

Precious, Pure, Uncivilised, Vulnerable: Infant Embodiment in Australian Popular Media

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This article describes how infants' bodies were portrayed in a range of Australian popular media texts. Four main discourses on infant embodiment were identified: the infant as 'precious', 'pure', 'uncivilised' and 'vulnerable'. While, on the one hand, infants were positioned as the most valuable and affectively appealing of humans, they were alternatively represented as uncivilised. Infant bodies were portrayed as appropriately inhabiting the domestic sphere of the home and as barely tolerated or even as excluded in the public sphere. The discussion looks at how concepts of 'nature', civility and Self and Otherness underpinned the identified discourses. © 2013 The Author(s). Children & Society © 2013 National Children's Bureau and Blackwell Publishing Limited.

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Introduction

Sociocultural scholarship on the body and that on the new social studies of childhood have much in common. Both consider their topics of analyses — the body and childhood — to be dynamic cultural forms, structured through social, cultural, historical and political processes and discourses. While some researchers have brought these two areas together and begun to investigate children's embodiment (for example, the chapters in Horschelmann and Colls, 2010; Prout, 2000), very little research has specifically addressed aspects of embodiment of the smallest and youngest of all children — infants — from a sociocultural and critical perspective. Some sociologists have researched mothers' perspectives on their infants' bodies in relation to their physical care and health in various western countries, including the United States, Britain, Sweden and Australia (see, for example, Brownlie and Leith, 2011; Keenan and Stapleton, 2009; Lauritzen, 1997; Lupton, 2011; Murcott, 1993; Murphy, 2007). A number of interesting anthropological and sociological accounts have been published on theoretical aspects of how infants' bodies are conceptualised (reviewed by Lupton, in press). However, there remains much more to explore in relation to the social and cultural dimensions of infant embodiment.

The ways in which infants' bodies are portrayed in popular culture is the central question to which the present article is directed. Popular cultural representations of entities both reflect and reproduce dominant meanings and practices circulating in wider society, configuring shared systems of meaning (Lehtonen, 2000; Parker, 1999). Focusing on the major images and discourses that receive expression in mainstream media forums is a means by which social and cultural attitudes about entities may be identified. Adopting a critical discourse analysis approach to do so incorporates acknowledgement of the wider power relations and sociocultural meanings underpinning specific discourses as they are generated and repro-

duced in cultural artefacts: the 'cultural backdrop', as Parker (1999, p. 2) terms it. From a Foucauldian discourse analytic perspective, discourses and practices are interrelated, and in fact are seen to be part of the same phenomenon of the construction of meaning (Parker, 1999, p. 3).

Such an approach highlights the ways in which shared meaning systems and practices related to infants are socially constructed. Infants' bodies, like other bodies, are produced through and accompanied by discourse and visual representation from the moment of conception. Such vehicles of representation as advertisements, television programmes, news media reports, popular books and magazines and websites are important forums for the portrayal and reproduction of dominant meanings, practices and discourses around infants' bodies. Popular media texts such as these contribute to both producing and privileging shared understandings, making it possible to see the phenomenon in question in certain defined ways. The discursive formations, which appear in these texts, use specific repertoires of concepts, words and images, and construct particular regimes of truth (Lehtonen, 2000).

I have been unable to locate any previous research attempting to identify the ways in which the infant — the child in the age group from newborn to approximately two years of age — is portrayed in the contemporary popular media. Those previous studies, which have analysed popular cultural representations of young children have tended to focus on the problematic child who is older than the infant stage: for example, the abused child, the child 'in crisis' or the child who differs significantly from the norm, such as children with disabilities or fat children (Evans and others, 2011; Kehily, 2010; Kendrick, 2008; Matthews, 2009; O'Dell, 2008). The present article is an attempt to address this neglected topic focusing on the Australian context, using a critical discourse analysis based on the Foucauldian approach referred to above, which combines an interest in the discursive elements of texts with a focus on how power relations are reproduced therein (Fairclough and others, 2011; Lehtonen, 2000; Parker, 1999).

