
Violent Boys and Precocious Girls: regulating childhood at the end of the millennium

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ABSTRACT This article explores the regulation of childhood at the end of the twentieth century by focusing on the figures of the proto-violent boy and the proto-sexual girl in relation to the figure of the dangerous and predatory male adult. These figures, who represent the Other to normal childhood, are explored with respect to popular culture, examining computer games on the one hand and popular song and dance on the other. It is argued that conceptions of childhood for the next century need to engage with the specificity of the sites in which subjectivities are constituted and to move away from the simple dichotomies of normality and pathology.

In recent years a number of major concerns have been raised in relation to the safety of children in public and private spaces, both in relation to their vulnerability to dangerous adults, but also the problem of dangerous children who prey on others. British examples include the James Bulger case, where two young boys murdered a small boy and the Dunblane massacre in which a gunman shot children in a primary school. American examples include the spate of recent school killings by boys and the case of the murder of the child beauty queen, Jon Benet Ramsey. We might also include the recent furore over the discovery of paedophile rings in Belgium. In all of these examples there are two features: the dangerous adult (almost exclusively male) who is violent and/or sexually predatory on young children and the proto violent or proto-sexual girl, as in the case of James Bulger and Jon Benet Ramsey respectively. As one British judge put it in a case of child sexual abuse, the girl involved was understood as 'no angel'.

I want to explore in this article the way in which this huge anxiety about children and the status of childhood erupts at the end of the twentieth century. It is understood in terms on the one hand, of pathological adults who sully the otherwise sound barrel, so that it is not necessary to ask questions about masculine sexuality. Conversely, I want to argue that indeed such issues raise profound questions about the status of adult sexuality and

its object, or, as Rose (1985) suggests, the desire of adults for children. In particular I want to raise some issues about the easy separation of normality and pathology. In addition to this, I want to think about the way in which models of childhood from within developmental theory also privilege a particular model of normality, to the extent that it is certain children, who are 'Othered', who become the object of pathologisation discourses. Normal boys are naughty and playful, not violent. Normal girls are well behaved, hard working and asexual (e.g. Walkerdine, 1989). In order to understand the production of such figures we need to examine the historical constitution of regimes of truth about children and the discourses and practices through which the masses were, and still are, regulated (Walkerdine, 1997).

Here, I explore these issues in two ways: firstly with respect to a research project on children and computer games and secondly in relation to the study of young girls and popular culture (Walkerdine, 1997), both of which deal with aspects of the constitution of childhood in relation to the popular.

Children and Computer Games

I argue that grand metanarratives of modernity elide the specificities of childhood in the present and in order to understand these it is necessary to work not with a general theory (of development, for example) but with an approach which understands the discourses and practices through which particular subjectivities are produced in specific locations. The theoretical framework underlying this approach has been articulated in a number of publications (for example, Foucault, 1977; Henriques et al, 1994). In brief, what is particularly important is the concept of subjectivity that is that the human subject is produced in the discursive practices that make up the social world (as opposed to a pre-given psychological subject who is made social or socialised). This means that we need an understanding of how, what Foucault (1977) called the micro-physics of power, actually works to form the discourses through what it means to be a subject within different social practices, is produced and regulated. In this analysis, the subject is produced through the discursive relations of the practices themselves and is not co-terminus with the actual embodied and lived experience of being a subject. To understand the relation between subjectification (the condition of being a subject) and subjectivity (the lived experience of being a subject), it is necessary to examine what subject-positions are created within specific practices and how actual subjects are both created in and live those diverse positions. The reason that I am labouring this point is that to understand subjectivity is not the same as understanding 'learning' or 'cognition': rather, the issue becomes how to examine both how social and cultural practices work and how they create what it means to be a subject inside those practices. Thus, the understanding of how practices operate and how subjects are formed inside them becomes one and the same activity. For Foucault (1977), power/knowledge is a central component of the current social order. To examine what counts as childhood therefore, as well as the

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

relation of children to popular culture, we need to examine how that relation is formed inside the discourses which constitute the technologies of the social (Foucault, 1977). Doing this within a Foucauldian framework involves a historical dimension.

Understanding the Historical Dimension

In Foucault's approach to 'the history of the present', it is necessary to examine how the present is constituted through the historical production of power/knowledge relations. In relation to children and computer games, we need to look at least to the post-Enlightenment concern about the over-suggestible, irrational poor (Blackman, 1996). Work on the suggestibility of crowds (for example, Tarde, 1890; Le Bon, 1895) paves the way for the later emergence of social psychology and of mass communications research. The importance of the twin issues of the mass medium and the vulnerable and suggestible mind cohere to produce a social psychology and a psychopathology of groups in which mass irrationality and suggestibility have a central place (Walkerdine, 1997). I want to argue that the concern about the regulation of the masses through their mass suggestibility and irrationality became one of the central aspects of the technologies through which they were regulated. To cut a long story short, concern about rationality and irrationality, the vulnerable minds of certain children to the media finds its antecedence within the emergence of these discourses and technologies. We can trace the surveillance of children's viewing, for example, in and through the technologies of the regulation both of what counts as childhood and what was shown to children (films, television, video, games). This intersected with concerns about children and rationality, which also tied in with the production of the rational government of the masses and the bourgeois order, in which to be civilised was to be understood as ultimately rational, with women, the masses and colonial peoples being defined as dangerously outside rationality. To produce the individual in the image of reason, therefore, was to produce a subject who would accept the moral and political order of a liberal democracy apparently according to their own free will and not rebel (Walkerdine, 1984). It is out of these intersecting discourses and claims to truth that we can find the current concerns about children and the new media and technologies. Indeed, if we are to examine current concerns we can find that they cohere largely around concerns about the vulnerability and suggestibility of young minds, with those being understood as most at risk being the children of the masses, the poor. Alongside that however, we can also find a Utopian discourse of the new information super-highway as a new frontier, a new space for the production of a new, and perhaps super, rationality, a new body without organs (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). It is to these twin and oppositional discourses that I will now turn.

