Neoliberal agency, relational agency, and the representation of the agentic child in the Sociology of Childhood

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Neoliberal agency, relational agency, and the representation of the agentic child in the Sociology of Childhood

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Abstract

This critical commentary fulfils the regulations laid out by the University of Westminster as part of the submission for the award of PhD by Published Works. It accompanies nine published works that form the body of this submission and outlines their coherence, originality and contribution to knowledge. This body of work were published over a period of 6 years (2013-2019) and collectively is situated within, and at the intersection of the fields of sociology and childhood studies. In these works I interrogate the canonical concept of agency and I argue that the inherent contradictions of how agency is conceptualised, has more to do with the neoliberal model of agency being applied than whether children can and do exercise agency. The spaces of popular culture and of research with children are both contexts within which, dominant images of the child are reified and indeed produced. They offer both serious and playful spaces to critique and to reimagine the concept of agency and the potential that it offers. By considering explicitly how agency intersects with related concepts of vulnerability, care, participation, relationships and voice this body of work demonstrates there is significant analytical value in the concept of agency as applied to children and childhood. However, neoliberal models, which prize self-interested, individualistic, independent autonomy fail to acknowledge the lived realities of children's lives or their situated and embedded nature in families, peer networks and assemblages of people and things. Like adults, children are not wholly agentic, nor are they utterly powerless. Rather, as I argue in this commentary, the agency of children is situated, contextual, contingent, and most importantly, relational; emerging in interesting and unexpected ways.

List of Publications

Clark, J. (2019) Biker Gangs and Boyhood Agency in Akira, in Castro, I.E. and Clark, J. (eds.) *Child and Youth Agency in Science Fiction: Travel, Technology, Time*, Langham, MA: Lexington, pp. 109-130

Clark, J. (2018) Speddies with Spraypaints: intersections of agency, childhood and disability in award winning young adult fiction, in Castro, I. and Clark, J. (eds.) (2018) *Representing Agency in Popular Culture: Children and Youth on Page, Screen and In Between*, New York: Lexington

Clark, J. and Duschinksy, R. (2018) Young Masculinities, Purity and Danger: framings of boys and girls in policy discourses of sexualisation, *Sexualities*, Vol. 22: Issue 7 https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717736718

Clark, J. (2018) There's plenty more clunge in the sea: young masculinities and sexual talk, *Jnl Media, Sexualisation and Society, Sage Open*, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018769756

Clark, J. (2018) Embodiment and Representation, in Boggis, A. (ed.) *Dis/Abled Childhoods? A Transdisciplinary Introduction*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan,

Clark, J. and Richards, S. (2018) Research with Disabled Children: Past, Present and Future, in Boggis, A., (ed.) *Dis/Abled Childhoods? A Transdisciplinary Introduction*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Clark, J. and Richards, S. (2017) The Cherished Conceits of Research with Children: Do participatory methods that seek the voice of the agentic child deliver what they promise? In Castro, I. Harger, B. and Swauger, M. (eds.) *Researching Children and Youth: Methodological issues, strategies and innovations,* Sociological Studies in Childhood and Youth, Vol. 22, Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing

Richards, S., Clark, J. and Boggis, A. (2015) *Ethical Research with Children: Untold Narratives and Taboos*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Clark, J. (2013) Passive, heterosexual and female: Constructing appropriate childhoods in the 'sexualisation of childhood' debate, *Sociological Research Online*, 18(2) DOI; 10.5153/sro.3079

Commentary

Introduction

This critical commentary fulfils the regulations laid out by the University of Westminster as part of the submission for the award of PhD by Published Works. It accompanies nine published works that form the body of this submission and outlines their coherence, originality and contribution to knowledge. This body of work were published over a period of 6 years (2013-2019) during my tenure as Lecturer and Senior Lecturer at the University of Suffolk and latterly the University of Essex. They do not represent all of the publications from this period but are the pivotal pieces which best document the 'narrative' of my theoretical work and contribution to the sociological study of childhood. Collectively the body of work submitted is situated within, and at the intersection of the fields of sociology and childhood studies.

The Context of Childhood Studies

Attention to childhood and children's experiences as a distinct field of study in its own right emerged from the 1970s onwards, sweeping through the academy and institutions of welfare and childhood. It signaled a seismic shift in the exploration of childhood and children's lives in the social sciences. Traditionally children within academic study were positioned not as persons with voice but as objects of concern (Prout and Hallet 2003). In the previous sub-disciplinary silos where childhood was located, such as psychological understandings of intelligence (Thorndike 1916), adult perspectives reigned (Clark 2018a). Linear models of development that charted performance, behaviour or growth were the measures of children's successes or failures. Children often relegated to the role of adult in waiting with limited ability to contribute to their own worlds or wider cultures (Kehily 2012). In contrast, the

discourse of children as agentic, rights bearers encapsulated in the ‘new’ sociology of childhood positioned children not as limited to their potential as future investments but as active beings in their present ‘child’ state. In their seminal work, James, Jenks, and Prout’s (1998) presented children’s abilities to actively contribute to their social worlds as a central tenet, an organizing feature of their manifesto for a new way of understanding children and childhood. This was a paradigmatic challenge to previous dominant ideas of dependence, maturation, and unknowingness.

The ‘new’ sociology of childhood and its advocates including for example, Alanen (1988), Corsaro (1997), and James, Jenks, and Prout (1998), positioned children as agentic beings and experts in their social worlds. Simultaneously, attention to children as rights bearers rose, including notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. Outside of the academy provisions surrounding the family, school and welfare approaches were adapted too (see Children Act 1989) to better reflect this new rights status of the ‘being’ child with voice (Clark and Richards 2017). Childhood Studies as an academic field in its own right reached critical mass in the 1990s with the formation of specific journals such as Childhood in 1993, the development of higher education programmes of study and the first UK professors in childhood studies, early years and play.

The idea that children have agency or can act agentically has achieved normative status, constructed almost as commonsense in Childhood Studies (Clark and Richards 2017). The recognition of agency and voice as attributes of childhood paved the way for creative and progressive accounts of children’s lives, often in their own words and

on their own terms. These approaches to agency and participation were transformative and in the academy and elsewhere there was a rush to ensure children's voices were heard and rights upheld (Clark 2019:5). Such scholarship should be celebrated, it paved the way for insightful theoretical and methodological approaches to seek understanding of children's worlds outside of adult constructions. However, childhood studies, just like all disciplines, adopted particular foundational ideas to explain and understand children and childhood. I argue in the works presented here that these conceptual frameworks require critical, reflexive interrogation. Some thirty years on from its emergence childhood studies is certainly strong enough to withstand critique (see Hammerlsey 2016) and this is critical to avoid inertia, or indeed risk the same accusations of determinism that have plagued those approaches that came before.

In the works submitted for this PhD I have sought out spaces whereby such foundational concepts can be interrogated and reconstructed – notably representations of children and childhood in popular culture and methodological literature, guidance and governance on research with children. While such spaces may appear disparate they both actively participate in the construction of childhood and shape the very objects of which they speak. Contemporary societies are saturated with pop culture with relatively easy access in the majority world to all manner of media, imagery, and representation. We are presented with images, music, celebrities, and stories that both represent and contribute to dominant discourses of childhood itself. In research with children, the academy seeks to discover something about 'the child' and children's lives, and to present this in the form of evidence; often with the specific aim of shaping policy around childhood. Both fields contribute to the construction of the discursive figure of the child and thus offer interesting and productive territories for the analysis of core discipline defining concepts.

This work presented here will consider adult-child relations, the heterogeneity of childhoods and the boundaries constructed around children's knowledge and about childhood. However, it is the concept of agency that has been the analytical thread binding together this work and to which this commentary now turns.

Agency in Childhood Studies

Agency can be broadly defined as a capacity to be autonomous, to make decisions and undertake action. It is associated with selfhood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, and initiative (Emirbuyer and Mische (1998:962). The application of this understanding to individual subjects prizes attributes such as self sufficiency and self reliance, (Walter & Ross 2014:16) and values such as rationality, freedom and self interest (Emirbuyer and Mische 1998:965). There is an explicit weight placed upon on notions of individual rights and self-protection (Greenfield 1994). Agency is positioned as dominant in a hierarchy of characteristics evident within an adult rights holder in advanced liberal societies and is regarded as a necessary component of economic citizenry (Tronto 2009:164). Rose (1999:91) argues that this 'self' is constructed as 'an object of knowledge and autonomy' realised through continual self-improvement achieved by applying and privileging 'rational knowledge'. This process enables individuals to constitute themselves as the citizens and selves required in contemporary socio-political neoliberal spaces.

This neoliberal model of agency positions particular, often highly individualised, attributes in adult citizens as privileged. Given that childhood studies developed in a

Western context saturated in neoliberalism, it is no surprise that such attributes are subsequently prioritized and come to characterise the theorising of childhood itself. As Raby (2014:80) argues children's agency is "grounded within a broader context of neoliberalism, which favors…individual autonomy over citizen interdependence". Agency as a concept, defined in these neoliberal terms, has come to be seen as a normative, even natural, part of contemporary theorising about children and childhood and enshrined in child-centred methodologies (Clark and Richards 2017). It has become a rallying point around which those committed to the rights, voices, and participation of children can convene. However, lack of evaluation of both the theoretical assumptions underpinning this concept of agency and potential alternatives, have made it challenging to be clear what it is we are all rallying around (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2013) and whether it can be otherwise. In fact, despite its placement as a canonical concept, or, indeed, "cherished conceit," childhood agency is an undertheorized concept (Castro 2017; Clark and Richards 2017; Prout 2000; Segal 1999). Despite contemporary developments to reconfigure how agency is understood (se for example Esser 2016) many in the field are still critical of its pervasive, unquestioned nature (Coffey and Farrguia 2014; Wyness 2006).

I argue in the work presented here that all children, indeed all adults, can be considered as lacking agency when defined in these individualistic, neoliberal terms. Just like adults, children have no claim to agency in absolutist terms and although autonomy is prized for all individuals, it is never without constraint (Hammersley, 2015). A more effective route forward, which helps to avoid absolutist claims to power or powerlessness, would be to challenge modernity's neoliberal Westernized model of childhood and the agency it denies or endows. The idealization of the autonomous

child should be recognized as a dominant discursive regime situated in a particular historical context of neoliberalism and individualism (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie 2006). Reconfigured academic models of agency in childhood studies must consider how it is enacted in particular social contexts, embedded and enacted in social relationships and facilitated by normative assumptions about child development, innocence, and hierarchical adult-child relations.

Relational Agency

In contrast to the approaches of agency developed in the previous section and coming to dominate the development of childhood studies as a discipline, I argue, process that agency is far better understood when articulated as social and relational, embedded within and enacted through relationships and in particular contexts. As Giddens (1991:18) states the contemporary Western self is an eminently social and relational entity and Raithelhuber (2016:99) suggests that agency can be "conceived as a complex, situational and collective achievement that is partly stabilised through other 'humans'". Power, resilience, creativity, and action emerge not from the solitary individual, but from interdependent relations, whereby agency emerges through relationships with others (Twine 1994). Specific to childhood studies, Corsaro (1997) argues, that theorizing must "break free from the individualistic doctrine". Corsaro's (1997) theories of interpretive reproduction seek to prioritise children's innovative and creative work in everyday life and value it for its active and collective contribution to meaning-making and social change. His approach, while not taken up as actively as other canonical concepts in childhood studies, shifts attention from the development and socialization among children as one of individual, passive internalization. In

making sense of the world around them, children and young people collectively interpret, produce, or reproduce knowledge in their peer worlds and cultures and, in doing so, contribute to wider society (Corsaro 1997). The emphasis on peer cultures in Corsaro's body of work is pertinent, given that it recognizes children's action, the construction of meaning, the development of skills, and, indeed, the emergence of agency are embedded and realised in and through relationships (Clark 2018a; Clark 2018b).

The importance of children's and young people's friendships to their everyday lives and their processes of meaning-making is well-documented (Corsaro 1997; James 1993; Willis 1977). There is much less application of friendships to understanding children's agency as an analytical concept (Clark 2018b). This void exists despite the significant value we place on friendships as a hallmark of good adult outcomes and happy childhoods and adolescence (Buhrmester 1990; Calder, Hill, and Pellicano 2013; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Lotter 1978). It also exists despite the significant emphasis on collective activities, such as the focus group, in child-centred research (Clark and Richards 2017). Partial responsibility for this lies in the oft-unquestioned dominance of a neoliberal model of agency, whereby individual autonomy and actualization is prized over interdependent relationships and shared achievements (Castro 2019a, 2019b; Clark and Richards 2017). Social and/or relational agency as concepts are far more indicative of the ways children manage their relationships, which require skills in negotiation, compromise, and empathy. Mauthner (1997) describes children's peer relationships as being "characterized by intimacy and negotiation" (pp. 21–22) and Castro (2005) in her analysis of cinematic

representation of childhood agency, highlights how agency can and does emerge through friendships.

In addition, emphasizing the relational aspects of children's agency can also aid in understandings of adult-child relations in society and children's intergenerational relationships. In previous, work I have argued that to deny relational agency in the context of research is to abstract children and their voices from the context in which they are produced (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). In addition it also denies the generational interactions that shape all aspects of children's agentic participation in research. Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) research on corporal punishment found that children's views and experiences were heavily shaped by and located within adult-child relationships. Their exploration of the topic continually referenced the views of friends and siblings but also parents, teachers and other adults in their community clearly demonstrating the relational character of social interaction and meaning making. The image of the singular authentic voice of the participating child emblematic of the idealised autonomous, individualized, neoliberal citizen in waiting is not present here. Rather, what can be imagined is a motif of the child located in a complex web of fluid social interactions and relationships through which agency can and does emerge. Childhood and adulthood I argue, are not dichotomies of agency and powerlessness nor does the presence of adults deny children agency. While neoliberal models prize the autonomous individual this to some extent denies the intricately interwoven nature of childhood and adulthood. It masks the potential to understand the relationships between the two and the contexts within which agency for children and for adults can and does emerge (Clark 2018a).

Similarly to the research context identified above, in my explorations of popular culture representations of children and childhood, relational agency and the role of relationships, is a sustained presence. While the use of the concept of agency is common in social science literature, the concept has not been taken up with as much vigour in the fields connected to arts and humanities or in the study of representation from a social science perspective (Castro and Clark 2018). Popular culture and media are prolific areas of exploration in sociological theorising ranging from understanding audiences to interrogating the self in new social media environments (refs). There has been limited attention to the concept of agency as it might be represented in such imagery, particularly representations of childhood, and how such representations might aid our understanding of children and childhood. Chapters exploring young adult literature (Clark 2018b) and anime (Clark 2019), and a paper examining sitcom (Clark 2018c), all submitted here, demonstrate that in such representation relationships are a vital context for the enactment of agency. While characters Biddy and Quincy in YA novel 'Girls Like Us' (Giles 2014) lean on each other to share and process trauma, they also use the context of their relationship to shape their futures and understand their pasts. The gang of 'lads' in the Inbetweeners use the peer group from which to navigate their first forays in romantic relationships (Clark 2018c) and the animated figure of Kaneda swirls round the city of Neo-Tokyo acting as both rebel and ultimately saviour, not alone but with friends.

Relational Agency and Popular Culture

Representations in popular culture are powerful in shaping ideologies that position particular subjects in particular ways (Hall 1997). Such texts represent and produce

meanings that allow individuals to make sense of themselves, their identities and their positions within society (Clark 2018a). Thus critical evaluation of the agency endowed (or indeed, not) to children and young people within such cultural forms is vital in understanding the subject positions made available from which to speak or act (see Foucault 1972). While of course children 'talk back' to such representations, these subjectivities are not one sided, they do provide a frame by which individuals are able to understand themselves (Clark 2018). As Blaska (2004) argues children's literature can act as a mirror for the individual and a window into the social world. As such sustained analysis of popular culture is vital to understand the subject positions made available to children from which they are able to speak or act. Films like Akira and sitcoms like The Inbetweeners allow individuals to contemplate discourses of masculinity (Clark 2019, 2018c), while young adult novels such as (Julia) construct visions of disability (Clark 2018b) and reviews on the sexualisation of childhood (Clark 2013) facilitate reflection on parent-child relations. In the work presented for this critical review I have analysed such texts with the explicit purpose of understanding how children and young people's agency is constructed. Repetition of imagery plays a role in the solidification of discourse (Clark 2018a) and thus there is the potential for popular culture to further reify neoliberal, individualised models of children's agency. For example, young people with disabilities have spent decades facing an onslaught of images from popular culture where disability is to be overcome, pitied, or avenged (Barnes 1992, Clark 2018). However, I argue that the imagery found in these examples of popular culture troubles such individualistic approaches, representing instead something much more akin to the performance of social agency. Analysis of such texts thus has huge potential to actively contribute to the reconfiguring of models of agency in childhood studies.

While my earlier work focused on independent reviews instigated by governmental institutions and the governance of empirical research with children in the academy, the particular popular culture spaces where my analysis has extended have been very different. The sitcom, young adult literature, and anime are all cultural spaces which, like to some extent childhood studies itself, have struggled to be taken seriously in social science literature (Apter 2013; Berndt 2018; Mumcu and Yilmaz 2018). This is partly due to the Western tendency to exclude certain kinds of cultural production from the realm of high culture (Apter 2013) and perhaps because as some critics suggest they lack realism and socio-political critique (Berndt 2018). However, I argue that in such playful spaces there is significant potential for critical interrogation of the conceptual frameworks that shape the study of childhood and children's everyday lives. For example the humour in televised sitcom forces us to confront assumptions about the emotional agency of boys and young men (Clark 2018c). In addition, the impossible bodies found in anime challenge our conceptualisations not just of agency, but of what it means to be human. This form of animation allows for "bodies to erupt, explore, fly and roar – to do the impossible" (Clark 2018:122). The posthuman forms and assemblages of Akira's teen bodies "creatively and energetically express their refusal to be contained" (Clark 2018:122). Such hybrid creatures unleash fear and "techno terror" (Gee 2015:135) but these transgressive forms also offer alternative perspectives and the potential to subvert traditional dichotomies such as nature/culture, passive/active etc.

Caring for people and caring for things

Relational agency is threaded through the popular culture forms interrogated in my work, offering a sustained and legitimate alternative to individualized, neoliberal models. In examining award winning young adult fiction, I argue that young disabled people, indeed all human beings, rely on relationships for resilience, strength, action, reflection and development (Clark 2018b). It is within this context of friendship that identity negotiation and meaning making takes place and that agency emerges. While transitioning out of their high schools special education programme the two central protaganists of Gail Giles YA novel *Girls Like Us* (2014) draw their strength from the support they offer each other to tackle their past experiences and current troubles (Clark 2018a).

In the 1998 anime film *Akira*, central characters Kaneda and Tetsuo are able to save the future of the city of Neo-Tokyo because of the strength of their relationship founded in a shared experience in institutions of care, education and control (Clark 2019). In addition, throughout the film their creative navigation of the constraints of authoritarian regimes is reminiscent of subcultural theory (see Becker 1963; Willis 1977) where individuals agentically resist dominant cultures through the subversion of oppositional norms, display and performance of group identity, meaningful relationship within and to the group. The bōsōzoku or biker gang to which Kaneda and Tetsuo belong race in a visual spectacle through the military industrial complex of Neo-Tokyo avoiding representations of authoritarian rule, displaying their membership to the group through dress, which in itself traditionally subverts Japanese military imagery. This adaptation and inversion of styles and ideologies highlights the playful use of bricolage among

the boys. An approach to material, popular, and consumer culture that denies children agency and creativity in their navigations and is present in contemporary political concerns around sexualisation (Clark 2013). This acknowledgement of the potential of such playfulness allows for agency to emerge in a context where the Kaneda and Tetsuo fail to achieve success through traditional means of education or wealth. By turning themselves into a spectacle, much like Standish's (1998) analysis of Madonna, Kaneda and Tetsuo control the image of their self "denying the audience the position of voyeur" (Clark 2019:119). Their identities are no longer fixed by external socio-political discourse rather they control 'the gaze' and are empowered by their control over the act of looking (Mulvey 1992; Garland-Thomson 2009).

The friendship of Simon, Neil, Will and Jay, the four middle class lads from the televised young adult sitcom The Inbetweeners is the central context for the entire show and both spin off films. While my analysis of this sitcom (Clark 2018c) raises issues with the representations of young masculinity and sexuality the core peer group, which provides the context for boat trips, theme park rides and days bunking off is also the space where these young men are able to present themselves as (momentarily) vulnerable. In their navigation of emerging romantic and sexual relationships there is problematic homophobic 'banter' and only the veneer of sexual agency for girls and young women. However, it also provides a valuable space within which to contribute to the reconfiguring of agency as applied to boys, whereby dominant neoliberal models reify dominant gender norms that remove emotion or vulnerabilities from the potential repertoires of young men (see Edwards 2006).

Characteristic of the relationships embedded in all this popular culture imagery is both the giving and receiving of care as a foundational element. Children and young people have traditionally been understood (in recent Western history) as receivers of care, childhood as a phase of the lifecourse to be protected and innocence preserved (Tisdall 2012); they are not to be the givers of care rather than the receivers. This is particularly problematic when considering for example looked after children or disabled children's experiences. The additional needs in the everyday lives of children with disabilities produces perceptions, within neoliberal societies that prize autonomy and independence, that they are unable to enact agency in meaningful ways. I argue, as do others (see Lewis 2003; Esser 2016) that such a standpoint ignores the realities of interdependencies in the lives of all adults and children. Mutual interdependence is something to be recognized and valued, prompting reconsiderations of competency and interdependence (see Arneil 2002; Oliver 2013) and vulnerability and weakness do not necessarily prohibit agency. A powerful example of this comes in the exploration of the strategies of girls in Kitzinger's (1997) research to avoid or manage sexual violence in the home. Indeed in the perception of weakness perceived weakness (a romanticized characterization of the child) girls were able to exert some agency, and some control over when and where they may be at risk. In such reconceptualizations, all human beings are both carers and cared for in embedded relationships comprised of attentiveness and responsibilities toward one another (Esser 2016; Wihstutz 2016). Caring is undertaken in multiple ways throughout all the works analysed here, from advice, personal embodied care, and support in household tasks to the saving of a life. All the young characters exercise care for others, and equally receive that care in performances of mutual support. At times this does to some extent challenge the traidional hierarchy of adult child relations.

Adult-child relations may be generally characterized by inequality, as children must act within adult-dominated social structures, but these relationships are also interdependent, reciprocal, and dynamic (see Alanen 2011; Castro 2018; Leonard 2015). Whilst a relatively underexplored topic, some scholars devote significant attention to generationality in Childhood Studies and as an analytical tool for understanding children's lives (see, for example, Alanen 2011; Leonard 2015). Most focus on the structuring of children's lives through adult-child hierarchies (for example, see Mayall 2003). However, they also recognize the potential for children to participate in a form of generational exchange, whereby interpretations, perspectives, and wishes are understood and valued by all parties (Alanen 2011; Castro 2018).

Child-adult relational negotiation does not equate to automatic removal or endowment of agency to children. However, it does highlight the interdependent nature of children's lives as they are socially bound up with the adults they depend on, live with, or share parts of their lives. Just as adults can respond to the needs of children in their lives, so do children respond to the needs of others through emotional work, negotiation, and care (Castro 2017; Mayall 2003). In line with Tronto's (1993) conceptualization of care, neediness is presented as a threat to autonomy. This supposed inversion of the power relations of child and adult is constructed as problematic to normative conceptions of both adulthood and childhood. The mother is positioned as failing in her duty to properly mother and the child is ousted from childhood (and the accompanying, discursively constructed, freedom from responsibility). However, Tronto (1993) positions care with the fundamental presumption that all individuals will, at some point in their lifecourse, be dependent on others. What Biddy, Quincy, and Julia demonstrate is that children and adults can and

do develop relationships of attentiveness and responsibility toward one another (Wihstutz 2016). Children can find the role of carer as problematic (see Dearden and Becker 2000). However, children also find themselves invested with power in their caring roles (Jones, Jeyasingham, and Rajasoorya 2002). In this process, young people develop an ethical position, whereby they develop responsiveness to situations, recognizing the needs of family members or friends without fundamentally placing parent-child relationships or friendships into question while enacting help (Miller 2005). These relationships reveal themselves as highly valued, places where care is both received and provided (Wihstutz 2016). These works reveal, understandings of agency must be reconfigured to consider how it is enacted in being cared for, as well as doing caring, found in being vulnerable as well as capable, and bound up in resilience and reflection, facilitating critical questions of normative assumptions about child development and hierarchical child-adult relations (Clark 2018a).

All the characters in the works explored here enact agency in the context of relationships, these can are peers, friends, adults, and also things. Material objects play a significant role in these young people's lives, they are invested with emotional meaning and they deploy them as part of enacting agency (Corsaro 1997; Miller 2010). An increasing range of post-structural and post-humanist theorists are turning their attentions to the entanglement of human and non-human agents (Whatmore 1997). The potential for post-humanist perspectives to radically alter the hierarchies of humanity and embodiment, attending to materiality, are gaining significant traction in a variety of disciplines (see Braidotti 2013; Goodley, Runswick-Cole, and Liddiard 2016). Indeed, I have argued previously in this critical review that the post human possibilities available through animated forms of popular culture have potential for

expanding understandings of agency, bodies and what it means to be human. However, these approaches have received relatively limited engagement in the field of Childhood Studies, with the notable exception of Prout's (2000, 2005, 2011) work on bodies and hybrid childhoods and Nieuwenhuys (2011) work on teddy bears. Prout's (2005) arguments are salient here, as he pointedly discusses the requirement to move beyond artificial dichotomies of agency/structure, nature/culture, etc. Instead, it is imperative to recognize the capacities and agency of children as not pitted against or replaced through, but extended and supplemented by, material artefacts and technologies (Prout 2005).

Corsaro (1997) points out that rather than being somehow independently "powerful," consumer artefacts and experiences are embedded in myriad ways within children's peer cultures. Such collective actions contribute to innovative friendship cultures and are vital to cultural reproduction and change (Corsaro 1997). Common views about the corruption of childhood from material and consumer cultures can blind us to broader analyses of agency and youth empowerment through their relationships with material "stuff" (Miller 2010). This perspective is clearly evident in reviews on the sexualisation of childhood in Western nations (Clark 2013). Thus, I argue that Kaneda and Tetsuo's motorbikes for example serve not just as forms of entertainment and status rather they shape and provide context for the emergence and enactment of agency. This material and mobile item offers opportunities for strength, loyalty, resilience, and power. Similarly in The Inbetweeners, Simon's bright yellow car serves as a distinct embarrassment, however it also extends the boys' abilities to travel outside of their community and facilitates opportunities to engage in romantic relationships. Thus *Akira* and *The Inbetweeners*, in this reading, encourages

recognition of agency as not owned by the individual but emerging through interplay with material culture (Cetina 2001).

Biddy, from *Girls Like Us*, recounts a memory from her days at school noting that a friend in her special education class keeps a diary. Biddy is both curious and envious of the diary, but is acutely aware her lack of literacy abilities prohibit such an activity. On hearing her anxieties, Biddy's teacher provides her with a tape recorder to keep a diary, a place to share her feelings and to reflect on events and experiences in her life situations. Biddy uses the recorder for many years, keeping her boxes of tapes as one would preserve collections of written diaries. The recorder offers Biddy the ability to reflect upon her experiences and relationships in a way not available to her through writing. The recorder's importance comes into starker focus in the light of Quincy's attack. Quincy is subject to sexual violence at the hands of a co-worker on leaving her part time job one evening. In the aftermath, Biddy is keen to know what happened so that she can help her friend, but Quincy can barely look at her, let alone share the gruesome details of the rape. Biddy collects her recorder, finds a tape, and records a brief recollection of the sexual abuse she was forced to endure in a bid to encourage Quincy to share and to know she is not alone. The Dictaphone acts as a mediator between the girls as their relationship continues to evolve to new, emotionally open, spaces not available in their relationships with others. Through this technology, the girls access the strength and resources they can offer one another. While the recorder could be used as evidence of increasing attention to self-analysis and self-regulation required of the ideal responsible citizen in late industrialized society (Rose 2007), it is deployed by Biddy and Quincy not just for introspective analysis of self but for the ability to relate harmful experiences to one another, an important form of

communication to strengthen their friendship. As Turmel (2008:33) argues, “a child’s agency is not the property of a subject, but rather is derived from a distributed network of subjects, bodies, materials, texts and technologies”. The dictaphone, the motorbike and the car are not agentic but like Nieuwenuys’ (2011) teddy bear, they contribute to these productive friendships, enhancing and extending opportunities where agency can and does emerge.

Drawing upon a neoliberal model of agency whereby autonomous individual self serving action is prized would have prohibited recognition of the capacities and capabilities of children and young people contained in these examples from popular culture. I have argued here that a reconfigured approach to agency that values relationships, reciprocity, and care offer far greater analytical potential for understanding how children and young people enact agency and analysis of these representations of such agency can serve to further analytical evaluative conversations about this foundational concept. However, traditional restrictions to agency, and its related concepts of voice and participation, remain in research endeavours to explore the lived experiences of children and the reviews of their contemporary experiences that shape practice and policy.

Agency and Participatory Research with Children

The paradigmatic shift that heralded the arrival of conceptual frameworks including agency, the being child, and children as rights bearers that swept through the academy and the socio-political institutions of childhood instigated significant change in the way research with children is conducted (Christensen and James 2000). Previously

conceptualised as objects of concern rather than persons with voice there was little imperative to hear the voice of a child. Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC 1989 and the imperative of participation enshrined in the Children Act 1989 began the journey of meaningful attempts to hear about children's worlds in their own terms. Children were now regarded as experts in their social worlds and perceived to be knowledge holders (sometimes in contrast to adult researchers (Stanley & Wise, 1993)). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the agency of children is a popular and well-used concept in participatory research and has become inextricably entwined with methodological and ethical values. In fact, agency has become one of the cherished virtues in participatory research (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015; Clark and Richards 2017). It is instrumental in child centred research – as I have asked in work presented here – "who would challenge that the best interests of children should be central, that the voices of children should be heard, or that their agency should be assured?" (Clark and Richards 2017:129)

I argue that that this pursuit of or reliance upon individualised concepts of agency ensures that the ways children are relationally and creatively agentic in their social worlds are overlooked (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). Once a suitable method is identified to capture the supposedly agentic voice of the child, and a reasonable claim to being child-centred has been made, there is little interrogation methodologically of agency (for notable exceptions see Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hammersley, 2015, 2016; Prout, 2011; Richards, Clark, & Boggis, 2015). Such activity is perceived to be an enlightened, beneficent approach that regards children as experts in their lives and competent beings able to make useful contributions to social research. There is an assumption that research done with and by children is a legitimate representation of

children's realities (James, 2007) with limited interrogation of the conceptual frameworks such claims are grounded upon.

The ethical governance of research and the choice of participatory methods are two spaces within the broad field of 'research with children', where agency, and the broader discursive image of the child, can be further interrogated. In the works presented for this critical review I have sought to demonstrate the contradictory image of the child present in research and ethical guidance and the importance of research relationships, not the realisation of some individualised agency, for the construction of knowledge of children and childhood.

As I have argued above in relation to relational agency in popular culture, I too have argued that the pursuit of individualised models of agency in research approaches and encounters fails to adequately account for the ways in which children are relationally agentic in their social worlds (Clark and Richards 2017). Children make active use of their relationships to seek further information and make decisions about consenting in research (ref). In addition they play an active role in the positioning of researchers, variously taking on the role of pupil, daughter/son, or expert researcher, in order to encourage a similar role adoption by the researcher (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). In doing so children actively shape the social interactions in the research space to gain help with a task, to demonstrate care, or to resist perceived authority. The concept of agency underpinning participatory methodologies only allows for the elevation of individual voice (Clark and Richards 2017). I argue that relational agency, as would be far more effective in capturing the social competencies of children. After all, participatory methodologies are built upon notions of reciprocity and collaboration and thus relational agency can be thought of as somewhat inevitable in participatory methods but frequently ignored in the presentation of research.

Despite the emphasis of capturing the authentic voice of the (individualised) child in research literature, focus groups are argued to be a particularly useful method to capitalize on existing friendship relations for children (Christensen, 2004). However, these benefits are articulated to justify the use of a particular research tool as effective for facilitating participation rather than to critically and explicitly consider the role of relationships in the enactment of agency or in the knowledge constructions that take place through the use of such methods. Reciprocity, mutual obligation, and collaboration are concepts frequently constructed as ill-fitting the modern demands on citizens and the ways that we currently live (Raby, 2014). Yet, these qualities are visible in children's social interactions with adults and other children in everyday life (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). They are indeed invoked in the popularity of the focus group. These concepts should be the "bread and butter" of participatory research but they are rarely articulated as relevant, desirable, or indeed inevitable in research with children. Acknowledging such interdependency risks both the primacy of the voice of the child and the authenticity of the researcher.

Perhaps researchers do fear admitting the relational aspects of children's voices in their data for fear of damaging the participatory and rights projects themselves. But would I damage the authenticity of the concept of agency by recognising its relational emergence? I argue that rather than this, it would provide fertile terrain to extend conversations about agency itself. As researchers we also fear that acknowledging the data and analysis as a relational and participatory endeavour undermines our legitimacy as researchers. Communication within and about research relations doesn't complicate fieldwork and data analysis rather it is the foundation for it. However, whilst these relationships are intrinsic to how we research with children they seem to disperse into the background in the writing up. Findings become abstracted from the

social context in which they were produced (Richards, Clark and Boggis, 2015), and are often cleansed of that which reveals cooperation, collaboration, negotiation, and participation as epistemological evidence. With the exception of work such as Montgomery (2003) there is limited critical reflexivity on the deployment of core concepts in research encounters, or indeed the messiness of social research on the ground (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). However, as Clifford (1988) reminds us, mainstream anthropology manages to embrace the collaborative elements of participatory research in a way that the wider childhood studies community has yet to reach, but must move toward. This lack of self-reflection protects the discursive sanctity of the voice of the child and ensures that researcher expertise is secured. After all, our academic careers are built on such individual endeavours and academia sits within, and is not removed from, the neoliberalist agenda.

It is not just in the choice of methods or an approach to disseminating knowledge where researchers must interrogate the assumptions which shape research with children but in the formal frameworks of research governance itself, notably contradictory models of agency which shape what children can say and who can ask?

Children's Agency and the Construction of Knowledge

The models of individual, neoliberal agency hitherto discussed can also be found in the very guidance which shapes how empirical research with children can be undertaken (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015; Clark and Richards 2017). Such agency is not only desirable but also regarded as achievable. Through the right choice of methods and approach researchers can capture the previously latent and now

privileged voice of the agentic child. This is however, in direct contrast to other attributes of the dominant discursive figure of the child – innocence and vulnerability.

The assumed vulnerability of children coexists and is supported by notions of the innate innocence of the child. Discourses of childhood innocence have come to be regulatory tools by which child and adult subjectivities are shaped and child-adult relations are discursively governed (Robinson 2013). Childhood itself is infused with a sentimentality and nostalgia that is largely built on this idea of innocence, and thus the innocent child has "become a figurehead for the ideals of Western civilization" (Robinson 2013, 42). Therefore, notions of childhood innocence and vulnerability, whereby the agentic adult is contrasted with the passive, unknowing, innocent child, underpin child-adult power relations. Thus, alongside powerful constructions of agency, protectionist discourses have emerged, restricting children's access to knowledge and playing a key role in constituting political/legal policies and cultural practices which are all predominantly motivated by "the best interests of the child" rhetoric (Robinson 2013).

Somewhat counter-intuitively to the child centred approach promoted in much research guidance, ethical approval of participatory approaches frequently requires the articulation of discourses of vulnerability, where regard for young participants must reflect childhood as an inherently dependent, fragile state requiring sensitivity, skill, and particular caution. Researchers then must navigate a contradictory path where different stages of the research process require the dichotomous childhood constructs of passivity and agency to be central (Richards, 2013; Richards, Clark and Boggis, 2015). What is not considered is the potential for the child to be agentic and innocent and vulnerable. The analytical potential for reframing children's agency is lost. Assumptively, innocence and vulnerability are viewed as mutually exclusive to the

conceptualization of children as agentic beings. Alternately, as Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) state, and as I argue in relation to popular culture in this critical review, through recognition of their own vulnerability, children come to make complex decisions in their lives. Vulnerability, in this sense, is not mutually exclusive with notions of agency,

Appeals to innocence as an innate feature of childhood, defined in a Post-Enlightenment Western sense as combining vulnerability, passivity, and purity, are used in other spaces to govern the experiences of children and shape the knowledge formed about childhoods. In reports on the sexualisation of childhood that emerged from the turn of the millennia childhood is predominantly constructed as a vulnerable period of the lifecourse where children are in need of innate protection (Clark 2013). Agency and interdependency as features of children's lives or the creativity shown in engagement with popular and consumer culture (Clark 2013) are not attended to. In my paper of 2013 I demonstrated that this focus on protecting children from sexual knowledge but simultaneously ensuring an adherence to sexual norms, namely heteronormativity, limited children's capacity for agency in both individual and relational terms (Clark 2013). Parents were constructed as fearful for the fates of their children (notaby the girlchild) in this sexually saturated world and sought to protect them while simultaneously expressing a desire to for help as they struggled to retain authority and control in the face of the dominance of popular culture (Clark 2013). There was potential for a moment here, a trigger, for the sustained analysis of agency in children's interactions with consumer culture and how this is enacted or indeed restricted through friendships or generational relationships, but it was not realised.

The Papadopoulos review, commissioned in 2009, also sought to understand sexualisation in contemporary society. The examination of both boys and girls in sexualisation discourses, in contrast to other commissioned reviews by Governments,

professional organisations, and think-tanks, also marked a moment for a potential to generate new knowledge about childhood and children's agency in the context of sexualisation. I have argued, in work presented for this critical review, that it is the sociological criterion of innocence and the ways in which subjects are assessed against it that prohibited such analysis. Again, it is argued, there is a lack of attention to the potential for new understandings of agency. No recognition of how children's capacity to negotiate sexualising discourses is inherently gendered or classed (Clark and Duschinsky 2018) and thus a reification of sexualised girls and hyper-masculine men not embedded in relational dynamics but pitted against one another, emblematic of the passive/active dichotomy that plagues analysis of agency.

