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MAKING THEM STRONG? VULNERABILITY, CAPABILITIES AND RESILIENCE IN POOR CHILDREN

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Abstract: The main purpose of our paper consists in establishing the idea that the negative consequences that result from child poverty can be mitigated if the government and social workers promote the resilience of poor children. We use Amartya Sen's capability approach as an evaluative framework to argue for this thesis. By distinguishing different sources of vulnerability we assume that children are inherently vulnerable, because they are dependent and in need of care. Poor children are, however, even more vulnerable in specific ways. Following Catriona MacKenzie, we call these vulnerabilities "pathogenetic"; they are caused by social arrangements like institutional settings. We claim that at least some some of those vulnerabilities can and should be diminished by promoting children's resilience. We proceed in three steps. In the first part of the paper, we develop our concept of vulnerability and explain how child poverty renders children vulnerable to specific harms. Here we also introduce the capability approach by asking which capabilities children need for coping with this situation. In part two we argue that the concept of resilience helps us to understand why capabilities (and not resources or abilities) are relevant for coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. We claim that promoting the capabilities of children is a matter of justice, and that implementing resilience is, too. It is also highly important to see that promoting resilience is mainly a social matter, not a task the individual child has to fulfil on its own. Hence, we argue that children are entitled to gain those capabilities that promote their

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resilience against the adverse effects of poverty. In part three we discuss several difficulties of our account, such as the danger that children will be burdened with coping with the effects of poverty instead of society fighting poverty.

Keywords: vulnerability, resilience, capability approach

Introduction

Child poverty is a worldwide occurring phenomenon that occurs not only in undeveloped countries but in highly developed and rich parts of the world as well, such as Europe or Northern America. According to the social report of the European Union (EU) of 2007, more than 19% of children in Europe live in poverty (European Commission, 2007). No one denies that poverty has many adverse effects on the people suffering from it. For example, poor people are statistically less healthy, less educated, less happy and more concerned by social and familial problems. One does not need a demanding conception of the good life for claiming that poverty disadvantages those suffering from it and that any adequate conception of justice has to address it in some way. This is truer for children. Children are at least less competent than adults when it comes to facing the effects of poverty. Moreover, children are passively exposed to the conditions they live in and not responsible for it. Taking into account the adverse effects of child poverty there is, therefore, a strong rationale for claiming that children should be protected from those effects. This paper investigates a specific idea for doing so.

The main thesis of this paper is that many adverse effects of child poverty could be mitigated by promoting the resilience of children. Our background assumption is that child poverty renders children vulnerable in specific regards. We argue that at least some of those vulnerabilities that are linked to childhood poverty can be mitigated by promoting children's resilience. In the first part of the paper we develop the concept of vulnerability and explain how child poverty renders children vulnerable to specific harms, and we ask which capabilities children need for coping with this situation. In part two we argue that the concept of resilience helps us to

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understand why capabilities are relevant for coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. We claim that promoting the capabilities of children is a matter of justice, and that implementing resilience is thus mainly a social matter, not a task the individual child has to fulfil on its own. Hence, we argue that children are entitled to gain those capabilities that promote their resilience against the adverse effects of poverty. In part three we discuss several difficulties of our account, such as the danger that children will be burdened with coping with the effects of poverty instead of society fighting poverty.

Vulnerability and child poverty: What is vulnerability?

Vulnerability is a critical concept. Contrary to traditional conceptions of justice - where the liberal subject plays a key role - the concept of vulnerability draws on human needs and the constitution of humanity as such. In this paper we advocate that persons do not inhabit those empty social spaces that are presumed in liberal accounts of justice. Furthermore, people depend on specific social relations that they, at least sometimes, do not choose themselves. Persons like children, some elderly or very ill persons, and some severely disabled persons need special care. In the case of those people the liberal call for personal freedom seems to be unjust because they are not able to make equal use of it. The role of justice: arranging social institutions in a way that makes it possible to reduce the effects of human vulnerability. In this vein, authors like Martha Nussbaum, Alasdair MacIntyre or Martha Fineman argue that the concept of vulnerability should play a central role in any theory of justice (Macintyre, 2001; Nussbaum, 2006; Fineman, 2008). They do so because they take vulnerability as an essential feature of the human condition. Hence, according to these authors, any egalitarian account of justice is in some way confronted with the question of how to deal with the situation of the vulnerable. Pointing to those universal features of vulnerability (meaning features that are inherent to the ontological condition of humans) is, however, not sufficient. As Robert Goodin points out in his book *Protecting*

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the Vulnerable, many forms of vulnerability are "created shaped, or sustained by existing social arrangements [that are not] wholly natural" (Goodin, 1985: 191). The upshot of Goodin's critique is that mere pointing to human vulnerability is susceptible to neglecting circumstances that depend on social arrangements and that render persons vulnerable. In other words: the social arrangements that we construct to help those in dire need can themselves produce vulnerabilities. Consider the situation when children have been removed from their families because of maltreatment. In such cases children typically will become institutionalized in a protectory. However, this leads to situations which make children vulnerable to their new situation, for example when being stigmatized as "home-children", inasmuch as they lack persons they feel attached to, or simply because they have been removed from their familiar environments. In some cases the institutional setups might be even worse for children than the sort of maltreatment they suffered at their homes. In such cases we would clearly face social arrangements that, as Goodin puts it, create new forms of vulnerability for children.

