Book Reviews

The themes of resilience and agency in the face of adversity and at the point of transition from one stage to another recur in these reviews of recent books, each one of which has important things to say to the readers of IJEE. Bauman and Rivers celebrate the opportunities offered by the digital age while not downplaying the potential risks to the mental health of children and young people. Lamericks, Danby, Bateman and Ekberg use exciting, child-centred methods to access the experiences and perspectives on mental health of young people in a range of institutional settings. This innovative book has a wealth of information that is relevant to practitioners and researchers alike.

Next, two books, one quantitative and the other qualitative, demonstrate convincingly the extreme impact of poverty on children's well-being. Evans, Ruane and Southall, members of the Radical Statistics Group, argue that powerful individuals and institutions control statistical data to serve their own ends. In fact, the authors propose, governments often mislead us through their manipulation of statistical findings. Consequently, physical and mental health difficulties, especially among poor families, are perpetuated. Kerry Hudson gives the inside view of the child growing up in poverty and the longstanding impact on her emotional and social development. Through her own determination and resilience, she not only survived but became a successful writer. However, on her return to the places of her   childhood, she found that many families continue to experience dire poverty and deprivation. Her book is a moving testament to her journey and the people who helped her along the way but it is also a plea for action to be taken in the present day.

In the context of higher education, Lee and LaDousa report on the continuing patterns of discrimination experienced by students from non-traditional backgrounds, not only from fellow students but also from the universities themselves. The section on the institutional lens to marginalisation gives disturbing insights into the ways in which inequalities are perpetuated.

Finally, from a more theoretical perspective, Paul Downes presents the case for a spatial phenomenology in our conception of human development. Transitions between different spatial systems, according to his theory, are a means of understanding agency. He presents a powerful argument that challenges the domination of time over space by developmental psychologists. By contrast, he considers movements from one space or system to another as offering a much deeper understanding of agency and lived experience.

Each book is challenging and offers us new ways of thinking about our field. I hope that you find the reviews insightful.

If you would like to review books for IJEE, please write to me and let me know your areas of interest.

Helen Cowie
Reviews Editor

1. *Mental Health in the Digital Age*

Author:	**Sheri Bauman & Ian Rivers**
Publisher:	**Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK**
Year of Publication:	**2015**
ISBN:	**978-1-349-56654-9; eBook: 978-1-137-33317-9**

It is undeniable that we live in a digital world of enhanced connectivity and ease of communication. In the UK alone 90% of people have either their own digital device or access to public devices. In recent years, however, global mental health has declined. 450 million people across the globe have a diagnosed mental health disorder; in a given year it is predicted that 25% of UK adults will experience a mental illness, 20% of US adolescents and 13% of US 8-15 year-olds. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that across Europe 25-35% of people have a mental disorder in a given year. Despite this, approximately 60% of adults and 50% of young people do not receive treatment for these illnesses. The negative implication of this upon wellbeing can be long-term and detrimental to society as a whole.

Sheri Bauman and Ian Rivers address the current mental health climate in terms of risks and opportunities within the digital world. Addressing the topic head on they discuss the practicalities of treatment whilst systematically evaluating the literature as well as incorporating case studies illustrating key points. This makes the book applicable to mental health practitioners, service providers and academics. Divided into ten chapters, the content covers:

1. An overview of mental health in the digital age providing statistics and an understanding of the general background in this field;
2. Mental health information seeking behaviours online identifying the opportunities for access to health information yet the risk of finding inaccurate or hypochondria information;
3. The diverse availability of online mental health treatments as well as the risks of irresponsible use and negative communities;
4. Considerations for ethical research;
5. A general overview of the risks online across developmental stages with suggestions for enhancing resilience;
6. The risks and opportunities of social networking sites;
7. The benefits of social connectedness online and the positive impact of this upon wellbeing;
8. The uniqueness of virtual worlds;
9. Opportunities for developing and manipulating the self-online and the potential repercussions of these behaviours;
10. A conclusion with further questions to consider.