Generating knowledge about childhood in the field of sex, sexuality and sexualisation is fraught with difficulties as researchers navigate the moral order of so-called sensitive topics, unsure of which motif of the child will be presented to them at any one time. The term sensitive topics is much used but surprisingly rarely defined, rolled out to cover particular areas of research as if it were self-explanatory (Lee 1993). Sieber and Stanley (1988) define sensitive topics as those which are socially sensitive dependent on the individuals involved, the topic or the context of the investigation. The advantages of this definition, as Lee (1999) highlights is that it points us to topics which might not ordinarily be sensitive but which in particular contexts are. Far less research exists on children's views of contentious or indeed simply topics defined as adult (Uprichard 2010). What is particularly dangerous about such classifications is that the designation of a topic as taboo or sensitive is often simply assumed and rarely interrogated, an unreflected moral order in the ways in which we research with children, including assumptions of children's agentic capacity to cope or contribute. Sensitive topics can be found in the diverse work of Farberow (1963) drawing on

psychoanalytic and anthropological research who labels those topics which inspire feelings of awe or dread as sensitive or taboo. Extending upon these anthropological leanings explorations of taboo by Douglas are defined, like dirt, as that which can be thought of as 'matter out of place' (1991 p.36).

Like with dirt, taboo for Douglas is held in the eye of the beholder and has little to do with real dangers, to wellbeing for example. Nonetheless taboos do result in the formation of systems of classifications and social rules, for example in this current discussion of ethics committee. The aim of such rules and classifications being to negate the potential disorder that breaking a taboo threatens. Douglas's (1991) anthropological exploration of global societies in relation to religion and the supernatural points to the dreaded effects (for example famine, drought or epidemic) that are perceived to be the result of breach of taboos. Taboos thus become broken up and extended to form classes and rules, as part of this process we come to label things and activities as right or appropriate and others as abhorrent (Douglas 1979).

Applying the above ideas to children's agency and wider research with children it can be seen that certain topics, for example sex, are perceived as taboo, crossing powerful yet hidden boundaries which have been constructed around children and childhood to protect the discursively constructed innocence of childhood itself. The potential implications of this for research with children are that particular groups perceived as 'vulnerable', particular situations or contexts thought of as 'inappropriate' and particular topics constructed as taboo or sensitive risk becoming marginalised by both researchers and the groups and committees that govern research for the very risks to the social order that they pose (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015).

In my co-authored book of 2015 I and my co-authors share our stories of attempting to explore taboo topics in research with children, while I was labelled brave for

exploring a topic such as sexualisation, I was encouraged away from online research with children as complex and contentious (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). My co-authors were both faced with long ethics applications, with significant delays to the research process because the topics of adoption and disability were to outside the bounds of children's knowledge. In addition, we have all had to share as part of research governance evidence of our capacity to do research beyond our professional training and roles. As variously a helpline volunteer, bereavement counsellor and mother, we all had to justify our presence in that 'sensitive' space. While this fails to recognise that our roles in the research relationships are as much shaped by our participants as they are ourselves, it perpetuates approaches to research which fail to critically analyse the figure of the child adopted in such governance. Topics defined as outside the realms of either childhood studies or children's worlds are deemed problematic and I and my colleagues were not the only ones to share our stories (see for example Goode 2010). Drawing on Foucault's concept of the 'examination' ethics review and wider research governance can be seen as disciplinary strategies that combine techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of normalising judgements (Guta et al 2013) functioning as a 'normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish' (Foucault 1995:184). The classification of children as incapable subjects while simultaneously applauding child centred methodological reinforces the perpetual 'othering' of children within the research process (Lahman 2008). Such practices offer significant potential for understanding how the figure of the child comes to be realised in research and the extent to which agency is understood and deployed in such work. If indeed, childhood studies were to aspire to Foucault's concept of egarement – 'straying afield or distancing oneself from normative definitions of morality…to attempt to gain a critical, usefully knowledgeable

perspective' (Boden et al 2009 p728) then it needs to challenge such boundaries of acceptability and such assumptions about children's capacity and agency. To be ethical in Foucault's terms is thus to reflect upon such classifications of normative and taboo both in terms of topic and in terms of the construction of childhood and children's agency itself. While crossing these boundaries may lead to dangerous territory, it also offers sustained and critical potential for the analysis of the conceptual frameworks of childhood studies.

Agency as Responsibility

The concept of agency, whether defined in neoliberal or relational terms is presented in childhood studies predominantly as a benefit to the discipline and to the children who participate in research. However, aspects of my work have highlighted not only how the neoliberal stronghold on agency also shapes its sister concept participation. It is through participation that children are argued to enact agency.

Participation has been defined as "the sense of knowing that one's actions are taken note of and may be acted upon" (Boyden & Ennew, 1997, p. 24). Powell and Smith (2009) argue that participation can "enhance children's skills and self-esteem, support better decision-making and protection of children and improve policies for children" (p. 124). The necessity for children to acquire these skills, as a part of a contemporary neoliberal citizenship agenda, is a neglected yet ever present undercurrent in the study of children and childhood in and out of the academy (Raby, 2014). In their enactment, these skills have become more representative of the responsibilities and obligations of children as neoliberal citizens in the making rather than the effective articulation of

their rights as children. The language of collaboration and participation evoked in current policy and participatory methods are the mechanisms through which the autonomous, agentic, individualized citizen is developed and privileged. In a neoliberal saturated society (Strickland, 2002). Here, Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality is again relevant and already integrated elsewhere in explorations of childhood (see Pike, 2008), but its application to the practice of research with children is limited. The liberal notion of empowerment grounded in a desire to hand power to perceived powerless groups can be challenged when considering governmentality (Bragg, 2007). By recognizing such desires for children's participation as part of strategies or techniques to construct subjects capable of bearing the burdens of liberty in advanced liberal western democracies (Rose, 1999), participatory methods and rights to participation discourses seem less benign than initially assumed. When demanding participation of children by requiring they share their voices, we facilitate their acquisition of the necessary techniques of self (Bragg, 2007). Constructed as a fundamental right in childhood, participation becomes an obligation of contemporary neoliberal citizenship (Lister, 2003). To endow rights also requires the endowment of responsibility within the contemporary articulation of rights discourse (Hammersley, 2015). The rights of a child to participate are used to generate the skills needed from the ideal adult citizen (see Bragg, 2007) for whom individual responsibility and autonomy become a necessity of contemporary neoliberal landscapes. While it may be perceived that these approaches to participation elevate the figure "the child" prizes an individualistic notion of agency and the rights of the individual child and devalues collective identities and actions (Langford, 2010).

Outside of Childhood Studies, critical theorists such as Giroux (1986) consider hidden coercion in notions of the agentic and authentic voice by highlighting concerns related to the value of silence (Haavind, 2005; Lewis, 2010). Such critical reflection is only just emerging in the field of research with children (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). There is limited acknowledgment of concerns that existing neoliberal agendas are entrenched through the use of the agency and participation of children, with little recognition that these processes represent additional mechanisms of control rather than enable liberation in childhood (Fielding, 2001). I do not argue for the collapse or disuse of participatory methods but rather greater, sustained interrogation of the models of agency that lay the foundation for their usage.

Conclusion

The nine works attached to this commentary and the commentary itself have sought over the 7 years of their publications, to actively contribute to theorising about some of the canonical narratives of childhood and contemporary childhood studies. As I have suggested elsewhere, shining a light in certain places creates shadows elsewhere (Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015). However, I believe that interrogating such foundational concepts and their articulation in the spaces of childhood is vital for developing the discipline, avoiding apathy and assumptions and for better understanding children's lived experiences.

The spaces of popular culture and of research with children are both contexts within which dominant images of the child are reified and indeed produced. They offer both serious and playful spaces to critique and to reimagine the concept of agency and the

potential that it offers. By considering explicitly how agency intersects with related concepts of vulnerability, care, participation, relationships and voice this body of work demonstrates there is significant analytical value in the concept of agency as applied to children and childhood. However, neoliberal models, which prize self-interested, individualistic, independent autonomy fail to acknowledge the lived realities of children's lives or their situated and embedded nature in families, peer networks and assemblages of people and things. Like adults, children are not wholly agentic, nor are they utterly powerless. Rather, as I argue in this commentary, they are situated, contextual and contingent, emerging in interesting and unexpected ways.

It is relatively easy to apply neoliberal models of agency to such imagery and claim that children, particularly certain categories of child, such as children with disabilities, the sexualised girl child or the socially excluded adolescent, fail to live up to such expectations. Such assumptions are found in innocent discourses, which when taken to extremes generate significant boundaries around the construction of knowledge itself. However, adopting alternative models of relational agency that emphasise relationships as fundamental to the emergence and enactment of agency is fundamental to developing understanding of this analytical tool. Such relational perspectives don't position vulnerability, care, or reciprocity as mutually exclusive to the agentic child (see for example Esser 2016). Within ethical governance and research guidance however, such positioning does occur and researchers must grapple with the varying assumptions of incompetence and capacity at different stages. What is lacking from recognition is the notion that a singular child could indeed be both these things simultaneously and to try to consider how deepening our understanding of this could enhance research practice with children. In addition,

researchers must grapple with entire topics being taboo and thus out of bounds. Assumptions about children's agency and capacity, once again grounded in individual models, fail to consider the relational context of the research encounter or indeed that the child is embedded in a range of peer and intergenerational relationships to support their participation and wellbeing. While engaging children in research deemed 'sensitive' that don't have these relational resources to support them would require careful consideration, it should not render entire topics taboo and limit knowledge production, agentic participation or the further development of childhood studies as a discipline. Nonetheless participation is not necessarily the Holy Grail it has been upheld as either. In research with children, I have argued there is a lack of explicit acknowledgement of the conditions required for participatory methodologies to be effective and how these contrast with the primacy given to the authentic individual voice of the child. I have argued here and elsewhere that such assumptions about the requirements of contemporary neoliberal citizenry has resulted in participation no longer acting as a right but as a responsibility. Children are deemed through their participation to have exercised agency but they are (also) learning the necessary skills for success as good adult future citizens.

Childhood Studies as it has emerged in Western societies at the end of the 20th century is now in its fourth decade. Its scholars and proponents should be celebrated for their unparalleled contributions to understandings of children and childhood. However, I argue in this commentary and the body of work to which it refers that it is necessary to engage further sustained interrogation and critique of agency. My work during the last 7 years has aimed to contribute to this by focusing on the representations of children and childhood in popular culture and in research guidance and governance.

In doing so, I argue that the failure of children to be perceived as agentic and the inherent contradictions of how agency is conceptualised in different spaces, has more to do with the neoliberal model being applied than whether children can and do exercise agency. Relational agency offers an alternative already articulated in children's popular culture and which can and should be considered in the context of the production of knowledge about children and childhood in childhood studies.

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Appendix A

Clark, J. (2019) Biker Gangs and Boyhood Agency in Akira, in Castro, I.E. and Clark, J. (eds.) Child and Youth Agency in Science Fiction: Travel, Technology, Time, Langham, MA: Lexington, pp. 109-130

Akira (1988) is an infamous and influential anime film, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo and based on his manga comic of the same name. Set in 2019, *Akira* takes place in the dystopian fictional city of Neo-Tokyo. The central character, Kaneda, leads his biker gang, the Capsules, in clashes with a rival gang, the Clowns. In doing so, the Capsules inadvertently uncover a series of government experiments that embroil Kaneda's best friend Tetsuo and threaten to destroy the city itself. Variously described as body horror, cyberpunk, and post-apocalyptic, this science fiction anime film represents a landmark moment in the consumption of anime in the West (Napier 2005). As such, *Akira* is subject to significant analysis including, but not limited to, the circulation of global cultures, the nation state of Japan post World War II, the use of pastiche, and economic growth in the Asia Pacific (see Dasgupta 2009; Martinez 1998; McCrea 2008; Standish 1998). My chapter instead explicitly considers previously less attended to aspects of *Akira*, namely the positioning and agency of the adolescent boy. Films such as *Akira* are part of a wider popular culture that produces meaning, allowing individuals to make sense of masculinity and agency within their everyday experiences (J. Clark 2018). Thus, critical consideration of the agency endowed (or, indeed, not) to young men within cultural forms is vital to understanding subject positionality available to young people from which they are able to speak or act (see Foucault 1972). The construction of these subjectivities is not one-sided and young people can and do "talk back" to representations; nonetheless, such works provide a frame through which individuals understand themselves and their places in the world. What frameworks are young people

experiencing? How are young men portrayed in this influential and celebrated anime text? How do representations respond to or shape contemporary discourses of masculinity, agency, and, indeed, humanity itself? As theoretical arguments rage in the academy regarding how child and adolescent agency should be conceptualized (see Castro 2005, 2017, 2019a; Clark and Richards 2017; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Raby 2014; Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015), here I ask: What kind of agency (if any) do these young characters embody and how do our understandings of agency intersect with constructions of masculinity, humanity, and nationhood?

Akira is the first anime film that meaningfully moved beyond Asian audiences, part of the increasing popularity of anime to global/Western audiences in the latter decades of the 20th Century (Napier 2005). Based on Katsuhiro Otomo's manga that first appeared in *Young Magazine* in 1982, the film was released in Japan in 1988 and dubbed for Western audiences in 1992 (Standish 1998). The complexity of pop culture consumption across nations means that *Akira*'s success with global audiences marked a key moment in time for the consumption of anime and manga and the complexity of its transitions across nation state borders. The animated children's series *Postman Pat*, for example, cannot be translated from the UK to Japan because its four fingered animation style is emblematic of Yakuza gangs (Martinez 1998). Where cultural differences prohibit cross-cultural consumption, at other points it facilitates them. The original *Power Rangers*, for example, was exported from Japan to the U.S., only for the new U.S. version (with American actors) to be exported back again with English dubbed into Japanese (Martinez 1998). *Akira*, too, is multinational, reminiscent of Japanese arts such as Kabuki and woodblock print, while simultaneously drawing on the cinematic blockbuster *Blade Runner* (1982) and Otomo's interest in Walt Disney (Mumcu and Yilmaz 2018). There is much that can be said about the transmission of popular culture across nations that is not in the remit of this chapter; however, the success of *Akira* for

Western audiences marked out its place in history as a core part of the rise of anime and Japanese pop culture in the West, perhaps the beginnings of "Cool Japan" (McLelland 2017).

Anime is widely considered one of the greatest cultural exports of Japan (Fennell et al. 2013). Although there are extensive debates about the similarities or differences between animation and anime, it is broadly defined to include "animated feature length films" that are renowned for a particular aesthetic of fantastical landscapes and complex non-linear narratives (Berndt 2018; Martinez 2015,72). Anime has a relatively strong presence in the academy, more so than its sister product manga, as Film Studies appears to have a stronger grounding than Comic Studies (Berndt 2018). However, like Childhood Studies, anime tends to be trivialized, allegedly for its lack of realism and political critique (Berndt 2018). Part of this disconnect comes from an insecurity of where Anime Studies should live, either in area studies such as Japanese Studies or in academic Cinema Studies departments. Regardless of where it is studied, the Western tendency to exclude certain kinds of cultural production from the realm of art or high culture means it is often not considered a worthy or appropriate source for academic analyses (Apter 2013). Perhaps until recently, animation has remained in the remit of children's films and programming and, thus, like Childhood Studies, struggled to be taken "seriously" (Mumcu and Yilmaz 2018). This exclusion remains despite animation's potential as an abstract visual medium to represent humanity, science, technology, gender, adolescence, and many other aspects of the human experience; the genre contains creative, visual, and ideological flexibility not as easily generated in its live action counterparts (McCrea 2008; Napier 2005). Additionally, this assumption continues to be disrupted; indeed, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) was the first anime film to win an Academy Award in the U.S. in 2002 (Mumcu and Yilmaz 2018). In this chapter I argue that anime, like other popular culture, reveals the values of societies that produce and consume the genre. There are multiple readings of *Akira*, since anime has multiple faces (Fennell et al. 2013).

However, in this chapter as I embrace "serious approaches to playful delights" (Berndt 2018, 3) – the performances of masculinity and boyhood agency are critically considered in a post-apocalyptic setting wherein adult corruption threatens to devastate children's, and society's, landscapes and futures.

The plot of *Akira* centers around Shotaro Kaneda, age 16 and the leader of biker gang the Capsules. In their clashes with rival gang the Clowns and authoritarian forces of the military-industrial complex, they discover a scientific experiment and surrounding conspiracy threatening to destroy to the city of Neo-Tokyo (a repetition of a fictionalized World War III, which is alluded to in the mushroom cloud during the film's opening sequence). Kaneda's best friend Tetsuo, age 15, crashes into a child while in a bike race with the Clowns. This child is an Esper – one of the experiments who has extrasensory perception, hailing from the government regime responsible for previous destruction of the city in World War III. This meeting awakens Tetsuo's own psychic powers and the narrative of the film involves Kaneda, his friends, and the remaining Espers, the latter attempting to control or destroy Tetsuo as his powers expand and his body metamorphosizes into a bloated, monstrous, uncontained form that threatens total annihilation of society. This uncontrollable posthuman mass is eventually transported by Akira, the most powerful Esper, to another dimension. This process causes huge destruction to the city. However, Kaneda is returned to Neo-Tokyo by the Espers to witness collapse and flooding, symbolizing a new world, while Tetsuo's reduction to pure narrative is confirmed with the film's final disembodied words "I am Tetsuo."

Akira's plot is similar to other anime in that it refutes the normative flow of Westernized animation (McCrea 2008). The film's rapid narrative pace and soundtrack, use of pastiche, and extreme postmodern fluctuation of identities, dimensions, and contexts makes it complex to explain and analyze. However, the visual flexibility of anime makes the

genre a wondrous form for considering complex notions of humanity, war, technology, masculinity, boundaries, change, and adolescence. Indeed, metamorphosis is generally a key trope in anime (Napier 2005); thus, there is synergy to be found in the genre's exploration of the transitory space of adolescence. In the liminal landscape of adolescence, many debates about childhood agency rage. Traditionally, children are positioned as objects of concern rather than persons with voice (Prout and Hallett 2003). Models of maturation from dominating fields like Education and Developmental Psychology combine with philosophies of innocence and unknowingness to position children as vulnerable, dependent, and irrational (Kehily 2012). Even though teenagers are considered to exist in later stages of maturation, they are still subject to adult control and often continue to be viewed as struggling to rationally and productively contribute to their wider societies. The powerful and pervasive rights discourse that swept through the academy and institutions of welfare and childhood more generally from the 1970s onwards shifted such assumptions. The "new" Sociology of Childhood and its advocates, including Alanen (1988), Corsaro (1997), and James, Jenks, and Prout (1998), positioned children as active beings, rights bearers, knowledge holders, and experts in their social worlds. In the academy, there was a rush to ensure children's voices were heard and rights upheld. However, there was limited critical attention to how agency was itself defined. As I argue elsewhere (Clark 2019; Clark and Richards 2017), agency, as a part of childhood, is now considered natural and normative, part of child-centered methodologies and a rallying point for contemporary Sociology of Childhood and the interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies. However, as Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) point out, it is not clear what it is we are all rallying around.

While founding scholars who championed such approaches and broke down the stronghold of Psychology and Education in the field of Childhood Studies deserve celebrating, the neoliberal context of developments in agency is largely neglected (Clark

2019). With some notable exceptions (see, for example, Castro 2017, 2019a; Clark 2019; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Raby 2014), the autonomous, rational, individualized attributes of adult citizens are unquestioningly accepted rather than interrogated as part of the sociopolitical context of agency's existence in and for children as a theoretical concept. As Raby (2004) discusses, children's agency is "grounded within the broader context of western neo-liberalism which favours…individual autonomy over citizen interdependence" (80). In this process, children's collective identities and actions are somewhat devalued (Langford 2010). I argue here and elsewhere (Clark 2019; Clark and Richards 2017) that children do not lack agency; rather, modernity's neoliberal Westernized model of childhood and the agency it endows require interrogating. The rather unique space of anime offers fascinating ways to contribute to such theorizations. Anime is rooted in East Asian cultures – for *Akira*, specifically Japan. Such cultures are spaces where neoliberalism was not able to take such a massive hold in comparison to the U.S. and UK (Gee 2015). Visible in texts such as *Akira* are the traditional Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto values that continue to play a role in such societies, whereby the collective is frequently still privileged over the individual (Castro 2019a; Martinez 1998). As Martinez (1998) argues, anime has something to teach us about "Japan as a nation where the group is still important" (10). Rather than adhering to Western norms of actorship (Esser 2016), in *Akira* there is a profound focus on reciprocity, peer relationships, and interdependence. Agency is thus recognized, as I find true in other popular culture products about young people, as complex, fluid, interdependent, and expressed through relationships (see Clark 2019). The idealization of the autonomous child is thus recognized as a dominant discursive regime situated in a particular historical context of humanism, neoliberalism, and individualism (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie 2006). Reconfigured academic models of agency must consider how it is enacted in particular societal contexts, bound up in social relationships, and facilitated by normative assumptions

about child development, hierarchical adult-child relations, and, crucial to this chapter, gender.

The central characters in *Akira* are the child-like Espers (discussed in the next section) and Kaneda, Tetsuo, and their "Capsule" friends. The Capsules are adolescent young men in their mid- to late- teens (15 years and older). In contrast to popular Miyazaki works whose focus is usually on girlhoods, the majority of the characters in *Akira* are boys and men.[i] The masculine ideal, termed by Connell (1987) "hegemonic masculinity," provides a heterosexual, socio-politically dominant, physically strong, virile, and heroic image of being a man or "doing" manhood (Piatti-Farnell 2013). The term hegemony originates in Marxist discourse and here designates a motif of masculinity transmitted in persuasive cultural (and mediatized) ideologies and "popularised as common sense" (MacKinnon 2003, 9). Hegemonic masculinity is thus a dominant, socially and culturally reinforced ideal that stabilizes patriarchal power (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic discourse is, to some extent, culturally specific; for the Japanese, the latter half of 20th Century masculinity was dominated by images of the salaryman (Dasgupta 2009). This "kigyou-senshi" – corporate warrior – embodies notions of the family breadwinner and disciplined worker crucial to the rebuilding of the nation state (Izuhara 2000). This figure of the suited, white collar office worker, executive, or businessman is the posterchild of Japan's economic transformation post-World War II (Dasgupta 2013). However, economic turmoil in the 1990s, which emerged at the turn of the decade (and is the point when *Akira* was being developed in both manga and anime form), destabilized dominant salaryman discourse. This period of economic turmoil meant that hard work and jobs for life were no longer a certainty (Napier 2005). In tandem, previous raw economic successes of Japan led to fears regarding the growing power of the military industrial complex and the demise of traditional Japanese cultural values and social structures such as family, loyalty, and self-sacrifice (White 2002).

While work remains central to notions of masculinity, notably the particular masculinity of Japan, for many younger men normative, traditional employment models may now be undesirable or perhaps an impossible option (Dasgupta 2009). Despite this shift in realities of the job market, the most dangerous categorization for young men (and young women) in Japan remains being unproductive (Castro 2019a; Shamoon 2012, Wakeling 2011). This precariousness in education and the job market is certainly the case for Kaneda, Tetsuo, and the other members of the Capsules. Kaneda and Tetsuo have no identified family and flashbacks reveal they grew up together in an orphanage rather than in traditional and idealized family units. They now reside in a vocational training center or reform school, operating with an authoritarian regime that structures the boys' lives but which the boys give little attention or respect. The image of the school is one step away from formal juvenile detention or incarceration and mirrors the authoritarian tone of Neo-Tokyo more broadly. The boys care little about education and lack the desire to embody specific characteristics of ideal masculinity, such as perseverance or self-sacrifice, in this educational context (Napier 2005). They skirt a thin line of maintaining enough compliance to retain their places in desired classes (like Mechanics), instead devoting much of their time to their biker gang or bōsōzoku.[ii] This divided attention is, in itself, an agentic endeavor.

Images of Kaneda and his gang might be perceived as a simplistic representation of Japanese youth as parasitic or failure-prone (Cook 2013). In this labeling, young men are indulgent, ungrateful, and to blame (along with their parents) for Japan's perceived failures, or they are viewed as passive victims of economic development (and subsequent recession).[iii] Rather, I argue these boys are navigating structural constraints of schooling and authoritarian regimes in creative, imaginative, and social ways (see Dotson, Vaquera, and Cunningham 2015). They frequently attempt entrée into local bars, race around the city on their motorbikes, and engage in disputes with rival bōsōzoku as part of their group identity.

Bōsōzoku can be constructed as the manifestation of a new generational consciousness that poses a direct challenge to the dominant messages of Japan's work ethic or exists as a direct result of its decline and/or inaccessibility to many young men in Japanese 1990s culture (Standish 1998). As Willis (1977) argues regarding a similar time period in the UK, particular groups of "lads" navigate a classed structural system, and in the process draw on their own alternative aspirations, generating their own social codes to measure out alternate versions of success when dominant social norms become less attainable for contemporary youth. As Cohen (1955) argued, a person's ability to achieve depends on the criteria set out by other people in accordance with consensual view. A new consensus is established in the subculture of the bōzōsoku that subverts dominant societal perspectives, offering alternative routes to understanding, gaining, and maintaining success. Despite youth's efforts, the strong linkages between educational success, salaried employment, and masculinity in Japan mean that without success in these fields they risk not being seen as adults, as men (Cook 2013). Kaneda and the Capsules are thus not just a threat to themselves and their imagined futures, but to normative adult citizenry and profitability of the Japanese state (Cook 2013).

What is neglected in perceptions of boys and young men as failed citizens is a holistic understanding of the group dynamics and male friendships that play significant roles in all aspects of boys' lives. The importance of children's friendships to their processes of meaning-making is well-documented (Corsaro 1997; James 1993). Understandings of agency in terms of resistance to dominant cultures has also been well-explored in relation to analyses of subcultures; for example, studying displays of group identity, meaningful relationships/membership to groups, and the establishment of oppositional group norms and values (Becker 1963; Willis 1977). However, the application of friendships to understanding children's agency as an analytical concept is less interrogated. This void exists despite the significant value we place on friendships as a hallmark of good adult outcomes and happy

childhoods and adolescence (Buhrmester 1990; Calder, Hill, and Pellicano 2013; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Lotter 1978). Partial blame for this dearth of scholarship lies in the relative lack of evaluative work that adequately conceptualizes childhood agency. Responsibility also lies in the oft-unquestioned dominance of a neoliberal model of agency, whereby individual autonomy and actualization is prized over interdependent relationships and shared achievements (Castro 2019a, 2019b; Clark and Richards 2017).

Meaningfully, Kaneda's and Tetsuo's close relationship plays a key role in the film's narrative. Flashbacks of their time together in a children's group home depict Kaneda helping Tetsuo learn to ride and defending him when subjected to negative peer encounters and bullying. Indeed, even as Tetsuo can no longer contain his psychic powers and his physical form degenerates, Kaneda continues to work to save him. Tetsuo's actions challenge their friendship group; in his quest for answers he harms members of the Capsules and people in the city of Neo-Tokyo. Kaneda seeks out Tetsuo to enact revenge and help save the city, shouting "He's our friend. If anyone's going to kill him, it's us!" However, in Tetsuo's final moments, as his body metamorphosizes to amorphous blobs of ever-expanding flesh, Tetsuo calls to Kaneda for help. Their friendship is what spurs Kaneda's actions to save his city, his friends, and Tetsuo. This loyalty to one another is the context for Tetsuo's desire for redemption as he calls out regrets, apologies, and pleas to be saved. The formation of their friendship is what provides the boys with power and strength; it is the context within which their agency emerges and grows. Specific to understanding friendships in the lives of boys, Cook (2013) argues that explorations in masculinities (such as found in this chapter) need to move away from the individual and his subjectivity and pay more attention to romantic relationships, peer groups, families, and community relationships. Far from being a risk to the communities of Neo-Tokyo, it is members of the bōsōzoku culture and the strength of their loyalty in relationships that are friendship's ultimate saviors. Strength and agency in

relationships is not only found amongst young men such as Kaneda and Tetsuo of the bōsozoku. The child Espers also band together and play just as crucial a role in saving Neo-Tokyo.

While early scenes in *Akira* focus on Kaneda and his biker gang weaving through a city filled with neon lights, commerce, student protests, and indications of military rule, as the film's plot develops audiences are introduced to the Espers. As stated previously, Espers are psychic children created as a result of secret government experiments – they possess abilities of telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation, among others. Akira, the titular character, was an Esper whose powers became too great and who was ultimately responsible for the destruction of the city of Tokyo in 1988. This destruction is the opening sequence in the film, when a white light and subsequent black dome engulf the city. While the rest of the film takes place in newly formed Neo-Tokyo, what is left of Akira is stored in cryogenic canisters under the old, partly destroyed Olympic stadium to ensure the future safety of the city and to hide evidence of the failed experiment. Three Espers remain but are kept hidden away in a military complex in the new city. Kiyoko, Takashi, and Masaru have the bodies and voices of children with greyish-green, somewhat wrinkled skin. Their appearance as wizened childlike beings is a consequence of both the original experimentation on them and the regime of drugs they are fed so to restrict growth of their psychic powers in the attempt to avoid potential catastrophe. The head scientist (Dr. Onishi) and Military Colonel (Shikishima) are supervisors of this experiment and keep the Espers housed in a room known as "the nursery." This room contains many symbols of childhood itself; doorways have teddy bear surrounds, sketches of fairy tales (such as *Snow White*) decorate the walls, and children's toys adorn Kiyoko's lace-trimmed bed. This imagery of childhood is somewhat incongruous in an institution devoted to housing military personnel and scientific experimentation. The Espers conjure images of children and childhood as both Dionysian and Apollonian (Jenks 1996). This nursery signals

child containment since the Espers pose a risk of exposure and destruction, and thus are perceived as a group that needs controlling. Their representation as perpetual children positions the Espers as innocent beings in need of protection from a dangerous and corrupt outside world. Colonel Shikishima embodies structure and control as he variously discusses the risks their experimentation poses in the context of previous devastation and the need for the Espers to be kept safe. Such imagery of children positions them as passive, in need of either protection or control. However, *Akira* challenges this vision as the Espers' psychic and affectual connection with Tetsuo and each other provide the context for agentic action. As the Espers' connection with Tetsuo grows and they begin to feel the risk his powers pose, they state, "The thing about Akira's power is that it exists from the start…we have to choose wisely how to use it. Tetsuo is our newest companion and our friend; his actions are out of control and we are partly to blame."

As Corsaro (1997) argues, sociological theorizing about childhood must "break free from the individualistic doctrine" (18). Corsaro's (1997) theories of interpretive reproduction shift children's development from individual internalization of norms, values, and skills into a realm wherein children's innovative and creative work is valued for its active and collective contribution to cultural meaning-making and social change. In making sense of the world around them, children and young people collectively interpret, produce, or reproduce knowledge in their peer worlds and cultures and, in doing so, contribute to wider society (Corsaro 1997). The emphasis on peer cultures in Bill Corsaro's entire body of work is pertinent to discussing *Akira*, given that the film recognizes children's action, the construction of meaning, the development of skills, and the enactment of agency. Indeed, in the final scenes of the film set in the old Olympic stadium, Kaneda and the Espers frantically try to save Tetsuo, the city, and each other. While the Espers have their powers tempered by medication in order to control them and the risks they pose, they believe that by working

together they can generate enough power and energy to meaningfully act. As light begins to fill the stadium, Kiyoko (the girl-Esper) seeks to save Kaneda, shouting, "None of this is his fault!" Kiyoko continues, "If we went in there [referring to Tetsuo's monstrous form], we wouldn't be strong enough to come out. If all three of us try together maybe, we will be strong enough to face that boy." Ultimately, it is the relationships and connections between the Espers that generate the power required to meaningfully act and effect change. Giddens (1991) argues that the contemporary Western self is an eminently social and relational entity, reflexively constituted through processes connecting the personal to the social. Through their connections with each other, along with Akira and Tetsuo, the Espers are able to act outside of the military authority within which they were previously ensconced. Navigating the bio-political structures that seek to control them, it is not the Espers' raw power or their extra-human abilities but their social relationships that ultimately prevent total destruction of their city.

Relationships between the young characters of *Akira* are at the heart of the film's narratives, and these friendships and connections are powerful facilitators/conditions of the enactment of agency. However, the importance of relations between people are rivaled by the importance of "things" present in *Akira*'s central characters' lives. Kaneda's motorbike, the Espers' hovercraft, military drones, and, indeed, the architecture of the industrial complex and the new and old cities provide context and underscore the meaningful relations between central characters throughout *Akira*'s narrative. The characters form significant relationships with various material objects and endow these items and structures emotional importance and meaning, deploying them as part of their agentic action (Corsaro 1997; Miller 2010). An increasing range of post-structural and post-humanist theorists are turning their attentions to the entanglement of human and non-human agents (Whatmore 1997). The potential for post-humanist perspectives to radically alter the hierarchies of humanity and embodiment,

attending to materiality, are gaining significant traction in a variety of disciplines (see Braidotti 2013; Goodley, Runswick-Cole, and Liddiard 2016). However, these approaches have received relatively limited engagement in the field of Childhood Studies, with the notable exception of Prout's (2000, 2005, 2011) work on bodies and hybrid childhoods and Nieuwenhuys (2011) work on teddy bears. Prout's (2005) arguments are salient here, as he pointedly discusses the requirement to move beyond artificial dichotomies of agency/structure, nature/culture, etc. Instead, it is imperative to recognize the capacities and agency of children as not pitted against or replaced through, but extended and supplemented by, material artefacts and technologies (Prout 2005).

A powerful example of the significance of relationships with things and the role of agency can be found in the bōsōzoku culture more broadly, represented by Kaneda and the Capsules. Badges, insignias, boiler suits, and modifications made to bikes are common in bōsōzoku culture (Standish 1998). While these gangs might be perceived as destructive and anarchistic, bike modifications are part of the agentic resistance enacted by Kaneda and the Capsules. In this process, they refuse to accept the social identity proposed by the dominant ideology and the social control that accompanies it in future (now present) Japan (Fiske 1991). Adapting symbols of working class laborers, kamikaze pilots, imperial flags, and kanji slogans, bōsōzoku reflect youth cultures of resistance and, in doing so, destabilize myths of Japanese cultural homogeneity. This expression of "asobi," or play, is adopted by Sato (1991) in an ethnographic study of bōsōzoku culture, and while the study may neglect structural causes of bōsōzoku culture, it highlights the playful use of bricolage, whereby styles and ideologies are adapted and inverted to construct alternative identities (Standish 1998). The bōsōzoku style simultaneously allows for empowerment and pleasure; for example, there is a carnivalesque concentration on materiality and its signifiers (Sambell 2004; Standish 1998). Here, Standish (1998) provides an interesting parallel with the artist Madonna. Madonna, she

argues, turns herself into a spectacle, and by controlling the image of the self, the performer denies the audience the position of voyeur. Kaneda and his Capsules, I argue, participate in a similar process – by utilizing visual markers of their subcultural style and positionality, they facilitate a degree of empowerment and agency in their society. By controlling "the gaze," the boys' identities are no longer fixed by external socio-political discourse and mechanisms of control; rather, they generate control in their post-industrialist consumer society, wherein image and identity are no longer static but open to be played with (Mulvey 1992; Standish 1998). Thus, just as happens in the Carnival, Kaneda and the Capsules are empowered by an inversion of the usual power relations found in "the gaze" and the act of looking (Garland-Thomson 2009; Mulvey 1992; Sambell 2004).

The youth in *Akira* have special relationships to technology and materiality which facilitate their agentic action – most notable reflected in Kaneda's iconic motorbike. This bright red racing bike has no attributed make or model but is by far the most technologically advanced found in the film. The bike's rounded exterior, reference to 200 horsepower,[iv] and electricity that crackles around it while it slides and drifts all place it as a powerful and empowering object; its persistent function in *Akira*'s narrative positions it as almost a character in itself. Though we are introduced to Kaneda in a bar, his first action, other than choosing a song for the jukebox, is to jump on his bike to ride with his friends. Riding through the neon lights of the city in frenetic scenes accompanied by a fast-paced soundtrack, the boys and their bikes contextualize the rest of the film. Indeed, the entire structure of *Akira* is reminiscent of a "bozo drive"[v] (Standish 1998) with the fragmentation of narrative, aesthetic spectacle, and frantic score peppering the roar of loud, modified exhaust systems. The boys' bikes facilitate independence, enhance and extend mobility, and lend a sense of freedom and feeling of empowerment (Bellaby and Lawrenson 2001).

[INSERT Figure 4.1 HERE]

Caption: Kaneda's iconic futuristic motorcycle: *Akira* (1988).

Kaneda's bike, with its technological advancement, appealing aesthetic, and empowering positionality, has become an iconic image within global popular culture. Images of it can be found in the 1980s inspired film *Ready Player One* (2018), and it otherwise has inspired many animators and filmmakers to recreate its iconic slides and drifts (Shambrookblog 2018). Fans readily consume attempts to create real-life models of the bike, and the racing scenes through the streets of Neo-Tokyo played an inspirational role in Kanye West's music video "Stronger" (Dickey 2009; K. Clark 2018). Even when Kaneda's bike is not accessible to him, the skills generated from it are evident; for example, when he breaks into the military complex to rescue Tetsuo. Kaneda finds a drone in his attempt at rescue and escape. He quickly learns to control and fly this drone so to escape Tetsuo's powers that are destroying the complex. Kaneda's skills – developed through his motorbike – allow him to quickly and expertly navigate the sleek, red drone object for his own ends. Upon his escape, Kaneda returns to his bike and it plays a powerful role through the end of the film. In the final scene of *Akira*, Kaneda weaves around Tetsuo's changing form, dodging Tetsuo's powerful reach, proving his skills in riding and using the bike to extend and enhance his own abilities. The bike itself is not agentic, nor is it represented as such in *Akira*; rather, as Nieuwenhuys (2011) argues in reference to the agency of teddy bears, this mobile material object enables and extends Kaneda's self. The bikes of the bōsōzoku do not just symbolically represent an identity or a friendship without extending any further role or meaning; instead, these items are part of the formation of close relationships.

In science fiction, things are the locus of values because we experience them as sources of power (Standish 1998). Related, Corsaro (1997) points out that rather than being

somehow independently "powerful," consumer artefacts and experiences are embedded in myriad ways within children's peer cultures. Such collective actions contribute to innovative friendship cultures and are vital to cultural reproduction and change (Corsaro 1997). Coombs (2017) makes extensive use of children's material cultures in her research on young people's perspectives on death. She discusses the importance of physical mementos in dealing with death in everyday life, encouraging young people in her research to bring household "stuff" to "travel back and forth across the topic of death" (Coombs 2017, 75). Common views about the corruption of childhood from material and consumer cultures can blind us to broader analyses of agency and youth empowerment through their relationships with material "stuff" (Miller 2010). Thus, I argue that Kaneda's bike and the bikes of all the Capsules serve to shape and provide context for the emergence and enactment of agency. This material and mobile item offers opportunities for strength, loyalty, resilience, and power. *Akira*, in this reading, encourages recognition of agency as not owned by the individual but emerging through interplay with material culture (Cetina 2001). As Turmel (2008) argues, "a child's agency is not the property of a subject, but rather is derived from a distributed network of subjects, bodies, materials, texts and technologies" (33-4).

