



Framing the Study

Poverty is not only a severe problem in so-called poor countries. The rich countries of the Western society are also having to face rising figures of poor people or people at risk of poverty or marginalisation. This development goes hand-in-hand with a widening inequality gap in most of the OECD countries (UNICEF, 2016, p. 2). People nowadays often feel bewildered and insecure and many of them are afraid of being pushed to the margins of society. Unfortunately, for younger people poverty or the risk of poverty or being marginalised is an increasing problem (UNICEF, 2016, p. 2). At the same time, we witness far-reaching societal and medial transformation processes, which we discuss as aspects of the “*meta process*” (Krotz, 2014, p. 137, emphasis in original) of mediatisation. However, it should be emphasised that social disadvantage in rich countries is strongly connected to a lack of participation opportunities, which, in turn, are quite often linked with communication and media. It is against the backdrop of these developments that we have formulated the central research question of our project: How do socially disadvantaged life circumstances affect adolescents, their socialisation and their opportunities to participate in society, and what is the role of media in this context?

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF THIS BOOK

Our study, “*Social inequality, childhood and the media: A longitudinal study of the mediatization of socialisation*”, focuses on precisely these questions to deal with adolescents growing up in socially disadvantaged families. Such adolescents are at risk of lacking social opportunities and may well not be able to perceive and profit from the possibilities of the social space in which they grow up. Here it is important to note that it is scarcely enough only to think about the adolescents’ social rights. Rather more, being able to benefit from these rights is what counts. In this context we must recognise that the term “socially disadvantaged circumstances” does not only concern the material level of living in everyday life, but also includes individual living conditions as a whole (see Rosenmayr & Majce, 1978). So, we are setting out to observe the “cumulative disadvantage”, in the sense of a reciprocal reinforcement of poverty, illness and social isolation” (Hörl, 1999, p. 172, translated by the authors). The concept of social disadvantage clearly indicates the contrast with adolescents in better circumstances (see Hörl, 1999 as well as Fehr, 2017) and points to inequality. The term social inequality connotes the imperative (see Hörl, 1999, p. 172; see as well Fehr, 2017) to remove disadvantage.

This particular understanding, coupled with the object of serving society forms one of the starting points of the longitudinal study we present here. Following Norbert Elias (1987), we offer “dedicated social research” (for details see Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler, 2008; Paus-Hasebrink & Kulterer, 2014) with not only a scientific outcome but also a social one. Our initial impulse derives from different analyses that focused on an emerging gap in society’s socio-economic structure. Today, society is a consumer society, but, of course, not everyone is able to participate equally in its prosperity. Several scientific studies suggest a growing socio-economic gap in society and warn about further and increasing discrepancies between “winners” and “losers” during the process of growing up (see Rauschenbach, 2011, p. 5). It is likely that socially disadvantaged children, even in rich countries like Austria (see Chapter 2), will be pushed towards the edge of society. This prejudices their socialisation and their opportunities for participation in society. Finally, there is a close connection between family and social structure¹: The allocation of core resources, like income, formal education and the profession of the wage earner(s) in a family, is highly unequal. In this

context, the media are important since they are an integral part of everyday life. It stands to reason that the resources of social participation via media are unequally distributed, as are the social and cultural resources of different social groups (see Niesyto, 2009). With developing mediatization, manifested in the convergence of old and new media as well as with the temporal and spatial dissolution of boundaries of media contents and services, media are becoming increasingly important for society as a whole, as well as for the everyday life of every individual in it (see Krotz, 2013).

The media determine many of our everyday practices and, therefore, produce new communicative practices as they shape everyday life. This raises the questions: How does this manifest itself in the everyday life of socially disadvantaged children and adolescents? How is their everyday life shaped?

This study specifically asks how socially disadvantaged adolescents use media, which practices they develop to cope with their everyday life and how they integrate media contents and services meaningfully into it, against the background of their current lifeworld situation. How does the socialisation (see Chapter 3) of adolescents within socially disadvantaged conditions proceed, and how are the media relevant during their socialisation? The important issues are, hence, the construction of an individual identity, the structure of knowledge, the perception of ways to participate in society and the mediation of values in and through the media, as well as the socio-economic and socio-emotional changes in core relationship groups. Against this background, it is crucial to consider the *double, interweaving dynamic* of the ongoing media-technological changes in media contents and services, on the one hand, and the dynamic governing the development of children in their socialisation their specific social situation, on the other. Socialisation today is mediated socialisation (see Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 151).

