

Chapter 1: Introduction: Care, Childhood, Youth and Family in the context of Coronavirus

Tom Disney and Lucy Grimshaw

ABSTRACT:

This introductory chapter provides the context for this edited collection: *Care and Coronavirus: Children, Youth and Families* which aims to understand care in the context of COVID-19, the practices, experiences and potential futures of it for children, young people and families. In this chapter we begin by exploring COVID-19 and its implications for children, young people and families. This includes a consideration of how particular discourses of childhood and youth often led to the marginalisation of children in care policy and practice during the lockdown periods. We then discuss interdisciplinary literatures on care to identify directions in policy, practice and research; drawing attention to the political nature of care and the need for scholars of childhood, youth and family to engage with these critical and political approaches to care. We argue that developments in the field of Childhood Studies can be brought into productive dialogue with care to forge new ways of thinking through care and childhood. The final part of the chapter provides an overview of the ensuing chapters and concludes with the implications of this work for future research, policy and practice. We argue that COVID-19 heightened the attention paid to care and the ways in which care is vital for the sustenance of ourselves and the world around us. However, the pandemic also exposed inequalities and the commodification of care. We end with a call for reflection on the failures and successes of caring during the pandemic and in its aftermath so we might plan a more caring future.

Keywords: Childhood; care; COVID-19; family; politics of care; young people

On 3rd January 2020, the BBC reported on a ‘mysterious viral pneumonia’ and concerns that this infection might resemble the flu-like SARS virus, which killed 700 people in 2002-2003 across the globe (BBC 2020). Within a month the situation had changed dramatically, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared the outbreak a global emergency. By 20th March, there had been 10,000 recorded deaths, with unofficial figures likely much higher, many countries began to lockdown borders and officially limit social contact between their citizens. What we now know of as Covid-19 is, according to the WHO (2024), officially connected to an excess mortality of at least 3 million people globally. We use the term ‘connected’ deliberately, because as Horton (2020: 874) notes, COVID-19 did not act in isolation but was made particularly deadly through its interaction with a range of non-communicable diseases that clustered in particular social groups ‘according to particular patterns of inequality deeply embedded in our societies.’ This avoidable context of social and economic inequality that allowed COVID-19 to particularly ravage certain communities, underscores the political nature of the pandemic. A common refrain during these uncertain times was ‘we are all in this together!’ yet when examining the impacts of the virus, exposure was deeply stratified across racialised and gendered lines with certain groups essentially positioned as ‘surplus populations’ (Tyner, 2013) pointing to the biopolitical nature of this pandemic. In addition, forms of state withdrawal and erosion of formal care services exacerbated community vulnerability to the virus. In the UK, for instance, a preceding decade of unrelenting and cynical austerity policies withered the state’s infrastructure and ability to protect its citizens. As Raghuram (2021: 865) argues these outcomes can be read as the ‘inheritance of uncaring economies and states.’ The necessity of care and the failure of its provision was starkly felt across the world. In amongst the horrors that were experienced throughout the pandemic, this period was also marked by hope; there was optimism that the intense shock of such a phenomenon might finally herald a change to the dominant capitalist system and precipitate a kinder, more caring form of governance (Mazzucato, 2020).

Today it can feel like the possibility of radical alternative futures that prioritise care has diminished, as countries across the world have now largely reoriented themselves back to business as normal; lockdowns have now ended, the virus has cemented itself into everyday life, having become endemic, and capitalism has retained its hegemonic position. If anything, the virus itself has now become a new means of accumulation, co-opted by capitalism, reflecting its tendency to cannibalise seemingly everything (Fraser, 2022). Despite this, there were moments, practices and experiences during the height of the pandemic, where care, and its potential, offered a glimpse into what might be or what could be if we were brave enough to radically alter our state of being and approach to care. It is this premise which is the inspiration for this edited collection; to understand care in the context of COVID-19, the practices, experiences and potential futures of it for children, young people and families. We argue that COVID-19 has fundamentally challenged perspectives on childhood and care, opening up important new possibilities for Childhood Studies.

This collection draws on the perspectives of academics from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including geography, sociology, art, child development, education, social policy and public health; insights from practitioners working during the lockdown periods, in fields such as early years, education, youth work, and public health; and finally, also the voices of

those who lived during these periods, including young people. In doing so, it provides unique insights into experiences of children, young people, families and practitioners during the peak of the pandemic across the globe, but also indicates future avenues for care policy, practice and conceptual understandings within this area.

In this introductory chapter, we begin by providing an initial commentary on COVID-19 and its implications for children, young people and families, to contextualise and situate this collection. In particular, we reflect on the ways in which children were often marginalised in care policy and practice during the lockdown periods, shaped by particular discourses of childhood and youth. Next, we draw inspiration from interdisciplinary literatures on care through which we seek to forge future directions in policy, practice and research. There have been critical engagements with the pandemic in care literatures that highlight the political nature of care and we argue this is important for scholars of childhood, youth and family to reflect upon. We also take time to reflect on developments in the field of Childhood Studies, which we argue can be brought into productive dialogue with care to forge new ways of thinking through care and childhood. Finally, we provide an overview of a rich collection of chapters and conclude with the implications of this work for future research, policy and practice.