Interplays between humanity, material culture, and technology are not always positioned in emancipatory or giving ways. Indeed, in *Akira* experiments conducted by the military-political regime are positioned as responsible for the demise of past Tokyo, once again threatening the city of Neo-Tokyo in 2019. Science fiction's posthuman futures are commonly both celebrated and feared (Miller Jr. 2012). Tetsuo's character and all the child Espers can be viewed as examples of the fragility of humanness, highlighting to us that the boundaries generated around the human are somewhat illusory. When boundaries between man and machine break down, techno-terror is unleashed, generating fear and reaffirming the need for the human to remain an isolated, bounded being (Gee 2015). Tetsuo represents the

end of the human subject and new forms of subjectivity. The beginnings of Tetsuo's bodily changes happen in the final scenes in the stadium of the old city. Suffering from his ongoing fight with Kaneda, Tetsuo psychically generates a biomechanical arm to replace the one he just lost. As he sits on a stone chair, his arm begins to meld with its surroundings and his metamorphosis begins. This transformation quickly escalates, and the past recognizable human form of Tetsuo becomes a mass of pink flesh, blue veins, and raw nerves, with eyes rolling through the various mounds.

[INSERT Figure 4.2]

Caption: Tetsuo's monstrous form becomes uncontrollable and unbounded in the old Olympic Stadium: *Akira* (1988).

The collapse of bodily boundaries undermines dominant post-Enlightenment definitions of selfhood (Lawton 1998). This process situates *Akira* as a cyberpunk text that addresses human and machine hybridity (Roberts 2010). Cyberpunk itself is defined as a "literature of anxiety regarding the consequences of technology invading the body," with the cyborg[vi] a prominent feature of cyberpunk science fiction (Vint 2010, 101). One reading of *Akira* includes the central terror of Tetsuo, the Espers, and the destruction of whole cityscapes. In this reading, fear of technology, post-nuclear militarized nation states, and capitalist corruption is dominant, and the film becomes a warning of potential destructive futures. Alternative perspectives in posthuman thought, such as that presented by Haraway (1985), offer different, less pessimistic potentiality, highlighting intermingling human and technology possibilities, wherein transgressive hybrid creatures can subvert traditional dichotomies of nature/culture, agency/structure, etc. (Clayton 2013). Here, the impossible bodies found in anime challenge our conceptualizations of what it means to be human. Yes,

Akira's teen bodies destroy, but, importantly, these posthuman forms and assemblages creatively and energetically express their refusal to be contained by geo-political structures found in the adult world (Rutherford 2004). Animation allows for bodies to erupt, explore, fly, and roar – to do the impossible; Tetsuo's descent (or, indeed, ascent) into pure narrative space offers alternative futures troped onto the body of the teen (Rutherford 2004). *Akira* is of two minds as the film comes to a close. The collective action of the Espers contains Tetsuo and while there is destruction in Neo-Tokyo, the closing scenes leave us with the bounded body of Kaneda. In this sense, *Akira* gels with perspectives which argue that in representations of the posthuman, we can rediscover humanity and the power and agency of human beings (Gee 2015). An alternative reading, however, emphasizes the enduring nature of Tetsuo. Tetsuo's human body is destroyed and he transcends to a state of consciousness, a force or energy beyond human physicality. In this new form of humanity, posthuman possibility is realized. *Akira* leaves future existences open to interpretation, but the film can be read as the end of the subject as we know it, allowing for new variations of agency to come to the fore. As the Espers reminded us as Tetsuo began his transformative journey:

> "Humans were once like monkeys, right? And before that we were like reptiles and fish, and even before that plankton and amoebas…What if there were some mistakes in the progression and something goes wrong, like an amoeba is suddenly given the powers that a human has…all that energy."

The Espers go on to say that power "Exists within everyone from the start…but when that power is awakened inside it is important to wisely choose how to use it." Such posthuman possibilities are thus firmly rooted in the hands of the young. Adults in *Akira* are largely presented as corrupt capitalists or political figures, generating and participating in a political and industrial system for their own gains regardless of the destruction their actions caused in the past, causes in the present, or may cause in the future. As in other science fiction works,

the child or young person is presented as incorruptible in the face of an unfair adult world (Neustadter 1989). Elements frequently and strictly attributed to adults – superior states of knowing and the bringers and primary sources of moral superiority – are dismantled. As in other dystopian science fiction literary/filmic works such as *Mortal Engines* (2001/2018), *The Hunger Games* (2008/2012), and *Divergent* (2011/2014), adult status, political authority, and ideological principles are all questioned and transgressed; in *Akira*, human and posthuman legacies are left for audiences to contemplate. A carnivalized future is presented with new perceptions of adult-child relationships, human and posthuman existences, and forms of agency.

Akira's 2019 setting, its transcendence from Japanese popular culture to widespread popularity in the West, and its continued cult following three decades later marks it out as a filmic text worthy of reanalysis. While *Akira* has been subject to academic discourse regarding body horror, post-nuclear societies, and the technology of anime itself, agency (specifically agency as it intersects with both age and boyhood) is a neglected field of analytic framework. This chapter endeavors to contextualize how masculinity, childhood, and agency collide in this iconic science fiction cyberpunk film. The impossible posthuman surround of anime and its intersection with the bodies of adolescents, defined by change and transition, offer powerful opportunities for understanding the agency of young boys, young people. The evocative imagery of Tetsuo in his unruly, uncontained form is symbolic of young people's relationship with untold futures – in such post/human and technology assemblages, uncertainty and fear may germinate (McCrea 2008). While the film may be a warning of the role of technology, capitalism, and the industrial complex in our future (now present) lives, it can also be viewed as testament to the creativity, energy, and agency of the young working together to harness technology's abilities or, indeed, to protect humanity from technology even as they embrace its elements in their own peer cultures. While technology

destroyed Tokyo and now poses a risk to Neo-Tokyo, it also posits new questions about what it means to be human and possibilities offered through interminglings between the body and technology (Denison 2015). The powerful relationships between beings and things that generate action and provide the context for agency to emerge are central to *Akira*. Debates about agentic young people and the future of nations and humanity (as in much other science fiction) are played out on bodies of the young. *Akira*'s boys are not simply anarchistic, mindless youth and the Espers are not simply innocent, powerless, child victims of military experimentation. Rather, all children and youth in *Akira* demonstrate the flexibility to engage in social and political resistance and, by embracing new technologies and posthuman possibilities, agency can and does emerge.

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Notes

Appendix B

Clark, J. (2018) "Speddies with Spraypaints": Intersections of Agency, Childhood, and Disability in Award- Winning Young Adult Fiction, in Castro, I.E. and Clark, J. (eds.) *Representing Agency in Popular Culture, Children and Youth on Page, Screen and In Between*, Lanham, MA: Lexington, pp. 133-156

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From object of ridicule to burden and from curio to evil villain, a range of commonly recurring and damaging stereotypes traditionally dominates representations of disability in popular culture (Barnes 1992). As Ellis and Goggin (2015) argue, "there is good reason to take seriously the notion that representation is intimately involved in the policing of how we relate to disability, and indeed what is accepted as normal" (84). These media tropes are part of the material that children and young people have to work with in negotiating their own performances (James 2000). Perhaps the most dominant of all of these representations is passivity, which fails to endow agency to the disabled character. This portrayal is found in supervillains driven to insanity by accidents, which causes their disability; for example, Two-Face in the Batman franchise. Alternatively, it is seen in the vulnerability, marginalization, and dependence attributed to John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* (1980). Despite the differences in these characters, the result is the same: disability overrides the person, their autonomy, independence, and personality; thus, their potential for action and/or agency. Young people consuming such material are confronted with ableist discourses, whereby disabled bodies and minds are framed as icons of deviance, accentuating the otherness

through which disability is defined (Donnelly 2016). In response to such criticisms, numerous efforts have been made to recognize and celebrate so-called "positive images" of disability and disabled people (see, for example, Curwood 2013; Dyches, Prater, and Jenson 2006). For many, the primary mechanism by which disability is learned about and understood is popular culture (Snyder and Mitchell 2001). Children's and young adult's literature operates as both a window onto the social world and a mirror for the individual, revealing the discursive construction of disability (Blaska 2004). In response to the absence of positive disability imagery and accompanying damaging stereotypes, a slow but steady stream of more inclusive literature is emerging (Keith 2004). This chapter interrogates two examples of popular cultural texts that received recognition for their representations of disability and young adulthood. Such texts produce meanings that allow individuals to make sense of disability within their everyday experiences (Clark 2018). Thus, critical consideration of the agency endowed (or, indeed, not) to young people with disabilities within such cultural forms is vital in understanding the subject positions made available to young people from which they are able to speak or act (see Foucault 1972). The construction of these subjectivities is not one-sided, and young people can and do "talk back" to such representations, but these imaginings nonetheless provide a frame by which individuals understand themselves and their places in the world. As theoretical arguments emerge in the academy regarding how childhood agency should be conceptualized (see Castro 2005; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Raby 2014; Richards, Clark, and Boggis 2015; Twum-Danso Imoh 2013), here I ask: what kind of agency (if any) do young characters embody in young adult literature and how do such understandings of agency intersect with constructions of childhood and disability?

Award-Winning Young Adult Literature

The honoring of children's and young adult books through awards is not a new endeavor. The Randolf Caldecott Medal is awarded annually for distinguished picture books and the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award biennially recognizes "authentic" portrayals of individuals with developmental disabilities (Dyches, Prater, and Jenson 2006; Gray 2004). There are, of course, many other examples available; however, this chapter focuses on an analysis of two recent recipients (2015 and 2018) of the annual Schneider Family Book Award. The Schneider Family Book Award (SFBA) is part of the American Library Association's Media Youth Awards and honors an author and/or illustrator for a book that "embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences" (American Library Association 2018). Three awards are presented annually for children's books (aged under 10), middle school (age 11-13), and teen readers (age 13-18). Upon the first presentation of the award in 2004, the namesake and donor Dr. Katherine Schneider highlighted the central tenet of the award: that "the disability experience…is part of a character's full life, not the focus of the life" (Schneider Family Book Award 2014, 3). The criteria articulated in the judging manual suggest that disability should not be pitied, exaggeration and stereotypes are to be avoided, and, crucially for my current analysis, the person with a disability is integral – "not merely a passive bystander" (Schneider Family Book Award 2014, 6). This chapter critically evaluates what a lack of passivity actually means in representing disability. How is agency configured and understood within such award-winning literature and how might such understandings serve to further theoretical conversations about the agency of disabled young people?

The SFBA award winners considered here are from the young adult category and include 2015 recipient – *Girls Like Us* by Gail Giles (2014), and 2018 recipient – *You're Welcome Universe* by Whitney Gardner (2017). From these titles, the diversity of disabilities

represented is immediately evident. Gardner (2017) explores deaf and hearing cultures through her central protagonist, profoundly deaf Julia. Julia's expulsion from a school for the deaf leads her to enter a mainstream school, forging new friendships and developing her identity as a deaf individual, a young woman, and an artist. Giles (2014) provides a powerful fictional account of intersecting discriminatory divides and the interplay between race, class, gender, and intellectual disability in the lives of Biddy and Quincy. This pair forge a meaningful friendship in the face of abandonment, exclusion, and rape.

As found in SFBA award winning books, disability in the lives of children and families is an encompassing term, bringing together mental illness with emotional, intellectual, and physical disability under a broad umbrella. The central characters of both books are young adults: Julia (Gardner 2017) is in her last years of schooling, and Biddy and Quincy (Giles 2014) just graduated from their school's special education program.[vii] Both books are written in the first person; therefore, the stories are told from the viewpoint of central protagonists. This narrative is singular for Julia in *You're Welcome Universe* and oscillates between Biddy and Quincy in *Girls Like Us.* Such first-person narrative styles facilitate a window into the internal processes of the central characters. Readers are able to vicariously experience their actions but also hear the inner workings of their hearts and minds. Thus, these books offer an interesting opportunity to reflect upon the ways agency is attributed to and enacted by young characters with disabilities – characters who traditionally are not conceptualized as agentic beings (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2013).

Agency, Disability, and Childhood

The academic study of childhood was traditionally dominated by the positioning of children as objects of concern rather than persons with voice (Prout and Hallett 2003). Placed in sub-disciplinary silos such as Developmental Psychology or Sociology of Education (particularly when intersecting with disability), theoretical analyses of childhood was limited to adult perspectives. In this framework, performance, growth, or behavior were the units of children's measurable successes or failures, often through standardized tests like the Binet-Simon Scale (Thorndike 1916). In this process, models of linear maturation combined with philosophies of innocence and unknowingness to position children as vulnerable creatures with limited, if any, ability to meaningfully contribute to their own lives or wider cultures (Kehily 2012). Thus, children were understood as adults in waiting, their role relegated to quietly learning the skills and duties of the adult – notably, the individual, responsible, and autonomous ideal citizenry of contemporary neoliberal societies (Raby 2014). In many Western cultures, from the 1970s onward, a powerful and persuasive rights discourse swept through the social institutions of childhood (Clark and Richards 2017). Originally championed by academics such as Alanen (1988), Corsaro (1997), Prout and James (1997), and Qvortrup (1994), the "new" Sociology of Childhood positioned children as active beings in their present state, rather than limited only to their potential as future investments in adulthood. Here, agency was a key and transformative concept, whereby children were constructed as rights bearers, knowledge holders, and experts in their social worlds. As a result, children were thought of as agentic beings with the capacity to be active in their own and wider cultures.

While claims can be made that the voices, participation, and general positioning of children in society has improved, or at the very least become more visible, disabled children's profound lack of visibility has been subject to longstanding critique (Curran 2013). The dominance of the medical model, whereby disability is conceptualized as a problem of the

individual to be fixed whenever possible, is partially to blame. However, accompanying the above 1970s ideological shift, the social model of disability began to gain traction, particularly in the United Kingdom. This development heralded a seismic shift in attention away from deviant bodies and minds to the larger disabling physical, social, and cultural environments of all people (Clark 2018; Oliver 2013). Despite the increased emphasis on voice and participation of children more broadly, disabled children and their experiences continued to be marginalized. This continued lack of recognition has prompted recent development of a distinct sub-field, *Disabled Children's Childhood Studies* (Curran and Runswick-Cole 2014). Shaped by critical disability studies, post-humanist perspectives, and interactionist models of disability, a core aim of this approach is to understand and address the exclusion of children with disabilities in both the academy and public life (Goodley 2013; Goodley, Runswick-Cole, and Liddiard 2016; Shakespeare 2006). In this work, the tyranny of the "normal distribution curve" is highlighted as children are regularly syphoned off into categories of "normal," "abnormal," "universal" or "special" (Burman 1994, 22).[viii] These categorizations cause social construction of "otherness," with exclusionary and discriminatory results (Said 1993). Thus, even as positive shifts in children's rights discourses and theorizing about children as active and agentic gained prominence in scholarship (see Mayall 2002; Moran-Ellis 2010; Wyness 2001), disabled children were still being measured against normative developmental frameworks. Therefore, it is no surprise that disabled children's voices still remained overwhelmingly hidden (Franklin and Sloper 2009). Even in studies where disabled children are constructed as having some agency (for example, their voices are sought in research), their participation and action remains focused upon their disability, largely centered on service provisions and evaluations, not extending to their wider lives or broader cultures (Abbott 2013). This myopathy exists despite wonderfully creative examples of empirical research with children with disabilities within which agency is

clearly evidenced. For example, Davis, Watson, and Cunningham-Burley (2008) examine the active participation of disabled children in cultural production and their creative negotiation of intergenerational relations. Likewise, Brunnberg (2005) highlights the capacity of children with disabilities to construct and maintain friendship narratives. Notwithstanding these few works, a deficit approach to disability remains prominent, playing a large role in denying agency (in theoretical and practical terms) to disabled children. However, I argue that the definition of agency dominating often unquestioned Childhood Studies frameworks remains problematic for disabled children. Here, agency is usually understood in a neoliberal context where individual autonomy and capacity for individual action rule. In fact, despite its placement as a canonical concept, or, indeed, "cherished conceit," childhood agency is a radically undertheorized concept (Castro 2017; Clark and Richards 2017; Prout 2000; Segal 1999).

In James, Jenks, and Prout's (1998) seminal work *Theorizing Childhood*, children's abilities to actively contribute to their social worlds is a central tenet, an organizing feature of their manifesto for a new way of understanding children and childhood. Such was the popularity of this approach that the idea children have agency is now considered commonsense, holding natural and normative status in Childhood Studies (Clark and Richards 2017). The concept offered a radical departure from the ideas of dependence, irrationality, and unknowningness that previously dominated scholarship, but resulting academic enthusiasm frequently excludes close and sustained analyses of the concept and conditions surrounding its recognition in children. Despite agency's usage as part of child-centered methodologies and as a rallying point in contemporary Sociology of Childhood and interdisciplinary Childhood Studies, as Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) point out, it is not altogether clear what exactly theorists and researchers are rallying around.

The ‘new’ social studies of childhood and its associated participatory methodologies developed in a Western context is saturated in neoliberalism. This connection positions particular attributes in adult citizens as desired and privileged. Such attributes are subsequently prioritized for children to learn and come to also characterize the theorizing of childhood itself. Rational, autonomous individualism is a quality necessary for contemporary citizens, with economic participation as their primary focus. As Raby (2014) argues, children’s agency is “grounded within a broader context of neoliberalism, which favors…individual autonomy over citizen interdependence” (80). What is proffered here is, thus, an individualistic notion of agency that devalues collective identities and actions and artificially separates adults from children and children from other children (Langford 2010). I argue here and elsewhere (see Clark 2018; Richards and Clark 2018) that children with disabilities do not lack agency. Rather, modernity’s model of childhood and the agency it endows (or, in many cases, fails to recognize) needs to be interrogated. This chapter contributes to such theorizing by examining the ways award-winning young adult literature presents us with new ways of understanding agency, childhood, and disability that focus on reciprocity, relational agency, and interdependence. Instead of endorsing the myth of the autonomous and independent person, the characters and narratives in two SFBA award holders demonstrate how agency emerges in dynamic connections between social actors and specific contexts (Prout 2005; Wihstutz 2016). Here, agency is not connected to externally recognizable transformations shaped by the powerful action of the single individual; rather, it is recognized as complex, fluid, interdependent, affective, and expressed through varied relationships and in diverse contexts. Instead of continuing to follow norms of a Western model of actorship (Esser 2016), in these books choosing to do something is not necessarily evidence of agency, and failing to do something (or indeed choosing not to) is not necessarily evidence of an absence of agency. This chapter argues that the idealization of the autonomous

child is a dominant discursive regime situated in a particular historical context of humanism, neoliberalism, and individualism (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De-Bie 2006). Understandings of agency must be reconfigured to consider how it is enacted in being cared for, as well as doing caring, found in being vulnerable as well as capable, and bound up in resilience and reflection, facilitating critical questions of normative assumptions about child development and hierarchical child-adult relations.

Relational Agency and Disabled Young People: Biddy, Quincy and Julia

Friendships

In contrast to traditional models of individual, neoliberal agency, notions of action, happiness, reflection, and resilience emerge within the two SFBA winners not through solitary activity but largely within friendships. YA literature has a long history of prioritizing peer relationships in its character development and story arcs (Cornelius – this volume) and the presence is no less powerful here. Biddy and Quincy from *Girls Like Us* must live together when they simultaneously graduate from their school's special education program and the foster care system. Their social workers facilitate a live-in arrangement for the pair in an apartment above the garage in the home of the elderly Lizabeth. Here, cooking and cleaning for Lizabeth are exchanged for lodgings and presumed safety for Biddy and Quincy. Both girls self-identify as "slow." Biddy was born with undefined intellectual disabilities, described as "moderate retardation," reflected in her difficulty doing certain everyday things and she cannot read or write (Giles 2014, 2). Abandoned by her mother as a young child, Biddy was raised by her grandmother (who claims she can no longer afford to keep her).

Quincy has a brain injury as a result of being hit with a brick by her mother's boyfriend; the incident resulted in her being taken out of the family home and becoming a ward of the state. Both Quincy and Biddy are aware of their differences to other people. They identify as "speddies" – a nickname for special education – and, as Quincy states, "We understand stuff. We just learn it slow" (3). As the two spend time together in their new living arrangements, initial interpersonal friction transforms to respect and mutual care. While Quincy teaches Biddy to cook, Biddy teaches Quincy that not all the world is hateful. As they fight and bond in equal measure over the duck that nests in the garden, Lizabeth's meddling in Biddy's past, and sharing walks together, it is evident that Quincy and Biddy find strength in one another. When Biddy walks with Quincy to her workplace at a restaurant across town, she does so in protection, calming Quincy's anxieties. However, the walk itself supports Biddy's increased confidence to engage with the world in the light of past painful and abusive experiences.

The most powerful example of agency, evidenced in strength, resilience, critical reflection, and mutual support, comes when the two share harrowing accounts of sexual assaults. Biddy recounts her experience of being lured into a barn by a boy promising her candy; the boy's friends gang-rape her, shoving her pants in her mouth and spitting on her once finished. The first-person narrative and writing style, whereby the phrasing and spelling echoes the direct thoughts of the protagonists, gives the description of the rape a raw, unfiltered quality. Biddy's disclosure is in direct response to Quincy's experience that happens within the present-time narrative of *Girls Like Us*. Robert, a young man Quincy knows from her workplace, sexually attacks her in an alleyway on her way home one evening. In seeking to understand Quincy's ordeal, Biddy employs what is methodologically articulated as a feminist focus on reciprocity (Ackerly and True 2010). In giving part of herself, she seeks to know more about and experience parts of the other. When Quincy does not return on time from work, Biddy uses her newfound ability to navigate the journey to the

restaurant and her (proud) ability to tell the time, indicating the necessity to search for her. Finding Quincy's tied up, half-naked body, her head encircled in her own trousers, Biddy's own past horror prompts her into empathetic action. "I knew how she felt, I knew. I knew what to do. I couldn't go screamy. I had to stay easy. I had to help my friend" (Giles 2014, 140). Upon returning to their apartment, Biddy takes charge: "I don't think you're dirty, but I know you feel like it. You wash till you feel some better. I'll make coffee. You gonna drink it, and I'm gonna tell you what to do next" (143).

This kind of decisive action could perhaps be taken to be an example of neoliberal individual agency, whereby Biddy takes charge, effects change, and shapes the action in their home. However, the action is deeply embedded in relational and emotional ties and while Biddy uses her own experiences to take charge and direct action, she too comes to learn things from this encounter. Biddy's experience of being rejected by her grandmother after the rape that she experienced a few years prior prompts her to advise Quincy not to tell anyone else, notably Lizabeth or the police – Biddy cautions, "All of a sudden you're dirty and they don't want to get it on them" (Giles 2015, 142). Quincy does re-count her experience to Lizabeth and then, ultimately, informs the police. In doing so, Quincy attempts to protect Lizabeth and Biddy from threats made by the rapist. However, she is also teaching Biddy about the worth of all human beings – that Biddy and, indeed, herself are not worth less than "normal" people. Here, motivations for action are bound up with relational connection, and it is only through mutual and shared friendship that agency is realized.

The importance of children's friendships to their processes of meaning making is well-documented (Corsaro 1997; James 1993). The application of friendships to understanding children's agency as an analytical concept has been subject to less interrogation. This void exists despite the significant value we place on friendships as a hallmark of a good adult outcomes and happy childhoods (Burhmester 1990; Calder, Hill,

and Pellicano 2012; Gifford-Smith and Brownell 2003; Lotter 1978). Partial blame for this dearth of scholarship lies in the relative lack of evaluative work that adequately conceptualizes childhood agency. In addition, responsibility also lies in the often unquestioned dominance of a neoliberal model of agency, whereby individual autonomy and actualization is prized over interdependent relationships and shared achievements (Castro forthcoming; Clark and Richards 2017). For Biddy and Quincy, the formation of their friendship and their reciprocal processes of meaning-making are what provides them with power, strength, and resilience.

These award-winning books do not merely portray disabled young people's relationships with one another, but also demonstrate how agency emerges from diverse friendships. In *You're Welcome Universe*, central protagonist Julia's peer relations are complex and multidimensional, each providing her contexts within which agency emerges. In the beginning of the book, Julia is expelled from her school for deaf children as a result of being caught using graffiti on school property. This rebellious act is prompted by peers writing the term "slag" on a school wall, a message that is directed at her friend Jordan. Julia's loyalty to her friend results in her covering up the word with her own graffiti. However, Julia learns the difficulties of friendships when she realizes it was Jordan who divulged her actions to school authorities, resulting in expulsion, forcing Julia to enroll in a mainstream high school. Her identity as a deaf young person means she requires support in such a setting and is provided with an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, a local college girl, Casey. This relationship, despite their differences in age, has value for Julia. However, it is outside of this adult-mediated interaction that Julia meets her most significant friend, "Yoga Pants"' (YP). Although YP does not identify as deaf, she does experience the otherness Julia expresses. A former cheerleader who dated the popular boy at school, YP has issues with food and body size that emerge slowly in the story as her friendship with Julia

develops. YP's boyfriend ended their relationship because he claimed she had become too fat. This also damaged YP's social capital amongst her peers and her status shifted from one of near universal popularity to one of exclusion and marginalization. YP no longer existed within the successful romantic relationship that cemented higher status amongst her peers, and elements of her embodied self become problematized and "othered" (Frost 2005). Sharing similar feelings of "difference" at school is the impetus for friendship between Julia and YP. In this friendship, they help and support each other in action, emotional resilience, and strength. YP takes the time to learn elements of ASL beyond the typical hello and thumbs up that Julia feels characterize "hearing people's" efforts. In turn, Julia seeks to understand YP's emotional distress and supports her in dealing with unpleasantness and intimidation from peers. Both girls invest in the friendship, drawing on the practical and emotional support that close peer relations offer.

As Corsaro (1997) argues, sociological theorizing about childhood must "break free from the individualistic doctrine" (18). Corsaro's (1997) theory of interpretive reproduction shifts children's development from individual internalization of norms, values, and skills into a realm whereby children's innovative and creative work is valued for its active and collective contribution to cultural meaning-making and social change. In making sense of the world around them, children and young people collectively interpret, produce, or reproduce knowledge in their peer worlds and cultures and, in doing so, contribute to wider society (Corsaro 1997, 23). The emphasis on peer cultures in Corsaro's body of work is pertinent here, given that it recognizes children's action, the construction of meaning, the development of skills, and, indeed, the emergence of agency happen within relationships. Thus, in the example discussed above, Julia and YP act in ways that demonstrate commitments to their friendship and to themselves; through their friendship they contribute to their own development and to the wellbeing of the other.

Thus, agency is not a solely individual endeavor, whereby young people seek to further themselves and accidentally support others in the process. Rather, agency is relationally defined, and the young disabled people in these SFBA award winning books are strengthened, supported, and their identities further negotiated and given meaning within and through their peer relations. The characters of Julia, Biddy, and Quincy are firmly embedded with peers from which their agency emerges. Here, shared acts of social practice are sometimes acted out alone and sometimes together, but agency always builds on and develops from their relationships with others. These actions and attributes are sometimes for the direct benefit of themselves and sometimes for others, but neither is given priority over the other. Biddy and Quincy provide emotional and practical support to each other in a didactic relationship, whereby the success of each is dependent on and emerges from the success of the other. This is not to suggest a form of pathological codependence, which is constructed as problematic because it does not support prized models of neoliberal individualism. Rather, it is to suggest that all human beings, including young people with disabilities, rely on relationships for resilience, strength, action, reflection, and development, and it is from such contexts that agency emerges.

Young people with disabilities or non-normative bodies often report experiences of bullying and negative peer relations and encounters (see, for example, Laws and Kelly 2005). Stigmatizations of disability, rise in hate crimes, and negative peer reactions often become the focus of conversations about disabled children's peer relations (Green 2003; Petry 2018; Sherry 2010). However, research also identifies the positive impact of friendships in the lives of children and young people with disabilities. Morrison and Burgman (2009) suggest friendships are far from homogenously negative, and children acknowledge friends as supportive in overcoming isolation and offering defense in negative situations. The characters in these SFBA winners do not only experience idealistic friendships and they certainly

encounter negative reactions from peers. Julia is upset when her friend Jordan betrays trust when informing school authorities of her efforts to cover the graffiti; and Biddy and Quincy encounter and try to actively resist derogatory language (such as "retarded") from peers at school and family members. Clearly, even when peer relations are constructed as negative for the young people in these SFBA award winners, their experiences, action, and power are managed, and in tandem are constrained or realized in relation to others.

Relationships with Things

Notable in the two SFBA winning books is a focus on the characters' relationships not just with people but with things. Julia's spray paint and art practice in *You're Welcome, Universe* provides her with a space for the expression of creativity and for the forging of new friendships with others. In addition, Biddy's Dictaphone allows her to critically reflect on her experiences and share them with others. The characters deploy these material objects as part of their everyday agency. The characters form meaningful relationships with these material objects and endow them with emotional importance and meaning (Corsaro 1997; Miller 2010). An increasing range of post-structural and post-humanist theorists are turning their attentions to the entanglement of human and non-human agents (Whatmore 1997). The potential for post-humanist perspectives to radically alter the hierarchies of humanity and embodiment are gaining significant traction in disability studies (see Braidotti 2013; Goodley, Runswick-Cole, and Liddiard 2016). However, these areas have received relatively limited engagement in the field of Childhood Studies, with the notable exception of Prout's (2000, 2005, 2011) work on bodies and hybrid childhoods and Nieuwenhuys (2011) work on teddy bears. Prout's (2005) arguments are salient here, as he pointedly discusses the requirement to move beyond artificial dichotomies of agency/structure, nature/culture, etc. Instead, it is imperative to recognize the capacities and agency of children as not pitted

against or replaced through, but extended and supplemented by, material artefacts and technologies (Prout 2005).

Biddy's Dictaphone offers a powerful example of material culture's important positioning in the lives of children and young people. In recounting a memory from her days at school, Biddy notes that a friend in her special education class keeps a diary. Biddy is both curious and envious of the diary, but is acutely aware her lack of literacy abilities prohibit such an activity. On hearing her anxieties, Biddy's teacher provides her with a tape recorder to keep a diary, a place to share her feelings and to reflect on events and experiences in her life situations. Biddy uses the recorder for many years, keeping her boxes of tapes as one would preserve collections of written diaries. The recorder offers Biddy the ability to reflect upon her experiences and relationships in a way not available to her through writing. The recorder's importance comes into starker focus in the light of Quincy's attack. In the aftermath, Biddy is keen to know what happened so that she can help her friend, but Quincy can barely look at her, let alone share the gruesome details of the rape. Biddy collects her recorder, finds a tape, and records a brief recollection of the sexual abuse she was forced to endure in a bid to encourage Quincy to share and to know she is not alone. The Dictaphone acts as a mediator between the girls as their relationship continues to evolve to new, emotionally open, spaces not available in their relationships with others. Through this technology, the girls access the strength and resources they can offer one another. While the recorder could be used as evidence of increasing attention to self-analysis and self-regulation required of the ideal responsible citizen in late industrialized society (Rose 2007), it is deployed by Biddy and Quincy not just for introspective analysis of self but for the ability to relate harmful experiences to one another, an important form of communication to strengthen their friendship.

Art and graffiti, symbolized by cans of spray paint, is a powerful presence in the life of Julia in *You're Welcome, Universe*. Initially her reason for being expelled, art presents itself as a lifeline to Julia as she battles to get into the over-enrolled advanced art class in her new school. As Julia navigates her feelings about her old friend Jordan (she feels underappreciated and betrayed), she uses her graffiti, sketch books, and illicit art supplies to feel in control and express her emotional turmoil.[ix] Art also becomes a significant part of her emerging, and ultimately solidified, friendship with YP. Through the strength she gains from YP and her graffiti art, Julia manages to let her disappointing friendship with Jordan go. Toward the end of the novel, Julia collects the last of her supplies from her part-time job at McDonalds and, when doing so, bumps into Jordan. Jordan is crying because her latest boyfriend broke up with her. Julia is not mad; instead, she comes to the realization that Jordan is only interested in their friendship when she is selfishly in need. Julia states, "And when it does happen again…I don't want to hear about it" (Gardener 2017, 290). Symbolically, she grabs her backpack full of art materials and slams the door to return to YP. Julia's friendship with YP becomes more than mutual support for supposed "otherness"; as the book progresses we learn they have additional relational elements in common. Throughout *You're Welcome, Universe*, a competition emerges between Julia and an unknown graffiti artist. Every time Julia creates a graffiti piece around her town, it is added to or modified by this unknown source. Toward the end of the novel, it is revealed that this person is indeed YP, who, as it turns out, is a very experienced graffiti artist in her own right. After some faltering in their relationship due to YP's secret identity, Julia and YP emerge more solidified friends. Indeed, learning from each other about their art practice, and how to navigate the legal boundaries to their artistic expression, enables them to fully cement the friendship. The book closes with Julia and YP about to tackle their largest piece of graffiti art yet. Setting up tarps, sheets, and ladders, YP realizes she forgot to bring the art plans.

Communicating in near perfect ASL, she panics, but Julia calmly reminds her that they practiced this piece a thousand times. Julia is eager to get started on this powerful, shared, and symbolic mural they are creating for Julia's mother – Julia thinks, "I want all of our histories, YP's and mine, tangled up together on the wall, our wall" (290).

I wish not to present an analysis that is technologically deterministic, whereby technology is condemned or prized as universally negative or positive for the human condition. The Dictaphone is not agentic, but as Nieuwenhuys (2011) argues in reference to the agency of teddy bears, the material object is enabling and extending of both Biddy's and Quincy's selves. From the productive friendship they build together, agency can and does emerge. For Julia and YP, art practice and materials are not just symbolic gestures to represent a friendship, but are part of the formation of the relationship itself. As Corsaro (1997) points out, consumer artifacts and experiences are embedded myriad ways in children's peer cultures. Such collective actions contribute to innovative friendship cultures, vital to cultural reproduction and change (Corsaro 1997, 140). Coombs (2017) makes extensive use of children's material cultures in her research on young people's perspectives on death. She discusses the importance of physical mementoes in dealing with death in everyday life, encouraging young people in her research to bring household "stuff" to "travel back and forth across the topic of death" (Coombs 2017, 75). Common views about the corruption of childhood from material and consumer culture can blind us to broader analysis of agency and youth empowerment through their relationships with material "stuff" (Miller 2010, 144). Thus, I argue that the novels demonstrate how material objects serve to shape the agency of children and young people. For Biddy, Quincy, and Julia, these cultural items offer opportunities for reflection, resilience, and power. Therefore, these books encourage recognition of agency as not owned by the individual, but emerging through interplay with others and material culture (Cetina 2001). As Turmel (2008) argues, "a child's agency is not

the property of a subject but rather is derived from a distributed network of subjects, bodies, materials, texts and technologies" (34).

Relations of Care

Disabled children and young people's capacities have traditionally been under-recognized, treated as lesser and positioned as dependent, passive, and unknowing (Tisdall 2012). Childhood, as a phase of the life course, is traditionally conceptualized as free from responsibility, a space of protection, innocence, and care. Active, autonomous adult citizens are defined by their abilities to undertake the responsibilities of adulthood, to economically provide for and further themselves in private and public spheres. Children, on the other hand, are not to care; rather, they are to be cared for. Traditionally, this so-called dependence positioned children at the bottom of a hierarchical child-adult relationship. The additional needs or adjustments that may be required for functioning, wellbeing, and happiness in the everyday lives of children with disabilities results in perceptions of vulnerability, dependence, and a distinct lack of agency. While some call for notions of passivity and vulnerability to be replaced with notions of agency and independence, this standpoint ignores the realities of generational interdependencies and limits productive conversations about the value of dependency and care (Lewis 2003). This chapter, and the books it analyzes, echo existing work in Disability Studies and Childhood Studies that positions mutual interdependence as something to be recognized and valued, prompting reconsiderations of competency and interdependence (see Arneil 2002; Oliver 2013). Vulnerability and weakness do not necessarily prohibit agency. As Kitzinger (1997) notes in her analysis of girls' strategies to avoid or get through sexual violence in the home, perceived weakness (a

romanticized characterization of the child) enabled one of her interviewees to avoid situations where she would be at risk. The reconfiguration of agency as not mutually exclusive with dependence or vulnerability, an agency that can potentially incorporate weakness, provides a different analytic picture. In such reconceptualizations, all human beings are both carers and cared for in embedded relationships comprised of attentiveness and responsibilities toward one another (Esser 2016; Wihstutz 2016).

The relationships in these SFBA winners are interdependent. The elderly Lizabeth, whom Biddy and Quincy lodge with in *Girls Like Us*, is the girls' boss, a wealthy, older, white, middle class woman. At first, she teaches Biddy and Quincy about setting the table and sitting appropriately at dinner. These elements of the narrative support a hierarchical interpretation of child-adult relations. However, Lizabeth's desire to help leads to an awkward and painful scenario. The result of rape, Biddy became pregnant and was forced to give her newborn daughter up for adoption prior to the onset of the book. Reflecting upon this memory, Biddy decides she believes this was a good decision but it remains a painful element in her life. Lizabeth, trying to help, realizes who the baby's adoptive family are and invites the mother to tea. The mother, Mrs. Judge, is scared for her daughter and speaks to Biddy with contempt, warning her to stay away from her daughter, home, and family. After the encounter, Biddy and Quincy are simultaneously angry and sad. They admonish Lizabeth for making the mistake of inviting Mrs. Judge to meet Biddy. Explaining Lizabeth's actions to Biddy, Quincy states: "Maybe she meant to do a good thing, but she's a full grown woman and she ain't no Speddie and should know when right is right and wrong is wrong. It's hard knowing that real people can make mistakes just like girls like us" (Giles 2014, 194). Here, the girls reflect on the fluid nature of power and knowledge. The certainty of adult knowledge pitted against the construction of children with disabilities as unknowing, irrational, and dependent is lost as they experience the ramifications of Lizabeth's decision-making.

Lizabeth, too, reflects upon her actions and says to the girls: “I never meant that to happen. I’m a meddling old fool” (190).

Adult-child relations may be generally characterized by inequality, as children must act within adult-dominated social structures, but these relationships are also interdependent, reciprocal, and dynamic (see Alanen 2011; Castro – this volume; Leonard 2015). Whilst a relatively underexplored topic, some scholars devote significant attention to generationality in Childhood Studies and as an analytical tool for understanding children’s lives (see, for example, Alanen 2011; Leonard 2015; Mayall 2003) Most focus on the structuring of children’s lives through adult-child hierarchies (for example, see Mayall 2003). However, they also recognize the potential for children to participate in a form of generational exchange, whereby interpretations, perspectives, and wishes are understood and valued by all parties (Alanen 2011; Castro – this volume). This potential does not position children as theoretically or practically “in charge,” but recognizes that in relationships imbued with power, power is fluid in the Foucauldian (1995) sense. Children and young people with disabilities often have as much to teach and share with adults in their lives as adults do with these children. From Lizabeth, Quincy learns not all adults are bad and Biddy learns the conduct and composure to sit with good comportment at the dinner table . In turn, Lizabeth learns of the complexity of families and the need to speak and share, rather than to position oneself as “knowing better” when one really does not know at all.