Hence, a thorough analysis of the concept of vulnerability needs to take account for different *sources* of vulnerability. Such an analysis has been proposed in two recent papers by Catriona Mackenzie and Susann Dodds. (Mackenzie, 2013; Dodds, 2013) Both distinguish *three different sources of vulnerability*: inherent vulnerability, situational vulnerability and pathogenetic vulnerability. Some sources of vulnerability are part of our human nature. This is why they are called *inherent sources* of vulnerability. According to Mackenzie "we should expect from the just society […] that its social and political structures are responsive to and mitigate the effects of inherent vulnerabilities […]" (Mackenzie, 2013). Examples mentioned by Mackenzie are universal health care, social welfare support, and subsidized child-care. In contrast to inherent sources of vulnerability, *situational sources* of vulnerability are brought about by social and environmental factors like

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institutional norms or economic and ecological crisis. In such situations, vulnerability is due to human behavior. Some cases of situational vulnerability are brought about by unjust social arrangements. They are called *pathogenetic sources* of vulnerability because of the way in which they render persons vulnerable. Pathogenetic vulnerability is a subclass of situational vulnerability because it is caused by social arrangements like institutional settings. But it is a specific form of situational vulnerability as well, due to the quality of the sources which is unjust by definition.

To see how these distinctions work, let us again consider a child that has been removed from his or her family. All children are inherently vulnerable insofar as they lack competencies like foresight, risk assessment, or emotional stability. Hence they need the attention of their caregivers. If the caregivers, however, fail to come up to the needs of the children they are supposed to care for, children become situationally vulnerable. This situational vulnerability is a case of pathogenetic vulnerability if it is created by sources that are themselves unjust. Consider the case of child poverty. If caregivers are not able to care for their children in an appropriate way because they simply lack the economic means to do so, we are faced with a situation when the child is vulnerable, but this vulnerability is due to to unjust causes. Or consider, once again, the example of the "institutionalized child" that suffers from inappropriate treatment at a children's home. Again, this would be a case of situational vulnerability, since the child has already been removed from its home. But furthermore, the vulnerability of the child is intensified on a qualitative and quantitative level if it is not adequately treated at the institution that is supposed to protect its interests. We can call this situation pathogenetic because unjust rules of our institutional arrangements render situations for children which make them more vulnerable. Those rules are unjust if they violate basic egalitarian principles according to which all children should have access to at least a certain adequate amount of goods that are important for their well-being and development.

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Vulnerable children

Childhood is arguably the most vulnerable period of human life. Children are highly dependent on others to satisfy their basic needs, and this makes them particularly vulnerable. This is, of course, true for other stages of life as well. Many elderly people, for example, are not able to care for themselves. However, they are at least in principle entitled to choose the persons that care for them. The situation of children is categorically different insofar as they do not start, as elder people normally do, from a position in which they are autonomous, i.e. entitled to make their own decisions about their course of life. Children are dependent on decisions that others make for them right from start. This seems to be the most salient source of children's vulnerability. All societies need to take account for this feature of childhood which can best be called the *fact of dependency*. While the fact of dependency is an inherent source of children's vulnerability, the respective societal arrangements for coping with this fact are not. These arrangements might, as in the ancient conception of *patria potestas*, be completely in favor of parental (paternal) prerogatives. Nevertheless, even here we can speak at least of an institutional standard, namely the complete neutrality of the state in educational questions. Contrary to the doctrine of *patria potestas*, most contemporary legal systems have implemented what David Archard calls the *liberal standard* (Archard, 2004: 153). According to the liberal standard, the parents have the right to care for their children. The state, however, is not completely neutral concerning the way in which parents raise their children. Rather, the concept of custody is best understood as entailing parental *duties* to the same extent as the *right* to raise one's children. In accordance with this model of child-raising, the state interferes with parental prerogatives in the context of education if parents neglect their parental duties. Hence, the liberal standard can be considered a situational source of children's vulnerability. Many people endorse the liberal standard, due to its function to protect children's interests while, at the same time, it treats child-raising as a private matter (within families). Nonetheless, some authors

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consider the liberal standard a source of unjust disadvantages for children growing up in dysfunctional families (Archard, 2004; Stoecklin & Bonvin, 2014). If the state's intervention with parental prerogatives comes only *after* the parents have been convicted for child-maltreatment, the maltreated child has already suffered from parental misconduct other children do not experience. This seems to be unjust and leads to the question if the liberal standard might even be a pathogenetic source of children's vulnerability. Because any answer to this question is far too presuppositional for the limited space of this paper, we will focus on the very specific topic of child poverty.

