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Abstract

Only recently has the topic of children's well-being become of greater interest for Childhood Studies and is now an area awaiting further contributions. Moreover, of late there have been calls within the discipline for a cross-cultural investigation of children's lives, for a more global approach to childhood. This chapter addresses both topics and, referring to knowledge and debates within these fields, offers frameworks for research.

Drawing on relevant theories, as well as on concrete examples from a cross-cultural ethnography on children's well-being, theoretical and methodological issues are discussed. It is illustrated how both in research on children's well-being and in cross-cultural research on children's lives in general, dualistic approaches – such as particular versus universal or childhood versus childhoods – are limiting. Furthermore, since children's experiences are directly related to their coexistence with adults, the intergenerational component needs to be part of such research. Sociocultural constructions of childhood ('what it means to be

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a child'), for instance, are created mainly in social interaction with adults and influence children's level of resilience and self-confidence. Especially in cross-cultural research, exploring childhood from a generational perspective can generate valuable insights into the diversity of children's worlds.

Keywords

Childhood, Cultural Construction of · Comparison, Cross-Cultural · Competition · Friendship, Children's · Intergenerationality · Interpretative Reproduction · Peer Cultures, Children's · Social Constructivism · Social Indicators · Subjective Well-Being, Children's

1 Introduction

Children's well-being has not always been a subject of public interest as it is nowadays in most countries. Only as late as the sixteenth century did a public concern for children begin to develop in Europe when churches and charities drew attention to lives of orphans and street children (Doek 2014). A second wave of interest in children's well-being arose during the era of industrialization when a concern for child laborers sparked several children's rights movements. The activists were able to enforce child-protection laws which ultimately led to children's right to primary education becoming compulsory in many countries by the turn of the century (Fyfe 2009). Since the second half of the twentieth century, governments' policies around the world have increasingly addressed children's well-being issues, such as health care and education (Punch 2013). These developments culminated in the UNCRC agreement in, 1989, a treaty which "made well-being a right of the child" (Doek 2014, p. 188). Activities of major international organizations such as WHO, UNICEF, and Save the Children reflect these trends (Punch 2013).

2 Researching Children's Well-Being

A commonly held perspective in Childhood Studies is that children are "a minority social group, whose wrongs need writing" (Mayall 2002, p. 9) – a view which contains the concern for children's well-being. Children's well-being is therefore an especially well-suited area for Childhood Studies. However, only recently has Childhood Studies begun explicitly to research children's well-being (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014; Fattore et al. 2007), a development taking place alongside wider political and academic discourses where well-being has become an increasingly popular subject matter (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009b). Reports from different parts of the world testify to the challenges children and young people still face (see Minujin and Nandy 2012), some indicating an increase of mental health problems, such as depression and suicidal preoccupation (Hartras 2008; Newman 2002). Such reports

reemphasize the importance of social science research for getting a better understanding of children's well-being and how it can be improved.

The notion of well-being has become especially popular in social science over the past two decades (see Buchanan 2000; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009b), however, as definitions of well-being are variable and often muddled "the field is in need of conceptual clarification" (Alanen 2014, p. 132). This chapter describes the different theoretical approaches to researching well-being, considering how these may be applied in cross-cultural research on children's well-being. Based on experiences from a cross-cultural research project on children's well-being at a Tibetan and a German primary school, these elaborations will be sustained by concrete examples from ethnographic research.

3 Cross-Cultural Research with Children

Sociocultural contexts play a key role in how people experience the world (Lutz 1988) and unsurprisingly, therefore, children's cultures vary significantly across the globe (Montgomery 2009). Accordingly, recent calls within the field of Childhood Studies have urged for a more global take on childhood (see Punch and Tisdall 2014). Cross-cultural research is also particularly well suited for researching children's well-being as notions of well-being differ cross-culturally and a better understanding of well-being may be derived from these differences. It is "by understanding (...) well-being (...) in a diverse array of societies, we can begin to understand it in its cultural specificities and also in a broader, human sense" (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009b, p. 2).

Until recently, research with children has been overwhelmingly in Minority World contexts (Chen et al. 2006). Several studies have begun to shift this one-sided focus, yet cross-cultural accounts are still rare (Punch 2016). Some discussions on research from different parts of the world (see, for example, Montgomery 2009) and cross-cultural collections of different empirical accounts (see, for example, Punch and Tisdall 2014) are available. Only a few sources (Chen et al. 2004; Cribari-Assali 2015) include research from both Majority and Minority Worlds which is therefore an area yet to be explored by Childhood Studies.

