The adult in the room: mobilizing the figure of the child in Sweden and Germany

Maria Brock[1]*, Jeanette Sundhall[2] and Lena Martinsson[2]

[1]Department of Media and Communication Studies, Södertörn University, Huddinge, Sweden,
[2]Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

This discussion takes as its starting point recent right-wing protests and -rhetoric, forming part of a conservative moral panic surrounding Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) and LGBTQ+ pride events, and in particular the harm these are proclaimed to be causing children. While mobilizing the figure of the child for political purposes is not a recent phenomenon, the momentum and number of fellow travelers the instrumentalization of vulnerable innocence of children has achieved recently demand an intervention. The aim of this article is therefore—in conversation with feminist theoretical work, primarily focusing on gender-based needs, to explore specific figures of the child at a time when nationalist right-wing politics are naturalized across multiple domains and geographies. We situate our research at a specific historical and political juncture, with the purpose of enabling a feminist reflection of the categories of childhood and adulthood in order to open them up in potentially empowering ways. We focus on the symbolic and political weight of childhood as a particular age category, analyzing political rhetoric from Germany and Sweden, but speaking to transnational discourses about the child and how it is both transformed and anchored in different national contexts. Importantly, this also means inquiring what it means for some population groups to be forcibly adultified, while being infantilized in other contexts. We conclude that the political use and co-optation of the child in order to mobilize actors arguing that the child is only safe within the confines of traditional values and the ethnonationalist state in fact undermines children's rights.

KEYWORDS

(figure of) the child, feminist and gender studies, right-wing nationalism, anti-gender movement, adultism

Introduction

> *Let children be children, to talk about sexual orientation with two-year-old's is downright disgusting. It is our moral obligation to stop it (Jonathan Sager, 3 November 2022).*[1]

The figure of the child has become a central, symbolic rallying point for the anti-gender movement, and to contemporary right-wing politics more generally (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022; Brock, 2022; Brock and Askanius, 2023; Butler, 2024). Indeed, a tried and (historically) tested way in which a phenomenon can attract political attention is to construct a connection to children (Edelman, 2004; Levine, 2002), and this is being increasingly exploited by politicians.

---

1 Drag Story Hour, or Drag Queen Story Hour is a type of children's event, first started in San Francisco in 2015 by Michelle Tea as a way of encouraging reading and representation.

Jonathan Sager, a far-right nationalist politician formerly with the Sweden Democrats (SD) responsible for the quote at the beginning of this article, used this tactic to intervene and try to stop a Drag Story Hour event that was to take place at the public library in Kalmar in Southern Sweden. In Gothenburg, the priest Lars Gårdfeldt, who was holding a Drag Story Event at a culture festival was threatened by a man who, with a megaphone, called him a "pedophile, evil, disgusting and obnoxious." This led to Gårdfeldt cancelling future story times, citing safety concerns (Björklund, 2024).

Threats against the organizers of Drag Story Hours have become a common phenomenon in Sweden in recent years. For example, Drag Story Hour events had been held in Malmö since 2017, proving very popular and unproblematic for the first five years. However, in 2022 local SD-politicians started protesting and taking action to cancel it. Additional security had to be hired to protect actual children from those claiming to want to "protect the children" from drag queens. In Trelleborg, an SD-politician canceled a similar event (Axelsson, 2023). In Olofström, the event was held digitally after organizers received threatening e-mails. The chairman of the Culture and Leisure Committee in Olofström stated: "[W]e did so for the children's safety" (Carlsson, 2022, see also Engström et al., 2024). Such developments are not confined to Sweden: resistance against similar events has taken place in Munich for example, once more in response to local politicians criticizing the event (Volk, 2025). Previously, a wholesale ban on drag was discussed in several US states, such as Texas, Tennessee, and Arizona, while protests against drag events also took place in the UK, other European countries, several Latin American countries, and Australia and New Zealand (Gallagher, 2023).

While disgust expressed by right-wing politicians and -activists towards LGBTQ+ persons is not new, one could argue that the instrumentalization of emotions has become more central since the "populist turn" (Brock and Gunnarsson Payne, 2023; Mouffe, 2018). Similarly, and crucially, mobilizing the figure of the child for political purposes is not a recent phenomenon, and this instrumentalization of vulnerable innocence is not confined to the right end of the political spectrum. However, the momentum and number of fellow travelers the instrumentalization of children has achieved recently demand an intervention: as feminist scholars, it becomes important not to let right-wing nationalists use the figure of the child-as-projection surface unopposed. Instead, we want to problematize the political operationalization of this figure because it not only naturalizes far-right movements but also the marginal position of the child, as the innocent-but-powerless category that carries the future within it. The aim of this article is therefore—in conversation with feminist theoretical work—to explore *specific* figures of the child in a time when nationalist right-wing politics are becoming more dominant and naturalized. We ask what this performative move does: What impact does such child protection rhetoric have on how far-right movements are mobilizing? How can we understand the figure of the child as part of this political mobilization? More specifically, who is the adult that emerges in opposition to, and with greater power over, the child?

The (figure of the) child in feminist theory

Over the years, feminist theory has oftentimes been discussed as an excluding practice, interpreting gender-based needs to mean those

of white, heterosexual, middle class and Western women (Mohanty, 1984; Butler, 1990/1999; Spivak, 1994; Crenshaw, 2003). A less common charge is that of feminism being adult-centric. However, Barrie Thorne formulated this critique in 1987: "Both feminist and traditional knowledge remain deeply and unreflectively centered around the experiences of adults" (Thorne, 1987, p.86). According to Thorne, referring to de Beauvoir and Fanon, "adults use children to define themselves in an ideological process of dominance and self-definition, analogous to the way in which men have defined women, and colonialists have defined those they colonized, as 'the other'" (Ibid.). In fact, both the parallels with colonial subjects, and with childhood as the absence of adulthood, are relevant for this discussion. Wallace speaks to the fact that there are no "concepts of childhood which are socially and politically innocent (Wallace, 1995, p. 286), because "historically, 'the child' has never been a subject-position available to all, or even most, children; moreover, it has frequently been a subject-position imposed on colonized adults" (Wallace, 1995).

There are also numerous parallels in the representation of women and children: the (figure of the) child is always subject to uneven relations of power. The child, like women historically, lacks a political voice and finds itself represented by others, spoken for. Furthermore, children are not all considered equal, despite, paradoxically, also being considered blank slates, defined by innocence and vulnerability. Gender, race and class are used as markers to relegate certain populations as less worthy or grievable – and this too, affects child subjects. Across all theoretical approaches, it becomes clear that referring to children always means a preconfigured "child". Despite this recognition, little agency continues to be afforded to the child, such that "the child is everywhere in representation (on Benetton's billboards, on television shows, in the news) but almost nowhere in *self*-representation" (Wallace, 1995, p.294). Instead, childhood becomes a figure, or a "[…] stand-in for contestations over race, gender, sexuality and national belonging" (Breslow, 2021, p.19). "Childhood", like "femininity", stands in for and mediates larger social anxieties. A recurrent, fundamental anxiety is that of human sexuality and gender diversity, which partially explains why the child is so often at the center of sex (moral) panics (Levine, 2002) and plays such a central role in anti-gender mobilizations.

