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"Can We Approach the Subject of Child Sexual Abuse Ethically in Academia? Towards a Queer Ethics of CSA Analysis"

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to the question of ethics. It addresses the ethical issues that arise when making the painful subject of CSA the central focus of an academic inquiry. The first section considers the failures of certain subsections of twentieth-century American and Western European critical theory in approaching the study of CSA with ethical integrity. The disciplines of queer theory, feminist theory and sex-radical literature are focused on in particular in order to question and contextualize why academic endorsement of CSA acts has occurred. The article both considers and questions the rigid concepts of sexual normativity that both demonizes queer sex and leaves queer children vulnerable to abuse. In the second section, the pressure for personal confession of trauma when writing and researching on this issue is considered, and the fixed character of the survivor is examined.

KEYWORDS: child sexual abuse, queer theory, childhood studies, queer ethics, sex radicalism, victim studies, autoethnography, Michel Foucault, feminist theory, confessional writing

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Introduction

When studying a topic as difficult as child sexual abuse (CSA) one must be mindful of the social realities that underpin it. As criminal justice professor David Wilson and BBC correspondent Ian Silverman emphasise, the study of CSA is a study of violence, and we must underline this fact throughout our research, rather than reducing scholarship on this subject to a mere intellectual exercise, or affecting a false neutrality that would not only be disingenuous but also contextually unsound. This is part of a longer-running history that conflates a refusal to endorse crimes against children with a form of conservative regressivism, and it is this history that continues to shape academic receptions to CSA-themed analyses. It is such limited, binary understandings of CSA that this paper first examines, then pushes beyond.

A noteworthy example of a PhD candidate approaching the subject of CSA in such an irresponsible, and potentially illegal, manner can be found in the 2002 case of Richard Yuill. Yuill was a PhD student at Glasgow University whose doctoral research on 'man-boy love' attracted the attention of Strathclyde Police's Paedophile Unit. The student granted confidentiality to CS abusers such as the convicted sex offender and former chairman of the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) Tom O'Carroll, with "two of his interviewees admit[ting] [that unknown to the police] they brought foreign boys back to the UK and had sex with them over some years." Writing to his potential interviewees, Yuill said, "I would like to assure anyone that any information and identities will be anonymous and treated sensitively." This is particularly questionable considering Yuill was in no way qualified to grant anonymity to the confession of such a crime, while his assurance of sensitivity towards potential CS abusers, rather than CSA survivors, suggests a disconnected understanding of his chosen subject of research. Such limited insight is evidenced in Yuill's vague statement on his research that "the conclusions are [in my doctoral research] that in such relationships I think you've got the good, the bad and the ugly, and that's where I stand on that." It is notable that Yuill's doctoral supervisor, David Evans, defended the thesis by stating that "nothing was taboo in academia." While a researcher should strive to shine light on the most stigmatised subjects of society, this must be done with ethical rigour; to negate this denies the social responsibility an academic researcher holds. It is this social responsibility that forms the central focus of this article, which studies the history of academic engagement with the subject of CSA in order to envision a new future for studying this complex subject with ethical integrity.

As the Foucauldian philosopher Ian Hacking states, "the most sensational trauma of recent times is child abuse. As a trauma this abuse has equal impact on morality and on medicine." It is this 'sensational' model of CSA storytelling that still draws apprehension when it comes to intellectual inquiries on this subject. Regarded as an inherently ideological part of the world of red-top newspapers and vigilante justice, Hacking warned in 1991 that child abuse is not only an

"intrinsically moral topic" but also "dangerously topical. It arouses high passions." Eliciting the 'think of the children' model of debate, he elaborates: "There is so much morality, so much righteousness here that one can begin to suspect that some sort of pseudo-morality is creeping in."

