

**TRACING DOMINANT DISCOURSES OF CHILDHOOD IN CHILDREN'S
VISUAL IMAGES: A QUALITATIVE APPRAISAL
OF NEWS MEDIA AND EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The literature on childhood involves various appraisals of childhood discourses from various disciplines. The romantic view of passive children as needing affection and protection is contrasted to the critical view of children that suggests defining children as empowered and active social agents. While these discourses of childhood are visible through the medium of written language, the elements of the discourses mediated through the visual images remain uncovered. In addressing this gap in the literature, this study presents a qualitative appraisal of children's visual images in newspapers and education textbooks. The study employs techniques from documentary research and offers a hybridized analysis combining constructionist approaches and content analysis of visual materials. Traces of dominant childhood discourses have been observed in the visual images of children appearing in selected newspapers and education textbooks.

Keywords: childhood discourse, media and education, visual images, content analysis

**Egemen Çocukluk Söylemlerinin Görsel İmgelerde Yansımaları: Haber Medyası ve
Eğitime Yönelik Nitel Bir Değerlendirme**

Özet

Çocukluk kavramı konusunda yapılan kuramsal çalışmalarda, çocukluğun tanımlanmasına yönelik olarak çeşitli disiplinlerin farklı yaklaşımlar sergilediği görülmektedir. Tüm bu çeşitliliğe rağmen, alan yazın genel hatlarıyla çocukluk üzerine kurgulanmış iki zıt söylemin varlığına işaret etmektedir. Çocukluk kavramına romantik açıdan yaklaşan ve çocukları yetişkinlerin korumasına muhtaç, edilgen bireyler olarak kurgulayan egemen söyleme karşın çocukların etkin, yetkin ve eyleyen bireyler olarak tanımlanmasını savunan eleştirel söylem tartışmaların odak noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Çeşitli yönleriyle sosyal pratiklere yansıdığı öngörülen egemen çocukluk söylemi yazı dilinde tartışmalar yoluyla görünür kılınmış olmasına rağmen, haber medyası ve eğitim alanında görsel imgeler üzerinden çocukluğun nasıl tanımlandığı henüz saptanmamıştır. Alan yazında gözlenen bu boşluğa yönelik olarak bu çalışmanın amacı, gazeteler ve okul öncesi eğitimi ders kitaplarında kullanılan fotoğraflarda çocukluk kavramının nasıl tanımlandığını, nitel yöntemlere başvurarak değerlendirmektir. Betimsel nitelikte olan bu çalışmada, görsel belgelerin içerik analizi yapılmış ve bulgular kültürel çalışmalar alanından çeşitli yaklaşımlar ışığında yorumlanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları doğrultusunda, egemen çocukluk söyleminin incelemeye konu olan gazete ve ders kitaplarındaki görsel imgelerle desteklendiği vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: çocukluk söylemi; medya ve eğitim; görsel imgeler; içerik analizi

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Introduction

The question of what childhood is and how certain constructions of childhood inform our practices with young children have been at the center of theoretical debates since 1990s. While there seems to be a consensus on the prevalence of adult perspectives in the concept of childhood as a vulnerable stage of life and its implications for children's social status, divergences still exist in the scope of discussion. Perhaps, the most promising dimension of the debates on childhood will be the emergence of an interdisciplinary field for childhood studies in the near future. Presently, various approaches from sociology (Corsaro, 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 2004), education (Cannella, 1998; Dahlberg Moss and Pence, 1999), psychology (Walkerline, 2004), consumer studies (Cook 2005; Schor, 2008) and mass media (Bignell, 2002) are contributing to the literature on the concept of childhood.

Among those approaches, it is clear that the closest alliance is formed between the sociological theorizing on childhood and educational perspectives in early childhood. Within this strand of literature, social and historical contexts underlying the construction of childhood are emphasized along with a thorough critique of universalizing assumptions of psychological perspectives in early childhood education. For instance, drawing from various authors in childhood studies (i.e. Burman, 1994; Nsamenang, 1992; Silin, 1995), Cannella (1998) identifies dominant images constituting discourses of childhood; and she attacks foundational assumptions of developmental psychology in early childhood education. In the same vein, Dahlberg et al. (1999) point out the absence of children's agency in modernist standpoints and they propose a postmodern perspective in viewing children. Their proposal comes to life in the Reggio Emilia approach in which relationships and communication, as oppose to isolating discourse of child centeredness, create room

for children to speak the 'hundred languages of childhood' (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Edwards, Gandini and Forman, 1993).