We situate our research at a specific historical and political juncture in which processes of neoliberalism are merging with authoritarianism (Hall, 2021; Brown, 2019), with the purpose of enabling a feminist reflection of the categories of childhood and adulthood in order to open them up in potentially empowering ways. We focus on the symbolic and political weight of childhood as a particular age category, analysing political rhetoric from Germany and Sweden, but speaking to transnational discourses about the child and how it is both transformed and anchored in different national contexts. Importantly, this also means inquiring what it means for some population groups to be forcibly adultified, while being infantilized in other contexts. Finally, as feminist researchers we seek to make an intervention and claim scholarly responsibility for how the figure of the child is operationalized, before it is co-opted further by actors arguing that the child is only safe within the confines of traditional values and the ethnonationalist state. In the next section, we present our theoretical perspectives and methodologies before interspersing existing analyses and reflections of childhood in feminist scholarly work with current political instances of

the child being instrumentalized as a political figure, before ending on a discussion of the emergence of adultness as a category.

Theoretical perspectives: the child as signifier and subject to moral panics

We argue that it is crucial to understand how the figure of the child is politicized in anti-gender, illiberal and authoritarian contexts, or to put it differently, how the figure of the child emerges and is used in political struggle. Highly imbued with positive affect (or sentimentalized) as members of families and society, children represent a promise or hope for the future. Indeed, in the words of Lee Edelman, "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman, 2004, p.11). Simultaneously, childhood as a categorization carries low social status and little to no power, as conveyed by expressions such as *to be treated like a child*. This ambiguity, or simultaneity of low social status and high emotional (or sentimental) appreciation is fundamental to an understanding of the figure of the child as well as the lives of those who are called children.

A vantage point for us, in our ambitions to analyze processes of politicization of the child, is that the figure of the child can be understood as an *empty signifier*. While an empty signifier carries a hegemonic understanding of great significance, it simultaneously does not have a stable definition. An empty signifier will therefore be encumbered with different meanings, becoming a place for political and discursive struggles and mobilizations (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). For instance, the figure of the child is full of intersecting references to discourses on race, gender, sexuality and class. In our analyses about what is at stake, but also who in these political struggles counts as a child and who becomes excluded as the unchilded other (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020), we therefore utilize this understanding of the figure of the child as an affective empty signifier, built on intersecting processes.

The struggle over the figure of the child also contains ideas about how those identified as children should act and feel. Once these reach the child, such discourses acquire material qualities and impact the conditions for the child's subjectivity. To give an example of importance to this discussion: central to struggles over the meaning of the child is the idea that children should be protected from what is deemed sexual – so much so that it has become a prominent feature of childhood related moral panics. In fact, it has been argued that moral panics "can be understood as ordering practices of late modernity—to create community we need to demarcate its border, exclude and expel" (Robinson, 2008, p.124). In times of ontological insecurity, fertile ground is prepared for ever new moral panics. One might thus say that, at least in the West, the child, or figures of the child, continue to be "subjects of anxiety" (Tsaliki and Chronaki, 2020). In other words, the notion of "the 'child at risk' within a 'risk averse' culture, leads to the rampant 'child protectionism' and 'moral parenting' we experience today" (Tsaliki and Chronaki, 2020, p.9).

Who gets to be a child?

Historically, one can track the creation of both benign, idealized and of threatening figures of the child, and the exclusion of *some* children from the ideal figuration of the child—in Western countries, this being the white child from the expanding middle- and upper classes. Between 1870 and 1930, the ideology of domesticated mothers

and children expanded across social classes in industrialized societies, in a process analyzed by Zelizer (1985), who emphasizes the changing definitions of children. Child labor laws and compulsory public schooling further "privatized" childhood. Through considerable conflict that often pitted working-class women and men against middle-class reformers, an earlier view of the useful wage-earning child was replaced by a view of the child as "economically worthless, but emotionally priceless" (Zelizer, 1985, p.21). Children became defined sentimentally, their "proper place" narrowed to families and school.

The field of child development also emerged in this period, providing "expert" definitions of the nature and needs of children, and charging mothers with the work of deliberately "developing" the child. However, this "sanctification of modern, precious childhood" (Gill-Peterson, 2023) was not only the prerogative of middle-class children, according to Gill-Peterson it was made possible chiefly by excluding most children from it, instead making them work in factories, or by barring black and indigenous children from this status. Similarly, (sexual) innocence was distributed unevenly between white children and children of color (Bernstein, 2011). Unique to this polarization was another idea emerging in the second half of the 19th century: that black children and youth could not experience pain. "The libel that African American juveniles were invulnerable, did not suffer, and were not victims, then, defined them out of childhood itself" (Bernstein, 2011, p.42).

In other words, childhood, instead of being the pre-political and pre-cultural period of innocence as it is presented at times, is exactly where power relations are first enacted, for example through the demarcation of childhood's borders, and who gets to dwell within them. Certain lives are seen as worthy of protection – at the cost of barring them from empowering knowledge – while others are seen as problematic or even disposable, a biopolitical move of "regulating and disciplining of individuals and populations through childhood in order to maximize the life of (some of) the population" (Breslow, 2021, p.12). This need to exclude some children through the process of othering to create the desirable figure is anchored in the many reiterations of the innocent, white child which floods the discursive and political struggle over whose lives are deserving of state protection.

Trans-exclusionary feminism and right-wing nationalist concerns for the child

As we stated at the beginning of this text, the discourse of the innocent child, which contains both the *idea* of the child as well as actual children, is a central part not just of so-called culture wars, but anti-democratic, illiberal and neo-fascist political projects. While it is to be expected that right-wing nationalists would make recourse to affect to express their points of view, it is precisely trans* issues which are dividing feminist groups. As gender diversity has become a regular topic of public debate and a favored target of right-wing attacks, feminist critics have joined the battle. Some refer to themselves as "gender critical", while others name them "trans-exclusionary radical feminists", or TERFs. The main problem, according to this coalition, is that a non-adult is too young to make a decision that concerns their gender identity and -expression. That adults perform a gate-keeping role in relation to trans* children and youth to decide whose voices get heard and whose identities are valid, is well documented in research (Hall, 2021; Schroeder, 2012; Tan and Weisbart, 2023). At the same time, vulnerable young children arriving as refugees or from migrant backgrounds are *unchilded*, as we demonstrate below, in order to enable their punishment and deprivation.