Anxieties About Children in Public Space

So much has changed since the individualist developmentalism of earlier decades, in which children's exploration of physical space was seen as basic to development. Now, there are increasing fears about the safety of children in any kind of public space. For example, we have moved from the idea of the primary school as a safe environment in which the right kind of development might be accomplished through the easy exploration of concrete physical space, with the school being understood as a safe and nurturing environment in which development can occur naturally in contrast to sometimes difficult environments outside (see in particular the government report *Children and their Primary Schools* (Central Advisory Council for Education, [1967], discussed in Walkerdine, 1984), to the primary school as a site of danger, best characterised in Britain by the killing of children and teachers by a gunman in the Scottish town of Dunblane. Increasingly, newspaper reports express concerns about the safety of children on the streets and in public parks, whether play schemes or beaches are safe. This concern about safety is less a worry about environmental danger (though that certainly plays a part), but more about the threat posed by the violence and sexuality of adults. In this sense, the private space of the home is also no longer considered safe from child sexual abuse. A great deal has changed, from even the 1960s and '70s in which the idea of development as unhindered play in a natural environment is less and less on the agenda. This is very significant in terms of our approach to the assumptions about space made within developmental theory. In addition to this, adults are presented as not only part of the problem (especially of course adult men), but also as unable to put a stop to what is happening to children and indeed to the destruction of the environment. Children are left to their own devices, as is graphically illustrated in television series like *Ninja Turtles* (Urwin, 1995) and *Rugrats*. In this context, cyberspace offers a new space, one in which rational play may be offered, without the fears attached to public space and indeed without undue interference from adults: it is adult-free, unknown and unsupervised. To the technophile, it is a new frontier, an untamed and anarchic space in which transformation might still be possible (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995). However, this is crosscut by technophobia, in terms of discourses about media effects, which play upon the dangers of new technologies to the vulnerable minds of the children of the masses as the producer of addiction on the one hand and violence on the other. In particular, in Britain at least, two forms have been singled out for concern: videos and computer and video games. The murder of James Bulger in Liverpool by two young boys brought to the surface not only the danger to children in public space but also the danger wrought by children themselves. The children in danger have to be saved from dangerous children, but those dangerous children have minds made vulnerable and over-suggestible by their environment (these are of course, the children of the poor) and the effects of the media are most marked upon them, thus both videos and games

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

are blamed for addiction and for violence. Actually, then, in effect, we have at the end of the twentieth century, the twin poles that were there at its birth: the vulnerable-minded proto-violent masses and the super-rational explorers of the information super-highway. In the information age then, two kinds of male children as subjects are constituted through these discourses in relation to children and new technologies: the male child in danger in public space who can be protected to enter the safe rationality of exploration of cyber-space and the dangerous male child, whose vulnerability of mind threatens addiction and violence. These figures are not actual children but discursively constructed fictional entities, whose positions are the object of considerable surveillance and regulation through the practices in which the relation of children to new technologies is policed (Walkerline & Blackman, in press). The issue then is how such fictional positions relate to the production of children as subjects in, for example, home and school practices. We can therefore describe the 'fiction functioning in truth' of both the proto-violent (poor boy) and the super-rational (middle class male) explorer, but how far are these fictions related to projected fears and fantasies on the part of the governing onto the governed. For example, Bhabha (1984) used the work of Fanon (1963) to argue that the colonial subject was constituted out of a mixture of fear, 'phobia and fetish' as in the fiction of the lazy and over-sexed black man. What then are the fears, phobias and fetishes about the game-playing child? How do those fantasies both project onto the child in question and therefore what is the relation between those projections and the cultural, domestic and psychic organisation necessary to take up those subject positions?

Cyberspace as a New Form of Space

In addition to the concerns about children we need to examine the concepts of space within modernity upon which developmental psychology has relied to explain children's learning of spatial concepts. Most work depends upon distinctions made by Piaget (1956) between topological and Euclidean space, arguing that children acquired spatial concepts through their active manipulation of objects within the physical world, recognising first that there were two dimensions and later three. However, this model of solid space fits neither sub-atomic physics nor cyberspace. Piaget (1956) argued that children cannot master three dimensions before two, suggesting also that young children had difficulty with the abstract, needing first to experience the concrete. Cyberspace requires a conception of space as flow and energy, not as fixed, solid and geographical. Quite young children playing computer games handle with ease the complex relation of two to three dimensions, the n dimensional space of levels in platformers, (accomplishments that 'concretely' they should not be able to do), for example, with its intricate relation of movement in virtual space and reaction time, suggesting the necessity of a different conception not only of the space that children inhabit, but of the processes of acquisition of modes of understanding of that space itself. If the spaces in which children grow up

have changed fundamentally from those of previous generations, in terms of the anxieties and possibilities that surround them and if a space of flows and energies, replaces that of solids, then the time has come for us to rethink the concepts of childhood and of space, as well as the relationship between them.