Children from poor families are vulnerable in very specific regards. First (and obviously), children from poor families have less economic support than children from higher-income-families. Hence, children from poor families are vulnerable at least in respect of the fulfillment of their desires. This point has of course no normative relevance per se. Justice certainly does not require that persons (children included) are supplied with the goods that are necessary to accomplish all of their desires. However, there seems to be a certain economic threshold for the provision of goods for children that any egalitarian conception of justice has to endorse. We will deal with this point in more detail in the next section. The next (and less obvious) way in which children from poor families are more vulnerable than children from higher income families concerns the habits and naturalness of discriminating and unhealthy behavior of the parents. Consider, for example, the studies on children's speech development by Betty Hart & Todd Risley, presented in their book *Meaningful Differences* (Hart & Risley, 1995). According to Hart and Risley, there is a strict statistical correlation between familial backgrounds of children and their speech development. In one of their studies they literally counted the vocabulary of children from two different preschools. While the children from one preschool came from poor and low-income families, the children from the other preschool came primarily from families with higher income and academic backgrounds. The

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troubling result of the study was that, by the age of four, the vocabulary of the children from higher income families was 0.3 more extensive than the vocabulary of the children from poor families.[3] Furthermore, Hart and Risley analyzed the vocabulary growth rates until children's enrolment at school. As a result they found out that the children with less vocabulary even fall more behind until their first days at school (Hart & Risley, 1995: 12ff). In the end, children from poor families do predictably worse when it comes to simply understand the lessons of their schoolbooks, simply because they lack the necessary vocabulary. Another example is the far more extensive occurrence of obesity in poor families. Gopal K. Singh et al. in their long-term-study (1976-2008) analyzed that obesity among American children from poor families is more than 0.2 higher than among children from higher income households (Singh et al., 2011). Another quite recent study has revealed that the rates for severe obesity are 1.7 higher than in higher income families. Given that there are correlations of obesity and health risks, life span and general well-being, there seems to be a clear nexus between child poverty and children's vulnerability.

Due to their dependency, children's well-being and development depends largely on their parent's behavior. If parents lack economic, educational or epistemic resources themselves, their children run the risk of being in a disadvantaged situation compared to children from better-off families. However, it is not self-evident that such a disadvantaged situation is already unjust. For making this claim we furthermore need to clarify the connection between children's entitlements and children's vulnerability. The question is why and to which extend children's vulnerability is a source of entitlements.

3 Hart and Risley counted 15 000 spoken words and recorded the vocabulary size in relation to that. In the case of children from poor families they counted that the children (statistically) used 1000 different words, while children coming from an academic background used 1500 different words. (Hart & Risley, 1995: 10f)

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Child poverty, children's vulnerability and capabilities

What do we owe to children because of their vulnerability? In order to answer this question with regard to child poverty, it is important to keep in mind that vulnerability is a complementary concept to conceptions of justice where entitlements of persons are solely founded in notions of consent and individual liberties. Goodin is very clear in this respect: «Duties and responsibilities are not necessarily […] things that you deserve. More often than not, they are things that just happen to you» (Goodin, 1985: 133). Goodin argues explicitly against contractarian and voluntarist models of obligation because their focus is too narrowly on situations where one describes individuals in idealized decision-making-processes. According to Goodin, this blurs the relevance of situations when a person A is in need of help while another Person B is in the position to help A. According to Goodin, the obligation to help A is not derived from B's consent in the first place but from the mere fact that A is in need of help. This leads to the question in which situations B is obliged to help A (or A is entitled to being helped by B). Gooding answers this question by introducing the concept of basic needs. For Goodin, the principle of protecting the vulnerable is "[…] first and foremost [a principle of] aiding those in dire need" (Goodin, 1985, 111). But what are *dire* needs? In our interpretation, "dire needs" are basic needs. Connecting the concept of vulnerability to the basic needs of persons is intuitively compelling. Yet the concept of basic needs leads to notorious obscurities about what is basic and what is not. Instead of following this path, we suggest another model for measuring inequalities in relation to children's vulnerability, namely the Capability Approach (CA) as it has been developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. We are aware that there are several differences in Sen's and Nussbaum's accounts, e.g. differences they make between different types of capabilities (Robeyns, 2005). Still, we believe that Sen's and Nussbaum's critique of resource based forms of justice and utilitarianism comes from the same concerns for human vulnerability. Their

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theories share the core idea of justice as a matter of creating substantial freedoms (in the form of "capabilities"), and they come from the same philosophical roots, namely Aristotelian thought.

The CA departs from a critique of resource theories of justice for measuring unfair advantages or disadvantages primarily in terms of resources or goods. The CA does not deny that the provision of resources is in some sense relevant for justice. Still, it stresses that opportunities have to be somehow *accessible* for a person. Consider, for example, the case of 'learnt helplessness' when persons simply lack the competencies for actively using their chances and opportunities. If someone does not believe that he or she is part of the democratic system, for example, he or she will probably not be motivated to join political participation. In the same way, children from poor families seem to have the same chances and opportunities in life as children from higher income families because they go to the same public schools. However, they may still lack certain capabilities that children from more economically well-off backgrounds have.