This culture of sensationalism has been an ongoing question within my own research into cultural representations of CSA. How can one address the altogether urgent issue of ethics without falling into the trap of what Hacking describes as 'righteousness' and 'pseudo-morality?' The article considers a model of queer ethics for analyzing the subject of CSA that takes inspiration from anti-violence advocate Jennifer Patterson's theoretical model of "queering sexual violence." Patterson provides a methodological foundation that simultaneously centres and problematises the rigid concept of sexual normativity, which both demonises queer sex and leaves queer children vulnerable to abuse. This paper continues Patterson's argument that in addressing both interpersonal queer violence and the subject of queer survivorhood, we must have a "commitment to exposing the systems that criminalize rather than serve." For, as researchers I would argue that we have an ethical responsibility to center the social reality of such acts, and this article is inspired by my own challenges completing a PhD thesis on this painful subject.

Here, the ethics of academic analysis in terms of approaching the subject of CSA is closely considered. This is in order to set both a contextual foundation and a clear outline of ethics for researching cultural representations of this difficult subject. In the first section of this article, I examine a selection of Western European and American queer theory, feminist literature and sex-radical writings on the subject of CSA. The section focuses on authors who have argued in support of CSA, with the aim of examining the context behind such viewpoints. Due to the concerning nature of these arguments, I will locate this section within the scholarship of moral philosophers such as Tom Regan and the social justice lens of childhood studies theorists such as Gertrud Lenzer and Jules-Gill Peterson. Section Two explains and provides an overview of my own personal development in regards to approaching my thesis' subject in an ethical manner. In this section, the place of positionality and personal experience in academic analyses of CSA is questioned and the fixed character of the survivor is problematised.

I. Against Childhood: Analyzing Existing Academic Arguments in Favour of CSA

While this article regards the subject of CSA as rooted in power imbalances and injustice, in order to approach this subject with ethical integrity it is important to recognise that many theorists– most notably in 1970s and 1980s radical circles– have argued in its favour, viewing incidences of statutory rape under the revolutionary spirit of free love. This section analyzes a select number of such examples within queer theory, feminist literature and radical sex writings. This is in order to put forward a materialist argument on the imbalances of power between adult and child which results in the category of CSA existing in the first place. For, as Donald E. Hall and Dennis W. Allen write in their 2000 article, 'Is there a Queer Ethics?' it is simply not enough to:

> "[Have a discussion on ethics] that amply document a broad social dynamic of rebellious behaviour [which contains] no boundaries on behaviour within the queer community, only boundaries for those who would oppress the community.

> This is, at best, only one half of a discussion on ethics. And few seem interested in pursuing the other half of the discussion."

A striking example of such support is the 1977 petition challenging questions of consent in relation to adults performing sexual acts on minors and seeking to overthrow charges of statutory rape. This was signed and supported by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, André Glucksmann, Louis Aragon, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guatarri and Jean Paul Sartre. The petition was reflective of broader anti-institutional criticisms of the period.

As a result of this context, to speak critically of the subject of CSA may appear anti-intellectual or pro-establishment, a position summarised by the villainous figure of Headmaster Felix Armstrong in Alan Bennett's 2004 play *The History Boys*. A comical, cold and ignorant figure, in contrast to the warmth and intellect of their beloved, though imperfect, teacher Hector, the Headmaster rails against Hector's molestation of his teenage students:

> Hector: Nothing happened.
>
> Headmaster: A hand on a boy's genitals at fifty miles an hour, and you call it nothing?
>
> Hector: The transmission of knowledge is in itself an erotic act. In the Renaissance...
>
> Headmaster: Fuck the Renaissance. And fuck literature and Plato and Michelangelo and Oscar Wilde and all the other shrunken violets you people line up. This is a school and it isn't normal.