; " ÁhA t̄ ã^çh; 02ñoffj E₄—^ç3 ° ff₄ -^çffjã^çh] ã^ç 2ff₄

In 2020 the virus spread across every country in the world, but there were differentiated policy responses; some countries introduced lockdowns with strict rules rendering some people housebound, while in other contexts there was the opportunity to leave the house for time limited periods for specific purposes. In contrast, some locations, such as some US states, resisted the imposition of state controls entirely and left people to regulate themselves. Regardless of lockdown measures, the spread of COVID-19 across the globe radically reshaped the lives of children, young people and families. Alongside direct impacts of the virus, such as illness and death, families were impacted by a range of indirect implications of lockdowns, such as income precarity, (un)employment, isolation and mental ill health (Lebow, 2020). In contexts where lockdowns occurred, there were concerns about the longer-term developmental impacts upon children (see for example European Commission (2021) report on Denmark, Spain, Greece, Ireland, Germany, and France). This period was also marked by diverse and heterogeneous experiences; for example, studies of family wellbeing across a range of countries during this time noted both heightened levels of familial stress due to prolonged proximity but also enhanced levels of closeness and resilience (see for example Shah et al., (2021) for UK, Italy, Lebanon, Singapore; Gadermann et al., (2021) for Canada; Lee and Ward, (2020) for United States).

Childhood and youth, as social constructions that are constituted by and enmeshed in wider systems of power, were unavoidably impacted by the social and economic inequalities that contributed to COVID-19's rapid and deadly spread through certain communities (Khan, 2022). The closing of schooling spaces, for instance, has been noted as having a significant impact upon children and young people; 188 countries closed schools and educational spaces (Cortes-Morales et al., 2022), with an estimated 91% of the world student population affected (UNESCO, 2020a). But significantly, the impact of this is not even and it is girls who are predicted to be most greatly impacted by the closures (UNESCO, 2020b). Similarly, while certain children and young people were able to draw on family units to facilitate resilience, certain childhoods were also particularly vulnerable. For example, the implementation of social

distancing legislation led to the invisibilisation of children at risk of serious harm, through the disruption of in person child protection practice (see Katz et al., 2022 for a review of Australia, Brazil, US, Colombia, England, Germany, Israel, Japan, Canada and South Africa). The confinement to family also put LGBTQ+ children and young people at risk of violence or discrimination (Shah et al., 2021). Not all children necessarily resided in families either; children and young people entangled in the criminal justice system, in particular those institutionalised in detention settings, were particularly marginalised during this time (Khan and Boswell, 2022: 18). Writing about the US, Khan (2022) illustrates the intersectional impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people, with Black and Hispanic children more at risk of economic precarity.

Whilst research on the material, health and educational impacts of COVID-19 and lockdowns on children, families and young people is well-established, the role of discourses of childhood and youth, which heavily permeated societal engagements with children and young people at this time are perhaps less acknowledged or understood. In many Global North countries, social constructions of childhood as a period of ‘innocence’ and ‘in need of protection’ led to the imposition of policies that emphasised children’s vulnerability; for example, many universities at this time prohibited research with children as a ‘high risk group’ (Cortes-Morales et al., 2022). While the intention was to protect, the outcome is a silencing of a particular group in society. Where it suited governments, childhood ‘innocence’ could be mobilised in public health messaging as a form of affect management to achieve behaviour change. This was particularly apparent in then New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Arden’s seemingly child orientated speeches, which were lauded across the globe, yet as Spray (2024) notes New Zealand’s own public health measures largely ignored children’s voices and failed to address children as meaningful subjects. At the same time, children and young people were also considered ‘risky’ as potential vectors of disease and inherent rule breakers, indicated by the closure of schools to limit their mobility to family homes, but also through direct messaging such as in the UK where young people were warned to stay away from elderly relatives with statements such as ‘Don’t kill grandma!’ (Walker and Pidd, 2020). In some contexts, the notion of young people as reckless vectors of disease was notably stigmatising and resulted in stricter lockdowns, as Cortes-Morales et al. (2022) note in relation to Columbia and Chile. The unevenness of childhood experience during these times point to the important role of Childhood Studies in unearthing the distinctive construction of childhood and its variations across the globe. What is common to both the conceptualisation of children and young people as either in need of protection or vectors of disease, is the erasure of their own subjectivity. Children and young people were largely sidelined during the height of the pandemic and treated as objects of public health intervention, yet they were central actors in caregiving in many contexts across the globe. Children and young people are conscious and sensitive to economic inequality and the impacts of poverty (Ridge, 2013), and the pandemic was no different (Shah et al., 2021), indeed if anything this awareness was heightened and demonstrated by their own caregiving activities.

Care and Childhood

COVID-19 and the lockdowns became a defining moment when the essential nature of ‘care’ and the very word itself came to the fore in all societies in the world (Fine and Tronto, 2020); how could states enact care for their populations and protect them from infection? Who should be prioritised? How best to care for those who had become ill? Not only were there diverging opinions about what form this care should take, there were also intense and heated debates about whether or not caring policies had gone too far or not far enough to protect human life.