A theme of balancing the pros and cons of the digital age is present throughout the book. The availability of information online provides a valuable resource for users seeking health information. Search engines as well as community groups and trend tracking allow users to actively investigate or openly explore health topics. This can be particularly beneficial in a variety of ways. For those seeking quick reassurance, a Google of symptoms can provide knowledge and practical information at hand subsequently enhancing autonomy and a lesser strain on public healthcare. Further, those with specific health disorders can find a community online for discussion and support easing loneliness that individuals can often feel when diagnosed. Bauman and Rivers explore the growing popularity of online support groups both with synchronous (everyone present at the same time) and asynchronous (posts, responses and threads over time) designs. Direct communication with a trained professional in the digital environment can occur through online therapy sessions. Reducing privacy concerns and anxieties of being spotted en route to a clinic can make these types of sessions appealing. Communicating online can also be effective in terms of virtual worlds and virtual reality. Immersing users can enhance opportunities for exploration of the self, theory of mind, empathy and efficacy. Particularly when incorporated within treatment schemes such innovative methods provide unique opportunities that simply cannot be replicated offline. Benefits are also evident within the opportunities for collaboration, problem-solving and community building. Particularly for those experiencing loneliness or depression these platforms provide communication and community involvement. Social connectedness online is emphasised within this book as a particularly beneficial aspect of the digital world, particularly with the use of social networking sites. Regardless of financial or geographical status, users are able to connect and communicate with great ease. This is particularly important for stigmatized or vulnerable groups such as the homeless, disabled and elderly. Overall, these benefits provide insight into the great breadth of opportunity that the digital world provides. Those already suffering with poor mental health have many options for treatment and support, whilst those with typical metal health may be less likely to suffer.

Bauman and Rives recognise the prominent risk antonymous with these benefits. The ethical considerations of the online world lack clarity within many current ethical guidelines. Bauman and Rivers discuss the ethical grey area of ethnographers online as well as the difficulties of ethical procedures, such as informed consent, debrief, etc. Investigating symptoms online can be inaccurate by the user resulting in false information, as well as information provided being from an unreliable and unknowledgeable source. Those with hypochondria may exacerbate concerns. Communities online can be damaging if promoting unhealthy lifestyles. Damaging communities are particularly problematic in terms of mental health treatments online. Risks of ill-use, such as trolling, and the fostering of dangerous behaviours, such as pro-ana communities, are mostly evident in the absence of a professional support leader. Incorporating professionals within these communities allows for appropriate support and accurate information to be disseminated. Of course, with the vastness of the internet this is not always possible. One-to-one communication with a professional, such as online therapy sessions, can be ineffective due to the lack of interpersonal interaction. Therapists require non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expression, timing, etc which can be more difficult to detect through

a camera. This sense of distance can also encourage disinhibition from the user which can often occur during virtual immersion. Playing games online as well as excessive social networking site use can blur awareness of the self-resulting in a warped perception. This can have a negative impact upon self-esteem. Engaging with the online world can also be developmentally risky. Inappropriate content, interaction with strangers, poor e-safety practices, sexting/revenge porn and experiences of cyberbullying can expose vulnerable groups to poor wellbeing and long-term mental health difficulties. Developing resilience is discussed as a potential buffer to these risks but is acknowledge by Bauman and Rivers as requiring further consideration and development.

Throughout these risks and benefits, Bauman and Rivers incorporate case studies to illustrate key points. As well as this, the practicalities are discussed with suggestions being provided to aid practitioners. For example, keeping up-to-date with the latest technologies, settings, practices and terminology can help practitioners with the ever-evolving digital world. Furthermore, small tips and tricks can be particularly useful when bridging the online and offline worlds. Such as placing a box of tissues and a glass of water near the camera within online therapy sessions mimicking the friendly yet also professional environment of a clinic. This information is particularly effective in bringing the discussion to life. Particularly within the digital age, where many concepts can appear rather abstract, these practical suggestions encourage the reader to think realistically about the role of mental health within the digital age.

The digital age is a new era providing opportunities for all individuals regardless of social and cultural barriers. Bauman and Rivers orchestrate a comprehensive discussion leaving the reader pensive yet innovative of opportunity. In their conclusion, they outline eight questions they believe require further consideration. These questions are embedded within sociological frameworks of our generation, digitization and awareness of impact. Encouraging theoretical discussion regarding mental health in the digital age is important in understanding its impact. What Bauman and Rivers achieve particularly successfully in this book is their ability to apply these theories to the realities of the online world. Anyone from a professor, to a clinician, to a parent can gleam tips and usefulness from this book.