Children are placed at the center of a public struggle of values, and by framing a debate with children at the heart of it, urgency is added to the issue, while those in control of the debate get to signal their care -and yet, what is at stake seems to lie elsewhere, both of the above mentioned issues do not seem to be about children. The figure of these children, and the transformation to see them as youth become, we suggest, an affective force in political mobilization, where the understanding of the problematic child leads to the emergence of a community, a *we*. It is possible to identify this affective rhetoric as the political creation of a moral panic. Moral panics are after all also exercises in power, echolocating how the public might be rallied – often in the service of regressive, or retrogressive political projects.

Childhood moral panics

Moral panics around child safety, and especially around children and sexuality, have a long history, with contemporary aftereffects and echoes. In fact, the concept (Cohen, 1972/2011) and the social phenomena associated with it have been of perennial relevance since the end of World War II, or can even be characterized as an intrinsic feature of the modernity, while with the rise of biopolitics, children's minds and bodies have been subject to regulation since at least the 19th century (Ariès, 1960/1982; Oswell, 2013; Kennedy, 2006). According to Ariès (1960/1982) it was during the 17th century that adults stopped tolerating, or encouraging, children's free sexual behavior, while the idea of children's innocence gained prominence. The morality reform of the time, which initially had religious overtones, began to argue for greater monitoring and control of children's behavior. With the creation of age-segregated schools, the separation of children from adults increased, and this led to an enhanced focus on protecting children. During this time, knowledge about sexuality was seen as appropriate for adults only (Ariès, 1960/1982).

However, there continues to be a big difference between the treatment and representation of *normalized* heterosexuality versus that of *norm-deviant* queerness. At present, heterosexuality is considered "safe" even at preschool level, without it disturbing the idea of childhood innocence. Heterosexuality ends up becoming an "asexual sexuality", in that it is not referred to as sexual, becoming the unmarked (Robinson, 2013; Sotevik, 2021). Indeed, similar arguments occur in the drag queen story hour controversy: the exhortation to protect children is seen to justify the labelling of LGBTQI+ issues and persons as undesirable, or as a threat. The effect of such speech-acts is that they rationalize the denial of civil rights to LGBTQI+-persons. It also denies children sexuality, or any agency thereover: "Remaining innocent (the defining category of childhood) requires the negation of experience. Knowledge becomes tricky. For example, it is nearly impossible to name youths' sexual agency and pleasure, particularly within a culture of persistent sexual violence that targets young people" (Meiners, 2016, p.37). While the child is vulnerable *because of* its innocence, the loss of this innocence then frequently has connotations of immorality – and this loss can occur through "premature" encounters with forms of knowledge, that, from a more liberal perspective, might be read as empowering.

Returning to the idea of the child as empty signifier and how to operationalize it, it is important to note that the empty signifier inevitably creates instability. There is no single, essential understanding of the Child. By virtue of being politicized, the figure

of the child is political. In the words of Barbara Baird, "[t]he child' may be a floating signifier, capable of carrying multiple meanings depending on time and place, but it brooks no opposition" (Baird, 2008, p.291). It becomes our task to explore how one might "reoccupy" the figure of the child, even as this creates a tension between allowing for the radical emptiness—or openness—of the figure, and barring it from being taken over by regressive, anti-democratic projects. Therefore, while "the child has an exceptionally generative capacity across multiple discursive fields" (Burman and Stacey, 2010, p.231), which is being taken advantage of by political actors, but also those working with the figure for more creative ends, it is academics who can often be accused of using the child for the purposes of theorization, not liberation – as a kind of impasse of theory, or as an adult-to-be (see Baird, 2008; Sotevik, 2021; Burman and Stacey, 2010).

Materials and methodology

In her discussion of "The child as a feminist figuration", Claudia Castañeda critiques methodological-theoretical approaches which enact "adult privilege so as to occlude the existence of differences between the adult and the child" (Castañeda, 2001, p.36). This is a gesture of control, whereby we "exercise knowledge-as-power to remake our own privilege as adults when our claims to the child constitute the child either as the adult's Other, or through our failure to account for the historically constituted differences of power between children and adults" (Castañeda, 2001, p.35). Paraphrasing her, a methodological and ethical task for the scholar is to try to avoid imposing adult phantasms of children onto the materials we study. Even as we are transparent that our focus is on fantasies about, or projections onto the child, and how these are intertwined with political ideologies, we are aware of the risk of producing new phantasms which could again be projected onto those identified as children.

The materials used in this article are part of two research projects. The first addressed broader comparative dynamics of anti-gender mobilization and -thought in the context of Germany and Russia. The second focused on the emergence of political subjectivities among teachers and students in a context of conservative and ethno-nationalist movements in Sweden. The article thus draws on a larger empirical database of media texts, party-programs, speeches, live television performances, written commentary, and literary work. For Germany, this included media reports, web pages, pamphlets, books and live streams of public events that provided information about the aims, strategies, rhetoric, and public activities of anti-gender initiatives specifically centred on child protection (in the years 2010–2025). Actors included established political parties (from centrist to conservative) as well as far-right groups and parental initiatives, together with individual politicians, activists, academics and other media personalities. For Sweden, the project looked at a number of cases and events where students, teachers and school leaders protested or engaged in other efforts *for* or *against* expressions of sexual and gender diversity, such as rainbow flags and personal pronouns. The body of data included articles from the major Swedish newspapers and public service television from 2021onwards, as well as interviews and observations. For example, in the 2022 Swedish parliamentary election campaign,

political parties made a number of proposals concerning children, while at the same time, issues from the so called "culture wars" in the US were imported by right-wing parties. Consequently, frequent public debates centered on concerns for children, but at the same time also seemed to be based on normative thinking and entangled with questions about morality and sexuality.

Methodologically, we examine the ongoing, iterative production of politicized meanings. In particular, we track child-centric rhetoric as it is operationalized by conservative and far-right nationalist political actors. We analyze this material specifically from the vantage point of how the child is constructed and then connected to the larger project of political actors and the parties they represent. While examining how the figure of the child is connected to anti-gender and far-right politics, we are particularly on the lookout for contingencies and contradictions in these ideas. Such "following" as a method is inspired by ethnographer Marcus's (1995) conceptualisation of multi-sited ethnography and organizational scholar Czarniawska's (2007) work on shadowing. The method is often employed among scholars who focus on political struggles and processes of power from a humanistic or cultural perspective (Alm et al., 2021). For example, Laskar (2021) followed "pink porn" producers to analyze how money and sexual liberation are intertwined in sometimes unexpected ways, showing how the economy of pink porn formed queer communities of belonging and politics—while others ended up being excluded (Laskar, 2021). Alm et al. (2021) focused on the political debates on trans* rights, in a longitudinal approach examining the spaces between civil society and the state, with the method making it possible to outline different measures which had an impact on struggles against neo-liberal governance (Alm, 2021).

