

A Study of the Relationship between Media,  
Commercial Markets and Children's Play in the UK  
between 1950 and 2011

**FINAL REPORT**

British Academy Grant Number: SG111215



## **The research context**

There is extensive media and scholarly discussion and reflection on the changing nature of childhood in the twentieth century and the way in which developments in technology may have diminished childhood in some way (e.g. Palmer, 2006), yet much of this speculation is based on anecdotes and misinformation, as discussed by Buckingham (2000). The aim of this study was to explore changes in the nature of the relationship between play, media and commercial culture in England through a comparison of play in the 1950s/60s and the present day, drawing on oral history accounts of adults in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and comparing these accounts with data from an ethnographic study of contemporary playgrounds. The latter study was conducted as part of the AHRC “Beyond Text” programme, ‘Children’s Playground Games and Songs in the New Media Age’ (Burn et al., 2011). A second aim was to identify the way in which the use of social networking sites might be used to trace contributors to previous research studies conducted by Iona and Peter Opie.

The project was based on the archival collection of Iona (1923-) and Peter Opie (1918-1982) relating to the play and traditions of UK children in the mid twentieth century. A series of landmark publications by the Opies (1959, 1969, 1997) became the definitive guide to the contemporary and historical manifestations of these aspects of children’s culture in the UK and the English-speaking world. They were based on information contributed by some 20,000 children from schools all over Britain, in response to three surveys

(c.1950–80), supplemented by the Opies' own in-depth observation and sound recording. The collection covers a wide range of play and traditions in a variety of outdoor environments – including linguistic items, games, rhymes, songs, customs, rites of passage and beliefs – and provides ethnographic detail on transmission, performance and re-creation.

In the following report, we outline the steps undertaken to collect data and then move on to report findings in relation to the aims identified above.

The project was conducted between August 2011 and January 2012 by Professor Jackie Marsh and Dr Julia Bishop, University of Sheffield. We acknowledge, and are grateful for, the assistance of the Bodleian Libraries. We also thank the British Library for hosting the data alongside the data from the AHRC 'Playgrounds' project.

### **What we have done**

The first step in the project was to identify the two schools that we would work with. We searched the corpus of material located at the Bodleian library to find schools that were geographically close to the schools in the AHRC 'Playgrounds' study and which contained letters from children that indicated that they engaged in media-related play. The first school, Ecclesfield Grammar, was the only school from Sheffield to contribute to the original Opie

surveys. It was, therefore, fortunate that it was a school that was geographically close to the school which participated in the 'Playgrounds' project, Montenev Primary School. Indeed, many children from Montenev move to Ecclesfield school in Year 7, although it is now a comprehensive school. Both schools serve primarily white working class families who live in Parson Cross, a large housing estate which contains both private and public housing. The London school which participated in the 'Playgrounds' study was an inner-city school, Christopher Hatton Primary. We therefore identified a school that was geographically close (although not as close as the two Sheffield schools), St Winefride's School in Manor Park, Newham. The demography of the catchment area had changed since the original Opie surveys, however. Whilst the original data was collected from children with names from a limited range of origins (including England, Ireland, Poland and the Caribbean), the current school has children whose families' ethnic identities originate from a wide range of other countries, including Asian countries. Both schools were contacted and were interested in the project, stating that they would circulate details of the project to alumni networks.

We then set up a *Facebook* page<sup>1</sup> related to the project. The first challenge faced was the lack of space on the *Facebook* page to outline information about the project. We therefore felt it necessary to set up a separate web page for the project<sup>2</sup> that could be linked to the *Facebook* page in order that sufficient information about the project could be placed on the Internet. We populated the *Facebook* page with various entries that aimed to stimulate

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/MemoriesofChildhoodPlay>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/research/groups/csnl/relationmedia>

interest in the project, such as links to newspaper articles about the project and examples of games and toys from the 1950s. We included the URL for this *Facebook* page in all of the publicity material relating to the project.