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2. *Children and Mental Health Talk: Perspectives on Social Competence*

Author:	**Joyce Lamerichs, Susan J. Danby, Amanda Bateman & Stuart Ekberg (Editors)**
Publisher:	**Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK**
Year of Publication:	**2019**
ISBN:	**978-3-030-28425-1; eBook: 978-3-030-28426-8**

This is an intriguing and eclectic book and a valuable addition to literature with a focus on mental health in childhood. With the increased focus on mental health in childhood in national, international and global contexts, has come a rise in monographs and textbooks reflecting on mental health and wellbeing in childhood. The book by Lamerichs et al is a great addition to this, as it does two things that are often overlooked and ignored in literature with a focus on childhood. Firstly, the book centralises the voices of children, through a collection of documented research and professional practices and reflections examining the complex interplay of children's interactional practices within a range of institutional settings. Second, each chapter draws on and provides an overview of research methods (usually ethnomethodological and conversation analysis approaches) to provide insight into child mental health talk and how this interfaces with children's competence. Chapters are written by key researchers in the field and each chapter provides data, from the social organisation of echolalia in clinical encounters involving children with ASD, to child witnesses in police interviews and children's competence and wellbeing in sensitive research and psychological research interviews. As such, this book provides a useful contribution to the literature and research around children's social competence and wellbeing in mental health talk, by providing the reader with examples of data and practice (clinical encounters, non-clinical encounters and research encounters), as well as reflections on practice. Each chapter ends with a personal reflection of the author on their professional practice and learning in relation to the research undertaken and presented in the respective chapters. The book consists of eight chapters written by authors from across the globe (UK, Australia, Sweden, Japan, the Netherlands, USA, New Zealand). The first chapter provides useful insights into professional practices and children's social competence, offering an overview of extracts representing children's talk and perspectives, analysed through ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. Chapter two focuses on mental health interviews and assessments by General Practitioners in the UK, and the role of children's social competence therein. The chapter draws on data from 28 video-recorded clinical conversations between mental health practitioners, children, young people and their families, which are analysed using a conversation analysis approach. The analysis provides insight into the sophisticated and competent ways in which children and young people attend to clinical encounters and institutional environments, highlighting that social competence needs to be understood as something that is situated, contextualised and collaboratively achieved. The professional reflection that follows on from the chapter is

helpful in gaining insight into what the practitioner (author) learned from the encounter and analysis. Chapter three takes the reader into a slightly different direction, topic-wise, by discussing and analysing echolalia in clinical encounters involving children with ASD. As with the other chapters, data and methods are clearly discussed and presented and are mostly grounded in ethnomethodological and conversation analysis approaches. The professional reflection at the end of the chapter highlights the benefit of this type of research and how this can offer actual and practical examples of interactionally appropriate responses towards echolalic utterances. The next chapter, chapter four, focuses on past traumatic events (in this case earthquakes), viewing this through a lens of video material and conversation analysis of data from children about their experiences and perceptions. The data presented in chapter five revolves around interviews with children who have been witness to a sexual offense. Contextual information is presented here as well, such as in relation to the Dutch system (where the research has taken place), as well as the related approach and policies in relation to police interviews. Here some good examples are provided of centralising the voice of the child and taking children seriously. Moreover, ethics is addressed as well, which is a crucial element as part of the research process and safeguarding of children involved in (sensitive) research. Again, the professional reflection of the author at the end of the chapter is very useful as well – here the author reflects on their experience as a social worker and researcher. Chapter six sheds a light on children's wellbeing in research encounters, using (once again) an ethnomethodological approach towards conversation analysis. The focus here is on managing research encounters in a way that is ethical and sensitive to the child's wellbeing. The professional reflection at the end of the chapter provides insight into the research and learning process of the author as teacher. Some of this is taken further in chapter seven, with an analysis of how children manage normality and difference in talk about traumatic events. Chapter seven highlights that eliciting children's perspectives on how they have experienced a traumatic occurrence and inviting them to do so in their own words, may be met with some unforeseen challenges, such as the tendency of children to resist the topical agenda. Key points and facts are pulled together in chapter eight. Overall, the chapters in the book offer insight into how children handle themselves in interactional encounters with adults and other children. The children in the various chapters presented in this book show agency through their nuanced and detailed accounts of experiences, which are well-presented and discussed, making this book a must-have for academics as well as students in the field of childhood studies and wellbeing.

