts that there is no external reality outside of representations of it. As multiple versions of the world and reality exist, no one account is 'more' true or real than the other. This alignment to relativism has been the Achilles heel of social constructionism. One of the most important reasons for this has been, according to Burr (2003):

...the problematic nature of morality and political action that ensues from a relativist position...If all accounts of the worlds are equally valid then we appear deprived of defensible grounds for our moral choices and political allegiances. (p. 23)

Other trends within micro-social constructionism can be linked to discursive psychology. Discursive psychology is concerned with the performative use of language with a particular focus on the use of discursive practices in the intersubjective creation of meaning. While it favours an understanding of the constructive capability of language, its position is decidedly less relativistic than that of, for example Gergen, in that discursive psychologists do not deny the existence of internal mental states. They in fact distance themselves from the ontological debate of what exists by 'bracketing' the issue. As Potter (1996) states:

I am certainly not trying to answer ontological questions about what sort of things exist. The focus is upon the way people construct descriptions as factual, and how others undermine those constructions. This does not require an answer to the philosophical question of what factuality is. (p. 6)

The second version, the dark, strong or macro-social constructionism, while similarly focused on the constructive role of language, is concerned with the relations between power and social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices. Largely influenced by the writings of Foucault, macro-social constructionists include proponents such as Hollway (1984), Parker (1992, 1999), Rose (1989, 1990) and Willig (1999). As their focus is on issues relating to power, their research is often focused on elucidating how unequal power relations foster social inequality in society (Burr, 2003). Foucault (1984) did, however, have a particular aversion towards the concept of ideology, especially the Marxist version. For Foucault, ideology is a mere effect of power and not the other way around. In this sense, the concept of ideology would be inherently partial as it is tacitly assumed to be irreducible. Foucault argues that ideology is always reducible to the

effects of a regulatory power (Thompson, 2010), and it is this function and productive capacity of power that he deems essential. Foucault further believes that it is the relationship between power and discourse that constitutes knowledge and warrants our ontological pursuits and that ideology is a mere effect of the relationship. This relegation of ideology to an effect or outcome variable is thus inappropriate for this project, wherein ideology is critically perceived as meaning in the service of power and which aims to reveal the ideological nature of childhood, i.e. how the meanings of childhood are constructed to establish and sustain relations of domination.

Noting the above, in this study the author has opted to adopt a brand of social constructionism that is more in line with the discursive approach, favouring a micro-social constructionism perspective, which is more concerned about the role of language and discourse in the construction of meaning.

These two versions do, however, have a number of common themes to which they generally adhere. Similarly Burr (2003) believes that the two versions should not be seen as mutually exclusive and points to the possibility of synthesising the two approaches, which have been attempted by Burkitt (1999), Burr and Butt (2000) and Davies and Harre (1990) (as cited in Burr, 2003). Following is a synopsis of the commonalities between the two versions.

Anti-essentialism

The first commonality that is typical to both approaches is that of anti-essentialism.

Anti-essentialism is the notion that there are no essences that determine the nature of people or the world, i.e. there is no definable and discoverable nature that make people what they are (Burr, 2003).

A critical stance toward taken-for-granted-knowledge

A key tenet of all social constructionist approaches is its challenge to the notion that knowledge is based on objective observation of the world. It therefore advances a critical stance towards taken-for-granted understandings of the world, which includes questioning how we perceive and categorise the social world (Burr, 2003; Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Gergen, 1985).

Knowledge is the product of social processes

Social constructionists contend that the world we experience is the product of social processes. In other words, how we perceive things, how we understand the world is not derived from how the world really is but rather constructed by people during social interaction. Cromby and Nightingale (1999) contend that, “it is the social reproduction and transformation of structures of meaning, conventions, morals and discursive practices that principally constitutes both our relationships and ourselves” (p. 4). The role of language in constructing the world therefore becomes paramount.

Knowledge and social action

The claims that “knowledge and social action go together” (Burr, 2003, p. 5) and that “knowledge is inextricably linked to, and emerges as a product of, activity and

purpose” (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999, p. 5) point to the close relationship between knowledge and social action. It is through negotiated social interaction that people construct the world around them. However, not one perspective or truth but rather multiple truths are constructed, each with their own associated social action. For example, the concept of childhood was previously constructed as a phase of development wherein children were characterised as incomplete human beings. This construction of childhood was associated with various social actions that facilitated this construction which, notwithstanding the issue of power relations, included amongst others, the education system and child-rearing practises. Another construction of childhood portrays children as innocents in need of protection. In this instance, decisions regarding children were effected within the framework of children’s rights and child liberatory discourse and action. Noting the above, it is a short step to concur with Burr (2003) who subsequently argues that constructions of the world are bound up within existing power relations. It would then not be inaccurate to infer a dialectical relationship between power relations and common-sense constructions.

Historical and cultural specificity

As Burr (2003) states, “the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific” (pp. 3-4). This means that how we perceive and understand the world is contingent on where and when one lives. Burr (2003) further argues that knowledge should therefore be seen as products or artefacts of that culture and history. It follows then that it would be erroneous to place a premium on one type of knowledge, or understanding, over

the other, or even to presume that certain types of knowledge are closer to the truth than others.

As stipulated, the above four premises are common to all forms of social constructionism. A closer reading of these suggests that there are two key themes that implicitly emerge which most social constructionists, or various forms of social constructionism would subscribe to with disparate levels of intensity, gradation and enthusiasm. These are considered thus.

The first theme is that of multiple perspectives. From an ontological position, social constructionism is concerned with the construction of meaning and not truth. Social constructionism holds that there can be no one absolute truth and favours a view that there exists multiple truths. Generally within social constructionism, this 'truth nihilism' has its roots in the often made claim that there is no relation between words and the world, referred to as external reference or referential (in its adjectival form) (Hibberd, 2005). The point is that language does not have a representational function, i.e. language does not represent or mirror reality. The focus is therefore on the function of talk within particular contexts and traditions and not the truth or falsity of the statements.

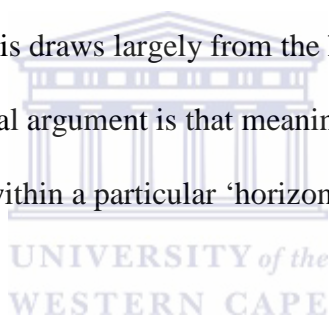
The second theme concerns the function of language. Social constructionists hold that language is both a precondition for thought and a form of social action. Within psychology there exists a polarised view of the relationship between thought and language. While traditional psychology perceives language as an expression of thought (the aforementioned referential view), others, such as discursive psychology

and social constructionism in particular, hold a resolute view that language is in fact a precondition for it. Burr (2003), for example, claims that our understanding of the world does not transpire from our perception of objective reality but from the conceptual frameworks and categories used by others within specific socio-cultural contexts. In other words, humans are born into a pre-existing conceptual reality with pre-existing categories that provide a framework of meaning for them. As access to this framework is provided by language, one can argue that language is a precondition for thought. However, some constructionists extend the argument claiming that language is in fact a form of social action. This focus on the performative use of language is based on the notion that language has practical consequences. As Burr (2003) argues:

When a judge says, ‘I sentence you to four years imprisonment’, or when a priest says, ‘I pronounce you man and wife’, certain practical consequences, restrictions and obligations ensue. (p. 8)

The major implication of adopting this notion of language is that what we understand to be human, i.e. our personalities, emotions, motivations etc, are contingent on and structured by language. Burr (2003) claims that the “way that language is structured therefore determines the way that experience and consciousness is structured” (p. 48). However, social constructionists in general, and Gergen (1999) in particular, argue that it is important to remain cognisant of the fact that language is a social phenomenon. The conceptual implications, especially with regard to the implication for meaning follow.

The conceptualisation of language as a social phenomenon, at a most basic level, points to the notion that the world is constructed during social interactions. This essentially means that how we understand the world is dependent on human interchange concerning “agreements or rules of interpretation shared within particular communities” (Misra, as cited in Hibberd, 2005, p. 23). Gergen (1999), drawing strongly on the work of Wittgenstein, similarly puts forward the relational account of meaning, claiming that meaning is located in relations between communities of interlocutors and not within the individual’s head or even within the actual utterance. Furthermore, the meanings of words and concepts are never permanent but rather indeterminate and contingent on specific contexts wherein it is used. The indeterminate thesis draws largely from the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer (1994) whose central argument is that meaning is not fixed but is derived through interpretation from within a particular ‘horizon of understanding’.



Closely linked to the indeterminate thesis is the question of context. Social constructionists are generally in agreement that the meanings of words are context-dependent and intricately tied up to the specific context wherein it is used. With meaning being contestable, language becomes sites of variability, conflict and struggle where power relations are contested (Burr, 2003). Applied to the concept of childhood, the meanings of childhood are constructed during social exchanges, are not universal, and are contingent on the specific context. Following the above conceptualisation, a number of questions emerge. For example, with regard to the social exchanges: who are the participants in these exchanges? More specifically, are the exchanges between adults, between adults and children, between children themselves or between institutions? What is the nature of these exchanges? Are the

interlocutors equal contributors during the exchanges or are there distinct levels of status and power?

3.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlined the epistemological positioning of the current study. The concept of ideology which is the focal point of the study and subsequently a key determinant of the position adopted is also considered. Noting its tumultuous genesis, the concept of ideology has emerged in contemporary society with a multitude of definitions and meanings. With this came an array of functions, some positive, while others are negative with critical intent. Noting the diverse conceptualisations and theoretical positions of various proponents of ideology, it is clear that the concept is highly contested in the social sciences. Reconciling this with the epistemology of social constructionism is an extremely complex task, specifically noting that social constructionism is itself highly contested and going through a renaissance of sorts. Encapsulated in the work of Cromby and Nightingale (1999), Hibberd (2001a; 2005), Liebrucks (2001) and Willig (1999) amongst others, this debate with the relativism/realism dichotomy as its key point of contestation, culminated in a heated debate documented in a special edition of the *Theory and Psychology*, 11(3) in 2001. In this study, the author has opted to adopt a brand of social constructionism that is more in line with the discursive approach, favouring a micro-social constructionism perspective, which is more concerned about the role of language and discourse in the construction of meaning and less concerned about the ontological debates about the nature and existence of reality. This is also consistent with Thompson's (1984, 1990) conception of ideology i.e. how meaning is discursively constructed and mobilised in the social world to

establish and sustain relations of domination. To reconcile this position with Thompson's concept of ideology, the author employed an ontological realist position, also referred to as critical realism. An explanation of the constituents of this position as well as its implications is taken up in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. The next chapter details the method.



CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three outlined the key philosophical underpinnings of the current research study, delineating the specific epistemological framework of the study as well as deliberating on various epistemological dilemmas that emerged during the course of the study. It clearly emerged that when researching children and childhood, one is inherently faced with a gamut of epistemological challenges. As the epistemological position of a study is inherently linked to the method, these challenges have methodological implications. This chapter presents the method and engages with these implications.

4.2 Design

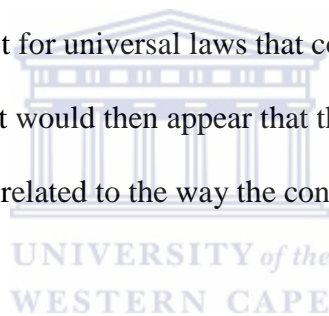
In accordance with the aims, objectives and epistemological orientation of the study, a qualitative methodological framework will be followed¹⁷. Concordantly, the sampling, data collection methods and analysis will be consistent with this framework. The study further advances the child participation model as the methodological point of departure.

As intimated on various occasions in this study, a key theoretical constraint in childhood studies is the historical lack of genuine research interest in children and childhood. With children seen as incomplete adults, constituting a passive role in society, and childhood merely as a preparatory phase for adulthood, effectively

¹⁷ It is unnecessary to enter into a polemic regarding the two main research traditions. However, the design does demonstrate conceptual synergy between the aims, theoretical perspective and methodology. Furthermore the epistemological framework, which is clearly articulated in this document, warrants a qualitative approach.

translated into lack of empirical consideration. The subsequent result is an area of study that lacks a methodological heritage.

The notable exception to the above contention was the experimental method engendered by traditional developmental psychology. Even then, developmental psychology was primarily focussed on the attainment of adulthood (see Chapter Two). The way research relates to its subject is related to the way the concept under investigation is theorised. The dominant conception of childhood was that of 'development' (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000), with methods imported directly from the positivistic disciplines. Invariably it was these methods, based on controlled experimentation and the quest for universal laws that contributed to the objectification of the child. It would then appear that the reverse is also true; the way a concept is theorised is related to the way the concept is researched.



With the emerging interest in the role of children in society in the 1960's, quantitative initiatives, grounded within the positivist tradition, were historically placed to get the methodological ball rolling.

An examination of early initiatives in childhood research suggests that childhood and children's lives have been exclusively explored via the knowledge and understanding of adults (Christensen & James, 2000). In this sense one can identify two factors that stand out as most critical. Firstly, the notion that children have not been made the unit of analysis, and secondly, that research has not taken children's perspectives into consideration (Knuttsen, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994; September, 2002).

Early research tended to locate children's empirical position within structures such as the family, school and community. Public statistics for example, generally tended to collect data on the state of families, school and community with child data having to be extrapolated from these units (Qvortrup, 1994). This relegation of children to secondary units is a direct result of common sense construction and conceptualisation of children as incomplete social actors. Qvortrup (1994) argues:

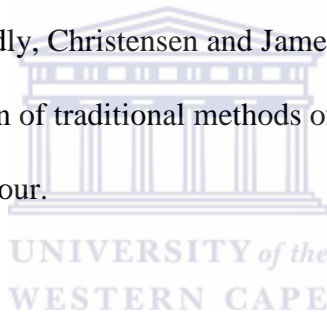
The statistical treatment of children as well as their representation in other accounts from political bodies reflect the position children generally hold in both society and adult imagery – that of dependents. (p. 7)

Qvortrup (1994) further argues that the central issue behind using children as the unit of analysis is to elucidate children's position in society. Thus, to reiterate what was mentioned previously, there seems to be a model of cyclical influence between children represented conceptually, empirically and their position in society.

Essentially then, Qvortrup argues, that it is not only important to have information on e.g. the number of children in the family, but also the amount of siblings that the child has. In other words, one needs to look at the context from the vantage point of the child. The next logical step, methodologically speaking, is to grant children a valid voice in research (Flekkøy & Kaufman, 1997).

This notion that children should be granted a valid voice in research is not an appeal for the exclusive implementation of qualitative methodologies, as is often thought. Rather, the argument is that children be repositioned as subjects rather than objects of research. Christensen and James (2000) have postulated on the complexity of effecting this methodological shift. Firstly, they argue it requires a paradigm shift

in what constitutes valid knowledge. This is an epistemological endeavour. Secondly, it requires a simultaneous conceptual shift in acknowledging children as valid social actors and informants and thus suspending alignment to traditional developmental theory. This is a theoretical and conceptual endeavour and in effect, means subscribing to the new sociology of childhood as the conceptual and theoretical basis of childhood research. From a methodological perspective, Hendrick (2000), commenting on the historical method, highlights three contingencies of effecting this conceptual shift. He argues that children should be acknowledged as being capable of social action; the areas in which children are socially active should be identified and adults need to acknowledge being in a relationship with them. Thirdly, Christensen and James (2000) argue that it requires a critical scrutiny and revision of traditional methods of research with children. This is the methodological endeavour.



The crucial question then arises: How do we translate the theory into practice? Or put more specifically: How do we develop appropriate research methods based on the new theoretical understanding of childhood. Roberts (2000) highlighting the important relationship between theory and practice, rightly cautions that the paradigmatic shift should ensure that the research process as well as the outcomes are of genuine value and benefit for children. This raises another consideration that is intricately linked to research with children, that of research ethics. This issue will be taken up later.

A good starting point for the above questions is put forward by O’Kane (2000) who questions the appropriateness of using existing research methodologies and ethical

positions, initially designed for adults, on childhood research. The initial treatise on the new sociology of childhood was not without a methodological arm, proffering the ethnographic method as being most appropriate. Later, Christensen and James (2000), however, argued that research with children does not necessitate the use of particular child specific methods nor should it privilege one technique over another. They argue thus:

As in all research, what is important is that the particular methods chosen for a piece of research should be appropriate for the people involved in the study, its social and cultural context and the kinds of research questions that have been posed. (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 2)

In lieu of prescribing a dedicated method for conducting research with children the idea is then rather to foster working relationships, where children are considered a vital part of the research process and subsequently encouraged to participate.

In research with children, forming relationships in which children feel that they want to participate throughout the research process is particularly important in order to keep up a continuing dialogue over which children, as well as researchers feel that they have control.

(Christensen & James, 2000, p. 5)

Their contention touches on a number of important considerations. Firstly, it asks important questions about the role of children in the research process. Should children be seen as objects, subjects or participants? Secondly, it also elucidates the power relationship that is inherent between researcher and researched and how this relationship is exacerbated in childhood studies. How to negotiate this power

imbalance and create space and opportunities for children to engage in a meaningful way is ultimately the most pressing methodological challenge in childhood studies (Morrow & Richards, 1996; O' Kane, 2000). At a methodological level, it is this relationship that further perpetuates the ideological construction of childhood. So while it is logical to concur with Christensen and James (2000) regarding the application of a dedicated research method for childhood research, it is equally important to engage in a process of repositioning the subject. How this repositioning takes place at the level of epistemology has been discussed in the previous chapter. An option for the repositioning at the level of methodology is presented below.

4.2.1 Child Participation: A new trend in research with children

A developing trend in child research is the realization of children's agency in research (Pole et al., 1999). This contention is demonstrated by the following two extracts.

We should make use of these different abilities rather than asking children to participate unpracticed in interviews or unmasked in surveilling gaze. Talking to children about the meanings that they themselves attribute to their paintings or asking them to write a story... allows children to engage more productively with our research questions using their talents which they, as children, possess. (James, 1995, as cited in O'Kane, p. 140)

In addition, O'Kane (2000) argues that:

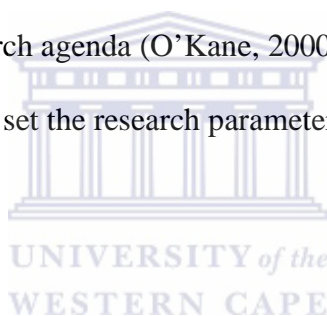
In recognizing both the biological and structural conditions which structure children's lives, we need to develop communication strategies which engage children, build upon their own abilities and capabilities, and allow their agenda to take precedence. The use of participatory activities does precisely this. (p. 140)

These extracts are specifically referring to both the acknowledgement of children as valid informants and participants in the research process, and the subsequent shift towards soliciting their knowledge, opinions, attitudes and perceptions on matters that affect them. When applied to a developmental context or research strategy, this 'agency' is often referred to as child participation. The advantages of adopting a child participation approach in the research environment is that it facilitates dialogue with children on a range of complex and abstract issues (O'Kane, 2000); addresses the power imbalance and subsequently increases the child's confidence which in turn facilitates the collection of more in-depth data (Sapkota & Sharma, 1996); reduces the constraining influence of age as a determining construct of children's ability (Solberg, 1996); facilitates enhanced engagement of children with the research process (James, 1995, as cited in O'Kane, 2000); and is less invasive and more transparent (O'Kane, 2000). Ultimately these motivations all point to increasing the ecological validity of the research.

Participation also has a number of potential developmental and educative benefits. Nagel (1987) for example, believes that the process of participation itself could lead to intrinsic benefits such as enhanced self-worth and a heightened level of community identity. He further contends that participation could contribute to the

development of new values, knowledge, attitudes, skills and beliefs. Flekkøy and Kaufman (1997), however, do not view these benefits within the role of children as future adults but rather as contemporary and valid social actors. They therefore point to the potential of participation to ultimately contribute to democratic values within society.

A further rationale is put forward by Alderson (1995) who postulates that participation techniques have the potential to resolve a number of ethical issues in research with children. Generally, this resolution refers to the fact that participation techniques enable children's voices, interests and needs to be articulated and given preference over adults' research agenda (O'Kane, 2000), and specifically to the fact that children are permitted to set the research parameters and direct both discussions and interpretation.



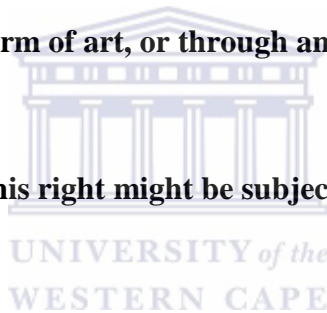
The trend towards child participation can be directly related to the increased acknowledgment that children are valid social actors in their own right. This has been fuelled by the growing emphasis and subsequent social interest on children's rights, especially with regard to affording children their participation rights as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 12 (p. 50) provides children with the right to express their opinion on all matters which affect them:

- 1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child**

2. **For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.**

Similarly Article 13 (p. 50) provides the right to freedom of expression:

1. **The child shall have the right of freedom of expression; this right shall include the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice**
2. **The exercise of this right might be subject to certain restrictions...**



Furthermore, the new Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) makes similar claims of participation rights:

Every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participate in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration. (p. 34)

Even a cursory look at the above pieces of legislation confirms the changing conceptions and position of children in society. However, while one can concur with regard to the influence exerted by legislation and human rights instruments in

advancing participation, this trend is also to some extent, the methodological outcome of the epistemological turn to social constructionism.

Child participation is best defined as the process whereby children actively contribute to and share in all decisions that affect their lives as well as the communities they live in (UNICEF, 2003). In *The State of the World's Children 2003*, UNICEF underscores the obligation of states parties to ensure child participation and cautions that failure to do so will result in “a world of young adults who do not know how to express themselves, negotiate differences, engage in constructive dialogue, or assume responsibility for self, family, community and society” (p. 4). The report also emphasizes the need to help children develop the skills of participation and to create ‘opportunities for meaningful participation’ (Willenberg et al, 2006).

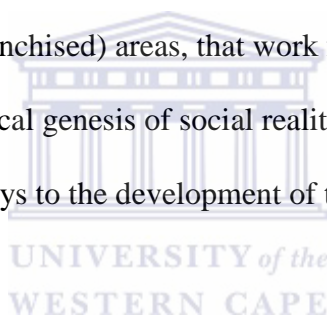


Despite the near universal ratification of the UNCRC, there is still a predominant culture of non-participation by young people (Mathews, Limb & Taylor, 1999). In South Africa, there are few structured opportunities and forums for young people to engage in discussions regarding their well-being. Mathews et al. (1999) believe that there are three key factors that contribute to this culture of non-participation. Firstly, the dominant, common-sense discourses question the appropriateness of children's involvement. Secondly, children are largely perceived to lack the relevant competence to provide any meaningful level of participation. Thirdly, there still exists controversy about the form and desired outcomes of participation. Lansdown (1995) similarly noticed a general reluctance in adult society in assenting to children meaningfully participating in society.

Some authors, such as Alderson (2000) believe that the right to express a view is the most important participation right for children. Others, such as Melton (1999) and Smith (2000) argue that simply expressing a view may not be enough. Melton (1999) argues that freedom of expression becomes a redundant exercise without access to information and the educational opportunities. Smith (2000) on the other hand, questions adults' perceptions and acknowledgment of children's views and whether they would stimulate action from adults for the realization of the participation rights.

Arguing for a children's policy that promotes child participation, Melton (1999) makes two further important points. Firstly, he puts forward the notion of shared decision making. He argues that since matters affecting children usually involve the vested interest of multiple parties, structures and processes should be developed to promote shared decision making. It is important, however, at this juncture to again point out that even these structures and processes themselves need to be developed in a participatory process. Further, as was argued earlier, these structures become redundant enterprises if children are not acknowledged as valid and competent social actors. Thomas (2000) in fact speaks of a 'presumption of competence' as the overarching factor when working with children. Concordantly, when conducting research with children the idea would be to foreground children's participation, especially in terms of methodological issues but also with regard to the actual empirical focus of the endeavour.

Melton's (1999) second point is that children's interests are best served by 'graduated decision making'¹⁸. What Melton is suggesting, is that children participate in a task or decision but only assume full autonomy or independence through a graduated process based on the acquisition of relevant experience. This essentially bridges the gap between children and adult society and sets the scene for shared decision making. Formalising this suggestion and 'selling' it to society is probably the primary concern. Cultural influences would probably be a key factor to consider in this regard. Hart (1997), in fact emphasises the importance of the notion culture in children's participatory initiatives. He believes that it is paramount to build a strong sense of cultural identity within children. Projects with children, from disadvantaged (disenfranchised) areas, that work from this premise invariably end up elucidating the historical genesis of social realities. This process could contribute in fundamental ways to the development of the child's social identity.

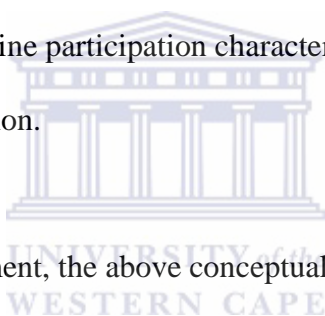


When used within a research context, it is important to point out that the author is not referring to children who merely participate as research subjects during the data collection process, but rather children who actively and meaningfully participate by making valid contributions at various stages of the research process. Pretty (1995) similarly cautions against the mechanical application of participation as a technique or method. This view is further enhanced by O'Kane's (2000) contention that "the successful use of participatory techniques *lies in the process*, rather than simply the techniques used ... the genuine use of participatory techniques requires commitment

¹⁸ Zimring (as cited in Smith, 2000) puts forward the idea of 'learners permits' that incrementally allows for full independence of children. Similarly, Rogoff's 'apprenticeship' and Wood, Bruner and Ross's 'scaffolding' are concepts based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development that explicate graduated decision making (as cited in Smith, 2000).

to ongoing processes of information sharing, dialogue, reflection and action” (2000, p. 138, emphasis added). This means that child participation as a methodological strategy not only allows for the elucidation of children’s voices but sanctions, in a collaborative relationship, full access to children’s lived experiences of the real world.

A cursory look at Hart’s (1992, 1997) metaphorical ladder of participation, which he uses to demonstrate eight different levels of participation, provides an explanation to the above arguments. Adapting Arnstein’s (1969) model of citizen participation, Hart posits that the first three rungs of the ladder denote non-participation while the five upper levels denote genuine participation characterised by increasing degrees of child initiation and participation.



Within the research environment, the above conceptualization of child participation as a methodological strategy, has gained a significant following over the past years, fuelled in part by the success of the realization of participation exercises in development initiatives. For example, children have been actively involved in community development and environmental care (see e.g. Hart 1997, Swart-Kruger, 2001); creating child-friendly environments (see e.g. Horelli, 1998), public decision making (see e.g. Partridge, 2005) and developing indicators of child well-being (see Savahl et al., 2006; September & Savahl, 2009; Willenberg et al, 2006).

Furthermore, Horelli (1998) evaluated children’s participation in the creation of child friendly environments in three European cities. Her findings lend support to the notion that children should be regarded as active citizens and ultimately indicate a progression towards a more ecological and socially supportive setting that fosters

intergroup involvement. Horelli (1998) did however identify a discrepancy between children's knowledge and expertise and the organizational and institutional capacity of local authorities to respond appropriately. She therefore argues that the effective participation of children is contingent on a number of factors. These include the institutionalization of appropriate tools for participation, as well as the support, both institutional and ideological, of schools, municipalities, local government and the state, which should advance the agency and space of children and young people.

More recently, Partridge (2005) investigated the potential of children and young people's participation in public decision making. Whilst she concluded positively with regard to the creativity and depth of the children's contribution, she similarly acknowledged the challenges in terms of addressing the existing power relations between adults and children, and deep seated notions of children's role in society. Furthermore, the edited publication "Stepping Forward" (Johnson, Ivan-Smith, Gordon, Pridmore & Scott, 1998) has documented a number of initiatives that have implemented the child participation approach as the methodological point of departure. The above mentioned efforts operate from the premise that children have a legislative right to express a view on matters that affect them (Chawla & Heft, 2002) and that children are valid and competent social actors (Prout & James, 1997).

Translating the above theoretical underpinnings of child participation into practice, the current project followed the ensuing key principles.

