

**QUEER THEORY AND THE LOGIC OF ADOLESCENCE**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2011

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary examination of the history and theory of adolescence. I draw on a variety of materials, from both Britain and the United States, including nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspapers and periodicals, literary texts, educational treatises, advertisements, pamphlets, and medical discourse which reveal the term and the category of adolescence as it has been put into service by fields like medicine, psychology, education, and public policy. Methodologically, I use this range of materials to look for patterns, tracing not only the word and concept of adolescence, but the construction and circulation of social meanings associated with adolescence. Queer theory understands categories of gender and sexuality as unstable, shifting, malleable, contextual—and this project understands that theorized complexity as belonging to the past as well as the present, in the movement of adolescence as a term and a concept.

Among constructivist studies of adolescence, scholars often cite G. Stanley Hall's exhaustive two-volume work *Adolescence* (1904) as a point of origin, the beginning of what we recognize today as adolescence. This project maps out a trajectory of fragmented, multi-purposed conceptualizations of adolescence, one that precedes Hall and continues after him, a mapping that brings to light the surprising movement and instability of this trajectory over time. If we understand language and meaning as having a certain flexibility, as moving with each iteration and reiteration, then my framing historical question is not whether adolescence existed

in earlier centuries, but how the concept existed, and more specifically, how it existed in shifting and interconnected discourses, such as nineteenth-century American newspapers and British sex education pamphlets from the 1930s and 40s. This methodology allows me to speak to the perplexing question of how language constitutes social realities and modes of knowledge. My research encompasses a wide range of materials and historical moments to explore the ideological dimensions of adolescence, ones that circulate and reappear in very specific, located contexts. This project brings to light a nonlinear history that reframes present assumptions about adolescence and opens up the category as a powerful site for work in queer theory, cultural studies, and literary studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

What is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

—Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*

We can find some measure of liberation, I believe, by examining the directions we receive for reading the past and then disobeying them as brazenly as we can, flaunting them, turning them back on themselves.

—James Kincaid, *Child-Loving*

There are political implications inherent in the act of interpretation itself, whatever meaning that interpretation bestows.

—Julia Kristeva, “Psychoanalysis and the Polis”

The question of adolescence inevitably becomes a question about the present, a question about the meanings we use to make sense of ourselves and each other. I am interested in exploring these ways of making meaning, how they are constituted, and in what ways it might be possible to think differently. One way to consider the question of adolescence, then, is as a hermeneutic of the self.<sup>1</sup> How does adolescence work as a way of interpreting our past and present, our memories, our thoughts and feelings? As a hermeneutic, it has a great degree of interpretive

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<sup>1</sup> I am deploying “hermeneutic of self” for adolescence as a launch point from Michel Foucault’s theorization of sexuality as a hermeneutic of self in the *History of Sexuality*, volumes 1-3.

flexibility, albeit within its conceptual and definitional limits. And yet, this hermeneutic of self is closely tied to other ways of interpreting the self, closely tied to sexuality, to science, to the nation. Within the logic of adolescence there is a sequence in which we are to order our experiences and to feel that we know what they mean. This hermeneutic unavoidably extends to our interpretations of others as well. That is to say, we live in a world with an ever-shifting group of people who are called adolescents, without their consent, and any of us might say that we know them because we have known adolescence ourselves. Often, what is known as adolescence is taken for granted, and as such it functions both empty of meanings and full of meanings at the same time.

The meaning of adolescence appears to be shared meaning, to be something everyone has or will have experienced, to be something any of us might speak about. But I want to question the very notion that we can know adolescence at all. People who are twelve to eighteen years old are called adolescents, talked about *as* adolescents, and grouped as such for research studies, marketing strategies, and school curricula. We find adolescence deployed for complex and even contradictory goals in fields like education, psychology, library science, and public policy. Adolescence can be used as a rationale for schooling, for censorship, for religion, for approaches to parenting, for writing and publishing young adult literature. More than any one set of rationales, adolescence is remarkable for its adaptability to a wide range of arguments about how things should be. I begin here not to make claims, but to suspend claims of knowledge, to suspend what we think we know about adolescence in the first place. Indeed, my claim that adolescence is a question may be considered the first part of my argument. The notions of adolescence we encounter are not stable, not fixed in time, not objectively defined or even

definable. The idea of adolescence moves; and yet, in this movement I argue that adolescence has a logic, a logic which shapes the ways we see ourselves and the world.

I use *logic of adolescence* to describe the conceptual ways of being and knowing that make the idea of adolescence possible. In many ways, this project is about uncovering that logic, tracking it through texts and through time, and articulating the work it does today. Or, I could put this agenda more broadly—what are the meanings we attach to conditions of being, like childhood and adolescence, and how is that shared meaning sustained and shifting over time? Where and when do these shared meanings break down, radically split, or dissolve? Adolescence has a history, and ideas about adolescence have shifted over time along with ideas about the self, about family and gender, about science and civilization. The history of adolescence, however, cannot be separated out from the present or the perspectives we bring to bear on the past. And so, I am bound by the very conditions of language and culture that I seek to make visible. My thinking about language and meaning cannot hover above that language, but must inhabit it. I want to make the claim, then, that to study the history of adolescence is to practice a kind of historical ontology, or study of being.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of adolescence raises questions about identity and the self, about what it means to be in the world and to experience ourselves and others in relation to language and meaning. These are questions about the present, about being in the present, though we can consider notions of *being* themselves historically located and contingent, shifting over time and place. The question of adolescence is not simply one of terminology, not simply a matter of linking earlier notions of youth with twentieth century notions of adolescence; rather, it is a historical inquiry

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<sup>2</sup> Historical ontology comes from Ian Hacking, who does work in the philosophy of science and whose histories of “making up people” have informed my thinking about the history of adolescence.

into the ways we conceptualize identity and the self, agency and power, language and reality. In this sense, I find that there are both radical contingencies in notions of adolescence in the present and significant conceptual links between past and present notions of youth. If we understand language and meaning as having a certain flexibility, as moving with each iteration and reiteration, then my framing historical question is not whether adolescence existed in earlier centuries, but how its logic existed in shifting, fragmented, and interconnected discourses over time. This methodology allows me to speak to the perplexing question of how language constitutes social realities and modes of knowledge. Identity, we might say, is one form of social reality, one of these modes of knowledge, and I am interested in the ways that identity functions both within the logic of adolescence and within its conceptualizations of the self. This is an investigation of world, self, and text that aims to expose and explore these gaps and excesses of meaning.

We might say it was not always possible *to be* an adolescent, since this term and the social meanings we attach to it emerged only as recently as the nineteenth century, though this claim is more complicated than it may at first appear. A claim like this about the history of adolescence speaks to a much larger question about the relationship between the names of things and things themselves, a question that will form one of the central lines of inquiry in the chapters that follow. Of course, we might say that there were people between the ages of twelve and eighteen before the nineteenth century, but I am interested in how these people understood themselves and were understood by others in relation to the ways of being and knowing available through language over time. I am interested in understanding how we think about ourselves and others, how we might be able to think these things differently.

The availability of widely circulating historical newspapers and periodicals in electronic databases, in conjunction with searchable full-text books online, makes an investigation of this scale possible, allowing me to trace not only theories of adolescence, but patterns of meaning that both echo and depart from the big thinkers we now associate with adolescence. Through wide reading of these archives, I have found a significant number of shifting, multi-purposed conceptualizations of youth, not only those articulated by experts, but also those that circulated in more popular forms. Indeed, the nineteenth and early-twentieth century discourses constructing adolescence indicate that the very notion of expertise was itself under negotiation in relation to the new scientific and philosophical conceptualizations of human development in childhood and adolescence.

At what point did the term adolescent begin to evoke a particular type of person? How do understandings of interiority, consciousness, and the self shape these ideas of childhood and adolescence? What ways of thinking about *being* and *knowing* make the concept of adolescence possible, even necessary, to our thinking about ourselves in the past and the present? And what work does the idea of adolescence do in our thinking about human life, identity, education? Adolescence refers to a stage of life that marks the end of childhood but not yet the beginning of adulthood, and with this sequencing comes a multitude of spoken and unspoken assumptions, investments, and expectations. How do notions of social hierarchy inflect this sequencing? Adolescence sustains assumptions about what childhood was and what adulthood should be. Adolescence sustains assumptions about what is normal, natural, right, and good, instructing us as to which of our feelings belong to the past and which to our future, which of them we should disavow and which we should own. Adolescence directs us towards the ways in which we are supposed to develop and also secures the ways in which we are not to go.

Scholars in queer theory have emphasized the constructed nature of gender and sexuality, a methodology that arises out of an often personal awareness of ways of being that fall outside of language, outside of the existing definitions and categories; and what this methodology suggests is that lived realities are always more complex, contradictory, and queer than the discursive ways of being we use to make sense of those realities. These personal and political investments of queer theory, much like feminist theory, are what distinguish it from other poststructuralist methodologies. I have often been asked what the difference is between queer notions of fluidity and other poststructuralist theories heralding the fluidity of meaning. There seems to be growing in popularity a postmodern notion of self that is perpetually subject to one's own self-fashioning—imagined as the ultimate freedom of self-expression where we are not limited even by gender or sex or race or class.<sup>3</sup> Postmodern fluidity is sold as the ultimate equalizer. And yet, these postmodern conceptualizations of fluidity seem always to imply an ideal, another point of arrival for the self much farther away, and with it our abilities to construct the ideal self that we now have the power to become.

Queer theory, as a methodology, does not anticipate or require such points of arrival, nor are arrivals understood as fixed in themselves. Rather, such arrivals are not fixed moments of identity, but identifications occurring in the movement between moments of fluidity and fixity. Postmodern fluidity can be billed as the freedom to choose who we are; and yet, in this imagining of the self, it is precisely that which is deemed desirable that seems to be scripted ahead of time, without our input or consent. What we find in these notions of fluidity, rather than greater acceptance of variation, are even more rigid boundaries around the normal, right,

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<sup>3</sup> I am characterizing here familiar dismissals of trans theory that can mistakenly equate transgendered identities and theories with popular, normative trends in plastic surgery.

and good way to be a man or a woman. What we find instead are even greater imperatives to occupy these bounds, to occupy an ideal imagined and sold by someone else.

What we find in some versions of postmodern critique are analyses of language that seem to hover above that language, to refuse to admit how we are materially inscribed by bodies, words, and ideas that cannot be escaped, even as we push against them. To say that something, like gender or childhood, is culturally constructed, does not mean that the text of the body is then open to infinite interpretive possibility. The body is a kind of text; and its materiality, however temporary, does not take on an entirely new form every time we come into contact with that materiality. The body has meaning, just as the text has meaning, but that meaning is not inherently located in the body any more than it is inherently located in the printed ink on the page. Butler reminds us that the meaning of gender is constituted by its very expression, like language; and so neither the meaning of gender nor biological sex is inherently located in genitals, or mannerisms, or voice. We read sex and gender like we read the words on the page. And, we read childhood and adolescence onto the body, like gender, like language, meaning that is shared and yet fraught. Adolescence, then, is a discursive construct that ultimately limits what we can see and understand about being in the world. But, this acknowledgment itself tells us very little about what adolescence means, or what the idea of adolescence itself reveals and obscures through language.

We bring meaning to the text, to each other, and to ourselves. What is at stake in whether we can talk about a “real” child or a “real” adolescent is really a question about the relationship between discourse and lived experience, about whether it is possible to speak of lived experience when our speaking is already and inevitably a part of discourse. I am invested in this problem, though my investment is not in solving this problem; ultimately the problems of language and

interpretation are not resolvable, which is what makes their exploration open to such infinite layering. In this sense, my project is one of opening up rather than closing down meanings, moving my inquiry inside its very questions rather than attempting to answer questions while I stand outside them. One way I have approached this problem of language is to overlap language, text, and world, a strategy that makes visible the discursive and the hermeneutic dimensions of any engagement with these contradictory and shifting constructions of self and other. Certainly, the objective of cultural criticism is to challenge existing interpretations, to shift or stretch the interpretive possibilities of self, text, and world. And, in these pages, I take great pleasure in imagining infinite possibility, just as someone might take great pleasure in believing in an objective, knowable world. But, the fact that I can queerly take pleasure in the idea of no meaning or of falling outside of meaning does not make such theoretical nothingness any more actual than objective knowledge of a real world. Adolescence is not real, at least, not exactly real. And so, I see adolescence as a kind of identity marker, an interpretive mechanism against and within which adolescent persons must negotiate themselves, against and within which we must negotiate them, too.

Of course, adolescents and children are people. Though, it is troubling how the privilege of personhood is not granted to all children or adolescents, how such a privilege is contingent on other social dimensions or at times contingent on only the discretion of a few parents, teachers, doctors, social workers. The logics of childhood and adolescence themselves powerfully function to justify the denial of personhood to this person who is not yet a person, to those who may never achieve personhood. Childhood obscures these abuses of childhood. And, adolescence stands in as reason enough to deny a young person the dignity of their own meaning-making. As I have inhabited throughout this project so many evocations of the

adolescent and the child, I have paid particular attention to those that seemed driven by projects of control. What were these projects of control and what did they want? What seemed to motivate their values and assumptions and grounds for justification?

We cannot control other people. I say this, perhaps, at the risk of stating the obvious. And yet, for some, the idea of allowing others control of themselves ushers on visions of anarchy and chaos, visions of a world in which all hope of freedom and security are gone forever. Here, I think, we find the utopian project of imagining a better world only one side of the coin, which on the flip side is merely a dystopian nightmare. The ominous phrase, for example, *the end of the world as we know it*, gives away its investments in preserving to the end the known over the unknown, this threat hinging on apocalyptic fear. I am interested in exploring the connections between the productive, even utopian, project of imagining a better social world and the regulatory impulse to manage those aspects of the social world that we cannot know, anticipate, or control. Figures of youth can be used to hold apocalyptic visions at bay, coming to represent both the cause and the cure for fears of the unknown, both what propels us towards the end of the world and back towards its beginning. It is perhaps the fantasy of starting over that adolescence promises, the illusion that there are origins we can discover or return to, futures at which we can arrive.

Chapter 1, “Adolescence as Narrative,” approaches these questions through an investigation of American adolescence at the turn of the century, recontextualizing the contributions of psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall. Hall is often called the father or the inventor of adolescence, a claim that locates the origin of adolescence in the United States at the turn of the century. Drawing from nineteenth-century American newspaper archives, this chapter tracks the circulation of the term adolescence in the hundred years before Hall's 1904

two-volume work *Adolescence* to show his reliance on a number of popular tropes circulating nearly a century earlier, one of the most significant tropes being the use of adolescence as a metaphor for nation. This trope survives to this day in submerged expressions of futurity, racism, and heteronormativity.

At the heart of social histories of childhood and adolescence are underlying tensions between constructivist and essentialist methodologies, and both Chapters 1 and 2 seek to unravel and reconcile these methodological tensions, enacting a mode of cultural study that encompasses both the discursive and the material. Chapter 2, “Interpreting Self and Other,” turns to the early twentieth century, focusing on the history of adolescence and sexuality in early psychology, medicine, and educational discourses. The kinds of anxieties around sex in the late-nineteenth century are institutional anxieties rather than moral, and they raise the question: *what is so important about regulating sex?* The answer to this question is complex, submerged in a history of sexuality that is difficult to see behind the lens of the present. The arguments for sex education in the early twentieth century are connected to arguments that science could direct the future. What before was left to God seemed now in the hands of institutions. Sex education pamphlets from the 1930s appear, on first glance, to be aimed at adolescents; but their message is more often for adults whose knowledge is being usurped by the language of science and reproduction, the language of evolution, heredity, and futurism.

Chapter 3, “Self, World, Text,” focuses on psychoanalytic notions of the child, surfacing intersections between Jacqueline Rose’s *The Case of Peter Pan* and some of the primary concerns of queer theory. How does the theoretical come to bear on the very real and urgent problem of being in the world and being in relation to others? Reframing the concept of impossibility as productively unresolvable, this chapter shows how Rose’s work engages notions

of the “child” in ways that speak to both questions of theory and questions of the lived world. By thinking through issues of relationality, the child and the queer overlap to reveal the categories of child and adolescent as part of the real and part of the imaginary, both of which inevitably shape our experiences and our interpretations of ourselves and others. In this chapter, the logic of adolescence unfolds from the contradictory and complex logics of childhood.

As Rose’s book connects questions of the child and questions of reading, I also see an inextricable link between notions of the self and acts of reading and interpretation. In Chapter 4, “Enlightened Reading, Risky Reading,” I consider late twentieth-century notions of “the adolescent” as a central point of interrogation, revealing the layers of this ideological construction through the problem of reading. I find ideas about identity, agency, childhood, and time to be intimately connected to notions of adolescence and reading. As Hall’s work is deeply anxious about the corrupting and stunting influence of reading, I examine this dimension of Hall alongside scenes of reading from late nineteenth-century novels, twentieth-century classics, and contemporary young adult fiction to explore the conceptual logic of adolescence as it is put to use by publishers, librarians, and educators. Scenes of reading appear with surprising frequency in fiction, and I read these scenes as compact, interpretively supple negotiations of being in the world, exploring how these diverse representations of self and world play with notions of age, identity, and norms. The tensions surrounding adolescent reading and interpretation echo tensions between norms and queer possibilities, and I engage these tensions to theorize issues of identity and agency central to adolescence.

Why a project about adolescence? Adolescence is a fiction, but one that cannot be so easily undone. It is always difficult to see the present *as* the present. That is, a critical inquiry that aims to describe the present is perpetually enmeshed in the very culture it seeks to describe.

My hope is to pry apart language, to begin to wriggle it free from the natural, the normal, and the known of our present. With this objective in mind, I have sought after the perverse interpretive possibilities of both past and present. I have sought after the submerged and explicit ways that we need adolescence, what functions it serves and whether we are best served by it. I do not know if we can ever do away with adolescence, whether the disciplines of medicine and psychology will move away from it in the twenty-first century, whether changes will occur in public policies on the age of consent, voting rights, driving, drinking, and compulsory schooling. For now, my hope is to dislodge adolescence from its present knowability and with it, the logic that sustains it.

## 1. ADOLESCENCE AS NARRATIVE

Must the story that the child tells about his or her origin, a story that will no doubt be subject to many retellings, conform to a single story about how the human comes into being? Or will we find the human emerging through narrative structures that are not reducible to one story, the story of a capitalized Culture itself?

—Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

We are bound to ask how far any of the abstract generalizations of science can be declared in an absolute sense more factual than that of Religion. Would it not be truer, and more conducive to the widest freethinking, to regard both as metaphorical, not as strict and literal but figurative and analogical expression of experienced reality?

—F. H. Bradley, “Free Thought”

At the turn of the century, American psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall set adolescence at the forefront of evolutionary progress, creating an inextricable link between what he understood as a stage of human life and the progress of civilization as a whole. Hall created this link through a series of interrelated narratives—narratives that structured history, civilization, and human development in correlating, linear lines of progression. These narratives constructed by Hall offered a rationale for the surveillance and control of young people, including the measurement of their height and weight and limbs, the study of their minds and feelings, the directing of their interests and educations towards Hall’s particular vision of progress. These narratives of progress continue to construct the illusion of control over an unpredictable future

through the watchful and guided upbringing of youth. For Hall, adolescence was essential to this control, at once both a stage of human life and a metaphor for the evolution of all of humankind.

I am interested in the ways these narratives of progress persist to this day, the ways they inflect the logics surrounding childhood and adolescence, the ways they have survived in different forms of collective investment in the future. My aim is to disrupt these narratives by reframing both Hall and the logics of the present. While I do not think it is possible to do away with narrative or to find an essential truth beyond it, unraveling these threads allows us to question what the narrative constructs as real, natural, and inevitable. Narrative constructs its own inevitability, but these narratives around adolescence are not natural or inevitable; rather, the concept of adolescence is itself narrative, a story we tell about ourselves, and one that has intersected over time with shifting ideological investments in gender, race, nation, and culture.

This chapter sketches out an ideological shift in the 1860s and 70s when adolescence began to take on the characteristics of an identity category, functioning not only as a stage of life, but also as a type of person who can be identified and known. This is where we see some of the first strikingly negative and dismissive descriptors assumed to belong to adolescence. Along with this shift, we also see adolescence begin to do the ideological work of reinforcing other social hierarchies, like those of race and class, a shift that I argue occurred shortly after the Civil War in the United States but nearly forty years prior to the publication of G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence* (1904). We can see adolescence enacting and reinforcing some of these same social hierarchies to this day. My investigation of adolescence in nineteenth century contexts raises questions about identity, about what constitutes an identity category, and how it can be said to function. These are questions that I take up through discursive analysis, through the ideological patterns that emerge from the texts and concepts I examine circulating over time. I show how

this shift towards identity has profound intersections and resonances with the reception and circulation of evolutionary theory, how the impact of texts like *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) and Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) changed the story told by adolescence about the structure and organization of social life. All histories are about the present, but they don't always announce the ways they are invested in the present, in present assumptions, in the present as progress. I think that adolescence can tell us something about histories, about the ways we conceive of the past, conceive of our pasts, and the stories we tell about them.

I begin with Hall because he is often referred to as the father of adolescence, and social histories tend to focus on his work at the turn of the century as a key moment in medical, psychological, legal, and educational discourse about adolescence. This moment has even been called the invention of adolescence, and the importance of Hall's massive two-volume *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* is largely taken for granted as the point of origin for a stage of human life previously unrecognized or unacknowledged. My research, however, reveals over 1200 references to adolescence in American newspapers before 1900, one of the earliest dated 1769.<sup>4</sup> What a wide survey of American newspapers and periodicals reveals are trajectories of

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers are taken from searches of two electronic databases, the American Antiquarian Society's collection *Early American Newspapers, 1690-1922* by Readex and Infotrac's *19<sup>th</sup> Century US Newspapers*. I read each newspaper article in these databases referencing adolescence prior to 1870, and then I read selectively from 1870-1900 because of the significant increases in hits in the latter part of the century. One of my methodological objectives was to read this archive with fresh eyes, reading for what was there rather than for a preconceived idea of what might be there. I read for patterns, tracking uses of the word "adolescence" and the meanings that cropped up alongside it. This combination of both wide reading and close reading was profoundly inspired by the methodologies of graduate seminars taught by Steve Carr at the University of Pittsburgh, and also by the practices of archival research in *Archives of Instruction: Nineteenth Century Rhetorics, Readers, and Composition Books in the United States* (2005) by Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz.

fragmented, multi-purposed conceptualizations of adolescence, trajectories that precede Hall and continue after him. My mapping of early American newspapers brings to light the surprising movement and instability of these trajectories over time. I think it is worth noting that twentieth-century conceptions of adolescence do not stabilize following the publication of Hall's *Adolescence* any more than the conceptions of adolescence deployed today in the fields of education, psychology, library science, or public policy represent a single entity. In this chapter, I focus on nineteenth century uses of adolescence and what they reveal about both Hall's work and the ideological functions of adolescence today.

## **I. ADOLESCENCE IN EARLY AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS**

The earliest instance of the word adolescence in my reading of American newspapers appears in a short 1769 essay titled "The Use and Abuse of Time" printed in the *New York Chronicle*. The essay is written in a wordy and polemical style that seems to contradict itself in line after line of metaphors about the meaning of life. This verbose style of writing suggests that "The Use and Abuse of Time" is a parody of philosophical writing, and the word adolescence appears in a line seemingly lamenting the human tendency towards perpetual dissatisfaction: "With these, scarce does Spring appear before they want Autumn; so that if their Prayer were granted, they would instantly skip from the Adolescence of Youth to the Decrepitude of Age" (68). The repetitive phrasing, "Adolescence of Youth," further suggests parody and also that adolescence is functioning here as an empty word, stuffy sounding, pompous, archaic. It is possible that this

writer would have been familiar with the word adolescence from reading in Latin or French, though the word was circulating in the English language by this time.<sup>5</sup>

A similar usage of the word adolescence appears in an 1811 article by a “Philologer” printed in the *Columbian*, humorously titled “Pompous Reflections No. 1.” Clearly mocking the pretense of the philologer’s use of language, the article enacts its reflections on the “cogitation of man” with lines like this one: “From his ablactation to his adolescence, with respect to ethics, he is nearly adiaphorous” (2). This humorous piece was even reprinted as “Pompous Reflections” in the *New-York Weekly Museum* a few weeks later in April of 1811. Like adolescence, words such as “ablactation” and “adiaphorous” can be found in dictionaries, but they may be taken here as unnecessarily opaque, verbose, pompous sounding.

A joke appearing numerous times throughout mid-century also features adolescence as an ostentatious word; however, the joke differs from the examples above in that it addresses a person who is called by the name adolescence. Adolescence seems to be used as an empty term in this joke as well—indeed, the humor of the joke seems to depend on this emptiness, but the fact that it specifically refers to a person distinguishes it from earlier uses and is consistent with shifts in usage occurring mid-century. This version of the joke, one of the earliest examples, appears in the *Ohio Statesman* in 1848:

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<sup>5</sup> The word “adolescence” comes from Latin and appears in French in the fourteenth century and English in the fifteenth century meaning “the process or condition of growing up” and was used in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as “the period between childhood and manhood.” My reading of historical American newspapers shows only three uses of the word before 1800, and over seven hundred from 1800-1900, dramatically increasing in number in the 1860s. The OED attributes the definitions of “youth” and specific age designations for “adolescence” to the late nineteenth century. The word “adolescent” appears in the fifteenth century in English to mean “a person in the age of adolescence,” corresponding with the fifteenth century sense of this term, and the more recent meanings as a noun, “a youth between the age of childhood and manhood,” and an adjective “growing towards maturity” to the early nineteenth century.

A dabbler in literature and fine arts, who prided himself on his knowledge and proper use of the English language, came upon a youngster sitting upon the bank of a mill-pond, angling for shiners, and thus addressed him—“Adolescens, art thou not endeavoring to entice the finny race to engulf into their denticulated mouths a barbed hook, upon whose point is affixed a dainty allurements?”

“No,” said the boy, “*I’m fishin.*” ([“A Dabbler”] 3)

The wording varies in reprints from paper to paper, suggesting that the joke may have circulated orally as well as in print.<sup>6</sup> The joke sometimes appears without the introduction above, beginning simply with dialogue, as it does in the *Daily Columbus Enquirer* in 1863 (“[Adolescence]” 2). The 1848 introduction to the dialogue above, referring to “a dabbler in literature and arts,” suggests that the joke is on the adult speaker and not on the boy named by “adolescens.” In this reading, the boy’s response might be understood as the commonsense response and as the response the audience would most likely identify with. Likewise, the reference to the “proper use of the English language” may be taken as ironic, resisting the normalizing functions of grammar books circulating in the United States at this time. However, I think it is important to consider this joke as potentially ambiguous, or potentially funny in more than one way. That is, while the joke mocks the presumption of the adult “dabbler in literature and the fine arts,” it could at the same time mock the boy who does not seem to be able to understand the ornate, poetic language of the adult. An 1870 version in the *San Antonio Express* changes the introduction to read somewhat more sarcastically, directing the audience towards the

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<sup>6</sup> Versions of this joke appear in the following American newspapers listed in chronological order: *The Daily Ohio Statesman* 1848, *Barre Patriot* 1848, *The Hudson River Chronicle* 1848, *The Semi-Weekly Eagle* 1848, *The Saturday Evening Post* 1856, *The Columbus Enquirer* 1856, *Daily Columbus Enquirer* 1863, *San Antonio Express* 1870, the *Youth’s Companion* 1870, *Daily Columbus Enquirer* 1871, *The Owyhee Avalanche* 1871, *Morning Republican* 1871, the *Christian Advocate* 1871, and a playful reference to the joke appears in *Weekly Columbus Enquirer* 1887. The joke also appears as late as 1935 in the *Wall Street Journal*. Interestingly enough, I found two reprints of the joke in British newspapers, the *Star and National Trades’ Journal* from Leeds in 1852 and the *Hull Packet and East Riding Times* in 1876. Another version appears in 1898 in the London periodical *Fishing Gazette*. Two British sources from 1932, *John O’London’s Weekly* and the book *Reading, Writing, Remembering: A Literary Record*, cite the joke from memory, but misremember “adolescens” as “Adolphus” (Lucas 7-8).

first interpretation: “A gentleman, whose learning does not appear to have sat very lightly upon him addressed a boy whom he found fishing, in the following simple and unaffected manner” (“[A Gentleman]” 2). Like the 1848 version, this introduction overtly mocks the adult whose learning has not “sat very lightly upon him,” but this change may also suggest that the earlier version was not clear enough to signal this angle of the joke without such sarcastic signposts. Or, if the joke was reprinted from memory, from circulating in oral conversations, then it is telling that the set-up is remembered and reproduced as sarcastic. This overt sarcasm could also suggest that it was necessary by this point to guard against its interpretation as a joke on the “adolescens” boy.

A quite different version printed in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1856 refers to the adult speaker as “an eccentric individual” who “gives vent to his feelings” by asking the boy, “Art thou endeavoring to entice the finny tribe to engulf into their denticulated mouths a barbed hook, upon whose point thou has fixed a dainty allurements” (“Hifalutin” 3). What I want to emphasize in these multiple examples is the movement of the joke, its contingency upon the context of its reading and retelling, and how adolescence is part of that movement and contingency. The logic of the joke suggests the emptiness of adolescence as a term, used by an “eccentric individual” who speaks in unnecessarily ornate language; and yet, the appearance of the joke in multiple newspapers over twenty years suggests its familiarity, even if that familiarity involved an incredibly contingent and movable set of implied meanings.

We can see some evidence of the joke's familiarity and also its movement in an obscure reference to the joke in the *Weekly Columbus Enquirer*<sup>7</sup> in 1887, appearing in a gossip column titled "Dots from Don":

A party consisting of Miss Ida Alexander and Clara Stallings, of this place, and Alice Stallings, of Talbotton, and as many gallant beaux, spent Saturday in a fishing expedition at Robert H. Alexander's mill pond. While others were endeavoring to tempt the finny tribe with the dainty allurements affixed upon the barbed instrument your correspondent was "fishing for love," whose dainty allurements were sweet smiles and tender words, and as usual caught nothing. (3)

What I find interesting about this reference is that the joke does not appear in the column, but only some phrases from it, and that these phrases are significantly reworked to create a play on words. There is no overt reference to adolescence, but the gossip column is clearly describing the social activities of young, unmarried men and women, connecting the joke to the leisure activities of actual young people. This allusion, however, reverses the humor of the original joke. The phrases "endeavoring to tempt the finny tribe" and "dainty allurements" emphasize that fishing is *not* a practical activity, but perhaps as absurd as the language used to describe it, something these young people are doing for entertainment, leisure, and love. These phrases may even be read as trivializing these social and romantic pursuits, making fun of the young people who are fishing rather than the person who is deploying the ornate phrases. But the gossip column is written by a young man, who refers to himself as "your correspondent," suggesting that this humor is self-referential and self-deprecating as well; after all, his "dainty allurements" of smiles and words "caught nothing." The "Dots from Don" correspondent often makes reference to his crushes in the column. It is notable that the class politics underpinning the joke

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<sup>7</sup> It makes sense that this allusion to the joke appears in a Columbus paper because nearly half of the appearances of the joke from 1848 to 1871 in the American Antiquarian Society's *Early American Newspapers* collection are in Ohio papers. Interestingly enough, the gossip reported is not from Ohio. The "Dots from Don" column is from a town in Harris County, Georgia.

seem to have shifted in “Dots from Don.” The boy in the earlier version is engaged in the activity of fishing for the sake of fishing, its practicality evident in both his actions and his language, whereas the young women in the gossip column are on a social “fishing expedition” organized for leisure and matchmaking. The young correspondent’s use of the ornate language from the joke also suggests his fluency in poetic language and that such wording is taken here to be more silly than opaque. This allusion relies on the joke being recognizable in this repurposed form where it can make fun of ornate language while also trivializing the activity that language describes. Significantly, I found that trivializing language was linked to adolescence only in the last half of the century.

What I have described above is one highly contingent trajectory of meanings for the word adolescence spanning from 1769 to 1935. Of course, alongside this trajectory is another pattern of usage where adolescence refers specifically to a stage of human life. What I am interested in noticing about this pattern of usage are differences in the ways stages of human life are conceptualized over the nineteenth century and beyond. Thus, notions of childhood are equally relevant to notions of adolescence in seeking to answer these questions. The fact that adolescence was used to refer to a stage of human life in the nineteenth century (and even earlier) does not necessarily indicate that the adolescence of the 1820s meant the same thing as the adolescence of the 1920s. Not only do I find evidence that the range of ages varies from usage to usage, but the meaning of adolescence as a stage of life varies significantly as well. In the 1820s, we see a number of articles referring to adolescence as a stage of human life in regard to issues of health, education, and physiology. In contrast, earlier references most commonly referred to adolescence as a metaphor for the nation, which closely aligned adult subjectivity and citizenship with adolescence, a pattern I will discuss in more detail in a section below. If not

used as a metaphor for nation, adolescence is frequently mentioned in political or historical biographies in the past tense, as a narrative feature that also closely aligns adolescence with adulthood.

In my reading of early nineteenth century sources, I paid particular attention to instances where adolescence crops up alongside medical prescriptions about how to care for children, which might indicate a shift aligning adolescence more closely with childhood as a stage requiring specific kinds of care and supervision. Medical prescriptions do not themselves indicate a distinct shift, however, especially when these prescriptions resemble or echo those made by John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). For example, an 1825 article “On the Sleep of Infants” from the *Boston Medical Intelligencer* gives very detailed, authoritative instructions about how an infant should be laid on his right side, but switched to the left at least twice a day, explaining that “sleep promotes a more calm and uniform circulation of the blood, and it facilitates assimilation of the nutriment received.” This advice is accompanied by an explanation that “the horizontal posture” is “the most favorable to the growth and bodily development of the infant” (“On Sleep” 1). The growth and bodily development of children appears here as a matter of medical expertise, stating that “a child of seven years old may sleep about eight, and not exceeding nine hours” and that “this proportion may be continued to the age of adolescence, and even to manhood” (1). Adolescence here, however, is an afterthought to the sleep requirements of childhood, offered as a generalization including the sleep requirements of adulthood. This article was subsequently excerpted in at least three American papers, including the *Farmer’s Cabinet*, the *New England Farmer*, and the *Eastern Argus*.

Another closely related pattern are references to adolescence that evoke or indirectly refer to actual people. In the early nineteenth century, adolescence is much more frequently used

as an abstract concept, even when referring to a stage of human life, which might explain why it was translated so frequently into metaphors for nation, city governments, and even local institutions. References to adolescence that appear to evoke actual people, on the other hand, show up most often in the context of discussions about conduct, educating youth, and the capabilities of the mind. One early example, published in the *Pittsfield Sun* in 1818, extracts from “an old periodical work” some remarks “worthy the consideration of parents” (“The Weekly” 1). The word adolescence appears in the context of chastising wealthy, upper class parents whose children are wastefully educated towards securing their wealth and status. As a consequence, during childhood, “an undue exaltation is cherished” and “by degrees he becomes habituated to consider himself as superior to various classes of his fellow-men,” so that “his adolescence is passed in frivolous pursuits” (“The Weekly” 1). The periodical work referenced here is an essay column written by Judith Sargent Murray called “The Gleaner” from the 1790s in the *Massachusetts Magazine*. Murray was a poet and one of the earliest American writers on women’s rights, though she often published under pseudonyms. Her essays from “The Gleaner,” including the one excerpted here, were collected in a three-volume work published under the name “Constantia” in 1798. This particular essay of Murray’s echoes concerns expressed by Rousseau about the child-rearing habits of the upper classes in France, though she appears to be concerned with attitudes of superiority as a specifically American problem in this essay.<sup>8</sup> It is significant, I think, that no generalizations are being made here about childhood or adolescence

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I would argue that the primary project of Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) was to imagine how one might raise a child who would not grow up to feel superior to others or compelled to rule over them, a deeply personal project borne out of Rousseau’s own preoccupations with domination and inferiority. The rigid controls that Rousseau advocates as he imagines himself as a tutor over an imaginary pupil, then, might be taken as a particularly reactive experiment, driven by his own fears. These fears, however, are quite opposite from those we see operating a century later around childhood and adolescence. Rather than being imagined as ways of preventing the domination of others, childhood and adolescence are imagined as ways to enable national projects of control and domination.

as categories or stages themselves; rather, the generalizations made are about the upper classes and are working as a critique of superiority and the child-rearing practices that fuel it.

