

Published in: *Sociology*, 37 (2): 277-295.

Childhoods in the Majority World: Miniature adults or tribal children?

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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic data from rural Bolivia and applying the theoretical approaches of the minority group child and the tribal child (James et al. 1998), this paper shows that majority world children integrate work, play and school, moving back and forth between child and adult-centred worlds. It argues that majority world children have largely been perceived in relation to their work, and that the overlapping arenas of their everyday lives tend to be ignored. A more holistic perspective which considers how they may combine work and school with play could be more appropriate for understanding children's childhoods.

Key Words

Bolivia, childhood culture, Majority World, play, work

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The majority of the world's children live in the economically poor world regions of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Broadly comparing developed and developing worlds, the most common type of 'childhood' is therefore that of 'Third World' children (many of whom work). Yet paradoxically Third World childhoods tend to be considered deviant when examined within the globalised model of childhood which is based on western ideals that children should play and study but not work (Boyden 1990). Quantitatively, in a global context, it is more common for children to work and go to school than to have a childhood dedicated to play and school. Rather than perceiving Third World children as having 'abnormal' childhoods, it should be remembered that First World children tend to experience more privileged, protected childhoods compared to most of the world's children. In order to redress this imbalance of the perception of children in the First and Third World, in this paper I refer to these world areas as the minority world and majority world¹ respectively. Despite recognising that the terms majority world and minority world unduly homogenise both world regions, their use at least invites reflection on the unequal relations between them. The terms highlight that First World children are the minority whilst Third World children are the majority of the world's child population.

However, it is now widely recognised that childhood is both a social and cultural construction and that a diversity of childhoods exist both between and within different cultures. Simplistic distinctions between majority world and minority world childhoods are problematic because children's lives vary according to a range of factors such as culture, class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, religion and birth order. For example, Hecht (1998) differentiates between the protected, nurtured childhoods of the rich and the

independent, nurturing childhoods of the poor. Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the heterogeneity of children's childhoods, it is still important to explore some broad general differences which are often raised as contrasting features of majority world and minority world childhoods. These differences are related primarily to work and play, both of which are the focus of this paper.

Work is more commonplace and visible in majority world childhoods (James et al. 1998:103) whereas play tends to be considered more central to minority world childhoods (Boyden 1996:20). It is notoriously difficult to define 'play' and 'work' because they include a wide range of activities and are concepts which are both socially and culturally constructed. The term 'play' tends to be used to describe 'what children do' (James et al. 1998: 90): voluntary and pleasurable activities that have no extrinsic goals (Garvey 1977: 10). For the purposes of this paper, play activities include those identified by Göncü et al. (1999: 160): object play (using a toy or object), language play (words and sounds), physical play (having fun using sensory and motor actions), pretend play (using ideas or objects to represent the meaning of something else) and games (routinized activity with rules). 'Work' is defined as "activities that produce goods and services for one's own use or in exchange for pay or support" (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 1). In this paper, children's work mainly refers to unpaid work for their own household, and includes agricultural, domestic or animal-related work.

There exist powerful but crude assumptions which permeate our culture about the differences between childhood and adulthood: children play and adults work:

Along the historical trajectory of Western societies the binarism of the work/play distinction became progressively mapped on to the adult/child dichotomy, both symptom

and cause of the growing conceptual and practical separation between the social worlds of adults and children. (James et al. 1998: 90)

However, it should be recognised that play is not exclusively a child-like activity nor work the prerogative of adults, but that 'By the late twentieth century both these marks of identity have become increasingly fixed attributes of child or adult status' (James et al. 1998: 91). Whilst this paper shows that children can work as well as play, it is worth bearing in mind that adults can also play as well as work.

In popular and media discourses majority world children who work from an early age: 'burdened with adult-like duties and responsibilities' (Kefyalew 1996:209) tend to be conceptualised as miniature adults (Boyden et al. 1998; Ennew 1994; Green 1998). This is because the notion of the globalisation of childhood based on minority world ideals continues to persist, where childhood is perceived as a time for play and school but as incompatible with work (Boyden 1990; Burman 1996; White 1996). Childhood is considered as a special time when we need to be protected, often resulting in exclusion from the world of adults, especially from adult responsibilities of work. The popular conceptualisation of children who do not live up to such idealism is that they have 'abnormal' childhoods (Edwards 1996; Save the Children 1995:40). Whilst not denying that some child work can be extremely exploitative, recent academic studies have shown that work is central to many majority world childhoods and that it is not necessarily detrimental, often having both positive and negative effects (Boyden et al. 1998; Connolly and Ennew 1996; Miljeteig 1999; Woodhead 1998). Nevertheless, literature about majority world childhoods tends to focus overwhelmingly on their work whilst neglecting their play.