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3. *Data in Society: Challenging Statistics in an Age of Globalisation*

This is a book that all social scientists should read, even if their expertise lies in qualitative research methods. As researchers and educators, most of us have at some point taken account of statistical data on such subjects as childhood obesity, the incidence of mental health disorders, the extent of child poverty, academic achievement rates in children from different social backgrounds, the effectiveness of social or educational interventions in schools, and many other topics in our fields of interest. This book is the third in a series initiated by the Radical Statistics Group, an independent network which supports its members in critical analysis of statistics and research. The editors' mission is to reveal how social statistics are constructed and controlled in ways that serve the powerful in society. The editors, Jeff Evans, Sally Ruane and Humphrey Southall, have collaborated with a group of authors in order to demonstrate, in a range of contexts, the extent to which governments mislead us through their manipulation of data for their own purposes. The book also covers the release of the Panama Papers in 2016 and the Paradise Papers in 2017, each of which demonstrated the tax avoidance practices of both individuals and corporations (see chapter 17). Chapters 15 (focussed on the UK) and 25 (focussed on Australia) show the extent to which pay has fallen below a living wage and document the growth in "casualised" employment and the "gig economy" with the consequent erosions of employees' rights and implications for the wellbeing of children and families. Additionally, the editors point out that reductions in UK government spending since 2010 on the National Health Service and Social Services are masked by the manipulation of statistics in order to support the argument from politicians that the funding for such services is "protected".

The editors begin by outlining the major challenges that face statisticians today. Traditionally statistical research was based on data gathered by governments or multinational agencies and made available to researchers and the general public. Now more and more data are in private hands (generally commercial) and too much power has been given to corporations like Facebook and Google. They also note the growing reluctance of people to complete scientific surveys while at the same time they consciously or unwittingly post vast amounts of personal information about themselves online. Statisticians' training in the use of representative samples is also threatened by "data analytics" (Chapter 3) and social media data (Chapter 4) where datasets may well be biased. A major concern is that the application of automated techniques to unrepresentative data can yield utterly false results.

They propose that there is a growing antipathy towards statistics and a widespread suspicion of "experts" evident in the UK and US where scientific evidence is too often dismissed as "fake news" and priority is given to intuition and personal experiences rather than hard evidence. For example, the section about inequalities in health and wellbeing covers health divides, the measurement of social wellbeing, health policy research and the "phoney information war" between young and old. (chap 22). Young people today face bleaker prospects than their parents did when young, through such factors as the rising cost of rent, house prices, student loan repayment, cuts in social and health services for families. Some politicians, however, use the argument of "intergenerational unfairness" to legitimise the replacement of state welfare by private, commercial provision. Yet, argue the statisticians in this book, the evidence from statistical analysis is that simply making older people poorer will not help the young,

The book is divided into six parts, each one introduced by the editors with a thoughtful and informed commentary to guide the reader through the argument. Witty cartoons illuminate each section. Part I compares traditional ways of doing statistics with the enormous expansion of data held about us today and the implications of this for society at large. Part II considers the consequences of a globalised world and the impact of large-scale movement of knowledge and information, as well as the challenge of applying data collection methods developed in high-income countries to low-income contexts. Parts III and IV review changes in the economy and in how the State functions. For example, the chapters in this section document such changes as reductions in health and social service provision, changes in the allocation of resources through taxation and public spending, and a shifting boundary between the private and the public sectors. Part V addresses inequalities in health and wellbeing in infancy and childhood, adolescence, and middle to late life. Here the authors explore the challenges associated with the measurement of preventable social differences in physical and mental health and stress the importance of large representative samples of the population that include vulnerable people and children whose voices are often not heard. The authors also indicate life-span aspects associated with gender, social class and ethnicity. Part VI gives examples of progressive responses from statisticians and others to a range of challenges, not least the fact that the general public is often misinformed on key issues in the community and in society at large. Finally, the Epilogue considers the way forward.