Children and New Technologies

Next, I summarise the major conditions of possibility for the discursive constitution of the present concern with children and new technologies. The emergence of social psychology at the end of the 19th century, with its emphasis on the group as a crowd (Tarde, 1890; Le Bon, 1895) built on earlier concerns about the irrationality, vulnerability, suggestibility and absence of morality of the 'dangerous classes'. These characteristics paved the way for the understanding of poor peoples as psychologically lacking and pathological and can be related directly to the kind of assumptions which became taken for granted in work on children of the poor in general and children and the media in particular. That is, that certain children had minds that were vulnerable to outside influences, hence concerns about violence and addiction. These become very clear in the debates surrounding the James Bulger case and video nasties, for example. This generated strategies of population management in relation to psychopathology on the one hand and popular entertainment and crowd control on the other. The ready use of existing concepts in the emergent pre- and post-war traditions of mass media and communication studies, principally in the USA, and the use of, for example, theories of vulnerable masses and social psychology, in the work of the Frankfurt school, helped to cement this discursive apparatus. American social psychology made moves in the 1950s to make psychoanalytic insights amenable to 'scientific enquiry'. One of the kinds of work on children to emerge from this was Bandura's work (1976) on social learning theory, producing a number of key studies, highlighting the role of imitation in the production of anti-social behaviour and signalling the way in which children could be understood as aggressively and violently imitating what they saw on television. In Britain, the study by Himmelweit et al (1958) argued that children could be addicted to television, with the worst addicts being working class children whose viewing habits were less likely to be supervised by their parents. Thus, moral concern about violence and addiction was generated at this time, building upon the moral technologies from the nineteenth century (and indeed before this). Concern about violence and addiction were two of the major concerns addressed by research on video games, as was previously also the case with the arrival of video technology. In the USA in particular, such research appears to have developed in tandem with the anxiety about the loss and disappearance of childhood itself, with figures such as Neil Postman (1983) arguing that television signalled the erosion of childhood, to arguments about addiction and abuse (e.g. Jenkins, 1992; Best, 1990), which suggested that 95% of American adults are addicted and/or had abused childhoods, presenting this

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

as one of the major American anxieties of the late twentieth century. This can be put together with the fact that almost all research on violence and the media comes from the USA. In Britain too, however, there has been a sharp increase in anxiety about children as victims of abuse and perpetrators of crime, with a number of psychologists lining up behind Newson (1994) to argue, controversially, that the only thing to have accounted for the change in children's behaviour (*pace* the Bulger case) is violent videos. British media and cultural studies have tended to use notions of media literacy to counter notions of passively imitating children (Buckingham, 1991). However, this tends to build upon pre-existing strategies and technologies which stress rationality as a counter to the irrationality of the dangerous classes, in the sense that such strategies can be understood as techniques of population regulation, in the Foucauldian manner.

Game Narratives

Fuller & Jenkins (1995) argue that virtual technologies constantly present themselves in terms of the opening up of a new frontier, very much in the mode of the wild west. Indeed they argue that this new frontier is presented as opening up in an America which is oversettled, overfamiliar, and overpopulated (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995). Virtual space is a new frontier, which can be explored or 'navigated' in the words of the Internet. In terms of the games themselves, they argue that plot is not a central feature, as the games focus on interactivity rather than characterisation and atmospheres rather than story lines, with the central feature of the constant presentation of spectacular spaces (or 'worlds'). 'Its landscapes dwarf characters who serve, in turn, primarily as vehicles for players to move through these remarkable places. Once immersed in playing, we don't really care whether we rescue Princess Toadstool or not; all that matters is staying alive long enough to move between levels, to see what spectacle awaits us on the next screen' (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995, p. 61). They add that 'most of the criteria by which we might judge a classically constructed narrative fall by the wayside when we look at these games as storytelling systems' (p. 61). In Nintendo's narratives, characters play a minimal role, displaying traits that are largely capacities for action: fighting skills, modes of transportation, preestablished goals. The game's dependence on characters (e.g. Ninja Turtles, Bart Simpson) borrowed from other media allows them to simply evoke those characters rather than to fully develop them. The character is little more than a cursor that mediates the player's relationship to the story world. Similarly, plot is transformed into a generic atmosphere that the player can explore. The games offer a new world by presenting (as in fighting games in particular) a number of arenas for the fight, which vary from an Indian temple to a Las Vegas show palace, which provide exotic backdrops to the action. They further suggest that this shallow provision of a 'story' as a device for a narrative of movement through space builds upon the devices used by explorers of the 'New World' to describe their journeys: hence further developing the idea of virtual space as the new 'new world',

with the aim of the journey being more significant than the arrival. If we turn to the practices of game-playing themselves, we might examine how textual and narrative subjects are constituted and subjectivities produced through their insertion into game-playing as a discursive practice.

Family Discourses

In a recent pilot study I examined game-playing practices through observations and interviews of families of 10-year-olds who were keen computer game players. I concentrate here on a discussion of the interviews conducted with parents and children. One of the most important features which may be discerned from the interviews, is that parents' concern about addiction and violence, especially in relation to boys, acts as a very strong regulator of game-playing. It is through the regulation of time allowed for the playing of games that parents guard against the spectre of addiction. Thus, a child, who is unregulated could become addicted, just as in the Himmelweit et al (1958) study of television viewing in the 1950s. Almost all parents claimed that such unregulated and addicted children existed, mostly understood in terms of the figure of the working class boy. Yet, hardly anybody when pressed actually knew such a child, but they were positive that such children existed. Therefore the regulation of the amount, time and frequency of playing acts as a regulative device through which the absence of pathology is ensured, thus keeping at bay the anxiety about the proto-addicted boy, who is constituted as Other. The regulation of childhood activity extends further than this. Middle class families tended to have what I would describe as a 'full diary syndrome'. That is, their children had a very organised life outside of school, with a number of activities taking place throughout the week, including swimming, other sports, dancing and so forth. Such activities required money and transport and the absence of these helped to provide an impression that working class households were less regulated. For the working class children, transport was often not available and money was scarce. This meant that the children were far more likely to spend time inside the house (the street often being considered as unsafe) and time was therefore understood rather differently. Indeed such families usually did not have enough money to buy the latest games. It was middle class boys in fact, who were the keenest players and who possessed the most and latest games. The working class proto-addicted boy was the object of concern, it was the middle class boys who were the biggest fans of game-playing, yet they were neither the object of concern nor of most scrutiny.

