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Title	Children : Their Place in Organization Studies
Authors(s)	Kavanagh, Donncha
Publication date	2013-10
Publication information	Kavanagh, Donncha. “Children : Their Place in Organization Studies” 34, no. 10 (October, 2013).
Publisher	Sage
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/5135
Publisher's version (DOI)	10.1177/0170840613495329

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Children: Their place in organization studies

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Abstract

This paper argues that children and childhood constitute a 'white space' in organization studies, which should now be explored, mapped and analysed. Rather than being separate, children and organization are deeply implicated in one another, which provides a rich basis for theoretical inquiry. The paper draws on Spivak's concept of the subaltern and on actor-network theory to articulate how and where organization studies might critically engage with, and find a place for, children and childhood. It frames such an inquiry around six potential research trajectories: epistemological, methodological, ontological, temporal, political and reflexive.

Keywords

Childhood, constructionism, organization theory, actor-network theory, subaltern.

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Children: Their place in organization studies

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a big white space…

This special issue invites us to 'propose ways of exploring the "white spaces" of organizing: those regions that, at least in our field, are currently unmapped, unplanned or ignored – residing in the absence and interstices of representation'. Taking up this invitation means that three issues be addressed. First, one must show that a phenomenon has been largely ignored by scholars of organization heretofore. Second, one should show that the field of organization studies should be extended to incorporate this 'white space'. And third, one must propose plausible ways to explore, map and analyse the white space itself. This paper addresses each of these tasks by considering those spaces inhabited mainly by children and, more broadly, the phenomenon of childhood, which, I argue, constitutes a significant lacuna in the field of organization studies. The paper draws on Spivak's concept of the subaltern and on actor-network theory to articulate how and where organization studies might critically engage with, and find a place for, children and childhood. Specifically, it identifies six potential trajectories of inquiry: epistemological, methodological, ontological, temporal, political and reflexive.

The Absent Child

The first task is to show that those spaces inhabited by children, and the phenomenon of childhood more generally, have been unexplored, unmapped and ignored by organization studies. There is plenty of evidence that this is the case. For instance, a search of the Business Source Premier database in May 2011 found no article with 'children' and 'organization theory' as keywords. A broader search for articles that contained 'children' and 'organization theory' or 'organization studies' in the abstract yielded 24 papers, but very few of these focused empirically or theoretically on the organization of children, or studied interactions between children as a way of understanding organizing processes.

Of the articles that did discuss children, almost all framed children as an 'object of worry' for organizations, either in terms of child labour or child welfare. *Organization Studies* has published only one article that is 'about' children: Ingersoll and Damas's (1992) study of images of organization in US children's literature. *Organization* has published no paper on children or on the organizing practices that are inculcated during childhood. Neither has *Management Learning*. And while *The Leadership Quarterly* has recently produced a special issue (2011, 22(3)) on the precursors of adult leadership, this is in the context of there being 'a dearth of research on leader development activities or leadership effectiveness before college' (Murphy and Johnson, 2011: 460). Moreover, 'the role of early experiences in leadership development…clearly needs to be further explored in future research' (Riggio and Mumford, 2011: 454).

Dunne, Harney and Parker (2008) provide further evidence in their study of the gaps in the field of organization studies. To identify such gaps, they analysed over 2,000 articles published in the top business and management journals in an attempt to determine 'whether silence has become complicity in the realm of business and management studies' (p. 272). They conclude:

> Our study can certainly tell us what UK based management academics are not doing. They are not paying any sustained attention to war and violence, racism and sexism, population movements and displacement, mal-distribution of wealth, accidents and ill-health in the workplace or gender and sexuality (p. 273).

What's interesting here is that even those authors who work hard at identifying what organization studies is *not* doing, are silent about the absence or exclusion of children from the field. Children, evidently, are to be neither seen nor heard.

There is a small but growing literature outside of management and organization studies that considers children's economic activities and their participation in production, distribution and consumption (see Zelizer (2002) for a review). But even Zelizer laments the dearth of research:

> Characteristically, and unfortunately, we know even less about children's production involving their peers, or with agents of organizations, including other households. When it comes to children working with peers, we draw on little more than sentimentalized visions of future self-made capitalists learning their skills on lemonade stands or sharing newspaper routes (Zelizer, 2002: 383).

Within the broader social sciences things are little different. By and large, children are not seen as competent social actors, leading Jenks (1996) to speak of sociology's 'gerontocentrism', reflecting the field's tendency to speak about 'the child' in much the same way that anthropologists in the early 1900s spoke of 'the savage'. In response to this critique, a 'new' sociology of children has emerged over the last fifteen years or so (Matthews, 2007), which seeks to transcend the tradition in which children are 'conceptualized as a lump of clay in need of being molded to fit the requirements of a social system' (Knapp, 1999: 55). Notwithstanding this development, little has changed as Bühler-Niederberger (2010) admits in her review of the field: the 'core domains of sociology tend to ignore children as social actors and a distinct social category, and the emergence of childhood sociology as a new sociological field has not altered this very much' (p. 155). This is perhaps unsurprising if we take a historical perspective. For instance, Aristotle routinely lumps children with brutes and animals – 'children and all other animals share in voluntary action but not in Moral Choice' (Aristotle, 1934: chapter 2) – while Plato viewed the non-serious play of children as a distraction.

