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A CONSIDERATION OF CHILDREN AS A SOCIAL GROUP
LIABLE TO OPPRESSION

by

Frances E. Hill

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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A CONSIDERATION OF CHILDREN AS A SOCIAL GROUP LIABLE TO OPPRESSION

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Abstract

In the world today, children experience various forms of social injustice and human rights violations such as poverty, forced labour, torture and even death. This thesis builds an argument based upon Iris Marion Young's conception of social groups that children are also a social group in ways similar to other groups claiming to be oppressed. Using Young's definition of oppression, this thesis further establishes that children experience oppression in the forms of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. It examines the implications for adults of the oppression of children, especially for teachers and parents and offers a rationale and suggestions wherein such conditions can be mitigated or removed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Father

It's not time
To make a change
Just relax. Take it easy.
You're still young
That's your fault
There's so much you have to know
Find a girl. Settle down.
If you want you can marry.
Look at me. I am old.
But I'm happy.
I was once like you are now and
I know that it's not easy to be calm.
When you found something going on.
But take your time.
Think a lot.
Think of everything you've got.
For you'll still be here tomorrow
But your dreams may not

Son

How can I try to explain
When I do he turns away again
It's always been the same
Same old story
From the moment I could talk
I was ordered to listen
Now there's a way
And I know I have to go away
I have to go away

'Father and Son' (Cat Stevens) Published by Cat Music Ltd.® 1970 Island Records Ltd.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.............................................................................................................................................................................. 1

**Children as a Social Group**.................................................................................................................................................... 12
  Collectives vs. Social Groups.................................................................................................................................................. 12
  Children as a Social Group..................................................................................................................................................... 16
    First Criterion...................................................................................................................................................................... 16
    Second Criterion................................................................................................................................................................. 36
    *Thrownness*...................................................................................................................................................................... 36
    *Boundedness*...................................................................................................................................................................... 41
  Summary.................................................................................................................................................................................. 47

**Children as Oppressed**.......................................................................................................................................................... 49
  Exploitation........................................................................................................................................................................... 50
  Marginalization.................................................................................................................................................................... 56
  Powerlessness.......................................................................................................................................................................... 63
  Cultural Imperialism............................................................................................................................................................... 67
  Violence.................................................................................................................................................................................. 70

**Implications**........................................................................................................................................................................... 73
  Can conditions of oppression be avoided for children?....................................................................................................... 74
  Can conditions of oppression for children be eased?........................................................................................................... 88

**Conclusion**............................................................................................................................................................................. 93

Appendix.................................................................................................................................................................................... 96

Bibliography.................................................................................................................................................................................. 97
INTRODUCTION

Children are vulnerable. Daily the media are rife with stories and reports of children experiencing violence and other forms of abuse at the hands of their entrusted caregivers. There are regular accounts given of children suffering from the effects of shortages of food and shelter within a variety of countries, some of which have great economic wealth. The UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child was developed because children were not being afforded their basic human rights for survival. In his book, *The UN Convention and Children’s Rights in the UK*, Peter Newell sites Barbara Kahan, former chair of the National Children’s Bureau in the United Kingdom. She hints that such problems are deeply rooted in relations between children and adults and writes, “All too often their (children’s) needs and interests are submerged by the concerns of adults, whether professionals or parents.”¹

Children are silenced. Reports aimed at eliminating child abuse, legislation aimed at welfare system improvements, and media portrayals of children’s suffering all seem to have had one significant omission: The real and expressed voice of the child is mute. Well, there has been one notable exception. Back in May of 1996 the U.S. Depart of Labour reported on their Internet Web site that they had hosted Craig Kielberger, the 12 year old child labour activist from Canada. He appeared in Washington to testify before Congress and met with a variety of

government officials to discuss the problem of child labour around the world. What is striking about this exception is that it has caught the imagination of the media and the politicians that someone so young could articulate so effectively the issues of child labour. However, there is a sense that he is no ordinary young man and that is perhaps why adult attention was caught. For example, Deputy Under Secretary for International Affairs, Jack Otero, expressed this feeling when he said, “In my more than 25 years in international affairs here at DOL and in the labor movement, I have met innumerable kings, queens, prime ministers and presidents. But I have never met anyone as engaging, warm and refreshing as Craig.” But most of the voices of children are not exceptional.

Consider all the famines covered by the television media in the past decade. Rarely is heard a direct account from a child. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers state that this is not accidental. We hear accounts of children’s suffering as expressed through the lens of journalists. In family law cases the child’s viewpoint is provided through legal guardians, adults trained in the law. Changes in educational goals and pedagogy that directly affect children are provided through adult political and educational experts. Rationalizations are often provided on paternalistic grounds, but often such paternalism masks problems which are set up in the relations between adults and children.

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It could be asked of myself, 'Who are you to ask such questions and point moral fingers?' That is a fair question as I am an adult and I am writing without the inclusion of the child’s voice. I am, however, writing about its exclusion. I am writing as the 'subject' in this relationship that sets up children as 'other'. I write because the boundaries between child and adult are frequently blurred for me and this messy vision has necessitated questions of clarification.

I bring to this discussion what Stainton Rogers would call the 'adult gaze'. They borrow this term 'gaze' from Foucault. It refers to his notion of how a text is made and read. The text is seen as a cultural product with the author and reader as vehicles for cultural construction. How a text is read is a culturally mediated activity. As the text is given a reading it comes with a person’s or group’s world view. Foucault’s notion gave the term 'gaze’ local, contingent, and shifting characteristics. An 'adult gaze’ means the lens or world view that adults would use to read the text. I believe that my own 'gaze', although unique and particular, is far from being purely 'adult'. I believe that I still carry with me my membership within childhood in a way few other adults do. This connection to smaller human beings has enabled me to see the relatedness between adults and children in such a way that calls into question the moral certainty that society has about the value of this arrangement.

To explain: I was raised as the eldest of eleven children. I was also closer in age to my parents than I was to my youngest brother. He was born after I left home but was raised with all of our other siblings and with the same relational understandings. Although my brother was only a couple of years older than my own daughter, he called me by my diminutive and related to me as
any of my other siblings did. When we gathered as a family I saw myself as one of many children to my parents and as an adult to my own children despite this overlapping experience in the generations created by my brother and daughter’s proximity in age. This had the time-stretching effect for me of reinforcing my sameness as a child to children much younger than I, while I was operating as a member of adult groups concurrently.

As I was the eldest, it was stated and expected by my parents that I “set a good example” for my siblings, and because I was female, I was required to assist my mother in a variety of ways with many of the domestic tasks. Needless to say, some of my energy went into resisting. I grew up understanding that assuming responsibility was a double-edged sword. With responsibility not only came freedom but also accountability, and there was enough of a group affinity for me with the others to see the value in sharing, not only responsibility (the work), but also the accountability (the blame). Rarely did this accountability take the form of praise. My father had been a senior corporate executive and expected ‘bottom line’ results. He often referred to himself as a ‘benevolent dictator’ (similar to Pat Conroy’s character, the Great Santini\(^4\)). I was the eldest and was ultimately accountable for the actions of all of us children. I learned how to negotiate sharing early. These understandings of sharing responsibility, freedom and accountability carried over into my adult roles as parent and educator.

While there are many elements of my own childhood I claim to still remember and employ consciously in my interactions with children, conversely, many memories of childhood I have

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forgotten. Some injustices that I experienced as a child, I have kept alive and tried not to repeat in my adult life, while other experiences may have been too painful for me to maintain in my consciousness or I simply never experienced as hurtful. To understand why adults forget certain aspects of their own childhood may account, in part, for why children are ignored.

Children are ignored. In discussions of differences, detailed under various ‘isms’ such as racism, sexism, etc., the critical literature is silent on the topic of children. Why would this be? Surely there are sufficient examples of social injustice in the daily lives of children to consider such similar issues which are raised in other discussions of gender, ethnicity and ability. But part of the reason that this does not occur is that people find it difficult to see and understand the world from the standpoint of another. For example, it is difficult for me to understand the social pressures and expectations that men experience since I, as a woman, do not experience this same set. Likewise it is difficult for me, an adult, to remember how I felt as a child and it seems that human consciousness has a way of burying or forgetting the more painful events one experiences in order to heal and continue to move forward in life. It is understandable that the difficulties of another are not at the forefront of one’s own consciousness since part of our effort to exist day to day is to forget even our own experiences.

Another part of the reason that writers fail to take into account the needs and conditions of others is that one’s own life, when experienced in a positive and enjoyable way, is made positive and enjoyable through the efforts of others. If we are attempting to enjoy a little of the good life and suppress our memories of the bad times, then it is not necessarily in our interests to explore fully
how the good life is being experienced by us. There is an inherent risk that such introspection may jeopardize our enjoyment of the good life. For example, if my parental responsibilities are being met by compulsory schooling, not only could my inspection of the nature of compulsory schooling possibly jeopardize a significant means by which I fulfil my parental responsibilities, but I may have to expend significant energy to ensure these responsibilities are met in other ways and I already have committed my energies to other priorities.

Adults may have a further reason for ignoring a problem of ageism for children. In our daily lives where existence continues to be a struggle in all cultures, one must establish priorities to which one’s limited energies are allocated. Even if we recognize that children are experiencing forms of social injustice, we can at least place this problem lower on the list of adult priorities, because we believe that the conditions children experience will eventually go away. If they are oppressed, children will, if they survive, inevitably grow out of the condition.

If we can claim that children are vulnerable, silenced and ignored, it may be that a power imbalance is being experienced by them. These observations then prompt the question, ‘Are our considerations of children different from our considerations of other groups in society?’ Iris Young discusses such power imbalance as disabling constraints of oppression and domination. It is from Young’s conception of injustice that I would examine the question ‘In what sense do children constitute a particular kind of collectivity (which Young describes as a ‘social group’) liable to oppression?’
For reasons I have outlined, children may have been overlooked or not recognized as a 'group' in which others claim social group status. As Young says,

Social groups of this sort are not simply collections of people, for they are more fundamentally intertwined with the identities of the people described as belonging to them. They are a specific kind of collectivity, with specific consequences for how people understand one another and themselves.5

Part of the problem upon which I hope to shed more light is that children are not seen as a group in relation to adults and the literature is unlikely to come from adults for reasons I have just outlined. The literature is also unlikely to come from children. Along with the literacy barriers that many children experience, there is also the inability by adults to recognize and value any writing from children. As Gareth Matthews writes about the problem of valuing children's art, the valuing has to come from the other, and this 'other' is the adult.6

Young explicitly offers her analysis as "a means of refuting some people’s belief that their group is oppressed when it is not, as well as a means of persuading others that a group is oppressed when they doubt it."7 Thus I find it particularly useful for exploring the status of children. In Part 1 I will examine Young's conception of 'social group'. The term social group can be used rather broadly and has come to mean different things to different people. Young has defined this term to clarify the differences between social groups and other collectivities. Defining social

7 Young, I., p. 64, op.cit.
group in this way has enabled Young to examine common claims of oppression made by such
groups as women and visible minorities. Since children are not referenced by example in
Young’s work, it is important to examine what constitutes a social group to see whether
‘children’ qualify.

In Part II I will explore Young’s conception of oppression. Young writes, “[The five faces of
oppression]... function as criteria for determining whether individuals and groups are oppressed,
rather than as a full theory of oppression.”8 Throughout this section I will attempt to clarify the
areas in which there are not legitimate justifications for maintaining the power imbalances that
give rise to conditions of oppression for children and perhaps to narrow the scope for future
writers on legitimate justifications. I have found Iris Young’s writing on ‘social groups’ to be a
helpful means by which a collective of persons can begin to examine the societal structures that
are working, often in hidden ways, in people’s everyday lives. Young’s work also develops
‘oppression’ as a structural concept which works relationally between groups. Through this
analysis one is better able to view oneself as connected to the structures that lock one group into
a position of domination over another and to see oppression, not as an “...evil perpetrated by
Others”9 but as a system of domination in which some groups derive benefit at the expense of
another. In this way Young’s analysis of oppression moves away from the paradigm of
consciousness and intentionality. “The conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to
maintaining and reproducing oppression, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or

8 ibid., p.64.
9Young, I., p. 41, op.cit.
living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression.”

This effort at exposing a particular expression of a system of oppression is intended to be helpful. It is from my experiences as sister, mother, and teacher that I have seen children and adults are often caught in 'no-win' situations. Too often we (adults) say that children are too young to engage in certain activities and perform certain tasks, yet we are disappointed when they are not held accountable for actions or behaviours that contravene adult-imposed restrictions. Conversely, children who freely choose to behave and act in certain ways are also given immunity to being held responsible. Are they too young or are they not too young? The answer seems to depend often on what suits adults’ needs.

Having established the case in Parts I and II for considering children as an oppressed group, in Part III I will explore the implications for both adults and children who are related by conditions of domination and oppression. It is my hope that adults will be more conscious of the power imbalances that exist between themselves and children and will consciously work out better arrangements within the arenas in which they can create an improved equilibrium.

I will refer to M. Minow’s work Making All the Difference and attempt to uncloak the hidden assumptions underlying the ‘dilemma of difference’ as it relates to children and adults. Martha Minow writes,

\[^{10}\text{ibid. p. 42.}\]
I believe we make a mistake when we assume that the categories we use for analysis just exist and simply sort out our experiences, perceptions, and problems through them. When we identify one thing as like the others, we are not merely classifying the world; we are investing particular classifications with consequences and positioning ourselves in relation to those meanings. When we identify one thing as unlike the others, we are dividing the world; we use language to exclude, to distinguish—to discriminate. This last word may be the one that most recognizably raises the issues about which I worry.11

Like Minow I worry also about classifications which express and implement prejudice and ageism. In particular, theories of developmentalism are used as an example of descriptions of differences that cloak power imbalances and mask the relational difficulties which exist between adults and children. In some instances, these difficulties constitute forms of oppression for children.

