Constructs of childhood: Constructs of self

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Notions of childhood have been debated through time and place. This paper works from the understanding of childhood as an adult imposed, socially constructed and culturally transmitted concept. This paper provides a typology of ten ways in which adults construct children and childhood. The authors assert that in the process of defining children, adults necessarily and simultaneously define their own position/s in relation to children. Thus for each of the ten constructs of childhood, the authors present ten types of relationship adults consciously or unconsciously impose upon themselves when they work from these constructions. The authors intend that the typology presented creates a beginning tool for conscious, critical reflection of how we are perceiving children and how this perception may drive our work and relationships with them. It may also provide a reflective tool for imagining working differently with children in ways which better serve them (and us!).

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Throughout European history, notions of what constitutes a child and defines childhood have been strongly contested. Within post modernity (from approximately the mid-1980s), childhood is largely recognised by writers in 'childhood studies' as a constructed notion developed, perpetuated and contested by adults who act and speak on behalf of politically and economically disenfranchised children. Wrigley (2003) argues that these adult constructs of children 'necessarily involve profound questions of moral judgement that rest on implicit ideas of children's place in the social order' (p. 693). While this literature focuses on defining children and childhood, it is less overt in recognising that through processes of defining the child, adults are necessarily and simultaneously defining themselves in relation to children rather than as a mutually exclusive entity.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

In this paper, we present ten different constructs of childhood through which we elucidate the demands these constructs place on children and adults in their relationships with each other. These typologies have been drawn from the writings of major authors in the field of childhood studies, including those from education and family therapy, inclusive of narrative therapy. These two fields represent the authors' professional fields of practice. In addition, as a test of literary validity, writers in the field of childhood studies cited in this study were cross-referenced by other writers in childhood studies whose work was also used. Layder (1993) argued that cross reference validity is an acceptable measure of literary reliability.

Family therapy as a field of practice is recognised as a psychotherapy. It differs from earlier forms of childhood psychology in the sense that it is much more concerned with relationships between systems and persons, as both determining and pre-figuring constructions of self and others (Nichols & Schwarz 1995). Family therapy is therefore much less concerned with the 'grand' developmental theories of Freud, Piaget and Erikson, which presume individuals progress through a series of psychological and physiological stages of development to reach adulthood, than it is with the relationships between persons (children and adults in the case of this paper) which determine their social contract. This paper is therefore presented within a framework of postmodern, social constructivist theory. True

to this philosophical underpinning and to the mission and practice of typology building, this paper does not present 'truth'. It does not present or even suggest an 'essential', core, fundamental relationship which is, or should be, extant between children and adults. Rather, it seeks to present the gamut of relationships articulated in family therapy and childhood studies texts between children and adults. This breadth of focus is the hallmark of typology building (Layder 1993). That we found ten typologies in the literature we studied is interesting, but should not infer that there are really, or only, ten types of relationship between children and adults. Indeed, we are hoping that this paper will stimulate readers to submit other 'types' of relationships which they think manifest between children and adults. The authors are increasingly refining this typology to a series of subtypes within the major ten categorisations (types). This latter project is outside the scope of this paper.

Unlike other studies and writings in childhood, and more especially those concerned with educational and social policies, this paper does not prescribe hard (modernist) determinants (like age) of what makes a child or what makes an adult, but rather it seeks to expose through a literature analysis the types of relationships engaged, and espoused through literature, which construct us as 'adults' and 'children' and through which our roles each in relation to the other are prescribed. This freedom to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct definitions of ourselves and ways of being with others is fundamental to social constructivist theory. Indeed it is this aspect of post structuralism which liberates us from the shackles of what and who we 'should' be in relation to each other, to the possibilities of what and who we can be in relation to each other. It is this cause that is served in the process of typology building.

While typology building sets out to explore a range of discrete 'types' within any given study, those of us working with children recognise that it is at the interface between constructs (types) of childhood that we confront major dilemmas in our relationship with children. Each construct jostles with the other for pre-eminence. In this sense, these categories (types) are not mutually exclusive. That is, we may work with children, even the same children, from multiple definitional perspectives. Hutchison and Charlesworth (2000) articulate this in their example of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, wherein there is an explicit call to extend human rights to children (with the expectation that the child is agentic and can act on these rights) whilst simultaneously recognising childhood as a time of immaturity and vulnerability when children are in need of care and protection (the child as innocent). Similarly, children who are focused on under policy directives of 'child protection' are engaged through a paradigm of 'child as innocent'. At the point at which the child acts out their abuse on others, though, they are more likely to be engaged through a paradigm of 'child as evil'.

