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**Researching children, youth and religion: Identity, complexity and agency**

Peter J. Hemming, Cardiff University, UK

Nicola Madge, Brunel University, UK

**Abstract**

*Research on children, young people and religion is becoming more prevalent following an*

*increased interest in this traditionally under-researched area. However, little discussion has taken place to date on the appropriateness of past frameworks for making sense of children’s religious lives. This article calls attention to the issue of religious identity in relation to children and young people. By drawing on the diffuse body of interdisciplinary social scientific research in this area, the article seeks to apply the new social studies of childhood model through the two concepts of complexity and agency. Following this, it then goes on to make some suggestions for future directions in the study of children, young people and religious identity.*

**Keywords**

agency, children, identity, religion, young people

**Introduction**

The body of scholarly work on children, youth and religion has slowly been expanding

over the last two decades. This research exists in many forms and can be found within

various disciplines, including religious education, religious studies, sociology, human

geography and psychology. Despite this, the field remains rather fragmented and incoherent, with scholars continuing to question the marginal place of children and young people within their own disciplines (e.g. Bunge, 2006), or instead pointing to the failure of much research to view the category of childhood in a more critical way, and to move away from adult concerns such as pedagogy and philosophy (e.g. Miller-McLemore, 2006).

Developments elsewhere in the ‘new social studies of childhood’ have highlighted the benefits of viewing children as a variable of social analysis in their own right (Prout and James, 1990) and acknowledging the category of childhood as socially constructed (James et al., 1998). These advancements have led to a new emphasis on the child- and youth-centred study of children and young people, taking their own priorities and concerns as starting points for social enquiry. Over the last few years, the importance of children and young people’s views and experiences of religion have increasingly been recognized in the social sciences. These new studies (many of which are discussed in this article) have added to the diffuse body of previous work taking children, young people and religious identity as its focus.

As the field of research in this area continues to grow, it seems timely to start asking questions about how we go about researching such issues. Can previously used frameworks, methods and approaches provide adequate ways to investigate children and young people’s religious identities, or do we need to look again? In this article, we attempt to bring together some of the interdisciplinary threads of research into a coherent whole, focused around the two issues of complexity and agency. We then make some suggestions for future directions in the study of children and religious identity. While we draw on a number of social scientific studies to make our arguments about religious identity, we intend our examples to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, and acknowledge that the field is somewhat wider than can be reflected in one article.

**Identity and complexity**

The concept of religion, as with culture, cannot adequately be described as simple, static and unchanging, but rather multifaceted, contradictory and in a constant state of flux (Jackson, 1997). Any discussion of religious identity must therefore begin with a consideration of what we actually mean by religion as an object of enquiry. Geertz’s (1966) famous definition of religion as a cultural system, and its emphasis on individual moods, motivations and beliefs has been critiqued for its Protestant nature, and its tendency to ignore the importance of community and practice, which are more prominent in Catholicism and Islam (see Asad, 1993). Durkheim’s (1961: 15, cited in Turner, 1991: 243) definition of religion stresses the importance of sacred practices and rituals alongside religious thought and belief, but fails to adequately take account of individuals’ subjective experiences of the sacred or recognize more informal modes of religion (see Turner, 1991). Lincoln (2006: 5–7) suggests a useful definition of religion, encompassing ‘discourse’, ‘practice’, ‘community’ and ‘institution’, which begins to bridge these gaps, but could be more useful for making sense of religion as a concept rather than its significance for individuals’ identity.

Although the above definitions emphasize different aspects of religion, they all point to the need to account for these various components when investigating religious identity. We might well want to know how individuals label themselves as a member of a particular faith, how far they see themselves as belonging to a religious community and how they express and experience their beliefs privately and individually, just as much as the things they believe in and how often they attend a place of worship or celebrate religious festivals. For this reason, we suggest a four-fold definition of religious identity that includes (1) affiliation and belonging; (2) behaviours and practices; (3) beliefs and values; and (4) religious and spiritual experiences. We argue that investigating these different aspects and components and their relation to each other will provide a holistic and complex view of religious identity and the role it plays in the lives of children and young people.

