

# REVIEW EVALUATION FORM

## Australian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC)

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This is a very good response to the piece of which it is a criticism. I would accept this article almost as is, apart from the following sentence which requires a clearer articulation of the subject i.e., replace "it" with a more explicit reference. "It does not depend on her (misleading) reframing of the debate over the sexualisation of children". (p 3)

The author works carefully through a range of theoretical issues that were not effectively dealt with in the piece for which this is a response (Taylor). I think the author should be commended for providing a succinct account of how these issues modify and ameliorate our understanding of matters raised, which are highly sensitive and deserve extensive commentary and debate.

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The focus of this article is to provide a 'response' to Affrica Taylor's recently published article in AJEC titled, 'Troubling childhood innocence': reframing the debate over the media sexualisation of children'. The author aims to provide an alternative and more comprehensive view of the debate, than what the author perceives as the 'inadequate' and 'misleading' view given by Taylor that 'does not hold up to critical scrutiny'. But the counter arguments based on these perspectives currently often do not hold enough depth of discussion, analysis, and theoretical grounding to extend the debate in this response. The author argues that Taylor's 'reframing significantly distorts the full range of issues raised by the corporate-led sexualisation of children' in three ways. 1. The lack of recognition of the macropolitics surrounding the sexualisation of children in the media; 2. Taylor's discussion fails to recognize that children's sexuality is importantly distinct from the issue of sexualisation; and 3. The lack of recognition of child health, well-being and safety as the driving concerns for professionals and policy-makers around these issues – not the perceived loss of innocence as the author considers to be the focus of Taylor's argument. It is important that there is academic debate about the issues surrounding the sexualisation of children in the media, so that the multiple issues that contribute to the fostering of this situation can be acknowledged in the process of developing strategies. Interestingly, the ways forward raised by this author and the reports used in this response, and by Taylor, are not necessarily out of sync with each other! The following points are raised as issues for consideration by the author when reviewing the paper for publication.

I feel that as this response currently stands, its arguments are often based on superficial readings of Taylor's discussion and of the issues raised by her, and falls into traps that the author critiques Taylor for doing i.e. lack of evidence to support arguments and a dismissal of other issues/perspectives. After reading the response, one is left feeling

that the evidence of causation linked to children's health and wellbeing is not strong either, which is often indicated by the author, yet the alternative arguments for believing the links are probable are not discussed or built on in enough depth to allow the reader a 'full' understanding of these alternative issues. At the moment much of the discussion seems based on brief statements /opinion around several reports that need to be given more analytical and theoretical depth. For example, when reading Taylor's paper, I do not get the sense that she is dismissing the macro-politics around this issue at the expense of the micro-politics, as a result of a poststructuralist perspective, as suggested in the response. Attention to micro-politics in the Foucaultian sense does not dismiss their critical link to broader socio-cultural issues; in fact micropolitics are constituted in discourses that prevail and reinforced through power relations that are equally operating in the macro-context. This first 'axis' of the argument in the response needs to be stronger to demonstrate how the author sees this happening.

The second area of focus in the response is the difference between sexuality and sexualisation. This is an important issue in the discussion. Once again the arguments are limited and need more thought and analytical and theoretical grounding. For example, the last paragraph on page 6 going over into page 7 needs to more depth of discussion to make the points clearer. Especially in terms of the argument and logic associated with the comment 'There would be complaints that the media are presenting too many examples of healthy adult sexuality in all its diversity'. This does not add anything to trying to understand the issue being addressed. The comment at the end of this paragraph on page 7 that 'Taylor's representation of the debate is a distortion', is not supported very well in the previous discussion in this paragraph.

A second concern is that there seems to be an over-simplification of Lumby's argument, raised by Taylor, around the performative effects of the sexualisation of children debate. The author argues that what is implied is the 'idea that by expressing concerns about sexualised images of children, critics are implying that children provoke sexual abuse through their appearance' (p.10). Taylor provides a theoretical discussion of Butler's performativity that has links to Foucault's works around repression, to give the reader an insight into what Lumby actually means by these ideas. It is an over-simplification to read this point as a re-emergence of the 'blame the victim' discourse'. The discussion of child abuse that follows this point in the response does not seem to have any major relevancy to Taylor's discussion. There is nothing in Taylor's paper that would suggest that she does not similarly have concerns about the prevalence of child abuse. This overview of child abuse, although a critical concern in itself, is not disputed in the Taylor discussion and does not have any direct relevance to the argument. There is also a concern around the discussion of the section that includes ..."sexual abuse of children as a result of perceiving that social norms had changed. Those who are concerned about the sexualisation of children would agree, but would add that it is not the psychologically healthy and ethically robust adults who place children at risk. It is the proportion of adults, overwhelmingly male, who are not psychologically healthy or not ethically robust or both. The statistics on child sexual abuse indicate that these are a minority of adults – but nonetheless, a significant minority." (p.11-12). Doesn't research overwhelmingly indicate that it is our fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, family friends,

priests, and teachers who are the perpetrators? If so, it says something about family relations, as well as how deeply unethical relationships prevail in our everyday lives across adult/child relations and in intimate relationships; perhaps even more so than what it says about psychologically unhealthy individuals.

Taylor's discussion around the significance of childhood innocence is critical to the debate and raises issues that have been articulated by others internationally who have critiqued the sexualisation of children, particularly in the media across disciplinary perspectives. Her one quote to childhood innocence equated to Free 2 B kids on page 13, critiqued by the author of the response as a lack of evidence, seems overly picky when Taylor provides an indepth discussion of childhood innocence in her paper. It does not really require numerous links to quotes. The perspective of childhood innocence cannot be so readily dismissed as what seems to be the case in this response.