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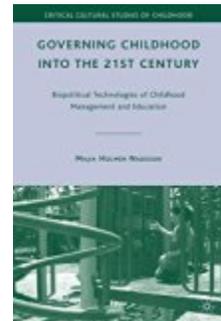


Majia Holmer Nadesan. *Governing Childhood into the 21st Century: Biopolitical Technologies of Childhood Management and Education*. Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 245 pp. \$89.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-61321-8.

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Governing Childhood into the 21st Century is part of Palgrave Macmillan's interdisciplinary Critical Cultural Studies of Childhood series, which focuses on the construction of childhood, family, and education within broad social contexts. The intent of the series is to examine notions of normalcy and "other" within various frameworks of power, both current and historic. Majia Holmer Nadesan's previous work, *Constructing Autism: Unraveling the 'Truth' and Understanding the Social* (2005), like this one, traces the roots of today's views of the history of autism, using an interdisciplinary framework. Her work *Governmentality, Biopower, and Everyday Life* (2010) addresses the rise of the neoliberal political state, a state that depends on the individual to be self-monitoring, self-regulating, and essentially self-governing, in an attempt to divest the state of paternalistic responsibility and recreate the state in a market-based economy. In *Governing Childhood*, Nadesan examines childhood as a product of "cultural and historically specific technologies of government" (p. 15).

Nadesan considers the treatment of children, who were considered less than full-fledged citizens within the new social framework of the liberal democracy and more-over less than fully capable workers within the new economic framework of the industrial workplace, as risk management. Risk was found in the children themselves, seen as threats, actual or potential, to the moral and economic power structure. Due to growing concern with rates of immigration and birthrate among white citizens, "childhood delinquency was discovered as a problem in the nineteenth century," Nadesan writes, citing Anthony Platt's *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (1969). Delinquency rates were soon being compiled and

tabulated by the new growing class of experts; in fact, delinquency rates were compiled before records of births started to become standardized. Children were also considered vulnerable to risk and in need of protection, as they were viewed as important for future national security. By the 1930s, childhood experts were devoting nearly a third of their time to the observation and study of "well children" in an attempt to develop an understanding of childhood norms (p. 11). Nadesan traces the role of parents, particularly mothers, as it became one of monitoring, surveillance, and intervention.

For historians of disability, the most salient topics the work has to offer are found in chapters 2 and 4. Chapter 2, "A Genealogy of Family Life and Childhood Governance," examines "governmental strategies used to identify, discipline and 'save' dangerous children during the nineteenth century, and children constituted 'at risk' in the early 20th century" (p. 17). Drawing from the work of Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962), Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (1977), and Michel Foucault, Nadesan turns to the cultural pivot of the Reformation in society's perspective on childhood, which had previously gone unremarked, and a newfound attention to the state of a child's soul. Ideas about what constituted personhood changed; as the concept of personhood changed, so too did the concepts of family, political stability, units of power, and units of economic productivity. Prior to the seventeenth century, moreover, the idea of children as "innocents" did not exist, whether sexual innocents or moral innocents. Teaching children codes of moral, ethical, and socially correct sexual behavior led to a new "intrusive" parenting model, one that, Nadesan writes, was "central

to producing the moralistic, pious, economically productive subjects of early liberal capitalism” (p. 22). At first, dour attention was paid to breaking the child’s will; a moral education meant teaching humility and obedience, far from the child’s natural, willful state, a state of sin to be overcome. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this viewpoint softened. Children, at least those of economic privilege, were more likely to be seen as fragile creatures requiring careful, sheltered cultivation. Within this context, the internalization of discipline was encouraged over the external discipline previously favored, a development of a new awareness of the internal life that arose in the eighteenth century. This attention to discipline was less concern for the child’s immortal soul than it was a newfound concern for vigilance against workers’ revolts; “its main object was pacification of the population,” Nadesan writes, citing Donzelot (p. 26). Internal loci of control continued to be emphasized into the nineteenth century, but they were paired with new, Malthusian concerns as the specter of overpopulation gripped the public imagination. The importance of children’s moral education was thus a matter of national security, with mothers held responsible for surveillance and intervention. The model of a virtuous child, the product of vigilant parents and a potentially worthy citizen, raised as well the image of its opposite: a criminally delinquent child, offspring of intemperance and vice and a threat to national security.

Nadesan traces the development of strategies of containment for delinquent children. For example, she examines asylums and special schools designed to contain existing “threats” found in disabled, “feebleminded,” or other differently developing children, as well as preventative containment of potential bearers of such children. Another preventative measure used was to remove the child from the parent; “orphan trains” ran from impoverished urban centers to farm communities from 1850 to the 1920s (p. 35). A third strategy, “medicalizing and educating” children perceived as risky, was linked to the mother’s role to provide moral guidance for her children (p. 36). Now, however, the mother was “directly implicated in childhood mortality, delinquency, degeneracy, and madness” (p. 37). The role of the expert in the overseeing and surveillance of child rearing assumed a greater urgency, particularly in immigrant and impoverished communities. By the 1900s, public schools were being built to assist in child rearing, their role again expanded into one of national security.

