



# FAMILY TROUBLES

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Jane Ribbens McCarthy

Visiting Fellow, Open University

# Outline

- Background to (children's) family troubles work
- Thinking about care, change, loss, and harm, across diverse contexts
- Symposium

# Background to family troubles work

- A historical divergence in (UK) family studies?
- Beneath the surface - making troubles visible in the normal and making the normal visible in the troubled
- Seeking dialogue – between disciplines, across substantive issues, between academics and professionals, across contexts.
- The Colloquium 2010 – with Carol-Ann Hooper and Val Gillies – the book, and later events

<http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/research/families-relationships-and-communities/family-troubles>

# Setting out the terrain

...change is an inescapable feature of life, and these changes will often be highly challenging, although in some circumstances, it may be the absence of change that is troubling... [Further,] troubles, conflict and painful experiences are common features of children's and young people's lives as these occur in the particular contexts of their families and close relationships, and all families are likely to be troubled at times.

Yet an idealised notion of childhood as a time of protection and innocence in contemporary Western cultures sometimes undermines the ability to acknowledge this and to equip children to deal with such trouble when they encounter it, and this failure may itself exacerbate the impact of trouble.

This raises a significant tension between how far to understand troubles as pervasive and, indeed, universal and to build expectations of and for children's lives on this basis, and how far to see troubles as avoidable and unacceptable and requiring clear interventions that will state this unequivocally, and seek to remedy and/or prevent such troubles. (Ribbens McCarthy, Hooper and Gillies, 2013)

# Key dilemmas

- How to draw boundaries or distinctions between harm and change, while recognising ambivalences and complexities
- How to avoid 'othering' some groups in this process
- How to take account of diverse localised meanings and 'expectations' (Carrithers), alongside power, structural issues and unequal access to resources, cultural + material
- How to avoid interventions that themselves create harm

# Building blocks

- Concepts that enable attention to the ‘cultural’ and phenomenological:
  - ‘change’ – and ‘loss’ - as developmental or chaotic – ‘critical moments’ and ‘vital conjunctures’
  - ‘expectations’ – typically, normatively, shaped by meanings and power
  - ‘disruptions’ – of expectations, trajectories, the ‘ordered scene’
  - ‘transitions’
  - ‘troubles’
- Broader structures
  - applications of categories (institutional) – labelling
  - resources and inequalities
  - power and politics – including sociological concepts, questions asked, theoretical models

# Moving further? An exploration of the human condition

- 'Disappointment' – psychic pain and suffering as inevitable (Craib)
- 'Suffering' – embodied pain experienced through cultural constructions (Wilkinson)
- 'Vicissitudes' - how 'cultures' /people respond to disruptive hardships and difficulties (Carrithers)
- Potential for enlargement of ourselves
- Inclusion of existential meanings (Kleinman and Kleinman)

# Frameworks for thinking

- Sociological approach - Sayer's 'pluralist objectivism' of why anything matters to people
- Anthropological approach - Shweder's non-uniform [pluralist] universality [of moral stance]
- Legal approach - Rights of the Child – protection, prevention, provision, participation
- Feminist philosophical approach – ethics of care – dependency and vulnerability – grounded and ambivalent



# Continuing dialogues and border crossings: today's Symposium

- Across disciplines – social policy, sociology, health care, education, geography, social work, childhood studies, gender studies
- Across national contexts – China, South Africa, Israel, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway, Latin America, USA, Japan, Taiwan, and the UK
- Across substantive family-related issues – trauma, domestic abuse, terminal illness, violence among young people, education, healthcare, kinship care, young carers, household composition, racial mixedness, generational dynamics, legal status