In another early example, an 1820 article printed in the *New-England Palladium* refers to childhood and adolescence together to justify the project of education in a broad sense: “Childhood and adolescence are the ages for instruction, but the memory being the most powerful faculty of the child, that faculty must be most improved” (“Education” 1). Here we see adolescence aligned more closely with childhood. Like the example above, the emphasis is on education itself, rather than on what childhood and adolescence are specifically. Together, childhood and adolescence refer to a “time” rather than a category of person. In 1824, Charleston’s *City Gazette* reported a proposal that all boys “should spend one year of the period of adolescence in each quarter of the country of which he is not a native.” The goal of this proposal was to “preserve, in some degree, the homogeneousness of the People, and educate men for future public life” (“[Mr. Webster]” 2). These examples indicate an occupation with childhood and adolescence as having the potential to be directed towards a desired future outcome, one that reaches beyond the individual child or young person in question. We might trace this notion back throughout time, as far back as the idea of the mind as a *tabula rasa* that is imprinted by experience, or even further to Virgil’s oft-quoted, “Just as the twig is bent, so the tree’s inclined.” What I want to emphasize here are a diverse set of references to childhood and adolescence alongside a variable set of desired outcomes.

Childhood and adolescence in the examples above seem to be categorically lumped together even as they are named by two separate terms. Another common phrasing to this effect is “infancy and adolescence,” used together throughout the nineteenth century to refer to the time

before a literal or metaphorical maturity.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that these references to adolescence do not refer to or evoke a specific age group. The range of ages evoked by childhood and adolescence were not necessarily specific, and this conceptual flexibility can be confirmed by a short newspaper piece called “The Periods of Human Life,” published in at least eight American newspapers and periodicals in 1825.<sup>10</sup> The short piece lists as many as fifteen stages of human life along with their corresponding ages and characteristics. Adolescence is only the second stage listed, following childhood, which is named first. In this rendering, adolescence spans from ages eight to fourteen and is “the age of hopes, improvidence, curiosity, impatience.” Puberty follows adolescence, from ages fifteen to twenty-one and consists “of triumphs, desires, self love, independence and vanity” (1). What is so interesting about this example is that the majority of stages occur in adulthood, significantly deemphasizing the importance of the early developmental years. The entire sequence consists of childhood, adolescence, puberty, youth, manhood, middle age, mature age, decline of life, commencement of old age, old age, decrepitude, caducity, age of favor, age of wonder, and phenomenon. Phenomenon, the last stage, ends at 105 years old. We can probably assume that this piece did not represent widespread cultural assumptions about the stages of life, but rather that such assumptions were flexible enough for this curious organization to be of interest to people. This

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<sup>9</sup> My encounters with the phrase “infancy and adolescence” were often coincidental, in my reading of newspaper references to adolescence. As of this writing, the Readex and Infotrac newspaper databases are not very effective when searching for a phrase because of the ways the newspaper images must be tagged with searchable text, even though the search feature is itself capable of finding phrases using quote marks.

<sup>10</sup> In 1825, this piece appeared in the *Boston Medical Intelligencer*, the *Christian Secretary*, the *New England Farmer and Horticultural Register*, *Newburyport Herald*, the *Ballston Spa Gazette*, the *New Hampshire Sentinel*, the *New Hampshire Gazette*, and the *Norwich Courier*, again in 1828 in the *Middlesex Gazette*, the *Baltimore Patriot*, the *Watch-Tower*, the *Berks and Schuylkill Journal*, and the *Eastern Argus*. This piece also circulated in British newspapers and periodicals.

particular organization of human life was printed without interpretive commentary, even in the *Boston Medical Intelligencer* where, as far as I can tell, it first appeared in print.

In 1840, a medical doctor named E. G. Wheeler reproduced the fifteen stages in “The Periods of Human Life” alongside his commentary in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. Wheeler discusses a number of other organizations for human life, including how the ancients described six stages of human life, whereas the physiologist Dr. Dunglison describes five total, with three subcategories for infancy. In addition to these, Wheeler references the 1825 list “The Periods of Human Life,” attributing it to John Cotton. Wheeler reproduces the complete list of fifteen as a “curious division of the age of man,” which he hopes will interest other readers. He remarks, “there may be some inaccuracies in regard to the names of the different periods in the above quotation, particularly as regards adolescence and puberty, but the passions, qualities of the mind, &c., as therein attached to the several stages of life, are principally, if not altogether, correct, as I have no doubt every observing mind will at once admit” (396). Despite his claim of “inaccuracies,” Wheeler doesn’t offer a correction for any of the organizations of human life under discussion, but calls upon his readers’ common sense to recognize the stages of life and their corresponding characteristics. This appeal to common sense suggests their conceptual flexibility for those readers and even for Wheeler himself, who hopes his readers will consider all of them equally. That is, these different ways of conceptualizing the stages of human life seem to be intended by Wheeler to be reflected upon rather than asserted as scientific fact.

As early as 1832, we can find calls for the study of adolescence, though the method of this study is quite different from the scientific agenda outlined by Hall almost a century later. The *Newburyport Herald* declares, also appealing to commonsense, that, “we are all disposed to regard the age of adolescence with affection, for its beauty as well as its feebleness invites our

sympathy and attachment.” It is for this reason, the *Herald* continues, that “we should do more, we should consider it with grave attention, study it, and in learning and improving from its simplicity, bend our best energies to its direction and encouragement” (1). These assumptions about adolescence resemble much more closely those of childhood, as expressed by appeals like this: “We must remember that man is a mimic, that his virtues and vices are closely copied by the young, who are exposed to the influence of his example (1). The ideas expressed here seem to encourage a perceptiveness in parents and teachers that would change from context to context, rather than an unquestioned acceptance of authorized truth about childhood and adolescence. The appeal to affection, sympathy, and attachment also assume a very positive feeling about adolescence that is quite different from that expressed a century later.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, there is a striking pattern of positive descriptors accompanying the word adolescence including “the treasures of adolescence,” “the joys of adolescence,” “the vigor of adolescence,” “healthy adolescence,” “the bloom of adolescence and youth,” and “the sunshine of adolescence.”<sup>11</sup> An early example, reprinted from a London paper, appears in New York’s *Commercial Advertiser* in 1798. This article, reportedly written by a French Officer of Engineers regarding the art of sculpture, describes the work of an Italian sculptor named Canova: “this delicious abandonment—this picture of youthful pleasure—these treasures of adolescence, have a grace, beauty and delicacy, which no description can reach” (“Sculpture” 2). An 1806 advertisement for an aromatic confidently claims to “have inspired the feeblest decrepitude with the vigor of adolescence” (“Robert” 3). As we see in this ad, vigor is deemed a highly desirable state. But, the vigor of adolescence is given a more intense cast in William Cowper’s poem “Lewd Conversation,” which was printed in 1807 in the *Newburyport*

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<sup>11</sup> These phrases appear in early American newspapers from 1798-1820.

*Herald*: “Not e’en the headlong and vigorous rage / Of adolescence, or a firmer age, / Affords a plea, allowable or just, / For making speech the pamperer of lust” (4). On the other hand, a political story written for the *Monitor* in 1808 describes how two characters “seized our guns with all the gaiety and vigor of a healthy adolescence” (“Amicable” 2). Another account, called “Sachem’s Head; A Story of the Seventeenth Century,” from the *Middlesex Gazette* in 1826, describes a character who “seemed in the very prime of adolescence, having just arrived at that period when the slender and less powerful graces of youth are strengthening into and blending with the firm and muscular symmetry of full manhood” (2). Another 1827 article in the *Norwich Courier* talks about the “enchantments of youth” and the power of memory to “restore to the autumn of age the adolescence of youth” (“The Past” 2). In this phrase “the adolescence of youth,” the word “adolescence” is used positively to describe the health, vigor, and strength of feeling belonging to youth.<sup>12</sup> These examples are significant as a pattern of strikingly positive and powerful associations with the word adolescence.

In the 1830s, 40s, and 50s, we continue to see adolescence associated with highly positive qualities. In 1831, for example, a rave review of the child actor Master Burke depicted how “the soul of adolescence kindles in his eyes, and breathes in all his acts,” making it

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<sup>12</sup> It is highly likely that the association of vigor and health with adolescence refers exclusively to male adolescence. Around this same time, in 1828, the newspaper *Washington Whig* describes “the innocent face of the blooming girl, just shooting up from the first period of childhood, in to the more sedate age of adolescence” (“Simple” 2). The “sedate” age of adolescence seems a stark contrast to all the references to strength and vigor contemporary to it. Another 1848 story in the *Boston Daily Atlas* describes, “so sad a year had taken from Joanna the almost infantile character of adolescence, which had given her so much naivete and charm” (“Joanna” 1). The “infantile character of adolescence” here indicates that female adolescence is like childhood. These examples are not strongly negative, but suggest that the stages of life belonging to women and their corresponding qualities were always subordinate to men, excluded from the independence associated with male adolescence.

“delightful to regard so singular a combination of youth, genius and renown” (“Master” 2).<sup>13</sup> And, in 1834, a lecture reprinted in the *Richmond Enquirer* refers to the “luxuriance of adolescence” (“Dr. A. L. Warner” 4). In 1840, adolescence is used as a compliment in the context of praise for the late Prentiss Mellon, who, despite his age, wrote an article “exhibiting all the elasticity of adolescence” (“Laugh” 1). A moral tale reprinted from the *Ladies Companion* in both the *Salem Gazette* and *Pennsylvania Inquirer* in 1841 explains: “My children are now grown to adolescence—wealth and honor and goodness are theirs” (Embury 1). In 1847, an article on the opening of a New York exhibition reported that all ages were actively interested, including “vigorous manhood, happy adolescence, and squalling babyhood” (“The Illumination” 1). In another example from 1851, adolescence is used to compliment Col. W. D. Miller, who was Secretary of State in Texas: “When we speak of the Colonel as an old friend, it is not to be inferred that he is old in years, for the reverse is true, and this his countenance, still indicative of adolescence, and flushed with robust health, bespeaks in language plainer than words” (“[Col. W. D. Miller]” 2). Similarly, an 1853 story called “The Poacher” in *Boston Daily Atlas* relates how “every part of this graceful ensemble gave evidence of strength,” but significantly, “it was the young and flexible strength of adolescence” (1).<sup>14</sup> This pattern of positive descriptors is surprising in contrast to the condescending and dismissive characteristics we find associated with adolescence later. A significant shift in meaning occurs sometime over the 1860s and 70s, where we begin to see some of the first negative, dismissive, and condescending references to adolescence.

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<sup>13</sup> Master Burke is the name of child prodigy Joseph Burke (1818-1902), an actor and musician also known as the “Irish Roscius,” who came to the United States in 1830. He would have been thirteen years old at the time of this review.

<sup>14</sup> This story was reportedly translated from the French periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

In 1870, we find one of the most unambiguously negative examples, printed in the newspaper *Pomeroy's Democrat*: “We certainly would have never intentionally accused John Q. A. of the absurdities and crudities of adolescence. It is strange how often the young prove inadequate to represent the sound sense of their progenitors” (“Letters” 8). Considering the abundantly positive pattern of descriptors preceding, the words “absurdities” and “crudities” mark a distinct shift in usage. The word “progenitors” resonates with the language of evolutionary theory, the word connoting biological ancestry, not just parenting. And, it is remarkable that this quip constructs generational deterioration—the idea of children devolving into something weaker or lesser than their parents—and that this idea is not even presented as a fear, but a known fact. *It is strange how often the young prove inadequate.* In the 1870s, adolescence began to appear with a number of negative and condescending descriptors, including “feeble-minded adolescence” and “gushing adolescence,” both of these appearing in separate December issues of the *New-Orleans Times* in 1874.

Not coincidentally, this shift corresponds to the date Foucault identifies the homosexual spoken of as a type of person, citing Westphal’s article on “contrary sexual sensations” as the first medical account of the homosexual as a species (43).<sup>15</sup> While I do not specifically investigate Foucault’s historical claim about the homosexual as species in this chapter, my analysis of adolescence here further illuminates the ideological shifts that Foucault articulates in *The History of Sexuality*, and this is an issue I return to in my discussion of adolescence and

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<sup>15</sup> Westphal’s article is often credited as one of the first medical accounts of sexuality as a type of psychiatric disorder. Foucault describes in this claim a shift in thinking about sexuality from discrete acts anyone might commit to types of behavior indicating an identity or type of person, such as homosexual or heterosexual. Considering that terms like homosexual and heterosexual, which are so essential to our understanding of sexuality today, did not even exist until the nineteenth century suggests there is something to Foucault’s claim, even if it was not specifically Westphal’s article that marks the origin of this shift.

sexuality in Chapter 2. Foucault's use of the word "species" to describe the shift in thinking about sexuality is important, raising questions about the impact of evolutionary theory in the nineteenth century and what a word like species signals when used to conceptualize human life. This shift also occurs more than thirty years before the publication of G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*, calling into question the ways he is held responsible in contemporary social histories for the negative representations of adolescence belonging to the twentieth century.

## II. SOCIAL HISTORIES OF ADOLESCENCE

Some scholars have argued that it is only what we now understand as adolescence that can be traced to Hall and to the turn of the century. Though I hesitate to characterize adolescence *now* as just one thing. Kent Baxter, for example, claims in *The Modern Age* that "the common construction of the impulsive, conflicted, and rebellious adolescent found its origin and most vigorous articulation in America at the turn of the century" (3). Roberta Seelinger Trites writes in *Disturbing the Universe*, "Adolescence as a social concept did not gain the widespread attention of the American public until G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*" (8). John R. Gillis offers another version in *Youth and History*, arguing that adolescence was an invention of the middle classes. He explains, "what were historically-evolved social norms of a particular class became enshrined in medical and psychological literature as the 'natural' attributes of adolescence" (114). And, Jeffrey P. Moran's *Teaching Sex* begins with this line: "At the dawn of the twentieth century, a sixty year old man invented adolescence" (1). Moran is not alone, as so many scholars from so many different fields of study reproduce this historical narrative. The wording of "invention" sometimes signals a constructivist history, following the work of Philippe Ariès, in

which ideas about youth are made the primary object of study in contrast to methodologies seeking to uncover the experiences of young people throughout history. And yet, the popularity of the wording “invention” in scholarship on adolescence suggests that it has an appeal beyond the methodological.

Philippe Ariès’ groundbreaking book *Centuries of Childhood* is still widely cited and hotly debated, though these debates are frequently fueled by different assumptions about what it means to study history. Published in 1960 in France as *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime*, the methodology Ariès uses to study the history of childhood has clear overlaps with the work of Michel Foucault, whose first book *Naissance de la Clinique* was published in France in 1963. Both were intellectuals in France at the same time, and though they had different political affiliations, they were friends and sometimes worked together. Foucault wrote Ariès’ obituary in 1984. The work of both of these scholars emphasizes language and discursive meaning as central to what we understand as real and true about the world and ourselves. Historical work of this kind questions both past and present versions of reality.

In *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès argues that childhood and family are not timeless or universal concepts which comprise the foundation of society, but rather that both are relatively recent formations. Ariès goes so far as to claim that present notions of childhood did not even exist in the fifteenth century, and that they only existed in the upper classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The validity of these specific historical claims is not what interests me; but rather, it is the question of childhood and family itself that makes his argument so powerful. In his introduction, Ariès situates his argument in opposition to a dominant historical narrative about family, namely, a narrative of decline. The family, so the story goes, was the organizing principle of society but has deteriorated due to emerging notions of the individual in the

eighteenth century, the forces of industrialization in the nineteenth, and the increase of divorce rates and juvenile crime in the twentieth. Ariès writes, “I accordingly looked back into our past, to find out whether the idea of the family had not been born comparatively recently, at a time when the family had freed itself from both biology and law to become a value, a theme of expression, an occasion of emotion” (10). Ariès suggests that the present moment is not one of decline, but one in which notions of family are stronger than ever before. Family, Ariès suggests, is functioning in the present as a timeless and universal value. But *family* was not always *family*. By historicizing conceptions of childhood and family, Ariès makes it possible to see the present more clearly, to, in a sense, historicize the present.<sup>16</sup> Our present becomes, then, not inevitable or natural, but contingent and fleeting. Our present becomes moveable.

Frank Musgrove’s 1964 *Youth and the Social Order* was perhaps the first account of adolescence to use the phrase “the invention of the adolescent,” and this phrase circulated widely afterward in sociology, psychology, and education journals. Clearly influenced by his book *Centuries of Childhood*, Musgrove cites Ariès, but claims that it was Rousseau who invented adolescence in 1762. Ariès, on the other hand, finds examples of adolescence represented in the eighteenth century, but locates “the first typical adolescent of modern times” in Wagner’s *Siegfried* in late-nineteenth century Germany (30). Like the social histories that followed, Ariès argues that the concept of adolescence entered France (and we might add the United States) a bit later, around 1900. In 1977, Joseph Kett also uses the phrasing of “invention,” titling the eighth

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<sup>16</sup> My reading of Ariès here closely follows James Kincaid’s in *Child-Loving*, in which he writes: “It is Ariès’s procedures and not the accuracy of the new blueprint that concern us here. Whatever one thinks of these historical recuperations, Ariès’s analyses of the present are brilliant. If we take him to be saying that there simply *is* no child in the past, we trudge down dusty and familiar roads to dreary positivist debates. If, on the other hand, we hear him more directly and simply, his arguments become productive: looking as closely as he can, he can spot nothing in the past that he would, personally speaking, call a child” (62).

chapter of his book *Rites of Passage* exactly as Musgrove titled his third: “The Invention of the Adolescent.” Interestingly enough, Musgrove is not cited in Kett’s *Rites of Passage*. And, with the exception of Patricia Meyer Spacks’ 1981 *The Adolescent Idea*, Musgrove is not cited in any of the book-length social histories that followed. One reason for this oversight may have be the observance of academic disciplinary boundaries, where the separation of sociology from history and the United States from Great Britain is the norm. Because Musgrove was writing as a British sociologist interested in contemporary youth culture, a historian like Kett may not have considered *Youth and the Social Order* relevant to his study of the history of adolescence in the United States. My interest in bringing these different accounts of adolescence together is to seek, through an interdisciplinary lens, what is at stake in these overlapping versions of history.

For Kett, I think that “invention” is a way to articulate that something significant happened at the turn of the century, though what exactly happened is more difficult to pinpoint. Kett’s social history is a study of both social perceptions and documented events; and despite mounting scholarly objections to the Ariès thesis by that time, Kett cites Ariès for his historical claims rather than his methodological innovations. Of course, Kett does not mean that Hall literally invented adolescence, nor does he begin his history with Hall, who is featured in the eighth chapter. The term “invention” is a way for Kett to articulate what he calls efforts to “universalize and democratize the concept of adolescence” at the turn of the century (215). And, while these efforts occurred under the auspices of discovering the truth about human development, deliberate attempts were made to institutionalize and universalize adolescence in the fields of medicine, psychology, and education at the turn of the century. For Kett, the differences in constructions of youth in Britain, Germany, and the United States attest to the cultural nature of this process, which was not the result “of a clear and consistent social

movement but of a coalition of different types of people with different and often conflicting motives” (216). The invention of the adolescent, then, is one way to describe the widespread movement to link a varied set of social investments with a biological stage in human development. A scholar of comparative literature, John Neubauer, makes a related claim in his 1992 *Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* that “adolescence ‘came of age’ in the decades around 1900, not only because the term itself had little currency earlier, but [...]because interlocking discourses about adolescence emerged in psychoanalysis, psychology, criminal justice, pedagogy, sociology, as well as in literature” (6). Others, like John Springhall, Kent Baxter, and Sarah E. Chinn qualify their claims about adolescence with the term “modern,” saying it was the modern conception of adolescence that emerged at the turn of the century. So, what is it that we mean when we attribute modern conceptions of adolescence to the turn of the century? What is it that we recognize in Hall, and how do the conditions of this recognition obscure both the past and our present?

The idea that adolescence was new (or finally known) at the turn of the century may itself be a narrative that was constructed at the turn of the century. While scholars are in the habit of crediting G. Stanley Hall and his colleagues at Clark University with the discovery or invention of adolescence, the *Journal of Adolescence* confidently reported in 1900 that “Indiana was the first state to formally recognize the study of Adolescence” (Yoder 16). Claims like this indicate an emphasis on discovery itself, a pattern in emerging fields of study like education and psychology at the turn of the century. Take, for example, the celebratory language of a review in 1904 titled “Dr. Hall’s *Adolescence* Considered One of the Most Important in Years.” In addition to its abundant praise, this review of Hall’s *Adolescence* concludes with a telling statement: “It is astonishing how little we know ourselves. The whole truth about life is coming

slowly, but it is certain that we have much yet to learn” (5). The reviewer’s characterization of adolescence as exposing how little we know ourselves is important—adolescence is cast here both as a way of knowing the self, and yet still a mystery that will provide access to the whole truth about life. This characterization also depicts its own moment—the turn of the century—as the moment when, at last, the whole truth is within reach. This kind of statement encapsulates Hall’s views on adolescence and on the purpose of his research, but it also captures a disciplinary context of “discovery,” one in which he was working in the emerging fields of education and psychology.

Such investment in discovery was not confined to academic contexts. An advertisement for Bradford’s tonic in the *Macon Telegraph* in 1897 opened with this proclamation: “The period succeeding youth is now more desirable than adolescence. The strangest thing is that it has not been discovered before with all the examples that exist in history” (“Majestic” 2). Proclamations of new discovery at the turn of the century make it difficult to determine from secondary sources what was new about adolescence aside from this compelling narrative. As early as the 1920s, we can find claims resembling those of recent social histories of adolescence, locating the “discovery” of adolescence at the turn of the century. Take, for example, the *Transactions and Proceedings of the National Association of State Universities*, which boasted in 1927 that “another development of the last twenty years which is closely related to the already mentioned shifting emphasis to the student as the most important aspect of university life and activity is the discovery of adolescence” (Upham 113). What is striking in these examples is the strength and consistency of the narrative of discovery itself. So, the question remains, what is it about this story that we continue to tell it?

### III. REINVENTING G. STANELY HALL

To consider this question, I want to return to Hall's *Adolescence* as a specific location where we see adolescence overlapping with ideas about scientific progress, the advancement of civilization, and public education. Hall's *Adolescence* was published well into his career, when he was already president of Clark University and an influential figure in the field of education in the United States. The two large volumes of *Adolescence* are full of data representing a substantial body of research on youth, and perhaps it is the scale of this work that lends it to being called the first major work on adolescence. An abridged and exceedingly more readable version was published in 1907 under the title *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene*, and the change in title suggests that Hall and his publisher considered the terms "adolescence" and "youth" to be relatively equivalent at the time of his writing, or perhaps that "youth" was the more colloquial term and "adolescence" the more scientific of the two. Hall's preface to *Youth* mentions that he had "often been asked to select and epitomize the practical and especially the pedagogical conclusions" of the larger volumes of *Adolescence* "in such form that they may be available at minimum cost to parents, teachers, reading circles, normal schools, and college classes" (v). Both versions were well received in the United States and abroad, and Hall is widely cited in the early twentieth century sources in medicine, psychology, and education. In both versions of his book, Hall depicts adolescence as a critical, dangerous, and vulnerable period of human life, a period requiring specific kinds of guidance and instruction to produce healthy and productive members of society.

Captivated by evolutionary theory, Hall believed that the human race was in a single stage of its evolution and that this stage was "a late, partial, and perhaps essentially abnormal and remedial outcrop of the great underlying life of man-soul." He explains, "man is not a

permanent type but an organism in a very active stage of evolution toward a more permanent form” (*Adolescence* 1: vii). The descriptors abnormal and remedial are not used here to describe young people, but adults whose “consciousness,” he feels, has yet to fully evolve. For Hall, the evolution of man was not only a biological process, but also spiritual, social, and psychological. His extensive study of adolescence, then, would serve to advance all of humankind, to discover ways to accelerate and maximize human potential over subsequent generations. Hall thought that humankind, as a whole, was in what he considered to be its evolutionary adolescence: “While his bodily form is comparatively stable, his soul is in a transition stage, and all that we call progress is more and more rapid. Old moorings are constantly broken; adaptive plasticity to new environments—somatic, economic, industrial, social, moral and religious—was never so great” (*Adolescence* 1: vii). Childhood and adolescence, he argued, were keys to the development of the entire human race. In one great metaphorical leap, he argues that understanding and nurturing the development of adolescents is the key to guiding the advancement of the human race to the next evolutionary stage. And, importantly, Hall places education at the center of this plan: he writes, “truth about things of the soul, in a unique sense, is never complete or certain till it has been applied to education, and [...]the latter field is itself preeminent and unlike all other fields of application for either scientific or philosophic conclusions” (*Adolescence* 1: ix). Hall did not make this link by analogy only: childhood and adolescence became for him literal embodiments of the state of civilization, both as evidence of its current distress and as singular opportunities for intervention by parents, educators, and psychologists.

Hall makes adolescent development synonymous with the advancement of civilization through the theory of recapitulation, which postulates embryonic development as parallel to the

evolution of all life forms, a theory most commonly expressed as “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.”<sup>17</sup> The theory of recapitulation had been largely discredited in biology even by the time of Hall’s writing, a fact that he acknowledges while simultaneously making a claim for its profound social relevance:

Realizing the limitations and qualifications of the recapitulation theory in the biologic field, I am now convinced that its psychogenetic applications have a method of their own[...]. Along with the sense of immense importance of further coordinating childhood and youth with the development of the race, has grown the conviction that only here can we hope to find true norms against the tendencies to precocity in home, school, church, and civilization generally, and also to establish criteria by which to both diagnose and measure arrest and retardation in the individual and the race. (*Adolescence* 1: viii)

This highly problematic theory, in addition to its alarming characterization of some human cultures as infantile or advanced, also links the education of individuals to the advancement of civilization as a whole. Childhood and adolescence, Hall argues, are literal representations of the evolution of humankind, the child being the most like an animal, whereas the adolescent has both the ability to reason and strong carnal urges. Humankind is imagined to be on a linear path in which it moves either forward towards the advancement of civilization or backward towards living like wild animals. Thus, Hall attaches to youth the various pressures, hopes, anxieties, and grandiosities implied in the fate of humanity. The individual and the race, as they are deployed here by Hall, are ideologically interdependent, conceptualized in relation to one another. Hall suggests that by evaluating and improving the “psychogenetic” development of individual children and adolescents, we can avoid degeneration.

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<sup>17</sup> The theory of recapitulation was developed most extensively by Ernst Haeckel in 1866 in his “Biogenetic Law.” According to Haeckel’s Biogenetic Law, then, the embryos of more advanced species could be said to represent the “adult” stages of more primitive species. One of its more insidious uses in the nineteenth century was to rank humans according to racial characteristics, thereby justifying racial supremacy, usually ranking the white European male above all others.

The application of recapitulation theory to justify existing social hierarchies clearly favored the delay of adulthood, or at least the prolonged development of one's adulthood, and thus those who had the luxury of delaying the need to make a living on their own: the wealthy, the educated, and the upper classes. That is, according to Hall's schema, the longer it takes a person to reach adulthood, the more advanced that adulthood is in evolutionary terms. This type of rationale was not new and was often used in the nineteenth century to justify imperialism, where "natives" were seen as trapped in a perpetual "savage childhood" that could only be advanced through outside intervention.<sup>18</sup> Hall is certainly not innocent of this kind of racism, as is evident in a chapter in the second volume of *Adolescence* on "Ethnic Psychology and Pedagogy, or Adolescent Races and Their Treatment." It is significant, however, that Hall's depictions of adolescence project this degree of condescension toward all young people regardless of race, class, or nationality. In a logical slippery slope, the development of even one child (meaning every child) takes on metaphorical significance for the state of all humankind.<sup>19</sup> While this metaphor serves to bestow teaching and parenting with monumental importance, this importance comes at great cost, weighting parenthood with an enormous responsibility to society and displacing the relationship between parents and children for one shaped by institutional priorities. It also sets in place a supreme rationalization for the surveillance and regulation of parents and teachers who are responsible for the development of children according to the "true norms" of home, school, church, and civilization.

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Hall equates "the animal, the savage, and the child-soul," clearly indicating his view of the racial superiority of some over others, and adults over children (*Adolescence* 1: vii).

<sup>19</sup> We see this logic today in the rhetoric surrounding various educational reform platforms, programs like "No Child Left Behind," where even the name of this bill suggests that *every* child must conform to the path set by public education and national testing standards. The debates around "No Child Left Behind" suggest that this logic is still with us. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that we want to *leave children behind*, though Lee Edelman's queer anti-child polemic *No Future* (2004) attempts to do just that.

While Hall's work does have moral and religious overtones, he imagines the evolutionary path forward in terms of science, culture, and industry rather than, for example, in terms of the pilgrim's progress towards eternal life. This overlap between philosophy and science was of great concern to G. Stanley Hall, whose preface to *Adolescence* betrays his lingering anxiety about the subject of adolescence psychology belonging to science and no longer to metaphysics. He disdainfully refers to "the present lust for theories of the nature of knowledge, which have become a veritable and multiform psychosis" (1: v). What is at stake for Hall in declaring epistemological concerns "a multiform psychosis" is his own claim to knowability, authority, and expertise. There is a significant epistemological difference between conceptualizations of childhood and adolescence in works of philosophy and those conceptualizations that lay claim to the knowability of science.

Only twenty-five years after the publication of Hall's *Adolescence*, a reviewer in London's *Times Literary Supplement* critiqued the claim that "Science arises out of the testable notation of the known, and Religion out of the untestable guessing at the unknown." I came across this review in the papers of Dr. Frederick Parkes Weber, a medical doctor who practiced in London. The review had been clipped and taped into his commonplace book, which is now held in the Wellcome Library's special collections. The inscription made by Weber in his commonplace book is linked to G. Stanley Hall as part of its organizing principles, its contents described as "some notes and writings related to the gradual evolution of the mind and the sense of responsibility in childhood and youth, especially from the rational education point of view (G. Stanley Hall, on "Adolescence," Sir W. Osler, on education of boys, etc.)" (emphasis in the original). This particular review is perhaps an unlikely link to Hall, but here we find a surprising trajectory of connections spanning Hall, Weber, and a 1929 review of J. M. Robertson's *A*

*History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*, all three of these locations wrestling with the epistemological problem of knowability itself.

The reviewer, British philosopher F. H. Bradley, questioned “how far any of the abstract generalizations of science can be declared in an absolute sense any more factual than that of Religion,” arguing that we might “regard both as metaphorical, not as strict and literal but figurative and analogical expression of experienced reality, calling equally in both fields for a constant individual revision and amendment?” (1070). I find Bradley’s understanding of science as metaphorical and analogical so important for thinking about what is often forgotten in historical narratives of the recent past. Indeed, Hall harnessed the metaphorical power of adolescence, one that his contemporaries were likely to recognize, but that we have long since forgotten. While we might not consider Hall’s characterizations of adolescence accurate today, we might be tempted to consider more recent characterizations as accurate, the result of scientific progress and academic knowledge. Bradley’s argument is uncommon amongst the proliferation of medical and scientific claims to knowability in the early twentieth century, following the publication of Hall’s *Adolescence*. These claims to knowability rely on an institutional authority that requires maintenance, requires institutionally sanctioned practices of discovery and knowledge making.

To maintain the need for institutional authority and expertise, biology alone cannot be considered enough to achieve maturity. “The momentum of heredity,” Hall writes, “often seems insufficient to enable the child to achieve this great revolution and come to complete maturity, so that every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind, and morals” (*Adolescence* 1: xiv). As a nation, Hall felt that the United States was in a unique developmental predicament as well, one that echoed the conditions of adolescence he had just described:

In a very pregnant psychological sense, ours is an unhistoric land. Our very Constitution had a Minerva birth, and was not the slow growth of precedent. Our ideas of freedom were at the outset fevered by the convulsion of the French Revolution. Our literature, customs, fashions, and institutions, and legislation were inherited or copied, and our religion was not a gradual indigenous growth, but both its spirit and forms were imported ready-made from Holland, Rome, England, and Palestine. To this extent, we are a fiat nation, and in a very significant sense we have had neither childhood or youth, but have lost touch with these stages of life because we lack a normal developmental history. (1: xvi)

Hall's solution for premature development of the United States was to address the education of its citizens from childhood through adolescence and young adulthood, allowing abundant space for the enculturation of each young person: "for the complete apprenticeship to life, youth needs repose, leisure, art, legends, romance, idealization, in a word, humanism, if it is to enter the kingdom of man well equipped for man's highest work in the world (*Adolescence* 1: xvii). His analysis of the nation's development leads him to a critique of the current educational system, which he finds both too rigid and too indulgent. What I want to highlight in these passages from Hall is the metaphorical layering of human evolution, biological development over a lifetime, the past and future of the nation, and the mental and psychological development of individuals through education. But it was not G. Stanley Hall who made the stage of adolescence into a metaphor for the nation, nor was this a trend that belongs to the turn of the century. Rather, Hall reinvigorated a metaphor that was, at this point, over a century old, one that he made literal in his work *Adolescence*.

#### **IV. ADOLESCENCE AS A METAPHOR FOR NATION**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, one of the most frequent uses of the word adolescence in American newspapers was as a metaphor for the United States, a metaphor heavily weighted

with the triumphant narrative of a recently independent nation. For example, the following Fourth of July commemorative speech given by Joel Barlow, printed in Philadelphia's *Daily Advertiser* in 1809, casts the nation in terms of stages of human life nearly 100 years before the publication of Hall's *Adolescence*:

Yes, my friends, we are now a nation. As such we have arrived at that epoch when instead of looking back to with wonder upon our infancy, we may look forward with solicitude to a state of adolescence, with confidence to a state of manhood. Tho' as a nation we are yet in the morning of life, we have already attained an elevation which enables us to discern our course to its meridian splendor. (Barlow 1)<sup>20</sup>

Adolescence here has a strongly positive connotation—it is a moment of looking forward with confidence to a state of manhood—and that this metaphor allows the speaker to make claims about what the future holds or what it *should* hold, to discern the course ahead. Another 1809 article printed in the *Washington Federalist* uses infancy and adolescence to make a political argument for why the United States should not get involved in the war in Europe: “Will this country, as yet, comparatively speaking, in a state of infancy, certainly not advanced beyond a state of adolescence, be able to meet the shock of such a war?” (“Debate” 2).<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the preceding example, adolescence is used to indicate the need for protection, though this is accomplished through the link between infancy and adolescence. What these two examples have in common, though, is the use of adolescence as an argument to achieve a desired outcome, where adolescence has enough conceptual flexibility to argue for quite different objectives. In another example, an 1813 address printed in the Philadelphia paper *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* uses infancy and adolescence to tell a patriotic national narrative:

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<sup>20</sup> This speech was also printed in the Richmond, VA paper the *Enquirer* and the Philadelphia's *Democratic Press* in July, and the *New-Hampshire Patriot* in August of 1809.

<sup>21</sup> The war in question is The Peninsular War, 1808-1814, between France and the allied powers of Spain, the United Kingdom, and Portugal for control of the Iberian Peninsula during the Napoleonic Wars.

Other countries by gradual accretions of strength, by slow and painful step, had risen, through an arduous and toilsome course, to the same degree of maturity, to which we ascended with the rapidity of a single impulse: the period of their infancy and adolescence had been long precarious and exposed; America was like the infant Hercules, and in her cradle strangled the serpent anarchy. (“Address” 2)

Infancy and adolescence refer to the nation’s development; and notably, in the comparison made above, America’s adolescence is *not* precarious but heroic and strong. The use of adolescence as a national metaphor was quite adaptable, as we see in another article from 1815 supporting the great mental advantages of reading newspapers: “And to what are we to attribute the implantation and adolescence of patriotism in our fellow-citizens, but to a knowledge of the heroic deeds of our fathers in establishing our Republic” (“From the Winchester” 4). In this case it is not exactly the nation, but patriotism itself that is in its adolescence, and as such, this patriotism is described as well established and enthusiastically felt. Another 1820 article in the *Daily National Intelligencer* celebrates the opening of the city hall in the District of Columbia using the metaphor of adolescence for the city: “We, of this city, are now passing from an infancy in which we were surrounded by difficulties, to an adolescence which is full of promise” (“City Hall” A).<sup>22</sup> The positive connotations of metaphorical adolescence echo the positive characteristics of adolescence as a stage of human life in the early nineteenth century, both uses of the word evoking vitality, health, and strength.