This recognised, however, a focus on the intersection between constructs of childhood is outside the scope of this paper. The task of this paper is to present a typology of childhood which explicates both the power of the child and the power of the adult as a first step in developing a political consciousness of our engagement with children. Like many typologies, this is presented outside of notions of culture, class, gender, ability, age, etc. It is hoped that the typology presented provides a tool for people working either directly or indirectly with children, to interrupt their taken-for-granted notions of children and childhood to expand that which is possible in the relationship between children and adults. This will force us away from expectations of linear or singular change, from either the adult or the child, to a recognition that change within either definition will provoke change in both.

TEN CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Through analysis of literature, art and discourse surrounding children and childhood, we suggest that there are at least ten ways in which childhood is conceptualised. These are:

- the child as innocent;
- the child as evil;
- the snowballing child;
- the out of control child;
- the child as noble/saviour;
- the child as miniature adult;
- the child as adult-in-training;
- the child as commodity;
- the child as victim; and
- the agentic child.

Each of these constructs is presented in terms of its defining characteristics, images or examples of this type; power and a critique of each construct, along with the simultaneous demands these constructs make of adults. A table summarising each type is presented at the end of this paper.

THE CHILD AS INNOCENT: THE ADULT AS PROTECTOR

This construct has been presented since the late Middle Ages, from depictions of the child saint, and with the belief that adults should care for the young and innocent (Branscombe et al. 2000). Childhood is located as distinct from adulthood — a time of pure innocence that will never be recaptured and should be the best time of our lives (Hutchison & Charlesworth 2000; Wood 2003). Froebel's metaphor of *kindergarten* depicts this through imagery of a garden of children in a state of natural goodness, to be nurtured and tended by responsible adults (Aries 1962).

The innocent child is present in works of fiction, as well as non-fiction, where children are portrayed as weak and suffering, in need of pity and protection (Wolfenstein, in Mead & Wolfenstein 1955). For example, in Alcott's *Little*

Women, central character, Jo, dreads growing up and her mother states that children should be children for as long as possible (Wood 2003).

This construct is evident in codes of ethics and codes of conduct towards children, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that in all actions towards children, 'the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration' (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989) and Australian child protection policies and practices (Mason & Steadman 1997). While the 'best interests of the child' are fore grounded in these and other policies, these are for the large part defined outside of the child's own agency. Their innocence is conflated with their simultaneous ignorance or naivety.

Within this discourse of the child as innocent, children are granted little power; they are perceived as incapable of making decisions and positioned as needing adult protection. They are therefore at the mercy of adults (Corsaro 1997). Walkerdine (1999) argues that this is a predominant paradigm at the beginning of the 21st century as we seek to protect our (innocent) children from those who would harm them. She cites several examples of events which act upon the fears of adults and entrench 'protection', such as the Dunblane tragedy in Scotland where teachers and children were killed by a gunman, and adult fear of children's relationships with others in cyberspace.

In this construct, adults are perceived as having power and responsibility over and for the children with whom they interact. They are positioned as nurturers and moulders (sculptors) of the child. If the child does not respond in ways which society deems appropriate, then it is because they have not been loved, cared for, taught, and moulded appropriately (Gibson 1998; Wintersberger 1994, cited in Hutchison & Charlesworth 2000). The adult is expected to control (or limit) the child's environment and type of stimulus to which they are exposed, such as the amount of time children can watch television as well as what they can watch (Buckingham 1994).

This construct of childhood is criticised in terms of its assumption that adults always act in and with goodwill towards children. Further, it denies the child a voice in their own lives and decisions, allowing adults to speak and give consent on their behalf (Dockett 1998, p. 7; Fasoli 2001; Wood 2003). Hutchison and Charlesworth (2000) argue that childhood becomes sentimentalised in this construct. Dockett (1998) concurs that this is a nostalgic view but more seriously, it is one that stops us taking children seriously — they are cute and cuddly.

There is also an over-concentration on outcomes of socialisation to explain the phenomena of childhood rather than other variables, such as development, genetics and/or free will (Corsaro 1997), whilst remaining devoid of a wider socio-political and material understanding of the lives of children. Therefore, this framework of the child as innocent is over-reliant on standardised, psychological 'universal' knowledge of an homogenous entity – 'children' (Dockett 1998). The outcomes of this framework are that school and other curricula and the world are sanitised in their presentation of and to children (Dockett 1998). We control what children are able to see, do and participate in, because this state of innocence is to be preserved, not only for the child's good, but as a societal end in itself (i.e. this state of innocence is good for all of us). Silin (1995, cited in Woodrow 1999) urges us to recognise that when we construct safe, nurturing and sanitised environments for children, we separate them from their own knowledges and disconnect them from their own experiences of life.