Children: subject to and objects of organization

One rather obvious reason why organization studies has not focused on children is because, across the developed world, children are legally excluded from most formal (as in work) organizations. Indeed work is routinely seen as alien to childhood to the point where 'child labour' is considered inappropriate, abusive, exploitative and is usually either taboo or illegal or both. (At the same time, children are commonly seen as an *obstructio*n to work.) If 'labour' and

'children' are concepts that sit uncomfortably with one another, then it is perhaps unsurprising that organization studies, which has traditionally focused on the organization of work, is reticent about engaging with children or childish activities.

But this reticence, while perhaps understandable, is unwarranted and inappropriate. The position taken in this paper – based on a broader understanding of organization – is that children are both the *object of* and *subject to* organization. Most children in the developed world are forced by law to attend one site of organization, the school, until their mid-teens. Even pre-school children spend much of their time in – and interacting with – sites of organization, whether this be the (company) kindergarten, the local sports club, leisure centre, the circus, *McDonalds,* or watching television programmes like *Barney* or playing video games that are designed, produced and promoted by large multinational corporations. From this perspective, the organizing that happens in formal organizations is but an extension and subset of a more general organizing logic that includes the organization of children and childhood. This would lead us to the somewhat skeptical position that children are not so much excluded from formal organizations for their own good, but rather for the good of formal organizations (on the basis that children need to be properly 'cultivated' – 'groomed', with all of its intimations of future exploitation – before they can adequately contribute). A Foucauldian twist to this sees childhood as primarily about the production of docile bodies for use in (or indeed harvesting by) corporations (Fox, 1996; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997). For instance Cooley (1987) argues that the emphasis placed on timekeeping in school is because of the corporate need for 'time-disciplined' workers who can perform their factory duties punctually and regularly. More generally, the formal and informal curricula of primary school is explicitly concerned with the cultivation of the basic forms of organizational life, such as teamwork, cooperation, goal orientation, timekeeping, task completion, etc. And it is in the micro processes

of interaction in the primary school system where the values of equality, justice, power, social differentiation and hierarchy are first addressed and fostered. From a political perspective, practices and values such as communication, decision-making, consensus building, reconciling difference, accepting authority – the very basis of democratic institutions, morality and organizational life – are all first inculcated in the institution that is the primary school. This perspective would suggest that far from children being the Other of organizational life – i.e. falling outside the ambit of formal organization – children are actually central to organizational practices. Consequently, the literature on organization is theoretically impoverished and biased by its exclusion of children and childhood.

The image of the child as the quintessential subject of organization, management and control is most visibly manifest where the child is the subject / inmate of adult 'total institutions' – orphanages, industrial schools, borstals and the like. A recent and harrowing description of this phenomenon is to be found in the 'Ryan Report' into the incarceration, torture and slavery of thousands of Irish children in church-run, state-funded facilities between 1930 and 1990 (Ryan, 2009). This is but the most recent report into a worldwide pattern: similar organized systems of child abuse are well documented in the USA, Canada and Australia in the recent history of advanced western liberal democracies. If one were to cast a wider net, to include practices in the former Eastern Bloc, to bonded child labour in India, to sweatshops and the sex industry in SE Asia, to child soldiers in Africa, and reaching back historically to the plight of children in adult-centred organizations, the overall picture would be truly horrendous. But even if we restrict our discussion to the place of children in formal organizational contexts in the western world since the mid to late 20th century, we find children entrammelled in and subject to organization in the numerous complex, overlapping and swarming disciplinary technologies of the school and other

regimes of power, such as the corporation (Bakan, 2011), parenting, the family and even the playground (Ryan, 2008).

A salient issue for organization studies is the degree to which it is partaking in such regimes of power by its unwillingness to include children within its discourse. In considering this issue, we find Spivak's concept of the 'subaltern' to be especially useful, and it is to this that we now turn.

The Subaltern Child

The term 'subaltern' was popularized by Gayatri Spivak (1985/1988) in her seminal article, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, in which she argued that the subaltern cannot speak if there is no possibility of authentic exchange between a speaker and listener, which is a basic requirement of speaking. This can occur when a discourse works to silence the subaltern by refusing to provide a space where the subaltern can express herself. In other words, the subaltern cannot speak if there is no space from which she can express herself that is not already determined by a discourse designed to silence her. Thus, 'within the definition of subalternity as such there is a certain not-being-able-to-make-speech acts that is implicit' (Spivak et al., 1996: 290). For her, subalternity is not just another word for the oppressed or the discriminated against. Rather, it is a particular form of exclusion that works through silencing some people through their structural exclusion from communication within a language community.