One of the main epistemological issues facing cross-cultural research with children is the question of how to approach the notion of childhood. Most theories in Childhood Studies posit childhood as *either* a plural *or* a singular category (James 2010). In the singular thesis, childhood is understood as a universal category which is constructed by *all* societies, in various forms, yet universally. In this view "childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its conception vary historically" (Cosaro 2011, p. 4). This position contrasts to the relativistic stance of constructivist approaches in Childhood Studies, which emphasize sociocultural plurality. According to such a relativistic paradigm, childhood as a singular category does *not* reflect a social reality. Instead, the term *childhoods* (as a plural) is used, and a

growing body of research underscores this multiple nature of childhood (Christensen and James 2008).

Acknowledging the sociocultural diversity of human experience, cross-cultural research needs to be based on a relativistic stance (Fay 1996). At the same time, however, viewing childhood as a universal category (the singular approach) is also a valuable perspective, as it draws attention to children's marginalization and exploitation worldwide – one of Childhood Studies' main *raison d'être*s (Cosaro 2011). Its proponents argue that a focus on the multiplicity of childhoods may undermine efforts to establish general ethical standards necessary to improve children's living conditions worldwide.

It has therefore been argued that a plural and a singular concept of childhood must not be considered oppositional approaches (James 2010). In fact, the intertwining of the two approaches can be of methodological value for cross-cultural research on children's lives. As Punch explains, “the two strands weave together creating a particular pattern in the cloth and integrating the perspective of childhood as a singular social category with the diversity perspective of many childhoods” (2016, p. 5).

The second issue that needs to be considered in cross-cultural research on children's lives is the notion of cross-cultural *comparison*. This notion poses a challenge when it comes to social (as opposed to natural) phenomena, “due to the impossibility of comparing like with like” (Thomson 2007, p. 575). Punch (2016) also acknowledges this difficulty and suggests drawing on samples of children from similar social backgrounds for cross-cultural comparisons and focusing on transcultural themes, such as identity and agency or leisure and play. Yet the notion remains problematic.

Consideration of the two most significant approaches in comparative social science by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, respectively (Smelser 1976), may shed some light on the issue. Durkheim's stance was positivist which presupposed an existence of independently existing “social facts” that can be compared (see, for example Durkheim's [1997] comparison between suicide rates among Protestants and among Catholics). In *Rules of Sociological Methods* he defines a social fact as something “which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations” (1982, p. 59). A positivist stance in social science is, however, inherently problematic as Max Weber (1949, 1991) has argued. As opposed to natural phenomena, social phenomena are not reproducible in experiments, are continuously changing and, most importantly, multicausal. According to Weber's philosophy of social science, the infinitely complex nature of social phenomena is abstracted by the researcher's likes, interests, and views and does *not* reflect any independently existing social reality. The data selected in research are ‘value oriented’ rather than ‘naturally given’ and therefore cannot be compared as if they were facts (Weber 1949). According to a Weberian comparative sociology, therefore, the researcher merely generates ‘ideal types’, abstractions of a highly complex, abundant social reality, and thereafter reveals ‘elective affinities’ between these ideal types (1949, 1958). In *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958), for instance, he merely posits an elective affinity

between the Protestant worldviews (Calvinism, in particular) and Capitalist principles and does not claim that one led to the other.

Applying Weber's approach to cross-cultural research on children's well-being, explanations on how certain conceptualizations of well-being are held by children and how they seem to relate to aspects within their wider sociocultural backgrounds would therefore *not* be considered social facts, but merely ideal types that the author has constructed through analysis. At the same time, however, the use of ideal types does allow for (limited) conceptual generalizations. According to this view, a cross-cultural research account may give the impression that comparisons are being made; however, what is being compared are never snippets of a social reality but merely the authors own observations. It may be suggested, therefore, that the notion of comparison is misleading insofar as it does not capture this fine but significant difference of social science research and that a term needs to be found which is less positivistic.

Based on Thomson's (2007) considerations on this issue, Punch (2016) has referred to the phrase 'conversation between cases' in place of the notion comparison. Similarly, the term *dialectical study* (Cribari-Assali 2015) may be suitable – 'dialectical' implying a theoretical discussion between different (cross-cultural) views. As opposed to the notion of cross-cultural comparison, a dialectical study of children's lives does not claim to compare social phenomena but merely to paint a cross-cultural picture of children's experiences. The picture is, of course, the author's creation and not a mirror of any social reality 'out there'; or as Clifford and Marcus put it in *Writing Culture*, it is "caught up in the invention, not in the representation of culture" (1986, p. 2).