THE CHILD AS EVIL: THE ADULT AS GOOD/MORAL

Notions of the evil child arise from the concept of original sin, that is, all children born are essentially demonic because they are evidence of their parents' intimacy (James, Jenks & Prout 1998). This construct allowed practices of infanticide and incest to persist (in Greece, Rome, Africa and China). Children who were considered less than perfect were drowned, exposed to the elements or starved (De Mause 1992).

In this construct of childhood, children are seen as intrinsically driven by their own needs, desires, nature and pleasure. Adults are positioned as good and moral; people who have passed from this naturally evil state to a more mature state. Our society becomes sustainable through adult transmission of this goodness or morality. Parents, teachers and others who work with children are expected to control this innate evil. Beatings and harsh discipline from adults may be seen as good for the child, where the adult claims, 'It did me no harm, so it will do you good'. When adults cannot or will not do this, they are seen as weak and blamed for not controlling the 'evil' child. Current discussion in Australia about fining parents for the misbehaviour of their child/ren, for example, operates from this typology.

This view prevails through literature like Golding's (1954) *Lord of the Flies*. The child as evil is an underlying construct in the regulation of children in educational settings, where children must conform to specific dress and behavioural codes. This construct forms the basis of research that positions children as objects to be studied in the search for better methods of establishing conformity and ease of teaching practice (Woodrow 1999). While the adult who views the child as innocent restricts the curriculum and alternative world views available to children, adults with constructs of the child as evil seek to restrict the child him/herself (Sorin 2003). The child is positioned as 'an untamed threat' (Corsaro 1997, p. 9) who must be controlled and trained to 'fit in'. This image is maintained not only through Christian beliefs, but through mass communication about child killers (e.g. the James Bulger case, where a

toddler was murdered by two young boys in England); young people involved in drugs, alcohol and irresponsible behaviour upon completion of their final year of high school; and imagery of deviant and violent youth (Guppy 2005). These events are often followed by some call to control and 'tame' young people through detention, curfews or 'boot camps'.

Walkerdine (1999) notes that adults may simultaneously position some children as innocent and others as evil. As evil children are seen to be a threat to the social order and its reproduction, the control of some children more than others is condoned. As in the construct of the child as innocent, there is an over-concentration on outcomes of socialisation within this paradigm of the child as evil. This paradigm does not consider the issue of real material social conditions, such as poverty and unemployment, conditions under which some children live. Children are seen as driven through psychological processes rather than as actors in their world.

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THE SNOWBALLING CHILD: THE DEFERRING ADULT

This child, while not out of control, seems to be in charge of adults and situations around her/him. Possibly due to the social conditions of the 21st century where busy, tired parents defer or give in to children (Steinberg & Kincheloe 2004), snowballing children make inflexible demands of adults. If things don't go the child's way, the child either withdraws or goes on the attack, either verbally or physically. Within this construct, the child is attributed to having more influence on the parent/adult than the parent/adult has on him/her. These children are products of a time when individual gratification takes precedence over community needs (Kincheloe 2004, in Steinberg & Kincheloe 2004). They are represented through images of the 'spoilt brat' who has all the toys and accessories s/he wants, but remains unsatisfied and continues to demand. Advertising to children supports this image, where children are offered a plethora of goods and services to be acquired through manipulation of their parents. Online shopping and wish lists are examples of this. Children who choose what and where to eat and refuse to eat meals prepared by adults have assumed this construct.

Snowballing children see power as a birthright, based on the parent giving in to their demands. They get a little power, and it snowballs. Adults are too busy or distracted and so, to ease their guilt or just to keep them quiet, give these children more and more of their own power (Sorin 2005). It is, however, illegitimate power — that is, their power does not derive from themselves but from an abrogating adult. This child is neither at the mercy of adults, like the innocent child, nor driven through intrinsic forces, like the evil child, but gains power through the lack of adult influence. The power they gain may or may not be useful in their own long term interests, but it is the short term gratification that conditions this behaviour. For example, the child may go to bed whenever they decide regardless of the impact this has on her/him or those around them either in the short or long term, or parents/adults feel like they 'talk till you're blue in the face', then give up and let children experience consequences for themselves. The adult could take the power back, but often doesn't know how to, or the snowball is so big now that it seems impossible.