Anti-genderism and the child

In a development that is particularly relevant for the aims of this article, feminist scholars who have been engaging with the rise in anti-genderism and anti-gender movements have observed how the instrumentalization of children, at times in conjunction with, or in the guise of parental rights' movements, necessitates a lens that understands the primacy of (the category) of gender to political antagonism. Judith Butler highlights this focus by stating that "there is hardly an instance of the anti-gender movement that does not claim to be saving the children – from harm. The movement finds, stokes, and organizes that fear wherever it can" (Butler, 2024, p.249).

In Agnieszka Graff and Elzbieta Korolczuk's 2022 book on the "opportunistic synergy" between the populist right, religious and anti-gender actors, the scholars argue that within the anti-gender movement, the child, and its (presumed) heterosexual family are seen not just as a last frontier of "traditional values" and heteronormativity, but as a bastion against neoliberalism, wherein the traditional family acts as a sanctuary offering protection from governments and markets:

> We claim that the emotional power of anti-genderism may lie not only in effectively fueling the moral panic around "sexualization of children," but also in promoting and exploiting the view of the "traditional" family as a nexus of solidarity, the last frontier of social cohesion, a defense against rampant individualism and consumerism. (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022, p.124)

By incorporating the empty signifier of the Child into anti-gender claims—often in conjunction with right-wing populist ideas—an affective realm is explored in which parenthood becomes a politicized identity category, which in turns helps to mobilize and forge new solidarities. While more general talk of parents' rights can feel devoid of emotion, a threat to parents' identity via a threat to children can inject such debates with affective investment. At the same time, however, the rhetoric of child protection can operate as a smokescreen, according to Graff and Korolczuk, for "what is really a far-right political project. While the term family is repeated endlessly in anti-gender discourse and while it is sentimentalized to convey love, connection and community, the actual aim is that of gaining political power" (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022, p.122).

Anti-gender claims and the (figure of the) child in Sweden and Germany

Intertwinements of the figure of the child with anti-genderism are transnational. Yet the success of anti-gender politics also depends on adapting to local concerns (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). For instance, when the right-wing Sweden Democrats (SD) publicized their vision of a "Sweden for young people," a first program point was to "Cancel all investments in gender."[2] According to SD, Sweden as a country that has unduly "invested in gender" is an idea reiterated by conservative and right-wing actors across Europe, who use the nation as an example of all that could go wrong when governments subscribe to "overly progressive" ideas, from education to migration and foreign policy. Incidentally, international anti-gender positions also frequently rely on Sweden as such an "other" onto which they can project scenarios of (Western, liberal) failure, and as a means of formulating their own positions (Brock and Askanius, 2023).

Germany is another context in which anti-gender positions have been appropriated by right-wing and more mainstream conservative actors, both in politics and public debates more generally (Hark and Villa, 2015). Distorted ideas of Sweden—both in its perceived closeness to German culture and its frequently accepted "example function" as a functioning social democracy—are used to conjure up negative scenarios of what lies ahead for Germany if it pursues commitments to gender mainstreaming, more liberal migration policies, and supports LGBTQI+ rights. Much of this is framed around ideas of protecting children (and their families) from intervention by state institutions and the harmful values they carry (Schmincke, 2015). One example of this is an excerpt from the rubric on childcare and children in Alternative for Germany's program for the 2021 parliamentary elections in Germany, which it is worth quoting at length:

> Children should grow up free from indoctrination until they are settled in the family and old enough to face the problems of our world. Ideologues of various stripes, however, try to influence children as early as possible. This was already practiced on a large scale in the Third Reich and the GDR. Political ideologies, such as gender delusion (*Genderwahn*) and climate hysteria (*Klimahysterie*), are now being taught to children as early as pre-school age. The AfD demands that daycare centers and

---

2   Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) (2025).

> schools be kept free of fear and hysteria and that a positive attitude towards life be taught. Often, political influence is accompanied by early sexualization in the sense of "diverse" gender roles. The "sexual pedagogy of diversity" tries to make children insecure about their sexual identity and to dissolve gender roles. This massively disturbs their development. Children have the right to protection of their privacy so that they can develop their sexuality in a self-determined way[3].

One aspect illustrated here is that a more recent instantiation of the child protection rhetoric in traditional family values discourses is a concern with gender identity along with a privileging of biological sex, while undermining the possible existence of trans* experiences and trans* identifications. The AfD's 2025 electoral program retained these references to 'early sexualization' and 'gender hysteria', adding the qualifier 'trans-gender-hysteria', and introducing the idea of a 'trans cult' reigning in childcare and educational institutions and media that is seeking to convert children[4]. The next section will further highlight the queer- and trans*phobia which is behind recent protests to Drag Queen Story hours and Pride events, which are framed by their antagonists as endangering children's wellbeing.

Drag queen story events and the child

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, the presence of right-wing protest groups outside Drag Queen Story Hours has now become commonplace. There is increased national as well as transnational attention to drag performances – from protests and threats in Sweden and Germany to proposed ban on drag performances and – venues in the US (Gallagher, 2023). One well-known right-wing conspiratorial myth surrounding LGBTQI-issues connected to children is the threat of pedophilia. At the time of Stockholm Pride in August 2023, Björn Söder, a Sweden Democrat member of parliament, wrote on X that he "has nothing against homosexuality or bisexuality" as long as it "…does not harm the innocent" […] But with Pride and the involvement of children and the legitimization of pedophilia is a completely different matter" (Christensen, 2023). Söder then reiterated that he will never defend Pride "…and its close—and now legitimate—connections to pedophilia and the involvement of children in the sexual world of adults" (Christensen, 2023). Later in November that year, during an internal debate at the Sweden Democrats' highest decision-making authority, the so-called *landsdagarna*, the aforementioned politician Jonathan Sager called on the party to introduce mandatory age restrictions for drag story hours. He also claimed that the culture war is not over until the drag queen "Shameless Winewhore" is out of the country (Morby, 2023). The drag artist "Miss Shameless Winewhore" uses the name "Miss Shameless" when reading for children, skipping the Winewhore part, nevertheless, several SD politicians keep repeating Winewhore whenever referring to the artist and/or drag story hour. In addition, SD announced plans to deport the artist.