The Bodleian Library sent us photocopies of the original entries from the children at the two schools. There were letters from 21 children at Ecclesfield Grammar and 39 at St Winefride's, although two of the latter did not contain surnames. It was also difficult to discern some of the names because of the nature of the children's handwriting, and in some cases across both schools, only first initial and then surname was provided, therefore limiting what could be discerned with regard to gender. We then used the website *Friends Reunited* to try and trace some of these original contributors. This was done in two ways. We traced actual former pupils of the schools or those with the same surname from around the same period who might be a relation and approached them via the *Friends Reunited* messaging facility. We also used the general Message Boards for both schools, first to appeal for help tracing the Opie contributors (without mentioning them specifically by name) and then to appeal for help with the project generally. Another social networking avenue was available to us with Ecclesfield, as they have their own online alumni network independent of *Friends Reunited* entitled the 'Ecclesfield Grammar Virtual Community'. Julia Bishop, the Research Assistant on the project, posted a general message on this site. Using these methods, we received responses from two former Ecclesfield pupils from the right period, but who were not Opie contributors.

As many of the contributors were not members of *Friends Reunited*, we also used an online directory, *192.com*, to attempt to trace these individuals. Further, we circulated a press release, which was published in local press in Sheffield and in Essex, given that many of the families who originally lived in Manor Park had relocated to Essex, and asked that people who attended the schools during the relevant dates contact us. We also took part in a radio interview on Radio Sheffield in order to recruit participants.

Given the challenges faced in tracing the original contributors, we decided that we would extend the study to include individuals who attended either these schools or schools close to these in the 1950s and 1960s, but who had not taken part in the Opies' surveys. Montenev Primary School was asked to distribute letters to the families of children who attended the school, asking them to volunteer to be interviewed for the project. We decided not to distribute these letters at St Winifrede's School because of the population change – very many grandparents would not have English as a first language and are recent immigrants to the area and the country. Instead, we approached the East of London Family History Society and a number of people are, subsequently, writing memories for us. Another woman, who read an article about the project in *Lewisham Life*, contacted us and was interviewed for the project. The alumni organizer at St Winefride's School also contacted a former pupil of the school who corresponded at length with us. Through these various and multi-stranded strategies, of the 21 original Sheffield contributors, we have ascertained that one is deceased, we have traced and contacted two of the remaining contributors and currently have

leads on nine others. Of the 39 original St Winefride's contributors, two have no surname, leaving 37, and we have likewise ascertained that one of them is now deceased; we have traced and contacted eleven of the remaining students and have leads on six others.

We conducted a semi-structured interview with each individual we have contacted who agreed to participate. In the interviews, we probed the individual's memories of childhood play and its relation to media and commercial markets. Participants were also asked about their use (or not) of *Facebook* (see Appendix 1). Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and over the telephone, according to logistics and individual choice, where possible. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Twenty-eight interviews were completed, including a telephone interview and a face-to-face interview that were not recorded (but during which notes were taken), and we received four substantive written submissions. This has resulted in data being obtained from 32 respondents in total.

Ethical issues have been considered throughout the study. Ethical consent was gained from the relevant University research ethics committee, and we have ensured that the project adheres to the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004). All potential interviewees were sent an information sheet about the study and were asked to sign consent forms. It was made clear to participants that anonymity would be guaranteed, although if people wished to make their names public, we informed them that we would respect that. Interviewees were told that they could withdraw from the

project at any point. Almost all of the former contributors to the Opie surveys we contacted were keen to be interviewed and were generous with their time. Many had no recollection of contributing to the surveys (although one did remember doing the survey and recalled that the Opies made a follow-up visit to the school). All the former Opie contributors that we traced were given a copy of their original contribution. The data will be lodged at the British Library for future research purposes.

A thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the data was undertaken. The data were viewed and read a number of times and an initial set of codes was developed by conceptualising patterns in the data. The codes then informed the analysis of the data at the broader level of themes, which drew together clusters of codes into categories. The themes which emerged as a result of this process were: (i) forms of play (ii) media and play (iii) technology and play (iv) commercial markets and play (v) gender, sexuality and play; (vi) space and play; (vii) parents, family and play; (viii) schooling and play (viii) changing childhoods. We then compared and contrasted these data with data arising from the AHRC 'Playgrounds' project, which consisted of video observations, written field notes and interviews with children in the two schools, collected over a two-year period (see Willett et al., in press). For an analysis of the 'parents, family and play' theme, we contrasted the oral narrative accounts with other relevant research concerning contemporary families and play.