This question of normality reflects how CSA sits outside of "good and normal sexual practices," a value system that also excludes the queer subject. Thus, in some historical incidences, the queer individual has in reaction taken to the defence of CSA, regarding its condemnation as inherently intertwined with heteronormative conservativism. A noteworthy example of such a defence is found in the queer, sex-radical literature of Patrick Califia. In 1980, at the height of the sex wars, Califia argued that gay advocacy groups must support the self-identified 'man-boy lovers' within their community in order to implement a sex-radical future. It is revealing that Califia publicly retracted these ideas in 2000, suggesting that these ideas were very much a product of their time. Describing self-identified pedophiles as a "frightened" and "oppressed group" of "considerable courage," Califia had argued that "instead of condemning pedophiles for their involvement with lesbian and gay youth, we should be supporting them. They need us badly." Such a defence of statutory rape is questionable, and one does not need to take a moralistic or sentimental approach to understand the obvious flaws in claims such as:

> [The] assumption that adults have more power than young people is not an adequate description of the social conditions that surround cross-generational relationships. Any minor has the potential power to send an adult partner to jail for half of her or his life. It is condescending to assume that young people are so dazzled by the power of adults that they cannot tell the difference between being molested and being in love or being horny. Any child old enough to decide whether or not she or he wants to eat spinach, play with

> trucks, or wear shoes is old enough to decide whether or not she or he wants to run around naked in the sun, masturbate, sit in somebody's lap, or engage in sexual activity.

Such arguments reflect how understandings of CSA within a radically sex-positive framework can fall into a shallow form of cultural analysis. However, one point to be taken from the sex-radical defence of CSA is the question of prison abolition. Califia is correct in his claim that sex workers, especially underage sex workers, as well as queer communities, have been persecuted by the state. Thus, we should consider what a queer model of justice looks like for the issue of CSA, beyond what Angela Davis defines as the prison industrial complex, which, as Davis emphasizes, is a system that perpetuates rather than eliminates sexual abuse.

In finding an alternative position to this history, it is certainly easy to fall into circular arguments of engagement, which provoke only frustration and knee-jerk reactions on one side and hyperbolic obfuscation and performative victimization on the other. However, to do such a complex subject justice, it is necessary to go deeper in our understanding of how we navigate the response to the harmful actions of CS abusers beyond mere outrage and sensationalism. This is a reductive reaction that has proved time and time again to be utterly unhelpful for preventing such incidences from occurring. However, analyzing and identifying these instinctively emotional responses can assist our understanding of how we can shift our focus away from lurid notions of 'child molesters' and towards the needs of self-identified CSA survivors.

Those that occupy the status of 'child' are a politically disenfranchised class and should be considered as such. Children cannot vote, they are forced to attend schools and study under curricula they did not choose, they are reliant on their adult carers for transport, food, clothing, education, shelter, entertainment and more. As a historian of childhood and transgender cultures, Jules Gill-Peterson, explains, "children, by design [are] deprived of civil rights and infantilized, are easy targets for political violence—just as easily, it turns out, as concerned adults can claim them for protection." Even the misuse of the umbrella term CSA, such as in the prosecution of girls in their early teens for sexting and the potentially traumatic medical system built to treat CSA survivors, is proof of this. As childhood studies founder Gertrud Lenzer emphasizes: "Children are indeed confronted with the considerable power the adult world has over them. Children cannot represent themselves, unlike other powerless groups who have made their claims heard. For most of what we know about children has been created by adults."

From a Marxist feminist perspective, Shulamith Firestone's chapter 'Down with Childhood' (1970) is useful in its emphasis of both the "class basis of the emerging concept of childhood" and its close relationship to the oppression of women. Here "the myth of childhood" and "the myth of femininity" are symbiotic in their shared oppression. Thus, Firestone urges us to consider a future free from CSA, for "children's liberation would demand an end to all fondling not dictated by the child itself."

Such emphasis on childhood as an oppressed class problematizes decontextualised statements in queer theory texts such as Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child* (2009) that "we stay focused on safeguarding children because we fear them" and "pedophiles, like anyone, can be abusive and the abused child can be an agent." But the pedophile cannot be 'anyone' and neither can the child. There is a specific set of power relations informing the occupation of these categories, therefore any acts of abuse from the 'pedophile' to the 'child' should be considered accordingly. Thus, a postmodern framework that seeks to "challenge [the idea that] children are necessarily innocent and vulnerable" negates the material imbalance between adult and child.