The texts on infants I gathered for the study were Australian newspaper and news magazine articles and advertisements as well as Australian television advertisements. Over the eight-month period spanning 1 January to 31 August 2011, I collected articles and advertisements about infants appearing in the print version of two Australian newspapers (the Sydney Morning Herald and the Weekend Australian), as well as the weekly coloured magazines published by both newspapers. These newspapers were chosen because the former is the broadsheet published in my city of residence, while the latter is Australia's only national daily newspaper. I also searched these newspapers' online sites for relevant articles and advertisements appearing during the study period. The total number of articles about infants published during this period was 82 (I did not include those with mere passing references or that used the terms 'infants' or 'babies' to describe phenomena other than human infants). To access a further source of images and print and television advertisements, I reviewed those appearing on an Australian-based website directed at mothers with infants and young children during the final month of the study period (<http://www.babycenter.com.au/>).

All of these texts were subjected to a qualitative analysis, examined for the recurring images and rhetorical and discursive devices used to portray and describe infants' bodies. The analysis asked the following questions: How are infants' bodies portrayed using visual imagery? How are their bodies shown in relation to others' bodies? What spaces do they inhabit or are deemed appropriate to inhabit? What rhetorical devices are used to convey meaning about

the infant body? To what broader discourses concerning infant embodiment do these visual and rhetorical devices contribute?

Four dominant discourses of infant embodiment were identified in the data set: precious, pure, uncivilised and vulnerable. Below, I provide exemplars of each of these discourses, accompanied by analysis of how these discourses were expressed in the texts. These exemplars are representative of the wider data set, chosen to illustrate the main ways in which these discourses were presented across the texts. In the tradition of critical discourse analysis, the discussion section then draws upon relevant sociocultural theory to explain and contextualise the resonance and power of these discourses in giving meaning to infants' bodies. Where possible, I have included weblinks to the texts to which I refer; further examples of the types of representations discussed here may be viewed at my Pinterest site (Sociology of Infancy, <http://pinterest.com/dalupton/sociology-of-infancy/>).

Discourses of infant embodiment

Precious

A television advertisement for a brand of nappies shows several scenes of different mothers (and some fathers) cuddling or playing with their infants. The infants are shown in the parents' arms or lying on a bed with the sleeping baby snuggled into the parents' bodies. The parents are laughing and smiling, expressing their pleasure and joy at experiencing these embodied moments of intimacy with their babies. The babies smile responsively at their parents or sleep peacefully next to them.

Another television advertisement, this time for an IVF clinic, uses real black-and-white footage of a woman giving birth. We see the woman grimacing in pain and effort as she goes through labour. Although the setting is clearly a hospital, there is very little footage of healthcare professionals assisting the woman, but her male partner is shown supporting her. The only sound in the advertisement is a high angel-like voice singing a hymn-like wordless tune, suggesting that the event occurring is wondrous. The baby is eventually born, and is placed on its mother's chest, as she smiles widely and places her arms around it. Her partner leans over to share the moment, also overjoyed to meet and touch his baby. The final image shows a tiny baby's hand grasping a much larger adult male's finger — presumably that of its father (see this advertisement here: <http://blog.myivfblogs.com/2012/02/because-little-things-matter/>).

Images such as those described above reproduce the notion of the infant as precious in its sheer tininess, affective appeal, helplessness, innocence and lack of artifice. The image of the peacefully slumbering, angelic baby is very common in visual portrayals of infants such as the first text described above. It is in sleep that the infant is least demanding and most vulnerable. The affective aspects of viewing the sleeping child or cuddling it are also often highlighted in such portrayals: the calm, peace, and perhaps relief felt by the carer as she or he gazes upon the child or feels its relaxed body against her or his own. The advertisement for the IVF clinic, with its angel-like singing, depicts the birth of an infant as a wondrous event. The mother's efforts in labour and the father's work in supporting her are rewarded with this final moment of family togetherness as they revel in seeing and touching their infant for the first time. The mother holds the naked infant against her skin as the father strokes the child.