These different approaches and debates are indicative of the complicated and multifaceted nature of 'care'.

Care has been understood as a relational process and the work of Fisher and Tronto (1990) has often been central. They define care as:

'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complete, life-sustaining web.' (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40)

Academic scholarship has often separated care into two strands: caring about and caring for (Tronto, 1989), the latter encompassing care practice (both formal and informal) and the former focused on the emotional and affective dynamics of care. While it is often associated with being proximate, care is not limited to close physical contact; transnational care has been enacted in the form of remittances sent between countries to support families divided by borders (Carling, 2014). As Milligan and Wiles (2010) note, and hinted at in Fisher and Tronto's definition, care extends to whole networks of relations and is multidirectional and weblike; analysis of care should encompass a focus beyond the individual and simplistic interpersonal relationships. Care and care giving is complex, extending additionally beyond human actors; the wider environment and natural world, and its interconnected entities such as the soil, can be understood as a caregiver that sustains life, rather than a resource for human consumption (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Care is also interlinked with social reproduction, and the inequalities inherent in care work have been of particular interest within feminist and Marxist thought (Schwiter and Steiner, 2020), pointing to the contested and political nature of care. It is this political and expanded notion of care that is of interest to us in this edited collection. Given the deeply unequal impacts of the pandemic, an attention to the political nature of care is thus unavoidable in our minds. Equally important, is that while proclamations such as 'we are all in this together' may have rung hollow, neoliberalism's valorisation of individualism was undeniably undermined given how survival during these times was premised on collective action, and so care must be understood as deeply intertwined in the wider world beyond the individual, including the human and non-human. This points to a need to consider care as a form of radical interdependency, and recent developments thinking through care during the pandemic help to make sense of this. This is articulated particularly effectively in the Care Manifesto (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) in which the authors argue that predominance of neoliberalism and its fetishisation of individualism has led to societies that see little value in care, this in turn hastened the damage wrought by COVID-19. It is important, however, to note that neoliberalism is not a feature of all places; not all countries will have experienced this specific devaluation of care, and this reflects concerns that care literatures are often Western-centric (Raghuram, 2021).

In a recent contribution on COVID-19 and care, Neely and Lopez (2022: 2) similarly argue to push 'against neoliberal frameworks of individualism and autonomy, recognizing interrelatedness both as material fact and as ground through which to imagine worlds otherwise.' However, they argue that during COVID-19, care across the globe has been impacted primarily by the role of racial capitalism rather than neoliberalism and highlight the concept of 'othermothering', drawing on Black feminist care ethics. Othermothering originates within African American communities during and beyond slavery, where practices of education and socialisation took place outside of the nuclear family, involving wider networks of people in

caring (Guiffrida, 2005). It challenges Western conceptualisations of care and family, resisting neoliberal individualism, the privatisation of care and the resulting exploitation within capitalist care relations. The attention to the Black Feminist care ethics and intersectional experiences of care necessarily emphasises the political nature of care and the fight against social oppression (Neely and Lopez, 2022). Both the Care Manifesto and Neely and Lopez's use of othermothering are important and critical interventions within care literatures to make sense of pandemic times. Both point to our interdependencies and the politics of care which inform this edited collection; we also aim to extend these debates in care by incorporating children's own subjectivities during the pandemic.

Children are often obscured within caring processes and practices, with assumptions about their inherent vulnerability often positioning them necessarily as simple recipients of care. Children feature primarily as objects of care, and how the care they necessitate may be stratified by inequalities. Rarely, are they meaningful subjects within care literatures; Horton and Pyer (2017: 13) note that research 'with - rather than about - children and young people in relation to care seems to be, problematically, rather marginalised; certainly it is relatively rare to encounter children and young people's own voices, experiences, issues, practices, politics and ethics represented within the very rich body of work on care'. While children and young people certainly are recipients of care, often within families or designated spaces of care, this does not mean that they are not also sophisticated and meaningful caring agents. Childhood scholars have been at the forefront of exploring children's caring agency and responsibilities within both the Global South (Evans, 2010) and the Global North (Disney, 2015). We argue that there is much of value in literatures exploring care during pandemic times, but they should be brought together with recent developments within Childhood Studies to think through the complexities of care during the pandemic.

; 022ã⁶; 02h0₄ h^a c-hffj

The current vibrant and expanding interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies, often drawing from the sociological New Social Studies of Childhood (James and Prout, 1997) has pioneered more sophisticated engagements with the social and cultural contexts of childhood (Wyness, 2012) and has endeavoured to treat children as subjects and participants in social research (Wells, 2018). Central to much scholarship within Childhood Studies, is that children are social agents and not passive recipients of adult culture, rather they are meaningful rights bearers and beings with the capacity to remake and reshape the social world (Corsaro, 2015). The social construction of childhood and children's agentic capacity are now very much foundational aspects of Childhood Studies (Wells, 2018). With this rich scholarship has come limitations, however; the discipline has been argued to have remained largely preoccupied with the micro-scale of childhood and children's everyday lives, despite now longstanding calls to reflect on macro-scale processes which shape and produce childhoods (Ansell, 2009). Additionally, the discipline has been argued to be 'complicit in valorizing children's agency to the point of fetish' (Spyrou, Rosen and Cook, 2019: 3). There are political consequences to the conceptual dominance of agency in Childhood Studies scholarship as Spyrou, Rosen and Cook (2019) caution; such approaches that celebrate individual action risk reflecting and supporting neoliberal and late capitalist agendas that have often had negative consequences for many children across the world, exacerbating poverty and inequality. The preoccupation with children's agency in the discipline has furthermore restricted the discipline from other ways of knowing childhood and children's everyday lives, resulting in more partial views and understandings. Psychological and developmental approaches are often perceived with wariness