The hope of the authors in this book is to empower and inform their readers and ultimately to enable them, as responsible citizens, to develop types of action appropriate to the contexts where they live and work. As Danny Dorling explains in his foreword, "statistics used well can be the weapon of the otherwise unheard, unseen, ignored."

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4. *Lowborn: Growing Up, Getting Away and Returning to Britain's Poorest Towns*

Author:	**Kerry Hudson**
Publisher:	**Chatto & Windus, London, UK**
Year of Publication:	**2019**
ISBN:	**978-1-7847-4245-4**

The statistics paint a stark picture. One-fifth of UK families live in poverty. Two-thirds of children living in poverty are in working families where the wages, despite long hours of work, are insufficient to support payment of rent, heating and food bills. The UK Government's most recent poverty figures show that more than 4 million children are growing up in poverty, a rise of 500,000 over five years. Between April 2018 and March 2019, the Trussell Trust distributed a record 1.6 million food bank parcels in the UK.

The outcomes for children living in poverty are serious with a high risk of poorer mental health, wellbeing and physical health, underachievement at school, and experience of bullying and stigma at school. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) publication Growing up in poverty detrimental to children's friendships and family life (https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/growing-poverty-detrimental-children's-friendships-and-family-life) found that children who have experienced poverty, particularly persistent poverty, are:

- More likely to be solitary. More than a third of children in persistent poverty were described as tending to play alone, compared to a quarter of children who have never experienced poverty.

- Three times as likely to fall out with their friends 'most days' (9% of children in persistent poverty compared to 3% of those who had never experienced poverty).

- Four times more likely to fight with or bully other children (16% of those in persistent poverty, compared to 4% of those who had never been poor). They are also more than twice as likely to report being bullied frequently themselves (12% compared to 5% of the never poor).

- Less likely to talk to their friends about their worries (34% of those in persistent poverty, compared to 43% of those never poor).

- More likely to spend time with their friends outside school. Half of children (50%) in persistent poverty say they see their friends outside school most days, compared with a third (35%) of children who had never been in poverty.

In Lowborn, Kerry Hudson gives the inside picture. She spent her entire childhood and adolescence in dire poverty. This book vividly describes her exploration of the places where she grew up - Aberdeen, Liverpool, Canterbury, Airdrie, North Shields, Coatbridge, Great Yarmouth and Hetton-le-Hole - to which she returned as an adult. As a child, she was constantly on the move with her single mother, living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and council flats, spending two periods in foster care, experiencing emotional and

sexual abuse; her family was blighted by poverty but also by alcoholism, mental illness and abuse which emerged down the generations; she attended nine primary schools and five secondary schools. Some members of her family, despite the great difficulties, created good lives for themselves and their own families, against all the odds. Incredibly, through her own giftedness, determination and resilience, Kerry Hudson became a prize-winning novelist. But here she documents her struggle and makes a powerful plea for the many children who are left behind. In her words (p. 2), "True poverty is all-encompassing, grinding, brutal and often dehumanising. I think it goes without saying that the gnawing shame and fear of poverty is not something I have ever missed, particularly since I frequently still experience its aftershocks."

The book shifts in time from her memories of childhood in the 1980s to her return in 2017 and 2018 to the places where she had lived. Unfortunately, Kerry Hudson discovered that many of the difficulties are still very much alive in the districts of her childhood. Her overall message is to challenge the myth that poverty is in some way the fault of those who are impoverished and that poverty is a personal choice or failing. She argues powerfully that a succession of hostile governments took from those who could least afford it while offering tax cuts to the rich and powerful. All the evidence indicates the dreadful impact that poverty has on children and the disturbing fact that poverty is passed down through generations. By writing this book, Kerry Hudson freed herself to an extent from the shame and fear that was predominant during her childhood, but she never forgot that children today are going through the same emotional and physical pain as she did.