By this move to uncloak hidden assumptions, I also reveal myself and my part in this system of oppression. I have already identified myself as an adult, parent, and educator. I have already suggested that I, myself, am implicated in the suggestion that children are oppressed and dominated. That could mean that I am an oppressor or at least complicit in a system of oppression. This realization does not sit well, particularly as I have often believed that I, too, have been oppressed or part of a group that experiences opposition. Have I not learned anything from my own claims of oppression that would prevent me from perpetrating similar offenses? Surely when it comes to children there are legitimate justifications that must hold when it comes

to exercising the adult will over the child's. Young's analysis of oppression moves away from the paradigm of consciousness and intentionality and assists in understanding the nature of oppression and how it works separate from traditional understandings of tyranny.
**CHILDREN as a SOCIAL GROUP?**

**Collectivities vs. Social Groups**

Can children be considered as a social group? Not only is the term ‘social group’ subject to broad interpretation in our everyday use of language, but there are a variety of ways people can be grouped. Young shapes her conception of a social group within her larger analysis of social injustice. In this context Young explicates oppression as a condition of social groups, using a conception broader in scope than that found in traditional analysis of oppression. Previous notions of oppression were understood to be the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group. Oppression as an expression of social injustice is something that happens between relational groups of a certain kind. Her conception aids our understandings of how people understand one another and themselves when situated within conditions of oppression.

To focus attention on groups of the sort liable to oppression, Young contrasts them to other, different kinds of collectivities. Associations are one kind and aggregates are another. These collectivities are different from social groups in several ways.

Groups of individuals who form associations come together, usually voluntarily, as “already formed persons” and set up rules and roles in formal institutions. An example of an association is my local school Parent Association. When my child entered school I was invited to join the school’s Parent Association. While a member, I was involved with other members in drafting the association’s constitution which was voted by the members to be binding on all. The
formation of this and other associations is done by and for the members for purposes known and developed by them.

Aggregates are another kind of collectivity. They differ from associations in that individuals who join associations are aware of their membership in the group because the act of ‘joining’ was intentional. Awareness of one’s membership is not a feature of aggregates. There is no ‘joining’ of aggregates in the way in which one joins an association. “Aggregates are relatively arbitrary groupings, collections of individuals who are put together into one category for episodic, instrumental reasons, reasons that can change infinitely.”¹² For example, I may not be aware that Revenue Canada has decided to collect information on groups of people who have the same characteristics of geography and earnings. For Revenue Canada this may be a one-time undertaking to examine whether or not there are any correlations between these two characteristics. When the study has been completed, my membership in this group of ‘Newmarket income earners’ will cease. The formation of aggregates is often short term and has a purpose that may well be unknown to most of the people who would be members of this type of collectivity. Thus the forming of the aggregate can be done to the members by non-members for purposes unknown to the members.

Members of associations can separate from the group. Members of aggregates cannot choose to separate from the group but can find themselves terminated from a group. Membership in both

of these collectivities can change, but rarely does such change have significant upheavals in the individual’s identity. As Young explains, this is due to the formation of the individual’s identity prior to group membership and not by membership in the group.

Aggregates and associations exist independently of any other aggregate or association. Their existence is not contingent upon another group’s existence. The Canadian Auto Association, for example, requires no other group for it to be constituted and in force. This is different from social groups whose existence comes into being in relation to another group. The CAA exists independently of any other collectivity. I can choose to join and end my membership or the CAA can terminate my membership despite my wishes to remain as a member. Similarly my membership in the ‘Newmarket income earners’ ended long before I was aware that I had been a member. Both collectivities do not require any other group for their continued existence. These groups do not exist in relation to any other group.

In contrast to both aggregates and associations, what Young is calling ‘social groups’ exist only in relation with at least one other group. If one group dissolves, so would the other. Conversely, a social group arises in relation to one other group. Young makes this point with her reference to the American Indian Group. “The encounter with other American Indians created an awareness of difference; the others were named as a group, and the first group came to see themselves as a group.”¹³

¹³Young, l., p. 43, op.cit.
In aggregates and associations the identity of the member is formed prior to the membership. This also is an essential difference between other kinds of collectivities and Young’s conception of a social group. In the latter, the individual’s identity is partly formed by group membership and affinity.

In summary, aggregates are made up of individuals who are already formed in their individual identities, who are not necessarily aware that they are so constituted and whose membership can change with little impact on the member’s identity. Associations are also made up of individuals whose identities are already formed and who are aware of their membership. These groups are “methodologically individualist concepts.” By this Young means that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. Using the CAA example, I became a member of this group when my car began to deteriorate. I did choose to join this association -- unlike my membership to Caucasians into which I was born and became an automatic member. This inherited membership bestowed certain elements of my identity and constituted a significant part of who I am in relation to those who are not white. The CAA does not alter my identity in any significant way and, likewise, leaving the CAA did not create any significant identity upheaval.

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14Young, I., p. 43, op.cit.
Children as a Social Group

The question I wish to address is, 'Can children be considered as a social group in this special sense of a 'group'?' To answer this question adequately it will be necessary to establish that children form the kind of collectivity that is not like associations and aggregates and then to show how they do constitute a social group.

From Young's conception of social groups I have isolated two criteria for qualifying a collectivity as a social group. First, social groups are relational in their difference at least to one other correlate social group. Second, social groups must partly form the identity of the members. To satisfy these criteria it must be shown that children exist only in relation to adults and that childhood itself partly constitutes the identity of children.

First Criterion

In order for children to be a social group they must be seen in relation to at least one other group. This relatedness must be examined closely from several standpoints. Who is the 'other' group? What is the nature of the relatedness of the groups? And how is this relatedness supported?

Children today are seen in relation to adults and must be differentiated from adults. This was not always the case. There is some dispute as to when 'children' were invented.
Aries asserts that the reason for the obscurity of children within traditional historical practices is that prior to the sixteenth century childhood as a separate life-stage did not exist.\textsuperscript{15} William Kessen asserts that different cultures have invented different children. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers, however, dispute Aries’ claim that childhood was invented because their polytextual deconstruction theory argues that such an ‘invention of childhood’ is only one account of childhood.

Different accounts of childhood are likely to co-exist wherever a society has the time to recount them.... True, these conditions were defined by doing (e.g. a child might be a servant) rather than by psychologized inner essences (such as a state of concrete operational thought). But such reconstructions (and there have been several) do not permit us to identify any singular historical or cultural point of ‘invention’.\textsuperscript{16}

What is important for our considerations is not whether or not Aries is wrong and Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers are right or vice versa. What matters is that in both claims children are being recognized, grouped, viewed or ‘gazed upon’ as others by these adults and other historical adults. At various points in time in the past children as a social group came into existence as adults encountered them and created an awareness of difference.

Social groups which are relationally dependent upon each other must be understood in terms of the differences between them. However, it is a certain kind of difference which marks their relatedness. Applebaum and Boyd write that the nature of this relevant difference is normative


\textsuperscript{16}Stainton Rogers, R.\&W., p.65, op.cit.
and connotes hierarchy. They write,

Young, ... while alerting us to the need to focus on the relationship between groups, also underscores the nature of the relevant difference upon which such a relationship depends. The independence of groups which Young rejects, we believe, is not merely an acknowledgment of empirical difference, but rather, is based upon the realization that difference is normative and connotes hierarchy. Because the concept of difference regarding social groups will always "perform the dual function of implicitly evaluating as 'inferior' what they purport to be describing as 'different' " (Rothenberg, 1990, p.47), one social group cannot be understood without understanding another (the norm against which it is evaluated).

This means that the ways in which social groups are related are characterized by certain standards of difference which have an implied ranking to them. Applebaum and Boyd also note this implied ranking as they refer to this quote from Young, "...for every oppressed group there is a group that is privileged in relation to that group." If one social group is inferior the other related group is superior, and if one social group is privileged the other related social group is disadvantaged.

If children and adults have an implied ranking between them, then it could also be suggested that children are constrained and defined in their relatedness to adults by an implied norm. If this is true, what might it be? To answer this question it may be helpful to consider a well recognized theory of cognitive development. According to Piaget, children think in stages and progress in their thinking from one stage to another. Children must experience and pass through each stage

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18 Young, L., (1990) op.cit., p. 42.
and can be recognized as 'at' a certain stage in their cognitive development. Implied by stages of development are notions of difference.

Each stage of development is written and described in such a way as to hide the fact that there is one ultimate ideal or norm. For example, consider this excerpt from by D.F. Bjorklund’s book, *Children’s Thinking*. This text is used as reference material in university courses on human development and as teacher training course bibliography.

The process of true imitation begun during substage 4 continues in substage 5 (12 to 18 months). Piaget contended that imitation becomes more systematic and exact at this time. It becomes more deliberate and is more accommodative to the model than at previous substages. Nevertheless, the differences between imitation in substage 4 and in substage 5 are ones of degree rather than kind.

In both substage 4 and substage 5, children are limited to imitating a model in the model’s presence. They are unable to observe a model and delay imitation for any length of time. Delayed, or deferred, imitation is the hallmark of Piaget’s sixth sensorimotor substage (18 to 24 months).19

Or consider this excerpt from the same source on adolescence.

One interesting observation Piaget made about adolescents that ties their cognition to that of much younger children concerns egocentricity..... Adolescents also may believe that these abstract ideas are unique to them, making them impatient with the ‘stodgy and simple-minded’ ideas of their elders. This view changes as the adolescent approaches adulthood."20

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20 Ibid., p. 84.
Many theories of development are constructed out of a goal for adulthood. Wartofsky is more explicit about the norm for children in his description of the myth of the child as *homunculus* - a miniature adult with all features already prefigured, only waiting to unfold. He writes that the 'homunculus myth' proposes that we already know what the child will become, since we know what a proper adult is. This is a retroactively normative model, having already fastened on the norm of mature adulthood (whatever a particular society takes *that* to be). The right development of childhood, therefore, is whatever leads to that desired outcome.\(^{21}\) For children, maturity is the norm and immaturity is a deviation.

We can now begin to see how this relational difference of maturity connotes hierarchy.

Applebaum and Boyd, quoting Rothenberg write,

> Claims about difference are often difficult to deal with precisely because they are offered under the guise of value-free descriptions yet smuggle in normative considerations that carry with them the stigma of inferiority. (Rothenberg, 1990 P.43)\(^{22}\)

If we refer back to stage theory of cognitive development, the hierarchy connoted in the relational differences of children and adults can be better recognized. The stages are numbered in chronological order. The first stage is the lowest, earliest and least complex. These stages build sequentially until the highest stage (and number) in the theory is achieved. Children move through each stage and can be identified as 'at' a certain stage in their development. In the

\(^{21}\)Wartofsky, p. 200.

\(^{22}\)Applebaum, B. & Boyd, D., p. 13, op.cit.
1980s, the Ministry of Education in Ontario produced a graphic chart\(^{23}\) which represented Piaget’s stages of intellectual development along with Erickson’s psycho-social stages of development as an inverted pyramid. The narrowest point was at the bottom, and the widest part was at the top. The inverted pyramid was comprised of progressively widening layers of development detail. Each layer had more descriptive content added to it to fill out the increasing amount of space that became available as the triangle widened toward the top. The message is conveyed visually that as one gradually moves from infancy (the bottom) toward adulthood (the top), one moves closer to the ideal.

These differences, which mark the relatedness, are also reinforced by ordinary discourse and social processes. Ordinary discourse is similar to social processes for both are means by which the social groups relate. Ordinary discourse is slightly different in that the relatedness occurs on a symbolic level. Groups communicate visually or orally through the use of printed symbolic conventions or through the production of organized sounds. On the other hand, social processes such as the sexual division of labour or schooling are also means of relating by what one does or experiences. Such processes are more material than they are symbolic. It is useful to create this distinction in order to understand how these two means of relating reinforce the differences which maintain the group relatedness, particularly in the context of children and adults. What children and adults say, write and do with each other keeps them locked into their dyad as children and adults.

By ordinary discourse I am referring to the everyday ways we write and speak to each other. Ordinary discourse includes such devices as voice, styles of utterance and writing, and speech genre. The ordinary discourse to which I am referring is demonstrated by the ease with which we write and read various official accounts in our society. These would include textbooks, policy documents, and government communications, to mention only a few, which are expressed from a position of sanctioned authority.

John Shotter aids our understanding of this use of discourse and points out that such use is not accidental but quite deliberate. Shotter writes about ordinary discourse in the context of social accountability and writes specifically about that which Young is describing more broadly: how relationality is maintained. He tells us that we must talk in ways that are already established in order to meet the demands that come from our particular location and status in society and in order to maintain that position.24 From the following excerpt a parallel with Young’s notion of the relatedness of social groups can also be observed.

In other words, what we talk of as our experience of reality is constituted for us very largely by the already established ways in which we must talk in our attempts to account for ourselves — and for it — to the others around us.25

The phrase ‘already established ways in which we must talk’ is similar to Young’s description of how one experiences one’s membership in a social group—“one finds oneself as a member of a


25Ibid., p.140.
group, which one experiences as always already having been.”

Although Young does not explicate the ways in which one finds oneself as a group member, it seems reasonable to presume that ordinary discourse, being already established ways of accounting for ourselves, is part of this same experience that Young has described as ‘thrownness’.

