

Sjöberg, Johanna: Children in visual culture; “childity” as a theoretical and methodological concept

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When we study children, children’s culture and culture for children, what do we mean by “children”?

I suggest most researchers would answer that question by referring to a specific age span. This, despite that many of us lean towards a social constructivist view on children, arguing that children and childhood are constructed and dependent on culture, time, place and experience, rather than being easily defined by length of life. I suggest that studies using a social constructivist view on children suffer from a problem on how to talk about the category. The problem appears as the term confirms the existence of children as one stable category clearly defined and possible to delimit from other categories, such as adults (Prasad 2012). However, children as a category, and as a word, are something much more slippery, well worth linger on to, and problematize. In my presentation I will problematize “children” with examples from my research on how children are visually constructed in print advertising. In line with Erving Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (1979) several studies has focused on the visual construct of gender, but how age identities, especially “child” identity, are visually constructed is not as well studied (except f.ex. Holland 2004, O’Brien 2003, Higonnet 1998). Seeing identities and images alike, as socially and culturally constructed, raises questions on how children are visually constructed. It also raises questions on how language enables and prevents us to speak about seeing “children” and analyzing what notions and expectations of children are being constructed in images. In discussing visual elements, including certain types of bodies, certain clothes, activities, poses, gestures and settings, that are used to distinguish children from adults I will elaborate on the construction of a visual “child identity”. In this the concept “childity” (Sjöberg 2013, p. 55), similar to the concepts of constructed masculinity and femininity, will be worked on. “Childity” is a theoretical and methodological tool for discussing what (visual) elements marks and construct someone as a child. It is also proposed to function in other field of child studies.

The presentation is planned to be held in English.

References

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