The boys preferred the apparent realism of fighting games (usually described as beat-'em-ups), while the girls liked platformers. Indeed, it was the very realism (they stressed good graphics) which allowed them most to immerse themselves into the fantasy of the games. It is the boys who were most able to talk about their sense of removal from reality when immersed in the games. They were certainly most interested in realist images of violence and gore and most into acting this out. However, all children claimed that

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

while boys might simulate moves in the playground, the children themselves imposed strict limits on actual violence. They had a strong sense that hurting anyone was a transgression of boundaries – that violence was simply simulated in games and not to be repeated in real life. Both boys and girls were familiar with the discourse of addiction and used it easily, though it tended to mean different things. To the girls it meant how much somebody played while for the boys it was linked to the overriding interest in violence and gore.

Parents expressed considerable anxiety about the breakdown of society, increased violence, drugs, crime and the breakdown of the family. These anxieties were consonant with existing discourses projected both onto children and onto technology. Games appeared to operate at the intersection of these two anxieties, hence the concern with balance. The middle class defence against this anxiety appeared as both intellectualisation and the regulation of game-playing and of timetabled activities more generally. Working class families appeared less defensive, possibly because they had to think the unthinkable, that is that future criminals would come from their ranks. However, this anxiety about new technology was an entirely adult affair. For children, computers are simply a taken-for-granted part of their lives. However, children displayed different anxieties of their own. According to them, mastery of the games involved the control of panic and anxiety, which, if allowed to get the upper hand, would impede the mastery of the game. On the one hand, this provided valuable lessons in the coping with anxiety and the panic involved in speedy and skilled responses. On the other, it provided a mechanism through which anxiety could be displaced rather than worked through. Some children also claimed that the games gave them a space for misbehaviour, in which they did not have to be good. I have argued elsewhere (Walkerline, 1988/90) that mastery of school mathematics discourse involves the mastery of anxiety through its displacement into rational control of a calculable universe. It is interesting to note here then that mastery of the games also requires the displacement of anxiety, through the mastery of the relation of virtual space and reaction time. That this mastery is intimately connected to masculinity may well be the case. Let us now turn to another set of anxieties, those about femininity in relation to the constitution of that other Other, the precocious eroticised girl.

The Eroticisation of Little Girls

If studies of popular culture have largely ignored young children and studies of girls are limited to teenagers, the topic of popular portrayals of little girls as eroticised, little girls and sexuality, is an issue which touches on a number of very difficult, and often, taboo areas. Feminism has had little to say about little girls, except through studies of socialisation and sex-role stereotyping. With regard to sexuality, almost all attention has been focussed on adult women. Little girls enter debates about women's memories of their own girlhood in the main: discussions of little girls' fantasies of sex with their fathers or adult men, as in Freud's Dora case, the debate surrounding

Masson's (1985) claim that Freud had suppressed the evidence that many of his female patients had been sexually abused as children and of course, the discourse of abuse itself. The topic of little girls and sexuality has come to be seen then as being about the problem of the sexual abuse of innocent and vulnerable girls by bad adult men, or conversely, less politically correct but no less present, the idea of little girls as little seductresses. I want to open up a set of issues that I believe are occluded by such debates. That is, in short, the ubiquitous eroticisation of little girls in the popular media and the just as ubiquitous ignorance and denial of this phenomenon.

Childhood Innocence and Little Lollitas

Janie is six. In the classroom she sits almost silently well-behaved, the epitome of the hard-working girl, so often scorned as uninteresting in the educational literature on girls' attainment (Walkerdine, 1989). She says very little and appears to be constantly aware of being watched and herself watches the model that she presents to her teacher and classmates, as well as to myself, seated in a corner of the classroom, making an audio recording. She always presents immaculate work and is used to getting very high marks. She asks to go to the toilet and leaves the classroom. As she is wearing a radio microphone I hear her cross the hall in which a class is doing music and movement to a radio programme: the teacher tells them to pretend to be bunnies. She leaves the hall and enters the silence of the toilets and in there, alone she sings loudly to herself. I imagine her swaying in front of the mirror. The song that she sings is one on the lips of many of the girls at the time I was making the recordings: Toni Basil's 'Oh Mickie' (see Walkerdine, 1997).

'Oh Mickie' is a song sung by a woman dressed as a teenager. In the promotional video for the song she wears a cheerleader's outfit, complete with very short skirt and is surrounded by large, butch-looking women cheerleaders who conspire to make her look both smaller and more feminine. 'Oh Mickie, you're so fine, you're so fine, you blow my mind', she sings. 'Give it to me, give to me, any way you can, give it to me, give it to me, I'll take it like a man'. What does it mean for a six-year-old girl to sing these highly erotic lyrics? It could be argued that what we have here is the intrusion of adult sexuality into the innocent world of childhood. Or indeed, that because she is only six, such lyrics do not count because she is incapable of understanding them. I shall explore the issue of childhood innocence in more detail, and rather than attempting to dismiss the issue of the meaning of the lyrics as irrelevant, I shall try to place these meanings in the overall study of little girls and sexuality. In moving out of the public and highly surveilled space of the classroom, where she is a 'good, well-behaved girl', to the private space of the toilets she enters a quite different discursive space, the space of the little Lolita, the sexual little girl, who cannot be revealed to the cosy sanitised classroom. She shifts in this move from innocent to sexual, from virgin to whore, from child to little woman, from good to bad.