As we shall argue in more detail below, disadvantages in children's well-being should therefore be measured by the evaluative perspective of the CA, which assesses well-being in terms of capabilities and functionings, because it adds something to the conception of well-being that alternative accounts lack. Sen argues that traditional economic and philosophic approaches to measure human well-being fail to take into account certain aspects of human freedom. Thus, they overlook crucial human inequalities. For instance, an able-bodied person and a disabled person may well have the same amount of resources at their command, but the latter is not able to make use of them in the same manner as the former. For instance, she may need a wheelchair to perform the same tasks as the former, such as getting from one location to another. The person in the wheelchair thus lacks certain substantial freedoms that able-bodied persons have, even though their stack of resources may be the same.

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Sen couches this idea in the language of functionings and capabilities: functionings are beings and doings a person my value (Sen, 1999), such as being adequately nourished, being able to participate in politics, or personal states such as having self-respect (Sen, 1999). Capability or, more precisely, a person´s *capability set*, is defined derivatively from functionings (Sen, 1993). Having a capability set means having a set of potential functionings that one may realize. In a nutshell we could say that a person possessing a large enough capability set has the real freedom to achieve various lifestyles. Sen claims that evaluations of human well-being should focus on both: on what people actually do and are, i.e. their *functionings*, but also on what people can do and be, i.e. their *capabilities*.

Focusing on functionings and capabilities does not mean that resources play no role for well-being. On the contrary, people need certain resources to achieve functionings. For instance, being well-nourished depends on having food. However, the CA claims that it is important to regard a person's ability to convert these resources into functionings. If, for instance, you possess the resources of a computer, but your home lacks electricity, you make very little out of that resource. Conversion factors can be *personal* (i.e. a person's abilities, qualities and skills), *social* (e.g. social norms, the political system, family) or environmental (e.g. climate, nature, technology). We will come back to the topic of conversion factors below, since they play an important role in resilience promotion among children.

We believe that the perspective of the CA provides a plausible tool to evaluate disadvantage and characterize the vulnerability of children in poverty. It presents what Gerald Allen Cohen (1989: 921) characterized as the "currency" of justice, i.e. the goods that are to be distributed within a just state. The CA provides a valuable insight for conceptualizing human well-being because it captures a dimension of freedom that other approaches do not. For instance, "resourcist" accounts (Graf & Schweiger, 2015: 19) cannot show the difference in freedom that exists between an abled-bodied person and one in a

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wheel-chair (as we have pointed out above). The same goes for rights-based approaches. Even though two persons may have the same rights, there may be considerable differences in their powers and abilities to realize those rights, e.g. if one of these persons belongs to a group that faces a lot of prejudice and discrimination (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001).

We think therefore that the CA also highlights dimensions in children's well-being and lack thereof that alternative accounts overlook. Before we can argue for this claim, however, we must concede that the CA was not originally designed to apply to the well-being of children, even though recent research aims to change that (see e.g. Ballet et. al., 2011; Stoecker & Bonvin, 2014). Sen and Nussbaum mainly focus on autonomous adults. Sen emphasizes a person's *agency* in choosing the combination of functionings from the capability set that he may value or rather has reason to value. (Sen, 1999) As we have already stated, the abilities of valuing, choosing and deciding are not fully developed in children, especially not in young ones.

In our view, however, excluding children from the realm of capability justice would be a grave mistake. This move would violate the basic tenets of the CA as being inclusive of people in their real, actual situation. A considerable part of Nussbaum's criticism of Rawls and similar approaches points out how these accounts fail to include vulnerable people such as the disabled, elderly or severely discriminated into the basic model of justice (Nussbaum, 2007). It would be almost contradictory to exclude children as a group of concern on the ground that they lack certain abilities to choose while including the groups mentioned.

Graf & Schweiger (2015) point out that the CA needs to be modified in two ways if it is to be applied to children. First, along with Graf & Schweiger (2015) we claim that a theory of justice for children (and for other vulnerable groups) should not rest on the assumption that its subjects are fully autonomous beings like in the liberal model, which is not able to adequately deal with vulnerabilities. Even many adults do not

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fulfill this assumption. The well-being of children, especially babies and toddlers, who are hardly able to make the choice of capabilities and valuing them in the ways required, should therefore rather be judged along their actual achieved functionings. Correspondingly, these are the elements we should promote in the lives of young children, e.g. making sure that they are well-nourished, learning how to read and write etc. Second, children's capabilities *evolve* along with the changes and development that they are going through (Ballet et al., 2011: 34). Most important for our discussion is the fact that the development of these capabilities is severely shaped by the social environment of the child, especially the family and social relations.