Constructs such as child, innocence and vulnerability, and the conditions under which these terms are awarded, can be questioned while still maintaining this materialist understanding.

Such a postmodern outlook stands in contrast to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1991 essay 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay.' which is a powerful illustration of how the realities of queer children must be centred in order for academic work on childhood subjects to have an ethical foundation. Sedgwick closely analyses how leading literature on gay identity in 1980s America targeted and pathologised children identified as "effeminate boys," who they deemed abject and Other in contrast to the increasingly acceptable figure of the adult, masculine gay man. Rooted in the reality of queer childhood inequality, Sedgwick explains how such femmephobic literature seeks to normalise homophobic hatred from parents towards their gay children, enforce and essentialise a child's assigned gender, and, in the erasure of the feminine gay child, enforce "the overarching, hygienic Western fantasy of a world without any more homosexuals in it," Yet, it is still pertinent to consider who theoretical visions of queer childhood amplifies and excludes, with Gill-Peterson highlighting that "in the wake of "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," the trans child, unlike the effeminate boy, has received no attention in queer theory." A dedication to the rights of the trans child is particularly pertinent within a CSA context, as gender non-conforming children have been identified as at a higher risk of being abused by parents and other adults than their gender conforming peers.

To give a specific cultural instance, the material struggles of the queer child stand as a challenge to Lee Edelman's provocative polemic *No Future* (2004). Edelman's argument about the child as a disciplinary, anti-queer figure hinges on the erasure of the queer child in favour of an imaginary ideal of childhood that he confirms rather than critiques. In queer resistance, Edelman argues that the child must be rejected so "the future stops here." But the children he rejects are entirely fictional: "fuck Annie, fuck the waif from Les Mis," Edelman declares, giving no consideration to any actual LGBTQ children. Edelman even goes so far as to deem the categories of child and queer entirely incompatible with his 'no future' vision.

This is powerfully rebuked by José Esteban Muñoz's study of queer futurity, *Cruising Utopia,* (2009), which stands as a direct challenge to Edelman's *No Future*. Muñoz problematizes Edelman's equation of childhood with stock characters, such as Annie and Tiny Tim, emphasising that "all children are not the privileged white babies to whom contemporary society caters" and that issues of race, class and queer struggles must be centered. This is in order to avoid "accepting and reproducing the monolithic figure of the child" that alienates and excludes actual children and reduces academic inquiry to sweeping generalisations. Here, as Gill-Peterson reminds us "the delusional adoration of the rosy figure of the Child abuts the most heinous quotidian modes of violence in the lives of real children."

Muñoz's argument is pertinent given the academic argument of childhood as a Western invention, spearheaded by the French medievalist Phillipe Ariès in his 1960 text *Centuries of Childhood*. Though Ariès' influence should not be underestimated or undermined, to rely wholly on such a postmodern theoretical framework risks ignoring the rich history of cultures of childhood outside of Europe. As Middle Eastern historian Elizabeth Warnock Fernea explains, "the idea of childhood, the place of the child, the duties of the child: these are basic important issues in the Middle East and have been since recorded history in the area began, about 3000 BC." Historian of colonial Nigeria Saheed Aderinto similarly emphasizes that "the study of the history of children is significant to the understanding of every aspect and era of African history." Ignorance of these histories is not only reflective of the broader erasure of colonized cultures, it

also has the potential to encourage the white supremacist idea that only young white children merit the labels of child or innocent.

