



Figuring the Child:

Sex, Sexism, Sexuality and Sexualisation

A Forum hosted by the Somatechnics Research Centre,

Macquarie University

18th November 2010

9 am - 5.30 pm

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Sydney Mechanics School of Arts

280 Pitt St, Sydney

Googlemaps: <http://bit.ly/bgAfBP>

The figure of the child remains a vexed and specifically invested site in contemporary culture, politics, law, education and other institutions, especially in relation to ideas of sex, gender and sexuality. Recently in Australia, discussions about indigenous communities, about the internet filter, about eating habits, about appropriate media consumption, about exercise, about ‘proper’ boys’ and girls’ behaviours, and about ‘art’ have focussed on children and childhood, often without critical consideration, because the imag(in)ing of the child is so intensely and emotionally invested. ‘The child’ has thus become a regular point of reference for both sides of politics, often deployed to conservative ends. This forum brings together speakers from a range of different backgrounds, to discuss the role that specific knowledges about the figure of the child, particularly about ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ forms of gender and sexuality in childhood and adolescence, have played in contemporary developments in law, policy, education and concepts of family.

Our participants, whose presentation abstracts can be found below, are: Dr Barbara Baird, Dr Stephen Angelides, Dr Dinesh Wadiwel and Dr. Dierdre Tedmanson Ms. Rachael Wallbank, Mr. Sean Swift, Dr. Anna Hickey-Moody and Ms Sophie Martin.

Attendance at this event is free. Lunch will be provided. However, due to space limitations, we do require RSVPs. Please RSVP to our Administrator Vanessa Fredericks via email SomatechnicsAdmin@gmail.com by the 15th November 2010. For more information, please contact the organiser, Dr. Jessica Cadwallader via email: jess.cadwallader@gmail.com

The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts is an accessible building with universal access facilities. Please let us know in advance if there are specific accessibility requirements, and we will do our best to fulfil them.

There have been numerous requests for a schedule of events. Please find the abstracts within the schedule below.

9-9.15 a.m. **Welcome**

9.15 - 9.45 a.m.

How to reflect critically on the popular concern with 'the sexualization of children in the media'

Dr. Barbara Baird (Department of Women's Studies, Flinders University)

This paper will consider the popular concern with the increasing 'sexualisation of children in the media'. In particular it will be grounded in observations about three well-attended public meetings that I have attended in Adelaide during the last year that have been organised and supported by a mix of children's media organisations and women's organisations. The paper will offer a critical account of this 'movement', its conceptual framework, its goals and its strategies, without necessarily dismissing all of the concerns raised about children and the media. It will contextualise the concern with the 'sexualisation of children in the media' in particular with respect to the discourses of race and neo-liberalism that are simultaneously shaping thinking and practice about children in the Australian context. While not promising any answers for those trying to unravel the tangle of issues and discourses that are summoned in the concern with the 'sexualisation of children in the media' my hope is that the paper will lay out terrain in a way that enables us to work towards an engagement with the

issues that does not reproduce normative assumptions about gender, race and sexuality.

9.45 - 10.15 a.m. Questions and discussion

10.15-10.45 a.m. Morning Tea

10.45 - 11.15 a.m.

Innocent sexism? : The innocent child and the good teacher

Ms. Sophie Martin (Early Childhood Teacher)

The figure of the innocent child is powerful and largely uncontested, both within the field of early childhood education as well as in the broader community. The construction of the innocent child is problematic, especially when it comes to thinking about how discourses and practices of sexism operate in their lives. The idea of innocence suggests that because children cannot fully comprehend sex and sexism, in the same ways that adults do, they are innocent of sexism, and cannot experience sexism as sexism. In this paper, I will discuss how these ideas have impacted on my work as an early childhood teacher. I will explore the ways that questioning the idea of childhood innocence has allowed me to interrupt some of these discourses and practices in my work with children, both in their interactions with each other, and with me. In addition, I want to consider the ways that the idea of childhood innocence (in)forms the ideal of the 'good teacher', an ideal which is heavily gendered. I will share some of my reflections on my practical and conceptual negotiations with this ideal, which has raised all kinds of complexities, ambiguities and questions for me in my everyday work with children.

11.15 - 11.45 a.m. Questions and discussion

11.45 a.m. - 12.15 p.m.

What's Behind Child Sex Panics?

Dr. Steven Angelides (Centre for Women's Studies & Gender Research/Sociology, Monash University)

The subject of children and sexuality has been, it goes without saying, an exceptionally volatile and controversial one especially throughout the last 50 years. When the boundaries between child and adult sexualities are blurred or overlap, or when adult sexuality or sexual frameworks are seen to be prematurely imposed upon children, usually grave concerns about the wellbeing of young people are prompted. Oftentimes these concerns erupt into highly emotive “sex panics” about the inappropriate sexualisation and/or abuse of children by adults. This paper offers a critical inquiry into “sex panics” of this kind. A remarkably similar cluster of them has emerged in most Anglophone countries in the last five decades around familiar social “problems”: the sexualisation of children in the media and art; secular and humanistic sex education; child sexual abuse; homosexual equality; pedophilia; and, more recently, sexual relationships between teacher and pupils. The paper argues that the overt concern about protecting children from sexualization, exploitation, and abuse has been masking and obscuring a latent and equally (if not often more) palpable anxiety that societies are having extreme difficulty grappling with, let alone adequately recognizing at this historical juncture.

12.15 - 12.45 p.m. Questions and discussion

12.45 - 1.30 p.m. Lunch (provided)

1.30 – 2.30 p.m.

“My Body is Not My Own - Our Child is Not Our Own – the Unique Experience of Adolescents who experience Transsexualism and their Parents in Australia.”