This paper, which builds on a case study of rural Bolivia, aims to explore the ways in which children from a poor area of the majority world both work and play. It begins by outlining the background and methods of the research before describing the theoretical framework of James et al.'s approaches to the new social studies of childhood (1998). The nature of children's rural work is examined, followed by an exploration of their play and childhood culture. Finally, there is a discussion of how children integrate their work, play and school.

Background and theoretical approach to the study

The paper is based on an ethnographic study of rural childhoods in a subsistent farming community of sixty-eight households in Tarija, southern Bolivia (Punch 2001a). The community is in an economically poor and relatively isolated rural area, lacking basic services such as electricity and drinking water. The fieldwork was conducted during short-term regular visits over two years 1993-1995 and a six month period when I lived with two different households in the community from 1996 to 1997. I used a variety of qualitative methods including classroom-based tasks, participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews with most members of a sample of eighteen households. Both adults' and children's perspectives were sought, although children's views were the central concern. The research at the community school consisted of thirty-seven children aged 8-14 years writing diaries, taking photographs, drawing pictures and completing worksheets (see Punch forthcoming 2002).

This paper builds on the work of James et al. (1998). They identify four approaches as ways of exploring contemporary childhoods: the socially constructed child, the social structural child, the minority group child and the tribal child. All of these approaches of the new social studies of childhood take children's views seriously and focus on the child as 'being' rather than 'becoming' (Qvortrup 1994). The socially constructed child approach sees childhoods as varied both historically and culturally: 'in many parts of the world a child's age impinges very differently on local conceptualizations of children's physical and social skills' (James et al. 1998: 175). In contrast, the social structural child approach sees children as a universal category, a part of all social worlds where children are a group whose 'manifestations may vary from society to society but within each particular society they are uniform' (James et al. 1998: 32).

The perspectives of the social structural child and the socially constructed child are structural approaches which are each reflected in the empirical versions of the minority group child (the politicized version of the social structural child) and the tribal child (the politicized version of the socially constructed child) (James et al. 1998). As the minority group child and the tribal child focus on children's agency, they are more appropriate for this micro study of children as social actors in rural Bolivia which explores the situated nature of their work and play. Whilst James et al. remind us that the four approaches can overlap each other and fluidity between them exists, they suggest that movement between the minority group and the tribal child approaches is 'relatively rare' (1998:217). In this paper I use these two approaches to childhood in order to discuss empirical data of Bolivian children's everyday lives and show that they can be combined. First, I shall briefly outline the relevance of each perspective in relation to literature on children's play and work.

The tribal child approach conceptualises children as different from adults, focusing on the 'otherness' of childhood. It sees the child's cultural world as separate from that of adults, where children act autonomously with their own rituals and rules, thereby being an appropriate approach to explore the nature of children's play. It is understandable that, in order to redress the imbalance of studies which previously focused on adults, much of the initial empirical work in the minority world within the new sociology of childhood focused solely on child-centred contexts, such as the playground. In particular, children's games and language were explored as different from those of adults (James 1993; Opie and Opie 1982). Such studies concentrated on children's culture in relation to other children but ignored adult-child relations. This can lead to a simplification of the child's social world as separate from adults, ignoring the fact that in households or at school children frequently interact with adults, particularly parents and teachers (Alanen and Mayall 2001).

Most of the literature on children's culture focuses on minority world contexts (James 1995; Opie and Opie 1982; Thorne 1993). In contrast, there is a paucity of literature on childhood culture in the majority world and there are several possible reasons for this gap. The visibility of majority world children's work can obscure the importance of other aspects of their lives such as play. In addition, we may not recognise their localised forms of play, thereby not realising that often they combine their work with play (for a noteworthy exception see Katz 1986; 1991). James has suggested that the child-focused studies carried out in the majority world seemed to imply that children's and adults' worlds are less divided socially and culturally than in the minority world (1998:55). She observed that research using the tribal child approach had not been carried out in the majority world

which means that it is not known whether semi-autonomous children's cultures, similar for example to those described by James (1993) in the UK or Thorne (1993) in the US, exist elsewhere (James 1998). Thus one of the aims of this paper is to begin to address this gap by showing that Bolivian children who work also actively engage in their own well-developed childhood culture.