Despite its pitfalls, cross-cultural research can be a valuable empirical method for researching children's lives. Precisely because of the subjective nature of social science research, mentioned above, cross-cultural research may generate especially rich data by making "the exotic familiar, and the familiar exotic" (Sax 1998, p. 292). The researcher may begin to see issues, aspects, and sociocultural patterns that would have otherwise remained unnoticed.

Especially if the researcher is familiar with the sociocultural context where research is conducted, it is likely that certain phenomena relevant for the research are overlooked as "normal" (Cribari-Assali 2015). The founder of ethnomethodology, Harold Garfinkel, describes this phenomenon as "'seen but unnoticed', expected, background features of every day scenes" (1967, p. 36). He argues that, "for these background expectancies to come into view one must either be a stranger to the 'life as usual' character of everyday scenes, or become estranged from them" (1967, p. 37). Cross-cultural research may have such an estranging effect on the researcher as through the cross-cultural contrast unnoticed data may suddenly become apparent.

This argument is illustrated by examples from a research project on children's well-being, which spanned both a Majority and Minority World setting, by Cribari-Assali (2015). The ethnography was conducted with children (6–8 years old) in a Tibetan day-school (India) and in a German day-school (Germany) for 6 months at each site, 3–4 days a week, in 2012. Many of the findings from this research turned out to be strongly related to the cross-culturality of the project and would have not

manifested in single sited fieldwork. For instance, as will be explained later in this chapter, it was observed that the Tibetan children displayed a much higher level of self-confidence and resilience than the children at the German school – an indicator for well-being. These observations were only possible on the basis of the cross-cultural contrast. Another set of findings further illustrate this point whose contents will only be outlined here. Briefly, it was found that a demand for *fairness* was very prominent with the children in the German school, however, fully absent in the Tibetan school, while *luck* played a central role at Tibetan school but was rare in the German school. Although they were documented, these data would have remained unnoticed without the cross-cultural contrast. Having grown up in a German context, the researcher would have overlooked these data from the German school as “normal” if it would have not been for the fact that this phenomena was apparently absent at the Tibetan site. The data, however, proved significant to research insofar as they suggested that the children were constructing different notions of their selves which, in turn, were found to be linked to particular aspects of well-being.

These examples show how the cross-culturality of a research project may be key to eliciting particular data. As Fay in a *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* suggests, this phenomena has much to do with the nature of understanding itself:

Changes in our understanding of others lead to changes in our self-understanding, and changes in our self-understanding lead to changes in our understanding of others (...) Epistemologically all understanding is comparative: there is no self-understanding if no other-understanding. (1996, p. 229)

Cross-cultural research on the diversity of children’s lives is therefore not only a fascinating subject of study but can be simultaneously a heuristic tool. This can be said to be especially true for researching children’s well-being, as the following will elaborate.

4 Exploring Well-Being

Social science research on well-being can be roughly categorized as accounts either of subjective or objective well-being (Morrow and Boyden 2014). The former investigates people’s experiences and conceptualizations of well-being, while the latter focuses on outer factors considered relevant for well-being, such as income, social relationships, health, political freedom, etc. Objective well-being research has produced quite an extensive body of work, especially in the field of economics. Most accounts of children’s well-being also deal mainly with the influence of objective factors, such as parental care, access to education, wealth, political rights, etc. (see, for example, Mapp 2010).

Even though of value, studies which focus solely on objective well-being may be insufficient (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014). It has been found, for instance, that subjective experiences of well-being do not necessarily correlate with high levels of objective

well-being (Bartram 2011). A study by Easterbrook (2004) suggests that well-being may even decrease parallel to the rise of affluence within a society – an objective factor usually considered basic to well-being. According to his analysis, unipolar depression “has been rising in eerie synchronization with rising prosperity” (Easterbrook 2004, p. xvi) in the USA over the past 50 years. Similarly, social-psychological disorders in children are reported to have increased in most wealthy countries over the last half of the century. “Even countries with such widely admired social welfare systems as Sweden have not escaped these trends” (Newman 2002, p. 2).

Proponents of a subjective well-being approach frequently apply a social constructivist viewpoint (Uchida et al. 2004). Social constructivism is also considered an important approach in Childhood Studies, for understanding childhood as a social construction (rather than as a naturally given category) appreciates the variety of forms childhood takes cross-culturally and across time (Christensen and James 2008; Cosaro 2011; Mayall 2002). When investigating children's well-being from a social constructivist view it makes little sense to assume that objective factors will universally determine well-being. People experience and construct the world according to their unique sociocultural conditioning and history (Lutz 1988) which accounts for the phenomenon that individuals can be happy in the most challenging circumstances or depressed even though all objective factors for happiness seem to be present. Accordingly, subjective well-being researchers have defined happiness “as a positive emotional state that is most general and, thus, not restricted to any specific circumstances or events” (Uchida et al. 2004, p. 226).