Ms. Rachael Wallbank (Accredited Specialist Family Lawyer (LSNSW) and Human Rights Activist for People Who Experience Transsexualism)

The presentation will examine transsexualism as a phenomenon as experienced in childhood and adolescence and the developing primacy of the of “biological” explanation for the phenomenon of transsexualism as an aspect of intersexual diversity in human sexual formation rather than a form of mental disorder in the context of the developing cultural legitimacy of difference.

The presentation will examine the medico/legal, ethical and cultural issues associated with the currently determinative decision of the Family Court of Australia called *Re Alex – Hormonal Treatment for Gender Identity Dysphoria* 2004 31 Fam LR 503 ("Re Alex") which established the current legal regime that determines that adolescents who experience transsexualism in Australia cannot receive the medical treatments called "The Dutch Protocol" without an individual court hearing and approval; even though that critical medical treatment is anxiously sought by the adolescent and has the support of both parents and the young person's treating medical practitioners and even if the adolescent concerned is able to demonstrate Gillick Competence.

The presentation will also discuss the apparent inability/refusal of the Family Court and Australian legislators to date to reverse *Re Alex* and a current test case ("*Bernadette's Case*") seeking to do so and the significantly different medico/legal rights of young Australians who experience other forms of diversity in sexual formation and the often ignored impact of cultural prejudice where the objectivity of both medical practitioners and lawyers is presumed. In this context, the presentation will discuss the positions and language of the various stakeholders; including the young people themselves, their parents, their treating medical practitioners, various religious and cultural interest groups and the State.

Human, medical and legal rights are engaged here hand in hand with the (often unstated) moral, ethical and/or religious concerns.

Dealing with difference: A Parent's Account of Transsexualism

Mr. Sean Swift, a father of a (now adult) daughter who has experienced transsexualism. and who is the first young person with transsexualism in Australia to have received complete Adolescent Sex Affirmation Treatment as per the internationally respected medical protocol called "The Dutch Protocol" – which is now the standard for such medical treatment in Australia.

Sean will talk of the personal experiences of his daughter and his family in confronting their own prejudices, cultural prejudice and the challenges that had to be faced in relation to education, the medical profession and the legal system. He will discuss the obstacles they overcame along the way to secure the medical treatment his

daughter needed in order to have the best chance possible to live a full and fulfilling life.

What is required to overcome the obstacles still present that others are now faced with which may prevent them from giving their children that same opportunity and why a support group like "True Colours" is a necessity.

2.30 – 3 p.m. Questions and discussion

3-3.15 p.m. Afternoon Tea

3.15 - 3.45 p.m.

Spare the rod; spoil the child: racialised biopolitics, the innocence of children and the pleasure of sovereignty.

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel (Notre Dame) and Dr Dierdre Tedmanson (School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia)

This paper will explore themes of pleasure, biopolitics and state sovereignty made manifest by Australia's Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) intervention into Indigenous life-worlds. Using Foucault's notions of biopolitics and drawing on discourses of war from Hobbes, through to Mbembe, we explore the management, surveillance and administration of violence, sexuality and sovereign 'pleasure' in the NTER to conceptualize the intervention as a distinct form of racialized combat that seeks to claim the bodies of Indigenous children as a 'spoil of war.' Governmentality and the organizational regimes of control enacted through the NTER correlate with a prurient, sexualized and intensely moralizing public discourse, focused on the 'protection' of children. Such paternalistic discourses have a dual infantilizing function: to both announce the passivity of the 'vulnerable indigenous child' as an object for white sovereign guardianship and simultaneously eulogize a state paternalism over all Indigenous Australians through systems of biopolitical control. In this paper we explore constructions of the 'child' in this context, as a target within a race/pleasure war; re-conceptualizing the 'child' as a 'spoil' of this same war.

3.45 - 4.15 p.m. Questions and discussion

4.15 - 4.45 p.m.

Beyond Discursive Orthopedics: Little Hans and the Sexuality of Children

Dr. Anna Hickey-Moody (Gender and Cultural Studies, University of Sydney)

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* Foucault states: “Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it. The situation was similar in the case of children’s sex. It is often said that the classical period consigned it to an obscurity from which it scarcely emerged before *The Three Essays* or the beneficent anxieties of Little Hans.” (1978, pp. 26-7) Deleuze and Guattari also take up the figure of Hans as a means by which the sexuality of children might be thought outside what Foucault calls ‘discursive orthopedics’ (1987, p. 29). While Hans provided Freud with material he used to support the existence of sexuality in children, his case study also overcoded the importance of sexuality in children with psychoanalytic ideas of phobia and ‘normal’ sexual development (see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 10*, pp. 1-147). Deleuze and Guattari offer a radically different reading of Little Hans’ sexuality and his curiosity about genitalia. *A Thousand Plateaus* presents Hans as an exemplification of the fact that “Children are Spinozists. When Little Hans talks about a “peepee-maker”, he is referring not to an organ or an organic function but basically to a material, in other words, to an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement and rest, the different individuated assemblages it enters” (1987, p. 282). This chapter revisits the case of Little Hans in order to argue that Freud’s original case study, while offering a much needed rationale for the sexuality of children, can also be read as containing some defining features of the medicalized and administered sexuality Foucault critiques. I then suggest that in order to move beyond such an implicit ‘orthopedic’ management of children’s sexuality we might re-read Little Hans through Deleuze and Guattari. While *A Thousand Plateaus* offers a useful treatment of Little Hans, the details of Freud’s case are not examined in their totality. Indeed, the partiality of Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of the case could be considered a limit in their argument. I endeavour to expand the reading of Little Hans as a Spinozist through a careful analysis of Freud, conducted in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought.

4.45 - 5.15 p.m. Questions and discussion

5.15 - 5.30 p.m. Closing Remarks/Discussion



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