

Introduction to the Special Issue on Adulthood

Adam F. C. Fletcher & J. Cynthia McDermott

An emergent consciousness is alerting the world to adulthood. This new awareness is apparent in the increasingly sophisticated literature addressing the issue as the fields of psychology, civic engagement, education, healthcare, parenting, governance and social services begin grappling with it through theory and practice. This special edition of *Taboo* addresses several of these, gathering disparate international authors in a single edition to highlight current cross-disciplinary understandings of adulthood.

In this special edition, there are fifteen articles by twenty-one authors from five countries, including Argentina, Germany, the United States of America, Ireland and Greece. At least ten disciplines are addressed in this collection. Two writers are from Argentina, one from Greece, five from Germany, one from Ireland and eleven are from the United States of America. Two of the American submissions specifically identify co-authors as young people. Seventeen writers come from higher education institutions with four inclusions from the private sector.

Adam F. C. Fletcher is a consultant, speaker and writer focused on engaging everyone, everywhere, all of the time. The author of thirteen books including Facing Adulthood (2015), he has had more than 100 articles published and is the co-founder of the Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement and the director of SoundOut.org. J. Cynthia McDermott began her teaching career as a high school English teacher and has been a teacher and teacher educator for 50 plus years, including service as a university faculty member working with preservice teachers. She recently retired as the department chair of education at Antioch University Los Angeles. McDermott is a co-editor of Taboo and Fletcher and McDermott served as co-editors of this special Spring 2024 issue on Adulthood. Email addresses: adam@commonaction.org & mcdprof@hotmail.com

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Xamuel Bañales is in the Ethnic Studies Department at California State University, Stanislaus in the United States of America. Their contribution, “De/colonization: A Framework to Understand and Transgress Adultism,” suggests moving from “discourses of liberal inclusivity” toward social transformation. Highlighting a de/colonization framework, this essay examines the interwoven relationship between adultism and colonization and shares how failing to address that reality can perpetuate oppression.

A German submission comes from Julia Höke of the Catholic University of Applied Science NRW and Katrin Velten from Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin University of Applied Sciences. Their article, called “‘I don’t know.’ Analysis of a Powerful Interaction Strategy of Children in Dealing with Adult-Dominated Interactions,” examines the hierarchical order implicit in intergenerational interactions, especially interviews between children and adults. They examine their own research and share observations about how to better facilitate these interactions in order to gather more effective data.

Writing with students, Alison Cook-Sather is the director of the Students as Teachers and Learners (SaLT) program a signature program of the Teaching and Learning Institute at Bryn Mawr and Haverford College in the United States of America. The writing partners along with Cook-Sather in this study are Abyssinia Braud, Brisa Kane and Abhirami Sures who are undergraduates who have worked in pedagogical partnership with faculty through SaLT, and their collective piece is called “How Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnerships Counter Adultism in Higher Education.” In the article they explore how this program counters adultism on multiple levels, and share ways it can be dismantled.

In an essay called “A Future Without Adultism,” Canadian-American advocate Adam F.C. Fletcher of the Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement in the United States of America proposes a hypothetical future absent of discrimination against youth and bias benefiting adults. Fletcher proposes that in the place of adultism and other oppressions is sustained democracy, freedom, and justice for all.

“Exploring Age-Based Oppression: Adultism, Ageism, and Their Potential Interactions” was submitted by Katherine King, the Geropsychology Concentration Director and an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Clinical Psychology Department at William James College in the United States of America. Their article provides a first-person account of adultism. Focused on understanding the geropsychology workforce shortage, it also centers on findings from several studies demonstrating adultist concerns among graduate students considering careers serving older adults. Included are an Adultist Concerns Scale, qualitative research gathering student concerns, and related findings from studies exploring how adultist concerns relate to ageism and discomfort with death. There is also a review of educational resources exploring age-based oppression.