Subjective well-being approaches do not deny the significance of objective factors for well-being. However, they hold that focusing on these cannot generate holistic accounts of human well-being. Social science has therefore begun exploring subjective well-being (see, for example, Diener and Suh 2000; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a) and recently more explicitly in children's lives (see, for example, Fattore et al. 2007). Yet accounts of children's subjective well-being are still few (Casas 2011) as it is “often taken for granted that children need not be asked, because they do not know (are not yet capable or competent to know) what is good for them” (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014, p. 10). Morrow and Boyden (2014) draw awareness to ethical issues when children's well-being is being researched without an interest in the children's own definitions of well-being. They ask for a consideration of

... what happens when questions about well-being are applied to children and across social groups and countries? One of the most serious problems, often overlooked, is that notions of well-being tend to be underpinned by powerful values about desired life goals and about children and childhood. (Morrow and Boyden 2014, p. 2899)

Investigating children's views on well-being is an important part of well-being research, and cross-cultural research needs to generate a socioculturally rich account of the children's own understandings and experiences of well-being rather than relying on adult's views. Moreover, it needs to focus on children's experiences in the here and now (Qvortrup 2014) rather than on their future lives as adults.

Although not denying its value, a forward-looking view that postpones children's well-being "until adulthood" (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014, p. 16) or children's "well-becoming" (Qvortrup 2014) cannot be the main interest of such an account.

Yet what is well-being? It is said to be "a fluid, holistic and ambiguous notion which is difficult to define" (Punch 2013, p. 226; see also Morrow and Mayall 2009) and unsurprisingly, therefore, theoretical and methodological frameworks for researching well-being are still variable and often conceptually muddled (Alanen 2014; Fattore et al. 2007; Morrow and Boyden 2014). Moreover, especially in a cross-cultural study, a definition of well-being needs to be broad enough to allow for the sociocultural diversity of different sites. How can well-being be defined in a socioculturally sensitive way? The following sections explore these questions.

5 Children's Views on Well-Being

A growing body of work in the social sciences usually referred to as subjective well-being (SWB) (Diener and Suh 2000) investigates well-being cross-culturally by documenting people's cognitive appreciation of their quality of life. In these accounts, subjective well-being is usually defined as "a person's evaluative reactions to his or her life – either in terms of life satisfaction (cognitive evaluations) or affect (ongoing emotional reactions)" (Diener and Diener 1995, p. 653). More recently, the SWB approach has been applied also to research with children (Huebner et al. 2014). Nguyen (2011), for example, undertook a longitudinal study with 1000 Vietnamese children (aged 12), investigating how family income and/or social inclusion related to the children's happiness. Each child was shown a picture of a ladder with nine steps and asked the following question:

There are nine steps on this ladder. Suppose we say that the ninth step, at the very top, represents the best possible life for you and the bottom represents the worst possible life for you. Where on the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time? (Nguyen 2011, p. 5)

Fattore et al. (2007) interviewed 123 children from rural and urban areas of New South Wales in less structured interviews about their definitions of well-being. The final stage of the research asked participants to complete a creative project of their own design, choosing from photography, drawing, journal keeping, etc., to describe what well-being meant to them. Hart et al. (2007) investigated children's well-being in Sri Lanka by conducting a well-being exercise with them. Participants were asked to think of someone their own age who is "doing well in life" and describe the things that indicate this. All three of these accounts are examples of research on children's well-being that values children's views and appreciates them as mature informants. This has been considered a key to Childhood Studies (Punch and Tisdall 2014) – the researcher can and should rely on children's knowledge and reflexivity during research and analysis (Mayall 2008).

Some argue, however, that focusing merely on participants' cognitive evaluations is limited when researching well-being (Bartram 2011). This may be considered an argument also because people's views are always situational and socioculturally tainted (Garfinkel 1967) and sociocultural knowledge is to a large degree tacit (Polanyi 1966). As Mason warns, "it is important to remember that qualitative interviewing has limitations (...) generated through the rather specific and refined context of the interview" (2002, p. 83). Limitations of interviewing are even more significant when conducted with children as, due to the inherent adult-child power-imbalance, they are more likely to respond in ways they believe may be expected from them (Mayall 2008). Also the ethical challenges when interviewing children need not be underestimated. As Morrow and Boyden explain:

One-to-one interviews may be difficult for children in contexts in which children are not used to talking one-to-one with unfamiliar adults (i.e., most of the world), and questionnaires may include questions that do not make sense to the children concerned, ask insensitive or irrelevant questions, or questions that children do not know the answer to. (2014, p. 2904)

Interviewing very young children about their definitions of well-being is, moreover, extremely limited or impossible due to their cognitive abilities (Huebner et al. 2014).