According to Shotter, ordinary discourse, whether ‘talk’ or ‘print’ requires the co-ordinated management of sense-making practices to continue communication. In communicating, the ‘I’ must always speak or act with an understanding of what the anticipated response of ‘You’ might be. People must understand what they are trying to achieve socially, in what they actually do individually. Ordinary discourse has a purpose. It is not simply a means of transferring information,

It is a part of what it is for someone to attempt to mean something to someone else: they are addressed as being capable of responding to such an address in some way. And an understanding of who they are for us; and clearly, we compose ourselves differently according to whether we must address a child, a superior or inferior, an equal, a loved one, an academic critic, an enemy and so on.

This passage demonstrates that ordinary discourse from the first person carries an anticipated response from the second person. Furthermore, the second person constrains or limits the range of opportunities offered to the first person. If the first person attempts to communicate beyond that which is permitted or afforded by the second person, communication will fail. Shotter notes

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26. Young, I., p. 46, op. cit.
27. Young, I., p. 46, op. cit.
that ordinary discourse necessarily takes on an ethical or moral quality.

I cannot just relate myself to the others around me as I myself please: the relationship is ours, not just mine, and in performing within it I must proceed with the expectation that you will intervene in some way if I go 'wrong'—only with a highly developed skill at anticipating and pre-empting such interventions, can I proceed as I please."\textsuperscript{29}

Thus ordinary discourse anticipates and limits communication in certain routine and accountable ways known by both parties involved in the discourse.

Shotter also states that human communication is ontologically formative, a process by which people can inform one another's being, that is, help to make each other persons of this or that kind. I would add that human communication is also ontologically prior to the individual.

Language, as groups come to define it and use it, also comes as already having been.

The primary function of language is formative or rhetorical, and only secondarily and in a derived way referential and representational.... This enables the crafting, the social construction, of certain devices, particularly ways of speaking, for use by people in managing the nature of their social relations; that is, people can construct, within the activity of speaking itself (and once having done so, continually reproduce in their speaking), devices or procedures for use in co-ordinating and sequentially ordering complex and intricate activities (and their outcomes) among large numbers of people over large distances and long times. Such devices help in administrating and co-ordinating the logistical problems involved in managing different ways of meaning -- who has responsibility for what.\textsuperscript{30}

According to Shotter the voice in which one speaks influences where authority is to be located.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 145

\textsuperscript{30}Shotter, J., p.148, op. cit.
when matters of definition are involved. He writes that the shared ways and means that people use to make sense to each other enable and constrain members of a social order to be held responsible for their use of these ways and means which are related to their identity and to how they are placed in relation to others around them.\textsuperscript{31}

Shotter writes that people cannot just talk as they please. We must talk not only about what facts will permit but also with the requirements of the medium of communication. This is often the reproduction of a certain dominant social ordering. It follows that “if our ways of talking are constrained in any way — if, for an instance, only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate and others are not — then our understanding, and apparently our experience of ourselves, will be constrained also.”\textsuperscript{32} He adds that we are all embedded within a dominant social order which we must continually reproduce.

Our communally shared ways of making sense, according to Shotter, “enable the members of a social order not only to account for themselves and others when required to do so, but also to act \textit{routinely} in an \textit{accountable} manner.”\textsuperscript{33} These shared ways take into account how members are placed in relation to others around them. “In other words, in developing within a particular region of one’s society, from child to an adult, one learns from other adults there how to be the

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p.142.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p.141.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p.142.
kind of person required in that region of one’s social order, in order to reproduce it.”

We can see that Shotter has some similar beliefs to Young about the way in which human beings are connected to one another as evidenced in part by his use of the phrase, region of one’s social order. Here he discusses how one talks to another from the location of one’s social status for the purpose of reproducing and maintaining the social ordering. Yet Shotter implies that there are serious consequences when one is positioned in an inferior position in the social order and rendered the status of ‘neutral’ third person and passive voice, which ignores the ‘you’. Shotter does not discuss the politics of one’s dominant or inferior social status but limits his discussion to how ordinary discourse maintains and reproduces these locations.

Concurrently ordinary discourse attempts to promote change while at the same time reinforces the status quo. “Our ways of talking work to 'propose' different forms of social relationship, different statuses, different ways of ‘positioning’ ourselves in relation to others, different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations.” This contradiction suggests struggle and conflict. Shotter seems to be speaking specifically about that which Young discusses broadly. Young writes, “...all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings.” If the dominant and

[^34]: Ibid., p. 141.
[^35]: Ibid., p. 150.
[^36]: Ibid., p. 149.
[^37]: Young, p. 40, op.cit.
subordinate *regions of one's social order* are used synonymously with *related social groups*, then the parallels between Shotter and Young become clearer. If social groups exist only in relation to other social groups and group meanings have been forced upon members or forged by them or both then Shotter gives us a specific sense of how that occurs in the ordinary ways of communicating with one another.

Shotter moves into the discussion of how individuals assume and reproduce their identities through human communication and I will discuss this further under the second criterion. For this part, Shotter offers a way of understanding how ordinary discourse maintains and reproduces the relatedness of social groups.

Although Shotter writes convincingly about the relational differences that ordinary discourse structures, he too fails to identify the power imbalance that creeps into 'I' and 'You' which can be seen within his own example of adults and children. Shotter writes that the device of voice "functions both to 'locate' the subject in relation to a process, and to define what might be called the positional field of the subject." Because we must talk to each other in ways that are already established, and failure to do so will be sanctioned by those around us, Shotter says that "it is because of this -- the moral (or perhaps better, the moralistic) requirement that we express ourselves only in ways approved by others -- that we *feel* that our reality *must be* of a certain

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38 Young, p. 44, op.cit.

kind. What Shotter does not explicitly uncloak is the power imbalance inherent in the ways certain people are required to talk to each other. He points out that 'I' can ignore 'you' and render 'you' a passive voice as third person, but he does not discuss the issues of how the 'I' gets to be in the dominant location in one's social order. He does not discuss the differences in social ordering, only how they are maintained or how changes are proposed. If the child is to learn from the adult 'how to be the kind of person required in that region of one's social order', then Shotter implies a concept of difference which evaluates, in this case, children, as inferior and adults as superior.

This concept of difference can be seen played out in schools with the kind of everyday ordinary discourse used to maintain and reinforce the relatedness of these two groups. Adults have the knowledge which is imparted to children at school. The norm is determined by the adult teacher and is set up as that against which the child is being evaluated. Rarely do children score grades of 100%, so in a practical sense they still have inferior knowledge to that which the adult has and that which the adult deems it necessary for the child to acquire. These areas of difference in which hierarchy exists are the arenas in which oppression and domination play out.

This 'superiority and inferiority' characteristic of hierarchy is seen through the use of comparative language. For example children are described as 'smaller than', or 'immature'. These are particular forms of descriptive language employed for the purposes of describing children in relation to adults. Children are not just small human beings, but smaller than adults in relation

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40Ibid., p. 141
to size. Children are not just 'new' human beings, they are immature. Children are always less than adults and the list is limited only by one’s imagination. The type of language used is an illustration of the description difference which brings children into existence now in relation to adults. Conversely adults as a group come into existence in relation to children. Adults by a description of difference are not just 'big' but they are 'bigger than' children.

Ordinary discourse, the everyday ways we use to talk and write, serves to maintain and reinforce the relatedness of social groups, and in particular, adults and children. The ways in which people talk are already established, co-ordinated sense-making practices, in terms of which one’s communicative behaviour has moral consequences. Shotter writes, “And in learning the 'architecture’ of address, children learn not only a set of ideal, reciprocal rights and duties to do with an equality of access to communicative opportunities, but also the actual distribution of such opportunities in the region of their development, and hence the nature of the social structure there -- that some people are most difficult of access than others.\[s\ic\]”41 In other words, not all people have equal access of communication opportunities.

In summary, ordinary discourse is a means by which the subject and the other relate to each other by symbolic communication. Whether it is print or voice, ordinary discourse serves to inform the other of who it is they are and who the subject is in relation to the other. The effect of this is to develop and maintain the relatedness of both parties engaged in human communication. The 'parties' in Young's analysis would be social groups. “Ordinary discourse differentiates people

41 Ibid., p. 146
according to social groups such as women and men, age groups, racial and ethnic groups, religious groups, and so on.\textsuperscript{42}

Social processes also support the relatedness of groups. Members of social groups have a special affinity with others in their group because of what they do and experience, and they differentiate themselves from the other group on this basis. Thus the relationality is further supported by what social groups do to and amongst each other. Young writes that social groups do not arise only from an encounter between different societies. "Social processes differentiate groups within a single society. The sexual division of labour, for example, has created social groups of women and men in all known societies."\textsuperscript{43} By employing the use of gender differences, Young tells us that differentiation occurs because of what the respective relational others do or experience despite the fact that each has much in common with members of the other and belong to the same society. Thus women have an affinity with other women in that their work in the home is different in practice and form from that which men do in the home, although both genders often do work in the home.

Similarly, children are viewed from the point of view of ageist divisions of labour. Labour, as a social process, supports and maintains the relatedness of adults and children. In the Western experience children are not allowed to work, so they are not recognized as doing work or producing anything of value to adults. I note one exception to this. With computer technology

\textsuperscript{42}Young, op.cit., p. 42.

\textsuperscript{43}Young, I., p. 43, op. cit.
taking such a grip on the production of work, technological dependencies have developed where children’s abilities and understandings have outpaced those of adults. (Perhaps because children have lots of energy.) As computer games require children to assist in the design and development of these lucrative products and changing technological specifications can only be kept pace by those with time to hack and learn, children have been hired by leading hardware and software manufacturers to assist in their corporate mission.\textsuperscript{44} However, this unique social process for the production of work only underscores the point that there is a power differential in the differentiation of groups that such processes produce.

Probably the most significant social process to maintain the relatedness of adults and children is schooling. In the West there is universal schooling. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers write that it marks the domain of childhood whereby the child is subject to systematic and intended, state or institutional, social intervention.\textsuperscript{45} It provides a location for molding the young by a directed social force, ‘education’. Stainton Rogers cite other writers such as Illich to make the point that education and schooling are different kinds of pursuits. Schooling is experienced as a specific institutional regime of enculturation which has an overt syllabus of testable knowledge. It is accepted by society that the state has a right to impose schooling on children. Compulsory, universal state-provided schooling is a recent cultural innovation and it has in its early development a co-relation with the other defining social process for children — work. Universal

\textsuperscript{44}Ravensburger, J., (1996, Oct. 28) 'PC Guy: At 17, he was a CEGEP dropout. At 24, he is Quebec’s Young Entrepreneur of the Year and on his way to becoming a millionaire'. \textit{Montreal Gazette}

\textsuperscript{45}Stainton Rogers, R. & W., p. 130, op.cit.
schooling was made possible to remove the young from paid work and as the Stainton Rogers team write, “paved the way for the alternative containment of (unpaid) school work.”46 This was due in part to the need to remove children from harsh working conditions and put children into the less harsh conditions of nineteenth century schools. Stainton Rogers write that universal schooling is one of the key factors in the constructing of the modern work-force. “On the one hand, it acts directly and indirectly as a training ground for knowledge, skills, values and attitudes transferable to — if not directly salient or useful to — the demands of adults’ labour and the requirements of labour consumption.”47 At the same time it ages as it educates the young and thus emancipates and empowers the work-force. In other words, it’s a waiting room for the inevitable. Children then outgrow their social group and enter another.

Schooling has been a powerful mechanism for social control of the young. Arguments have been over who should have control over the young, the parents or the state. The state as a collectivity has been and continues to be more powerful than parents and has successfully assumed and maintained control. But children as a social group understood the result to be inevitably the same: Adults would (attempt to) control children.

Schooling becomes a location where group affinities are strengthened. Children have a special affinity with other children because they go to school and schooling is a way of life all children in the Western experience. Children do school work. Schooling, by its compulsory nature,

46Ibid., p. 130.
47Ibid., p. 130.
compels children to associate with one another more than those who are not children. Children at school identify with their own social status. They are not the teachers and the principals; the adults and children understand the superior social status of these adults.

In the West schooling is the location where theories of development are practiced. Such theories work well with schooling in maintaining the relatedness of adults and children. Early in this century, Piaget pursued a quest to reveal the unfolding of logical reasoning in the child. From his stage theory of cognitive development, classroom practitioners have developed curriculum based upon children’s readiness to learn from their particular stage of development. "The theory is intrinsically 'adultist' and educationally elitist, stressing as it does a prewired metamorphosis of knowledge through early stages to the final emergence of logical-mathematical reasoning only reliably found in those educated in the Western mode to around university entrance level."48 It is the adult educator that determines what will be taught; when it will be taught and when the child is ready.

Schooling has also encroached into the world of work. "Not only have school leaving ages been raised, but the proportion of the young population remaining in full-time schooling beyond the compulsory minimum leaving age has also grown. This has the effect of increasing the span of the young’s ultimate economic dependence (but not their childhood which may well be moving in the opposite direction)."49 Adults now concerned about the duration of dependency of the

48ibid., p. 95.

49ibid., p. 131.
young upon them are now promoting earlier transition programs to the workforce to offset the trend. Co-op education programs and work placement components are now well entrenched into the secondary school course offerings while students continue formally in school.

Other social processes in which children are differentiated from adults would be marriage and reproduction. Children have an affinity with other children not only in what they do and experience but also in what they do not do and do not experience. Children do not marry and do not have children. Children see themselves as different from adults in that adults marry and have other children like themselves.

Childhood ends when adolescence begins. According to Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers childhood’s ending is marked in one of two ways. It is marked as a biological event or a chronological event. In traditional societies childhood’s end is indexed in terms of biological clocks, the onset of puberty. In such traditional societies this biological change does not necessarily bring full adult rights and responsibilities but brings the sense that such rights are soon to be granted. This is termed as the period of ‘readiness’.