Children and the Popular

In order to explore the varying subject positions taken by Janie, I want to explore some of the 'gazes' at the little girl, the ways that she is inscribed in a number of competing discourses. I will concentrate on the figure of the little girl as an object of psycho-pedagogic discourse and as the eroticised child-woman of popular culture. I have argued in previous work (Walkerdine, 1998), that 'the nature of the child' is not discovered but produced in regimes of truth created in those very practices which proclaim the child in all his naturalness. I write 'his' advisedly, because a central plank of my argument has been that although this child is taken to be gender-neutral, actually he is always figured as a boy, a boy who is playful, creative, naughty, rule-breaking, rational. The figure of the girl, by contrast, suggests an unnatural pathology: she works to the child's play, she follows rules to his breaking of them, she is good, well-behaved and irrational. Femininity becomes the Other of rational childhood. If she is everything that the child is not supposed to be, it follows that her presence, where it displays the above attributes may be considered to demonstrate a pathological development, an improper childhood, a danger or threat to what is normal and natural. However, attempts (and they are legion) to transform her into the model playful child often come up against a set of discursive barriers: a playful and assertive girl may be understood as forward, uppity, over-mature, too precocious (in one study a primary teacher called such a 10-year-old girl a 'madam', see Walkerdine, 1989). Empirically then, 'girls' like 'children' are not discovered in a natural state. What is found to be the case by teachers, parents and others is the result of complex processes of subjectification (Henriques et al, 1984). Yet, while this model of girlhood is at once pathologised, it is also needed: the good and hard-working girl who follows the rules prefigures the nurturant mother figure, who uses her irrationality to safeguard rationality, to allow it to develop (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Consider then the threat to the natural child posed by the eroticised child, the little Lolita, the girl who presents as a little woman, but not of the nurturant kind, but the seductress, the unsanitised whore to the good girl's virgin. It is my contention that popular culture lets this figure into the sanitised space of natural childhood, a space from which it must be guarded and kept at all costs. What is being kept out and what safe inside this fictional space?

The discourse of natural childhood builds upon a model of naturally occurring rationality, itself echoing the idea of childhood as an unsullied and innocent state, free from the interference of adults. The very cognitivism of most models of childhood as they have been incorporated into educational practices, leaves both emotionality and sexuality to one side. Although Freud posited a notion of childhood sexuality which has been very pervasive, it was concepts like repression and the problems of adult interference in development which became incorporated into educational practices rather than any notion of sexuality in children as a given or natural

phenomenon. Indeed, it is precisely the idea that sexuality is an adult notion, which sullies the safe innocence of a childhood free to emerge inside the primary classroom, which is most important. Adult sexuality interferes with the uniqueness of childhood, its stages of development. Popular culture then, insofar as it presents the intrusion of adult sexuality into the sanitised space of childhood, is understood as very harmful.

Visually these positions can be distinguished by a number of gazes at the little girl. Psychopedagogic images are presented in two ways: the fly on the wall documentary photograph in which the young girl is seen always engaged in some educational activity and is never shown looking at the camera and the cartoon-type book illustration in which she appears as a smiley faced rounded (but certainly not curvy) unisex figure. If we begin to explore popular images of little girls they present a stark contrast. I do not have room in this piece to explore this issue in detail, but simply let me make reference to newspaper and magazine fashion shots, recent television advertisements, for example for Volkswagen cars, Yoplait yoghurt and Kodak gold film. All present the highly eroticised alluring little girl, often (at least in all three of these TV advertisements) with fair hair and ringlets, usually made up and with a look which seductively returns the gaze of the camera. Indeed, such shots bear far more similarity with images taken from child pornography than they do with psychoeducational images. However, the popular advertisement and fashion images are ubiquitous: they are an everyday part of our culture and have certainly not been equated with child pornography.

It would not be difficult to make a case that such images are the soft porn of child pornography and that they exploit childhood by introducing adult sexuality into childhood innocence. In that sense then, they could be understood as the precursor to child sexual abuse in the way that pornography has been understood by some feminists as the precursor to rape. However, I feel that such an interpretation is over-simplistic. The eroticisation of little girls is a complex phenomenon, in which a certain aspect of feminine sexuality and childhood sexuality is understood as corrupting of an innocent state. The blame is laid both at the door of abuse and therefore pathological and bad men who enter and sully the terrain of childhood innocence and of course conversely, with the little Lolitas who lead men on. But, popular images of little girls as alluring and seductive, at once innocent and highly erotic, are contained in the most respectable and mundane of locations: broadsheet newspapers, women's magazines, television adverts. The phenomenon that we are talking about therefore has to be far more pervasive than a rotten apple, pathological and bad abusive men approach. This is not about a few perverts, but about the complex construction of the highly contradictory gaze at little girls, one which places them as at once threatening and sustaining rationality, little virgins that might be whores, to be protected yet to be constantly alluring. The complexity of this phenomenon, in terms of both the cultural production of little girls as these ambivalent objects and the way in which little girls themselves as well as adults live this complexity, how it produces their

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

subjectivity, has not begun to be explored, and yet doing so is very important to avoid an overdetermination of what constitutes 'girl'.