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5. *College Students' Experiences of Power and Marginality: Sharing Spaces and Negotiating Differences*

This book, edited by Elizabeth M. Lee and Chaise LaDousa, is a collection of empirical studies on the Higher Education experiences of underrepresented students on American campuses. It is a particularly relevant read in a global context of increasing access and participation to Higher Education, as traditionally White and upper/middle-class spaces, by students from diverse backgrounds. In this context, the book emphasises the role of Higher Education as contributing to both social mobility and social reproduction, as this increased access and participation coincide with continued patterns of inequality in retention, graduation and experience.

Apprehended from the perspective of the non-traditional students themselves, the studies in this edited collection use a multiplicity of qualitative research methodologies and methods to capture the micro-interactional basis of inequality. This allows for 'diversity' to be considered and presented as multifaceted and contradictory: in its meanings and implications, in its benefits and its constraints and in the complex ways racial, class, and sexual identities intersect. By addressing and challenging the assumptions too commonly made over categories of students, the book will be of particular interest to all those working with, teaching and supporting students.

A key strength of this edited collection is the focus on agency, speaking back to traditional representations of non-traditional students as victims/disadvantaged. The authors explore the students' experiences with power and marginality as feelings of isolation and difference, for example, as embodied in the ways they speak and dress, and as strategies they deploy to find support and occupy space. As a result, the book gives unique insights into the day-to-day lives of under-represented students, that administrators and policymakers will find particularly useful in devising student support and improving 'campus climate'.

The book is made of two parts, in addition to the editors' introduction. The first part of the book, entitled 'Identities in Practice', includes four studies investigating the ramifications of grouping students along simplified categories of race/class/sexuality. In Chapter 1, Truong et al. use autoethnography to explore the intersections of race and class and the tensions that arise from being both a 'low-income' and an 'Asian American' student. In Chapter 2, Nenga et al. unpack the many strategies students grouped as 'Hispanic' deploy to make friends and join extracurricular activities on campus. In Chapter 3, Eisen explores the normalization of Whiteness in Higher Education, with White spaces remaining unnamed and invisible and 'counterspaces' -used by diverse students as protection from microaggressions- perceived by the White

majority as self-segregation and refusal to assimilate. In Chapter 4, McCabe investigates students' preferences for racial diversity or racial solidarity in their friendship choices, and highlight how both strategies are conducive to academic and social success. These studies expose the ways sorting non-traditional students into broad categories based on race/class/sexuality, leads to inadequate support provision, feelings of discomfort and experiences of stereotyping for the students.

The second part of the book is entitled 'Institutional Interactions Around Power and Marginality' and adopts an "institutional lens to marginalization" (p.5), shedding light on the inequalities between and within Higher Education institutions. In Chapter 5, Jack compares the diverse educational trajectories among low-income students - more specifically between 'enrichment' and 'extraction' programmes. He highlights how the students who attended private/elite secondary schooling through 'extraction programmes' find it easier to crisscross socioeconomic and racial boundaries, in turn affecting their sense of belonging and ability to accumulate social and cultural capitals in Higher Education. Hurst and Warnock in Chapter 6 investigate the relations between discourses of mobility and classed interests, demonstrating how working-class students adhering to a narrative of individual achievement are more likely to be recognised and awarded institutional support, than students using a counternarrative of class solidarity. In Chapter 7, Stuber examines the on-campus participation of first-generation working-class students, comparing a small elite institution to a larger, more diverse one. In Chapter 8, Jensen and Lewis investigate a group of students' out-of-class experiences and perceptions as they complete academic work. In Chapter 9, Ray and Best compare the (dis)advantages experienced by students in Black and White fraternities, demonstrating how university standards maintain a racial hierarchy on campus. In Chapter 10, Lee and LaDousa shed light on the ways 'being out' can constrain the engagement of LGBTQ students on campus. Grouped together, the second part of the book emphasizes the role of educational providers in shaping student experience, through the support and spaces given to students and devising who is entitled to and access these provision.