Spivak was making her point in the context of post-colonial discourse and was wary of the term being appropriated outside this domain. Nevertheless, the concept is helpful in this paper because it focuses attention on silencing within an hegemonic discourse and the academic appropriation of the voice of the other for its own authoritative purposes. Thus while being conscious of Spivak's worry about the unwarranted diffusion of the term (Rhodes, 2010), the concept does resonate well here because in many ways children are equivalent to, and labour under the same difficulties as, Spivak's subalterns. Her description of a

'Catch-22' situation where a subaltern discourse can only be heard if it adopts the dominant discourse, within which its form of knowledge has no legitimacy anyway, is arguably precisely the same plight of children: to be seen but not heard. Their voices cannot be heard as they are formally proscribed from authoritative speech up to certain thresholds: a child is politically disenfranchised until 18 years; cannot give consent to sexual relations until 16 years; cannot give legal testimony until the age of seven, and so on. Returning to the Ryan Report (above), a question that has perplexed those concerned with institutional child abuse is why the children did not speak up, why they remained silent. Spivak's insight is that the hegemonic discourse ensured their silence through marginalizing and excluding them *both from and within* the dominant discourse, which works akin to a house of language – one might refer to it as the Father's house – that, while it may have many rooms, has no exit door for escape. For example, if children are not provided with the word 'paedophile' or a meaningful understanding of the word, then paedophilia in a very real sense does not exist (while Santa Claus, in a very real sense, does exist for the child). Of course children struggle to develop their own language for these events and situations, and one of the findings of the Ryan Report and similar reports is that children in institutional abuse situations developed an extensive vocabulary and elaborate communicative codes to grasp and articulate their predicament, to communicate it to one another, to warn other children of risks and dangers and so on, a complex of language games akin to that of adult prisoners, members of a proscribed underground movement or a criminal fraternity. Such language games, though developed within the house, as a response to the hegemony of the Father's *logos*, are, of course, by necessity, designed to be a secret language, a secret code incomprehensible to the authorities, so that even though the subaltern does in fact actually speak, and often speaks eloquently, s/he speaks a language that cannot be heard within the Father's house, meaning of course not just the particular religious houses of

incarceration but also extending to the whole wider society, the general language community where the Father's word is authoritative.

Spivak's insight, and similar points made by others like Bell Hooks (1990), has special relevance to academic engagements with children and their experiences, about who speaks, about whose experience matters, about who the researcher collects data from, and how such data is recorded, analysed and re-presented. Building on her point, we can see that the favoured discourses of academia (which are full of phrases, like 'favoured discourses of academia,' that would never be used by children) actively work to disallow the voice of the child. Children, then, are invisible and subaltern because 'the very constitution of objective knowledge requires certain kinds of exclusion' (Dunne et al., 2008: 275). From this perspective, conventional academic discourse is typically *not* about the giving children a voice, or presenting a child's view of the world – even it professes to be doing precisely this – but rather about presenting knowledge of (and hence power over) children (Rhodes, 2010).

Following this line of reasoning might imply that *Organization Studies* should *not* seek to map out, fill or explore this particular 'white space'. Notwithstanding the ambitions of individual researchers, it is likely that strong institutional forces will conspire to ensure that publications about children, such as this one, will invoke conventional academic discourse that will be used, not to give children a voice or to present a child's view of the world, but to present knowledge of children, and, since knowledge and power are entangled in one another, this implicitly works to control them. There is, then, a real danger of doing (collateral) damage to the idea of childhood by seeking to 'place' them in organization studies.

Caution: White Space Ahead

If childhood is made up of sacred times and places, then it might be best to leave the field to those who have specialized in the area, such as developmental

psychologists, childhood sociologists, educationalists, and those who publish in the 129 journals in my university library that have the word 'child' in the journal title. However, a central argument of this paper is that organizational scholars *should* explore the white space because (a) children and organization are deeply implicated in one another; (b) the exclusion of children diminishes and biases theories of organization; and (c) it enables the assumptions underlying the field of organization studies to be challenged.

Yet, while exploring the 'white space' might be alluring, it also brings certain challenges and risks. Perhaps the most important one is that the academic study of children implicitly works to control them, as discussed in the section on subalternity above. However, there are other issues as well.

One relates to the risks that organizational scholars may be taking, in terms of their own career and status, if they begin to work in the area of children and organization. This is because the invisibility of children in the field may well be an instance of Rehn's (2008) insight that 'an important part of the management scholar's self-identity is the capacity to position his or her research in a way that conveys seriousness, austere scholarship and the most po-faced interpretations possible of organizational events'. Management academics know that to be treated seriously they should study adults (at work) rather than children (at play). And there is a double whammy. For if work is serious and for adults, then those who work at studying work – i.e. scholars of management and organization – must be very serious indeed. Conversely, those who study children may be marginalizing themselves, perhaps unwittingly, within their academic community.