## **Key findings**

In this section we discuss the findings in relation to the two separate aims of the project: (a) to identify continuities and discontinuities in relation to play, media and commercial brands in the 1950s/ 1960s and (b) to explore the use of social networking sites in tracing contributors to the Opie collection.

### ***(a) A comparison of childhood and play, 1950s/ 1960s and 2010s***

#### *Media, technology and play*

Inevitably, given the developments in relation to media and technology over the past sixty years, there were significant differences in the experiences of the adults we interviewed and the children who were the focus of the ethnographic studies. Contemporary children have access to a wide range of media and technologies, such as cinema, television, radio, computer games, DVD, tablet pcs, handheld computers, mp3 players and so on (Marsh et al., 2005; Willett et al., in press). The data from the oral history interviews indicate that television, cinema, radio and record players were the media sources for the participants in this study in the 1950s and 1960s.

The adults reported seldom watching television, as they preferred to play outside. The programmes they reported watching were primarily those produced for children, although a few respondents mentioned programmes that were aired past the watershed. In contrast, children in the 'Playgrounds'

study watched television more extensively and watched a variety of programmes, including programmes aimed primarily at an adult audience e.g. *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (see Marsh and Bishop, in press). Due to the prevalence of DVD players, cinema attendance is less frequent for contemporary children than it was the adults in this study, many of whom reported going to the cinema every Saturday to watch children's films. In relation to music, the adults listened to popular music on the radio and record players, whereas children in the 'Playgrounds' study enjoyed music across a variety of platforms including radio, MP3 players and the Internet.

Nevertheless, despite the disparity between the types and range of media employed, there were similarities in the way in which children drew from media in their play across both cohorts. Bishop and Curtis (2006) have outlined a number of observable practices in children's use of media, practices which may occur simultaneously or overlap: (i) allusion (onomastic, gestural and topical); (ii) syncretism or hybridisation and (iii) mimesis, which includes parody. We found these categories present in both sets of data. For example, we noted allusion, particularly onomastic allusion, in which children referenced television characters in their play, across all of the datasets. Similarly, in relation to mimesis, the adults in the oral history interviews reported re-playing stories from favourite television programmes and films, just as we observed this activity in the contemporary playgrounds. The process of syncretism or hybridization was also discernible across the two projects. Children blended characters and plots drawn from media with more

traditional play practices. In *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1969), the Opies identify eight categories of 'pretending games':

- Mothers and Fathers,
- Playing Schools,
- Road Accidents (boys feign injury; girls make-believe they are nurses),
- Playing Horses (children pretend to be or to possess animals),
- Storybook World (children make-believe they would be able to manage in abnormal situations),
- War Games (children engage in pretence battles either against an imaginary enemy or an opposing group of children),
- Cops and Robbers (players on one side chase or seek the other side),
- Fairies and Witches (girls enact the everlasting fight between good and evil) (1969: xxv-xxvi).

Media influenced play across the majority of these categories, such as children playing 'cowboys and indians' war games in the 1950s and 1960s, based on 'Westerns' and programmes such as *Bonanza*, and children playing witches in the 2010s, based on programmes such as *Wizards of Waverley Place*. This process has been a persistent theme over the decades. This process of syncretisation is complex and multi-layered and certainly

challenges any notion that children simply 'copy' the source text (Sutton Smith, 1997).

*The material cultures of childhood: 1950s/60s v 2010s*

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the positioning of children as economic subjects in the market became even more pronounced (Cook, 2008; 2010). This has influenced how the materiality of childhood has changed in the past 60 years. The place of toys, artefacts and commercial items in children's play in the 1950s/60s is very different to that of contemporary children. Few branded toys were available to the adults we interviewed when they were children, although the adults who were infants in the 1960s did have access to some branded toys, such as 'Tiny Tears' dolls and 'Meccano' sets. In the main, the adults reported playing with generic dolls, balls and toys such as whip and tops. In addition, they reported playing with items they had constructed themselves (such as go-carts, made with wood and discarded sets of pram wheels) or that their fathers had constructed for them (such as wooden dolls' houses). Contemporary children do not play with home-made toys, instead they are surrounded by an intertextual web (Kinder, 1991) of manufactured toys that may belong to particular brands, such as Disney, Lego and Mattel.