(Tatlow-Golden and Montgomery, 2021), and a focus on the micro-scale agency of children has neglected more structural approaches (Spyrou, Rosen and Cook, 2019).

In an important recent conceptual intervention, Spyrou, Rosen and Cook (2019: 6) suggest reorientating our attention to ‘the relational and interdependent aspects of children’s lives as well as the ethics and politics that characterise them.’ They employ a relational ontology to understand childhood subjectivities, embedding them within the wider political and structural contexts in which they live and thus move Childhood Studies beyond a fascination with the individual agentic child. Ultimately, what matters, they argue, is ‘not what [children] are but how they affect and are affected in the event assemblages they find themselves in’ (Spyrou, Rosen and Cook, 2019: 8). Notably, their approach is implicitly underpinned by care ethics; they caution childhood scholars to question which child is brought into view by our research activities. This points to the important synergies between recent developments in care literatures and Childhood Studies; a focus beyond the individual and a call for attention to the political nature of our interdependencies embedded in socio-structural scalar processes. Childhood scholars could find much of value in recent care scholarship that decentres the individual and radically embeds us within the world around us, acknowledging human and non-human subjectivities. Similarly, critical childhood scholarship has much to offer care literatures – in questioning who we bring into view with our research and resisting the prioritisation of adult voice and the marginalisation of children’s subjectivities. We suggest such an approach is vital in order to help understand childhood, youth and family and for conceptualising and developing future caring practices in the wake of COVID-19.

Structure and contributions of the book

The book is organised into five sections which explore the COVID-19’s incursion into the everyday lives of children, young people and families across the globe. These sections comprise ‘Early Systems of Care’, ‘Children and Young People’s Health and Wellbeing’, ‘Parents as Subjects and Recipients of Care’, ‘Schooling as Care’, and ‘Young People Navigating Care and Control Beyond the School’. Within each section authors present research on diverse topics across various contexts with a central guiding theme of how care was enacted, experienced or denied during these times. Each section ends with a reflection from practitioners and those who lived through the pandemic voicing their experiences of the lockdowns, providing rich and moving accounts that remind us how these times were felt.

The first section examines experiences and practices of care within systems of early childhood during the lockdown periods. In Chapter 2, Fabio Dovigo notes there has been surprisingly limited research focused on exploring the implications of the pandemic upon children’s development and their socialisation within early childhood settings. This is mirrored, he argues, by a similar dearth of insights into the impacts of the lockdowns upon parents. His chapter provides an important reference point, addressing these lacunae through a systematic literature review of international literatures to explore the experiences of children and their carers during the pandemic. He points to the need for interventions to address lost learning and socialisation, but with a clear focus on supporting parents and carers in this. With an international focus this chapter provides an important macro-scale perspective on the impacts of COVID-19 on childhood and care.

In Chapter 3, Donald Simpson and Sandra Lydon argue that despite the importance afforded to early childhood, the role of care has been gradually eroded in these settings for some time. In earlier research with early years practitioners in England and America, they noted the circulation of deficit discourses when working with children in poverty, and an overall prioritisation of education rather than care. As they explain, the circulation of particular discourses of the importance of care during

the pandemic offered an opportunity for a reset and to deconstruct deficit approaches, echoing the aims of this collection to explore what might have been from the pandemic. While practitioners did exhibit increased poverty sensitivity and focus on care, it is notable that this quickly succumbed to pre-pandemic ideals of 'school-readiness' and the relegation of care to secondary importance in these settings. The result of this was again that children in poverty experienced unequal provision, highlighting a significant lost opportunity. Despite this, they argue that there will be 'small places' where caring adaptations will persist, and while much of what we see today may suggest a return to the 'normal' of pre-pandemic times, it is important to excavate these moments of care and emphasise them to help develop a kinder, more caring society.

This section on early childhood systems of care ends with a reflection from practice provided in Chapter 4 by Charmaine Agius Ferrante and Elaine Chaplin. In their conversations with early year practitioners, Ferrante and Chaplin's contribution highlights the strain that practitioners were under to provide care under during the pandemic, the adaptations they have implemented to support child development and how this has remained unspoken and unacknowledged. Ferrante and Chaplin's intervention and Dovigo's, highlight the importance of sufficiently resourcing and supporting early childhood systems of care in order to safeguard the wellbeing of children. Their contribution, as with Dovigo's, emphasises the developmental impacts of the pandemic and are situated within these literatures and perspectives. Significantly, these contributions thus root the collection in a more holistic approach to Childhood Studies, resisting Childhood Studies' traditional scepticism of developmental ways of knowing.