Another issue relates to the problematic nature of the concept of the child, since it is clear that not all children are the same: a sixteen year old, middle-class boy from Essex is not the same as a fourteen year old girl working in a Vietnamese shirt factory. Childhood is an invented category, as Ariès and others have demonstrated (Ariès, 1962; Corsaro, 1997/2005); it is not a 'natural' state but an

historically and anthropologically varied social construct, with any meaningful difference between a person of six or eight years old and a little 'adult' being a relatively modern distinction. For this reason, social constructionism is probably the dominant philosophical orientation in the sociology of children, with studies in this tradition highlighting how children operate in and construct specific types of social worlds, which are age-related and context-dependent, with idiosyncratic rules that evolve and yet reproduce as children join and leave (Sacks, 1972; Corsaro, 1997/2005; Christensen and James, 2000/2008; Freeman and Mathison, 2009). A feature of such studies is that they studiously avoid making general claims and 'grand' theorizing, *à la* Piaget, who was so heavily criticized during the 1980s (Graue and Walsh, 1998: 2, 43–8). However, highly contextualized research is at odds with the dominant epistemology in academia and the institutionalized valorization of citation counts and impact factors (if knowledge is situated and contextualized then one shouldn't expect a situated study to be highly cited). Here, it is useful to compare the journal *Childhood*, which advances a 'new' sociology of childhood, with *Child Development,* which takes an educational psychology rather than a social constructionist tack. The difference in epistemological stance is reflected in the fact that 44 of the last 100 papers in *Childhood* include a country or location in the paper title, compared to just 6 of the last 100 papers in *Child Development* (and 5 in *Organization Studies*). But the penchant for local, situated studies also probably explains why *Childhood*'s Impact Factor in July 2011 was only 1.06 compared with *Child Development*'s 3.77 (and *Organization Studies*' 2.34). The lesson perhaps is that a commitment to a situated epistemology brings certain risks for individual authors and journals in terms of performance on key academic metrics (Bühler-Niederberger, 2010).

Yet it seems right that a social constructionist approach be taken, not least because all research suffers the same problem: all 'teleworkers' are different, as are all 'women', 'managers', or whatever umbrella term we choose to use

(Hacking, 1999). The pervasiveness of idiosyncrasy should only ever amount to a caveat on research, rather than make it untenable. Here, actor-network theory provides a helpful epistemological basis for social research: we should seek to study social orders, and while social orders are never universal, they are likely to be more interesting if they are more widespread and embedded. We should be committed to anti-essentialism, but not immobilized by this commitment. For instance, John Law's (1994:15) call for a 'modest sociology' that will 'seek to turn itself into a sociology of verbs rather than a sociology of nouns' is alluring but impractical. We must use nouns like 'children', even though we know this may be interpreted as a lapse into essentialism. Here, Spivak's (1987) notion of 'strategic essentialism' is especially helpful: while we might adopt a term – because one cannot really speak without it – one still recognizes that it seeks to describe a phenomenon that is socially constructed within a political context. This seems to be the only plausible way of reconciling the use of essentialist language while retaining a commitment to constructionism, even though this might be construed as an exercise in 'epistemic two-timing'.

Invading the white space: six trajectories

While there are some areas that organizational scholars might avoid, and particular issues relating to how and what scholars should study, much research can be done on the topic of children and organization. This section of the paper maps out six potential research trajectories: epistemological, methodological, ontological, temporal, political, and reflexive (table 1), which together provide a coherent and comprehensive basis for inquiry. Epistemology and ontology are included because they are foundational to any research endeavour. Moreover, as the discussion in the previous section highlights, they seem especially relevant to the study of children and childhood. Methodology is important not least because the study of children raises particular issues about how such inquires should be conducted. In addition, knowing how students of childhood have addressed methodological issues can help us reflect on methodology more

generally and the role of method in advancing theory. Temporality is the fourth trajectory. This is included because childhood is socially constructed within a milieu of other concepts, but in particular an understanding of time that provides the concept of childhood with much of its meaning as something that is (temporally) distinct from adulthood. The political is given a trajectory of its own because, as the discussion thus far has sought to make clear, there is a deeply political aspect to the indwelling of children and organization. The final trajectory, labelled 'reflexive', invites us to ask why childhood is a white space in organization studies and what other such spaces might exist and why. Each of these trajectories will now be discussed in more detail.

Insert Table 1 about here

Epistemological

This first trajectory addresses the epistemological question of what children know about various organizational phenomena and how they acquire this knowledge. The term 'organizational phenomena' captures a multitude, but it certainly includes ideas about work, the corporation, enterprise, bureaucracy, decision-making, authority, power, control, autonomy, etc. One stream of research might focus on children's understandings of these ideas, across different age groups. An early example of such a study is Wilcox's (1968) research into children's knowledge of bureaucracy. In this study children were first shown and then asked to identify a blank organization chart. They were then given a chart with each position numbered and asked a series of questions about relationships depicted in the chart: for example, 'Who would give orders to 3'. Wilcox found that suburban, middle-class children understood representations of organizational hierarchy by the age of 14. Denhardt (1980) replicated this study

and also assessed each child's propensity to adhere to the traditional rules of bureaucracy.

Another stream of research might consider how such understandings are constructed during childhood. For example, a study of bureaucratic socialization would be not so much about children's knowledge of bureaucracy, but rather the process through which orientations to and beliefs about bureaucracy come to be. Here, it is worth highlighting that although a central tenet of organization studies is to study the processes by which things and ideas come to be, practically all of the field's inquiry has been into the construction work that happens within organizations populated by adults. Yet it is clear that the practices that shape organizational life are themselves a product of what individuals learn in childhood, which is a necessary and integral part of social renewal and organization. It's a bit like a student who aspires to study how buildings are built, but only looks at finished buildings in her research. Or a student of dress-making who only examines items of clothing in retail outlets (but examines such items in great detail).