Despite these differences in experiences, continuities existed in the datasets and these continuities were related to the practices involved in collecting material goods. Adults reported collecting a range of items, such as cigarette

cards, marbles and beads, whilst the children in the 'Playgrounds' collected football cards and cards related to media interests (such as *Club Penguin*, the virtual world developed by Disney). Pugh (2009) suggests that these kinds of social practices should be seen as 'an economy of dignity' and that children 'collect or confer dignity among themselves according to their (shifting) consensus about what sort of objects are experiences are supposed to count for it' (pp6-7). The key motivation for engaging in these collective expressions of consumerism is to seek a sense of belonging. Engaging in these practices enables children to accrue cultural capital, which interfaces with social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The changing nature of children's economic capital over the past sixty years has impacted on the extent to which material goods circulate capital in this way in the playground.

### *Forms of play*

There were many similarities in the forms of play reported by the adults in the oral history interviews and the forms of play observed in the ethnographic studies. Physical play, such as running and chasing games (e.g. Tig), were prevalent in both studies, as were skipping, football, playing with hoops and balls. Pretend play was also pervasive, with adults and contemporary children reporting being involved in fantasy play and socio-dramatic play. The changes in relation to forms of play could be identified as those activities which were more prevalent in current childhood play (e.g. clapping games), those activities which were new to playgrounds (e.g. handshakes; pretend play based on reality television) and activities which were less prevalent than in

previous generations or not present on the contemporary playgrounds we observed (e.g. games such as 'British Bulldog; conkers). The features of play that were less prevalent today relate to issues of safety and reflect the way in which many schools have curtailed such play deliberately through school policies.

Ways in which the rhymes and games are transmitted have also changed since the mid-twentieth century due to developments in media and technology. Our adult respondents reported learning games and rhymes from their peers, whereas in the 'Playgrounds' study, some children had learned clapping games, for example, from Internet sources such as YouTube.

### *Schools and play*

Over the last sixty years, there have been key developments in the way in which playtimes are conceived of and constructed in primary schools, with contemporary playtimes being shorter in nature due to curriculum pressures (Blatchford and Baines, 2006). In terms of the management of play, many of the adults who were interviewed in this study stated that adults in schools rarely intervened in play during playtimes, whilst in the ethnographic studies, adult play workers and teachers were observed stimulating and engaging in play with children. Safety issues were of much less concern in the schoolyards of the 1950s and 1960s, with some adults reporting risky play during playtimes (such as playing on bunkers).

Whilst there were some exceptions, the adults in the oral interviews rarely reported problems in the playground such as bullying and exclusion, mirroring the tendency of adults in other historical studies to present 'happy childhood narratives' (Wright and McLeod, 2010). Whilst anti-social behaviour was observed and reported in the 'Playgrounds' study, there were more sophisticated means for addressing issues of social exclusion in the contemporary playgrounds than in the past due to school policies and strategies such as the use of 'buddying' schemes.

Developments in media and commercialisation have, inevitably, impacted upon play in the school playgrounds over the sixty years between the first Opie survey and the AHRC 'Playgrounds' study. Children in the recent study brought branded toys and artefacts into the playgrounds and sometimes utilised these in their play, whereas the adults reported taking only non-commercial or low-cost items to school, such as whip and tops and tins of beads they collected. The increase in the visible presence of material objects in the playgrounds has resulted in some schools imposing sanctions on children bringing certain popular cultural items to school in recent years, including the London school in the 'Playgrounds' study (see Willett et al., in press).

### *Parents, family and play*

Parental and family involvement in children's play has changed since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Interviews with adults who reflected on their play in the

1950s/60s suggested that parents did not generally engage with children's play unless it was to supervise and monitor the activities from a distance. Some adults did report playing board games and card games with their parents. In contemporary Britain, play is frequently viewed as a site for adult engagement in order to promote learning, which has led to the proliferation of a range of 'edutainment' toys, games and websites which some parents use with children to develop skills and knowledge (Buckingham and Scanlon, 2003). In addition, new forms of technologies, such as the Wii and X-Box Connect, encourage greater diversity in contemporary forms of family play (Marsh, 2010).