In the second section, the chapters explore children and young people's health during the pandemic. While the notion that children are biologically and developmentally vulnerable is common in societal discourses, policy and practice, it was perceived that children generally experienced milder symptoms of COVID-19 (Rotulo and Palma, 2023). Despite this apparent resilience, children and young people were not free from negative impacts upon their physical and mental health during the pandemic. In Chapter 5 Lucy Currie, Sibusisiwe Tendai Sibanda and Athenkosi Mtumtum explore the impacts of lockdowns on young girls living in a South African settlement in a collaborative piece between academia and practice. They demonstrate the precarity of care through a situation marked by state abandonment and where the family might be thought to constitute a safe space this was not always the case, with significant implications for their mental health. Despite this, the girls in their chapter demonstrated resilience in these informal settlements during the pandemic, engaging in care for their communities, their families and friends, and themselves. Currie, Tendai Sibanda and Mtumtum caution, however, that this resilience persisted despite many of the structures that should have been there to support these girls. Such insights underscore the importance of not reproducing neoliberal logics of individualistic coping, and to look at where resilience could have been fostered by the state, within settlements. To focus solely on how these girls coped, is to absolve other actors of responsibility to have provided care; this lesson is starkly relayed in their chapter and has a powerful message of the need to prioritise care for all, so that no one is abandoned by state inaction (Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi, 2017). In the same section, Julie Spray in Chapter 6 provides powerful insights into the manipulation of public affects through the mobilisation of childhood as a public health tool. Drawing upon an innovative method of co-making comics with children and an extensive review of government transcripts of the time period, Spray examines how children and their perspectives were represented. She argues that during New Zealand's lockdowns, childhood was coopted for the purposes of public health protection. The result of this was that children's own subjectivities were largely erased, and their voices ignored. This underscores children's widespread systematic exclusion from meaningful engagement in political processes and highlights their minority status. Spray's

contribution highlights how despite intentions, care can be extractive and exploitative, which should lead us all to question where children's voices are in policy and how they are accurately represented.

In Chapter 7, Frances Gunn a Service Manager with responsibility for a Health Visiting service in Scotland reflects on her experiences. She explores the role of health visitors as a vital early care service for infants and parents, and how this was enacted during and between lockdowns. Despite the severity of Scottish lockdowns, health visitors adapted and engaged in creative practice to make sure they were able to see families with newborn children. Gunn's contribution highlights the precarity of certain people during this period, in particular women and girls at risk of abuse and underscores the importance of health visiting as a technique to facilitate safety for these families.

In the third section, the authors explore experiences of parenting during the pandemic. Through the contributions within this section, the gendered impacts of care are powerfully illustrated. In Chapter 8 Laura Bellusi and Sian Lucas analyse gendered experiences of new mothers, finding that the enforced isolation exacerbated the 'impression management' that new mothers engage in. The emotional and physical labour that new mothers had to engage in during this time increased, as did the anxieties about needing to be 'good enough' and feel knowledgeable about child health and development whilst they were physically distanced from child professionals and their normal support networks were restricted. The amplified pressure on mothers at this time again highlights the multifaceted nature of care, where caring can be debilitating and unequal. Despite this, Bellusi and Lucas identify moments of hope with mothers able to resist these societal discourses and practice care for one another. With an allied focus, in Chapter 9 Claire Matysova explores the implementation and experience of 'shared parental leave' during the pandemic. Drawing inspiration from feminist ethics of care literatures she examines the potential disruption of gendered norms during this time and considers the possible hopeful reimagining of shared parental care through the closure of schools and nurseries and the resourcing of childcare to the family home. While Matysova finds hope in the possible future flexibility, she notes that dominant masculinist working cultures impede this advancement and cautions that the responsibility for greater cultural shifts must be placed on wider society rather than parents themselves.

Completing this section is Chapter 10 – a powerful reflection from Fiona Ranson and Cuong Nguyen on their experiences of being a parent and child, respectively, during this time. Their contribution takes the form of a conversation, tracing the implementation of the lockdown period, the spread of the virus and the implications for the mutual care they shared during this time. Ranson and Nguyen's recollections highlight the corrosive role of racism during the pandemic, and the protective caring measures enacted to defend against it. Critically, their reflection is emblematic of the multidirectionality of care, with child providing care for parent as well as being a recipient of care.