To overview briefly, educational perspectives pondering about the dominant constructions of childhood images note that a dichotomous and de-contextualized vision for children prevail in education. This vision defines childhood as 'the start of a journey of realization,' beginning with incompleteness and moving toward full potential adulthood. According to Dahlberg et al. (1999), "the focus is on the individual child who, irrespective of context, follows a standard sequence of biological stages that constitute a path to full realization or a ladder like progression to maturity" (p. 46). Similarly, Cannella (1998) notes that such visions of childhood shape underlying tenets of early childhood education including the whole child narrative, child centeredness, progressive development, and attachment theory. On the one hand, 'the whole child' and 'progressive development' narratives deny children's own voices as social agents because they contain such images of vulnerable children dependent on the surveillance of strong and competent adults for nurture and care. On the other hand, attachment theory supports the construction of dominant images regarding the relationships between the child, mother and family. Cannella (1998) points out the absence of later life experiences and diverse families' voices in the discourse of psychologically grounded early life experiences. She further claims that a heterosexual and nuclear family model with an individualistic image of dependent child and submissive mother dominate the discourse of early experiences. Moreover, it controls children and women and fosters class, culture and gender privileges. Thus, the discourse of early experiences in attachment theory defines appropriate gender roles for women as children and mother are posited together in a subordinate form of relationship.

The literature reviewed on the intersection of media and children reveals similar lines of discourses as the postmodern approaches. Within this framework, discourses of childhood in media are constructed along the lines of children's interactions with the media. Reviewing discourses on the interactions of children with television, Bignell (2002) draws attention to the absence of the child as a subject in these discourses and notes to the existence of polarized views in regards to the effects of media. He suggests that both theories of media whether focusing on positive or negative effects involve conventional views of children that define the child 'negatively and retrospectively as a being who is not yet an adult' (p. 139). Parallel to this theoretical discussion, the research scrutinizing the content (i.e. newspapers, magazines and television) and children's interactions with the media, posits media as a context of socialization (Milkie, 1999; Jipguep and Phillips, 2003). Some studies in this vein remind media its responsibility to provide more information on child care and development for parents (Gerson, 1966; Jacobs and Eccles, 1985; Kunkel, Smith, Suding and Biely, 2002). While studies of this nature emphasize giving voice to children in media, they ironically reinforce the discourse of childhood by situating children in media as an ignored and vulnerable part of population.

The counter reflections of these provocative arguments regarding the discourses of childhood can be seen in the form of stomped critiques from other disciplines. While Dahlberg et al. (1999) argue, "... if we hide children away from a world of which they are already a part, then we not only deceive ourselves but do not take children seriously and respect them" (p. 45), they, in fact, draw blurred boundaries for the social world of children. The question of what children's world contains in social life other than school, community and family still waits for an answer. For instance, what is the economy's role in this world where

children should be perceived as active? Drawing from the research on spaces of children in commercial stores, Cook (2005) shows how, indeed, children's voices are taken into account by the commercial industries as they spend resources for research about children. Thus, the author points out the limitations of alternative constructs of agentive, empowered and active child in various literature; and she suggests using plural constructs of childhood viewing children both as subjects and objects, persons and symbols, active and passive. From this standpoint, Cook (2008) invites scholars to be 'cognizant of the often unexamined assumption that posits children as somehow outside the realm of economic life who are then brought into it either by caring adults, like parents or teachers, or dragged in by media and marketers' (p. 236). Thus, the need for a thorough analysis of childhood discourses has been brought forward that should emphasize all realms of social action utilizing non-dichotomous concepts.

In similar lines of thought, Schor (2008) discusses commercial culture and identifies two dominant paradigms constructing children either vulnerable or empowered members of the society. She cautions about the threats associated with commercial culture for both children and adults and suggests using a critical paradigm that integrates children and adults. Emphasizing weaknesses of the two paradigms of vulnerable and empowered children in relation to the commercial culture, Schor draws attention to the philosophy of integrated child and adult paradigm: "The paradigm being suggested is one that avoids the economic myopia, or boosterism of liberal theory and the empowered consumer, but which also rejects the child exceptionalism of the protectionist approach" (p. 489). In this view, children are defined in relation to commercial economy, often ignored as a realm of social action in educational thought, and childhood is situated parallel to adulthood in terms of consumption trends and tendencies.

The literature on childhood reviewed so far has involved critical appraisals of childhood discourses from various disciplines. The romantic view of passive children as needing affection and protection of adults is contrasted to the critical view of active children that suggests defining children as empowered social agents who have equal status to adults in social life. A limited number of studies, though, suggest leading discussions on childhood in non-dichotomous terms. While these discourses of childhood are visible through the medium of written language outlined so far, the elements of the discourses mediated through the visual images remain uncovered. How do visual images represent children? What are the dominant discourses of childhood operating at the level of visual images? Based on the assumption that printed media involving visual images is as powerful as written and spoken language in constructing discourses, this study presents a qualitative appraisal of children's visual images in media and education materials.

Methods

The main purpose of this qualitative study is to trace dominant discourses of childhood in visual materials. To trace dominant discourses of childhood in children's visual images, the responses to the following questions were sought in this inquiry:

- 1) How do photographs in newspapers and textbooks visually represent children?
- 2) What are the discourses of childhood present in the visual images of children?
- 3) To what extent do visual images of children address the issues of power, equity and social justice?