1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 2 of this book is devoted to outlining the connections between social inequality, childhood and media. The first part is dedicated to national contexts of social inequality. It provides a discussion of social disadvantage in rich Western societies, with the specific examples of Austria and Germany, in order to better understand the specific circumstances that socially disadvantaged families encounter in the national

context. The second part deals with the connection between inequality and mediatization, and what implications emerge for children affected by an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities as they grow up. One central argument is that a disadvantageous position in a mediated society often leads to a lack of participation in society (education, job perspectives and so on). In our mediated Western societies, participation is closely connected to (digital) media, so that socialisation often becomes media socialisation. Following, we will preface a survey of relevant trends in global mediatization with a literature review covering the evidence of the links between social disadvantages and media experiences. To conclude, we will discuss the consequences of mediatization for academic research on young people's growing up in general and for our study on media socialisation among socially disadvantaged adolescents in particular.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework that underlies this study. It presents a praxeological research perspective on the processes of the media socialisation of children and adolescents. One of the main arguments is that socialisation has to be contextualised in a dynamic and interlinked process, that is connected to both the individual child and the relevant social contexts like family, peers, institutional contexts such as kindergarten and school, and non-institutional recreational contexts. The interactions of these contexts have to be systematically analysed, in order to understand how children make sense of their life and, in this context, of the media within their everyday lives. The chapter starts out by providing an overview of how socialisation is theorised in different disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, and then moves on to the perspective of media and communications, where we look at the rich empirical evidence on young people's use of media devices and products. By introducing the theoretical concept of developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972), the chapter explores a way of theoretically grasping the interface between the individual, subjective level and the level of society and of objective factors in the process of growing up. At this point, definitions of childhood-specific and adolescence-specific developmental tasks are discussed as well. Subsequently, we look at the relevance of different socialisation contexts in a child's life and in a child's attempt to come to terms with its developmental tasks; the concept of *doing family* gains particular relevance in this discussion. Finally, based on the assumption that the conduct of everyday life is manifested in social milieus where individuals attempt to realise their specific goals in

life, including their own particular plans and wishes, the authors introduce the three analytical concepts: *options*, *outlines* and *competences for action*, that allow a theoretical and empirical understanding of the connection between a social milieu, and the subjective structure of making sense of one's life. It is argued that, based on these three analytical concepts, the role of the media becomes understandable and comprehensible as it relates to the interlinkage of subjective perception, action-driven orientations, and everyday life practices against the backdrop of socio-structural conditions.

Chapter 4 outlines how the theoretical foundation of the study (Chapter 3) calls for a specific methodological concept. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the methodological approach was designed in order to grasp the complexity of the topic and later on revised in order to grasp new challenges caused by the longitudinal character of the project. In order to understand the processes of socialisation, this study has been designed as a qualitative panel study on a selected sample of 20 (later 18) children who were five to six years old when the research started in 2005 and who were 17–18 years old when it was ended. At the core of the chapter, we deal with the questions how to collect, to process and analyse data from a qualitative longitudinal study over the 12 years from 2005 to 2017 (Fig. 1.1).

Following the logic of triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2), we discuss the development of a rich design where all the components draw on, complement, and control each other in the processes of data collection and analysis; that way, we will argue, research becomes transparent and comprehensible in terms of intersubjectivity. The whole process of developing and using the methodological design is covered in much detail to allow for a deeper understanding of the logic behind, the purpose and the demands of a qualitative longitudinal study. The chapter covers all the relevant steps from the recruitment of the families, the ethical challenges and the actual data collection to the methods that were used. At the core of the methods to be presented and discussed are the guided in-depth interviews with children and parents over six waves of research (from 2005 until end of 2016), moving on to additional methods like observations protocols, a short standardised questionnaire for the parent(s) concerning income, formal education, and other topics, and finally later additions to the design—the adolescents were asked to draw network maps concerning important persons and media and to demonstrate their most favourite social media application,

using the method of thinking aloud, and to take photos of their favourite spots in their rooms—are explained. Furthermore, after the sixth wave of research, we conducted telephone interviews with the adolescents in our panel and their parents, in order to get a final update on their personal situation. The chapter also addresses how the collected data was processed and prepared for analysis, including transcription and thorough anonymisation of the sensitive data and how the actual analysis was conducted. This part of the chapter is especially important and innovative from a methodological perspective, as in existing literature this issue is rarely discussed extensively with regard to longitudinal research.