As we shall argue in the following, conceiving of children's well-being along the lines of the just described CA helps us understand the concept of resilience and its role in dealing with vulnerability. Before turning to this argument, we point out how the CA's concept of well-being is a plausible normative basis for assessing the severe disadvantages of child poverty – therefore creating entitlements based on the vulnerabilities – also conceived of as lack of capabilities – that arise for poor children.

Resilience, Capabilities, and Child Poverty

As initially claimed, child poverty is a bad thing, however you may look at it and wherever it may occur. But what exactly is the ethical problem about it? We think that the considerable body of empirical and normative literature on the topic (e.g. Zander, 2008; Luthar, 2003; Ballet et al., 2011) has made a convincing case that poverty poses a severe risk for what we call a child's present and future well-being. The risk is multidimensional: poverty has detrimental effects on important functionings such as being well-nourished, being clothed appropriately, not to be socially excluded or knowing how to read and write. Also children from poor families are statistically more prone to developmental disadvantages like having less communicative and educated parents and, as a consequence, developing less vocabulary. Further, due to the fact of

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dependency children are extremely vulnerable to parental misconduct, even if they are not directly affected by it (like in cases of child-maltreatment).

Child poverty as a capability deprivation

The CA delivers the normative background for calling these effects of poverty on children unjust. Consider again Hart & Risley's example of speech patterns: even though– formally – the children in the example have the same chances in education, because they attend the same schools, their actual functionings and their evolving capabilities are different, due to their parent's economic disadvantages and its effects. If we measured well-being by rights or resources only, we would not detect much inequality with regard to education. If, however, we look at the capabilities of these children, we can pinpoint how children from economically weaker groups are disadvantaged: they lack many important conversion factors such as social and emotional support, so that many opportunities are not realizable for them in the same way as for the kids that come from more well-off backgrounds. As a (partial) theory of justice, the CA thus shows when inequality in capabilities is problematic. However, as we have pointed out, children are dependent and cannot themselves cope with this situation. Justice requires that poor children will be supported by societal institutions in developing their capabilities, if economic and further support from the immediate social environment fails.

One recent discussion in this context makes use of the concept of resilience. Its advocates can mainly be found in social work and pedagogics. They hope that fostering resilience –as the capacity to cope with severe risk – will help children to deal with the adverse effects of poverty (Yates et. al., 2003). They thus use it as a form of poverty prevention on a secondary level (Zander, 2008). So far, the topic of resilience has not been linked very often with questions of social justice. We think, however, that a discussion of the normative aspects of resilience is long overdue. For instance, we may ask: What exactly is it we want to foster here if we talk about coping or

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adapting? Is it a good way to foster resilience if we want to change the situation of children in situational and especially pathogenetic vulnerability? If so, do children have an entitlement to have their resilience promoted? In the following, we cannot give full attention to solving all of these tricky questions. Our hope is to give a first account of the normativity of resilience and of how it should be understood with regard to social justice. We argue that resilience plays an important role in removing poor children's (situational) vulnerability by promoting their capabilities.

What is Resilience?

The concept of resilience comes from the social sciences and some branches of the natural sciences (mostly ecological studies, Walker et. al., 2014). In addition, resilience has become a buzzword in the media, signifying the hope for training people to cope with stress e.g. at the work place or at home. We claim that the fact that nowadays so many people are interested in the idea leads us to certain philosophical questions that have been troubling people long before the word "resilience" was invented. Among them are: coming to terms with human shortcomings, dealing with inequalities and disadvantage in society or identifying the resources we need to stay strong and hopeful.

Despite its popularity (or maybe just because if it), the concept of resilience is often used in a rather vague way, especially in developmental psychology and social work, where it is related to "positive adaptation" or "successful life", but also to "robustness", "hardness" or "resistance". (Yates et. al., 2003: 243). Different associations are evoked which go from extreme flexibility that demands radical adaptation to some form of robustness, which seems to imply just the opposite. If, as we propose below, human resilience is defined in some form of agency, these seemingly contradictory implications can be matched.

As a first approximation to the idea of resilience, we can say the following. Two characteristics must be present so that we can call a person or a group "resilient": (i) being subjected to a significant risk as well as (ii) coping with

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

this risk successfully. The definition of *risk* and successful coping are heavily dependent on the normative definition of child-well-being and vulnerability. In a way, resilience is a counterpart to certain forms of vulnerability, because it implies that vulnerabilities that are created by risks such as poverty.

In developmental psychology, thinking about resilience leads us to another, rather fundamental, normative question about the general goal of fostering resilience (Zander, 2008). To put it provocatively: there may be people that are very well able to cope with regard to risk, but we may not view this positively. For instance, criminals or dictatorships may withstand the severest threats and impacts, such as punishment, violence or embargos. Similarly, people or groups who strongly resist changes or even deny reality, such as severely delusional persons, may thereby have a successful strategy to deal with changes. In a way, they may be called resilient, if resilience is given the mere descriptive meaning mentioned above.