In conclusion, this edited collection explores numerous aspects of university student experience, including the friendships students form, the extracurriculars they engage with, the places they (dis)occupy, demonstrating their centrality to learner identity and success. The book highlights formal and informal sources of support as valuable sources of social and cultural capitals, affecting students' sense of belonging and subsequent retention. Yet, the authors of the book also emphasize campuses as spaces students inhabit unequally: while some students feel comfortable in dominant spaces, many non-traditional students retreat in 'counterspaces' or in the confine of their rooms. As student bodies are becoming more diverse, the authors in this collection raise crucial questions regarding the ways universities 'do' diversity and the implications of current diversity policies, asking who is (not) currently benefitting from diversity on campus, and institutions' role in supporting underrepresented students and/or reinforcing the status quo.

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6. *Reconstructing Agency in Developmental and Educational Psychology: Inclusive Systems as Concentric Space*

In this innovative, scholarly book, Paul Downes proposes a different conception of development that depends on space rather than time – in his words "a spatial-phenomenology of concentric and diametric structured experience." Concentric spatial models, such as the one proposed by Bronfenbrenner, offer insights into the broader family, community, social and cultural systems within which children change and grow, while diametric spatial systems are to be found in such mirror-image inverted symmetries as above/below, us/them, good/bad.

Paul Downes' central idea is that the transition between concentric and diametric spatial systems offers a new paradigm for understanding agency in developmental and educational psychology. He is not pitting time against space, however. Rather, he explores human development in terms of spatial movements or transitions whether at individual level or in the context of wider systems.

He acknowledges that psychologists in different domains of the field have long concerned themselves with space. Piaget recognised the constructed dimension to Euclidean space in the individual child's experience. Vygotsky, taking account of the child's culture and the tools and aids that exist within that culture, proposed "the zone of proximal development (ZPD)" as a space that enhances children's and adults' engagement in learning". Bruner built on these ideas to develop the concept of "scaffolding" as a structure that enables children to climb to a higher level of understanding and recommended a "spiral curriculum" to consolidate learning. Inspired by these great thinkers, many psychologists and educators have examined spatial thinking in pre-schoolers' sensori-motor play as well as the links between language and spatial cognition in young children; others have investigated children's evolving constructions of physical space (for example, their understanding that the earth is round and not flat); still others have examined "the world of the imagination" in children's stories and in their socio-dramatic play; psychotherapists have explored "the space between" in order to understand interpersonal relationships more deeply.

However, Downes argues, the power of space rather than time as a mode of experience and a way of framing experience has only been partially investigated by developmental and educational psychologists, in contrast to thinkers from other disciplines, such as philosophy and anthropology. He has drawn inspiration from Bronfenbrenner's systemic model of development which is always diagrammatically represented as a set of nested concentric circles ranging from micro relationships in the child's immediate setting through meso-

levels, exo-levels and macro-levels, each embedded within the other like Russian dolls. As Downes indicates, this is more than an illustration or even a metaphor. Rather, it is potentially a fundamental insight into space itself. This is crucial, he argues, if we are truly to understand cultural diversity and, more specifically, agency in developmental and educational psychology. To take Bronfenbrenner's ideas further, Paul Downes proposes a sense of movement at whatever system level is being described. To Downes it is the interactive feature between concentric and diametric spatial systems that offers "potential agential dynamism" in contrast to Bronfenbrenner's rather static model.

Paul Downes gives illuminating examples of his theory in action to explore ways of understanding important issues, such as the promotion of resilience in the face of adversity, the encouragement of young people to express their voice on things that matter to them, the understanding of young people's mental health difficulties, the unravelling of the factors that influence young people's decision to drop out of school early and the role of social support services in and around schools in challenging what he calls "system blockage". He also examines school bullying where the fracturing of concentric relational spaces of trust leads to systems of diametric oppositional relations and argues that a challenge to diametric space is needed to combine a common system response for bullying prevention.

On first reading, Paul Downes' language can be heavy and even, at times, repetitive. However, once you get used to this, the ideas challenge you to think about shifting spatial conditions and their impact on agency, so it is worth persevering. His illustrative examples really help you to understand the theory and encourage you to apply his thinking to the aspects of children development and education that are of specific interest to you. This is a valuable resource for academics, researchers and post-graduate students of psychology, sociology, education, anthropology and psychotherapy.

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