In bureaucratized cultures, chronological age is the marker of transition from childhood to adolescence. Adolescence is the stage prior to adulthood.

The basis for setting the cut-off point is partly informed by historically sedimented concepts of the child as a politically performative incompetent, but has more recently
been warranted by a developmentalism which portrays children as *cognitive* aliens.\textsuperscript{50}

The division of labour, schooling and other social processes such as marriage and reproduction serve to differentiate, maintain and reinforce adults and adolescents as well as adults and children in our society.

It is important to note that adolescents also experience adults as their relational other. Children and adolescents do not come into existence in relation to each other but in relation to adults. There are similarities in their disadvantaged status. Both share an inferior status to adults, and this inferiority is maintained by the power privileges that adults enjoy. Both groups eventually outgrow their social group. The key difference between children and adolescents is that children must move from their disadvantaged location of childhood to another disadvantaged location of adolescence before outgrowing their inferior status altogether.

Although adolescents occasionally attempt to claim a position of relational `other' to children, this is an illegitimate claim for it is still subject to being undermined and overruled by adults. Such attempts may characterize the nature of adolescence as the members emerge from their location and group affinity to become adults. Another way of demonstrating how children and adolescents are not related is to point out that children are still children if adolescents as a social group were to disappear. Adults would continue to exist in relation to children. Young has stated that social groups are related to *at least one* other social group and although the existence of adolescents as a social group poses some complication for this paper, it is sufficient for this

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 143.
purpose to focus on the child-adult dyad.

I have noted that ordinary discourse and social processes support and maintain the relational differences of adults and children. These elements provide depth to the claim that children are relationally connected to adults as a social group. The next part of our analysis will be to consider the second significant criterion in Young’s conception of social groups which, combined with the first criterion, supports the conclusion that children are a social group.

Second Criterion

At the outset, two criteria were identified in order to establish a collectivity as a social group. The second criterion requires that the individual experience his or her group imbeddedness in certain ways. These ways are partly identity-forming for a group’s members. Thrownness and boundedness are characteristics of how one experiences the process of identity formation which are required to support the claim that social groups partly constitute the individual’s identity.

Thrownness

Young borrows the term thrownness from Heidegger. It describes the sense that the individual has when one experiences one’s group affinity.

Group affinity...has the character...(of) ‘thrownness’: one finds oneself as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been.51

51Young, I., p. 46, op.cit.
This sense of experiencing one’s group imbeddedness is much like entering into a dark room of identity (at birth). When the lights go on the question the individual then asks is not `Where am I?’ but rather `Who am I?’ All that has been placed in the room has been put there previously. The room is older than the individual and it has been appointed in a certain way (attributes, stereotypes, norms) which the individual sees, not only with its unique furnishings, but sees as different from other rooms into which s/he has entered or subsequently enters.

While this metaphor may assist in understanding Young’s notion of thrownness, it is, nevertheless, a very difficult notion for individuals from the West to internalize. In social groups the self is not ontologically prior to and independent of the group. Our consciousness is deeply imbedded in a very individualistic view of our own identities. In our western liberal culture there is a sense that I form my own identity even though I may be influenced by the environment in which I am located. I see me and then I see you and others. I don’t see me in us. It therefore becomes difficult to accept that my own identity, whether I like it or not, choose it or not, is partly already formed by others and I have inherited it like a last name.

One place where children experience their group affinity is at school. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers tell us that it is here at this major site of secondary socialization where the domain of childhood is experienced. It may be difficult to dispute that children see the world as given and immutable and don’t see how they connect to it, let alone transform it. Naïve consciousness sees the world as given, immutable, and with this naive consciousness individuals fail to recognize their connectedness to the world and their ability to transform it. Children may be in a state of
naïve consciousness about their group affinity. Children’s experience of their group affinity may be happening to them without children being fully conscious of this experience. This, however, does not mean that the characteristics of childhood are not being imprinted on children. I have often heard children explain (or defend) their actions with the phrase, “I’m just a kid!” There are various ways in which children have their group identity imprinted upon them. One way requires us to return to the discussion of ordinary discourse.

Ordinary discourse, as previously mentioned, is the ordinary way we talk or write to make sense or co-ordinate sense-making to each other. Children routinely speak in ways that not only locate themselves as children but also recognize and locate other children in their same group. Adults do the same. They locate themselves with the voice of authority as a member of the group that is relationally different from the child.

One form of ordinary discourse is the report card. It is used by all educators to report on the pupil’s progress. One way children know that they are kids is through the use of report cards. All kids get one. Kids do not give them (much as they might want to) and they do not write them (see Appendix). Teachers who are adults write them and give them out about kids to parents (other adults). Permanent copies of this writing are kept in files that belong to adults and only adults get to read these. The report card is an example of ordinary discourse that locates children and adults in relation to one another. The categories, the content, the frequency of reporting, the storage and the access to the report card are all controlled by the education system’s adults. Every time in my professional experience in which I have suggested that
students write reports or evaluations on teachers I have received an immediate negative response from my colleagues. There is a clear message that this is boundary crossing that will not be tolerated. Adults will not permit other adults to dissolve the boundaries that maintain group affinity and relationality.52

Young writes that the experience of *thrownness* does not preclude the self from future identity transformations. Such transformations in fact exemplify *thrownness* “precisely because such changes in group affinity are experienced as transformations in one's identity.”53 One significant and inevitable identity transformation is that of adolescence. Most children will experience identity transformations and move from subordinate group status to a superordinate group affinity. This transformation in identity will also find itself 'thrown' into adolescence. Adolescents experience themselves as different from both children and adults and this brings with it a certain amount of stress and tension, especially as adolescence is experienced as a 'limbo-state between childhood and adulthood.'54 One strongly prevailing stereotype is that adolescence is a time of identity crisis. This particular stereotype serves to emphasize this group's sense of thrownness. “Many of the crises of puberty are a direct result of change, not in hormones, but in status — change having to do with how one is perceived and responded to by

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52 Although this example of ordinary discourse, in the form of the report card, also highlights power differentials, it is my intention here to restrict my discussion to the use of report cards as an example of the way ordinary discourse maintains the relatedness of children and adults.

53 Young, I., p. 46, op. cit.

54 Stainton Rogers, R. & W., p. 147, op. cit.
Another reason why adolescence is such a traumatic identity transformation is that it occurs so swiftly. Children have *eased* into their identity from birth, gradually and they spend many years experiencing their group affinity. Within a few short months physical changes can bring about the end of childhood and the new identity stereotypes, attributes and norms. The old affinity quickly ends and the new one is just as quickly taken up. Group meanings are being *forced upon* the individual and the self is having to adjust to these meanings very quickly. The speed with which this occurs creates significant upheavals in one’s relationships with individuals and with groups.

Group affinity can occur before group identification because one can experience with others a similar way of life quite quickly. For example, it would not take long for one child to associate with other children in a school setting, since their mutual experience in this significant way of their lives takes place from the first day they pass through the school doors. Each day attending school reinforces the similarity of one’s experience with others that attend.

Group identification can take much longer to experience. Although going to the library and researching one’s group’s social status and common history is helpful to assuming one’s group identity, much of one’s identity must be experienced by encounters and interactions between the relational other group. As Young writes, "A person’s group identities may be for the most part

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only a background or horizon to his or her life, becoming salient only in specific interactive contexts." Unlike the experience of 'thrownness' this can take time.

**Boundedness**

One also experiences one's identity as *more than* the set of stereotypes, attributes and norms that one's group affinities bequeaths. Our metaphor of the room occludes this experience. It can hide the recognition that the question 'Who am I?' is experienced as only *partly* answered by the experience of being located in one or more rooms. I am more than that which I have inherited as my identity.

Young's conception of social justice was not intended, I don't believe, to negate the concept of the autonomous individual. From the following passages Young does not exclude the Cartesian assumption but complements it.

I have proposed an enabling conception of justice. Justice should refer *not only* to distribution, *but also* to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation.⁵⁷ and,

A person’s particular sense of history, affinity, and separateness, even the person’s mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feeling, are constituted partly by her or his group affinities. This does *not* mean that persons have no individual styles, or are unable to transcend or reject a group identity. *Nor* does it preclude persons from having

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⁵⁶Young, I., op.cit. p.46.

⁵⁷Young, I., op.cit. p. 34 (my emphasis)
many aspects that are independent of these group identities.58

and,

While I agree that individuals should be free to pursue life plans in their own way, it is foolish to deny the reality of groups.59

From these preceding passages, Young suggests that the concept of the autonomous individual is bounded by group affiliations. Young further states,

The social ontology underlying many contemporary theories of justice, ...is methodologically individualist or atomist. It presumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. This individualist social ontology usually goes together with a normative conception of the self as independent. The authentic self is autonomous, unified, free, and self-made, standing apart from history and affiliations, choosing its life plan entirely for itself.60

The individual is ontologically after the social and as such, the authentic self becomes partly autonomous, unified, free and self-made, standing in the midst of history and affiliations, choosing its life plan partly for itself. This experience of the self as partly formed and constrained by group affinities can be described as 'boundedness' and is a second characteristic of how one experiences the process of identity formation.

If our identities are partly formed by our group affinities which constrains the autonomous self, then how might the concept of identity formation be more fully understood? How can we account for Young's use of the term partly? It is not my intention to develop a concept of

58Ibid., p. 45 (my emphasis)

59Ibid., p. 47

60Young, I., p. 45, op.cit.
personal relationships here, but I intend to suggest that such a concept is compatible with Young’s conception of identity formation and use of the term *partly*.

Unlike other collectivities such as aggregates and associations where a person’s identity is formed *prior to* membership, social groups form individual identities - *partly*.

Group meanings *partially* constitute people’s identities....A person’s particular sense of history, affinity, and separateness, even the person’s mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feeling, are constituted *partly* by her or his group affinities.61

‘Affinities’ is pluralized and Young makes the point that as human beings we find ourselves belonging to several groups in our large, complex and highly differentiated society, though in a given context one group affinity may become the salient group identity. “Thus individual persons, as constituted *partly* by their group affinities and relations, cannot be unified, themselves are heterogeneous and not necessarily coherent.”62 In other words, in Young’s conception, our identities are formed partly by the many groups to which we find ourselves belonging. But Young does not elaborate on what she means by ‘partly’. Not to hint at what could be implied by the use of *partly* leaves her conception of identity formation to be filled in by “individual styles...(or)aspects that are independent of these group identities.”63 Perhaps we can assume that individual identities, while *partly* formed by group affinities can also be *partly* formed from personal relationships.

61 Young, I., p. 44  op.cit. (my emphasis)
62 Young, I., p. 48, op.cit.
63 Young, I., p. 45, op.cit.
It may be that the self is also partly constituted not only by group affinity but also by the personal relationships that group affinity can produce. Davis and Roberts\textsuperscript{64} discuss the notion of the self as a product of social processes. These processes are built in part from the formation of personal relationships. While Davis and Roberts do not discuss social group affinities as constituting the self, they are describing the individual as being constituted by the relational other. Perhaps such a concept of personal relationships can co-exist within the concept of social groups in order to offer a fuller sense of the relational process of identity formation and transformation.

The individual is constituted by personal relationships in three ways: I-Thou, I-Them and I-It.

The I-Thou relationship is also described as 'mutual status assigners'. "It is characteristic of the worlds created in personal relationships that each person's world has a place for the other person in it. The worlds are thus shared worlds in which each other's interests and values have a place, and a place in which the applicable standards are negotiated."\textsuperscript{65} The shared worlds are constructed by the mutual assignment of statuses and negotiated differences, characterized by mutually spontaneous and authentic actions, respective behaviour potential enhancement, and the freedom to renegotiate the relationship. The I-Them relationship is also described by Davis and Roberts as the 'Imperialists versus Doormats'. "From the imperialist's point of view, other persons exist to play assigned roles in the game of life."\textsuperscript{66} Role assignments are not negotiated. "An imperialist does not recognize his own role as a world creator and status


\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., p. 147.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., p. 147.
assigner....Doormats have sketchy notions of who they are and what they should do and thus are quite ready to have others structure a world that has a place for them."67 L-Lt relationships are also termed 'rote status-assigners'. "Rote status-assigners do not develop a competence in negotiation, for they do not have to. Each person performs the preassigned role, and questions of how to treat the person are answered by knowing one’s position in relationship to the other’s position."68

In these three types of personal relationships there is a further delineation of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. "Normatively, persons are insiders with respect to personal relationships....Insiders would be those who could appreciate and participate in personal relationships as negotiated, shared worlds taking account of each persons’ individual characteristics."69 'Outsiders' pertain to the other two relationships. "Both imperialist-doormat and rote status assigners have an outsider stance with respect to personal relationships: Personal relationships serve to accomplish other ends. For the imperialist, the end of upholding truth; for rote status assigners, the end of fitting into the social order."70

"The self is a product of social processes, not their origin."71 According to Young, Habermas

67 Ibid., p. 147.
68 Ibid., p. 149.
69 Ibid., p. 150.
70 Ibid., p. 150.
71 Young, I., p. 45, op. cit.
calls these social processes, "linguistic and practical interaction." Although Young refers to Habermas and Epstein to clarify her use of the term 'identity', this concept has a sociological equivalency to the concept of the self. Habermas, himself, along with Döbert and Nunner-Winkler explains the nature of this equivalency as the reflexive relationship of self and others.