Chapter 5 consists of brief descriptions of the 18 families that were still part of the sample by the time the study came to an end. The chapter consists of a short summary of each family’s situation as it developed over the years. With regard to the relevant selection criteria (see Chapter 4) at the beginning of the project, the focus is on the socio-economic situation of each family, with particular attention being paid to income, job situation, housing situation, formal education (of parents), family constellation (nuclear family, patchwork family, single-parent households, extended families, migration background and so on). The summaries give an idea of the dynamic that each family experienced throughout the years, especially with regard to their socio-economic and socio-emotional development.

Chapter 6 provides a perspective on the dynamic media environment and patterns of socialisation within the panel over nearly twelve years of research. This chapter focuses on the core aspects that are the heart of the study: the dynamic development of the children and their media repertoires (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006), on the one hand, and, on the other,

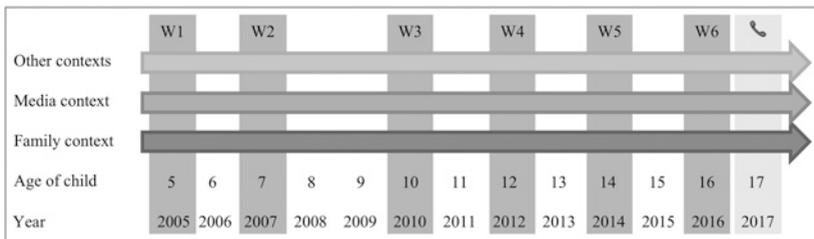


Fig. 1.1 The waves of research at a glance

the role of different contexts of socialisation as they affect the children in different ways at various stages of their personal development throughout the years. Twelve years is a long time, during which the children in the panel not only get older, but also a lot can change as far as the situation of the family in general is concerned. The chapter unravels what happened between the time when the study began in 2005, when the children were between four and six years old, when their lives were mainly framed by their experiences at home or in kindergarten, and then later, when other contexts such as schools and friends became more relevant, so that by the time it ended in spring 2017, they were teenagers about to make important life decisions. This chapter highlights how the children's media usage and especially their motives for using certain types of media content changed in this context. We argue in this chapter that, at the same time, technology is progressing and it leads to transformations on the level of media products and media use. Among them are the processes of digitalisation and convergence that have greatly affected and altered the media's role in society and in individual lifeworlds. Against this background, the chapter sheds light on the variety of manners in which the children incorporate media (classic as well as "new" media) into their everyday lives, how they form media repertoires and how media are part of a complex array of socialisation contexts with varying functions and purposes.

Chapter 7 has a stronger focus on the interplay between family and media as socialisation contexts in the sample where it looks at ways in which parents approach parenting and the mediation of media literacy. As a first step, the chapter introduces insights from relevant studies and theoretical concepts. Secondly, it focuses on parents' mediation practices and how they changed over time with respect to both the children's age and the changing media over nearly twelve years of research. Against this background, the following different practices of parents' mediation practices that were uncovered in the panel will be discussed: *laissez-faire*, *unmethodical restriction*, *arbitrary control and exploitation of dominance*, *amicability* and *child-centred* and how they are related to *options for action*, *outlines for action* and *competences for action*.

Chapter 8 presents a typology of the families in the sample of the study at hand. We explain how the discovery of similarities and differences of living as a family were the starting point for developing a typology in which the main dimensions for characterising the families were the socio-economic situation, the socio-emotional climate and the identifiable coping strategies. The four types of families we discovered are

explained in detail, and each family in the sample is portrayed and discussed with regard to their allocation to the specific type. The typology focuses on the most recent data but also takes the development of the families over the years into account. The arguments in the chapter are amplified through selected cases that delve deeper into the individual lifeworlds of the children and their families. This chapter helps to understand how many of the researched families are often overtaxed in multiple ways and experience different forms of deprivation on many levels.

Finally, Chapter 9 discusses the scope of the approach as presented, its limitations and benefits and its potential. Based on the results of the longitudinal study, it discusses how the complex interplay of factors that were shown to shape the lives of children as they grew up can help policymakers and stakeholders to develop more individualised approaches for the support and encouragement of children and their families. While the empirical work of this study has been done in Austria, the theoretical framework and the methodological approach have a general scope, since they can be applied in any country. Furthermore, we wish to emphasise that the findings do not reflect particularities of the Austrian context. Within the theoretical framework they will be interpreted as empirical evidence showing how contextual conditions, patterns of *doing family*, and individual factors shape socialisation processes; this interaction between the different contexts and individual factors is not a regional particularity but a general pattern that is relevant for understanding socialisation within mediatised worlds in general.