Adolescence, used as a metaphor for nation, often functioned as a narrative device used to justify or predict particular outcomes, and it is this ideological force that we see harnessed by G. Stanley Hall nearly a century later. Take, for instance, a striking 1816 campaign piece for the upcoming presidential election. This example is notable because adolescence is being used to

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<sup>22</sup> This article was also printed in 1820 in the New York papers the *American*, the *Mercantile Advertiser*, and the *New-York Gazette*, the Connecticut paper the *Norwich Courier*, the Massachusetts paper the *Pittsfield Sun*, and under “Foreign and Domestic News” in the *Providence Patriot*.

construct a future result, a story that hasn't happened yet, a narrative arc that begins with patriotic adolescence and ends with the election of James Monroe, one that suggests to voters what they should do to make the story complete. Indeed, this campaign piece spends most of its time instructing readers how to think about voting, what questions to ask, what requirements they should have for the next President. The *Daily National Intelligencer* declared: "What citizen, then, has greatly merited the suffrage of his country by a series of public services and patriotic sacrifices from the age of adolescence to the maturity of years of wisdom? Who is he who at the age of sixteen took up arms to assert his country's independence?" ("The Presidential" 2). The answer was James Monroe, and the narrative evoked here, the story of adolescence that would justify the choice for the future President, was reprinted in at least four American newspapers in February of 1816, including the *Baltimore Patriot*, the *Essex Register*, and the *Vermont Republican*. Often, when we see adolescence used as evidence of future greatness, it works through narrative backformation, where the literal or metaphorical adolescence justifies the achievements of the present or the recent past.<sup>23</sup> The narrative here, on the other hand, works to make the desired future outcome, the election of James Monroe, feel inevitable, and the rightness of it indisputable.

While uses of adolescence as a metaphor for nation in the United States tended to be celebratory, some were more defensive, and this defensiveness may have arisen in relation to characterizations of the United States as "adolescent" in the British press, where the tone was more often one of condescension. In an 1804 article titled "On American Genius" printed in the *Richmond Enquirer*, the writer attempts to evaluate the American genius, but has to work

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<sup>23</sup> For example, we see this backformation in a 1791 article meditating on the superior achievements of the Greeks and Romans, who "displayed even in their adolescence, knowledge and abilities our mature age rarely attains" ("The Olio" 2).

through the analogy of national development as stages of human life in order to make comparisons that allow him to defend the “American genius.” The writer sets up the analogy this way: “In every animated object which strikes our sense, we uniformly behold, and as uniformly expect, the seasons of infancy, adolescence, maturity, decay, and dissolution.” And so, from this argument, he explains, “the life of a nation is marked by the same gradations, which take place in the existence of every individual” (“On American” 4). An important difference between nations and individuals, he asserts, is that the human mind can only exhibit achievements relative to its development in years (he compares infants and old men), and yet he points out that the intellectual achievements of a nation are not bound by set periods of time. This author clearly feels he cannot make a case that American genius is equal to that of Europe, but settles rather to make the case that more time and opportunity is necessary before anyone can claim that Americans are inferior.

In 1841, however, adolescence was still being used as a strongly positive metaphor in relation to nationhood. On the very same subject of American intellectual achievements, an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the one year anniversary of a “handsome building” in Washington called the National Institute for the Promotion of Science, founded by a few individuals who were “lovers of science, literature, and the fine arts” (“National Institution” 2). This institution, now part of the Smithsonian, is positively characterized in terms of human life: “a short year since, it was in its cradle; it now exhibits the thews and sinews of graceful adolescence” (2). It is precisely this adolescence that promises to “render us independent in the very point where we are accused of being subservient.” And so, “in literature and science, we will be homogenous, and we will establish a character of nationality as a people” (2). It is interesting that achievements in literature and science are put in terms of national independence

or subservience, metaphorically referencing American independence to link these intellectual achievements to something valuable to Americans, but without acknowledging that political independence has already been achieved. Even in this article about an institution, adolescence acts as a highly positive narrative that evokes national independence and the potential for achievement. In the *Madisonian* that same year, an article about the recently independent Republic of Texas, written a few years before its annexation as a state, also used adolescence as a desirable future arrival:

The social economy of Texas is yet imperfect.—Speaking in a comparative sense, society is rude and unpolished; no uniform system of education has been adopted, and above all, little attention has been paid to the improvement of public morals. These evils, however, incidental to a new country will vanish with the advent of national adolescence: the manners of the people to some extent now brutal and rough, will be softened and refined; moral and religious obligations will be better appreciated and observed. (Berrian 2)

Remarkably, adolescence is not described as the time when Texas is most vulnerable to these evils, but rather the moment they will vanish and the people will become “softened and refined” (2). The development of Texas, using the metaphor of adolescence, appears as inevitable as the development of the human body. And yet, the refinement and education this writer expresses will not necessarily involve everyone in Texas; he writes: “the tide of immigration rolls onward, and with it most generally the scum and froth of the world; this effervescence cannot last long; interest and pride will eventually effect a social and religious reform, such as will reflect credit and eulogy on the young and prosperous *Republic of Texas*” (Berrian 2). While this writer does not explicitly express the need or the method to direct Texas into its adolescence, as we see in Hall’s arguments for education half a century later, he alludes to social and religious reform that will occur from within, once the undesirable “scum and froth of the world” have moved elsewhere.

Adolescence, interestingly enough, constructs this desirable outcome, the promise of inevitable national development hinging on the narrative of American independence. However, the narrative of adolescence also betrays its instability here alongside social and political anxieties about Texas, which in 1841 was considered a new neighboring nation. Shortly after the annexation of Texas as a state, an article from 1845 in the *New York Herald* about ongoing border disputes with Mexico and wars with the Seminoles over territory expresses concern about spending millions on wars in Texas. “This, we need hardly say, would be a glorious thing for Texas,” the article reads, going on to make an unflattering political comparison with Florida:

Florida was a miserable, poor, beggarly territory, ready to beg, or steal, to get into the Union, before the war. After the war against the Indians had distributed some thirty or forty millions within her borders, it became saucy, and is now one of the most independent States in the confederacy—talks of nullification, and in the very first days of its adolescence, gets too big for its breeches. (“Our Relations with Mexico” 2)

In this example, Florida’s metaphorical adolescence does not connote its inevitable right to independence, but rather its failure to show proper deference. Because adolescence was so strongly linked to the American Revolution in the early nineteenth century, the expectation of deference would have been strikingly at odds with the celebratory narrative of American independence. Florida is depicted as independent in the example above; but it is significant that rather than celebrating the state’s independence, this writer condescendingly casts it as “saucy” and acting “too big for its breeches.” This shift in perspective foreshadows changes in the characteristics attributed to adolescence later in the century, but this instance alone does not indicate a pattern. In particular, the condescension expressed by the writer above seems to belong as much, if not more so, to class prejudice towards the “miserable, poor, beggarly” as it does to adolescence.

In the 1840s, adolescence as a national metaphor showed significant temporal variability, sometimes representing American independence in the present, sometimes representing the past or a future that was just ahead. Usually, these instances constructed adolescence as an empowered state. In 1842, another article in the *Madisonian* places the United States just past adolescence: “When this system was resorted to before, we were in our adolescence: we have now grown up into the bone and sinew of manhood” (“Our Relations with England” 4). In 1843, the terms sinew and adolescence are used positively to depict the progress of the temperance movement in Chester County, Pennsylvania: “The meetings of the people are not only numerous but large; composed of the sinew, the beauty, and the adolescence of the county” (“The Temperance” 2). But, only a few years later in 1845, an article in the *New York Herald* positioned the United States as on the verge of a triumphant adolescence: “All these combined together form the annual increase in the wealth of the United States, and indicate to the world at large, that in everything that constitutes power, wealth, civilization, abundance, and national prosperity, the United States are almost in a state of adolescence” (“The Progress” 2). Later in 1845, the *New York Herald* depicted the entire world as in its adolescence: “society is constantly in a state of transition—of progress. That which many are accustomed to call the old age of the world, was but its infancy, and it is yet in the days of its adolescence” (“The New” 2). This reference appears in the context of Whig candidate Dudley Selden’s campaign for mayor of New York, in which he ran on promises of “the new revolution” which would be “one of those great, original movements which constitute an era in the history of human affairs” (“The New” 2). All of these examples utilize adolescence as a metaphor linked to the triumphant story of national independence, but there is another layer of meaning having to do with the progress of human civilization as a whole, where revolution by human efforts blurs into the idea of an evolution

which is inevitable. This layer of inevitable and unpredictable progress, expressed in the idea that *society is constantly in a state of transition*, is one that we see profoundly emphasized in Hall's *Adolescence* more than half a century later.

In the 1850s, there is a shift in references to political and national adolescence in which this metaphor begins to construct a state of dependence rather than triumphant, revolutionary independence. In 1852, a condescending reference to national adolescence was indignantly reproduced from the *London Times* in the *Trenton State Gazette* in an article on the death of the American statesman Daniel Webster. The *Gazette* characterizes the *Times* article as speaking “slightingly, if not superciliously, of Mr. Webster’s qualities as a statesman” and outrageously dismissing Americans speaking about Webster “almost as Peel was spoken of in England!” (“[The London Times]” 2). The *Times* excerpt reads: “They magnify their statesman as they magnify their scenery or their strength; not, it must be owned, for purposes of delusion, and still less with the emptiness of Asiatic boasting, but with the exaggeration incidental to Democratic institutions and national adolescence” (“[The London Times]” 2).<sup>24</sup> Notably, the *Gazette* is not using adolescence in the same way that the *Times* excerpt is; and yet, this example implies that exaggeration is a specifically adolescent tendency.

In 1853, there are still very positive descriptors accompanying adolescence, as we see in the *North American*, which printed a speech made by the Earl of Ellesmere on the occasion of a public school celebration in Boston: “may I not claim to myself something of a patriarchal pride and joy,” he says, “as from the decks of your gorgeous steamers or the windows of your cars I obtain but too rapid a glimpse of the evidence of your prosperity, and of the flourishing

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<sup>24</sup> Only a few excerpts were quoted in the *Gazette*, but the New York paper the *Weekly Herald* reprinted the entire article from the *London Times* without any commentary a few days later.

adolescence of the scions of our common stock?” (“Public School” 1). But, in 1856, the *Wisconsin Patriot* printed a scathing article about recent resolutions passed in Congress in which adolescence is used to construct a political state of dependency rather than independence. In a discussion about whether the government has the right to appoint any governing officers in US territories, the *Patriot* argues that intervention is necessary, at least during a territory’s adolescence:

It seems to us a matter of indispensable necessity, that when Congress organizes a Territory, it should extend the blessings of a limited code of laws and somebody to enforce them—otherwise all would be anarchy and confusion—the people would be without law and order at least during their adolescence, or the period of intervening between their being a territorial Government, and the time they could enact and enforce their own laws. (“Mr. Knowlton’s” 2)

Unlike the uses of adolescence we see in the first half of the century, here the *Wisconsin Patriot* uses adolescence as a metaphor to argue for the *need* for external rule. This is a very different characterization than what we see earlier, a profound shift in the narrative implied by adolescence. This exceptional example is particularly interesting alongside an idiosyncratic trend of negative characterizations appearing in the *Wisconsin Patriot* throughout 1856, including the following two examples in which adolescence is used as a kind of political slur via the phrases “gangrene adolescence” and “effeminate adolescence.”<sup>25</sup> Significantly, these two examples are unique in comparison to references to adolescence in other papers. I think it is important to note that in neither context does the term adolescence carry the weight of the slur alone, as we see in the reference to “the absurdities and crudities of adolescence” in *Pomeroy’s Democrat* from 1870. Rather, the descriptors “gangrene” and “effeminate” do the work of

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<sup>25</sup> The phrase “gangrene adolescence” appears in a scathing April 5, 1856 “Rotary Biography” of the Wisconsin Assembly of 1856, and “effeminate adolescence” appears in an equally scathing October 25, 1856 “Rotary Biography” of the Wisconsin Legislature, likely by the same writer who signed the article with the pseudonym Gov. Rotary Pump, Esquire in the April article.

critiquing first the Wisconsin Assembly and then the Wisconsin Legislature of 1856. And yet, the words gangrene and effeminate work as descriptors alongside adolescence to specifically evoke a metaphor of hereditary or genetic inferiority. So, it is not adolescence itself that is characteristically gangrene or effeminate in either of these examples, but rather the signs of a weak and inferior political body that, metaphorically speaking, will grow up inherently perverse and diseased.

## **V. HUMAN AS SPECIES**

There are many factors we might consider to account for the shifts in meaning accompanying uses of adolescence both as a stage of life and as a political metaphor in the nineteenth century, though I hesitate to claim that any one of these factors is the cause of these shifts in meaning. For example, we might consider economic changes which excluded young people from the work force in conjunction with educational reforms extending the age limit at which young people were required by law to attend school as factors which would have significantly changed the legal agency and status of adolescents in the last half of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> At some point in the second half of the nineteenth century, adolescence moved away from being conceptualized as a stage of human life and began to describe a type of person, a particular species of human, though the word still retains both meanings to this day. Childhood and adolescence, however, were not the only categories subject to this new species thinking. Nineteenth century categories

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<sup>26</sup> Frank Musgrove argues that increases in the legal “protection” of young people led to decreases in the status of those young people, an argument that goes against the commonly accepted wisdom that increased protections correlate to increases in status (58).

were being invented for an enormous number of human conditions that were being subjected to institutional management and control. Thinking about the human *as* species, as evolved from other (presumably lesser) forms, however, seems to have had particular conceptual effects on characterizations of childhood and adolescence as lesser forms of human life. As we see in the examples above, these effects can be found even in uses of adolescence as a political and national metaphor.

I am interested in the ideological assumptions behind the idea of species as independently created in contrast to the idea of species as descended from one another, and how this shift in thinking from one to the other plays out in nineteenth century references to adolescence and the stages of human life. It seems there might be a very important, and troubling, connection between nineteenth century notions of species and a twentieth century notion of identity. Both, to some degree, determine without our consent what we *are* as social beings and determine how we fit in existing social hierarchies. Hall's characterizations of adolescence were profoundly influenced by evolution, and he easily merged scientific and religious conceptualizations of human life, a reconciliation of science and religious faith that was widely accepted before the publication of *Adolescence* in 1904. Moran reports that Hall "dreamed of becoming the 'Darwin of the Mind,'" and perhaps this in part explains the ambitious scope and grandiosity of his two large volumes on adolescence (15). Hall was deeply influenced by Darwin, though we might read him as also deeply influenced by the circulation of cultural fears and fantasies about the human as species permeating both popular and professional discourses in the second half the nineteenth century. What we find in the nineteenth century is the influence of evolutionary theory that cannot be traced to any single scientific or philosophical work.

Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) was not about the origin of human life despite the fact that this was a dominant preoccupation in the periodical press in the 1850s and 60s. In his conclusion, Darwin obliquely foreshadows the argument he would make in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and also the work of G. Stanley Hall, writing: "In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history" (759). Hall's utopian desire for the advancement of all humankind, however, did not necessarily follow Darwinian thought, despite this obvious launching point. Darwin avoids directly addressing the issue of human life in *Origin of the Species* except in a frequent and curious overlapping of terminology, speaking often of "a country" and its hypothetical "inhabitants" which we are to understand as plants and animals, not people. But, the implications seem to be there, if carefully avoided—sidestepped, if you will. The primary argument of the book concerned natural selection as the method by which evolution occurred in nature, an argument which disputed the widely held view among scientists that each species of plant and animal were independently created by God.

An early scientific review of *Origin* in England, by T. V. Wollaston, states: "The opinion amongst naturalists that species were independently created, and have not been transmuted one from the other, has been hitherto so general that we might almost call it an axiom" (133). As an axiom, then, this prevailing assumption shaped the ways that differences between species were understood *as* differences, perhaps hierarchically ordered differences, but as such by God. And, among these independently created species there was "man" made in God's image, and under this view "man" *did not evolve*. People were independently created as is by God, and so they did not change in the ways evolution implied, but were born into their stations in life. So, the logic

goes, you live your life, you suffer, you serve God, and your reward is in heaven. There is no “progress,” so to speak, except closeness to God. It seems that this difference in conceptualizing human life is largely ideological, not simply about how things happen, but how concepts like growth, development, and progress were thought about and valued.<sup>27</sup> Natural selection suggested an entirely different value system and method of progression for the stages of human life.

Importantly, this scientific and religious dispute about evolution was not only about the method of natural selection, but the logic or reasoning behind its method. Within the lines of his argument, Darwin significantly undermines the idea of purposeful evolution, the idea that it is even possible to have a purpose. He writes:

As man can produce and certainly has produced a great result by his methodical and unconscious means of selection, what may not nature effect? Man can act only on external and visible characters: nature cares nothing for appearances, except insofar as they may be useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends. (503)

The most profound implication here, I think, is that the selections of nature do not follow the reasoning or purpose we might imagine them to follow; that in a sense, we cannot even know the purpose of natural selection, and its causes may in fact be gone before the changes have even manifested in the next generation. *Man selects only for his own good*, only for what he imagines to be good, whether moral or educational or industrial. But *nature cares nothing for appearances*. Darwin’s theory, too, was unique in that it emphasized variation, whereas previous theories had emphasized continuities among species; and so, “during the modification

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<sup>27</sup> This suggests that earlier articulations of “progress” would not be the same as those articulated under evolution and industrial development. Considering G. Stanley Hall’s blurring of evolution and moral conservatism, I wonder if even religious conceptions of growth and progress changed after the 1860s, which would mean that later nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of progress would be different from those circulating earlier.

of the descendants of any one species, and during the incessant struggle of all species to increase in numbers, the more diversified these descendants become, the better will be their chance of succeeding in the battle of life” (532). The value system of nature, according to Darwin, was contingency, change, variation. The good outcome that might be imagined by a nation’s leader, by the church, by an educator or parent, while subject to change, is not itself imagined to be change. That is, the values of nature are at odds with the values that might be articulated by a society.

Indeed, Darwin implies that natural selection confounds the objectives of parenting: “Natural selection may modify and adapt the larva of an insect to a score of contingencies wholly different from those which concern the mature insect” (505). Whether we are to read here the *concerns of the mature insect* as concerns that resemble our own, it is hard to say. Was Darwin trying to tell us something here? We may never know. Edward O. Wilson, the editor of Darwin’s collected works, puts it this way in *From So Simple a Beginning*: “Evolution in a pure Darwinian world has no goal or purpose: the exclusive driving force is random mutations sorted out by natural selection from one generation to the next” (12). It is perhaps not surprising that the reception and circulation of Darwin’s ideas after the publication of *Origin of the Species* did not dwell on the implications of this queer and unique insight. In my reading, it seems that a number of preoccupations shaped the ways that evolutionary theory was culturally appropriated to understand human stages of life, and that these preoccupations had very little to do with Darwin at all.

The idea of evolution was not new when Darwin published *Origin of the Species*. Among scientists, the idea of transmutation was first put forth by Lamarck in 1802, but was ultimately considered invalid despite its suggestive implications. And, it was perhaps not

Darwin at all, but the anonymous publication of the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) that sparked renewed interest and fascination with evolutionary ideas around mid-century.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, hierarchical relations among human beings certainly preceded Darwin and preceded ideas about evolution. But the ways that these conceptualizations of hierarchy resonated with the stages of human life changed sometime over the course of the nineteenth century, and it is the language of heredity that seems to mark these changes. I think it is important that these terms of condescension are not associated primarily with childhood, but instead construct a distinct kind of distancing and disavowal having to do with prejudices towards different species. This kind of distancing and disavowal more closely resembles a synthesis of ideas about social hierarchy and evolutionary theory, a synthesis that, perhaps surprisingly, occurred in the decades before the publication of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. But, how did this kind of hierarchy get mapped onto stages of human life? And what kind of hierarchy is it? The ideas of social hierarchy that came weighted with such disavowal and distancing seem connected to the anxieties surrounding race, imperialism, and slavery, anxieties that can be found in early sensational articles on "ape theory" and the evolution of the species.

In 1854, an article called "Men with Tails" appearing in the *Daily Globe* reporting evidence of a man with a tail, a "singular variety of our species" seen by M. Couret, who has drawn for readers "the authentic likeness of a man with a tail, which supplement is three inches in length, and almost as flexible as the tail of a monkey" (3). The article, which was translated

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<sup>28</sup> First published anonymously, the book's author was later revealed in 1884 as Robert Chambers, one of the editors of *Chambers's Journal*. Ellegård reports that in Britain it was "a popular success, and sold no less than 11 editions, or about 24,000 copies, up to 1860" (11). A number of newspaper articles in the United States were preoccupied with identifying the "true" author of the book, one article in *The Boston Daily Atlas* in 1845 announcing: "It is not generally known, that a work which was recently published in England, and created a great sensation there, and which Dr. Cheever, in his preface to the American reprint of it, has called it a 'philosophical romance,' is from the pen of an English member of Parliament" (2).

from French, presents this information as astonishing—mythology come to life—and with a deeply racist condescension: “M. Couret adds, that his model has the gift of speech, and that besides his maternal language, he speaks the Arabic fluently. He was a slave; and worked for his master, who was obliged to give him a ration of raw mutton every morning, and as he was anthropophagus by nature, this was a wise precaution” (3). The man with a tail is decidedly *not* human in this depiction, requiring a feeding of raw mutton each morning since “by nature” he was a cannibal and might take to eating human flesh. There are approximately seventy articles about “men with tails” in the American Antiquarian’s digital collection of early American newspapers, published between 1803-1922. Some of these “men with tails” are articles about races of men and sometimes they are about primates. In 1859, for example, an article was published in the *Constitution* called “The New Man Monkey,” reporting on the recent discovery of the gorilla: “At the London Royal Institution, recently, Professor Owen delivered a lecture to a crowded audience on the Gorilla, the recently discovered animal of Central Africa which bears the nearest resemblance to man of any one of the monkey tribe that has hitherto been discovered, not excepting the Chimpanzee” (1).<sup>29</sup> The short article repeats four times, at different points, that the gorilla is closer to “man” than any other animal, in addition to relating the details supporting this claim.

The article sensationalizes the lecture, using the title “The New Man Monkey” and offering a number of exceptionally vivid and violent descriptions which seem to both align the gorilla with human characteristics and distance it from humanness. The local Africans call the gorilla “stupid old man” because it lacks intelligence, stealing fruit and sugar canes one by one,

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<sup>29</sup> Professor Owen, referred to in this article, was Richard Owen, a well-known opponent of Darwin’s work.

instead of “tying them together and carrying several at the same time.” The scenes of violence in the article mainly take place at the expense of the “negroes” depicted in the article, who are “quickly overtaken and killed, or dreadfully mangled by the canine teeth of the creature” or sometimes snatched up into a tree by the gorilla’s long arms. The article seems to blur the lines between the animal and the human in the stories it tells, later depicting a mother gorilla holding her baby to her chest “when the gun was leveled at her,” waving “her arm as if to beseech for mercy,” but in the end she is shot and killed anyway (1). What is surprising about this overtly sensational piece is that the gorilla is at times depicted as *more* human than the Africans. I give these examples as moments where existing social hierarchies are inflected by sensationalized scientific discoveries, betraying evolutionary anxieties about both the connections of human races to each other and the distance between the human and animal.

It is fascinating, then, that child protection laws passed around the turn of the century in the United States were put into motion by making the argument that children were like animals. This connection was so profound that Wyoming and Colorado established what was called The Board of Child and Animal Protection, what eventually came into being in other states as The Humane Society. An article from 1904 in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, for example, makes an argument for the Wyoming and Colorado models to be put into law at the national level:

A measure will be introduced into Congress, asking for the establishment of a National Board of Child and Animal Protection, with a secretary and offices in Washington. It was shown that there are a number of states without legislation of any sort for the protection of either children or animals. The horrible conditions connected with cattle shipped from the West suggested the project for a national law and bureau. (“Seeks” 2)

This legislation was being lobbied for because five-hundred thousand dollars worth of cattle died on a ranch in Texas that winter, and the story was picked up by the Colorado Board of Child and Animal Protection to argue for a national measure (“Ask Mercy” 14). This logic linking five-

hundred thousand dollars worth of cattle with the need to protect children is a fascinating historical phenomenon, occurring at the moment when children are identified as being the most precious and the most in need of protection. It seems clear that adoring, idolizing, protecting, or valuing children is not the same as granting humanness or personhood to children.<sup>30</sup>

It was not Darwin, nor was it specifically *Origin of the Species*, that led to these ways of thinking about the stages of human life, but rather the wide circulation and appropriation of evolutionary theory as it was adapted for various ideological purposes. In this synthesis of ideas, evolution provided the rationale for a preexisting sense of superiority and naturalized sense of social hierarchy, justifying narratives that were already in place, the project of advancing civilization and humankind at the center of its drama. The appropriation of notions of species into understandings of human stages of life allowed the condescension felt towards animals and insects and plants to be justifiably transposed onto children and adolescents, the “earlier” forms of mature, adult, civilized human beings. These ways of thinking were powerfully impacted by imperialism and racism, by ideas about savages and the ordering of races of men, which presumably happened according to a hierarchical ordering sanctioned by God. To be clear, I am

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the material and symbolic value of children at the turn of the century, Viviana Zelizer’s *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (1985) makes an argument about the relationship between the rising cost of raising dependent children and the perceived “pricelessness” of those children. In an unpublished dissertation called “Making Children Normal: Standardizing Children in the United States (1880-1930),” Carita Constable Huang documents the corresponding, but seemingly opposite trend to count, measure, and sort children in statistics at the turn of the century. Huang writes: “Zelizer’s excellent analysis has inspired many of the questions that I have brought to this work. Yet, on the surface, our conclusions do not necessarily agree. There are a few differences in our stories that might reconcile them. Zelizer looked at how parents and the general public were evaluating children and many of my sources are from school officials, reformers and foundations. More importantly, the people that I was looking at were concerned with how children fit into school systems and what they will be in the future as members of society. They are not thinking about particular children, but children as abstract units. If we assume that we are both right, there is an interesting irony, that society began to esteem children as precious while objectifying them as future resources. Both scenarios led to the conclusion that the nation should pay attention to children and their development. Some reformers at the time made use of both points of view (following heart-rending stories about child suffering with arguments about wasting precious resources). It seems that they did not see a contradiction” (25).

not arguing that the social regulation of children and adults was new to the nineteenth century. But I do think that this particular logic of hierarchy and regulation, this particular logic of adolescence, began to circulate during the nineteenth century and that it preceded the publication of Hall's *Adolescence* by nearly fifty years. Existing social hierarchies found new expression in evolutionary terms, and social institutions and reforms were justified according to fears and fantasies of evolution and decline.

Fears of decline are based on the assumption that time is linear, that history moves either in the direction of progress or decline, that what has happened in the past resembles the narrative structures we impose. The idea of adolescence itself imposes a narrative structure onto human experience and conceptions of identity. Adolescence, as a stage of life, implies something before and after. But, I want to suggest that even "the adolescent" as a notion of person operates according to a narrative logic, a logic that flexes and shifts within the story that is being told, the story that is both contingent and fleeting. If I use adolescence to refer to the past, something that happened *in my adolescence*, then this location, this happening in the past is story. When we align conceptions of adolescence and conceptions of the past, we expose their relation to one another as story, how they are set in relation as both real and true, how they echo each other, how they fulfill the needs of the story itself.

## 2. INTERPRETING SELF AND OTHER

The adolescent is a very queer creature.

—Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, “Youth and Health”

The adolescent, like the child, is a mythical figure of the imaginary that enables us to distance ourselves from some of our failings, splittings of the ego, disavowals, or mere desires, which it reifies into the figure of someone who has not yet grown up. Moreover, the adolescent allows us to see, hear, and read these subjective fluctuations.

—Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*

Here is a philosopher who fancied that the world was “known” when he had reduced it to the “idea.” Was it not because the “idea” was so familiar to him and he was so well used to it—because he hardly was afraid of the “idea” any more?

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

The adolescent evoked at the turn of the century was overtly and purposefully constructed with an ever-shifting set of characteristics by new institutions that were negotiating for their own authority and expertise. The emerging institutions of medicine, psychology, and education set the figures of “the child” and “the adolescent” at the center of their investigations and their authority. The function of these figures was not merely to exercise control over the young, but to compel parents and teachers, those in close relation to the young, to submit to institutional expertise over their own.

More often than certainty, we find definitions of adolescence fraught with the unknown. In a lecture on “Youth and Health” delivered to the British Red Cross Society in 1934, Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld remarked: “The adolescent is a very queer creature. All of us who are in intimate contact with the adolescent feel at times completely baffled.” The word creature echoes uncomfortably with the scientific language of insects, animals, aliens. She distances those who know and who don’t know “the adolescent” by drawing a line between those *who are in intimate contact* and everyone else. But, then, “the adolescent” does not appear to her as known but as a representation of the unknown. Despite evoking the adolescent as a type of person, a creature she is in intimate contact with, an object of study that might be spoken about in generalized terms, Lowenfeld expresses the impossibility of knowing the adolescent in this way, this way that leaves her *at times completely baffled*. This kind of comment is familiar, distancing and disavowing the adolescent *as* the unknown, appearing almost as a trope of adolescence in the twentieth century. The “invention” or “discovery” of adolescence at the turn of the century leaves so much undiscovered, setting up this object of study, this category, in relation to the endless pursuit of progress and scientific knowledge.

Childhood and adolescence played a significant role in the classifications emerging out of nineteenth-century discourses, a role that enabled different narratives at different times, sometimes playing one off the other, and yet setting the child always in the structural logic of institutional authority and expertise. This chapter traces shifting delineations of “child” and “adolescent” in early-twentieth century medical discourse, relying on an archive at the Wellcome Library in London which houses a collection of the history of medicine. Reading pamphlets, articles, and private papers archived under “childhood and adolescence” from the British Social Hygiene Council (1910-1940), the Medical Women’s Federation (1920-80), and Dr. Margaret

Lowenfeld, who was a pioneering child psychologist and researcher of pediatric medicine, I found inextricable overlaps between medical, psychological, and educational discourses, overlaps that revealed the nation, the institution, and their futures always in close relation to “the child” and “the adolescent.” One of the things these varied institutional discourses had in common was their purposeful evocations of “the adolescent” as a discovery and as a subject belonging to science and medicine. These purposeful evocations are so common, so insistent, that it was apparent how fragile these constructions were.

## **I. SEX EDUCATION PAMPHLETS**

In the 1930s and 40s, organizations such as the British Social Hygiene Council and the Medical Women’s Federation published and circulated dozens of pamphlets on sex education. With titles such as “The Approach to Womanhood,” “What Parents Should Tell Their Children,” and “Sex Education of Small Children,” the content of these pamphlets is overtly regulatory, aimed at policing the knowledge and behavior of children and adolescents through sex education. What is surprising, however, is how often this archive of pamphlets seems to be aimed at policing parents, displacing their private knowledge of sex with an institutionally sanctioned, scientific discourse about reproduction. Early twentieth century medical documents often acknowledge morality as a motivating factor for sex education, and yet these gestures appear perfunctory, only a single layer of a much more widespread, secular project of social regulation.

In an undated pamphlet titled “Adolescence,” published by the Mothers’ Union, marriage and childbearing is the ultimate goal of educating their members about adolescence. As a Christian organization, the pamphlet states in its conclusion that, “the Mothers’ Union stands for

the view that the bond should be indissoluble, or rather that marriage is less a bond than a relationship, differing from others only as being the result not of birth, but of choice” (“Adolescence” 16). It is strange that “choice” is the word emphasized here, since it is this willful act of choice that leads marriage to be “an obligation” in which “bride and bridegroom completely understand the responsibilities and the conditions of their new relationship to each other” (“Adolescence” 16). And so, it follows that as their responsibility, both parties of the married couple “should fully learn the beauty and dignity of sex, and realize it as a solemn trust from God Himself for the happiness of men and women, and continuance of the race in the children” (“Adolescence” 16). Despite evoking God Himself, the spiritual dimension of marriage is overshadowed by evolutionary language, the responsibility of married men and women to ensure the continuance of the race.

Medical reports on sexuality in the early and mid-twentieth century were equally concerned with preventing “sexual vice” as they were concerned with figuring out how to get married people to have sex. In 1938, the Medical Adviser and Secretary for The Central Council for Health Education, Robert Sutherland, gave a report on “Sexual Delinquency” which explicitly expressed concerns about both preventing “delinquent” sexual activity and encouraging sexual activity among married people. “Delinquency” in this context surprisingly includes the failure of married people to produce children. It seemed that the problem of sex was not simply one of regulating knowledge and controlling the behaviors of young people, but of regulating the entire project of reproduction on a national and institutional scale through the family. It is perhaps worth remarking that eugenicist projects are deeply connected to early twentieth century sex education, though it became much less socially acceptable to talk about overtly eugenicist agendas after World War II. To give one example, at the time Margaret

Sanger published her book *Woman and the New Race* (1920), it seemed to be more socially acceptable to express ideas and measures for racial purity than it was to say that women and youth should be told to decide for themselves what they would do with their sex.

Sanger's book is a polemical argument for birth control, and her eugenicist arguments seem to operate in the text as the *least* controversial part of her book, as the most acceptable platform to sway an audience to accept her much more controversial claim that women have reproductive rights. As parents and teachers were being made responsible for the problems of childhood and adolescence by so many institutional discourses—like Louis Starr's *The Adolescent Period: Its Features and Management* (1915), which declared unequivocally, “parents and teachers are in a marked degree responsible for the faults of children” (139)—Sanger turns this accusation on its head and uses this responsibility as the foothold for her argument. She writes:

The creators of over-population are the women, who, while wringing their hands over each fresh horror, submit anew to their task of producing the multitudes who will bring about the *next* tragedy of civilization.

While unknowingly laying the foundations of tyrannies and providing the human tinder for racial conflagrations, woman was also unknowingly creating slums, filling asylums with insane, and institutions with other defectives. She was replenishing the ranks of the prostitutes, furnishing grist for the criminal courts and inmates for prisons. Had she planned deliberately to achieve this tragic total of human waste and misery, she could hardly have done it more effectively. (4)

Sanger takes the blame for women as the ones producing mental defectives, criminals, prostitutes—all recently developed categories of undesirables named by medical and psychological discourses—and she argues for a revolt, for women to take into their own hands their right to voluntary motherhood. Sanger, at times, appeals to agendas of racial purity, offering statistics on immigration and nationalities and races, but she ultimately argues against national and racial prejudices even as these appeals are made. She writes: “we have been told

times without number that out of the mixture of stocks, the intermingling of ideas and aspirations, there is to come a race greater than any which has contributed to the population of the United States” (30). In order for us to understand how “the dream of a greater race in America can be attained,” Sanger argues that the women who will give birth to this race must be given reproductive control of their own bodies (30). It is perhaps disturbing that one of the earliest advocates for women’s reproductive rights also argued for sterilization and the attainment of “a greater race” through planned parenthood—and yet, it is perhaps even *more* disturbing that these were the available platforms for advocating for reproductive rights in the first place.

Sanger’s arguments appeal to fantasies of racial purity while the more radical component of her argument for reproductive rights is submerged under eugenicist aims. In contrast, Marie Stopes, who is considered one of Britain’s most prominent early activists for reproductive rights, expressed a more overt belief in the eugenicist project.<sup>31</sup> After her death, it was discovered that she was an ardent fan of Hitler, and she reportedly wrote her own son out of her will for marrying a woman who was nearsighted, an apparently unforgivable genetic flaw that would prevent him from doing his reproductive duty for the nation and the race. What might Stopes have done to her son if he had been the one who was nearsighted—would she have considered sterilization to be her only option? Stopes is an extreme example, perhaps, though it is surprising how many sex education pamphlets from the 1930s and 40s express overt reproductive goals that should be carefully controlled by the institutions held responsible for monitoring families, both parents and children.

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<sup>31</sup> The copy of Margaret Sanger’s *Woman and the New Race* held at the Wellcome Library was donated from Stopes’ personal collection and still contains her original purchase receipt.

For example, in a 1938 pamphlet called “What Every Mother Should Tell Her Children” circulated by the Medical Women’s Federation, the rationale for reproduction is stated directly as an obligation to the nation: “There was never a time when the country was so much in need of fine, healthy citizens, and our children must be armed with the knowledge which will protect them against the dangers and temptations they will meet as they grow older; and which will help them to make a success of marriage and parenthood” (Workday 3). The project of managing the production of “fine, healthy citizens” through the sex education of youth is an overt theme in many of these early pamphlets. Another pamphlet from the 1930s, titled “England’s Girls and England’s Future,” claims that its intent is to rouse the ambition of England’s girls with its ambitious title. They have an important part to play in England’s future, one they should take seriously:

For if she does not realise her responsibility for that future, and accept whatever the fulfillment of that responsibility entails, she is evading the universal call to service—and service is the payment she is called to make for the great gift of life entrusted to her.

Every girl, then, is bound to realise and accept her responsibility for the future, and if she is to fulfil that responsibility she can only do so by realising that the present, her every-day life and daily actions, are all-important in shaping that future. (Douie 4)

Sex education in this pamphlet makes attempts at rousing an inspirational and patriotic sense of duty, but turns threatening if any of England’s girls does not realize or understand her “responsibility” to produce children for the nation—she is *evading* her call to service and the *payment she is called to make* simply for having reproductive capacities, the *great gift of life entrusted to her*.