Smith (2005) found that children in his study reflected a range of commitment to and understanding of religions, regardless of their religious background. He drew on different aspects of religious identity in order to describe this range of observance, including religious affiliation, beliefs, belonging and practice. While some children spoke about levels of belief, others focused more on participation in religious rituals and events. The study highlighted well the multifaceted nature of religious identity and some of the different ways it was expressed within a primary school setting. Similarly, by looking at the different aspects and components of religious identity in both young people and adults, scholars have been able to develop theories about the role of religion in wider society, such as ‘believing without belonging’ (Davie, 1994) or ‘believing in belonging’ (Day, 2009). These theories have considered belief, practice and belonging as distinct aspects of religious identity in order to investigate the changing significance of religion for populations in European societies.

Religious identity is complex not only because of the multifaceted nature of religion, but also because the concept of identity is itself a nuanced one. Bradley (1996) makes a distinction between personal identity and social identity. Whereas personal identity refers to the distinctive and unique sense of self, background and experiences that all of us possess, social identity refers to the social groups we belong to and the commonalities we share with others. It refers to our social location within society and how we interact with other people within social groups. Woodward (1997) argues that gender, class and ethnicity/culture are the most significant of these classifications, but age, religion, (dis)ability and sexuality are among other important social identities. Although social identities refer to what we are, often they are defined just as much by what we are not and how we see ourselves as different to others (Payne, 2000). Similarly, identities may be ascribed in ways that do not necessarily concur with our own understandings of self but still affect how others relate to us. Social identities, including religious identities, have a key role in shaping and interacting with our personal identities and making us the people that we are.

As such, religious identity, like religion itself, is not constructed in a vacuum, but may change and evolve through an interactive process with social factors and influences. Hall (1992) draws attention to the relational nature of identity through the concept of the ‘sociological subject’. This model insists that the idea of a completely autonomous identity is a fallacy. Instead, we are formed through interaction between our core self and others in society, shaping our identities through participation in social structures. In this article, we mainly employ the notion of the ‘sociological subject’ to make sense of religious identity, while accepting the postmodern argument that societal interactions may well result in multiple and contradictory influences on identity as a fluid project (see Giddens, 1991). Religious identity will be structured through other social identities and subject to negotiation, across a range of social spaces, at different times throughout the life-course. Some of these are explored in the next two sections, where our examples are indicative of the significance of these identities and spaces rather than exhaustive accounts of previous research.

**Religion and social identities**

Existing research on children, young people and religion has pointed to the significance of other social identities for religious identity. In the case of gender, quantitative research has generally shown that girls tend to demonstrate higher levels of religious observance than boys (Francis, 2001; Kay and Francis, 1996; Smith et al., 2003). Similarly, qualitative studies have shown gender differences across a range of religious understandings, attitudes, behaviours and experiences (Erricker et al., 1997; Levitt, 2003; Ramji, 2007). Research on age has been less conclusive, with some studies suggesting that young people become less religious as they get older (Francis, 2001; Kay and Francis, 1996; Wallace et al., 2003), but others arguing that age is not significant (Mason et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2003). Argue et al. (1999) maintain that religious observance actually increases with age when considered across the whole life-course. However, it seems clear that both gender and age identities are closely entwined with an individual’s religious identity.

Ethnicity and its relationship to religion has also been the focus of a number of studies, particularly in the case of minority communities in western contexts. This body of work has often focused on the complex ways in which ethnic and religious labels are used (Baumann, 1996; Moinian, 2009; Smith, 2005) and the resurgence of religious identities in relation to national and cultural ones (Duderija, 2007; Jacobson, 1998; Valentine and Sporton, 2009). Many Sikhs and Hindus highlight their religious rather than their ethnic identity in order to differentiate themselves from Muslims (e.g. see Raj, 2000). The role of ethnicity and culture in young Muslim engagement or disengagement with the West is another area of interest. Lewis (2007) points out that Islam originates in six distinct linguistic and geographical zones, each with different histories, cultures and relationships with the West. Consequently, there exists a wide range of Muslim religiosities, including traditionalist, progressive, Islamist and cultural models from which young Muslims can draw (see also Sahin, 2005). The key theme emerging from this work is the fluid and interconnected nature of ethnic and religious identities.