However, if we look at the treatment of resilience in the social sciences, resilience is usually defined in a positive way, especially when it is evoked as a basis for promoting certain capacities of children that should help them succeed in life. We also believe that the term "resilience" should be used only for certain positive cases (whereas in the cases just mentioned we should speak of resistance or survival skills). This is backed up by our project of closely connecting the notion of resilience with the normative demands of the CA, as we point out in the following.

Resilience and Capabilities

If resilience is taken to be normatively valuable, we need to identify a normative basis from which we can form judgements when strategies to cope with risk are valuable – and conversely when the risk is a bad one that needs to be overcome. A pivotal normative basis is Sen's ideal of agency that is closely connected to his CA: Sen takes an agent to be an active being that brings about change, whose achievement can be evaluated in terms of her own values and goals (Sen, 1999). To realize these goals,

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

agents need real opportunities, i.e. capabilities.

The problem with this definition is, however, its implications of individualism and rationalism. It seems that Sen only has adults in mind who are able to set their goals freely and on the basis of their own individual values. Thus, his view of agency comes close to the classic view of personal autonomy in liberalism which assumes that autonomous agents are rational, self-governing individuals, thereby denying that another person or group has authority over them. (Buss, 1994). Children clearly are not autonomous in this way, nor should they be, because they are dependent and vulnerable in the ways we have already pointed out.

Still, Sen's conception of agency is interesting for our project in two ways. First, even though it is not fully applicable to a child's actual life, it highlights the idea that we need normative ideals and goals in rearing and educating children. One important goal in parenting should be to equip children with the competence to navigate their way through adult life. Sen's idea of agency highlights that being someone who makes changes for himself and in the world happen forms a central part of what an agent should be. This ability is already basically present in children and is also encouraged by their care-givers who teach them how certain feasible goals can be reached. For instance, good parents gradually teach children how to eat alone, how to put on their clothes or to reach for an item they want to have. They thus do not only promote technical abilities to become efficient in bringing about changes but also enhance children's *self-efficacy*, i.e. a belief in one's ability to complete tasks and reach goals. (Osterndorff, 2013). The goal thus should be helping children with becoming a self-efficient agent.

Second, having actual agency depends heavily on the capabilities that are open to a person. Therefore, the question whether Sen's concept of agency is too individualistic also depends on the interpretation of capabilities. Going back to the definition of capabilities and conversion factors set out above, it becomes apparent that many of them are formed by social and

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

environmental conversion factors. For instance, the capabilities someone has in graduating from school heavily depend on public institutions of education, family relations and social acceptance. Even the impact of personal factors such as sex or age is heavily influenced by the societal context, e.g. by norms discriminating against women or girls (Nussbaum, 2001). We think it is thus consistent to emphasise the social nature of capabilities and the dependency of individuals on these contextual aspects. Children are especially dependent on the social environment, as we have pointed out. Their dependency becomes particularly obvious by having to rely on the social environment to have their functionings and capabilities realised.

This social interpretation of the CA gives us more insight in the normative aspects of resilience we have introduced above. Resilience is often understood, as we have briefly sketched, as the individual capacity of coping with risk. It thus suggests that resilience is some kind of invulnerability of an individual, often herself working on overcoming the odds that society has thrown in her way. Emmy Werner's pioneering longitudinal study on the Hawaiin island of Kauai, which has introduced the idea of resilience in the social sciences, seems to support an interpretation of resilience as an individual capacity. (Werner, 1993) The study ran over thirty years and focuses on children within the birth cohort of 1955 facing multiple risks such as poverty, premature birth or violence. The, then, surprising results of the study suggested that one-third of the children of this cohort grew into competent adults. Many readers thought that these children must have some favourable genetic makeup or some other remarkable strength that makes them unbreakable. This is the image of resilience that has stuck with many popular works on the subject as well as psychological research. Initial research in psychology also mainly focused on the competences and abilities of the individual (Exenberger & Juen, 2014).

Yet, a closer look reveals that resilience is far from being extraordinary (though still admirable). Even Werner (1993) herself argued that resilience is a

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

common mechanism of the human adaptive system which is able to react aptly if the preconditions are adequate, e.g. there are strong social relations (to parents, teachers or other care-givers). In several works the question of resilience was shifted from the individual to the issue of what the *social environment* (parents, teachers, other adults and children) do to promote coping skills among children. In a second step, larger contextual concerns were addressed by including the political system, social institutions and the general provision of resources (Exenberger & Juen, 2014). The psychologist Manuel Ungar (2005) assumes that environment and context may count even more than individual capacity as antecedents of successful coping. He therefore demands that the promotion of resilience puts great emphasis on the provision of resources and respective institutions.

For the reasons just given in our social account of capabilities, we concur with the following definition of resilience stated by Ungar: "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways" (Ungar, 2008: 225).