Instead of relying exclusively on interviews, children's subjective well-being can effectively be investigated by ethnographic research (Camfield et al. 2009). Ethnography is considered a key methodology for research with children as it gives children a more direct voice in the generation of the data while focusing on what is meaningful in their daily lives (James and Prout 1990). Moreover, through ethnographic participant observation sociocultural patterns and tacit knowledge are more easily accessible. Ethnography "allows us to understand nonverbal communication, to anticipate and understand responses (...) [and] shapes the way we interact with others and, in a more fundamental way, it shapes the way we interpret what we observe" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, p. 11).

As ethnographic research investigates social interaction, well-being may be understood as an umbrella term that embraces any form of social action (Weber 1991) that people (explicitly or implicitly) relate to maintaining or creating "a good life" (Izquierdo 2009, p. 68; see also Ben-Arieh et al. 2014). While ways of maintaining or improving a good life are a part of social action everywhere, they are experienced, presupposed, and conceptualized in various socioculturally specific ways and may therefore even be contradictory (Buchanan 2000). Ethnographic research allows for the sociocultural sensitivity that is needed in order to capture this diversity.

Yet how is it possible to identify social action that is specifically related to maintaining or creating a good life? One way would be to explore 'what matters most' to the children (Cribari-Assali 2015), as what matters most must be considered an essential condition for a good life by the person concerned – why otherwise strive for it? Moreover, researching what matters most is more concrete than what makes

up a good life and can be observed in real life situations rather than having to rely on thoughts and views expressed verbally by the participants.

Again, experience from the Tibetan/German research project (Cribari-Assali 2015), mentioned earlier, may assist in illustrating this point. During fieldwork in both schools, the children's notions of well-being and their related social practices at each site were explored by investigating what mattered most to them. This proved to be very different. What mattered most to the children at the Tibetan school was 'being skilful' as the children would spend most of the time demonstrating and negotiating their different skills with each other. Certain skills were valued higher than others within the peer group (academic skillfulness was leading, for example), yet an individual's proficiency in one area seemed to balance lesser skillfulness in another. Some of the boys' lack of academic skillfulness, for instance, was compensated for by their strong physicality which they would display in physically dominating each other or the girls (physical 'teasing'). At the German school, on the other hand, what mattered most to the children was friendship with peers (see also Corsaro 2003). These children spent most of their time negotiating and establishing belonging to peers, and interviews confirmed that that the children considered friends central to their sense of well-being.

When investigating the children's social practices related to achieving these particular conditions for well-being (being skilful/friendship) at each school, it was found that this took place mainly within competitive frameworks at both sites. At the Tibetan school the children would establish skillfulness in competitions and at the German school belonging to peers was negotiated competitively. Most of the Tibetan girls were especially successful in academic competitions, the majority of the Tibetan boys tended to focus their skills in physical teasing and members of both sexes had developed skillfulness in verbal teasing (see also Corsaro 2003; Goodwin 1990). In contrast to the Tibetan children the competitions of the children at the German school for friendship were indirect, taking on the form of *othering* practices. The notion of *othering* describes the creating of difference mainly by rendering the other inferior, antagonistic, or both – a process through which the self and belonging becomes highlighted and empowered (Spivak 1985). In research with children, *othering* could be distinguished from 'usual' forms of exclusion in terms of its focus. When children exclude peers in order to protect their interactive space (Corsaro 2003, 2011), for example, the focus is on the commonalities of one's group whereas in the *othering* practices individuals are deliberately sought out in order to make them into a 'social other' and otherness is the center of attention. The children at the German school were creating belonging through *othering* peers. Within the girls' group *othering* manifested often as a form of bullying; boys and girls would create gender-based quarrels and many children would generate social others within role play. The result was a (heightened) sense of belonging: by creating a social other the social us became highlighted and belonging was confirmed for individuals and groups.

