

Maimed, Disabled, Enslaved as Commodity: Child-Maiming in the Lens of Critical Consciousness

Graduate Research Assistant John C. H. HU
Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine –
Occupational Therapy, University of Alberta, Canada
chiahao@ualberta.ca
PhD Student Joyce de GOOIJER
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada
jdegooij@ualberta.ca

Abstract

This essay seeks to acknowledge the unsettling reality of children being intentionally maimed towards disability and disfigurement as economic commodity. The issue is easily invisibilized in modern education, and understandably so: the trauma triggered by these bloody realities can automatically disqualify the content for formal in-school education as a form of “unwelcome truth”. Freire and Fanon, however, did not shy away from the horrific state of life for the oppressed and the wretched in their consideration of pedagogy. The lived experience of maimed children is tragic, but it is lived experience nonetheless – acknowledged by hooks as “a way of knowing that coexists in a non-hierarchical way with other ways of knowing” (2014). In other words, this knowledge exists but is arguably not mobilized by society towards action. Critical consciousness, upheld by Freire as the key to seeing inequality to act upon it, is a goal beyond reach for the maimed children themselves. Here, we consider the extension proposed by Nicholls (2011), who discusses pedagogy of the privileged as an equally-important parallel towards collaborative action against long-standing inequalities. In the context of these children having minimal access to education, we contend that privileged students must be the ones to carry forth the knowledge towards their own critical consciousness. Specifically, we explore what acknowledging children who are maimed could offer towards pedagogy, in relation to helping students to 1) minimize the act of “othering” in a global community; 2) reconsider the role of mass-media and media literacy in their critical consciousness; and 3) move away from surface-level, performative charity against societal inequalities.

Keywords: *inequality; digital media; social justice; education; colonialism.*

Context

What can critical consciousness look like for a child living in extreme oppression? As a severely under-researched violation against the wellbeing of children, intentional maiming of a child to produce lifelong disfigurement or disability is nonetheless reported to occur beyond individual cases (Helal & Kabir, 2013; Kaushik, 2014; Iqbal, 2013). Common methods include forced amputation of limbs or removal of the eyes, with the intent of forcing children into the street-economy of begging. These children spend their entire lives as a vulnerable presence on the streets, and completely depend upon their maimers for everyday survival. Profits earned are maximized towards the share of the maimers. There is no economic gain in the upkeep of the child's basic health or wellbeing; contrarily, deliberately creating additional conditions that visually convey disease or lack of wellbeing can generate increased daily profit. Due to the fact that many of these children were abducted from caregivers, disfigurement is a practice which minimizes chances of parents or law enforcement in successfully recovering the child. Additional disabilities such as removal of vocal cords also prevent children from being able to provide identifying information about their maimers if the child has an opportunity to be recovered.

Limited research exists on the fates of the children once they age out of childhood, and can no longer attract the same level of sympathy and profit for their maimers.

Critical Consciousness in the Classroom

The level of research dedicated to the investigation or prevention of this phenomenon does not match its graveness. In fact, intentional maiming of children for economic oppression is rarely acknowledged in academic nor society as an "unwelcome truth" (Kemmis, 2006).

If critical consciousness seeks to acknowledge and address inequalities in our world, child-maiming – as one of the most serious violations against human equality – should be included amongst the inequalities pedagogy seeks to tackle. Freire openly names the process of dehumanization and discusses populations "whose humanity has been stolen" towards emancipation. If the educator is concerned with humanizing students, the concern must lead "to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as a historical reality" (Freire, 2000). Access to education and any form of pedagogy is beyond reach for children living through these unjust realities. To carry forth their legacy and embrace both the validity and value of their lived experiences, formal education

should consider how children who have been maimed contribute to student's understanding of critical consciousness in settings of privilege (Nicholls, 2011).

Currently, exposing students to maiming of children is often performed with the intent of increasing awareness for self-protection in areas where there are high-profile cases of abduction. In other words, this pedagogy is a preventative intervention that relies on the knowledge of students to reduce potential cases of maiming. In itself, if this pedagogy is capable of preventing a single victim, its value cannot be overstated. At the same time, in order to truly apply a lens of critical consciousness, students should not be exposed to child-maiming as an issue affecting an "other" which they must both avoid and separate the "self" from (Fanon, 2004). The subconscious division of the other versus the self, when the pedagogy is centered around and only around self-protection, may have more serious implications on how the student engages with inequalities in the future. The idea of self-protection and preservation to not be a victim of inequality is worthwhile, but is not directly related to the concept of critical consciousness. Ideally, pedagogy can empower students beyond removing themselves from inequalities. "What matters is not to know the world but to change it" (Fanon, 2004); this change can be much more powerful and meaningful compared to pure self-isolation from parts of the world which pose risks to the student.