The fourth section focuses on schooling as an often central facet of children and young people's everyday lives. In Chapter 11, Tom Disney, Lucy Grimshaw and Judy Thomas draw upon arts-based participatory methods to explore the experiences of teenage secondary school girls in England who found their schooling disrupted by the pandemic and implementation of lockdowns. They draw on Katz (2008) to argue that children and young people experience ever increasing pressure to act as redemptive future agents and thus sites of capital accumulation. Despite this, they argue there were important moments, practices and experiences of care during the lockdown periods that can be harnessed to help resist the capitalist logics that exert such pressures upon current school children. The girls in their study were able to point to many positive experiences of schooling during this time, in contrast to the negative media discourses

about COVID-19 and home learning that have become common place. Their findings point to the potentialities of care and the hope that can be excavated from this time and importantly that these young girls were also sophisticated and important caring agents, despite a lack of societal acknowledgement. In Chapter 12, Lucy Grimshaw, Kay Heslop, Kirstin Mulholland, Vikki Park, Jill Duncan, Jaden Allen, Cathryn Meredith and Christopher Warnock examine the experiences of an online peer support group comprised of academics caring for children and homeschooling whilst working. They present innovative research based on analysis of the group's digital chats (which form a contemporaneous historical diary) during the pandemic and lockdown periods. They demonstrate how the group was underpinned by an ethic of care, based on reciprocal relationships of care across multiple caring roles which enabled them to cope with homeschooling periods. They demonstrate the strength and benefits of caring collectively whilst adapting to challenging and stressful home, school and work routines. Whilst acknowledging gendered inequalities in care provision and workplaces, the group illustrates the possibility of developing a caring and inclusive peer support group (including mothers, fathers and a grandparents) which sought to influence and enhance caring cultures within the workplace.

This section finishes with contributions from two secondary school teachers in England, both of whom were active practitioners during the pandemic, although within different contexts and with different experiences. In Chapter 13, Linzi Brown reflects on the struggles of trying to continue to provide education in a time of significant disruption. Motivated by care, she articulates a number of interventions she implemented to keep students engaged and connected. This came at a personal cost, reminding us that practitioners working through the pandemic were often in a precarious position. This is also powerfully illustrated by Jason Burg in Chapter 14 where he traces his precarity as an early career teacher and then hourly paid teaching assistant working among students during the pandemic. His reflection draws attention to the political nature of the pandemic, whereby those often most at risk of infection were in positions of low pay with little protection despite fulfilling vital caring roles for children; such interventions underscore the societal devaluation of care and thus its own precarious nature.

In section five the contributors reflect on the experiences of young people, who were often positioned at the sharp end of narratives of risk and being considered 'out of place' during lockdown periods in contrast to the notion of early childhood 'innocence'. In Chapter 15, Catherine Nixon, Kirsty Deacon, Andrew James, Ciera Waugh, Zodie and Sarah McGarrol provide an examination of the Children's Hearings System, a Scottish welfare-based tribunal-based system. This system is particular to Scotland and is central to caring for children in need of protection but also those who come into conflict with the law. Critically, their contribution involves young people who have experience of this system as authors and meaningful contributors, providing unique insight into young people's perspectives. The pandemic resulted in hearings being conducted virtually with implications for the young people attending them. Their chapter underscores the complexity of care during these times; the experiences were multifaceted, with some finding their sense of safety and control eroded by virtual hearings, whereas others argued that avoiding the Hearings centres meant that they avoided re-traumatisation through visiting a place that was associated with a lack of safety and control. The authors argue that the system could learn from this period to address potential re-traumatisation and how attending hearings from a safe place may alleviate anxiety, ultimately creating a more caring system. The role of the state in promoting care for young people is further explored in Chapter 16 by Stephen Crossley. He provides a discussion of grassroots sports clubs and traces their importance to formal and informal caring practices for young people. He argues these spaces have been neglected and undervalued in their importance in the UK

compared to other countries, not least following a decade of austerity policies and a prioritisation of elite sport during lockdowns. Drawing on Tronto (2015), he notes that care needs to, and does, take place in the everyday among the multiplicity of relations and connections we have. These sports clubs are often embedded in local communities forming links, for example, between and within families, and provide meaningful moments of connection and care. This was particularly felt as they became incrementally available as lockdowns eased in England. He calls for future research to meaningfully examine the role of these spaces in facilitating care for young people.

In the final practitioner reflection, in Chapter 17, Alison Ní Charraighe, Kelly Coates, Shannon Devine and Elisha Sanchez discuss their experience of the role of Youth Work during the lockdowns. They argue that Youth Work was overlooked in many respects as a profession, with priority status given to other professions that worked with children and young people, such as child protection social work. Their chapter is delivered as a conversation piece between Ní Charraighe (an academic and Youth Worker) and three current Youth Workers in the North East of England. They argue that the lack of priority given to Youth Work during the lockdowns reflects the devaluation and decimation of this service through austerity policies and consequently a neglect of young people who do receive support from a service which is intertwined with care, or what hooks (1994) terms ‘professional love’.

In Chapter 18, Rachel Rosen provides the final commentary ‘Childhood and Care in the Time of Coronavirus’. She draws our attention to the global impacts and inequalities of COVID-19 for children and young people. Noting the unevenness of childhood globally, she traces the ways in which familiar tropes of child at risk and risky child have been deployed to control rather than care for children. She challenges us to think beyond these and consider children as potential carers themselves. In doing so, she challenges readers to consider the implications for children’s subjectivities, relations and worlds and the caring practices that are brought into being through this.