Child-adult relational negotiation does not equate to automatic removal or endowment of agency to children. However, it does highlight the interdependent nature of children’s lives as they are socially bound up with the adults they depend on, live with, or share parts of their lives. Just as adults can respond to the needs of children in their lives, so do children respond to the needs of others through emotional work, negotiation, and care (Castro 2017; Mayall 2003). In line with Tronto’s (1993) conceptualization of care, neediness is presented as a

threat to autonomy. This supposed inversion of the power relations of child and adult is constructed as problematic to normative conceptions of both adulthood and childhood. The mother is positioned as failing in her duty to properly mother and the child is ousted from childhood (and the accompanying, discursively constructed, freedom from responsibility). However, Tronto (1993) positions care with the fundamental presumption that all individuals will, at some point in their lifecourse, be dependent on others. What Biddy, Quincy, and Julia demonstrate is that children and adults can and do develop relationships of attentiveness and responsibility toward one another (Wihstutz 2016). Children can find the role of carer as problematic (see Dearden and Becker 2000). However, children also find themselves invested with power in their caring roles (Jones, Jeyasingham, and Rajasoorya 2002). In this process, young people develop an ethical position, whereby they develop responsiveness to situations, recognizing the needs of family members or friends without fundamentally placing parent-child relationships or friendships into question while enacting help (Miller 2005). The ability of the three central protagonists to position themselves as belonging participants in effective and valued relationships characterizes the plot trajectories of the two novels explored here. These relationships reveal themselves as highly valued, places where care is both received and provided (Wihstutz 2016).

Conclusion

The rise of children's agency as a transformative concept in the newly-formed, 1970s discipline of Childhood Studies is without question. The recognition of agency and voice as attributes of childhood paved the way for creative and progressive accounts of children's lives, often in their own words and on their own terms. However, some have criticized that its

pervasive and unquestioned nature results in analytical dead ends (Coffey and Farrugia 2014; Wyness 2006). The application of these individualized neoliberal models of agency to the lives and experiences of children with disabilities is problematic. The elements of children's lives (or, indeed, adults with disabilities) that require dependence, adjustments, support, and intervention results in deficit model positionality. Even as disability rights and activism grows and as attention in the academy rises, young people with disabilities still grapple with assumptions about their capabilities, power, and agency (Oliver 2013). These young people also face an onslaught of popular culture products filled with visions of superheroes overcoming disability, vengeful disabled villains pitted against a wrathful world, or pitiable/pitiful victims (Clark 2018). As Hall (1997) argues, representations in popular culture are powerful in shaping ideologies that position particular subjects in particular ways. Thus, texts recognized as positive through literature awards are highly visible examples of how discourses come to be reified or challenged. While repetition of imagery plays a role in the solidification of discourse as truth, forward-thinking, award-winning literature can combat the cementing of so-called truths. These SFBA winners can, and do, trouble oft-adopted, problematic notions of disabled children's limited identities, power, and agency.

Since children are traditionally constructed as individuals lacking power and knowledge, power relations are critical to any analysis of agency. Their "powerless" position is thus dichotomous to the powerful, rational, agentic adult. However, increasing numbers of theorists are pointing to the negotiation between children and adults (see Castro – this volume). I argue elsewhere that making blind assumptions that adults are powerful and children are powerless is naïve and denies the creativity of children to navigate social structures for their own benefits (Richards, Clark, and Boggis 2015). Childhood and adulthood are intricately interwoven, and reducing discussions of agency to simplistic child-adult dichotomies is unhelpful, masking the potential to understand relationships between the

two and those accompanying contexts within which agency for both parties can and does emerge. I argue that children who are too often conceptualized as vulnerable can indeed respond to this characterization with empowerment. The assumed vulnerability of children coexists and is supported by notions of the innate innocence of the child. Discourses of childhood innocence have come to be regulatory tools by which child and adult subjectivities are shaped and child-adult relations are discursively governed (Robinson 2013).

Childhood itself is infused with a sentimentality and nostalgia that is largely built on this idea of innocence, and thus the innocent child has "become a figurehead for the ideals of Western civilization" (Robinson 2013, 42). Therefore, notions of childhood innocence and vulnerability, whereby the agentic adult is contrasted with the passive, unknowing, innocent child, underpin child-adult power relations. Thus, protectionist discourses have emerged, restricting children's access to knowledge and playing a key role in constituting political/legal policies and cultural practices which are all predominantly motivated by "the best interests of the child" rhetoric (Robinson 2013). Assumptively, innocence and vulnerability are viewed as mutually exclusive to the conceptualization of children as agentic beings. Alternately, as Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) state, through recognition of their own vulnerability, children come to make complex decisions in their lives. Vulnerability, in this sense, is not mutually exclusive with notions of agency, and, as witnessed in these two novels, a perspective that foregrounds care as an analytical framework draws attention to the interdependent and relational aspects of children's agency.

These books are ostensibly celebrated for offering alternative visions whereby disability is not tied to passivity and dependence; instead, disability is part of their rich, colorful lives. In addition, these SFBA winners provide alternative ways of imagining disability and the agency of young people with disabilities. Contrasted against neoliberal models of individualistic, autonomous agentic action, disabled young people fall short; for, as

Quincy points out, "we understand stuff, we just learn it slow" (Giles 2014, 3). However, these books also suggest an alternative way to theorize agency – children's agency can and does emerge in the context of relationships and interdependence. Through building connections with peers, adults, and material culture, the characters in these books grapple with the implications of disability, emerging romances, family troubles, and the strains, strife, and joy of adolescence itself. Raithelhuber (2016) suggests that agency can be "conceived as a complex, situational and collective achievement that is partly stabilised through other 'humans'" (99). Power, resilience, creativity, and action emerge not from the solitary individual, but from interdependent relations characterized by care. Thus, reconfiguring notions of care and dependence allows for more imaginative recognition and understanding of agency that encompasses the everyday lives of young people with disabilities and, indeed, all children.

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Appendix C

Clark, J. and Duschinsky, R. (2018) Young Masculinities, Purity, and Danger: Disparities in framings of boys and girls in policy discourses of sexualisation, in *Sexualities*, Vol. 22: Issue 7, https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717736718

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Introduction: 'the boys and the girls'

On the 4th May 2011, Conservative MP Nadine Dorries won a vote on the floor of the House of Commons for a Bill to go for further consideration, which proposed the compulsory teaching of abstinence in sex education to 13-16 year old girls in British schools. Such measures are necessary, she argued, because of the 'sexualisation of young girls', which leads them to invite inappropriate male attention through their fashion-choices and deportment (HC 4 May 2011, c679). In a later article in *The Daily Mail* justifying her decision to propose the Bill, Dorries cited in support 'the prodigious amount of academic research which proves that the over-sexualisation of our young puts them in harm's way' of the 'drip, drip effect'. Labour MP Chris Bryant, arguing against Dorries, stated that 'this is the daftest piece of legislation that I have seen brought forward. I agree about many of the problems that she has highlighted, and I will come on to those, but this is not the way to solve any of those problems. For a start, the Bill is just about girls. I said that I am not an expert, but it seems axiomatic to me that if we want to tackle teenage pregnancy, we have to talk to the boys and the girls' (HC 4 May 2011, c682). Yet such talk about 'the boys and the girls' has not occurred in policy or media texts in the years subsequent to this debate. Most saliently, it was largely missing from the debates in the House of Lords which ultimately led to the rejection of an amendment to the Children and Families Bill which would have mandated compulsory sex and relationship education in British state schools.

A parallel inattention to boys in discourses around sexualisation can also be noted in the academic literature. In their report of the Scottish Executive, Buckingham et al. (2010: 19) noted more generally that in contemporary society 'there is no discussion of the sexualisation of boys, but only of the effects upon them of the sexualisation of girls and women. This is a recurrent absence in the literature,

and in the wider public debate in this area, although it is hard to explain.' Garner (2012: 325) has concurred, noting that 'consideration of men and masculinities remains scarce or only thinly sketched across the field.' Recently, Clark (2013) has called for scrutiny of the 'lacuna which [the] sexualisation for boys appears to fall into'. Many theorists have highlighted the invariable invisibility of masculinity constituted as universal and natural (Beasley 2008; Gardiner 1997; Kimmel 1997;).

One of the reasons why it is 'hard to explain' the lack of attention to boys in discourses in sexualisation is that approached head-on, it appears that the focus on girls has no logic and is merely accidental. One might point to the trickle of research which is beginning to emerge on the increased visibility of the male body in contemporary visual cultures (e.g. Gill, 2009) and to sexuality and masculinity in relation to boys' fashion and embodiment (e.g. Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2013). However, we wish to propose that the tendency towards a problematisation of girls' fashion and deportment and the invisibility of boys within policy and media discourses on 'sexualisation' is a systemic effect of constructions of gender and sexual subjectivity. In our society, we shall argue, signifiers of feminine purity operate as a form of symbolic capital, a construction which is not attributed to boys and which is integral scaffolding for the depiction of a subject as threatened by sexualisation. To illustrate this explanation for the lack of policy and media concern regarding the 'sexualisation of boys', we shall make use of fashion and dress as useful sites of analysis (notably due to their significant presence within such documented concerns), and after setting out our theoretical position and frame, will examine an apparent exception to the rule: the *Papadopoulos Review* (2010). This review was commissioned in 2009 as part of the then UK Labour government's consultation entitled 'Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls' with the aim to consider how sexualised images and messages affect the development of children and the link between sexualisation and violence. The *Papadopoulos Review* sets out explicitly to attend to the sexualisation of boys, as well as girls, but ends up re-emphasising rather than analysing the gendered and classed discourses of sexualisation. Returning to the *Papadopolous Review* is useful because it indicates a moment at which a problematisation of the sexualisation of boys could have been triggered in the UK (and potentially elsewhere given its publication in the context of other reviews such as the American Psychological Association's (2007) investigation into the sexualisation of girls). This is particularly since attention to both 'the boys

and the girls' was specifically part of the remit of the *Papadopoulos Review* – but no trigger to prompt a more even analysis of gender and sexuality in policy concerns regarding sexualisation was pulled. This is, we argue, for specific sociological reasons to do with the ways in which subjects are assessed against the criterion of innocence.

Innocence and Class

A starting point for reflecting on implicit gender and class bias in the construction of innocent and sexual subjectivities is Foucault's genealogy of the family (Lenoir and Duschinsky, 2012). In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault ([1976] 1978: 122) implied that 'the 'conventional' family' was a middle-class ideal that was then imposed as a norm in the nineteenth-century upon the urban proletariat. His *Collège de France* lectures deepen this account by documenting how this norm operated differently between the middle and working classes, presenting the reader with Foucault as an incisive theorist of class. Foucault ([1975] 2003: 271) draws a distinction between "two processes of formation, two ways of organising the cellular family around the dangers of sexuality", one in the bourgeois family, the other appearing in the working-class family. Medical control first takes particular aim at the bourgeoisie, 'for the sake of a general protection of society and race', while judicial control is aimed more particularly at the working classes ([1975] 2003: 272; [1976] 1978: 122). Whereas in the bourgeois family Foucault identifies that the central concern is the desire of the child, which must be monitored to avoid perversion, in the working-class family it is adult sexuality which is constructed as dangerous. The curious implication is that two types of incest must be acknowledged as operating within nineteenth-century discourses on sexuality, depending on whether we are considering the bourgeois or working-class family. These two types of incest have two corresponding types of treatment: in the case of the bourgeois family, 'the child's sexuality is dangerous and calls for the coagulation of the family; in the other case, adult sexuality is thought to be dangerous and calls instead for the optimal distribution of the family' ([1975] 2003: 271).

For the bourgeois family, danger was perceived to lie in the abnormal personality which may result from problems or precociousness in the emergence of a child's sexuality, requiring the intervention from the medical field, and more precisely,

the intervention of psychoanalysis 'which appears as the technique of dealing with infantile incest and all its disturbing effects in the family space'. For the working-class family, however, what was considered dangerous was the 'incestuous appetite of parents or older children, sexualisation around a possible incest coming from above, from the older members of the family', resulting in social, judicial and police intervention ([1975] 2003: 272). The peasant who enters the city as a new member of the proletariat finds himself without institutional supports or systems of stabilising obligations. Foucault claims that in the nineteenth century, as 'the European proletariat was being formed, conditions of work and housing, movements of the labour force, and the use of child labour, all made family relationships increasingly fragile and disabled the family structure', leading to 'bands of children' unsupervised by adults and an increase in 'foundlings, and infanticides, etcetera'. Foucault argues that 'faced with this immediate consequence of the constitution of the proletariat, very early on, around 1820-1825, there was major effort to reconstitute the family; employers, philanthropists, and public authorities used every possible means to reconstitute the family, to force workers to live in couples, to marry, have children and to recognise their children. The employers even made financial sacrifices in order to achieve this refamilialisation of working class life' ([1974] 2006: 83). The ideal of the family would serve as a means of stabilising workers, through 'mechanisms like the saving banks, housing policy, and so on' (1975] 2003: 270). Within this family, a strict rule would be the segregation of the sexes and the generations, apart from the heterosexual married couple in the conjugal bed. On the basis of this class analysis of the family, Foucault makes one further point, arguing against the universality of the psychoanalytic theory of incest: 'there have been two modes of... the familialisation of sexuality, two family spaces of sexuality and sexual prohibition. No theory can validly pass over this duality' (1975] 2003: 273).

We would like to place this genealogy of representations of innocent and sexual subjectivities together with an observation by one of the participants in Buckingham and Bragg's (2003: 103) research on young people, sexuality and the media. Their 17-year-old informant, Ed, 'offered us an overview of the porn market' and the distinction that existed between 'class' or 'trashy' pornographic models: 'the innocent ones are always the best'. Even in pornographic images, the signifiers of 'innocent' femininity are a signifier of 'class'. Foucault's genealogy and Ed's remarks raise an important question: what then is innocence? Modernity as a historical epoch

has connected shifting perspectives on childhood innocence particularly with sexual and bodily inexperience and virginity (Vanska, 2012). Furthermore, Kincaid (1992) has suggested that 'innocence' can be thought of as an absence, primarily of sexuality. This alone is not an adequate account, as it cannot explain the class and gender alignment of innocence discourses (Duschinsky, 2015). By contrast, we regard innocence as not lacking content, but as hiding its content: a normalising training in femininity. Only those forms and processes that will contribute to the embodiment of an ideal adult femininity – socially, ethnically, morally, economically, sexually, culturally – are treated as unmarked characteristics of innocence. The observation of Buckingham and Bragg's participant needs to be placed in the context of the classed context of innocence discourses. Foucault's genealogy discerned the historical roots of this 'duality'; signifiers of innocence play a similar, but updated, role in neoliberal societies as a marker and facilitator of middle-class status for young women:

> Delay in age of marriage and also delay in the birth of a first child on the part of young Western women, are directly connected with their being able to come forward into the labour market...poor white and black young women alike are targeted by government because the higher rate of teenage pregnancy (set against the falling birth rate among older and better educated young women) is almost exclusively concentrated within this group. Middle-class status requires the refusal of teenage mother hood and much effort is invested in ensuring that this norm is adhered to (McRobbie, 2009: 85).

Paechter (2011) has described 'precocious sexuality' as a 'pathology around which moral panics are repeatedly constructed, and in which themes of dirt and pollution feature strongly. These pathologies are varied but cluster around an understanding that there has been a loss of childhood innocence' and include especially today 'concern about young girls wearing sexualised clothing'. The investment in the fashion and deportment of middle-class young women by the state, their parents and girls themselves, should be understood as the result of the capacity of innocence to serve as a species of 'symbolic capital' – cultural resources that serve to tacitly naturalise relations of power and stratification (Bourdieu, [1979] 1984:

382; [1997] 2000: 240-2). Possession of innocence, signified through clothing choice and deportment, bestows a quality of purity –which represents correspondence between the human subject and their originary essence. As such, defences of innocence – and the covert normalisation it enacts at the intersection of age and gender– are morally valorised as oriented and justified by the very nature of human existence. Though the purity of young women and children is taken to ontologically precede discourses regarding the threat they face by discourses on sexualisation, we would suggest otherwise. The threat of impurity to middle-class girls and the need to combat it are discursively produced through the problematisation of the distance of female subjects from their own essence – and particularly those who are not white or middle-class. The narrative of sexualisation as a corruption of the subject, located most visibly in fashion choices and deportment, can be useful to different discursive actors in presenting strategic explanations as to why in practice young women deviate from an imputed middle-class norm, constructed as their true and proper nature in an image aligned with early childhood (defined by QAA, (2014) subject benchmarks as 0-8years).

Purity and Inviolability

In contemporary Western societies, women gain social protections if they are perceived to be in line with the essence of femininity: either in the form of innocent children or as adults in monogamous, heterosexual relationships. Women risk losing their social protections if they are perceived to diverge in marked ways from this essence, and are marked as impure. Brown identifies the gender politics involved in this division between pure and impure forms of femininity:

> Operating simultaneously to link 'femininity' to the privileged races and classes, protection codes are also markers and vehicles of such divisions among women, distinguishing those women constructed as violable and hence protectable from those women who are their violation, logically unviolable because marked sexually available, marked as sexuality. Protection codes are thus key technologies in regulating privileged women as well as in intensifying the vulnerability and degradation of those on the

> unprotected side of the constructed divide between light and dark, wives and prostitutes, good girls and bad ones' (1995: 165).

Innocence has long operated as the paradigmatic 'protection code'. Some scholars have argued that this code is breaking down. They argue that it is imposed upon adult women as an erotic and subordinating signifier, and no longer serves as a marker of girlhood as children are forced to deploy signifiers of adult sexuality (e.g. Coy, 2009). Our position is that the protection code has become more complex but has not broken down. Young women are enjoined to display both innocence and sexuality, producing young femininity as a performative tightrope at best and a paradox at worst. Renold and Ringrose (2011), for example, have described the way in which the 'Playboy Bunny' icon may be mobilised by young working class women to mean both innocence and sexiness, though each sign appears to formally exclude the other. Renold and Ringrose attend insightfully to the strong intersection between gender and class, generally occluded and presumed upon by discourses on sexualisation, by treating social practices as strategies for navigating and managing the demands of competing demands and norms. In such an analysis, girls are neither cynically or innocently 'buying into' patriarchy, but mobilising the cultural resources available in the context of material and gendered inequalities in ways that are both normative and disruptive. In a Bourdieusian frame, innocence can be regarded as a *polyvalent* form of symbolic capital for women and girls, able to satisfy competing social imperatives of age and gender norms faced by a subject.

If innocence is considered as symbolic capital, to be 'invested' (Renold, 2005: 34) in by young women, this can be conceptualised using the microeconomic theory of intertemporal consumption choice, used to model aggregate decisions to invest their money or spend it between two periods - Time 1 and Time 2 (Loewenstein and Elster, 1992). Actors may be oriented towards 'investing' more time and effort in Time 1 into innocence if this promises to pay dividends in Time 2. Most notably, investment in representations of purity in adolescence, as opposed to interpersonal power or freedom of movement or taste, may facilitate access for young women to the symbolic and material rewards of middle-class life. However such an investment does not make sense for young women whose conditions of life do not suggest to them that they will be rewarded in Time 2 (Walkerdine, et al. 2001); moreover, authorities too will not be as concerned to ensure 'investment' rather than 'spending'

in such cases. Those who do not invest in the signs of innocence, as a marker of docile training in unmarked normalcy, can in turn be mobilised as the constitutive outside of proper, inviolable femininity (see e.g. Dobson, 2014; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Hasinoff, 2014; Ringrose & Renold 2014;). Young women, in this perspective, are mobilising the constitutively both normative and disruptive cultural resources of 'innocence' and/or 'desirability' to mark their performed identities, in the context of embedded material and gendered inequalities. The abject, violable figure of the 'slut' haunts these practices of the self, with discourses such as 'shamelessness' organising practices and identities of pleasure and threat at the boundaries.

So long as a boy has enjoyed a 'normal' upbringing, his departure from childhood's natural innocence over the course of his childhood is not seen as problematic. There are of course examples of public furores around the representation of young boys, an excellent example being the 1990s Calvin Klein advertising campaign explored by Vanska (2011). This, very quickly cancelled, campaign featured a black and white image of 2 young boys in Calvin Klein underwear (a pair of white boxers and white briefs) jumping and playing on a sofa. Concerns were raised about the sexual representation of these boys still within the discursive domain of early childhood. Particular attention was paid to the boy in the white briefs and the potential visibility of the outline of his penis (Vanska, 2011). The public reaction to this imagery clearly demonstrates that anxieties around the sexualisation of childhood do of course transcend girls to the fashion, deportment and representation of boys. This does suggest a change in the way the bodies of boys are seen, understood and assigned meanings (Vanska, 2011). Young boys are, like girls, readily thought of as sexually vulnerable and thus must work within the boundaries that signify innocence. We contend however, that this shifts in relation to boys beyond early childhood. After middle childhood, (generally defined as the period after early childhood and before adolescence) boys have no need to be encouraged to 'invest' in innocence rather than 'spend' on their sexual identity. This is because masculinity is already presumed to contain (hetero)sexual desire at least after middle childhood; its presence thus not a cause for concern. As such, some tensions parallel to the innocence/sexual tightrope for young women can be seen in the tensions for performing and dressing as a desiring (i.e. full) masculine subject whilst also investing in the 'feminised' capital of the primary school classroom – however, these are much less pressing already by secondary school (Skelton, 2002,

2012). So long as they remember to use condoms and are not clearly culpable of using force, adolescent boys' responsibility for (hetero)sexual self-management is finished in terms of the potential for stigma or threat. Thus, in contrast to women, men generally retain their *unmarked relative purity* and a *status of inviolability*, except in cases in which they have been situated as inhuman (Graham, 2006). This makes signifiers of male sexuality in public spaces unmarked and unremarkable, in contrast to what we call the *new sexual visibility* of young women, whose fashion, behaviours and movements are all the more salient and assessable due to the contradictory injunction that to be acceptable they must signify as assertive but not aggressive, successful but not square, sexy but not a slut.

The allocation of acceptability and unacceptability, and of sexuality and innocence, as properties of a subject are organised through codes which mark particular classed and notably for here, gendered subjects as particularly visible and assessable (Attwood, 2014). For example, Beasley (2008) draws upon the Australian 'Holden cars' advert to consider how stereotypical representations of both masculinity and femininity (which are also heavily classed) generate different societal reactions, with the former apparently invisible and the latter cause for public concern (Kizilos, 2006). As Beasley (2008:90) states stereotypes of sexualised femininity are demeaning to women but stereotypic masculinity 'could not possibly demean men'. Men's bodies and fashion can be marked – for example, regarding size (Monaghan, 2005) – but contemporary visual cultures and representation do not mark and question men's (hetero)sexual citizenship in terms that make sexuality a threat to them. In homohysterical (Anderson, 2009) cultures masculinity is perceived as a threatened by homosexual desire but it is not the presence of sex or sexual desire that is problematic rather its direction. Young male adolescents are assumed by themselves and others to be in dramatically less danger from heterosexual sexuality than young female adolescents (see e.g. Farvid and Braun, 2006; Kehily 2001; Korobov & Bamberg 2004;). As Wood (2005) notes, girls who played on the street, actively engaging in public spaces, were treated as having willingly put themselves at sexual risk as a result of not making the choice to play in the 'safe' indoors. By contrast, even sexual relations between female teachers and male students were generally seen by participants in Meyer's (2007) focus groups as morally acceptable and causing no damage to the young person, though some argued that harm might be caused if the age-difference were so great that the male could not be in control.

Indeed, if innocence and purity function as signifiers of approved femininity for the girl-child, in general signifiers of heterosexuality are understood as a form of symbolic capital for young men (Allen, 2013; Pascoe 2007). Sex and sexuality are considered as key sites where individuals 'become' masculine (Allen, 2003) and the imagery of masculine sexuality is one of natural, strong, unbridled and virile sexual knowledge and activity, existing in a constant state of readiness (Jackson, 2006; Phoenix and Frosh, 2001;). For boys and young men then sex is not considered a cause for concern rather a natural state, an assumed signifier of full, adult masculinity itself. The existence of erotic desire for the young male subject thus doesn't prompt the degree of anxiety that it does for the innocent and pure young women. That is unless the direction and object of that desire is constructed as inappropriate. Successful masculine status is tied to both heterosexuality and traditionally homophobia (Francis and Skelton, 2005). Research has identified that boys themselves are often complicit in policing heterosexuality (Connell, 2000) and as such anxieties about being gay or effeminate are central to why boys attempt not to stray far from the masculine ideal and risk being labelled as failed subjects. Barnes (2012) identified school boy humour, notably homophobic banter, as a key part of maintaining the boundaries of acceptable masculinity and as such power in male friendship groups (see also Fair, 2011; Pascoe, 2007;). This traditional theorising of masculinity and homophobia that emerged and then dominated studies of men and masculinity in the late 20th century is constrasted by contemporary evolutions in the field (see for example Arxer, 2011; Elliott, 2016; Ward, 2015). Theories of inclusive masculinity (see Anderson and McCormack, 2016) suggest that contemporary masculinities particularly for young men, are more diverse, less characterised by homophobia and involve increasing physical touch and emotional openness within male peer relationships. Despite this shift in the centrality of homophobia to the construction of hegemonic masculinity in conversations in the academy the biological essentialism that dominates many of the reports and reviews into sexualisation in minority world nations to date (of which Papadopolous is a central one) assumes heterosexuality as the default sexual subjecthood of citizens (see e.g. Barker and Duchinsky, 2012; Clark, 2013). Young men's sexual subjecthoods become a source of public anxiety or moral outrage not because they are 'sexualised', losing innocence or purity, as is the case for girls, but when their

‘natural’ sexual desires are ‘used’ inappropriately (perhaps with force) or are directed at an ‘inappropriate’ subject or object (by virtue for example of age).

Negotiating Purity and Inviolability in Fashion and Dress

Contemporary fears surrounding the sexualisation of girls as perpetual, potential victims of men’s supposedly natural and unstoppable sexual desire often centre on how girls present themselves with clothing, for example padded bras, bikinis or shoes with heels (Rush and La Nauze, 2006). Signifiers of purity, modesty and innocence have long pervaded social and moral debates regarding the clothing and dress of women and girls. Entwistle (2000) highlights the role of Christian doctrines in promoting modesty of dress for women, ‘a moral duty born out of Eve’s guilt’. Whilst men’s fashions could be considered highly erotic, with the rise of fashions for sizeable codpieces in the 16th century for example, it was predominantly women’s immodest displays, not the clothing of men, that prompted moral and religious condemnation. This began to shift in the 17th century and beyond with dress and the appearance of men associated with the image of a nation. For example Elizabethan society saw the rise of concerns about the effeminacy of young men’s dress with too much interest in ‘womanly things’ such as clothing and jewellery. Men represented their nation and should be above such a trivial thing as fashion. Thus concerns about male clothing considered the extent to which men embodied current cultural ideals of masculinity, and whether they had been tempted into effeminate ways, rather than the dangers posed to/by them of the sexual elements of dress.

Cole’s (2000) extensive explorations of fashion and clothing in relation to gay men highlight the role of dress as a signifier of masculinity and sexuality. Cole cites advice given to male homosexuals in Britain in the 1940s which suggests avoiding being ‘too meticulous in the matter of your own clothes’ or having ‘any extremes in colour or cut’ (2011:216). Indeed prior to gay liberation, gay male dress choice seemingly followed hegemonic male dress codes to avoid identification by mainstream society (Cole, 2014:14). Cole goes on to argue that this desire to appear masculine led to a rise in interest in the body amongst gay men that accounts for the rise of body-building and gym culture in the stereotype of the nineties urban gay male. Based on ethnographic research, Pascoe (2007) draws our attention to the ways in which discourses of male sexuality and clothing are also highly racialised.

For example during her US school based research with young men, she noted that careful attention and care of clothing and appearance among young white men would have resulted in the attachment of the fag label, questioning a subjects sexuality and/or masculinity. However, among young African-American men this was actually a signifier of masculinity and part of their relationship to a certain cultural or racial group.

McCormack's work (2014) usefully highlights the classed negotiations of masculinity amongst teenage boys. Although he argues that there is an increasingly positive attitude towards homosexuality across classes in his research in UK further education, his 2014 work highlights the classed nature of embodied interactions amongst young men. Despite a general expansion of gendered behaviours, including notably homosocial tactility he noted that the limitations placed by class on young men's interactions on social media and in nearby but often little accessed towns and cities. It is argued that this prohibits the emphatic support for LGBT rights and condemnation of homophobia (Anderson 2009; 2011) that was evidenced amongst middle class boys in McCormack's other research (McCormack 2014). Class in this instance results in less social and cultural capital amongst these young men as a result of restricted access to wider cultural discourses that esteem softer masculinities whereby, as one participant highlighted, the wearing of a t shirt with glitter (Anderson, 2014) would be deemed acceptable. Evidenced here is what Savage (2003) describes as the particular universal whereby middle class practices are regarded as good and alternative working class norms or capitals are marginalised (Skeggs, 2009). Thus class functions here as a parameter of privilege (Taylor, 2012) whereby working class young men struggle to accommodate decreasing cultural homophobia and increasing softer masculinities as they dress and perform their own everyday subjectivities. Indeed in McCormack's research the only time that homophobic language was used was in pertaining to a subject's physical appearance. In this case despite increasing acceptance of LGBT identities amongst all of the young men, the appearance, dress and comportment of some of the (working class) boys was still being assessed against, and thus performed in line with, (traditional) signifiers of masculinity that rely on heterosexuality.

Discourses of sexualisation, sexuality, clothing and dress are adopted, rejected, negotiated and reconfigured within classed and racialised frames of reference. Yet, it remains the case that in general signifiers of (hetero)sexuality

(however this is performed) are understood as a form of symbolic capital for young men (Allen, 2013; Pascoe 2007). By contrast, girls continue to be assessed by a standard of heteronormative 'innocence', not just during early childhood, as for boys but even as childhood comes to a close (Egan, 2013). For the female adolescent, the norm of retaining a state of purity even into sexual maturity requires a redoubled effort in self-regulation in order to achieve an acceptable performative identity. Sexualisation as the contamination of identity is always but a single step away, or potentially already present for those whose class context makes appeal to innocence as symbolic capital difficult or ineffective. However, for young men such an assessment is foreclosed, as they are perceived to already have been endowed with sexuality by virtue of their masculinity and for this to be natural rather than a contaminant. As a consequence, to 'sexualise' an adolescent boy is to give him a double-dose of masculine sexuality. And where masculine sexuality is perceived as predatory, sexualisation turns 'the boy' into a sexual predator on innocent girls - as in the *Papadopoulos Review*.

The 'sexualisation of boys' in the *Papadopoulos Review*

The *Papadopoulos Review* claims that 'femininity' has been subjected to 'hyper-sexualisation and objectification', whereas 'masculinity' has been 'hyper-masculinised' (2010: 3, 10). A 'double standard' for sexuality between men and women is encoded through the 'hyper-' prefixing both terms, which allows discursive constructions of the respective essence of each gender to be covertly produced, precisely via representations of what is being added to this originary state. The *Papadopoulos Review* assumes that boys are already 'masculine' by virtue of being males, and become more so through 'sexualisation'. Other reviews of 'sexualisation of childhood' debates also mirror this construction, Rush and La Nauze (2006) in their very short list of clothing that 'sexualises' boys cite jackets with structured shoulders (or shoulder pads) with the rationale that this item sexualises boys by drawing attention to attributes, such as broad shoulders, associated with adult masculinity. Rather than critically considering the gendered relations of power that organise this differential marking of adult sexual status, the Papadopolous text takes 'femininity' as a pure and vulnerable state, threatened by the intrusion of (hetero)sexuality. For instance, the *Papadopoulos Review* notes that whereas

'wanting to be desired is natural', a hyper-sexualised form of femininity is oriented by a 'dominant desire... to be desired' by men (2010: 31). By contrast, a hyper-masculinised 'male' (as identified in the Papadopoulos Review) consumes pornography which makes them 'sexually callous', (2010: 31-3, 68-9). The assumption being that boys and young men could only possibly identify, when consuming pornographic representations, with having women as objects and never themselves imagining being sexually passive (see Bragg, 2015) or identifying with a more fluid sexuality. In addition, these men will have fewer feelings 'of guilt, repulsion and disgust' (Papadopolous, 2010: 31-3, 68-9). Disgust therefore allows men to distinguish within heterosexual objects between those that are appropriate and those that must be inviolable because of their purity, a division which with Foucault we can see as potentially highly classed. Were it not for this division between pure and impure forms of female subjectivity, the Papadopoulos Review suggests that 'male desire' would be trained on 'girls', since it would be 'acceptable to relate to children in a sexual way' (2010: 36, 38). A presumed assumption of heterosexual desire pervades this analysis and the vital importance of purity to the account of the *Papadopoulos Review* regarding the danger of sexualisation is that it stands as a barrier that holds back innate and inevitable masculine desire, and thus offers a crucial measure of protection to those (classed and raced) forms of subjectivity that successfully manage to embody it.

A strategic ambiguity also occurs in the age ascribed by the text to this male threat. For instance, the text cites quantitative studies which indicate that, of '9-19 year-olds' – a vast age-range spanning pre-pubescence through to full adulthood – 'almost one in eight had visited pornographic websites showing violent images' (2010: 45). Moreover, the *Papadopoulos Review* asserts that reliable, quantitative studies have shown that 'among offenders, the largest group trading in internet child pornography were aged between 15-19'. However, in making this assertion, the Papadopoulos Review neglects to clarify that 'child pornography' is defined under UK law as an indecent image of an individual under eighteen years of age (2010: 73; cf. Section 45 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003). The distinction between 'peers' and 'adult predators' (2010a: 49) is therefore strategically blurred by the text. The two categories are made to slide into one another, constructing adult predation on young girls as common, and teenage males as animalistic: inherently dangerous, immoral and impure. Something similar occurs in the Rush and La Nauze (2006) report

where images of children from store catalogues were analysed and presented as sexualised. One notable example is a picture (p.6) of a boy and girl outside in a garden or park, both are dressed perhaps unremarkably (or ideally?) for the setting, but the interpretation, because the boy is looking over the girl's shoulder is one of male predator and female victim. Such a discursive construction positions heterosexual desire as both normative and sinister, and in turn situates young women as in severe and pervasive sexual danger. The assumption is that boys consuming popular culture and pornography would only identify with and be influenced by (dominant or predatory) the men that they see and in turn, girls only by women (Bragg, 2015). In addition failure to critically evaluate this unquestioning gendered positioning is at risk of impoverishing men's emotional and sexual ontologies (Edwards, 2006). There is a lack of consideration of how such statements and perspectives actually serve to reify the imagery it is intended to critique; whereby boys are once again constructed as perpetually potential predators, resulting in emotion as 'taboo' (Donaldson, 1993). The consequences of this are both to fail to recognise the increasing diversities of contemporary masculinities (as more emotionally and physically open, see McCormack, 2014) and simultaneously to potentially prohibit the discussion of emotion and feeling in both platonic and romantic and sexual relationships.

The *Papadopoulos Review* also makes gendered claims about young people, sexuality and morality in arguing for sexualisation as caused by and contributing to 'pornification of society' (2010: 11). It proposes that the statistical correlation found in a study by Carroll et al. (2008) evidences a 'clear link' between 'acceptance of pornography' and 'risky sexual attitudes and behaviours, substance abuse and non-marital cohabitation values' (2010: 69). Such appeals to psychological findings serve as a strategy of legitimation within the text. They ground, in the objectivity of a scientific register, assertions about the true nature of men and women, in contrast to what are taken as their debased present forms of subjectivity and behaviour. Depictions of hyper-sexualised femininity in the *Papadopoulos Review* construct an image of individuals deviating from the pure and 'natural' feminine state of wanting to be desired by men and 'having a family and raising children'. Depictions of hyper-masculinised males in the *Papadopoulos Review* construct an image of animalistic male sexual desire – normally held in check by guilt and disgust, but now directed towards violent and risky behaviours and inappropriate (hetero)sexual objects,

'outside' of 'stable' monogamous, ideally married, relationships (2010: 46, 69). For instance, the *Papadopoulos Review* quotes an article by Dines (2008), a prominent feminist anti-pornography campaigner, which uses anecdotal evidence to suggest that male use of online adult pornography leads to the desire for more and more deviant sexual objects, such that consumers 'moved seamlessly from adult women to children' (2010: 47, citing Dines, 2008: 140). Without the floodgates provided by representations of purity, which designate appropriate and inappropriate objects of desire, unbound and dangerous masculine sexuality will spill out with a 'seamless' lack of discrimination.

Conclusion

In contemporary media and policy discourses, working-class girls are treated as already sexualised: they are judged as distant from the true essence of femininity, and this distance is identified within discourses on sexualisation with the display of sexual signifiers. Middle-class girls are treated as always at risk of sexualisation, of departing from the precarious image of middle-class heteronormative respectability that waits until adult monogamy for the display of signifiers of adult sexuality. By contrast, after middle childhood, boys are not generally seen as threatened by sexualisation, as masculinity is always already presumed to contain a substantial dose of heterosexual desire. Sexualisation is re-interpreted as hyper masculinisation and positions boys as potential predators and/or with immoral desires for inappropriate subjects. This paper has responded to calls from authors such as Garner (2012) to consider explicitly the sexualisation of boys. We have shown that the negotiation of clothing, dress and embodiment within this problematisation has been shot through with classed, racialised and gendered dynamics.

Our argument, has been that 'the sexualisation of boys' is a problematisation which has a substantial barrier to its activation and widespread acceptance, leaving the practices of young men underscrutinised and the practices of young women overscrutinised. This is despite the fact that constructions of men as always and ever-sexual have a significant impact on gendered practices (Kim, et al. 2007), not least sexual violence. In addition, such lack of any sustained focus serves to leave hyper masculinisation (see Papadopolous, 2010) as the only term through which

sexualisation and boys can be examined in policy terms or in media attention. Assumptions of the predatory and uncontrollable nature of the (hetero)sexuality of boys and men remain unquestioned. Heterosexuality is assumed and slippages of age present paedophilia as an inevitable 'next step' when so-called hyper masculinity reigns. Fashion and dress for girls and for boys operate as both protection and threat in terms of sexualisation. In discussions of the appropriateness of clothing or its advertisement for young women their assumed status as object is positioned against that of a powerful, predatory young men who cannot help himself under such cultural conditions. It is an un-interrogated assumption that men will only identify with the dominant, predator portrayed in fashion, perfume adverts or pornography (and women in turn with the passive victim) (Bragg, 2015).