- i) Relinquish top down view of knowledge generation

- ii) Acknowledge children as valid and competent social actors and constructors of knowledge and subsequently acknowledge their constructions as valid and meaningful
- iii) Children should be perceived as participants in research
- iv) Children should play an active role in the development of the research design

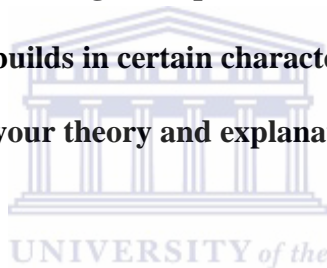
4.3 Participants

The study was conducted in the Western Cape. The total sample consisted of 56 thirteen¹⁹ year old children selected from a total of three schools in rural and urban geographical locations. The motivation for using this age group was the following: Firstly, they are still embedded in childhood in terms of developmental theory. Secondly, they are legally regarded as children in terms of the South African Constitution (1996), The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified by the South African Government. Thirdly, this age group is at a developmental stage of systematic reasoning with the capacity for abstract thought and formal operations (Louw, & Louw, 2007; Piaget, as cited in Papalia & Olds, 1992) and the ability to debate, and critically engage with complex concepts and to present their ideas, opinions and feelings in an articulate and conceptually elaborated manner (Papalia & Olds, 1992).

¹⁹ At the commencement of the data collection all the participants were 13 years old. However, the data collection scheduled spanned over a period of five months and eight of the participants turned 14 years old during that period.

The participants of the study were selected using purposive or theoretical²⁰ sampling. Since the aim of qualitative research is not to generalise to the broader population (Mouton, as cited in Stevens, 1996), purposive sampling is an acceptable sampling technique in qualitative research and in the current context ensured inclusion of children from across all demographics as well as lowered the possibility of attrition²¹. Mason (1996) further argues that purposive (or theoretical) sampling:

means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position... and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing... it is concerned with constructing a sample which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory and explanation. (p. 94)



The schools included in the study were purposively selected from a sampling frame of nine schools. These nine schools formed part of a research contractual arrangement and subsequently afforded the researcher unproblematic access to children of the required age. Once the sampling frame was established three schools were purposively selected from the sampling frame. The primary motivation for the final selection of the three participating schools was that they offered access to children from different racial, cultural, language and social class backgrounds. The sample reflected equal gender composition, while the cultural, racial and language disparities reflected the geographical realities. The actual participants were also

²⁰ 'Theoretical sampling' is sometimes used synonymously with 'purposive sampling'.

²¹ Since the study follows a longitudinal series of focus groups, participant attrition was an important variable to consider.

purposively selected in collaboration with the schools' life skills teachers.

Additional inclusion criteria included: perceived reliability, enthusiasm, willingness to participate and commitment. The participants were drawn from two urban and one rural location. Following is a description of each group:

Group 1 consisted of 8 children residing in the Kuilsriver area and attending an Ex-Model C²² high school. These children typically reside in the more affluent designation of Kuilsriver.

Group 2 consisted of eight children residing in the Kuilsriver area and attending a previously disadvantaged public school. These children typically reside in the less affluent designation of Kuilsriver.

Group 3 consisted of eight children residing in the rural area of Genadendal and attending a previously disadvantaged public school.

Group 4 consisted of eight children residing in the rural area of Genadendal and attending a previously disadvantaged public school.

Group 5 consisted of eight children residing in the township of Parkwood and attending a previously disadvantaged public school.

Group 6 consisted of eight children residing in the township of Parkwood and attending a previously disadvantaged public school.

Group 7 consisted of consisted of eight children residing in the Kuilsriver area and attending an Ex-Model C high school. These children typically reside in the more affluent designation of Kuilsriver.

²² Model C schools were previously advantaged and generally have more financial, physical and human resources.

4.3.1 Description of Research Context

Kuilsriver

Participants from Group 1, 2 and 7 were selected from students residing in the Kuilsriver area. Kuilsriver is situated in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town approximately 25 km from the Cape Town city centre. It is characterised by two diverse neighbourhoods, a previously advantaged well-resourced middle class and a previously disadvantaged and poorly resourced working class. In this suburb, skills and education levels are relatively high and unemployment fairly low.

Parkwood

Participants from Group 5 and 6 were selected from the Coloured township of Parkwood, situated on the Cape Flats²³ approximately 15 km from the Cape Town city centre. Parkwood is characterised by low levels of skills and education, and high levels of unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, crime and gangsterism.

Genadendal

Participants from Group 3 and 4 were selected from the rural town of Genadendal. Genadendal, which has the distinction of being the first mission station in South Africa, is a small rural town situated approximately 200 km from Cape Town in the Overberg region of the Western Cape. The town has approximately 3500 exclusively Coloured inhabitants, and is characterised by few resources and many

²³ The Cape Flats is a vast expanse of flat land situated on the outskirts of Cape Town and houses a vast number of Coloured and Black townships. These townships are characterized by high unemployment and crime, and poor infrastructure.

infrastructural deficits. The inhabitants are mainly children, youth, and older persons. Economically active adults between the ages of approximately 20 to 45 tend to be living and working outside the town. The main source of employment for this community is the surrounding farmlands.

4.4 Method of Data Collection

Focus group interviews constituted the primary data collection technique. The technique essentially collects qualitative data to provide insight into attitudes, perceptions, experiences and opinions. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), “the key to using focus groups successfully in social science research is assuring that their use is consistent with the objectives and the purpose of the study” (p. 76). The technique conforms to this contention both in terms of being consistent with the aims of the project as well as consistent with the broader epistemological framework of social constructionism. The focus group process provides the relational context that constructionism espouses as the key element in the construction of meanings. In relation, Krueger (1994) contends that focus groups provide a mutual influencing process as it is essentially a socially orientated procedure. Furthermore, children are found to respond more freely in focus groups as it provides a more relaxed environment (Smithson, 2000) and enhances engagement between the researcher and the children (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998).

As the design was based on sustained contact, the design followed a three phase process with each phase consisting of seven groups, comprising eight participants

per group. Most literature on focus groups recommend that the group number be anywhere between six and twelve participants.

Given the nature of the research aims, it was not methodologically prudent to attempt to garner the information from the participants in a direct way. Therefore, the discussion was located within a broad theme and the emerging meanings extrapolated. This process was advanced by a discussion of the participants' perception of well-being, the problems and difficulties that they, as children, are currently experiencing within their social lives, and their experiences of being young. In other words, their discussions of well-being, their current problems and their experiences of being young, essentially functioned as 'hermeneutic keys' (Gadamer, 1976) to extrapolate their meanings of childhood; or as from Gadamer's perspective, to advance the 'horizons of understanding'. For Gadamer (1976), understanding is embedded in one's 'present horizons', 'knowledge and experience' and 'effective history'. These 'hermeneutic keys' function as triggers to access the 'horizons of understanding'.

The interview protocol was largely unstructured, with only three core questions (one in each focus group phase) and a number of probes designed to elicit the psychological, social and political-historical meanings of childhood as they are embedded in the 'present horizons', 'knowledge and experience' and 'effective

history'. A premium was placed on creating a flowing discussion and spontaneous ambiance. The three core questions²⁴ (hermeneutic keys) were:

- i) What does it mean for you to be well? (exploring what well-being means to them)
- ii) What are the problems (important issues) that you (as young people) are currently facing within the community?
- iii) What is it like being a young person in the world today?

The actual focus groups were preceded by one pre-emptive contact session to facilitate rapport-building, which was explicitly aimed at increasing the ecological validity of the data. The author previously found that a strong rapport between the participants and group facilitators not only facilitated the focus group process but also advanced the collection of richer, more complex and detailed accounts (see e.g. Savahl et al., 2006). The focus groups were followed with a termination session that ensured a structured exit point for the researcher, as well as giving the respondents the opportunity to add or amend certain viewpoints and reflect on the experience of being involved in the research. Christensen and James (2000) believe that the concept of reflexivity should extend to the participants as well and consequently attribute great importance to the reflections of the participants. Even though the pre-emptive and termination session were not formal focus group sessions, the information garnered was considered admissible to the overall data set.

Furthermore, the researcher found that informal discussions with participants before

²⁴ These questions were used by the researcher in a previous project and proved successful in generating discussion around the nature and experiences of children and young people.

or after the focus group sessions yielded a rich amount of information. The content of these discussions were also included in the overall data set.

The same groups comprising the same participants were used for each phase. The attrition rate was very low with only two children, one each from Group 1 and Group 6, failing to attend the final group discussion. With the inclusion of the pre-emptive and termination sessions this effectively translated into 35 contact sessions and 21 focus groups sessions. Each session was between 60 and 90 minutes in duration and was conducted by the author who has had considerable experience both working with, and conducting group discussions with children and youth. The table below provides a graphical representation of the data collection protocol. The phases explored the previously specified psychological and social dimensions of childhood.

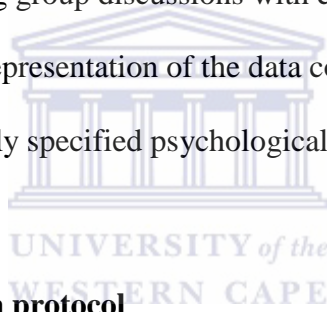


Table 1: The data collection protocol

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
Group 1	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 2	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 3	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 4	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 5	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 6	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination
Group 7	Pre-emptive session	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Termination

The transcription schedule reflects at which point data was collected. The focus groups were recorded using a digital Dictaphone and saved as a digital audio-file. Thereafter, the raw audio data was transcribed verbatim by a private company offering transcription and translation services. The participants were informed and gave permission for this to take place. The author had previously used the services of the company which operates under a strict ethical code. This company is also often used by the Human Sciences Research Council²⁵ and private law practices. The transcribed data was verified by the researcher and served as the initial phase of analysis. Besides verifying that the spoken word was accurately captured, the verification process was also characterised by reflexive listening where the author reconciled the field-notes and memos with the transcribed data. The following transcription convention was used.

Table 2: Transcription Convention

<i>F</i>	Facilitator
MR	Male Respondent
FR	Female Respondent
AR	Multiple Respondents
[text]	Explanatory text
...	Omitted text

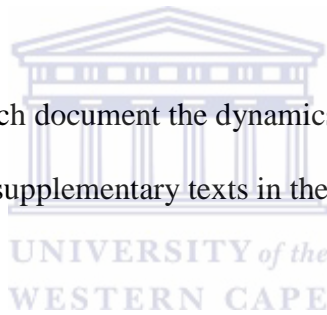
After each contact session, detailed memos were developed. Memos constitute the reflections of the group facilitator immediately after the data collection session.

They can be defined as specialised written records that document various instances

²⁵ The Human Sciences Research Council is a statutory body that supports development nationally by conducting large scale policy-relevant social research.

of the research process. Thus memos are an essential methodological tool in qualitative research, ensuring methodological rigour and contributing to the validity of qualitative research studies. Following Kvale (1996) three types of memos were used in the current study:

- i. Process memos, which document the entire research process.
- ii. Interview memos, which document the actual interview process. These memos consist of theoretical memos (summarising the substantive theoretical issues that emerged during the interview), methodological memos (outlining the methodological dynamics of the interview process) and personal memos (describing the researcher's experience of the interview process).
- iii. Analysis memos, which document the dynamics of the analysis process. The memos were used as supplementary texts in the data analysis phase.



4.4.1 Focus Group Interview Protocol

Session One: Pre-emptive Meeting

Session Two: Focus Group One

Core Question 1: What does it mean for you to be well?

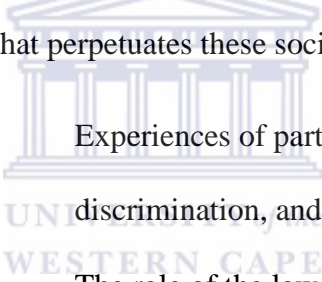
- Probes:
1. Elucidate their understanding of well-being, and what it means to them.
 2. Domains of well being (*probe their understanding of the various domains of well-being*):

- Socio-psychological constructs (self-esteem, self-concept, social relationships, personal safety, discrimination)
- Perceived future (explore hope etc)
- Physical (health, nutrition)

Session Three: Focus Group Two

Core Question 2: What are the problems (important issues) that you (as young people) are currently facing?

Probes: 1. Explore each problem in detail specifically noting the nature and dynamic of the power relations between children and adults that perpetuates these social problems:

- 
- Experiences of participation, marginalisation, discrimination, and prejudice
 - The role of the law (including social rules and regulations in their experience of these social problems)
 - Children's role in society (how they think they fit in and what contributions they think that they can make)
 - Civic participation and perceptions of citizenship

Session Four: Focus Group Three

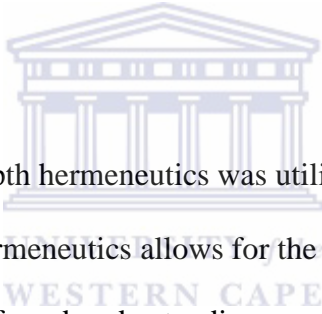
Core Question 3: What is it like being a child (young person) today?

- Probes:
1. Explore each sphere or social space of childhood, i.e. household, neighbourhood, community, school and society in general
 2. What are the positives and negatives of the experiences in each sphere.
 3. What can be done to create a more favourable experience of childhood.

Session Five Termination

4.5 Data Analysis

4.5.1 Depth Hermeneutics



Thompson's (1984, 1990) depth hermeneutics was utilised as the primary method to frame the analysis. Depth hermeneutics allows for the systematic interpretation of the meanings, opinions, beliefs and understandings conveyed by everyday constructions (Stevens, 1996; Thompson, 1984, 1990). The technique works from the assumption that the interpretation of symbolic forms occurs within a particular socio-historical context, "as it attempts to provide the ideological significance of such symbolic forms" (Stevens, 1996, p. 35). Thompson defines symbolic forms as "a broad range of actions and utterances, images and texts, which are produced by subjects and recognised by them and others as meaningful" (1990, p. 59). While Thompson regards linguistic utterances as key in this regard, symbolic forms can also be non-linguistic in nature.

Based on the philosophical tenets as espoused by Ricoeur²⁶, the value of depth hermeneutics lies in its acknowledgement of the fact that an understanding and interpretation of phenomenon is actually a reinterpretation of the individual's understanding or interpretation of that phenomenon. Or as Thompson (1990) states:

The value of this idea is orientated towards the interpretation (or re-interpretation) of meaningful phenomenon, but in which different types of analysis can play legitimate and mutually supportive roles. It enables us to see that that the process of interpretation is not necessarily opposed to types of analysis which are concerned with structural features of symbolic forms or with the social-historical conditions of action and interaction, but that, on the contrary, these types of analysis can be linked together and construed as necessary steps along the path of interpretation. (p. 21)

This technique was specifically selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, by its very nature and design, it allows for the analysis of symbolic forms and ideology.

Thompson initially developed depth hermeneutics as an overarching framework for the analysis of cultural phenomenon. However, he found it to be highly applicable to the analysis of ideology. He argues that when applied to ideological phenomenon, depth hermeneutics aims to elucidate the ideological nature of symbolic forms, i.e. elucidating the ways that meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination. Thus, when applied to the study of ideology and symbolic forms, depth hermeneutics now has critical intent. Secondly, the framework is congruous to the conceptualisation of ideology that this study

²⁶ While Thompson (1984, 1990) is generally in accord with Ricoeur's thesis about meaning and interpretation he disagrees significantly with Ricoeur's underplaying of the importance of social and historical circumstances in interpretation.

employs, i.e. how meaning serves to establish and maintain relations of domination. Thirdly, the framework engenders the broad epistemological framework of social constructionism that frames the current study.

Drawing on the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987/1992), Thompson (1984, 1990) and van Dijk (1997) the method of the present study consisted of three analytically interrelated²⁷ phases of analysis, viz. social-historical analysis, discursive analysis and interpretation/reinterpretation²⁸.

The first phase was concerned with how the socio-historical context influenced the production of symbolic forms. The contention is that since symbolic forms do not exist independently, the temporal, physical and socio-historical context is essential to the understanding of how meaning is mobilised. Thompson (1984) argues that discourse must be viewed as situated practices, “expressions are uttered... by particular agents at particular times and in particular settings...”, and that the social contexts in which discourse are produced are critical determinants of their production. Acknowledging Thompson (1984), Duncan (1993) insists that in order to elicit a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed in discourse, it is “essential that the researcher identifies and attempts to reconstruct the temporal and physical context of its production as comprehensively as possible” (p. 75). Duncan (1993) is rightly arguing for the consideration of the broader social forces which structure the social contexts, as it is these forces that inevitably determine the nature of the domination which discourses ideologically serve to maintain

²⁷ See Thompson (1990) for a comprehensive discussion of the dimensions.

²⁸ See also Duncan (1993) and Stevens (1996).

(Thompson, 1984). This is implicit to the study and is an ongoing process that takes place throughout the course of the study.

The second phase, discourse or discursive analysis, is concerned with the analysis of the structural features of symbolic forms. This phase is essentially the prime analytic phase of depth hermeneutics. Defined as the analysis of functional or performative use of language, this systematic method elucidates discursive activity by isolating structural units that are theoretically assigned, i.e. forms, functions, meanings, categorical values, interpretations, strategies and beliefs (van Dyk, as cited in Duncan, 1993). Both Duncan (1993) and Thompson (1984) are of the opinion that the forms of discourse which express ideology must essentially be seen as linguistic constructions. In this phase of analysis, the discourses of childhood well-being were examined as linguistic constructions consisting of explanatory narratives, and chains of reasoning which can be deconstructed. These deconstructions allow for the elucidation of the ideological features of discourses on childhood by explicating procedures and strategies of legitimation, dissimulation and reification (see also Duncan, 1993).

There exists a range of definitions of discourse. For the purpose of this study the two that provide the best working definition for the study of ideology is that of Burr (1995) and Dant (1991). Burr's (1995), constructionist and oft quoted definition sees discourse as:

a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. (p. 48)

Dant (1991) on the other hand, offers a more explicit meaning orientated definition typical of those seeking a more ideological based type of discourse analysis. He sees discourse as:

the material content of utterances exchanged in social contexts that are imbued with meaning by the intention of utterers and treated as meaningful by other participants. (p. 7)

Parker (1992) and Kress (1985) offer a more post-structuralist approach:

A good working definition of discourse should be that it is a system of statements which constructs an object. (Parker, 1992, p. 5)

A discourse is a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object or process is to be talked about. (Kress, 1985, p. 7)

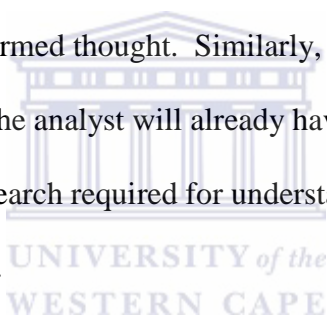
Given the range of definitions of discourse, and the fact that discourse analysis does not engender a unified approach, there are numerous versions of doing discourse analysis. Within the social sciences two versions of discourse analysis can be generally distinguished. The first version, with roots in ethnomethodology and communication studies, focuses on the discourse practices and how speakers draw on various forms of discursive resources to construct particular realities and to achieve certain aims in interpersonal contexts (see e.g. Edward, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Willig, 2000). The second version commonly associated with the Foucauldian tradition, focuses on the function of discourse in the constitution of subjectivity, selfhood and power relations (see e.g. Hollway, 1984). Based on Potter

and Wetherell's (1987/1992) approach this study employed a version of discourse analysis that can best be described as an amalgamation of the two, an eclectic approach that focuses on elucidating the discursive activity of the interlocutors whilst acknowledging the imbrication of discourse, power and subjectivity. Indeed Wetherell (1998) argues that "a stance that reads one in terms of the other continues to provide the most productive basis for discourse work in social psychology" (p. 388).

The applicability of using discourse analysis as a means to analyse ideology is supported by van Dijk, Neff, van Aertselaer and Putz (2004) who argue that since ideologies are not innate but learned social practices, they are often commented on, discussed, legitimated and defended in discourse. In other words, the ideologies are reproduced in discourse and it is largely through discourse that various forms of ideologies are perpetuated and disseminated to children and youth. They subsequently argue that the study of discursive and communicative practices is one of the most productive methods in studying ideology. Furthermore, they believe that discourse analysis would allow for the elucidation of the underlying socio-cognitive structures of ideologies.

Discourse research is based on the premise that meanings emerge from complex social and historical processes (Wetherell, 2001). The ability of discourse analysis to reveal how the participants create meaning (through the analysis of discursive activity, nuances and contradictions) in their life within diverse social, historical and political milieus are the prime motivating factors. The broad question was therefore: How do children, within the contemporary social landscape, use language to

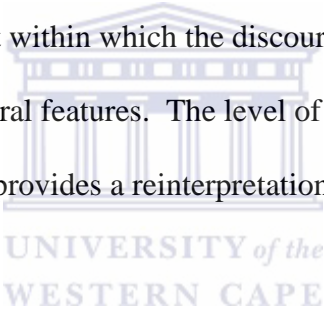
construct versions of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). It is this constructive view of language that is the central theoretical tenet of discourse analysis. Furthermore, it is pre-empted that the meanings emerging from the discourse is the product of cultural, historical and social processes. Discourse analysts typically ask two questions. What are people trying to achieve with their talk, and how are they going about doing it. Considering the above, the question that intuitively comes to mind is: how does one actually go about identifying the discourses? Duncan (1993) and Billig (as cited in Duncan, 1993) warn that there is no mechanical process or preset programme to be followed when analysing discourse. Levett (1989, as cited in Duncan, 1993) believes that the essence of analysis is extensive background reading and theoretically informed thought. Similarly, Billig argues that the text is not the starting point; rather the analyst will already have built up a knowledge of the topic before starting the search required for understanding the particular text (as cited in Duncan, 1993, p. 77).



Indeed, the author, at reaching the point of analysis, had completed the literature review and theoretical considerations. Furthermore, the author had extensive research exposure in the field of child well-being and childhood. With this insight and context, the emerging themes and discourses were thus more easily identifiable than if this had not been the case. Duncan (1993), Stevens (1996) and Henning (2000) point out that discourse analysis is often preceded by a content thematic analysis which assists in making initial sense of the data. This is essential, especially if there is a large corpus of texts. This suggestion was followed in the current study where the author used a basic thematic analysis technique prior to the discourse analysis. What this basically entailed was the identification of broad

themes or thematic domains. Thereafter, the analysis proceeded by explicating the discourses that emerged within these thematic domains. It is important to note that, in accordance with Duncan (1993), the most important consideration in this stage is “to locate the broad recurring, as well as atypical, discursive patterns or themes – rather than focussing on the analysis of every word or inflection – which appeared in the discourses under scrutiny” (p. 78).

The final phase of interpretation/reinterpretation draws on the first two phases, attempting to provide a comprehensive explication of the meanings generated by the discourses. Essentially then, it is concerned with the construction of meaning. It also reveals the social context within which the discourse or symbolic forms function, as well as its structural features. The level of interpretation within this phase is significant as it also provides a reinterpretation. Thompson (1990) states thus:



The process of interpretation is at the same time a process of re-interpretation, in the sense that it is a re-interpretation ... of an object domain which is already interpreted and understood by the subjects who make up the socio-historical world. (p. 22)

This process of interpretation/reinterpretation does, however, create the possibility for multiple interpretations.

Duncan (1993) stresses that the three stages of analysis should not be seen as distinct from one another, but rather as a single on-going process. Moreover, these phases are not presented in the neat sequence displayed above when the actual findings of

the study are discussed in Chapter Five and Six. In accordance with Duncan's (1993) recommendations, the findings will only consist of the final interpretations of the discourses analysed and an explication of the emerging meanings. It is common practice for discourse analysts, as a method of validation, to present the entire corpus of texts as an addendum. The main advantage of this practice is that it allows the reader to evaluate the plausibility of the interpretations, and where possible, to contemplate alternative interpretations (Duncan, 1993). In the current study, as there was an inordinate amount of raw data (transcripts), the author, for practical purposes, decided to refrain from employing this practice²⁹. However, 59 extracts from the corpus of texts have been included in the discussion (Chapter Five) to give meaning and support to the interpretations.

4.6 Well-being: The Hermeneutic Key

Since the concept of well-being was used as an important 'hermeneutic key' in the study, the following section provides a brief synopsis of the current status of the concept.

Well-being has a long history and can be traced back to Jahoda's (1958) concept of positive psychological health, and more acutely to the concept of quality of life (see Cummins, 1995). Child well-being gained significance with the increased public and political concern for children in the 1960's and 1970's. During the last three decades an intensified interest in the well-being of children has been seen, both locally and internationally.

²⁹ The entire corpus of texts is available to the reader on request.

The conventional understanding of child well-being has been conceptualised and associated with an absence of positive behaviours and the presence of physical deficiencies (see e.g. Moore, 1997) and more recently with the prevention of problem behaviour (see e.g. Moore & Keyes, 2003) and promoting strengths and positive outcomes (Pollard & Rosenberg, 2003). Contemporary notions of well-being have envisaged developing an integrated model that amalgamates the treatment and prevention of problem behaviour and the promoting strengths approaches (see e.g. Pollard & Rosenberg, 2003). While these integrated models are cogent and have appeared to have good outcomes in the public health arena, it is important that the concept is thoroughly conceptualised and that consensus is reached on what constitutes well-being. Furthermore, it has been recognised that when conceptualising and defining the concept, cognisance needs to be taken of the specific social and cultural milieu (Pollard & Rosenberg, 2003). Pollard and Rosenberg (2003) define well-being as:

A state of successful performance throughout the life course integrating physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional function that results in productive activities deemed significant by one's cultural community, fulfilling social relationships, and the ability to transcend moderate psychosocial and environmental problems. (p. 14)

Pollard and Rosenberg's (2003) definition of well-being acknowledges critical contextual factors, namely culture, social relationships, as well as various stress factors. Consequently, 'productive activities' are determined by what the socio-cultural community of the individual regards as important and necessary. Similarly, the rules of engagement for social relationships are also culturally determined.

Finally, this definition recognises that for all individuals there are various factors, both tangible and intangible, that have potentially deleterious consequences for well-being (Willenberg et al., 2006).

Considering the multifaceted and composite nature of well-being, a perusal of contemporary literature on well-being suggests that the concept is often differentiated into a number of dimensions (Land, Lamb & Mustillo, 2001; Pollard & Davidson, 2001; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Thornton, 2001; Zaff, Smith, Rogers, Leavitt, Halle & Bornstein, 2003). Thornton (2001), drawing on the work of a number of authors, and Pollard and Lee (2003), after conducting comprehensive and systematic reviews, identified five key domains consistent in the literature viz. physical, psychological, cognitive and educational, social, and economic. Physical well-being includes general physical attributes such as height, weight, nutrition, physical abilities, and overall health and susceptibility to diseases. The psychological/emotional dimension encompasses psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-worth, happiness, anxiety, and stress. Social well-being is concerned with the quality of children's social relationships and includes personal interaction, social coping skills, delinquency, and pro-social behaviour. Cognitive and educational well-being includes factors such as cognitive ability, knowledge acquisition, and school attendance and achievement. Finally, economic well-being pertains to economic determinants of quality of life such as standards of living and caregiver employment status. Zaff et al. (2003) and Pollard and Davidson (2001) collapsed Thornton's five domains into three namely, physical, socio-emotional and cognitive, whilst Land et al. (2001), drawing on the quality of life literature proposed by Cummins (1995) expanded it to seven: material, health and

safety, productive activity, place in community, education, social relationships and emotional /spiritual. The Multinational Project for Monitoring and Measuring Children's Well-Being uses a variation of Thornton's five domains in their construction of indicators (Chapin Hall, 2005). These are safety and physical status, personal life, civic life, children's economic resources and contribution and children's activities.

Due to its complex and broad nature, the concept of well-being, as a holistic concept, has not received much attention for empirical investigation. There have however been numerous studies, albeit not directly concerned with the concept of well-being, that focused on various key domains of well-being such as the physical (see e.g. Immink, & Payongayong, 1999), social (see e.g. Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003), psychological (see e.g. Reynolds, Wallace, Hill, Weist & Nabors (2001), and educational (see e.g. Piekarska, 2000). Government reports, extrapolating child data from various social surveys generally provide the most comprehensive account of the well-being of children. For example, in the US, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics publishes an annual report entitled *Key National Indicators on Child Well-Being*, that provides descriptive data on child and youth well-being. Furthermore, countries that are signatories to the UNCRC are obligated to provide regular reports on the state and well-being of their resident children. In South Africa, for example, the *Children in 2001* report provided a descriptive account of the state and well-being of South Africa's children. South Africa also has a number of non-governmental organisations developing regular publications that outline the state of South Africa's

children. IDASA's *Children's Budget Review* and the Children Institute's annual *Child Gauge* are examples of these endeavours.