; 4 6 4 2 6

This collection of chapters marks an important contribution to understanding the role and nature of care for and by children, young people and families during unprecedented times, and for the future. Central to the collection’s significance is its diversity; the collection is grounded in interdisciplinary scholarship, with insights from sociology, geography, social policy, art, anthropology, education and developmental approaches to understanding childhood, youth and family. It is vital that academics resist disciplinary silos, which limit our insights and potential contributions to the world. Furthermore, this significance is evidenced through a range of methodological approaches that provide multifaceted insights into the experiences and practices of care during the pandemic. These range from arts-based participatory methods revealing rich examples of lived experience to quantitative methods that draw our attention to the socio-scalar implications of COVID-19 for care.

Many of the chapters demonstrate the sophisticated caring agency that children and young people displayed for themselves and others, both human and non-human; and the complex and political nature of care within families, communities, organisations and societies. This collection highlights the important role and experiences of children and young people in care and caring. The sophisticated relational caring agency exhibited calls for academics, practitioners and policy makers to consider new ways of thinking through the care that took place during the Coronavirus pandemic without erasing children’s subjectivities.

Too often those who are the focus of academic work are only partially represented in academic texts and an important contribution of this collection is the inclusion of the practitioner reflections, and the young people who have co-authored chapters. Rich narratives from practitioners and participants in the various studies highlight the challenges of providing care during those uncertain times but also the joys of caring. The nature of care in everyday lives is revealed as multidirectional, relational and reciprocal, but also sometimes through small, overlooked acts of 'being there' (Askins, 2015).

This collection tells us much about care and caring in our world, highlighting important lessons from the lockdowns. COVID-19 remains a hugely significant global phenomenon with macro-scale implications for us all. The attention to the scalar complexities of the pandemic within this volume highlight the political nature of care; in many chapters, caring took place despite the withdrawal or failure of formal caring policies and processes during and preceding the pandemic. It has underscored the centrality of care to our world – a return to a pre-pandemic 'normal' is not possible nor desirable. Care is not a commodity to facilitate capitalist modes of being, but a vital means by which we sustain ourselves and our world, which is demonstrated again and again in this collection. Yet, it is also clear from this collection that care is fragile and may be destabilised by crises such as COVID-19 but also by its devaluation through austerity policies informed by neoliberalism. It is important the COVID-19 does not mask the fragilities of care that preceded it, where it has been cannibalised by capitalism to facilitate greater profit making (Fraser, 2022).

Ultimately, this collection calls for us all to confront the legacy of COVID-19. To examine the failures and successes of care, inequalities and the impacts on children, young people and families preceding the pandemic emergence and its aftermath. This book provides an opportunity to reflect on and resist the ways in which care has been so systematically eroded and devalued in our societies; that we might recognise our mutual vulnerabilities and interdependencies and plan for a more caring future.

References:

- Ansell, N. (2009) 'Childhood and politics of scale: Descaling children's geographies?' *Progress in Human Geography* 33(2): 190-209.
- Askins, K. (2015) 'Being together: Everyday geographies and the quiet politics of belonging.' *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14(2): 470-478.
- BBC (2020) 'China pneumonia outbreak: Mystery virus probed.' Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-50984025> (Accessed 29/01/2024)
- Carling, J. (2014) 'Scripting remittances: Making sense of money transfers in transnational relationships.' *International Migration Review* 48(1): 218-262.
- Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Littler, J., Rottenberg, C. and Segal, L. (2020). *The care manifesto – The politics of interdependence*. Verso Books.
- Corsaro, W. (2015) *The Sociology of Childhood* (4th Edition). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cortes-Morales, S., Holt, L., Acevedo-Rincon, J., Aitken, S., Ladru, D., Joelsson, T., Kraftl, P., Murray, L. and Tebet, G. (2022) 'Children living in pandemic times: A geographical, transnational and situated view.' *Children's Geographies* 20(4): 381-391.
- Davies, T., Isakjee, A., and Dhesi, S. (2017) 'Violent inaction: The necropolitical experience of refugees in Europe.' *Antipode* 49(5): 1263-1284.
- Disney, T. (2015) 'Complex spaces of orphan care: A Russian therapeutic children's community.' *Children's Geographies* 13(1): 30-43.
- European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2021a). *Early childhood education and care and the Covid-19 pandemic: Understanding and managing the impact of the crisis on the sector*. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/60724> (accessed 05/02/2024)
- Evans, R. (2010) 'Children's caring roles and responsibilities within the family in Africa.' *Geography Compass* 4: 1477-1496.
- Fine, M., and Tronto, J. (2020) Care goes viral: care theory and research confront the global COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Care and Caring* 4, 3, 301-309
- Fisher, B. and Tronto, J. (1990) 'Toward a feminist theory of caring.' In E. Abel and M. Nelson (eds.) *Circles of care* Albany, NY: SUNY Press. Pp 36–54.
- Fraser, N. (2022) *Cannibal capitalism: How are system is devouring democracy, care, and the planet – and what we can do about it*. New York: Verso.
- Gadermann, A. C., Thomson, K. C., Richardson, C. G., Gagné, M., McAuliffe, C., Hirani, S., et al. (2021) 'Examining the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Mental Health in Canada: Findings from a National Cross-Sectional Study.' *BMJ Open* 11 e042871.
- Guiffrida, D. (2005) 'Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American students' definitions of student-centred faculty.' *The Journal of Higher Education* 76(6): 701-723.

hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge.