In this image, the adult is very much seen as responsible, or rather irresponsible. Any power the child has is power that has been taken from the adult, rather than power in the child's right. The opportunity to negotiate power and autonomy is denied, as the adult defaults power to the child. This denies both the adult and the child agency in their relationship.

THE OUT-OF-CONTROL CHILD: THE INEFFECTUAL ADULT

Challenging adult authority is part of childhood (Corsaro 1997), but the out-of-control child uses power in negative ways, such as violence, to get people to do what they want them to do. They may internalise power and control in ways that ultimately incapacitate them, for example, by getting sick (e.g. anorexia nervosa). These children may also use protective policies against adults; for example, the small number of children who allege physical or sexual abuse by significant adults when this has not occurred. They can be found in the pages of newspapers, having committed violent crimes without being sanctioned for their behaviour (Robson 2005). This stands in contrast to the evil child, who will be sanctioned. While the out-of-control child initially assumes power in their relationships with adults, this is transitory, as they (eventually) feel out-of-control and believe that no-one is there to help them regain control — of themselves and their lives; and their behaviour may lead to sanctions upon reaching adulthood. Significant adults of the out-of-control child are ineffectual — they may feel powerless and even defeated in regaining influence with the child.

In this image, the notion of a co-constructed relationship between the child and the adult is negated, as the child is focused upon as an isolated identity in need of coming under their own control. Most adults give up on these children. However, in the work of narrative therapists Epston (1989) and White (1988/89; 1991), out-of-control children are engaged in ways that seem to allow them to increasingly

come under their own control. Temper tantrums, for example, are understood in narrative therapy as events through which children lose control of themselves and come more directly under the control of the temper tantrums (this is the process of externalising the problem). In the event of ongoing temper tantrums, children become labelled as dysfunctional. Their parents may label themselves, or be labelled by others, as ineffective. In this process, narratives begin to build about both children and their parents that privilege the version of themselves as under the control of the temper tantrum, camouflaging the narrative of children and their parents as agents in their own lives and authors of their own narratives. Through narrative processes, Epston and White help children and adults rediscover these liberating narratives that help them regain control over the problems or issues in their lives, thus providing alternatives to the evil/innocent narrative and paving the way for working with children and adults as agentic.

THE NOBLE/SAVIOUR CHILD: THE DEPENDENT ADULT

Like the innocent child, the noble/saviour child is beautiful and beloved, but in addition has the power to save not only other children, but adults, families, communities and even the world. This image of the child saint, or saviour, emerged in early Christian times with the recognition of Jesus' wisdom as a child and the Christian tenet that 'a little child will lead' (Branscombe et al. 2000). An example of the noble child cited by Wolfenstein (in Mead & Wolfenstein 1955) is the hero in the Italian film, *The White Line.*

> The boy hero of this film embodies the essentials of the Christ-legend. He forgives his enemies, he bears the cross, he dies for the sins of others; by his example he teaches his fellow men that they should love instead of hate one another (p. 279).

In the noble/saviour construct of childhood, children assume power – to save, reconcile, or take over adult responsibilities. Adults in the lives of noble/saviour children are generally dependent, through disability, hardship, substance abuse or other issues. They may absolve themselves of responsibility or literally be unable to undertake that which is expected. The power of the child is assumed through circumstances, rather than choice, and rightfully should belong with the adult. The child is neither agentic (has real choice, is able to make informed decisions) nor innocent; the responsibility is placed upon them (through acts of commission or omission) rather than it being their free choice.

In the 1980s, the Milan family therapists depicted a number of child 'problems' as attempts by the child to solve much broader family problems which they perceived, even at a subconscious level, as a threat to the integrity of the family. For example, a child getting major headaches or developing other health problems might enable a dysfunctional couple to remain together as they worry about the child rather than focusing on their own marital problems (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn 1987). Noble/saviour children are presented in literature, as in J.K Rowling's (1997) *Harry Potter.* Despite his own loss (his parents' deaths) and suffering, Harry places himself on the line in order that others might be protected. Children who look after their parents may be viewed this way. If, however, a child is looking after parents who are abusing drugs or alcohol, the focus may be on the child as a victim of abuse, since this behaviour is often assumed to result in a loss of the child's innocence.

The noble/saviour framework of childhood is created by powerful adults (e.g. therapist, grandparents, society) rather than children themselves, and assumes that we can understand the subconscious of children. Like other constructs of childhood, this framework may be seen as deterministic, since it relies on an understanding of a system (whether this be family or any other system) as homeostatic (Bateson 1972), that is, a system which during crisis will revert to 'how things should be', thus propelling even young children into activities which make their system (family, home) seem 'normal'. The child then carries out activities normally the reserve of adults/parents, which 'allows' the adults to revert to some form of dependency.