Other local initiatives include the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS), who in 2002, explored children's experiences of poverty. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) (2004) similarly investigated the experiences of children living in poverty and the extent to which their socio-economic rights were being realised. These findings indicate a violation of children's socio-economic rights and highlight the debilitating effects of poverty in relation to children's well-being. Under the auspices of the UNESCO *Growing up in Cities project*, Swart-Kruger and Chawla (2002) investigated children's perceptions of their community environments and their recommendations for improvements to make their city more child-friendly. Their findings indicate safe places to play, general public safety, transport, and waste management as key areas of concern identified by the participants. The Department of Labour commissioned a report that explored children's views on labour practices (Clacherty & Budlender, 2004). They found that children were excessively involved in domestic chores and labour practices that negatively impacted on their well-being. Finally, Ward (2007) explored adolescents' perceptions and experiences of community violence and gangsterism. She found negative behavioural and psychological outcomes associated with violence exposure.

There have also been dedicated initiatives aimed at developing indicators to monitor the various domains of well-being. Dawes et al. (2007) have focused on developing

a rights-based approach, while Willenberg et al. (2006) used the child participation approach to develop indicators from children's perspectives.

While well-being is merely used as a hermeneutic key in the current study, the above discussion demonstrates the importance of the concept in contemporary child research, especially with regard to issues relating to policy and practice.

4.7 Validity

Validity, reliability and generalisability remain the holy trinity in research and all studies aspire to score highly on these measures which would then indicate scientific rigor (Kvale, 1996). The concept of validity is often used as a general term referring to all three. In qualitative research, the relevance of validity is a domain that remains highly contested within the field of scientific research (Pyett, 2003; Sparkes, 2001). Indeed the major point of contention in the debate around the scientific legitimacy of qualitative research is the concept of validity. Quantitative researchers often point out qualitative study's lack of adherence to validity measures and on the basis of these shortcomings, regard qualitative studies as unscientific. Proponents of quantitative research use the lack of adherence of qualitative research to validity measures to claim them to be unscientific.

However, proponents of anti-positivist paradigms, who espouse qualitative methods, have responded in a number of ways. They have, for example, attempted to directly adopt quantitative criteria within qualitative research. However, Jardine (1990) believes that qualitative research will never satisfy the criteria of objectivity desired by quantitative researchers and thus argues for a reformulation. Proponents of

qualitative research have endeavoured to redefine the notion of validity and developed concepts that are more in line with interpretivist pursuits. In agreement, Smith (1990) contends that the underlying assumptions of qualitative inquiry precludes using method based criteria and rather requires a reformulation of validity. Smith (1984) fervently suggests that practitioners should “dispense with traditionalist ideas of subjectivity and truth and realise that we are beyond method” (p. 390). Taking up the challenge of reformulation, Lincoln and Guba (1985) for example put forward the pursuits of credibility, authenticity and legitimacy.

Cresswell (1998) has formulated eight criteria or techniques which he believes is important for a valid qualitative study. These include prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review (debriefing), member checks, thick description and external audits. Hammersly (1987) notes that qualitative research is valid “if it represents accurately those features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise” (p. 69). Wolcott (1990), however, is critical of the reformulation attempts arguing that neither validity nor any analogous concept is useful in qualitative research. He favours accuracy of ‘understanding’ as a more fundamental concept than validity in qualitative research. Pyett (2003) similarly argues that qualitative researchers need to ask themselves the following question: How can we have confidence that our account is an accurate representation?

Maxwell (2002) puts forward a critical realist position. He contends that since we have no direct knowledge of the objects of our accounts, we have no independent entity to which to compare these accounts. Maxwell is essentially suggesting that the validity of an account is not contingent on method or procedures, but rather its relationship to those things it is intended to be an account of. This is consistent with

Hammersley and Atkinson's (1983) contention that it is inferences drawn from data and not data in itself that should be seen as valid or invalid. Commenting on this perspective of validity Maxwell (2002) states:

The applicability of the concept of validity presented here does not depend on the existence of absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exists ways of accessing accounts that do not depend entirely on the features of the account itself, but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about.

(p. 42)

Following Mishler (1990), Maxwell further argues that validity is perspectival and 'understanding' relative. This essentially means that the validity and understanding of an account is contingent on the perspective and understanding of a specific community of inquirers. This point is critical in determining the validity measure of the current study. Its implication is reflected on in the final chapter.

Maxwell (2002) identifies three categories of understanding and corresponding types of validity that concern qualitative researchers. The first, descriptive validity, is concerned with the factual accuracy of the account. Maxwell bases descriptive validity³⁰ on Wolcott's (1990) contention that "description is the foundation upon which qualitative research is built" (p. 27), and asks the question: "are you as the researcher accurately reporting what you saw and heard"? The key issue in descriptive validity is accuracy of the account and the meaning of the account is not in dispute (Maxwell, 2002). Meaning is the key concern for the second type of

³⁰ This concept corresponds to what Runciman (1983) calls 'reportage' or 'primary understanding'.

validity in Maxwell's typology, referred to as interpretive validity. With no quantitative counterpart, interpretive validity is concerned with capturing an understanding of what the account means from the perspective of the participants. It is thus concerned with the accuracy of the inferences made, based on the participants talk, actions and behaviours. The third type of validity identified by Maxwell (2002) is theoretical validity which refers to the application of a theoretical construct to the descriptive and interpretive understanding of account. In other words, it refers to an account's function as a theoretical explanation of phenomena. Maxwell (2002) explains that theoretical validity focuses on the "legitimacy of the application of a given concept or theory to established facts" (p. 52).

While these reformulations have at least tacitly been taken up by the research community there is a voice that calls for an even more radical transformation of the concept. Again, under the broad epistemological banner of social constructionism, interpretivism and discursive psychologists, commentators such as Aguinaldo (2004), Kvale (1996) and Sparkes (2001) have questioned the nature of the concept and perceived of it as a social and discursive construction developed to maintain power within the research environment. Ironically, it appears that validity functions as an apparatus of ideology to maintain relations of domination of one form of understanding (science) over another. Validity makes available a range of linguistic repertoires (Aguinaldo, 2004), formalised within the structures of scientific convention to assert and determine method and assert certain knowledge claims as valid and scientific and subvert others as illegitimate and unscientific. As Aguinaldo (2004) argues:

validity polices the social sciences and operates as a form of power that is practiced through its capacity to de/legitimise social knowledge, research practice and experiential possibilities. (p. 128)

Validity must then be interrogated for its discursive (Aguinaldo, 2004) and ideological function within the social sciences. This interrogation is the necessary first step in the successful reformulation of validity. Aguinaldo (2004), however, warns that during the process of reformulation, one must guard against merely putting forward an alternate regime of truth as well as the practice of foreclosing through binary opposition; be it valid/invalid or even trustworthy/non-trustworthy. In that sense the validity question is changed from: “Is that research valid?” to “what is that research valid for?” In Aguinaldo’s (2004) sense validity is then not a determination of binary opposites (valid versus not valid) but rather an interrogation that “necessitates multiple and sometimes contradictory readings of the functions any particular research representation can serve” (p. 130).

Noting the current contestation regarding validity, Angen (2000) summarised these attempts under two broad configurations, viz., ethical validation and substantive validation³¹. These configurations are considered with reference to the qualities of the researcher. Ethical validation refers to the way that researchers provide beneficial (of benefit to the community), generative (moving beyond current understanding) and transformative (effectiveness of change) answers to questions asked by researchers.

³¹ “The term validation rather than validity is used deliberately to emphasise the way in which a judgement of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research is a continuous process occurring within a community of researchers...”(Angen, 2000, p. 387).

The acknowledgement or even celebration of subjectivity in qualitative research provides the base for substantive validation. Angen (2000) states that substantive validation indicates a focus on process. More specifically, the focus should be on the thorough documentation of the process of the research. This means that the researcher needs to produce 'substantive' evidence of rigor, thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the process that was followed in order to reach the understandings and interpretations (Madison, as cited in Angen, 2000). This implies a commitment to reflexivity, which entails a process of critical self-reflection (Alcoff, 1994). Angen (2000) believes that accounts of self-reflexivity and the socio-personal histories of the researchers also impact on substantive validation.

As noted earlier, the above configurations are, to a large extent, contingent on the characteristics and competencies of the researcher. Angen (2000), in fact, believes that the researcher is the instrument through which the understanding of the topic is revealed while Morse (1994) and Patton (1990) note that the quality of the research is related to the skills, training, insights and capacities of the researcher.

Furthermore, Pyett (2003) argues that the specific attributes of the researcher determine how the research is conceptualised, designed and analysed. Others have noted the important attributes of a good qualitative researcher e.g. good interpersonal skills, resilience and commitment, flexibility and attention to detail (McCarl-Nielson, 1990), intense involvement in the research process (Sanjek, 1990), and being a creative and persuasive writer (Angen, 2000). The ethical and substantive validation with reference to the qualities of the researcher must resonate with the consumers of the research.

While the above discussion presented the status and position of validity in qualitative research, it did not demonstrate how validity was conceptualised or the actual criteria, strategies or techniques that were followed in the current study. These strategies are outlined below.

A critical reference group consisting of four children was established to guide the study. These children participated in a previous study on child well-being and were familiar with the research process. They were consulted on four occasions prior to data collection where they provided useful insight and recommendations into the design of the study, sampling and the development of the interview protocol.

Member checking, which refers to the process where the analysed information is taken back to the participants for verification, was effected. The researcher verbally reported back to four of the seven groups who confirmed that the information was an accurate reflection of what transpired in the groups.

Memos, which refer to the documentation of the thoughts and processes during the stages of the study, were recorded. This included the documentation of reflexive moments during the entire study.

Morse, Baret, Mayan, Olsen and Spiers (2002) believe that a critical task of achieving validity in qualitative research is ensuring coherence between the research questions and the method. They refer to this as 'methodological coherence' which was a key consideration throughout the course of the study. This also included theoretical sampling which ensures that the selected participants have the best

knowledge and experience of the research topic. Morse et al. (2002) believe that this “ensures efficient and effective saturation of categories, with optimal quality data...” (p. 12).

Finally, a detailed audit trail, as presented in this chapter and supplemented in Chapter Seven enhances the study’s validity as consumers of the manuscript are presented with sufficient information to allow for the corroboration of the findings. A method of validation often employed by discourse analysts is to present, as an addendum, the entire corpus of texts from which the interpretations were drawn. The advantage of this practice is that it allows the reader the opportunity to more effectively evaluate the plausibility of the interpretations (Duncan, 1993). However, in the current study the raw data was in excess of 400 pages, and as previously suggested, for practical purposes, only 59 extracts from the corpus of texts have been included in the discussion to give meaning and support to the interpretations.

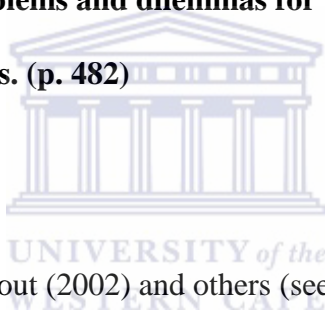
4.8 Ethical Considerations

How the researcher conceptualises childhood has important implications for research practice, including method and ethical considerations. In the section on Design, the author pointed out how the transition from a conceptualisation of children as objects of research to subjects and then to valid participants and social actors in society, has significantly impacted on methodological and design considerations. Morrow and Richards (1996) point out that respect for children as valid rights holders and social actors and the subsequent acknowledgement of their competencies “need to become a methodological technique in itself” (p. 100). With this recognition of rights and competencies emerges the need to adhere to a code of ethics when engaging with

children (Greig & Taylor, 1999). It has been pointed out by Alderson (1995) and others that it is with sound method that the ethics of research with children can be advanced.

Christensen and Prout (2002) argue that the new conceptualisation of children as valid social actors has advanced the ethical complexity of conducting research with children. They state that:

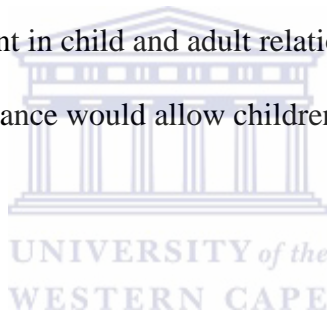
It proliferates the number of cross-cutting relationships and expands the possibility that interests may come into conflict. This is likely to create not only new ethical problems and dilemmas for the researcher, but also particular responsibilities. (p. 482)



However, Christensen and Prout (2002) and others (see e.g. Solberg, 1996) contend that this does not necessarily mean that unique considerations for children need to be developed or that children require a special set of ethical guidelines. Similarly Harden, Scott, Backet-Milburn and Jackson (2000) and Thomas and O’Kane (1998) believe that ethical issues applicable to children are consistent with those involving adults. Christensen and Prout (2002) put forward the notion of ‘ethical symmetry’ wherein they postulate that ethical guidelines between researcher and participant should be the same for adults and for children. They do, however, argue against the age and developmentally based perception of children’s competencies and suggest that practices used in research with children need to acknowledge and take cognisance of children’s experiences, interests, values and social routines. This

entails that the researcher needs to consider and “engage with the local cultures of communicating among children paying attention to the social actions of children, their use of language and the meanings they put into words, notions and actions” (Christensen, as cited in Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 483).

Posing a great ethical challenge to developing and sustaining this ethical symmetry, according to Morrow and Richards, “is the disparities in power and status between adults and children” (1996, p. 98). This power differential contributes to the ‘*othering*’ or marginalisation of children. Part of the task of engaging in ethical research with children is to acknowledge and redress these disparities and unequal power dynamic that is inherent in child and adult relations (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Redressing this imbalance would allow children to participate on their own terms.



Kirk (2007) and Thomas and O’Kane (1998) suggest that the use of participatory techniques could assist in reducing the power imbalance. Christensen (2004) argues that the researcher should relate to the child participants as fellow competent human beings, while Alderson (2000) has emphasised the importance of developing rapport. Similarly, Mauthner (1997) has pointed to the importance of negotiating the delicate relationship between researcher and the child.

Of course the discussion on the issue of power is indicative of the liberation-protection dichotomy that pervades perceptions of the contemporary child. A research process that is too liberal might cause undue harm, while over-protection may inhibit children’s participation (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Assimilating these

issues and aligning them to contemporary principles of ethical research is a complex task of balance and reflection on the part of the researcher. There are implications which are outlined below.

While the principles of ‘non-maleficence’ (do no harm), ‘beneficence’ (of benefit to the research participants), ‘autonomy and informed consent’, ‘confidentiality’, ‘respect and privacy’, and ‘dissemination and reporting’ are universally accepted principles of ethical research, they take on a different format with child research. With regard to ‘non-maleficence’ the researcher needs to actively and consistently maintain a climate of safety for the participant. This entails, on a practical level, consistent monitoring of the state of the child by verbal confirmation and also by the observation of non-verbal behaviour that might indicate distress. ‘Beneficence’ requires that children have a full understanding of the benefits of participation but also entails active reflection by the researcher that these benefits are real and plausible. Both these issues imply that the design and conceptualisation of the study has an ethical genesis.

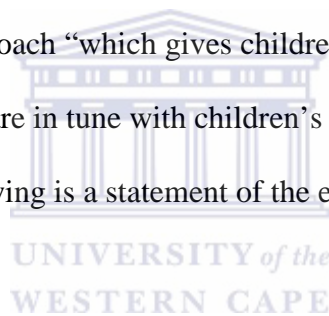
Thomas and O’Kane (1998) suggest that with regard to ‘autonomy’ and ‘informed consent’ an active agreement on the part of the child and a passive agreement on the part of the parent/guardian are needed for ethically appropriate research. This departs markedly from the traditional practice of obtaining consent from parents and assent from children. This active consent also implies that children have complete autonomy over their participation and involvement in all aspects of research (Mahon *et al.*, 1996). This includes the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time and without prejudice.

The principle of confidentiality, which entails the protection of information provided by the child, is an especially important, albeit dilemmatic, feature of research with children (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998) encapsulated by the question “what do we do if a child discloses that she or he is being abused?” (p. 339). Disclosure of current, imminent or potential harm to the child poses serious challenges with repercussions relating to confidentiality, trust and credibility of the research. Mahon et al. (1996) believe that complete confidentiality can never be guaranteed to child participants and that the researcher is duty bound to report the information to professional agencies. Others such as Alderson (1995) believe that the matter needs to be discussed with the child prior to reporting, whilst Williamson (as cited in Thomas & O’Kane, 1998) recommends that the researcher and child should collaboratively develop a strategy for dealing with the disclosure. More radically, Thomas and O’Kane’s (1998) assert that the reporting of information severely jeopardises the relationship between the researcher and the child. Following a middle ground approach based on a pre-emptive agreement at the initiation of the project is suggested. This was followed in the current study.

With an acknowledgement of children as valid social actors and active members of society comes a need to respect children’s autonomy and right to privacy. In a practical sense this implies a large degree of reflection on the part of the researcher, where the researcher should refrain from employing discursive and shrewd interview strategies to finesse and elicit information from child participants who clearly wish not to divulge certain information.

The reporting of information involves the dissemination of findings. In child research, an ethically appropriate strategy would entail member checks or reporting back to the participants prior to the traditional dissemination protocols.

To conclude this section, it is important to acknowledge the moral and methodological dilemmas that arise from conducting research with children. The extent to which these dilemmas are ethically symmetrical to, or reconcilable with, universal principles of ethics and the underlying conceptualisation of children determines the ethical standard of the research. Thomas and O’Kane (1998) argue that the ethical appropriateness of research with children can be enhanced by adopting a participatory approach “which gives children control over the research process and methods which are in tune with children’s ways of seeing and relating to their world” (p. 337). Following is a statement of the ethical procedures followed in the study.



This project, closely informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the South African Constitution and the Children’s Act (No. 38 of 2005), prioritises the application of the highest ethical standards. The project complies with the ten-point ethics guidelines as outlined by Alderson (1995) in *Children, ethics and social research* as well as UNICEF’s (2002) *Principles and guidelines for ethical research with children*, taking special cognisance of the issues of

- i) Acknowledgement of children as active and valid social actors
- ii) Confidentiality
- iii) Informed consent
- iv) Involving children without exploiting, intrusion or misrepresentation

- v) Treating children with respect and as active participants and moral agents of their own well-being
- vi) Dissemination of findings

The following guidelines were developed to ensure the realisation of the above:

- i) Before the commencement of the focus groups, children were clearly informed about the rationale behind the study and the nature of their participation. They were informed of the option of non-participation without discrimination and that this was applicable at any time or phase of the study. The facilitator took due consideration that all the children had given consent based on a clear and informed understanding before proceeding. Consent was obtained in both a written and verbal format from the children and their parents. The participant was also allowed to claim certain or all content of individual responses as inadmissible to the research project. The researcher agreed to omit all such content from the transcripts.
- ii) Confidentiality in terms of the protection of disclosed information and the protection of the children's identity was strictly enforced. No registration requirements were applicable. No surnames were used during the discussion and individual first names were changed. Children were advised prior to the commencement of the focus groups that disclosure of any current or potential abuse would need to be engaged with and may need to be referred for professional assistance. The participants were also asked to ensure that any information divulged

during the discussion be treated as confidential and not be discussed outside the group.

- iii) Permission was obtained for any recording (written or audio) from all the children. If any objection was obtained for the audio-recording, the researcher endeavoured to refrain from using it. Non-verbal gestures were also considered. The researcher further endeavoured to immediately terminate audio recording if even one child exhibited feelings of being uncomfortable with the audio recording, even after giving verbal permission. No video recording equipment was utilised.
- iv) The findings of the process were presented to four of the seven groups in the form of a verbal report, before being compiled in the current manuscript. The remaining three groups were not available for the report back. Permission was also obtained from the children, parents/guardians as well as the School and Education Department, concerning the dissemination of the outcomes.

4.9 Concluding remarks

This chapter detailed the methodological strategy employed in the current study. Specific factors around design, participant selection, instrumentation and analysis strategies were outlined. The most profound explication of the chapter was the delineation of the child participation model that was followed. It appears that this conceptualisation is rapidly becoming the standard in child research. While shifting away from conceptualisations of children as immature social beings evokes a sense of moral righteousness, it has resulted in the need for new and creative methods for conducting research with children. The proliferation of the child participation model

in contemporary projects is indicative of the response. Child participation, however, is not a set of standardised methods, a recipe or step-wise procedure that one can follow. Indeed, in its pure form, it rather resembles a loose selection of ideas of how to think about conducting research with children rather than specific methods or data collection techniques. Child participation is therefore less about certain procedures but rather a constant process of critical reflection. Another critical issue is that of negotiating the power differential between children and adults and reaching general consensus about how children are conceptualised and the role of children in society. Once consensus is reached, on this then it is possible to proceed to develop creative data collection techniques with children and construct novel ways of involving children in the research process.



CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction³²

This chapter is predominantly concerned with reaching an understanding of the young people's perceptions of well-being. More specifically, the focus is on elucidating the discourses that they use and highlighting the discursive practices that they draw on to make sense of their well-being. The emerging discourses will then be used to develop the meanings of childhood.

The central discourses emerging from the corpus of texts were located in three broad thematic categories or domains viz. personal safety, social and environmental context, and socio-psychological well-being. These discourses, as they emerge within the thematic domains, are presented below.

5.2 Thematic Domains of Well-Being

5.2.1 Personal Safety

Being exposed to, and experiencing various forms of violence, abuse and criminal activity were the key elements of this thematic domain. These issues were invariably associated with the specific social contexts of the participants.

Furthermore, the discourses strongly point to the psychological functioning of the participants. A range of psychological responses associated with violence and abuse manifested in the focus group sessions, with fear and anxiety being the most prominent responses. In their explication of well-being, this domain was the most dominant and prolific in the discussion, generating intense reactions.

³² Some of the extracts have been translated from Afrikaans and are presented in English.

The extracts below demonstrate the intensity of the children's responses:

1. **FR: Violence. People in the neighbourhood always clashing with one**
2. **another.**
3. **FR: Sexual abuse and AIDS are the things that bother me. I know this**
4. **girl that went out with this guy and he drugged her and when she came**
5. **to her senses she discovered she was raped! It's sickening to know that**
6. **such things are happening to us children.**
7. *F: That's really sad! So this is what I'm hearing...*
8. **MR: I think the world has gone crazy. Men and everyone need anger**
9. **management.**
10. **MR ...if you are a man, you must never hit a woman. And to see it in**
11. **front of you is just the worst experience.**
12. **FR: At a very young age you expose yourself to all kinds of gangster**
13. **elements, especially growing up in Cape Town.**
14. **FR: That doesn't mean that we should accept these elements!**
15. **MR: I know, but we're so used to it. We sometimes seem not to notice**
16. **it anymore.**
17. **FR: You get grade 4 children with no life-experience shouting gang**
18. **slogans and talking to each other in a gangster lingo. Now you tell me,**
19. **where did they get that from?**
20. **MR: It could be anybody: a parent, an uncle, friend or just the**
21. **neighbourhood.**
22. **MR: So we should hold all of society accountable.**

Extract 1 (Group 1)

The children's comments in the above excerpt signify their intense dissatisfaction with the pervasiveness of violence in their society and introduce a highly conspicuous discourse i.e. '*personal safety as a non-negotiable*'. This discourse was particularly evident in the delivery of the responses. Furthermore, the tone and demeanour portrayed a sense of exigency. This, together with the fact that all the participants of the group responded in a consistent and forceful manner, supports the non-negotiable sentiment of the discourse. Further evidence of its significance is revealed in the fact that all the participants within the study acknowledged the impact of experience and exposure to violence on their lives and well-being.

In Line 2 of the above extract, a female participant demonstrates the close proximity and imminence of instances of abuse and sexual violence in her anecdotal portrayal of a sexually violent incident. This, together with a first hand account of witnessing violence (Line 4), functions to lend a sense of credibility to the contentions as well as attempting to ensure that a complete understanding is achieved by the interlocutors. It is further interesting to note how the participants make sense of violence by the critical appraisal of how it is perpetuated in society. They even extended the appraisal to include an examination of their own responses to it (Lines 14-21). The discourse does however portray the resistance towards the current state of affairs regarding crime and violence. However, by displaying a sense of familiarity with instances of violence as well as a keen self-awareness of their reaction and responses to it: "*we are so used to it*", a discursive theme, albeit of a contradictory nature to the dominant discourse, that of '*desensitisation*', emerges. This theme is rather interesting as it appears to be running a strong contradictory line to the dominant discourse, yet is conspicuously present. On closer examination

however, the desensitisation in fact supports the discourse, as it suggests an intense familiarity and consistent exposure. The emergence of this theme supports findings by Overstreet and Braun (2000) as well as Leoschut and Burton (2006) who found that subjects reported feeling safe even though they were exposed to chronic community violence. The contradiction between this dominant discourse and the conspicuous portrayal of desensitisation is the first indication of the contestations present within the meaning making process of the participants.

A further point to note is the participants' use of the narrative to demonstrate the meanings of exposure to violence. Shaw (2004) demonstrates how narratives provide a route to meaning. In this instance both the anecdotal experience and the self appraisal are presented in narrative form. Thus, in the process of retelling, the participants are allowing themselves an opportunity to re-examine the details of the experiences of violence in an attempt to make sense of the experiences (Shaw, 2004).

While the internal reaction to violence is not overt in the above extract, it is conspicuously demonstrated in the following selection of excerpts from the rural high school participants:

1. **MR Must not worry that people are going to attack you**
2. **[silence]**
3. **MR [different respondent] For example you are walking, and there by**
4. **us it is very dark and there are no streetlights, I'm actually quite scared,**
5. **and the path that I've to walk to get to my friends is very dark, I'm too**
6. **scared, I cant see where the people are going to come out to attack me,**

7. **and the police drive very quickly, without taking note of anything, they**
8. **are only interested in doing their own things.**
9. **FR I want to walk as I want, it is not nice to have to look over your**
10. **shoulder all the time**

Extract 2 (Group 3: translated)

In Line 1, the respondent clearly constructs his well-being as being dependent on a psychological state, inferring constructs such as fear, anxiety and psychological distress in relation to the issue of safety. This is consistent with previous research which shows a relationship between persistent exposure to community violence and negative emotional and behavioural outcomes (see e.g. Berman, Kurtines, Silverman & Serafini, 1996; Bowen & Chapman, 1996; Cooley-Quille, Turner & Beidel, 1995; Hinton-Nelson, Roberts and Snyder, 1996; Osofsky, 1995; Overstreet & Braun, 2000). Furthermore, research has also shown that exposure to community violence can lead to a state of chronic threat characterised by symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (Overstreet & Braun, 2000; Pynoos, Steinberg & Goenjian, 1996). A closer examination of the extract posits that this respondent qualifies the previous statement without any prompting from the facilitator (Line 3). This response was possibly induced by the participants' dissatisfaction with the lack of detail provided by the previous respondent and the subsequent need to provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation, so that the message could be more powerfully delivered. In so doing, he not only foregrounds the significance of 'safety' but also elucidates the multidimensional nature of children's well-being. The final response (Lines 9-10) supports the previous statement, also pointing to the inherent fear present in children's daily functioning as well as behaviour restriction. Similarly, Overstreet

and Braun (2000) acknowledge that perception of threat may lead to change in behaviour characterised by the preference of indoor activities to outdoor activities. Perception of threat has also been found to have a negative impact on academic achievement (see e.g. Henrich, Schwab-Stone, Fanti, Jones & Ruchkin, 2004). The dominant discourse present in the extract is nevertheless that of '*safety as a non-negotiable*'.

The excerpts are further suggesting that well-being (in this case psychological), is exacerbated by poor infrastructural and service delivery. The children claimed that the poor conditions of the road, lack of streetlights and the lack of police officials in the area contributed negatively to their well-being as it increased their risk of personal injury. Similarly Dawes (2003) believes that this is typical of areas characterised by poverty. He believes that interventions focussed on the improvement of infrastructure, safety and reduction of poverty would contribute to the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of children in these communities. Salzinger, Feldman, Stockhammer and Hood (2002) further outline the relationship between exposure to violence and neighbourhood (community) contextual factors. Advocating for an ecological perspective, these authors argue that exposure is positively correlated with economic disadvantage. Similarly, Esbensen and Huizinga (1991) as well as Schwab-Stone, Ayers, Kaspro, Voyce, Barone, Shriver, and Weissberg (1995) found that neighbourhood type was related to violence exposure, with children from poorer neighbourhoods reporting higher levels of community exposure. An important point to note when engaging with these texts is the inherent sense of helplessness portrayed by these and the other participants of the study. They clearly are presenting themselves as helpless

recipients of the situation. When probed regarding their role in society, they responded as follows.

