

Violent 'Treatment': Who counts as a child and what counts as violence?

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Who confers recognition and representation of violence, and what is *it* that is being represented? How do terms such as 'violence' and 'child' work, what do they foreclose and what are they used to justify? Drawing on previous research with children who hear voices, this paper will attend to how medical and media representations of children who hear voices or self-harm are dominated and monopolized by bio-psychiatry and the pharmaceutical industry, working to establish what will count as publicly recognized violence, and what will not. These dominant schemes of intelligibility normalise the absence of children with mental illness and pathologise their presence within mental health legislation and rights discourse. But what delimits what we understand as discursive rather than material violence, and how do the two converge? To engage with how this discursive violence interweaves with material violence on the bodies of children with mental health problems, I will explore psychiatry's use of force in medicating children with mental health problems, and its construction of such children as incompetent. Thus a category of children who cannot refuse receives a legal formulation and are subjected to 'treatment' that would in other circumstances be constituted as legal battery and child abuse. To engage with these issues I will draw upon Judith Butler's 'politics of grievability' and Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life', putting them in conversation with each other over a topic they rarely if ever discuss, the child with mental health problems.