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Dear Dr. Edwards:

Within the English 400 course being led by Dr. Miskec, I have reviewed several pieces that concern youth culture on various fronts, ranging from childhood athletics, drag kids, and sexualization of child ballerinas. Following your earlier request to learn more about the work that has been made in the class, I write this letter in the hopes of clearly communicating some of the major themes that I have come across throughout many of the pieces read.

After reviewing numerous articles regarding contemporary discussions of Western youth culture similar themes have been found illustrated throughout. Specifically, one of the most prevalent themes within each of the articles was the consideration of children entering an adult-centered world. Childhood and adolescence are typically considered separate states from adulthood; however, the lines between childhood and adulthood are becoming increasingly blurred as children are introduced to adult activities and overall values. This phenomenon is of great concern as children are being exposed to complex and mature themes at earlier ages causing a disruption in the normal progression of childhood and adolescence.

Within some articles, such as Perry Nodelman’s “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children’s Literature”, Sean Gregory’s “Kid Sports Inc: How Your Child’s Rec League Turned into a $15 Billion Industry”, and Hugh Ryan’s “Drag Kids”, the rising maturity of youth culture is discussed. Nodelman’s article dives into the occurrence of children, and childhood overall, being detached from adults and adulthood. Beyond some of the surface level distinctions, children and teens are considered drastically different from their adult counterparts. This realization is incredibly pertinent as it raises concern regarding what is and is not appropriate for a child. With this separation in power, adults must caution themselves from including children in practices for which they are viewed as ill-suited. As Nodelman points out, “objective descriptions of childhood are equally anything but objective” (30); demonstrating that while adults seemingly want to view children as a foreign, other groups who do not comprehend adult themes and values, they simultaneously delight at the idea of seeing them emulate adults and participate in adult culture.

While this may seem innocent enough, in actuality, adults are seemingly oblivious to the actual concerns and desires of children and are simply projecting their own values onto them. Similarly, at certain points, aspects of childhood culture are expanded until they slip into the medium of adulthood. This development can be seen in areas such as youth sports, which although once was considered simple, childhood whimsy, has now morphed into a mature and monetized industry. The drastic shift in childhood sports has resulted in “a new reality for America’s aspiring young athletes and their families” (Gregory 44). Currently, child athletes are placed into more adult situations such as long, arduous training hours, expensive participation fees, and generally higher physical expectations. Often this associated pressure is increased as the adults attempt to vicariously work through their children. The initial charm linked with youth sports, such as the stereotypical neighborhood ball games, has been lost. Unfortunately, it appears as Gregory notes, “the more pressure […] kids feel […] the less they enjoy and feel committed to their sport” (49). Unfortunately, it appears that children are being pushed out of the safety and comfort of childhood and into the fast-paced and highly competitive world of adulthood, resulting in a loss of previous youth culture.

However, in some instances, children themselves are the driving force into adult culture. While children have always participated in dress-up play - the charming and endearing emulation of adults usually as a form of admiration and flattery - the prevalence of more drastic and mature costuming has increased. In the article “Drag Kids”, Hugh notes that “all kids love playing dress-up of some kind, but kids today have greater and easier access to queer culture than any generations before them” (62). Children are becomingly increasingly aware of adult culture and how their own personal interest can pave the way into that forum. Likewise, with shows such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *Toddlers & Tiaras* becoming progressively more mainstream, children are being exposed to new adult themes and creating an entirely more mature and distinct space for themselves.

The increasingly competitive and mature nature of childhood seems to be propelled by the surrounding adults who, although wishing to maintain childhood innocence, are attempting to push adult values and expectations onto these participating children. As such, society is potentially destroying childhood as it once stood and is subsequently creating an entirely new entity. Overall, it can be implied that the current narrative of childhood and adolescence is a seeming desperation by adults to protect its inherent values while simultaneously introducing children to a new, complex, and mature world. I appreciate your interest in my work and hope that I have satisfied your inquiries regarding children’s literature and youth culture within the English 400 course.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Sparrock

Works Cited

Gregory, Sean. “Kid Sports Inc: How Your Child's Rec League Turned into a $15 Billion

 Industry.” *TIME*, 4 Sept. 2017, pp. 42–51.

Nodelman, P. "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's

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Ryan, Hugh. “The Drag Kids.” *Out Magazine*, Feb. 2018, pp. 62-69