Although class, sexuality and disability are also significant markers of social difference, there is a conspicuous lack of research on the relationship between these social identities and the religious identity of children and young people. A very small number of studies exist on the influence of class on church going and religious observance (Francis, 2000; Kay and Francis, 1996; Wallace et al., 2003) but much more attention needs to be paid to this important area. For example, Ramji (2007) provides a good illustration of how class can be significant for making sense of the interactions between gender and religion. She shows how young working-class Muslim men may use religion as a capital resource to justify their own patriarchal positions of power, because of their lack of other economic, social and cultural capital and their relative positions of powerlessness (e.g. by insisting that women should maintain modesty by not working). In contrast, middle-class Muslim men in her study were more likely to see a working wife as enhancing their own cultural capital and status in the community.

Following the idea that social identity is often determined by what we are not, just as much as what we are, the religious identities of others are also likely to affect how children and young people understand their own religious identities. For example, Torstenson-Ed (2006) found that levels of belief in God among all pupils tended to be much higher in Swedish schools with a multi-faith intake than those with a less diverse range of religions represented. Jacobson (1998) argues that young Muslims have a strong sense of identity because of the religious boundaries in place between themselves and others, in terms of the stringent demands of Islam on formal practices, routine behaviour and social conduct. In other words, the social boundaries set up between self and other may result in more salient religious identities, as was the case in the study by Torstenson-Ed (2006). These boundaries may also be constructed through the attitudes that children and young people hold towards individuals from other faiths to their own (e.g. see Baumann, 1996; Ipgrave and McKenna, 2008; McKenna et al., 2008). Such attitudes are likely to be strongly influenced by a range of social spaces and contexts, which we explore in the next section.

**Religion and social spaces**

As discussed earlier, religious identity does not exist in a vacuum, but rather takes shape within and across a range of social spaces and contexts. The significance of parents for influencing the religious identity of young people is well documented, certainly in terms of levels of religious observance, where strongly religious parents are more likely to raise children who also display a high degree of religious observance (Francis, 2001; Kay and Francis, 1996; Myers, 1996). Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) draw attention to the role of the extended family in processes of religious transmission that determine the continuity or discontinuity of faith traditions within mixed-faith families. Intergenerational relations are also integral to children and young people’s religious lives in other ways. Lees and Horwath (2009) argue that many young people see religion as contributing positively to family life, but other studies have emphasized the constraints that adherence to family expectations may create for individuals (Baumann, 1996; Lewis, 2007; Sahin, 2005).

A number of quantitative studies have shown that religious climate and school denomination can affect student religiosity (Barrett et al., 2007; Kay and Francis, 1996) and the school may play an important role in influencing how religious difference is perceived and constructed. This includes the formal and informal provision of information about different religions (Baumann, 1996; Ipgrave and McKenna, 2008), but also the way in which the needs of religious minorities are provided for in school (Hemming, 2011a; Nesbitt, 2004; Smith, 2005). School ethos and values can have an important influence on social cohesion, particularly in terms of inter-religious relations and encounters (Hemming, 2011b; Smith, 2005), but may also result in difficulties for pupils (particularly from religious minorities) when there is a gap between values and expectations at home and school (e.g. Lewis, 2007).

Friends and peers are integral to the lives of most children and young people, and a number of quantitative studies have shown that friends can have an influence on levels of religious observance and religious beliefs and practices (Regenus et al., 2004; Smith and Denton, 2005). Peers can also affect religious identity in terms of how religion is experienced and how far an individual feels they belong to a particular group (Nesbitt, 2004; Rymarz and Graham, 2005), or the extent to which young people conform to social and religious norms within particular communities (Hopkins, 2004). Indeed, social relationships may even act as foundations for religious or non-religious frameworks of meaning and making sense of the world, morally and emotionally (Day, 2009; Savage et al., 2006). On the issue of religious literacy and social cohesion, friends may provide an important source of information about other religions for children and young people (Ipgrave and McKenna, 2008).

Faith community leaders, structures and norms may both enable and constrain young people, particular the ways in which individuals interact with wider society (e.g. see Dwyer, 1999 on young Muslim women). Experiences at places of worship, and the communities associated with these, may encourage or discourage the continuation of religious observance (Rymarz and Graham, 2005). Neighbourhood communities have taken on increased significance following recent debates about social cohesion between different faith groups (Ouseley, 2001). Localities may become associated with particular religious groups, and territoriality thus has a role in structuring young people’s experiences of public space and shaping their identities (Watt and Stenson, 1998; Webster, 1996).