Theoretical framework of the study is informed by constructionist approaches to the systems of representation in the realm of cultural studies. The language, production of meaning, discourse, and production of knowledge are foundational concepts of

constructionist approach. The constructionist approach emphasizing the role of language as a system of representation focuses on the production of meaning and views representation as a complex process of producing meaning (Hall, 1997). The pioneering studies in this strand involve Saussure's work on linguistics and Barthes's work on semiotics. The guiding principle of linguistic and semiotic approach in constructionism is that objects, people or events do not have a fixed meaning apart from language. That is, the meaning we assign to the material world comes from the symbolic processes and practices involving language and representation systems. In this approach, language is viewed as a system of representation consisting of 'the actual sounds we make with our vocal chords, the images we make on light sensitive paper with cameras, the marks we make with paint on canvas, the digital impulses we transmit electronically' (p. 25).

The constructionist approach emphasizing the role of discourse as a system of representation focuses on the production of knowledge and meaning through discursive formations in different historical contexts and periods. Owing to Foucault's work on knowledge and power, this approach in constructionism moves the basic processes of meaning production through language to a more advanced level of knowledge production through discourses. The guiding principle of discursive approach is that physical things and actions only become meaningful objects of knowledge within discourse (Hall, 1997). In this approach, discourse is defined as 'a group of statements' that 'constructs, defines, and produces objects of knowledge' and 'influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others' (p. 44).

Drawing from the constructionist approaches to the systems of representation, the purpose of this study is to trace dominant discourses of childhood in visual images of children. Underlying assumption is that

visual images are representational systems on which interplay of several discourses can take place. In parallel lines, Aries's infamous work, *Centuries of Childhood* can be shown as a classical example for the analysis of visual images. Aries (1962) examined paintings and etchings to show changing conceptions of childhood from medieval times to more recent times. The visual images of children in this study are defined as photographs of children used in media and education materials. According to Loizos (2000), photographs are visual research materials and they offer several kinds of uses including to document specific historical changes and to read them for implicit cultural and historical information. Using visual materials to identify implicit information requires asking such questions as "Who is missing from the photograph or painting, and why? The young? The old? The rich? Whites? Blacks? And what is implied by their absences?" (p. 98). Guided by these questions and methodological framework offered for qualitative research, symbolic system of visual images was selected as the domain of analysis in the present study. Since photographs in printed materials are targeted for the analysis, this qualitative inquiry employs techniques from documentary research and offers a hybridized analysis utilizing the concepts of constructionist approaches and content analysis of visual materials (Hall, 1997; Penn, 2000; Bauer, 2000).

Data sources for the analysis of children's visual images consist of the issues of the New York Times newspaper and three early childhood education textbooks. Newspaper issues included all the New York Times issues between March 1 and 9, 1980; November 1 and 11, 1990; and September 21 and 30, 2001. There were a total of 57 visual images of children in these newspaper issues. All visual images of children appeared in these time periods were analyzed comparatively. The newspaper issues were drawn in weekly clusters from three different months to prevent seasonal effects in the analysis due to superficial increase in children's visual images during

certain periods (i.e. school openings, national exam times, school breaks in holiday seasons etc.).

Textbooks as data sources included Roopnarine and Johnson's, *Approaches to Early Childhood Education* (2000) as the main analysis unit and Golubchick's *Early Childhood Education* (1977), and Gordon and Browne's *Beginnings and Beyond* (1993) as the supporting documents. The initial reasons for selecting these specific textbooks were the difference of the topics covered in each book, availability of the visual images in the texts, and the assumption that there would be different categories of children's visual images because of the years they were published. However, this assumption didn't hold when the children's images were examined. Therefore, the analysis was focused on Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook, but findings were compared to the latter two textbooks for possible divergences in the analysis of children's visual images. There were total of 35 children's visual images in Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook and all these images were analyzed. To ensure the accuracy of interpretations drawn from the analysis, 13 visual images from Golubchick textbook and 16 visual images from Gordon and Browne's textbook were cross checked. The visual images in the latter two textbooks were observed to be representative of children's visual images in the Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook.

These two sets of documents (newspaper issues and textbooks) were chosen in ten year intervals to substantiate the continuity/discontinuity of the representations and discourses in children's visual images. However, selecting these documents from different years doesn't serve to generalize findings beyond or within those years, rather it serves to offer maximum variability for triangulation and historicity in data sources. Using purposeful sampling methods, the newspapers and textbooks were selected based on the target audience for the media identified. While the target audience consists of general public for

the former, the audience for the latter is limited to undergraduate or graduate students in teacher education programs. Common to the audiences of newspapers and textbooks is their reading activity in decoding the meaning and their exposure to several visual images of children.

Results

The results of the study are broken down into two sections based on the document types analyzed. Due to copyright issues and space limitations, copies of photographs are not provided in this article but detailed descriptions are provided as needed.