The issue lies in the way 'sexualisation' has been framed as an inappropriate supplement of sexuality, added to a young person's identity and actions. This is only an emotive concern when the object being 'sexualised' is assessed in terms of their innocence as proximity with a natural essence – an assessment that is not made of contemporary, unmarked masculinity. Policy and media discourses are less concerned with the hyper-masculine male than the sexualised female because the former is something treated as deriving from, if intensifying, the 'natural' whereas the latter is viewed as the destruction of the subjects' imputed 'innocent' essence. This double standard means that women are either natural or unnatural, pure or impure; whereas men are not subject to this assessment after middle childhood. So long as they are not assessed in this way, we would suggest, boys will not be problematised as threatened by sexualisation.

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Appendix D

"There's Plenty More Clunge in the Sea": Boyhood Masculinities and Sexual Talk

Empirical Paper

Abstract

This article sets out to analyze the dominant sexual discourses embedded and negotiated within the television sitcom *The Inbetweeners*. Sex is a highly visible element of the program, marking it as a prevailing feature of the life of the teenage boy, paradoxically natural yet problematic. The performances draw upon and reproduce governing discourses of sexuality and gender. Of the potential themes, three are considered here. First, sex is represented as ubiquitous within the boys' narratives, an assumed attribute of (the transition to) the performance of successful adult masculinity. Second, individual (hetero) sexuality is policed through peer-led homophobic banter and humor. Third, girls are objectified by boys, demonstrating the role of gendered relations in the governance of femininity and the discursive sanctions, which define masculinity through objects of desire. This article reveals some of the sexual subjecthoods made available to young men through televised representation, and considers their position within the wider sexual landscapes of boyhood.

Keywords

boyhoods, masculinities, sexuality, gender, sitcom

Introduction

The exploration of girls, girlhoods, and femininities in relation to sex and sexualization in contemporary cultures is extensive (e.g., Duschinsky, 2013; Egan & Hawkes, 2008;

Kehily, 2012; Renold & Ringrose, 2011). However, discussions that theorize and consider these issues in relation to boys, boyhoods, and masculinities are much thinner on the ground (Buckingham, Willett, Bragg, & Russell, 2010). The need for further consideration of young men and boyhood masculinities notably greater attention to sex, sexuality, and sexualization in relation to boys has been highlighted (Clark, 2013, 2014; Garner, 2012). There is a very small amount of work which attempts to further these discussions (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Bragg, 2015; Clark & Duschinsky, 2018; Pascoe, 2005). This article responds to this lacuna and to calls to pay more attention to boyhood sexual subjectivities. To interrogate what it means to "do boy" (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2001) and the ways on offer of being a man in contemporary cultures (Garner, 2012). Here, the positioning of boys as sexual subjects is explicitly considered through an examination of their representation in a U.K. "young adult" television sitcom. *The Inbetweeners* is a television sitcom, aimed at a young adult audience, which ran for three series (2008-2011) on the U.K. digital channel E4 (a sister station to mainstream broadcaster Channel 4 with a remit to produce and air programming aimed at a young adult audience). It achieved the highest audience ratings for the channel since its inception and received numerous awards including BAFTAs (British Academy Film and Television Award), British Comedy Awards and the Rose D'Or. A successful feature length film *The Inbetweeners* opened in U.K. box offices in the summer of 2011, an adapted U.S. version of the sitcom aired on MTV in summer 2012 and a second feature film *The Inbetweeners 2* released in the United Kingdom in the autumn of 2014. Many of the phrases from the series entered into wider popular culture and everyday language, spawning memes, and merchandise of "in-jokes."

The four central characters of *The Inbetweeners* are described by the program makers as a "bunch of middle class lads" ("The Inbetweeners: About the Series," 2014) aged 16 when the first series begins and 18 years old, finishing compulsory schooling, when we leave them at the end of Series 3. The two films document a post college party holiday in Europe and a period of traveling in Australia. *The Inbetweeners* charts the everyday calamities and conversations of Simon, Jay, Will, and Neil and is explained by the writers in their publication of the series' script-book, as attempting to tap into some of the universals of the adolescent experience (Beesley & Morris, 2012). As such,

episodes are loosely structured around what are pitched as seminal yet common moments in the lives of the boys. These include taking a driving test, the school Christmas party, examinations, camping, theme parks, school trips, “bunking off,” and work experience. Among this focus on supposed “universals” of the (middle class, suburban, White, heterosexual) experience of boyhood adolescence, what is immediately clear is the ubiquitous presence of sex; this is the focus of the analysis presented here. There are explorations that can be made regarding social class, place and space, race and ethnicity, the construction of adulthood, and parenting and family life (and the intersectional elements of some of these are attended to). However, this article focuses on the positioning of the four central characters as sexual subjects and considers how through visual imagery, dialogue, humor, storytelling, and the representation of relationships, sex is constructed as constant, desirable, and heterosexual. Sex and sexual authority are key markers of transition to full and successful (adult) masculinity.

Televised representations of social landscapes can be viewed as rhetorical frames that “shape people’s perceptions of the world” (Myers, 2012, p. 127). Television’s immediacy results in its drawing upon and dramatizing contemporary social and political issues (Arthurs, 2004), and such texts are argued to shape young people’s identities (Buckingham et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2004). Willis (2003) in fact identifies popular culture as more important than schooling in young people’s everyday lives. With such an acknowledgment comes the recognition that an analysis of how masculine status is portrayed via televisual medium offers the potential to uncover the kind of discursive figures and as such, subjecthoods (perhaps best explained as the state of being a “subject”) made available to boys and young men in the practice and performance of masculinity. This is not to say that young people passively receive media content and messages in a universal unchallenging way, or that such programming is a simple reflection of some objective reality.

Rather representations of particular subjects both offer and close down potential ways of being in the world which are a significant part of understanding the boyhood experience.

Exploring *The Inbetweeners*

The analysis undertaken of *The Inbetweeners* franchise is best described as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA; as defined by Carrabine, 2001). The concept of discourse can be defined as "sets of statements that construct objects . . . and an array of subject positions" (Parker, 1994, p. 245). FDA is particularly useful in this regard due to its specific focus on the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power. As the ways of speaking about a topic cohere, they establish the truth or truths of a particular moment. Particular subject positions are made available from which individuals are able to speak or act. In a constant state of flux, these are contested and negotiated, and operate by offering or restricting opportunities for action (Clark, 2013).

In a similar way to Driscoll's (2011) approach to exploring teen film, this article focuses on the discursive rather than the aesthetic. This does not mean that aesthetic or stylistic issues are ignored, rather that the focus here is not on processes of cinematic production, direction, or editing but on the discourses that are embedded within the characters, the images, the dialogue and the performance as seen on screen. For these purposes text, and its analysis, are defined broadly:

> text designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also use every unit of discourse . . . an image . . . a sculpture, a film, a musical passage . . . constitute texts . . . even the units known as performances can be considered as texts and can thus become the object of textual analysis. (De Marinis, 1993, p. 47)

Such texts are considered, in line with Vanska's (2011, 2012) work on childhood, sex, and fashion, as feeding into wider cultural processes that construct certain subjectivities through gazing. Such images produce meaning, which allows individuals to make sense of experiences such as childhood,

and/or gendered positions. They function as fields of production and reproduction. Television sitcom and other cultural products such as advertising or fashion, for example, participate in wider processes of the identity formation of subjects in contemporary cultures (Vanska, 2012). De Lauretis's (1994 in Vanska, 2012) seminal work in this field positions images as social technologies of gender which normalize particular gender positions. Here, *The Inbetweeners* can be considered as cultural imagery, which provides information on and participates in the construction of gendered and sexed identities. Thus, representations of gendered and sexual subjects not only reflect but also produce our sense of real (Cook, 2004). This is not to say that such cultural texts are one-directional, permanent, and only responded to by audiences in a linear and discursively conventional fashion. Boys and girls can and do talk back to media productions, the fashion industry, and indeed all elements of the culture within which they are located. Such cultural products are not "straightjackets from which there is little escape for living subjects" (Hunter, 2012, p. 4). They do, however, provide opportunities for action and identity formation or indeed close down such activities. They are thus worthy of analysis, here through the use of FDA, to better understand the positions made available to boys and girls as gendered and sexual beings.

Discourses constructed within the text have been identified through FDA, by viewing and reviewing the character portrayals of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and their position within the wider narratives of *The Inbetweeners*. Identifying the positioning of sex in relation to masculinity and boyhood means light is shed upon the sanctioned ways made available to "do" adolescence and masculinity, and to "be" a boy and a

sexual being. Of the potential themes, three are examined

here. First, sex is ubiquitous and thus marked as a key feature of the life of the teenage boy. Second, successful masculinity is represented as depending on the performance of heterosexuality through sexual action and talk, and this is heavily policed through peer-led banter focused on homosexuality and femininity. Third, heterosexuality as the default approved sexual subjecthood for young men results in the positioning of women not ever as part of a platonic relationship but with the constant potential (if she is performing the "right kind of girl") for sexual activity and/or objectification. This in itself also functions to govern the boys own performance; their masculinity appraised by the object of their desire.

Sex as Everywhere, Always, and Innate

The supposed "universals" of the boyhood experience are part of a loose structure to the episodes of *The Inbetweeners* and this can be gleaned by the episode titles "Bunk Off" (S1, E2) or "The Field Trip" (S2, E1). Such titles are innocuous, referring to the central focus of that particular show, their focus usually structured around events within the boys' schooling. This in itself documents the importance of education in the structuring of young people's lives (Christensen & James, 2001). Beyond this focus on educational, spatial and temporal environments, it is immediately and consistently clear that sex, sexuality, and sexual experiences (real and fictional) are a dominant part of every single episode. Sex features as part of the development of subplots that crisscross through and across series, for example, Simon's (long standing) crush on family friend Carli or as part of one-off episodes, for example, when Jay gets a (short-lived) girlfriend (S2, E6). The significance in singular and multiple episode plot lines means that sex makes it into almost all of the conversations that the boys have. The sexual content is diverse within these performances, ranging from homophobic banter about the activities and appearance of Neil's dad (see, for

example, S1, E2), constant reference to masturbation as both natural and subject to extensive peer discussion (see, for example, S2, E3), and to the theme park visit they embark upon (S1, E3). It turns out this episode is not about theme park rides at all, but rather "them little lovelies on the teacup rides . . . with their tits and that." Sex, in short, permeates all aspects of the boys' lives.

Sex and sexuality are conceptualized as key sites where individuals "become" masculine (Allen, 2003). Explorations of hegemonic ideals of masculinity position sexual knowledge, activity and a constant state of readiness as key elements attributed to the successful performance of masculinity (see, for example, Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Jackson, 2006). Imagery of the naturally strong, voracious, unbridled, and virile sexual masculine subject is powerfully pervasive (Phoenix & Frosh, 2001) and exists as a signifier of ideal masculinity throughout *The Inbetweeners*. Garner (2012) calls for increasing attention to the ways that are on offer of being a man in contemporary cultures and a significant element of this should concern cultural imagery and commodities. Here, what can be seen is that crucial to the performance of successful young masculinity is the performance of a (hetero)sexual being who is sexually knowledgeable, active, and authoritative.

The Inbetweeners sitcom participates in the construction of a discursive space of young male sexuality and the focus on adolescence, rather than boyhoods in earlier childhood, mitigates it becoming subject to public concerns regarding childhood sexuality. There are examples of public furors around the purportedly "sexualized" representation of young boys. An excellent example being the 1990s Calvin Klein advertising campaign explored by Vanska (2011). This, very quickly canceled, campaign featured a black and white image of two young boys in Calvin Klein underwear (a pair of

white boxers and white briefs) jumping and playing on a sofa. Concerns were raised about the sexual representation of these boys, still constructed as being contained within the discursive domain of early childhood. Particular attention was paid to the boy in the white briefs and the potential visibility of the outline of his penis (Vanska, 2011). The public reaction to this imagery clearly demonstrates that anxieties around the sexualization of childhood are not just directed at girls, but do of course transcend to the fashion, deportment, and representation of boys. This does suggest a change in the way the bodies of boys are seen, understood, and assigned meanings (Vanska, 2011). Young boys are, like girls, readily thought of as sexually vulnerable and thus must work within the boundaries that signify innocence. I contend here, as elsewhere (Clark & Duschinsky, 2018), that this shifts beyond early childhood. After middle childhood, boys have no need to be encouraged to "invest" in innocence rather than "spend" on their sexual identity (Clark & Duschinsky, 2018). This is because adult masculinity is already presumed to contain heterosexual desire. Therefore, the presence of sex in the lives of boys who are occupying the transitional space of adolescence does not produce the same social, moral, and political concern as has been expressed about girls. *The Inbetweeners* as a cultural product is thus to some extent socially sanctioned as a result of the discursive positioning of sex as natural and innate for the adult male. The discursive positioning of age as a marker of development means that for the teenage boy (hetero)sex is, both sanctioned but, actually socially necessary in the development of successful adult masculinity.

Despite sex being pervasive, the central male characters in *The Inbetweeners* do not embody the successful masculine subject, rather they exhibit a kind of heterosexual fumbling. Representations of the coming of age narrative, which

can be traced in U.S. teen film from *Porky's* to *American Pie* is considered a significant part of the rise of the "sex comedy" as a genre (Bernstein, 1997). Such narratives appear to actually subvert dominant images of hegemonic masculinity with clumsy, sexually inexperienced male lead characters

set alongside sexually aware, agentic young women. This is a potential reading of the texts of *The Inbetweeners* and has been applied to other teenage sex comedies aimed at a young male audience; for example, Pearce's (2003) analysis of the U.S. film *American Pie* (1999). Pearce (2003) considered the sexual fumblings of young male characters to be insubordinate performances, which challenge dominant images of masculinity produced in the hegemonic field of signification, which regulates the production of sex, gender, and desire. Pearce (2006), however, revised her analysis on the furthering of the *American Pie* film franchise with the release of, what was thought of at the time as, the final installment *American Pie: The Wedding* (2003). Considering the development of the franchise as a collection of texts Pearce (2006) followed Kidd's (2004) exploration of adolescent vulnerability as a standard theme in teen films and as such she reversed her perspective. Pearce (2006) concluded that the franchise is not subversive, but represents a firmly conservative position, idealizing and maintaining heterosexuality and the nuclear family, with merely a veneer of radical sexism.

In a similar way to American Pie, *The Inbetweeners* is structured around "the horny awkward boy [in] . . . close encounters with the opposite sex" (Kidd, 2004, p. 101) that is characteristic of the sex comedy, coming-of-age genre. The heterosexual fumbling of the boys offers a potential reading, as highlighted above, of their characters as subverting dominant imagery of what it means to successfully do "boy" or

"young man." This article suggests an alternative view, akin to that of Kidd (2004) and Pearce (2006), arguing that the comedic value of such failings suggests the audience is painfully aware of the shortcomings of the boys in their pursuit of successful sex. Will fails to lose his virginity with the "gorgeous" Charlotte because when given the opportunity he is unable to demonstrate sufficient sexual knowledge instead "bouncing around on Charlotte's stomach" (S1, E4). Indeed the boys self-described "disappointing" status as virgins is made clear in the first 5 min of Episode 1. By laughing at Will, and the other boys in their sexual failures the signifiers of ideal masculinity remain intact.

In addition, the boys are positioned against other minor male characters who serve as their "love rivals." These characters embody many of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity identified previously, that Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will lack. Tom is Carli's boyfriend and is set in contrast to Simon who has a long-standing crush on Carli. Donovan is Charlotte's on and off again boyfriend, with whom Will must compete for her attention. Both Tom and Donovan are muscular in physical stature, both have no problem being served alcohol while under the legal age and crucially, both are sexually knowledgeable and experienced. The masculine subject thus remains idealized as naturally and constantly sexual. Therefore, although possible to read *The Inbetweeners* as subverting dominant gender and sexuality norms, this is far from a revolutionary text. Any transgressions the characters exhibit are swiftly punished often with comedic value thus reinforcing the social order of approved masculine (hetero) sex and sexual desire.

Heteronormativity and Homophobia

Barnes (2012) identifies schoolboy humor as crucial to the construction and maintenance of power in male friendship groups. Humor, as discussed in the previous section of this

article functioned to allow the boys to exhibit less than ideal performances without troubling the discursive motif of masculinity. The use of everyday peer-led banter permeates the representation of young men in *The Inbetweeners* and relates almost entirely to sex, sexuality, and gendered performances. One of the group jumps upon the boys immediately when they exhibit behavior or talk that is perceived as homosexual, or most notably feminized, as indicated in the extract below (S1, E6):

Simon: You know I get breathless every time I think of her and I see her, my heart does little flips.

Jay: Are you bent?

Simon: Shut up!

Jay: It's just that right then you sounded really, really bent.

In the above dialogue, Simon is denigrated as *homosexual*, the term used in a derogatory fashion, for expressing feminized, emotional feelings, even when they are aimed at the "appropriate" opposite sex. Here humor is used to police and maintain the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. The terms *gay* and *bent*, when used in this context, can certainly be characterized as derogatory but the joke is not directly aiming to denigrate homosexuality as legitimate identity, Simon is after all expressing heterosexual affection and desire. The joke actually pinpoints an overt display of femininity (linked of course to sexuality within the heterosexual matrix; Butler, 1993). This "feminine" performance is at odds with hegemonic masculine ideals. Following the work of Plummer (2001) and Pascoe (2005) to only analyze terminology such as *bent* or *fag* as homophobic obscures the gendered nature of sexualized insults and language. As articulated in the previous section, we are encouraged to laugh at the failings of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and in doing so, we reinforce the culturally exalted position of hegemonic masculinity (Barnes, 2012) and reify its signifiers. A key part of successful masculinity

is heterosexuality and homophobia (Francis & Skelton, 2005). Full masculine status is separate from homosexual and crucially feminine identities, which speaks to a wider conflation of sex with gender (Nayak & Kehily, 2008) in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1993). Here, what is revealed, as Pascoe (2005) argues, is that it is not so simple as to argue that there are "homosexual boys and heterosexual boys and the homosexual ones are marginalized" (p. 332). Rather, what can be seen is the myriad ways in which sexuality in part

constitutes gender. As such, displays in *The Inbetweeners* of comedy based on homosexuality are not solely about the denigration of homosexual desire or static homosexual identities, but rather about feminized performances that are fluid and identified periodically as sitting outside of the discursive construction of ideal hegemonic masculinity.

Various signifiers in *The Inbetweeners* mark an individual, activity, or object as "gay," ranging from the small denim shorts that Neil's dad wears to do the gardening (S1, E2) to the whiskey liquor Will buys when the boys bunk off school (S1, E2). Commodities such as dress and food presume the production of social statuses, identities, and images (Cook, 2004). In *The Inbetweeners* these are diverse and the phrase "gay" is used consistently as an insult within peer banter aimed not often directly at an expression of homosexual desire but at the performance or display of feminized attributes, behavior, and commodities. In wider academic research, boys are identified as themselves complicit in policing heterosexuality as a central component of successful masculinity (Connell, 2000) and this is certainly the case here. Phoenix and Frosh's (2001) research identifies anxiety about being gay or effeminate as central to why boys attempt not to stray far from the masculine ideal and risk being labeled as failed subjects. What is also noticeable, however,

is how male friendships here are clearly valued in the lives of the boys. They are more than willing in particular circumstances to engage in physical touching to offer emotional support—for example, when Jay experiences a relationship break up (S2, E6). They are also willing to sleep close together in a small tent (S3, E6) without any humor based on homosexual desire or action. This points to the work of both Anderson and McCormack (2016) on inclusive masculinity, whereby they argue that contemporary young masculinities and male peer relationships are beginning to be less characterized by homophobia and involve increasing physical touch and emotional openness. Although the reading of *The Inbetweeners* presented here argues that homophobic banter (indicative of both sexual and gendered discourses) continues to play a crucial role in the performance and negotiation of young masculinities, there is also some evidence that homosocial tactility (Anderson, 2009) and emotional openness do characterize some elements of male teenage friendships. As such, the ways in which the performance of gendered and sexual identities within the maintenance and negotiation of peer relations should be recognized as fluid, complex, and situational; and the role representations in popular culture may play within this, should receive greater attention within the academy. In addition, it is worth noting the need to consider intersectional aspects of the boyhood experience. I have previously argued (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2008) that masculinities and explorations of boyhood sexuality are intricately intertwined with other aspects of subjects' identities. Whether this is class (see Anderson, 2009), sexual identity (see Cole, 2011), race (see Pascoe, 2007), or disability (see Ostrander, 2008). For example, Pascoe (2007) points to the importance of race and its intersection with gender in designation of interest in fashion as normative or subject to sanctions. For young White

men in Pascoe's research in U.S. high schools, interest in appearance resulted in the questioning of a subjects sexuality and/or masculinity. However, discourses of male sexuality are highly racialized and careful attention to dress was a signifier of successful hegemonic masculinity for young African American men (Pascoe, 2007). Despite this awareness, there is limited opportunity to consider the intersectional aspects of contemporary masculinity in *The Inbetweeners*. The four central characters, although shown to have different interests, career aspirations, and family formations, are positioned as homogeneous; firmly White, middle class, "able-bodied," and suburban. This lack of attention to diversity does in itself reify a homogeneous model of masculinity that fails to take into account race, class, religion, and disability, and presents a model of heterosexuality as the default identity for masculine subjects.

As highlighted above, the focus of the jokes, which make both overt and implicit references to homosexuality is about the expression of homosexual desire, but is perhaps more so, about feminized performances. These often involve displays of vulnerability, at odds with the emotionally controlled, objective, active, neoliberal agency attributed to adult males (Edwards, 2006). Consider the examples presented thus far: Neil's dad's tiny shorts refer to existing cultural imagery surrounding gender, sexuality, and dress (see Cole, 2014; Entwistle, 2000) and Simon has displayed his emotions for his "crush." In addition, Jay has offered strong "protection" of his girlfriend from peer group sexual banter (S2, E6, discussed in more detail shortly), showing a performance of feeling so out of the ordinary, it immediately signifies cautious exchanges among the group and an air of seriousness descends. In *The Inbetweeners*, it is thus a feminized performance, rather than a homosexual one, which denotes the potential failure

of a masculine subject.

"... and Wait for the Gash Form an Orderly Queue": Boys Talking About Girls

The positioning of girls in *The Inbetweeners* sitcom and two subsequent films is inherently contradictory. Despite the boys sexual fumblings with attractive and sexually active female subjects the position of women is on the surface one of objectification. Throughout women and girls occupy not positions of equals within platonic relationships but instead are either the objects of crushes and girlfriends or they are siblings and mothers. They are judged on their appearance and often referred to by slang terms for their body parts including *gash, clunge*, and *jugs* to cite just a few. In the example below (S1, E4), Jay and Neil discuss Will's potential love interest, Charlotte Hinchcliff:

Jay: Ahh, I'd make her come, all over my face. You know she has to get special bras made because not only are her tits so big, but they are perfectly round.
Neil: Like porn star tits.
Jay: And she's a slag. She once munched off the whole rugby team.

As identified previously homophobia has been generally considered a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity and this has also been the case of misogyny (Francis & Skelton, 2005). What girls are considered as being able to offer to these boys is sexual gratification and the prospect of satisfying the (hetero)sexual desire considered innate in the adolescent boy. Consider, for example, the popular and frequently used *Inbetweeners*' phrase "clunge magnet" (see, for example, S3, E3). *Clunge* is a slang term used most frequently by the character Jay to refer to female genitalia. Making explicit and sexual reference to female genitalia over and above other

attributes of girls is as an objectifying process. The positioning of television comedy marketed at a young adult audience is one where the viewer is encouraged to share the male characters' viewing position and this objectification risks young women becoming sexualized erotic subjects existing merely as recipients of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975).

However, here, as with the previous discussions of humor and homosexuality, the reading of this imagery is far from straightforward. Although the above discussion stands, girls are objectified and sexualized, on continued viewing and reviewing what emerges are additional readings and potential ways of understanding boys objectifying talk beyond the problematic positioning of the adult male as biologically, innately misogynistic. Just as girls' performances are policed against the criterion of femininity (see Duschinsky, 2013), boys' performances are also governed and negotiated in the context of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality (see Plummer, 2001). In a wider cultural framework, where emotional expression among boys remains somewhat of a taboo, a female attribute at odds with the ideal motif of adult masculinity, girls' bodies and their sexuality may not just be "fair game" in a patriarchal, hypersexual, or misogynistic society. This may be a mechanism by which feelings, emotions, and desires can be expressed by boys in the emerging (heterosexual) romantic relationships of adolescent boyhood. If boys are not permitted to share their feelings of love, respect, and desire for girls in emotional language for fear of being cast as effeminate (a problem in itself of course) then how should they talk about girls? Consider, for example, the character of Jay, consistently in all episodes telling exaggerated stories of sexual conquests in graphic detail. However, these stories are often unmasked as untrue and as a cover for fears, anxieties, sadness, joy, and love. In dealing with the breakup of his relationship to Chloe, at her instigation (S2 E6), Jay

tearfully shouts at his friends ". . . alright, she did break up with me, but it was because my cock was too big." Here, we see that sexual bravado remains if only as an attempted cover for such emotional talk in a subjects struggle to maintain a performance in line with ideal adult masculine (hetero)sexuality. This argument is not intended to justify chauvinism, misogyny, or the objectification or mistreatment of women and girls and there are concerns to be raised for both boys and girls of such language and the views of women that it potentially belies. Misogyny, chauvinism, and sexism are to be rightfully condemned but in a social context where male sexual behavior is currently being debated as deeply problematic, for example, the current campaign regarding sexual abuse that surrounds the phrase #metoo (Shugerman, 2017), more work needs to take place to understand the complexity of expressions of masculine sexuality. This article does not wish to fall in line with assumptions that all boys and men are sexist and wish to objectify or potentially predate upon women and girls (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2018) as this perspective is just as problematic. Rather here, I wish to begin what will hopefully be a wider process of more sustained academic analysis to attempt to understand misogynistic, objectifying behavior among young men, both in everyday encounters and in popular culture representations. The divorcing of male sexuality from emotional expression is identified as appropriately "masculine" in line with hegemonic ideals but is identified as risking the impoverishment of men's emotional and sexual ontologies (Edwards, 2006). Objectifying talk does not just objectify the subjects it is directed at, it also plays a part in the discursive construction of the subjects doing the talking. The consequences of acknowledging this regulation of boyhood romantic and sexual talk allows a reconceptualization of boys and men as not merely naturally sexual subjects, innately misogynistic and

homophobic but as heavily constrained, by intersecting discourses of gender and sexuality.

The active male is set against the passive female in the discursive ideals highlighted in the previous paragraph. This is actually in direct contrast to the surface level presentation of many of the female characters in *The Inbetweeners* who are constructed as sexually active and knowledgeable young women. This obvious presentation, previously praised as subverting dominant ideals in other teen representations (Pearce, 2003), masks an innate passivity in the expression of female sexual desire. Charlotte, for example, enjoys making Will uncomfortable with small stories and comments of her sexual prowess and interests (S1, E4). This ranges from how many sexual partners she has had to exploits with her friends and sex toys. However, when Will accepts Charlotte's invite to her house for the overt purpose of sex, she lays back passively on her bed as he attempts to engage in sexual relations with her. After a short and awkward scene, the encounter ends with her pushing him off in frustration and declaring him a virgin. Will's anxiety and lack of sexual knowledge is clear but Charlotte does not take the lead, she displays little agency or positive action within the physical acts of foreplay and sex itself. What is demonstrated here is the pressure to

perform from within particular discourses. As Butler (1993) argues, certain discursive configurations become dominant reifying cultural differences in gender and rendering them natural and inevitable—"identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1993, p. 25). In the scene with Will and Charlotte outlined above, both assume their culturally designated positions as gendered beings within the dichotomy of active/passive. Thereby, what is assumed as natural is actually created and reified though a performance where the satisfaction of

feminine desires is not generated through action of the female subject who must remain passive, but is in fact the responsibility of the actively sexual boy.

Female characters are readily identified when they are not considered to embody and perform the "right" kind of femininity. For example, when Will is paired up on an impromptu blind double date with Kerry (a girl known to the group through Simon's short-lived girlfriend Tara), he does not want to engage with her sexually because she is significantly taller than him (S3, E3). Despite encouragement from the others (that she has engaged sexually with other boys and is therefore a "sure thing"), Will is extremely resistant to such a possibility and this is attributed to the fact that her physicality strays from the feminine ideal. When it is revealed that he kissed her, Jay jokes about the physical possibility of this as Will refers to her as the Empire State Building. Another example can be found in the first *The Inbetweeners* film where Jay meets Jane, who is immediately labeled as the "fat girl." She is at one point publicly highlighted as such through insults shouted by male strangers on the street. These insults were not directly aimed at Jane but rather at Jay for engaging with a less than ideal girl. Part of his character's narrative in this particular film is constructed around him wrestling with and realizing his desire for Jane despite her transgressions of the physical embodied ideal for young women (Gill, 2009). These examples demonstrate not only that femininity is policed through such imagery and performances but also that such everyday talk about female subjects informs our understanding of masculine sexuality itself. As Butler (1993) argues, sex generates gender which in turn generates desire. This can be seen in the performances within *The Inbetweeners*, whereby the objects of male desire themselves function as signifiers of ideal young masculinity.

Conclusion

Sex, sexualities, and sexualization are well-trodden areas when exploring the everyday lives and representations of women and, particularly in recent years, girls (see, for example, Allen, 2003; Clark, 2013; Coy, 2009; Renold, Ringrose, & Egan, 2015). These topics remain, however, under theorized issues in the lives of men and boys (with notable exceptions such as Connell, 2000; Clark & Duschinsky, 2018; Vanska, 2011). This article has responded to calls within the academic community for greater exploration of what it means to "do boy" or the ways of offer of being a man in contemporary cultures (Garner, 2012).

FDA was used to consider the subject positions presented to young men within an U.K. television sitcom aimed at a young adult audience. Discursive objects and imagery constructed within the text of *The Inbetweeners* were identified by viewing and reviewing the character portrayals of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and their position within the wider narratives of the series and films. By identifying the positioning of sex in relation to masculinity and boyhood, light can be shed upon the sanctioned ways made available to "do" adolescence and masculinity and to "be" a boy and a sexual being. Of the potential themes, three have been examined here. First, sex is ubiquitous and thus marked as a key feature of the life of the teenage boy. Sex occupies a position within boyhood where sexual knowledge, experience, and activeness are signifiers of successful masculinity. Although the boys fumble in their attempts at (hetero)sexual sex the very process of failing serves to reinforce this dominant discursive motif of the ideal man.

Second, successful masculinity is represented as depending on the performance of heterosexuality through sexual action and talk and this is heavily policed through peer-led banter and language which highlights the negativity associated with homophobia and femininity. The term *gay* is

applied variously to people, objects, and actions but always in a derogatory manner to identify something that is perceived as transgressing sexual or gendered boundaries. This could be because one of the boys appears attracted to others of the same sex or, much more frequently, is engaging in feminized behavior. Both these kinds of performances are considered as antithetical to the successful performance of ideal young masculinity.

Third, and finally, heterosexuality as the default approved sexual subjecthood for young men results in the positioning of women not ever as part of a platonic relationship but with the constant potential for sexual activity and/or objectification. The boundaries of femininity are also policed within the boys' sexual talk with women and girls readily identified as not embodying or performing correct femininity. Girls who transgress the feminine ideal, generally by not conforming to rigid stereotypes relating to weight, height, and other embodied ideals, are readily identified. Girls who do embody the feminine ideal are objectified with constant reference to their body parts (clunge, jugs, etc.) and to how the boys would treat or take them sexually given the chance. It is not only internal or embodied attributes, such as emotional regulation or sexual knowledge and readiness, which are signifiers of young hegemonic masculinity but also, and importantly, external objects of romantic and sexual desire. The social positioning of the boy suffers if their desires are directed at a (female) subject who is not exhibiting the right kind of performance and is enhanced if they do indeed embody the right kind of girlhood.

In conclusion, although possible to read *The Inbetweeners* as a revolutionary text this article considers such representations of boys sexualities and sexual talk as contributing to the

reification of dominant models of (hetero)sex as crucial to the performance of successful masculinity (and femininity). The implications for this in the lived experiences of young men require exploration with boys themselves about their perceptions and negotiations of such cultural imagery. However, such representations, as identified here, do have the potential to impact upon the lives of boys as particular ways of "doing boy" and "being masculine" are opened and restricted. There are significant implications for performances which show boys objectifying girls, which use humor and comedy to display failed masculinity and which remove emotional expression from boys' (hetero)sexual identity. The boys are operating in an emotionally impoverished, tightly governed matrix of gendered and sexed relationships where they have little power or autonomy over how they would like to perform boyhood masculinities and sexualities. The problem with this is that behaviors needed to perform successfully in the transition to adult male sexuality such as homophobia or misogyny actually become demonized by wider adult society as evidence of insidious sexualizing processes or hypermasculinization within childhood and youth (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2018). Thus, boys run a tightrope that is different to the one well documented for girls. Generally, boys operate from a position of potentially greater power and privilege than girls due to the historical (and indeed contemporary) positioning of both gender and sexuality, discursively and structurally. They do not have to operate within the frigid/slut dynamic, but such is the significance of sex to successful adult masculinity that they must operate within a dichotomy of ideal hegemonic masculinity/ failure. The image currently presented is that sexual desire for the "right kind of boy" is innate, uncontrollable, and ideally devoid of emotional expression, and that the appropriate direction for this is the "right kind of girl."

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Appendix E

Chapter 6

Embodiment and Representation

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The body in disability studies has been characterised as an absent presence (Shakespeare and Watson 2001) and the discipline has been described as having a form of somatophobia (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2013), paying little attention to the physical body or notions of embodiment. This can perhaps be explained by a desire to embrace the tenets of the social model, whereby environments and cultures are considered disabling and to move away from previously dominant 'medicalised' approaches that focussed on the individual and their impairment(s). However, in contemporary disability studies many theorists are attempting to reconnect with the body (Thomas 2007). Advocates of realist (Shakespeare 2006) or Nordic models (Tøssebro 2004) attempt to re-emphasise the importance of the corporeal for theorising about disability and for understanding the experiences of individuals with disabilities. The desire here is to bring the body back from the outskirts and acknowledge that there are distinct experiences and implications for individuals as a result of 'being a disabled body'. The aim is to avoid ignoring the realities of the body, such as alternative communications or mobilities, exhaustion or pain, but to do so in such a way that we do not return to the medicalised, individualised approaches which characterised much 20th century work. This chapter aims to contribute to this resurgence by considering how the 'disabled body' is represented in popular culture. What bodies are audiences seeing on their screens, hearing about on their radios or tweeting about on their phones? How are disabled bodies constructed in the mediatised narratives available to children and young people and what is the implication of this for young audiences?

It is an impossible task to consider all bodies and all representations so this chapter identifies and considers some of the foremost ways in which the figure of the disabled body circulates in popular culture, both challenging and reifying dominant imagery of disability. Foucauldian notions of discourse suggest that discourses are productive, constructing the objects of which they speak (Ackerly and True 2010) and thus the images available to us in popular culture can be considered a vital part of constructing dominant imaginings of the disabled body. Indeed, media and popular culture has been argued to be a more influential component of young people's lives than schooling (Willis 2003). The importance of such cultural motifs for understanding images of disability and children and young people's embodied everyday experiences cannot therefore be under estimated. In a short chapter the wealth of images, debates and experiences surrounding representations of the disabled body cannot all be explored. As such, after positioning the body and it's representations in contemporary disability studies, this chapter will examine three dominant tropes that audiences are presented with in popular culture – disabled bodies as: First, objects of pity; second, objects of evil; and third, objects of inspiration.

In addition a final category will be considered –absence and resistance. Here the limited inclusion of characters with disabilities in television programming, films and literature for young children is highlighted. What value can be placed on disability it is not present and cannot be seen? In addition this section will highlight the potential for new technologies and the more sustained inclusion of disabled children and young people in cultural production is considered. This final section aims to offer hope for the subversive potential of popular culture whereby cultural content can be re-conceptualised as a site for resistance of dominant abelist discourses.

The body in disability studies

The body as defined in a biomedical model is a relatively stable, objective entity – a machine to be repaired with the right kind of intervention. Indeed, the examination and inspection of bodies was vital to the historical development of clinical medicine and enabled the measuring and thus classification of bodies in relation to the establishment of biophysical norms. This

medical gaze plays a crucial role in invalidating bodies that do not conform (Loja, Costa, Hughes, and Menezes 2013), they are constructed as abnormal, deviant and inferior (Campbell 2008). There is an economic and social imperative here where such bodies are 'justifiably' excluded as a result of perceptions about the physical and intellectual requirements for individuals to be economically productive (Burnett and Holmes 2001). Thus bodies are categorised on both physical appearance and physical and intellectual function leading to stigmatising social distinctions (Zola 1982, 1991). Given the social and cultural basis of such classifications it is reasonable to challenge claims about the intransigence of biophysical norms. As Foucault argues (1972), discourses actively shape and influence how the body is defined and experienced in any given epoch. Areas of specialist knowledge establish and shape definitions of the body. Hierarchies are created and subsequently reinforced so it is clear that not all bodies are equal. In response to such marginalisation, exclusion and disempowerment (see also Ayling 2017; Richards 2017 and Richards and Clark 2017 – this volume) the social model developed and gained significant traction (particularly in the UK) both within civil society and the academy. The development of the social model heralded a seismic shift in attention from the 'deviant' individual body to disabling physical, social and cultural environments (Oliver 2013). The fleshy issue of impairment was conceded to medicine (Hughes and Paterson 1997), and thus the body remained under-theorised in disability studies, positioned well within 'the terrain of the oppressor' (Hughes 2009).

Within the last two decades, in response to calls to 'bring the body back' (Zola 1991), there has been a slow but steady increase in academic interest in the body in disability studies. Hughes (2009) examines the absence of the disabled body in the sociological imaginary, Shildrick's (1997) work on leaky bodies and Garland Thomson's (1997) examination of extraordinary bodies are both notable. There are increasing 'embodied' applications of Bourdieu's (1986) work on Capital (see Holt 2010) and Post-Human perspectives offer a degree of creativity and playfulness in their interrogation of the limits of bodies and what it means to be human (see Dolezal 2016; Toffoletti 2007). In addition the bodies and embodiment of disabled children and young people are being increasingly interrogated. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2013) examine the embodied experiences of young people with disabilities and James (2000) discusses non-disabled children's perspectives on friendships which link perceived moral deficits with bodily deviance, disability and ugliness.