The concept of identity is the sociological equivalent of the concept of the self. Identity is the symbolic structure that permits a personality system to insure continuity and consistency under changing biographical conditions and different positions in the social space. A person must claim his or her identity for himself or herself and *vis à vis* others. Self-identification, the differentiation of self from others, must be recognized by these others as well. In other words, the reflexive relationship of the individual that is self-identified depends on the intersubjective relationships that he or she has with those others by whom he or she is identified.73

For children this concept of identity allows for individual identities to be formed *partly* from personal relationships with other children and adults along with identities to be formed *partly* from group affinities.

Another part of one's identity formation which contributes to our examination of the use of the word 'partly' is that set of characteristics which is already genetically predetermined. This is a significant variable worth noting but for the purposes of this paper I have limited my discussion only to those characteristics of the self which are created from one's social context.

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72Ibid., p. 45.

For children, their identities come from their location within childhood and partly from personal relationships with other children and with adults. The primary location for this identity formation process is the family. “Families and kinship networks provide small-group interaction in all societies.”\(^{74}\) It is here, within the family, through these personal relationships that children first experience themselves as the 'I' in I-Thou, I-Them, and I-It ways. The 'I' is being formed partly from one's experiences of their personal relationships first experienced within the family.

**Summary**

To summarize, social groups are different from other types of collectivities in two significant ways: first, groups are relational in their difference to at least one other group. Second, groups are partly identity-forming for the members. I have attempted to show that children do constitute a social group in that they satisfy both of these significant criteria. First, children can be seen in relation to 'adults' and the nature of their relatedness is characterized by the unstated norm of maturity from which they are evaluated as immature. This relatedness manifests itself in two distinctive ways for children, in what they say (ordinary discourse) and in what they do (e.g., schooling). Second, children's identities are partly formed from their affinity to childhood and this process of identity formation is characterized by thrownness and boundedness. Childhood provides children with a particular set of characteristics which the child experiences as having already existed. This set is only a part of that which constitutes the child's identity as personal relationships along with one's unique genetic makeup also form the child's identity.

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Now that I have demonstrated that children satisfy the requirements for social group status, I will consider the second question. Are children, as a social group, liable to conditions of oppression? In the next section, I will examine Young's five conditions of oppression and review each to determine if children indeed experience any or all of these conditions.
Young provides a framework for a comprehensive explication of conditions of oppression which she calls the 'five faces of oppression'. Oppression, according to Young, is a condition of groups and is structural.\textsuperscript{75}

Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules. In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms -- in short, the normal processes of everyday life.\textsuperscript{76}

Oppression is the effect of the exercise of power within a range of 'humane' practices such as education and bureaucratic administration, among others. Individuals embedded in these oppressing groups are often unaware of their own agency in maintaining and reproducing oppression. For every oppressed group, Young writes, there is a group that is privileged in relation to that group.\textsuperscript{77}

To be oppressed, one must be a member of a social group, although not all social groups are subjected to a condition of oppression. The task is to examine how this conception of oppression

\textsuperscript{75}Young, I., p.41, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., p.41.
\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., p. 42.
with its five conditions applies to children as a social group. These five conditions are: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. For oppression to occur only one condition needs to be met. I intend to review these ‘faces’ and consider whether any or all are relevant for children.

**Exploitation**

This condition occurs as the result of a regular process in which the results of one social group’s efforts are transferred to benefit another social group. The rules that govern the game of transfer of one’s group efforts are shaped up through systemic relations of power in which the ‘haves’ always win. The game itself is one in which the ‘have-nots’ must play. “These relations are produced and reproduced through a systemic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves.”

Built into this power relationship is dependency by the ‘have-nots’. For example, gender-specific exploitation is experienced by women in that their domestic labour is used primarily for the advantage of men. Analogous with this form of exploitation is a racially-specific form which Young terms ‘menial labour’. Menial labour is low-paying and autonomy-lacking work performed by members of oppressed racial groups for the benefit of the privileged group. In both cases the labourers enhance the status of the served. Exploitation has a relationship of force which perpetuates an unequal exchange by coercive structures in which the dependents have few options.

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78 Ibid., p. 50.
Adults can experience exploitation with other adults. Yet it can be said that an unequal transfer of labour, energy and wealth occurs between parents and children. This suggests that parents can be exploited by their children. As a parent I have often felt oppressed by my parenting obligations, for it exacts an enormous amount of my physical and emotional energy along with my income. Implicit in this condition of exploitation is the dependency by the 'have-nots' to the 'haves'. Are children really the 'haves'? I suggest not yet. Parents expend their energies to promote independence and create 'haves' in order to break the dependency cycle. Parents have the freedom and are encouraged by society to diminish their transfer of power and at a set point in time may end this transference altogether. Under a truly exploitive condition, children would acquire and maintain an ability to continue to extract benefits from parents. Call it "tough love", but I have often said "no" to my children. Furthermore, parents (adults) experiencing parenting as a steady transfer of their energies and wealth to the benefit of their children do not necessarily experience a loss of self-respect. Often one's esteem is enhanced by this arrangement. Exploited workers, on the other hand, are deprived of important elements of self-respect. That is why it is difficult to call myself exploited by my children in the same sense that Young has described.

Exploitation is a difficult face with which to see children as a socially oppressed group for it involves the production of work in a formal workplace within a capitalist society. This market-driven production of work as central to this form of oppression makes it difficult to take a world view of children. In many cultures children are expected to work. Unregulated and unrestricted access to work has been opposed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. This is evident in Article 32 of the Declaration:
Sec.(1) State Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation...

Sec.(2) State Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and education measures to ensure the implementation of this article...

a) provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admissions to employment;
b) provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
c) provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of this article.

In North American society, children have been prevented from paid employment because historically children were often found to be working under inhumane conditions.\textsuperscript{79}

In his book \textit{The Children's Rights Movement}, Joseph M. Hawes writes that during the late 1800s in the United States reformers began to address the problem of child labour. New York passed the Factory Act of 1886 which prohibited factory work by children under 13. However, it was not well policed. Reform efforts continued in the U.S. but with meager success.

One new idea was that perhaps child labour could be prevented if some way could be found to keep children out of factories other than through direct legislation. If children could be compelled to be in school during certain hours of the day and during certain periods of the year, they could not be in factories. If children could not be in factories, the temptation to hire children at low wages might lessen. And if there was less interest in hiring children, perhaps child labour would diminish—not by being prohibited but by being discouraged indirectly.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Stainton Rogers, Rex & Wendy. \textit{Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern}. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 130

There was a strong correlation between compulsory school attendance legislation and a decline in incidence of child labour.

The problem of child labour had not disappeared altogether. Where children were employed, either legally or illegally, the conditions under which they worked were very poor and often dangerous. In 1938 the Fair Labour Standards bill was passed by Congress. It prohibited the employment of children under 16 in industries engaged in interstate commerce and young people under 18 in dangerous occupations. As noted earlier from Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers, removal of children from the harshness of the workplace resulted in meeting the demands of adults’ exclusive access to labour and the requirements of labour consumption.

Where child labour is permitted but regulated, state policing of illegal practices has been poorly enforced. This point is seen more clearly through the experience of the U.K. In 1933 the Children and Young Persons Act, and in 1937 the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act, were passed, and local authorities enacted bylaws under these statutes. This legislation provided basic safeguards for those working part-time under 16 years of age. The Employment of Children Act 1973, intended to standardize safeguards in bylaws and strengthen enforcement powers, was drafted but never enacted. It was designed to police exploitation of children in the workplace. Yet in 1991 non-governmental organizations estimated that 43% of children between the ages of 10 and 16 were employed in conditions of low pay, illegal hours or illegal

\(^{81}\text{ibid. p. 52.}\)
Children can be more easily exploited where they are prohibited from working altogether. Since they are not allowed into the workplace, they can hardly grieve that their wages are unfairly low, or their working conditions unsafe.

In other countries where children are recognized in the workplace, children experience wage discrimination on the basis of age. Here in Canada we have the Employment Standards Act which sets out a minimum wage for workers and a lower minimum age for persons under 18. There is no 'equal pay for work of equal value'. Where children are employed they earn the lowest wages within the social ordering of the labour force and occupy the lowest status of jobs. In this arrangement adults are the recipients of the transfer of energy and wealth.

In the same way that Young notes women's exploitation is gender specific, children's work is age specific. Both experience exploitation as a social group. Both are wage workers. While gender specific exploitation is experienced by women in that their labour is used primarily for the advantage of men, age specific exploitation is experienced by children in roles of service for the status enhancement of adults. As previously mentioned, this form of exploitation is described by Young as menial work. Examples of children as servants in our western liberal society are 'shoe

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83 Article 23 Sec.(2) Declaration of Human Rights.
shine kids’, ‘squeegee kids’, ‘paperboys’ and ‘babysitters’. These roles can be seen as ‘auxiliary’ work enhancing the social status of those receiving the result of their labour.

Children must be seen in relation to adults and adults must derive some privilege from this exploitive relationship. Adults’ agency in this condition is not likely to be understood by them. The context for this condition is the workplace. It is necessary to ask the question, ‘what benefit do adults derive from this condition and are they conscious of their complicity?’

Central to this face of oppression is the workplace. It is a place in which there is a certain kind of power transference. Exploitation involves labour as a social process in which the results of a group’s work are transferred to benefit another. But in western liberal society children do not work. They go to school. Schooling is a different social process and would not qualify as a location for exploitation. But something is hidden here. The fact that children are not in the workplace and engaged in the production of work may in fact be the largest transfer of results of all. Young writes that “in this process of the transfer of powers, the capitalist class acquires and maintains an ability to extract benefits from workers. Not only are powers transferred from worker to capitalists, but the powers of workers diminish by more than the amount of transfer, because workers suffer material deprivation and a loss of control, and hence are deprived of important elements of self-respect.” But the word ‘diminish’ suggests that some amount is left and there is some control and self-respect, albeit inadequate. But from the standpoint of children who are outside of the workplace, the issue is relative. At least workers have work, although

84Young, I., p.49, op.cit.
they are not capitalists. The benefit that workers have in the hierarchical and social ordering of the workplace is that which remains after the transfer to the capitalists. For children they have the least opportunity in the workplace to have some control over their lives and develop some self-respect. The advantage for adults as workers is that they then obtain the better opportunities for control and self-respect even if they are suffering by lesser degree from conditions of exploitation in the same workplace as children. On the other end of the scale, the advantage for adults as the privileged group is that they receive from children that which children have in common with all other workers, the uneven exchange of their labour. Moreover, when children are removed altogether from the workplace and there is no exchange of labour and there is no exchange of benefits, children may in fact be experiencing the second face of oppression, marginalization.

**Marginalization**

Marginalization is a form of social injustice which results from a group of people being “expelled from useful participation in society....Marginals are people the system of labour cannot or will not use.”

Although Young highlights the workplace as the arena in which this form of injustice occurs, she asserts that this ‘face’ of oppression occurs within a broader cultural context. “Most of our society’s productive and recognized activities take place in contexts of organized social cooperation, and social structures and processes that close persons out of participation. While marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a

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85 Young, I., p.53, op.cit.
context of recognition and interaction." It can result in material deprivation as well as a loss in citizenship rights, and it blocks opportunities for self-actualization in socially defined and recognizable ways. Visible forms of this kind of social injustice are described in terms of 'uselessness', 'boredom', and 'lack of self respect.' Ambrosio writes, "the arbitrary and invasive authority of those who control access to ... resources contributes to the demeaning and punitive aspects of this 'face' of oppression." Marginalization is a form of social relations that penalizes those members of the society who are dependent on society. "Dependency in our society thus implies, as it has in all liberal societies, a sufficient warrant to suspend basic rights to privacy, respect, and individual choice."

This is a different form of oppression than exploitation in that within exploitative arrangements groups of people are exercising their capacities and are transferring (albeit unfairly) the products of their work. The privileged group in the exploitative arrangement needs the work of those exploited. However, those who experience marginalization are clearly told that the products of their labour are not needed and not wanted. Marginals are often seen as a burden to the privileged groups in society and there a strong message to members of marginal groups that society would be much improved if they did not exist. This explains why Young writes that

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86 Ibid., p.55.
87 Ibid., p.55.
89 Young, I., p.54, op.cit.
“marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression.”  

A strong case could be made that if children are not being exploited in the workplace then they may be marginalized from it. There is no question that from the moment a child is born, s/he is dependent. According to Young such dependency gives adults in liberal western society license to suspend certain basic rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, while attempting to ensure some universal rights for children, really acts to restrict basic Human Rights. To better understand this claim, it is useful to briefly examine and compare a sampling of Articles from both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948. It was felt that a universal moral standard needed to be in place by which all nations of the world would have a common understanding regarding the worth and dignity of all citizens. Throughout World War II there had been many atrocities perpetrated by aggressors against the most vulnerable populations that could not be condoned under any circumstances. The second clause in the Declaration makes direct reference to this need:

**Whereas** disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.  

The Declaration of Human Rights has seven ‘Whereas’ clauses which are followed by thirty

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90 Ibid., p.53.

91 Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
articles that describe the moral standard agreed upon at this point in time in human history.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. It was the culmination of work that had commenced during the International Year of the Child in 1979 by a Working Group of the UN Commission on Human Rights. It is comprised of thirteen preamble clauses and fifty-four articles. The Convention recognized the vulnerability of children and was intended to put protections for them in place.