### *Space and play*

There has been widespread discussion about the way in which contemporary childhoods are spatially constrained due to concerns about risk, although Gleave (2009) notes that there is a lack of actual data to confirm some of the speculation. In this study, the adults who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s reported being able to play at a distance from their family homes, unsupervised by adults, in parks, wasteland and woods. Fewer cars meant that they were able to play on streets, stretching skipping ropes across roads or running from side to side of the road. Issues of personal safety were not paramount as the adults reported climbing trees and exploring bomb sites. For contemporary children, play is largely restricted to school playgrounds, their own homes and the homes of friends. Zeiher (2003) notes that, in the case of Denmark, modern children in urban settings are accompanied to and

from designated play spaces for children, such as parks or activity centres, by parents. For the adults who participated in the oral history narratives, play spaces were not generally designated as specifically aimed at children; they describe play taking place in a wide range of settings (street, wasteland, countryside, parks, homes).

Developments in new technologies means that spatial elements of play are also different for children today because of access to both online and offline spaces. Children in the 'Playgrounds' study reported playing with both known and unknown others on a range of online sites such as virtual worlds, whereas children playing in the 1950s and 1960s played only with others they knew in offline spaces.

### *Gender, sexuality and play*

A number of issues relating to gender, sexuality and play were fairly persistent across the studies. Adults reported playing primarily in same-sex groups in their childhoods and some attended schools at which the playgrounds of boys and girls were spatially separate. Gendered patterns in play were apparent, with girls reporting being involved in skipping and boys in football. Only in a few cases did the adults report examples that were counter to these gendered patterns. In the contemporary playgrounds, gender differences remained persistent, but were more complex. Similar issues reported by the adults in relation to space and play were still apparent in the 'Playgrounds' study, in that boys frequently took up large sections of the playground for football and

girls spent time in small social groups to the edges of the space. There were some changes in that mixed-gender friendship groups were apparent and a minority of children did engage in play which was not usual for their gender. Heteronormative play was apparent across both studies, which includes games such as 'Kiss-Catch'.

Developments in relation to media and commercialised practices across the sixty years difference in the childhoods we studied also mean that gendered representations are more complex today. In the 1950s and 1960s, children were presented with stereotypical accounts of girlhood and boyhood in television advertising and books, for example. In contemporary society, children do encounter stereotypes and toys and artefacts targeted primarily at boys or girls, but they are also more likely to encounter non-stereotypical representations. There has been much written about the increasingly sexualised nature of contemporary childhoods (e.g. Olfman, 2008), but we have found little evidence across the studies to support this thesis in relation to the participants in our projects.

### *Changing childhoods*

The majority of adults interviewed felt that contemporary childhoods were very different from their own and this difference was primarily expressed in deficit terms. Various ways in which current childhoods had, in the perception of participants, worsened were identified, in terms of: (i) restrictions on play due to concerns about risk; (ii) over-commercialisation of childhood; (iii) children

appearing to be less imaginative, less able to rely on their own creativity for entertainment; (iv) access to too much technology. In contrast, adults' own childhoods were remembered positively in terms of relative freedom and the ability to 'make do' with limited resources. As Wright and McCleod (2010) suggest, 'Nostalgia...is pivotal to how participants construct a critique of their present and navigate the shifting relationship between past and present.' They note that rather than considering this process as diminishing the reliability of oral history data, we should understand the way in which the present shapes an understanding of the past.

We now move on to consider the findings of the study in relation to the second aim, which was to identify the way in which the use of social networking sites might be used to trace contributors to previous research studies conducted by Iona and Peter Opie

### **(b) The use of social networking sites as a means of tracing participants**

There are a number of features of social networking sites which mean that they can be valuable tools for research purposes. As previous studies have found (Amerson, 2010; Masson et al., 2011; O'Connor and Goodwin; Power et al., 2005), it is possible to contact participants in previous research studies using *Friends Reunited*. The facilities of this site which make it valuable for contacting this type of research participant have been noted in a previous study. Power et al. (2005) identified the ease of the search facility and the

potential to search by school and cohort as advantages of the site. To this, we would suggest that the site is useful for placing messages about the desire for contact through the 'Messages' facility. It is also possible to link to the project website, or *Facebook* page, in such a message, thus enabling ease of access to information about the research project for potential participants. Amerson (2010) identified that *Facebook* was a valuable tool to locate potential participants because individuals can be searched on the site and a private message can then be sent to that individual. A further advantage to the use of *Facebook* is that one can set up a project *Facebook* page, which some contributors may be more likely to access because it is within *Facebook* itself. Masson et al. (2011) found that *Facebook* was useful for tracing family members who could then be used to indirectly approach target participants. They also note that during the course of their study, *Facebook* became very popular and eclipsed the popularity of other social networking sites and so they recommend researchers being alert to the changing nature of the use of these sites.