In the meantime, the relatively recently introduced format of Drag Queen Story Hour Germany, as part of events surrounding "Christopher Street Day" (as Pride is called in Germany), was also seeing attacks in Bavaria in 2023 – an election year for the regional parliament. Politicians ranging from the Christian Democrats to the center-right "Freie Wähler" (Free Voters) were using the already common dog whistle term of "premature sexualization" (*Frühsexualisierung*), here coupled with the similarly dog whistle – coded term of "woke" to criticize the event, some even positing it as a kind of recruiting ground for pedophiles (Rüder, 2023). In June 2023, the regional AfD organization in Munich also called for a meeting under the (previously used) motto of "Hände weg von unseren Kindern! Genderpropaganda verbieten!" ("Hands off our Children! Ban gender propaganda!"). The announcement was accompanied by a poster showing a young, wide-eyed child being approached from behind by a male-presenting adult wearing makeup reaching for the child with arms outstretched as if to grab and potentially harm it. The trans*, drag- and queerphobia of the images in question was coupled with speeches at the actual gathering which equated drag artistry with trans* identities, and slandered trans* persons as "freaks", "perverts" and "pedophiles" who were allegedly using events such as Drag Queen Story Hour to groom children. However, reactions to such tactics were by and large swift and negative. Not only were parallels between the poster and antisemitic caricatures of National Socialist propaganda pointed out by the Left Party (*Die Linke*) and treated as evidence of "incitement to hatred" (Rupp, 2023), the AfD was also placed on a watch list for its extremist view, among other things for its anti-migrant and anti-muslim views and its queerphobia[5]. Similarly, and as the ISD report clearly demonstrates, counter-protesters often outnumber the queer-phobic and far-right protesters at recent protests to drag queen events (Gallagher, 2023). However, the larger aim of gaining attention, and shifting discourses – or indeed the Overton window – had been achieved.

Protecting the white child

Alternative für Deutschland's previously mentioned program lists demands for protecting children from "early sexualization" and "gender hysteria" along openly anti-migrant and anti-muslim sentiments and calls to keep schools "free of Islam". The link, or unconscious alliance created between these positions lies at the core of one of our arguments: the calls for the protection of children by right-wing and anti-gender actors usually contain an implicit demarcation of *which* children are to be included. Non-white, migrant or queer children's lives are invisibilized or are even treated as dispensable. Thus, protecting the nation's children can also be an implicit call to protect the nation, in Sweden and Germany's case, from non-whiteness.

In the Swedish case, one can observe an outspoken practice of exclusion. Ahead of the Swedish parliamentary elections in 2022, the conservative party The Moderates (M), the liberal party, The Liberals (L) and far right nationalist the Sweden Democrats (SD)

---

parties floated suggestions concerning children, aimed at their parents or caregivers. SD promised to introduce "humiliating punishment" for children who committed crimes. The conservative party (M) proposed a quick test for ADHD targeting children in so called "vulnerable areas" (Moderaterna, 2023). The Liberals (L) suggested a mandatory language test for two-year-olds who are not enrolled in preschool [Sveriges Television (SVT), 2023]. Similarly, in Germany the AfD insisted that no more than 10% of children in any classroom should come from a "migrant background" (*Migrationshintergrund*)– a fuzzy term that could be understood to mean anyone with at least one parent who was not born in Germany (News4teachers, 2023), and which is not feasible for logistical as well as ethical reasons.

After the 2022 general election, the conservative parties (Moderate and KD – Christian Democrats) and the Liberal party (L) in Sweden formed a government coalition with support from the far right nationalist party (aforementioned Sweden Democrats, SD). This constellation is called the "Tidö parties", named after a 17th century castle where the agreement was formed. The document: "The Tidö Agreement: Agreement for Sweden", similarly contains several proposals that affect children's legal status and proposals that imply a limitation to children's freedom of movement and privacy. A much-debated proposal in the Tidö Agreement is to lower the age of criminal responsibility, which is currently 15 years in Sweden. The Sweden Democrats' leader Jimmie Åkesson has commented in the media that he thinks it is a good idea to sentence 13-year-olds to life (Strömberg Wallin, 2023). In Germany, the AfD has similarly proposed lowering the age of criminal responsibility to 12, while highlighting the number of children "without German citizenship" depending on state benefits (Springer, 2023). Proposals such as lowering the age of criminal responsibility and sentencing children to life are clear violations of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). However, in the (ethno)nationalist discourse, children are either worthy of protection to a degree that threatens their right to participation in society, and knowledge about, as well as empowerment regarding sexuality and identity, or they have no protection value at all.

The refugee children who arrived unaccompanied in Sweden in the latter part of the 2010s were initially assumed to be vulnerable and in need of society's help and support, but in the public discourse they soon moved from the category of "innocent" children to the more complex category of adolescent. By being referred to as young men, they were later portrayed as imposters, lying about both their age and origin, and then portrayed as morally threatening, thus becoming personifications of a larger European crisis (Lems et al., 2020). Indeed, there are parallels with the cases of child migrants entering the US from the Southern border, who ended up getting referred to as "undocumented minors" (Ticktin, 2020). In an undifferentiated fashion, migrant children were linked to a problem whose solutions were proposed based on ideological interests (Kazemi, 2021). A discursive change occurred, for example, when beards and children were put together: the word "beard child" (*skäggbarn*) was a right-wing thought construct (and dog whistle) that functioned as a racist stereotype, which at the same time questioned the honesty, age and intentions of these unaccompanied boys (Hedlund, 2015). Although the stereotype was created and perpetuated in right-wing online environments, it gained traction in public debates and influenced public opinion on the legal right of these boys to remain in Sweden (Hillén and Sundhall, 2024).

The adult in the room, or acts of *unchilding*

The above examples illustrate ways in which different figures of the child can be excluded from the imagined national community (Anderson, 1991). The apparent paradox established is that some children are deemed too "innocent", too pre-sexual to be exposed to information relating to sex education, or even to examples of sexual and gender diversity. At the same time, other children are considered too "mature", too dangerous and criminal to be deserving of state protection. However, what may appear as a paradox in fact shows that such acts of dehumanization and exclusion can be intentional, with the effect of strengthening the identification with an ethno-nationalist movement, or the creation and emergence of a collective "we" formed by the exclusion of the figure of the abjected child.

One strategy of dehumanizing children is through acts of *unchilding*, a concept coined by Palestinian feminist activist and scholar Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019). Shalhoub-Kevorkian describes *unchilding* as a process whereby children become political capital and as such can be "made and unmade" and "defined along the continuum of the helpless, uncivilized, dangerous, and terrorist other" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019, p.12). According to Shalhoub-Kevorkian, the Israeli state does not treat Palestinian children as children, but as potential terrorists. They are not considered as children, but neither are they considered to be adults with legal rights, but "always already illegitimate non-subjects" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019, p.17). Shaloub-Kevorkian argues that many contemporary political issues can be linked to *unchilding* processes, where children cannot take their childhoods for granted and where children are denied recognition as children (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019).

While the figure of the child as an empty signifier becomes a site of mobilization, the figure of the adult emerges simultaneously. In our material, the figure of the adult is constantly present, albeit at times presumed rather than avowed. If the emergence of the modern concept of childhood occurred at the same time as the appearance of the nation-state, and manifested along uneven lines of race, class and gender, then adulthood in contrast is a naturalized position, a norm so strong it becomes almost invisible. However, this is not a complete process, because language facilitates an insight into the naturalization of adulthood, and the subsequent effects of this naturalization may become easier to uncover (Sundhall, 2017). Adulthood, like gender, emerges through an embodiment and reiteration of norms which lead others to believe in their naturalizing effects (Butler, 1993).