The ninth preamble clause states this intention:

* Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1959, 'the child by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.'* 92

Children are seen as immature. Once again we see the norm of maturity as implied and a subtle hint creeping into the rationale for children's rights that children are not yet fully human. This is detected in the wording of the sixth paragraph of the preamble:

* Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.* 93

The restriction of basic human rights for children begins with the Declaration of Human Rights. **Article 2** sets out who is entitled to enjoy these rights. It states:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, set forth in this Declaration, without

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93 Ibid.
distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Note that this article describes every kind of distinction that could be used to sidestep this Declaration by listing them. Noticeable by its absence is the distinction of age. This is done quite deliberately as can be observed in such other Articles as Article 16. Section (1) states:

Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.94

This does not mean that children do not have the same rights, but since they would not be deemed to be of 'full age', their enjoyment of this right is contingent. When one looks at the Convention the contingency becomes explicit in some articles. For example, Article 19 of the Convention of Human Rights, which addresses the right to freedom of expression, states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.95

And Article 20 addresses the right to peaceful assembly:

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.  
(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.96

Now if one examines Article 13 and Article 15 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

94Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.  
95Ibid.  
96Ibid.
which addresses these same human rights we are able to recognize the contingency:

**Article 13:**

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression:....
2. **The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions**\(^97\), but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
   a) for respect of the rights or reputations of others: or
   b) for the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.\(^98\)

**Article 15:**

1. State Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercises of these rights **other than**\(^99\) those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.\(^100\)

In both Articles one can observe how certain rights of the child are contingent upon other individuals’ rights and adult interpretations of conflicts with the child’s exercise of a right. There are no such restrictions on these same rights in the Declaration of Human Rights.

An important restriction of basic human rights for the purpose of this consideration of children as

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\(^97\)The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (my emphasis)

\(^98\)Ibid.

\(^99\)Ibid., (my emphasis)

marginalized is the right to work. The Declaration part of Article 25 states:

(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration.\textsuperscript{101}

Article 32 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child structures the right to work as a right to be protected from exploitation in work. Part of Article 32 states:

1. State Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2. State Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of this article. To this end...State Parties shall in particular:
a) provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admissions to employment;
b) provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment; and
c) provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of this article.\textsuperscript{102}

In Article 25 all human beings have the right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work. Children, needing protection from exploitation, who also should have a right to favourable conditions of work, have had this right diminished for them by placing a legal responsibility upon the state to prevent children at a certain age from entry into the workplace. As mentioned previously, wherever children are found to be illegally in the workplace, the policing has been

\textsuperscript{101}Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

ineffective. Wherever the state has recognized this problem, a solution of compulsory education has been introduced as a means to control the exploitation.

It is difficult to understand why children are not entitled to the same human rights as adults unencumbered. Anyone whose rights are threatened are in need of protection. This need is not limited to children. However, adults who constructed both documents have dealt with children’s vulnerability by restricting their rights, not enhancing enforcement. This is particularly evident in the right to work. Wherever children are present in the workforce there is a greater likelihood of their exploitation. Where children are legally unable to be part of the workplace, that central area in our western society where one exercises one’s own capacities in a context of recognition and interaction, we see conditions of marginalization. It is not uncommon to read or hear the youth of society characterized as useless, bored or having little to no self-respect. The school becomes a form of bureaucratic control where institutional relations serve to contain those deprived of their citizenship and deemed to be not fully rational or developed.

**Powerlessness**

This form of oppression also plays out within the workplace. Since the workplace is socially ordered, professionals are ranked very high in authority, status and their sense of self. The status of privilege that professionals enjoy has three aspects: first, a progressive development of capacities and avenues for recognition; second, a degree of autonomy over daily work; and third, the norm of respectability.\(^{103}\) Nonprofessionals lack these three aspects and are vulnerable to the

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\(^{103}\) Young, I., p.57, op.cit.
condition of powerlessness. Thus, this condition has several injustices associated with it: "inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decision making power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies."\textsuperscript{104}

Where children are found in the workplace, they are not seen as professionals. "Being a professional usually requires a college education and the acquisition of a specialized knowledge that entails working with symbols and concepts."\textsuperscript{105} Children are in the early stages of their formal education. Post secondary education is closer to the end stage. Coincidentally, the speed with which one moves from primary education to post secondary education roughly parallels the speed with which the child moves chronologically from childhood to adulthood.

As a professional, one has some authority over others. Children in the workplace are not known to be in supervisory roles of any kind. As in most aspects of their lives, they lack autonomy, which they will only earn incrementally as they progress through their sequenced developmental stages. Children, like nonprofessionals lack respectability. "To treat people with respect is to be prepared to listen to what they have to say or to do what they request because they have some authority, expertise or influence."\textsuperscript{106} The rules that govern the classroom are generally not to listen to what the child has to say but to listen to what the professional teacher says. The behavioural understandings in the classroom are not to do what other students request but to do

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., p.58.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., p. 57.
\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., p. 57.
what the voices of authority require. The division between professionals and nonprofessionals are culturally expressed in forms of dress, speech, tastes and demeanor. Professional dress connotes respectability. Professional speech is specialized and often multi-syllabic. Professional demeanor is confident, assertive and expectant of respect. Children, when viewed as nonprofessionals, can often be seen in dress that appears defiant and openly disrespectful. Where schools and workplaces wish to exert control over this form of expression, children will often be seen wearing uniforms.

Exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness are forms of oppression that divide labour in relation to “who works for whom, who does not work, and how the content of work defines one institutional position relative to others.” The underlying assumption is that all individuals being viewed in these relations of power have access to the workplace to one degree or another. But children do not have access to the workplace in any consistent way. Can children be considered oppressed under one of these three conditions?108

If we recall that work is a social process, then we can quickly see some parallels in these three conditions when we examine schooling as a social process. For example, exploitation can be

107Ibid., p. 58.

108One difficulty with Young’s analysis is that her consideration of structural oppression looks only at conditions within capitalist countries. I believe, however, that her writing is not intended to be read narrowly and is written to address conditions of oppression which can occur not only in non-democratic countries but also in countries that purport to have democratic freedoms. That is why I have considered children to be eligible for consideration of Young’s conception of structural oppression in the workplace wherever they are allowed access and in schools where there is an unequal exchange occurring and in countries where access to the workplace is often denied.
seen to occur at school when we think of `school work' as the product of children's labour which is transferred in the form of a societal investment, that will produce a return to society at a future date. In another sense children produce work (unpaid) which supports the schooling industry (paid). It is an unequal exchange occurring within coercive and compulsory structures that provide few options to children.

With the condition of marginalization children can be seen as marginals, as I have stated earlier, in that they are dependent and this dependency is used as justification for the suspension of citizenship rights. Children are either not permitted entry to the workplace or, if they are, it is discouraged by the imposition of compulsory schooling. If we consider schooling a workplace where children are engaged in school work then we can better seen children as having little autonomy and being subjected to the control of this particular institutional bureaucracy.

Powerlessness is experienced in schools by children as they have little choice or decision making opportunities over their environment, the content of their learning and how this learning will be experienced. Children have no say about the speed with which they must move through each grade, one year at a time, irrespective of the content or their achievement levels. Children must be grouped with other children by similar age. Children's status in schools is low. It is lower than their professional adult educators and they frequently experience a lack of respect that the professionals and non professionals within the school would not receive or accept.
Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism is an interesting perspective from which to view children and adults. Young writes that this form of oppression means that one group experiences the dominant meanings of society in such a way as to render one’s own group invisible, but paradoxically one’s group experiences are stereotyped and marked as “Other”. “Otherness” creates specific experiences not shared by the dominant group. Ambrosio writes, “The paradox is that while the culture of the oppressed group is concealed by that of the dominant group, it becomes visible as different from the norm by the process of stereotyping, a process in which an individual who is a member of a particular group is ascribed the attributes that the dominant group sees as defining that group.” Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture and their establishment as the norm.

I have already detailed the differences which mark the relatedness of children and adults and how these differences are maintained. Reinforcing these differences is ordinary discourse and, in particular, the discourse of developmental theories. This powerful combination hosts the conditions for cultural imperialism of children. Consider the life cycle of the human being. A human is born, grows, can reproduce, ages and dies. The cycle is repeated with the birth of another human being. Presumably all stages in this cycle are equally important in maintaining the cycle. Consider for a moment that one stage is more important than another. By virtue of this weighting, other stages are less important. Consider this stage the ‘mature’ stage. Other stages are ‘pre’ and ‘post’ maturation. Now consider this mature stage to be the norm, the ideal

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109 Ambrosio, p. 130, op.cit.
to which the human grows to and dies from. This dominant, weighted view reinforces its position by reconstructing children as immature, deviant from the norm and inferior. Now consider shifting the weighting. The new life stage is the ultimate stage, new, innocent, full of possibilities. All other stages are post natal, older, tainted, limited. The natal stage is the norm and ideal. Such a view would not work well with theories of development. Although they purport to be explications of differences, they have been conceived, written, and implemented by adults with adulthood as the norm and, combined with a broader sense of powerlessness, leaves children, who are at a lesser stage in development, with a sense of inferiority and lacking. Developmentalism assists in the construction of children as the relational ‘Other’ to adults. Young writes that the injustice of cultural imperialism is that while the perceptions and experiences of the oppressed group have little effect on the dominant culture, the perceptions of the dominant group are imposed on the oppressed.

This is an illustration of how groups of human beings could establish themselves as the norm, and structure the world in which their own cultural view dominates. In our everyday world all groups are not equally valued. Cultural imperialism provides a way of examining the effect of the dominant group’s experience and culture on the subordinate group. For example, adults have “exclusive, or primary access to what Nancy Fraser calls the means of interpretation and communication in society.” Adults own and operate all media. Adults also have the financial means to maintain their control. Any access children have to the media is heavily dependent upon adults. Adults censor movies. Adults withhold admission money. Adults can refuse to

110 Young, I., op.cit., p. 59.
drive. The list can be large. As a result, a cinematic sensation like ‘Titanic’ which appears to be responding to the “experiences, values and goals”\(^\text{111}\) of young people may only be manipulating this medium for the purposes of improving profits and the financial base of some adults. This is not to say that young people would not have wanted to see the same movie if they were to have had financial control over its production and profits, (although they did not). The degree to which this movie was financially successful depended upon how accurately the adult producers accurately predicted that parents and guardians would permit their children to view it. Furthermore, the fact that many 13 year old girls were captivated by this movie may also mean that many were experiencing another phenomenon of cultural imperialism which Young describes as double consciousness.

Culturally oppressed groups can experience ‘double consciousness’ of their identity. This is the sense one has when being defined by two cultures: a dominant and a subordinate culture. Young refers to DuBois’ description of this experience: “Double consciousness — this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”\(^\text{112}\) Children experience double consciousness exactly as Young writes about it for women. They desire recognition as human, capable of activity, and full of hope and possibility. Yet the child receives from adults the judgement that s/he is different and this difference is felt to be inferior. In the example of the movie, Titanic, double consciousness could be experienced by young people (including 33 year old girls) who would see

\(^{111}\)Ibid., p. 59.

\(^{112}\)Ibid., p. 60, op.cit. From DuBois, 1969[1903], p 45.
themselves as equal and able to engage in similar pursuits. Once, however, the movie ends and they attempt to act on these perceived possibilities, it would be reasonable for them to expect adult intervention. They would likely be overruled if any serious attempt to act as emancipated adults were to follow. Self-repudiation and lowered self-esteem for having allowed oneself to entertain such goals are the usual indications of the effects of this double consciousness within cultural imperialism.

Violence

Young's fifth condition of oppression is violence. Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate or destroy the person simply because of one's membership in another group.\textsuperscript{113} It is a form of social injustice, "to the degree that institutions and social practices encourage, tolerate, or enable the perpetration of violence against members of specific groups."\textsuperscript{114} Although irrational, it is often legitimated by society due in part to the fear that some groups have of a loss of their identity. Young writes, "Violence-causing fear or hatred of the other at least partly involves insecurities on the part of the violators; its irrationality suggest that unconscious processes are at work."\textsuperscript{115} It is a process by which other groups are deemed frightening or hateful by defining them as loathsome and ugly. It sets up the logic by which violence against such groups can be rationalized. If such groups are culturally

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p.61.

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p.63.

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p.63.
imperialized and wish to "reject the dominant meanings and attempt to assert their own subjectivity or [assert] the fact of their cultural difference [which] may put the lie to the dominant culture’s implicit claim to universality,"116 then such oppressed groups can challenge the identity of the dominant group. This identity comes into being only in relation to the subordinate group. All of one’s group identity which has been inherited could be threatened by the perceived assertions of the oppressed group. This fear can be sensed as 'If you are no longer you in relation to me, then who am I in relation to you?' Young believes that such unconscious fears account partly for the oppression of violence.

This form of oppression may be seen alongside conditions of cultural imperialism. We have already noted that children experience cultural imperialism. It ripens the conditions in which acts of violence may occur. Since children grow older and adults know what metamorphosis will occur at the end of childhood, the relationality between adults and children becomes strained. When children move into the next group of adolescence it is not a smooth transition primarily because we as adults insist on controlling all of the significant conditions in life that give human beings meaning and purpose. Children, as they age, challenge the dominant meanings that set children in place as the relational other. Their message becomes, 'We are not lesser and immature, but equal.' For parents this is a particularly difficult time because they are unsure of how to assume a new identity and relationship. For educators, it is especially frightening to work in an environment in which control is threatened. Some would try to slow the process of change. Violence is one means of putting down the insurrectionists and 'putting on the breaks'. But this

116Ibid., p.63.
only adds to the friction. Change is inevitable. As children grow physically large in stature, they know they are at less risk to their personal safety from this face of oppression and can counter intimidation tactics. Until the end of childhood, however, the existence of children's aid societies across North America and the UN 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19, are clear indications that children are vulnerable to this form of social injustice and in need of societal protections.