One controversial aspect of sex education was the fear of overexciting children and adolescents. In “What Every Mother Should Tell Her Children,” the author emphasizes that it is best to let the child approach the mother about the topic of reproduction, rather than the mother

approach the child. But if the child fails to do so before adolescence, “it may be necessary for the mother to ask him point blank if he would not like to hear the beautiful story of birth” (Workday 5). Strangely, this is because “he *must* be taught before he reaches the difficult age of adolescence, when the body is undergoing rapid changes and when the nervous system is sensitive and excitable” (Workday 5). The project of sex education was fraught with worries about the excitability of children, and even more so the sexual excitability of adolescents themselves, as if hearing “the beautiful story of birth” might send them into a fit of sexual panic or promiscuity. The pamphlet explains in technical detail about the reproductive organs and the changes in the body during puberty in a sing-songy way for the mother to imitate when speaking to her children. It urges mothers to talk to their children before they might hear from anyone else, because “there is always the danger that she may hear frightening things from other sources, and so it is important for you to ‘get in first’” (Workday 14-15). The mother is the only one whose knowledge of sex is authorized by the institution, and the control of this knowledge is essential.

One of the worries about children hearing about sex from someone other than their mothers is that girls will fear the pain of childbirth and potentially fail to do their duty of producing fine, healthy citizens for the nation. The author of this pamphlet, calling herself anonymously a “Workday Mother,” then tackles the most difficult aspect of this subject:

I expect you will say, “But this is perfectly simple. The difficulty arises when one has to explain the father’s part in the scheme of things.” I agree that is not easy. [...] This may seem terribly shocking and embarrassing at first sight, but the point is this: Children who are trained early bring such a pure, unspoiled attitude of mind to the subject, they can see nothing shameful or embarrassing about it, and they will accept what you tell them in the frankest possible way. (15)

The difficulty of explaining the father’s part in things is slightly sidestepped, emphasizing telling children in “the frankest possible way” without really telling readers very frankly. Why, too,

might the father's part in things be so tricky? It seems that all notions of sexual desire are located with the "father's part," and so become the most difficult to explain to children, and especially young girls who are imagined to be passive listeners and passive sexual partners despite their important childbearing and childrearing roles. The "Workday Mother" emphasizes again: "I repeat that it is my opinion, and that of many well-known doctors, that all children must be told the full facts of reproduction before they reach adolescence" (16). Reproduction is the first priority here, though not in a strictly moral sense, but rather in regards to producing the nation's citizens under the circumstances within institutional reach—the family provides the access required for the teacher, doctor, and psychologist to monitor the child's upbringing and education.

It remains somewhat unclear, however, what it is about a child's awareness of her fallopian tubes that will effectively impact that child's later successful reproductive practices, let alone her use of pleasure. For all its emphasis on frankness, this pamphlet, like many others of its kind, leaves out any useful information about pleasure, desire, and sex. Aside from the occasional reference to "temptations" and perhaps the "father's part" in things, there is really no acknowledgement that sex might be desirable at all. Desire is irrelevant here, perhaps imagined as even hindering the institutional goals of sex itself. This pamphlet, among others, appears to put sex education in the hands of parents or mothers specifically, when it is really being put in the hands of institutions who aim to regulate what it is the mother says and doesn't say, thinks and doesn't think, about sex. The pamphlet operates under the assumption that mothers will not know what to say to their children, rendering their own experiences with sex and desire irrelevant, since the story they are to tell about sex is the story told by the psychologist, doctor, or expert. In this sense, instruction is a form of control working backwards onto the instructor,

quite explicitly a lesson for adults as much for the children these adults are supposed to teach. The regulation of the child or the adolescent's desire, then, is inseparable from the regulation of adult desire—and this overlap brings to the surface the question of whether there are even meaningful distinctions among child, adolescent, and adult desire.

In a 1952 pamphlet by Hugh Warner called “Where Did I Come From? The Story of Reproduction for Children of Eight and Over,” we get a somewhat accurate but even more impractical explanation of “the father's part in the scheme of things” that the Workday Mother had such trouble explaining. The “father's part” is given a narrative presumably suitable for children, taking on almost the quality of a fable:

Your Daddy, ever since he was born, had also been given a special part of his body which he could put the seed very near to the egg, and so make it begin to grow right inside your mother's womb. He didn't put the seed near the egg until he had made a proper home for your mother where you could play with toys and be safe from danger, and grow up properly. God does not want babies to be born if there are no loving father and mother to dress them and feed them and play with them, and give them a home of their own. (8)

Warner also solves the problem of desire by rendering it invisible, creating a very practical, functional distance between father and mother as “the seed” is *put* “very near the egg.” This moment is one that is planned, in which father does *not* put the seed near the egg until a “proper home” has been made where the child (who is also the adult reading this pamphlet) can “grow up properly.” Desire enters the picture, but in the negative. *God does not want babies to be born.* Wanting does not come from desire or from sex, not from the desire that human beings might feel for one another, but rather from what God wants. We leave the wanting up to God. In this pamphlet, God acts as the very expression of Warner's desires, desires which are for the nation, for the proper home, for the mother and father who have read these instructions. What God wants is an expression of what the institution wants—rational, orderly, proper reproduction.

In a 1935 pamphlet called “How You Grow: A Book for Boys” in the Medical Women’s Women’s Federation papers, Theodore Tucker explains that “both girls and boys should take care that their clothing does not get tight between the thighs, as it excites nerves connected with the sex glands and starts them off working too quickly” (32). Girls and boys, too, should even be cautious that they do not outgrow their pajamas without noticing, so as to prevent accidental stimulation. And, “those of you who roll up into a ball, like hedgehogs” also need to beware that there is enough room in their pajama bottoms (32). And, if the “sex glands” should get sensitive for any reason, it is important not to touch them because “this would be unwise as if, when something makes your eye smart, you were to start rubbing that, for it will only make it worse” (33). Worse, indeed. Tucker takes pains to explain, “perhaps the most important reason why we have to avoid their rough or careless handling, is that it may sometimes force some of the semen from the storehouses before nature is ready [...] something that we do not want to happen” (34). Tucker explains that, luckily, what we have to do is very simple to ensure our good health, but there is one more thing he wants us to remember. “That is,” he writes, “the way we think about these things affects the way the sex glands work.” And so, he suggests that “as a matter of fact, the less we think about them the better,” and now that “you know how they work, and how to keep them healthy, you will not have to bother yourself by wondering about them” (34). He suggests plenty of exercise, outdoor activities, and even work to keep the mind clear. And, if we happen to find people who want to *talk* about sex, it is only because they are very ignorant, and so we need to take great measures to stay away from them.

In a 1931 pamphlet published by the Mother’s Union called “The Psychology of Adolescence,” Doris Odlum explains that adolescence is the period of life in which the transition from childhood to adulthood is made. And yet, “the actual age at which adolescence occurs

shows a very marked individual, racial and climatic variation” (1). Odlum explains in confident terms how these variations are determined:

Those races with a highly developed civilization “adolesce,” if one may use the term, later than those which are more primitive. The peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions have a slower development than those which inhabit the more temperate zones, and these, in turn, are slower than the subtropical and tropical peoples. The more Western nations develop later than the Eastern, and the Nordic stock more slowly than the Latin. Thus the people of the British Isles have a comparatively late and long adolescence, and this is an important factor in modifying the relations between the developing child and its environment. (1)

Like Hall’s *Adolescence*, Odlum associates a late adolescence with advanced civilization, blurring the distinction between biological processes and the cultural and institutional mechanisms that prolong the perceived transition between childhood and adulthood. In addition to the bodily and intellectual changes, Odlum states that “adolescence marks the first real appearance of the social sense” in which “the developing human being begins to [...] appreciate its rights and duties in relation to the community” (2). And so, markedly, “with the mental defective, even with a relatively high intellectual capacity, the sense of social responsibility is more than correspondingly deficient” (2).

In Odlum’s section on “The Teaching of Sex Knowledge,” she explains how essential it is to give proper information to children and adolescents about the sexual functions. For the child, this information is “not charged with any real emotional significance,” since he “feels very little more personal concern with the matter than he does with the question of where trees or rabbits come from and how they grow, or how a motor car is made” (8). But, for the adolescent, “the question has become intensely personal, heavily charged with emotion,” and that is why the question of sex must be dealt with simply and without shame when children are still children. Odlum regrets that few parents are equipped to do this properly, since they themselves are so full of shame or embarrassment in regards to sex. And yet, if the parents wait until adolescence, it

may be too late, since “later on great damage may be done by explanations given by the wrong person or at the wrong time or in the wrong way, and even more damage, perhaps, may be done by withholding necessary explanations” (8). Despite the number of sex education pamphlets published for both parents and children in the 1930s and 40s, Odlum feels that “nothing is more fatal than handing an adolescent boy or girl a book dealing with the facts of life, and telling them that they will find everything that they ought to know clearly explained there.” This is because no book can “adjust itself to the needs of the person who reads it, and that is quite essential in such a matter as this,” since “some of us have all sorts of personal problems and difficulties which make us interpret things in different ways, and a mere statement of facts cannot by any means satisfy all the problems and questions, mostly of a quite personal nature, that trouble the adolescent” (9). The only solution is for sex information to be given in person and adjusted to the needs of the questioner. “If we fail in this,” Odlum warns, “we shall be sowing the seeds of fear and distrust, both of life and of self, and in adolescence, at the time when the sex urge is awakening, what should be the most beautiful and wonderful mystery of life is inevitably spoiled from the outset” (9). Parents, teachers, and everyone concerned with the proper development of children should be involved in understanding the psychological processes of the child.

At the end of this piece, Odlum makes a fascinating move, reversing the psychology of adolescence, which has been the object of this study, back onto her adult readers. She cautions parents about attempting to reproduce images of themselves in their children. “Are we so successful and happy in the conduct of our lives that we wish their lives to be a replica of our own?” she writes (30). Even if children could see and experience life second-hand through adults, would this even be good for them? Odlum takes one more turn in her writing, bringing

adolescence back into adulthood, unraveling the very category she has so confidently constructed in earlier pages:

Are we, in fact, much more than adolescents ourselves? Is it even doubtful whether anybody can be said to be wholly grown up, if by that we mean that we have struck a perfectly satisfactory balance between the primitive urges of our nature and the requirements of reality, so that we are harmoniously functioning organisms, balanced to withstand stresses from without or assailings from within; beings whose judgment is not clouded by emotion, whose orientation is firmly established in relation to our fellows and the life here, and to the infinite and the hereafter. (30)

This moment in Odlum's pamphlet is astonishing, grappling with the degree to which the expectations she has just established for adolescents—the requirements for achieving a “normal” maturity—are impossible even for adults, even for someone such as herself. The struggles that she has just outlined as belonging to adolescence are the very struggles that belong to adulthood, the very struggles of life itself.

These, and other, early twentieth century medical and psychological discourses about adolescence make clear this inextricable link between adolescence and sexuality—the sexuality of adolescents in desperate need of being cut off at the pass by the proper, institutionally approved information, information that will keep them from wanting what they want, that will keep them in line with what God wants, what school wants, what the nation needs from their bodies. Among the proliferation of literature on childhood development written before and after Hall's *Adolescence*, parents, teachers, and doctors are made participants in a system of cooperative watchfulness that regulates exactly how a child should develop and at which rate and in what direction. And when that child fails to meet expectations, it is not only the child who is held responsible but even more so the adults who have been charged with that child's progress, who have, in a sense, been charged with their own failure to meet these expectations themselves, charged with the complex and messy denial of their own desires.

## II. HISTORICAL ONTOLOGY

The correlation between shifts in thinking about homosexuality and adolescence in the 1870s suggests that ideas about childhood and adolescence changed in relation to new ways of understanding categories of people. What this means is that our present conceptualizations of identity, how we understand *being* and *becoming* ourselves, are ideologically inflected by the intense drive towards classification and control that we find in the nineteenth century. I think it is worth asking what happened to ideas of adolescence in the late nineteenth century, though I do not think this question can be answered with certainty. And, another closely related question, what might this shift have meant for the people who, as a result, were being named by this category? On the one hand, these are historical questions. But, on the other hand, they are also theoretical questions about the relationship between language and lived reality. Can the new categories that emerged out of the statistics in the nineteenth century be said to have *described* existing ways of being or to have *created* those ways of being? Or, are these different moments of simultaneous describing and creating ways of being in a relation to one another, much like desire itself, a relation that will not be still long enough for us to know who we are?

Ian Hacking, who does work in the philosophy of science, suggests in his book *Historical Ontology* that both of these dynamics—the invention of new categories and the appearance of new kinds of people—happened at the same time, and that we might think about the history of categories, what he calls “making up people,” in this way:

I do not believe there is a general story to be told about making up people. Each category has its own history. If we wish to present a partial framework in which to describe such events, we might think of two vectors. One is the vector of labeling from above, from a community of experts who create a “reality” that some people make their own. Different from this is the vector of the autonomous behavior of the person so labeled, which presses from below, creating a reality every expert must face. (111)

Hacking remarks that scholars at work on the history of homosexuality often disagree about the importance of these two vectors. We can read Foucault's famous claim that in 1870, "the homosexual was now a species," as being concerned with labeling from above (43); whereas John Boswell's research of homosexuality in the middle ages is concerned with what we *now* call homosexuality in a span of time long before this specific labeling existed. Hacking describes this methodological split as one between nominalists and realists, and proposes "dynamic nominalism" to describe another, more flexible position which accounts for the complex relation between classification and identification: "The claim of dynamic nominalism is not that there was a kind of person who came increasingly to be recognized by bureaucrats or by students of human nature, but rather that a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented" (106). So, if we take homosexuality as our example, dynamic nominalism would acknowledge that people of the same gender may have loved one another romantically or sexually throughout time, but "the homosexual" as a kind of person identified by a set of characteristics and behaviors, like cross-dressing or prostitution, for example, emerged at the same time as this kind of person was being invented by institutional discourse. I use cross-dressing and prostitution as my examples because these are the kinds of characteristics named in both nineteenth and twentieth century psychological discourse to "identify" a homosexual (usually male). It is telling that even now, the Wellcome Library's special collections paired the terms "Homosexuality and Prostitution" on archive folders, as if these two were conceptually linked in much the same way as folders I encountered labeled "Children and Adolescents."

I think that dynamic nominalism, while a very complex theory for historical inquiry, is only limited in that it does not account for the stakes involved in this dynamic relation between classification and identification. That is, it does not probe the dynamic relation between

discourse and the lived reality of a person, and this troubling relation is one of the chief concerns of queer theory. These charged examples, cross-dressing and prostitution, highlight my point about the stakes involved in investigating the politics of classification, a dimension “dynamic nominalism” doesn’t address. So, I find it hard to imagine that, as medical discourse was defining “the homosexual” as a male prostitute, men named by this discourse became prostitutes to enact this newly defined identity. The two vectors Hacking describes do not address the oppressive effects *or* the possibilities for resistance or reclamation on the part of people who have been historically classified, researched, and generalized in terms of psychiatric disorder. I think that there is a more complex relation between the identities defined by institutions and the way groups of people might refashion and define themselves in relation to these identities. The term queer itself is an example of the possibilities of reclamation.

Considering the effects of new classifications of people in the nineteenth century, Hacking suggests that “making up people changes the space of possibilities for personhood” (107). I think this is true, though how it changes the space of possibilities is somewhat ambiguous in this formulation. The history of homosexuality suggests that these “changes” were new limits on possibilities for human relationality, rather than a new expansion of possibilities. Importantly, the word personhood used by Hacking points towards conceptualizations of the self, which may function quite differently from the space of possibilities for lived experience. So, while it may have been impossible to understand oneself as either heterosexual or homosexual prior to 1870, since these terms did not exist, that understanding does not preclude the much wider field of possibility for human action and experience. More broadly, I might ask, how are we, as human and as lingual, constrained by discourse? Or, from another angle, I wonder, is it ever possible to resist or escape the constraints of discourse? Can a thirteen-year-old escape the

meaning of adolescence? The answers to these questions may not be generalizable; that is, there is not a theory of language to settle them once and for all. If not answers, then these questions may offer instead a glimpse of the stakes involved in becoming conscious of this fraught relation between language and ourselves.

The undeniable enthusiasm for classification we can attribute to the nineteenth century raises questions about the relationship between those classifications and the people being named, counted, and sorted. And, we cannot ignore the more insidious uses of these statistics to support agendas like eugenics, sterilization, and slavery. Hacking describes “the avalanche of numbers that begins around 1820” as being “obsessed with *analyse morale*, namely, the statistics of deviance” including “suicide, prostitution, drunkenness, vagrancy, madness, crime, *les misérables*” (100). This striking trend of accounting for deviance leads him to ask: “is making up people intimately linked to control? Is making up people itself of recent origins?” (104). Indeed, is classification always a form of control? And then, what form is it?

In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Adolescence* published in 1900, four years before Hall’s *Adolescence*, editor L. A. Stout’s “Words of Welcome” offered an explicit agenda of control as part of the journal’s framing lines of inquiry: “Why do so many young people choose a life for which nature manifestly does not intend for them? What can be done to correct this evil?” (16). It is unclear what evil Stout is referring to in his “Words of Welcome,” but the *life for which nature manifestly does not intend* suggests concerns about homosexuality. James E. Russell expressed a similar agenda of control in the *School Review* in 1896, writing: “The important pedagogic consideration is the enormous accession of physical and psychical energy. What shall be done with it? This question the educator must answer ” (529). I find it so telling that Russell poses the question of what shall be done with adolescent energy as one the educator

must answer, and not one to be posed to adolescents themselves. The title of Louis Starr's 1915 *The Adolescent Period: Its Features and Management* also suggests that management and control are intimately linked to constructions of adolescence, and his book devotes one of six chapters to "The Faults and Criminal Tendencies of Adolescents." Starr's emphasis on management in *The Adolescent Period* is typical of publications on adolescence in Britain and the United States from the late-nineteenth century forward. Likewise, a section called "Discipline, Crime, and Punishment" in T. A. A. Hunter and M. E. M. Herford's 1961 *Adolescence: The Years of Indiscretion*, covers what was still at mid-century being treated as an obligatory topic in any full-length work on adolescence. Both Hall's *Adolescence* and the abridged version called *Youth* devote a large number of pages to adolescent faults and crimes. The frequency with which chapters appear with titles such as "Adolescent Delinquency and Crime" in C. Stanford Read's 1928 *The Struggles of Male Adolescence*, or "Some Pathological Cases: The Juvenile Delinquent" and "The Problem of Discipline during Adolescence" in Olive Wheeler's 1929 *Youth: The Psychology of Adolescence and Its Bearing on the Reorganization of Adolescent Education*, for example, suggests that the institutionalized study of adolescence at once emerges out of and reproduces anxieties about deviance and control.

The classification of things like stars and algae—two of Hacking's hypothetical examples—indicates that classifying may at least be a subtle form of control, perhaps the kind Nietzsche's philosopher might use to "know" the world through the "idea" of stars or algae. Though, certainly, the politics of classifying stars or algae differs from the politics of classifying people. To Hacking's excellent questions, I would add another abstraction. Perhaps we should ask ourselves, what kinds of things can be classified, to what ends, and with what range of consequences? Margaret Lowenfeld's comments about the adolescent in her 1934 lecture expose

her own classification as baffling and even counterproductive for those *who are in intimate contact* with adolescents. I think there is an important distinction to be made between classifications that identify kinds of persons and classifications of stars or algae, or even a condition like tuberculosis, for example. This is not to say that tuberculosis could not be functioned to mark a *kind of person*, as we see in medical writings linking “self-abuse,” i.e. masturbation, and tuberculosis.<sup>32</sup> But, in classifications of adolescence and homosexuality, the aims of social control are more often overt, explicitly stated by doctors, researchers, and educators as we see in the examples above. And the frequency with which childhood and adolescence are evoked in medical and psychological discourse on homosexuality in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries suggests that these forms of classification, these forms of “making up people,” have something to do with one another.

### III. THE ADOLESCENT AND THE HOMOSEXUAL

In 1976, the first volume of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* challenged a story that had been told and retold for a long time, a story that located something called sexual repression in a time called the Victorian period.<sup>33</sup> By shifting the terms of this narrative, Foucault was able to ask a very different question of the past: not why are we repressed, but why do we say that we are? The idea we had taken for granted, our repression, became for Foucault the repressive

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<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, “self-abuse” has also been used to identify the homosexual as a type. Symonds notes that medical writings in France and Germany on “sexual inversion” regard it as a “psychopathic or neuropathic derangement, inherited from morbid ancestors, and developed in the patient by early habits of self-abuse” (29).

<sup>33</sup> I refer here to the book’s first publication in France as *La volonté de savoir* in 1976.

hypothesis. And our speaking about sex, our century of science and medicine and psychology, became discourse, the instrument of its regulation. This argument, of course, raises some very interesting questions about the relationship between language and reality, about what language does in relation to being and world. Certainly, language does not represent reality; but it would be hasty to say that language simply constructs reality. It would be a mistake to say that this question is settled in Foucault's work. Rather, *The History of Sexuality* does not take up only a subject for analysis, in this case sexuality, but works and reworks this question about the relationship between language and reality, the perplexing question of how language constitutes social realities and modes of knowledge. Identity, we might say, is one form of social reality, one of these modes of knowledge. And, closely linked to identity, is adolescence, the stage of life in which identity formation presumably takes place.

In volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault remarks that the term "sexuality" emerged only as recently as the start of the nineteenth century. The question here is how individuals in Western societies began to experience themselves as subjects of a "sexuality," that is, "to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being" (5). Foucault takes as his object of analysis a number of ancient texts in which he reads for the formation of what he calls a "hermeneutics of the self," what we might understand as the social imperative to interpret oneself in certain ways, according to certain schemas, "the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought" (6-7). I think that the changing meanings of adolescence in the nineteenth century are deeply connected to sexuality, and I have borrowed from Foucault the notion of a "hermeneutics of the self" to inquire about when and

how adolescence begins to function as an imperative for interpreting the self in connection with maturity, development, and sexuality.

I want to look at the early discourse constructing homosexuality as one, albeit unlikely, but fascinating case in point about the relation between “the child” and “the adolescent” and classifications of identity and sexuality. Eugene S. Talbot’s 1898 *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results*, for example, references “sexual inversion” in a footnote citing Havelock Ellis’s first volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* titled *Sexual Inversion*, his text being concerned on these pages with physical indications he calls “masculinism” and “feminism” that indicate a range of degenerate conditions (272-6).<sup>34</sup> In addition to these allusions to the “crime” of homosexuality, Talbot’s book covers *all* kinds of “degeneracy,” which he believes to be inheritable and detectable through physical abnormalities. Talbot writes, “this work has been written with a special intention of reaching educators and parents” (viii). That is, he intends educators and parents to be especially watchful of children for the physical traits he describes so that they can be identified as degenerate before doing harm to themselves or society. These educators and parents are called on to be guards of the institution, its gatekeepers, its whistle-blowers.

Talbot was inspired by the work of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who rejected the idea that crime was a part of human nature and suggested that some people are born criminals, what he understood as a biological reappearance of the traits and behaviors of an

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<sup>34</sup> Ellis also shows a concern with childhood and adolescence in this volume first published in 1897, though his treatment of both homosexuality and human development is sympathetic, euphemistically avoiding overt condemnation or validation of this “abnormal manifestation” (xi). John Addington Symonds is named as an author in the first edition, which contains his Appendix A titled “A Problem in Greek Ethics,” though published posthumously. In the second edition, published in 1901, Ellis is named as the only author, and Symonds Appendix A has been replaced by another. Symonds’ own book was called *A Problem in Modern Ethics* and was published in 1896.

earlier evolutionary stage.<sup>35</sup> Lombroso writes: “Just as the fetus shows deformities that in the adult would be considered monstrosities, so, too, does the child lack moral sense. When adults possess the following impetuous passions of children, psychiatrists call them moral madmen, and we call them born criminals” (188). Lombroso’s equating of the child and the criminal here works to construct criminals as developmentally arrested, though this kind of reasoning also reverses back onto the figure of the child: “Anomalous and monstrous sexual tendencies, like criminal behavior, begin in childhood” (192). These projects of classification are working simultaneously to create “the criminal” and “the child” as types, and these statements about “the child” enable the classification of “the criminal.” Through classification, criminality becomes more manageable, something that can be identified before the crime is committed, something the doctor can control. We might hear, in this formation of criminality, some of the same ideas circulating in sex education literature, the fantasy of intervention and detection at some critical moment before any potentially disastrous and irreversible events can occur.

John Addington Symonds, a colleague of Havelock Ellis, published a much more sympathetic treatment of homosexuality in 1896 called *A Problem in Modern Ethics* which ends with an argument to change the laws in England. Symonds uses children to cast the stakes of this “problem” differently: “Every family runs the risk of producing a boy or girl whose life will be embittered by inverted sexuality, but who in all other respects will be no worse or better than the normal members of the home” (4). Symonds uses the threat of heredity, the lives of children

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<sup>35</sup> The English translation of Lombroso’s *Criminal Man* was not published until 1911. Both Talbot and Symonds, who cite Lombroso, were reading the German translation *Der Verbrecher in Anthropologischer, Aertzlicher und Juristischer Beziehung* published in Hamburg by Richter in 1887. The editors of a more recent scholarly translation, spanning multiple editions of the original works, remark that Lombroso’s theory included sociological causes and humanitarian efforts at rehabilitation for occasional criminals, a fact that more dubious works like Talbot’s do not account for (Gibson and Rafter 2).

and adolescents, as a way to justify his discussion of a topic that “deserves a name,” though he “can hardly find a name which will not soil this paper” (3). Interestingly, his approach to the topic resists the practice of classification, critiquing Krafft-Ebing whose work “suffers from too much subdivision and parade of classification” (43). Another instance is a review of Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion*, which insists on the importance of childhood even as it admits that Ellis does not emphasize childhood, confidently stating that “in about one third of the cases there is reason to believe that some event, or special environment, in early life had influence in turning the sexual instinct into the homosexual channels, or calling out a latent inversion,” this bold claim followed by the obligatory acknowledgement that Ellis “gives grounds for believing that the influence of suggestion has by some writers been greatly overestimated, and that suggestion is inoperative when no predisposition exists” (H. E. 428). This reviewer’s transformation of Ellis’s findings suggests the ways that the figure of the child is perpetually at the center of questions of “sexual inversion,” even when this figure is absent; “the child” is read in between the lines, made essential to visions of progress and decline, evoked as a cause and a justification, called into being as the embodiment of all possible social ailments and promises. In these texts, the figures of the child and the adolescent are contradictions of both prediction and prevention. The fantasy is that we can both predict a child’s desire based on careful watchfulness and inspection, or perhaps the psychological exploration of childhood events, and that we can, simultaneously and paradoxically, prevent such events from ever happening in the first place. The fantasy is that we can prevent the child from arriving at adolescence with the wrong events in hand, the wrong information, the wrong experiences at the wrong time; we can prevent and detect their perversion, their expressions of unwieldy desire.

By the mid-twentieth century, this contradiction does not disappear, but rather emerges as specifically adolescent, as we see in a paper read at meeting of the Section of Psychiatry at the Royal Society of Medicine in 1947 by Dr. Albertine Winner. She addresses the relatively unstudied issue of female homosexuality, explaining:

In dealing with large numbers of Lesbians one of the most striking thing is the recurrent traits of immaturity, mainly emotional, but showing themselves in many unexpected ways, that one meets in women of high intellectual or artistic development. This certainly bears out the view that the homosexual relation is an immature one, an arrest of normal sexual development at an adolescent stage. (3-4)

Winner acknowledges lesbians as “women of high intellectual or artistic development” while still insisting on their emotional immaturity and “arrest of normal sexual development at an adolescent stage,” seeing no problem with this seeming developmental discrepancy between intellect and emotion. The problem, which Winner struggles to describe *as* a problem, is adolescent. Adolescence is evoked to embody an array of social problems. The lesbian is, in effect, stuck in adolescence, never having properly moved out from it, perhaps even because of the failures of those who might have been responsible for leading her forward. A 1940 pamphlet by The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene on prostitution blames “not only poverty,” but “an unhappy childhood” for the number of girls that turn to the streets to make their living (“Something” 2). This example is interesting because of its shift of condemnation from the “prostitute” to the “unhappy childhood,” a shift that, despite its good intentions, relocates these “criminal” tendencies in the imagined realm of institutional intervention. What we find here are fantasies of control and of the knowability of desire—how desire forms, how it happens, how it shifts off course. Perversion happens because childhood was not properly tended to, because adolescence was not properly vacated, because interventions were made at the wrong time or in the wrong way. These notions of control veil a profound anxiety about the inexplicable

mutability of desire, about the subjective fluctuations Kristeva describes in the epigraph that begins this chapter.

Again, in 1955, a report by a committee for the British Medical Association treats both prostitution and homosexuality together with the argument that “the normal development of the sexual drive passes through auto-erotic and homosexual phases in childhood and adolescence before it reaches the normal heterosexual maturity,” thus concluding that homosexuality “represents some immaturity of development which may be due to a variety of causes” (“Homosexuality” 11). One of these causes is “defective homes” where parents might be too lax or too strict in their roles, resulting in acquired homosexuality (vi). Childhood and adolescence are deployed not only in overt condemnations of these sexual behaviors, but also in sympathetic accounts of “sexual delinquency,” as in a 1939 address by Dr. Robert Sutherland to the National Association of Probation Officers. Sutherland speaks of “the hormonal intoxication of the adolescent, during which there is a tremendous drive towards some form of sexual experience” to explain and garner sympathy for those charged with delinquency (3). He uses the same dubious evolutionary arguments as Talbot and Lombroso, but he uses them in this instance to recast illegal sexual behaviors as natural: “The work of anthropologists has shown that it is quite a natural thing among primitive people for children to engage experimentally” (1). Citing research from the Kinsey Report, Sutherland claims, “the youngster who has been indicted for sexual delinquency differs from the average youth only in degree and in the fact that he has been found out” (2).

I have given these examples, which show varying degrees of both sympathy and outright condemnation to highlight the prominence of childhood and adolescence in all of these constructions of homosexuality, prostitution, sexual delinquency, and crime. In all of these

examples, childhood and adolescence are functioning to support and construct expertise, management, treatment, and control. One way we might think about the movement of this institutional discourse is through Nietzsche's own critique; here, the child and the adolescent are the "idea" that allows for classifications of the criminal, the abnormal, the homosexual, and the prostitute to appear "known" to an institutional expertise, an expertise *so well used to it* that they are *hardly afraid of the "idea" anymore*. The child and the adolescent shape the narrative of this expertise, construct its distance and proximity, its appearance of objectivity and its semblance of knowledge.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that an emerging discourse of classification and control was necessarily effective in its aims or even that it was accepted without question. The following is from an editorial appearing in the *Macon Telegraph* the same year as Hall's *Adolescence*, and it indicates a sharp distinction between the aims of institutional discourse and public acceptance of those aims:

The psycho-pathologists claim to have discovered the anatomical cause for every intellectual and ethical defect, and there is even talk of converting bad boys into good ones by means of surgery, the cauterization of the turbinated bone and a judicious application of the knife to the pharyngeal region being suggested as effective methods of dealing with juvenile depravity. The lack of any suggested method of restricting boy's capacity for noise, during childhood and adolescence shows that these learned psycho-pathologists have not yet sounded the depths of this profound subject. ("[Boys]" 4)

The tone is overtly sarcastic, calling into question the claims of the "psycho-pathologists" and their delusions "of converting bad boys into good ones." The last line, rather than expressing a literal desire to silence children, expresses a realistic skepticism about the power of institutions to control individuals. Despite the claims of doctors, psychologists, or educators, these emerging institutional discourses more significantly expressed the desire for control than the realization of that control. And certainly, whilst methods of control were being imagined in new ways, the

desire for control was not in itself new to the nineteenth century. The authority of these institutions was not always taken for granted, and resistance to this authority can be found in book reviews and editorials, in sarcasm and parody. While adolescence exists in a hierarchical relation to adulthood, it is clear that this relation reifies and obscures the power dynamics of other social relations, those between doctors and patients, institutions and individuals. These dynamics are not stabilized by hierarchical structures, but exist in complex systematic relation to one another.

This chapter opens with one of its epigraphs taken from Julia Kristeva's *New Maladies of the Soul*. Kristeva's project is to open psychoanalysis back up again, open it to the unknown in its recovery of "the soul" as the part of human experience science has thrown out. She brings this perspective to "the adolescent," and offers a theory for understanding some of the ways this figure functions to distance the things we don't want to see, a theory for understanding how analysis can make these things visible to us again. Kristeva's psychoanalytic perspective highlights the fictional nature of adolescence, defining adolescence as an idea that shapes our experiences of ourselves and others.

"The adolescent, like the child," she writes, "is a mythical figure of the imaginary that enables us to distance ourselves from some of our failings, splittings of ego, disavowals or mere desires, which it reifies into the figure of someone who has not yet grown up" (*New* 135). We might understand this theory as one of an individual mind, full of the peculiarities of emotion, memory, and history, but I think that we can take this theory as also a part of a cultural imaginary—just as fleeting—but made of the shared meanings *and* disavowals of language moving over time. Reading both past and present for evocations of "the adolescent" brings us to the limits of the visible, the possible, the real, and "allows us to see, hear, and read these

subjective fluctuations” (*New* 135). Kristeva offers a way to read adolescence for patterns of disavowal and desire as it is deployed in varied discourses, for varied and even contradictory purposes, contexts, and people.

In the same 1934 lecture in which Margaret Lowenfeld declared that “the adolescent is a very queer creature,” she proceeded to explain two “pieces of knowledge” she had acquired from working with children at the Institute of Child Psychology in London. “The adolescent has two main hungers,” she said, “which are very real to the girl and boy themselves, though they are looked at very differently by the outside world. The first is the hunger for knowledge, and the second the hunger for power.” Having just distanced herself from this *queer creature* she is describing, these revelations are somewhat surprising. What struck me reading this moment in the lecture is Lowenfeld’s simultaneous admission and denial of the adolescent’s knowledge and power. In the copy of this lecture in Lowenfeld’s papers at the Wellcome Library, these lines are typed in all capital letters, signaling the importance of these remarks, the way they might have been emphasized in the style of her delivery. It is the distance between doctor and creature that rationalizes her claims to know the adolescent’s hungers, rationalizes her claims to power and authority.

Of course we can see that the adolescent, who is a person, wants knowledge and power, just as Lowenfeld does. Lowenfeld grants these desires to the adolescent as *very real to the boy and girl themselves*. But, she must say *they are looked at very differently by the outside world*. This strange way of phrasing suggests an evasion—does she mean these desires are not *real* to the outside world, or not shared by the outside world? The distance she has constructed between herself and the adolescent, between the boy and girl themselves and the outside world, is fragile in this phrasing, barely holding that distance at bay, threatening to dissolve. Lowenfeld

negotiates her own experiences with young people—her perceptions of the human desire for power and knowledge—against a medical and psychological discourse that requires “the adolescent” to have neither power nor knowledge in order to justify its expertise. For Lowenfeld to deny the validity of that discourse, she would have to deny or reformulate the importance of her role in the lives of her patients, a role that was still under tenuous construction in 1934.<sup>36</sup> The active construction of her authority *depends* on her hunger for knowledge, her hunger for power. She can cast the adolescent as the unknown, as the object of scientific study, but she cannot give over to adolescents themselves the power to say who they are without also calling into question the social need for her institutional authority and expertise.

Lowenfeld’s solution to the adolescent’s two main hungers, ironically, is that they learn about science and medicine, learn how to become doctors and researchers, the very place that Lowenfeld is negotiating for her own knowledge and power. It is “the science of health” that offers “the satisfaction we need.” She explains:

There is nothing so delightful at times as to talk to children on the microbe-hunters, to give them the life stories of Pasteur and Koch, and the men who cleaned the Panama Canal from yellow fever, and the men who pursued and destroyed the sleeping sickness germ in Africa. There is enough material in all that for sheer adventure and excitement and heroism, far better than anything in the cinema. The facts stand for themselves. They carry the *feeling* that there is in this progress of science.

Here we see Lowenfeld’s own subjective fluctuations, the movement of her desires for power and knowledge fluctuating between “the adolescent” she constructs and her own negotiations of that construction. What is so fascinating about this example from Lowenfeld is that we do not see her disavowal or condemnation of the hungers of the adolescent, but her thoughtful reasoning

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<sup>36</sup> Lowenfeld is considered a pioneering researcher in the field of child psychology, and had founded The Institute for Child Psychology only a few years earlier in 1931.

to grant these desires to “the adolescent,” to bring full circle the fulfillment of her own hungers. It is her participation in the “science of health” which carries this essential *feeling* (her feeling) of knowledge and power in the progress of science. Lowenfeld is not simply the voice of the institution, but caught in a complex system of institutional authority and expertise in which she is negotiating for her own voice, her own desires, her own power. And, in these systematic relations, “the adolescent” of Lowenfeld’s discourse *is not a person*, but a figure imagined from memory and experience, experiences of a lived world that is fleeting, unpredictable, contradictory, a world that both eludes and exceeds the limits of discourse.