A starting point for the interdisciplinary research field of childhood studies has been that views of children and societal conduct towards them has differed across times, classes, cultures and geographical contexts. Childhood Studies is not only interested in questions of *how* children are constructed in different contexts, but also *when* children are children (Cook, 2020). That is, the conditions under which "children" become recognizable as children and will be treated as such (Cardell and Sköld, 2023, p.77). Another stated purpose for childhood studies was to question the assumption that children and adults are fundamentally different (James and Prout, 1990; Alanen, 1992; Näsman 1994). The division child / adult is not merely binary but hierarchical. Adulthood is the final goal of childhood and so fundamental to being seen as a complete human that it is considered self-evident that children are not-yet-citizens, not-yet-fully human. Thus, adulthood becomes naturalized as a legitimate power order, at least regarding the age categorization of

children, since children's subordination is assumed as natural and often even desirable; children are viewed as "in development" and in need of adult protection and care.

For instance, the discourse which has so far dominated in Sweden, and which has manifested in legislation concerning children and young people who commit crimes, is about to change. The discourse on children being in special need of protection due to.

their subordinate position in relation to adults is being challenged by an opposing discourse, a discourse that equates them with adults. This is exemplied by a recent proposal to lower the age of criminal responsibility and a decision to introduce juvenile (read children's) prisons (Sundhall and Hillén, 2024). Children are thus positioned in different ways depending on the argumentation and can serve as a starting point to push through policy changes.

Adultism and the naturalization of adulthood

Adultism involves assumptions that adults are superior to children and young people, and that adults are thus justified in treating children and young people on that basis. The concepts of "adultism" (Flasher, 1978; Kennedy, 2006; Moosa-Mitha, 2005), "adulthood norms" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Sundhall, 2017) and a "critical adulthood perspective" (Sundhall, 2012) are all useful in order to understand the ongoing creation of both the figure of the child, the figure of the adult, as well as how the empty signifier of the child becomes a site for affective struggle (Butler, 2024). Kennedy (2006) regards adultism as a means for adults to project their own shortcomings onto children. Kennedy (2006) writes about the history of adulthood in the context of the "privileged, patriarchal West" where—like racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism—adultism is based on what appear to be empirical differences – in anatomy, neural development, ego-structure, psychoculture, size and physical strength. These "real" differences very often lead to "subspeciation" or the tendency to regard and to treat certain human others implicitly as if they were members of a separate species. As a psychological phenomenon, subspeciation is projective, which means that the subspeciator – the one with the power – attributes his or her unconscious, unresolved sexual and aggressive material to the subspeciated. This psychological process can be understood as the engine behind the creation of the other, here meaning the idea of the child. To Kennedy's important insights about how children become the object for adults' dual projections – which is part of giving meanings to the figure of the child – we would like to add that through the meaning given to the figure of the adult by expressions like "the adult in the room," a possible identificatory position emerges. This figure is superior not only to children, but also to others who identify as adults.

Conclusion

Old prejudices and stereotypes regarding gender and sexuality, such as the conflation of homosexuality with pedophilia, are still prevalent and available for (re)circulation. The inclination to confound the concepts of sex, gender, and sexual orientation is exceedingly common when discussed in relation to children and childhood: "…as the public attitudes towards lesbians and gay people have improved opponency of LGBT rights have pivoted toward a focus on protecting children from exposure to 'men dressed as women', 'drag queens', and 'transgender activists'" (Rosky, 2013, p.616). Importantly, protests at

drag queen story hours, and the demand for, creation of, and possible implementation of legal bills limiting drag performances to "minors" can also be seen as a testing ground for implementing other, future bans. In other words: moral panics such as the one surrounding Drag Queen Story Hour could also be read as barometers of the public (and political) appetite for more anti-democratic projects, becoming a practice in which authoritarian ideas have increasing identificatory potential.

In moral panics around Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH), the child is constructed as pre-sexual but also highly malleable and as needing to be protected from dangerous knowledge about sexuality or gender identity – knowledge which could harm it physically or psychologically. Simultaneously, what is implied indirectly is that one eventually reaches an age category when this type of knowledge is no longer too dangerous to handle – and that it should be certain adults that have deciding or gatekeeping power over when this knowledge is "safe" to be passed on. However, a significant difference between the power orders of gender and age is that while gender has been discussed as a social construct and as something we *do*, rather than something we *have* or *are*; age, because of its close relation to time, is regarded as biological, chronological and therefore natural (Krekula et al., 2005). Currently, the term *child* legally refers to all individuals under the age of 18, according to, for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, it is not obvious who counts as a child in a given context and which children are thus excluded from the category of child. Under some circumstances, children lose their status as being worthy of special protection and care and are instead equated with adults. Under other circumstances, such as when becoming a linchpin in the culture wars, children's vulnerability and protection value is emphasized and it is stressed that children are very different from adults.

Jo-Ann Wallace asks: "What kinds of activities does an idea of 'the child' authorize? What kinds of symbolic management does an idea of 'the child' enable?" (Wallace, 1995, p.286). In this article we have examined how the figure of the child is imbued with political meaning in right-wing, ethnonationalist rhetoric in Sweden and Germany; a figure which becomes the oppositional other in the ongoing construction of the adult. We have also tracked how this figure has been split into several different figurations. This process of splitting makes it possible for these groups to identify with some figures— namely those representing fantasies of the white, cis-gendered, that is, *innocent* child worthy of protection, while other children are cast out of this category through acts of *unchilding*. In such exclusionary discourses, left-wing actors and members of the LGBTQ+ community are described as a danger to the child. The person designated to step in and save the child is the "adult in the room" – itself a fantasy of power and whiteness. The imaginary of the exposed child is tasked with doing boundary work in the service of political organizations, communicating the "need to be responsible". The discourse of the innocent child finds its articulation on both left and right ends of the political spectrum, however, as our examples have illustrated, it is the right that has taken charge of the discourse to entrench conservative understandings of genders as another means to limit progressive social movements.

To reiterate: the paradox we grappled with in this discussion is that the child is marginalized in public life, yet highly efficacious and hence central as a political figure. Our suggestion is to make the figure of the child legible as an empty signifier, thereby making

the rhetoric about "what is best for the child" transparent as deeply political and open to being challenged. As feminist scholars we need to interrogate these exclusionary practices, as well as discourses that create fundamentalistic inclusions. We also need to study how certain discourses deprive the child of a voice. This would mean allowing for the child to remain an open figure with multiple potentialities, while also acknowledging the powerlessness of children. The child is a uniquely rich and affect-laden symbol, so rich that theorists can be tempted into forgetting that they also correspond to real beings who can experience both joy and suffering.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

MB: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. JS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. LM: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Funding

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

Alanen, L. (1992). Modern childhood? Exploring the "child question" in sociology. Jyväskylä: Institute for educational research.