1. **FR: What can we do, that's the way it is**
2. *I: What do you mean, why don't you do something*
3. **MR: Its just the way things are. Like what, as a teenager you can't**
4. **just do things**
5. *I: Why not*
6. **MR: [responds] because it doesn't work like that...**
7. **FR: But we shouldn't just take things lying down, we are people too...**

Extract 3 (Group 7)

The above represents the first indication of ideology in action. From the above extract, it seems that the participants have bought into the notion that “*its just the way things are*” and have to some extent accepted their position in society. While this ‘interpretive repertoire’ is challenged later in the discussion, the above extract portrays the legitimisation and reification modus operandi of ideology, in the sense that they have prescribed to the notion of social relations between adults and teenagers (children) being natural and permanent and which follows a line of reasoning that ultimately legitimates and rationalises the nature of the social relations between the two. A concept put forward by Potter and Wetherell (1992), an interpretive repertoire is defined as:

a culturally and habitual line of argument comprised of recognisable themes, common places and tropes (Wetherell, 1998, p. 400).

And

The building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restrictive range of terms used in a specific or stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech. (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172)

And

By interpretive repertoires we mean broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions or figures of speech often assembled around metaphors...they are available resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions. (Potter & Wetherell, 1995, p. 89)




However, even though there appeared to be a prescription to this repertoire of children being of inferior in social status, there appears to be a subtle element of resistance already emerging (Line 7). It is this element that lays the foundation for the contestations that emerge later. Of equal significance to note, is the presence of another important theme that is also touched upon, that of helplessness, which needs to be examined vis-à-vis the broader context of psychological reaction to violence. While the emotional response of fear was already alluded to previously, the psychological reaction becomes pertinent.

To further examine the relationship between violence exposure and the participants' perceived psychological reaction, it may be useful to consider further explications.

The following excerpt, for example, provides further context and evidence.

1. **FR: you mustn't come home and think will my father hit me, will he**
2. **hit my mother, or something like that**
3. **MR: you need to feel that you are surviving in this world, to be in a**
4. **stable environment... to come home and feel happy and safe**
5. **FR: even if you live in a poor household you need to feel safe**
6. **FR: what about the Std. 6 girl that was raped by one of the men who**
7. **worked by the school. There are quite a few things like that going**
8. **around...it's the norm... we just so used to hearing these things.**



Extract 4 (Group 2)

The above extract undoubtedly demonstrates a close relationship between violence and their psychological state demonstrated by the 'feelings of safety' discursive theme. Line 1 makes the link between the psychological state and exposure and the experience of intra-familial and inter-spousal violence. There is a large corpus of literature that outlines the psychological sequelae of inter-spousal violence for children, e.g. depression and dissociative disorders (Malchiodi, 1997; Reynolds et al. 2001), anxiety disorders, eating disorders and phobic and obsessive responses (McIntosh, 2002) as well as low self-esteem, aggressive and regressive behaviours, poor interpersonal relations and self-blame (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Cummings & Davies, 1994). In Line 3, the participant further portrays the significance of perceived safety and emotional stability. What is interesting is not

the relationship, which is in fact not new knowledge, but rather the degree of effort that the participants are going through to portray this relationship.

The psychological reaction to violence reveals another discourse that is overtly present in the extract, that of '*helplessness and vulnerability*'. Lack of agency in the negotiation of social relationships and engagement with the adult world, leaves the children vulnerable to the exploits of the adult world. There is a sense that children are the receivers of the society's actions and behaviours and, for various reasons, lack the capacity to challenge (physically or ideologically) the actions and behaviours. Sentiments of legitimisation and reification are again subtly present in the above extract. Strongly influenced by the discourse of '*helplessness and vulnerability*', a further analysis of the responses shows the '*personal safety as a non-negotiable*' discourse as omnipresent. The repetition of the word(s) "*need*" and "*happy and safe*" demonstrates this contention explicitly. It appears to be presented as an entitlement, which could indicate the assimilation of alternate repertoires into their cognitive structure. In this case, it could be children's rights rhetoric which was often a topic of discussion with the participants during the various meetings. It could be the assimilation of these alternate meanings that initiates the resistance and contestation that becomes a key feature of the discussion, as will be revealed as the discussion progresses. It is interesting to note their emphasis that this entitlement should apply to the lower economic group as well. Lines 6-8 point to the frequency of these events, with further evidence of the '*desensitisation*' discursive theme as there appears to be a sense of normalisation to this exposure.

Another explicit example of violence exposure is presented by a female participant from an urban group.

1. **FR:** ...we sit in class today and this female, not a female a girl at our
2. school...
3. she came down the bridge, ...two guys came from behind her and
4. grabbed her, and she ran off... and when she came here she was in a
5. state...

Extract 5 (Group 1)

The discernible rearticulating of her words from “*not a female,*” to “*a girl at our school*” negates any probable perception of a far-removed relation. This discursive manoeuvre to demonstrate the contiguity of the relationship serves to highlight their firsthand exposure to violence. The extract further highlights the typical events that children are exposed to on a daily basis. The children’s reaction to this sort of incident is best described by a female participant’s matter of fact response:

1. **FR:** I feel unsafe and not secure

Extract 6 (Group 1)

While the above quotation provides the quintessential expression of the children’s feelings towards violence, the deeper psychological impact is more cogently displayed in the following quotations by female participants:

1. *I:* Do you feel unsafe in your neighbourhood?
2. **FR:** Extremely, sometimes you just, when you walking and you
3. thinking, what’s going to happen, what’s going to happen now when you
4. go around this corner...we so scared...we can’t even breathe.

Extract 7 (Group 7)

1. **FR:** yes, you kind of inside you in this little umm like a box in this
 2. thing and there's no way out because *you the only one in the box* and
 3. that's how we feel when you constantly have to face these things that we
 4. can't do anything about and *you the only one there at the moment*
- [emphasis added]

Extract 8 (Group 1)

The first quotation depicts the daily psychological distress experienced by this participant, suggesting a consciousness governed by fear and anxiety. The major concern is that these fears are not imagined or constructed, but presented as real and plausible possibilities. The rest of the group concurred with this description and proceeded to provide further anecdotal evidence of exposure to violence. This second extract (*I feel unsafe and not secure*), profound in both content and delivery, exemplifies the psychological impact of violence. It suggests a life-world of constant struggle, isolation and helplessness. The quotation further suggests a devastating impact on the development of the self. Both the discourses of '*helplessness and vulnerability*' and '*marginalisation*' are clearly evident in this quotation. The manner of the delivery further depicts the intensity of the feelings and assists in creating the ethos of '*helplessness and vulnerability*'. The participant is experiencing her childhood as a space of helplessness, isolation and marginalisation. While she is not directly attributing these experiences to the nature of adult-child relations, her constant use of the word 'we' is a subtle reference that undoubtedly refers to childhood as a unified and singular group, and by implication suggests that these experiences are brought on by the simple membership to the

social category of childhood. The transformation of the singular to the collective pronoun is also of analytic value and depicts the participants' intent. This transition driven by the participants' strategic intent, whereby the singular is used in collaboration with the metaphor to exaggerate the experience (in this case anxiety, isolation and helplessness), is meant to remind or sensitise the interlocutor to the typical reality of the childhood. In this way the interlocutors are drawn into the experiences. Furthermore, while she is not capturing the mechanisms of how ideology operates, the potential outcomes of the ideological process is starkly revealed.

Even though the children concurred that their '*helplessness*' was experienced as a collective, it also appears to be experienced individually, or in isolation, as the italicised part of the quotation strongly emphasises. This refers to the fragmentation modus operandi of ideology whereby the distinctions and divisions between individuals and groups are foregrounded, perpetuating disunity and creating in-group and out-group symbolic forms.

Closely related to exposure to violence, is the discursive theme of sexual abuse, which included discussion around inappropriate sexual propositioning. The female respondents spoke at length of restricted freedom due to the threat of sexual violence and demonstrated their unhappiness in having their dress-code determined by the behaviour of men. When asked what else they needed security from, they felt that "*men*", especially "*older men*" were a threat.

1. **FR: Yes, older men proposition us all the time**

Extract 9 (Group 6: Translated)

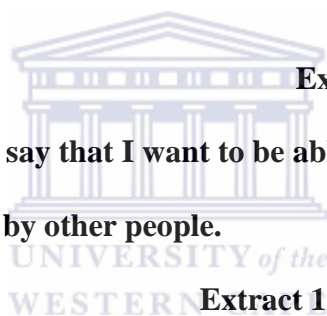
1. **FR:** I mean you as a girl or woman should be able to walk freely in.
2. **the road in whatever you want to wear and then the people they look at**
3. **you and they have other ideas. And that you should be able to do or**
4. **wear whatever you want to. And not be worried, oh don't walk down**
5. **here alone, they just rape you and stuff like that.**
6. **FR** I think girls can wear what they want to wear. Like the men
7. **should just keep their hands off you [exclamation].**

Extract 10 (Group 2)

1. **FR:** And I want to be safe, and say go where I want to go and walk
2. **where I want to walk...**

Extract 11 (Group 1)

1. **FR:** I just want to say that I want to be able to walk wherever I want
2. **and not be bothered by other people.**



Extract 12 (Group 4: Translated)

1. **FR:** The boys are so touchy, and we can do nothing...

Extract 13 (Group 6: Translated)

The above extracts again elucidate the *'helplessness and vulnerability'* discourse that is inherent to the corpora of texts, in as much as they are *'helpless'* against the power that society, especially adults, exerts over children. The extracts indicate that since the participants' behaviours, actions and movements are restricted, the locus of power, in this instance is moved from the ideological to the physical. The children's reaction to this is explicit in their demonstration of internal psychological factors

such as ‘frustration’ and ‘desperation’ brought across by the intimation of what they “*want*” and the ways that their lives “*should be*”. The emergence and apparent proliferation of this discourse is consistent with models of traumatic stress (see e.g. Pynoos *et al.*, 1996) which identifies feelings of hopelessness and helplessness as outcomes of sustained exposure to violence.

A rather interesting and contradictory discursive theme that emerged within one group was their lack of importance attached to exposure to violence. The participants of this group, rather ironically, all resided in a neighbourhood that was characterised by violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse and high rates of unemployment. Initially, it appeared that the reason for their indifference towards personal safety was as a result of them being street smart and able to negotiate the vagaries of a violent environment. For example, participants acknowledged the relationship between safety and well-being but claimed that they “*need to feel safe in order to feel well but for me its no problem I can handle myself in my neighbourhood*”, and that they “*knew all the gangsters*” in their area. There even appeared to be a sense of status attached to alignment with gangs with one female participant claiming that:

1. **FR: you see, I’m safe here, see my uncle is the leader of the biggest**
2. **gang here, so no-one will mess with me.**

Extract 14 (Group 6)

Extract 14 was extremely interesting in its delivery. While it appeared to be volunteered hesitantly, there was a subtle yet definite tone of pride. In fact, the hesitation appeared to be used both consciously and deliberately to evoke a certain

aura. It appears that a certain amount of status is attached to gang association. In this case, the association is used in a sort of crude positioning. In other words, positioning herself as a close relative of a notorious gangster she achieves two things. Firstly, she is both confirming her safety to the group and reaffirming the notion that her social environment is a place of safety for her. Secondly, she is raising her status within the group. Even though Wetherell (1998) points out that subject positions are highly occasioned and situated, the above two points suggest that it would not be a huge leap to suggest that she engages in similar positioning within her social circle in general. Her presentation of this information subsequently led to a barrage of other participants claiming similar safety networks with gangsters, based largely on friendship and familial relations. At this point there are a number of positions being taken up by various participants. Antaki, Condor and Levine (1996) note the important relationship between this type of positioning and the maintenance of social identities:

Such bringings-to-bear are briefly over and done, of course, but their accumulated record is what gives a person their (portfolio of) identities. Ephemeral as they might be, they become available for future invocation ...The speakers are doing these things at once: invoking social identities, negotiating what the features or boundaries of those identities are and accumulating a record of having those identities. They will be able in the next round of their interactional history, to draw on having all been exposed to this conversational display of identities. (p. 488)

This bout of positioning presented above, while seemingly contradictory to the dominant discourse, in fact, reaffirms it quite profoundly, as even though they

regarded personal safety as a non-issue, they nonetheless engaged in rather arduous and rigorous accounts of positioning themselves as ‘safe children’. Put crudely, from the participants’ point of view, it is profoundly important, but not an issue.

Thereafter, the discussion suggested that their feelings towards safety were couched within the ‘desensitisation’ discursive theme. The participants in this specific group spoke freely about the witnessing of both domestic and neighbourhood violence.

There was a clear indication that these instances of violence were common everyday occurrences. They appeared to have a matter of fact response to questions about how it affected them. One could then argue that it is not a desensitisation, or even that a means of coping has evolved. Rather, it appears that it has become assimilated as part of life and what it means to be a child. As the following excerpt suggests:


1. **FR: Actually, you don’t think of it 24/7, it’s just built into the way you**
2. **are**

Extract 15 (Group 5)

This assimilation and strong sentiment of ‘naturalisation’ in the above extract demonstrates the reification mode of operation of ideology, as the participant has subscribed to the idea that their reaction is normative and typical. The extent of the ‘reification’ is made apparent when examining the tone of participant’s response, which was complacent, proud and even sanctimonious. In this instance the reification functions by creating this sense of natural progression and masking the fact that it is actually being used to exert control over the individual. The essence of the domination is further exaggerated by the fact that the participant has not only

subscribed to this naturalised sense of progression but also feels a sense of accomplishment and achievement.

Further discussion, albeit much later in the session, revealed further contradictions within the discourses. Here the same participants intimated about the importance of safety in groups. They claimed that it was important to walk home from school in a group, and also highlighted the dangers of certain areas within the community. It is therefore, rather contradictory to earlier claims. The discussion again carried a 'matter of fact' tone. The claim that it appears to be an accepted factor of their existence and assimilated into the meaning of childhood is again apparent and is explicitly demonstrated in the participants' discussion of 'walking the angles'. As the excerpt below demonstrates:

- 
1. **FR: You must know how to walk the angles.**
 2. *I: What do you mean*
 3. **FR: You know the angles. The guys always want to grab you, so**
 4. **when they see you coming, they stand in a way that they can easily grab**
 5. **you**
 6. *I: Grab you in a sexual way? Is that what you mean?*
 7. **FR: [responds] Yes, so walk in a way that takes you past them**
 8. **where they can't grab you, but at the same time, you don't walk the**
 9. **long way, or show them that you avoiding them. You mustn't**
 10. **show them that you scared, they mustn't think you just a**
 11. **litie (child)... I won't let them see... if they see then they target you...**
 12. **then you in groot (big) trouble.**

Extract 16 (Group 5)

While the above extract lends further support to the discourse of '*safety as a non-negotiable*' discourse, it demonstrates the complexity of the discourse. Firstly, at a minimum, it suggests that they are reasonably street smart. Secondly, it strongly intimates that this knowledge has been garnered through experience, which essentially translates into actual unwanted physical contact with strong sexual connotations. Finally, it also shows how the social environment is a key determinant of behaviour. In this case, the social category (of being a child) is a determinant of behaviour. It is further interesting to note the participant's suggestion of not showing fear (Lines 8-10). In this case the participant is suggesting that at times, when one's safety is threatened, it is important not to present yourself as a child. Interestingly, the participant uses the colloquial term "*litie*" in reference to a child. This term, while directly translating into the word child, carries a definite connotation of weakness or inferiority. This suggests that membership to the childhood social category carries an implication of weakness, '*helplessness and vulnerability*'. The question is therefore, if the individual was an adult would they experience the situation in the same way as the child did.

Other contradictory themes were also present in the discourses. Previous discussion demonstrated how participants would go to great lengths to depict their world as unsafe. The claim that "*the world is not safe, the adults make it not safe*" best demonstrates this contention. However, these claims advanced some contradictory engagement, as the following dialogue illustrates:

1. **FR1: Why are parents so overprotective?**
2. **FR2: but they have to be because they want to keep their children safe.**
3. **FR1: if you going to be overprotective, but then they are going to lie.**

4. **FR2: But children also do wrong things.**
5. **FR1: but you can't also just keep children in – then they not going to**
6. **experience the world**
7. **FR3: In a way it is wrong because you can't keep children in, but also**
8. **in a way you must also allow them...**

Extract 17 (Group 6)

The extract depicts the conflicting nature of the participants meaning making process. The four subsequent responses to the question in Line 1 show opposing points of view with a subtle use of the blaming rhetoric as a means of justification. The repetitive use of the word “*but*” is also strategically used by the participants to advance and justify their argument. This whole engagement is further enhanced by the precise turn taking by the participants. The nature and tone of the engagement suggests that there was a definite sense that they felt it important that both sides’ argument was equally presented. This point is substantiated by the final response where another participant summarised the debate lending equal credence to both points of view. Of course, the participants are in effect involved in a recreation of the protection/liberation repertoire that is topical within contemporary child research.

The importance of social support was also apparent. For these children, social support was important in helping them to negotiate the daily threats to their personal safety. Consider for example the following extracts:

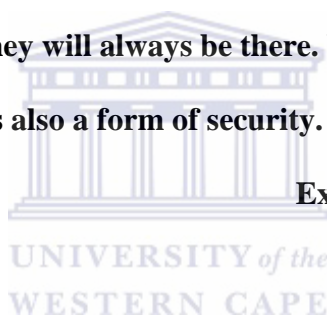
1. **FR: to me, its like say security is like ... I know that if someone**
2. **should do something wrong to me I can run to one of my family not to**

3. **defend me but to at least tell them and they will either support, not**
4. **support me, but stand up for.**

Extract 18 (Group 1)

1. **MR: Yes, umm your parents can, security can also be in the form of**
2. **protection, where they tell u no don't go to that place that's the wrong**
3. **party. That for me is also security.**
4. **MR: security of your friendship with you friends**
5. **F: Okay, what is that**
6. **MR: you can rely on them if you need something or you them to do**
7. **something for you they will always be there. You secure that you can**
8. **rely on them. That is also a form of security.**

Extract 19 (Group 1)



The above extracts provides both active (“*they tell you don't go to that place that is the wrong party*”) and passive (“*you can rely on them...they will always be there*”) depictions of the buffering role that social support can play in relation to personal safety issues. In this instance it is unique that the ‘us’ and ‘them’ rhetorical strategies are used to demonstrate a positive and beneficial rather than a polarised relationship, which it is generally used to achieve. However, further in the analysis the same rhetorical strategies are used as a means to demonstrate a different outcome. As presented previously, the parents’ involvement in the social lives of children is then depicted in stark contrast to the above.

Overall, the discourses to emerge within this thematic category reveal overt issues of power. The discourses demonstrate that their feelings of insecurity and cognitions, which include perception of threat, show how the meanings attached to childhood establish relations of domination. Put differently, it reveals how the interplay of power constructs various meanings of childhood.

5.2.2 Social and Environmental Context

“*To be in a stable environment*” was often the first response to the question of well-being, suggesting that the broader social context is a key determinant of well-being. This response was usually met with a high degree of concurrence among participants and it was often presented as a proviso for well-being.

1. **FR:** because if a child has a good home environment and brought up
2. properly, then there’s no problem, but if the environment is not good,
3. then there’s always problems
4. **FR:** Yes, I agree, I think you need a stable environment...

Extract 20 (Group 7)

The above extract elucidates how the ‘*if – then*’ and ‘*if – but*’ rhetorical strategies are used to advance the notion of causality between the social environment and well-being. A ‘*stable environment*’ can thus be included as a ‘*non-negotiable*’ discourse. The participants conceptualised the environment as constituting both the physical and social environment and often included discussion around infrastructure, recreational facilities, as well as services such as transport, municipal, health and police services. This conceptualisation provides further evidence of the need to address the concept of child well-being, as an integrated whole, rather than

perceiving it as a distinct multi-dimensional phenomena. In other words, the components or domains of well-being should be perceived as closely interrelated and mutually influencing and should not be considered in isolation from each other. As the discussion continues, this phenomenon becomes more explicit.

Poor infrastructure and lack of community services were frequently mentioned as impediments to well-being. As previously mentioned, this was to a large extent related to personal safety. A female respondent believed that the poor conditions of the road, lack of streetlights and the lack of police officials in the area contributed negatively to their well-being.

The lack of recreational facilities emerged consistently as a point of discussion. The participants mentioned the need for a gym, parks, a library, a swimming pool and community centre. They believed that the presence of these facilities would contribute significantly to their well-being. More specifically, they felt that it would help them “*forget about problems*” and “*calm*” them. A female respondent further mentioned that the lack of these activities for children was often the instigating factor that contributed to their involvement in deviant behaviour.

1. **MR: We do not have recreational facilities in our neighbourhood.**
2. **Therefore most of the young people end up just drinking and so on**
3. **MR: There is not enough things to do**
4. *F: The fact that there are not enough things to do here – How does it*
5. *make you feel?*
6. **MR: We do wrong things**
7. *F: Like what?*

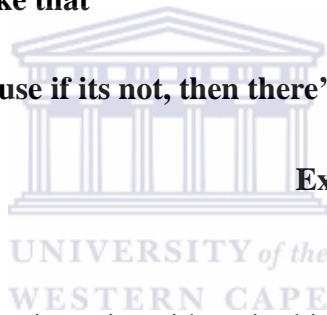
8. **FR: Drink, use drugs**
9. **MR: Experiment with drugs and such things...**
10. *F: And how does it make you feel?*
11. **MR: Frustrated, its like banging your head against the wall.**

Extract 21 (Group 3: Translated)

The above extract shows the blaming rhetoric in action. The participants are clearly trying to externalise the cause of deviant behaviour. This is accomplished by the use of the blaming rhetoric to maximise the causal relationship between the lack of recreational activities and deviant behaviour. The recreational activities in this way function as an excuse for the deviant behaviour. Excuses are accounts which acknowledge that certain related acts are adverse but claim that the genesis of the acts lie in some external agency (Austin, 1962; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Using Semin and Manstead's (1983) typology of excuses, a closer look at the extract suggests that the participant is 'appealing to mitigating circumstances' and using the lack of recreational activities as a 'scapegoat'. The use of the metaphor (Line 11) also deserves some consideration. In this instance the participant is using a metaphorical construction to help package and present the contention more persuasively. Overall, the rhetorical strategies in the above extract are functioning to maintain the social integrity of young people at one level and the social standing of the actual participant on another. While this appears to be the functional aim of the account, it also implicitly reveals that the participants' behaviour is to a large extent contingent on the social context which is ultimately determined by adult society. The level of autonomy that children have over their behaviour is therefore questioned.

Probably the most telling explication of the significance of this category was presented by male participants from the urban group. In the first of the two extracts presented below, the participant comments on the prerequisites for well-being. He asserted:

1. **MR: Probably to enjoy your life...and your surrounding have to be**
2. **totally A Ok.**
3. *I: A Ok?*
4. **MR: [replies]Yes, where you live and where you stay, the people**
5. **around you, your friends and family; the stuff that you do: in your**
6. **family; and things like that**
7. **should be OK. Because if its not, then there's going to be trouble.**



Extract 22 (Group 1)

The ‘*non-negotiable*’ discourse is again evident; in this instance it is related to the social environment. It is interesting to note how the participant perceives his well-being as a fusion of the social milieu (“*your surrounding has to be A OK*”) and social relations (“*your family and friends; the stuff that you do in your family and things like that should be OK*”) and presents it as a definitive condition of well-being (“*because if its not, then there's going to be trouble*”). This excerpt provides further evidence that well-being consists of closely related and mutually influencing elements rather than disparate components. Kjørholt (2003) similarly argues that:

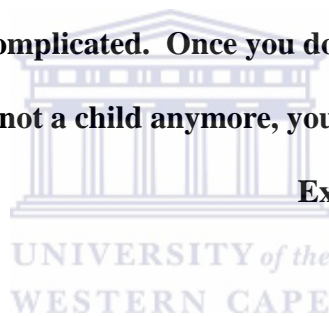
research focusing on childhood and children’s social practices in everyday life must also include the dynamic inter-relations between children’s

activities and practices with peers on the one hand, and the surrounding society and cultural context on the other. (p. 262)

In the second extract, the participant comments on the impact of the social environment:

1. **MR: Its how your environment is, like say you live in an**
2. **environment where you just drink, fight and that. Now you can't be**
3. **a child in an environment like that. Then the children in the road,**
4. **they do things like adults do. Now you feel so out, then you also want**
5. **to do it, then you have to make a choice now. Do you want to do it or**
6. **don't you. But it's complicated. Once you do it then you are no**
7. **longer a child...you not a child anymore, you now an adult...**

Extract 23 (Group 5)



For this participant the social environment is the defining factor in the experience of childhood. While the participant touched on the issue of peer pressure and the need for group membership, the emergent point is the contested nature of childhood.

Here the contestation is at the level of the individual. The social environment creates a dilemma which the child then has to contest within the self. The fact that the child has two options, both of which have undesirable consequences, is further evidence of the constestation. On the one hand, you risk sacrificing your childhood membership as the participant is claiming that involvement in some activities implies a premature termination of childhood. It is clear that, on this occasion at least, the participant has conceptualised childhood as a space of innocence and purity. He is thus, discursively it seems, protecting the integrity of childhood,

because “*once you do it then you are no longer a child*”. However, on the other hand, you run the risk of being marginalised and isolated. Group membership and a sense of acceptance are important factors that impact on the integrity of the self. The fact that abstention would lead to a potential loss of group membership is significant. It is these forms of dilemmas that inhibit the world of the child and shows how the social environment could act as a key determinant of well-being. It appears that even the social environment can potentially act as a space for ideology.

The participant further voiced discontent about poor community services and was especially irate about poor health and police services, citing instances of corruption and inefficiency as well as lack of access to medication and poor treatment at these facilities. They further indicated that they, as children were often discriminated against. Commenting on experiences of requesting condoms at the local health clinic, the children reported:

1. **Multiple Respondents: They don't want to give you**
2. **MR: [imitates response from clinic] You are too young.**
3. **FR: [continues imitation] You too young , you cant have sex**
4. **MR: And they also say...**
5. **MR: [imitates general response] Go away you wasting our time, go...**
6. *I: Now what effect does that have on young people...*
7. **MR: We stay away**
8. **FR: And they rude...on this one occasion when I was sick and went to**
9. **the clinic without an appointment, I was horribly insulted in front of**
10. **other people.**

Extract 24 (Group 3: Translated)

The above extract is a quintessential example of discourses in action. The proliferation of these discourses fuel negative perceptions of children (Prout & James, 1997), which in turn leads to discriminatory practices against young people, as the last quotation demonstrates. The use of narratives as well as the act of imitating adults' responses to children (Line 2 and 3) is decisive in that it posits the participants' insistence on the accurate portrayal of how children are treated. The imitation itself was devoid of any humour in its delivery and was used exclusively as a mechanism to portray accuracy. This imitation is a well-known discursive technique of 'speaking by the mouth of the other' which enables the speaker to make inferences about what the 'other' believes. It has the further rhetorical outcome of ridiculing the other's opinions or words³³.

What is fundamental about these engagements with society is the young people's behavioural ("we stay away", from the clinic) reaction to it. Various other accounts and anecdotal evidence from the participants posit the profound effect that these discourses and common-sense constructions of children have on the behavioural patterns of the young people. One participant was highly convinced that the skewed perceptions of adult society towards young people were directly responsible for a number of deviant-type behaviours. She argued thus:

1. **FR: I know of this couple, this young couple that decided to have sex,**
2. **or not like decided but wanted to have sex. So the guy went to the clinic**
3. **for condoms, and you know...he was chased away... and now the girl is**
4. **pregnant.**
5. *I: But you can't blame it on the clinic, the staff at the clinic didn't force*

³³ See van Dijk et al (2004) for further examples.