Representation of the disabled body has also received a more sustained focus during this time period (see Crow 2014; Ellis 2015; Ellis and Goggin 2015; Matthews 2009);

The disabled body in the landscapes of popular culture

Representations in popular culture are argued to shape young people's identities (McRobbie 2004). Analysis of images of disabled bodies thus has the potential to uncover the kind of discursive figures and as such subjecthoods made available to (disabled) children in the practice and performance of identity in everyday life. The perceived power of media to both reflect and produce culture is demonstrated by UK Television Channel 4's mission in it's coverage of the 2012 Paralympic Games to 'transform the perception of disabled people in society' (Office for Disability Issues 2011:4). Of course, audiences do not receive media content and messages in a universal unchallenging way (Hall 1980), and media texts are not a simple reflection of some objective reality. Rather representations of particular subjects both offer and close down potential ways of being in the world (see Foucault, 1972; 1990) which are a significant part of understanding the embodied disability experience. As the ways of speaking about a topic cohere they establish the truth or truths of a particular moment. Particular subject positions are made available from which individuals are able to speak or act (see Foucault 1972). In a constant state of flux, these are contested and negotiated, and operate by offering or restricting opportunities for action (Clark 2013a; Clark forthcoming). Such texts can thus be conceptualised as feeding into wider cultural processes that construct certain subjectivities through gazing. Such images produce meaning which allows individuals to make sense of disability and the disabled body within their everyday experiences. This gaze it is argued turns into a stare sculpting the disabled subject into a grotesque spectacle (Norden 1994); the body, and of course subject, framed as an icon of deviance (Donnelly 2016). To stare, Garland Thomson (1997) argues, is to enfreak because visual images have the potential to disable those who are the subjects of imagery (Shakespeare 1994) in ways that accentuate the otherness (Said 1993) through which disability is defined.

Representations of disability and the disabled body in popular culture have been dominated by a relatively small number of overwhelmingly negative motifs or tropes. Barnes (1992)

identified 11 commonly recurring media stereotypes which range from burden and sexually abnormal to curio and object of ridicule. Three of these, pitiable, evil and super, will be examined in this chapter. Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992) found the portrayal of disability in British television to be inadequate and Norden's (1994) analysis of films as 'constructing warped social imagery' (1994:1) of physical disabilities established cinema as an important cultural site for exploration. These studies marked an increased focus on representations and concern continues to be raised about the ways in which all media forms depict disability (see for example Ellis 2015; Crow 2014; Ellis and Goggin 2015; Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015). These conventions are part of the material children have to work with in negotiating their own bodily performances (James 2000). 'Culture saturates the body with meanings that far outstrip their biological base' (Garland Thomson 2009:21) and interrogation of this is essential in identifying limiting stereotypes as well as addressing their ramifications (Reid-Hresko and Reid 2005). As Ellis and Goggin (2015:84) point out:

> "…there is good reason to take seriously the notion that representation is intimately involved in the policing of how we relate to disability, and indeed what is accepted as normal in our societies".

This chapter aims to contribute to such analysis and make it accessible to students as they explore disability studies through highlighting both the place of the body and a small number of prevailing media tropes. Thus, bringing to the fore "the social and cultural shaping…[and] production of the impaired body" (Matthews 2009:39) in popular culture.

Evil Bodies

A familiar convention of art and literature is the close relationship between physical deformity or visible defect and the monstrous or evil (Sontag 1978). From Shakespeare's Richard III to Captain Hook in J M Barrie's Peter Pan the 'cripple as metaphor' (Dahl 1993) is widespread in popular culture. In this persistent stereotype, the association of disability is with malevolence. Deformity of the body symbolises deformity of the soul and as such physical impairments are made the emblems of evil (Longmore 2003). One only needs to take a look

through the vast range of villains in the long-running James Bond film franchise to see the narratives and casting of disfigured characters. From the metal toothed 'Jaws' to the facially scarred 'Blofeld' and the amputee turned cyborg 'Dr. No', such characters are easily identifiable personifications of immorality and/or world-ending vengeance (Harnett 2000). Such manifestations are also visible in the world of superheroes and the film, television and toy markets that have emanated from original comic books notably in the Marvel and DC universes. The character 'Two Face' from the Batman franchise is transformed by a disfiguring accident into one of Batman's arch enemies and the elderly crime villain in the various Spiderman narratives uses a wheelchair and other life support devices. Classic literature also contains this trope with Captain Ahab from Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick* having one prosthetic leg and Mills (2002) has documented how physical deformity and/or low intelligence go hand in hand with corrupt moral character in classic children's books. The Disney franchise provides a rich plethora of examples of the 'disability as evil' metaphor: In the 1994 film *The Lion King* the character Scar's facial scar is a representation of his jealously and manipulation, as is the case for the character of Mr Skinner, the taxidermist from the 1996 live action film of *101 Dalmatians*. The 'Blind Witch' is a child-eating visually impaired witch from the television series that premiered in 2011 *Once Upon A Time* and Ratcliffe, the colonial governor from the 1995 animated film *Pocahontas* has an identified but undefined spinal condition/injury.

Although not 'evil' in the sense portrayed in Disney villains, the link between immorality and disability is reinforced in alternative ways through contemporary representations of the 'scrounger' or 'welfare cheat' (see Hadley 2016; Crow 2014; Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015; Heeney 2015). Here narratives presented in televised news, online memes and print media express outrage at the perceived pretence of disability performed by individuals in an attempt to deceive the UK taxpayer and garner financial benefits they are not entitled to. Hadley (2016) cites a meme that contains an image of an older man shaking his finger and the caption reads 'back in my day…wheelchairs were for disabled people not fat people' (Meme Collection 2013 in Hadley 2016:682). Furthermore, Heeney (2015) examines the televised spat between Katie Price (former glamour model and mother of disabled child Harvey) and Katie Hopkins (former The Apprentice winner turned right wing columnist) where differences of disability, embodiment, parenting and class intersect in painful and discriminatory ways.

Television programmes such as documentary *Benefits Street* that premiered in the UK on Channel 4 in 2014 present audiences with images that suggest disability is a label used by lazy, immoral and undesirable people to profit at the expense of others. Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2015) examine the portrayal of Deidre Kelly (known as White Dee) on *Benefits Street* and note the narrative prosthesis that her mental health issues, and associated receipt of disability living allowance, have for representing her and the rest of 'the street' as 'scroungers'. The UK newspaper The Sun had a campaign by which readers could phone in and report on their family, friends and neighbours who they suspected of being a 'disability benefits cheat' (Newton Dunn 2012). In response to the strength and pace of the emergence of such media coverage Disability Rights UK produced a damning indictment of contemporary news media reporting on disability in the light of the government spending cuts in contemporary periods of austerity (Disability Rights UK 2012). The problem with such imagery is that it forces disabled people to perform their disabilities in particular ways, for example individuals may play down their physical abilities (Evans 2013) for fear of losing financial support or being accosted in a supermarket car park for (rightfully) using a parking space designated for people with disabilities. Such imagery presents disability as an emphatic and easily defined category that is usually marked on the body and thus readily identifiable, there is no room for anything between 'completely disabled' and 'like everyone else' (Bury 1996). Such coverage simplifies difference and reinforces dichotomies of ability and disability, us and other. As disabled people are made to retell their stories in line with discriminatory ideologies for the moral judgement of spectators and bystanders the potential for such representation to generate exclusion and fear is significant (Hadley 2016).

Imagery which equates disability with malevolence thus has a significant history in general popular culture and news media, and in specific productions for children and young people, whereby the stigma of bodily difference is interpreted as a moral deficit (Goffman 1963). Such bodies are used as cinematic and representational techniques for exposing something unusual, imperfect and negative about the person (Loja et al 2013). It is these conventions that make up part of the material children have to work with in negotiating their own bodily performances (James 2000). What value can young people place in their own identities, societal positions and embodied experiences when dominant imagery suggests that their disabilities are indicative of deficit, malevolent immorality and the inducement of fear? As

Shapiro (1993:30) argues these images 'build social stereotypes, create artificial limitations, and contribute to discrimination'.

Bodies of Pity

This discrimination experienced by disabled people through their on screen representations is not always as overt as that described above. Disability is not always representative of malevolence and a significant alternative trope is one where disability is an affliction to be suffered. From Tiny Tim in the Charles Dickens' 1836 novella *A Christmas Carol* to portrayals of John Merrick in 1980 film *The Elephant Man,* sadness, vulnerability, dependence, marginalisation and suffering characterise a significant number of representations of disability in popular culture across genres and mediums. When such images manifest in fundraising and charitable content, the disabled individual is to be pitied and the able bodied viewer can be recast as a benevolent giver of resources designed to improve the lives of the 'sufferer'. Here in this subsection some such charitable images are examined and the 'pity' which they evoke is interrogated.

During the Victorian era (and beyond) Britain witnessed a significant rise in concern for the welfare of children (see for example Cunningham 2005). The age of sexual consent was raised from 12 to 16 in 1885 in an effort to end child prostitution on the streets of London; the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was founded in 1884 (formerly known as the London SPCC); and a range of philanthropists and campaigners established ways of helping poor, sick or disabled children. This includes Thomas Coram's opening of the Foundling Hospital founded in 1739 (see Lomax 1996) and Dr Thomas John Barnardo's efforts as a self-styled missionary of London's urban poor whose first residential homes for boys and girls opened in the South East of England in 1870 and 1873 respectively (see Bressey 2002). Establishing enough financial support to continue such work once it was established required garnering donations from members of the public. Highlighting the so-called plight of the disabled child is thus a well-trodden path in terms of convincing benefactors to part with their money. As such a charitable disposition developed whereby the

sick, poverty-stricken and disabled were characterised as individual objects of benefaction, often captured through the medium of photography. Indeed the archives of Barnardos contain tens of thousands of images of children, many of which are before and after shots showing how better care had transformed their bodies and minds (see Bressey 2002). The individual child 'suffering' with a disability remains a common sight in charitable advertising.

A 2010 poster for the Muscular Dystrophy campaign contains a black and white image of a boy in a wheelchair on a country lane (see Brook 2010). This poster was a purposeful recreation of a famous photograph of a similar boy by Lord Snowden some 33 years earlier, which was used by the charity on and off for two decades. Although in the 2010 poster the design of the wheels is dominated by big smiley faces the boy's expression is one of stoic melancholy. The strapline reads 'He'd love to walk away from this poster too'. Aside from denying any form of agency or voice to children with wheelchairs or other mobility support and undermining the fulfilment disabled people experience in everyday life, the assumption here is that the viewer is not disabled, as if no person who makes use of a wheelchair could ever a) see such imagery or b) wish to support such charitable endeavours. This ableism denies the significant role that disabled people play in supporting the organisations that support them. Many other posters used by charities adopt a similar style and tone. Hoijer (2004) considers that the helpless stare into the camera of an 'ideal victim' (women, children, older people) are central to audience's compassion. While groups are constructed as a faceless mass, perceived as disproportionate consumers of limited resources or an unwanted threat to a way of life (see Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchinson and Nicholson 2013), a single person's 'suffering' has been identified as more readily evoking the sympathy necessary for political or economic support (Small and Verrochi 2009). For example the Australian charity Cerebral Palsy Alliance launched its new name in 2011 (formerly The Spastic Centre) with a series of TV adverts and marketing, including a poster featuring a young girl in a motorised wheelchair with a range of adaptations for bodily support. The heading is 'You never imagine your child will be anything less than perfect' (see Den-Ouden 2011). The UKs Newlife Foundation for Disabled Children used Rare Disease Day – 28th February 2017 – to highlight the role they play in children's lives through a close up picture of a sleeping baby girl, such a zoomed in view highlights the nasal canular delivering oxygen taped to her plump cheeks (Newlife 2017). Even campaigns which do not make use of photos of children with disabilities

draw upon and reify dominant discourses of both disability and childhood which evoke images of dependence, innocence and vulnerability. The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDB) (Australia) is plain speaking in its 2013 poster heading 'We need your help' and this is combined with a handful of brightly coloured children's toys including building blocks and a wooden train (Campaign Brief 2013). The central figure is a large soft brown teddy bear, sitting alone; head bowed in amongst but not playing with the toys, the bear is portrayed without ears or eyes. The existential guilt appeal (Ellis 2015) such images evoke is a successful tool employed to elicit donations (Lwin and Phau 2008 in Ellis 152). Few would deny that the work charities do in supporting children and young people with disabilities is invaluable however that does not prohibit critique of the mechanisms by which support is garnered and the impact of such imagery and advertising on wider discourses of disability and on disabled children themselves.

Loja et al (2013) argues that pity often shapes the inter-corporeal emotions in abled-disabled encounters – arising from what Oliver (1990) dubs personal tragedy theory and institutionalised in the charitable disposition that constitutes disabled people as objects of benefaction. This cultural dislocation (Snyder and Mitchell 2006) positions disability as an individual concern and the charity of non-disabled people as morally uplifting. French and Swain (2003) argue that charity advertising actually provokes fear, guilt and pity and is built upon ableist stereotypes of disabled people as dependent and tragic. This pity is not just an emotional response it places the viewer in an asymmetrical power relationship with the object of pity (Hayes and Black 2003). One party directs and holds the gaze; the other is the object of it and the subject of its consequences. This is only further exacerbated by charitable imagery of disabled children which evokes not just unequal societal relations between ability and disability but also the existing inequality and power relations between adult and child (see for example Devine 2002). It has been argued that rather than benevolent, charity is a way for individuals and society to avoid their obligation to address disabling barriers in society (Shakespeare 2000).

Inspirational Bodies

The barriers reinforced by images which generate pity or fear appear on the surface to dissipate when audiences are presented with heroic, talented, achievers who have run marathons, climbed mountains and won medals. The portrayal of disabled people as superhuman is common – audiences are encouraged to gaze at such wondrous bodies, the subjects constructed as amazing because of physical feats or because they function normally in spite of their disabilities. Within this trope is television coverage of the paralympian conquering the world of disability sport and the poster of a disabled child doing an everyday activity like kicking a ball with the caption 'before you quit, try' (Ellis 2015). The supercrip is defined as an individual with a disability who has overcome individual limitations and tragedy through a positive personal attitude, hard work and determination (Harnett 2016). Despite surface appearances of awe and wonder, these images do intersect with the notion of pity as documentation of achievement and award-winning often sits alongside personal stories of tragedy and overcoming the odds. Ellis (2015) uses the example of leaked emails from the production team of US television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* that ran on US cable channel ABC between 2003 and 2012 to illustrate the power of the pity/overcoming dichotomy; whereby staff were seeking 'a sad story of an afflicted family whose suffering is eased…'. While some argue that representation of this kind serves to show what is possible for all people and to positively impact the value placed on disability in contemporary societies, others within disability studies and the disability movement are very critical of the supercripisation of disability (see for example Crow 2014; Peers 2009).

The supercrip emerges notably in disability sport as a stereotype and the tendency for 'disability supercripization' does not necessarily embody empowerment. The disabled athlete elicits amazement and can be positioned at the intersection of the freak show, rehabilitation and mainstream sport (Peers 2009). Portrayals of such individuals are superhuman – the actual phrase used in promotional materials for the 2012 London Paralympic Games – but these subjects occupy dual positions feted for embodied athletic achievements but recognised largely because of impairment (Loja 193). Peers (2009: 654), a paralympian herself, questions this discourse of power and agency 'My entire life story transformed into

that of a Paralympian…I see how it renders me anonymous, just as it renders me famous. I feel how it renders me passive, so that it can empower me'.

The 2016 Rio Paralympic Games advertising continued the theme of empowerment set at the previous games in London replacing 'Meet the Superhumans' with the phrase 'Yes we can'. This televised trailer (Channel 4 2017) mixed celebratory dance and music scenes, with slices of coverage of athletes winning and the same athletes undertaking everyday tasks such as putting petrol in the car or changing a baby's nappy. These individuals are characterised as remarkable achievers, their bodies extraordinary and both the mechanism by which and a symbol of, rising above their impairment. The repetition of such imagery leads to it appearing natural (see Hall 1997) to the exclusion of other identities. Children consuming such material are presented with a 'legitimate' subjecthood however social acceptance is premised on overcoming their disability. It is the rising above disability that has been identified as notably problematic in academic literature. Harnett (2016) highlights that the language of personal endeavour to overcome obstacles is individualising and clear connections can be drawn here between medical models of disability which locate impairment within the individual at the expense of recognising the social context within which discourses of disability are performed and negotiated. What, it can then be asked, for those individuals who cannot or do not want to 'rise above'? When disabled children see the supercrip as the acceptable public face of disability, rather than avowed as valuable in their own right, they are defined in terms of their impairment, their limitations and their ability to overcome (Harnett 2016). In such representation there is little attention paid to intersectionality and the roles that poverty and social class, gender, ethnicity and religion or perhaps age or family circumstances might play in an individual's ability or desire to win paralympic gold. A focus only on achievement neglects the material circumstances of such success and encourages the view that disabled children have to overcompensate to be socially accepted (Barnes 1992).

Absence and Resistance

The categories of representation examined throughout this chapter have been highlighted primarily because the portrayal of disability within them is problematic. They imply that disability is a deficit: something that is malevolent, to be pitied or to be risen above. Highlighting such imagery is vital in order to contest the normative constructions of subjects and bodies. It must also be noted however that popular culture does contain some more nuanced and subtle images that more accurately represent the diversity of the embodied disability experience. Harnett highlights the inclusion of disability as a normative part of identity and young people's friendship groups in the 1991 film *Boyz in the Hood* and its normative inclusion in the 1994 romantic comedy *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. The popularity of the comedy show *The Last Leg* that premiered on UK Channel 4 in 2012, hosted by disabled comedian Adam Hills signifies perhaps emerging shifts in the inclusion of disability as more than stereotypes and tropes and as part of normative subjecthoods. Disability in more progressive representations that avoid damaging tropes is thus relevant and irrelevant, a challenge, a cause for celebration and a 'normal' part of the continuum that is the human experience. The critically acclaimed and immensely popular fantasy television drama *Game of Thrones* (2011 – present) received a Media Access Award in 2013 for its portrayal of disability as a feature of humanity, celebrating characters strengths, flaws and complexities. In the giving of the award it was stated '…Game of Thrones is not commonly thought of a show that 'deals with disability' – it is something even better: a show that embraces the reality that no one is easily definable' (George RR Martin 2014).

Examples like the very few highlighted above demonstrate the potential for a positive trajectory in representations of disabilities across various media. Just as popular culture serves to refiy normality and perpetuates ableism it can play a powerful role in challenging dominant discourses. Mitchell and Snyder (2001) points to the disruptive potential of disability in challenging normative prospective ideals, values and norms that are imposed upon the body. Televised and cinematic imagery as well as the static image and the internet meme provide the opportunity for audiences to gaze upon and confront society's culpability in 'labelling, ostracising and delimiting….disabled people whom we choose to other' (Donnelly 2016). It is not possible to confront such imagery however, if it is absent. It is worth noting that the two films and the television comedy and drama cited in the paragraph above are all accessible to a young adult audience. In the worlds of younger children however, with notable

exceptions such the 2014 introduction of wheelchair user Hannah Sparkes in *Fireman Sam*, the introduction of a young girl with autism, Julia in *Sesame Street* in March 2017, the online presence of *BBC Ouch* since 2002 and the CBeebies production based on Makaton that began in 2003, Something Special, there remains a significant absence of disability. We do not find disability in immensely popular ventures for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers such as *Peppa Pig* (2004 – Present), *In the Night Garden* (2007-2009), *Paw Patrol* (2013 – Present), *Blaze and the Monster Machines* (2014 – Present) or *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*(2006-2016). An exploration of American television found that 'only 1% of series regulars had a disability' (Ellis and Goggin 2015: 81). Ellis (2015) highlights the lack of toys that portray disability. This is particularly noteworthy when considered alongside the normalising tendencies often found in the marketing of toys by educational value and chronological age. Here is evident the dominance of models of maturation that assume development exists on a linear unidirectional trajectory with markers tied to age (see Clark 2013b). In addition to television and toys, a lack of inclusion of disability in children's literature has been frequently identified in social and cultural research (see Matthews 2009; Rieger and McGrail 2015) Given the identified importance of the role of popular culture in young people's negotiation of identity (see Willis 2003, Hall 1980) this sustained absence of disability serves to marginalise and exclude disabled children. After all, what value is placed on disability if there is no need to include it at all?

One response to perceptions of misrepresentation, damaging stereotypes and indeed absence has been the creation of cultural content by disabled people themselves. The internet has been identified as having emancipatory potential whereby people with disabilities are telling new stories about disability (Ellis 2015). Couldry and Curran (2003) describe this as an alternative media world with opportunities to challenge ableist discourses. These new forms of participation in popular culture come in the form of blogs, vlogs, self-publishing, social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), YouTube and web series'. *The Specials*, aired online in 2009, is one such example of a webseries based on a reality TV format following the lives of five young adult housemates all with intellectual disabilities. The focus is on non-medicalised representation and the narratives are familiar in terms of teen and young adult dramas (first dates, relationship problems, friendships) (Ellis 2015). Such productions have been praised for their 'ordinary' representations of disability as an

embodied everyday experience (Shaw 2010). There is perhaps the potential for representations of disability to reclaim the 'stare' (Garland Thompson 1997) and highlight the ways imagery and attitudes adversely affect people with a disability (Ellis 2015). The production of such material is not however, straightforward. Matthews (2009) documents the attempts by Scope as part of the British BigLottery funded project 'In the Picture' to demonstrate the need for more inclusive picture books for children. Here the problem of representing the bodies of disabled children came to the fore as this participatory project grappled with issues related to both how to represent invisible disabilities and to broaden images of disability beyond wheelchair users (Matthews 2009). Despite these complexities the production of culture by disabled people themselves is indicative of the development of a disability rights agenda (see Ayling 2017 – this volume; UNCRC 1989; UNCRPD 2006). In addition, existing mainstream content such as the variously received reality TV series *Push Girls* (2012-2013), performer Miley Cyrus' heavily criticised twerking dwarves (Ellis and Goggin 2015) and the outrageous humour surrounding disability in TV animation *South Park* (1997 – Present) (Reid-Hresko and Reid 2005) might be controversial but it does bring disability crashing into the wider cultural imaginary. Such representation remains imperfect but bringing disability to fore has the potential to contribute to the refiguration of disability as part of the normative embodied human experience. This is integral to challenging ableist values imposed upon the bodies of disabled children.

Final Thoughts

The body in disability studies, notably the bodies of children, has been characterised as an absent presence (Shakespeare and Watson 2001), characterised by the very lack of attention it has received in a field hitherto dominated by the social model. The physiological body and its impairments were somewhat conceded to medicine and the biomedical model while social research has focussed on structural and attitudinal barriers that shape constructions and experiences of disability. This chapter seeks to contribute to the resurgence of interest in the bodies of (disabled) children by examining how disabled bodies are represented in popular culture. Given that cultural and mediatised images are argued to shape young people's identities, analysis of images of disabled bodies and the narrative contexts in which they

appear, has the potential to uncover the kind of discursive subjecthoods made available to children. The aim here has been to participate in the bringing to the fore of the social and cultural production of the disabled body. These images are the material that children have to negotiate in their everyday experiences and formation of their identities (James 2000). They are thus worthy of examination and vital for understanding disability as an embodied experience shaped by discursive constructions which offer subjects places from which to speak and opportunities (or not) for action.

The tropes that have dominated representation of disability in popular culture are relatively well documented (see Barnes 1992; Norden 1994). Here we traversed the malevolent and immoral disabled villain and scrounger, the pitiable object of charitable benefaction and the inspirational supercrip. Each of these sets of images is repeated to the extent that they become perceived as natural rather than cultural: Of course disabled children need support through charitable donations and why is it bad to celebrate paralympic achievement? Both these points are valid but what has been highlighted here is the unequal power relations that such cultural imagery both represents and contributes to. In addition, representations which equate disability with immorality, pity and dependency or as something to be risen above or overcome, play a significant role in the marginalisation and exclusion of disabled children and young people. However, just as the media holds a degree of power in its contribution to abelist discourses it can also be a site of resistance. Through new technologies, new programming formats and content and greater participation of disabled people themselves in cultural production, popular culture can be conceptualised as a site for alternative perspectives with greater emphasis on disability as part of a continuum of the embodied experience of childhood.

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Appendix F

Research with Disabled Children: Tracing the Past, Present, and Future

Sarah Richards and Jessica Clark

In Boggis, A. (ed.) (2018) Dis/Abled Childhoods? A Transdisciplinary Approach, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 187-209

This chapter does not provide a toolkit or a 'how to guide' for conducting research with disabled children. Rather here the trajectory of disability research in relation to children and childhood is examined within the complex and dynamic social structures in which such research is situated. We trace the general direction of travel that has taken this research out of the institution and the domain of the medical profession into the field of social science, interpretivism and rights. Wider methodological trends, the emerging interest of the social sciences in children's lives and social agency along with the progression of disability rights and activism has transformed the landscape of contemporary research. We therefore take readers from the imposed passivity of disabled children to their agentic participation in research and highlight the ways that these ideas have been, and can continue to be, applied and interrogated. An exploration of the ways in which disability research is facilitated, conducted and published cannot be extricated from the social context in which 'disability' and 'childhood' sit. Therefore this chapter does not shy away from the ongoing debates which research in this field generate. We consider here not only changing methodologies and the positioning of participants in research but touch upon ongoing, unresolved social and political debates about who can research, what can they seek to know and what purpose such knowledge should serve. To that effect disability studies is similar to other academic disciplines that interrogate the ways in which social research is conducted. As such, readers (as well as the authors) of this chapter enter an ongoing debate about the characteristics of research with disabled children and at its end should not seek simple and complete

answers to what constitutes 'good' research. Rather readers should aim to recognise some of the dynamic complexities and opposing positions that influence social research in this field.

The Past

Throughout the majority of the 19th and 20th centuries the lives of disabled people were sequestered within institutions; the workhouse, the asylum and the special school, being the most predominant (Richards 2017 – this volume). Professional specialisms such as medicine, psychiatry and education emerged within these institutions (Borsay 2005) as part of the disciplinary and professional control and ownership of knowledge about disability and the disabled (Foucault 1975). As such, knowledge and expertise in this field focussed almost entirely on developmental and medical perspectives to diagnose, classify, prevent and manage the bodies and minds of the disabled (Clark 2017 – this volume). Research was thus governed by a model from the natural sciences which emphasise positivistic traits such as objectivity, measurement and the expertise of the researcher over those of the researched. Such knowledge generation thus reinforced the structural marginalisation and dominant social values associated with disabled people at the time – marginalised, vulnerable, passive, irrational and incompetent. This deficit model came to dominate almost all areas of law making, policy, education and approaches to health. A hegemonic discourse, which also shaped how research was undertaken and can be emphasized by bell hooks' critical discussion of social inequalities where there is 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself' (1990:151).

The initial development of the standardised test, the 'Binet-Simon scale' (1905) provides a pertinent example of the values and approaches embedded in research at this time. This intelligence test was developed to measure and identify those children in need of special education. In consequence generating three categories where mental age and chronological age intersect to provide classifications to divide children between 'advanced', 'average' and 'retarded' (Strong 1915). Such mechanisms of measurement

were appropriated by the emerging Eugenics movement to reify ideological beliefs about both disability and race (Rioux and Bach 1994). To existing hegemonies was added 'a new faith in the explanatory powers of measurement' (Rioux and Bach 1994). Much of the academy actually participated in, rather than challenged the production of such dogma about the unsuitability of particular disabilities and ethnic groups to participate in the social world (ibid). This research, like much of the time, participated in the social construction of the 'other' (Said 2003) rather than challenged its 'Imperialist' production (Fanon 1993). The prevalent social anxiety was about how to ensure the reproduction of a supposedly 'ideal' human species; the able-bodied, intelligent, racially pure uncontaminated by intellectual and physical 'deficiencies' (Rioux and Bach 1994). Academic and clinical research provided empirical, objective, measurable evidence to legitimise these socially relative, highly prejudicial 'truths' of the time. Summed up by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2012: 215) when they claim 'research is an imperialist, disablist and heteronormative peculiarity of modernist knowledge production'.

The demise of the institution in the late 20th century and the rise of alternative epistemologies that challenged the dominance of positivism and the natural sciences gave rise to alternative ways of doing research, which prioritised the social. The increasing popularity of the interpretivist paradigm is referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as the 'qualitative revolution'. In contrast to positivistic methodologies these approaches to research emphasise the role of the individual experience (Sarantakos 2013) including paradigms such as social constructionism, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. These perspectives promoted methodologies which constructed an alternative research subject. This participant was more than an object to be studied under a microscope and rather an individual to be engaged with as knowledgeable of their life experiences and social worlds (Oliver 1992). Thus the methods of research shifted from nomothetic experiments to idiographic interviews.

Despite the shift described above, methods which began to ask individuals about their lives, carried with them the values and assumptions which were embedded in earlier approaches (Hunt 1981). Participants therefore continued to see research as oppressive, a violation of their experiences, irrelevant to their needs and failing to improve their circumstances (Oliver 1992). For example, an early attempt to capture

the knowledge and experience of individuals with disabilities in the UK was the Office of Population and Census Survey's 1988 National Disability Survey (Martin, Meltzer and Elliot 1988). This large scale quantitative survey sought to understand the life experiences of individuals with disabilities but maintained the pathologised assumption of disability as a problem with the individual to be fixed. The first question on this survey thus reads 'Can you tell me what is wrong with you?' (Abberley 1992; Oliver 1992). Readers are here encouraged to consider the extent to which this is a leading question and the values which underpin the structuring of such supposedly objective questions.

The Present

Emancipatory research emerged among oppressed groups in the 1970s with an aim to challenge the social relations of research production (Barnes 1996; Oliver 1992). This approach can be associated with fields such as feminism (Haraway 1991), critical race research (Hall 1997) and critical ethnography (Madison 2012) and as such privileges particular value positions about the role of the researcher and the purpose of research. For example an influential series of seminars by Joseph Rowntree Foundation beginning in 1991 provided a forum for developing new approaches to disability research (Barnes 2008). Such examples paved the way for more recent studies emblematic of emancipatory research concerning independence (Barnes and Mercer 2006), social care (Beresford and Hasler 2009) and sex and relationships (CHANGE 2010). It is not coincidental that such approaches gained traction within a wider social and political context in which wider disability activism and rights discourses (Goodley 2017; Ayling 2017 – this volume) evolved (see for example Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the Equality Act 2010 and the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)). Making this 'qualitative turn' (Hammersley 2016) of raising the voices of the marginalised (methodologically) inextricable from wider emancipatory agendas of the late 20th century (women, children, disabled, race and ethnicity, class, majority world perspectives). Within this approach research must be seen to elevate the voices of disabled people, the social positioning of the disability

community and enhance the structural and material conditions of the lives of people with disabilities, specifically those actively involved in the research process (Barnes 2014). This revised position for research and the researcher is inevitably contested and controversial as it moves research from where it has been traditionally situated. Here, it steps beyond neutrality and objectivity and into the realms of social and political justice (Becker 1967). Thus contemporary disability research is extensively politicised, making it as much a political endeavour as a knowledge endeavour.

This approach is thus characterised by participatory methods which position the participant as a powerful knowledge holder and the researcher as a seeker of knowledge. This can be easily contrasted with previous power relations in the research process (Hunt 1981). As such, methods were used and designed to encourage agentic contributions from participants rather than their positioning as objects of passive experimentations. These methods include semi-structured and conversational interviews (Lewis and Porter 2004; Green 2016), focus groups (Smith Rainey 2016), storytelling (Atkinson 2004), visual methods (Booth and Booth 2003; Lorenz and Paiewonsky 2016), ethnography (Boggis 2011; Boggis forthcoming; Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley 2000; Hammer 2016). The emphasis is on the creative use of methods to reflect the changed value positions and ensure that the perspectives and experiences of disabled people are central. Diverse strategies and tools can be applied in innovative ways to support the participatory methods now more commonly used (Germain 2004; Clark and Moss 2001; McSherry,D. Larkin, E. Fargas, M. Kelly, G. Robinson, C. MacDonald, G. Schubotz, D. and Kilpatrick, R. 2008; Berger and Lorenz 2016; Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2011)

The wider social context in which this shift in research takes place should not be ignored and therefore research with children must be recognised as taking an equally transformative journey. Perhaps later than other emancipatory approaches the recognition of the subordinate positioning of children in the social world as problematic emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s (Cunningham 2005). Children's position, like that of disabled people, was one premised on subordination, vulnerability and marginalisation (Hendrick 2005). Research with children was thus dominated by developmental models of maturation models of how to ensure 'good' future adult citizens (Raby 2014; Clark and Richards 2017). The rise of children's rights discourses

and legislation (Mayall 2000; Wyness 2001) and the development of the new sociology of childhood (James and Prout 1997) required the active participation of children. As with disability research, this prompted a shift in how research in childhood was conducted, from research *on* children to research *with* children (Moran-Ellis 2010). This development meant that methodologies and methods that attempted to hear the voices of the marginalised became increasingly popular with childhood scholars (see Montgomery 2007, Phoenix 2008, Twum-Danso Imoh 2009).

Despite all of the developments described previously many have argued that attempts to undertake participatory research with children with disabilities has yet to be fully transformative and therefore disabled children's experiences remain marginalised (Franklin and Sloper 2009). We can celebrate the notable examples that are available (see for example Curran and Runswick-Cole 2014; Hammer 2016; Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2011). However it is argued that much research still relies upon the perspectives of more powerful individuals, such as parents and professionals (Stalker and Connors 2003) and remains focused upon service provision and evaluation (Abbott 2013). In this context, the stories of those with disabilities can often be told by service providers rather than disabled people themselves (French and Swain 2001). Thus research rarely extends beyond the experience of disability as its focus to all the other aspects of children's lives. Like the emerging criticism in Childhood Studies (see Uprichard 2010; Richards, Clark and Boggis 2015), whereby children are only asked when the research specifically relates to aspects of childhood, i.e. education or wellbeing, disabled children's participation, where it is elicited, often remains restricted to a narrow set of particular topics related to disability.

Such a restriction is not confined to disability studies, we find similar boundaries in research with children more generally, whereby certain topics such as play, healthy food and aspects of education and learning are profligate (Richards et al 2015). Topics beyond these constraints are more scarce in their production and problematic at each stage of the research, such as sexuality (Clark 2013), death (Coombs 2014) or alternative family formations (Richards 2013). Such sensitive topics (Sieber and Stanley 1988) are not static but are in fact relative and culturally produced (Hydén 2008) thus it is the discursive construction of disability and of childhood "manifest in structural regulations…which render particular topics problematic' (Richards et al 2015: 27). That

is to say, that exploring the topic of intimate relationships with able-bodied adults might be considered significantly less problematic than discussing this with disabled adults, and even more so with disabled young people (Smith Rainey 2016). The impediments in front of researchers wishing to explore these topics can play a role in compounding the existing marginalisation of their potential participants. The result being that the normative life experiences of particular groups deemed vulnerable are excluded from this kind of research focus. Thus as we have asked elsewhere 'for whom is this a sensitive topic and what role do such assumptions play?' (Richards et al 2015:27).

Despite the above criticisms there has clearly been a rise in participatory research methods with disabled children which have produced knowledge hitherto ignored or neglected, which shed light on the capacities and capabilities of children with disabilities. Such alternative approaches are supported by recent rights developments including notably the UNCRC articles 12 and 13 and the UNCRPD articles 7 and 21 which articulate the right of the child to have their voices heard in areas of life pertaining to them and that we, as adults, have a responsibility to facilitate their active engagement. Such perspectives contradict previously dominant medical and deficit models which constructed the disabled child as passive, incapable, irrational, incompetent and unknowing. For example Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley (2008) use ethnography to examine the active participation of disabled children in cultural production and their creative negotiation of social structures and intergenerational relations. In addition, Brunnberg (2005) using interviews, highlights the capacity of children with disabilities to select and construct friendship narratives and Boggis (2011) illuminates the voices of disabled children that use Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems (AACS).

In order to conduct such participatory research with children with disabilities certain key hurdles must be successfully navigated. The following areas being particularly pertinent: ethics committee requirements, access and gatekeepers, informed consent and researcher positionality.

Ethical Governance

Formal protocols and frameworks exist to regulate and guide the ethical conduct of human research and have seeped from governing medical research into other disciplines such as the social sciences, where contemporary disability studies predominantly sits. This has led to the establishment of formal procedures for the ethical governance of research, including Research Ethics Committees (RECs) (sometimes known as Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)) in a range of institutions including universities, research councils and the UK's National Health Service (NHS). The aim of RECs is broadly to guide and support sound ethical research practices and to safeguard both participants and researchers. RECs will make use of institutional guidelines including the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics 2012, British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines 2011 or British Sociological Association (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (2002). Such frameworks outline key principles which govern the research process and aim to protect both participants and researchers from harm. Ethics committees can be particularly vigilant concerning research with children (Kelly 2007). Researchers must submit a comprehensive research proposal which is appraised by REC members for its methodological and ethical suitability. It is only after approval has been granted through REC procedures that the research can begin. Within the approval process researchers must often negotiate the contradictory motifs of both the agentic and the vulnerable child (Richards et al 2015). Within research proposal documentation in childhood, methods must commonly be shown to be inclusive and promote the expertise of participants. In contrast, researchers must also demonstrate awareness of the socially constructed vulnerability and dependency of 'the child', perhaps even more so when seeking to research with children with disabilities (Siebers 2008). The articulation of both these contradictory images of 'the child' is required in order to be considered ethically informed enough to be given permission by often cautious institutions (Monaghan, O'Dwyer, and Gabe 2012). Notwithstanding the general critique of ethical processes in contemporary social sciences (Hammersley 2009), one of the consequences of this paradox is that those wishing to engage in emancipatory research with children must construct an entirely different child in order to gain ethical approval to conduct their research. This is particularly problematic in the field of disability studies where researchers are often required to engage with the activist community (Goodley 2017) and demonstrate ways in which they empower their participants and

indeed can sometimes be critiqued or even condemned if they do not do so (Stone and Priestley 1996).

Gatekeepers

Having negotiated the gatekeepers in the ethics committee (McDonald, Keys and Henry 2008) the researcher must negotiate access to their participants through a variety of gatekeepers in the field. This requires careful management of power relations, trust and rapport and can be complex to manage in the realities of different research fields, particularly with children with disabilities. Gatekeepers can function as both an asset and an impediment to conducting research. The gatekeeper relationship is complex in research with children (Punch 2002) because embedded within it are the inherent power relations of the adult-child dichotomy. This is perhaps complicated further when seeking to do research with children with disabilities (Stalker and Connors 2003). It is incumbent upon the researcher to establish how the gatekeeper is constructing their own role in the research process. Do they view themselves as the holder of consent, required to give a yes or no answer to the researcher about institutional or family access or do they consider themselves a facilitator supporting participants in the provision of their own informed consent? The implication of this difference is that in the first scenario the researcher is faced with adults making decisions about the involvement of children before children have the opportunity to determine this for themselves. This may pose significant contradictions for those seeking to undertake emancipatory and/or child-centred research.