Television, radio, newspapers and the World Wide Web all have a part to play in the construction of religious identity through the way they portray religion and particular religious groups. These images and representations may influence children and young people’s identities directly, or may cause individuals to react against them and form identities in opposition to what is being portrayed (Berger and Ezzy, 2009; Dwyer, 1998; Lewis, 2007). The way in which the media represent geopolitical events such as conflicts and terrorist attacks may influence how excluded or included religious minorities feel in society (Hopkins, 2004), as can particular constructions of national citizenship and identity (Hemming, 2011a). Finally, the role of religion in society as a whole will also be represented in particular ways through the media. For example, news stories about the established Church of England can reveal perceptions about the status of religious resources within Britain (Davie, 2007).

Religious identity is therefore a complex concept, consisting of various different aspects and influenced by many competing factors. But the construction and development of children and young people’s religious identity is not a one-way process. In the next section, we draw on one body of social scientific work that begins to highlight the importance of agency in this context.

**Agency**

As mentioned in the introduction, part of the rationale for the new wave of research on children, young people and religion originates from the ‘new social studies of childhood’ with their emphasis on children as social actors in their own right, capable of actively constructing and determining their own social lives (Prout and James, 1990). This has translated into a concern for ‘child-centred’ work that takes the interests and concerns of children as the foundation for study. Qualitative research and ethnography have proven to be useful research tools for achieving this aim (James, 2001) so it is unsurprising that much of the ‘child-centred’ research on children, young people and religion and spirituality has employed qualitative methods. Many of these studies have identified or implied the significance of agency in this context, and some of these works are discussed later in this section of the article.

Agency is not a straightforward issue because there may well be variation in the extent to which children and young people exercise agency, or indeed are expected to exercise agency by their cultural or religious group. Marcia (1980) suggests a number of ‘identity statuses’, all of which demonstrate different degrees of active self-involvement in young people’s identity formation. For example, ‘Identity Achievements’ refer to young individuals who are secure in particular identity positions that they themselves have made a commitment to, whereas ‘Foreclosures’ refer to those young people who are in identity positions that are based on those of their parents and community. ‘Identity Diffusions’ relate to those young people who do not have such a set or secure identity position and are in a state of indecision or indifference, while ‘Moratoriums’ relate to individuals who are still actively exploring different identities. It is therefore necessary to investigate the balance of individual and group/community influences on religious identities, for young people within and across different religious backgrounds and traditions.

Previous literature has, however, highlighted a number of ways in which children and young people may demonstrate religious and spiritual agency, in the same way as social and moral agency (see Mayall, 2002). The first observation that we make from this body of work is that children and young people may attach their own value and importance to particular concepts, ideas and practices in their religious and spiritual lives. In the case of formal religion, the aspects that children enjoy taking part in and the importance given to particular elements of their faith are often very different to adults. This has been demonstrated across a range of religious groups, including New Age, Evangelical Christian and Roman Catholic (Erricker et al., 1997); Christian, Muslim and Jewish (Coles, 1990; Heller, 1986); Sikh and Hindu (Nesbitt, 2004). The point about value and importance is also relevant for much broader understandings of spirituality, which are not so tied to formal religion, such as performance arts and relationships between self, others and the environment (e.g. Hart, 2003; Hay and Nye, 1998; Hyde, 2008).

The second observation to demonstrate the existence of agency is that children and young people may reconfigure and renegotiate formal religious meanings and practices. Nesbitt (2004) has shown how real-life religious practice as experienced by children from a range of different faith backgrounds is much more complex than represented in textbooks about ‘world religions’. Moreover, these practices can be modified by children’s own religious agency. Examples include birthday celebrations, the experience of being a vegetarian and understandings about religious service, festivals and fasting. In all of these situations, complexity and diversity were prevalent in the understandings expressed by children. Similarly, Hemming (2011a) shows how children renegotiate formal religious practice in the primary school context, by using the school toilets as a private space in which to pray, or by reconfiguring Christian prayers during assembly through the use of mental space to pray to Allah instead.

The third observation that adds support to the religious and spiritual agency argument is that children and young people draw on a range of sources to make sense of religious issues and concerns. Qualitative studies have shown that children and young people draw on their own faith, other religions, science, their imagination, the media and their own experiences to create frameworks of meaning. This has been demonstrated in the context of discussing bible stories (Worsley, 2004), ‘big questions’ about life and death (Erricker et al., 1997) and ‘spiritual’ stimuli, such as photographs of landscapes and people (Hyde, 2008). All three of the above observations demonstrate the existence of religious and spiritual agency in children and young people’s religious lives, and these factors no doubt impact upon their religious identities. However, there are also a number of studies that have focused specifically on religious identity and the role of agency in its construction.

