

The **adult** view of **children**  
as **lesser** humans:  
how it erodes **autonomy**  
and leads to **abuse**

*Emma Hakansson*



“Contained in this treaty is a profound idea: that children are **not just objects** who belong to their parents and **for whom decisions are made**, or **adults in training**. Rather, they are **human beings and individuals** with their **own rights**.”

**autonomy**



**“good girl”**

**adult**

**child**

**“weird”**

# Hear us now, act now

**First insights on prevention and early  
intervention from those with lived and  
living experience of child sexual abuse**

The first report from  
**Our Collective Experience Project.**

**March 2024**

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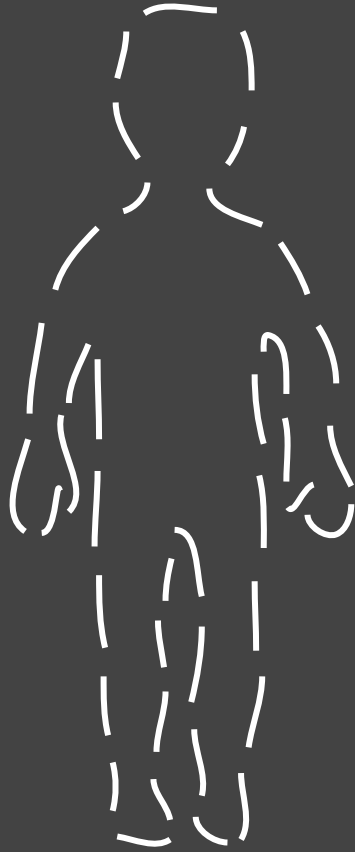
# obedient children and danger

**child resistance**





**children as an  
oppressed group**



Alderson, P. (2013). Young children's rights. Jessica Kingsley / Save the Children







Faulkner, J. (2010). The importance of being innocent: Why we worry about children. Cambridge University Press.



children are seen as a **‘primary and unequivocal source of love’** as well as **‘partners in the most fundamental, unchosen, unnegotiated form of relationship’**



Hakansson, E. (2024). Sub-Human. Lantern Press.

**reunderstanding**  
disobedience

# an ethic of care not domination

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Harvard University Press.

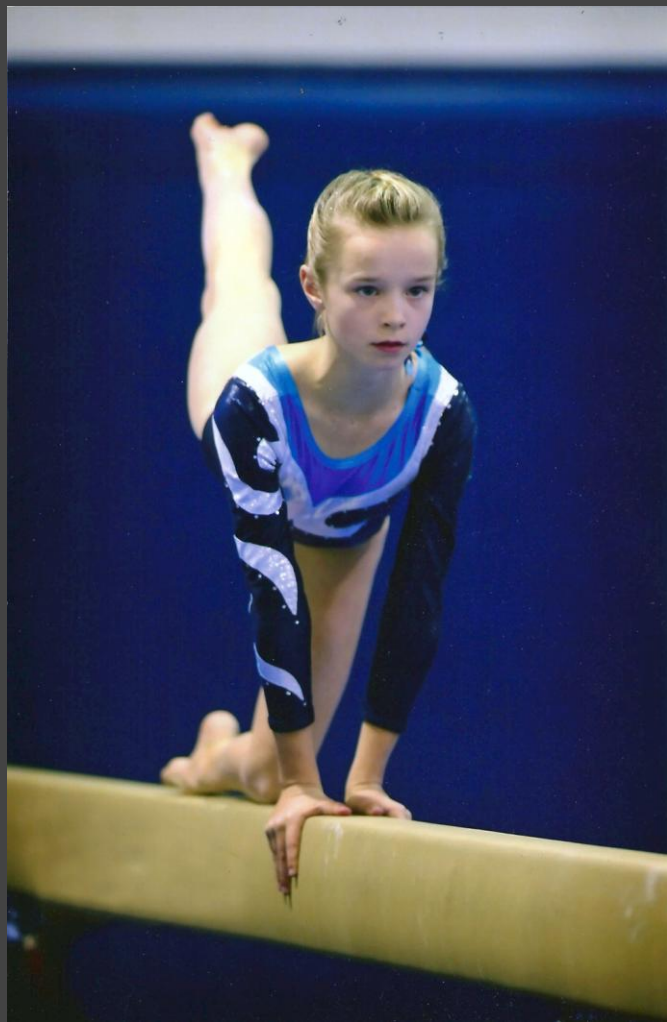
Arneil, B. (2002). *Becoming versus being: a critical analysis of the child in liberal theory*. In D. Archard and C.M. Macleod (Eds.), *Moral and political status of children* (pp. 70-96). Oxford University Press.

Tisdall, E. K. M., & Punch, S. (2012). Not so 'new'? Looking critically at childhood studies. *Children's geographies*, 10(3), 249-264.

**“no”**

is often impossible

**“we cannot change that children  
are physically and socially  
vulnerable but we could change  
that they are structurally”**







“Probably nothing could have made disclosing easier because I was in a mindset where **adults were never wrong.**”

“Growing up in my family I learnt very early that **saying no to an adult was never allowed.** I learnt that there were different rules for adults.”

Children **resist** in many ways.

**Join children in  
their revolution.**

**Autonomy** > acceptability

**“Children should have the right to question and disobey adults in positions of power over them, and to act autonomously, particularly in order to protect their safety and freedom.**

Governments should help parents and other adults **protect and empower children** by instilling **personal agency and confidence** in them.”



**Australian  
Childhood  
Foundation**

**Children have no lesser right  
to autonomy than adults.**



Thank you