Despite this, gatekeepers hold a vital safeguarding role (see also Boggis 2018 – this volume) and cannot be avoided within research with children with disabilities. Nind (2008) argues that researchers may have to convince gatekeepers of the likely benefits for participants (see also Tuffrey-Wijne et al 2008) as caregivers can position themselves as advocates and perhaps protectors for the children in their care. They can however, enable effective access to the field. For example, Munford et al 2007, found the relationship between the parents with intellectual disabilities in their research and their care workers to be trusting and supportive one, which proved beneficial in gaining

access to participants and supporting informed consent. One parent, for example who spoke English as a second language was very enthusiastic about their participation but the researchers were concerned about the extent to which the focus of the research was clear. As such, a trusted care worker was able to clarify the purpose ensuring that the researcher felt confident about the resulting informed consent. This highlights the importance of the gatekeepers having sufficient information about the research (Nind 2008) to support participants in making their own decisions about taking part and the importance of ongoing consent (Richards et al 2015) that researchers must acknowledge throughout their time in the field. In addition, Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley (2008) identify how reliant they were on gatekeepers in the initial stage of their ethnographic research in a school. While establishing confidence and rapport with participants they were obliged to rely upon adult staff in the setting to interpret behaviour and communications of participants. This provided vital time and space for the researchers to establish trust and rapport with the participants themselves, an important and sometimes complex element to navigate in fieldwork (Montgomery 2007).

It is important for us as researchers to acknowledge and reflect upon the power relations embedded in gatekeeper contributions (Clark and Richards 2017) as well as the ethical implications of using such existing relationships for their own purpose. It can be tempting to fall into hearing and prioritising the voices of those more articulate (the teacher, the carer) rather than stories that are more difficult to untangle and more time consuming to share. Whilst it is appropriate to recognise the co-production of such stories, care needs to be taken to ensure that these are not given precedence over those of disabled children. As highlighted above, gaining informed consent to hear any of these stories in the first place is complex nevertheless it is an essential element of all research endeavours, it is this issue that we consider next.

Assent and Informed Consent

Informed consent broadly includes three principles. First, the provision of sufficient knowledge to prospective participants, second the initial and ongoing voluntary giving

of consent and third that such decisions are made by competent individuals choosing freely (Brooks et al 2014). It is important to recognise that historically individuals with disabilities, notably those with intellectual disabilities have been considered unable to make such decisions for themselves. The right of the individual to be self-determined emerged in part as a result of the human rights violations documented within World War II and in early research studies such as the Tuskegee syphilis study from the 1930s to the 1970s and Stanley Milgram's obedience research in the 1960s. Responses to these include the Nuremberg Code (1947) and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953) (latterly the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)). The underlying principles of such historical conventions is that individuals have rights and that their involvement in research should only come about as a result of their agreement and permission. These developments occurred in a socio-political context where social rights, such as the responsibility of the state towards the individual, were prevalent but where the rights of the individual were gradually taking precedence, emblematic of neoliberal principles such as autonomy, which govern contemporary minority world societies. Despite this groundswell of emphasis on rights and self-determination the disability communities remained excluded and marginalised. The principle of informed consent as required to be freely given by the competent individual was initially emphasised to provide protection for certain less powerful groups from abuse in the research process. In practice however, it has also meant that those deemed less able to provide such consent have been overlooked or consent has been sought elsewhere by the associated 'capable' adult such as carers, parents, teachers and social workers. Ableist discourses located the disabled individual as one incapable of living up to the autonomous, controlled, capable, responsible, independent, self-actualising ideal of the neo liberal citizen (Siebers 2008; Hammersley 2009). As such, initial research on individuals with disabilities, particularly children and young people, was much slower to adopt fundamental principles of research, such as informed consent and still often relied on 'assent', premised on an assumption of incapability, irrationality, vulnerability and dependence (Archard 2004).

Assent has been defined as permission or affirmation of agreement given by the child to participate in research (Broome and Richards 1998). It is not a legally mandated process (Twycross 2009) but is regarded by some researchers as an alternative to full

informed consent whereby children assent to parent's, caregiver's or professional's consent (Powell and Smith 2010). Informed consent is defined somewhat differently with emphasis on the capabilities of the individual to understand the information being presented, to have the capacity to make the choice and to do so free from coercion (Curran and Hollins 1994). These traits of capability and capacity are often assumed in the case of 'able' adults but contemporary discourses on both childhood and disability mean that they are not often attributes assigned to children with disabilities. Watershed moments in this regard came with both the Gillick-competency test and the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Both these events offered opportunities for recognising the possibilities for children (with and without disabilities) to consent and dissent from medical treatment, decisions about living arrangements and indeed research participation. Nonetheless it remains important for researchers to be aware of the role of others such as family, carers and professionals, many of whom act as gatekeepers to open up or close down opportunities for the active participation of disabled children in research. As discussed previously, gatekeepers can be both problematic in their inclusion in research projects as well as valuable assets to support desired participation. A common problem identified in research in this domain is the potential reliance on the approbation of these influential others. Furthermore the desire to please powerful adults can complicate research relations whereby participants may feel the compulsion to provide what they think is the right answer for the adult asking (Mitchell 2010). This isn't restricted to research with children but rather a prevalent theme to consider across research relations more generally. Careful design of information and consent materials that are accessible to the specific groups and individuals being sought is an ethical imperative. Recent research has demonstrated the value of creative uses of written, visual or auditory tools to assist with the provision of information as well as for the recording of consent (see for example Boggis 2011; Booth and Booth 2003; Germain 2004; Lorenz and Paiewonsky 2016). Such an approach is congruent with an increasing desire in wider social research to recognise that informed consent is both contextual and ongoing throughout the research process (Richards et al 2015). Such an approach to informed consent also corresponds with the move towards greater emphasis on participant as expert, not just in their own lives and experiences but in the research process itself (Atkinson 2004).

Power Relations and the Child as Expert

A general shift towards qualitative and participatory methods occurred in the latter half of the 20th century. The decline of grand political narratives in the 1980s also generated the political space through which emerged new social movements including the second wave of feminism, environmentalism, anti-war and civil rights movements. Many individuals were increasingly detached from these all-encompassing political narratives choosing to pursue more personal narratives that were more meaningful in their life experiences (Alcock 2014). Such endeavours were linked to activism, social justice and the empowerment of previously marginalised individuals, groups and causes. It is in this context that disability rights emerged as political and where the rise of the social model, particularly in the UK, took hold. The impact of these shifts upon social research within the disability community was profound. The disability rights movement challenged some of the fundamental assumptions upon which dominant research perspectives were situated (Barnes 1996; Oliver 1992). Such methods became open to extensive critique through the absence of the research participants playing agentic, empowered roles beyond simply notions of informed consent. It is here we find demands on the part of disability rights groups for greater control in what topics are researched, how the disability community is constructed and also how such research is funded, designed and managed (Barnes 1996). As Apsis (2000) claims, "nothing about us without us". Therefore an important principle of any research endeavour is that it must have benefit not only for those taking part but for the disability community and movement more generally (Oliver 1992).

These stances fundamentally shifted the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Calling into question the motives of the researcher and their legitimacy in engaging in such research. In a similar vein to previous feminist debates and those in critical race and ethnicity studies, the researcher's own dis/ability status has become key to the debate. It is not unusual in many articles to read of the 'expertise' of the researchers not in their methodological fields but rather their subject positions as disabled or having experiential knowledge (e.g. through mothering or profession) of

disability (Tuffrey-Wijne et al 2008). Such an approach is considered to ensure the generation of authentic knowledge about and for the disability community. This stance has generated a significant volume of participatory and emancipatory research with individuals with disabilities but it does also pose potential problems for the field. Here participants are constructed as powerful yet there still remains the underlying assumption that the researcher is the most powerful of all. This reification of the researcher as powerful enough to make these decisions for their subjects fails to recognise the need for researchers to navigate the demands and expectations of others i.e. research funders, academic institutions and publishers. Here the researcher is not the most powerful. In addition, in advocating this stance there is a risk of continued reification of the separation of those with a disability from the rest of society through this sustained emphasis on difference. Academia and academics are thus inextricable from the politicisation and activism of disability rights and in this context, of children's rights. They are thus vulnerable to accusations of appropriation and inauthenticity. We, as authors here, are not currently disabled under standardised categorisations and nor do we hold professional or personal caring or support roles for individuals with disabilities in our families or otherwise. Thus we recognise our potentially vulnerable position within these debates and despite our expertise in the field of research, notably research with children, we cannot authenticate ourselves in this way and thus we tread carefully in this politicised domain.

This positioning of participant as expert also dominates in childhood studies and is extended to a place whereby children are positioned as researchers themselves, actively involved in research design, management and fieldwork (Cheney 2011). This perspective is open to interrogation (Clark and Richards 2017; Hammersley 2017) whereby participatory methods have conflated participant as knower with participant as researcher. Despite its increasing popularity such positions have not been as dominant in research with children with disabilities where positioning them as expert researcher has been much slower to emerge. This is arguably a result of the lingering legacy of the medical model which contributes to the discursive construction of the disabled child as vulnerable, difficult to communicate with, dependent and unknowing. Perhaps this is also related to the domains of research which disabled children are frequently situated within (or outside of); cast as the pupil, the service user, the subject

of an intervention. None of these positions easily comply with the child as agentic, powerful, rights holder and/or expert researcher.

Final Thoughts: The Future?

How we involve children with disabilities in research is simultaneously celebrated, contested and controversial. The issues and opportunities highlighted in this chapter could serve to deter students or researchers away from such controversy into safer waters. It is not unusual for academics and students alike to be encouraged by supervisors and senior colleagues to be cautious in this field, to choose easier to reach populations, pursue theoretical alternatives and thus avoid the pitfalls that inevitably come with such politicised and polarised arenas. This is not our intention. Rather we wish to encourage the further development of emancipatory and participatory research in the fields of disability studies and childhood studies and this can only be achieved by the 'doing' of it.

Despite these issues, the road that's being travelled is heading in the right direction. There are pitfalls along the way but the field is moving away from the notion of 'done unto' whereby academics and clinicians seek to appropriate and retell in their own voices the stories, knowledge and experiences of children with disabilities. This move towards participatory approaches is a result of wider change in social research, the development of disability studies as a distinct academic discipline and from the powerful calls of disability activist groups for more emancipatory approaches. However, there remains a potentially problematic ideological divide (Oliver and Barnes 2012) which calls into question who is this research for and what does it aim to do for those involved? It is difficult to manage the embedded tensions of any given research project where different interest groups each call for alternative positions to dominate. The researcher is compelled to comply with funding regulations; the activist is motivated to ensure the prominence of rights discourses and the elevation of the participant; and the research itself is often required to be empowering, not just for the individual subject, but for the disability community as a whole. Navigating these competing expectations is

no easy task and can impact on the quality of the research that is produced. We thus argue that attempting to reconcile these sometimes polarised positions would be emancipatory for disability research itself.

A potential way of doing this is to recognise the fluidity and negotiated status of power relations within research relationships (Richards et al 2015). Simplistic assumptions that the researcher was all powerful are now being replaced by an equally simplistic assumption that the child can be positioned as all powerful. We argue elsewhere that this leads to tokenistic understandings of participation and power relations in research (Clark and Richards 2017). Instead of a straightforward dichotomy of powerful and powerless what we need to recognise is that power is far more complex. It is negotiated interdependently within research relationships and cannot be assumed nor simply handed from one party to another. An alternative way forward in research with disabled children is to recognise the researcher and researched as both powerful and powerless. The research encounter should thus be constructed as a meeting place where the knowledge and expertise of both not only come together but are actually required for good research.

We celebrate the general trajectory as one where the voices of disabled children are given greater prominence and such populations are now constructed as experts in their own lives. Disabled children are now more involved in participatory research than ever before. However, rarely do we find their inclusion and participation outside of their disabilities and into the realm of childhood more generally. Even more scarce is research where disabled children are asked about topics not related to childhood at all. As Uprichard (2010) argues only when we include children in research as a matter of course and about topics unrelated to childhood itself can we claim that children are actively involved in research about the social world. We therefore argue that only when disabled children are asked about issues beyond their disability and the associated services and interventions can it be claimed that the rhetoric of inclusive research is being realised.

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Appendix G

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Abstract

The canonical narratives (Bruner, 2004) of contemporary research with children include participation, agency and voice. This inclusive language has saturated research literature throughout the development of the “new” social studies of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Their presence was highlighted as illuminating greater understanding of the social realities of children’s lives but they mask and mute as much as they reveal. Heralded as the holy grail of emancipatory research with children, participatory methods have come to be recognized almost exclusively as the route for ethical practice and valid data. The absence of substantial, critical evaluation results in these concepts being little more than “cherished conceits” (Segal, 1999, p. 118). There has been a lack of thorough interrogation of what participation actually means and the data and social relations it produces. Participation implies collaboration and reciprocity but is counter-intuitively used to seek and promote the agentic child enshrined in neoliberalism. Children as social beings negotiate complex social relations (Richards, Clark, & Boggis, 2015) but this is often lost in research encounters which privilege the individual voice, informed by an under-interrogated definition of agency. Instead of following the neoliberal agenda we argue that recognizing the ways in which participatory methods, agency, and voice can and should promote reciprocal and relational social realities is vital to a better understanding of the worlds of children. We call not for their expulsion from research methods but for a re-evaluation of the assumptions that lie beneath and what is produced in their name.

Keywords:

Research with children, participation, agency, relational agency, voice, neoliberalism

Chapter Full text

Introduction

Participatory methods have been heralded as holding the promise of including children in the generation of knowledge about the social world more effectively and collaboratively than previous methods, which have traditionally positioned the child as object rather than subject. This is, for the most, part an uncontested stance that as childhood scholars we have hitherto collectively embraced. As such, the establishment of this approach is entrenched in how we study childhood and research with children. However, there is an emerging critique which calls for greater critical evaluation of the key narratives and concepts upon which this approach is premised (Hammersley, 2016; Philo, 2011; Prout, 2011; Tisdall, 2012). This chapter is positioned as a response to calls for reconceptualizing some of the cherished conceits that this approach embodies.

A powerful and predominantly uncontested rights discourse swept through the social institutions of childhood as part of the "new" social studies of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Provisions surrounding the family, school, and welfare approaches toward children were adapted to better reflect the elevated rights status of the "being" child. This paradigm shift ensured that dictums such as "best interests," "the voice of the child," and "children as agentic" are now promoted as normative throughout contemporary welfare development. They are regarded as emblematic of children as rights holders and demonstrative of adult commitment to the fulfillment and protection of these rights.

Participatory research with children emerged as part of this cultural shift, situated within a more general qualitative turn in the social sciences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Participation has been defined as "the sense of knowing that one's actions are taken note of and may be acted upon" (Boyden & Ennew, 1997, p. 24). Like the dominant contemporary approaches to the study of childhood and children's lives, participatory methods have come to be regarded as instrumental in promoting the dictums – participation, agency, and voice – through compliance to a benign and somewhat tokenistic rights discourse. After all, who would challenge that the best interests of children should be central, that the voices of children should be heard, or that their agency should be assured? The inevitable controversy of promoting rights of a particular group – in that it must always come at the expense of another (Marx, 1959) – has been averted in children's rights debates through being reduced to three basic components: children should be included (participation), children should be active in their social worlds (agency), and children should be allowed to speak about their lives (voice). The inclusion of such neutral and mostly uncontested concepts (with exceptions such as Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Uprichard, 2010) are recognized as evidence of a rights discourse that allows for the comfortable assumption that children's lives are elevated by the presence of such enlightened concepts. Powell and Smith (2009) argue that participation can "enhance children's skills and self-esteem, support better decision-making and protection of children and improve policies for children" (p. 124). The necessity for children to acquire these skills, as a part of a contemporary neoliberal citizenship agenda, is a neglected yet ever present undercurrent in the study of children and childhood in and out of the academy (Raby, 2014).

In their enactment, these skills have become more representative of the responsibilities and obligations of children as neoliberal citizens in the making rather than the effective articulation of their rights as children. The language of collaboration and participation evoked in current policy and

participatory methods are the mechanisms through which the autonomous, agentic, individualized citizen is developed and privileged. In a neoliberal saturated society (Strickland, 2002) these three dominant components of children's rights – participation, agency, and voice – have become adult-led "cherished conceits" (Segal, 1999, p. 18), assumptions that we live by but rarely choose to interrogate. Here, we contribute to emerging debates in research with children that call for the interrogation of and challenge to the dominance of these concepts in their contemporary forms (Bragg, 2007; Raby, 2014).

The transformation of research into childhood and children's lives as a result of the new social studies and a universal rights agenda should not be underestimated. Children as participants is a mantra now recognized as normative, commonly positioned as ethically superior to other approaches. Research that does not promote such participation is often seen as ethically dubious and less effective in achieving valid data. Producing a social science research proposal which does not promote the voices of children is likely to receive a less than positive response from an ethics committee in institutions where childhood as a social phenomenon is studied. The current positioning of children as the ultimate experts in their lives emerged out of the new sociology of childhood (see James et al., 1998), and its manifestation in research with children is sometimes taken to the extent that they are situated as researchers themselves (Cheney, 2011) involved in the selection of fieldwork method and analysis (Kellett, 2005; Murray, 2015a, 2015b). This is representative of the general elevation of the status of children in the research process and is an extension of the shifts in power indicative of current qualitative research, whereby groups are given more control over research "about" them; for example, indigenous groups (Chilisa, 2009). However, this construction is not representative of all groups perceived as marginalized, in which specific examples such as sex offenders (Hammersley, 2016) are not afforded such rights or agency. In addition, notions of empowerment, which are articulated through the hearing of voices within participatory methods, require further interrogation.

Here, Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality is relevant and already integrated elsewhere in explorations of childhood (see Pike, 2008; Smith, 2014), but its application to the practice of research with children is limited. The liberal notion of empowerment grounded in a desire to hand power to perceived powerless groups can be challenged when considering governmentality (Bragg, 2007). By recognizing such desires for children's participation as part of strategies or techniques to construct subjects capable of bearing the burdens of liberty in advanced liberal western democracies (Rose, 1999), participatory methods and rights to participation discourses seem less benign than initially assumed. When demanding participation of children by requiring they share their voices, we facilitate their acquisition of the necessary techniques of self (Bragg, 2007). Power, thus, becomes further entrenched at both the institutional and individual levels.

In this chapter, we take three canonical components of contemporary ethical research with children – participation, agency, and voice – and critically evaluate their roles in the production of knowledge about childhood, children, and their lives. Here, we question their presence in research as being emblematic of a rights discourse. We challenge the current definitions of these terms, calling instead for alternative interpretations of these concepts in participatory research, which are not only more representative of how children live their lives but also potentially more fruitful in the data they produce.

Participation

The expectation that children should participate in activities which affect their lives has been transformative in how institutions, such as education, are organized (Burke, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Such transformation is reflective of the ways participatory democracy and active participation has spread from the confines of the conventional spheres of politics and economics into "the organization and relations of social and cultural life" to include welfare institutions and the family (Gould, 1988, quoted in Lister, 2003, p. 26). Such an expansion of the definitions of what it means to be political, by including participation in both public and private institutions (Lister, 2003), extends the capacity and the responsibility for children to be involved in this citizenry shift. School councils, citizenship as a curricular subject, and the roles of school in local communities are demonstrative of the ways children play a far more active role in the life of the school than previously recognized (Wyse, 2001). Despite this emphasis, James (2007) argues that constructing children as citizens in the social world with ideas to contribute remains patchy; ironic, given the emphasis by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) on children's participation worldwide. Constructed as a fundamental right in childhood, participation becomes an obligation of contemporary neoliberal citizenship most clearly articulated as a compulsion to participate economically (Lister, 2003). To endow rights also requires the endowment of responsibility within the contemporary articulation of rights discourse (Hammersley, 2015). The rights of a child to participate are used to generate the skills needed from the ideal adult citizen (see Bragg, 2007) for whom individual responsibility and autonomy become a necessity of contemporary neoliberal landscapes. This makes the presence of participation in the lives of children less about a right and more about an obligation to learn the expectations of contemporary adulthood.

This participation, when present in research, facilitates alternative method selection. Pictures and drawings (Liamputtong, 2007; McTague, Froyum, & Risman, 2017), photography (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Nunes de Almeida, Carvalho, & Delicado, 2017), online methods (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Standlee, 2017), focus groups (Christensen, 2004; Zonio, 2017), ethnographic approaches (Hagerman, 2017; Montgomery, 2007; Scheer, 2017), and stories (McNamee & Frankel, 2017; Richards, 2012) all seek and promote ways to effectively ensure the participation of children. There are some dissenters who question the necessity for such specific methods to facilitate the participation of children. Punch (2002) claims that adults, too, would like to use such methods and therefore argues for their extension into adult research. Uprichard (2010) questions the narrowness of the ways children participate by claiming that children continue to be asked only to contribute to topics pertaining to their lives or childhood more broadly. True participation, she argues, will only come when children are involved in research which is not directly related to their lives or childhood exclusively.

Rich and colorful ways of engaging with children in research are not to be condemned, and such diverse methodology can facilitate the inclusion of previously hidden and marginalized groups (Tisdall, 2012). Nevertheless, we argue that a focus on method alone is insufficient to understand children's lives. A better route is to pay greater attention to existing and emerging relationships and relatedness between researchers and researched. As Schwandt (2001) argues, it is important to recognize that "dialogue and conversation … are the conditions in which understanding emerges" (pp. 181–182). Despite this, we as researchers often focus extensively on our methods of choice rather than the social relations that are produced within it, through which we can then claim an

ethical stance and thus ensure the effective inclusion of children. Those reading the research can assume that the rights of the children to participate in issues that affect their lives have been effectively met. Little interrogation beyond these assumptions is evident in most research-based articles (for notable exceptions see Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hammersley, 2015, 2016; Prout, 2011; Richards, Clark, & Boggis, 2015). This deficit allows participation to be framed and interpreted in multiple ways, beginning with tokenistic consultation through extensive involvement in the whole research process (Hart, 1997). Such activity is perceived to be an enlightened, beneficent approach that regards children as experts in their lives and competent beings able to make useful contributions to social research. There is an assumption that research done with and by children is a legitimate representation of children's realities (James, 2007). The assumption that the presence of children's voices holds a revered status must be interrogated. We need to maintain the role of children in research without privileging their voices, where their words hold the status of unquestioned, un-interrogated truths. As academics and researchers, we are quick to pick up on the perceived tokenism of children's rights in practice; for example, the school council (Robinson & Kellett, 2004; Wyse, 2001), but this stance is less often addressed in our own research practices.

In this chapter, we do not advocate for the demise of participatory approaches, nor underestimate the impact on our knowledge and understanding of children's social worlds; rather, we seek greater acknowledgment that children's participation be recognized as representative of both a right and an obligation. We argue that to be framed exclusively as a right for children is both disingenuous and unreflective of the expectations placed on their shoulders to acquire the necessary skills of neoliberal citizenship. Dominant constructions of agency in childhood, articulated as necessary for such participation, are based upon the pursuit of children's ability to make independent decisions separately from adults (Alderson, 2004). This causes us to question how such an aspiration can be achieved through participatory methods with their implied emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge and meaning. At the heart of participatory methods lies a commitment to children's individual agency and to the elevation of the voice of the child, and it is to these canonical narratives that we now turn.

Agency

The imperative to demonstrate children's capacity for being active in their social worlds, in contradiction to the assumed passivity of previously dominant developmental constructs, ensured that notions of the "being" child were at the forefront of the paradigmatic challenge promoted by the proponents of the new social studies of childhood. Originally championed by Alanen (1988), Corsaro (1997), James et al. (1998), Mayall (2001), Qvortrup (1994), and Wyness (2001), children came to be recognized as active beings in their present state rather than perceived only through their potential as a future investment in adulthood. This key and transformative concept has come to be recognized by the term "active" or "agentic." Welfare approaches promote this agentic child to the extent that it has become a commonsense concept, holding the status of natural and normative.

The elevation of children's status from passive recipients to agentic beings also compliments the development of the status of participant in qualitative research methods. Children are regarded as experts in their social worlds and perceived to be knowledge holders, in contrast to adult researchers (Stanley & Wise, 1993). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the agency of children is a popular and well-used concept in participatory research and has become inextricably entwined with

methodological and ethical values. Agency and its close companion autonomy (terms which are often used interchangeably) have become cherished virtues in participatory research, whereby methods such as focus groups, photography, and storytelling are frequently claimed by those using them to facilitate a somehow otherwise latent attribute of agency in those who take part. The agentic child does not enter the field of research but by virtue of a methodology and method she/he is somehow constructed through it. Such agency is not only desirable but also regarded as achievable and in direct opposition to other key constructs of childhood, those of passivity and vulnerability. Somewhat counter-intuitively, ethical approval of participatory approaches frequently requires the articulation of discourses of vulnerability in applications to ethics committees, where regard for young participants must reflect childhood as an inherently dependent, fragile state requiring sensitivity, skill, and particular caution. Researchers then must navigate a contradictory path where different stages of the research process require the dichotomous childhood constructs of passivity and agency to be central (Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2015).

Neglected in these research discussions are clear definitions of what agency and autonomy might actually mean and how such terms are applied elsewhere in childhood. The context in which participatory methods and the new social studies of childhood are situated in the United Kingdom and the United States is one saturated in neoliberalism, where specific attributes in adult citizens are desired and privileged. Rational, autonomous individualism are qualities expected and necessary for contemporary citizens whose primary responsibility can be argued to focus on economic participation (Lister, 2003). As Raby (2014) argues "children's participation is grounded within a broader context of neoliberalism which favors privatization, liberalized trade, the erosion of the welfare state, and individual autonomy over citizen interdependence" (p. 80). It is therefore to be expected that children, as citizens in waiting, are provided with the means by which they can acquire the skills of adulthood. Environments for agentic action are provided but controlled by adults (such as school and research projects). These settings represent an opportunity to learn the necessary skills required for neoliberal citizenry. Participation is claimed as a benefit for children and young people in order to facilitate "personal importance, self-esteem … and self-determination" (Raby, 2014, p. 80). Agency has thus become a tool of the state for self-regulation and self-governance of its citizens, rather than an exclusive part of the emancipatory project it professes to be (Walkerdine, 1990). James (2007) challenges childhood academics to interrogate the "core issues of social theory" (p. 262) to realize the aspirations of what agency for children can offer. We argue that in order to do this we have to re-evaluate the current definitions and applications of this concept within participatory research with children.

The individual, agentic child is developed through participatory methods. Yet, alternative definitions of agency can be recognized in the social interactions of children. As adept social beings, children navigate complex social hierarchies, relationships, and spaces imbued with unequal power relations, where their status is predominantly (but not always) a subordinate one. Such social positioning requires agency but not the normative individualized concept of agency where self-interest and individual choice are privileged, and emblematic of what Walter and Ross (2014) term the "in control model" (p. 16). In contrast, the social or relational model views agency as emerging through relationships with others (Twine, 1994). These ideas of relational agency and greater acknowledgment of the complex relations between adults and children are undermined by entrenched, simplistic constructions of agency.

Social agency is far more indicative of the ways children manage their relationships, which require skills in negotiation, compromise, and empathy. For example, in her analysis of cinematic representation of childhood agency, Castro (2005) highlights how agency can emerge through bodies and friendships. Mauthner (1997) describes these relationships as being "characterized by intimacy and negotiation" (pp. 21–22). Within the research literature, focus groups are argued to be a particularly useful method to capitalize on existing friendship relations for children (Christensen, 2004). However, these benefits are articulated to justify the use of a particular research tool as effective for facilitating participation rather than to critically and explicitly consider the role of relationships in the knowledge constructions that take place through the use of such methods. Reciprocity, mutual obligation, and collaboration are concepts frequently linked to previously dominant social democratic and egalitarian ideologies (Alcock, 2014), which are now commonly conceived of as values, that ill-fit the modern demands on citizens and the ways that we currently live (Raby, 2014). Yet, these qualities are visible in children's social interactions with adults and other children in everyday life (see Richards et al., 2015). These concepts should be the "bread and butter" of participatory research but they are rarely articulated as relevant, desirable, or indeed inevitable in research with children.

An attempt to raise the profile of "the child" through child-centered pedagogy and participatory methods prizes an individualistic notion of agency and the rights of the individual child. This conversely contributes to the artificial separation of adults and children that a more relational approach could help to address. This separation of intergenerational relations and an emphasis on individual agency devalues collective identities and actions (Langford, 2010). This is not just within the data collection itself but also relevant as children and families make decisions whether to take part in a research project at all. For example, Maundeni (2002) found that responding to children's questions about her research, in combination with the support of mothers in the family environment, enabled the children to make more informed decisions about their participation in interviews. This demonstrates, as we argue elsewhere (Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2015), that agency emerges and is articulated through research relationships. After all, it is through communication, rather than method, that we are able to perceive and exercise power (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). In Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) work, we also see the importance of re-evaluating views of agency that privilege the autonomous individual. Her work on physical punishment demonstrates that children's views and experiences are shaped by and embedded within interdependent relationships. The situated nature of their perspectives where they reference the views of friends, siblings, parents, teachers, and other members of their communities demonstrate the relational character of social interaction and meaning making. Here, there is no image of the autonomous, individualized, neoliberal citizen in waiting with a singular voice. Rather, what can be imagined is a motif of the child located in a complex web of fluid social interactions and relationships.

Just like adults, children have no claim to agency in absolutist terms and although autonomy is prized for all individuals, it is never without constraint (Hammersley, 2015). In previous discussions (Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2015), we highlight how children use their social agency to make informed consent choices, interact with other participants, construct their responses to research questions, and shape the roles that researchers play (teacher, parent, and researcher). We therefore argue here that the pursuit of individualized concepts of agency ensures that the ways children are relationally agentic in their social worlds are overlooked. It is almost as if as researchers we fear

admitting the relational aspects of children's voices in our data for fear of damaging the participatory and rights projects themselves. Perhaps we also fear that acknowledging the data and analysis as a relational and participatory endeavor undermines our legitimacy as researchers. However, as Clifford (1988) reminds us, mainstream anthropology manages to embrace the collaborative elements of participatory research in a way that the wider childhood studies community has yet to reach, but must move toward. This lack of self-reflection protects the sanctity of the voice of the child and ensures that researcher expertise is secured. After all, our academic careers are built on such individual endeavors and academia sits within, and is not removed from, the neoliberalist agenda.

We recognize that such communication within relationships can complicate fieldwork and data analysis because whilst these relationships are intrinsic to how we research with children they seem to disperse into the background in the writing up. Findings can become abstracted from the social context in which they were produced (Richards et al., 2015), and are often cleansed of that which reveals cooperation, collaboration, negotiation, and participation as epistemological evidence. Is it too simplistic to argue that participatory methods should at the very least exhibit such equal participation and compromise? Somehow, the ideology of participation has become separate to the practices of participating, where taking part in something is not the same as collaborating, sharing, or building something together. So does the initial problem for participatory methods begin with how we understand the name and the embedded neoliberal concept of agency that is dominant within it? This recurring emphasis on an independent "being" child overshadows the interdependent relational competencies of children demonstrated in participatory methods that evoke the language of collaboration, reciprocity, and inclusion. This hegemony ensures scholars are inevitably destined to reproduce this neoliberal, individualized rhetoric. Such manifestation is highlighted by the emphasis on capturing the "voice" of this agentic child.

Voice

The desire to include and promote the voices of children, previously neglected in academic disciplines (James, 2007; Mayall, 2001; Waller, 2014), is not surprising. Such voices are said to offer us experiences that we as adults cannot share due to the fundamental and ontological differences between adults and children within society. Desires to hear the views of silenced or marginalized "others" developed in sociology during the 1960s, found in the influential publication "Whose side are we on?" (Becker, 1967). Such accounts, which can be traced back further to the 1920s Chicago School (see Johnson, 2001), were said to allow new views of social life and were adopted and developed by a number of fields such as feminisms (Stanley & Wise, 1993), race, and ethnicity scholarship (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978) and the study of youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979). However, at no point did Becker (or others) propose that said voices should themselves become dominant. The argument was rather that such perspectives should be given as much weight as those in more powerful positions, not that they should be given more weight; this inverts rather than addresses dominant hierarchies. Despite this, the adoption and extension of some of these assumptions into the field of research with children has resulted in a somewhat peculiar position, whereby children are considered as the only beings (or at least the most superior) fit to comment upon children and childhood. However, some theorists challenge the notion that children's voices are always epistemologically essential. Philo (2011), for example, controversially argues it is not always helpful or necessary to listen to the voice of the child.

This voice, in its contemporary conceptual guise, is assumed to be a route toward capturing a greater truth than alternative approaches where voice is ignored or neglected. Voice is assumed to convey a reality other methods cannot. Its presence in research suggests validity and strength. This voice is inextricably linked to a rights discourse where the perspectives of children supposedly become available to us once we allow them to speak. The mute passive child becomes transformed into an agentic and involved child simply by the presence of their voice. Participatory methods are seen to be an effective tool in facilitating the release of this hitherto silent voice, thus linking participatory methodologies to children's rights and more enlightened perspectives toward children that reflect the new social studies of childhood. Method alone is seemingly afforded the powers of alchemy in being able to turn a mute, passive child into a vocal, agentic one.

Outside of Childhood Studies, critical theorists such as Giroux (1986) consider hidden coercion in notions of "voice" by highlighting concerns related to the value of silence (Haavind, 2005; Lewis, 2010) and question whose interests are ultimately served by giving primacy to marginalized voices. Such critical reflection is only just emerging in the field of research with children (Richards et al., 2015). There is limited acknowledgment of concerns that existing neoliberal agendas are entrenched through the use of the voices of children, with little recognition that these processes represent additional mechanisms of control rather than enable liberation in childhood (Fielding, 2001). Too little interrogation of the ways in which "voice" is used occurs within conversations surrounding participatory methodologies with children. The presence of the child's voice alone seems to be taken as testament of ethical and empowered status for children. But, like agency, we argue that it is the individualized, not interdependent, voice that is elevated in participatory methods. As researchers, we risk seeking a sanitized sound bite to further our arguments because we are able to abstract "voice," which results in promoting our privileged positions. This leaves behind the social context and relational interactions from which this disembodied voice emerges (Richards et al., 2015). Such abstraction occurs in childhood normatively, which Heywood (2001) reminds us is itself already an abstraction. Voice becomes little more than a vehicle to promote the perspectives of others, rather than the active inclusion of children's views (Kraftl, 2013). Clifford (1988) states that such abstractions are always staged by the writer, and as scholars we should take care to critically consider how far child voices can be argued to truly represent children's experiences.

To elevate voice without the corresponding inclusion of the embedded power relations and interactional context where such voices are articulated does little to empower children, and is potentially exploitative and unrepresentative of their social worlds. For example, such voices are used as evidence for existing paradigms rather than in the production of new knowledge or understanding (James, 2007). Such an argument is not new and can be found across disciplines, where critical theorists drawing on feminisms, postmodernism, and poststructuralism challenge the simplicity of contemporary notions of the child's voice or child-centered research practice. Instead, such theorists argue that the child should be seen as "existing always in a particular social context and in relations with others" (Langford, 2010, p. 119). Despite being significant in early childhood education (Burman, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990), work on children's citizenship (Cockburn, 2013; Wyness, 2001), and understandings of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 1997, 2015), this argument has made little headway in other areas of childhood studies, such as the critical examination of research with children (Richards et al., 2015). However, this neglect is not universal and elsewhere it is common to see acknowledgment of interdependence, negotiation, reciprocity, and community as fundamental features of research with children in the majority world (see Castro,

2017; Montgomery, 2007; Twum-Danso-Imoh, 2013; Waite & Conn, 2011). Therefore, we question why the independent, autonomous voice of the child continues to be fundamental to the ongoing dominance of participatory methods. We are not arguing for the dismissal of children's voices as important for understanding children's lives, but suggest that it is more useful to consider voices as multidimensional and always relationally intertwined with the voices of others.

Recognizing the voices of children as plural and relational requires the acknowledgment of these voices when they are dissenting or silent. Rights discourses that give primacy to the voice of the child are rendered somewhat problematic when children share perspectives that position themselves outside the dominant discursive construction of childhood (Clark, 2013) or where their views are not situated within adult-defined narratives (see Philo's, 2011; work on child sexuality). James (2007) argues that despite the prevalence of children's voices in contemporary research, children still find themselves "silenced, suppressed or ignored in their everyday lives" (p. 261). This is particularly notable in research on children's economic contributions; they often express pleasure and pride in contributing to family and community (Bey, 2003). Children's dissent from adult-defined narratives is also found in Twum-Danso Imoh's (2013) research on corporeal punishment, whereby children demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the role of physical punishment in their own experiences, child-rearing practices, and wider social cultures. Here, children advocated measured physical punishment as part of effective child-rearing, a view that complicates campaigns based on children's rights agenda to abolish such practices. Upholding children's voices, particularly as experts, means listening even when such voices make us, as adults uncomfortable. We cannot declare that children are experts and their voices are vital to effective research endeavors (basing claims on contemporary rights discourses) while simultaneously referencing developmental discourses of incompetence and unknowingness to position children's views as less valid when they are not in line with dominant, adult ways of thinking about childhood. If we adopt an expanded notion of voice (Kraftl, 2013), we as childhood researchers become obligated to more effectively accommodate the voices of children who say things we may not want to hear (Montgomery, 2016).

Accommodating voices that dissent also requires greater interrogation of those who remain silent. How are those who do not want to participate conceptualized? To some extent, feminist scholars have encouraged the critical evaluation of silence as more than just the absence of data (Haavind, 2005; Lewis, 2010). However, non-participation as active choice has received limited attention in the literature on research with children. This increasing normativity of participation can result in the marginalization of those who decline. If the well-being of children is premised on exercising their rights – the right to participation as crucial – then those not engaging in this new social order have the potential to be constructed as a risk to the children's rights project itself (Bragg, 2007). Without effective, sustained, and critical evaluation, the participation project has the potential to create newly expanded categories of what constitutes the "problematic child." The will to participate in the neoliberal world results in those not doing so being "rendered senseless" (Bragg, 2007, p. 354). Participation in research, or being attributed the role of child researcher, has the potential to exacerbate existing differential opportunities (or indeed create new ones). The expanded notion of voice (Kraftl, 2013) allows us to manage the relational strategies through which voices are articulated, and gives us space to incorporate silence as important data, rather than consigning it to passive non-response (Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2015). This stance also accommodates the different ways children share their perspectives through emotion, action, protest, and resistance.

Conclusion

We celebrate those childhood scholars who paved the way for more insightful research approaches and whose perspectives herald recognition of the importance of understanding children's worlds outside of adult constructions. They are responsible for the existence of childhood studies as a distinct discipline and for shaping contemporary research with children. Participatory methods have come to dominate this field and we suggest that such developments have reached a point where they are strong enough to withstand sustained reflexive critique (see Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Hammersley, 2016; James, 2007; Tisdall, 2012; Uprichard, 2010). There is a need to recognize the other agendas at play when we seek children's participation. As Raby (2014) argues, such endeavors "commonly reflect a more governmental than liberatory agenda" (p. 79). We argue such critiques are necessary in order to move the field forward and to avoid inertia in the theory, methodology, and method.

For the purposes of this chapter, the conceptual theories of participation, agency, and voice are individually considered to allow for the articulation of key arguments, but we recognize that in the theory and practice of research with children these concepts are inextricable. Nonetheless, teasing out the core principles upon which some contemporary research practices are advocated is a necessary endeavor in order to better understand the ways in which we may erroneously claim validity in our research. Facilitating the participation of agentic children and asking that they share their voice does not always lead to children's truths.