The minority group child approach is the 'adult child' approach which sees children 'as essentially indistinguishable from adults ... they are seen as active subjects' (James et al. 1998:31). However, the world they inhabit is adult-centred, forcing children to be marginalised in a similar way to other minority groups such as women or ethnic groups. This approach explores children's perceptions of the adult-centred world in which they participate and is often concerned with children's rights. One area of study which is particularly relevant to the minority group child approach, perceiving children as similar to adults but more likely to be exploited, is that of children's work (such as Niewenhuys 1994; Reynolds 1991; Solberg 1996).

Children of the majority world tend to be studied from the perspective of the minority group child because most of the sociological and anthropological literature about their childhoods is located within the context of children's work.² Much child research in Latin America, Africa and Asia continues to remain strongly focused on children in exceptionally difficult circumstances or especially disadvantaged children, such as child prostitutes, child soldiers, street children, child labourers and child slaves (for example, Connolly and Ennew 1996; Ennew 1994; Hecht 1998; Miljeteig 1999). Despite dispelling many of the misplaced assumptions that majority world children are merely passive, exploited victims, such research still concentrates on the child's world of work. Although

essential to highlighting the complexities of children's work, I would argue that an almost exclusive focus on their working lives has led to an obfuscation of more ordinary everyday aspects of majority world children's childhoods.

Whilst recent research has shown that work can also be an important element of minority world children's lives (McKechnie et al. 2000; Mizen et al. 1999; Morrow 1994), play, as an element of majority world childhoods, is rarely acknowledged or explored. Although it has been recognised that many children in the majority world combine both work and school (Boyden 1994; Woodhead 1998), very few studies have shown how they combine work and play (Katz 1986; 1991) and virtually none have shown how they integrate all three arenas of work, play and school (except briefly in Nieuwenhuys 1994: 53; Woodhead 1998: 157). Therefore, this paper explores the ways in which children who work and go to school in the majority world can also create their own childhood culture. Since the perspectives of the tribal child and the minority group child reflect the child as 'other' and the child as 'adult' respectively, they are particularly suitable for exploring the nature of children's play and work, activities which have increasingly become associated with the status of childhood (play) and adulthood (work) (James et al. 1998: 90).

Negotiating child-adult roles

The discussion of the empirical data is begun by using an extract from my fieldnotes to illustrate some of the complex ways that children move in and out of adult and child-centred worlds³ in different contexts with different people. It also indicates that they may switch adult and child roles almost instantaneously within the same context with the same people. The example shows sibling relationships being negotiated in the absence of parents. On the way home from school the siblings had been searching for long leafed

plants to make dresses for dolls they had made out of bubble gum wrappers. On arrival at their house ten year old Marianela takes on an authoritative adult role then moves into a more child-like role as she loses her authority and starts to physically fight with her sister.

"Come on Alma, here's your food," said Marianela to her five year old sister as she served up her food. "Pablito, get changed," she told her seven year old brother.

"Okay," he replied.

Alma finished eating: "We've just eaten roast piggy."

Marianela corrected her: "Roast pork, not roast piggy." Marianela washed up all the dishes as she usually does after meals.

"Alma, get changed," said Pablo to his little sister, echoing Marianela's words to him earlier.

"No," responded Alma.

"And what are you going to wear to school tomorrow?" he asked her.

"This dress," she replied, pointing to the one she was wearing.

"Hurry up and get changed," snapped Pablo, and finally Alma did change her dress.

A short while later: "Stop messing around now," Marianela scolded Pablo and Alma for playing on the beds.

"But we really want to play," said Pablo.

"Then come out here and play. Or I'll tell mum," warned Marianela.