The fact that the children at both schools established competitive frameworks for well-being suggests that well-being was linked to competition for the children. On the one hand, competition may have been a 'thrilling' experience for the children, a welcome change from school's monotony (Harden 2012). On the other hand, the

children may have been interpretatively reproducing (Cosaro 2003, 2011) the values of their societies where well-being is inevitably linked to an engagement in economic competition. Within both Tibetan society in Exile (Roemer 2008) and German society (Steingart 2013) achieving well-being is mostly dependent on engaging in (educational or economic) competitions. Accordingly, the Tibetan children as well as the children at the German school are likely to have creatively integrated competitive conditions as a doorway to their unique understandings of conditions for well-being, that is, individual skillfulness and belonging, respectively. As children interpretatively reproduce aspects of their sociocultural environment in their peer cultures, children's views on well-being are also likely to reflect some of their societies' values.

6 Transcultural Well-Being: Self-Confidence and Resilience

While exploring children's perspectives of well-being is an important part of well-being research, a richer account should also acknowledge aspects of well-being that people are not always aware of (Cribari-Assali 2015). The Tibetan/German research project showed, for example, that while the children at each site had different understandings of what mattered most to their well-being (i.e., being skillful/friendship), other phenomena indicating their well-being, such as strong self-confidence, for instance, was not something they would necessarily conceptualize. This section suggests, therefore, that the study of well-being needs to include the exploration of aspects of well-being which participants do not necessarily conceptualize in terms of what matters most. In cross-cultural research, this would be considered a more *transcultural* approach since definitions of well-being do not rely primarily on the participants' understandings. Instead, well-being is defined primarily in accord with the researcher's conceptualizations.

In the light of such a transcultural take on well-being, the definition of well-being adopted for the first part of research – what makes up a good life for the participants – does therefore not serve anymore and requires a different approach. Yet, how is one able to identify local aspects of well-being without relying on the participants' understandings? Social science research on well-being has been tackling this dilemma by investigating transcultural *indicators* for well-being (Alanen 2014; Ben-Arieh et al. 2014). Social indicators for well-being are usually associated with objective factors; however, they have recently been applied to subjective well-being as well (Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011). Many of these accounts (for example, Uchida et al. 2004; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a) consider *happiness* an indicator, arguing it to be an emotion which is universally present. Childhood Studies, on the other hand, has frequently focused on children's *resilience* as a potential indicator of well-being (Punch 2013; Ungar 2005) even when studies do not mention the term well-being much at all (Daniel 2010; de Berry and Boyden 2000).

However, focusing on transcultural social indicators for well-being has the potential of becoming socioculturally ethnocentric – the pitfall of any transcultural approach in social science (Markus and Kitayama 1991). There is always the danger of “judging others according to our benchmark” (Fay 1996, p. 3). As mentioned

earlier, the danger of imposing definitions of well-being can also be considered an ethical challenge when conducting research with children (Morrow and Boyden 2014). In the Tibetan/German research project this problem was met by choosing transcultural indicators for well-being inductively during data analysis. Rather than selecting an indicator (such as happiness or resilience) prior to field entry, the topics were elicited from preliminary data analysis and thereafter pursued. This approach was conducted in line with postmodern grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2006), where data are typically collected at first in accord with what seems relevant and conceptualizations are formulated thereafter.

Thus, the Tibetan/German research project ultimately began exploring the two indicators self-confidence and resilience because in cross-cultural preliminary analysis there was a noticeable difference in self-confidence and resilience at both schools. The Tibetan children displayed a comparably higher level of both. Self-confidence or self-esteem is often linked to well-being in social science literature (Daniel and Wassell 2002) especially in social psychology (Diener and Diener 1995). Children's resilience is another indicator frequently related to children's well-being (Punch 2013). Its proponents argue that research on resilience may be helpful in fostering children's well-being (Ungar 2005).

The Tibetan children appeared much more self-confident than most of the children at the German school. Even the "least popular" children at the Tibetan school showed themselves to be confident in terms of their wants and needs whereas many children at the German school would frequently relinquish their personal wants, in order to appease more popular peers. Post-fieldwork analysis suggested how this phenomenon may have been related to what mattered most to the children at each site. First, becoming skillful (Tibetan site) presupposed a preoccupation mainly with oneself while achieving belonging (German site) required others' affection. The Tibetan children would therefore manifest a much more individualized sense of self and the children at the German school a more relational sense of self which could relate to a higher and lesser level of self-confidence, respectively. Moreover, it was much easier for the Tibetan children to demonstrate their individual skillfulness than it was to achieve an experience of belonging for the children at the German school. The Tibetan children had various ways of presenting themselves as skillful and therefore everyone seemed to 'have access' to being skillful to a certain extent. At the German school, on the other hand, achieving a stable sense of belonging was difficult for most children – especially since the othering activity (that served to establish belonging in the first place) would exclude some children from belonging by default. The children's othering practices were therefore overall not conducive to their sense of well-being.