Alm, E. (2021). A state affair?: notions of the state in discourses on trans rights in Sweden. In: Alm, E. Pluralistic struggles in gender, sexuality and Coloniality: Challenging Swedish exceptionalism. London: Palgrave Macillan.

Alm, E., Lundahl, M., Berg, L., Johansson, A., Laskar, P., Martinsson, L., et al. (2021). Pluralistic struggles in gender, sexuality and Coloniality: Challenging Swedish exceptionalism. 2021. London: Palgrave Macillan.

Anderson, B. (1991). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso.

Ariès, P. (1960/1982). Barndomens historia. Möklinta: Gidlunds.

Axelsson, S. (2023). Hatet mot dragqueens riskerar andra hbtq-rättigheter, Dagens ETC. Available at: https://www.etc.se/inrikes/hatet-mot-dragqueens-riskerar-andra-hbtq-raettigheter (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Baird, B. (2008). Child politics, feminist analyses. Aust. Fem. Stud. 23, 291–305. doi: 10.1080/08164640802263440

Bernstein, R. (2011). Racial innocence: Performing American childhood from slavery to civil rights. New York: New York University Press.

Björklund, T. (2024) Hotade Lars Gårdfeldt vid sagostund—åtalas för hets mot folkgrupp, Sveriges Radio. Available online at: https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/hotade-lars-gardfeldt-vid-sagostund-atalas-for-hets-mot-folkgrupp (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Breslow, J. (2021). Ambivalent childhoods: Speculative futures and the psychic life of the child. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Brock, M. (2022). The Necropolitics of Russia's family values. Lambda Nordica 27, 173–178. doi: 10.34041/ln.v27.840

Brock, M., and Askanius, T. (2023). Raping turtles and kidnapping children: Fantasmatic logics of Sweden in Russian and German anti-gender discourse', issue theme: 'the return of propaganda. Nordic J. Media Stud. 5, 95–114. doi: 10.2478/njms-2023-0006

Brock, M., and Gunnarsson Payne, J. (2023). "That's disgusting!': Shifting politics of affect in right-wing populist mobilisation" in Populism and the people in contemporary critical thought. ed. A. Stagnell (London: Bloomsbury).

Brown, W. (2019). In the ruins of neoliberalism: The rise of antidemocratic politics in the west. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Burman, E., and Stacey, J. (2010). The child and childhood in feminist theory. Fem. Theory 11, 227–240. doi: 10.1177/1464700110376288

Butler, J. (1990/1999). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2024). Who's afraid of gender? London, UK: Allen Lane.

Cardell, D., and Sköld, J. (2023). Barndom. Stockholm: Liber.

Carlsson, S. (2022) 'SD-politiker vill stoppa sagostund för småbarn med dragqueens', SVT Nyheter. Available online at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/smaland/sd-politiker-vill-stoppa-sagostund-for-smabarn-med-dragqueens (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Castañeda, C. (2001). The child as a feminist figuration: toward a politics of privilege. Fem. Theor. 2, 29–53. doi: 10.1177/14647000122229361

Christensen, T. (2023). 'Björn Söder (SD) menar Pride legitimerar pedofili – möter kritik från regeringsföreträdare'. SVT Nyheter. Available online at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/bjorn-soder-sd-menar-pride-legitimerar-pedofili-moter-kritik-fran-regeringsforetradare (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Cohen, S. (1972/2011). Folk devils and moral panics. London & New York: Routledge.

Cook, D. T. (2020). The moral project of childhood: Motherhood, material life, and early children's consumer culture. New York: New York University Press.

Crenshaw, K. (2003). Mapping the margins: intersecionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Identities: race, class, gender, and nationality, 175–200.

Czarniawska, B. (2007). Shadowing and other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies. Koege: Herndon (VA): Abingdon.

Deutschland. Aber Normal. (2021). Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag. Available online at: https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/20210611_AfD_Programm_2021.pdf

Edelman, L. (2004). No Future. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.

Engström, L., Carlsson, H., and Hanell, F. (2024). Drag story hour at public libraries: the reading child and the construction of fear and othering in Swedish cultural policy debate. J. Doc. 80, 226–245. doi: 10.1108/JD-02-2024-0026

Flasher, J. (1978). Adultism. Adolescence 8, 517–523.

Gallagher, A. (2023). 'A year of hate: anti-drag mobilisation efforts targeting LGBTQ+ people in the UK'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Available online at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Anti-Drag-Mobilisation-Efforts-Targeting-LGBTQ-People-in-the-UK.pdf

Gill-Peterson, J. (2023). The child, parapraxis magazine. Available online at: https://www.parapraxismagazine.com/articles/the-child

Graff, A., and Korolczuk, E. (2022). Anti-gender politics in the populist moment. London and New York: Routledge.

Hall, S. F. (2021). Panoptical time, cissexism, and heterosexism: how discourses of adultism discipline queer and trans youth. Feminist Form. 33, 283–312.

Hark, S., and Villa, P. (Eds.) (2015). Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen. Bielefeld: transcript.

Hedlund, D. (2015). "Beard boys: Standing in the way of a transformation of the self, 83–94 i C" in The Invisible Boy. The making of contemporary masculinities. eds. E. D. Hällgren and G.-M. Frånberg (Umeå: Umeå universitet).

Hill Collins, P., and Bilge, S. (2020). Intersectionality. Cambridge: Polity press.

Hillén, S., and Sundhall, J. (2024). Barnet som rättighetsbärare. Migration och integration i Tidöavtalet. Sociologisk Forskning, årgång 61, 399–421. doi: 10.37062/sf.61.26242

James, A., and Prout, A. (1990). Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological studies of childhood. London: Fallmer Press.

Kazemi, B. (2021). "Ensamkommande barn och unga i svensk lagstiftning" in Rättssäkerheten och solidariteten – vad hände? En antologi om mottagande av människor på flykt. eds. T. Elsrud, S. Gruber and A. Lundberg (Linköping: Linköpings universitet, Asylkommissionen), 127–142.

Kennedy, D. (2006). The well of being. Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Krekula, C., Närvänen, A., and Näsman, E. (2005). Ålder i intersecionell analys. Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift 26, 81–94. doi: 10.55870/tgv.v26i2-3.4018

Kuhar, R., and Paternotte, D. (2017). Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality (Eds.). London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C. (1985). Hegemony & socialist strategy. London: Verso.

Laskar, P. (2021) Pink porn economy: Genealogies of transnational LGBTQ Organising. London.