"I won't let you," retorted Alma. Marianela and Alma started hitting each other and fighting, ending up rolling around on top of one another on the beds.⁴

This conversation took place in one of the households where I often used to stay. Similar sibling negotiations were observed in other households, but it was easier to record the detail of conversations in the households where I stayed and spent most time. This incident occurred when the children and I had returned from school having been making dolls along the way. On finding the house empty, since the mother had taken lunch to her husband working in some distant fields, Marianela, as the oldest sibling present, stopped playing with the dolls and automatically assumed a parental type role. She served lunch, which her mother had left prepared for them, ordering her younger siblings about in a competent, organised way. Her actions, choice of words and tone of voice echo her mother's style of speech when she is telling the children what to do and how to behave. The children know they must change out of their school clothes when they get home, so as not to get them dirty for the next day, yet Marianela took on the parental role of reminding them of their obligations. Pablo, the middle sibling, tried to exercise his authority over the youngest sibling, by copying Marianela's words of advice to him. Alma is not so compliant, responding cheekily, showing she has limited respect for her brother who is just two years older than her.

Marianela is only ten years old, yet here she acts in an independent, responsible way, using her own initiative to organise her siblings. Only towards the end of the example do we see her losing some authority and having to resort to threatening the others with 'telling mum', which indicates that most power in the household is held by adults over children. Alma's final answer to her older sister, indicates her own sense of control: 'I won't let you,' seems to suggest that she might be able to persuade her sister not 'to tell' after all. In this case they end up fighting and rolling about on the very beds that Marianela had just

been scolding them for playing on. Thus her adult role is transformed back into a child-like role as she physically fights and struggles with her sister.

The adult role that Marianela assumes of her own accord in this example, is not exceptional behaviour for a ten year old in rural Bolivia. In fact, at this point it is worth remembering that this is not necessarily unusual behaviour for many sibling caretakers in the minority world (see Kosonen 1996). In particular, it should be acknowledged that poor children from the majority world may have more in common with the childhoods of the working classes in the minority world than with middle-class children from their own countries (see Hecht 1998: 83). Thus, we must not forget the limitations of distinguishing between majority and minority worlds and that within cultures children's childhoods can differ markedly.

Marianela's example shows how children both respond to power and use it themselves, so they are at once receivers and givers of power (Reynolds 1991). Yet Marianela is still a child who enjoys playing, going to school and singing songs. She switches easily between these two roles of responsible adult and carefree child, assuming a different identity according to the situation. As the oldest female sibling in her household, Marianela frequently takes on a mother role towards her younger siblings, looking after them while her father is working as a day labourer and her mother is carrying out some other task. She often cares for her two year old brother:

When mum and dad go off to a party, I stay with Marcelo and he's all right. He stays quietly with me, he loves me, but he almost doesn't love Pablo and Alma because they hit him.⁵ (Marianela, 10 years)

She washes and combs the two youngest siblings' hair, changes their clothes and plays with them. Her position of responsibility gives her certain authority and control over them, yet she helps them considerably too. This example shows how, on the one hand, children can take on adult responsibility and, like the 'minority group child' approach, she can be seen acting in a similar way to adults, working in an adult-centred world. On the other hand, Marianela plays and fights with her siblings and, like the 'tribal child' approach, she can be perceived as acting very different from adults, inhabiting a child-centred social world. Marianela's example shows how children can be like children and like adults almost simultaneously, switching adult and child roles within minutes of each other, in the same context with the same people.

The minority group child approach: children's work

Saturday, 28 September 1996: I got up at 6, combed my hair, washed my face and had my breakfast with pancakes. I went to Felisa's house to look for a goat and afterwards I came home and began to peel potatoes. I put the pot on to cook and made lunch. I went to let the goats out, I milked them and let them out of the enclosure. I went to feed my chicks and then I went to fetch water from the stream, I came home and ate my lunch. My lunch was made of rice. I went to give water and maize to the pigs and from there I fetched water to water my flowers, then I went to harvest potatoes. Then with my sister we went to play with my brother's bicycle and I went to fetch water and my sister saw a little pigeon. We wanted to catch it but we couldn't catch the small pigeon, we fetched water and went to play football. Then I had my tea with bread and then I went to enclose the cows and the goats. I had my supper and went to bed at 8 o'clock⁶.