6. *the couple to have sex. That was irresponsible to have sex like that, don't*
7. *you think*
8. **FR: No, the responsible thing was to go to the clinic to get condoms...**
9. **they did that... so were they responsible or not?... so much AIDS here**
10. **world today, adults getting AIDS from not wanting to use condoms, so**
11. **those young people were very responsible, even more responsible than**
12. **all the thousands of people that got AIDS from sex without condoms.**
13. **But sometimes you just react.**
14. *I: You make a good point. But why did they still have sex then... were*
15. *they just reacting to the clinic, to show them...*
16. **FR: Its difficult to say you know, I don't know what was going**
17. **their minds... but sometimes you just react, like you don't care because**
18. **you can't anymore with people that treat you like nothing... and the**
19. **hormones maybe the hormones made them just do it.**

Extract 25 (Group 4: Translated)

The above account makes for an interesting analysis. In this account it is rather axiomatic that the participant is going to great lengths to depict the young people as responsible. To a certain degree she achieves this in her precise detailed narration of the sequence of events as they unfolded. She specifically details certain acts of the young people that depict them as blameless whilst similarly depicting the behaviour of the clinic staff as blameworthy. When questioned on this (Line 5), the defences were immediate, as if anticipated. The participant at this point in the discussion had two options, either justification or an excuse. The immediacy of the defence suggests that the participant had previously deliberated on the matter and organised

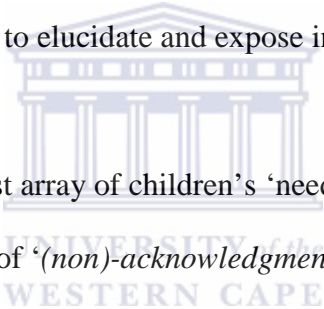
a cogent retort in the form of a justification. The overall upshot of the defence is that the young couple were actually “*very responsible*”, even more so than the typical adult couple. The nature of a justification in this sense is that they remind the interlocutor of the broader frame of ethics, moral conventions and societal rules wherein life is carried out (Gergen, 1999).

With further interrogation, the rhetorical tactics and defences are however changed. Here, the participant first rhetorically distances herself from the couple, in what can be called a ‘denial of volition’ (Semin & Manstead, 1983) and subsequently comes up with an excuse for the activity (Lines 16-19). In this way the veracity of the excuse cannot be questioned, as “*I don’t know what was going through their minds*”, lends greater credence to the excuse. Potter (1997) refers to the use of “*I don’t know*” as stake inoculation. The fact that people perceive others as always having a vested interest in some position, often leads respondents to present themselves as having no stake in the outcome. If they are seen as having no interest, then their position will be regarded as valid and untainted. In this extract the “*I don’t know*” is strategically used to create this discursive distance.

The excuse itself contained three arms which compliment each other and lend further credibility. The first was located internally, “*you just react*”, the second was located externally in the form of scapegoating, “*cant anymore with people that treat you like that*” and the third was based on natural drives, “*maybe the hormones made them just do it*”. These excuses are consistent with Scott and Lyman’s (1968, as cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1992) typology of excuses. In all three instances the aim was to externalise the blame and deflect attention away from matters where

blame could potentially be allocated. The focus of social constructionism and discourse analysis in particular is on how accounts are constructed. The account above shows how the participant uses various rhetorical strategies and discursive techniques to construct their version of the events. A further point of consideration is examining both the function or purposes it achieves as well as the outcomes. From an ideological perspective it is necessary to look beyond discourse and even beyond the context that provides meaning to the discourse. It is essential for the ideological analyst to elucidate the underlying power relations that are present. More specifically, how is language used to mask certain instances of domination? In this case in particular, what emerged as significant was how language was used, strategically and deliberately, to elucidate and expose instances of domination.

Finally, closely noting the vast array of children's 'needs' as well as the experienced discrimination, the discourse of '(non)-acknowledgment' is evident.

- 
1. *I: Do you think that sometimes adults don't acknowledge, don't believe*
 2. *that as young people you should have rights and ...*
 3. **MR: [continues] and that we don't belong to this world... only when**
 4. **you 21. Yes, I think so.**
 5. **FR: They say [imitates] "What rights do you have, you are children,**
 6. **you must just do"**

Extract 26 (Group 1)

The above extract is suggesting that on a societal level children appear not to be acknowledged for the role that they play in society, or as valid social actors or contributors. At best they are seen to be perceived as a nuisance as they are told "*go away you wasting our time, go play or do something*". At worst they are perceived

as non-valid members of society, encapsulated in the statement, “*What rights do you have, you are children, you must just do*” (Lines 5-6). At first glance it appears that the discourse of ‘*non-acknowledgement*’ is the dominant discourse. A closer reading however points to the presence of the more powerful ‘*marginalisation*’ discourse.

Furthermore, there seems to be a sentiment that children need to exercise a high degree of autonomy in their own individual development. The paradox is conspicuous. On a superficial level, it appears that children are being protected, and that is the sentiment that is very often put forward by adages such as “*children should be seen and not heard*”. In this case it is “*you are too young to have sex*”. However, the participants claimed that society’s general reaction in terms of the behavioural response in this instance is overtly laissez-faire, with children largely left to their own development. It is these attitudes and behavioural characteristics of adult society that strongly contributes to feelings of ‘*marginalisation*’ which is a key feature of the participants’ discourses. For the children from the rural town, the geographical isolation further exacerbated the feelings of ‘*marginalisation*’. This discourse of ‘*marginalisation*’ has significance for the following thematic domain as well.

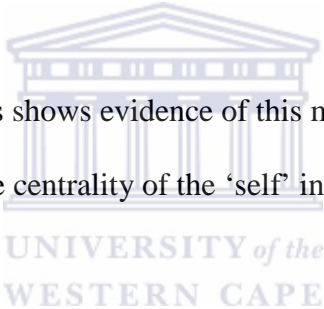
5.2.3 Socio-psychological

This thematic domain included discussion around psychological well-being, social acceptance, participation, respect/acknowledgement, interpersonal relations, substance abuse, discrimination, role models and social support.

The significance of the 'self' as a key construct of psychological well-being was the central concept of psychological well-being. However, following the epistemological position of the current study, the 'self' is conceived of discursively. In this way, the focus is not on the self as an entity but rather on the different ways the self is constructed within different contexts. Potter and Wetherell (1992) explains that "the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how is it theorised in discourse" (p. 102). This perspective advances the notion of a multitude of selves. Thus, depending on the context or intention, the person could draw on various models of the self to describe themselves.

Whilst an analysis of the texts shows evidence of this multitude of constructions, the common denominator was the centrality of the 'self' in contributing to well-being.

As the extracts reveal:

- 
1. *I: What does it mean for you to be well?*
 2. **MR: To feel good about yourself, like inside you happy with who you**
 3. **are, and not to feel down.**
 4. *I: Can you give me an example, what do you mean to be happy with*
 5. *who you are?*
 6. **MR: Like, I'm good at sports and she now he's good at schoolwork.**
 7. **So you must be happy with what you got...**

Extract 27 (Group 3: Translated)

1. **FR: To be happy with yourself and to be pleased with your life as a**

2. **young person and not to be under or doing something that you don't**
- 3 **want to.**

Extract 28 (Group 1)

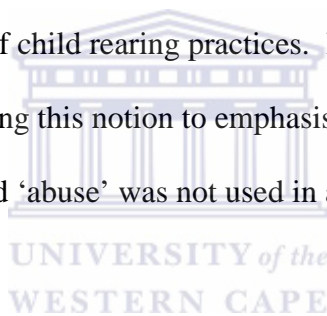
While each quotation is depicting a different theoretical variant of the 'self', e.g. trait theory "...*I'm good at sports and she now she's good at schoolwork*", and role theory "*To be happy with yourself and to be pleased with your life as a young person*", well-being is clearly constructed around the integrity and stability of the 'self'. In other words, being well means that the 'self' is functioning successfully. If the integrity of the 'self' is breached, well-being is compromised. In the current study, it appears that society's attitude towards young people could trigger these effects. As two participants, commenting on some teachers' attitudes and behaviour towards learners, state:

1. **FR: It destroys your self-esteem.**
2. **MR: They are committing character murder.**

Extract 29 (Group 1: Translated)

These descriptions, both powerful in content and delivery, succinctly convey the notion of a fragile self-esteem. The word usage is interesting as it indicates a sense of inevitability and permanency. The discourse of '*helplessness and vulnerability*' is also overtly present. However, in this instance it appears that the participants are consciously aiming to project the '*helplessness and vulnerability*' discourse. Potter and Wetherell (1992) contend that the 'self' is articulated in discourse in ways that will enhance one's claim to be heard. Here the 'self' is positioned as being under duress, a fragile entity suffering under the throes of society. By this subtle

positioning of the 'self' within the discourse, the participants are staking a stronger claim that their voices should be heard or warrant special consideration. This discourse is itself ideological. Not in the sense that it is maintaining relations of domination, but rather that it is being used to reveal instances of domination. The fragility of the 'self' is the main concern implicitly highlighted by the above excerpts. It is well accepted within developmental theory that the development of the 'self' is a product of the child's interaction with society and that its development is critical for successfully negotiating subsequent stages of development. If the development of the 'self' is then stifled, it is axiomatic that children's development is going to be severely impeded. In fact, this knowledge has become assimilated into the everyday discourse of child rearing practices. In the discussions, it appeared as if the participants were using this notion to emphasise the severity of the abuse. Interestingly enough the word 'abuse' was not used in any of the narratives.



Social acceptance also proved influential in the functioning of the self.

1. **FR: I think to be accepted for who you are. Not only at home, but also**
2. **wherever you go. To be accepted for who you are... It's very difficult. So**
3. **being accepted would mean everything.**

Extract 30 (Group 1)

1. **FR: ...as a young person everybody, every single one wants to be**
2. **accepted and that's why they do things to be accepted into a group.**
3. **MR: Some children... they aren't accepted so they do what they can**
4. **to be accepted or at least acknowledged for their existence... at least**
5. **that person knows, I exist. I think that's the main thing, children want**
6. **to know that they exist that they are accepted by society.**

Extract 31 (Group 7)

An analysis of these quotations clearly point to the functioning of the 'self'. In this instance it shows that these participants have constructed well-being in terms of the social acceptance of their self. It again also points to well-being being a socially negotiated construct. The content and word usage further suggests that social acceptance should be perceived as a '*non-negotiable*'.

Other signs of low self-esteem emerged in response to evidence of pervasive negative sentiment, most notably when children were falsely accused or when they were presumed guilty based solely on their social status as children.

1. **FR:** They just want to accuse you of things. They rude to you. They
2. **don't know how you feel when they accuse you and you feel so bad, you**
3. **feel like you worth nothing that they can just say those things of you**
4. *I: When do they accuse you of things*
5. **FR:** [responds] That happens all the time
6. *I: And for what kind of things? But lets face it, sometimes you're guilty*
7. *right.*
8. **FR:** [responds] For anything. It's like it's their hobby
9. **FR:** [different participant] Then we must suffer the consequences
10. **FR:** [different participant] They accuse you of ten things then maybe
11. **you do only one**

Extract 32 (Group 6: Translated)

The discourses of ‘(dis)respect and (non)acknowledgement’, as well as ‘helplessness and vulnerability’, are evident in the above extract. Whilst it is obvious that the impact of constant false accusations would erode the integrity of the self-esteem, the means by which they carry that over discursively makes for interesting analysis. An analysis of the taxonomy of the extract shows the following: The issue of accusations is introduced and clearly shown to affect the self since “*you feel like you are worth nothing*”. At this point there is a dialogue between the interviewer and one participant. However, when this point of view is challenged by the researcher, the participant resorts to the use of a metaphor³⁴ (Line 8). What is revealed in this instance is that the metaphor was used as a strategy to modify and strengthen the account after the previous formulations failed to produce the desired result. It also appeared to be used as an invitation to the other participants to enter the discussion as thereafter, other participants, who had been quiet up until that point, joined the discussion in vigorous support of the claims being made. In this instance, it appears as if their silence indicated that they were satisfied with what their peer was communicating. When the point of view was threatened, they rapidly engaged to ensure that their point of view prevailed.

The discourses of ‘(non)acknowledgment and (dis)respect’ as well as ‘helplessness and vulnerability’ were similarly pervasive within other groups. As the following collection of extracts aptly demonstrate:

1. **FR: People have to respect your opinion as a child**

Extract 33 (Group 2)

1. **FR: Because people don’t respect you or the way you look or the way**

³⁴ In strict grammatical sense it is actually a simile and not a metaphor.

2. **you are**

Extract 34 (Group 1)

1. *I: Do you sometimes feel as a child that you are not...*
2. **MR: Yes. Most commonly at school**
3. **MR: [continues] teachers say, “shut up and then you can’t respond”**
4. *F: You feel that is because you are a child*
5. **MR: Yes, yes and you can’t even think of saying anything back**

Extract 35 (Group 1: Translated)

1. **MR: If you are just sitting around, and you are a youngster, then you**
2. **must be up to no good.**



Extract 36 (Group 7)

The above excerpts point to the centrality of respect in the well-being of children and also further illustrate the discourses of ‘(dis)respect and (non)acknowledgement’. There is also a strong element of the discourse of ‘helplessness and vulnerability’ which clearly links to the accusations that the participants highlighted in the previous extracts. A point of note is the participant’s use of the present tense in his explanation of disrespect (Extract 35, Line 3). This narrative technique has the result of making the incident more contemporaneous and real, and more effectively demonstrates their ‘helplessness’. Again, it would be accurate to contend that the emerging discourses are not manifestations but rather intended outcomes. What is interesting, however, is that even though the participants appear to be yielding to the societal structure they do not, in this extract at least, posit hegemonic tendencies typical of repressed social categories in society.

A key point to emerge here (Extract 36) is the claim that it was essentially their social status as children that contributed to this conduct of adult society.

Further fuelling the '*helplessness and vulnerability*' discourse is the fact that social convention does not allow for children to voice their opinion or views (see Extract 35). This can be understood within the normative view of ideology where common-sense understandings are used to exercise control and maintain relations of domination. In support of the above contention, consider the following extract:

1. **MR: But they will see you as disrespectful, you are disrespecting them**
2. **if you like talking back to them...**
3. **MR: The fact that children can't make a point without being told "you**
4. **backchatting" is a big problem. Children can't defend themselves.**
5. **MR: ...and you can't prove your point to them... that's the thing, you**
6. **can't say it wasn't your fault...**

Extract 37 (Group 7)

It is not a denial of rights to participation, or even general disrespect, but rather a lack of meaningful acknowledgement of children and young people as valid and contributing members of society that advances this '*helplessness*'. An interesting phenomenon that emerged was how the '*(non)acknowledgment and (dis)respect*' is used to advance the '*helplessness and vulnerability*' discourse. The content speaks to '*(non)acknowledgment and (dis)respect*' but the intended message is clearly to project '*helplessness*'. As contended previously, the '*helplessness and vulnerability*' discourse is often not a manifestation but rather an intended outcome or conscious proclamation.

The extract further demonstrates a quintessential example of the ideological nature of childhood. This ‘backchatting’ is a colloquial term which means responding to someone who is reprimanding you. The common shared rule or convention is that children are not allowed to respond to adults when being reprimanded. The use of the term ‘backchatting’ has thus become a means to perpetuate control over children. It can thus be seen as a discursive instrument of ideology. Further in the study, the texts show how the participants themselves have actually subscribed to the concept.

Furthermore, the previous extracts demonstrated the tendency of the participants to locate the genesis of the problem within adult society’s frame of reference. The resulting tension is demonstrated in the following response:

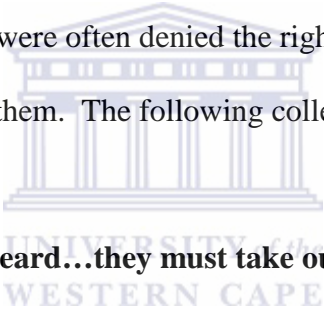
1. **FR: My point is that if grown-ups can’t have respect for me then I**
2. **can’t have respect for them. From my side, its just normal, wouldn’t you**
3. **say, just say if someone doesn’t have respect for you its natural you not**
4. **gonna (going to) have respect for them.**

Extract 38 (Group 1)

It appears that the children’s reaction to this culture of disrespect, in fact perpetuates a cycle of disrespect between children and society in general. The disrespect is not always explicit, but often results in instances of social deviance and delinquency. In this statement the participant is using the ‘*us*’ and ‘*them*’ rhetorical strategy to demonstrate a polarised relationship between themselves and adult society. This ‘*othering*’ discursive strategy, as well as the use of the blaming and justification strategies, is also obvious. The essence of these strategies is human nature or natural reactions. Potter (1996) argues that speakers have a tendency to construct accounts

which invoke privileged knowledge. It is these accounts that contribute to the authenticity of the sequence. In this case, the participant is commenting, with authority, on her experience of the interaction with adults. The participant is blaming adult society, i.e. externalising the cause of their behaviour and simultaneously justifying their behaviour as a 'natural' reaction.

The lack of acknowledgement of children's perspectives appears also to be fundamentally contributing towards the ethos of non-participation. The participants, for example, claimed that their input was not regarded as important and that no platform was provided for them to voice their opinion. Exaggerating the issue of non-participation is that they were often denied the right to voice their concern on matters that directly affected them. The following collection of extracts provides the most telling examples:

- 
1. **FR: I want to be heard...they must take our opinion as important**
 2. **MR: I believe children under 18 should participate. The constitution says**
 3. **that children have the right to be heard so when you're young and a child**
 4. **it means that you have the right to be heard and you should question**
 5. **sometimes.**
 6. **FR: Our opinion should be taken into consideration, we are a part of**
 7. **South Africa and our opinion should matter.**
 8. **MR: I mean we're the future doctors, lawyers, teachers and**
 9. **researchers so our rights should be protected now people should**
 10. **satisfy our best interest and stuff, now already so that we can build up**
 11. **to be good citizens.**

Extract 39 (Group 2)

1. **FR:** They must also give me a chance to have my say so that I can also
2. be part of decisions that they make. Most of the decisions that my father
3. makes has an impact on me and most of the time its not even a good.
4. Because decisions were made here that I must live with for the rest of
5. my life and it was made without consulting my brother, sister or myself.

Extract 40 (Group 4: Translated)

1. **MR:** You are not even allowed to present your side of the story then
2. its a big deal
3. **MR:** its very difficult to raise your voice and actually say something
4. like this is wrong, no I don't like this.
5. **MR:** You all know that its your right, you know that?
6. **MR:** ...yes, but they actually stopping us from having a say, they don't
7. believe in our rights
8. **MR:** They think that we don't have rights because they are law

Extract 41 (Group 1)

The above extracts all show a conviction for the right to '*participation*', with '*participation*' presented as a '*non-negotiable*' of well-being. The extracts further posit the intensity of the responses towards participation with the participants' narrative tone being quite animated and excited. They contended that they were excluded from significant decisions and believed that this negatively impacted on their well-being. They further showed an acute awareness of their rights, explicitly demanding recognition of their rights. This could in all likelihood be a residue of the participatory method. Participation was presented as dependent on adult

society's acknowledgement of these participation rights as "*they don't believe in our rights*".

Also present in the extracts are clear indications of the '*(non)-acknowledgement*' discourse as children claimed that they should be acknowledged as bona fide members of society. They further show that the '*(non)-participation*' and '*(non)acknowledgement*' discourse act in a mutually influencing way. Further evidence is presented in the following excerpt:

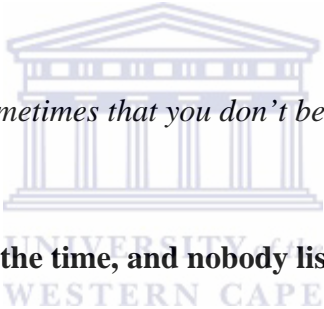
1. *I: Do you feel that you're part of this world, part of this country part of*
2. *this [interrupted] community*
3. **MR: [interrupts] No, I don't feel.**
4. *I: Why not?*
5. **MR: [responds]the people don't take note that you also have**
6. **freedom, that you don't have a say in this world**
7. **MR: Children also have rights...we also people, we also have a say**
8. **FR: but we feel they don't let you**
9. **MR: They take it away.**
10. **MR: They take it away from you yeah.**

Extract 42 (Group 6)

The key message transmitted by this extract is that participation is dependent on external acknowledgement, or more specifically on adult society's acknowledgement that children possess the right to participate. Given that the children are not acknowledged as valid members of society, their rights are not respected and opportunities for participation are limited. There is a discursive move

from demand for rights to acceptance which demonstrates, discursively at least, the effect of ideology on discourse.

As a result of the ‘*non-acknowledgement*’ and ‘*non-participation*’, protracted discussions further revealed how these discourses contributed to the discourse of ‘*marginalisation*’. For the rural participants these feelings of ‘*marginalisation*’ were exacerbated by their geographical isolation. In fact, they tend to experience their geographical isolation itself, as a form of marginalisation. For most, the discourses vacillated between ‘*(non)acknowledgement*’, ‘*non-participation*’ and ‘*marginalisation*’, with the latter undoubtedly the most powerful, as revealed by the following extracts.

- 
1. *I: Do you feel sometimes that you don't belong?*
 2. **MR: Yes**
 3. **FR: Everyday, all the time, and nobody listens to you**
 4. *I: What do you mean nobody listens to you*
 5. **FR: [replies] If you don't belong then nobody listens to you, then**
 6. **they tell you [animates a waving away action] right?**
 7. *I: I don't know, you tell me*
 8. **FR: [replies] Well, right**
 9. *I: How does it make you feel that nobody listens to you?*
 10. **FR: Junk**
 11. **FR: I feel they don't care**
 12. *I: What does junk mean? [translated]*
 13. **FR: Junk man, like you don't exist, you are not seen in this world...**
 14. *I: You don't exist*

15. **FR:** [emphatic] yes
16. **MR:** You feel like a stranger
17. **MR:** You feel out man
18. **FR:** You feel so empty inside
19. **MR:** And you can feel it here boiling up in your throat

Extract 43 (Group 5)

The extract portrays classic ‘*marginalisation*’ discourse. The participant’s response to the question (Line 3) is of particular interest. It is axiomatic that she is responding not only to the question but also addressing the inadequacy of the first response. She finds it important to elaborate on the first response which she probably deems inadequate. However, she continues to upgrade her response from “*everyday*” to “*all the time*”, a discursive manoeuvre intended to emphasise the serious nature of the trend, as well as to ensure that the message is brought across adequately and forcefully. This is also typical of what Edwards and Potter (2001) refer to as ‘extreme case formulation’ which refers to the use of extreme accounts to indicate commitment and investment in those accounts. In this example, the extreme case is being used to strengthen the account against doubt and reservation (see also Pomerantz, 1986).

Less apparent, but still conspicuous nonetheless, is that the participant is consciously and deliberately making the link between ‘*(non)acknowledgement*’ and ‘*marginalisation*’. Her response to the probe regarding this is fascinating and complex. At face value it appears as if she is simply referring to group membership (“*if you don’t belong*”), with children on the receiving end of an outgroup status. A

closer examination posits a number of discourses operating simultaneously within this seemingly innocuous statement. Firstly, the '*othering*' discursive strategy is apparent, elucidated by the presence of the "if – then" rhetorical strategy. Secondly, the '*(non)acknowledgement*' discourse is operative since "you don't belong", which in this instance, implies that outgroup status results in them not being acknowledged as valid members of a group. In this case the group membership under question is personhood. Thirdly, the '*non-participation*' discourse is overtly present, elucidated in this case by the waving away gesture. This statement further serves to emphasise the inextricable link between the discourses of '*non-acknowledgement and disrespect*' and '*non-participation*'. Together, these discourses contribute to the '*marginalisation*' discourse. The subsequent responses all appear to be supporting and confirming the discourse of '*marginalisation*' in what appears to be an act of discursive scaffolding. In other words, once the '*marginalisation*' discourse was presented all subsequent responses were geared towards confirming its validity. This discursive manoeuvre was further advanced by precise turn taking and the use of short explicit responses which added to the overall feel of authenticity. One can even go as far to say that it presented as a well-orchestrated and pre-determined performance. At this point, identifying the intent of this engagement can only be mere conjecture.

Also, what is fascinating is that it presented, albeit less fervently, in other groups and was a definite discursive trend throughout the study. Rather than being the presence of the '*marginalisation*' discourse, it would be more accurate to perceive of it as the '*proclamation of marginalisation discourse*'. However, its presence does

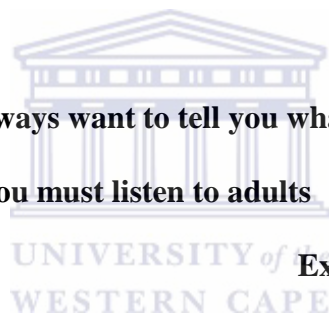
not depart from the fact that marginalisation itself was a key feature in the current study.

From the previous discussion it is axiomatic that the participants are engaged in a fierce positioning endeavour which appeared to be aimed at elucidating their status in society. It is therefore strange that discourses that contradict this general trend are evident. As the following selection of extracts reveal:

1. **FR: ...but today we just think, the older people don't respect us, why**
2. **must we have respect for them, that's all that runs through out**
3. **minds, but we also wrong, no matter what a big person do we must**
4. **still have respect.**

5. **FR: But adults always want to tell you what to do when it suits them**

6. **FR [responds] but you must listen to adults**



Extract 44 (Group 6)

1. *I: What do you think your role is as a child, a young person?*
2. **FR: Not to do wrong unnecessary things and just obey the things that**
3. **your mother says**
4. **MR: And don't skinner with big people**
5. **MR: And don't keep you big, don't talk to an uncle or so, talk to your**
6. **own age, something like that**

Extract 45 (Group 7)

The above extracts do not show, with any degree of certainty, if the participants are merely replicating common constructions or if they acquiesce this to be the actual role of the child in society. In fact, an analysis of demeanour, delivery and non-verbal behaviour associated with the extracts similarly fail to provide any definite

answer. The first extract shows the dichotomous nature of the *(dis)respect* discourse, and how the participant seamlessly moves between the two poles within one single statement. It is, in fact, a typical example of how children have been socialised to accept certain constructions of childhood. Of greater importance is the fact that both these extracts elucidate the ideological configuration of discourses. They seem to be positioning themselves inline with this inferior construction of childhood. On this occasion, based on the above extract, it seems to imply a sense of 'self-subjugation'. In other words, even though they appeared to be challenging the status quo, they are actually submitting to, and accepting their subservient position in society. On other occasions it appears as if they are strategically using the positionings to achieve particular social objectives (Hollway, 1984). Of course, as Wetherell (1998) notes, some order can be put to the emerging array of positions by observing their consistency or fit with broader interpretive repertoires available to the children and youth. The repertoires in the above extract include, for example, childhood as an inferior social category/class of society and childhood as a subservient social category/class in society.

While it is clear that the positionings that the children have at their disposal are constrained by various institutionalised material and social practices (Willig, 2000), they appear to be attempting to use the available positions to showcase their dominated experience. This point is starkly demonstrated when, on closer examination, it seems to be more than mere positioning but rather that they involved in genuine bouts of role-playing. It is this role-playing that seems to be a key feature within the discourses. During the interview process, the researcher had the

distinct impression that it was definite role-playing and not a response bias or socially desirable response set.

The role playing theme was a common trend in most of the discourses. A re-examination of the corpus of texts suggests that the participants adopted a number of different roles or subject positions. These different roles were correspondingly attached to the different discourses. Contradictions in discourses therefore suggest the adoption of a different role. What is less clear is when and why they adopt these roles, and also if they are completely conscious of the roles they are playing. For example, for long periods of the interview the participants adopted the role of victims of society and expended a considerable amount of energy to construct and position themselves as such. On other occasions, they felt it necessary to construct themselves as competent, valid individuals warranting equitable inclusion in society. Another adopted role is that of the 'good child'. It is within this role that the children appear to be accepting of their common-sense construction and lay understanding of what it means to be a child and what the role of the child is. While it does not appear that the participants are attempting, in a shrewd or dishonest way, to mask the true nature of their social identity, it is not definitive if the participants are consciously switching roles or if it takes place without conscious thought. The answer probably lies in examining how the adaptation of cultural norms, socialisation and particular ideologies become internalised. As ideology becomes internalised, it operates at the level of consciousness. However, at this age, according to Piaget's theory, the participants would have developed the competence of abstract reasoning and may cognitively challenge the existing status quo. Considering that these participants have developed cognitively, consciousness

becomes the site of contestation between ideological hegemony and cognitive reasoning. This contestation manifests in contradictions within discourses. In other words, as ideology becomes internalised within their consciousness, the contestation arises between what they think and the ideology that is part of their consciousness.