THE MINIATURE ADULT AND THE ADULT-IN-TRAINING: CHILDREN AND ADULTS AS THE SAME AND THE ADULT AS TEACHER

Literature describes two different, yet similar, types of child categorisation: the miniature adult and the adult-in-training, with some understanding that the former prescription of children predates the latter.

Miniature adult

This construct of childhood is one in which children are depicted as the same as adults. Childhood is not perceived as a separate phase of development (as it is in the child as innocent construct). For example, in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, children of slaves had to perform adult work alongside adult workers. During the Middle Ages, children were depicted in art as having adult behaviours, proportions and facial features. Relatively recently, during the Industrial Revolution, children were made to work long hours in mines and factories in harsh conditions (Branscombe et al. 2000). In some countries today, children are treated as miniature adults, performing factory work or used as soldiers, working or fighting alongside their adult counterparts. This construct may be overlooked by people who benefit from this labour, for example, through the availability of cheap shells from the Philippines, soccer balls from South America or carpets from India.

Postman (1983) points out the increasing representation of children as the same as adults in television 'sitcoms', from Gary Coleman, in *Diff'rent Strokes* to Franklin (Noah Gray-Cabey) in *My Wife and Kids.* Children who commit crimes

are often presented as miniature adults with some sections of society calling for children to be tried alongside adults for particular crimes (Postman 1983). Likewise, children who engage in paid work or who work for their parents are examples of the child as miniature adult. In the recent movie, *Shall We Dance*, a young Jennifer Lopez is put to work in her parents' laundry.

Adult-in-training

This construct positions children as working through various motor, psychological and social tasks, or stages, to reach adulthood. Advertising campaigns that tout children as our future promote this image. Developmental psychologists like Piaget, Erikson and Freud popularised this view of children as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings' (Hutchison & Charlesworth 2000). Children are thus perceived as a 'defective form of adult, social only in their future potential, but not in their present being' (Corsaro 1997, p. 6). School curricula that push children to achieve outcomes and to compete and achieve on standardised tests operate from this construct of childhood (Woodrow 1999). Similarly, children whose time is taken up with music lessons, extra tutoring, sport, dance and clubs are examples of this construct.

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Postman (1983), in his now classic *The Disappearance of Childhood*, provides compelling evidence of the miniature adult/adult-in-training as a strong contemporary construct of childhood. He argues that society has shifted from notions of the child as innocent, due largely to forms of media that are universally available to children and adults in their adult-centric form. He argues that we no longer protect children from the world when news is broadcast into our living room without censorship (one can think of the recent media coverage of the Iraq war and the events of 9/11). He presents other indicators of this construct in terms of clothing, which is now styled similarly for children and adults.

In both the construct of the miniature adult and that of the adult-in-training, children's power lies in their capacity to learn and participate in the adult world. In the case of the miniature adult, both child and adult are players in the keeping of the social order; in the case of the adult-in-training, an adult's power lies in the capacity to harness the abilities of the child to suit their or societal imperatives. The adult can be tyrannical or a loving guide or facilitator (Woodrow 1999). Adults socialise children from the basis of their own knowledge, resources and networks. The adult in this construct is knowledgeable or otherwise powerful, while the child is simultaneously positioned as less knowing — an apprentice to the adult, and less powerful (bio-psycho-socially and politically) (Sorin 2003).

However, as Woodrow (1999) argues, these constructs are socio-politically deterministic models of childhood. She contends that within these constructs, neither the adult nor the child is intrinsically, personally powerful; rather the relationship between adults and children is simply the means through which the social order is reproduced. Similarly, Hoffman (2000) notes the impoverished emotional connection between children and adults who are positioned within these constructs. She believes the adult-in-training is a particularly western approach to childhood based as it is upon individualism and meritocracy (Hoffman 2000). Developmental approaches to children focus on deficiency in the child; 'developmental milestones', 'developmental delay', and 'readiness' are key terms signifying this approach (Hoffman 2000). Critics of this approach argue that children in this typology are positioned without authority until they attain adulthood (Corsaro 1997; Hutchison & Charlesworth 2000).