Visual Images of Children in the New York Times

The analysis of selected issues from the *New York Times* newspaper is presented in this section. There were total of 57 different photographs of

children in the selected issues of the newspaper. The analysis of photographs and accompanying news texts in the *New York Times* issues revealed that children’s images were used in three different contexts:

- 1) Children’s images as part of the news related to children (children as tittle-tattle category)
- 2) Children’s images as part of the advertisements related to commercial products and services (children as consumers category)
- 3) Children’s images as part of the news related to adults in which the news stories do not involve children (children as instruments category)

The distribution of children’s visual images in these three categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Children’s Images in the New York Times

| The New York Times Issues | Children as tittle-tattle | | Children as consumers | | Children as instruments | | Total | Total |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------|----|-------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| March 1 thru 9, 1980 | 7 | 50 | 5 | 36 | 2 | 14 | 14 | 25 |
| November 1 thru 11, 1990 | 6 | 38 | 5 | 31 | 5 | 31 | 16 | 28 |
| September 21 thru 29, 2001 | 6 | 22 | 9 | 33 | 12 | 45 | 27 | 47 |

As the statistics show in Table 1, the use of children’s images in three categories differed across three years. When the photographs in the *New York Times* are examined across three years, the increase in the use of children’s visual images is worth noting. That is, the number of children’s images used in the newspaper appears to be increased dramatically from 25 % to 47 % between the years of 1980 and 2001 respectively. This dramatic increase in

using children’s visual images as shown in Table 1 may be attributed to changing trends of newspaper coverage in the media industry. However, the use of children’s images is not equally reflected in *children as tittle-tattle*, *children as consumers* and *children as instruments* categories. The changes in the use of children’s images for these categories are shown in Figure 1.

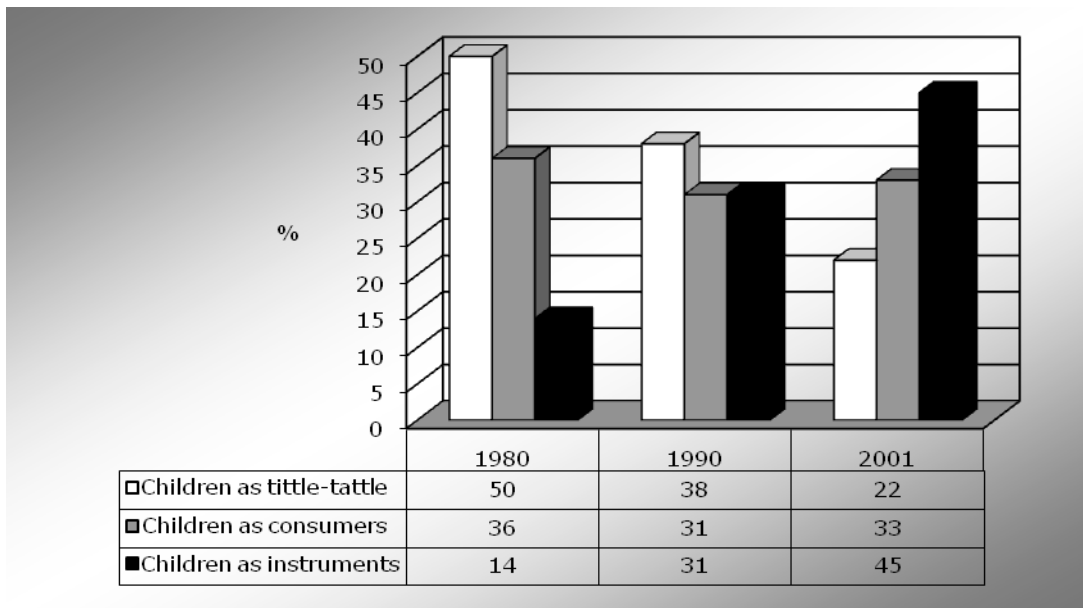


Figure 1: Changes in Children's Visual Images

While the percentage of children's images in *children as tittle-tattle* category decreased from 50% to 22%, the percentage of children's images in the *children as instruments* category increased from 14% to 45% between 1980 and 2001 respectively. On the contrary to these statistics, the percentage of children's images in *children as consumers* category remained relatively stable (36% in 1980 and 33% in 2001). The fact that children's images used as part of commercial advertisements remained stable shows on the surface that children are regarded as established consumers and their presence in the market is equally important as adults. However, the simultaneous decrease in using children's visual images as part of the news related to children and the increase in using children's visual images as part of the news related to adults appear to support the dominant discourses of childhood. That is, newspapers use children's visual images less as the direct focus of the news and more as part of adult news and this implies that children's own voices are rarely heard in public life and they are not regarded as active members of society as they are viewed as dependent on superior adults. However, this observation cannot be solely based on the changing

statistics of children's visual images in the newspaper. Therefore, the foregoing three sections will document the strength of these insights based on an in-depth analysis of individual photographs of children in each category.