Methodological

I replicated Wilcox's study for this paper and found that most 11-year olds recognized an organization chart and were able to articulate the manifest power relationships.[1] However, what the exercise showed most was that the survey instrument, which is commonly used in organizational research, is likely to have limited application when studying children. Others have also identified various problems with conventional research methods, such as interviewing, when used with children, which has created space and a rationale to experiment with new methods of inquiry (Waterman et al., 2000; Punch, 2002). As a result, the sociology of childhood now provides an interesting sandbox of methods that organizational researchers might employ or adapt (Greene and Hogan, 2005). For instance, Christensen and James's (2000/2008) edited collection discusses many of the issues associated with researching children, and examines new

methods, such as the analysis of children's drawings, photographs, videos, stories, role play and drama. Similarly, Young and Barrett (2001) have developed play-full, child-led research methods, as when the street children they were studying created their own radio presentation to discuss 'street life' issues.

In recent years, the sociology of childhood has taken a 'visual turn' (Cook and Hess, 2007; Thomson, 2008; Spyrou, 2011) with a veritable deluge of image-based research on topics such as children's play areas (Gharahbeiglu, 2007), child labour (Mizen, 2005), boarding schools (Margolis, 2004) and street children (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2010). Of course visual techniques are also used in organization studies, but sociologists of children can teach us much about these and indeed more conventional research methods, such as observation and interviewing, because the problems associated with each method are usually exacerbated when studying children. Appropriating actor-network theory's 'principle of symmetry' into this context would suggest that if a method is unsound when studying children, it is probably also flawed if used with adults. Hence, rather than studying children, the agenda for organizational scholars in this trajectory is to deepen the field's understanding of existing methods and learn about new ones, through drawing on extant studies in the sociology of childhood where such methods have been developed and used.

Ontological

While the epistemological trajectory focused on children's knowledge and understanding of organizational phenomena, this trajectory considers the nature of such phenomena in the life-world and practices of children, and/or looked at through the eyes of a child. Hence, research projects in this stream might consider the nature of leadership during childhood, how children make decisions, how groups, composed of children, are formed and maintained, etc. This is a potentially rich vein of research not least because children are different and because the phenomenon of study will always be context dependent and related to the children's age or life-stage (Erikson, 1963). Alternatively, one

might consider the historical emergence and construction of concepts like the child, childhood and childishness in different times and places. There is a potentially huge number of studies that might be conducted within this trajectory, since if a research question is deemed interesting enough to justify a study of a phenomenon in an organization of adults, then one is also likely to find interesting answers through studying the phenomenon in an organization of children. For instance, one could examine the relationship between technology and identity as Turkle (1984) and Livingstone (2009) did in their studies of how children interface with new technologies. Even though children's social worlds are distinct from the social world writ large, the rules and *modus operandi* of children's peer groups reflect and are influenced by the rules of the broader society. Indeed groups of children warrant special study because social rules probably operate more candidly in this context. For example, we might well learn much about 'gangs at work' (Stein and Pinto, 2011) through studying gangs of youths (which are commonplace).

Another important reason for studying children arises from Alvesson and Karreman's (2007) insight that theory development is fostered through exploring the differences between similar domains. Here, the logic is that by carefully comparing the organizational behaviour of children and adults we can develop our theoretical understanding of a whole range of organizational phenomena. While the domains are different, the same mode of inquiry should be followed, in line with actor-network theory's principle of symmetry. One such study is the so-called 'marshmallow challenge' where groups of four are tasked with building a free-standing structure that will support a single marshmallow, using only spaghetti, tape, and string (http://marshmallowchallenge.com accessed 25 July 2011). In this study, kindergarten children out-performed business school graduates (who perform worst of all) and CEOs, providing important insights into group dynamics, problem solving and decision-making among adults (and children).

Another line of inquiry could focus on those aspects of management discourse that are most embroiled within children's culture (Ingersoll and Adams, 1992; Grey, 1998; Rehn, 2009). While children are managed through management discourse, they also (manage to) appropriate this and other discourses and through doing so manage their own experiences and context. Thus, one way of proceeding is to consider those cultural artefacts – television programmes, films and the like – that are commonly consumed by children and are implicated in the way children learn about and do 'management'. Rehn's (2009) reading of *Disney's* Scrooge McDuck, *The Simpsons'* Monty Burns, and 'My First Business Day Playset' opens up an understanding of what management *is* to children, and how they (perhaps) use play to satirize and critique organizational practices. Rhodes (2001) effects a similar exercise in his study of *The Simpsons* which, he argues, functions in a liberating manner not unlike Bakhtin's carnivalesque. Ingersoll and Adams (1992) take a similar approach in their study of children's literature, which, they posit, is an important and ignored part of the process of social construction.

These indicative projects should provide insight in two ways. First, they should add to our understanding of organisational phenomena in the situated life-world of children. Second, and perhaps more important, they should add to our theoretical understanding (and illuminate theoretical blindspots) of such phenomena generally.