There are challenges, however, with the reliance on these tools. The major difficulty that we found in our project is that the potential participants are of a generation that do not use the Internet as extensively as younger generations. Ofcom (2006), in a report on a national survey of adult media literacy, noted that ownership of new media declined with age. This was also the case with use. It was clear from the interviews that the majority of the participants we traced had a number of concerns about, or barriers to using, social networking sites. First, some expressed a lack of confidence and/or experience in using

computers. Second, for some participants, there appeared to be some concerns about the safety and privacy issues raised by the use of *Facebook*.

As O'Connor and Goodwin (2010) found, a further difficulty with the use of these sites is that they cannot always address the issues raised by individuals changing their names through marriage or civil partnership. Whilst this includes both men and women, the practice is adopted more extensively by females and we found it easier to trace the males who contributed to the Opie collection. Nevertheless, some women on *Friends Reunited* do use their birth name and make reference to their married name and we were able to use this information in the present study.

Ethical issues related to the use of social networking sites have been raised in a number of studies. Eysenbach and Till (2001) point out that whilst the data that individuals place on their pages are already public and therefore may imply some sort of consent for other people to use that data, those users most likely did not intend their data to be used for research purposes. We were careful in this study not to use information about individuals that we had found from their *Friends Reunited* page in any publications, although information was used to attempt to trace individuals through *192.com*. Similarly, where we used screenshots of the social networking sites for illustrative purposes in conference presentations, names of contributors to those pages were removed, even though some of those names may have been pseudonyms. This strategy acknowledges that social network sites are often complex and users may not be aware of the way in which they are structured when they

join them. Light and McGrath (2010), for example, drawing on Actor Network Theory (ANT), suggest that technology can be a moral actor and that researchers need to focus not only on the ethical behaviour of users, but also examine the way in which the sites themselves can lead users into disclosing information in certain ways. Drawing on a two-year ethnography of the use of *Facebook*, they document the way in which the applications embedded in the site distract users from managing their privacy from the point of registration. For this reason, it is important that researchers reflect carefully on the way in which they use data accessed using social networking sites, given that technology, as well as human beings, can be imbued with moral character in this way.

This overview of the data indicates that most successful means of tracing the original participants was through the use of directories such as *192.com*, which rely on electoral register information and telephone directory data in combination with the social networking site *Friends Reunited*. Given the small numbers of participants involved in this study, it is not possible to generalise with regard to its outcomes. Nevertheless, we can identify a key difference between the success of the use of social networking sites to trace participants in previous research studies in this study and projects undertaken by Amerson (2010), Masson et al. (2011) and O'Connor & Goodwin (2010). Whilst those studies found the use of social networking sites to be very successful in tracing individuals, we did not enjoy a similar measure of success with the use of *Facebook*, for example, and had only limited success with *Friends Reunited*. The main difference between the present study and

theirs is the age of the target group. We would resist any attempt to characterise particular generations as 'digital immigrants' or 'digital natives' because of questions regarding the usefulness of those terms (see Thomas, 2011, for a discussion) and also because there are some individuals over 55 who are extensive users of technologies and social networking sites. Nevertheless, given the concerns regarding the use of social networking sites expressed by some of our participants, we would advocate the use of additional tools in projects such as this, such as the use of online directories, the utilisation of local press and radio, the activation of school alumni networks and the adoption of the snowballing technique for tracing participants.

## **Conclusion**

This study was successful in meeting both of its aims, which were to:

(i) explore changes in the nature of the relationship between play, media and commercial culture in England through a comparison of play in the 1950s/60s and the present day, drawing on oral history accounts of adults in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and comparing these accounts with data from an ethnographic study of contemporary playgrounds; (ii) identify the way in which the use of social networking sites might be used to trace contributors to previous research studies conducted by Iona and Peter Opie.