Another dominant aspect of these types of portrayals is that of the diminutive infant's body contrasted against a much larger adult's body. This contrast receives its apotheosis in images such as that of the newborn infant's hand grasping the large male finger in the advertisement described above. The tininess, delicacy and helplessness of the infant are emphasised by these kinds of contrasts. When juxtaposed against the body of an adult carer who holds the child in his/her arms or rests next to the child on the bed, the child is represented as protected, kept safe from harm while it sleeps. These somewhat sentimentalised images of the infant body are the stock-in-trade of greetings cards, magazines and websites about infant care and advertisements for baby products. They represent all that is most valued in infant embodiment: the precious, adorable, contented baby who smiles or sleeps, safe in its parent's arms. Parent and infant revel in each other's company, with each enjoying the intimacy of embodied contact. The infant here is an 'angel' (Valentine, 1996): a superior, yet fragile, entity requiring careful handling and care.

As these images suggest, an important dimension of the precious infant body is the rewards which touching and gazing upon this body provide its caregivers (Lupton, in press). Some indication of this is given in the examples above, portraying parents enjoying their embodied interaction with their babies. Part of the positive meanings associated with the infant's body, therefore, is the opportunity to 'return to the body', to appreciate, acknowledge and revel in the ways in which the tiny body of the infant may be held and touched by oneself, to allow one's 'instincts' to take over from one's rational thinking. Embodied contact with infants allows their carers to escape from the lack of 'authenticity' in human relations, to experience 'natural' feelings and counter the rationalist, overly cognitive focus of contemporary adult subjectivity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

Pure

A magazine advertisement shows an image of a beatific small infant, white skinned and with very pale blonde hair, dressed in white. The baby is lying fast asleep face down on a carpet and clutching a green leaf in its hand. The advertisement is for the carpet, and the text makes much of its ecological credentials, noting that purchasers will 'Make more impact on your interior and less on the environment' as the carpet 'is made from natural corn sugar and provides new levels of performance plus enriched softness'. The imagery and text of the advertisement seek to transfer the meanings of the sleeping baby — innocence, purity, softness — to the carpet.

A television advertisement for a brand of yoghurt begins by showing several different babies happily and messily eating or chewing on a range of non-foods: for example, dirt, sand, shoes, lipstick and crayons. The advertisement ends by showing a baby sitting in a highchair, eating the yoghurt from a bowl with a spoon. The baby ends up smearing the yoghurt across its face, laughing as it plays with the stuff. The advertisement ends with the baby's mother holding the pot and smiling indulgently at it, as the voiceover talks about how important it is for babies to eat pure food. The yoghurt is described as 'a little pot of purity' (see this advertisement here: <http://www.jalna.com.au/common/advertising.html>).

In these advertisements, notions of purity and nature intertwine. In the first advertisement, the baby's purity is emphasised by its white garb, its relaxed slumber, its pale skin and golden hair, the leaf it is clutching in its tiny hand. Nature and the baby are one: pure, unsullied, clean, but also highly vulnerable, requiring protection from harmful contaminants.

In the second advertisement, babies are represented as instigators of mess, contentedly smearing themselves with all kinds of substances. Despite this, they are still represented as pure, requiring protection from contaminants, including the kind of objects (foodstuffs or otherwise) that they put into their mouths.

In both advertisements, a dominant cultural meaning ascribed to nature — purity — is shared by the portrayals of the infants' bodies and the advertised products. The reasoning behind these portrayals is that both nature and infants are good, innocent, harmless and wholesome. Infants are close to nature and are as pure and unsullied as nature. Furthermore, both infants and nature are vulnerable, open to contamination (see also the discussion below concerning the vulnerable infant body). A substance that is 'natural' and 'pure', therefore, must be good for infants' bodies, as are those commodities, which are able to protect infants' state of purity.