Another typical example that demonstrates this contention is presented below. After a protracted discussion about the disrespect experienced at the hands of teachers and parents, the participants stated:

1. **MR: That's why I say corporal punishment was the best way to**
2. **discipline because if he does it, he knows what's going to be, so he won't**
3. **do it because he's going to get hurt.**
4. *I: Do you agree with corporal punishment?*
5. **FR: Yes**
6. **MR: I agree with certain aspects**
7. *I: Let me just play devils advocate. Didn't you mention there a fear that*
8. *somebody was going to hit you and what about all those times when you're*
9. *falsely accused of doing something and you get beaten and you didn't do it?*
10. **MR: That was a problem**
11. **MR: Yeah, that was a problem**
12. **MR: But then again nothings perfect. You can't have a perfect system**
13. **MR: Yeah**

Extract 46 (Group 7)

This extract demonstrates clearly the stark contradictions with previous claims. The transition from one role to the next is also seamless and therefore seems highly

unlikely that the participants were aware of their contradictory stance. Yet, even when their contradictions were pointed out, their response was one of apathy and indifference. This means that it was not merely a shift in discursive activity, but rather a genuine shift in position, or the adoption of a completely new role. This also raises the question of whether it is a genuine contradiction. As mentioned previously, these contradictions could actually be thought of as being the manifestations of the contestations. It would then be inaccurate to ascribe particular importance to the contradictions in the individual sense and the focus should rather be placed on the essence of the contestations.

In conjunction with the above, the participants often adopted the justification or legitimising rhetoric. What is interesting is that this justification, whilst seemingly used to explain parents' behaviour, was also aimed at explaining and justifying their own claims. In other words, they were justifying their acceptance of the ideology. As the following extract further demonstrates:

1. **FR: You also have rights, but you must do what your parents tell you**

Extract 47 (Group 6)

This statement encapsulates the manifestation of ideology in particular Engels's concept of false consciousness. Moreover, it finds meaning when one contextualises it to the broader legal instruments, more specifically the UNCRC³⁵. Whilst the UNCRC essentially provided legal rights to children, these rights are, to a large extent, ceded to the guidance of parents and caregivers. Although the participant's statement does not capture the complexity of the UNCRC, it does raise the concern

³⁵ See Chapter Two for a discussion on the UNCRC

that legal instruments, such as the UNCRC, could potentially provide a false notion of possession of rights.

However, the texts do not always reveal a sense of false consciousness. On certain occasions the participants' resistance of ideology is evident, as the participants lamented the fact that their rights were not complied with. As the following quote demonstrates:

1. **MR: Children also have rights...we also people, we also have a say.**
2. **FR: But we feel they don't let you.**
3. **MR: They take it away.**
4. **MR: They take it away from you yeah.**
5. *I: What do they take away from you, your rights?*
6. **MR: Yeah, they take it away from you.**
7. **FR: Yeah, we don't really have rights, they just say we do.**
8. *I: Why do you say so?*
9. **FR: [responds] because its all talk, what rights do we have?**

Extract 48 (Group 6)

While the above suggests that the participants have an awareness of their rights, the key issue to emerge is that the proliferation of rights is dependent on adult society's recognition and acknowledgement of these rights. A related and interesting spin on this point emerged within the discussions, with the participants claiming that on certain occasions they were expected to fulfil the roles and responsibilities of adults. On these occasions, they claimed, they were no longer children. Following is a selection of quotes detailing the above contention.

1. **FR:** Sometimes adults want to hand over responsibility to us, then we
2. not laaities³⁶, we only laaities when it suits them.

Extract 49 (Group 5)

1. **FR:** And if they are drunk... then who must look after the children.
2. Then we are not laities. Who is drunk then?

Extract 50 (Group 5: Translated)

1. **FR:** We must be in by 9 o' clock... now there's either a problem at
2. home or somebody's drunk or whatever, take your pick, then you
3. must look after the house, you must clean, you must cook, you
4. must see that the small children are OK, then you not a laaitie.
5. **MR:** Uh, then you are now big enough
6. **MR:** You have sisters to look after
7. **FR:** Or brothers
8. **FR:** Your sister must wash by 4 o' clock, the food must be finished by
9. this time, by six o' clock, you must clean the house, the whole
10. house, daddy's going to come home, now I must work fast
11. **FR:** And the next morning you must dress the your brothers and
12. sisters, make breakfast and stuff, see that they OK and when you
13. come to school late then they tell you "don't bring your home
14. problems to school". So we must be a laaitie, act like one, but do
15. what the adults do, and all that stuff and then the end nobody
16. takes note

Extract 51 (Group 6: Translated)

³⁶ A colloquial, belligerent term for children, generally used to perpetuate the inferior status of children.

The above extracts support the claim that even though they are generally not recognised to possess bona fide rights, they were still expected at times to fulfil the roles of adults. The conspicuous irony is that, in these instances, it is apparently adults who are presenting with maladaptive behaviour and that the day to day responsibilities then become the children's burden. Adding to the children's burden is the fact that they have to fulfil these adult roles and responsibilities without the benefit of social privileges usually afforded to adults, as well as having to operate without recognition and acknowledgement of the role that they fulfil. It is for this reason that the participants lamented the fact that they "*must be a child*" but still have to "*do what the adults do and... nobody takes note*". It is worth noting the content of the discourse and the explicit detail used in the description by the participants of Group 6. Potter (1996) notes the use of detailed descriptions as a means to shore up the facticity of accounts.

They can provide an impression of being there by sketching features, although not substantial to the claim or argument would have been apparent to someone who actually witnessed some event. (pp. 117-118)

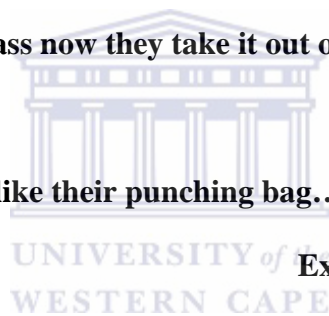
A re-look at the above extracts confirm Potter's contention as the participants were involved in an elaborate attempt to portray themselves as competent and responsible citizens. The participants used detailed narratives and were again involved in a precise bout of turn-taking with each subsequent response supporting and then building on the narrative. Added to this was even though the extract contained accounts by different participants, it presents like a single and continuous narrative. This suggests that the accounts were consciously and deliberately produced. They are again involved in a contestation of positioning. On this occasion they are

contesting their position in society, the common-sense construction of children as irresponsible and the subsequent notion that they are not valid members of society. In this instance one could even extend the argument and claim that alcohol was merely an incidental theme, and the primary aim of the participants was to present themselves as competent and responsible citizens. They are thus resisting the ideology. Duncan (1993) notes that ideology and its constituent discourses are not always accepted without question and resistance from the dominated group. Levett succinctly argues that “power exists with resistances to it” (as cited in Duncan, 1993, p. 57). Similar, both Thompson (1984) and Gramsci (1978) point out that even though discourse is the primary means through which ideology functions to reproduce and maintain asymmetrical relations of power, it is also the primary instrument through which domination is resisted or opposed (Duncan, 1993). It is, however, worth mentioning that the issue of alcohol appeared to be constantly emerging within the group discussions as a point of concern. This issue of alcohol abuse will be addressed presently.

Another related theme that emerged consistently within the discussions is encapsulated in the claim that “*adults like taking out their problems on children, and there is nothing we can do about it*”. While this statement seems straightforward enough, regardless of the fact that the participants appear to be victimised at the level of the physical and ideological, it finds similarities with the epigenic theory of de Mause (1973). de Mause (1973) essentially argued that childhood was historically characterised by constant physical and sexual abuse by adults, which resulted directly from adults’ inability to maintain their psychological integrity. In other words, they vented their problems on children. While de Mause (1973)

presented his theory as a historical treatise it appears to be applicable to contemporary society as well. Again it is worth pointing out the role that the participants are adopting and the discourses associated with this role. As intimated previously, discourse is used as an instrument of resistance. Here the participant adopts the role of the victim and is supported aptly by the *'helplessness and vulnerability'* discourse. The following extract referring to interaction with educators provides further evidence.

1. **FR:** **They take it out on you**
2. *I:* *What?*
3. **FR:** [responds] **Their problems, they take their problems out on you.**
4. **MR:** **Had a bad class now they take it out on you...and you can do**
5. **nothing**
6. **MR:** **You become like their punching bag...**



Extract 52 (Group 5)

The extract provides strong support for the arguments detailed above and clearly shows how adults exert both physical and ideological control over the children as *“they take their problems out on you ... and you can do nothing”*. What the participants are suggesting is that, from an ideological point of view, a child has no recourse to abuse from adults and it is an accepted practice. A particular point to note is the use of the metaphor (Line 6) which is probably used to drive home the discourse of *'helplessness and vulnerability'* more strongly, but also demonstrates the ideological role of childhood in controlling the behaviour of children. It is a subtle and intelligent piece of discursive activity as the punching bag generally takes a beating, but cannot return any offensive. What the use of the metaphor further

portrays is that the participant is consciously attempting to portray this discourse. Again, one can refer to the ‘*proclamation*’ of the ‘*helplessness and vulnerability*’ discourse. This is significant because the participants are strategically using the discursive space created by the interview as an opportunity to elucidate the nature of these relations.

The participants also communicated the importance of social and interpersonal relationships, specifically highlighting the importance of belonging to a social circle and having “*a social life*”, and claiming that it “*is important...*” and “*...its part of life*”. Moreover, they mentioned that the breakdown in interpersonal relations between themselves and parents, teachers and peers affected them profoundly. This is consistent with findings by Gorecka and Niespoj-Roguszko (as cited in Piekarska, 2000), who found a high incidence of reported conflicts with teachers and parents concerning school performance. The authors further reported that participants demonstrated high levels of frustration, fear and anger towards school and teachers. Similarly, Piekarska (2000) found that abusive behaviours by teachers significantly increased the stress levels of learners. In the current study the participants intimated that strained relations with friends and peers had similar negative outcomes and profoundly affected their sense of well-being.

The need for social support emerged as a relevant theme in this thematic domain and was related to the need for love and emotional support from friends and family.

This supports the notion that social support effectively contributes to the maintenance of the psychological integrity.

When probed the participants responded as follows:

1. **MR: Friends must stand by you and give you support...**

Extract 53 (Group 2: Translated)

2. **MR: family love**

3. *I: [repeats] Family love?*

4. **MR: Family love. When get home you get food and love and when you**
5. **feeling down there's someone to say look here that's right, do it this way,**
6. **don't worry I am here. That is love, your family caring for you. That's**
7. **important.**

8. *I: To be cared for?*

9. **MR: Yes, to be cared for. When you know people care for you, inside**
10. **you it just feels OK. Like its OK and you not alone in this world.**

Extract 54 (Group 1)

11. **MR: You can rely on them if you need something or you them to do**
12. **something for you they will always be there.**

Extract 55 (Group 1)

The above extracts support the significance of social support both in terms of the content of actual responses and also in terms of the subtle suggestion that, as social beings, children and young people require a certain level of interpersonal interaction. A closer reading of the extracts further supports the notion that social support effectively contributes to the maintenance of the psychological integrity.

Closely related to the theme of social support was that of the need for role models. Jencks and Meyer's (as cited in Curtis, Dooley & Phipps, 2004) 'theory of collective socialisation' underscores the importance of adult role models for positive child outcomes. Similarly, participants believed that the presence of mentors or role models would contribute positively to their development.

1. **FR: A person, who looks well after you, helps you with everything;**
2. **that you can turn to**
3. *I: A guardian or a care giver Ok!*
4. **MR: A mentor**
5. **MR: ... You need a mentor, someone that can guide you, someone who**
6. **can help you through life, and someone that you can learn from.**
7. **Someone that already has experience and of good experience you can**
8. **learn. I know that you must do up your own experience and that it's one**
9. **of the best ways to learn but you can keep certain mistakes aside by**
10. **learning from other people.**

Extract 56 (Group 2)

Socio-economic concerns were also raised by the participants. They contended that there were limited employment opportunities in the local community and cited examples of young people, who have completed formal schooling, having no opportunities for economic growth and falling victim to a range of social evils. Another major concern was the abuse of alcohol. The participants linked alcohol consumption to the poor economic conditions in the community and intimated that alcohol consumption is destroying community life and family life. They further cited a number of examples where parents' alcohol abuse affected them negatively.

This sentiment was exclusive to the rural participants and the participants from former disadvantaged areas with a low socio-economic status. Groups conducted with participants from the higher socio-economic status exhibited no negative sentiment towards alcohol. The following extract depicts the concerns of alcohol:

1. *I: What else don't you like?*
2. **FR1: If my daddy's drunk**
3. **FR2: Oh, don't speak... my daddy is the worst when he is drunk**
4. **FR3: My daddy's an alcoholic. He can't stop drinking, during the week**
5. **then he says he's going to work, then he go drink**
6. *I: And how does all of this make you feel*
7. **FR2: You feel down... you feel sad...it's embarrassing, because your**
8. **friends is around you and then they laugh, and then I'm so**
9. **embarrassed that I don't even want to show my face. If they ask**
10. **me...then I say no its not my daddy it's my uncle**
11. **FR4: You feel ashamed of yourself, you feel ashamed of him**
12. **MR1: You feel, yoh, like your head, your head just want to explode...**
13. **FR1: ...6 o' clock in the morning then they start and drink the whole**
14. **time until the afternoon, and then they go sleep, and then they drunk...**
15. *I: How often, do they drink, like only on weekends?*
16. **FR2: What! every single day, but yeah the weekends are worse.**

Extract 57 (Group 6: Translated)

The above extract is characteristic of children's experiences of living with parents and in neighbourhoods where alcohol abuse is rife. There exists a wealth of literature that documents the relationship between parental alcohol abuse and

adverse childhood experiences (Dube, Anda, Felitti, Croft, Edwards & Giles, 2001), child maltreatment (Walsh, MacMillan, Jamieson, 2003), increased risk for childhood stressors (Sher, Gershuny, Peterson & Raskin, 1997) and severe behavioural and emotional problems (Christensen & Bilenberg, 2000). The above text shows a consistency with some of these findings. The significance of this extract is heightened by the fact that, of the eight participants in the group, the responses of five suggest that they are living in households characterised by severe alcohol abuse. While this is not an attempt at quantifying the issue, it is rather concerning that the majority of the group, more or less randomly selected, experienced such direct and severe exposure.

While the psychological impact “*your head just want to explode*” and the social impact “*I’m so embarrassed that I don’t even want to show my face*” is obvious, it does not appear that elucidating these constituents is their primary aim. Rather, while they clearly acknowledge that alcohol abuse is a serious social problem, they appear to be going to great lengths to locate the problem within the parents and adults in general and not the alcohol. This is clearly encapsulated in the following extract:

1. **FR: That’s why I say, if you want to drink, drink for yourself and not**
2. **for other people.**

Extract 58 (Group 6)

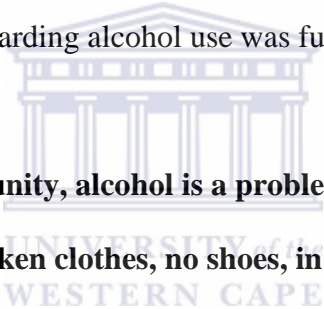
The reason for this complicated piece of discursive positioning is not obvious. One can speculate and suggest that the overall upshot is to maintain or protect their own entitlement to drink. Their belief is that extraneous factors contribute to alcohol

abuse and if you “*drink, drink for yourself and not for other people*”, then one can guard against abuse.

Other extracts, most notably from the rural participants, show a different conceptualisation of alcohol abuse. In this context there appeared to be a collective animosity towards alcohol and alcohol vendors with some participants even portraying it as the prime evil within the community. They claimed, for example, that “*if alcohol can go away, then everything would be fine*”. This is inconsistent with the above and some literature, especially the social learning and behavioural modelling literature, which predict cyclical alcohol abuse.

Another fascinating retort regarding alcohol use was furnished by a rural participant.

He claimed the following:

- 
1. **MR: In our community, alcohol is a problem. You see small children**
 2. **running around, broken clothes, no shoes, in the cold wind, they go**
 3. **to school with no jersey or anything...no food, and you know**
 4. **where the parents are, drunk, they laying drunk somewhere, not at**
 5. **all worried about their children. Now you tell me, is that right? No**
 6. **its not, I wouldn't do that**

Extract 59 (Group 4: Translated)

This extract cogently locates the blame both within the parents as well as alcohol.

However, the overall aim of the contention does not appear to be blaming, but rather an intelligent manoeuvre to discount the responsible nature of parents. Through this strategy the participant is then essentially challenging the common-sense perception that adult society is naturally more responsible than children. In the first section of

the account he systematically constructs a detailed³⁷ narrative of children in distress and then proceeds to locate the problem within adults' irresponsible drinking behaviour. This is followed by an instance of discursive brilliance (Line 5). He poses a question³⁸ based on adult society's own rules of moral conduct, and proceeds to answer it himself without waiting for a response. In fact, it appears as if he did not want a response at all. This discursive manoeuvre lends a sense of authenticity to his response by creating the impression that the answer was obvious and definitive. Finally, he reinforces the notion by claiming that "*I wouldn't do it*". The extract again reveals the contestations within childhood. Here the participant is contesting his position as an irresponsible child. He is not challenging his individual status as a member of a group, typically explained by social identity theory. Rather, he is contesting the status of childhood as inferior within the hierarchy. One can even claim that the theme of alcohol was incidental and that the argument was generic. As noted before, this participant is essentially (through discourse) resisting the ideology.

5.3 Summary of the emerging discourses

The findings indicate that the participants' discourses can be located within three interrelated thematic domains viz.: personal safety, social and environmental context and psycho-social functioning. These emerging domains are consistent with those identified in international literature (see e.g. Land et al., 2001; Pollard & Davidson, 2001; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Thornton, 2001; Zaff, Smith, Rogers, Leavitt, Halle &

³⁷ The use of detailed descriptions to build up the facticity of accounts has been previously discussed and applies in this example as well.

³⁸ The question was posed as genuine and not as a rhetorical question.

Bornstein, 2003) and local initiatives (see e.g. Dawes et al., 2007, September & Savahl, 2009).

The emerging discourses, viz. *'personal safety, a stable social environment, a stable 'self' and participation, as non-negotiables'*; *'helplessness and vulnerability'*; *'(non)acknowledgement' and (dis)respect'* and *'marginalisation'* are indicative of the actual meanings that the participants attribute to well-being and lends support to Pollard and Rosenberg's (2003) definition. The close and mutually influencing relationship of the domains and discourses suggest that the concept of well-being should be perceived as an integrated whole consisting of closely interacting components rather than a discrete multidimensional phenomenon.

'Personal safety as a non-negotiable', as it relates to exposure and experiences of violence, was the most pervasive discourse and was consistent in the discussions of all three thematic domains. It was furthermore present in the discourses of all the participants, irrespective of social class and economic status. However, a trend can be identified whereby those participants residing in the rural and lower socio-economic areas provided narratives depicting first hand exposure, while the participants from the more affluent areas provided secondary anecdotal evidence. For sexual abuse, the findings were even more alarming, with all female participants reporting first hand experience. It is therefore not entirely surprising that the discourses suggest that the profound psychological impact of violence exposure is inconsistent across socio-economic groups.

A '*stable social environment as a non-negotiable*' was another discourse that featured prominently. The meanings of well-being in this instance were attached to the integrity of the physical and social environment, in particular the infrastructure and provision of community services. What emerged as quite significant was the minutiae of children's and young people's relationship with the social environment, i.e., what was the nature of their engagement and how did this affect their well-being.

A '*stable self as a non-negotiable*' emerged in the thematic domain of psycho-social. This discursive theme includes social acceptance and good social relations. The final non-negotiable was '*participation*'. Children were quite impassioned about their role in society and their right to participation. The conviction was, however, more pronounced by the urban participants than the rural participants. The internal determinant here is the level of self-esteem of the participants. The urban participants for example posited a higher level of self-esteem than the rural participants, were more outspoken, vociferous, and resolute in their claims for participation rights.

'Helplessness and vulnerability' was another discourse that was pervasive in the corpus of texts. Whether referring to their '*helplessness and vulnerability*' in the face of physical and sexual violence, or as a remnant of being at the receiving end of a power relationship with adults, this discourse is substantial in its effects. Other closely related discourses are that of '*(non)acknowledgement*' and '*(dis)respect*' and '*desensitisation*'. This collection of related discourses is ultimately both a residue and catalyst of typical negative discourses and perceptions

that pervades society's view of children as incomplete members of society (James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994).

The discourse of '*marginalisation*' emerged as a key trend throughout the entire study. It appears to be considered as a sort of composite or index discourse comprising the '*(non)acknowledgement and (dis)respect*', '*helplessness and vulnerability*' and '*(non)participation*' discourses. One could extend the contention and in fact argue that it appears to be the culmination or manifestation of all the pervasive discourses within the participants talk. At times, an analysis revealed a strange spin on the discourse as it appeared not to be a manifestation but a proclaiming of discourses. Participants were constantly positioning, negotiating and contesting the terms of their childhood within the discussion. The use of the narrative and the supply of anecdotal evidence are both conspicuous and prolific in the corpus of texts. Understandably the children are using the narrative as a meaning-making device (Shaw, 2004). Their use of discursive and narrative techniques to bring their message across was in itself interesting. Through these techniques the participants were able to conjure up powerful images and effectively communicate the components of their well-being. It is also very evident that the children used this process as a platform to voice their discontent at their current experiences of childhood. A re-look at the corpus of texts as a whole, would in fact indicate that the children are often engaging in a type of pseudo political discourse with the primary function of highlighting the nature of their social space. An interesting point that arises is whether this positioning, negotiating and contesting are unique to these discussions, i.e. are children only using this opportunity to get

their voices heard. Or alternatively, is this typical of the lived world of the young person.

Indeed it appears that the nature of children's engagement with the social world, in particular the adult actors' attitudes and common-sense perceptions of children and childhood, is a pertinent factor of their well-being. Ultimately then the study is revealing that childhood is not regarded as a legitimate province of meaning (Corsaro, 2005) and that the notion of children as valid co-constructors of society is still some way off.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter focused on detailing the emerging discourses of well-being. It is important to remember that the study is following an analysis protocol that combines the two key discourse analysis trends. The current chapter was largely concerned with providing the conversational and ethnomethodological analysis on the participants' discussion. More specifically the focus was on elucidating what the participants were achieving with their utterances, how they achieved this through the use of specific discursive resources, how social organisation is accomplished in talk (Wetherell, 1992) and how the meanings were intersubjectively understood (Sacks, 1992). Within the analysis protocol the next step would be to offer an interpretation of how these discourses construct various meanings of childhood and the extent to which these meanings are ideologically configured. This will be taken up in Chapter Seven. The following chapter explores the relationship between discourse and meaning, in particular highlighting the complex nature between ideology and knowledge and how this finds expression in discourse.

CHAPTER SIX: FROM DISCOURSES TO MEANINGS

6.1 Introduction

At this point it might be useful to briefly reflect on the status of the overall project in general and the analysis in particular. To reflect on the former, a re-look at the aims and objectives of the study would be useful. As previously intimated, the study aims to explore the meanings that children assign to 'childhood'. More specifically the study aims to explore the extent to which these meanings of 'childhood' are ideologically configured. The following key objectives guided the study:

- (i) to examine how children use specific discursive resources and repertoires to construct childhood well-being
- (ii) to examine how these constructions are manifested in their discourses
- (iii) to examine how these discourses construct various meanings of childhood
- (iv) to examine the extent to which these meanings are ideologically configured

The previous chapter, concerned with the actual discourse analysis, addressed the first two objectives while Chapter Seven will address objectives three and four and is concerned with meaning generation and will explicate the meanings of childhood. The current chapter is aimed at theoretically contextualising the findings by providing a theoretical underpinning of the relationship between discourse and meaning. In other words, before these meanings of childhood are considered, it will be necessary to reflect on the nature of discourse and ideology.

6.2 On the Nature of Discourse and Ideology

Within the field of ideology many questions are unresolved. One question that is particularly problematic is the relationship between discourse and ideology. To address this issue the work of van Dijk (1995, 2003) is considered.

van Dijk puts forward a tentative theory based on elucidating the relationship between ideology and shared social representations³⁹. Following this line of reasoning, van Dijk explains that a racist ideology could be the basis of racist attitudes people share about 'other' groups. However, since socially shared knowledge also falls within this rubric, it follows that knowledge is also ideologically biased. van Dijk rejects this notion and claims that it would be inconsistent to assume that all knowledge is ideological. An examination of the texts in the current study, in fact, show support for the above contention. He puts forward the theoretical proposition that each group would have shared knowledge within a specific epistemic community that may or may not be ideologically biased. van Dijk's point is that regardless of the ideological status of knowledge, there is group consensus and belief that this knowledge is true and accurate. "In other words, both in their perceptions, interactions or discourses, group members deal with such beliefs as corresponding to the facts" (van Dijk, 2003, p. 17). Within the current study, this is clearly demonstrated by the contradictions within the participants' discourses. On the one hand they show contempt for certain practices and prejudices against them as young people. However, on the other hand their

³⁹ Consisting of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and defined as organized clusters of socially shared beliefs.

discourses often echo socially shared knowledge about the role and place of children in society.

While van Dijk's key motive is to elucidate the complex nature between ideology and knowledge and their expression in discourse, he acknowledges the complexity of the interaction and suggests that some details, especially those regarding the relevant mental and social processes are still largely obscure.

For the current study, the most interesting question would be to ascertain whether ideology is constructed by or manifested in discourse. Following social constructionism, it is accurate to work from the premise that language does not map or mirror reality but in fact constructs it. An extension of this principle to the current study suggests that ideology is constructed in language. However, a perusal of the emerging discourses in the previous chapter strongly indicates that ideology is both constructed by, and manifested in discourse. van Dijk (1998) similarly believes that ideology both shapes discourse and is formed by discourse. However, although discourse is not the only ideologically based social practices they are possibly the most critical (van Dijk, 1998). Whilst other forms of social practices are able to demonstrate the presence of ideologies, the specific features of discourse, which allows both for the manifestation as well as the exact means of how this is achieved, is often hard to articulate. van Dijk similarly argues that merely intimating about "production of meaning" (1998, p. 204), as is typical of scholarly studies, does not elucidate the role of discourse on ideological meaning construction. He attributes this to the inherent vagueness of the term, more specifically in the generic way that the term is often used. Added to this, meaning is also contingent on the theoretical

and subject position, i.e. it would mean different things to different people. In other words, the linguists, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers will be inextricably tied up to their subject positions and theoretical positions. Furthermore, there may also be diverse conceptualisations within these individual disciplines. With its strong constructionist base, the current study, following the propositions of Wittgenstein (1978), conceives of the meaning of a text or expression to be dependent on the context of its usage. Gergen (1994) extends the argument to include the relational account of meaning that essentially argues that the meanings of utterances are contingent on the intersubjective activities between interlocutors.

What the above is suggesting is that the mere location and consideration of the social context fails to reveal all the details in its entirety. Simply considering the social context would not reveal the mechanics of how institutions and social actors function to sustain relations of domination. In other words, it underestimates the role of ideology and falls short in revealing the means through which discourse functions to sustain relations of domination. Discourse is therefore aimed not at revealing multiple realities but rather the reality that depicts the relations of domination.

Interestingly enough, van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach makes similar claims linking meaning to the assignation of interpretation and understanding to discourse and its elements. van Dijk (1998) states:

Meanings are not so much abstract properties of words or expressions, rather the kinds of things language users *assign* to such expressions in processes of interpretation or understanding...meanings of discourse or

language in use are contextual or situated, and depend on the (interpretation of the) participants. (p. 204-205, emphasis in original)

van Dijk (1998) makes another important point. He argues that these meaning assignments are a function of cognitive processing and warns against an exclusive socially orientated discourse analysis which he believes intuitively infers the meanings rather than providing a rigorous elucidation. van Dijk's argument is undoubtedly cognitive. His position is that social representations are mapped on verbally expressed meanings of talk and text. The meanings of discourses emerge as a result of interlocutors "selecting relevant portions of mental models about events" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 205). Since models contain social representations, which may embody ideology, the meanings themselves are potentially ideological. To access these meanings, van Dijk (1998) proposes lexical analysis. He argues that social representations

may be conventionalised and codified in the lexicon, as the respective negative and positive meanings of the well-known pair 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighter' suggest. Lexical analysis is still the most obvious (and still fruitful) component in ideological discourse analysis. (p. 205)

Whilst van Dijk's argument of the importance of the cognitive dimension in meaning production is significant, it is problematic to regard it as the defining feature of an ideological analysis. It is therefore important that the cognitive dimension be considered along with the contextual and situated nature of discourse as well as the dynamics of intersubjective meaning making.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

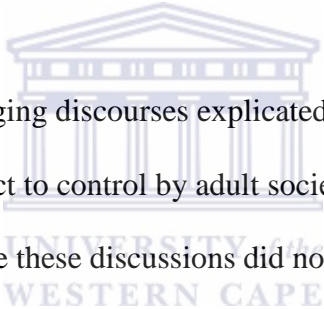
In the final analysis, to ascertain a plausible understanding of the mechanisms through which discourse constructs meaning, an approach that integrates the importance of linguistic constituents, social context and situatedness and social interaction is required. The current study engendered an analysis approach that foregrounded these aspects of drawing on the work of van Dijk (1998, 2003) and Thompson (1984, 1990) in particular, to offer an interpretation of how these discourses construct various meanings of childhood. More specifically the focus was on elucidating how these meanings are ideologically configured. This is taken up in the following chapter.