In parallel to queer theory, though feminist movements have contributed greatly to contemporary understanding of and advocacy for CSA survivors, feminist theory has at times favoured the idea of childhood over the reality of children. Some feminists have even taken a pro-pedophile stance as a result. The subject of statutory rape, much like in queer theory and the philosophers of the free love period, was an especially heated subject of debate, with certain feminist critics speaking in support of what they regarded as 'intergenerational love'. Examples of this include feminist theorist Beth Kelly's 1979 autobiographical essay 'Woman/Girl Love – Or, Lesbians Do "Do It,"' which writes in support of statutory rape and was reprinted by NAMBLA.The date of publication should of course contextualise this model of thought as a partial product of the 1960s and 1970s 'free love' outlook. However, the publication of such books as Germaine Greer's *The Boy* in 2003 reminds us that the intersection of statutory rape and feminist inquiry is a subject of interest that has continued into the twenty-first century.

It would certainly be easy– and perhaps more comfortable– to assume that all theorists within university spaces and academic histories recognise CSA as an 'issue' or 'a very bad thing.' However, this would be ahistorical, an oversight and a critical failing. Instead, in recognizing that the affirmation of abuse exists within the very canon that one is likely to use to deconstruct this issue, we are reminded of the shifting complexity of CSA, how it is picked up as a symbol of both the 'progressive', 'transgressive' and the 'regressive' in equal measures, deepening this research and highlighting the great responsibility that studying this subject holds. Here we can draw inspiration from moral philosopher Tom Regan, who emphasises ethical responsibility in academic study in order to encourage scholars to critically examine why writing on CSA has fallen short:

> Moral philosophers haven't devoted much attention to ethical questions about the treatment of children. But that answer only succeeds in forcing us to face another question, namely "Why have most moral philosophers failed to pay much attention to ethical questions about the treatment of children?" Informed attention to ethical questions involving children promises to improve both our homes and our moral philosophy.

By remembering the failures of certain sub-sections of queer theory, feminism, mid-twentieth-century philosophy, and sex-radical literature in addressing material power imbalances between adults and children or young people, we can build upon this contentious history to cultivate a model of academic inquiry that favours ethical integrity and intellectual accountability, and truly reflects the need to question the structural powers that allow abuse to thrive both inside and out of the academy.

II. Against Identity: Problematizing the Place of Positionality and Personal Experience in Analyses of CSA

In this section, it is my intention to analyze the individual survivor as cultural construct, with the objective of problematizing the necessity of performing this character when critiquing the subject of CSA. In an identity-driven landscape, the question of authorship is inherently (and I would argue unfairly) tied to the subject of ethics. This is the theory of positionality and the question of whether it is applicable to the subject of CSA. Clear power imbalances, such as my

own positions as a British citizen, as a very light skinned individual, as a non-Black person and as someone who does not experience transmisogyny, are certainly relevant to a materialist understanding of academic research. Such privileges not only have the potential to shape a person's research, but to influence who and what is researched in the first place. However, the application of this model of thought to sexual violence survivordom is more questionable. Do I need to make myself uncomfortable by revealing incredibly personal information of my background as a survivor of such experiences (in a study which is intended to be an academic investigation and not a personal memoir) in order to make the reader comfortable? This creates the false proposition that simply because a subject of academic research is uncomfortable it is somehow unethical. Does this in turn affirm the very capitalist model of trauma consumption that I am critiquing? The answer is: quite possibly.

The claim that the individually traumatized are somehow more qualified to investigate such issues feeds into a mythology of authentic trauma that burdens survivors with the sole responsibility of unpacking such a system. Rather, I hope in identifying and openly acknowledging the paradoxes of a system that continuously fails both self-identified CSA survivors and children and young people more broadly, researchers can create an accessible assessment of such a structure that builds upon existing advocacy work within mental health and sexual trauma. This can help to both center and empower those who identify as 'survivors,' 'victims' or 'experiencers' of CSA and to intellectually challenge those who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with such a subject.

Such cultures of individualism are explored by the literary critic Parul Sehgal in her 2016 *The New York Times* essay, 'The Forced Heroism of the Survivor,' which emphasizes both the limits and the influence of the cultural construct of heroic female survivordom.