### 3. SELF, WORLD, TEXT

Begin therefore by better studying your students, for most certainly you know nothing about them.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*

Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

The child serves to sanction that concept of a pure origin because the child is seen as just such an origin in itself. The child is there, and the original meaning is there—they *reinforce* each other.

—Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*

As I have shown, the establishment of new institutional practices in medicine, psychology, and education at the turn of the century required the displacement of contextual, contingent knowing in order to verify the authority of the institution's knowledge and expertise. My stakes in interrogating constructions of childhood and adolescence are not only discursive but also relational, concerned with unfolding a new logic for speaking about and relating to people called children and adolescents. This is at once a deeply personal undertaking, touching on the ways we see ourselves and the ways we care for others, and an abstraction that aims to unravel the institutional logics that have shaped these relations without our consent or control.

How does the theoretical come to bear on the very real and urgent problem of being in the world and being in relation to others? I am interested in the overlap between two theoretical claims, one belonging to the field of children's literature and one belonging to queer theory, though it is perhaps worth remarking that both of these fields may be understood as having emerged out of the moments in which these foundational claims were made. In children's literature, the claim *there is no child* was put forth most famously by Jacqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan* in 1984. Rose writes, "there is no child behind the category 'children's fiction' other than the one the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes" (10). And, in queer theory, the claim *there is no gender* was put forth most famously in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Butler puts it this way: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33). It is perhaps worth remarking that neither Rose nor Butler is saying there is no such thing as children or as gender; but rather, that neither childhood or gender are what they claim to be. The idea of the child behind children's fiction does not precede the category, but instead belongs to it. And, the gender identities created by expressions of masculinity or femininity do not precede these expressions; rather, they are constituted by those very expressions.

Both of these claims have led to some heated debates, debates that often go in circles. I think that at the heart of these debates is not acceptance or rejection of these foundational claims. Rather, I think that underpinning these debates are much larger, unanswered questions about the relationship between language and experience, questions about how our realities are inflected by discourse, and fears about what this might mean about our experiences of ourselves and others. I think the stakes of these two claims are deeply connected, and I want to spend some time

exploring them together. It might be worth returning later to what might also be at stake in denying them, what is at stake for someone who insists that there *is* a child or there *is* such thing as men and women.

Both the idea that there is no child and the idea that there is no gender aim to restore the ideological force of being human, of being a person, to those whom this kind of personhood has been denied. Queer, as a theoretical term, can be used to describe ways of being that fall outside of language, outside of a definably gendered or sexual existence, outside of what might be understood as real or possible for human expression and relationality. Likewise, if we consider the ways that the category child might describe someone who is naïve, unknowing, or without agency or desire, then it is this definition of childhood that makes the personhood of children difficult or impossible to see. By the very terms of being a child, the child's agency falls outside of language, outside of what is understood as real or possible for children. The stakes of interrogating gender and interrogating childhood have to do with imagining a world where personhood is both possible and legible for someone who is queer, who is a child, who is a person.

When Rose writes “we have been reading the wrong Freud to children,” she proceeds to give us a reading of Freud that brings to the surface a number of pressing theoretical issues (12). In Freud she finds language and meaning unstable, identity and truth always under tenuous construction, our subjectivity fragmented and contradictory. Of course, Freud's own inconsistencies and contradictions open his work to this kind of reading, a reading that uncovers the postmodern dimensions of psychoanalysis. Rose brings this way of looking to Freud, not only to better understand Freud, but also to better understand the kinds of investments that have led us to read and misread Freud in the ways we have. Like Rose, I too want to bring a particular

way of looking, but this time to her book *The Case of Peter Pan*. This way of looking comes out of queer theory, which I believe reframes Rose's work in useful ways. But this reframing speaks to queer theory as well, where Rose is conspicuously absent from recent criticism on the child.<sup>37</sup> What we will see, through this way of looking, is how the terms child and impossibility, which are so important to Rose, take on new meanings, new resonances with the concerns of queer theory, concerns of identity, agency, and power.

I am going to talk about constructions of the child. I am going to talk about actual people called children. I do not believe that these two projects are ever really separate from one another, even though they often emerge out of very different disciplinary practices. Queer theory understands the categories of gender and sexuality not as stable, but as shifting, malleable, contextual—and I see that theorized complexity as belonging to the child as well as to fiction for the child, what we might understand as layers of self, text, and world which are open to our interpretations. So often, the child functions ideologically as an empty category—one that can be filled with our anxieties, desires, hopes.<sup>38</sup> The fantasy here—the story we tell to cover up this projection of meanings—is that children cannot know themselves or what is good for them, and so they need us, need our guidance and protection. One of the things that *The Case of Peter Pan*

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<sup>37</sup> Rose is not cited in Kathryn Stockton's *The Queer Child* (2009), or in James Kincaid's *Child-Loving* (1992) or *Erotic Innocence* (1998), despite overlapping interests in psychoanalysis, childhood, and desire. In the introduction to the anthology *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004), editors Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley briefly mention Rose and quote her as having argued that "childhood innocence [is] . . . a portion of adult desire" (xiii), but her work is not mentioned in any of the essays included in the collection.

<sup>38</sup> I echo here the constructivist perspective of "the child" as a historically figured and contingent category. However, I follow Rose, and notably Kincaid, in framing this question as one that is about the present—present desires, present disavowals, present investments—and in being relevant to a lived world where we relate to actual children. In *Child-Loving*, Kincaid expresses an interest in the consequences faced by actual children, writing: "I will argue that the chief casualties are the very children we think we are protecting: needing the *idea* of the child so badly, we find ourselves sacrificing the bodies of children for it" (6).

reminds us of is the difficulty and unpredictability of shaping anyone, even a child, into someone we've imagined them to be. Rose puts it this way: "if children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp" (2). The image of the child inside the book is not necessarily constructed in the text on its pages, though I suppose it could be. We might understand the image Rose refers to in terms of the pious Harry and Lucy characters who appeared in children's fiction throughout the nineteenth century, but I do not think this is image she is most concerned with.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the image of the child inside the book is the one constructed in the relational act of imagining the child as a reader of the book. That is, the image of the child is first called up in the mind of the writer, publisher, bookseller, and also in the collective imagination of an industry devoted to producing child readers. Only later, when books are produced, does this image of the child appear inside the book in strange and indirect ways. When we consider the readers of this book, the actual people who are called children, or what Rose means by "the one who does not come so easily within its grasp," what we find instead is a notion of child that disappears right in front of our eyes.

Kathryn Stockton also describes a kind of disappearing when she talks about the "gay child" in her book *The Queer Child*. The field of queer theory has recently begun to explore the topic of childhood in order to illuminate questions about sexuality and culture, and Stockton's

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<sup>39</sup> I refer here to the recurring characters Harry and Lucy, who appear in many works by Maria Edgeworth, including *Moral Tales for Young People* (1801) and *Early Lessons* (1801), which circulated widely throughout the nineteenth century. These famously well-behaved characters are reworked as precocious troublemakers in Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839), which suggests an implicit debate among children's fiction writers about what children are really like.

book is the first to investigate queer and child as intertwining conceptualizations.<sup>40</sup> While Stockton argues that all children are queer, one of the contradictions she takes up is that the gay child does not exist in our language or representations until we construct her retrospectively. The gay child is not allowed to be conscious of herself as gay, not allowed to occupy this sexually aware subject position because she is a child, and so the gay child conceptually exists only in adult memories of childhood.<sup>41</sup> What happens to gay children in twentieth-century novels and films, according to Stockton, is that they disappear, or are ghosted through metaphors. Stockton writes that “the gay child shows how the figure of the child does not fit children—doesn’t fit the pleasures and terrors we recall.” She sees “this notion [of the gay child] figuring children as fighting with concepts and moving inside them, sometimes successfully, sometimes not” (6). Here Stockton is negotiating between cultural ideas and the relationship of actual people to them. There is the “we” who know the figure of the child and who recall a childhood that doesn’t fit. And, there are people called children who are fighting and moving, children who have agency of some kind, children navigating ideas about the child. I see the fighting and moving Stockton describes as exactly the movement Rose describes when she writes about the child who does not come so easily within the grasp of the book. Rose implies a child who is moving, who escapes, and I want to suggest that this movement, this disappearing, is what happens when the child is depicted not as empty, but as a powerful, unpredictable,

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<sup>40</sup> Published prior to Stockton’s *The Queer Child*, Bruhm and Hurley’s 2004 anthology *Curiouser* takes up some of the theoretical questions posed by the terms queer and child, but many of these essays focus on some aspect of children and sexuality. It is interesting that queer is the term used to describe the act of even talking about children and sexuality in certain ways.

<sup>41</sup> Stockton is cautious about whether the ability to name a “gay child” is an advantage if and when it does emerge in institutional contexts. She asks, “What will get lost through this way of being found?” (19).

desiring agent. We see a child disappearing in *The Case of Peter Pan* because when we grant the child this kind of personhood, we no longer see a child.

This disappearing refers literally to the ways we fail to see what is powerful, sexual, or adult about the children around us, but it also refers to the ways the workings of actual children are negotiated in *The Case of Peter Pan*. That is, I am making the claim that Rose talks about actual children, but not in the usual ways. For Rose, the child is never really a child, and to use this term to refer to children traps us in the very system of meanings she is trying to expose. This does not mean, though, that we are trapped forever. Consider for a moment how Stockton works through the matter of talking about children. Stockton does not cite Rose, though she takes up an issue that I think follows directly from the problems set before us in *The Case of Peter Pan*:

We should start again with the problem of the child as a general idea. The child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back. It is a ghostly, unreachable fantasy, making us wonder: Given that we cannot know the contours of children, who they are to themselves, should we stop talking of children altogether? Should all talk of the child subside, beyond our critique of the bad effects of looking back nostalgically in fantasy?

Fantasy, I find, is more interesting than this. It is fatter than we think, with dense possibilities. (5)

We might characterize Rose's book in Stockton's terms, as perhaps merely a critique of bad effects, even if we grant that it was one of the first books to do so. I'd like to think, though, that *The Case of Peter Pan* is about more than bad effects, is about a fantasy that's even fatter than we think, with dense possibilities. The idea of the child as part of memory and fantasy comes from psychoanalysis, and we might regard this dimension of psychoanalysis as underpinning the projects of both Rose and Stockton. But, we know from psychoanalysis that fantasy is inescapable. Fantasy shapes the ways we experience reality, indeed shapes reality itself. And, following Stockton and Rose, I am interested in notions of fantasy in relation to ideas about the

child. I am also interested in what happens if we begin looking around us with these insights in mind. I am interested in our experiences with children, our treatment of children, our talking about children. I am interested in what happens to these lived realities when we think through the problems put before us by *The Case of Peter Pan*—the problems of impossibility, identity, and language—the problems put before us by the very category child. I believe Rose offers not only a theory of what happens in and around the idea of children’s fiction, but a theory of how the stories we tell ourselves about what happens—or even, what can happen—so often operate independently of the lived reality right in front of us.

Actual children thwart ideas about children and childhood all the time. I think that people who live and work with children and adolescents everyday know better than anyone that the categories of “child” or “adolescent” do not account for the diversity of personality, ability, and creativity they see in the people in front of them. But, what happens is that these dimensions of personhood become difficult or impossible to represent, and sometimes difficult or impossible to even recognize. The terms of childhood and adolescence negate a range of experiences and expressions, even though the fact of age itself does not impose these limits. This negation works both ways, censoring adulthood in children and childishness in adults, the value judgments informing such censoring doing their own kind of work. Perhaps these problems do not ultimately prevent our seeing or knowing someone who is a child, adolescent, or adult, but it limits what can be said and what can be thought about them.

Every day people see children and adolescents who are never only children or adolescents, and yet these moments are obscured by concepts whose institutional delineations override variation. Working in institutional contexts makes it even more difficult to think outside of conceptions of childhood and adolescence, even if we try to speak about them in other

ways. To do the work of the institution, we are asked to speak its language. The stories we tell so often obscure the lived reality of language and meaning in motion, identity and truth always under tenuous construction, and our subjectivity divided. And thinking of *child* in the usual ways—where it functions as a category ready to be filled with our desires, projections, and disavowals—makes it impossible to really see either the child or ourselves.

## I. THE PROBLEM OF IMPOSSIBILITY

Perhaps what troubles us most about Rose's book is the word impossible. It is right there in the title, taunting us. She is talking to us. She is talking about us. And it sounds like she is saying that our parenting is impossible, our teaching impossible, our reading and writing for children impossible.<sup>42</sup> It is of little comfort that Rose does not mean this literally: "Children's fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child" (1). What does it mean, then, to be in an impossible relation? And where does that leave us as critics, as writers of children's books, or as parents and teachers who work with children everyday? These are questions about the lived reality of her claims, questions we have been left with in the wake of *The Case of Peter Pan*. After impossibility, what is left?

This question, seemingly strange and unfamiliar in the context of adult/child relationships, is not unfamiliar to queer theory. Queer lives are often defined by impossibility,

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<sup>42</sup> I am characterizing here the abundant misreadings of Rose that have followed the publication of *The Case of Peter Pan*.

both in ideological ways and in lived, material ways. Impossibility is a condition of existence, something that must be negotiated. Queer describes here not only gay or lesbian, but ways of being that fall outside of intelligibility, fall outside of definition, outside of what is usually understood as reality. These ways of being are often conceptualized in queer theory in terms of gender or sexuality, but they may be framed in other ways, too; in terms of Freud, they might be understood as the perverse or neurotic, which Freud himself remarkably located in the realm of childhood. I refer here to Freud's 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which is so central to Rose's argument, a work which echoes turn-of-the-century discourse on "sexual inversion," but there are other places we might look to see connections between queer and child. We see another example in Freud's 1921 "Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," a case in which he confidently claims that "it was possible to trace its origin and development in the mind with complete certainty" (147). It is perhaps not surprising, considering what we know about the turn-of-the-century, that he traces the origin of homosexuality to the childhood of the woman in question, to the floating Oedipal signifiers of her mother and father, and that it is childhood Freud uses to guarantee his *complete certainty*.

One factor which troubled Freud in this case was that the young woman was not suffering from any signs of mental disturbance, her parents being the ones who came to him first, making it difficult for him to convince her to continue psychoanalysis. While he refers to her condition as a disorder, the troubling lack of disorder in his patient gave him pause. Freud's understandings of the mind located queer sexualities in the child, framing the child's pleasure in terms of polymorphous perversity. The child would presumably grow out of these queer desires through the mechanisms of a developmental sequence, a sequence ending with normative heterosexual desires. But, the sequence described by Freud is inextricably bound up in cultural

norms that dictate heterosexuality as the direction in which we are supposed to develop. Rose articulates these submerged cultural dimensions in Freud's work:

Freud effected a break in our conception of both sexuality and childhood from which we do not seem to have recovered. The neurotic simply bears witness to the effects of what is always at some level an impossible task—the task of cohering the fragmented, component and perverse sexuality of the child. The fact that Freud used a myth to describe how this ordering is meant to take place (the myth of Oedipus) should alert us to the fictional nature of this process, which is at best precarious, and never complete. (14)

Indeed, Freud's acknowledgement in a 1935 letter, one addressing a mother's concerns about her son, show his own rethinking of his theory in relation to social norms and expectations. He wrote, "homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development" (787). The homosexual son, according to Freud, is stuck in an earlier stage, one belonging to childhood or adolescence. But, it is important that Freud does not use here the language of atavism or degeneration that we find in so many early-twentieth-century texts on sexuality, but rather the less loaded terminology of variation.

Rose's interpretation of Freud has significant resonances with queer theory, where the ways we arrive at heterosexuality and at notions of ourselves as gendered might be considered part of an ongoing fictional process. Childhood and adolescence, as categories and as ways of interpreting the self, serve a cultural function to fix adulthood as a stable location of heterosexuality and normative gender. Queer theory, in one sense, is concerned with those lives that do not follow the normative developmental sequence, those lives that have undertaken a different sort of process of cohering and ordering the self. Queer theory is concerned with the ways of being and relating that are possible when the normative sequence of heterosexual

romance, marriage, and reproduction renders those who do not follow the sequence invisible, irrelevant, or impossible.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, when we begin to unravel assumptions about time—assumptions about progress, development, sequence, and memory—we begin to unravel ideas about the child.

The child is imagined as that which is before the sequence—that which is before heterosexuality—and as such the category child has an important role in maintaining the sequence even while it presumably does not participate. In the sequence, the child is also invisible, or simply irrelevant, since the sexuality of children is imagined to be impossible. Child and queer overlap considerably in this formulation, but I do not want to make the claim that they are the same. Instead, I want to consider for a moment what queer can tell us about the child and “the impossible relation between adult and child” that Rose describes. How might impossibility work as a condition of existence for childhood, as something that must always be negotiated?

Impossibility is not something we like to associate with children. We like to tell children that they can be whatever they want when they grow up. We like to tell them that they can do anything. What is so interesting in sentiments like these is that they don’t usually mean that a child can grow up to be gay, queer, or strange. We mean they can be doctors, lawyers, dancers, teachers, writers. We mean they can be astronauts and millionaires. It seems as though childhood is full of possibility, both real and imagined. So, what might impossibility mean here?

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<sup>43</sup> For example, Judith Halberstam refers to transgendered experience as “queer time” in her book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005). For Halberstam, “queer time” might be described as “the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility” (qtd. in Freeman 182). The recent scholarship on the child in queer theory might be understood in terms of queer theory’s turn toward time.

To answer this question, I want to turn to a moment in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). I turn first to this familiar text, and to Alice, because we know Alice.<sup>44</sup> In one scene, Alice finds herself in a very curious conversation with the White Queen: "Now I'll give *you* something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day," the Queen tells Alice. But Alice says, "I ca'n't believe *that!*" (177). We might say that Alice finds the Queen's age to be *impossible*. The imaginative and fantastical quality of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, however, makes this incredulity seem nearly as ridiculous as the Queen's age. After falling down a rabbit hole, stepping through a looking-glass, and speaking to a Queen whose shawl seems to be alive, why is it the Queen's age that Alice finds so difficult to believe all of the sudden? Of all the things that have happened, the Queen's age is not that ridiculous:

"Ca'n't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "one *ca'n't* believe impossible things." (177)

What is so interesting in this scene is that Alice appears to be the voice of reason, the voice of a culture that tells us what is normal, what is right, what is possible.<sup>45</sup> The Queen, then, seems to represent the fantastic, the impossible, the queer. And yet, we could easily reverse these roles. The Queen's tone is thick with condescension, as if she is instructing Alice about the ways of the

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<sup>44</sup> In Bruhm and Hurley's introduction to *Curiouser*, Alice is "Exhibit A" for what queerness has to do with childhood (xi). I read Alice here, along with other canonical figures, in order to make visible the resonances between queer theory and Rose in a familiar context. My reading of Alice differs from Bruhm and Hurley's in that I do not locate queerness in Alice, or in the perspective of the child. Rather, I see queerness as something that moves in the text, in any text, and in our readings at the limits of what is visible, intelligible, or thinkable.

<sup>45</sup> Alice often occupies this position of being aligned with manners and social norms in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: scolding herself about crying and cheating at games (15), instructing the Mad Hatter about how to have a tea party and have conversations (60–68), and objecting to the court procedures and evidence in the mock trial (104–9), to name a few examples.

world, pointing to what is obviously true. She says, “I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” and “when I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day,” as if it were simply a matter of education, something to be learned in school, something to be practiced as a child. We might read the Queen’s dialogue as an ironic commentary on the arbitrariness of social rules and norms, rules that one must learn and believe in to be a participant in adult society. In this reading, Alice is the child who must learn, the child who must practice poetry recitations and proper manners, the child who must practice believing in the imaginary logic of the government, the legal system, capitalism. Alice is the skeptical child, the wise child. The White Queen is the adult who has learned to believe in impossible things.

Social norms, then, are learned through practice. And there are few places in which this is more obvious than in the raising and educating of children. Because the idea of being queer, or the idea of growing up to have queer relationships, is so often rendered invisible or impossible by these early lessons, queer theory understands both possibility and impossibility to be a matter of perception, ideological notions constituted by social norms. And, if queer describes what is outside those norms, excluded, impossible, then what is queer becomes possible only through the practice of believing in it. Queer relationships are no more imaginary than marriages between men and women, but they are far less often imagined within social norms that might constitute their possibility. Impossibility as a theoretical term, then, is productively unresolvable. It allows us to see and describe what is beyond the limits of language and meaning, what is usually rendered unseen or unthinkable *in order to make it so*. Impossibility, in this sense, is defined by culture. So, if we consider Rose’s declaration about the “impossible relation between adult and child” within these terms, the impossible relation she describes is constituted by the very social norms she seeks to make visible. In other words, she does not make the claim that adults and

children cannot relate to one another, but rather describes a culture that renders such a relation impossible within the systems of meaning defining childhood itself.

If childhood is understood as something entirely separate from adulthood, if the idea of the child describes someone who is naïve, unknowing, innocent, who is without agency or desire, then it is this construction that renders the relation between adult and child impossible—impossible because *child* is emptied so significantly of anything we might recognize as being ontologically meaningful. Rose attempts to account for this problem and work responsibly around it when she writes: “Let it be said from the start that it will be no part of this book’s contention that what is for the good of the child could somehow be better defined, that we could, if we shifted the terms of the discussion, determine what it is that the child really wants” (2). In one sense, Rose is right, only because what is good for another person is not something that can be definitively known and decided ahead of time by someone else—for example, someone like Rose. The project of determining what it is the child really wants is not something that can be done in generalized terms, or in a book of academic scholarship, but only something that can be partially and contingently known in a fleeting exchange between one person (maybe a child) and another (maybe an adult). In another sense, when Rose speaks of “the impossible relation between adult and child,” I cannot help but think that what she is describing here is really the impossibility—or, to put it another way, the difficulty—of any one person relating to another.

In an article called “The Precarious Life of Children’s Literature Criticism,” Perry Nodelman articulates this difficulty another way, drawing on Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life*, eloquently speaking of “both the complex weaves that form individual subjectivities and the complex and often conflicting range of discourses and ideologies available to each of us as we go about living our lives” (4). “I hasten to add,” Nodelman writes, “that I’m not suggesting that

children are by nature inherently different from adults—except insofar as all of us humans are inherently, in our inevitably different weavings of discourse, different from one another” (8). Between any two people, relationality presents difficulties of identity and representation, what it means to *know* another person, the difficulties of shared meaning and language, what it means to read and interpret one another. Certainly, these difficulties are compounded when we consider the ways ideological notions of childhood operate so powerfully in culture, inevitably shaping the ways we hear and understand those beings called children.

It is significant that Nodelman turns to queer theory. For those who are queer, the difficulty of relationality is compounded because of the ways queer identifications and experiences are rendered invisible or irrelevant by social norms. For example, if queer relationships are not recognizable as marriages or families under current law, the terms of social recognition become extremely difficult to achieve. At first glance, it seems that queer presents this difficulty of relationality because it is to some degree uncategorizable, whereas the child presents this difficulty by virtue of being overdetermined by the categorical meaning of *child*. I want to suggest, however, that this is the same problem, a problem having to do with the ideological function of the categories themselves. What interests me is the uncanny resemblance between the problem of relationality for someone who is queer and the problem of relationality for someone who is a child.

To consider this resemblance for a moment, I want to turn to Butler’s *Undoing Gender*, which takes up the problem of relationality from a theoretical position that interrogates sexual and gendered categories. One of the problems with categories is that they inevitably oversimplify things—they exclude any number of characteristics and even entire groups of people. Creating more categories is an endless task and doesn’t account for the problematic

hierarchical ordering that categories enable between *man* and *woman*, for example, or between *adult* and *child*.<sup>46</sup> The problem of relationality here is a problem of hierarchy. However, the idea that we could do away with all categories, or the queer possibility of failing to occupy any of the available categories, presents us with another problem when it comes to relationality—the problem of unintelligibility. I wonder, though, the degree to which *child* presents us with both of these problems.<sup>47</sup> Butler puts it this way:

To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor. (30)

To what degree are those people who are called children rendered unintelligible by the ideological functions of child as a category? Certainly, we can hear the uncanny resemblance if we shift the terms of Butler's prose to encompass child and adult: to be a child is *to find that you have not yet achieved access to adulthood, to find yourself speaking only and always as if you were adult, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming*. This problem of relationality is always being negotiated to varying degrees of effectiveness in any given encounter between one person and another. I am interested

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<sup>46</sup> Creating new names for things has its purposes, especially for those, such as Katharine Jones, who work in policy-making arenas. In her 2006 article "Getting Rid of Children's Literature," Jones proposes a number of new terms to describe the theoretical issues at stake in discussions of childhood and children's literature—including *age role*, *age difference*, and *ageuation*—terms intended to describe cultural processes in much the same way as feminist scholars have worked to describe gender. However, I am less interested in inventing new categories as I am in understanding existing categories and their power dynamics.

<sup>47</sup> I think it makes sense to think of any category in a secondary position of a hierarchical relationship as having not only the problem of hierarchy but also the problem of intelligibility, whether it be a gendered category or one of sexuality, race, class, or age.

in the moments when the category of child powerfully shapes these encounters, the moments when we might say, “she’s just a child,” and what that moment means for the person who is being characterized this way. And, then, what does this moment mean for us?

## II. THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

The trouble seems to begin with naming. We sense this trouble when the names we are called fall short of describing *what we are*. We can see this trouble in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), in which we find a character who is perpetually being called something he is *not*, something we as readers know he is not and feel good about knowing. The widow prays for his lost soul, cries over him, calls him “a poor lost lamb” and “a lot of other names, too” (Twain 14), and we can practically see Huck standing there, in his new clothes, this name-calling hanging in the space between them. We don’t find out what insults the widow hurled at Huck, but this is hardly the point; the irony of this moment is that “poor lost lamb” is just as terrible, if not worse, than any of the other names the widow might have used. One of the most beloved characters in American literature isn’t a “poor lost lamb” at this or any other moment in the book—and the best part is that he doesn’t even seem to know it, doesn’t even seem to know that he’s already been found to have a heart of gold. Huck tells us, “she never meant no harm by it” (14), and we get to think he’s a better Christian than the widow could ever be for forgiving so easily, so generously, after everything he’s been through. Twain plays with names here. He uses names to play on our sympathies, to create a little joke between writer and reader, and in doing so he reminds us of the trouble with names.

Perhaps it is this trouble with naming that Rose refers to when she writes: “There is no child behind the category ‘children’s fiction’, other than the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it must believe is there for its own purposes” (*The Case* 10). If we read Rose alongside this scene from *Huckleberry Finn*, we can hear another meaning behind the widow’s words—the widow needs to believe Huck is a “poor lost lamb” so that *she* can save him; she needs to believe for her own purposes, for her taking Huck in to have a purpose at all. We might have the instinct, in this moment, to feel superior to the widow, to say Huck is a good boy, to call Huck the *right* name. But is the right name ever really the *right* name? Certainly, the layers of irony in *Huckleberry Finn*, not to mention the abundance of literary criticism written over the years, suggest simultaneously numerous, contradictory interpretations of Huck. There is no “poor lost lamb” behind the character Huck, except the one the widow sets in place.

Rose asks us to think of *child* as a name, as a category defining the literature written for children. When Rose says *there is no child*, I don’t think she means that we cannot talk about children at all. I don’t think that she herself is particularly interested in talking about children, but that doesn’t mean that her work precludes the possibility of ever speaking about them. But this speaking is fraught from the beginning. Even if we think of a person called a child, a person who lives in a world even more complex than a book, we can imagine the abundance of interpretations possible and the failure of a term like *child* to tell us anything about the person who is named by it.

This failure, the failure of names, is something queer theory has grappled with out of necessity, out of the failure of identity to encompass queer subjectivities. Rose points out that identity, in some sense, always fails; but the illusion of its not failing might be understood to afford a certain degree of privilege. This is the trouble with names. Eve Sedgwick describes it

as “one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning where the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (8). Sedgwick describes here a failed, or troubled, meaning-making enterprise. Queer is when the name doesn’t fit, can’t fit. This problem of identity, however, is not one that only the queer must grapple with. For a moment, I want to return to the echo of Rose’s insistence that *there is no child* in Butler’s claim that *there is no gender* from the groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble*.

Butler articulates gender as performative, a copy with no original, and she later complicates this idea in *Bodies That Matter* by thinking through the degree to which even biological sex is subject to social meanings which inscribe certain bodies as bodies that matter, as bodies with matter or substance. The bodies that fall outside these social meanings do not matter, do not have matter, but also *cannot* matter if the immense social meanings attached to sex and gender are to remain sustainable.<sup>48</sup> In other words, Butler implies that the queer outside of the usual sexed and gendered categories is not just excluded, as if we could solve this problem by creating more categories of inclusion, but that it is this very exclusion that upholds the binary system in the first place. The inside *needs* the outside in order to be inside.<sup>49</sup> We can see how this functions in the rhetoric surrounding the debate over gay marriage—the panic that the very institution of marriage will no longer have meaning if same-sex partners are allowed to call their

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<sup>48</sup> The vast number of intersexed and trans bodies, both child and adult, are but a few examples of what Butler means, though we might also think about the consequences for male and female bodies that do not conform to recognizably masculine or feminine forms. While social expectations of gender conformity are slightly different when it comes to children, this does not exclude children from these regulations.

<sup>49</sup> The idea that I am summarizing from *Bodies That Matter* is articulated by Butler this way: “it will be as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as is it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are not constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary ‘outside,’ if not the necessary support for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter” (16).

relationships by the name marriage. We might think of the White Queen or Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass* having to practice believing when someone makes the argument, “I believe marriage is between a man and a woman.” Clearly, when this kind of argument is made, what is at stake is not the fact that any individual relationship between a man and a woman could lose its viability, that married men and women could fall out of love everywhere if gay marriage were to become legal; rather, what is at stake is the meaning of marriage, the meaning of a name to signify monolithically. The name itself is not at stake, nor the existence of marriages or children. What we are negotiating here is marriage as having gendered meaning, what marriage means. What we are negotiating is what child means, as deployed in a concept like children’s fiction. What is threatened by a theory that says *there is no gender* or *there is no child* is the system of meanings around gender, the system of meanings around the idea of the child.

Rose attempts to articulate this system of meanings around the child in *The Case of Peter Pan* by asking a different sort of question of children’s literature: “It will not be an issue here of what the child wants, but of what the adult desires—desires in the very act of construing the child as the object of its speech” (2). Rose is interested in the ways the child functions ideologically, in the ways that the child is part of a system of cultural meanings, a system that she attempts to get at through the psychoanalytic notions of fantasy and desire. What I find interesting about her arguments is that the child functions ideologically in a number of ways that gender might be said to function: “to hold off a panic, a threat to our assumption that language is something which can simply be organized and cohered, and that sexuality, while it cannot be removed, will eventually take on the forms in which we prefer to recognize and acknowledge each other” (Rose 10). The word *eventually* is significant here because it suggests that the child, even as an idea, has not yet taken on these forms. On the contrary, the idea of the child itself

signifies contradiction, movement, contingency. If children's fiction is the place where we can believe that language is simple, as Rose suggests, then the child is paradoxically the site where even the simplest language becomes unpredictable and impermanent. Rose points to the child here as both a site of fantasy and disavowal, a place to locate what we want to believe about ourselves and the world, and a place to locate what is uncertain, unstable, unresolvable. The idea is that if uncertainty belongs to childhood, then it doesn't belong to us.

Scholarly conversations in children's literature following the publication of *The Case of Peter Pan* have sometimes polarized in ways similar to scholarly conversations in feminist studies or queer studies—a polarization that stems from the ever-present tension between theory and identity politics. We do not usually think of childhood studies and children's literature criticism in terms of identity politics, but I think the terms of identity politics are useful if we are to understand the stakes of the debate following Rose, or what I will refer to here as the “real” child debate.

Citing Rose, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein in her book *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* takes the idea that *there is no child* quite literally, arguing that we cannot talk about “real” children and implying that any scholars who are not at work critiquing constructions of childhood are actively in the business of construction themselves. On the other side of this debate, I locate mostly everyone else: that is, people who are aware of childhood as a construction, but who also have very real and immediate investments in working with and caring for people called children. Lesnik-Oberstein goes so far as to vilify a few children's literature scholars who *do* critique constructions of childhood for momentarily pointing towards a “real”

child.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, Lesnik-Oberstein and her colleague Stephen Thomson find queer theory guilty as well, taking on Eve Sedgwick and Michael Moon in their 2002 article titled “What Is Queer Theory Doing with the Child?” Analyzing one instance where Sedgwick mentions childhood in the context of what they consider an otherwise theoretically self-reflexive work, Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson ask: “Why . . . risk mobilizing the child at all?” (37). I can’t help but hear in this moment Stockton’s answer to their question: it is because fantasy is more interesting than this, fatter than we think, with dense possibilities (5).

Lesnik-Oberstein and Thomson conclude that “the child in queer theory (but certainly not only in *queer* theory . . . ) signals impending collapses of poststructuralist self-reflexivity” (37). While we can easily see that Sedgwick and Moon do employ ideas of the child in their examples, the cost of this employment is hardly a collapse of poststructuralist self-reflexivity. The idea of the child moves: it moves in the texts of Sedgwick and Moon. And regardless of our degrees of poststructuralist reflexivity, I would argue that we are all implicated in the construction of childhood, just as we are implicated in the construction of all social meanings, to varying degrees of consequence. While Lesnik-Oberstein and the University of Reading critics are at work on an important theoretical problem, one that I too am concerned with, their work privileges certain kinds of questions while making others seem irrelevant. I don’t think it’s irrelevant to ask, what do we do, then? I think that as scholars we might do better to acknowledge the dialectic between working out how to think about something and what to do about something. The tension between theory and identity politics is a dialectic out of which emerges, one hopes, dynamic shifts in both thought and action. It might seem surprising that I am framing child as an identity

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<sup>50</sup> Nodelman responds to Lesnik-Oberstein and the University of Reading critics directly in “The Precarious Life of Children’s Literature Criticism,” where he reads Butler’s *Precarious Life* (2004) to consider the problems of relationality in regard to children’s literature criticism.

(and thus as one that might have both a theory and an identity politics), but I think this framing makes clear that we are not naïve or romantic for asking about actual people, people called children.

If we consider for a moment the work that comes out of education, psychology, library science, publishing, and even parenting—areas where there are actual people called children at stake in our articles, in our classrooms, and in our homes—it becomes immediately apparent that notions of child shift continually. As doctors, psychologists, librarians, publishers, teachers, and parents, we are often asked, sometimes required, to participate in institutional structures that threaten to override what we might see, feel, or say to children and about children. Like any interpretive schema, childhood and adolescence are flexible concepts, adaptive to individual experience and to changes in the values and goals of different institutions. But people who associate with children are continually reminded of how little we can know about the child, how little this category can tell us about the people we encounter. We see contradictions, exceptions, changes everyday in the groups called children, students, readers. Certainly, some fields require that we essentialize these groups. Certainly, current disciplinary conventions might put us in competition to say that we really “know” the child. But even this body of work coming out of psychology or education or library science is characterized by revision, by exceptions, by reimagining again and again the work of the field. The essentializing or “knowing” in this work has a rhetorical immediacy that may be necessary to get things done.<sup>51</sup> I can acknowledge this fact, even as the immediacy of my work has much more invested in loosening, questioning, unraveling these ways of knowing.

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<sup>51</sup> We can see the dialectic between rhetorical immediacy and conceptual thinking in the history of feminism, feminist theory, and women’s activism, which have also been characterized by revision, by waves of feminism, by contingency and context.

Lesnik-Oberstein fails to recognize or contend with these rhetorical contexts or their practical concerns because she does not have to contend with actual children in her book, or with the decisions a kindergarten teacher must make in her classroom everyday, or with the ways a mother (who thinks gender is constructed) helps her three-year-old identify “man” and “woman” along with the colors on the color wheel and circles, squares, and triangles. This kind of defining and categorizing, this kind of essentializing, is part of what education is about, part of what it means to function in the social world. Even Butler concedes that “we need norms in order to live, and to live well” (*Undoing* 206).<sup>52</sup> But childhood and adolescence can function as conceptual imperatives to interpret self and other according to a predetermined institutional logic. As ways of interpreting the self, they are not inherently harmful, but like gender, can be deployed to police the bounds of the real and unreal, the possible and impossible, the normal and the perverse ways of making sense of our experiences and ourselves. Because this policing happens within the logic of the concepts themselves, it can escape notice or can even be supported and justified with arguments for preserving childhood or adolescence, arguments which aim to preserve the idea over the person. I think what we have to gain, then, in doing cultural critique, in thinking through the functions of ideology, is a capacity to let go in the moments that come later, the moments that we insist on categories and definitions in the face of the variable, shifting, and contextual engagements we have with people everyday. What we have to gain is the capacity to understand why we want to insist in the first place, and what our wanting can tell us about ourselves.