Children as a social group do experience the conditions of cultural imperialism and violence. While Young's treatment of exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness are restricted to the workplace, children can be seen as experiencing these conditions when work includes other locations such as the school. Young's conception requires only one condition of oppression to be met in order for a social group to claim that they are oppressed. Children, I believe, more than satisfy this requirement. In conclusion, sufficient reasons have been provided to warrant the consideration of children as a social group liable to oppression within Young's conception. In the next section I will examine the implications for adults and children when children are subjects of any of the conditions of oppression.
IMPLICATIONS
for Adults and Children

When we consider that children are born dependent upon adults for their continuing survival, and born into a society that greatly values independence and autonomy, it is not difficult to see how children may be vulnerable to the disabling constraints of domination and oppression. Two questions arise from this realization. First, can such conditions be avoided? Second, if such conditions are inevitable between relational social groups, how can children and adults make the best of their situation? I will examine the contexts in which these relations play out and look at where changes might be entertained in society’s institutional structures of schools. I will examine how teachers and students can promote dialogue and changes in ordinary discourse with students in the classroom and how teacher training can improve the extent to which the relatedness of adults and children can be eased. I believe the school is a significant area in which the structural oppression of children is supported and maintained.

In both questions compelling reasons must be given to adults, who are enjoying benefits from this unequal relatedness, to play an important role in change. Such reasons must be a combination of altruistic as well as self-serving arguments. Altruistic reasons will note psychological harms that can permanently injure human beings. Self-serving reasons will include improvements in personal relationships within these relations of power and the implications of inevitable shifts in dependency and interdependency between adults and children.
The first question considers whether conditions of structural oppression can be avoided. In order to avoid structural oppression the related groups must be aware of the nature of their relatedness. Earlier I have stated that children are born into their group and are socialized into its group characteristics. As the subordinated group, children are often acutely aware of their own powerlessness and of those who have power. Children also realize early that they are not alone and quickly recognize their own group affinity.

On the other hand, the dominant group adults need to be helped to see their location in structural oppression. Since the nature of these forms of oppression have as hidden dominant norms and 'categories of meaning', one of the first tasks would be to reveal that which has been hidden. To remedy a problem one needs to know that a problem exists. This appears to be a daunting task even for those of us adults who claim to be aware of many of the markers of structural oppression that exist between related social groups.

**Can conditions of oppression be avoided for children?**

Martha Minow, author of the book *Making All the Difference*, has examined at length the dilemmas of difference which do exist between dominating and oppressed groups. Minow’s thesis contends that a dilemma or conundrum is created when the treatment of difference is either ignored or is focused upon and that either treatment option serves to reinforce the difference itself. “The dilemma of difference may be posed as a choice between integration and separation, as a choice between similar treatment and special treatment or as a choice between neutrality and

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The problem, as I have already stated, is that children are a social group liable to conditions of oppression. Reinforcing this unequal dyad are five assumptions that work to uphold their relational differences with adults. The first assumption is that difference is intrinsic and naturally occurring. Minow suggests that this assumption ought to be challenged since there are numerous differences which can exist between human beings. Which traits are salient depends upon the selection process for those traits and the persons making the selection. "An assessment of difference selects out some traits and makes them matter; indeed, it treats people as subject to categorization rather than as manifesting multitudes of characteristics."\(^{119}\)

In the case of children this can mean that at birth children are naturally small and cognitively undeveloped. These traits (and there are many others) that have been selected are size and cognition and this selection has been made by adults as categories that matter. Through these pre-selected categories one sees these characteristics of the child as naturally occurring. Adults need to examine all the traits that are deemed to be characteristic of the child, who has selected these traits, and for what purpose the particular set of traits have been selected. Furthermore, it would be helpful to examine what characteristics have been omitted from the list and why, and what the implications are for both adults and children for such omissions.


\(^{119}\)Ibid., p.51.
The second assumption underlying difference is that there is an implied norm that need not be stated. Minow states that "it is from the point of reference of this norm that we determine who is different and who is normal." The unstated norm is a default reference point which is implied or hidden. As argued earlier, when children are described as immature, the default reference point accorded to adults by adults is maturity. By uncloaking such hidden norms we can call into question the validity of using such a category to separate human beings. Such categories have the effect of accounting for children's experiences within categories selected by adults and diminishing them as full human beings. It is this process of categorizing human beings that needs to be understood as laden with potential harms for humanity. Making explicit the unstated points of reference of the adult is the first necessary step in addressing the dilemma of difference between adults and children.

The third assumption builds upon assumptions one and two. It is that the powerful default perspective is presumed to be neutral. One treats the person doing the seeing or judging as though that person did not have any particular perspective. Minow writes that "no one is free from perspective, and no one can see fully from another’s point of view." The way these assumptions work in the case of children is that children are not only small and underdeveloped (which is a natural reflection of their newness to humanity), but compared to the hidden norms of adulthood (e.g., 'bigness' is the norm) these differences can be seen by any observer not only as

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120 Ibid., p.51.

121 Ibid., p.51.
apparent but true. If, however, one can claim that it is true children are different because they are smaller and immature and one asks for validation of this truth from an objective observer, it is critical to understand the perspective of the observer. It is necessary for adults to examine the coincidence between who is the majority and the viewpoint of this majority that holds these categories to be true. It is critical to the dissolution of dilemmas of difference between adults and children for adults to acknowledge their own perspective (partial as it must be) and its influence in the assignment of difference in relation to some unstated norms of maturity and cognition. Failing to do so carries significant moral consequences. It surreptitiously forces one’s own world vision on everyone without having to negotiate and compromise its creation. “Veiling the standpoint of the observer conceals its impact on our perception of the world. Denying that the observer’s perspective influences perception leads to the next assumptions that all other perspectives are either presumptively identical to the observer’s own or do not matter.”

The fourth assumption is that the perspectives of those being judged are either irrelevant or have already been taken into account through the perspective of the judge. For children and adults this can have significant harmful consequences in failing to see the complexity of humanity. It reinforces the structures of oppression that can affect the relatedness and negatively impact the personal relationships held by members of both groups.

The last assumption is that the existing social and economic arrangements are natural and neutral. ‘Status quo is the way to go.’ The ways things are in society are good, natural and freely

[^122]: Ibid., p.65.
chosen. When this assumption is exposed, adults can better see that this is incorrect. The status quo presents societal arrangements between adults and children as neutral. But one can then see that, indeed, the arrangements have been developed to the unstated default perspective. Minow points out that it follows from this assumption that differences in the lives of particular individuals are thought to “arise because of personal choice. We presume that individuals are free, unhampered by the status quo, when they form their own preferences and act upon them. From this view, any departure from the status quo risks nonneutrality and interference with free choice.”123

The dilemma of difference fits well with Young’s theory of social groups. Minow states that difference is relational and from Minow’s following passage about the nature of difference we can see language very similar to that which Young uses to describe the relatedness of two social groups:

Both the social and legal constructions of difference have the effect of hiding from view the relationships among people, relationships marked by power and hierarchy. Within these relationships, we each become who we are and make order out of our own lives. Yet, by sorting people and problems into categories, we each cede power to social definitions that we individually no longer control.124

Although Minow refers to both ‘people’ and ‘individuals’ there is an area of agreement between Young and Minow in that people as they may be related by difference in social groups can

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123 Ibid., p.52

124 Ibid., p.22.
experience dominance and oppression depending on their position in the dyad.

While Minow attempts to find 'ways out' of the difference dilemma, she suggests that since it “is a symptom of a particular way of looking at the world”\textsuperscript{125} we need to begin, as a culture, to reconsider our ways of viewing our world. “The problem arises only in a culture that officially condemns the assigned status of inequalities and yet, in practice, perpetuates them.”\textsuperscript{126} Difference ought not to be seen as intrinsic “but as a function of relationships, as a comparison drawn between an individual and a norm that can be stated and evaluated.”\textsuperscript{127} To do this Minow holds that the people who assign difference can take into account the alternative perspectives of those who have been called 'different'. If assigners of difference take the perspective of those labelled 'different' she suggests that they would see “the process by which some people's traits are made compatible with social arrangements, while others are made not to fit in.”\textsuperscript{128} In other words, if people could take the perspective of the other then one would be able to see the social arrangements as unjust and one could see the need for the renovation of relationship between the status quo and the assignment of difference.\textsuperscript{129} Minow makes this point concrete by the example of Amy, a hearing-impaired child who was to be educated in a regular classroom with some program modifications for speech therapy tutoring. The parents maintained that their child’s

\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., p.79.

\textsuperscript{126}Ibid., p.79.

\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p.80.

\textsuperscript{128}Ibid., p.80.

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid., p.80.
needs required more special programming and segregated solutions, while the school maintained that more similarity and integration was their obligation. Minow writes that a third 'way out' was not discussed which could imbed the problem of her difference in the relationship of all the students in the class making them part of the problem. Minow suggests a 'way out' for Amy by raising the question "What if the teacher instructed all the students in sign language and ran the class in both spoken and sign language simultaneously? This approach conceives of the problem as a problem for all the students."\textsuperscript{130}

As adults it is difficult for us to identify our own complicity in structural oppression. Often we are oblivious to the full range of our own imbeddedness in groups of privilege. In addition to the need to have adults aware, there is the need to have adults open and willing to have their consciousness raised. As I have mentioned earlier, adults have their own reasons for remaining closed on this subject. If adults can be convinced that it is in their interest to be open on their relational position to children, then adults must also be willing to understand the nature of their relatedness. As Minow has shown, this is not a simple undertaking.

Minow suggests that if we remove the difference dilemma we dissolve the conditions that hold the related groups together. She asserts that such 'ways out' require taking the perspective of the other. It suggests that the dominant members of the dyad consider what it would be like to be the members of their correlate oppressed group. There is a great deal to be written about whether such 'perspective-taking' is possible and under what conditions. Minow, herself, doubts whether

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., p.84.
this is every fully possible. She writes,

It may be impossible to take the perspective of another completely, but the effort to do so can help us recognize that our own perspective is partial. Searching especially for the viewpoint of minorities not only helps those in the majority shake free of their unstated assumptions but also helps them develop a better normative sense in light of the experience of those with less power.\textsuperscript{131}

Boyd writes that if one is to begin to alter the disabling constraints of domination and oppression self-examination is also necessary. He tells us that it is critical for us to recognize our own relational differences "because they are so often, so systemically, determinant of both our identities and our life prospects as persons."\textsuperscript{132} This insight, it seems, creates a huge burden of responsibility on those who are privileged to ensure that those who are relationally disadvantaged are not adversely and permanently effected. Boyd also reminds us that as social groups related to each other, a power differential does exist. In this power imbalance children are vulnerable to oppression. Boyd writes,

In short, both our experience of the social world and our interactions within it are already "aligned" for us insofar as we are unavoidably members of groups (in Young's sense). And by this, we are differentially enabled/constraining or dis-enabled/constrained in relation to each other.\textsuperscript{133}

As adults we can and often do harm children. When this happens we are often benefitting at the expense of children and unaware of our harming. Boyd points out that,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p.68.
\item \textsuperscript{132}Boyd, D., op.cit. p.19.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Ibid., p. 26.
\end{itemize}
If I fail to identify this aspect of social reality by naming the source of this harm, and my part in it, by omission I am contributing to maintenance of the status quo, and thereby not taking due responsibility for being part of the oppression.\textsuperscript{134}

We arrive at the ‘So what?’ question. So what if one group benefits at the expense of the other. We can more readily recognize reasons that the subordinated group might provide to change the status quo. But why should the benefitting group be compelled to alter their comfortable position?

In Minow’s example of Amy’s classroom the ‘way out’ may, and indeed often does, meet with significant opposition. People do not want or are unable to take the perspective of the other. Why should Amy’s hearing impairment be every child’s problem? It could be argued that not only would the curriculum in Amy’s classroom be different significantly from that offered in other classrooms, but the cost of providing that modified curriculum in that classroom may be higher than the standard curriculum offered by the school board institution. Furthermore the difference dilemma does not really disappear in this remedy. It does for Amy but it then is shifted to the group level. Amy’s classroom teaches both sign language and English where next door another teacher teaches Mandarin and English and in another classroom down the hall children move about the room in non-ambulatory devices. The differences have not really disappeared but shifted from the individual to the class as a whole. We have not yet made a case for why others should share the burden of the difference which this solution puts forward.

\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., p.32.
As parents we claim to love our children and to not wish them harm. As educators we claim to help children acquire the skills and training they will need to succeed in life. If we do indeed love our children and care about their opportunities to enjoy the good life, then awareness of the harm we may be inflicting upon our charges is something to which all loving parents and caring educators would wish to be informed with a view to ending our hurtful practices.

Applebaum and Boyd discuss four psychological harms experienced by members of subordinate groups. First, a subordinate group does not have a match between its own social group identity and the prevailing patterns of meaning of the dominant group. For children this means that the "categories of meaning"\(^{135}\) are largely those of adults and making sense of their lives becomes awkward and difficult. There is a sense that they are 'less than' or 'immature', because their values, ways of talking, and behaviours, are considered 'not yet' normal. Childhood is not viewed as something that is positive but rather as something one must outgrow.

A second psychological harm experienced by members of a subordinate group is a continual struggle to define one's self in ways that are not alienating. For children this means that the way in which childhood is constructed gives rise to the very characteristics which describe them as children. There is a struggle to be defined on adult terms because there is not a match between how the child sees him or herself and how adults see the child. The struggle creates the characteristics of 'difficult', 'immature', 'demanding' and 'insubordinate' which aid in the recognition of the group as 'Other' and in seeing childhood as 'outside' of adulthood. Yet, the

\(^{135}\)Applebaum & Boyd, p.14, op.cit.
more a child adopts the 'categories of meaning' of adulthood, the more he or she denies a significant part of one's own identity and experiences a sense that one belongs neither to childhood nor to adulthood.