According to Sehgal, the subject stands as a technicolour character created through popular culture rather than defined by the individual who has experienced such an act. She cites the "rhetoric of almost mandatory heroism" of the female survivor, whose "distinctive silhouette" and aesthetic signifiers render her "interesting, even alluring." Sehgal uses on-screen examples of the 2000s and 2010s such as *Kill Bill, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and *Jessica Jones*, as well as the longer tradition of first-person survivor publishing, to trace the development of the survivor. The author identifies the child CSA survivor and the adult survivor of sexual violence as interchangeable in popular culture, both of which are gendered as female. Sehgal's essay charts the close relationship between mass media representation of the empowered survivor and the role this narrative has had in influencing US law-making, citing the Survivors' Bill of Rights Act of 2016. Arguing that "the evolving legal definition of rape has always been a bellwether of changing attitudes to race and gender," she proposes that the "legitimacy of [the] 'survivor' signals a subtle but important shift in thinking about sexual violence." This emphasis on the dynamic relationship between law-making and cultural production is supported by the work of historian Estelle B. Freedman, who argues that:

> At its core rape is a legal term that encompasses a malleable and culturally determined perception of an act. Different societies define which non-consensual sexual acts to criminalize, which to condone, and how forcefully to prosecute the former. Indeed, the history of rape consists in large part in tracking changing narratives that define which women may charge which men with the crime of forceful, unwanted sex, and whose accounts will be believed. The meaning of rape is thus fluid, rather than transhistorical or static.

The “culturally determined” nature of the survivor demonstrates that the divisions between the act of abuse, the construction of gender, the law-making process of criminalizing these acts, and the subsequent cultural representations intended to depict CSA are openly uncertain. This parallels Susan Sontag’s theory of illness as metaphor, where “punitive or sentimental fantasies concocted about that situation [of illness] [reveal] stereotypes of national character.” This is especially relevant considering the pathologising lens directed towards both the CS abuser, who is not just identified as a criminal but as ‘sick in the head’, and the CSA survivor, whose conflation with the adult woman rape survivor suggests that this is a subject deeply rooted in understandings of female purity and control of women’s bodies. This is reflective of the fact that “abuse is constructed as an illness that must be treated by experts”, which results in “the power imbalance between expert and client, adult and child [being] reinforced.”

Sontag’s theory of illness as metaphor is developed in the work of the author Barbara Ehrenreich, who analyzes the use of the term survivor within the feminised illness of breast cancer. Ehrenreich notes that “as in the AIDS movement, upon which breast cancer activism is partly modelled, the words ‘patient’ and ‘victim,’ with their aura of self-pity and passivity, have been ruled un-P.C." Rather, she proposes that there is an “overwhelming positive culture” which results in a “cheerfulness of breast cancer culture” that canonizes the inspirational survivors “who merit constant honour and acclaim” over “our lost brave sisters" who have died by the illness. Understanding the deployment of the term survivor in cases of sexual violence, as well as in other traumatic events and experiences which result in supposed damage to a woman’s body, is a question of both moralism and metaphor, reflecting the distinct place survivordom and the traumatized female body have in the popular imagination. In reading the CSA subject as the site of “the exceptional and the extraordinary,” it is easy to ignore the fact that “a traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma.” Thus, in focusing on the exceptional (fictitious) individual, not only are survivors denied “ordinary personhood”, their stories replaced with cinematic superheroes, but the question of sexual violence as a structural issue is erased.

This can be identified as the product of an individualistic model of survivordom, where abuses of power are decontextualized from the powers of gender, class, race, nation, disability, and LGBTQ identity that underpin them. This is emphasized by the fact that this very definition of ‘the survivor as she’ is only welcome to those deemed ‘wounded’ enough and ‘woman’ enough to struggle with the injustices of the world. As a result, there is a flattening of trauma, where all experiences against the female figure, and the feminised figure of the child, are positioned as interchangeably traumatic. This supports affect theorist Lauren Berlant’s criticism of the “fundamentally ahistoricizing logic” of popular trauma definition and interpretation, and stresses the importance of Ann Cvetkovich’s search for “public articulations of trauma that don’t look to either identity or the state as a means for resolution.”