CHAPTER SEVEN: THE EMERGING MEANINGS OF CHILDHOOD

7.1 Introduction

As previously pointed out, Thompson's (1984, 1990), three phase depth hermeneutics analysis framework was utilised as the primary method to frame the analysis. As discussed in Chapter Four, the first phase, *socio-historical analysis*, is implicit and subsumed within the process of the study itself. The second phase, *discourse analysis*, was addressed in Chapter Five. The final phase, *interpretation/reinterpretation* is concerned with the structural features of meaning construction as it emerges within specific social contexts and is considered in this chapter.



It is axiomatic from the emerging discourses explicated in Chapter Five that children have in some way been subject to control by adult society based to a large extent on their status as children. While these discussions did not focus on where and how these dominant discourses are produced, it did show the extent to which these common-sense constructions manifested in children's discourses. It would then not be inaccurate to assume that if children are confronted by this sense of control on a regular basis they would invariably attempt to give meaning to it. Meaning in the service of power is conceptualised as ideology in this study. It is these ideological meanings as constructed by the discourses of the participants that constitute the focus of the current chapter. This chapter therefore engages with the emerging meanings of childhood and the extent to which these meanings are ideologically configured. The chapter concludes by considering an ideologically configured social constructionism as a framework to understand childhood.

7.2 On meaning and ideology: The emerging meanings of Childhood

For the purposes of the current study, and in line with the epistemological and methodological trend, Thompson's (1984, 1990) conceptualization of meaning is followed. For Thompson (1984, 1990), meaning is a key component of ideology. As previously stipulated, Thompson defines ideology as 'meaning in the service of power', i.e. how meaning serves to maintain relations of domination between different social groups; in this case adults and children. Thompson postulates that ideology operates "through a complex series of mechanisms whereby meaning is mobilized, in the discursive practices of everyday life, for the maintenance of relations of domination" (1984, p. 63).

Thompson puts forward a positive conceptualisation of meaning by means of three interrelated theses. Firstly, he asserts that meaning is not a stable and static linguistic product but should rather be perceived as a complex and fluctuating phenomenon. Meaning is constituted both by the conditions of production and conditions of reception. This meaning can only be understood by considering the socio-historical conditions within which it is produced as well as the specific social differentiations, such as class, gender, religion, region etc, within which it is received⁴⁰.

Thompson's second thesis is that meaning is contingent on the structural features of the linguistic product. He is however not arguing that meaning is exclusively

⁴⁰ In this respect Thompson concurs with Bourdieu's view that "the linguistic product is fully realized as a message only if it is treated as such, that is, deciphered, and the schemes of interpretation which receivers employ in their creative appropriation of the product can be more or less distant from those which orientated the production" (Bourdieu, as cited in Thompson, 1984, p. 66).

constituted by structural features such as grammar, syntax and style but rather that meaning is constructed through these features. This leads directly to his third thesis. Here Thompson argues that to arrive at an interpretation of the meaning of an utterance or expression does not merely require one to mark the socially and historically situated nature of the linguistic expression, but also requires an appreciation of what is actually being asserted in the expression. In summary Thompson (1984) states that:

if ideology operates by the mobilization of meaning for the maintenance of relations of domination, then the analysis of ideology must seek to interpret the meaning of linguistic expressions in relation to the social and historical conditions in which they are produced and received. (p. 66)

Following Thompson, the analysis and interpretation of ideology is primarily concerned with language which is the principal medium through which meaning operates. While the functional capacity of language has long been established (see e.g. Austin, 1962; Wittgenstein, 1978) the relation between speech acts and the infusion with forms of power is often not emphasised. Bourdieu (1977) makes this point cogently:

Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected and distinguished. (p. 20)

Bourdieu essentially means that the power of words is fundamentally linked to the institutional position or authority of the speaker. In the case of adult/child relations,

at the most basic level, power and domination are exerted over young people through speech acts by virtue of their institutionally constructed authority, creating the sense that adult's utterances have privilege over that of children and young people. Secondly, it would appear that in the current study there is often a contradictory, or more accurately, a contested response from the participants. Thus, as previously stipulated, and present as a key feature throughout the participants' discourses, there is both a consensus and contestation of the common-sense constructions of the position of children in society.

7.3 Childhood as a *contested-consensual* space

Essentially, the previous discussion is suggesting that it is the meanings of childhood that become contested within the discourses. If one takes into consideration the Wittgensteinian notion that meaning is essentially open for dispute, contingent on the differential capacity of various groups to provide meaning, then it follows that the mobilisation of meaning by the dominant group would serve to create and sustain the relations of domination. Indeed Laclau and Mouffe (1985) point out that it is through the articulation of meaning that power becomes elucidated. Thompson (1984) thus rightly argues that it is the infusion of meaning with power, or relations of domination, that creates the opportunity for ideology to legitimate, dissimulate and reify the existing state of affairs, or as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) point out, become hegemonic and pervasive. In this sense, as the participants suggest, since adults dominate the discourse they control the mobilisation of meaning and subsequently they have power over children. However, this mobilisation of meaning is not without consequence. An outcome of this mobilisation of meaning is the *contestation-consensual* dichotomy, which

occurs at three levels, viz. within the individual (within the consciousness of the child), between children (in the sense that they contest the nature of childhood between themselves) and between children and adult society (in the sense that they contest their position as valid social actors). The participants' discourses are however, suggesting that the three levels do not operate in isolation or autonomously from one another. Rather, they should be conceived of as mutually influencing processes, or even more accurately as a single phenomenon. This is quite evident in the discourses of the participants as they often demonstrate three levels within a single utterance, contention or assertion.

While Chapter Two has posited the multidimensional nature of childhood, specifically explicating the various ways that childhood has been constructed, the ideological meanings seem to be emerging on a continuum. Following this line of thought the point opposite that of contestation would be consensus. The interplay of contestation and consensus is the interplay between two contrary tendencies of ideology. What is rather interesting is the fact that both contestation and consensus operate in the same manner and have similar manifestations and outcomes. In other words, as previously stipulated they operate at three levels, viz. within the child, between children and between children and adult society. An examination of the texts of the study quite clearly depicts the presence of these consensual notions. The grand meaning of '*childhood as a consensual space*' serves to further elucidate the relations of domination between the children and adults in society in as much as their discourses often reflect an adherence to, and acceptance of, common-sense constructions of childhood that generally depict the child as not yet a valid member of society, but a 'member in becoming' who still requires the guidance and control

of adults. From the adult perspective this is construed as their responsibility (and their right). While children may resent this, if interpolated into the dominant adult ideology, they will accept this as legitimate.

It is the presence of these grand meanings within the discourses that reveal the continuum of power between children and adult society and conspicuously demonstrate how the status of 'childhood' serves to maintain these relations of domination. The fact that it operates and manifests at the three levels mentioned above further points to the depth of its influence. In other words, it is part of the children's consciousness, exists as an accepted discourse between children, and most significantly between children and adult society. Indeed, it is at these levels that the contestation and consensual meanings of childhood play themselves out most profoundly. Following are relevant examples drawn from the participants' discourses that depict the *contested/consensual* dichotomy operating on the three levels.

7.3.1 Intrapersonal Level

The *contestation* is cogently encapsulated in the thematic category of *socio-environmental context* where the participants lay claim that their socio-environmental context is the defining factor in the experience of childhood (see page 190-191). While the participants touched on the issue of peer pressure and the need for group membership, the emergent point is the *contested* nature of childhood. Here the contestation is at the level of the individual where the interplay is between the *social environment as a non-negotiable* and the *helplessness and vulnerability* discourses. This experience creates a dilemma which the child then has to *contest*

within the self. The nature of the dilemma was related to the fact that the child has two undesirable options; i.e. either participate in social deviance and be accepted within the group, but sacrifice what they see as the innocence of childhood; or refrain from participation and maintain their childhood, but risks losing the safety of group membership. It is interesting to note how the participants have constructed this dilemma by perceiving deviance as a loss of childhood and alternatively constructing their identity as being dependent on group membership. The fact that both options have the potential for undesirable consequences suggests evidence of the *contestation*. On the one hand, they risk sacrificing their childhood membership as the participant is claiming that involvement in some activities implies a premature termination of childhood. It is clear that, on this occasion at least, the participant has conceptualised childhood as a space of innocence and purity. He is thus, discursively it seems, protecting the integrity of childhood, because “*once you do it then you are no longer a child*”. Adhering to this line of reasoning implies a *consensus* to societal values. However, on the other hand, “*you*” run the risk of being marginalised and isolated. Group membership and a sense of acceptance are important factors that impact on the integrity of the self. The fact that they see abstention as leading to a potential loss of group membership is significant. It would seem then that even the social environment could potentially act as a space for ideology. It is important to note that it is the extent that ideology has been assimilated into the cognitive structures that determine the level of the *contestation* or *consensus*. It appears then, that the grand meaning of childhood as a *contested/consensual* space is in fact, outcomes of the ideological influence.

While the above is merely one instance of the *contestation/consensus*, it indicates the extent to which ideology has become internalised into the consciousness of the child. Considering that these children have developed cognitively, the ideology comes into conflict with the cognitive reasoning. Consciousness thus becomes the site of *contestation*, between ideological hegemony and cognitive reasoning. This *contestation* manifests in contradictions within the discourses. What this essentially means is that, as ideology becomes internalised within their consciousness, the meanings ascribed to childhood emerges from what they think and the ideology that is part of their consciousness. It is the ubiquitous nature of the *contestation/consensus* tension that contributes to the grand meaning of *childhood as a contested/consensual space*.



7.3.2 Interpersonal Level

The interplay of the tension between children as they negotiate their understandings is also evident throughout the discourses that emerged in the focus groups. A point of note is that the contradictions within the consciousness of the child has implications for how the *contested/consensual* meanings of childhood are constructed between children. The evidence shows that the participants proffer similar as well as different views of the nature of childhood. Again, this is most likely an outcome of the extent to which the dominant discourses have been assimilated into the consciousness of the children (ideological hegemony). What is also quite interesting is the extent to which the participants intersubjectively construct the nature of childhood and well-being. Often, they appear to be using the focus group as a means to challenge the existing status quo. During these instances there are intricate and strategic discursive manoeuvres to present childhood as a

phase of exploitation and oppression. On occasion it appears as if the discussions were planned and pre-meditated as participants expertly weave narratives that depict their dire circumstances. During these discursive episodes the *consensual* meanings were constructed through collaborative efforts and delicate rhetorical positioning. This contention is best encapsulated in the discussion on the fragility of the 'self'. Here the participants embarked on a subtle, yet sophisticated attempt to depict the fragility of the 'self' and the extent to which adult society negatively impacts on the development of the 'self'. The discourses of '*marginalisation*' and '*helplessness and vulnerability*' were used to achieve this (see page 199-200) and is evident in their proclamation that adult society is "*committing character murder*" and that their (i.e. adult's) attitudes towards children "*destroys your self-esteem*". As the 'self' is articulated and positioned in discourse in ways that will enhance one's claim to be heard (Potter & Wetherell, 1992), in this instance it is positioned as being under duress, thus staking a stronger claim that their voices should be heard.

Another example of consensus at this level is evident during the discussion of '*participation as a non-negotiable*' as well as the discourses of *(non)acknowledgement and (dis)respect* (see pages 203 -210). Here the participants collaboratively weaved a sense of entitlement that their voices be acknowledged as valid and real.

The contested notion at the interpersonal level is best depicted during the discussion on exposure to community violence. Here the participants' claims that "*what can we do, that's the way it is*", "*you can't just do things*" and "*because it doesn't work like that...*" (see page 172) suggest that they are resigned to their position in society.

It portrays the legitimisation and reification modus operandi of ideology, in the sense that they have prescribed to the notion of social relations between adults and children being natural and permanent and which follows a line of reasoning that ultimately legitimates and rationalises the nature of the social relations between the two. The response in form of the retort “*but we shouldn’t just take things lying down, we are people too...*” (see page 172) points to the emergent resistance and lays the basis for the *contestation*. Another vivid example of this contestation emerged during the discussion on corporal punishment. In two of the groups, the issue of corporal punishment emerged as a significant point of *contestation*. During these discussions the group were profoundly split over the usefulness and legality of corporal punishment. Supporters appeared to have internalised its use as a necessary means to ‘maintain order’, again depicting the legitimisation modus operandi of ideology. Others argued against its legitimate use, basing their argument on child and human rights protocols. Interestingly there was a critical group that argued both for and against corporal punishment. It is within these individuals that the contestation was most profound.

7.3.3 Societal Level

The most prevalent contestation exists between children and adult society. It is, in fact, the key level that the *contestation/consensual* meanings of childhood play themselves out within the focus group discussions. At this level the participants were attempting to assign meaning to the unequal relations of power that exists between children and bearers of adult society ideology.

One can point to the socialisation process, and its associated institutions (school, home and media) as the prime agent of dissemination and sustainability, or what Althusser (1971) refers to as ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’. As previously intimated, it is the infusion of meaning with power that creates the opportunity for ideology to legitimate, dissimulate and reify the existing state of affairs, but noting Althusser’s (1971) position, childhood itself appears to have become an instrument of ideology, or as Althusser (1971) argues, an ideological state apparatus, complete with a political and legal dimension, a hegemonic acceptance in society, and members who act to solidify its existence. This is cogently displayed during the discussion on corporal punishment (see page 215-216), where some participants concur on the usefulness of corporal punishment.

Beyond Althusser’s (1971) argument, writers such as Cambell and Levine (as cited in Billig, 1976) as well as Duncan (1993) and Bulhan (1985) argue that it is inevitable in societies characterised by relations of domination for the dominated to reproduce the discourse of the dominant group. The essence of their position is that this is a result of the tendency of the dominated to strive for the elimination of cognitive dissonance. Strains of cognitive dissonance are conspicuously present in the discourse produced by the participants in the current study. However, in this instance it is not a mere reproduction of discourses but rather an active attempt at maintaining the system. This contention comes across very strongly when the participants appear to be challenging the dominant discourse whilst simultaneously appearing to use society’s frame of reference to solidify their challenges. This is aptly demonstrated in the quote “*adults always want to tell you what to do...but you must listen to adults*” (see page 212 for a contextual reference). Poulantzas (as cited

in Duncan, 1993) arrives at a similar conclusion. He argues that the “dominated classes live their conditions of political existence through the forms of dominant [group]... discourse...often they live even their revolt against domination...within the frame of reference of dominant legitimacy” (p. 226). This essentially means that the child participants’ discourses in the current study are framed within parameters set by adult society.

A similar argument to this is found in the work of Bulhan (1985) as well as in the writing of Althusser (1971). These writers invest the dominated with an instinctive ability to resist, challenge and oppose prevailing discourses of the dominant. While these resistances were prevalent in the current study, it is apparent that even the resistances were framed within the parameters set by the dominant discourses. A cogent example of this is presented during the participants’ discussions on the effects of exposure to violence (see page 176-178 for a contextual reference). These powerful descriptions suggest that the fears and psychological distress experienced as a result of violence exposure are not imagined or discursively constructed, but presented as real and plausible possibilities. The discourses of *‘helplessness and vulnerability’* and *‘marginalisation’* are immediately apparent and point to childhood as a space of helplessness and isolation. According to these participants, the experiences of violence exposure and the resulting psychological distress is a result of being members of the social category of childhood. The fact that they may be incorrectly assuming that adults are immune is immaterial. Rather the critical point is the collaborative construction of childhood as a space of helplessness and vulnerability within which the ideological content is revealed.

For the participants, the nature of childhood, i.e. what it means to be a child, what is expected and what is allowed or not, has been internalised into their consciousness. It suggests that it is not merely the reproduction of the dominant discourses but a thorough acceptance of the state of affairs. They live their domination with a sense of “*these are the ways things must be*”. To a large extent this position is probably perpetuated by the fact that childhood is a temporary phase and that eventually they would be beyond the rules that limit their existence. As childhood is a temporary life phase, merely biding one’s time would allow safe passage through the life phase and graduate to be both beyond, as well as the enforcer of the rules. This contention finds support in the participants’ constant intimation about how things will be “*when we grow up*”. It is through this understanding of the temporality of childhood that could potentially temper the resistance to the dominated discourses. With the restriction of opposition, the presence of cognitive dissonance and contradictory notions within the consciousness creates a tension within the child. This tension appears to be resolved through the participants immersing themselves in the implicit and explicit acts of negotiation.

7.4 Negotiating a synthesis: Ideologically configured meanings of childhood

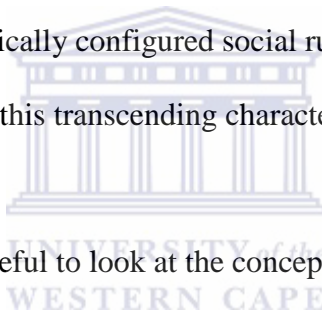
On the continuum, located between *consensus* and *contestation*, is the notion of ‘negotiation’, which acts as a synthesis between the polarised meanings of *consensus* and *contestation*. In other words, as the *contestation* and *consensus* are outcomes, the negotiation is a process. Within the texts of the current study these instances of negotiation are conspicuously present in the discursive space between *consensus* and *contestation*. Whilst it is also true that it too functions on the three levels as previously stipulated, its more significant function is that it mediates

between the two opposing poles, as it were, acting as a synthesis or resolution to the *contestation/consensus* tension. With regard to the actual discourses, this is demonstrated most prolifically, albeit ironically, by elucidating the nature of the ‘*non-negotiable discourses of safety*’, ‘*stable environment*’ and ‘*stable self*’. Even though a structural analysis would show a clear cut linguistic attempt at demanding these issues as being non-negotiable, they were in fact all negotiated within the course of the engagement. During the process of actively positioning, compromising, highlighting, masking, legitimating, constructing etc, the participants were actually negotiating their position within a framework of these relations. So, for example, when the participants constructed the ‘*non-negotiable*’ discourse, it was in fact negotiated discursively.

The negotiation further suggests that although the discourse appeared compelling, it demonstrates that the meanings are not fixed but rather, as social constructionism in general argues, an open, shifting and indeterminate phenomenon.

If the meanings are open and indeterminate, then an important question or task that emerges concerns identifying the factors which determine these different horizons of meanings. While both Dant (1991) and Thompson (1984) correctly point to the social status of the producers, a more useful indicator would be to look at the broader social context, as espoused by Gouldner (as cited in Thompson, 1984) who emphasises the importance of situating ideology within a social context. In other words, the above notion translates, within the context of the current study, to the following question: given that these discourses and meanings were negotiated within the engagement of data collection, essentially with a non-significant subject

(researcher) in the participants' lives, would the discourses be consistent in the process of their engagement with significant members and institutions in their lives? This is of course also a typical social constructionist argument and partly the argument that Gergen (1994) in particular, makes when he suggests that meaning is intersubjectively located in the relationship between interlocutors and not merely within the social context. Gergen argues that words acquire their meaning "through the ways they are used in patterns of ongoing exchange ..." or more precisely "by their function within a set of circumscribed rules" or 'language games'⁴¹ (Gergen, 1994, p. 52-53). In other words, it is not a mere consideration of the social context that is significant but rather elucidating how relations of domination are developed and sustained, within ideologically configured social rules and frameworks, within specific social contexts. It is this transcending character that must be grasped.



To elucidate this it may be useful to look at the concept of split reference introduced by Ricoeur (as cited in Thompson, 1984) and adapted by Thompson (1984).

Ricoeur (as cited in Thompson, 1984) argues that the understanding of discourse involves a suspension of the apparent meaning and the elucidation of second order reference, which refers to other aspects of experience which cannot be disclosed in a directly ostensive way. Applying this concept to the analysis on ideology, Thompson (1984) suggests a splitting of the referential domain. Thompson (1984) suggests that:

the terms of discourse carry out their ideological role by explicitly referring to one thing and implicitly referring to another, by tangling

⁴¹ In a Wittgensteinian sense.

these multiple referents in a way which serves to sustain relations of domination. (p. 137-138)

In other words, to interpret ideology requires a construction of meaning which discloses the referential domain of discourse, which identifies the individual referents, and explicitly reveals how their entanglement functions to sustain relations of domination. Applied to the study of childhood, the now fashionable repertoire of childhood as an autonomous and valid life stage, presents children as valid members of society while implicitly advancing notions of children as vulnerable and in need of protection. These referents become entangled, endorsing institutions and even legislation that advance and sanction the need for protection. With protection comes strict guidelines and principles on behaviour, movement and discourse. While the current study does not allow for the explication of this from a general perspective, it does show its manifestations which is revealed in, and can be inferred from, the participants' discourses. This is demonstrated most explicitly when the *contestation/consensus* meanings of childhood are presented within the same discourse or narrative. At times the referents become so entangled that the participants *contest, consent* and *negotiate* the various meanings within the same utterance and expression. It is precisely because of this entanglement that the participants would, for example, argue for autonomy and equal rights and simultaneously suggest contradictory notions. This contention is perfectly encapsulated in the expression “*you also have rights, but you must do what your parents tell you*” (see page 216). It is a key feature present throughout the participants' discussions.

7.5 Towards an ideologically configured constructionism

If one follows the widely held view of ideology as shared social representations, the above discussion suggests that ideology is shared between different groups, at different levels, as well as within groups. However, since a group of people commuting on a bus, or those waiting to board a plane are unlikely to share a similar ideology, it becomes important to define the nature of a group as well as to determine which groups develop and share different ideologies. van Dijk (1998) suggests that the criteria of group membership and social identification apply to social categories with relatively permanent characteristics e.g. religion, gender, age etc. So, Christians, Muslims and Jews; males and females as well as children and adults demonstrate ideological positions that are related to their position and interests in society. These are not merely random groups of people but could more accurately be described as ideological groupings by virtue of their social categorisation. When the ideological group exercises a form of power or domination over other groups, then it would be more accurate to speak of a social class. However, the notion of social class suggested above, is not the classic Marxist tradition where one class 'economically' exploits the other, but rather shared social representations that are social, political, economic, but also, in the spirit of van Dijk (1998), cognitive and affective.

Another decisive criterion is the shared experience of social conflict, discord or the common experience of exploitation or domination by one group over the other⁴².

The key issue here is that these social representations are the reference points of the

⁴² Possibly sharing remnants of a Marxist conception. In this instance dominant groups develop an ideology that is used to sustain its domination whilst the dominated groups develop ideologies as a basis for discourses of resistance or opposition.

exertion of power and sustenance of relations of domination. Therefore, for children, within the social category of childhood, this means that part of their personal identity is entangled with the social identity. The *consensus/contestation* meanings of childhood are possible manifestations of this identity entanglement. van Dijk (1998) extends his argument to demonstrate the role of ideology in the creation of a group identity. He claims that groups and ideology mutually constitute each other and thus “no group can socially exist and act without a group identity and shared ideological beliefs of its members” (p. 154).

Further consideration is required by the fact that various social actors may be members of various social groups or classes that each possess their own ideology. So, for example, if one looks at a black female adolescent, a number of contrasting ideologies operate within one consciousness. While the ideologies may compliment one another, these different ideologies are often in conflict with one another. The key point in this example is that belonging to these different social groups implies a number of different identities that may compliment or contradict one another. The ideologies, in van Dijk’s (1998) sense, cognitively represent these identities⁴³. Like Wetherell (1998) who notes that identities are constituted in discourse, and Mouffe (1992) who argues that subject positions are constructed in discourse, a key point of departure of the current study is that ideology is constructed in discourse. Wetherell (1998) extends the argument claiming that discourse only partly accounts for subject positions and identity. She argues that:

⁴³ Of course there are arguments against equating group identity with ideology. They suggest that ideologies, at best, form the basis of a group identity.

I want to emphasise the highly occasioned and situated nature of subject positions and the importance of accountability rather than discourse per se in fuelling the take up of positions in talk. (Wetherell 1998, p. 394)

This contention is supported by the findings of the current study which demonstrate that subject positions are to a large extent ideologically configured. However, as the texts show, it is not a single ideological configuration but a range of diverse and often competing ideological configurations that give rise to an ensemble of subject positions. Mouffe (1992) for example argues that the social agent can be conceived of as being:

constituted by an ensemble of subject positions' that can never be socially fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses, among which there is no necessary relation, but a constant movement of over-determination and displacement. The identity of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. It is therefore impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified, homogenous entity. We have to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various subject positions through which it is constituted within various discursive formations. (as cited in Wetherell, 1998, p. 393-394)

As the range of ideologically configured subject positions are often in conflict with one another, it essentially contributes to the contestation within the individual. The black female adolescent's philosophies and attitude toward life may conflict with her

beliefs of the role of the female or her experience of being black. It is likely that the social context or situation that she finds herself in would determine which ideology prevails. van Dijk (1998) argues that the social rules and norms would be the determining factor, with transgression resulting in unpleasant outcomes.

“Transgression of the rule, and outright deviance and dissidence will be sanctioned by marginalisation, exclusion or elimination, whether physical, economic, social or cultural” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 151)

In the current study, the presence of multiple identities of the participants is quite obvious. Whilst the main grouping is ‘childhood’, other notable memberships are the geographical location (urban/rural), class (middle or working class), race (white, coloured and black) and language (English, Afrikaans, Xhosa). In fact, one could even argue that the main grouping is adolescence, a sub-grouping of childhood, that presents with its own specific identity. Even though the analysis did not focus on these differences the implication was apparent and can to some extent explain the conflicting discourses and contested meanings of childhood that emerged.

With regard to the above, the concept of positioning can provide further explanation and context. In Chapter Five the findings revealed how the participants used discursive strategies and repertoires to adopt various positions within the discussion. While Davies and Harre (1990) contend that positioning allows discourses to frame experiences and mediate behaviour, they also create opportunities to engage and use the discourse in various social situations (as cited in Burr, 2003). With these two aspects of positioning operating at the same time, people are both constructors of, and constructed by discourses. But discourses do more than that; they also structure

our subjective experience of the world. Positioning within discourse thus provides us with the content of our subjectivity. Burr (2003) explains that as soon as we adopt a position within a discourse, we experience the world and our objective selves from the perspective of that vantage point and have a “limited set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives and so on” upon which to draw (p. 119). Ultimately then, how positions are constituted and taken up, that is how positions are offered, accepted, declined or claimed, determines us as persons. As Davies and Harre (1999) explain:

An individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices through which they interact. Accordingly, who one is...is always an open question with a shifting answer depending on the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories within which we make sense of our own and others' lives. (p. 35)

What this essentially means, at an extreme level, is that children function and construct their sense of self based on the selection of pre-determined positions. However, these positions are not necessarily determined by the children themselves, but rather by social and cultural determinants of adult society.

Willig (2000) similarly points out that positionings become internalised and are used strategically to achieve certain social objectives and can potentially even structure the person's private experience itself. However, these positionings, and role-playing (as pointed out in Chapter Five) are to a large extent mediated and limited by

ideologically configured institutionalised, social and material practices. As Willig (2000) argues:

Positionings constitute ways-of-being through placing the subject within a network of meanings and social relations which facilitate as well as constrain what can be thought, said and done by someone so positioned.
(p. 557)

For example, for the participants it was impossible to position themselves as anything other than children and thus show these networks of meaning to be ideologically configured. Whilst the role-playing can possibly be seen as an attempt to shirk certain positions accorded by childhood, the ideological constituents of childhood create a vacuum from which children cannot escape, regardless of the different roles or positions they adopt. The vacillation, or running between different positions (both between and within participants) imply the adoption of diverse ideological identities and could indicate an attempt to escape or resist the ideology, but ultimately manifesting in the contestation.