The study has highlighted the very rich potential of the Opie collection. This is a unique repository which has the potential to inform further, in-depth studies of the history of childhood and play in the UK over the latter decades of the twentieth century. The study has demonstrated that it is possible to trace the original contributors to the Opie collection in order to conduct oral history interviews, but we have also found that this process is complicated and, therefore, took longer than we originally anticipated. Further research is required to extend the analysis begun here, and should anticipate the time required to trace individuals. In addition, the adults we interviewed originated largely from working class families; there is a need to interview adults from other class groups. Further, we were able to focus on only two areas, London and Sheffield, and work with two schools from the many that contributed to the original surveys. The Opie collection is nation-wide and, therefore, can inform a broad geographical analysis of children and play across the UK. This work is important if we are to develop a fuller understanding of the nature of changes in childhood and play over the past sixty years.

## References

- Amerson, R. (2010) Facebook: A tool for nursing education research. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 50 (7) pp414-6. doi: 10.3928/01484834-20110331-01
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines*. Notts: BERA.
- Bishop, J. and Curtis, M. with Woolley, H.; Armitage, M.; and Ginsborg, J. (2006). Creative engagements: Children's uses of media elements in peer play at school. Paper presented at the Folklore Society Conference, *Folklore, Film and Television: Convergences in Traditional Cultures and Popular Media*, 31 March – 1 April 2006, London.
- Blatchford, P and Bains, E (2006) *A follow up national survey of breaktimes in primary and secondary schools: Reported to Nuffield Foundation*. Retrieved from: <http://www.breaktime.org.uk/NuffieldBreakTimeReport-WEBVersion>.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp241-258.) New York: Greenwood.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology.

*Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), pp. 77-101.

Buckingham, D. (2000) *After the death of childhood: growing up in the age of electronic media*. Polity: Cambridge.

Buckingham, D. and Scanlon, M. (eds.) (2003) *Education, Entertainment, and Learning in the Home*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Cook, D. (2008). The missing child in consumption theory. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8, 219 –243.

Cook, D. (2010). Commercial enculturation: Moving beyond consumer socialization. In D. Buckingham and V. Tingstad (Eds.) *Childhood and consumer culture*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Eysenbach, G., and Till, J.E. (2001) Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities. *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 323, pp1103-1105.

Gleave, J. (2009) *Children's time to play: A literature review*. London: PlayEngland. Retrieved from: [www.playday.org.uk](http://www.playday.org.uk)

Kinder, M. (1991) *Playing with Power in Movies: Television and Video Games from Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Light, B. and McGrath, K. (2010) Ethics and social networking sites: a disclosive analysis of Facebook. *Information Technology & People* Vol. 23 (4) pp. 290-311. DOI 10.1108/09593841011087770

Marsh, J., Brooks, G., Hughes, J., Ritchie, L., & Roberts, S. (2005). *Digital beginnings: Young children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies*. Sheffield, U.K.: University of Sheffield.

Marsh, K. 2008. *The Musical Playground: global tradition and change in children's songs and games*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marsh, J. (2010) *Childhood, culture and creativity: a literature review*. Creativity, Culture and education series: Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK. Available online: <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/research-impact/literature-reviews/>

Marsh, J. and Bishop, J. (in press) "We're playing 'Jeremy Kyle'!": Television talk shows in the playground. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*.

Masson, H., Balfe, M., Hackett, S. and Phillips, J. (2011) Lost without a trace? Social networking and social research with a hard-to-reach population. *British Journal of Social Work*. First published online: November 29, 2011  
doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcr168

O'Connor, H. & Goodwin, J. (2010) Utilizing data from a lost sociological project: experiences, insights, promises. *Qualitative Research* ,10 (3) pp 283-298. doi: 10.1177/1468794110362875

Olfman, S. (2008) *The sexualisation of childhood*. New York: Praeger.

Ofcom (2006) *Media literacy audit: Report on adult media literacy*. London: The Stationery Office (TSO). Available online at:  
[http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/media-lit-2010/medialit\\_audit.pdf](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/media-lit-2010/medialit_audit.pdf)

Opie, I., and Opie, P. 1997. *Children's Games with Things*. Oxford: OUP.