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<sup>52</sup> Butler takes up this issue throughout the essays in *Undoing Gender*, but I am thinking particularly of her articulation of “the doubled truth that although we need norms in order to live, and to live well, and to know in what direction to transform our social world, we are also constrained by norms in ways that sometimes do violence to us and which, for reasons of social justice, we must oppose” (206).

When Rose talks about constructions of the child as fantasy, she does not mean that we are all delusional for thinking and writing about people who are called children. In psychoanalysis, fantasy is conceptualized as part of an essential and ongoing process of identity formation, and it is this process that Rose describes when she writes: “All subjects—adults and children—have finally to take up a position of identity in language; they have to recognise themselves in the first person pronoun and cohere themselves to the accepted register of words and signs” (*The Case* 141). What psychoanalysis reveals is that identity is not something we arrive at, finally, once and for all, but something more fluid and contradictory. Butler puts it this way:

Moreover, there is no better theory for grasping the workings of fantasy construed not as a set of projections on an internal screen but as part of human relationality itself. It is on the basis of this insight that we can come to understand how fantasy is essential to an experience of one’s own body, or that of another, as gendered [...]. There is always a dimension of ourselves and our relation to others that we cannot know, and this not-knowing persists with us as a condition of existence and, indeed, of survivability. (*Undoing* 15)

The problem of identity is not only a problem of naming, but also one of knowing. Naming is an essential part of how we understand ourselves and others. And yet, it is worth asking how naming constrains, when and how naming requires us to pick one interpretation, requires us to simplify or ignore complexity. It is worth asking when making something visible in a named way makes its other ways of being invisible, or even impossible.

Rose points to the problem of naming in this way: “it is the shift of that ‘have to’ from a necessity, which is shared by both adult and child, to something more like a command, which passes from one to the other, that seems to find one of its favourite territories in and around the writing of children’s books” (*The Case* 141). Perhaps Rose makes an important distinction here between telling children what to do—what we want from them in terms of asking for

something—and the kinds of telling that construct who they are or who they should be. It is the latter that becomes dangerous, that can make other ways of being invisible or impossible. One of the most overt examples of this insistence can occur in families with gay kids. A dear friend, who had felt he was gay since he was very small, told me that he once heard his mother say she'd rather any of her sons were dead than gay. Eve Sedgwick also speaks to this disturbing turn of phrase in *Tendencies*: “I’ve heard of many people who claim they’d as soon their children were dead as gay. What it took me a long time to believe is that these people are saying no more than the truth” (2). Perhaps a comment like this one is slightly less awful coming from a woman who did not know that her son was gay and so was not (yet) literally wishing for his death. But, I have to ask, what is it that makes a comment like this conscionable for a mother of four boys? That public schools, medicine, and psychology do not (yet) admit the possibility of a gay child makes it likely that this mother may not have thought it possible to be literally wishing death on her son, who was in earshot, who was still a child and therefore still not gay. But, why might she have been weighing these two possibilities, dead or gay, in the first place? This mother was weighing what she thought were two different but similarly awful tragedies. The fact that she could even say she preferred death for her son suggests that she could imagine another parent, even another parent *like her*, thinking differently. That she had thought about it, that she needed to say this, suggests also that it had entered her mind that her son, who was still a child, could be gay. And yet, the idea of the child so powerfully overwhelmed this possibility that she felt she could wish aloud death for someone gay, someone who in her mind was not yet her son.

And so, when we tell a child *to be a nice boy* or *to be a nice girl*, what is implied in this command to *be* someone? How does this command shape behavior with ways of being, whether being nice or being gendered? Considering the subtle ways we come to know our gender and

sexuality, the commands can be even quieter than this command, can be effective even when unspoken. The child is often presumed to be on their way to heterosexuality, presumed to be either a girl or a boy. If we consider the possibility of a queer child, the possibility of a child that will grow up to identify against the *accepted register of words and signs*, we can see the threat of these commands.<sup>53</sup> It is not necessary for *all* children to suffer under a command for it to be insidious, nor am I denying the endless potential of children and adults to negotiate such commands. However, the function of a command to impose identity, to stabilize identity, suggests that another approach would be better, suggests that it is better to savor the gaps, to leave room for ways of knowing, being, and interpreting that perhaps aren't what we thought they were, that might turn out to be queer, strange, or contradictory.

### III. THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

I think that fiction is one of the places, aside from live interaction, where variant representations are most possible, though I admit that this possibility does not by any means guarantee them. Even if a book were to make its primary creative objective the deconstruction of childhood, this does not guarantee its interpretation as such by a world of readers. Likewise, the reverse can be true. Even in a book whose objective were the preservation of childhood, I might find the very threads of its unraveling.

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<sup>53</sup> I think that Eve Sedgwick's chapter "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys" in *Tendencies* (1995) illustrates this point powerfully (154–64). A version of this chapter can also be found in Bruhm and Hurley's edited collection *Curiouser*.

As scholars of children's literature, we are interested in and troubled by not only what happens in the lived world, but also what stories we tell ourselves about those experiences, what those stories leave out, and why. Children's literature is one of the places where these stories get told—and as stories, they are full of projections, desires, disavowals. Children's literature is one of the places where we imagine the world and imagine ourselves. So, one question I have yet to address is the question of children's fiction, the question of stories written and published *for* children, and what we are to do with these impossible fictions. Marah Gubar argues in *Artful Dodgers* that Golden Age children's authors did not produce images of children as naïve, simple, or unknowing, but rather constructed complex child characters depicted as negotiating their agency in surprising, cunning, and powerful ways. The literary technique of deploying child narrators, such as in E. Nesbit's *The Treasure Seekers* (1899), is offered as compelling evidence of efforts by children's authors to wrestle with "the question of whether and to what extent young people can rewrite the scripts handed to them by adults, taking a hand in the production of stories and their own self-fashioning" (*Artful* 6). Gubar takes on the issues at the center of *The Case of Peter Pan*—the figure of the child in children's literature—revising assumptions about the naïve, innocent child through readings in which the artful, knowing child is found in children's literature itself. Gubar's analysis brings us back to the question of why the naïve child is still so often what is seen, still so often what is recognized on pages where she cannot be found.

If we reframe impossibility, reframe the fantasies implied in the project of children's fiction, we can see how Alice or Huck might operate in relation to social critique, how the child might be imagined as the audience for the adult's own problems of agency, for things we might

find unnamable, unknowable, impossible—what Butler understands as the critical promise of fantasy:

Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality[...]. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. (*Undoing* 29)

I have quoted at length from Butler because I think she makes visible the doubled function of fantasy to both contain and escape. Children's literature is fascinating for this very reason, because it can operate both ways at once. At the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, we find out that it had all been a dream, the dream of a child, allowing both Carroll and the adult reader a way out of its fantasy without questioning anything about the social world. Fiction, at the end of the day, might be only fiction. We would be mistaken to assume that the fantasy or fiction here is for the child or for the survival of children, when the stories we tell are for ourselves, for our own survival. The category of child is itself a kind of story, a fantasy which provides us with ways to both contain the queer and strange and to delight in the possibility of the queer and strange.

I wonder if this is the queer pleasure of *Peter Pan*, a Golden Age novel Gubar also reframes for us, a story that flaunts the queer and the strange and yet, that we can insist, again and again, that such things belong only to the book, only to the child, only to the fantasy, and therefore not to the real world. The very irony of using a text like *Peter Pan* to reveal the category of child as fantasy is not what negates Rose's argument, but what makes the cultural life of this text ideal for her argument. In this story that has circulated widely, that has had a

cultural life of its own quite independent from its content, Rose asks why is it that we have seen, again and again, what is clearly not there. If we look, for a moment, at Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911) as one example, we can see how the idea of the child Rose describes exists most vividly in the interpretations that circulate around *Peter Pan* rather than in those that might be said to exist on the page (or the stage) itself. There is no authoritative text of *Peter Pan*, which has existed in so many forms, but I take *Peter and Wendy* as one of these forms, produced at a moment when the field of psychology and the social movement of mental hygiene were gaining traction on both sides of the ocean, and I offer here another reading, my own reading. Early in the novel, we find what I take to be an overt mockery of the mental hygiene movement:

Mrs. Darling first heard of Peter when she was tidying up her children's minds. It is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning, repacking their proper places the many articles that have wandered during the day. If you could keep awake (but of course you can't) you would see your own mother doing this, and you would find it very interesting to watch her. It's like tidying up drawers. (Barrie 9).

The discourse coming out of medicine, psychology, and education in the early twentieth century so often takes for granted, even insists on, the parent's ability to shape the most inaccessible dimensions of the child's experiences, and here we see Mrs. Darling going through the motions of mental hygiene, in this depiction taking seriously the absurd responsibility of tidying up her children's minds.

In a 1934 lecture titled "Cleanliness and Tidiness," given at the Friends' House in London, Margaret Lowenfeld speaks quite seriously of the child's mind in these very same terms: "another kind of tidiness" she says, "is that there is a sense of order in the mind, and that is a very profound part of human thinking" (15). This tidiness, for Lowenfeld, is a parent's responsibility on both a physical and mental level. "If you have helped a child to really

understand its own mind,” she suggests, “really to know which things go together and thereby be really interested in order, and if you have achieved at the same time a certain amount of practice in finding and making order and in making things tidy, then you have achieved that which will give any boy or girl one of the best foundations for life” (22). Lowenfeld’s suggestions seem reasonable enough, except for their insistence that the parent knows the child’s mind and can make order out of it. There is not a singular thing such as order and tidiness in the mind, and how strange that this order should be made by one person for another person. A mother is asked not only to teach a child to clean her room, but also to order her mind.

In the context of the social hygiene movement, the implication in Lowenfeld’s lecture on cleanliness and tidiness is that order is necessary to prevent mental illness along with a host of other social problems thought to arise from mental disturbances. Barrie’s depiction of Mrs. Darling in *Peter and Wendy* puts this concern about mental disorder in somewhat more old-fashioned terms: “When you wake in the morning,” he writes, “the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind, and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on” (8). The choice of words “evil passions” evokes an earlier eighteenth or nineteenth century preoccupation and not necessarily the psychological discourse that introduced a host of euphemisms for undesirable behavior in children. The phrase “evil passions” might have seemed old-fashioned enough at the time to exaggerate the absurdity of Mrs. Darling’s tidying of her children’s minds. What Mrs. Darling is doing, however, placing these passions “at the bottom of your mind,” sounds a bit like Freud’s unconscious, and the purposeful ordering and arrangement of mental contents speaks much more powerfully to the fantasy of knowability and control implicit in turn-of-the-century arguments for psychology as a science. In this scene of *Peter and*

*Wendy*, we might read Barrie as turning this fantasy on its head, mocking it, revealing its absurdity.

One of the central problems posed by Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan* is how the story of *Peter Pan*, which so brazenly disrupts any singular or knowable notion of the child, has come to represent and sing along with the myths of childhood innocence, of the child as origin, of the child as meaning. There are particular ways of understanding the self, the mind, and the experience of consciousness that enable this narrative capacity for the category child, and we might trace these understandings back, at least, to versions of enlightenment rationality. When might the child have come to be a category with this capacity to contain our ideas, desires, projections? Certainly, this question shares some ground with the question of adolescence. But, it is difficult to make claims about the circulation of social meanings in the eighteenth century in the same ways that I have made claims about patterns of meaning in the nineteenth. What I can offer is more speculative, the beginning of a trail into the past. I think there are patterns of meaning around childhood and adolescence that take interesting paths into the eighteenth century, not necessarily to their points of origin, but certainly to earlier expressions of their logic. What we recognize in the eighteenth century as belonging to us, as belonging to our ways of thinking in the present, are opportunities to defamiliarize the logics that lead us to our recognitions of the past and identifications with the present.

Rose traces her observations about children's fiction back in time, claiming that "the earliest children's writers took from Locke the idea of an education based on the child's direct and unproblematic access to objects of the real world, an education that would by-pass the imperfections of language" (*The Case* 8). Is it possible that the problem of language in the eighteenth century is the same as our own? Locke and Rousseau are joined together in a singular

historical narrative as Rose writes, “above all, for both Locke and Rousseau, the child can be seen, observed and known in exactly the same way as the world can be grasped by a rational understanding” (*The Case* 9). These claims, made in Rose’s introduction, are complicated in later chapters as she grapples with the fact that both Locke and Rousseau expressed concerns about the inherently unstable quality of language, showing their keen awareness of some the very insights about language she seeks to expose. Despite their awareness of the problem of language, an awareness we might find in multiple locations in the eighteenth century, Rose argues that the child provides a way out for these writers, acting as a pure point of access to the world beyond the problem of language. I would argue, however, that these readings of Locke and Rousseau have much more to do with the ways they are recognized in present contexts than what they meant in the past. Like Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, Locke and Rousseau have come to represent any number of investments in the present, whether it be the celebrated origins of our modernity or the genesis of all that ails Western civilization.

Rose’s interpretation of *Emile* suggests that Rousseau expresses a faith in the knowability of the world, one that I have described as belonging to turn-of-the-century education and psychology; and so, she suggests that in *Emile*, “the child is being asked not only to retrieve a lost state of nature, but also to take language back to its pure and uncontaminated source in the objects of the immediate world” (*The Case* 47). What Rose describes here we might link to characterizations of the Romantic child. While G. Stanley Hall is often held responsible for inventing adolescence, it is Rousseau who is held responsible for inventing the Romantic child, an abstracted version of childhood that exists only in the imaginations of adults. I wonder, though, if this recognition of the Romantic child in Rousseau is not a backformation, a misrecognition of present concerns in the strange and elaborate thought-experiment carried out

by Rousseau in *Emile*. What if Rose's interpretation of *Emile* and her argument about the child is not about Rousseau at all, but more accurately, a critique of the present and of the ways that *Emile* has been read and reread, through the lens of the present, as a depiction the Romantic child?

The power of the Romantic child, and thus what is most problematic about it, lies in the fact that this version of childhood is imaginary, but not admittedly so, invested with innocence and a host of other desirable characteristics, projected onto those people called children. I suppose, then, the greatest danger lies in our not knowing what we project onto children. If we were to bring this understanding to the complex, relational context of parents and children, it makes sense to say that parents do not need to be perfect, or to do everything perfectly, to have ethical relationships with their children—though this is not often what we are told. The fantasy of so many institutional discourses aimed at parents and teachers at the turn of the century is that they promise to have discovered and to have effectively implemented an ideal or perfect way to raise and educate children. If we suspend, for a moment, this institutional fantasy of organized, systematic relations to children and think instead about the highly contingent, problem of relationality between one person and another, it seems that a parent need only to own their imperfections, investments, and needs to disarm such projections. And this is the work of any relationship between two people.

Such relationality between parents and children seems possible when Rousseau writes in *Emile* to “begin therefore by better studying your students, for most certainly you know nothing about them” (1-2). For Rousseau, to know a child, who is also a person, is to listen, study, and see them better, and to do these things in an ever-shifting set of contexts. I am struck by this claim in *Emile* for the unknowability of the child, the insistence that he cannot tell us in

generalizable terms who the child is in front of us, in our classrooms, in our homes. If we must begin by looking, we must let go of what we think we know. We cannot let our seeing become overpowered with such claims of knowledge about the child in front of us. Even in the same breath that Rousseau affirms the separation of childhood and adulthood, he speaks in unresolvable contradictions:

Nature would have them children before they are men. If we try to invert this order we shall produce a forced fruit immature and flavourless, fruit that will be rotten before it is ripe; we shall have young doctors and old children. Childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling; nothing is more foolish than to try to substitute our ways. (54)

Rousseau's belief in the separation of childhood and adulthood allows him resolution, allows his claim that there is only one way to get to adulthood and that there is even a point at which we must arrive. His metaphor of early fruit, unripe and tasteless, suggests that there will be unwanted or unsatisfactory results; and yet, these results are curiously "young doctors and old children." The horror one might feel about young doctors and old children stems from this reversal of nature, this breaking down of categories, divisions of power, hierarchical structures. There is no place for young doctors and old children in the existing social order. Rousseau must make the distinction between "our ways" and the "ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling" he attributes to children if he is to avoid seeing, thinking, and feeling as a contingent contextual process of revision and change. But if we understand this separation between childhood and adulthood as a construction, as an arbitrary separation and categorization of the multiple, fluid, and unstable ways of being and knowing at any age, we can understand the contradiction Rousseau brings to our attention a different way. Rousseau brings into view the problem of beginnings and endings, the ways in which these two locations point to one another to create a circular and fluid space in which the beginning and end become illusory, become less visible as

beginnings and ends, become only identifiable through movement. In this moment, we cannot truly point to a childhood, to rationality, to adulthood. We can only point to a process of becoming.

The problem of the Romantic child, then, seems to lie in the mistaken belief that this empty, flexible notion of child actually resembles a child, that the pure innocence and pure access it provides are real. What does it mean, then, that Rousseau did not presume to describe a real child, that he insisted, from the beginning that he would not be a tutor, but would instead imagine himself the tutor of an imaginary pupil, whom he called Emile? Does it help us to interpret Rousseau's *Emile* to remember that he suggests that children who do not respect their mothers are so monstrous and unworthy of living that they should be smothered to death? (5). To read Rousseau by the letter is to miss his personal struggle with contradictions, his taste for hyperbole, and perhaps to miss the most pressing concerns of his imaginary experiment.

As readers of Rousseau in the present, the difficulties and contradictions of his writing are not merely the product of misreadings. Peter Gay tells us that many of the divides between Rousseau and his friends and fellow philosophers "were partly the fault of his style" which David Hume "noted in 1766, were 'full of extravagance'" and "marked by a vehemence of expression, an almost forced spontaneity, a fatal addiction to lapidary phrases that veiled their essential meaning despite Rousseau's desperate attempts to make them perspicuous" (2: 529-30).<sup>54</sup> Certainly, we can read *Emile* as the product of Rousseau's own fears and desires, projected in the education he imagined for Emile. We might understand also that what most concerned Rousseau was how to prevent free citizens from their inevitable desire to dominate others. This is one of the great contradictions of *Emile*, where the fear of domination is

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<sup>54</sup> Gay is quoting Hume's letter to Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard dated November 6, 1766.

answered by more domination, the strict control of the tutor over his imaginary pupil; Peter Gay puts it this way: “It is as though Rousseau, fearful of his powerlessness, compensates by dreaming his dreams of omnipotence in public. Such conduct is always inappropriate, but especially so in *Emile*, his pedagogic masterpiece, designed after all to show the road to human autonomy” (2: 531). Even at the end of *Emile*, the pupil is still unable to be free, to think for himself, to free himself of the governance of the tutor. The child in Rousseau’s *Emile* is his fantasy and nightmare. Gay writes, “having constructed his bold ideal, Rousseau is afraid to take hold of it” (2: 532). This fantasy departs from the one described by Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan* in that Rousseau’s child Emile is quite literally a fantasy, quite literally and admittedly the product of his imagination, a fiction. In this regard, we might also read *Emile* as a failed experiment, a fantasy that could not fulfill even what it most desired.

If we ask again Rose’s own question of Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, not “of what the child wants, but of what the adult desires—desires in the very act of construing the child as the object of its speech” (2), what is it that Locke’s text seems to want? The child imagined by Locke represents an equal, and his suggestions for the care and education of this child is ultimately to produce an equal, though only certain children are included in this vision of equality. He appears to be anxious to prevent both overindulgence and severe strictness, since when children grow up they are to be an “affectionate Friend” to their parents and others. Thus, Locke writes:

We must look upon our Children, when grown up, to be like our selves; with the same Passions, the same Desires. We would be thought Rational Creatures, and have our Freedom; we love not to be uneasy under constant Rebukes and Brow-beatings; nor can we bear severe Humours, and great Distance in those we converse with. [...]Every Man must some Time or other be trusted to himself, and his own Conduct. (145-6)

In this passage, Locke appeals to his reader's commonsense, assuming their own desires for respect and equality, which in turn should be given to children as soon as they are capable of it, as soon as they "grow able to judge for themselves, and to find what is right by their own Reason" (156). What is striking about this statement, in contrast to the kinds of statements about children and adolescents in the early twentieth century, is that what is "right by their own Reason" is not scripted ahead of time. Certainly, there are some underlying assumptions about morality, but there is an inherent flexibility in making moral judgments which each "Man" must find for himself. Jerrold Seigel, in his book *The Idea of the Self*, writes that Locke was both an empiricist and a rationalist, and that he "regarded people as powerfully shaped by the world around them, but also as free in some degree from both animal need and social determination, and thus as capable of determining some of their thoughts and actions on their own" (89). Locke's radical concept of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, then, was not totalizing, but one dimension of the self that is shaped by environment and culture. Indeed, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke suggests that the person who is around the child "should well study their Natures and Aptitudes" and to adapt an education that is suited "to the Child's natural Genius and Constitution" (159). Here, we might read in between the lines the incredible importance of seeing the individual child for who he is, contingent and changing, a person in his own right, and not merely what we'd have him be.

Locke's emphasis on habits, rather than rules, similarly suggests the parent or tutor's obligation to provide individual liberty to children rather than absolute rule. The child citizen imagined by Locke is an upper class male citizen, not a woman or a member of the lower classes, a man whose rational education would enable him to participate in and contribute to political life. Locke's anxious and disdainful comments about women and servants expose the limits of his

control as he imagines his ideal social world, and it is these limits he projects onto “lesser” beings. Indeed, his advice warns of treating children in servile ways, since this will lead to them being servile or losing all respect for their parents as people—we might gather the reverse of this argument, that those intended for servile positions should be treated in servile ways. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, however, it is remarkable that these anxieties about control and subjugation are not projected onto the child.

The ways that Locke’s ideas were interpreted and carried out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, is another story. What might explain the interest in childhood in the eighteenth century? Political changes in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created a context in which the individual became increasingly important in notions of equality, necessary for envisioning a democratic form of citizenship. The organization of a democratic government *by and for the people* meant that the capabilities, thoughts, and actions of each individual citizen acquired a new significance. And as the rights of a citizen were expanded to include *all* people, even those previously considered servile, we find anxieties increasing about what each and every person might know, think, and do. The child becomes an important signifier for the moment that equality *and* control can be effectively shaped and directed. And yet, this key moment can be fraught with so many different fears and investments.

Is children’s fiction implicated in the project of creating citizens out of children? Certainly, we can say that it is, along with a host of other grown-up agendas, but such a claim says nothing about what children’s fiction actually does, about what happens when these readers who are children encounter such fictions. I turn to a familiar text one last time. The narrator of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince* (1945) draws for us on the first page a boa constrictor that has swallowed an elephant. He calls it Drawing Number One. He explains, “I

showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them” (7). But he is discouraged to find that the adults interpret his drawing as a hat. He draws another, which he calls Drawing Number Two, which shows the elephant inside the skin of the giant snake. But he is discouraged again, directed to return to his studies. “Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves,” he remarks, “and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them” (8). The irony here is that our narrator is already a grown-up himself, a pilot who has flown around the world. He is now the adult that needs these explanations; and yet, he identifies with the child—certainly the very projection that Rose describes. She writes, “The child is there, and the original meaning is there—they *reinforce* each other” (19). She describes the child as the pure point of origin, the child as meaning, the child as simply someone who is there. And yet, reading against this interpretation of *The Little Prince*, perhaps we understand that the narrator is *not* the child, but instead the adult who tirelessly believes in the norms that delimit what is visible and invisible, the adult who sees only a hat. The problem of language, then, is the fact that the child is not *there*, but here.

The child’s experience of the book, Rose reminds us, is “more or less impossible to gauge” (9), suggesting the difficulty of making the claim that children’s literature is either oppressive or liberating. Indeed, Rose herself is careful not to use the term oppressive, distancing herself from this term explicitly in her conclusion. But, I would add that the child’s experience is impossible to gauge in the same way that our own experiences with books are more or less impossible to gauge. There is no original meaning. If we were to tell the story of our own reading, about what happens when we read, it would be marked by narrative decisions that inevitably simplify, distort, misrepresent. However, that doesn’t mean that the story is not important. Just because what we know is always partial, contingent, changing, unstable,

contradictory, all at once, does not mean that we know nothing. It doesn't mean that we should stop talking about books and reading, or that we should stop talking about ourselves and others. But in our talking, we are always faced with the limits of language and representation, the limits of our perspective and positionality, the limits of what can be known about each other.

The fact that ideology, or fantasy, shapes so much of what we understand as reality is not a problem. Rather, ideology—whether in the form of fantasy or narrative—is inevitable. We *need* it. But it is when these powerful constructions start to operate as reality, as truth—as truth imposed on others, as claims of knowledge about children or readers—that we run into trouble. It is when our ideas about someone become so powerful that we cannot see what is right in front of us, cannot see the lived reality of multiple, shifting, contradictory, queer possibilities. To recognize that something is discursive, is an ideological construction, allows movement and revision within it. What we are revising is *not* the world or our experiences, which are already full of contradiction and instability. Rather, we are allowing paradox, play, and possibility within the stories we tell ourselves about that world.

#### 4. ENLIGHTENED READING, RISKY READING

I stayed at my desk reading some lugubrious volume—usually *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by the amiable Mrs. Radcliffe. A translation of *The Sorrows of Werther* fell into my hands at this period, and if I could have committed suicide without killing myself, I should certainly have done so.

—Thomas Bailey Aldrich, *The Story of a Bad Boy*

It was a very good book. I'm quite illiterate, but I read quite a lot.

—J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

Lifting the pages of the book, I let them fan slowly by my eyes. Words, dimly familiar but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain.

—Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

There is something queer about adolescence. Something worrisome. Something other. Something to fear. Adolescence here represents not the adolescent persons one may encounter, but the idea of adolescence as an identity category, what we might understand as an interpretive schema against and within which we see and know adolescent persons. As such, this hermeneutic of self is also one within which adolescent persons must negotiate what they see and know about themselves. But, to what degree is adolescence socially significant as a schema for interpreting self and other? How does it function? And what can it tell us about the ways identity works to shape our experiences of ourselves and others? In this chapter, I take reading as a central location to explore these questions, as reading intersects with and reflects a complex

nexus of social structures, both institutional and ideological. I purposefully overlap here representational layers of world, self, and text in order to push on the limits of the real and unreal, the possible and impossible, the normal and perverse ways of making sense of our experiences and ourselves. The adolescent in the book is not necessarily the adolescent reading the book, except sometimes it is; and the adolescent book is not necessarily what the adolescent reads, except sometimes it is; and so we have notions of adolescent and reader both shifting and breaking down as they are summoned by one moment of naming or another, by my own, or by the ones I am trying to pull like threads through the layers of this chapter.

Detailed scenes of reading appear with surprising frequency in literary texts, and the collection of scenes I assemble here reveal patterns of uncertainty, nonconformity, and risk, patterns visible in nineteenth century novels, twentieth century classics, and contemporary young adult fiction. These diverse representations of self and text illuminate tensions surrounding adolescent reading and interpretation, tensions that surface questions of identity, agency, and power. They surface unexpected readerly acts, choices of book, strategies of interpretation, and constructions of self. These scenes of reading also surface the problem of reading itself, the troubling relation between reader and text that exposes our uncertainties about what happens in these unobservable and unsettling acts of interpretation. The word reading itself cannot mean one thing, and in these pages it moves between notions of the known and unknown.

I do not intend to affirm or deny what is real and what is imagined about adolescence, but to occupy another position where adolescence is both real and imagined at the same time—an inquiry into language and identity where adolescence exists in complex relation to lived experience and cultural mythology. Adolescence has been constructed as a temporary state of being that one is expected to move through and to eventually leave behind. Whereas some

identity categories offer the illusion of stability, adolescence curiously destabilizes identity; it is by definition transitory, imagined in relation to its arrival at an inevitable end, adulthood. The double meaning here is not coincidental—I mean both that the idea of adolescence troubles stable notions of identity, albeit temporarily, and that by its very definition, adolescence connotes instability, disruption, process. This very instability is part of what produces anxieties about adolescence and also what displaces those anxieties within the logic of adolescence, within the very nexus of ideas that make adolescence possible in the first place.

## I. ADOLESCENCE AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY

My interest in notions of identity comes from my investments in queer theory and has explicitly political motivations. That is, I am staunchly *for* the subversion of identity. Identity is one way to describe the social means we use to recognize and understand ourselves and others; and through the work of activists and scholars, we are now familiar with the forms of identity associated with identity politics like gender, race, class, and sexuality. Rightly so, scholars are adding age to this list, influenced by the pioneering work of Henry Giroux and James Kincaid in what is now being called youth studies or childhood studies.<sup>55</sup> What is so problematic about identity is that so many of us fail to inhabit existing categories in expected or recognizable ways. This failure to appear in legible ways can make opportunities for social relationships difficult and

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<sup>55</sup> Childhood studies is a relatively new field of study and can refer to work in the social sciences as well as the humanities, though the aims and priorities of these disciplinary fields often lead to different sets of questions. I name Giroux and Kincaid as two scholars doing interdisciplinary work in the humanities.

even dangerous.<sup>56</sup> Of course, an equally problematic function of identity are the ways that we are marked by social meanings without our consent—one might be *identified* as female in a world that privileges male, identified as black in a world that privileges white, identified as adolescent in a world that privileges adult.

One difference between the methodologies of gay and lesbian studies and queer theory is the role of identity in their disciplinary practices. Gay and lesbian studies, like some feminist methodologies, often approaches the problem of identity by advocating *for* the marginalized identity categories it seeks to represent.<sup>57</sup> The political work of representing and advocating for marginalized groups is important, and it can be argued that this work has been effective in changing legislation and shifting cultural attitudes. However, the difficulty of championing identity can be illustrated by the ever-present need to expand the acronym for gay and lesbian studies, what is often now called GLBTQ studies so that it can be said to represent gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer identifications. And we might say representation is exactly the trouble here if we consider a name's doubled function of both identifying and constituting the very subjects it seeks to represent.

If we are tempted to think that queer is finally the all-inclusive term we've been looking for, I am reminded of Kate Bornstein's suggestion in *Hello, Cruel World*: "I have this idea," she writes, "that every time we discover that the names we're being called are somehow keeping us less than free, we need to come up with new names for ourselves, and that the names we give

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<sup>56</sup> I mean dangerous here quite literally, in terms of harassment or "hate" crimes, two well-known cases being the murders of Matthew Shephard and Brandon Tina. In his book *Disciplining Gender*, John Sloop offers a useful analysis of the ways the discourse surrounding the Brandon Tina case, including the film representation *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberly Pierce, 1999), discipline variant notions of gender and sexuality by reinscribing norms.

<sup>57</sup> Movements like "Gay Pride" and "Girl Power" are well-known examples of this political strategy.

ourselves must no longer reflect a fear of being labeled outsiders, must no longer bind us to a system that would rather see us dead” (36-7). For Bornstein, new names are a matter of survival. We appear in the world, seen by others, in part through the identifications made possible by a language that inevitably precedes our arrival. Bornstein’s approach to the problem of identity is to destabilize it through an endless, playful, and empowering revision of the names we call ourselves, an approach that doesn’t lend itself easily to acronyms.

My section title is, of course, a play on the subtitle of Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. This book is considered one of the founding texts of queer theory because it calls into question the category of woman, and thus the very function of categories themselves. The relationship between the category “woman” and who is represented by this category is inevitably normalizing and exclusive, and so defeats the emancipatory aims of feminism. But instead of advocating for more inclusive definitions of femininity, Butler approaches the problem of gender inequality through a critique of gender itself. She argues that gender is constituted through performative enactments of masculinity and femininity that are repeated, and through repetition, acquire their meaning and value. Importantly, for Butler, this theory of gender suggests the possibility of resistance. That is, if gender is constituted through an accumulation of performative actions, then, arguably, there is the possibility of shifting gendered notions of identity through the repeated enactment of gender subversion. Queer theory, then, is engaged in the project of disrupting the system of meanings around sex and gender, disrupting the essentializing functions of the categories themselves.

On first glance, adolescence appears to be queer, positioned interminably *outside* adulthood. Adolescence is often conceptualized as unstable, as transitional, as a time when heterosexuality is practiced but not yet achieved. Adolescence is often linked with rebellion—if

we consider both *queer* and *rebel* to describe those who act against accepted norms. However, we need only to conjure up an image of James Dean leaning nonchalantly, hand in pocket, against the wall to recognize adolescence as an idealized state.<sup>58</sup> We cannot ignore the ways that adolescence is conceptualized as universal and even quite normal. If we take James Dean as our representative example, however, we face the troubling fact that the idealization of adolescence does not construct the livability of adolescent lives.

If we consider adolescence a discursive construct, like gender, then the idea of adolescence exists in complex relation to lived experience. I do not make this link through analogy; that is, adolescence is not the same as gender. But, both categories can reveal the ways language shapes what we experience as reality, shapes even what we are able to see in ourselves and in the world around us. For example, if we attempt to define adolescence strictly in terms of puberty, as a biological stage in human development—what some might consider a real definition of adolescence—we obscure the social meanings attached to puberty. Puberty defines the adolescent by reproductive capacities, by his or her sexuality. The category of adolescence itself, like gay or lesbian, cannot be untangled from sex, from desire, from the vulnerability that results from being so visibly defined by one’s sexuality. Such definitions can never be simply a matter of science. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler describes the relationship between the social and the material this way: “The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own” (21). We might say that

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<sup>58</sup> I am thinking of a widely circulating photo of James Dean leaning against a wall on the set of *Rebel Without a Cause* (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955).

even the biology of adolescence and the lived experience of that body exist in relation to the social meanings attached to the body, inescapably marked by youth, gender, race, and class.

Theoretically speaking, the conceptual relation between queer and identity is one of negation. If identity describes kinds of social legibility, discursive forms that both represent and produce subjects, then queer describes that which is rendered invisible, impossible, unthinkable, or unreal. As a theoretical term, queer is useful for its ability to describe what language often renders indescribable. The term queer, then, suggests a richness and complexity of experience that exists in excess of language, in the profound failure of language to *be* the material world and our experiences of it. And yet, we sometimes look for ourselves and others in representations, and even as we look for ourselves, others are looking for us. As language fails to be who we are, it also stands in for us, calls us into being. This is the one of the submerged theoretical problems underpinning discussions of adolescent reading.

## **II. BAD READERS, GOOD READERS**

Who is the adolescent reader? How is this category imagined to be different from the child reader, whose instruction and delight the children's book industry has made its object? Certainly, the adolescent reader presents problems that the child reader does not when professionals are speaking about them as separate groups. And yet, the adolescent reader is not simply a *reader* either, the term under which an adult reader might be considered. One might argue that there is no "adult" reader, only a reader who is imagined by adults who are writers, publishers, librarians, literary critics. The adults are active, the reader a passive construct. In these discussions, a *reader* becomes something we think we understand, something we don't

always stop to question. But *adolescent* serves as a qualifier of some kind, denoting another kind of reader, a special kind of reader with specific needs, habits, and challenges. The adolescent reader does not conform to the relation often assumed by the term reader. The adolescent reader is described as a kind of mystery, an unknown, undefined and indefinable.

I begin with J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a book that has an expansive cultural history beyond the text on its pages. *Catcher* was published before the designation "young adult literature" existed, before publishing houses created another branch from juvenile and called it young adult, at a moment when a book narrated by a teenager could become a classic, could come to represent something about America and disenchanted youth and youth's disenchanted relation to the establishment. This book was read by actual young people, and a good many adults, too; but before we get to that, I want to think about *Catcher*'s representation of reading. In this novel, Holden Caulfield is simultaneously a certain and uncertain reader, a reader who both does and does not choose the book he is going to read. He tells us: "The book I was reading was this book I took out of the library by mistake. They gave me the wrong book, and I didn't notice it till I got back to my room. They gave me *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen." He never tells us what book he intended to get at the library. Instead, he says, "I thought it was going to stink, but it didn't. It was a very good book. I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot" (24). Holden refuses categorization, talking about his reading in a chapter that begins with a confession of his unreliability. "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life," he announces, before telling us this story of his reading (22). What are we to make of Holden's illiterate reading? What do these confessions mean?

His contradictory account of illiterate reading, on the one hand, is a mockery of the impressionability of youth, an account that both confounds and conforms to the imaginary

dilemma of the adolescent reader, a reader who is caught between what is assumed to be the simple reading of childhood and the full agency of adulthood. This binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, between object and agent, describes two oversimplified versions of subjectivity, with adolescence messily straddling the two. “I put on my new hat and sat down and started reading that book *Out of Africa*. I’d read it already, but I wanted to read certain parts over again” (25). Despite his telling us about his reading in such great detail, these details do not make sense. We cannot know what Holden is doing with this book, why he is reading it, what happens when he reads.