Children as tittle-tattle: Children's visual images were categorized under *children as tittle-tattle* category when the news text was found directly related to children. Within this category, children were the focus of the news and the news topics included education, family news and celebration activities in which children were involved. For example, news stories reported school closing, sports, science, literacy, proficiency scores, celebrations in different facilities and adoption news. Educational news involving children was found as an overarching topic in 1980, 1990 and 2001. In education related news, children were usually photographed with an adult while they were engaged in a cognitive activity or they were photographed while they were in groups with their peers. The recurring themes of cognitive tasks, proficiency tests, literacy, school and sports seem to support a competitive discourse of education that education is about gaining cognitive and literacy skills for a competitive world. In this discourse,

education does not have an aspect of empowerment or enjoyment for the individual child and it has no space for children's construction of their own identity autonomously. Education for children, therefore, is constructed as a gateway toward full participation in the superior adult world where success and competition are more valued than aesthetics and individual empowerment. Thus, the discourse of childhood as a period of preparation for life through education appears to be reconstructed in the visual images of *children as tittle-tattle* category.

An important characteristic of the children's images in family related news was with whom children were photographed. The children's visual images appear in a heterosexual, nuclear family structure that involves a mother, father and sometimes a sibling, too. There were no representations of children in gay families; and children's visual images in single parent families rarely included a positive portrayal. In the visual images identified, traditional and accepted form of family appeared to be a happy nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and children in the news. When these visual images of heterosexual families with children were examined, happiness with a smile on each member's face was identified. The smile reinforcing the perception of happiness in these images helps to construct a discourse of childhood that children are happy and healthy in traditional nuclear families. The happiness and problem free lives of nuclear families signify conflict as an undesirable attribute in the society and that conflicts and problems may be avoided in heterosexual and nuclear families. This discourse is strengthened with the images of concerned single-parent families having problems in their lives. For example, a sad black woman holding her son was photographed under the news title, *On Pier 94, a Welfare State that Works, and a Possible Model for the Future*. This image with the news title seems to imply that being a single mother is not only a problem for children but it is also a problem for the

country. Thus, this negative image supports the discourse of traditional and heterosexual family for the guaranteed happiness of children.

Children as consumers: Children's visual images appearing in the commercial advertisements were coded under the category of *children as consumers*. Within this category, the commercials depicted children with the products or services related to fashion, health and safety. However, there was a changing focus on the commercials across three years. While the commercials for fashion industry appeared at every selected year, the commercials related to health sector and safety were more common in 2001 issues of the New York Times newspaper. The movie commercials having a child actor also appear more often in 2001 and 1990 issues.

The widening focus of the commercials toward health sector and entertainment sector using children's visual images construct the child as a potential consumer and client in the capitalist market. However, children as consumers are reached through their parents. In the health related commercials or safety related commercials, sad facial expressions of children and emotional quotes were used. Those visual images of children signify children's need for nurture and care, and they call for immediate action on the part of families. Since parents are the readers of these newspapers, the needs of children for various products are satisfied through families in the capitalist market. Thus, a discourse of childhood highlighting children's dependency to adults is supported and children's world is constructed within the borders of family in a subordinate form of relationship with their parents.

Children's visual images identified in commercials for fashion or entertainment industry usually included smiling photographs of children as opposed to adults' serious or inattentive faces in similar

commercials. Those happy facial expressions not only touch the hearts of loving parents but they also create a sense of trust for the advertising company and a strong urge to buy its products for children. At the same time, a pretty, happy and middle-class image of a childhood is reinforced. These children are happy as long as their parents satisfy their needs which are determined by outside experts. In addition, as needy individuals growing into adulthood, children's connection to institutionalized education is reminded once more through a visual image for a fashion commercial. The girl in this commercial was photographed with a smile on her face and a handwriting style quote accompanied the visual image: *Dear mom, school is great! Send more clothes.* The message given with the visual image of the child in this commercial thus emphasizes defining boundaries of life for children in public and private domains: education and family.

The final characteristic of the children's visual images in this category was their focus on the *whiteness*. Most of the images for fashion industry consisted of white children's photographs. This brings forward a cultural discourse of childhood privileging whiteness and western values. For example, in March 9, 1980 issue of the New York Times, there was only one black child's photograph for a fashion commercial. It is also noteworthy that the image was placed on the left bottom corner of the page which is the last point where readers' eye touch when looking at a page. In this commercial, mostly white children were photographed with an accompanying quote saying, *The Bright Whites!* While this quote is at the margins with its xenophobic implication, the absence of visual images other than intelligent, white, middle class, western children creates an oppressive discourse of childhood in the cultural realm. When children's visual images in the fashion commercials category were further examined, more children's images from non-white origins were found in 2001 issues compared to 1990 and 1980 issues. However, these images included diverse

children only on the surface, because they did not have any positive mention of non-western children's cultural characteristics. Therefore, a discourse of childhood based on whiteness and western cultural values seems to be operating at a deeper level in this category of children's visual images.

Children as instruments: An important characteristic of the children's visual images used in the category of *children as instruments* was that children were not direct focus of the specific news themselves and children's visual images were instrumental in strengthening the messages given in the news text. The news genre was also different than the news stories in which visual images of *children as tittle-tattle* appeared. The news topics in this category were related to the adults and many dramatic events that adults cause in the world. These news included such stories as attack to Turks, hunger, hardship and fear, attack in September 11, war in Afghanistan, hunt for Osama bin Ladin, death of relatives, people who lost significant others in the attacks and news about the political leaders. As the topic of these news reveal, the news in this category have a broader scope and a direct political context. That is, the visual images of children in this category are used to signify other meaning systems.