We think that this account of resilience only works fully with a normative background which explains why the multivariate factors mentioned, e.g. psychological or social ones, should be viewed as central elements of successful lives. After all, it is a normative issue what counts as "successful life". Above we have already pointed out how well-being and agency – understood as having capabilities - should be part of such a life. Therefore, the CA provides insights into understanding the *concept* and *value* of resilience.

Despite the similarities, we need to be careful in keeping the ideas of resilience and capabilities conceptually distinct. Resilience is not equivalent with having capabilities. Rather, capabilities constitute the normative backdrop of resilience in a system of social justice: as

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

defined, capabilities form the real opportunities a person needs to sustain her well-being. They are what Ungar calls "resources" in the quote above: resilient people need them as preconditions for coping which people have an entitlement to in the name of social justice. Correspondingly, capacities that are associated with resilience, e.g. self-efficacy, are necessary to fully realise capabilities, because they provide persons with the abilities and competences to do so. Building resilience in children should aim at giving them the present and future capabilities (and the suitable preconditions) to lead a life that they can value themselves, i.e. that they can be an agent. Thus, the CA and the idea of resilience form an interesting interplay which provides a basis for fighting child poverty.

Resilience as coping with the negative effects of child poverty: Protective factors and capabilities

What we have left to discuss is how promoting resilience according to the just given definition would help relieving child poverty. Let us draw attention to the features of resilience that are relevant with regard to putting it into practice via social policy. For characterising someone as being truly resilient, we must find out whether that individual *has already successfully overcome* a crisis. However, most work in psychology and social work that focuses on policy is interested in promoting factors that make people more likely to be resilient in order to avoid a break-down. Hence, we should rather speak of *resilience potential*. The literature on psychological resilience identifies so-called "protective factors" which make it more likely to overcome the negative effects of a crisis. Among them are strong social relations, self-efficacy and stable institutions. (Yates et al., 2003) Protective factors of these kinds are almost exactly similar to some of the "conversion factors" which the CA demands in the name of social justice, which, as we have explained above, individuals need to convert resources into valuable capabilities. Hence, we claim that having resilience potential is the same as having suitable conversion

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

factors: they are what makes children able to realise capabilities.

There are two crucial ways in which interpreting resilience potential on the basis of the CA contributes to coping with the adverse effects of child poverty. First of all, by defining child poverty as a lack of basic functionings and capabilities in children's lives, we are able to evaluate the multidimensional disadvantages poverty entails for children. We can thus identify the crisis that needs to be overcome by resilient conduct. Second, we can classify potential protective factors such as secure attachment, supportive relationships or institutions, as those that should be promoted in a poor child's life, in order to balance the adverse effects of poverty. Take the example of children brought up in institutions, which we have sketched above. Those children are often unable to find a secure relationship on their own. Extra care should be taken by social workers to promote attachments to other adults such as teachers or foster parents. Thereby social policy and social workers can meet the vulnerabilities of the situational and especially the *pathogenetic kind*: children are entitled to certain capabilities, i.e. resources and conversion factors that counter-balance the injustice of poverty. Hence, they are less vulnerable with regard to unjust institutions and social settings, because they will be given the respective social surrounding that substitute or balance these unjust influences.

Still, resilience is not an ideal solution. It is a mere second-best strategy in fighting child poverty, because it does not subvert its structural causes. Thus, ultimately, the goal of social justice is to prevent poverty on a systemic level – a concern that the CA strongly has. However, since we live in a non-ideal world that demands workable solutions for the present, we think that social justice should also focus on the urgent problems here and now. Also, here is another similarity between accounts of resilience and capabilities: they are concerned with helping people now, not in an ideal system of justice (Sen, 2010).

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Gênero & Direito
Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

Resilience, Children's Vulnerability and Justice: Some Tentative Conclusions

In the previous sections we have argued that child poverty leads to specific vulnerabilities of children that should be understood in terms of a lack of capabilities. Furthermore we have claimed that the concept of resilience combined with insights from the CA helps us to analyse the normative structure of child poverty insofar as it helps us to understand in which sense child poverty is unjust to children. Child poverty is unjust to children because it undermines the development of the capabilities that are necessary for becoming an agent – an agent that is also resilient to risks because she is self-efficient and has the adequate capabilities to overcome a risk. In this sense, promoting children's capabilities is a matter of social justice. The presence of certain capabilities, e.g. those for education or health care, are necessary social and political prerequisites to develop factors that make one resilient in a desirable way. i.e. if they are able to realise their capabilities.