He is at once a dutiful reader with the book the librarian has given him, which is a classic, and he is an arbitrary reader who reads even though he has the wrong book, even though he reads certain parts over, even though he is quite illiterate. And this uncertainty, which oozes from the gaps and excesses of meaning in his account of reading, is what I want to link to the panic surrounding this novel in the mid-fifties. Published as a novel for adults, *Catcher* quickly gained widespread recognition as a bestseller and critical attention as a “modern masterpiece” (West 2131). While the novel had been frequently taught on college campuses as contemporary literature, it wasn’t until the mid-fifties that a number of high school English teachers began to use *Catcher* in some advanced English courses in an attempt to expose high school students “to high-quality contemporary writing” (Chelton and Clendenning 224-8). However, once the novel made it into the hands of non-adult readers, it began to cause censorship scandals. Usually these protests cited Holden Caulfield’s foul language and sexual innuendo; but in a number of instances, the book was challenged because of concerns it would make students “susceptible to Marxist indoctrination” (West 2131). As it happens, censorship and scandal did not slow circulation. By 1961, *Catcher* was recommended reading for many high school students

(MacLeod 10) while simultaneously one of the most frequently challenged or censored books (Foerstel 212). Linda M. Pavonetti, a professor of Education who writes about young adult reading, recalls one of her classmates from advanced English being expelled from school for writing a report on *Catcher* her senior year of high school in the mid-1960s (33). Such events indicate a deep conflict and profound anxiety among parents, teachers, and school administrators about adolescent readers, what they should read and how they should read it. The content of the book is also a question about what might be done with it, how it might impress the reader, how it might lead them to act out its imaginary refusals and misbehaviors.

The adolescent reader imagined by censors is a contradiction: a *good* reader, someone who will read cover-to-cover with full understanding; but also a very literal reader, someone who will take Holden at his word regardless of the contradictions that unfold line by line, and so he or she is a passive reader, someone deeply susceptible to indoctrination. The reader imagined by censors is at once a fantasy and a nightmare. Someone without agency. Someone who can be overpowered by a book and thus someone who can be overpowered by them.

One important distinction between childhood and adulthood has to do with the ways agency is conceptualized—it is agency that distinguishes the child from the adult. The child's agency is understood as limited, even as they are given free reign of themselves, whereas the adult's agency is conceptualized as full agency, even as it is imagined to be constrained by outside circumstances. Agency, in this sense, describes a mental capacity, rather than an environmental condition. The adolescent, on the other hand, occupies a more ambiguous space in relation to knowledge and agency which highlights the various and contradictory ways agency is possible within the constraints of language and culture. The adolescent is understood sometimes as unable (like the child) to use his or her own understanding, and sometimes as

unwilling (like the adult). The idea of adolescence as a turbulent, unstable, transitional state of being—demonstrated in the dismissive exclamation “Teenagers!” to explain adolescent behavior—acknowledges the ambiguity inherent in making claims about agency. What kind of agency is available for anyone to choose a course of action when our options are always to some degree regulated or even predetermined? The available courses of action are often already defined as choices that will be interpreted as either positive or negative participation in the social institutions of family, school, and state.

However, because the adolescent is granted limited authority in these social institutions, the consequences for nonparticipation or negative participation appear to be—though this is not necessarily the case—less severe than they are for an adult; that is, for some adolescents, the consequences of nonparticipation do not always come to bear on one’s ability to live, work, feed oneself, etc. This creates the contradictory and temporary condition of subjugation to and freedom from the social institutions of family, school, and state. The adolescent is both bound to these institutions and under very little obligation to them until the future moment when they are expected to embrace their obligations to a system that has given them so much and so little. This condition feeds the contradictory mythology of adolescence as something to loathe and to long for, a space of both disempowerment and freedom at the same time. While this ambiguous condition is associated with adolescence, understood to belong to adolescence, and therefore to be a temporary fluctuation of agency, I suggest that agency is always unstable, fluctuating, and contradictory. We are all pressing at the limits of language and culture, bound by institutions and yet full of possibility, dutiful and unpredictable, impressionable and rebellious readers.

We can find echoes of the unpredictable adolescent reader in another mid-century novel that, like *The Catcher in the Rye*, has a cultural life of its own, considered both a classic *and* an

adolescent classic, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963).<sup>59</sup> Its status as an adolescent novel is a contradictory description in itself, signaling both a dismissive gesture and an investment in reclaiming this example of "classic literature" for adolescent reading. The narrator, Esther Greenwood, is just past adolescence, in college having just earned a summer internship working at a New York magazine. But this blurring of adolescence does not prevent the cultural inscription of the novel *as* adolescent. It is significant, then, that Plath's mother, Aurelia Plath, described the novel in precisely *adolescent* terms as a way of distancing herself from what she saw as the "cruel" depiction of Esther Greenwood's own mother, a distance that reveals her simultaneous identification with and disavowal of the mother figure depicted in the novel. She is on the record saying how hurt she was by *The Bell Jar*'s "raging adolescent voice" (quoted in Rose, *Haunting* 75).<sup>60</sup> Like *Catcher*, Plath's *The Bell Jar* also depicts scenes of reading that disturb and disorient the relation between reader and text.

Esther Greenwood has decided to read *Finnegan's Wake* over the summer and finish her honors thesis. This odd book, this odd choice of reading material, is depicted as much as an object as a text, the words physical, the sounds like shapes. "I crawled between the mattress and the padded bedstead and let the mattress fall across me like a tombstone. The thick book made an unpleasant dent in my stomach" (Plath 138). Esther keeps the book with her, pressed into her stomach, as the mattress rests heavy on top of her. She is practicing, eerily, to bury herself in the

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<sup>59</sup> *The Bell Jar* was first published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in Britain, presumably because the autobiographical elements were expected to upset the family. The novel was not published in the United States under Sylvia Plath's name until 1971, nearly a decade after her death.

<sup>60</sup> I have provided Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* for this citation, who attributes this quote to some of Aurelia's notes in the Plath Archive; however, I have also seen a video clip of Aurelia Plath making a similar statement in the PBS documentary *Voices and Visions* (New York Center for Visual History, 2000).

crawlspace of her mother's house. This attempt at suicide overlaps with her attempt at reading, the language of these two activities dangerously intertwined.

My eyes sank through an alphabet soup of letters to the long word in the middle of the page.

*bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonneronntuonnthunntrovar  
rhounawnshkawntoohooorderenthurnuk!*

I counted the letters. There were exactly a hundred of them. I thought that must be important.

Why should there be a hundred letters?

Haltingly, I tried the word aloud.

It sounded like a heavy wooden object falling downstairs, boomp boomp boomp, step after step. Lifting the pages of the book, I let them fan slowly by my eyes. Words, dimly familiar but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain. (138-9)

Her eyes sink, the words and the object fall downstairs, the words and images flee past, leaving no impression. Indeed, there are ten one-hundred-letter words invented by James Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake*. And, while this feature, among others in Joyce's novel, can be said to intentionally disrupt reading practices, what interests me here is that Esther is drawn to the most disruptive moments, reading aloud the one-hundred-letter word in the middle of the page. *I thought this must be important. Why should there be a hundred letters?* She thumbs the pages like a flipbook with no coherent images, no words. Esther is reading *Finnegan's Wake*, but not in the ways expected of her by her college thesis director. She is an accomplished student, someone who has won a college scholarship and a magazine prize. But Esther's reading is difficult to account for, even as she narrates it for us. This difficulty might lead one to categorize Esther as a *bad* reader, maybe even as someone who *can't* read because she is losing her mind; however, her bad reading suggests her complicated negotiation of agency, her ability to choose what she does with *Finnegan's Wake*, to make it her own, to take it with her where she is going, no matter how strange, how dark, or how unknown.

### III. THE NOWHERE PERIOD

G. Robert Carlsen opens his 1980 study called *Books and the Teenage Reader* with a description of adolescence as a state of limbo: “In between there is what has been called for centuries a ‘nowhere’ period, a troubled, unformed time of being no longer a child and yet not fully mature” (1).<sup>61</sup> The word nowhere weighs heavily in Carlsen’s description. The kind of person that Carlsen describes, here the adolescent, the kind of person that exists *nowhere*, is a kind of person that exists always outside of somewhere, defined against the definable location of adulthood, always arriving but never to arrive. This seemingly paradoxical construction of adolescence in relation to identity speaks to the ways adolescence gets constructed outside of normativity *as* adolescence.<sup>62</sup> This is not to say that there aren’t norms associated with adolescence, though it is striking how often such norms describe what is non-adult, strange, dangerous, different, criminal—in other words, what is queer about adolescence. The concept of adolescence distances these queer notions of being, functioning both as a location for desire and as a mechanism for disavowal, distancing the queer, the unknown, the anomalous, the abject.

Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection is one way we might reconceptualize adolescence within queer notions of identity.<sup>63</sup> Abjection describes that which can be neither subject nor

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<sup>61</sup> I use G. Robert Carlsen here as one example. However, I found that definitions like this one are frequent in writing about adolescents and reading from the past thirty years.

<sup>62</sup> I say *as* adolescence to specify this identity marker as that which is disruptive, and not, for example a particular adolescent’s whiteness, proper gender identification/performance, heterosexuality, etc., which certainly may fall within the range of normativity. Likewise, one might arguably be an adolescent, but not be marked by adolescence in certain contexts, just as one’s queer sexuality does not necessarily negate other privileges of race, class, or gender since these identities are simultaneous and contingent upon varying degrees of significance in varying contexts.

<sup>63</sup> Marah Gubar has also linked abjection with adolescence in her article “Species Trouble: The Abjection of Adolescence in E. B. White’s *Stuart Little*” in which she problematizes the “child empowerment”

object but that which is radically denied or cast out. Using these psychoanalytic relations of self and other, the adult becomes the subject, the self that experiences the world, and the child becomes object, accessible to the adult only in recollections taking the past self as its object. Thus, the adolescent can function as a kind of abject self, the self that is nowhere, in-between, neither subject nor object. Kristeva's theory of abjection echoes terms associated with adolescence: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience" (*Powers* 4). Remarkably, Kristeva herself theorizes adolescence in terms that are consistent with abjection in her book *New Maladies of the Soul*, casting the adolescent, the adolescent part of experience and the self, as a location for the abject, a repository for our "failings, splittings of the ego, disavowals, or mere desires" (135). While "the adolescent" might function this way as a recollected self, like childhood, Carlsen's "nowhere" period summons the abject. His choice of words signals a lack of coherence, system, meaning, and the inability to contain, understand, make sense of things.

Kristeva puts it this way: "if the object," which we might read here as the recollected child, "through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning," as something we can name, fix, understand, settle once and for all, "[...]what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where

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themes often mapped onto children's novels with miniature characters who often find themselves "in positions of utter abjection." She argues: "[I]n both *Stuart Little* and the *Borrowers* series, the act of expulsion, coupled with the threat of extermination and extinction, drives the narrative. Neither fully human nor entirely animal, the status of miniature beings is always problematic: will they be treated like vermin (hunted down, caged, killed) or like humans (incorporated into the family, nurtured, embraced)? The radical reversals these characters undergo—from empowerment to abjection, from autonomy to dependence—evoke the vicissitudes of puberty, a perilous period during which independence and power sometimes turn out to be gratifyingly real, and sometimes depressingly illusory" (99).

meaning collapses” (*Powers 2*). Carlsen’s notion of adolescence as a “troubled, unformed time” disrupts notions of identity, disrupts the stability of meaning, disrupts even the progression of time itself. It is this disruption of meaning that causes abjection, and thus it is radically expelled and relocated outside of us and in a stage we call adolescence. Such an understanding does not mean we must reject the idea of adolescence altogether, but instead offers a more flexible, fluid, queer way of thinking about adolescence, a way that “allows us to see, hear, and read these subjective fluctuations” (Kristeva, *New 135*). The paradoxes of adolescence emerge out of this radical division. The adolescent is often identified with what is lesser, other, marginal; and yet we can find adolescence weighted with projections of desire and longing, with retrospective identifications, with the fantasy of freedom from the regulation of desire and longing. This formulation of abjection is not only psychoanalytic, but social and phenomenological, according to David Halperin, “an effect of the play of social power” (70). These fluctuations, then, in this “troubled, unformed time,” do not belong exclusively to adolescence, but instead belong to all of us.

And the people who are called adolescents are not adolescents but merely people, people who must also navigate the functions of this category in their negotiations of self and world. If the adolescent, for the adult person, stands in for the parts of self that disrupt identity, meaning, stability, disrupt adulthood and thus must be cast out, then what can happen as a consequence is that the adolescent gets constructed as *lacking* characteristics supposedly belonging to adulthood, characteristics such as autonomous subjectivity, stability, sense of self. I want to suggest that neither of these lists belongs to either adolescence or adulthood, but that these ways of knowing and being are endlessly entangled, existing in relation to one another, continually moving in and out of one another, always somewhere and nowhere at once.

So, what kind of reading is possible in this “nowhere” period? What kind of meaning can be made in this “troubled, unformed time”? Perhaps it is the complete separation of text and meaning that occurs as Esther Greenwood flips through the pages of *Finnegan’s Wake*. Perhaps it is Holden Caulfield’s illiterate reading of *Out of Africa*. And yet, I do not consider these examples as failures or aberrations of reading, but as places where what it means to read, and what we think we understand about reading, is radically called into question, locations which make visible the very instability of subjectivity and meaning itself. In queer theory, such disruption is not understood as a problem, as Carlsen seems to suggest, but as an opportunity to open possibilities for interpretation, knowing, and being, possibilities that are vital to the material conditions of queer lives, and arguably adolescent lives as well.

Many critical works of the past thirty years written about young adult literature begin with a chapter that sets out to explain the young adult or adolescent reader.<sup>64</sup> The recurrence of such discussions demonstrates a continued attempt to define and classify the adolescent, and the difficulty of doing so. We cannot know the adolescent reader, and to claim such knowledge would be an inevitably essentializing move. And yet, these chapters demonstrate the need to define the adolescent reader, a need which is always connected to the desire for meaning, the desire for meaning that can be grasped so that the proper reading materials and environments can be provided, so that *good* readers can be made out of adolescents. *Who is the adolescent reader?* This is an unanswerable question, but one that I pose because of the problems it surfaces. This

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<sup>64</sup> Take for example Kenneth Donelson and Alleen Nilsen’s section titled “Understanding Young Adults” in *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* (1980), G. Robert Carlsen’s chapter “The Teenager’s World” in *Books and the Teenage Reader* (1980), Ruth Cline and William McBride’s chapter “The Young Adult” in *A Guide to Literature for Young Adults* (1983), Robert Probst’s section “The Secondary School Literature Student” in *Adolescent Literature: Response and Analysis* (1984), and Michael Cart’s extensive discussion of definitions of “young adult” and “adolescent” in the first chapter of *From Romance to Realism* (1996).

question summons two troubling categories, one that seeks to describe adolescents in some useful or comprehensive way, and one that likewise seeks to describe readers. And yet, for those teachers, librarians, editors, and publishers whose work depends upon knowing something about the adolescent reader, this question is not only one of theoretical importance, but one of practical implication as well. The difficulty lies not in lack of research or effort or uniformity in these fields of study, but in the fact that the adolescent reader is an idea, and *as* an idea, it is an unstable subject position only temporarily occupied by an ever-shifting set of subjects who get called adolescents and readers at certain times, in certain spaces, and not others.

Marc Aronson illustrates my point in an observation he makes in *Beyond the Pale*, writing about his experiences at Chicago's Midway airport, where a boy avidly reading is paradoxically considered a non-reader in his field of work:

The most avid reader of all, though, was tucked away in the back, where he could concentrate. This was a boy who looked to be eleven or twelve, and he was studying his book with a concentration I saw nowhere else. His book was *How to Catch Yellow-Fin Tuna*. Ironically, from the point of view of the children's and young adult world, because of what he was reading, that boy passionately learning from those dense, printed pages, is a non-reader. (99)

Aronson sees the boy's exclusion from the category "reader" to be a problem of the publishing world, a world that must better understand the needs of boy readers. I think Aronson is right to point to the disjoint between the category of "reader" constructed by discussions of children's and young adult publishing and the actual reading practices of young people. However, I want to suggest that this category of "reader" was never meant to describe actual readers, but instead created to represent an ideal reader. This imagined reader, like the fantasy of censors whose children are reading *Catcher in the Rye*, is continually sought after and advocated for, but always just beyond the grasp of the institutions intended to care for him. The trouble occurs when this ideological construction is not recognized as ideology, but allowed to function as a reference to

the reality of adolescent readers. Because this construction cannot refer to actual readers, who are too individualized and contingent in their adolescent-ness and reader-ness to be summarized by a stable and unified set of characteristics, the category adolescent reader begins to function as a powerful, unquestioned signifier used to prop up and justify a whole host of adult projections and desires.

#### IV. THE CHILD (AND ADOLESCENT) AS FUTURE

One kind of desire that has become synonymous with children and adolescents is the desire for future. Lee Edelman's anti-child polemic, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, points to the dangers of "reproductive futurism" in which "[the] Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). Edelman describes a logic where the child takes on a symbolic significance, standing in for the future itself, a logic in which any refusal of this child and the arguments made in its name are a refusal of *the* future, a refusal of hope, a refusal of life.<sup>65</sup> Edelman explains:

Such "self-evident" one-sidedness—the affirmation of a value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable, as that of the Child whose innocence solicits our defense—is precisely what distinguishes public service announcements from the partisan discourse of political argumentation. But it is also, I suggest, what makes such announcements so oppressively political—[...] political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. (2)

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<sup>65</sup> It may be useful to think here of the arguments used to keep visibly and/or "out" gay and lesbian teachers from teaching in elementary and high school classrooms, arguments about parents' rights to "protect the children" from these people, arguments which hinge on the unquestioned assumption that homosexuality is a threat or danger to children.

On the other side of reproductive futurism, Edelman situates queer, both as a position of radical resistance and as that which gets constructed as a dangerous threat to children and to the future. Much like the move made by Hall's *Adolescence* at the turn of the century, the child of reproductive futurism stands in for the future itself, making any refusal of this child unthinkable. Edelman's response is refreshingly antagonistic, arguing for a queer politics set against the symbolic, against the child, against the future. There are two layers I want to add to Edelman's argument that I think suggest avenues for thinking politics beyond reproductive futurism. One, which Edelman understandably avoids, is the argument that reproductive futurism does not serve children either. When the logic of reproductive futurism is used on children, as an explanation for why they should take a bath, go to school, become a Christian, do chores, or read a book, their lives appear to hang in the balance; and these arguments are all the more ominous in the mouths of parents and teachers who are in a position of power to withhold a child's material comforts, food, shelter, approval, love—in a word, his or her future.

My second point has to do with the historical echo of reproductive futurism present in Hall's *Adolescence*, which makes visible the appeal and the hegemony of this logic. Prior to the late-nineteenth century, the argument of reproductive futurism would not have made sense because children so often did not survive to adulthood. Children and death were much more closely linked than children and the future, and scenes of dying children in literature throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicate a very different set of ideological functions for childhood. The significant decrease in infant mortality rates in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries corresponds to advances in medicine and the increased availability of food, but these changes also correspond to new ideological functions for childhood and youth. The figures of the child and the adolescent crop up often in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth

century discourses as both the objects of study and the ultimate benefactors of such study, deployed by new institutions of medicine, psychology, and education who were negotiating for their authority and expertise.

We can see the logic of reproductive futurism in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), a novel published only a few years after Hall's *Adolescence*, though widely read throughout the century. *Anne of Green Gables* chronicles the mishaps of a precocious, red-haired heroine who, despite her best intentions, continually struggles to achieve what is expected of her. Anne reports to her guardian Marilla what she learned at school that day, and how she should be thinking of the future:

Miss Stacy took all us girls who are in our teens down to the brook last Wednesday, and talked to us about it. She said we couldn't be too careful what habits we formed and what ideals we acquired in our teens, because by the time we were twenty our characters would be developed and the foundation laid for our whole future life. (193)

Those ominous words *our whole future life* seem to echo here, getting fainter and fainter with each repetition, as if *our whole future life* were getting farther and farther from us as each moment passes. We could be ruined already. Already, Anne Shirley is different from her peers. Adopted by a bachelor brother and spinster sister, she is always just beyond the grasp of the dignity and privilege afforded her best friend Diana. Anne recounts for Marilla the advice of her teacher: "And she said if the foundation was shaky we could never build anything really worth while on it. Diana and I talked the matter over coming home from school. We felt extremely solemn" (193). Indeed, feeling the weight of responsibility for the *whole future* could be a solemn moment for a person of any age. And yet, what are these habits we must form? What ideals must we acquire? How are we to know what the *right* ones are? Someone will tell us. "Habits" and "ideals" take on an amorphous quality. The reasoning of reproductive futurism is

adaptable to any purpose, any set of instructions, anything imposed upon us “for our own good.” Reproductive futurism forecloses the need to know why we are doing what we are doing, forecloses the possibility of deciding for ourselves, forecloses the possibility of offering our consent. The future is too important, too urgent, too critical to risk figuring out ourselves.

Anne, the well-intentioned but flawed child, student, and adopted daughter repeats the lesson of the day: “And we decided that we would try to be very careful indeed and form respectable habits and learn all we could and be as sensible as possible, so that by the time we were twenty our characters would be properly developed” (193). The scenes of reading in *Anne of Green Gables* dramatize the conflict between Anne’s good intentions, her desire to conform, and the possibilities remaining for her reading. In another account of her day, Anne declares to Marilla: “I never read any book now unless either Miss Stacy or Mrs. Allan thinks it is a proper book for a girl thirteen and three-quarters to read. Miss Stacy made me promise that” (194). This promise, declared near the end of the novel, arrives belatedly in the narrative. Anne’s speech throughout the book is punctuated by literary references, serving both to undercut this declaration and to highlight the breadth of her reading, her desire for aesthetic pleasures, for the imaginary, for language. “She found me reading a book one day called *The Lurid Mystery of the Haunted Hall*. It was one Ruby Gillis had lent me, and, oh, Marilla, it was so fascinating and creepy. It just curdled the blood in my veins” (194). One can almost hear the impassioned Anne describing this pleasure, relishing the lurid mystery’s effects on her body and her spirit. “But Miss Stacy said it was a very silly, unwholesome book, and she asked me not to read any more of it or any like it, but it was agonizing to give back that book without knowing how it turned out. But my love for Miss Stacy stood the test and I did” (194). This act of love serves to normalize Anne, to curb her appetite for lurid mysteries, to normalize her desire by making it

conform to the “proper book” of Miss Stacy’s judgment. This act of love forecloses possibilities, forecloses pleasure for Anne. Her achievement of self-control does not come without its irony: “It’s really wonderful, Marilla, what you can do when you’re truly anxious to please a certain person” (194).

G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* is deeply anxious about the corrupting and stunting influences of reading. Hall cites a number of statistical surveys on reading interests and habits during childhood and adolescence. This research on reading is specifically concerned with reading outside of school, reading habits that are intended to reflect the individual interests, choices, and vices of young people. Among others, Hall gives details from two separate studies, one by Kirkpatrick and one by Lancaster, who both report a “reading craze” among youth (2: 476-7). Hall notes that Lancaster, in particular, believes that “parents little realize the intensity of the desire to read or how this nascent period is the golden age to cultivate taste and inoculate against reading what is bad” (2: 477). Hall himself seconds this thought: “For the young especially, the only ark of safety in the dark and rapidly rising flood of printer's ink is to turn resolutely away from the ideal of quantity to that of quality” (2: 478). What is so striking about this section on reading is how quickly the reporting of adolescent habits and interests turns to the regulation of those habits and interests. Equally striking is that Hall does not necessarily specify what he means by “quality” even though the studies he cites frequently name genres and even titles chosen by young people. His point, then, is not *what* to read, but how to intervene in the reading habits of others, how to impose regulation, how and when teachers and parents can take advantage of this “golden age to cultivate taste and inoculate against reading what is bad.” After reviewing these detailed statistics and reports, Hall ultimately concludes:

While literature rescues youth from individual limitations and enables it to act and think more as spectators of all time, and sharers of all existence, the passion for

reading may be excessive, and books which from the silent alcoves of our nearly 5,500 American libraries rule the world more now than ever before, may cause the young to neglect the oracles within, weaken them by too wide reading, make conversation bookish, and overwhelm spontaneity and originality with a superfetation of alien ideas. (2: 478)

Importantly, literature and reading are operating here as a symbolic measure of human development, a symbolic instrument that can either support “proper” development or hinder it. Literature is constructed in the above passage as doing one or the other; literature is not neutral, not passive, but essential *and* dangerous. Like the admonishment in *Anne of Green Gables* by Miss Stacy, this construction of literature and reading closes down possibilities. She says, “Miss Stacy made me promise,” and with that she gives up the book and its pleasures (Montgomery 194). However, it is important to emphasize that what is at stake here is not merely access to varied reading materials, but what counts as knowledge and truth itself.

Hall depicts in the passage above a passive reader, one who will accumulate the proper degree of cultural capital through exposure to great works, or alternately, one who will become corrupted by “a superfetation of alien ideas.” This depiction of literature and reading ultimately conceals the power dynamics at play, the power dynamics that enable Hall to imagine the adolescent reader as passive in the first place. The word “superfetation” is a fascinating choice. Superfetation describes the fertilization of two or more ova from different ovulation cycles resulting in embryos of different ages in the womb. This phenomenon is extremely rare in humans, occurring only sometimes in animals. Hall uses superfetation as a horrifying analogy, where the intellectual development of a young person *becomes* an embryo and competing ideologies become a second, belated, alien embryo competing for nourishment and putting the development of the first in danger. Exposure to varied perspectives, to more information, different information, other perspectives, is positioned as life-threatening rather than

enlightening or educational.<sup>66</sup> The promise required by Miss Stacy, the advice of Lancaster to parents, the cautions offered by Hall here—these mechanisms aim to produce and regulate knowledge. And, these mechanisms favor a single, fixed, stable definition of knowledge, favor maintaining the dominance of that knowledge, its hegemony.

So, who gets to say what counts as knowledge? Who gets to say what is the truth and what is not? The idea that truth is universal, and that universal truth exists in some accessible form, obscures the ways knowledge and truth function to authorize some and invalidate others. These epistemological questions are pressing when it comes to childhood and adolescence because these groups are not authorized to say what the truth is, not even the truth about themselves. We see this epistemological conundrum often dramatized in twentieth century adolescent literature. The suspense and humor of these scenes are contingent upon dynamics which render the adolescent without power to influence their environments or to interpret their experiences, regardless of their efforts. One such scene appears *Anne of Green Gables* in which Anne is accused of losing her guardian Marilla's amethyst brooch. Even though Anne tells the truth about the brooch, she is banished to her room and forbidden to go to a highly anticipated church picnic until she confesses that she took the brooch and lost it. In this position, Anne fabricates an elaborate confession; but is still forbidden to go to the picnic *because* she lost the brooch (Montgomery 81-5). No matter what Anne says, she does not get to decide what the truth

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<sup>66</sup> One might be struck by the conservatism of this perspective; however, the prevalence and force of anxieties about exposure to multiple perspectives still haunt textbooks, school curriculum, debates about extra-curricular clubs, and discussions about reading. For example, the Gifted and Talented Reading Program at Hauppauge High School in Long Island, New York offered an elective course in the 1992-93 school year called "Other Voices" in which students read Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes are Watching God*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and an anthology called *Black Voices* edited by Abraham Chapman. What is remarkable about this class is that it required a signed permission slip from parents. That is, parents had to explicitly give their permission for their children to be exposed to "other voices" in a progressive school district less than 30 miles from Manhattan.

of the matter is; and it is not until Marilla herself later finds the brooch pinned to her shawl that she absolves Anne (86-7). The humor and drama of a scene like this depends upon the power dynamic between adult and child. If *Anne of Green Gables* seems old-fashioned, the surprising frequency of these generational misunderstandings in contemporary young adult fiction suggests that they are a cultural trope, one that is worked and reworked, but never resolved.

Joyce Carol Oates dramatizes these power dynamics in her young adult novel *Big Mouth & Ugly Girl* (2002) in which a nerdy, over-achieving high school student named Matt Donaghy is accused of threatening to blow up the school. “The detective with the glasses regarded Matt now with a look of forced patience. ‘Son, you know why we’re here’” (7). But, of course, Matt has no idea why. Oates plays off the climate of paranoia following the Columbine shootings, in which school administrators and police cannot relinquish their responsibility to “protect” the school until they can prove that Matt is innocent. None of the other high school students remembers Matt’s threat, but cannot remember his not making one either, and caught up in the paranoia themselves, they refuse to defend him against these accusations. There is only one person, an outcast named Ursula Riggs, who remembers the incident in the cafeteria being misconstrued, but even her testimony is not enough to clear Matt’s name. The stigma remains until the accusers and their motives are exposed. Over the course of the novel, Matt never has the power to clear his own name, to tell the truth, to say what the truth is.

We find a similar scene of misunderstanding in Frank Portman’s *King Dork* (2006), in which the narrator Tom recounts an incident with his parents. He comes home from school one day to find his mother and stepfather disapprovingly waiting for him at the kitchen table, “the entire contents of [his] room” spread out before them (98). The items on the table include an assortment of gun magazines Tom carries around at school so as to *appear* troubled and

dangerous so that bullies will avoid him. Tom narrates the scene and his confusion for us, but there is very little dialogue. Tom does not even try to offer them an explanation or ask any questions, driving home the impotence of his words, his truth.<sup>67</sup> Instead, he stands mute before them as his parents say ominous things like: “I don’t know what to say. Your mother and I hoped to set an example so you would respect and share our values” (99). In this scene, Portman humorously takes this power dynamic to its extreme, exaggerating its absurdity. The parents enact the scene, interpret the items spread out on the table, extract a lesson for their adolescent son while he silently accepts the image of him they are constructing at that moment, an image conveyed to the reader as wildly disconnected from reality. This scene in *King Dork* echoes a dynamic articulated by G. Stanley Hall in very different terms, in which the effects of these power dynamics are naturalized as developmental symptoms of adolescence: “Plasticity is at its maximum, utterance at its minimum. The inward traffic obstructs outer currents. Boys especially are dumb-bound, monophrastic, inarticulate” (*Adolescence 2*: 454). The connection Hall makes between plasticity and utterance here does not serve to explain or excuse the adolescent’s silence; rather, it becomes an agent of the adolescent’s silencing, a mechanism which prevents the adolescent from being heard, from being recognized. It is a mechanism that makes impossible or irrelevant the adolescent’s naming and knowing.

The words “plastic” and “plasticity” appear more than sixty times in Hall’s two volumes to describe adolescence. In his preface, he writes, “Character and personality are taking form, but everything is plastic” (*Adolescence 1*: xv). Later, Hall overlaps his discussion of

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<sup>67</sup> We need not look very far in popular culture to see the power of this repeating trope of a child who cannot be heard or believed—Steven Spielberg’s Elliot in *E.T.* (1982) whose claims about his relationship to his “alien” are ignored, or Brad Bird’s Hogarth in *The Iron Giant* (1999) who tried to tell his town the Iron Giant is not there to harm them. In both cases and in many others, children and adolescents are not listened to, their voices irrelevant or silenced, deemed irrational, fantastical, and strange.

physiological development and character, writing: “Normal muscle tensions are thus of great importance during these plastic, and therefore vulnerable, years” (*Adolescence* 1: 82). In a discussion of the development of mind and body, “youth” is an agent and an abstract generalization: “It is plastic to every suggestion; tends to do everything that comes to its head, to instantly carry out every impulse; loves nothing more than abandon and hates nothing so much as restraint” (*Adolescence* 1: 310). One notable aspect of Hall’s writing is his tendency to overlap both literal and figurative plasticity, the physiology of the body and the psychology of the mind, as if these two always reflect one another. Indeed, his lengthy documentation of human growth from conception to adulthood concerns both the physicality of the body and matters of mental capacity. The idea of youth as impressionable has survived to this day, among notions of youth as unreasonable and uncontrollable, and these conflicting representations of youth are even found in the same texts.<sup>68</sup> However, the phrase “plastic youth” has largely fallen out of usage, and the wording of “plasticity” has reappeared only recently in the field of neuroscience and in its applications in education and developmental psychology. But, the notion of plasticity still pervades assumptions about adolescent readers.

Contemporary discussions about teenagers and reading often take the form of a lament—teenagers do not read enough, and young adult literature is the genre designed to entice them away from television and video games and back to the world of books. It may not come as a surprise, then, that young adult novels often depict reading and writing as creative, enlightened

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<sup>68</sup> For example, in 1945, Paul H. Landis’s *Adolescence and Youth: The Process of Maturing* depicts contradictory constructions of *plastic* youth and *rebellious* youth by casting the effects of the city in contrast to that of the country: “In the city today, everyone wants to appear young; consequently, youth receives little condemnation. But in the farm community people still grow old, and once a person begins to age psychologically, inelastic habits and attitudes crystallize and more plastic youth appears rebellious, frivolous, reckless, worldly, and godless” (357). We can find similar depictions of vulnerability and rebelliousness in representations of adolescence throughout the twentieth century.

acts symbolically set in opposition to dehumanizing forces. M.T. Anderson's young adult novel *Feed* (2002) positions the written word, which has become a rare commodity in this dystopian future, as a kind of enlightenment for its protagonist. Likewise, Sherman Alexie gives his young adult protagonist a love for reading and for drawing, a relationship with literature and art that eventually takes him out of poverty and off the reservation in *The Absolutely True-Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007). Even Walter Dean Myers' cautionary tale *Monster* (1999), about an African-American teen on trial for robbery and murder, uses the main character's creative writing in diary and screenplay form to depict him as sympathetic and worthy of another chance.

But, what if we consider reading and writing in these novels as markers of privilege? Reading is a mode of cultural capital that elevates these characters from their dire social situations. The depiction of reading in these novels, then, can function to obscure the social dynamics of race, class, and gender in the world of the book. Reading stands in for a kind of humanism, for the belief that we have the power to transcend our circumstances and to empower ourselves. The history of children's publishing tells another story about reading. In the eighteenth century, texts for children like Sarah Fielding's novel *The Governess* (1749) are marked by anxieties about the effects of reading. If reading could educate, it could also corrupt. Fielding's novel understood this problem as one about the use of reading, in which the burden lay with the readers themselves to make the proper use of a book. Nineteenth century discussions of reading are often more polarized, on the one side expressing deep concern about the corrupting influence of dime novels and sensational stories, and on the other side praising the transcendental power of reading books with moral and literary value. What is often taken for granted on both sides of these discussions is the vulnerability of the young reader who is impressed by the book. But, what if reading itself is not inherently corrupting or enlightening?

Are there more nuanced ways to understand the changing functions of reading in the past and the present? Stepping outside of the book, it is worth asking, what is reading doing in these scenes? And, is it possible to write a young adult novel aimed at uplifting readers without relying on the trope of reading itself as the way to empowerment?

The idea of reading, in particular, does not conform easily to fantasies of empowerment or control. Reading causes anxiety for Hall, for teachers, for parents, for publishers because they cannot know what others will do with their reading, what knowledge will result from it, intended or unintended knowledge, and thus what self or action will result from that knowledge. Hall wants to develop mechanisms to ensure that the next generation will share his values, priorities, morals, norms, and so imagines an adolescent reader who can be shaped by reading in predictable ways, in ways that Hall himself is predicting. The fantasy here is that if the proper book is chosen by parents and teachers, then the proper adult member of society will result. This oversimplification is a double bind in that it makes the improper book, the risky book, the book with other perspectives, all the more threatening. And yet, neither of these extremes can account for what happens when actual readers encounter texts. Neither can account for the multiple and varied ways that language and meaning diverge and intersect. Reading is not something that can be monitored in the ways necessary to maintain or stabilize its consequences. Reading is surrounded by uncertainties. How telling, then, that the adolescent reader is so often imagined in ways that attempt to solve these problems, the problems posed by reading, the problems posed by the impossible relation between adult and child.

## V. READING AS SUICIDE

Scenes of reading in nineteenth-century novels, before Hall's particular articulation of "the adolescent," also negotiate anxieties about reading. I've chosen Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1869), published in serial form the same year as Alcott's *Little Women*, as one example of the playful, ironic embodiments of these anxious discussions around reading. The main character, Tom Bailey, accounts for his experiences with books. Like Holden Caulfield, he is an unreliable narrator, exaggerating enough details that this unreliability is obvious and played for humor. In a chapter titled "I Become a Blighted Being," Tom recounts the loss of his first love, Miss Nelly, whom he was not old enough to marry. He enacts a parody of adult fears, fears about the naïve and literal reader, the impressionable reader. He says, "for a boy of a naturally vivacious disposition, the part of a blighted being presented difficulties" (Aldrich 246). But, he tries on the part anyway:

I neglected my hair. I avoided my playmates. I frowned abstractly. I did not eat as much as was good for me. I took lonely walks. I brooded in solitude. I not only committed to memory the more turgid poems of the late Lord Byron—"Fare thee well, and if forever," etc.—but I became a despondent poet on my own account. (Aldrich 247)

Literature and reading model for Tom how to enact the part of blighted being, the part of a scorned lover, the part of a despondent poet. The artificiality of this enactment is emphasized by the step-by-step instructions, the absurdity of purposefully neglecting one's hair or taking lonely walks, the way these acts are set in opposition to being a "naturally vivacious" boy. Literature here enables Tom to resist nature, to resist the natural inclinations of boyhood, to "overwhelm originality and spontaneity" with reading (Hall, *Adolescence 2*: 478). Tom does not project his lovesick feelings into his reading, but gets absorbed, swallowed whole by Lord Byron, becoming a blighted being. "I stayed at my desk reading some lugubrious volume—usually *The Mysteries*

of Udolpho, by the amiable Mrs. Radcliffe. A translation of *The Sorrows of Werther* fell into my hands at this period, and if I could have committed suicide without killing myself, I should certainly have done so” (Aldrich 248). What operates in *The Story of a Bad Boy* as irony, Tom’s consideration of suicide, illustrates here the risk and danger of reading as imagined by the educator, as imagined by Hall. Tom dramatizes this image of the passive reader who is vulnerable to literal interpretation, vulnerable to the invasion and “superfetation of alien ideas” that could derail development altogether and end the young reader’s life.