Following the above contentions, discourses and subject positions suggest diverse experiences of childhood and ultimately lend support to Frønes' (1994) and Jenks's (2004) notion of multiple childhoods. However, the current study demonstrated that whilst the diversity existed, the core constituents of the meanings of childhood were consistent across the different groups. For example, even though the participants from the working and middle class neighbourhoods experienced the issue of safety and security differently, the emerging meaning was consistent across groups. This suggests that, regardless of the sub-identities of the different participants, the

ideological experiences and meanings of 'childhood' supersede the other structural or ideological positions.

This is essentially the point that Qvortrup (2005; personal communication) makes when he rejects the multiple childhoods thesis. Highlighting the importance of a generational account of childhood studies, Qvortrup (2005) argues that a focus on other social variables detracts from the essence of the generational perspective.

Concerning what he calls the diversity thesis, he argues thus:

it is not seeking what is common to children but is profoundly sceptical to the very idea of commonness. On the contrary, it seeks differences *among* children or between groups of children. It is not unaware of contextualisation, but children or childhoods are contextualised in terms of variables such as class, gender, ethnicity, urbanisation etc. Since all such variables do not make distinctions between generations, it fails to problematise generational relations. A focus on diversification of childhood therefore risks eradicating the social contours of childhood as a generational form to the advantage of maximising local contextual variables. (Qvortrup, 2005, p. 3)

Of course Qvortrup (2005), as it is being argued in the current study, is not rejecting the importance of the diversity thesis, but rather highlighting the notion that the generational location of childhood should be regarded as the determining factor for identity and ideological construction. For children, and indeed for the participants in the current study, it is apparent that regardless of the various diversifying factors, they all share similar ideological propositions. However, it is also apparent that they

make different, sometimes radical, use of these ideological propositions in different social conditions. This explains the large variation in the discourses and associated social practices and behaviour (van Dijk, 1998).

This finding, and indeed the above explanation could be construed of as decidedly non-constructionist, as social constructionism would innately argue for the multiple perspective and diversity thesis. In fact, it appears that it was theorists working from that epistemological position that initially put forward the notion of multiple childhoods. Again, it is important to reiterate that the study is not rejecting the diversity and multiplicity thesis, but rather adopting the position that in the case of an ideological perspective, children should be perceived of as a single group (or class⁴⁴), as has been argued earlier. In this way it becomes possible to elucidate the relations of domination and nature of the power relationship. A focus on the other identities would undoubtedly cloud the focus on how these relations of domination operate. This represents a quintessential example of Thompson's 'fragmentation', more specifically the differentiation modus operandi of ideology whereby the distinctions and divisions between individuals and groups are foregrounded, perpetuating disunity and creating in-group and out-group ideological forms.

Social constructionist theorists (see e.g. Hibberd, 2005; Parker, 1992; Willig, 1999) believe that social constructionism need not be inconsistent with realism. They put forward the notion of critical realism which sees the world and one's knowledge, observations and experiences as generated by stable social structures within a structured reality (Willig, 1999). This is referred to as ontological realism and

⁴⁴ In the non-Marxist sense.

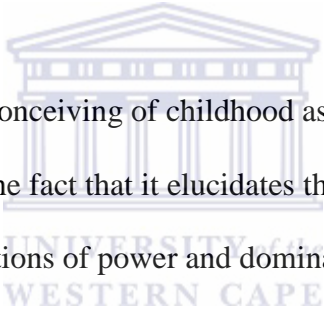
essentially means that there is a reality that exists outside of the discursive world which determines the nature of the discursive constructions. In this study that reality is conceptualised as ideology.

In this sense, the participants' constructions of childhood are not arbitrary, but rather constructions informed and shaped by ideologically configured social relationships, that are in all likelihood imbued with issues of power and relations of domination.

As this is a methodological argument and not a philosophical position, contestation regarding the suggestion of the meanings of childhood is similarly inapplicable.

However, it does beg the question that if this group, class or structure of society should be perceived of as a single entity with a common experience, would a social constructionist perspective be adequate? In other words, is it still viable to refer to childhood as a social construction? Or would it be more useful to speak of childhood as an ideologically configured construction? Social constructionism invests people with the capacity and freedom to intersubjectively negotiate meaning and reality between themselves and the social world. Progress through the current study has suggested that while a social constructionist approach is useful in generating an understanding of how the meaning of childhood is intersubjectively constructed, it does little to grasp the unequal relations of power that exists between children and society. The key point is that the meanings of childhood, whether constructed by or present in discourses, cannot be independent from the ideologically configured social, historical and material structures. An ideologically configured constructionism would maintain the key social constructionist thrust that childhood is constructed in discourses which would include socially shared

historical, economic and cultural representations. It will also add the critical component of elucidating the nature of how meaning is transferred through discourse to maintain relations of domination. It will shift the focus to how symbolic forms develop and sustain these relations but also expose how ideology creates hegemonic tendencies within the consciousness of child and adult society. It would also go a long way towards engaging with relativism, which has been the Achilles heel of social constructionism. Childhood would then no longer be regarded as a mere discursive construction but a reality that exists (one of many), constructed discursively to maintain relations of domination and unequal power relations.



The greatest contribution of conceiving of childhood as an ideologically configured construction is undoubtedly the fact that it elucidates the relationship between social practices associated with relations of power and domination on the one hand and social representations constituted in ideologies on the other. Explicating how they construct and sustain each other is critical and is made possible by conceiving of childhood as an ideologically configured construction. Importantly too, an ideological conception advances the addition of the cognitive and affective domains and allows an analysis of how they impact on the discursive. This provides a more holistic approach than the discursive position of social constructionism.

Of course the brand of social constructionism that focuses on issues relating to power and how unequal power relations foster social inequality in society, could possibly provide some means of negotiating the shortcomings of light constructionism (see Chapter Three). However, as previously intimated, this version is largely based on

the work of Foucault (1980) who had a particular aversion towards the concept of ideology, perceiving it as an effect of the relationship between institutional power and discourse. This relegation of ideology to a mere effect or outcome variable is thus inappropriate for this project, which aims to elucidate the ideological nature of childhood construction.

7.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter dealt with the development of the ideological meanings of childhood.

The ideological meanings of childhood were identified as consensus, contestation and negotiation, existing on a continuum within individuals (intrapersonal), between individuals (interpersonal) and between children and adult society (societal).

Critically, this chapter espouses a notion of childhood that gravitates away from the discursive position of social constructionism towards an ideologically configured constructionism. Essentially this means that beyond shared representations of childhood as socially, historically and culturally manifested, one also needs to consider how childhood is positioned in discourse to maintain unequal relations.

While this chapter elucidated the ideological configuration of the meanings of childhood, it also shows ideology as the referential point. In other words, ideology structures the nature and content of discourse and language. In that sense ideology determines the content of discussions and communications, e.g. the nature of socialising children, the child protection/liberation dichotomy, legislation and even formal developmental theory and child-rearing practices. The relationship with language and ideology is critical. Thompson (1984) argues that the language which is applicable is not the discreet 'sociolect' or meta-language but rather the language of everyday life. This study has provided support to this notion and confirms that it

is the language of everyday life which is the actual locus of ideology and the actual site of meaning that sustains relations of domination.

However, in line with van Dijk's (1998) contention, the findings suggest that not all discursive activity is ideological. While the discussions clearly show a range of discourses that are ideologically imbued, there are also discourses that construct perceptions and experiences of childhood devoid of ideological content. However, it appears that the ideological imbrications emerge during the process of meaning assignment. In other words, while the discursive constructions could be ideologically mute, aimed at providing vicarious descriptions of the experiences and nature of childhood, how the participants make sense of and assign meaning to these experiences is ideological. So while their experiences of childhood exist as real, and the discourses are at times constructed to sanction the veracity of these accounts, the ideological constituents are located within the process of meaning making. In sum to understand how ideologies work and how they are created and reproduced, it is necessary to look beyond discursive manifestations towards the mental and cognitive dimensions of discourse, i.e. meaning making and its embeddedness in social contexts and structures.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EPILOGUE

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three the concept of validity was engaged with at length. The outcome of this engagement was an acknowledgement of the critical importance of sustaining validity throughout the qualitative enterprise. Various conceptualisations and dimensions of validity were identified as significant pursuits in sustaining validity and rigour of qualitative studies. Within these varying accounts, the concept of reflexivity consistently emerged as an important factor in contemporary qualitative projects. As previously intimated, reflexivity refers to the self reflective process of “attending to the institutional location of historical and personal aspects of the research relationship” (Parker, 2005, p. 25). In practice, this means much has to be considered during the method phase of the project. This includes, but is not limited to the selection of the participants, triangulation of data collection methods and data sources, thick description and detailed report writing. When it comes to the final phases, reflexivity practically entails a large degree of critical self-reflection and reconsideration. This Chapter engenders these principles of reflexivity.

A number of methodological and theoretical dilemmas emerged throughout the course of this study. Identifying and explicating how they were negotiated is the focus of the current Chapter. They will be presented and engaged with, however, not necessarily in the order of their occurrence or importance. In the spirit of reflexivity, and to enhance the authenticity, the author has decided that this chapter will depart from orthodox academic prose and be written in the historical first person. I have noted Parker’s (2005) warning about reducing reflexivity to a mere first person confession on what was done. He argues that reflexivity is not simply

turning inward but rather “outward to the social relations that have enabled someone to experience themselves in relation to others” (p. 29). I present each dilemma and then proceed to discuss how I negotiated its implications and dealt with it in the study.

8.2 Well-Being as a Hermeneutic Key: A Point in Question

Undoubtedly a key concern for the current study was the question around accessing information. This essentially translated into the question: How was I going to get children to discuss childhood? It was pointed out to me that it was unlikely that a direct, or even indirect, line of questioning would provide me with an instrument to elicit responses from the participants. Indeed this dilemma was engaged with at length by my supervisory panel as well as the Faculty’s Higher Degrees Committee, which in fact declined to endorse the project proposal based on this methodological shortcoming. This was my first methodological hurdle. I negotiated it, under supervision, through the hermeneutic body of knowledge, as espoused by Gadamer (1976, 1994). Gadamer put forward the concept of hermeneutic key, referring to a key concept, thought or phrase that would stimulate or increase access to your ‘horizons of understanding’. Using the concept of well-being as a hermeneutic key was based on my previous extensive research into children’s perceptions of well-being (see e.g. Savahl et al, 2006; September & Savahl, 2009; Willenberg et al, 2006). It was during this research on well-being that I noticed that children’s discourses on the dimensions and complexities of well-being in fact pointed to a general construction of childhood. From there it was a short step to tailor the discussion guide to use well-being as a hermeneutic key and subsequently focus the probes to generate discussions on childhood. What the strategy achieved was that it

created a sense of continuity and fluidity as I was able to oscillate between probes on well-being and childhood as a seamless discursive process and not a fragmented discussion. This created a more natural and comfortable environment and ultimately enhanced the quality of the data. Overall the strategy was well justified as the discussion on well-being did in fact produce discourses that could elucidate the participants' general construction of childhood. Axiomatically, it was these discourses of well-being and childhood that were examined for its ideological content.

8.3 The Discourse Analysis Dichotomy: Micro versus Macro Approaches

I noted in Chapter Four that options in discourse analysis were quite diverse. I also pointed out that in the field of psychology it is usual to distinguish between two distinct lines of discourse analysis. Firstly, those that are associated with ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (see e.g. Edwards, 1997) and secondly, those focused on power and subjectivity often associated with the post-structuralist work of Foucault (see e.g. Hollway, 1984). The technique associated with Potter and Wetherell (1987/1992) used in the current study is generally understood to be located between the two (Wetherell, 1998), but metaphorically speaking, it is coming from the ethnomethodological tradition but facing towards the post-structural horizon. At face value, considering the main aim and objectives of the study, it appears that Foucault's discourse analysis, focusing on imbrications of discourse, power and subjectification would be the obvious choice. However, my main reservation was Foucault's complete aversion to the concept of ideology. Consistent with the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987/1992) and Wetherell (1998) this study to some extent attempted to weave the two positions into a viable

approach to understand ideological configurations of discourse. The extent to which it succeeds depends on the validity of the emerging meanings. I would acknowledge that the emerging meanings may initially appear to be more topical than original and lacking in philosophical sophistication. This may appear to be a huge stumbling block as the thrust of this dissertation is to engage with these contested concepts. However, I would urge consumers of this manuscript, and qualitative research in general, not to use internal logic and coherence, or even philosophical sophistication as factors of validity. Here, validity refers not to whether the meanings are a true interpretation of the discourses, but rather if it shows an account of the extent to which the emerging meanings are ideologically configured and constructed in discourse. Essentially then, the fact that the emerging meanings may or may not reflect contemporary notions and discourses of childhood is immaterial. Rather, the concern is to reveal the ideological constituents of the discourses. The question to ask changes from “are the meanings emerging from the discourses valid?” to, “to what extent are the ideological configurations of the emerging meanings elucidated?”

A further point of note is that the ideological meanings of one discourse can be used to exert influence over, exclude or marginalise others. Referring to scientific/medical discourses, Cheek and Rudge for example state that certain medical understandings gain prominence over others based on certain socio-historical influences over them (as cited in Cheek, 2004). As Cheek explains:

In contemporary health care, the truth status of medical/scientific discursive frames has shaped dominant taken-for-granted understandings of what is appropriate and authoritative practice...the claimed right of

certain groups of health professions rather than others to speak authoritatively about health and illness is premised on the authority of the scientific/medical discourse from which their expertise is both derived and, in turn, legitimated. (2004, p. 1143)

The outcome of this is a prominent truth status where truth is a product of the rules of discourse (Cheek & Rudge, as cited in Cheek, 2004). Cheek (2004) and Turner (1987) further point to the way that power is imbued within scientific and professional knowledge. It is this power that has the exclusionary potential and the capacity to marginalise alternate understandings. In the current study, this translates into adult discourse being the authoritative discourse of childhood. Cheek (2004) also argues that if this dominant effect of a certain discursive frame is recognised, then opportunities inevitably arise for alternate conceptions or discourses. In this study this contention is also explicitly demonstrated by the range of alternate conceptions and contestations within the discourses of the participants. While Cheek (2004) correctly argues that the aim should not be “to replace one discourse with another or of using one to exclude the other” (p. 1143), the current study shows that these alternate discourses along with the dominant discourse, become imbued within the consciousness of participants. This is the nature of ideology. In other words, ideology is not only about the dominance and hegemonic tendencies of one understanding over the other but rather how alternate meanings exist and operate within consciousness.

8.4 Concerning Discourse Analysis

Commentators (see e.g. Cheek, 2004, Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1992) note that discourse analysis is not a unitary single body of knowledge, and that because of its multidisciplinary inflection can potentially be used in various different ways. Potter and Wetherell famously claim that:

perhaps the only thing that all commentators are agreed on in this area is that terminological confusions abound... it is a field where it is possible to have two books on discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all.

(1987, p. 6)

Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter (2003) similarly note that, over the years, discourse analysis had transformed from a marginal approach to a widely accepted approach and has been represented in an ever increasing body of scholarly work such as conference presentations, PhDs as well as empirical and theoretical journals. This transformation has made the terrain of discourse more complex and spawned a proliferation of 'methods' of doing discourse analysis. Antaki et al. (2003), however, argue that regardless of the disparate nature of discourse analysis, there are a number of methodological hurdles that are common across the various approaches. So while I was vigilant in following the guidelines outlined in the Potter and Wetherell style of discourse analysis and understood what discourse analysis entailed, I still needed to be acutely aware of what was 'not' discourse analysis. To this end, I employed the typology put forward by Antaki et al. (2003). Based on their argument that normative approaches fail to make explicit what is not analysis, they put forward a six point typology of analyses shortcomings and errors often made during discourse analysis. During my analyses it was important to be

cognisant of these shortcomings, and to ensure that I was not effecting these analyses errors.

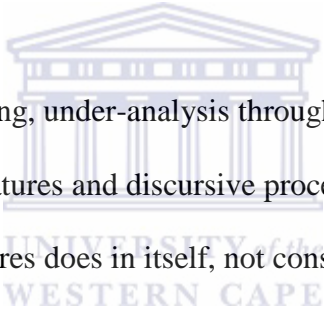
The first, under-analysis through summary, is a common error often made by inexperienced analysts, which refers to the mere summarising of participants' responses and emerging themes which does not proffer an analysis of the discourses being used.

The second, under-analysis through taking sides, refers to additional analysis provided by the analyst which puts forward their own personal, political or moral stance towards the responses. This subjective positioning, according to Antaki et al. (2003) can result in the corruption of the meaning of the participants' discourses as the analyst is involved in quote selection to substantiate his or her own and not the participants position.

Under-analysis through over-quotation, the third error, refers to the overwhelming provision of direct quotes from the analyst without providing an analysis of the discourse being used. This error is conspicuously elucidated by the high ratio of data extracts to analysts' comments. The fourth shortcoming, the circular discovery of discourses and mental constructs, refers to when discourse which have been appropriately identified are left unsubstantiated and the analyst merely refers back to the identified entities without further analysis.

The fifth, false survey, refers to the tendency of some analysts to implicitly extrapolate findings from study to the broader society. Whilst this concern is typical

of quantitative studies, especially in experimental studies and designs that have not followed rigorous sampling procedures, in discourse analysis this error is often committed when the findings of a certain group of respondents are implicitly reported as representing or being true for all members of a certain category. Antaki et al. (2003) warn that analysts should exercise great care that this impression is not carried across in the report. At this point I would then like to point out that any generalising of findings of the this study to the broader population or to the broader members of the categories participating in the discussion is not intended and that any impression should be attributed to semantic error rather than methodological intent or design.



The sixth and final shortcoming, under-analysis through spotting refers to the mere identification of rhetorical features and discursive procedures. The identification and recognition of these features does in itself, not constitute analysis. Rather the analysis must be used to elucidate how these devices are used intersubjectively to manage the speakers' business and achieve certain goals.

It would be too simplistic to suggest that the success of the discourse analysis depends on the extent to which I departed from these shortcomings. Being cognisant of the shortcomings and consistently aware of not making these errors is strangely more concerned with validity of method rather than method itself, so that consumers of this manuscript can note that discourse analysis is not an 'anything goes' procedure. I am aware that there is a certain amount of irony in presenting what discourse analysis is 'not' and not what actually counts as discourse analysis. Perhaps it is safe to say that analysis means a close engagement with one's texts or

transcripts, and the illumination of their meaning and significance through insightful and technically sophisticated work.

8.5 Ensuring Validity: Can this study be trusted?

The concept of validity is highly contested in qualitative research. As discussed in Chapter Four, commentators differ regarding the nature and extent that the concept should be employed in qualitative research. The point of most discontent is the growing voice that validity in qualitative research is not about method (Chamberlain, 1999; Smith, 1990). If I employed this line of argument, this study would undoubtedly be regarded as unscientific and discarded, and I would probably not receive a pass grade. I will not do this. The world of academia still depends on method as the key determinant of validity. My other option is to hide behind the epistemology, a tactic employed strategically and successfully by many. I could then argue that from a social constructionist perspective, “validity is a rhetorical construction...a feat of persuasion...a social construction...as such it must be interrogated for its discursive function within the social science enterprise” (Aguinaldo, 2004). I did not follow this approach either, but yielded to the common-sense notion of validity and method.

I religiously developed memos and to a large extent focused on producing detailed accounts in the write-up. I used a reference group extensively to assist in the development and validation of the research instrument. Member checking or respondent validation was employed in an attempt to validate the essence of the findings. I embraced the concept of reflexivity, but stopped short of using reflexivity as an instrument to create an objective distance between myself and the

research. I heeded Gadamer's (1994) warning that reflexivity is not aimed at creating an objective distance, but rather as Angen (2000) argues, an acknowledgement of the intersubjective creation of meaning and understanding.

In the final analysis I would acknowledge that I have, to some extent, committed methodolatry (Chamberlain, 1999), which refers to a preoccupation and privileging of method, a concept which is in opposition to the validity notions of contemporary qualitative research. However, the focus on method points towards my preoccupation with adhering to ethical guidelines rather than positivist assumptions of a recipe style process. Indeed it became increasingly clear that adhering to these apparent methodological regulations was to a large extent an endorsement of ethical principles of conducting research with children. The adoption of the participatory method is, for example, a quintessential technique used to enhance ethical research with children. In other words, conducting ethical research with children suggests, amongst others, the use of an appropriate method. This essentially means that my use of detailed memos, critical reference groups, member checking and participant validation was not so much about securing validity but more about conducting ethically appropriate research with children and youth. In the final analysis, I can to a reasonable extent, claim consistency between ontology (acknowledgement of children discourses and meanings as valid), method (child participation), epistemology (constructionism) as well as validity and ethical procedures, which comprise the minimum standard for academically acceptable and rigorous qualitative inquiry.

8.6 Epistemologically Speaking: Social Constructionism and its Ideological Discontents

As I noted in Chapter Three, it was always going to be difficult to marry the inherently relativist social constructionism with the inherently contested concept of ideology.

In its most general form, ideology, especially the false consciousness thesis, is epistemologically inconsistent with the general social constructionist thesis of multiple realities, where no one understanding has a higher status than the other. False consciousness, in fact, implies that there is one real truth that is being masked by ideology. The fact that ideology, in this study is conceptualised as the way meaning is mobilised through language to maintain relations of domination, does inspire a sense of hope that it could be reconciled with social constructionism. However, this sense of hope was diminished with the realisation that social constructionism itself has become a highly contested concept as the recent debates between the key meta-theorists of social constructionism show (see e.g. Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Gergen, 2001b; Hibberd, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; Lubricks, 2001; Stam, 2001; Willig, 1999). Whilst other versions and strands of social constructionism exist that gravitate away from the problematic relativism, the ‘nothing outside text’ position still seems to haunt social constructionism in general and the notion of childhood as a socially constructed phenomenon in particular. The key concern raised by those arguing against a relativist position is that it corrupts the moral grounding of action, choices and politics. On the question of this moral conundrum, Burr asks:

How can we justify our political preferences if there is no way of asserting that some groups of people really are oppressed by others, or even that we can justifiably argue that people belong to certain groups anyway. (2003, p. 81)

For the current study this means that children and their dominated position in society is just one way among many potential ways of constructing the world. This means that issues such as child abuse, neglect, poverty, etc are not real issues that need special concern but merely one of many discursive constructions.

Hibberd (2005) maintains that social constructionism need not be inconsistent with realism. Within the social constructionist stable, proponents (see e.g. Parker, 1992; Willig, 1999) who argue against the relativism, proffer the position of critical realism. Critical realism, according to Willig (1999) sees the world and our knowledge, observations and experiences as “generated by underlying, relatively enduring structures” which essentially means that “meanings are afforded by discourse, accommodated by social structures and changed by human actors” (p. 44-45). The overall point is that there is a reality that exists outside of the discursive world which influences our constructions of discourse. In this study I argued that ideology is this reality.

The current study, in fact, largely followed a discursive psychology approach to social constructionism. I argued, following Edwards and Potter (2001), that discourse is situated and action orientated, and very importantly that discourse both constructs versions of the world, and is itself constructed. Essentially then, I was

more concerned about the role of language and discourse in the construction of meaning and less concerned about the ontological debates about the nature and the existence of reality. So, while I would agree that social constructions are relative, they are not arbitrary constructions, but rather constructions informed and shaped by ideologically configured social relationships, that may or may not be imbued with issues of power and relations of domination.

To that extent, there is more than a tinge of realism in the way I conceptualised social constructionism in the study. Similar to Parker (1992) I followed epistemological relativism, in so far as accepting the fact that objective knowledge is an impossibility, and ontological realism, in so far as acknowledging that knowledge is produced by relatively enduring social structures (see e.g. Willig 1999) and that our social constructions are based on a structured reality (Parker, 1992)⁴⁵. This is essentially the point made by Edley (2001) who suggests that social constructionism can be used in both the ontological and epistemological sense. It is in the ontological sense that they concur that a reality exists.

I insist that the reality that provides significant impact is that of ideology, where ideology is defined as meaning in the service of power. My brand of constructionism is then one wherein social constructionism, discourses and meanings cannot be independent from the ideologically configured social, historical and material structures. This conceptualisation further reduced the dissonance between experiences, discourses and meaning making. The experiences of childhood were ontologically real, both constructing and being constructed by

⁴⁵ See also Burr (2003).

discourses. While the ideology emerged during this discursive activity, it is during the process of meaning making that the ideological constituents are most vividly located. Further developing the above contentions is the key indication for future research. At a minimum, I hope that these suggestions of how I reconciled social constructionism with studies of childhood provide a 'real' epistemological option for future studies of childhood as a social construction. Critical realism offers, for the time being, a starting point to develop a more robust social constructionism for childhood studies. What I believe is most important is that it offers ways of theorising the world that is aligned to practical actions, e.g. around policy, legislation and services for children. It has in fact made the social construction of childhood more real.

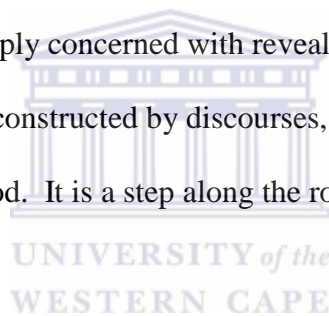


For future endeavours, given my perspective that consciousness is the site of ideological contestation, I also invite investigations into exploring, from Mannheim's perspective, whether the child's entire consciousness is ideological, i.e. a total conception (see Chapter Three) or is it only some part of its content, i.e. a particular conception.

Furthermore, I heed Prout and James's (1997) concern that child research should not be seen as external to the relationships with adults. Similarly, for future ideological studies of childhood, I would endorse notions of how adult society contributes to the conceptualisation of childhood as an ideological construction. A discursive analysis of adults' discourse would reveal telling accounts of how ideological meanings are constructed in discourse. In fact, a critical discourse analysis in the mould of Fairclough (see e.g. Fairclough, 1995, 2001) may produce enticing outcomes.

Critical discourse analysis is concerned with “how language and/or semiosis interconnect with other elements of social life, and... figure in unequal relations of power, in processes of exploitation and domination of some people by others” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 25).

Finally, no study in ideology is complete without a thorough investigation of the legislation and the legal frameworks that pervades the concept. With childhood, an analysis of current national legislation, the historical process of that legislation, along with the array of international Children’s Rights’ instruments that form part of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution will provide a more complete ideological analysis. This study was simply concerned with revealing how meanings of childhood, intersubjectively constructed by discourses, elucidated an ideological conceptualisation of childhood. It is a step along the road of an ideological analysis of childhood.



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APPENDIX I: Information letter and consent form for learner



Department of Psychology
 Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
 University of the Western Cape
 Private Bag X 17
 Bellville
 7535

**UNIVERSITY of the
 WESTERN CAPE**

Dear Learner

You have been selected to participate in a research project, based at the University of the Western Cape. The project aims to explore your experiences and thoughts of childhood.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to participate in two focus groups that will be conducted at your school. Your participation will in no way hinder your school activities.

Please note that the project ensures the strictest privacy and no names or any form of identification will be used. You have the option to withdraw from the study at any point. A comprehensive statement of the ethical procedures to be followed can be viewed overleaf.

Should you agree to participate, please indicate in the box provided. Please note that you can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

I agree to participate in the project and acknowledge that I can withdraw at any point without any consequences.	I do not wish to participate in the project

Mark with an X

Name _____

Signature _____

If you have any questions please contact Shazly Savahl on either of the following numbers:

Office: 021 959 2826

Cell: 082 4696 291

APPENDIX II: Information letter and consent form for parent



Department of Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville
7535

UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE

Dear Parent/Guardian

Your child has been selected to participate in a research project that aims to explore children's experiences, and the meanings they attach to childhood.

Should you consent your child will be asked to participate in two focus groups that will be conducted at the school. Their participation will in no way hinder their school activities.

The project, based at the University of the Western Cape, has been endorsed as adhering to ethical guidelines of the University as well as the Western Cape Education Department. Please note that the project ensures the strictest confidentiality. It will be conducted without prejudice and you or your child has the option to terminate participation at any point of the process. A comprehensive statement of the ethical procedures to be followed can be viewed overleaf.

Should you agree to your child's participation please indicate in the box provided.

I agree to my child participating in the above-mentioned project.	I do not give permission for my child to participate in the above mentioned project

Mark with an X

Name of Parent/Guardian

Signature

If you have any questions please contact Shazly Savahl on either of the following numbers:

Office: 021 959 2826

Cell: 082 4696 291