Eroticised Femininity and the Working Class Girl

Let us return to Janie and her clandestine singing. I have been at some pains to point out that Janie presents to the public world of the classroom the face of hard working diligent femininity, which, while pathologised, is still desired. She reserves the less acceptable face of femininity for more private spaces. I imagine her dancing as she sings in front of the mirror: this act can be understood as an acting out, a fantasising of the possibility of being someone and something else. I want to draw attention to the contradictions in the way in which the eroticised child-woman is a position presented publicly for the little girl to enter, but which is simultaneously treated as a position which removes childhood innocence, allows entry of the whore and makes the girl vulnerable to abuse. The entry of popular culture into the educational and family life of the little girl is therefore to be viewed with suspicion, as a threat posed by the lowering of standards, of the intrusion of the low against the superior high culture. It is the consumption of popular culture, which is taken as making the little working class girl understood as potentially more at risk of being victim and perpetrator. Janie's fantasy dirties the sanitary space of the classroom. But what is Janie's fantasy and at the intersection of which complex fantasies is she inscribed? I want to explore some of the popular fictions about the 'little working class girl' and to present the way in which the eroticisation presents for her the possibility of a different and better life, of which she is often presented as the carrier. The keeping at bay of sexuality as intruding upon innocent childhood is in sharp contrast to this.

There have been a number of cinematic depictions of young girls as capable of producing a transformation in their own and others' lives, from Judy Garland in the *Wizard of Oz*, through Shirley Temple, *Gigi*, *My Fair Lady* to (orphan) Annie. In the majority of these films the transformation effected relates to class and to money through the intervention of a lovable little girl. Eckert (1991) argued that Shirley Temple was often portrayed as an orphan in the Depression whose role was to soften the hearts of the wealthy such that they would identify her as one of the poor, not dirty and radical, but lovable, to become the object of charity through their donations. In a similar way, Annie is presented as an orphan for whom being working class is the isolation of a poor little girl, with no home, no parents, and no community. She too has to soften the heart of the armaments millionaire, Daddy Warbucks, as well as finding happiness herself through dint of her own lovable personality. It is by this means that she secures for herself a future in a wealthy family, which she creates, by bringing Daddy Warbucks and his secretary Grace, together. By concentrating on these two characters alone it is possible to envisage that the little working class girl is the object of massive projections. She is a figure of immense transformative power, who can make the rich love, thereby solving huge social and political

problems and she can immeasurably improve her own life in the process. At the same time she presents the face of a class turned underclass, ragged, disorganised, orphaned, for whom there is only one way out: embourgeoisement. Thus, she becomes the epitome of the feminised, and therefore emasculated, less threatening, proletariat. In addition to this, Graham Greene (1980) pointed to something unmentioned in the tales of innocent allure: the sexual coquettishness of Shirley Temple. His pointing to her paedophilic eroticisation led to the closure of the magazine, *Night and Day*, of which he was editor, after it was sued for libel.

What does the current figure of the eroticised little girl hold? What fantasies are projected onto her and how do these fantasies interact with the fantasy scenarios little working class girls create for themselves and their lives? If she is simultaneously holding so much that is understood as both good and bad, no wonder actual little girls might find their situation overwhelming. It would be easy to classify Janie and other girls' private eroticisation as resistance to the position accorded to her at school and in high culture, but I hope that I have demonstrated that this would be hopelessly simplistic.

Fantasies of Seduction

Let us see then what psychoanalysis has had to say about seduction and the eroticisation of little girls. It is easy to pinpoint Freud's seduction theory and his account of an auto-erotic childhood sexuality. We might also point to the place of the critiques of seduction theory in the accusation that psychoanalysis had ignored child abuse, the raising of the spectre of abuse as a widespread phenomenon and the recent attacks on therapists for producing 'false memories' of abuses that never happened in their clients. In this sense, the issue of little girls and sexuality can be seen to be a minefield of claim and counter-claim focusing on the issue of fantasy, memory and reality. If one wants therefore to examine sexuality and little girls as a cultural phenomenon, one is confronted by a denial of cultural processes: either little girls have a sexuality which is derived from their fantasies of seduction by their fathers or they are innocent of sexuality, which is imposed upon them from the outside by pathological or evil men who seduce, abuse and rape them. Culturally, we are left with a stark choice: sexuality in little girls is natural, universal and inevitable; or, a kind of Mulvey (1975) type male gaze is at work in which the little girl is produced as object of an adult male gaze. She has no fantasies of her own and in the Lacanian sense, we could say that 'the little girl does not exist except as symptom and myth of the masculine imaginary'. Or, in the mould of the *Women Against Violence Against Women* approach of 'porn is the theory, rape is the practice', we might conclude that 'popular representations of eroticised little girls is the theory and child sexual abuse is the practice'. Girls' fantasies prove a problem in all these accounts, because only Freud credited them with any of their own, although Freud made it clear that, like others working on psychopathology at the time, feminine sexuality was the central enigma.

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

Indeed his main question was 'what does the woman, the little girl, want?' A question to which Rose (1982) in her introduction to Lacanian writing on feminine sexuality asserts that 'all answers, including the mother are false: she simply wants'. So little girls have a desire without an object, a desire that must float in space, unable to find an object, indeed to be colonised by masculine fantasies, which create female desire in its own image. Of course, Mulvey's original 1974 work on the male cinematic gaze has been much revised and criticised (e.g. *Screen*, 1992), but critics have tended to ignore the complex production of subjectivity, concentrating only on the cinematic sign.