This provokes deeper questions of who is victimized under social powers and who has the power to identify and define such victimization. This is emphasized by the researchers Anna-Liisa Närvänen and Elisabet Näsman’s theory of childhood disenfranchisement; they argue that “age constitutes a part of social ordering, [and] relative power and powerlessness are embedded in the age order, and operate through social control.” This supports Ian Hacking’s argument that in isolating the CSA survivor from the wider inequalities of children and young people we wilfully ignore age-based oppression. For, as Hacking argues, “the normal treatment of American children is mediocre or worse. They’re all abused and we must become aware of that fact.” Instead of the singularizing CSA figure, we must seek to locate CSA as part of a larger

system of age-based inequality, a system tied to broader oppressions such as race, class, queerness, disability, and nation.

By going beyond the capitalist construction of the personal and the surface levels of the comfortable– two setups that so often pass for the ethically sound– we have the opportunity to question the singular survivor model of inquiry. By deconstructing this mythos of individualism, as researchers of trauma cultures we can seek to create an investigation of greater ethical and academic integrity by recognizing these crimes as what they are: a complex phenomenon which manifests itself in often strange and unexpected cultural productions that can be explored and understood not only through anecdote, but more importantly through the analysis. Through an in-depth understanding of the history that has created CSA, and close textual readings of the cultural artifacts that reflect our understanding of this issue, ethical integrity can be twinned with analytical rigour in order to deconstruct this complex and contested issue.

Conclusion: Towards a Queer Ethics of CSA Analysis

By both acknowledging and understanding the historical shortcomings of academic engagement with the CSA subject, we can begin to build a new future where this painful subject is treated with the ethical integrity it so badly deserves. In doing so we can begin to challenge the structural powers that allow abuse of all forms to thrive both inside and out of the academy. In this article, these shortcomings have been identified in a small selection of American and Western European queer theory, feminist literature and radical sex writings. However, such concerning defences of CSA are certainly not limited to these disciplines. Here, we must remember the social responsibility an academic researcher holds in relation to children and young people. This should begin by acknowledging the child not as a sentimental notion, as queer theorists such as Lee Edelman suggests, but rather an oppressed material class, intertwined with the oppressions of class, race, gender, LGBTQ identity, disability, and nation. The writings of Tom Regan, Shulamith Firestone, Gertrud Lenzer, Anna-Liisa Närvänen and Elisabet Näsman, Jules Gill-Peterson and José Esteban Muñoz set a vital foundation for understanding how such claims attack and alienate the needs of actual children and young people.

It is essential for CSA studies to recognise how this painful subject has been used as an ideological mouthpiece, its emotive nature manipulated for a wide variety of political motives. But this should not scare a researcher or student away from approaching this subject. It is entirely possible to research this topic without falling into a trap of sensationalism or sentimentality. This can be achieved by emphasizing that childhood is not an abstract idea but a material reality, and as argued in section two of this article, pushing against a pressure to confess intimate details of your own trauma to your professors or peers. Querying this essentialist model of survivor authorship, critiqued in depth by queer affect theorists such as Lauren Berlant and Ann Cvetkovich, allows conversations to move beyond the singular individual to consider the wider systems of violence from which such acts of abuse emerge.

This article has considered a model of queer ethics for analyzing the subject of CSA that takes inspiration from anti-violence advocate Jennifer Patterson's theoretical model of "queering sexual violence," alongside the writing of Donald E. Hall and Dennis W. Allen and Eve Sedgwick. This is with the intention of rejecting a carceral model of justice, which as Angela Davis observes creates the conditions for further acts of sexual violence to occur. Additionally, the scholarship of Gill-Peterson reminds us of the children that have been neglected and ignored in this archive: that of the trans child.

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