Our fourth and final observation therefore refers to the way that children and young people may develop complex religious identities that often challenge dominant representations and discourses. For example, Nesbitt (2004) shows how young British Hindus have multiple identities that are much more nuanced than those represented by ideas of a culture clash. They often identify strongly as Hindus in order to emphasize their family identity, rather than a drift to fundamentalism or strong teachings. Dwyer (1998) illustrates how young Muslim women negotiate identities through their use of dress and media, while Hopkins (2006) shows how dominant representations of young Muslim men as either aggressive/patriarchal or passive/academic are much more complex and include the influences of class, gender, sexuality, disability, locality and intergenerational relations (see also Jacobson, 1998 on the complexities of young British Muslim identities).

This last observation begins to stray back into the territory of intersubjectivity and the way that religious identity is constructed as part of a dynamic process with other social identities, such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability and sexuality. It is essential that research on religion and social identity takes adequate account of children and young people’s religious and spiritual agency in its analysis. Similarly, agency will be important when considering the many social spaces and contexts through which religious identity is shaped. Families, schools, friendship groups, communities, localities and the media do not merely impose religion upon individuals. Rather, children and young people are actively involved in the negotiation of competing influences in the construction of their religious identities. We might want to ask how children and young people’s agency is involved in processes of religious transmission across the generations, or in negotiating community or societal norms and expectations. Equally, we might wish to explore further how children and young people actively negotiate messages about religion they receive from their school or their peer group.

A good example of research on intergenerational relations that takes agency into account is the recent study by Hopkins et al. (2011), involving an exploration of how young people negotiate their religious identities with those of their family members. The study highlights a range of different strategies that young people use to demonstrate agency in this context, including adopting similar, but not identical, positions to their parents (‘correspondence’); conforming with parental religious expectations but privately questioning them (‘compliance’); openly debating and negotiating the religious positions of family members (‘challenge’); and adopting combative stances that are completely in contradiction with those of their parents (‘conflict’). Hopkins et al. (2011) also point to some instances where young people influence the religious beliefs and practices of their parents, in a two-way model of religious transmission. Thus, we should also be directing attention to the role that children and young people may play in shaping the religious identities of their families and friends, and the nature of religion in their schools, communities and wider society. How we go about researching some of these issues is the focus of the next section.

**Implications for research**

In this section, we consider some suggestions for ways in which the study of children, youth and religious identity might continue to progress in a way that is consistent with the new social studies of childhood, and that takes full account of agency and the complex nature of the issues in question. This discussion necessarily focuses on how such research should be undertaken as much as the content to be addressed and we explore below the themes of context, meaning and participation, in relation to research on young religious identities.

***Context***

Given the complex and evolving nature of religion, accounting for the varied and changing contexts within which it is present is essential for maintaining a relevant and up-to-date body of research on children and young people’s religious identities. This point is particularly salient in the context of rapid population change, migration and increasing cultural diversity in many western states (Castles, 2000). For example, in Britain, the religious landscape has changed beyond recognition in the last 50 years, with declining levels of Christian observance and an increasingly multi-faith population, particularly in many of the large urban centres (Brown, 2010). Local historical contexts and circumstances are also important, in terms of religious profile and denominational character (e.g. Davie, 1994) and changing inter- and intra-religious relations (e.g. Webster, 2011, forthcoming).

We would argue that one of the best ways of adequately reflecting context is through the use of multiple case-study work. Such research may be conducted using qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method approaches, but will necessarily engage with the logic of comparison, between different cases, situations and social and spatial units (e.g. see Mason, 2006; Yin, 2003). Assessing the similarities and differences between the urban and the rural, the religiously heterogeneous and homogeneous locality, the faith-based and the secular school, the liberal and the orthodox community and so on, can help us to gain a deeper understanding of the commonalities and particularities between different contexts. This undertaking will necessarily include a consideration of the various social identities (such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability) and social spaces (including the family, the school, the peer group, the community and the media) outlined earlier in the article. It will also require the design of appropriate and accessible research instruments that are contextually sensitive around issues such as multi-faith and non-faith respondent groups.