The above is an extract from nine year old Cira's diary highlighting the range of work that children carry out for their households. This section explores the nature of children's work in more detail highlighting the ways in which it can be both the same and different from adults' work. As the extract indicates, rural children in Bolivia get up early, usually between 5-6am, and begin by doing a few household chores such as fetching water and firewood, letting the animals out of their enclosures, feeding and milking them. During the day children's household jobs vary according to the season and may include: looking after and feeding animals, doing agricultural tasks, fetching more water and firewood, looking after younger siblings, washing clothes, or preparing food. In the evening, the animals have to be rounded up and brought in to the paddocks for the night. Since it gets dark about 6.30pm, kitchen tasks such as supper preparation or washing up are carried out by candlelight before children go to bed usually between 8-9pm.

During the week when children attend school from 8am-1pm, they compensate by doing more work before and after school. Some tasks are left for when they return from school in the afternoon, such as fetching more water and firewood, or feeding animals. Other tasks are postponed until the weekend, such as cleaning the house. Elsewhere I have presented a detailed discussion of the intergenerational division of household labour which is based on age, gender, birth order and sibling composition (Punch 2001b). A close examination of children's work roles within households emphasises that their work can be both similar to and different from that of adults.

Many children do not have the physical size, strength or height to do some adult tasks such as ploughing or reaching maize stored in trees. Some jobs cannot be carried out by children because they require a certain knowledge or skill, rather than just physical ability. For example, pruning fruit trees or ploughing in a straight line are jobs which must be done correctly with precision, otherwise the quality and quantity of the harvest will be reduced. Similarly, knowing how to kill a cow correctly, or how to tie up oxen or load a donkey are jobs that tend to need greater experience than children have in order to achieve the required level of competence to carry out the tasks in the correct, most efficient manner. Therefore although children can do much adult work, some tasks require further physical ability and/or a certain knowledge or skill.

In Bolivian rural households, I found that some jobs, in particular fetching and carrying tasks and animal care, are generation-specific, but gender-neutral tasks (Punch 2001b). Adults would rarely be seen looking after animals or collecting water if they had children. Children tend to have higher energy levels than adults, which enables them to carry out

child-specific tasks of running errands or running up hills to round up animals. They may be able to do such work quicker than adults, or it may be a convenient excuse which adults use to avoid doing them. The unequal power relations in households mean that children can be delegated jobs which adults would rather avoid, as well as releasing adults so they can carry out tasks which children may be physically unable to fulfil.

However, some of the work which children do is exactly the same as adults' work, such as much food preparation and some planting and harvesting jobs. Such tasks depend on competence built up through practice rather than biological or physical requirements which vary with age. For example, ten year old Vicenta can peel potatoes more skilfully and quicker than myself, an adult. She regularly peels large quantities for her family and can do so without watching what she is doing. She used to laugh at me when I helped her because I could not peel with a knife and would take too much potato off with the skin. I rarely peel potatoes and when I do, I tend to use a specially designed potato peeler. This emphasises how competence is acquired through experience and practice, rather than age.

In rural Bolivia, children may move between child and adult type jobs, and their work can be perceived as both the same and different from that of adults. It depends on the nature of the particular task at hand, as well as children's competence and physical abilities. Children carry out most of the work they do in a mixture of both adult and child ways, sometimes the same as, and sometimes different from, adults. Nevertheless, although children in rural Bolivia undertake many work responsibilities, they should not be perceived only from the minority group child approach as 'miniature adults' whilst ignoring their social world of play and childhood culture.

The tribal child approach: childhood culture

Childhood 'culture' has been defined as 'a form of social action, a way of being a child among other children, a particular cultural style, resonant with particular times and places' (James et al. 1998:90). This section provides empirical evidence of the nature of rural Bolivian children's culture, indicating that poor children who work can also engage in and create their own childhood culture. When asked, the school children indicated that playing was what they mainly did to enjoy themselves. Traditional games continued to be very popular amongst children in rural Bolivia where the community was in the gradual process of modernisation and was still relatively traditional. Girls most popular games were: chase, football, singing games and 'hide and seek'. They also liked pretending to sell things, playing with dolls and jumping over elastic. Boys overwhelmingly preferred to play football, followed by playing marbles and toy trucks. Thus football dominated boys' play and girls' play was more varied (see also Blatchford et al. 1991). Girls could more easily cross the boundaries of gender play: they could play football but boys would be teased harshly for playing with dolls as gender deviance for males held greater negative connotations (see also Thorne 1993).