The news reports about these dramatic events with instrumental children's visual images were found at all selected years of the newspaper issues. The main features of these news reports and the children's visual images were that children were up-front in the photographs and they were in direct focus of the camera. Additionally, a variety of emotional expressions were employed in the visual images and the texts. When these visual images were examined in the context of these dramatic events reported by the newspaper, portrayals of children as if they were behaving like mature adults attract the attention. For example, when the news story included losses or war children were photographed while they wore gas masks; or they were photographed under American

Flag with a soldier hat on their head (*Waves of Anguish and Loss*). In the news texts, children were not mentioned yet their mature and non-traditional behaviors were captured by the camera. Those portrayals create the perception that children are grown up and they are already a member of the adult world. In essence, the specific discourses of childhood are used to reinforce positive spirit for American nation and these visual images of children attract attention to the rightness of soldiers in war. There are also other meanings that these visual images are associated. The children's maturity and the ways in which they respond to dramatic events in these images are making them part of the adult world but their defenselessness is implying that they need protection by the adults in the private domain of the family. The children's images in the context of these dramatic events emphasize the innocence and vulnerability of children which place them once again under the shadows of the dominant discourses of childhood. In support of such discourses, adults' affection for children is aroused by presenting children as defenseless in an adult world. These images of children thus create a dichotomy that the gift of nature is touched by adult-made world which children should not be part of. In another image, in the news story, *For Arab Americans a Time of Disquiet* on September 30, 2001 issue of the New York Times, the children were shown at play. However, what the image signifies is not only children's play as their main activity. It is the vulnerability of the specific population that particular news is referring to. In fact, it creates such superficial dichotomies as happy versus sad, children's world of play versus adults' world of despair, and vulnerability versus strength. In addition to these meanings regarding the defenselessness of children, the nostalgia of being a young child is brought forward in this specific news story.

The children's' photographs taken with political leaders were the last set of visual images in 1990 issues of the New York

Times. The news stories did not include any coverage for the children photographed yet they mentioned the political leaders or their actions for high-pressure issues. The children's visual images in these news topics function like Pepcid AC to smoothen the obvious tension in a political context and possible negative reactions of the readers to the political leader. The idea of innocent child is instrumentally employed to signify the compassionate, honest and caring character of the political leaders, which might be well questioned in the context of political campaigns as a sensitive period. Once again, a dichotomy between the complicated adult world and sincerity in children's world is signified. Adult world is characterized with competition, discomfort and decision making whereas the world of children is characterized with comfort and protection.

Visual Images of Children in Textbooks

The analysis of children's visual images in education textbooks is discussed in this section. Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook (2000) was selected as the focal unit of visual content analysis and the textbooks by Golubchick (1977) and Gordon and Browne (1993) were examined for possible divergences in the analysis of children's visual images. The content of each textbook was different and they covered a variety of topics in early childhood education. The difference between the textbooks was not the categorical differentiation of children's visual images but it was the way that these visual images were organized in the textbooks. The children's images in Golubchick's introductory textbook, *Early Childhood Education* (1977), appeared at the end of the chapters as large size black and white photographs, occupying half of the page. None of the images were incorporated with a written section to strengthen the meaning of text, therefore, the relationship between the image and the chapter topic were arbitrary in most cases. The images appearing in Gordon and

Browne's textbook, *Beginnings and Beyond* (1993) were multiple color-photographs placed at the beginning of each chapter and some small size photographs were spread throughout the text. The pages with multiple children's visual images started with a question underlying the main topic in the upcoming chapter and the photographs were used to visualize the expected answer. Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook, *Approaches to Early Childhood Education* (2000), included fewer children's images compared to the former two textbooks. The visual images were incorporated with text in chapters, outlining various models of early childhood education.

Unlike *the New York Times* newspaper, there were no discrete contexts in which children's visual images were used in these textbooks yet dominant discourses of childhood were still evident in the representational sense. The visual images of children included in the textbooks portray dominant discourses regarding child development and education. That is, childhood is separated from adulthood as a distinct period of life and institutionalized education in a stimulus rich environment has

utmost importance for the development of children. The main activities of children were to play and to engage in learning activities in educational environments. These activities appear to be neutral on the surface that support children's natural course of development universally defined by mainstream approaches in psychology. Nonetheless, an in-depth reading of the children's visual images shows shady contours of these free standing activities in these textbooks. In fact, children in these visual images are defined outside the political, economic, and cultural structures therefore they represent children as passive adult-to-be candidates in a de-contextualized fashion. Parallel to mainstream approaches to child development and education constructing dominant discourses of childhood, traces of 'othering' discourses involving race, gender, socioeconomic class and culture were found in these visual images. Based on children's visual images used in Roopnarine and Johnson's textbook (2000), the statistics provided in Table 2 illustrate these observations.