As these advertisements suggest, the concept of 'nature' is integral in dominant discourses on infant embodiment. Infants and young children are seen to inspire 'natural' feelings because their bodies are portrayed as closer to nature than adult bodies. Aligned with the positive discourses of the 'precious' and the 'pure' infant body, nature is all that is good. This positive association of nature with the infant's body draws upon the concept of the Apollonian child (Jenks, 1996), close to and even an extension of nature. Nature here bears the valued meanings of cleanliness and lack of artifice. Nature is also vulnerable, requiring protection from the imposts of 'culture'. Positive discourses on nature celebrate its closeness to reality, humanity, empathy, refinement and feeling, its distance from what is seen to be the sterility, artifice and overly rationalist nature of 'culture'. Here, the infant body may be seen as the apotheosis of all that is to be appreciated about 'good nature'.

Uncivilised

A discussion in the online version of a newspaper concerns the issue of crying babies in aeroplanes. Headlined 'Travellers hate children — even their own: survey', the discussion is sparked by the findings of a survey of British travellers, which found that parents had had negative experiences travelling with infants and small children. Dozens of responses from readers to this piece are posted, many of which complain about the behaviour of small children and the noise of crying infants and criticise their parents for choosing to even bring them on the flight (see this article and comments at <http://www.smh.com.au/travel/travel--news/travellers-hate-children-even-their-own-survey-20110808-1iids.html>).

Another debate in the letters section of a print edition of the same newspaper raises the question of whether dogs should be allowed to accompany their owners to cafes. Some writers claim that dogs are perfectly acceptable: it is babies and small children who should be banned from cafes, because they make too much noise and are disruptive, detracting from other patrons' enjoyment.

Discussions on whether infants and small children should be allowed to enter spaces such as aeroplanes, cafes or restaurants recur in newspapers and online commentaries, inciting similar kinds of heated ripostes each time. On one side are parents who defend their right to take their infants to these places and position those who oppose it as intolerant and child-hating. On the other side are people who assert that infants and small children do not behave appropriately and spoil adults' experiences, and that parents are too lax in regulating their

children. On the above-mentioned online debate, the comments section expressed opinions as extreme as this:

I'd really like to see it go further, and remove all children from public areas... Holiday spots and travelling options should be classed as for and not for children, make these disgusting things travel in their own special carriages/planes and live in their own areas. The world would be a much better place if all children were just locked up until they were old enough to behave.

As these views suggest, while the infant's body may be often positively associated with nature, there is another, negative side to the symbolic meanings of nature: 'bad' nature. 'Bad' nature can be wild, chaotic, uncontrolled, confronting in its lack of civility. So too, as the above texts suggest, infant bodies can wreak havoc and challenge notions of acceptable behaviour. They are closer to animals than humans, and even inferior to animals, in their lack of control over their emotions. As such, their presence in public spaces where adults congregate is deemed inappropriate.

The negative representations of the infant as uncontrollable and even 'disgusting' dominating the newspaper debates about infants in public places draw upon the concept of the Dionysian child, which shares the negative meanings associated with 'bad nature': unruly, uncivilised and wild (Jenks, 1996). Valentine (1996) further uses the term 'devils' to encapsulate the idea of children as inherently unregulated and unsocialised humans who require adults' (and particularly parental) close surveillance and control when in public spaces. Although both Jenks and Valentine are referring to older children, their observations also have resonances for how infants are portrayed as uncivilised when in public. The concepts of the Dionysian or devil child suggest that infants are inferior humans and even less-than-human in their lack of containment of their bodies. They further suggest that infants are 'out of place' in public spaces such as aircraft and cafes and that they should be confined to privatised spheres, such as the home, where only their parents need to endure their uncivilised bodies.