Temporal

The concepts of childhood and adulthood exist as social constructions in a particular society, which also has a constructed understanding of temporality. Leveraging the notion of 'strategic essentialism', 'we' can say that, over time, children become adults, and all adults were children in a previous time. This suggests that there is scope for a distinct research trajectory that recognizes and works with this temporal dimension through inquiring into the relationship between early life experiences and organizational practices in later life. Good

examples of this type of research are to be found in a recent issue of *The Leadership Quarterly* (2011, 22(3)), which examines the role that early life experiences, parenting, and the larger environment play in the creation of adult leaders. For example, Li et al (2011) used the U.S. Department of Labor's National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to examine leadership variables (such as leader role occupancy) in the database, while Murphy and Johnson (2011) considered the role of parenting, early education and birth order in developing leaders and leadership potential. Such studies are not seeking to (re-)present the child's present perspective and experience, but rather to better understand what the child will grow up to be, or what type of early experiences particular adults might have had (Riggio and Mumford, 2011).

This trajectory might also incorporate psychoanalytic studies, which typically explain adult behaviour through focusing on early life experiences. As Oglensky (1995: 1036) puts it: 'the key assumption of psychoanalytic theory… [is] that present relations are structured by and resemble past ones, notably from early childhood with mother and father'. Indeed the relative dearth of psychoanalytic research in organization studies may be linked to the absence of children from the field, a topic that is itself worth studying.

Psychoanalysis also shows that, far from being innocent, infancy can be interpreted as a dark, chaotic world of epic power plays, wherein the infant is depicted as a seething mass of raging, insatiable desires and furious terrors, seeking to kill the father to have the mother. From this perspective, the kindergarten and playground can be likened to battlefields where young children will bully, blind, burn and bite one another, cruelly ridicule, ostracize, and scapegoat without the restraining and punitive super-egoic power of adult interventions to limit and govern their 'play'. From this perspective, what we see played out in the adult world of work and organization is not something substantially different and separate from childhood, but rather its continuity in higher and more sublimated forms, with organized, technicized and rationalized

collectivized violence, and professionally channelled, egotistically calculated predation and cruelty. The unregulated market, like the unsupervised playground, is potentially a cauldron of violence that tends towards catastrophe and its perpetual recurrence. Paradoxically and simultaneously, contemporary consumer culture routinely invokes a youthful, carefree, joyfully innocent, childlike dreamworld to depict how adults might engage with the world.

What is clear is that the adult and child worlds, while being temporally separate, are deeply and complexly implicated in one another. Thus there is much scope for time-based studies, especially those grounded in psychoanalysis, to explore and inform our understanding of organizational life, whether the focus is on the individual, the group, the organization, or the capitalist system.

Political

This paper has argued that children are not the Other of organization, but are instead the object of and subject to organization within regimes of power that work to silence and subdue them through the process of subalternity. From this perspective, children are ensnared by multiple, powerful actors, such as corporations, the state, religious bodies, schools, sporting bodies, and non-governmental organizations. Here, the discipline of organization studies has a particular role to play because of its close association with companies and the world of business. (*Organization Studies* has 29 editors or senior editors, all but two of whom are based in business schools; one of those two works in the area of corporate social responsibility while the other writes about labour markets.) In his best-selling book, *The Corporation*, Joel Bakan (2004) argued that companies are designed to pathologically pursue wealth and power, and that they manifest many of the attributes of psychotics. In his most recent book, *Childhood under siege: how big business targets children*, he describes how

companies exploit the vulnerabilities of children, manipulate parents' fears, and callously disregard children's health and well-being (Bakan, 2011).

This puts a special onus on how organizational scholars should study children and childhood, given the traditional expectation that academics should expose, critique, and confront power asymmetries. A potential frame for this issue is the sizeable literature that exists on how institutional norms and values are constructed and reproduced during childhood. For example, in *Learning to Labour* Paul Willis (1977) describes how working class children engage in school in a particular way, and through doing so reproduce working class identities. Others have built on this seminal work to examine how class (Weis, 1990; 2008), race (Gillborn, 1995), and gender (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 1996) are recreated within the organization that is the school. There is much scope to add to this literature, especially if one accepts that social identity is always situated and contextual. Organizational scholars also have links and access to companies, which gives them a significant and distinctive opportunity to examine the methods through which corporations seek to infiltrate, control and profit from childhood and the strategies of resistance that are effected (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997; Beder et al., 2009). At the same time, there is scope to question whether the stereotype of the corporation as a callous, greedy manipulator of children actually holds, and if it does then there is potential to study how employees of such corporations interpret and justify their own and the corporation's practices.

Another issue is how to deal with the political issues and tensions that are buried within popular ontological positions. In particular, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis are favoured within the constructionist tradition because they focus on how local orders, things and identities are constructed through micro-level practices and members' talk. However, the political criticism of these methods is that they fail to see the macro structures that operate behind members' backs. For example, just because a gang of boys might not talk about

excluding girls doesn't mean that girls will or can join the group. More generally, academic work that seeks to 'truly' re-present the voice of the child may be incompatible with normative efforts to 'politically' represent children within regimes of power.