I want the irony of *The Story of a Bad Boy* to resonate uncomfortably with irony of *The Bell Jar*, where the issue of suicide takes on a very different character both in the novel itself and in the mythology surrounding Sylvia Plath’s own suicide. For a moment, I am going to talk about the meaning of suicide; and certainly, while this analysis by no means accounts for the individual experiences and motivations for wishing to take one’s own life, I do not think that my analysis is entirely disconnected from the material conditions of adolescent lives or the power relations affecting those lives and our own. Foucault’s history of sexuality describes a shift in conceptualizations of death related to systematic changes in power relations between the nation-state and the citizen. While the sovereign ruler (whether God or monarch) had the power to condemn one to death, the nation reverses this power, taking instead the right “to ensure, maintain, or develop its life” (*History* 136). The problem of suicide, then, becomes a problem for the nation, a sign that it has failed at its purpose, a sign that it does not have the power to ensure life.<sup>69</sup> Foucault puts it this way:

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<sup>69</sup> Hacking reports that “suicide was made the property of medics only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and a major fight it was. It was generally allowed that there was the noble suicide, the suicide of honor or of the state, but all the rest had to be regarded as part of the new medicine of insanity.” And, with this shift of property, suicides and their methods and “causes” were meticulously documented in the

It is not surprising that suicide—once a crime, since it was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or the Lord above—became, in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die[...] was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life. (*History* 138-9)

Foucault's formulation of a political power with "the task of administering life" echoes with Edelman's insistent refusal of *the future*, his refusal of the "life" presented by that future, a life that is not his own but an ideal "life" imagined by the institutions charged with fostering life. Foucault understands this institutional power as one that "exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (*History* 137). Strikingly, this "positive influence" closely resembles the intentions stated by G. Stanley Hall, his desire to establish "true norms" by which "to both diagnose and measure arrest and retardation in the individual and the race" (*Adolescence* 1: viii). Foucault describes suicide from the perspective of the nation and its institutional discourses, hence it is *their* astonishment and not the suicidal person's. He does not attempt to account for the intentions of any individual suicide, but nevertheless suggests that suicide is a resistance, or more precisely, a refusal, of this power over life: "Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its domination; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'" (*History* 138). Suicide, in this formulation, does not necessarily represent the desire to die, or the refusal of life itself, but a refusal of *the life* intended for the individual by the institutions of family, school, and nation.

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nineteenth century in the name of science, the classification of suicide aimed at its prevention and control (108). This is a part of the same institutional shift that Foucault describes.

I do not intend here to advocate or celebrate suicide, but instead to consider it in relation to queerness in these scenes as the last available means when one is confronted with the mechanisms of regulation and control operating under the logic of reproductive futurism. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood recalls something her boyfriend has said to her, something she accepts to be true without question. “I also remembered Buddy Willard saying in a sinister knowing way that after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn’t want to write poems anymore” (Plath 94). Even though Buddy’s prediction clearly contradicts what Esther knows about herself, she accepts what he says as true because she has heard it before, heard it everywhere, heard it without ever having to remember hearing it. His sinister knowing comes from a much larger institutional and cultural knowing, one that says who a woman is supposed to be and how she is supposed to feel when she is a mother. She has seen it in her own mother, in books and magazines, at engagement parties and weddings, at celebrations of what is good and right and normal. Her resistance offers her few alternatives: “So I began to think that maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterward you went numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state” (94). She knows that the women at those weddings are not brainwashed, not necessarily even unhappy; but for her, it would feel like being brainwashed, like numbness, like death. Esther says she is never getting married, and this declaration is its own kind of resistance. However, the cost of this resistance—the ways that it may render her illegible in the narrative coherence defined as *life*, illegible as a woman, and therefore as a person—calls into question the very viability of her life.

The cost of resistance seems of particular concern when it comes to queer lives. And, I want to complicate what I mean by resistance, since this word can be associated with free will and choice, with radical political movements, with the spirit of America. But, I want to

understand resistance as also the inevitable condition of falling outside of normative conceptions of life, what counts as life, what life means. Resistance implies willful choice, but from the outside, from the perspective of power, resistance is the name given to the subject who resists their guidance, regulation, control, resists despite their power to shape and influence, resists because this subject cannot be shaped in the desired ways. Resistance, then, is also the condition of being *unable* to conform, unable to achieve the life that is good, right, and normal, unable to achieve what is understood as human. Even though Esther Greenwood says she is never going to get married, casting marriage as a compromise to the life she sees as a livable one, these words represent her resistance in so much as she *cannot* be made to fit the image of wife and mother Buddy Willard refers to, cannot make herself feel differently even though that is exactly what is expected of her. The association of adolescence with resistance—or rebellion—speaks to the ways that adolescence conceptually exists in a state of perpetual conflict with adulthood, conceptually stands to represent the moment of institutional intervention, the moment before it is too late. This association with resistance does not necessarily refer to the actual behaviors of adolescents, but instead to the powerful inscription of adolescence with this meaning that marks adolescents as resistant, rebellious, nonconforming. Adolescence exists in a curiously contradictory relation to conformity as the place where resistance belongs and is expected, where it can still be managed, guided, controlled. Adulthood *needs* adolescence to maintain the illusion of stability, the illusion of fixed meaning, the illusion of arrival at these sites of control, identity, future.

Queer lives and queer subjectivity exist always in this complex relation to resistance, in complex relation to unintelligibility and to the available choices. Eve Sedgwick cites “that queer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others; that

up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even more extreme risk” (1). Sedgwick takes these statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide* published in 1989, though certainly, this issue is not simply about statistics. Such statistics speak to how firmly entrenched heteronormative notions of good, right, and normal define the limits of who can achieve access to the human. The livable life is not decided only on an individual basis by individual decisions, by Esther Greenwood’s preferences for either marriage or poetry, for example, but defined already according to certain standards of what is good, right, and normal. It is no wonder when Sedgwick remarks: “I look at my adult friends and colleagues doing lesbian and gay work, and I feel that the survival of each one is a miracle. Everyone who has survived has stories about how it was done” (1). I think it is important to understand that what Sedgwick calls survival here is very different from resistance—survival is an imperative for queer lives to remain lives, necessary for existence.

David Halperin considers abjection to be a necessary negotiation for that survival. Halperin is writing specifically about gay male subjectivity, but gestures briefly to the applicability of abjection to other groups. He writes:

Indeed, even to recognize oneself as being named, described, and summed up by the clinical term *homosexual* (or *faggot* or *queer*) is to come to self-awareness and to a recognition of social condemnation at the very same instant. Abjection therefore has a particularly precise and powerful relevance to gay men as well as to other despised social groups, who have a heightened, and intimate, experience of its social operations. (69)

I do not intend to claim that all adolescents are “despised,” but instead to point to adolescence as a location for the despised, a container for what is unknown, strange, or queer, and also a location where that queerness can be extinguished. I think Halperin’s analysis here is relevant

for thinking about any kind of queer subjectivity, and that some of the ways that adolescence gets aligned with queerness, gets despised or dismissed, as I have discussed above, make Halperin's understanding of abjection relevant. Abjection is one way to describe the negotiation required when one is interpellated as queer, as adolescent, as other, against that which is good, right, normal, adult, human. It means that one must refashion the terms of dismissal and disgust as a way of surviving, casting them out and bringing them home again with new meaning. Halperin believes that "the concept of abjection presents [this] struggle in a dialectical, dynamic fashion as an ongoing battle for meaning" rather than as static, one-way, one-dimensional (70). And, in this dialectic, the possibilities for redefining and reinterpreting the self allow for livable possibilities outside of normativity, outside of the intelligible choices.

## **VI. THE LIVIBLE LIFE**

The word survival in the cliché, *I survived my adolescence*, does not suggest that living through adolescence is a given. I would argue that adolescence is not constructed as livable, that the very idea of adolescence implies an impending catastrophe, and the fact that we live, despite such catastrophe, is further evidence that these catastrophes never belonged to us in the first place. The logic of adolescence reproduces the idea of its very impossibility. James Dobson, founder of the Christian organization Focus on the Family, wrote a book for preteens called *Preparing for Adolescence* which has gone through many subsequent editions and remains in print to this day. The first edition came out in 1978 and was paired with a cassette tape series called *Straight Talk*. Dobson's self-help book is one of many places that adolescence is talked about in terms of life and death, in terms of survival. What does it mean to prepare for adolescence?

The book is addressed to young people, but begins with a preface addressed to parents. Dobson's metaphor of choice in the preface is a football game, the "game of life," so to speak, in which parents are the coaches. While the football game does not necessarily imply life and death stakes, Dobson's choice of words does. He explains, the coach "knows there will be little opportunity to teach or guide once the game has begun" and so, "his final words are vitally important, and in fact could change the outcome of the game" (8). He does not leave it at that, but concludes his preface by bullying parents with some of the coercive tactics one might expect him to save for his younger readers:

Do you get the message? If you have youngster in the preadolescent age, you should capitalize on this final "coaching session" prior to the big game. You must take this occasion to refresh his memory, provide last-minute instructions, and offer any necessary words of caution. But beware: if you let this fleeting moment escape unnoticed, you may never get another opportunity. (9)

The rhetorical question "Do you get the message?" and the warning words "But beware" are condescending at best, reproducing the flimsy institutional authority exercised by the doctor over parents. Why did Dobson need a message for parents? On the one hand, the parents would be the ones to buy, recommend, and circulate the book and its correlating series of cassette tapes. The *Preparing for Adolescence Growth Pak* [sic] includes the tapes and a workbook, and they are mentioned in this preface, again in a note from the publisher at the end of the book, and on an order form conveniently located in the last few pages. On the other hand, the preface is anxious for parents to do things a certain way, to pay attention to their teenagers, to enforce certain ways of being. The threat is implied, playing on parental fears, much like the sex education pamphlets from the 1930s. Dobson, who holds a PhD in child development from the University of California, would have been familiar with that version of institutional authority, where parents are vital to shaping both our individual and collective futures. This book, *Preparing for*

*Adolescence*, is part of that institutional system of surveillance and regulation requiring parental participation.

The book aims to regulate behavior without parental participation, to perhaps serve as a kind of surrogate parent, though its readers are frequently encouraged to talk with an adult they trust when they find themselves struggling to do what the book asks of them. Like the message to parents, the sections addressed to young people put their very lives at stake, advocating for certain kinds of behavior and self-regulation to guarantee human survival. Dobson's first chapter begins with another extended metaphor for adolescence, this one more threatening than a football game: "Imagine yourself driving alone down the highway in a small car" (14). The highway is life, and Dobson explains that you've just driven through a town called Puberty, and are headed towards one called Adultsville. If it isn't enough that you're *alone* in this metaphor and that your car is small, it gets worse:

But as you round a curve, you suddenly see a man waving a red flag and holding up a warning sign. He motions for you to stop as quickly as possible, so you jam on the brakes and skit to a halt just in front of the flagman. He comes over to the window of your car and says, "Friend, I have some very important information for you. A bridge has collapsed about one mile down the road, leaving a huge drop-off into a dark canyon. If you're not careful, you'll drive your car off the edge of the road and tumble down that canyon, and, of course, if you do that you'll never get to Adultsville." (14-5)

Surely, tumbling down a dark canyon alone in a small car sounds terrifying. But, if we were to try to interpret the canyon as merely a dark time, perhaps even as a metaphor for adolescence itself, Dobson heads off this possible interpretation by asserting that falling in that canyon means *you'll never get to Adultsville*. The question remains whether Dobson is talking about a metaphorical or a literal death. Surely, only a literal death would prevent one from aging. Dobson explains that you can't back up (or reverse time?) and so what you need to do is drive slowly, exit the highway, and go around the "ruined" bridge. The flagman says, "you don't have

to fall down that hole—you can drive around it—so good luck and drive carefully” (15). The possibility of driving around the canyon further suggests that Dobson means the driver’s literal life is at stake, but he continues with “the meaning” of the story, further muddling the difference between the challenges faced by adolescents and the literal risk of death.

Dobson explains that the road is life and that *he* is the flagman: “I want to warn you about a problem that lies down the road—a ‘canyon’ that *most* teenagers fall into on the road to adulthood” (16). If most teenagers can fall into this canyon, it would be absurd for Dobson to literally mean death. And yet, he asserts that “many young people have wrecked their lives by plunging down this dark gorge, but I can show you how to avoid it—how to go around the danger” (16). The phrase “wrecked their lives” overlaps with the language of wrecking that small car, tumbling down the canyon. The ambiguity between a literal or metaphorical death remains despite Dobson’s attempts to explain the meaning of the story. The danger Dobson describes appears to exclusively belong to adolescence, rather than to the danger of living in general. Dobson insists that the dangers he describes are only found on the dark road between puberty and adulthood.

I want to return to Dobson, but before I do, I want to turn to another more recent example depicting adolescence in terms of life and death. Allstate Insurance ran a series of full-page ads about teenage driving that appeared on the back covers of the *Economist*, the *New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* magazines as part of a campaign to pass stricter graduated licensing laws at the national level.<sup>70</sup> What for Dobson was an ambiguous metaphor—driving on the road of life—is for Allstate a literal threat. One advertisement features a cartoon drawing of an expansive

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<sup>70</sup> Graduated licensing laws exist in all states, but with different requirements. The most common of them is the requirement of a learner’s permit, though some states have subsequent requirements before someone under 18 can acquire a full driver’s license.

graveyard full of tombstones. The years 1992-2008, 1990-2008, and 1991-2008 have been etched on the stones, indicating that all of the graves belong to teenagers. An empty road runs through the middle of the many rows of tombstones. The headline reads: “Last year, nearly 5,000 teens died in car crashes.” Below this headline, in all capital letters, it says, “making it safer for a teen to be in a war zone than on a highway” (“Last Year”). Another ad in the series reads: “Two out of three teens admit to texting while driving. Some of them will never be heard from again” (“Two Out”). These ads are sponsored by Allstate Insurance, but are an explicit campaign for government legislation, the STANDUP Act of 2009, a bill that would create national criteria for graduated driver licensing laws. Below, in bold, it says, “Let’s make sure the STANDUP Act doesn’t get buried, or nearly 5,000 more teens could” (“Last Year”). Like Dobson’s message to parents, the Allstate Ads are aimed at parents, who are in this case potential voters, making an appeal to parental concern with the threat of death posed by adolescence.

The ads feature some statistical support for their position, declaring, “when states have implemented comprehensive GDL programs, the number of fatal crashes among 16-year-old drivers has fallen by almost 40%” (“Last Year”). Some of the ads in this series cite a specific state: “Since North Carolina implemented one of the most comprehensive GDL laws in the country, it has seen a 25% decline in crashes involving 16-year-olds” (“Remember” and “Why Do”). The fact that both of these figures specify declines among only 16-year-olds suggests that the data has been skewed specifically to promote GDL laws. One of the consequences of GDL laws is the postponement of driving privileges, which means that in states where stricter laws have been passed, there are fewer 16-year-olds on the road. If inexperience is actually the biggest predictor in accident statistics rather than age, I wonder if the lower accident rates among 16-year-olds corresponded to an increase in accident rates among 17-year-olds? North

Carolina's GDL laws, in particular, require a year of supervised driving *after* having completed Drivers Education classes and written exams at 15-years-old or later, followed by six months of restricted driving before full driving privileges are granted, thus delaying full driving privileges to at least 16 ½ years of age ("The North Carolina" 2-3). North Carolina did report a 29% decline in crashes among 16-year-olds between 1997-1999 and only a 1% change in crashes involving older drivers, which on first glance appears to confirm that GDL laws are working (3). However, later in the report, we find that the control group of older drivers includes only drivers over 21, leaving 17, 18, 19, and 20-year-old drivers out of these figures entirely (6).

The STANDUP Act of 2009, which, as of this writing, still has not become law, stands for Safe Teen and Novice Driver Uniform Protection Act. The law would make 16-years-old the minimum age for acquiring a learner's permit in all states, which is even one year older than the current requirement in North Carolina. After a learner's permit stage lasting six months or longer, only a provisional intermediate license would be allowed until the driver was 18 years of age or older. The intermediate stage would prohibit nighttime driving, prohibit more than one non-family member passenger under the age of 21, and prohibit the use of a cell phone in non-emergency situations. Any violation of GDL laws or speed limits would further postpone full driving privileges. I do not mean to suggest that these are all unreasonable laws. But, it is hard to ignore that these laws privilege adolescents from upper middle class families who may not have jobs in high school, who do not need to support themselves or their families. The ways that this legislation has been promoted, hinging on the dangers of adolescence itself rather than the dangers of inexperienced driving, further suggest that such legislation is not simply about saving lives.

One of the most insulting of the Allstate ads features a headline that reads, “Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they’re missing a part of their brain?” And, underneath this question, in all capital letters, it says, “BECAUSE THEY ARE” (“WHY DO”). Beneath these words we find a cartoon drawing of the human brain with a car-shaped hole. The brain is shown mounted on a display pedestal labeled “16-Year-Old-Brain” as if to metaphorically (or perhaps humorously) indicate the scientific validity of Allstate’s claims. Are we to assume the pink brain has been freshly farmed from a deceased teenage driver who has nobly donated it to science? The small print below the illustration explains:

Even bright, mature teenagers sometimes do things that are “stupid.” But when that happens, it’s not really their fault. It’s because their brain hasn’t finished developing. The underdeveloped area is called the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex. It plays a critical role in decision making, problem solving and understanding future consequences of today’s actions. Problem is, it won’t be fully mature until they’re in their 20s. It’s one reason 16-year-old drivers have crash rates three times higher than 17-year-olds and five times higher than 18-year-olds. (“Why Do”)

Since GDL laws have not passed at the national level and most states allow full driving privileges at the age of 16, it is strange to correlate crash rate statistics primarily with brain development rather than with inexperienced driving. The uncomplicated use of neuroscience statistics seems to indicate that age is the problem rather than inexperience, and that brain development is somehow complete after adolescence. These ads also seem to give the impression that only teens die in car crashes, burdening teenagers with the dangers of driving and relieving adults of this responsibility.

One question that remains is why an insurance company like Allstate would spend millions on an ad campaign for GDL legislation. One possibility is that teenage drivers bring in some of the highest insurance premiums of any other kind of driver. These ads and GDL legislation perpetuate the idea of the reckless teenage driver, which justifies high premiums and

even greater increases in premiums for young drivers. And if these ads give the impression that Allstate can protect teens, this myth may increase their customer base. On the other hand, if GDL laws were to pass, insurance companies would see a decrease in claims from drivers under the age of 18 while continuing to charge high premiums. Teenage drivers would be allowed on the road for only half the day, during daylight hours, but they would pay the same insurance premiums covering the full day. But, even if we were to assume that Allstate's agenda is purely about saving lives and not about increasing profits, why must saving adolescent lives come at the expense of the perceived credibility and capability of adolescents themselves?

Dobson's *Preparing for Adolescence* demonstrates conflicting investments in the capabilities of adolescents, on the one hand characterizing them much like the Allstate Ads as incompetent and unpredictable, while on the other hand seeming to need them to be capable of self-knowledge and self-direction. This conflict is particularly evident in Dobson's chapter on conformity. Dobson writes:

The word "conformity" refers to the desire to be just like everyone else—to do what they do and say what they say, to think what they think and wear what they wear. A conformist is someone who is afraid to be different from the majority; he feels a great need to be like everyone else. To conform means to accept the ideas, the fashion, the way of walking, and the way of talking that is popular at the time. In our society, there is a *tremendous* pressure on all of us to conform to the standards of the group. (41-2)

In what follows, we find out that the dangers of conformity are succumbing drugs, sex, and secular culture, and that "the pressure to conform is at its worst during adolescence," which is why "teenagers often move in 'herds,' like a flock of sheep" (46). There is an odd conflation of stereotypical "peer pressure" with, at one point, a deaf child refusing to wear his hearing aid, for fear of being different, and an African-American second grader named Jeff wearing gloves to school to cover the color of his skin. The troubling implication that Jeff's problem is his desire

to conform, rather than, say, his feeling of the effects of racism, is only one of the conflicted messages of this chapter. Dobson's most pressing concern is the risk conformity poses to Christianity. He hopes his readers will have the strength to say: "I'm not going to let *anything* keep me from living a Christian life. In other words, 'I will not conform!'" (61). Dobson does not acknowledge that the "Christian life" he refers to requires another degree of conformity, one that may be even more totalizing than the one he is guarding against. The Christian life requires conformity on the level of behavior, thoughts, feelings, and desires. Dobson encourages his readers to think for themselves so that they will not unthinkingly do as their friends do. But, on the other side of this empowerment is an enormous pressure to live as he prescribes, to conform to the norms of the Christian life, to suspend thinking for yourself when it comes to his prescriptions.

Dobson calls his book *Preparing for Adolescence*, but what this book is about is preparing for life. On one level, preparing for adolescence might mean the same thing as preparing for life. But, this would be a pretty bold claim for a book—Dobson would have a lot of work to do to convince readers that he's the one with the secret to life, or that this little paperback is the very thing you need to prepare for life. The cultural assumptions that allow Dobson to claim that he knows how to prepare for adolescence are that adolescence is an experience we all go through, that anyone who has been through it knows what it's like, and that this experience is transferrable in some way. This is one of the ways the category of adolescence itself can create the illusion of knowledge about others, and the illusion of control over an unpredictable future. Adolescence is not a preparation for life, as if such preparation were even possible, as if there were a stage before *life*. I would argue that adolescence *is* life.

I think these difficulties posed to adolescent lives and queer lives speak to the necessity of naming and knowing the self, to be granted this power of naming and knowing, not to settle meaning once and for all, but to make space for queer ways of being. This is not simply a matter of making space, of normalizing homosexuality, legalizing gay marriage, starting gay-straight alliances at high schools, though these are important and noble political objectives. This is not simply a matter of making the *queer* normal, human, or recognizable within privileged structures, a strategy which will always reinscribe an inside and another *queer* outside. Rather, queer politics seeks to disrupt the very systems that create the *inside* and the *outside* in hierarchical relation.

Judith Butler describes this disruption as productive, as “practices of instituting new modes of reality” which “take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm” (*Undoing* 29). This naming and knowing the self is a “mode of becoming,” marked by moments of fluidity and fixity, but never static, a mode of becoming that “in becoming otherwise” disrupts the normative notions of adulthood that have been laid out before us and allows for queer possibilities, some aspect of being and knowing that does not have a name, that refuses meaning, that resists categorization of any kind. The logic of adolescence shifts, but this logic is not *in* adolescents any more than it is in ourselves. The logic of adolescence is one which contains contradictory fears about morality, rebellions, control, and survival. In a sense, the logic of adolescence is the logic of adulthood, an ontological and epistemological logic created and sustained by institutions for adults. Controlling adolescence means controlling ourselves. Surviving adolescence means surviving ourselves—something, perhaps, we cannot prepare for, which is why we sometimes cling so

desperately to the idea that we *can* prepare for it, know it, name it, know ourselves, name ourselves with a language we recognize, be good readers, good knowable readers.

## CODA

It seems grotesque to speak of a society without teenagers.

—Albert K. Cohen, Foreword to *Youth and the Social Order*

My work here encompasses a wide range of materials and historical moments to explore the ideological dimensions of adolescence as a category and how these ideological dimensions circulate and reappear in very specific, located contexts. This project aims to bring to light a nonlinear history that reframes present assumptions about adolescence and to open up the category as a powerful site for work in queer theory, cultural studies, and literary studies. One of the difficulties with putting pressure on the category of adolescence, however, is its interpretive flexibility, its resistance to revision, its stickiness to the ideas it upholds. In 2004, Oxford University Press published in their Oxford Medical Publications series a book called *The End of Adolescence* by Philip Graham, a child psychiatrist. Graham argues that we do away with adolescence, using his clinical experience as evidence for the competence and diversity of young people who are unfairly disempowered and infantilized by the concept of adolescence. Similarly, a psychology researcher and professor Robert Epstein wrote a book in 2007 called *The Case Against Adolescence: Recognizing the Adult in Every Teen*. Whether this trend to do away with the concept of adolescence will shape the future of research in medicine and psychology, however, remains to be seen.

Graham and Epstein are not the first to make attempts to pressure the concept of adolescence. In 1996, an independent researcher named Mike Males wrote a book called *The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents*. Males makes California his central case study to make the argument that children and adolescents have been abandoned by government policy, law, education, and even the family. Males points out how children and adolescents are continually made the center of a crisis in these systems, positioned as the root of a shifting set of social problems. Using a significant body of government research, statistics, and reports, Males addresses the future of public policy in the state of California, but he also significantly digs into the past to expose America's "war on adolescents" in direct and sometimes rapid moves. Males remarks: "assertions of adolescent irrationality display the selfsame affliction. Repeated studies find that modern medical and psychological experts will radically overestimate the prevalence of clinical disturbances among teenagers by a factor of *three*" (33). Males contrasts statistical studies with contemporary cultural discourse that directly contradicts those statistics, even in sources coming from the same field of study, suggesting that the strength of ideological constructions attached to adolescence can often overpower research to the contrary. In his 1999 book, *Framing Youth: 10 Myths about the Next Generation*, Males is concerned with the material conditions of adolescent lives in the present and sees the mythologies associated with adolescence as flat out lies told about them. In his second book, Males takes on ten myths about youth and, one by one, uses meticulous research and statistics to prove how these myths are not only wrong, but also purposefully exaggerated and perpetuated by the very media and institutions citing this research. These studies have failed to do away with adolescence, not by any lack of effort, but perhaps because of the social significance of adolescence in supporting other myths and ideologies that are not so easily discarded.

Even Frank Musgrove's 1964 *Youth and the Social Order* makes some startlingly similar claims as the researchers above and supports many of the claims I have made here about the functions of adolescence as a social category. Musgrove's book is about the status of youth, which "has profound consequences for the kind and quality of relationship which exists between generations" (1). Using interdisciplinary research methods from history, sociology, and anthropology, Musgrove addresses the "problem of youth"—the assumption that youth people have rebelled against the values and authority of earlier generations—and finds instead, that "what emerged with the greatest clarity was the rejection of the youth by adults" (2). Musgrove argues that youth movements driven by "impetus towards social experimentation and change" do not occur when young people are granted too much social power, but rather precisely "when they are denied it" (3). Citing studies in biology, Musgrove finds that sexual and physical maturity is being reached at earlier and earlier ages, whereas social and institutional mechanisms have been working to keep the young even longer in a state of economic and legal dependence. Like the Allstate advertisements for increased graduated licensing laws, this dependence is lobbied for as a means of protection, and yet, as Musgrove reminds us: "protective measures are a two-edged device: while they may signify concern for the welfare of the young, they also define them as a separate, non-adult population, inhabiting a less than adult world" (58). Interestingly enough, in Britain, Musgrove finds that those elite youth who are chosen for the universities, which further delays their entrance into the adult world, reported feeling more alienated and depressed than their modern school peers who seemed to identify themselves more closely with the adult world.

In the foreword to *Youth and the Social Order*, Albert K. Cohen makes a curious declaration: "when I was a teenager, in the early depression years, there were no teenagers!" (ix). On the one hand, Cohen may be right, though we might read this declaration as a kind of

disavowal of Musgrove's findings, an insistence that such otherness never belonged to him. Cohen summarizes the arguments of *Youth and the Social Order*, which he feels calls into question "a conception of young people as a species apart." He writes, describing the social problem at the heart of this book: "Young people need a protracted period of preparation *for* life but must not participate directly *in* it together with adults, not even under their benevolent tutelage and authority" (xi). Cohen seems conflicted at points, overemphasizing the "benevolent tutelage and authority" of adults like himself. Earlier in his introduction, he strangely announces that "Dr. Musgrove's conclusions could be wrong," but should be considered by the reader anyhow because of the good intentions with which they were made. At each point, Cohen summarizes the arguments made by Musgrove while seemingly undermining them, reinforcing some of the very assumptions about youth that Musgrove's research refutes, at the end placing the blame back on young people for perhaps too naively coming to "believe the rhetoric of the commencement address and the brochure from the college's public relations office," and so, he implies, becoming the agents of their own disempowerment (xix). For someone who grew up in a time when there weren't any teenagers, Cohen seems unable to let go of his belief in them.

My work aims to put pressure on this institutional knowledge, to unravel its categories, but there are fields that require generalizations, require the reiteration and stabilization of categories as part of their disciplinary practices. This leaves us with a question—can we build institutions without requiring this displacement of authority? Can the institution function, with all its benefits, without requiring the sacrifice of self and other to its management and control? The authority of these institutions was not always taken for granted, and resistance to this authority can be found in book reviews and editorials, in sarcasm and parody. While adolescence exists in a hierarchical relation to adulthood, it is clear that this relation reifies and

obscures the power dynamics of other social relations, those between doctors and patients, institutions and individuals. The question remains, are there ways of imagining a better social world that are not utopian? Can utopia be imagined outside the shadow of social control? Can utopia ever be located in the present, in the doing, in the being and becoming of each present moment?

Adolescence, as a category, is inextricably tied up in notions of social order. These associations at times seem loose, coincidental, ideological. Today, we can find examples of discourse seemingly arguing for the maintenance of social order (or against the deterioration of social order) through adolescence. But we also see examples where adolescence is perpetually set against the social order, described as rebellious and free. These are merely two sides of the same coin, seemingly contradictory only in that they are two opposite deployments of the same logic. The logic of adolescence is that it is the pivotal moment, plastic youth, in which adults can be made. This is the fantasy we find most vigorously expressed at the turn of the century. What this means is that adolescence, as a category, was never only about those people called adolescents, as if their presence and increasing visibility were what led to their identification in emerging institutional discourses. Rather, the adolescent was called upon again and again to stand in for the adult in these discourses, to express fantasies of control and fears of anarchy.

As a metaphor for nation, adolescence was inextricably tied up in the turmoil, catharsis, and progress of revolution, and as such, this was the narrative force that propelled the concept of adolescence up through the nineteenth century. It was not necessarily that young people, as adolescents, were recognized in the 1870s in new ways, but that the story about adolescence had changed. Adolescence continued to be set against oppressive social forces, but the story of that oppression shifted depending on who was making use of this narrative. Resisting the social

order is a part of the narrative fabric of American culture. Adolescence is part of this narrative. But the ways that this narrative of resistance has been integrated into the structure of social order leaves us with the question of what forms of resistance are actually possible in the world we live in.

But, the truth is, resistance is possible. We know it is possible because there are queers, because there are adolescents sneaking out of windows in the middle of the night, because there are women deciding to be men or something altogether, because there are stories of great survival outside the modes of behavior deemed acceptable by James Dobson or science or religion or schools or institutions. We know resistance is possible even in silences, even within the confines of institutions themselves.

I will end with a scene from E. R. Frank's *America* (2002), a young adult novel that is not the world, but one that I will read as one writer's compact, interpretively rich negotiation of being in the world. On the first page of this young adult novel we meet a teenager named America, the narrator, who has grown up in foster care and, when we first encounter him, has found himself living in a psychiatric hospital following a suicide attempt. The novel opens with this telling advice from America: "You have to watch what you say here because everything you say means something and somebody's always telling you what you mean" (1). In these lines, we can imagine the series of doctors, therapists, nurses—the voices of the institution—telling him what he means, what his words say according to their textbooks, manuals, procedures. In the institution, his words can be made to speak their language.

Everything one says *does* mean something; he's right. *You have to watch what you say* because his words already belong to a language that is not his, a language that is part of discourse, that is part of the shared meanings we use make sense of one another. But America

doesn't speak, tells us instead, "so, I take their medicine and walk around in socks the way they make you, and stay real quiet" (1). In his *not* speaking, America does something else. The people around him, perhaps, believe that their words are their own even as they are a part of discourse, part of the institution, part of science and medicine and psychology, part of culture. But, America feels this fraught relation to discourse in a way that they do not. They speak the language of the institution to exercise its power. As the one walking around in socks, America feels these power dynamics, feels the paradox of his own agency. America knows that *everything you say means something* and that he is not the one who gets to say what it means. And yet, it is his relation to discourse that makes him aware of this gap, this fissure of meaning, this excess. And, in that space, he finds the possibility of meaning something else. He finds the queer possibility of not meaning something at all, the queer possibility of meaning nothing. His advice to us renders this gap visible and suggests both his and our own paradoxical agency to remake meaning or to take pleasure in no meaning at all. His words open to the unknowable, generating meaning and withdrawing from it.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Frank's narrator shares a name with the nation, an overlap we might see as a literal and symbolic investment in the fate of both, like the one made by Hall at the turn of the century. But does it make a difference if Frank is aware of the echo between the fate of her adolescent character and that of the nation? Is America, the boy, a metaphor for nation? There are moments in the novel we could interpret as irony, as commentary on this symbolic overlap. And yet, this is still a novel about how to save an abused and disturbed adolescent, a novel in which "Dr. B" saves him. The author, Frank, a practicing psychotherapist, has written four young adult novels based on her experiences with her patients. In writing an adolescent novel, she inhabits the positions of both doctor and patient.

Kristeva, another practicing psychotherapist, talks in *New Maladies of the Soul* about writing as potentially useful for both patient and analyst during therapy. Speaking about adolescent writing and the adolescent novel, she explains, “when I say ‘adolescent,’ I mean less a developmental stage than an open psychic structure” (136). The adolescent writer, the adult writing about adolescence, and the adolescent novel all provide access to this open psychic structure. Kristeva associates novel writing with a type of interiority she attributes to the eighteenth century and to the invention of the novel itself, which she feels would not be possible without such interiority. “More real than a fantasy, fiction generates a new living identity,” she explains. And, “the solitary economy of writing protects subjects from phobic affects” (137). For Kristeva, this solitary and realized exercise of fantasy creates the space for a patient to work through problems and to make changes via its access to the open psychic structure she calls “adolescent.” Though a person of any age might access this structure, she notes that it is more socially acceptable for “adolescents to have an imaginary.” But, “an adult could be entitled to this imaginary only as a reader or spectator of novels, films, or paintings—or as an artist.” A novelist, then, achieves such access, perhaps requires it, to do the work of writing a novel in the first place. “For that matter, what, if not an ‘open structure,’” she asks, “could motivate someone to write?” (139). Kristeva offers us both adolescence and the novel as locations that might be read or listened to, that enable the reconstruction of identity and self, that sustain the instability of meaning long enough for something else to take shape.

What we invest in the meaning of adolescence, as writers or readers of these texts, is really for ourselves. I find the questions of psychoanalysis particularly relevant for thinking about childhood and adolescence as ways of interpreting ourselves and others. What makes psychoanalysis so essential is the overlap of self, text, and world in which we are inevitably

situated as a kind of reader. We are physical bodies and part of a physical world; we are also conscious as selves and also a part of a consciousness that precedes us. While there is an experiential dimension to our existence, these experiences are also subject to interpretation within language and culture. Each of us must become a reader of some kind, a reader of self, text, and world. Freud offered his theories of how this interpretive relation works, and Kristeva offers us hers. But, there is no place within psychoanalysis to finally settle on meaning. If meaning is not inherently stable, the question ceases to be what do things mean, but why do we continue to find certain meanings and not others? What do we desire? Even, what do we need? As I write about these things, I am interested in patterns of meaning, places where meanings seem to have stabilized to fulfill a desire or need. Such stabilization can only occur through repetitions that are subject to cultural regulation. What we find in fiction are meanings subject to cultural patterns, but they are also subject to interpretive flexibility, both reading and writing functioning as complex negotiations of being in the world.

I have created my own overlaps in my reading of *America*, aligning the text, the self, and the world. All three I want to consider as interpretive fields subject to discursive constraints while at the same time exceeding discourse, spilling over it, and falling into its gaps. All three I find to be radically contingent, variant, and contradictory, available to me as reader who desires their unraveling, needs them to become undone.

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