

BOOK REVIEWS

Norman K. Denzin. *Childhood Socialization: Studies in the Development of Language, Social Behavior, and Identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977.

This collection of essays contains an implicit theory of the "politics of childhood" while couching this perspective, explicitly, in the form of an interactionist research program within the preschool, day-care setting. Denzin begins by denying that childhood represents a clear-cut, cultural object. Following Aires work in *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), he indicates, "there is nothing intrinsic to the object called 'child' that makes that object more or less 'childlike'" (p. 2). Developmental approaches to socialization, especially Piaget's genetic psychology, are criticized for reducing socialization "to the term learning," and further assuming that, "what is learned are cognitive skills involved with reasoning, logic, causality, and morality" (p. 9). Denzin links this criticism of developmental psychology to an explicit charge that educational testers and educational settings represent "Americanizing" institutions which integrate the child into middle-class culture: "Implicitly and explicitly, students are taught that Western culture is a male-oriented, white-based enterprise" (p. 199). Denzin's observations are politically astute. Denzin guides his research with a thoroughly interactionist strategy which is termed "naturalistic behaviorism." Joint activity is the basic unit of analysis for this perspective. The logic of joint-activity, furthermore, requires the researcher to sensitize him/herself to their role in the research process. "Naturalistic behaviorism attempts a wedding of the covert, private features of the social act with its public, behaviorally observable counterparts" (p. 29). This naturalistic perspective is characterized by the researcher's introspection on his/her interaction with the subject's under study, i.e., "recording one's behavior permits the observer to be both objective and subjective" (p. 34). Research itself is considered a joint activity by Denzin, yet his central methodological dilemma remains that of symbolic interactionism in general—specifically, how the naturalist "can emerge from the

field experience with sociologically reliable observations" which are theoretically understandable (p. 44).

The weakness of Denzin's triangulation methodology is apparent in his attempt (Chapter III) to provide an answer to this enigmatic feature of field-work. He provides a solution to the problems of sampling, measurement, and causal analysis while remaining embedded in the interactionist heritage. Yet, this perspective requires sensitivity to meaning as an emergent and social feature of joint activity. Denzin centers the problem of sampling in the selection of a *class* of joint acts for study which is circumscribed by the location and frequency of the specified behavior. Furthermore, and this is central to Denzin's methodology, he considers problems of causality and generalizability to be contingent on the selection of representative, as opposed to anecdotal, cases supplemented by the implementation of analytic induction. This is accomplished within triangulated methodology by isolating negative cases—"those behavior episodes which clearly refute an emerging theory or proposition" (p. 48).

The validity of this entire procedure, moreover, depends on the researcher's ability to "inform the broader scientific community of the steps he went through when his sampling decisions were made" (p. 46). Thus, the fusion of covert and public dimensions of the research act ultimately relies on the self-interpretation of the researcher's own behavior vis-a-vis the researched. Denzin does not provide the interpretive-rules to guide this wedding of covert and overt dimensions of the research act, except to posit a few cursory remarks on the relation of "introspection and the observer," and this is a major shortcoming.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, Denzin's work does provide illuminating and sensitive encounters between the researcher's adult world and that of the child. Centrally, he posits that childhood socialization, and language acquisition, must be viewed from the standpoint of the *child* as well as the *adult* participant. This stance allows Denzin to proffer a critique of Chomsky's transformational grammar and Piaget's genetic psychology as the two relate to language acquisition and development of intelligence. Citing a quotation from Deutscher's

essay, "Language, Methodology, and the Sociologist," (1969-1970), Denzin indicates:

We are not linguists; we are sociologists, and it is the sociological concept of language to which our attention is directed I suspect that the sociologist who assumes the linguists' perspective is as likely to achieve success in understanding language as is the sociologist who assumes the legal perspective in understanding crime (Pp. 115-16).

Thus, following Mead, Denzin asserts that the sociological study of language and language acquisition encompasses the verbal as well as nonverbal characteristics of the significant symbol. This leads Denzin to examine language acquisition in children as a joint-activity which can only be meaningfully approached by situating interactional episodes *in context*, i.e., as a product of covert as well as behaviorally observable activity.

The critical thrust of Denzin's arguments on "the politics of childhood" (Chapters II and XI) in his denial of relevance to any attempt which approaches children as "scientific products." He remarks:

Most sociological methods work best in the study of persons most like the sociologist They work least well with those persons who do not share the sociologist's perspective, and sociologists confront real problems when those studies are inarticulate. Children do not make good sociological subjects (p. 59).

Thus, implicit within Denzin's methodological perspective, "naturalistic behaviorism," is a *politics of social research* which is not given sufficient attention. Rather than develop a rigorous critique of previous research into the social psychology of childhood, and its methodology, Denzin recycles his conception of triangulated method. Whereas, on the one hand, he argues that "interactants can join behaviors in *orderly*, but not *predictable* ways" (p. 38), on the other hand, he attempts to salvage a conception of causation which aims to "develop sequential, phaselike theories" (p. 55). One must suppose this to be an

argument for "soft" as opposed to "hard" determinism. However, Denzin ultimately rejects even this perspective on childhood socialization.

Many specialists have assumed that young children lack well-developed self-conceptions. My observations show, on the contrary, that as early as age four a child can stand outside his own behavior and see himself from another's perspective (p. 186).

Contrary to developmental theories of socialization which, following Piaget, stress the progressive achievement of rational problem-solving ability, Denzin asserts that *at most* we can delineate levels of reflexivity among the child, its environment, and the various significant others to which communication is addressed. Thus, the object we call child must be approached as an active subject whose reflexive capabilities develop as a result of complex interactive, and often repressive, relations between itself as an impulsive, yet signifying, organism and its environment.

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REFERENCES

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