Images of the crying infant are rare in advertising, which, as noted above, tends to rely on sentimentalised depictions of smiling, content infants to evoke a positive affective response. Nonetheless, the portrayal of the happily messy infant or young child is quite common in this medium, as in the yoghurt advertisement described above. In such texts, the infant is portrayed as uncivilised in its lack of propriety and its inability to keep itself clean. However, such advertisements lack the forceful condemnations of the kind evident in the newspaper debates on infants on flights. The messy infant is instead represented as endearingly uncivilised, simply 'being a baby' who cannot help its lack of bodily control (cf. Murcott, 1993; Murphy, 2007). Because it is shown as within the home, this type of uncivilised infant does not offend others' sensibilities: it simply makes work for its mother, who does not resent this work because she is caring for her 'precious' infant.

Vulnerable

A television advertisement for a brand of spray cleaner shows a woman using the cleaner and wiping surfaces in her home. Images of the woman happily cleaning are interspersed with images of a baby sitting in its high chair eating food from its spoon and the baby crawling on the floor, putting a toy into its mouth and pulling itself to stand. The baby is also shown in a bathroom setting, crawling towards a toilet, as the mother is shown laughing and picking up the infant before it can touch the toilet. The voiceover discusses how 'invisible germs and dirt

can be everywhere' and asserts that to 'protect your family's health' the advertised spray cleaner should be used.

A newspaper weekend magazine report tells the story of an infant who experienced severe side effects as the result of receiving an influenza vaccination. The child, aged 11 months at the time of the vaccination, is now two years old. She suffered brain injury and global organ damage due to the high fever and seizures she experienced following the vaccine. A full-page photograph of the infant embraced by her mother illustrates the story. The child is shown gazing down with a blank expression on her face, an oxygen tube in her nose, and standing assisted by a back brace. The opposing page shows a smaller photograph of the child taken before the vaccination, looking directly at the camera and laughing, an apparently normal infant (see this article at <http://theaustralian.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>).

As these two examples demonstrate, discourses concerning risk and danger are also a prevalent way in which the infant's body is represented in contemporary culture. Infants' bodies, in their purity and closeness to nature, are considered to be especially fragile, vulnerable and open to contamination by outside agents such as the 'invisible dirt and germs' to which the first text refers. Even though the home environment which the baby is shown to inhabit in the advertisement is portrayed as very clean, the implication of the text's words is that because the 'germs and dirt' are 'invisible', mothers need to take extra precautions to remove them.

The second text acts as a warning to parents as to how a routine practice — vaccination — may alter an infant's body forever if something goes wrong. This is every parent's worst nightmare: the normal child who suddenly becomes severely physically and mentally disabled, requiring life-long care (Brownlie and Leith, 2011). While there is no suggestion that the parents were at fault for taking their infant to be vaccinated, it is implied that one's infant's health and well-being should not be taken for granted, and that parents should be on guard concerning how best to protect their infants from such calamities. Many of the newspaper articles examined as part of this study also focused on health risks related to infancy, including further news stories about the risk to infants of this particular influenza vaccine. In direct contrast to the above story, the perils of not vaccinating infants were also reported. Other risks to infants receiving attention in the news articles included such conditions as allergies and sudden infant death syndrome and the dangers of accidents such as drowning, smothering and dog attacks.

These texts suggest that by virtue of the fact that the infant is unable to control its body, keep it clean and proper and regulate the kinds of objects or foodstuffs that enter it, it is needful of constant adult regulation and surveillance. This imperative of surveillance is heightened in the context of the increased awareness of risk in western societies, in which risks are viewed as ever present and ever threatening the health and safety of infants and young children (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Furedi, 2002; Kehily, 2010; Lee and others, 2010). The concept of the child as 'angel' (Valentine, 1996) underpins this notion of infants as vulnerable, innocent and requiring adult protection in both private and public spaces.