One example of this can be seen in the cartoon character of Martin Prince on the TV comedy series, 'The Simpsons'. This series draws its humour from our society's understandings of various stereotypes in our culture. Martin is a miniature science professor. He is brilliant, articulate and extremely knowledgeable on any subject and is frequently found correcting Miss Crabapple's and the other students' inaccuracies in his grade four class. His clothing is that of the 'uniform' worn by the stereotypical systems analyst or tech operator believed to exist in most workplaces. Martin thinks and articulates like an adult but speaks with a prepubescent high frequency pitch to his voice. Martin, however, is in the fourth grade along with Bart Simpson and company. His classmates have made it abundantly clear to him that he is not a 'grown-up' and his continued efforts to please the teacher and the principal and other adults in Springfield will be subject to retribution. When there is a class prank followed by class punishment, Martin is required to be included. On the other hand if Martin doesn't conform to the pattern of struggle that characterizes the group, he will suffer further recriminations from his fellow classmates. This is the ever present threat. The kids are often ridiculing his exaggerated adult talk and with a phrase or a look, they remind him that he is still a kid. Martin is cartooned as a confident child in his own delusional world until his peer group reminds him that he is a kid. With those reminders he is cartooned as bewildered and unbelieving. The humour arises from his ignorance of his social place and the audience's awareness that his location is clearly between a rock (adults such
as Miss Crabapple) and a hard place (his class and town).

Third, *double consciousness* is experienced by the subordinate group as seeing oneself through one’s own eyes and through the oppressor’s eyes. This *double consciousness* is experienced as lack and negation. For children this is often expressed as a ‘lack of self esteem’. As a child one views the adult world with their norms of ability and maturity. This is one level of consciousness. Children view themselves from the outside and not part of the adult world. They view the norm from the adult perspective. Adults can drive, work, own a house and land and have great freedom of movement. From the outside children see themselves as ‘unable’ and ‘immature’. Children see that they cannot drive a car, go to work or own a house. They know that they do not know everything that the teacher knows and they know that they cannot do everything that the teacher does. They also know that their behaviours are ‘inappropriate’ when they spontaneously speak or express themselves in settings such as the classroom or the dinner table. So when children see themselves from the adult perspective, ‘dependent’ and sometimes ‘rebellious’, they see themselves as ‘mistake-makers’, ‘stupid’ or ‘unable’. This reinforces poor self esteem and creates the conditions for adult ‘expert’ intervention in the form of guidance, counselling and programming.

On another level children see the things they can do as things that are not valued by adults. For example children are small and physically more flexible than adults. They can adjust to a wide range of changes in their environment in ways that better guarantee their ongoing survival than adults can. However the message received as feedback from adults is that these abilities are
simply differences. Double consciousness, according to Young, is the sense that one is defined by two cultures: a dominant and a subordinate culture.\textsuperscript{136}

The fourth psychological harm is a trauma experienced by members of subordinate groups when they are either not recognized at all by others or they are misrecognized. "As one's own identification within dominant groups tends to disappear from view, all these privileges get perceived by oneself and by others as what one deserves, and deserves as an individual."\textsuperscript{137} Applebaum and Boyd were talking about members of dominant groups but I believe that similar effects can be observed in members of subordinate groups. In subordinate groups it is the disadvantages which members perceive to be deserved and deserved as an individual. This is a cause of psychological harm to the oppressed, putting downward pressure on self-esteem and, in the extreme, it can be manifested in children in the form of depression, anger and boredom.

If we claim that we really care about our children's welfare, then our motivations for removing these disabling constraints which mark the relatedness of these two groups would be considered altruistic. Such reasons alone are not enough. A case must also be made to serve the interests of the self.

As stated earlier in this paper, our society values independence and autonomy highly. With autonomy comes responsibility and accountability. The converse also exists. Without autonomy

\textsuperscript{136}Young, p. 60, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{137}Applebaum & Boyd, p.24, op.cit.
there cannot be responsibility let alone accountability. While adults possess autonomy, there is a sense of growing fatigue with this group to the overwhelming responsibilities this brings. Parents and teachers conflict with each other over who ought to be responsible for the actions of the child, but rarely is the child held responsible and accountable. Yet our programs are designed to create the autonomous learner. The recent report in Ontario entitled 'The Royal Commission on Learning' was also silent on this point. When a student fails to achieve the academic success that we as adults establish for them, who is responsible? Who ought to be responsible? This unevenness in the legitimate exercise of autonomy and responsibility is not helpful to either adults or children. The allocation of autonomy and responsibility is better determined with the inclusion of children and can possibly diminish the conditions that give rise to their oppression. Spreading the burden of responsibility is certainly rooted in self-interest.

A second reason for altering the status quo would be the improved interpersonal relationships experienced by members of both groups to one another. The relationship between adults and children can often be described as fearful or frustrating, depending upon one's perspective. But we also know that adults and children can experience great fun and joy in each other's company. Most people would support the latter as a good reason for altering the status quo.

A third self-serving reason for altering the structural oppression that exists between relational groups might include consideration of the inevitable shifting of dependency in the life cycle of human beings. When a human is born there is dependence on the adult for ongoing survival. As humans age, the child becomes the independent adult and the adult becomes the dependent senior
citizen. There is certainly a good set of probabilities in most cultural arrangements to conclude that if one cares well for the young, the young will be more likely to care for the aged later on in time. Stated conversely, if adults neglect and abuse the young, there is good reason to believe that when they are elderly they will be cared for by the same standard that they used on their new caregivers.

**Can conditions of oppression for children be eased?**

The second question under consideration asks how these conditions of oppression, if inevitable, can be eased. In the larger context, schools need to be aware of their role in supporting the relatedness of adults and children which gives rise to conditions of oppression. It is also important to remember that this relatedness only *partly* forms children’s identities. I have suggested that personal relationships also form identities. In relation to psychological harm that can be experienced from structural forms of oppression, could this not be a way to ease the harming effects? If teachers worked toward establishing ‘I-Thou’ relationships in which both children and teachers create the world in which each other’s interests and values have a place, and a place in which together they work out the terms of relating, then it seems to me that such relationships could build individual identities where groups cannot. These could, in turn, ease or offset some of the psychological harms previously mentioned.

It is not helpful that schooling is compulsory. As Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers have shown, students already stay in school well beyond the required date. What ought to be compulsory for society is that every citizen should know how to read, write and calculate, because in a society
which is dependent upon literacy and numeracy skills such knowledge is empowering to all of its members. Occasionally, however, some students need to opt out of school for periods of time.

If, on the other hand, students remain in school, part of the curriculum should be designed to raise students’ awareness of their location in this dyad. The rationale for anti-ageist education is similar to that which Arnold and Boyd proffer as the rationale for anti-racist education. They write,

...as racism is inherently the structural relationship of one group’s dominance over another, expressed systemically throughout social life, adequate practical educational efforts to address this phenomenon depend upon teachers’ grasp of this third Perspective and their willingness to use it in critical monitoring of their everyday practice.¹³⁸

Arnold and Boyd are writing about ethical perspectives which are assumed by teachers in the process of justifying claims about educational aims. The third ethical perspective relates to concerns for relationships among groups in Young’s sense. Arnold and Boyd have used this particular notion of a social group to focus on race, and, similarly, I would use it to focus on age. They write,

From this perspective the teacher’s concern is to address through education the quality of the relationships between and among such groups, requiring attention to structural social conditions affecting the use, constraint, and shaping of unequal power.¹³⁹

This approach could be useful if we consider the division of child/adult as a socially constructed


¹³⁹Arnold & Boyd, op.cit. p.2.
division. Arnold and Boyd, I believe, are correct in suggesting that this group perspective ought to be included in preservice courses for teachers. Teachers are the adults in this dyad, and as I have already suggested, they are likely to be unaware of their own complicity in conditions of oppression for their students. Such training, "might place teachers in a better position to identify and handle instances where race [and I will add 'age'] interacts with their practice."140

This understanding and awareness-raising on the part of teachers should ultimately impact on their own behaviours and actions in the classroom towards their students. If I am aware that I have an unequal amount of power over my students and this impacts on a child’s identity, how can I offset the negative effects of this power differential?

In the classroom, dialogue should be required. In his forward to Matthew Lipman’s book Dialogues with Children, R. Coles points out that a number of theorists of child development and of moral development did not share his regard for children. "Such theorists do not really relax and talk to children day after day; rather, they ask them pointed questions, get them to perform tasks, and grade them."141 Adults have to examine many of their own limitations which they carry into dialogue. If we as adults do not expect children to be capable of engaging in reflective and analytical discussion, what are we to make of what they wish to say?


On dialogue Kreisberg writes,

While dialogue is the foundation of empowering classroom dynamics, dialogue towards the goal of making choices and reaching decisions seems to be the linchpin in helping students develop their voices. Through the challenge of making personal choices students experience a developing sense of self. They derive a sense of ownership — of ideas, of values, of a vision of the right and the just. They are encouraged to not only express their opinions but to take stands and to be responsible for the stands they take. They begin to feel the contours of their unique identities and to hear the sounds of their unique voices.\(^{142}\)

Kreisberg gives us a rationale for dialogue and Matthew Lipman warns that we as adults lack appropriate models of thoughtful dialogue with which children might identify and from which they all could learn. Lipman’s book *Dialogues with Children* seeks to portray relationships with children that value children as full human beings “without condescension of experimenter to subject, or of instructor to neophyte, or of loving provider to recipient of care.”\(^{143}\)

Admittedly, it is doubtful that Lipman or Kreisberg have a conception of dialogue that takes into account social group differences of the kind that I have discussed here. A full explication of dialogue is beyond the scope of this paper. However, if a full account were to be developed, it would need to provide for the understanding of differences that maintain the partners to the dialogue as separate yet related groups. Such dialogue would seek to balance the inherent power differential that exists between children and adults and seek to minimize, if not eliminate, the


very differences that maintain group relatedness. An attempt to diminish or eliminate group
differences would also risk losing the group identities of adults and children. Such a conception
of dialogue must then risk the dissolution of these related social groups altogether.

The fear is that the adults of tomorrow will only learn how to perpetuate the conditions that give
rise to oppression for children and have few reasons to consider the worth of the former adult
now senior citizen. Ageism is the next frontier. I am convinced that our current societal
arrangements can be improved and the best means to undertake such change is to actively and
genuinely engage children in the endeavour.
The purpose of this paper was to consider whether or not children are a social group liable to conditions of oppression. To achieve this end it was necessary to break the task into two steps. The first step was to review Iris Young’s conception of a social group and examine what critical criteria were necessary to consider children as an eligible social group. The second step, once the first was achieved, was to determine whether any of Young’s five faces of oppression could be considered applicable to children as a social group.

With regard to the first step it was necessary to demonstrate that children as a social group under Young’s conception are different from other collectivities such as aggregates and associations in terms of group-group relationality. It was also necessary to demonstrate that as a social group children satisfied two critical criteria of ‘boundedness’ and ‘thrownness’.

With regard to the second step, it was necessary to examine children as a social group liable to one of the following conditions of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, or violence. Children were found to be vulnerable to exploitation or marginalization and powerless in the workplace and these same conditions were also found to be present for children in the school. Children were also found to be vulnerable to cultural imperialism and violence. In the end it is possible to conclude that there are sufficient reasons to warrant the consideration of children as a social group within Young’s conception and as liable to oppression.
I believe that it is adults’ obligation to detail the feature of their own perspectives and tell why it is a better perspective through which to view the world than that of the child’s perspective. This requires showing how the assumptions that underlie the adult perspective are intimately connected to that which the adult believes it is good to be committed. Furthermore, children should be freer to decide whether they share those particular moral commitments. Adults, failing to detail their position and provide to children more autonomy, leave themselves vulnerable to charges of oppression because they have failed to concede that their perspective is particular and subjective and have failed to provide a supporting rationale.

In her book *A Voice for Children* M.F. Flekkøy writes, in part, about the experiences of the Office of Ombudsman for Children in Norway. This office was instituted in 1981 by the government to ensure its commitment to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. In the first eight years of its operation, Flekkøy notes that

> the complaints from children demonstrate how aware children are and how clearly they can formulate their concerns. It was also important to note that children are effective in following up: given a place to go with their complaint and some minimal support and information, even young children can and will do a lot on their own behalf - and they call back to report on results, which adults rarely bother to do.\(^\text{144}\)

Children can speak but are silenced. Children have a point of view but are ignored. Childrens’ lives are vulnerable. The intention here is to raise the awareness of children’s oppression in the hope that adults will engage the young with a great deal more attention to what they want and

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need. There is a strong belief that the world will be a slightly better place for everyone if children are valued as full human beings and accorded due respect, something I believe is lacking in our present culture. There is also a warning here for adults. As we adults age, what is the example we have set for the our children as they become the future’s adults? We are living longer and there is a sense that the government will be unable to attend to the geriatric population by traditional means. We will become less independent and more dependent and it would be helpful to reconsider our human interdependence. Otherwise both children and the aged will be vulnerable groups liable to oppression. We should start with our most vulnerable population. Children have much to teach us about the importance of dependence. They have a great deal to say and to offer that is valuable to all of society. Society needs to ensure that they are heard.
APPENDIX

David Hill, Age 6, Gr. 1

David's response to the following questions:

'What are report cards?':

"They tell you if you're all bad or all good or some bad and some good."

'Who gets report cards?'

"The class."

'Does the teacher get a report card?'

"No she just writes them."
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