7 Children's Well-Being and the Generational Order

Childhood is generally constructed and children are constrained by the generational order (Mayall 2008) and, therefore, research on children's well-being needs to include this aspect of children's lives (Alanen 2014; Qvortrup 2014). The

Tibetan/German research project therefore investigated how the children's environments shaped by adults may have related to the different levels of self-confidence of the children at both schools. It was found that the children were constrained and monitored by adults in different ways and to different degrees at each site.

The German school and its staff emphasized a valuing of children's agency, intergenerational equality, and did not approve of authoritarian methods. Teaching methods at the Tibetan school, on the other hand, were more authoritarian – children were expected to show respect towards elders and corporal punishment was still common. At the same time, however, the Tibetan children showed a high level of resilience towards physical punishment and displayed a similar resilience when faced with other potentially emotionally challenging situations, such as being ill or hurt, being teased by peers, or receiving low marks in class – more so than the children at the German school. For one thing, the Tibetan children's greater daily exposure to adversities is likely to have made them more resilient. Living in India, the Tibetan children were more intensely exposed to physically and emotionally challenging situations than the German children, not least, being members of a displaced people who had to flee the Chinese occupation (Von Welck and Bernstorff 2004). Overall, Tibetan children are confronted with more adversities in their daily life (for themselves and the people around them) than children in Germany.

Research on children's resilience has demonstrated that children develop remarkable ways of dealing positively with adverse situations (de Berry and Boyden 2000; Punch 2013), and it makes sense to assume that experiencing adversities may raise children's level of resilience. Case studies have shown how children facing challenging circumstances, such as war, refuge, poverty, and terminal illness may even begin to support distressed adults (see de Berry and Boyden 2000; Hinton 2000). The common assumption that caregiving is exercised only by adults may therefore be questioned (Emond 2010). As self-confidence and resilience are often interrelated, it is not surprising that the Tibetan children were more resilient and experienced a higher self-confidence.

Moreover, how the children were approached by adults at each site – in other words, the prevalent constructions of childhood – suggested some further explanations for the different levels of resilience and self-confidence at each school. As mentioned, childhood is a relational phenomenon, constructed in relation to adulthood (James and Prout 1990) and the manner in which people are viewed by their sociocultural environment significantly influences their own constructions of self (Burkitt 2008). Socioculturally shaped conceptions of self and world “influence, and in many cases determine, the very nature of experience” (Markus and Kitayama 1991, p. 224).

Within Childhood Studies, mainly the generational focus has drawn attention to the importance of deconstructing underlying ontological assumptions (about self, world, childhood, etc.) present in the children's lives. For instance, Morrow and Mayall (2009) have pondered how children's socioculturally shaped sense of self in the UK may have contributed to children's low scores at school:

In the specific case of the UK, adults tend to construct children and childhood as a social problem. This construction links in to social class divides. It is entirely possible that media, teachers and even parental concern about childhood affects the children's self-image and may partially account for low scores. If childhood is (objectively) bad and children think so too, could this be because children have internalised their risky and at risk status? What is the impact on children themselves of societal denigration of children and childhood? (Morrow and Mayall 2009, p. 225)

In a cross-cultural comparison of children from US Middle class, Matsigenka and Samoan households, Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) demonstrate how the children's ideas about what constitutes well-being differ significantly in relation to their socioculturally constructed sense of self. For the Peruvian as well as the Samoan children, self-reliance proved to be a key component to their sense of well-being, which was not the case for the North American children, who were accustomed to being given significantly fewer responsibilities by their parents in their daily life.

The Tibetan/German research project showed how the children were approached very differently by the adults at each school: children's need for protection was much more emphasized at the German school while the Tibetan children were more expected to take care of themselves. At the German school, at least as much time was spent reflecting on, regulating, and discussing the children's social abilities as with developing their academic skills. The children's social behavior was monitored by the staff who would protect the children also from one another by disciplining students for unsocial behavior, such as teasing, exclusion, othering, or physical assaults. In fact, students would mostly be disciplined for socially inadequate behavior. The developing of children's social abilities was considered one of the main tasks by teachers and caretakers.

Similar to the German school, the Tibetan school and its staff also emphasized the importance of developing prosocial behavior in the children; however, only rarely did Tibetan adults actually intervene in the children's social interaction or instruct individual children directly about social matters. It was extremely rare that individual children were disciplined for "unsocial behavior" at the Tibetan school – particularly not during the break times, where the children were almost entirely left to themselves. Children at the Tibetan school would be scolded and punished mainly for not paying attention in class, for not doing homework, or for 'disobeying' adults. Teachers would get involved only reluctantly in social issues between children, and student's requests to intervene in their conflicts would often be ignored.