Horton, J. and Pyer, M. (2017) 'Introduction: Children, Young People and 'Care'.' In Horton, J. and Pyer, M. (eds.) *Children, Young People and Care*. London: Routledge. Pp 1-25.

Horton, R. (2020) Offline: Covid-19 is not a pandemic. *The Lancet*, 396, 874.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1997) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. Washington DC: Falmer Press.

Katz, C. (2008) 'Childhood as spectacle: Relays of anxiety and the reconfiguration of the child.' *Cultural Geographies* 15(1): 5-17.

Katz, I. et al. (2022) 'One year into COVID-19: What have we learned about child maltreatment reports and child protective service responses?' *Child Abuse & Neglect* 130(1): 105473.

Khan, N. (2022) 'Introduction - Unmasking childhood inequality.' In Khan, N. (ed.) *Covid-19 and Childhood Inequality*. London: Routledge. Pp 1-12.

Khan, N. and Boswell, A. (2022) 'Pandemic Eugenics' in Khan, N. (ed.) *Covid-19 and Childhood Inequality*. London: Routledge. Pp 13-34.

Lebow, J. (2020) 'Family in the Age of COVID-19.' *Family Process*. 59(2): 309–312.

Lee, S. J., and Ward, K. P. (2020). Research Brief: Stress and Parenting during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Parenting in Context Research Lab, WPRN-517152. Available at: <https://wprn.org/item/517152>.

Mazzucato, M. (2020) 'The Covid-19 crisis is a chance to do capitalism differently.' *The Guardian* available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/18/the-covid-19-crisis-is-a-chance-to-do-capitalism-differently> (Accessed 29/01/2024)

Milligan, C. and Wiles, J (2010) 'Landscapes of care.' *Progress in Human Geography* 34(6): 736–754.

Neely, A. and Lopez, P. (2022) 'Toward healthier futures in post-pandemic times: Political ecology, racial capitalism, and black feminist approaches to care.' *Geography Compass* 16(2): e12609.

Puig de La Bellacasa, M. (2). (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Raghuram, P. (2021) 'Caring for the Manifesto – Steps toward Making It an Achievable Dream.' *Social Politics* 28(4): 865-873.

Ridge, T. (2013) 'We are All in This Together'? The Hidden Costs of Poverty, Recession and Austerity Policies on Britain's Poorest Children' *Children and Society*, Vol. 27, p. 406-417

Roluto, G. and Palma, P. (2023) 'Understanding Covid-19 in children: Immune determinants and post-infection conditions.' *Pediatric Research* 94: 434-442.

Schwiter, K. and Steiner, J. (2020) 'Geographies of care work: The commodification of care, digital care futures and alternative caring visions.' *Geography Compass* 14(12): e12546.

Shah, M., Rizzo, S., Percy-Smith, B., Monchuk, L., Lorusso, E., Tay, C. and Day, L. (2021) 'Growing up under Covid-19: Young people's agency in family dynamics.' *Frontiers in Sociology* 6:722380.

Spray, J. (2024) 'Children's care for public health and politically expedient care for children in Aotearoa New Zealand's COVID-19 pandemic.' In Disney, T. and Grimshaw, L. (eds.) *Care and Coronavirus: Perspectives on Childhood, Youth and Family (Emerald Studies in Child-Centred Practice)*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Spyrou, S., Rosen, R. and Cook, D. T. (2019) 'Introduction: Remaining childhood studies: connectivities ... relationalities ... linkages ...' In Spyrou, S., Rosen, R. and Cook, D. T. (eds.) *Reimagining Childhood Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Press. Pp1-20.

Tatlow-Golden, M. and Montgomery, H. (2021) 'Childhood studies and child psychology: Disciplines and dialogue?' *Children & Society* 35(1): 3-17.

Tronto, J. (1989) 'Women and caring: What can feminists learn about morality from caring?' In: Gould, C. (Ed.) *Key concepts in critical theory: Gender*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, pp. 282-289.

Tronto, J. (2015) *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tyner, J. (2013) 'Population geography I: Surplus populations.' *Progress in Human Geography* 37(5): 701-711.

UNESCO (2020a) 'COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response.' Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> (accessed 05/02/2024)

UNESCO (2020b) 'Addressing the Gender Dimensions of COVID-related School Closures.' Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-webinar-3-addressing-gender-dimensions-covid-related-school-closures> (accessed 05/02/2024)

Walker, P. and Pidd, H. (2020) "'Don't kill granny!' Message for Preston Youth Aims to Slow Spread of Covid-19.' *The Guardian* Available at: ['Don't kill granny' message for Preston youth aims to slow spread of Covid-19 | Coronavirus | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/16/dont-kill-granny-message-for-preston-youth-aims-to-slow-spread-of-covid-19) (Accessed 19/02/2024)

Wells, K. (2017) *Childhood Studies – Making Young Subjects*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

WHO (2024) 'The true death toll of Covid-19 – Estimating global mortality.' Available at: <https://www.who.int/data/stories/the-true-death-toll-of-covid-19-estimating-global-excess-mortality> (Accessed 29/01/2024)

Wyness, M. (2012) *Childhood and Society* (2nd edition). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.