Concern about children as a social policy issue became a front-page topic during the twentieth century, re-

sulting in “the tutelary complex” (a phrase attributed to Donzelot), which was directed at the moral education and reformation of potentially dangerous children (p. 62). As these educational reforms became increasingly medicalized, attention broadened from children who had historically been targeted as objects of intervention to embrace normalization of all children, even while attempting to understand characteristics of what constituted “normal” stages of a child’s development. Normal was still a topic of broad debate and all children were expected to fall within its shifting definition. “At stake was the health and vitality of the nation,” Nadesan writes (p. 45). This was true for all children; however, intervention and treatment varied considerably based on race, class, and cognitive or physical ability, factors Nadesan considers when highlighting the “helping hand ethos” that pervaded the latter portion of the twentieth century (p. 50). As the social welfare model of government ceded to the neoliberal one, so too the education of children moved away from treatment toward discipline, often punitive.

Chapter 4, “Biopolitical Sorting: Comparing Neoliberal and Social Welfare Problem Solving Strategies,” which offers a closer look at the biological “sorting” strategies demonstrated through childhood diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, lends insight to the historical progression of perception. In particular, this chapter uses in-depth epidemiological studies of lead poisoning and Attention Deficit-Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) to illustrate uneven shifting societal perceptions, and the influence that socioeconomic perceptions have had on attention, treatment, and understanding of causality.

Nadesan notes that environmental health risk was not a known concept until the 1950s, but the health risks associated with lead paint were already well documented by the 1940s. The case of lead poisoning provides Nadesan with the opportunity to show this history as it unfolded through initial portrayals of individuals as victims of cognitive and emotional damage caused by the “social harm” of lead poisoning to the more recent recasting of these individuals as “perpetrators of criminal activity” (p. 115). Ridding one’s home of lead paint, while continuing to allow its production, created a circumstance of individual responsibility; if one’s home had lead paint, it would be attributed to individual negligence. As the caretaker for the child, then, the mother would bear ultimate responsibility. Because lead poisoning quickly became associated with poverty (exemplified by those who did not own or control their own homes), the idea reinforced was that of a neglectful mother, the child as victim. However, as epidemiological studies demonstrated, a broader array

of children demonstrating pica (eating non-food objects) attention became more broadly focused: lead poisoning was reinterpreted as a social crime rather than an act of individual negligence. As production of lead-free paint gradually developed in the 1970s, those who moved into newer or newly painted homes were less likely to be exposed, once again resulting in a distinct set of people affected by lead poisoning. Lead poisoning continues to be viewed as a problem only associated with poverty, one from which middle-class families are largely immune. Research studies of children poisoned by lead began to look at particular criminal behaviors, implying that the children were as much a *risk* in themselves as they were *at risk*.

The diagnosis of ADHD provides another case study of a condition initially conceptualized as biologic, then understood as cultural adaptation, and currently re-framed once again as an inborn, biological condition treatable through medication. At the turn of the twentieth century, the first documented case of what would later be termed ADHD was described in a young boy “on the move since birth”; his trouble was thought to be caused by lack of moral control, and later associated with pre-delinquency behaviors (pp. 131-132). As the cultural view incorporated psychological theories, behaviors indicating what was felt to be “emotional maladjustment” became linked both to inborn conditions of the nervous system and to external conditions of nurture, a “psychobiosocial” interpretation.[1]

These are but two chapters within a wide-ranging text that explore the attitudes of the government toward children as they have been shaped by cultural interpretation of risk and security. Chapter 1, “Biopolitics, Risk, and Childhood,” serves as an introduction to the themes this book takes up: Foucault’s view of governmentality, considerations of social welfare and neolib-

eral governmental policies, and the rise of epidemiological medicine. Chapter 3, “Risk, Biopolitics, and Bioeconomics,” examines the contradictions inherent in neoliberal policies, and maintains that these policies have a disproportionately negative impact on children of color. Chapter 5, “Biopower, Security, and Development,” considers two groups of children as national and international security concerns: poor children in the developing world and children of migrant workers entering the United States. Chapter 6, “Children and the Twenty-First Century: Risky Economics,” examines the lens through which childhood is viewed as a harbinger of future conditions, and the ultimate unsustainability of neoliberal policies that simultaneously emphasize a child’s vulnerability and demand accountability.

A casual reader may have difficulty with Nadesan’s dense prose. Her sentences at times feel like poorly constructed roads, rife with possible direction and little guidance. An example: “Liberal political economy demanded that governmental (i.e., police) operations aimed at enhancing the biovitality of the population be rationalized within economic calculi of value. Moreover, liberal political economy demanded that police operations be limited in scope to that social space defined as ‘private’ to preserve the essential autonomy of the market” (p. 25). But this is not a book written for a casual reader. The scholar or student who seeks a broader view on the subject of the politics of childhood, particularly within neoliberal policies, will be delighted by the range and depth of Nadesan’s research, in the many strands that she has meticulously unwoven and offered in this volume.

Note

[1]. This multi-pronged view, promoted by Adolph Meyer, deeply influenced Leo Kanner’s understanding of autism.

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