The manner in which adults approached children at the Tibetan school suggests that Tibetan children were credited with a greater ability to look after themselves. The Tibetan children were expected to care for their own safety and well-being more than the children at the German school. When Tibetan children were ill, for example, and able to walk, they were sent to the local medical station on the school compound on their own or in the company of a classmate. Children were also much less supervised by adults after class, even when they were playing in potentially dangerous areas without supervision. The pedagogical approach of the German school and its staff, on the other hand, mirrored a view of children much more in need of development not only academically but also socially. Implicitly, therefore, children

were constructed at the German school as much more vulnerable and therefore in need of protection (see also Daniel 2010).

Social constructions of children are not merely abstract views but are part of adults and children's lived experience. "Both children and adults carry society's patterns of childhood in their heads, though sometimes different interpretations of these" (Zeher 2001, p. 38). It is therefore probable that the different constructions of childhood at each site may have contributed to the different levels of resilience and self-confidence with the Tibetan children and the children at the German school. Approached as more vulnerable and in need of adult protection, the children at the German school are likely to have constructed a less confident self than the Tibetan children, who were approached much more as being resilient and entrusted with social responsibility. The German school and their staff were making a genuine effort to foster children's agency; however, their construction of childhood was most likely influencing the children's view of self in a disempowering manner.

Children in Minority Worlds have reported that they often do not feel perceived to be moral agents by their school environments (Mayall 2002). Elsewhere, Mayall explains how children themselves seem to reproduce this view: "Some children explain that they were indeed morally unreliable (...) this is a common theme in children's accounts" (2001, p. 125). Research has shown how children from Majority Worlds are often given much greater social and moral responsibility, not only for themselves but also for other family members, including adults (Hinton 2000). Moreover, many children develop astonishing abilities to deal with adverse situations as a response to these sociocultural expectations of their environment (de Berry and Boyden 2000). Corsaro (2003), for example, observed how children at an Afro-American school were left to solve their own conflicts and would skillfully master this challenge. Corsaro compares these situations to conflicts he had observed at a school in Berkeley where adults would more frequently intervene. The conflicts of the Afro-American children differed insofar as

...the children's disputes were longer, more complex, and often developed from spats between two or three kids to group debates (...) However, any serious conflict dissipated and the kids went on to more general discussion, where they tied their contributions to personal experiences and honed their skills in debate and argument. (Corsaro 2003, p. 189)

The children who were given the chance to solve their conflicts were actually able to do so, proving to be morally reliable agents.

These accounts and the findings from the Tibetan/German research project challenge the view that children's protection is exclusively beneficial to their well-being (see also Daniel 2010; Newman 2002; Punch 2013). While it is undeniable that children are in need of protection, it needs to be considered to what extent children's vulnerability is socioculturally constructed (Holland 2004) and how this may have adverse effects on children's well-being. Shielding children as much as possible from adversities may likewise prove to inhibit the development of a greater self-confidence and resilience towards the challenges of life (see also Punch 2013; Newman 2002).

8 Concluding Considerations

This chapter has provided an overview of relevant debates and theoretical frameworks for researching children's well-being, sustained by examples from a cross-cultural research project at a Tibetan and a German school. As well-being research is in its infancy within Childhood Studies, holistic theoretical frameworks for researching children's subjective well-being are still rare and in need of development.

It has been illustrated how cross-cultural research on children's well-being would be well-advised to include two approaches simultaneously: (a) researching the children's particular understandings of well-being and (b) investigating transcultural indicators for well-being within the children's interactions. These two approaches are rarely combined since a relativist and a transcultural approach (known as the particularistic versus universalistic dilemma, Papastephanou 2011) are often considered dichotomous. However, applying a methodological (as opposed to an ontological) relativism can appreciate both the similarity and uniqueness of social phenomena (Fay 1996; Geertz 1984): although children's experiences and understandings of well-being ultimately differ cross-culturally commonalities are likely. Future cross-cultural research on children's well-being may need to include these two sides of human experience in order to advance the knowledge in this field.

Moreover, research on children's well-being, more generally, can ill afford to ignore the significance of intergenerationality. Children negotiate their sense of self – in particular their understandings of what it means to be a child – in social interaction with adults which, as illustrated, is likely to influence factors for well-being, such as resilience and self-confidence.

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