A longstanding advocate/educator focused on adultism from the United States of America, Paul Kivel’s contribution is called “Working with Young Peo-

ple as Adult Allies.” In this piece, Kivel provides a necessary introduction to the concept of adultism and proposes practical steps for adults, including educators, youth workers and others, to take action to address adultism by becoming allies.

Sharing their perspectives from Germany, Manfred Liebel of the Social and Educational Sciences Department University of Applied Sciences Potsdam and Philip Meade explore different ways of conceptualizing the concept in their paper, “Intersectional Tensions in Theorizing Adultism.” Employing a Marxist lens, they argue adultism’s capitalist roots and suggest pathways toward countering it.

Verena Marke of Leuphana Universität Lüneburg in Germany shares a piece called “Critical and Intersectional Childhood Studies: A New Theoretical Framework of Adultism from Transdisciplinary Fields of Critical Age, Gender, Race, and Disability Studies.” Based on a Hawaiian case study of reframing self- and group identity in age-different learning environments, Marke reveals how classroom power relationships can be transformed to address adultism.

A professor emeritus at Antioch University Los Angeles in the United States of America, J. Cynthia McDermott contributes an article entitled, “Protection Is Insufficient.” They explore the rights of children and the roles of people responsible for ensuring those rights. Highlighting the creation of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the piece examines how adultism is present throughout this early work, and suggests that protecting children is not sufficient to empower them.

Santiago Morales from the Universidad de Buenos Aires and a CONICET Doctoral Fellow, based at the Instituto de Estudios de América Latina y El Caribe of the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales of the UBA, shares a Spanish-language article called “Adultocentrismo, adultismo y violencias contra niños y niñas. Una mirada crítica sobre las relaciones de poder entre clases de edad.” He employs a critical, intersectional approach to adultcentrism that highlights the role of adult violence innate within adultism and calls out its systemic nature.

Ryan Oto of Carleton College in the United States of America writes with Amina Smaller, a youth author, in an article called “Reclaiming Civic Life in Schools: Lessons on Contesting Anti-Black Adultism through Acts of Solidarity.” Based on Amina’s lived experience as a student, this article illustrates and addresses how anti-Blackness and adultism work together called anti-Black adultism. It shows how upsetting anti-Black adultism can lead to sustained intergenerational work toward racial justice in schools.

From Argentina comes an article by Paúlrah Nurit Shabel of Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas and the Instituto de Ciencias Antropológicas-Universidad de Buenos Aires. Called “Intergenerational Present. Unexpected Proximity Against the Adultist Temporality,” this piece examines temporality from an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach. This piece is a conceptual exercise that leads readers to an edge in intergenerational relationships: If time is not linear maybe you can make friends with a child.

Writing from Ireland, Karen Smith of the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice at University College Dublin contributes an article called “Using Adulthood in Conceptualizing Oppression of Children and Youth: More Than a Buzzword?” Examining the intellectual underpinnings of adulthood, this piece draws on multiple disciplines to show how the concept is employed today. It ultimately challenges specific debates within the areas of Childhood Studies and Youth Studies and the fields of Education and Social Justice and suggests new ways to confront adulthood in the academy.

Aikaterini Varela from Greece shares a piece called “Exploring & Combating Adulthood in Early Childhood Education and Beyond.” Exploring initial reactions to the concept of adulthood, Varela shares different reactions to notions of adult power, children’s dependence and protection, limits, guilt, the intersectionality of discrimination, and the internalization of adulthood. She then explores how to unpack and challenge those realities, and counters prescriptive approaches to stopping adulthood.

The force of each of these articles adds to the multi-disciplinary canon addressing adulthood; the sum of this entire edition shows the need for further research and examination to raise the profile of this topic across fields. It also shows the potential for trans-disciplinary approaches to encourage holistic perspectives of the very people most affected, children and youth. The whole of these writings shows us that seeing adulthood across topics and beyond singular points-of-view can encourage advocacy, action, and outcomes affecting the greatest numbers of people worldwide. This is one of the greatest ways scholars, academics, and other thinkers can contribute today.