Youth participatory research provides one possible template for squaring this circle. This research tradition deals almost exclusively with oppressed or marginalized groups of young people who are seen, not just as subjects, respondents and informants, but also as partners in the discovery of new knowledge and in the development of new programs and policies. Thus, in youth participatory research – which is very much set within healthcare, health promotion, and community development – young people are encouraged to collectively study the issues and conditions that affect *their* health and well-being (Hart, 1992; Hart, 2008). That, at least, is the plan. But, as Hart put it, 'one of the real problems seems to be getting participants to become interested in theoretical analyses which go too far beyond their own analysis of practical problems' (Hart, 1992: 16). In addressing this problem, his advice is that 'a researcher should enter participatory action research being clear about his own theory of social change and should be ready to share this with the participants in a democratic way rather than insisting upon a timetable which is his' (*ibid*). This perhaps maps a sensible path for organizational researchers grappling with the political issues embedded in fashionable methods and ontological positions.

Reflexive

While each of the other five trajectories might have a reflexive element, this trajectory is explicitly reflexive in that it focuses on the underlying assumptions and exclusions that constitute the discipline of organization studies. In this case the specific exclusion/assumption is the relative absence of children and childhood in the field, which raises a key question about how this exclusion came to be.

Answering this question will probably require a historical study of the discipline's emergence and/or it might be informed by the actor-network tradition of inquiring into how facts and things come to be. One potential project might trace the influence of Puritanism on the practice of management and on derivative academic disciplines like management and organization studies. Puritan beliefs about children can be found in a 17th century manual on childrearing which states: 'there is in all children, though not alike, a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from their natural pride, which must in the first place be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractableness' (quoted in Daniels (1991: 19)). Similarly, Ozment observed that, 'The cardinal sin of child-rearing in Reformation Europe…was wilful indulgence of children' (Ozment, 1983: 133) and that sparing the rod was equated with neglect of one's child (Ozment, 1983: 147, 225). Such beliefs remained strong in the northeastern United States in the 19th century where, in large part, the practice of 'management' first emerged.

A related set of research projects might build on earlier studies of how the relationship between children, work and adults emerged in parallel with other contestations about the relationship between work and females and the relationship between work and particular social classes (Zelizer, 1985/1994; Thorne, 1987; Miller, 2005). For instance, Zelizer describes how in the late 19th and early 20th century children came to be sacralized through restricting their traditional contribution to the household's labour and wages and removing them to the more protected spheres of the school and family. By 1930, the modern child had emerged as 'economically useless, but emotionally priceless' (Zelizer, 1985/1994), and so what is now a legally enforced boundary between the family and the market reflects different understandings of exchange inside and outside the family (e.g. housework is perceived to have no economic value, being based on an altruistic mode of exchange). Alternatively, another research project might focus on the actual representations of children in different contexts, and/or

describe the background contestations out of which these representations emerged. It might also examine how the construction of children as Other, or the silencing of children, is effected through the discourses of management and organization studies.

If one stream of research might have this child-centred focus, a parallel stream could investigate the more systemic forces through which 'white spaces' and disciplinary boundaries come to be (and 'un-be') more generally. In such a research programme one would suspect that journal rankings play a part, and that major information gatherers such as Thomson Reuters play a significant role as their categories and classification systems work to sort things out (and in) (Bowker and Star, 1999). However, one can also postulate other reasons – fashion, geography, history, serendipity, career metrics, aggrandizement (individual, disciplinary and institutional), and the 'supply' and 'demand' for ideas and texts that might be 'imported', 'exported' and translated between disciplinary areas (Oswick et al., 2011). Such a project might also examine the degree to which organization studies has become a closed, self-referential enclave. Take, for example, the journal *Child Development*'s most highly cited article over the last decade, Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker's (2000) paper on the concept of 'resilience'– how individuals positively adapt despite experiencing significant adversity. While their study focused on children, the concept should equally apply to adults and indeed organizations. Yet, only 1% of the 673 citations the paper received in the Web of Science (July 2011) were in the fields of management or business compared with 32% in developmental psychology. What this illustrates is the way academic disciplines can become isolated from other, and in the process 'white spaces' are created. This suggests that there is much scope for more systematic high-level mapping of fields – using techniques such as citation mapping, cocitation analysis, co-word analysis and data mining of bibliographic databases – that would delineate and make visible the pockets of isolation, the centres of self-reference and the white spaces in and between

disciplines (Börner et al., 2003; Tsai and Wu, 2010; Leydesdorff and Welbers, 2011).

Of course reflexive inquiry is about more than just explaining why exclusions exist. An equally important question is, 'What does an exclusion say about the assumptions underlying the existing literature?' For instance, children's invisibility in the organization studies literature probably reflects wider assumptions about gender and organisation, and assumed roles for women and men.