THE COMMODIFIED CHILD: THE SELF-INTERESTED ADULT

In juxtaposition to the Victorian image of the innocent child, the late 20th century and the early 21st century commodified child is one who 'has become an object to be consumed by an adult audience obsessed with childhood and youth' (Wood 2003, p. 8). Wood notes the use of children as marketing tools for clothing, toys, greeting cards and other merchandise. However, dual images are presented of the innocent, Victorianesque child (including pictures of doe-eyed, passive children), along with that of the child as pseudo adult, the 'Lolita' images of child pop stars (e.g. Britney Spears), models, and beauty queens (e.g. Jon-Benet Ramsey), which sexualise childhood in much the same way as Carroll's 19th century photographic images of Alice Liddell and her sisters (Wood 2003). Similarly the waif model of the 1990s (e.g. Kate Moss) represents the child-woman.

> Her large, mascaraed eyes connote the face of a child, while her engorged red lips suggest readiness for penetration. Her boyish body heightens the illusion of the fuckable child (Goldstein 1997, cited in Wood 2003).

But it is not only those of commercial or pornographic persuasion who compete for the money derived directly from their interaction with children. Ethicists and caring parents make a case for the reproduction of children for bone marrow matches, while still other adults engage in the buying and selling of children for body parts (Woodrow 1999). Those of us within welfare, health and education sectors are forced to compete with each other to increase our

market share of income for the services we provide to children. Government sectors and non-government sectors in health, education and welfare fields represent their work with children in ways that they hope will help them obtain this 'market share'. Intercultural and inter-country adoptions are increasingly expensive at both the private market and regulated market level. We might ask of welfare, health and education directors, where is the voice of children in programs and services submitted for their benefit, and upon which so many professionals rely for their income?

Within this construct of childhood, children are largely powerless. Some of these commodified children no doubt have an illusion of power (e.g. child movie stars, models and beauty queens), since they derive material benefit from the use of their image and/or labour, and may even feel a sense of 'power over' some adults (i.e. those who have come to rely upon them for their income). Nonetheless, it is powerful adults who broker these images and (re)construct the child as a saleable item. Adults hold the majority of power within this construct since they are able to manipulate the economy through the use of children.

When we see children as agentic, our policies and programs become participatory and collaborative, with sharing of resources (including money and power) with children.

A critique of the child as commodity largely revolves around the amount of agency the child has in consenting to how their image and/or body is being used as a means for making money (or other goods/needs) for adults. As Woodrow (1997, p. 17) states of Anne Geddes' photographic work:

> ... what capacity ... does a premature baby have to resist being placed in a strange man's hands in its first day out of the humidicrib, or a six-week-old child to be draped naked over a large pumpkin for the camera's eye?

Lewis Carroll's photographic images border on pornography, looking at the innocence of childhood through a voyeuristic lens and thus sexualising childhood. According to Wood (2003, p. 4):

> ... the presence of [Carroll's] camera acts as an unwanted intrusion (or penetration) into their world and this fantasy of a 'pre-fall' innocence.

Similarly, this construct of childhood unsettles those of us forced to operate within an economic system that consistently demonstrates its indifference to the most vulnerable population groupings, whilst pedagogically adhering to a different construct of childhood (child as innocent, evil, noble, adult-in training, agentic, etc.). Unlike the construct of the child as innocent, where the child receives the protection of 'good' adults, the commodification of childhood and particular groups of children makes us aware of the self-interest of adults, and confronts us with the idea that adults may not always act in the child's best interests (Woodrow 1999).

THE CHILD AS VICTIM: THE ABSENT ADULT

Sadly, this child goes largely unrecognised. The victim of social and political forces, this is the child who lives through war or terror, famine or poverty. While this child is faceless and nameless, so too are the adults in the immediate environment as they are either suffering alongside the children or absent altogether. They are often casualties of 'rational' market and political forces (Rees, Rodley & Stilwell 1993). We usually notice these children only when they have become commodified by the media, who use their images (without their knowledge or permission) to demonstrate world strife and to appeal to the charity of those more fortunate (Sorin 2005), or through reports such as UNICEF's *State of the World's Children* (2005).

While they usually seem worlds away, victim children are a silenced, disenfranchised group in schools and communities in every country. They are the children who live in poverty or neglect, whose presence is often ignored as teachers and society in general get on with their everyday functioning. They may miss out on textbooks, excursions, toys and family holidays, but as they aren't attention-seekers, other typologies often override their presence (Sorin 2005). Neither the child victim nor the adults in that child's life hold even an illusion of power. Voiceless, their existence only becomes apparent when teachers, social workers or philanthropists attempt to give them means of expression (Silin 2005, in Yelland 2005) and more often determine 'best' ways of educating, protecting and socialising them. In some ways, this resembles the innocent child whose voice is denied and overridden by well-meaning adults, in this case outside of the child's immediate circle.