Let us return to the psychoanalytic arguments about sexuality. Laplanche & Pontalis (1985) discuss seduction in terms of 'seduction into the fantasies of the parents'. Those fantasies can be understood in terms of the complex intertwining of parental histories and the regimes of truth, the cultural fantasies which circulate in the social. This may sound like a theory of socialisation, but socialisation implies the learning of roles and the taking on of stereotypes. What we have here is a complex interweaving of the many kinds of fantasy, both 'social' in the terms of Geraghty (1996) and others and psychic, as fantasy in the classic psychoanalytic sense. Lacan, of course, argued that the symbolic system carried social fantasies which were psychic in origin, an argument he made by recourse to structuralist principles, from De Saussure and Levi Strauss (Lacan, 1982). However, it is possible to understand the complexity in terms which conceive of the psychic/social relation as produced not in a-historical and universal categories, but in historically specific regimes of meaning and truth (Henriques et al, 1998).

However, what Freud did argue for was what he called a 'childhood sexuality'. What he meant was that the bodily sensations experienced by the baby could be very pleasurable, but this pleasure was, of course, always cross-cut by pain, a presence marked by the absence of the caregiver, usually the mother. In this context little children could learn in an omnipotent way that they too could give these pleasurable sensations to themselves, just as they learnt, according to Freud's famous example of the cotton reel game, that in fantasy they could control the presence and absence of the mother. So, for Freud there is no *tabula rasa*, no innocent child. The child's first senses of pleasure are already marked by the fantasies inherent in the presence and absence of the Other. However, as Laplanche and Pontalis (1985) point out, the infantile sexuality, marked by an 'infantile language of tenderness', is cross-cut by the introduction of an adult 'language', the language of passion. 'This is the language of desire, necessarily marked by prohibition, a language of guilt and hatred, including the sense of orgasmic pleasure.' How far does this view take us down the road of sorting out the problems associated with models of childhood innocence?

The model suggests that there are two kinds of sexuality: an infant one about bodily pleasures and an adult one which imposes a series of other meanings upon those pleasures. We should note here therefore that Laplanche & Pontalis (1985) do go as far as implying that not all of the fantasy is on the side of the child, but that the parents impose some of their

own. The sexuality would then develop in terms of the admixture of the two, in all its psychic complexity. Let me illustrate that briefly by making reference to a previous study of mine (Walkerdine, 1985) in which I discussed my own father's nickname for me, Tinky, short for Tinkerbelle, which I was reminded of by a father, Mr Cole, whose nickname for his six-year-old daughter, Joanne, was Dodo. I argued that Tinky and Dodo were fathers' fantasies about their daughters: a fairy with diminutive size but incredible powers on the one hand and a preserved baby name (Dodo, as a childish mispronunciation of JoJo) on the other. But a Dodo is also an extinct bird, or for Mr Cole, that aspect of extinction, which is preserved in his fantasy relationship with his daughter: a baby. Joanne is no longer a baby; babyhood, like the Dodo has gone, but it is preserved in the fantasy of Mr Cole's special nickname for his daughter, and in so designating her, he structures the relationship between them: she remains his baby. In the case of my own father's fantasy, Tinky signified for me the most potent aspect of my specialness for him. I associated it with a photograph of myself aged three winning a local fancy dress competition, dressed as a bluebell fairy. This is where I won and 'won him over': my fairy charms reciprocated his fantasy of me, designating me 'his girl' and fuelling my Oedipal fantasies. But, I am trying to demonstrate that those fantasies are not one-sided, neither on the side of the parent, nor the little girl, but, as the Tinky example illustrates, the 'language of adult desire' is entirely cultural. Tinkerbelle and bluebell fairies are cultural phenomena which can be examined in terms of their semiotics and their historical emergence, as well as their production and consumption. My father did not invent Tinkerbelle or the Bluebell Fairy. Rather he used what were available cultural fantasies to name something about his deep and complex feelings for his daughter. In return, I, his daughter, took those fantasies to my heart and my unconscious, making them my own. Now, of course it could be argued that this sails very close to Mulvey's original position, following Lacan, that woman (the little girl) does not exist (or have fantasies which originate with her) except as symptom and myth of male fantasy. But I am attempting to demonstrate that a position which suggests that fantasies come only from the adult male is far too simplistic. My father might have imposed Tinkerbelle on me but my own feelings for my father had their own role to play.

I want to argue that the culture carries these adult fantasies, creates vehicles for them. It carries the transformation of this into a projection onto children of the adult language of desire. In this view the little seductress is a complex phenomenon, which carries adult sexual desire but which hooks into the equally complex fantasies carried by the little girl herself. The idea of a sanitised natural childhood in which such things are kept at bay, having no place in childhood, becomes not the guarantor of the safety of children from the perversity of adult desires for them, but a huge defence against the acknowledgement of those, dangerous, desires on the part of adults. In this analysis, 'child protection' begins to look more like adult protection.

It is here then that I want to make a distinction between seduction and abuse. Fantasies of Tinky and Dodo were enticing, seductive, but they were

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

not abuse. To argue that they were is to make something very simplistic out of something immensely complex.

As long as seduction is subsumed under a discourse of abuse, issues of 'seduction into the fantasies of the parents', are hidden under a view which suggests that adult sexual fantasies about children are held only by perverts, who can be kept at bay, keeping children safe and childhood innocent. But if childhood innocence is really an adult defence, adult fantasies about children and the eroticisation of little girls is not a problem about a minority of perverts from whom the normal general public should be protected. It is about massive fantasies carried in the culture, which are equally massively defended by other cultural practices, in the form of the psychopedagogic and social welfare practices incorporating discourses of childhood innocence. This is not to suggest that children are not to be protected. Far from it. Rather, my argument is that a central issue of adult sexual projections onto children is not being addressed.