Table 2: Frequencies of Children's Visual Images in the Textbook

| Activity Types & Content | Non-White Children | White Children | Culturally Mixed Groups | Boys | Girls | Boys & Girls Mixed | Peers | Adults | Total |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------|------|-------|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Play | 3 | 10 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 15 |
| Academic | 6 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 20 |
| Literacy | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 10 |
| Math-Science | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Other | 4 | 10 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| Total | 9 | 19 | 7 | 14 | 9 | 12 | 19 | 16 | 35 |

As shown in Table 2, there were total of 35 photographs involving children in the textbook. When these images were examined according to the nature of children's activities, two types were found comprising 15 *play activities* (43%) and 20 *academic activities* (57%). Except for a few images showing children outdoors or at home in Golubchick's (1977) and Gordon and Browne's (1993) textbooks, these

images show children in the classrooms. When the images were examined according to the activity content, three areas were discerned, including 10 *literacy* (~29%), 10 *mathematics and science* (~29%), and 15 *other* (43%) content areas. The statistics regarding the nature and content of these activities in the visual images of children show a discourse of education in which literacy; mathematics

and science are more valued than other areas of learning and development. For the majority, children’s facial expressions captured in these visual images included smile, absorption and curiosity; adult’s facial expressions captured in the same images included interest, care and patience. Taken together, these images signify a discourse of childhood in which children need to learn to progress toward adulthood to be independent individuals through adults’ guidance, play and academic activities in education.

The social aspects of children’s visual images included *culture, gender and group structures*. From the cultural perspective, there were 9 photographs showing only *non-white children* (26%), 19 photographs showing only *white children* (54%), 7 photographs showing racially and *culturally mixed groups of children* (20%). In terms of gender aspect, there were 14 images showing *only boys*

(40%), 9 images showing *only girls* (26%), and 12 images showing *boys and girls in mixed groups* (34%). According to the group structures, 19 photographs showing children alone or in peer groups (54%) and 16 photographs showing children with adults (46%) seemed to be balanced. However, it is worth to note that the weight of adult presence was considerably different for play and academic activities. These statistics regarding the social aspect of children’s visual images show that non-white children and girls are underrepresented and white and male children are dominant in the textbooks (Table 2).

When quantitative representations of children from different cultural backgrounds and races were examined in these visual images, more images including only white children were observed in all types of activities across different content areas (Figure 2).

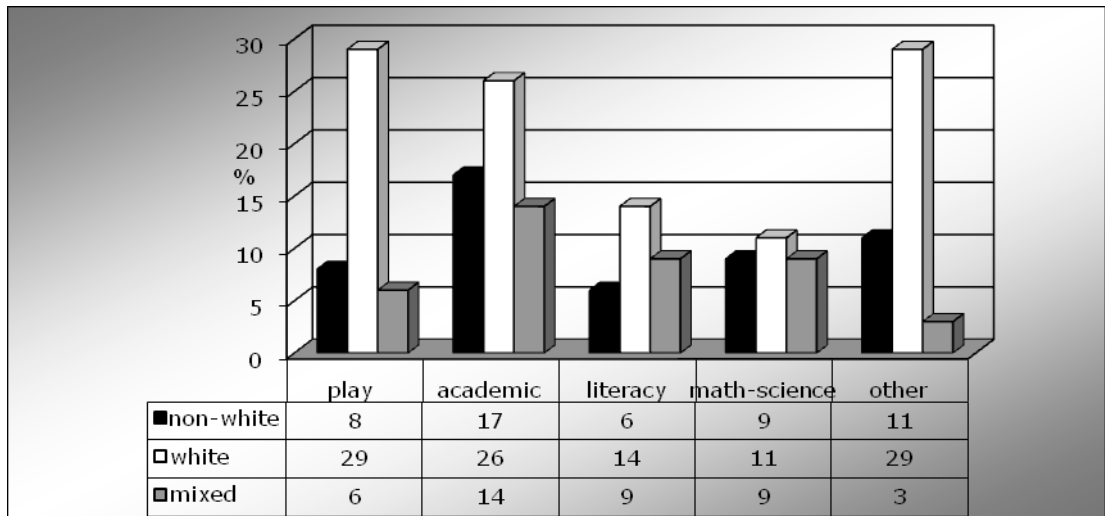


Figure 2: Cultural Aspect of Children’s Visual Images

This representation in favor of white children shows traces of a ‘*monocultural*’ discourse of childhood in the textbooks. This monocultural focus not only favors white and middle class children but it also positions non-white children of different cultural backgrounds and races as other and

inferior within the realm of educational institutions. For instance, in Roopnarine and Johnson (2000), a visual image of black children in Head Start classroom with their teacher showing how to brush their teeth (p. 24) shoulders this otherness compared to the visual image of a teacher rewarding a white child for his success in reading time (p. 130). This perspective was strengthened

with the absence of non-white teachers in the visual images. There was only one image of non-white adult shown as a parent helping her son (p. 249). This trace of monocultural discourse and the otherness are accompanied with other social aspects found in the visual images of children.