THE AGENTIC CHILD: THE ADULT AS CO-CONSTRUCTOR OF BEING

The agentic child is positioned as a capable and competent agent who appropriates and reproduces aspects of their culture through interaction with others (Corsaro 1997). Rather than focusing on aspects of interaction that limit opportunities for children to participate in the real world (James & Prout 1990, cited in Corsaro 1997), this is an optimistic construct. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) argue, for example, that childhood has social status in its own right, with its own agenda. Rather than 'becoming' (as in the miniature adult or the adult-in-training), the child is talked about as 'being':

> The child is conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences — in sum as a social actor (James, Jenks & Prout 1998, p. 207).

Childhood is a time of meaning-making and active participation in the world. The agentic child is competent and capable. Adults are co-learners who negotiate, challenge and guide through reflection on their own experiences. They negotiate and share power with children (Woodrow 1999). Within this image, children and adults alike construct childhood. In this co-constructivist framework, the child is an 'active and eager learner' (Corsaro 1997, p. 9), internalising experience while participating in and reproducing society (Corsaro 1997). Hoffman (2000) argues that 'concepts of the self are powerful molders (sic) of the adult the child will become'. One can explore early education, then, as 'pedagogy of the self' (p. 194). The ideas we have about ourselves are fundamental to what we learn and how we participate.

Children constitute a private world created and sustained by them. In describing the 'tribal child', therefore, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) seek in scholarship:

> ... a commitment to childhood's social worlds as real places and provinces of meaning in their own right and not as fantasies, games, poor imitations or inadequate precursors of the adults state of being (p. 28).

While affected by the adult world, childhood is an independent place:

> Children are not pathological or incomplete; they form a group, a body of social actors, and as citizens they have needs and rights (p. 32).

Research or any other relationship between adults and children is with children rather than about them. Their voices are given serious consideration (Sorin 2003). Cannella (2000) envisions a new field of childhood studies that celebrates diversity and values the multiple voices of children. She suggests denaturalising childhood and positioning children as equal partners in life and in educational decision-making. Similarly, Zelizer (1985) discusses research of the 1980s that clearly positioned children's voices in the quest for increased public and private space.

There is evidence of this construct of childhood in Reggio Emilia classrooms (Fraser 2000), where the child is seen as an active, curious and self-motivated learner and the curriculum is negotiated and emergent – actively designed with and by students focusing on their strengths and abilities. This paradigm views children as 'possessed of individual agency, as competent social actors and interpreters of the world' (James & Prout 1995, cited in Mason & Steadman 1997, p. 35). This view is also evident in the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) program (Dinkmeyer & McKay 1976), which teaches parents how to actively listen to and negotiate with their child/ren. Current school curricula, such as the Media strand of the Queensland Arts Syllabus, similarly teach children to interact with various media, including language, to negotiate their experiences (Queensland School Curriculum Council 2001). Many policies and practices are being reviewed and rewritten with this newer image of childhood in mind, such as Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics (Early Childhood Australia 2005), the new Queensland Early Years Curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority 2005) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Standards and Accreditation Performance Criteria (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2005).

Within the construct of the agentic child, children and adults both have power, which is negotiated as a critically conscious component of their relationship. The child is empowered through the relationship with the adult, who lends their power, strength and resources to the child, rather than imposing this upon, or doing for the child. The adult is also empowered and made knowledgeable, wise and influenced through the relationship with the child. Postman (1983) points out, for example, the influence children have on adults in terms of language use, with adults adopting terminology used by children.

The agentic construct of childhood rejects the view of the child as passive and innocent (Fasoli 2001; Woodrow 1999). It is somewhat at odds with both the deterministic model of childhood and the pure constructivist model that focuses on the child's actions as if these are separate or dislocated from the actions of others (Corsaro 1997). Nonetheless, co-constructivists recognise that the agency of both children and adults is 'constrained by a number of limited choices' (James, Jenks & Prout 1998, p. 25) available to them in their interactions with each other. In its ideal form, this image is congruent with what many professionals view as a basic tenet of their philosophical framework.