Discussion

The dominant discourses which I have here identified as giving meaning to infant embodiment in Australian popular cultural texts are important ways of thinking about infants'

bodies. Not only do they reflect common attitudes to infants, they also have the potential to influence or contribute to the ways in which parents and other caregivers treat infants. As symbolic representations, they form part of the heterogeneous network of discourse, practice, objects and bodies that configure and interact with infant bodies.

I have identified above four dominant ways of representing the infant body in popular culture: as precious, pure, uncivilised and vulnerable. These meanings interact with, contrast with or complement one another in various ways. Precious infants must be carefully protected because of their high value, their affective ties with their parents, their small, helpless bodies. Their distress, pain, injury or illness are unthinkable, and must be avoided. Pure infants' bodies, like 'good nature', are conceptualised as highly permeable, open to contamination by outside pollutants imposing themselves on their bodies. Uncivilised infant bodies are unable to protect themselves and may even introduce contaminants into their own bodies (by swallowing the wrong objects/foods or touching dirty surfaces, for example) because of their lack of knowledge about the world and their inability to control their bodies and the substances which emit from them.

These discourses bespeak a deep ambivalence about infants in contemporary western societies. Infants and young children are considered infinitely valuable in this cultural context, particularly for their parents. The notion of infants and young children as 'precious' has been reproduced in commercial advertising for over a century (Cross, 2004) and continues to receive expression in contemporary texts such as parenting magazines and popular commentaries on childhood (Kehily, 2010). Parents — and especially mothers — are encouraged to selflessly put their young children's needs above their own, to position them as the most important members of the family. Sociologists have argued that in the context of 'intensive parenting', young children are viewed as requiring much attention, intense love and the best of everything. They are portrayed as providing their parents with a sense of purpose and meaning (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Hays, 1996; Zelizer, 1985).

Yet, as the analysis above demonstrates, very young children are culturally portrayed as inferior by virtue of their lack of containment (Lupton, *in press*). Several theorists on the body have contended that in contemporary western societies, bodies which are seen as not tightly contained, controlled and distinct from other bodies are represented as contaminating, grotesque and deficient (Douglas, 1980/1966; Turner, 2003). Infants, like the very old or people with disabilities, are supreme examples of loss of containment and control in terms of both the body fluids that seep or erupt from them and must constantly be cleaned away as well as their uninhibited expression of emotion. Representations of infants as animalistic, untamed, chaotic bodies (the 'Dionysian' or 'devil' child) bespeak a certain hostility on the part of adults towards the infant body.

These emotional responses may at least partly be a result of the clash between expectation and reality. The precious and pure infant so dominant in popular cultural representations is quiet, clean and proper, angelically sleeping or smiling happily. It causes no trouble for its carers or others around it. These visions of infant docility inevitably create unrealistic expectations of infants in real life. The uncivilised infant, which all infants inevitably become at least sometimes, is demanding, noisy, crying, whingeing, disruptive, disorderly, grating on adults' nerves, provoking frustration and annoyance. Such ambivalence or downright hostility and anger rarely receive expression in the popular media, for they are so confronting of cherished ideals about parenting and infant–parent relations. It is often those who do not

have to care for young children regularly who feel freer to express their hostility towards the uncontrollable infant body, as in the viewpoints espoused by the commentators on infants in aeroplanes and cafes described above.

The discourse of the precious, pure and vulnerable child is in direct counter-opposition to these feelings: how can one feel hostility or anger towards such as highly valued, adorable, helpless infant who needs one's protection? Yet, it may be precisely these discourses that contribute to the provoking of such negative affect. Precious, vulnerable infants require constant devotion and self-sacrifice from their carers to maintain their pure status, and their ever-incipient propensity for uncivilised behaviour must be constantly checked and controlled. These discourses encourage mothers in particular to invest a great deal of time and energy into providing for and protecting their infants, relinquishing much of their autonomy and suppressing their own desires and needs. They also make it very difficult for parents to acknowledge that they too may experience their infants' bodies as uncivilised, animalistic and overly demanding, and that these aspects of infant embodiment may be challenging, at least sometimes, to parents' commitment and love.