Lems, A., Oester, K., and Strasser, S. (2020). Children of the crisis. Ethnographic perspectives on unaccompanied refugee youth in and en route to Europe. J. Ethn. Migr. Stud. 46, 315–335. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584697

Levine, J. (2002). Harmful to minors. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marcus, G. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 24, 95–117. doi: 10.1146/annurev.anthro.24.1.95

Meiners, E. R. (2016). For the children? Protecting innocence in a Carceral state. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Moderaterna (2023). 'Förslag: Snabbtest för ADHD i utsatta områden', Moderaterna. Available at: https://moderaterna.se/stockholm/nyhet/forslag-snabbtest-for-adhd-i-utsatta-omraden/ (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Mohanty, C. T. (1984). Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. boundary 2 12, 333–358. doi: 10.2307/302821

Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005). A difference-centered alternative to theorization of children's citizenship rights. Citizenship Stud. 9, 369–388. doi: 10.1080/13621020500211354

Morby, N. (2023). SD-politiker vill utvisa dragshowartist. Göteborgsposten, 26 November 2023. Available online at: https://www.gp.se/kultur/sd-politiker-vill-utvisa-dragartist.ed9f7b86-4370-44c3-bce1-c2b3e3b055d4

Mouffe, C. (2018). For a left populism. London: Verso.

Näsman, E. (1994). Individualization and Institutionalization of Childhood in Today's Europé. In Childhood Matters. Social Theory, Practice and Politics. eds. J. Qvortrup, B. Marjatta, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger Aldershot: Avebury.

News4teachers. (2023). 'AfD will Höchstgrenze für Schüler mit Migrationshintergrund: Zehn Prozent pro Klasse'. News4teachers, 25 January. Available online at: https://www.news4teachers.de/2023/01/afd-will-hoechstgrenze-fuer-schueler-mit-migrationshintergrund-zehn-prozent-pro-klasse/ (Accessed May 5, 2025).

Oswell, D. (2013). The agency of children. From family to global human rights. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, M. (2008). In the name of 'childhood innocence': a discursive exploration of the moral panic associated with childhood and sexuality. Cult. Stud. Rev. 14, 113–129. doi: 10.3316/ielapa.601354235410178

Robinson, K. H. (2013). Innocence, knowledge and the construction of childhood. The contradictory nature of sexuality and censorship in children's contemporary lives. Oxon: Routledge.

Rosky, C. J. (2013). Fear of the Queer Child. Buffalo Law Review. 61, 607–697.

Rüder, H. (2023) 'Drag-Künstler*innen lesen Kindern vor: Rechte Hetze trifft auf Realität', taz.de, 14 June. Available online at: https://taz.de/drag-kuenstlerinnen-lesen-kindern-vor/!5935315/ (Accessed May 5, 2025).

Rupp, A. (2023). Offener Brief DIE LINKE. Bayern zum Plakat der AfD "Hände weg von unseren Kindern!". Die Linke Bayern, 11 June 2023. Available online at: https://www.die-linke-bayern.de/aktuell/presse/detail/offener-brief-die-linke-bayern-zum-plakat-der-afd-haende-weg-von-unseren-kindern/

Schmincke, I. (2015). "Das Kind als Chiffre politischer Auseinandersetzung am Beispiel neuer konservativer Protestbewegungen in Frankreich und Deutschland" in AntiGenderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen, Transcript Bielefeld. eds. S. Hark and P. Villa.

Schroeder, C. G. (2012). Making space for queer youth: adolescent and adult interactions in Toledo, Ohio. Gend. Place Cult. 19, 635–651. doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2011.625078

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2019). Incarcerated childhood and the politics of Unchilding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sotevik, L. (2021). Barbiebröllop och homohundar: barn och barndomar i relation till queerhet och (hetero)normativa livslinjer. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet.

Spivak, G. C. (1994). "Can the subaltern speak?" in Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory. A reader. eds. P. Williams and L. Chrisman (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf).

Springer, R. (2023). René Springer: 40 Prozent aller ausländischen Kinder in Deutschland beziehen Bürgergeld. AfD-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag. Available online at: https://afdbundestag.de/rene-springer-40-prozent-aller-auslaendischen-kinder-in-deutschland-beziehen-buergergeld/ (Accessed May 5, 2025).

Strömberg Wallin, C. (2023) 'Jimmie Åkesson: Ge livstids fängelse till 13-åringar', Sveriges Radio. Available at: https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/jimmie-akesson-ge-livstids-fangelse-till-13-aringar (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Sundhall, J. (2012). Kan barn tala? En genusvetenskaplig undersökning av ålder i familjerättsliga utredningstexter. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet.

Sundhall, J. (2017). A political space for children? The age order and children's right to participation. Soc. Inclus. 5, 164–171. doi: 10.17645/si.v5i3.969

Sundhall, J., and Hillén, S. (2024). The punishable child in Sweden. The Tidö agreement from a children's rights perspective. Soc. Sci. 13, 215–226. doi: 10.3390/socsci13040215

Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) (2025). Available online at: https://sd.se/vad-vi-vill/sverige-for-unga/ (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Sveriges Radio. (2024). 'Hotade Lars Gårdfeldt vid sagostund—åtalas för hets mot folkgrupp, 31 January 2024. Available online at: https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/hotade-lars-gardfeldt-vid-sagostund-atalas-for-hets-mot-folkgrupp (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Sveriges Television (SVT) (2023) 'Därför stoppades Drag Queen Story Hour i Olofström – för barnens säkerhet', SVT Nyheter. Available online at: https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/blekinge/darfor-stoppades-drag-queen-story-hour-i-olofstrom-for-barnens-sakerhet (Accessed May 6, 2025).

Tan, S., and Weisbart, C. (2023). 'I'm me, and I'm Chinese and also transgender': coming out complexities of Asian-Canadian transgender youth. J. LGBT Youth 20, 326–352. doi: 10.1080/19361653.2022.2071789

Thorne, B. (1987). Re-visioning women and social change: where are the children? Gender Soc. 1, 85–109. doi: 10.1177/089124387001001005

Ticktin, M. (2020). "Innocence, shaping the concept and practice of humanity" in Humanitarianism and human rights. A world of differences? ed. M. Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Tsaliki, L., and Chronaki, D. (2020). Discourses of anxiety over childhood and youth across cultures. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Volk, S. (2025). Rallying 'round the drag: anti-gender mobilization and the mainstreaming of the far right. Eur. Soc. 27, 59–82. doi: 10.1162/euso_a_00009

Wallace, J. (1995). Technologies of 'the child': towards a theory of the child-subject. Text. Pract. 9, 285–302. doi: 10.1080/09502369508582221

Zeit für Deutschland (2025) Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag. Available online at: https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AfD_Bundestagswahlprogramm2025_web.pdf

Zelizer, V. B. (1985). Pricing the priceless child: The changing social value of children. New York: Basic Books.