***Meaning***

Throughout this article, we have outlined the complex meanings surrounding children and young people’s religious identity, and this complexity can be difficult to explore fully using just one methodological approach. While qualitative methods can often be more successful at delving deeper into the complex meanings present, quantitative surveys are generally better at capturing wider patterns and relationships to provide a contextual backcloth. Consequently, some of the more comprehensive studies on young people and religion have taken a mixed-method approach (e.g. Mason et al., 2007; Smith and Denton, 2005). While these studies demonstrate varying success at reflecting multi-faith or non-faith populations, the blending of large-scale surveys with qualitative interviews means they can engage in more detail with the emerging issues. As Mason (2006) argues, mixing methods can help us to bridge the gap between the micro and the macro, think about intellectual problems innovatively and creatively and extend and deepen our understanding of social issues. Such approaches therefore potentially enable researchers to make far-reaching conclusions about children and young people’s life views and religious identities.

In addition to methodological approaches, researcher positionality has an important impact on the framing, generation and interpretation of meaning. Although positionality has been well discussed in other areas such as feminist research (Rose, 1997), little has been said on the topic of children, youth and religion. The issue of researcher position, faith stance and purpose/motive is, however, an important ingredient for critical evaluation of such work. This is especially relevant in the case of mixed-method research, where different methods are grounded in different philosophical traditions. Whereas ‘distance’ and ‘objectivity’ are often sought in quantitative research, some strands of the qualitative paradigm value bias, subjectivity and ‘insider status’ as legitimate and beneficial for the construction of meaning (e.g. see Worth, 2008 on disability studies). There is certainly space for research on children, young people and religious identity conducted by scholars with a wide range of standpoints (confessional, religious, agnostic or atheist), for a variety of purposes (producing knowledge, informing policy, improving curricula, developing ministry). What is important, though, is that these positionalities are considered in a reflexive manner throughout the research process.

***Participation***

Scholars from the broader fields of childhood and youth studies have increasingly attempted to involve children and young people much more in research, to reflect their status as active social agents. Drawing, to a certain degree, on the participatory research paradigm, such work has engaged with a variety of ways of involving children more at different stages of the research process. Hart (1992) illustrates variability in citizenship participation through the idea of rungs of a ladder, with each step up indicating a greater level of involvement for children. Applying this to the context of research, the lower rungs could involve the use of so-called ‘child-centred’ methods, involving creative, imaginative and innovative child- and youth-friendly techniques, in order to generate relevant field data (e.g. Barker and Weller, 2003). Although past work on children’s understandings and experiences of religion has engaged with creative child-centred approaches to a certain degree (e.g. Coles, 1990; Erricker et al., 1997; Worsley, 2004), there is still room for further development in the context of researching religious identity. Methods such as photography, art, drama, diary writing, scrap books and a whole host of other activities can provide another valuable perspective on the role of agency in children and young people’s complex religious lives.

At the other end of Hart’s (1992) ladder, children and young people may become much more involved in the research process, including at the planning, analysis and dissemination stage (Alderson, 2000). In the case of research on religious identity, potential strategies include consulting with young advisory groups from various faith and non-faith communities, and enabling children and young people to play an active role in creative dissemination events aimed at a range of different audiences. Furthermore, young people may even act as co-researchers, interviewing their peers and drawing on what Nairn et al. (2007) refer to as ‘sub-cultural’ capital in order to access each other’s religious and world views. Such strategies can offer another way of engaging young research participants and provide alternative forums through which their religious and spiritual voices can be heard.

**Conclusion**

In this article, we have focused on the issue of children and young people’s religious identities and how existing research has pointed to the significance of both complexity and agency as important concepts for scholarly enquiry in this area. Not only is religious identity multifaceted and constructed through interaction with other social identities and a range of social spaces, but children and young people may also play an active role in shaping their own identities through relationships with other people and their environments. Although increasing numbers of studies on this topic do attempt to take complexity and agency into account, we have suggested a number of ways in which research in this area could be further developed. These include paying attention to changing context through case-study and comparative techniques and appropriate research instruments; considering how meaning could be deepened and clarified through the use of multi-method approaches and awareness of positionality; and developing ways in which children and young people could play a more significant role in the research process through increased participation. We hope that these suggestions and ideas will contribute to a wider debate about what is now becoming a fast-growing and increasingly significant area of research.

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