The children's access to manufactured toys and to a wider, more global, childhood culture was restricted by limited financial resources and the relative isolation of the community. Communication networks were limited: only local radio and a twice weekly bus to the nearby town. Magazines, comics, videos, television, cinema and other means of spreading mass culture had not yet invaded the relative tranquillity of this community. Famous cultural heroes from the minority world such as Superman, Mr. Bean, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers and Transformers (Fleming 1996) were not known

by most of the children. Because of scarce economic resources, toys were not priority goods for parents to buy for their children. On their worksheets, children listed an average of only three toys of their own. For boys these were trucks, cars, a football, marbles or spinning tops and for girls these were more likely to be dolls and toy plates and cutlery.

Because of their limited access to commercial toys, children used their own resourcefulness to make their own toys by using the natural environment and materials that were available to them, such as stones, water, mud and maize. Wood, as a readily available resource, was used as a free and longer-lasting alternative to plastic, for example to make toy trucks or stilts. Mud was a useful material for moulding into all kinds of temporary toys. Children also converted discarded items into toys or accessories for a game, such as used batteries became cargo on a truck.

Children's culture is closely related to the surrounding environment, which dictates the spaces where they play, the materials which they use and their access to recreational resources. For example, children from this rural community did not know how to play cops and robbers or war games: they played with soldiers by lining them up in teams spread out opposite each other and then took turns to flick marbles at them to knock them over. The winner was the first to knock the other players' team down. Therefore, although the children's play was restricted to traditional materials and resources, such a limitation encouraged them to make the most of their physical environment in order to create their own childhood culture (see also Katz 1993). It is also worth bearing in mind that even though minority world children tend to have greater access to manufactured toys, they can also create their own fun in imaginative and inventive ways.

In rural Bolivia, when children were at school they played with their friends, but when at home they played alone or with their siblings or sometimes with neighbours or cousins. Both parents and children agreed that adults almost never played with children: 'They just play amongst themselves, there's not really time to play with them,'⁷ or as another parent admitted: 'I don't know how to play, they play with other children.'⁸ Thus, children's social world of play was where children learnt to play with each other, discovering how to belong to the world of children's culture. Games were not explained to passive listeners, but were taught through active participation (see also James 1993). By joining in a game, children learnt the rules as they occurred and as the other children told them what to do. Children learnt most of the elements of their culture such as songs, games, riddles, and rhymes (James 1995; Opie and Opie 1982) at school from other children.

Hence, children's culture and play in rural Bolivia is quite distinct and separate from the social world of adults. This contrasts with the assumption that in the majority world there is an 'absence of any well-developed 'children's culture,' for in these contexts children's and adults' worlds are less socially divided and culturally distinguished' (James et al. 1998:90). Such an assumption emerges because many children in the majority world work, but it should not be forgotten that they also play. Therefore, although children, young people and adults in rural Bolivia all work, it should not be assumed that all of their social contexts are necessarily the same. Children engage in their own childhood culture but it is constrained because of their work and the time available to dedicate to play, the lack of financial resources and the relatively isolated rural location. Nevertheless as the following section will show, children's culture is enhanced by their own creative use of space, by combining both work and school with play and by making full use of their natural surroundings. Thus, this example of rural Bolivian children's social world shows

that poor children from the majority world who work alongside adults can also be perceived as ‘tribal children’ who have their own autonomous childhood culture.

Integrating work, play and school

Sociological studies of children's culture tend to focus on the types of play or the language which children use (James 1995; Opie and Opie 1982), but few studies have considered the importance of children combining play with other activities, such as work and school. As already mentioned, the main constraint to the extent to which children can engage in their own childhood culture is their work. Rural Bolivian children carry out much unpaid work for their households from an early age as well as going to school for approximately five years of primary education. Their agricultural, pastoral and domestic tasks increase in quantity and complexity as they get older (Punch 2001b). However, they combine their play with both work and school, by negotiating their own time and space to unite these different activities (Punch 2001a).

Children frequently played whilst they were working or on the way to and from their tasks. For example, Cira's diary extract mentioned earlier in this paper, indicates how children combine their household work with opportunistic moments of play: ‘I went to fetch water and my sister saw a little pigeon. We wanted to catch it but we couldn't catch the small pigeon, we fetched water and went to play football.’ She combined her work with play as she tried to catch the pigeon whilst she was out fetching water, then after completing the task she played football before engaging in another work activity. Similarly other children would extend the time spent carrying out their jobs in order to play before, during or after their work. Examples included going fishing after taking the

cows out to pasture, playing marbles with friends in the community square before running an errand to the local shop and playing with siblings whilst taking animals out to pasture. This would enable tasks to be more enjoyable whilst being completed or to be prolonged in order to delay subsequent chores (see Punch 2001a).