NOTE

1. Following the poverty report of the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2016), the growing up of children in poverty-vulnerable families is often shaped by a package of problems. In addition to chronic financial issues, there are factors like illnesses, the divorce of the parents, cramped housing and unsafe routes to school (Laubstein, Holz, & Seddig, 2016, pp. 12–15, 51, 55).

REFERENCES

- Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2016). *Kinderarmut. Kinder im SGB-II-Bezug in Deutschland* [Child poverty in Germany]. Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Retrieved from <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2016/september/kinderarmut-in-deutschland-waechst-weiter-mit-folgen-fuers-ganze-leben/>.

- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1–20). Los Angeles, CA, London, UK, and New Dehli, India: Sage.
- Elias, N. (1987). *Engagement und Distanzierung. Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie I* [Engagement and dissociation: Academic works on the sociology of knowledge I]. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp.
- Fehr, S. (2017). *Familien in der Falle: Dynamik familialer Armut in der individualisierten Erwerbsgesellschaft* [Families in a trap: Dynamics of familial poverty in the individualised employment society]. Weinheim, Germany: Beltz.
- Hasebrink, U., & Popp, J. (2006). Media repertoires as a result of selective media use: A conceptual approach to the analysis of patterns of exposure. *Communications*, 31(2), 369–387.
- Havighurst, R. J. (1972). *Developmental tasks and education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McKay.
- Hörl, J. (1999). Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Benachteiligung in Österreich – Konsens und Polarisierung [The perception of social disadvantage in Austria—Consensus and polarisation]. *SWS-Rundschau*, 2, 171–188.
- Krotz, F. (2013). Aufwachsen in mediatisierten Welten [Growing up in media-tised worlds]. In C. Wijnen, S. Trültzsch & C. Ortner (Eds.), *Medienwelten im Wandel. Kommunikationswissenschaftliche Positionen, Perspektiven und Konsequenzen* [Media worlds in transition: Scientific positions, perspectives and consequences in communications] (pp. 39–53). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. S. 39–53.
- Krotz, F. (2014). Mediatization as a mover in modernity: Social and cultural change in the context of media change. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization of communication: Handbook of communication science* (pp. 131–162). Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter.
- Laubstein, C., Holz, G., & Seddig, N. (2016). *Armutsfolgen für arme Kinder und Jugendliche. Erkenntnisse aus empirischen Studien in Deutschland* [Consequences of poverty for children and adolescents: Empirical evidence from research in Germany]. Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Retrieved from https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Studie_WB_Armutsfolgen_fuer_Kinder_und_Jugendliche_2016.pdf.
- Niesyto, H. (2009). Digitale Medien, soziale Benachteiligung und soziale Distinktion [Digital media, social disadvantage and social distinction]. *Medienpädagogik. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Medienbildung. Themenheft Nr., 17*, 1–19. Retrieved from <http://www.medienpaed.com/article/view/115/115>.

- Paus-Hasebrink, I., & Bichler, M. (2008). *Mediensozialisationsforschung. Theoretische Fundierung und Fallbeispiel sozial benachteiligte Kinder* [Media socialisation research—Theoretical foundation and a case study on socially disadvantaged children]. Assisted by C. Wijnen. Innsbruck, Austria: Studienverlag.
- Paus-Hasebrink, I., & Kulterer, J. (2014). *Praxeologische Mediensozialisationsforschung. Langzeitstudie zu sozial benachteiligten Heranwachsenden* [Praxeological media socialisation research: A longitudinal study regarding socially disadvantaged adolescents]. Assisted by P. Sinner. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.
- Rauschenbach, T. (2011). Aufwachsen unter neuen Vorzeichen [Growing up under new conditions]. *DJI Impulse*, 1, 4–7.
- Rosenmayr, L., & Majce, G. (1978). Die soziale Benachteiligung [Social disadvantage]. In L. Rosenmayr & H. Rosenmayr (Eds.), *Der alte Mensch in der Gesellschaft* [The elderly in the society] (pp. 231–260). Reinbek bei Hamburg, Germany: Rowohlt.
- UNICEF. (2016). *Fairness for children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries*. Innocenti Report Card 13. Children in the Developed World. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC13_eng.pdf.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