When children's visual images were examined based on gender and group structure, images of male children were used more than girls in play activities and across all content areas; and adult presence was found more than peer presence in academic activities and literacy content area. The discourse of gender roles was evident in the visual images of girls engaged in play activities such as cooking (p. 132) when compared to the images of boys' playing in block area (p. 42) or working on mathematics tasks (p. 194). Similar examples of visual images from Golubchick and Gordon and Brown's textbooks present girls playing in front of the mirror, wearing a nurse dress or hugging each other. Other images, however, illustrate boys working on a cognitive task, doing an experiment, learning about a mechanical problem or playing with a ball. This gender discourse is strengthened with the absence of male teachers in the visual images, except one image where a male teacher is reading to a small group of children (Roopnarine and Johnson, 2000, 44). It is also supported by the visual images of mothers affectionately playing with their toddlers (p. 61). These visual images of children signify accepted gender roles and stereotyped traits of men and women. The connotation of such images is that girls are more suited to domestic tasks like cooking and taking care of others due to their affectionate nature. At the same time, these visual images define boys as cognitively more active and present them as if they are more suited to tasks, requiring superior mental and physical skills.

The presence of teachers and mothers in academic activities and literacy content area and the portrayal of their relationship with children strengthen the dominant discourses while presenting children as dependent to

superior adults and constructing childhood as preparation for adulthood through education. The visual images of toddlers on the lap of female teachers or mothers (p. 243) further support the discourse of childhood as a period of vulnerability and dependency. In these images, children are positioned as a group of passive individuals on behalf of whom decisions are being made by active adults. While children are portrayed as independent at play with their peers, their freedom is sentenced to adult guidance in academic activities by the presence of teachers or mothers in education. Thus, they are vacuumed out of real life context and placed into a formal and so-called neutral setting. Absence of outside images thus reinforces an apolitical discourse of education for children and shows constant adult surveillance over the children's world as they prepare for the adult world.

Conclusion

This article presented a qualitative appraisal of visual images that traced dominant discourses of childhood in media and education. The findings of the study are meaningful in light of the idea of photography and photojournalism that Hamilton (1997) notes: "The apparent objectivity of the camera-produced image may help to fix the meaning of a given text, by providing it with a representational legitimacy" and "photojournalism provides important access to both feelings and facts" (p. 87). While the visual images of children analyzed in this study may seem objective on the surface, the objectivity of these camera-produced images is questionable considering the dominant discourses these images support to reconstruct. The children's visual images used in newspapers and textbooks appear to support the romantic discourse of childhood criticized by many authors from various fields. The newspapers and textbooks were found to portray children mostly in education and family contexts. Since visual images of children portray children's dependency to

family and their need to progress to adulthood through institutionalized education, those visual representations in media and education materials strengthen such discourses of childhood as a period of dependency, neediness, and preparation for the superior adult world. For instance, in media and education materials young children are usually photographed with a woman. Thus, women are represented as natural caretakers and nurturer of children. With these patterns of images, appropriate gender roles for women are signified and the discourse of heterosexual family structure is strengthened. These findings suggest that children are not represented as fully participating members of the society as active adults do. Such dominant discourses of childhood construct an image of child as innocent and pure that is in direct contrast to the adult qualities in the competitive world. Within these discourses, adults have sole power to determine children's status and life course in the realms of education and nuclear family. While observing educational contexts in textbooks may seem natural, this sole focus on educational contexts serves to reinforce dominant images of childhood in the romantic vein.

The way that visual images of children were used demonstrates multiple discourses operating at a given moment while reinforcing dominant discourses of childhood based on universalizing assumptions of developmental psychology. That is, there were multiple discourses at play in these visual images including gender roles, nationalism, and colonialism and these discourses reconstruct each other as they exist together in these media and education materials. The way issues of power, equity and justice were addressed in these images was in favor of specific groups in the society, while being in opposition to the other groups. That is, they were privileging white, western, middle-class, and male members of the society. For instance, most of the non-white and non-western groups are underrepresented in both media and education, and their images appear in the

context of such problems as low proficiency scores and welfare reforms. This underrepresentation may have major implications for non-white and non-western groups of children in education.

Based on these findings, it is plausible to suggest creating different and new ways of conceptualizing childhood and constructing childhood discourses with children. Such discourses could embrace adults and children in constructive terms as oppose to positioning them in subordinate forms of relationships. These integrative discourses would include children's own voices and responses to the courageous questions like these: How do children contribute to the lives of adults? How do children change the world? How do children imagine themselves in the adult dominated world? What kind of future do they want for the world that they actually own at present? Which adjectives do children find more suited for their images? These are some questions that we need to start asking to children themselves if, as adults, we want to challenge the deficient images of childhood in our minds. In closing, a revolutionary quote from Cannella (1998) would guide us toward the next step to be taken in educational practice: "I contend that we must cause trouble; our voices must be heard as advocates and activists for social justice and care, not only for the younger members of our society, but for everyone. When any of us must endure inequity or injustice, when there are those who are not heard, as human beings we are all diminished" (p. 179).

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