In addition, the nature of children's work can be closely related to play (see also Katz 1991), such as scaring birds away from crops by shooting stones slung from a catapult made of rubber or banging home-made drums to scare them. Boys in particular learnt how to use their catapults in a skilful manner, but both girls and boys learnt how to use one from an early age as it was one of the means used to frighten birds from crops such as peas. This is an example of how play and work were often combined; the necessities of work taught children a useful skill which could be used in play. The use of the catapult meant that work itself was fun and so overlapped with play. The nature of such tasks suggests that children's work can be different from that of adults as it is often adapted to their status as children.

This coincides with Katz's research in rural Sudan which shows that majority world children do play, in particular by combining play with their work responsibilities (1986; 1991). Katz showed how many of children's work activities are actually more similar to play than work. The dividing line between work, play and education becomes blurred, as 'children's play itself was often a creative means for the acquisition, use, and consolidation of environmental knowledge' (1991:503). Katz also argued that 'when play and work are separated, play becomes trivialised as "childish" activity in the eyes of adults' (1991:509). When the two are combined, they have a mutually enhancing socialisation and educational value. This can also be seen in Briggs' research (1990) of Canadian Inuit children. She

showed that children are taught survival strategies and problem-solving techniques through the harsh games which adults play with them.

As well as combining their play with work, children in rural Bolivia also played before, during and after school. School provided children with their main opportunity for meeting up with their friends and being able to play with them. In particular they would play on the way to and from school: arriving late at school and blaming their delay on completing chores at home or returning home late and blaming school activities for keeping them back later than usual. Elsewhere I have described in greater detail the ways in which the Bolivian children create strategies to prolong play, and combine it with both school and work in order to play when and where adults may be unaware of their actions (Punch 2000). As Woodhead found in his study of working children in the majority world, children negotiate limited choices despite being constrained by a series of factors, and they 'reconcile competing pressures to work, to go to school, to do domestic chores and to play' (1998:157). In rural Bolivia children often played on the way to and from both school and work, as well as at school and at work, thereby integrating the three main activities of their childhoods: work, school and play.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the limited knowledge about ordinary children from the majority world who go to school, work and play by exploring some aspects of the everyday lives of rural children in southern Bolivia. These economically poor children carry out a significant workload for their households and are constrained by limited financial resources and the isolation of their rural environment. The purpose of the article

has been to show that despite these constraints, they nonetheless combine their work and school with play, create their own childhood culture and move back and forth between adult and child-centred worlds. However, the study does not aim to make wider claims that all rural children in the majority world act in such a way, but offers empirical evidence of how working children should not necessarily be perceived only as miniature adults whilst ignoring their play and childhood culture.

The paper contributes to discussions about the meaning of childhood by challenging presociological assumptions that it should be a time protected from adult responsibilities and that 'work contradicts the very essence of childhood' (James et al. 1998:106). Majority world childhoods, which quantitatively are the norm, challenge minority world assumptions about what childhood is: as a time for play and school in contrast to adulthood as a time for work. Rural Bolivian children clearly both work and play, and they learn from both of these activities in addition to their formal education training at school. Thus this paper raises questions about the blurred boundaries of work/play, and adult/child. How is childhood defined: does it depend on activities performed such as work or play? Since children's work can be both the same and different from that of adults, what is it that enables such distinctions to be recognised? Further research needs to explore exactly how we distinguish child and adult practices. The recent work of Alanen and Mayall (2001) proposes that childhood as a relational concept could be studied in terms of 'generationing' practices, and therefore could be a useful way forward for differentiating between 'childing' and 'adulthooding' behaviours.