The canonical narrative of participation in research with children has advanced a number of key assumptions for childhood researchers. First, there is an assumed view that participatory methods imply ethical practice, in that they remain largely unquestioned. Second, not only are such approaches ethically preferable, but they are also (given the positioning of children as experts) the ideal route to validate data. Third, participation is positioned as emancipatory for children, but is equally representative as obligation. The adult social obligation to voice their views through societal mechanisms is neatly reframed into a citizen right when applied to children. Participation, therefore, is one of the routes through which children learn the skills necessary for adult life. Not only is it disingenuous to frame such methodologies as solely about the rights of the child, it also fails to recognize the context within which such research data is produced (Richards, 2013; Richards et al., 2015). Researchers using participatory methods must begin to recognize coercive responsibilities placed on children to participate while also championing their rights to do so.

These approaches elevate the individual agentic voice of the child, claiming children are empowered by participation. However, this does not acknowledge the social context within which children (and adults) live their lives. The concept of agency underpinning participatory methodologies only allows for the elevation of individual voice. We argue that relational agency, as a redefinition of the neoliberal articulation of individualism, would be far more effective in capturing the social competencies of children. After all, participatory methodologies are built upon notions of reciprocity and collaboration, yet we continue to ignore their presence in participatory research with children. Relational agency is inevitable in participatory methods but frequently ignored in the presentation of research. Acknowledging such interdependency risks both the primacy of the voice of the child and the authenticity of the researcher. What is the cost of our continued neglect to the authenticity of children's interconnected contributions?

We argue that without recognition of relational agency we will continue to abstract the voice of the child from the social context within which it is produced, leading to the continued neglect of the collaborative relationships that may exist in research and the power relations certainly embedded within. The original claims that call for greater inclusion of children's perspectives remain, but we question the positioning of children as the true and superior experts of childhood at the expense of ignoring other dissenting voices. We have reached the stage where the extent of the elevation of the voice of the child risks inverting traditional hierarchies to create a new dominance – one that marginalizes both children and adults. The extent of the elevation of the voice of child, rather than providing new understanding, actually serves to generate new and different power relations, casting new shadows on adults' understanding of social worlds. We argue for an expansion of the term "voice" (Kraftl, 2013) to embrace the co-construction of voice, children's silences, their dissent, and their perspectives when they move beyond the normative constructions of childhood. Rather than focusing on the independent, autonomous, individualized voice of the child, we need to recognize the interdependent, reciprocal, and communitarian voices that inevitably emerge through participatory methods. Emphasizing shared responsibility would reduce the capacity for abstracted notions of voice to support errant claims on our abilities to authentically represent children's worlds.

We are not arguing for the demise of participatory methodologies; we are instead calling for an expanded understanding of what participation means, how it is enacted, and what it produces. We remain committed to hearing the voices of children, but claim that this voice and the corresponding commitment to participatory methods should be the beginning of critical conversations, not the end. If we are to avoid reaching a point of inertia in research with children, we have to recognize the problems as well as the potential of using these methods and the canonical concepts they embody. Otherwise, they become little more than the "cherished conceits" (Segal, 1999, p. 118) that we perpetuate, rather than interrogate, in theories of, and research with, children.

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Appendix H:

Ethical Research with Children:

Untold Narratives and Taboos

By

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2015

Palgrave Macmillan

Redacted – unavailable here within this thesis.

Appendix I

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Article

Passive, Heterosexual and Female: Constructing Appropriate Childhoods in the 'Sexualisation of Childhood' Debate

Jessica Clark

Abstract

The proliferation of debates surrounding the sexualisation of childhood in the late 20th and early 21st century has led to the commission of a range of investigations into the role of sex and consumer culture in the lives of children and young people. This paper sets out to analyse the dominant 'sexual scripts' embedded within four international examples of such reports. It finds that a broad-brush approach to sexualisation appears to render all fashion, consumption, nudity and seemingly embodiment itself, as 'sexualised' and therefore inherently problematic. In what is overwhelmingly a negative reading of contemporary media and consumer cultures, the concepts of gender and sexuality remain un-problematised. Within these official discourses girls are constructed as vulnerable and passive whilst boys are ignored, presumably viewed as either unaffected or unimportant. Sexuality as an issue is palpable by its absence and throughout there is a lack of attention to the voices of children in an international debate which should place them at the centre of enquiry. The paper concludes by urging more in-depth consideration of value positions, lacunae and definitions of key concepts in such reports and consultation processes since such critiques have the potential to inform policy making and the gendered and embodied worlds we seek to explore.

Keywords

1. Sexualisation
2. Childhood
3. Gender
4. Heteronormativity

Introduction

1.1 Contemporary minority world societies can be characterised as perverse cultural landscapes, saturated with sexual imagery (Jackson & Scott 2010) yet framing the sexual as risky, rife with

cautions and prohibitions. Sexuality in contemporary cultures occupies a similar position to childhood itself, presumed to be natural yet requiring constant vigilance. It is argued that modern societies are characterised by risk anxiety (Giddens 1990; Beck 1992) and this is never more present than in conversations which consider the relationship between childhood and sexuality. Sexual knowledge is considered an important boundary marker between the worlds of adults and children (Jackson 1982) but the location of this boundary is a source of debate – often manifest in discussions of sex education (see Pilcher 2005). Sexuality is frequently conceptualised as inimical to childhood itself – the two domains as mutually exclusive. As such, discussions surrounding the sexualisation of childhood are indicative of a more general social fear regarding the loss or erosion of childhood itself (Postman 1994); emotionally charged with high degrees of moral concern.

1.2 This paper adopts an alternative position locating children as neither inherently sexual nor asexual; sexuality as neither intrinsically good nor bad for children's wellbeing. Instead it considers individual 'sexuality' to be imbued with symbolic meaning and social significance (Hawkes & Scott 2005:8) and as possessing a corporeal materiality that is simultaneously culturally constructed; accessed and understood through discourse. Individuals exercise agency in their negotiations of dominant sexual scripts (cultural scenarios individuals are provided with of 'doing' sex (Gagnon & Simon 2004)) but such discourses are influential in making available particular kinds of sexual subjecthoods. The critiques raised in this paper attempt to emphasise appreciation of biology, structure, culture and agency and move past moral absolutes.

1.3 This paper intends to explore the dominant discourses manifest in four international reports from the UK, North America and Australia, including: the Australia Institute's (AI) Corporate Paedophilia Report by Rush and La Nauze (2006), the American Psychological Association's (APA) (2007) Report of the Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls, the Australian Senate's Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts (SCECA) Report (2008) on the Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media and Reg Bailey's (2011) Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood commissioned by the Department of Education for England and Wales. By highlighting the prevailing discourses embedded and reproduced within such documents it is possible to critically evaluate the dominant images of childhood, sex, gender and sexuality in contemporary minority world cultures and therefore international policy making.

1.4 Arguments surrounding the democratisation of desire within Western cultures suggest that there are more expansive ways than ever of being a sexual subject. However the contemporary policy terrain has been labelled by some as 'schizoid' (Renold & Epstein 2010), where, for example, prevention of homophobia and promotion of heterosexuality can exist within the same document. This paper attempts to examine some of the assumptions made about gender and sexuality in childhood and interrogate some of the images of 'the child' drawn upon and reinforced in the reports under analysis. The approach of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) employed within this paper, discussed further in the next section, is particularly useful in this regard, identifying dominant discourses inside the four reports. This is not a new endeavour and many critiques have been levied at the reports selected here individually (see Bray 2008, Egan and Hawkes 2008, Bragg et al

2011, Barker and Duchinsky 2012). However, by bringing together reports from across international terrains and highlighting the similarities in how they construct and reify a number of important parts of the sexualisation debate, it will be possible to discern an overall landscape on which pertinent issues can be taken forward on an international scale. Just as Epstein et al. (2012) argue that there is a disconnect between how sexuality is lived by boys and girls everyday and the contemporary political terrain in which it is discussed; this paper argues that the same disconnect exists between academic interrogation of hegemonic images of the child in the sexualisation debates and their, often unchallenged perpetuation in reports and reviews by governments and think-tanks.

1.5 The aim of this piece is to draw attention to areas of the reports that, on analysis, are viewed as in need of more in-depth critical discussion and further questioning regarding assumptions about children, childhood and sex. Of the potential themes the three examined and developed in this paper are firstly, broad definitions of 'sexualised' media content or commercial goods which appear to render consumption and embodiment as implicitly 'sexualised'. Secondly, the limited attention paid to the role of agency in the lives of children and the resulting lack of attention to children's voices within the debate and finally, the unproblematised constructions of gender and sexuality.

The study

2.1 This analysis seeks to unpack the dominant discursive constructs and conceptual structures surrounding children, childhood and sex in contemporary consumer cultures across international terrains. The reports under analysis had the broad remit of investigating sexualised commodities and media content in the lives of children and were conducted by or on behalf of national governments or institutions in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom. Other reports could have been chosen but there was a desire to keep a balance across international terrains and to avoid reports which explored sexualisation but which were part of wider or alternative agendas (for example Papadopolous's 'Sexualisation of Young People Review' conducted as part of the UK Governments' Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls Consultation' launched in 2009). These reports and the discourses that they embody, promote, or indeed resist, form part of academic, professional and children's understandings of sexualisation and childhood and can and do underpin subsequent policy-making.

2.2 The method employed within this project is Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) (as defined by Carrabine 2001). The concept of discourse can be defined as 'sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions' (Parker 1994:245). Within this research, identification and evaluation of dominant discourses embedded within the reports analysed was the aim. FDA is particularly useful in this regard due to its specific focus on the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power. As the ways of speaking about a topic cohere they establish the truth or truths of a particular moment. Particular subject positions ('a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire' (Davies & Harre 1999: 35) are made available from which individuals speak or act. In a constant state of flux, these are contested and negotiated, and operate by offering or restricting opportunities for action. This approach is somewhat akin to critical frame analysis where official documents are studied to determine the

voices that are present and silent and how power is employed to regulate what can be said and by who (Ackerly & True 2010: 212). It is not possible from this kind of research to comment upon adults' or children's experiences of these discursive figures and associated talk, the implications of such ways of being in the world. Rather the aim here is to uncover the kinds of subjecthoods that are made available to children and young people, as well as the political concerns and policy responses made possible.

2.3 The processes of FDA employed were informed by the six stages laid down in the introductory text by Willig (2008: 114–117) and Carrabine's (2001) eleven step guide. Discursive objects constructed within the text were identified by extensive reading and re-reading of the data itself and surrounding contextual sources. By identifying the dominant constructions of childhood, sexualisation, gender and sexuality, by analysing how these concepts are defined, understood and talked about within international responses to the issue of the sexualisation of childhood, light can be shed upon the sanctioned ways made available to 'do' sex, gender and sexuality and to 'be' a child, an adult, a boy, a girl, a 'sexual' or a 'sexualised' being.

2.4 It is important to acknowledge my own positionality as the researcher: a white, middle class, female, feminist, sociologist interested in embodiment, gender and sexuality in childhood. This unique set of interrelated attributes impact upon interpretations of data, and recognition that this analysis is partial and framed by my own subjecthood is essential. Others may see different issues and level alternative critiques; so this analysis should be recognised as one potential reading of many. Nonetheless the three themes identified here are: definitions of childhood and sexualisation, children's agency and voices and the unproblematised constructions of gender and sexuality.

Sexualisation and childhood: Do we know what we mean?

3.1 The reports in question have very different approaches to defining 'sexualisation'. It is essential to recognise that the term sexualisation is highly contested and has significant critiques. Duchinsky (2012) evaluates the linguistic construction of the term, noting that its use as an action noun means it simultaneously designates both process and its consequence. '"-ation" follows after the suffix "-ise" which serves to make the word a process through which the noun "sexual" is endowed…signifying a passive process' (Duchinsky 2012). This linguistic definition of sexualisation as the endowment of the sexual (a range of phenomena which broadly means pertaining in some way to sex) onto a person, object or space for example, is useful. However, this is itself an imprecise definition and the term endowment signifies that for what is being sexualised the process of sexualisation is a passive one.

3.2 There is a simultaneous reliance within reports on dominant understandings of childhood as a developmental stage during the passive process of biological unidirectional maturation (Clark 2013). Rush and La Nauze (2006: 3) argue that sexualising forces result in a 'precocious and unhealthy leap towards the end of…developmental process'. Further reliance on these models is evidenced within other reports, for example the description of female (but not male) pubertal development in the Bailey Review (2011: 44), come at the expense of acknowledging the potential agentic and interdependent nature of children's everyday lives and the role of culture in how this is

understood. The gendered implications of this are discussed in the final section of this paper but this issue is problematic in its reliance on homogenising developmental models that are a 'one dimensional response to the diversity of girlhood experience' (Kehily 2012: 266). This problem is further exacerbated by the lack of attention paid to children's experiences within the report consultation and research processes and this issue is addressed in the subsequent section. However, this is not just pertinent for understanding how research or consultation with children was approached within these reports but also for how childhood itself is constructed. It appears to be viewed throughout all the reports predominantly as a period of sacred innocence (Faulkner 2010), evidenced in statements such as 'children are especially vulnerable and need to be given special consideration' (Bailey 2011: 9) and which conceptualise 'the tween market as consisting of the most vulnerable in our society' (SCECA 2008: 9). Sexualisation is constructed as an insidious threat comprised of outside adult influences and children as significantly demarcated from their adult counterparts. They are articulated as not able to act as 'responsible' subjects within contemporary individualising political discourses.

Contemporary neoliberal agendas, while all too often denying agency to children (as explored in the subsequent section) reaffirms the focus on the family as the rightful place within which children become responsible citizens. Bailey is explicit throughout his report about giving power back to parents to decide what their children see or experience, this is up front in the report introduction 'parents…should be the ones to set the standards that their children live by' (2011: 3). This is combined with a view that all adults should be responsible citizens but that state intervention (not favoured by a Conservative led Coalition UK Government and shrinking welfare system) in family life will disempower parents (Bailey 2011: 3). Moral governance is positioned as ensuring the social conditions within which adult subjects are responsible for their fates and decisions and those of their family (Turner 2008). As Cameron has stated, in a statement which addressed the sexualisation of childhood debate, 'we've got to stop treating children like adults and adults like children…the more that we as a society do, the less we will need government to do' (2009). The discursive image of the child, which is mobilised within these debates, not only reinforces individualising notions of private family life (Duchinsky 2012), but also the responsible, active adult subject, constructed in direct contrast with the passive becoming child. Children's wellbeing as future citizens is to be protected by an adherence to dominant sexual norms that are understood through the window of stage-based developmental discourses which promise to ensure correct and normal biological sexual development (Alldred & David 2007). And, as Bailey (2011: 3) states, it is responsible adults who must 'create the sort of environment that allows our nation's children to be children', thus 'creating and owning a better society' – whatever it is that that means.

3.3 Just as it emphasises that children should be 'children' but doesn't address what this actually means or acknowledge how it may be culturally or historically specific, the Bailey Review (2011: 8) argues that the sexualisation debate is not served well by developing 'complicated and contested, definitions of commercialisation and sexualisation'. The report makes no explicit attempt for readers, within the executive summary or main body, to define the sexualisation of childhood, no concept which can be operationalised in existing or future debates. Thus readers continue for a subsequent 100 pages unsure of exactly what it is that we're all supposed to be discussing.

3.4 It is questionable, however, whether the explicit attempts to define sexualisation actually place us in a better position than the uncertainty of the Bailey Review. The APA (2007) provides perhaps the most explicit definition (utilised also by SCECA 2008) of 'sexualisation' as occurring when one or more of four processes takes place, the final one being sexuality inappropriately imposed upon a person. This definition is so wide ranging that it offers nothing concrete for academics to operationalise further, for practitioners or parents to utilise or children and young people to discuss. This solely negative definition has been subject to extensive critique as violating an established academic standard by not even considering the possibility of a positive view, some condemning it as unworthy of publication (Verra 2009).

3.5 Focusing on negativity and passivity in definitions is not helpful for furthering the debate and can result in sensationalist claims. Rush and La Nauze (2006: 44) provide an interesting example of this in the name of their report itself 'Corporate Paedophilia'. Although a term which attempts to conceptualise how corporations exploit children within consumptive processes, by making an explicit link between consumerism and sex in popular culture and increased risk of paedophilia for children, a notion of fear is induced. This rather sensational title is not subject to explicit, critical reflexivity (Hawkesworth 2006) to consider the impact of using such a phrase on the debate itself. Without this awareness 'subjective interpretation and value judgements are presented as scientific fact' (Simpson 2011: 295) and such sensationalist statements are not recognised as potentially damaging.

3.6 An event which took place in the same Australian context as the Corporate Paedophilia Report is the investigation into images of naked children used by artist Bill Henson. The then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, described the images, before actually seeing them, as absolutely revolting (Trickey et al. 2008) with other politicians following suit, effectively sexualising the image. The recognition that images of child nudity have been present in art for centuries was not considered. In fact in the unfolding of this situation and in all the international reports analysed here historical perspectives are virtually absent (Wouters 2010). Henson's photographs are not necessarily sexual. Their construction as such instead rests upon the interpretation brought by the viewer and subsequent value judgements. Such absolutist political discourse serves to render the discussion of childhood sexuality as illegitimate in itself (Simpson 2011: 292). Such conversations will remain shrouded in veils of morality if no attempt is made to define imperative concepts, and adopting more encompassing historical and theoretical perspectives (Wouters 2010). 'Clichés such as "let children be children" are unhelpful and say nothing…the nature of childhood is not self-evident' (Simpson 2011:2 95).

3.7 As Goode (2010) states, moral panics result in a state of hysteria which appears to prevent the capacity to think clearly. Statements from the reports such as Rush and La Nauze's (2006: 2) view that 'sexualisation of children risks…encouraging paedophilic sexual desire for children' can potentially contribute to these kinds of sensationalising discussions. The view that adults will be uncontrollably attracted to the pre-pubescent girl solely as a result of her being endowed with a form of adult sexual availability by the playboy bunny on her pencil case does not reflect the complexity of issues surrounding adult sexual attraction to children or child sexual abuse. Abhorrence of child sexual abuse should not blind us to investigating sexual non-abusive aspects in

children's lives. As in the Bill Henson case, the question should be asked 'were those who wished to classify Henson's photography as child pornography in fact…rendering those particular images of the child even more sexually desirable to the very people they feared?' (Simpson 2011: 299). Inadequate consideration of the context of clothing, nakedness and images of children in consumer culture results in a struggle of signification (Cover 2003) where the rituals that constrain both gazer and performer become unstable. All-encompassing definitions, such as that provided by Rush and La Nauze (2006: 15) where 'material related to beauty, fashion, celebrities or romance…as sexualising content' are so unbounded that all imagery of children or commodities aimed at children can in theory be defined as sexualised or sexualising. If all embodied commodities or images of children's bodies are defined in official discourse as 'sexualised' this has the potential to render such imagery as sexual even if that was not its intention or how it is understood, by adults or children. As Archard (2004: 105) argues 'talk of children's essential innocence is in danger both of being mythic and ironically, of being sexualised'.

Agency, appropriation and voice

4.1 Throughout all the reports childhood is conceptualised as a period of becoming, a phase of the biological life course which, despite its apparent certainty and naturalness, is at risk from outside threats. This construction of children, and childhood itself as at risk is further reinforced by understandings of children as recipients of outside content lacking the ability to understand what they experience without adult guidance or intervention (Jenks 1996). The language employed within the reports is implicitly passive with regards to children's media literacy. Throughout references are made to children's vulnerability, susceptibility to marketing exploitation and limited capabilities to interact in mediatised consumer societies. The Bailey Review (2011: 9) goes so far as to state that to assume children are not passive receivers of media content somehow means those with such views seek to adultify children. As such, there is a lack of recognition of the negotiation of gender, consumer culture and sexuality by children whereby consumptive practices are subject to appropriation, used as both part of collective social practices and in the construction of identity (Konig 2008). The analytical concept of bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966), whereby consumer goods can be subject to a range of uses and meanings (Hebdige 1979), is not employed. Rush and La Nauze (2006) consider this as failing to acknowledge the vulnerability and limited capacity of young people to process information, and yes, it would be irresponsible to disregard the potential of media messages to impact, potentially negatively, on children's everyday experiences. However, Angelides (2004: 52) argues that 'notions of children's powerlessness…stand as unsubstantiated assumptions, begging the question of their political and performative function'. This paper mirrors these concerns highlighting the double-edged sword of contemporary culture's desire to protect and simultaneously to control children (Lumby 1998), taking issue with the suggestion that children and young people are entirely powerless and passive as they negotiate their cultural worlds.

4.2 This is not to say that children's agency is entirely ignored within the reports. Paradoxically, despite the dominant constructions of passivity highlighted above, children in the Bailey Review appear to be conceptualised as powerfully agentic in their role as 'pesterers', citing both parents and children's identification of the role of pester power. Operationalised here are popular motifs of the

Apollonian and Dionysian child which exist in parallel and have been identified as underpinning diverse policy orientations towards children (Stainton Rogers 2001). The Apollonian child is conceptualised as 'angelic, innocent and untainted by the world' (Jenks 1996: 73) and can be seen throughout all the reports which make consistent references to innocent, free children whose childhood is in need of protection. In contrast, the Dionysian child is considered to enter the world with a bias towards evil 'drawn to self-gratification and pleasure, lacking sensitivity and social control' (Murphy nd: 6). This image of the child is simultaneously mobilised alongside the Apollonian in Bailey's 'pester power' discussion. While being passive recipients of media and consumer messages children are also considered as powerful pleasure seeking individuals able to manipulate parental consumption for their own ends.

4.3 Existing research puts forward the view that both children and parents adopt a range of strategies in their consumptive negotiations, few of which are a source of conflict or resemble pestering (see Gram 2010 in Phoenix 2011; Nash 2009). There is potential in this discussion for the Bailey Review to further extend our understandings of how children and families negotiate consumption, media use and sexual content. Further discussion of children as interdependent beings – agentic individuals in their own right yet embedded in familial and peer relations from which they negotiate their worlds. However, instead we are presented with a kind of double fear – children as innocent marketing dupes in need of protection who, when captured by such practices, themselves become a threat to family life. In these discussions of pestering the individual child is not heard but rather functions as a symbol of 'a more disturbing and widespread phenomenon' (Hendrick 2003:11). In fact, for a debate which, on the face of it one would assume children are a central part of, their voices are peculiarly quiet.

4.4 SCECA (2008), Rush and La Nauze (2006) and APA (2007) did not actively conduct any direct primary research with children as part of their investigations. APA (2007) set out to conduct a form of literature review which explored the theoretical arguments, research evidence and clinical experience surrounding the sexualisation of girls. The issue of how adults and children may differ in their interpretation of 'sexualised' imagery is a fundamental part of exploring how children negotiate and understand sexual media content and commodities and their impact on children's everyday lives and wellbeing, yet much research cited within these debates including that selected within APA (2007) has been based on adults rather than children (Buckingham et al 2010).

4.5 Rush and La Nauze (2006) conducted their own research in the form of content analysis of selected media, a useful tool for examining the cultural scripts which children negotiate. However, there are critiques of the sample size and the process of selection of sample material has been questioned (Phoenix 2011: 7). No parameters for defining an image as 'sexualised' are laid out and as a result there is no distinction between sexual and sexualising imagery (Buckingham et al. 2010).

4.6 SCECA (2008) advertised a consultation for individuals and organisations, the number of responses to which they identify as evidence of significant public interest in this issue, none of the responses however, came directly from children. As a result children's voices are mediated by third, fourth even fifth parties, for example, submitted in the form of reports constructed by adults on

behalf of children following some brief consultation. An example of this, discussed below, is the submission of conclusions from a session held by the Children and Youth Board of the Department of Education to gather children and young people's views for the Bailey Review. When not left out entirely, this is often how children's views are often represented in such consultations. A reason for this can be derived from the discursive conception of children within these reports as Apollonian innocents and/or Dionysian wickeds (discussed in the previous section). Through such discourses children's voices are rendered questionable, either inadequate by their vulnerability or unreliable by their trustworthiness. When children's voices are absent from such discussions they are disempowered, suffering the indignity of 'being unable to present themselves as they would want to be seen' (Holland 2004: 21).

4.7 The Bailey Report did make explicit attempts to engage with children as part of its review. 520 children and young people aged 7–16 took part in the TNS Omnibus Survey, a further 552 participated in a survey organised by the Children's Commissioner for England, and the Children and Youth Board of the Department of Education, with the National Children's Bureau, held a session to discuss the review and submitted their conclusions (2011: 8).

4.8 This demonstrates a significant attempt, beyond the other reports considered here, to listen to the voices of children however, the significance given to these views remains questionable. Bailey (2011) devotes an entire section in his review to the views of parents but this is not mirrored by a section devoted to children/young people so that the voices of children can be afforded equal status. Frequent quotations from parents in large font decorate the pages throughout this report, and only two such quotations are the words of a child, both girls. The primacy of parents' voices over children's reinforces the dominant neoliberal UK Conservative-led Government agenda, despite significant developments in children's rights discourses in recent decades. As discussed previously, the private sphere of the family is represented as the rightful place of the child and in this domain, parents (adults) hold the power, and the role of Government and its associated institutions is merely to support them in this endeavour. As a result, the child's voice is subsumed into that of the family; this is done in a highly visible manner in the Bailey Review. The final section of the report is devoted to the views of parents, but this is not however mirrored with a section devoted to hearing children's views.

4.9 A graphical representation of results from the TNS Omnibus Survey (Bailey 2011: 58) shows that 'cost', 'peers' and 'parents' are reportedly significant influences on children's consumptive choices, with 42%, 39% and 23% identifying these factors respectively. In contrast, the brand, advert or role of celebrities is somewhat less [insert], identified as influential factors by 32%, 20% and 10% of children respectively. Despite these results from children themselves, the surrounding discussions and parental quotations place significant power in the hands of advertising and celebrity/brands. This is not to say that these are not powerful discursive forces but it appears that the initial views of children would encourage a more nuanced and contextual analysis. Since this does not take place, adult, parental views are given greater space, in effect deemed of greater significance. Children's voices even when explicitly sought out are not given the primacy that they deserve in a debate which ought to place them at the centre of enquiry.

Calling all straight girls…boys and LGBTQ need not apply!

5.1 It is only APA (2007) that sets out to explicitly explore only the lives of young girls in relation to the sexualisation debate, however the lacuna which sexualisation for boys appears to fall into in the other reports is cause for concern. The role of boys occupies a kind of absent presence, characterised by a lack of attention. Rush and La Nauze (2006: 7) provide an extensive list of clothing and accessories that 'sexualise' girls yet the list for boys contains simply one item and of the range of images provided in the report from magazines and catalogues only three contain boys.

'For girls, examples include: bolero cross over tops…crop tops…dangling jewellery from the necks, ears or wrists, dangling belts from the hips or waist, and rings on the fingers…some styles of dress or skirt, most particularly short skirts, and dresses held up by thin straps. For boys, examples include suit jackets…In addition sexualised girl models almost always have long hair…in contrast sexualised boys have short hair…'

The Bailey Review (2011) takes this further by providing a description of the pubertal development of females, as discussed previously, but failing to do so for boys. A form of biological essentialism failing to acknowledge how narrow stereotypes can make life a misery for many children (Barker & Duchinsky 2012) who Bailey would presume fall outside of healthy gender development (Bailey 2011:49). The justification for doing the above, that girls are more targeted by such sexualising forces, fails to recognise the role of the report itself in making this the case by reinforcing such views.

5.2 Boys' sexuality appears to be constructed as so fixed and so natural as to not be at risk. The sexualising forces that are constructed as so dangerous and insidious in conversations about girls are rarely considered in relation to boys. This absence in the reports leaves us to presume that they consider processes of sexualisation as posing limited, if any, threat to the lives or development of boys. This fails to acknowledge the ways in which boys must negotiate dominant sexual scripts or discursive constructions of what it means to be a child. There is no consideration of the potential of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) or a mask of masculinity policed by peers, social institutions and wider discourses as part of the male gaze (Pollack 2001). By seeming to represent boys' sexuality as unchanging and natural, rather than offering up critique or even recognition of this position, the reports themselves form part of dominant discourses of masculinity. Skimming over boys in consultations whose objective would appear to be exploring the role of sexualisation in the lives of *all* children fails to consider half of all young people. What message are we sending to boys by seeming to place so little value on their experiences? Even if the argument that girls are the most affected by this issue (Bailey 2011) is considered as a good reason for their restricted focus (which is in itself significantly questionable), by failing to consider the place of boys in the experiences of young women, these reports fall far short of providing a complete picture of the lives of girls.

5.3 The failure to consider boys in this debate is paralleled by an uneasiness regarding how young girls are constructed. Rush and La Nauze (2006:9) emphatically state that 'adult women use cosmetics to make themselves more attractive to men'. Such assumptions of gendered and

heterosexualised behaviour serve to construct women in particular ways that do not recognise the multi-faceted nature of girls' or women's experiences, [that some lesbians wear make-up]? or that 'girl culture' can act as a site for agency and creativity (Cook 2004). They fail to question the potential essentialism of femininity in popular culture (Jackson & Scott 2004) but instead naturalise gender as an issue – leaving little space for critiques of femininity and masculinity as social constructs. As Duchinsky (2012) argues, gender and the issue of sexism are embedded in biology in the Bailey Review. The focus is on ensuring that girls become healthy, sexually developed adults avoiding the perilous influences of sex and consumption, rather than offering a sustained critique of how 'normal' or ideal femininity is constructed in media and consumer cultures. These discourses reinforce naturalised understandings of gender at the expense of acknowledging other factors, for example, by citing how natural gender differences impact toy selection in a positive way (Bailey 2011). This can serve to further reify dominant cultural scripts pertaining to gender and femininity. What is somewhat paradoxical is that all the reports spend some time exploring gender stereotyped commodities and the role they may play in providing girls with narrow images of what it means to be a girl and/or woman, certainly a pertinent issue in the lives of girls, while failing to recognise that they themselves reinforce such understandings.

5.4 Beyond gender, sexuality rather than being openly portrayed in a particular (often unquestioning) manner is notable primarily through its absence. In an example of heteronormativity, all four reports appear to assume that the sexual imagery and relationships children may be exposed to will be heterosexual and that women's make-up use is necessarily seeking heterosexual success. Heteronormativity refers to the organisation and regulation of sexuality as grounded in heterosexuality to the point where it becomes a kind of foundational norm, considered so 'normal' that it requires no explanation, omnipresent yet invisible (Hawkes & Scott 2005: 6). While the contested nature of gender is acknowledged (although not evaluated) across the board in all reports, sexuality is predominantly ignored. This lacuna itself reveals something important, that heterosexuality is the default, assumed sexual subjecthood available to adults and children. Martin and Kazyak (2012) examine heteronormativity in children's films and here heterosexual love is portrayed as simultaneously natural and powerful. In the reports however, heterosexuality is not presented as special, it is simply assumed. The reports should thus be recognised as forming part of dominant discursive constructions of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980).

5.5 Potential spaces are available, within all the reports, for critical discussions surrounding sexuality, children and childhood. For example, Rush and La Nauze's (2006) content analysis revealed overwhelmingly frequent material relating to boyfriends and heterosexual crushes in girls' magazines. They did not use these findings to explore how children see imagery which reinforces compulsory heterosexuality but rather they operationalise this data only to consider the inappropriateness of such material for *young* readers. The primary concern here is a perceived need to keep sex and relationships, of which the only kind referred to are heterosexual monogamous ones, outside of the realm of childhood; rather than to offer a critique of the kinds of relationships and sexualities which are promoted to children. An opportunity is thus missed to fully utilise the data analysed for an exploration of how discursive images of sexuality both legitimise and prohibit particular sexual subjecthoods for children. Tolman (2012) suggests that through the naturalising

forces of compulsory heterosexuality the bodies of girls are policed and their desires silenced. In earlier work West and Zimmerman (1987) explore the implications of the processes of doing gender and the difficulty of separating this from the maintenance of heteronormativity. Not doing gender or sexuality in a way that is compatible with biology is thus conceptualised as a threat to heterosexuality (Schilt & Westbrook 2012). Here in these reports however heterosexuality appears not to be at risk, it is assumed and therefore is overtly, yet insidiously, dominant.

Conclusion

6.1 The intention here has been to identify and critically evaluate some of the discourses at play within the international sexualisation of childhood debate. This analysis has drawn attention to the ways that are made available for children to do 'sex', 'gender', 'sexuality' and indeed 'childhood' itself, or for political responses to be formulated. The commissioning of these reports on childhood 'sexualisation' has drawn attention to an important issue in the lives of children in contemporary cultures and they have provided valuable discursive space for debates to take place surrounding childhood and sexuality in contemporary media and consumer cultures. However opportunities to further understand gender, sexuality and indeed childhood itself are not taken up. The reports tend to take such a broad approach to the complex issue of child sexuality that this results in a failure to do anything beyond reinforce dominant gendered and heteronormative discourses. As part of a failure to adequately define key concepts the discussions lack historical context, are imbued with value judgements that have not been subject to critical reflexivity and are framed in morally absolutist, gendered and heteronormative terms.

6.2 What is apparent in the reports is a focus on girls, the construction of children as fundamentally passive, reinforced gendered and heteronormative assumptions, and the defining of all media and commodities that relate to young people's bodies as 'sexualised' and therefore intrinsically negative. These have led to a series of inherent failures in the critical debate that these reports are supposed to foster across international boundaries and serve to narrowly represent the complex, gendered and embodied worlds of children and young people. There is a failure to acknowledge within these reports the intricate nature of children's embodied relationships with consumptive practices and indeed their own gender and sexuality. This is not mirrored in the critical academic debates which have been had around these issues (see for example Attwood & Smith 2011; Coy & Garner 2012). A chasm appears to exist between academic engagement with the issues raised throughout this paper and the position and content of the reports themselves. There has been substantial critical discussion by academics across disciplines in responding to these publications and the issues surrounding 'sexualisation' (see, for example, Kehily 2012; Ringrose & Renold 2012) but recognition of the nuanced and complex issues, for example, in relation to how images of children and childhood are constructed and reproduced, are not attended to in the reports as they clearly have been academic circles. By identifying some of the commonalities that exist across these reports some of the more pertinent issues, such as those identified in this paper (definitions of sexualisation, gender and sexuality and the voices of children) can be incorporated into public debate, extending beyond academia into public debate and governmental response. By identifying critiques across national contexts research that foregrounds the diversity and complexity

of children's everyday sexual cultures and subjectivities (Epstein et al. 2012) can be given the primacy it deserves. Therefore despite being unsettling and challenging (Renold & Ringrose 2011) it can be used and indeed commissioned by policy makers across national boundaries.

6.3 In summary, the reports as they stand fail to recognise children as social actors (Prout 2000) and do not put value on children's voices in a debate which should place them at the centre of enquiry. Sexuality as an issue is palpable by its absence, characterised by the lack of attention it receives. By using FDA to unpick dominant discourses the reports themselves can be viewed as part of the overriding sexual scripts which promote compulsory heterosexuality as the default sexual subjecthood of citizens. Even where children's views are considered, they remain both heteronormative and gendered. To put this bluntly, to ignore boys in consultations and policy discussions risks ignoring boys and the issues that they feel are important in their everyday lives. It sends a message that boys are unaffected by these issues and that boys' views are unimportant within these conversations, neither of which are true and both of which run the risk of silencing their voices. The conceptualisation of girls as inherently vulnerable within a dominant culture will not serve to help reinforce women's power (Wolf 1994) or rights and, despite the emphasis on young girls within these reports, does not demonstrate the value of their voices either.

6.4 Highlighting here the dominant understandings of gender and sexuality within these reports does not mean that the media and consumer culture do not also circulate standardised images of femininity, masculinity or sexuality or reify dominant cultural standards of beauty and sex (see for example Frost 2001; Lloyd 1996). Indeed, Buckingham et al. (2010) argues that children are not wholly free to make their own choices but equally 'they are not in any sense simply the dupes of marketers' (2010: 4). As explored in the previous section concepts of appropriation and agency are imperative to understanding how children interact with and utilise commodities and media imagery. Young people 'present themselves as media literate and able to make their own decisions about sex' (Attwood 2009: xx). Nonetheless these decisions are mediated by structural forces and dominant cultural scripts. However, if we assume girls are unanimously vulnerable and passive and take the same generalising and unquestioning approach to gender and sexuality evidenced in these reports, then we too are guilty of not supporting the diversification of images of gender, sexuality and what it means to be a child in the 21st century.

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[i] *Akira* does include two fundamental girl characters: first, Kaneda's love interest Kei, who is part of a rebel group in Neo-Tokyo and plays a pivotal role in the second half of the film as the Capsules and the Espers seek to control Tetsuo. Second, the female Esper, Kiyoko, who works closely with the other two Espers, and who forges a link with Kei to help explain the legacy of Akira and the existence of psychic energies on earth.

[ii] The word bōsōzoku broadly translates as "violent running gang."

[iii] See Castro (2019a) for discussion of how modern Japanese girls also face such criticisms and similar labeling.

[iv] Horsepower is a term that refers to how much power an engine generates. Invented as a term in the 19th Century and applied to everything from lawnmowers to cars, the 200 horsepower Kaneda exclaims his bike can do had yet to be found in 1988's motorbike and engine technologies.

[v] A bozo drive is a collective activity when one or more bōsōzoku gather together to run through the city – they speed, run red lights, have unofficial races, and gun their loud exhausts, creating a maximum-impact, highly visual spectacle (see Kersten 1993).

[vi] The cyborg refers to an entity that is part machine and part physiologically human body. This entity represents an altered landscape consisting of new connections between the

biological, technological, and informatic (see Christie and Bloustien 2010; Franklin 2006; Haraway 1985).

[vii] Julia's age is unspecified throughout *You're Welcome, Universe*, although it is clear she is a high school student in Junior year of a North American high school, which places her age at approximately 16-17 years old. Biddy and Quincy also have unspecified ages but *Girls Like Us* begins as they are graduating high school so their age is likely to be 18 years old.

[viii] The notion of the "normal" child is distilled from the comparative scores of age-graded populations in a range of developmental fields related to IQ, physical development (i.e. gross and fine motor skills), and social and emotional development, to name a few. Critics of the way in which approaches rooted in Developmental Psychology come to be operationalized in the lives of children suggest that notions of this "normal" child, based on so-called objective measurement, are in fact "an abstraction, a fantasy, a fiction, a production of the testing apparatus" and that "no real child lies at its basis" (Burman 1994, 22).

[ix] Julia's expulsion from school at the very beginning of *You're Welcome, Universe* results in graffiti art being ostensibly banned by her mothers (Julia's parents are women in a same-sex relationship). As such, Julia must store her spray paints and other supplies in a variety of creative places including her car, school locker, under her bed, and the locker at her part-time job at McDonalds.