Drawing things together: And they all lived happily ever after…

This paper began by arguing that organization studies rarely mentions children or the phenomenon of childhood. It proceeded to argue that this absence constitutes a 'white space' which should now be explored, mapped and analysed. Rather than being separate, children and organization are very much implicated in one another, which makes the absence of children from the field especially perplexing. In many ways, children occupy a subaltern position, using Spivak's language, which raises profound issues about how they are excluded from discourse and the role of academic practice in such exclusions.

This issue of subalternity provides an overarching scaffolding around six potential research trajectories through which organization studies might engage with the 'white space'. Each of these trajectories is based on a set of questions that frame how organizational scholars might contribute in a way that is distinct from extant work in other disciplines concerned with children and childhood. This research agenda provides significant opportunity to enhance not only our understanding of childhood and organization, but also our theoretical understanding of organizational phenomena more generally.

The paper has drawn on ideas and approaches associated with actor-network theory. First, it follows the actor-network principle of not seeing an important boundary, such as the boundary between child and adult, as an *a priori*, but

rather as something to be explained. Thus, the absence of children from organization studies is an interesting phenomenon that warrants attention, inquiry and explanation. Second, it promotes the method advocated by actor-network theory (and ethnomethodology) for inquiring into how common social and organizational phenomena are continually re-made and re-embedded, but in the particular context of children's social worlds. Third, it appropriates actor-network theory's 'principle of symmetry' by advocating that the same methods should be used regardless of whether children or adults are being studied. Fourth, and again in the tradition of actor-network theory, it advocates a sociology of science approach to the study of organization studies, which should help map the boundaries between and within scholarly domains, and, more importantly, help explore the white spaces that exist in the interstices of inquiry.

Such research should have a 'critical' edge, not least because powerful actors traverse and organize the sites where children play, learn and come to be in the world. Being critical also means asking fundamental questions about what the discipline is doing and not doing and why, what its assumptions are, and whether its own organizing modalities, such as how and where it selects its gatekeepers, needs to change. And if white spaces are linked to, or created by, the process driving the proliferation of academic journals, then it is important to examine and critique this process and to develop new models of 'integrative inquiry' – perhaps journals from different fields jointly developing conferences, publications and longer-term alliances – that work to counter the 'silo mentality' that differentiation tends to produce. At the same time, this paper reminds us that not all white spaces should or can be colonized; they are, perhaps, what Lacan (1978) calls the 'Real', or the ever-present lack in the symbolic realm that is always beyond representation.

It is also important that organization studies' anticipated expedition into the realm of childhood is not a journey of colonization, driven by an instrumental view of children as a resource for organization. Conversely, the principle of

symmetry reminds us that children do not have a monopoly on enchantment, simplicity and playfulness, and that we might all benefit from a more 'childish' take on how we study, describe and analyse organizational phenomena.

Notes

1. I gave Wilcox's (1968) questionnaire to 71 boys and girls, aged between 10 and 13. Initially, children were asked what a blank, 3-level organization chart represented or symbolized. They were then asked 21 questions about the same chart, with numbers now identifying the 20 positions in the chart. A typical question: 'Who will give orders to 8, 10 and 20?' Overall, 74% of the questions were answered 'correctly' (which would be higher if slightly ambiguous questions were removed), with older children somewhat more knowledgeable.

Acknowledgements

I would like to especially thank Kieran Keohane and Carmen Kuhling who worked with me on an early draft of this paper. A sincere thanks to Máiréad Coakley and the teachers and pupils of Ballygarvan National School for facilitating this research. I would also like to thank Joan Buckley, Nick Butler, Jana Costas, Carys Egan-Wyer, Sebastian Green, Emma Jeanes, Dan Kärreman, Eileen Kavanagh, Bernadette Loacker, Sara Louise Muhr, Martin Parker, Jens Rennstam, Kevin Scally, Mathias Skrutkowski, Sverre Spoelstra and Katie Sullivan as well as the reviewers and editors of this special issue for their thoughtfulness and generosity. And a special thanks to my own children: Saoirse, Eilís and Oisín.

Bio

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Research Trajectory	Key Questions	Indicative Studies
Epistemological	• What do children know about organizational phenomena (bureaucracy, the corporation, enterprise, etc.)? • How does this knowledge come to be?	Wilcox (1968), Denhardt (1980)
Methodological	• How can children be studied? • How can this inform methodology in organisation studies generally?	Christensen & James (2000/2008); Punch (2002).
Ontological	• What is the nature of organizational phenomena within groups of children? • How do children 'do' management & organization?	Turkle (1984); Livingstone (2009).
Temporal	• What is the relationship between early life experiences and organizational practices in later life?	Murphy & Johnson (2011); Li et al (2011); Riggio (2011)
Political	• How do institutions (e.g. the corporation, the state, etc.) work with and organise children? • How is academia (and OS in particular) complicit in such regimes of power?	Steinberg & Kincheloe (1997); Bakan (2011); Beder et al (2009); Willis (1977).
Reflexive	• Why are children not seen in OS? • How might the sociology of children inform/change the dominant epistemology in OS? • What other white spaces exist in OS and why? • What does a white space say about the field's underlying assumptions?	Zelizer (1985/1994); Tsai & Wu (2010); Leydesdorf (2011).

Table 1: Potential trajectories for 'space invaders'.