The ambivalent feelings that parents may harbour for the children, including, on occasion, anger, hatred and frustration as well as deep love, have yet to be fully explored in academic research. Nonetheless, pockets of research carried out in Australia, the United Kingdom and Finland have identified some of these difficult-to-acknowledge feelings, demonstrating that mothers can find it difficult to lose their autonomy and freedom and are sometimes resentful of this loss, as well as experiencing great fatigue in dealing with the bodily demands of their infants (Lupton, 2000; Read and others, 2012; Sevon, 2007). So too, what has been entitled 'maternal confessional writing' about 'motherhood as trauma' (Quiney, 2007) has recently emerged in western countries, written by professionally successful women who have found motherhood a struggle and are willing to articulate in detail their negative feelings about the experience (examples include American writer Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions* and British journalist Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work*, both published in 2001). Such confessions articulate emotions which have often been viewed as the unspeakable and repressed because they transgress and confront norms of the 'good mother' who is not resentful of her infant's demands (Quiney, 2007).

Underlying many of these dominant representations is that of the Self/Other binary opposition. Whether celebrated for its preciousness, or resented for its lack of self-control and containment, the infant body is routinely positioned as Other to the Self of the adult body. Children in general are continually represented as Other to the adult subject, partly because of their association with disorder and the affectively charged dimensions of their bodily interaction with the world (Jenks, 1996; Jones, 2008; Valentine, 1996). Infants are somewhat different from older children because of their status as the most valuable and fragile of all children. They are coded as Other to adults by virtue of both positive and negative attributes. Their bodies are represented as helpless, vulnerable, uncontrolled, dirty and leaky in opposition to the idealised adult body that is powerful, self-regulated, autonomous, clean, its bodily boundaries sealed from the outside world, but their bodies are also portrayed as the epitome of preciousness and purity.

This Otherness of children's bodies, in a binary opposition with the privileged Self of adult embodiment, shares its meanings with the Other bodies in other symbolic oppositions: men/

women, white peoples/non-white peoples, human/animal. In each of these oppositions, the inferior Other, while also often possessing positive attributes, is frequently portrayed and treated with disdain and contempt in their divergence from what is considered the appropriate norm. The purity of the spaces which these Others traverse may, as a result, be regarded by the symbolically superior as defiled and disordered. Thus, in the above arguments against allowing parents to travel on long-haul flights with their very young children or to take them to cafes, the depiction of the infant body as Other — as uncivilised, annoying, lacking self-control — is evident.

The findings here reported suggest that infant bodies are viewed as appropriately inhabiting certain defined spaces, specifically the domestic sphere of the home. They are barely tolerated or even excluded in the public sphere, positioned as it is as the space of 'civilised' adults. 'Adult' spaces are symbolically 'spoilt' by the presence of these uncivilised infant bodies. As Valentine (1996) has argued in relation to older children, the contradictory archetypes of children as 'angels' and 'little devils' position them as belonging to the home rather than public space, either for their own safety or because they annoy others.

The texts analysed here were generated in the Australian context. As there are no equivalent studies analysing popular cultural representations of infant bodies in other countries, it is difficult to draw definite conclusions about how the findings here discussed may be generalised across other western countries. Nonetheless, the research conducted by others concerning mothers' concepts of infant embodiment, upon which I have drawn above to support and give depth to my textual analysis, has emerged from a number of other western nations, particularly the United States and Britain, and also Scandinavian countries. This suggests that many of the meanings I have here identified may well be shared across geographical contexts shaped by the cultures of the global north. Further research that investigates cultural representations of the infant body in different geographical locations would be a welcome contribution to the current literature on the discourses and practices which give meaning to and configure the infant body.

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