So the issue of fantasy and the eroticisation of little girls within popular culture becomes a complex phenomenon in which cultural fantasies, fantasies of the parents and little girls' oedipal fantasies mix and are given a cultural form which shapes them. Laplanche & Pontalis (1985) argue that fantasy is the setting for desire, 'but as for knowing who is responsible for the setting, it is not enough for the psychoanalyst to rely on the resources of his [*sic*] science, nor on the support of myth. He [*sic*] must become a philosopher' (p. 17). In post-structuralist terms this would take us into the domain of the production of knowledges about children and the production of the ethical subject. I want to explore lastly this latter connection by suggesting several courses of action and to examine briefly the issue through a specific example of a 'moral panic' about popular culture and the eroticisation of children.

Minipops

I want to end this article by examining briefly the case of Minipops, a series transmitted on the United Kingdom's Channel Four television in 1983. The series presented young children, boys and girls, white and black, singing current pop songs, dressed up and heavily made up. This series became the object of what was described as a moral panic. The stated intention of the director was to present a showcase of new talent, the idea having come from his daughter, who liked to dress up and sing pop songs at home. The furore caused by the programmes was entirely voiced by the middle classes. The broadsheet papers demanded the axing of the series on the grounds that it presented a sexuality which spoiled and intruded into an innocent childhood. One critic wrote of 'lashings of lipstick on mini mouths'. By contrast, the tabloids loved the series. For them, the programmes represented a chance for young children to be talent spotted, to find fame. There was no mention of the erosion of innocence. Why this difference? It would be easy to imagine that the tabloids were more exploitative, less concerned with issues of sexual exploitation so rampant in their own pages, with the broadsheets as

upholders of everything that is morally good. However, I think that this conclusion would be erroneous. While I deal with this argument in more detail elsewhere (Walkerdine, 1997), let me point out here that I have argued that the eroticised little girl presents a fantasy of otherness to the little working class girl. She is inscribed as one who can make a transformation, which is also a self-transformation, which is also a seductive allure. It is not surprising therefore that the tabloid discourse is about talent, discovery, fame: all the elements of the necessary transformation from rags to riches, from flower girl to princess, so to speak. Such a transformation is necessarily no part of middle class discourse, fantasy and aspiration. Rather, childhood, for the middle class is a state to be preserved, free from economic intrusion and producing the possibility of the rational and playful child who will become a rational, educated professional, a member of the 'new middle class'.

Seduction and the eroticisation of little girls are complex cultural phenomena. I have tried to demonstrate that the place of the little working class girl is important because her seductiveness has an important role to place in terms of both a social and personal transformation, a transformation which is glimpsed in the fantasies of fame embodied in series like *Minipops*. The figure of the little working class girl then simultaneously 'holds' transformation of an emasculated working class into lovable citizens and the fear against which the fantasy defends. This is the little *Lolita*: the whore, the contagion of the masses which will endanger the safety of the bourgeois order. On the other hand, child protection as the outlawing of perversion and a keeping of a safe space of innocent childhood, can also be viewed as class specific, and indeed the fantasy of the safe space which has not been invaded by the evil masses.

I have tried to place and understanding of unconscious processes inside of all of this. Because, as I hope that I have demonstrated, psychic processes form a central component of how social and cultural fantasies work. Some may argue that my recourse to psychoanalysis presents such psychic processes as universal and inevitable, but I have tried to show the social and the psychic merge together to form any particular fantasies at a specific moment. This is only a very small beginning that may help to sort out how we might approach a hugely important topic which has been badly neglected.

Conclusion

Might we therefore begin to examine what kinds of subjects and subjectivities are created through game-playing and through other popular media? What are the ways in which such discourses and practices prepare children for the world beyond the screen? The male figures of the rational middle class explorer and the proto-violent and addicted working class boy, the well-behaved proto-mother and the little seductress certainly exist not only as subject positions but are constantly created as modes of subjectivity within the practices of game-playing. These are not a-historical nor

VIOLENT BOYS AND PRECOCIOUS GIRLS

trans-cultural figures, but quite specific to the time and place which produces them. They are also replete with the fears, phobias and fetishes of late twentieth century Western cities. How might we begin to explore the situated production of all subjectivities of the world's children as they face the huge differences confronting the new millennium? It is not only our approach to the understanding of space, of popular culture that must change, but our approach to the issue of childhood itself. Rationality and its Others: irrationality, madness, criminality, sexual perversion, are popularly understood as the effects of success or failure of sexual perversion or similarly the result of simplistic ideas about the 'effects' of the media upon that socialisation. If we are to begin to construct both alternative kinds of accounts and to intervene differently in work with children, we must take seriously the simple pathologisation which is rooted in the long-established practices of regulation of the poor and the masses. In these modes of regulation, adult pathology is understood as expressed mostly by those who were poorly socialised as children. This prohibits our gaze at something else, that is, the way in which the practices of pathologisation sit so neatly alongside those very discourses and practices in which the eroticisation of little girls is commonplace and the Internet explorer one of today's anarcho-heroes. If we begin to interrogate both what is spoken and the way it sits so neatly alongside that which receives no comment, we may be able to approach the complexities of explanation and intervention in childhood in a different kind of way, one which avoids the dangers of the easy certainties of normality and pathology.

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VALERIE WALKERDINE

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