TABULAR CONSTRUCT SUMMARY

Table 1 at the end of this paper summarises the ten typologies discussed in terms of images of children and adults and their power.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Clearly the conscious or subconscious constructs we hold about children have implications for the ways in which we construct our relationships and share power and resources with, or over, them. Educational, welfare and parental policies and practices will all have different goals, processes and outcomes depending on the foundational philosophies power brokers subscribe to about the place of children, and therefore adults, in our society. This paper has suggested that policies and practices guided through a paradigm of the child

as innocent will seek to control a child's environment. These same policies and practices will seek to control the child him/herself when implemented from a framework of the child as evil. These policies and practices will attempt to help the deferring adult become more authoritative in the life of their child if the child is seen as 'snowballing'. Similarly, the ineffectual parent will be the focus of policy and program design if the child is considered 'out-of-control'. When we perceive children as 'noble', our policies and programs seek to have them assume power (with or without concomitant shared resources) that they may or may not desire or even know how to utilise. When we perceive children as miniature adults or adults-in-training, we see education and training provided by adults to children as the panacea for building and maintaining a functional society. When we view children as objects, we can buy and sell their images for our economic gain. When we see children as victims, we, as powerful adults, can turn a blind eye. When we see children as agentic, our policies and programs become participatory and collaborative, with sharing of resources (including money and power) with children.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have provided a typology for understanding the ways in which childhood is constructed. We have argued that any construction of childhood necessarily and simultaneously engages us in processes of constructing adulthood. It is hoped that the typology presented in this paper provides a means for adults and children to consciously, critically reflect on the relationships they engage with each other. When we engage this process, we have an opportunity to deconstruct practices which may or may not be helpful to the children we profess to serve. Similarly, conscious, critical reflection of types of relationships available to us in our work with children affords us an opportunity to reconstruct relationships which are mutually life-enhancing and liberating. ■

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Table 1: Constructs of children: Constructs of self

Image of child	Image of adult	Power of child	Power of adult
Child as innocent Carefree, good, incompetent, vulnerable, ignorant, naïve, a blank slate.	**The adult as protector** Loving and caring nurturers of children who act in the 'child's best interest'.	Little power	A lot of power from their (assumed) capacity to guide and protect children and limit the child's environment.
Child as evil Original sin; innate evil 'an untamed threat' (Corsaro 1997). Destructive; threat to the social order; driven by their own needs, desires and pleasures.	**The adult as good/moral** Controllers of children. Adults have gone from an evil stage to a more mature stage – they are 'good' and keepers of moral order.	Children have little power since they are 'driven'.	Adults have power to control the child (as opposed to the environment, above).
The snowballing child Seems to be in charge of the adults around them. Makes inflexible demands of adults for their own short term gratification.	**The deferring adult** Does not set limits therefore opportunity to negotiate power and autonomy is denied.	The child has illegitimate power – they get a little power and it snowballs.	Could have power, but they hand their power, authority and influence over to the child.
The out-of-control child Uses power in a negative way, for example by being violent, to get the parent to do what they want them to do. Eventually they feel out of control as if no-one is there to help them regain their control.	**The ineffectual adult** Feels defeated by the child. Feels as if they have little power and influence and/or do not know how to regain influence with the child.	Power is used in a negative way by the child. When the child is not sanctioned, they eventually feel out of control.	Their power is ineffectual. They feel defeated by the child.
The noble/saviour child Beautiful and beloved, can save people, look after others, e.g. Jesus, Harry Potter.	**The dependent adult** The adult depends on the child to get their needs/wants met.	Power is assumed through circumstances. The child is neither agentic nor innocent.	Adults absolve themselves of responsibility or literally cannot undertake that which is expected of them (by the child, by society, by themselves).
The miniature adult Children are the same as adults.	**The adult** The mature being.	Power of the child lies in their capacity to learn and participate in a world constructed for them by adults. The child is less knowing.	Power lies in their capacity to harness the abilities of the child to suit adult imperatives. Adults can be tyrannical or loving guides. Adults are knowledgeable.
The adult-in-training Human 'becomings' rather than human 'beings' (Hutchinson & Charlesworth 2000). Have future potential.	**The teacher**		
The commodified child Child is an object to be used and consumed by adults.	**The self-interested adult** Adult exploits the child for economic gain.	The child is powerless although they may have illusionary power as their image is manipulated by adults.	Hold the majority of power.
The child as victim Children of famine, pandemic diseases, war and poverty.	**The absent adult** The child's significant adults lack power. Adults who do have power turn a blind eye to what is happening to children.	Powerless.	Powerless.
The agentic child Capable and competent. An optimistic construct. Rather than 'becoming', the child is a social actor (James, Jenks & Prout 1998)	**Co-constructor of being** Helps the child on their life journey, as the child helps the adult on their journey.	Power is negotiated and shared.	Power is negotiated and shared. The adult lends their power, strength and resources with the child rather than imposing on the child.