Opie, I.A, and Opie, P. 1969. *Children's Games in Street and Playground: Chasing, Catching, Seeking v. 1*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Opie, I. and Opie, P. 1959. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Palmer, S. (2006) *Toxic Childhood*. London: Orion Press.

Power, S., Moss, G., Lewis, J., Whitty, G. and Edwards, T., (2005) Staying in Touch? The Potential of 'Friends Reunited' as a Research Tool, *Research Intelligence*, BERA 92, August, pp6-8.

Pugh, A.J. (2009). *Longing and belonging: Parents, children, and consumer culture*. Berkeley, LA: University of California Press

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Thomas, M. (Ed) (2011) *Deconstructing digital natives; Young people, technology and the new literacies*. New York: Routledge

Willett, R., Richards, C., Marsh, J., Burn, A. & Bishop, J. (in press) *Children, Media and Playground Cultures: Ethnographic studies of school playtimes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wright, J. and McLeod, K. (2010). Public Memories and Private Meanings: Representing the “Happy Childhood” Narrative in Oral Histories of Adolescence and Schooling in Australia, 1930s-1950s. *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 32 (2012), Special Issue “Making Educational Oral Histories in the 21st Century”.

Zeihner, H. (2003) Shaping daily lives in urban environments. In P. Christensen and M. O’Brien, (eds) *Children in the City*. London: Routledge Falmer.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Oral history interview schedule**

The following were used as prompts and each interview drew on different questions in response to the individual's particular account of his/ her childhood.

#### **General memories of childhood**

Tell us a bit about your family

Where did you live? When were you born?

What did your parents do for a living?

What would you say your social class origins were?

Siblings – position in the family, ages in relation to them.

#### **School**

What do you remember about your school days at St W's?

What dates would this have been?

What infants/junior schools did you attend before going to Ecclesfield Grammar School? What do you remember about your schooldays there?

What dates would this have been?

What was discipline like at the school?

Were you aware of the teachers and their attitude to play? (Supervision, control, passing on of games etc.)

#### **Play at School**

What was the school playground like?

Were boys and girls in the same playground?

Do you remember particular parts of the playground and what you played there?

What did you play at school in the playground?

Who did you play with? Did boys and girls play together?

Can you remember games and describe them?

Can you remember any rhymes, song, sayings, jingles? E.g. rhymes about the school and teachers?

## **Media, Commerce and Play**

Did you play any games that related to media? Film TV, Radio? Comics

Were there any advertising slogans or songs from media that were popular among children?

Influence of media and manufactured playthings? What playthings did you have and where did they come from?

Games with cigarette cards, bottle tops?

Crazes

What were your favourite tv programmes or films? Did you play any games based on these?

Did you listen to the radio? Favourite radio programmes? Popular music? Pop star games?

Do you remember going shopping for toys? If so, what do you remember about what you bought?

Did you get pocket money? If so, what did you spend it on?

Do you remember getting toys for Christmas?

## **Play in the Street/Park**

Do you remember playing out in the street or park?

Who did you play with? (Same children as in school?)

Where did you play? What times of the day?

What kind of games did you play?

Any games involved running across the street?

## **Language**

Rhymes for counting out, skipping, balls

Singing or ring games

Truce terms, counting out, school chant, derisive chant about boys from other schools

Other rhymes, nonsense, rhymes that mentioned famous people, topical items on the news etc.

Special names for any kinds of foods, sweets or drinks

Secret languages or codes

### **Custom and Belief**

Calendar customs – Bonfire Night, Halloween, Valentine’s Day, Christmas, last day of term or school year, May Day

Did you get pocket money? What did you spend it on? How much?

What kinds of toys and games did you get for Xmas? Did you ask for these?

Any sayings or superstitions or fortune telling connected with bus tickets, cigarette packets, film stars, lines on pavement or any other way of fortune telling?

Good or bad luck, charms

### **Play in the home**

When would you play indoors?

What did you do when you played in doors? With whom?

What kinds of toys did you have?

Do you remember any brand toys? Did you own any?

Were you aware of adverts for brand toys?

Were you aware of differences between you and your friends in games and brand toys that you owned?

### **General**

Have you got any young children in your family and what would you say would be the difference between your childhood and theirs? Any similarities?

Anything else you want to tell us?

### **Social Networking**

The project has a Facebook Page – do you used any social network sites?