In our account, resilience is a complex competency that helps reducing children's vulnerability insofar as it enforces children's ways of coping with adverse effects of child poverty. Consider, once again, the example of obesity in poor families. Children from poor families have a much higher risk to develop eating habits leading to obesity than children from higher income families. Children typically adapt to parental behaviour, and there is a strict statistical correlation between poverty and obesity. Poorness and neediness of families might be considered an unjust social phenomenon per se. In this sense, children from poor families should be treated as situationally (or even pathogenetically) vulnerable persons. In this context the question occurs if society should, for example, solve the situation for children by a redistribution of wealth. However, as we pointed out at the end of the last section, we live in a non-ideal society where child poverty remains a social fact. In this context, making children resilient by making changes in their social surroundings might be a proper 'tool' for making them less

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

vulnerable to the adverse effects of poverty. In the case of obesity the solution could be that new policies are implemented in educational domains such as preschools, schools and youth clubs where children gain knowledge of their diet. This knowledge could help children to become resilient against the influence of their parents concerning their eating habits. Sport programs, musical programs and other educational approaches could help taking children's resilience against adverse effects of child poverty on a more substantial and holistic level. No doubt, the implementation of such policies would face many problems and raise difficult questions concerning economic sources, legal feasibility, and, of course, the authority of the state in general. We are aware of these issues. However, it has to be kept in mind that child poverty has many normative and practical implications that must not be ignored. Child poverty can lead to substantially unjust situations for children, and this is a serious stain for any society that endorses the idea of equality of chances and opportunities. Furthermore, consider the negative effects on social systems like the health system and the political system if children's development is neglected. Hence, we believe that making children more resilient is not only important from a normative perspective but from a pragmatic or political perspective as well. We want to conclude our paper by pointing to some normative worries that any analysis of the concept of resilience should attend to.

Our first point concerns a hitherto undissolved tension between the concepts of resilience and vulnerability. In our account resilience means making children more capable for coping with their specific social set-backs and in this sense making them less vulnerable. However, the modern concept of childhood entails that children are vulnerable persons in the sense of needing special protection by their caregivers (Archard, 2004). In other words, the modern conception of childhood entails that children have a right to be vulnerable. Bringing the concept of resilience into the discourse bears at least the risk that children might become overburdened with the

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

responsibility of, so to say, becoming stronger. Resilience is still connected to ideas like performance, control and strength. While being strong and able to perform are certainly good traits in general, we run the risk of undermining the modern conception of childhood if we focus on them too much. Even if we understand resilience as the capacity to keep capable of acting and exploring the world in a child-like way, we still face the problem that children are expected to behave in a certain way. This is what Collin Macleod calls the "agency assumption". We have to some extent countered this objection by pointing out how truly valuable resilience should mainly be dependent on contextual and social factors: children should not be burdened with responsibility and individualistic expectations. Resilience, as a kind of healthy behaviour, may thus also involve not overcoming any obstacle or risk – a good agent (especially a child) should also be able to engage social support and rely on others. Children should therefore not be made fitter and stronger as individuals. Rather, their environment should be changed in order to diminish the situational and especially pathogenic vulnerabilities which are unjust. Nevertheless, this is just a first approach at a complex normative subject. Much more has to be said about the relation of the concept of resilience to the concept of children's vulnerability to make sure that we do not run the risk of undermining the value of childhood itself when trying to make children more resilient.

Secondly, and related to our first point, still resilience has some descriptive (psychological) aspects. What we mean by this is that some children may have the necessary capacities and the respective protective factors to a larger degree than others – partly due to their privileged social surroundings. By highlighting the normative aspects of resilience, we certainly do not want to enforce the elitist idea that specially gifted or privileged children should enjoy special treatment. On the contrary, we think that making children more resilient is compatible with the notion of equal treatment insofar as every child could benefit from the transfer of capabilities that make them more resilient. There is the worry that by

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Periódico do Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre Gênero e Direito
Centro de Ciências Jurídicas - Universidade Federal da Paraíba
V. 5 - Nº 03 - Ano 2016 – International Journal
ISSN | 2179-7137 | http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs2/index.php/ged/index

expecting children to be more resilient we might set a new level of normality for all children and that this, in turn, might lead to more and more pressure and stress for children in general. Again, to meet this challenge we need to state more clearly how the concept of resilience and its social nature is related to other important values of childhood.

Third, by demanding the promotion of resilience in children we have to bear in mind that there are many factors of child poverty and adverse effects of child poverty that cannot be solved merely by making children more resilient. As we have stated, promoting resilience is a second-best solution. We must not forget about the manifold social sources of child poverty that still remain to be solved. Consider, for example, the case of families in which the parents have to exert several jobs for earning enough money. In this case, just trying to make children more resilient by enabling them to take part in several educational programs or other social 'substitutes' seems to be futile. In such cases the whole family is in need of support. What children in such a situation need is more time with their parents and not primarily more educational support. In short: we must fight child poverty on a primary level, so that extraordinary resilience becomes obsolete. We still must strive for that ideal world.

Our fourth and last critical remark concerns the intra-family-consequences for the child when it learns to be resilient against the adverse effects of poverty. When children gain the capabilities that make them more resilient, they run the risk of becoming alienated from their family-background, especially when the child forms strong relationships with other care-givers that give them what their immediate family cannot. Family relations are still a most important value in a child's life, and they can almost never be fully substituted. Hence we strongly suggest that social policies that are directed to promoting children's resilience should always be accompanied by free consulting services for poor families.

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