Theoretical developments in childhood studies have identified different approaches to conceptualising children, such as the 'minority group child' and the 'tribal child' which

focus on children's agency (James et al. 1998). This paper argues that majority world children should not necessarily be perceived only in terms of their work from the minority group child approach as marginalised miniature adults nor should they be seen as so different from adults like tribal children but that they can be conceptualised as moving between the two. Therefore, it should not be assumed that certain children in particular situations can only be perceived as either similar to or different from adults, since such boundaries are fluid as children's lives move between adult and child roles. They may use different identities to suit different situations in their lives (see also James and Prout 1996), and they may also switch between their distinct roles according to particular activities or the arena in which they find themselves. However, such divisions are not clearly marked, but flexible and dynamic as children move in and out of different versions of adult and child-centred worlds. It is worth remembering that children not only take on different child or adult roles in different contexts or with different people, but can also negotiate both roles at the same time, changing almost simultaneously.

The paper suggests that a perspective which encompasses multiple and overlapping arenas of childhood could be more appropriate for understanding children's childhoods. By exploring only one context of children's everyday lives, such as their work (for example from the approach of the minority group child) or their play (using the tribal child approach) leads to a more limited and inflexible conceptualisation of their worlds. Therefore although these two approaches to the new social studies of childhood have rarely been combined (James et al. 1998), the findings from this study coincide with those of Holloway and Valentine (2000) who highlighted the usefulness of a combined approach. A more holistic perspective can lead to a greater understanding of children's

lives, showing how they integrate the different contexts of their childhoods at work, school, play and home.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the School of Geography and Centre for Development Studies at the University of Leeds and the British Federation of Women Graduates for their financial support of this doctoral study. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support of the British Academy through awarding me a Postdoctoral Fellowship which has provided me with time to revise this research for publication. I would also like to thank Rachel Burr, Jeni Harden and Ian McIntosh for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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¹ I first read these terms in the work of Helen Penn (1999) and Martin Woodhead (1998) but they, like myself, are uncertain as to the origins of the terminology.

² Literature on children in the majority world also includes anthropological studies of rites of passage and socialisation (for example, Mead and Wolfenstein 1955) and a largely psychological literature on children and war (for example, Turton et al. 1991).

³ It is worth bearing in mind that this raises the longstanding problem of imposing minority world conceptualisations and categories upon majority world relationships.

⁴ This conversation took place on 19 August 1996:

Marianela: *Ven Alma aquí está la comida. Pablito cambiate.*

Pablo: *Bueno...*

Alma: *Asado de cuchi hemos comido.*

Marianela: *De chanco, no de cuchi.*

Pablo: *Alma, cambiate.*

Alma: *No.*

Pablo: *Y con qué vas a ir a la escuela mañana?*

Alma: *Con este vestido.*

Pablo: *Apurate, cambiate.*

Marianela: *Ya que dejen de joder.*

Pablo: *Pero si queremos mucho jugar.*

Marianela: *Ya vengán aquí afuera. Yo voy a contar a mami.*

Alma: *No te voy a dejar.*

⁵ *Cuando mamá y papá se van por ahí a una fiesta, yo me quedo con Marcelo y él está bien. Se queda bien calladito conmigo, me quiere, pero casi no a Pablo y Alma porque lo pegan.* (19 August 1996)

⁶ The diary extract has been left with the child's original spelling so as not to lose the regional flavour of the language. Sabado 28 de septiembre de 1996: *Me levante de cama a las 6.00 y me fue peñarme y lavarme la cara y me fue a tomar mi desayuno con tortillas y me fue a doña Felisa a vuscar un chivito y despues vino a la casa me puesto a pelar papas y ay ponido la holla y hay echo el almuerzo y me fue a soltar los chivos y le saque leche y les solte y fue dar de comer mis pollitos y despues me fue a traer agua del canal y me veniste a la casa y me fue a almorsar. Mi almuerzo fue de arros y me fue a dar agua y mais a los chanchos y diay me fue a traer agua para regar mis flores y diay me fue carpiar las papas y diay con mi ermana emos ido a jugar con la visicleta de mi ermano y me fue a traer agua y mi ermana a visto una palomita. La amos querido pillarle y no le podiamos pillar a la palomita, amos alsado la agua y diay jugar con la pelota y diay me fue a tomar mi te con pan y de hai me fue a serrar las vacas y deay me fue a serrar las chivas y de hay me fue a senar y me acoste a las 8.00.* (Diary of Cira, 9 years).

⁷ *Entre ellos no más, casi no da tiempo.* (Rufino, parent, October 1996)

⁸ *Yo no sé jugar, con otros changos juegan.* (Rosaura, parent, December 1996)