The classroom can be a challenging space to house emotions. Separating emotion from education, inherited from positivist paradigms which prioritize scientific neutrality, can help to create a classroom that is easy to control (Nicholls, 2011). This however, ultimately does not aid in the development of empathy, courage, nor solidarity towards addressing inequalities in the world. An additional layer of nuance adds to the conundrum when educators are charged with the task of protecting the mental health of students. What if a student is exposed to the reality of children being maimed as economic commodity, and cannot emotionally recover before class ends? We argue students perhaps should not *recover* from emotional trauma in the traditional sense of simply feeling nothing any more – developing a strong, even vehement response to extreme inequality is part of what makes us human. One can bear trauma, in order to learn to mobilize trauma and all the emotions associated with it towards action in changing the conditions which espouse trauma. The complete removal of negative emotions does not indicate true recovery, but rather could signify that something more worrying exists which runs contrary to critical consciousness. If a student not only longs to feel nothing about inequalities – but is also actively encouraged by their instructors to no longer feel as a sign of possessing positive mental health, this new form of critical consciousness becomes challenging to differentiate from indifference. Clinically,

guided exposure to trauma in order to resist negative emotions in the future can lead to a stabilized state (Siehl et al., 2021) so that the individual can possess greater potential in taking action. To emphasize the goal of not feeling trauma could also lead to students no longer feeling any need to take action against injustices. Here, a superficial definition of mental health runs contrary to the outcome desired by Freire. The priority of having a positive mood in the classroom setting in itself can become an obsession, and a privilege accessible only to students of a higher class.

Students who cannot recover emotionally from being exposed to traumatic injustices can indeed pose a challenge to the classroom. They may be assumed to be emotionally fragile, or coming from backgrounds that make them unsuited for learning about the world and all its inequalities. The reality may veer from these assumptions: for a student who has truly understood the gravity of child-maiming, and for a student who can sympathize with an authenticity that allows them to feel what the victimized children feel, they may likewise exhibit an inability to switch off negative emotions at the behest of their instructors or peers. These students exhibit mental strength because they do not feel the need to construct a “compartmentalized world... divided in two” to separate themselves as “superior” to an “inferior” (Fanon, 2004), and are capable of blurring the lines between the self and the other – no matter what kind of injustices the other is facing. These facts could lead one to conclude that these students indeed have advanced further in their development of critical consciousness with less fear than their emotionally-balanced peers. What these students need is not an artificial removal from this mental state, but rather, as Freire would emphasize, empowerment.

For a student who is taught to protect themselves against child-maiming by being mindful of its reality, they may indeed exhibit fear. If this fear is about their own personal safety, it is a fear that can be assuaged by reinforcing the reality that they are currently safe and free from these injustices. Contrarily, for the perceptive student, they may exhibit inconsolable fear, because their fear does not concern themselves. The question they ask internally is not “what should I do to protect myself”, but rather “what about all the children who are already victimized” – a question that students, their educators, and in truth, all of society does not have an answer to.

This lack of a leverage point towards action can be a deep powerlessness that is the root of uncontrollable emotions. Being comforted is always helpful, but being empowered means much more in the lens of critical consciousness. One should be prepared for the possibility that in a classroom full of students, some are ready, willing, and actually desperately seeking actions that they can take against

injustice even in their present state of being a young student. What is traumatizing might not be the fact that they are exposed to an unjust reality happening in their world, but rather that they are stripped of an opportunity to act upon the injustice no matter how desperately they wish to. These students are not seeking more shallow forms of learning when it comes to injustice. They do not need to be protected, but rather, they are seeking to be taught in a way in which there is opportunity to directly and deeply engage with said injustices. In a worst case scenario, protection is prioritized for the sake of convenience. Students are being taught to protect themselves against any negative emotions, and embrace their disempowered state as a chronic condition which they must conform to and hold constant to appear mentally healthy. And in this mode of pedagogy towards critical consciousness, any form of societal injustices which lead to negative emotions must be removed, silenced, invalidated, as the wellbeing of the privileged student is paramount. The journey towards critical consciousness becomes one of intentional censorship of any issue that could remind the student of disempowerment. Power, or the illusion of power, is achieved via engaging with whichever issue that is most easily within reach. Within the context of this unique form of critical consciousness development, children who are maimed must remain invisibilized.

A society concerned with the wellbeing of all children should naturally be concerned with the wellbeing and existence of maimed children. We must teach their lived experience with utmost sensitivity, dignity, and respect to them, fully acknowledging that this is a valid legacy that they leave the world with. Erasing this legacy or acknowledging their lived experience as anything less is a form of further injustice; we may fall trap to our own language that is “used to make social inequality invisible” (Freire, 2000). The legacy of these children is worth passing on to the next generations beyond teaching self-protection. There will be trauma and there will be emotions, but with commitment, educators can co-learn with students that there is much more to be learned beyond the statement that “something horrible exists.”

The Paradox of Silence

Here it is worthwhile to consider another historical injustice, related specifically to Freire’s consideration of colonialism. The residential school system of Canada (Wilk et al., 2017) stole generations of indigenous children from all different First Nations, and placed them not under assimilation but rather in isolated school grounds for daily emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Sexual

abuse of students was so rampant that repeated forced abortions were documented (*The Bridgehead*, 2022). Graves of students lay testimony to the severity and frequency of crimes committed.

Residential schools are inseparable from these horrendous details of violations against the human being. Here, the details must be censored as the graphic nature would have many agree that they are not suited for audiences under the age of majority. This results in widespread censorship or complete removal of residential school history from textbooks and discourse in formal education settings. The immediate implication of this censorship is that survivors can find themselves in a society that has no understanding of, nor any interest in understanding their lived experience. Beyond this general phenomena of marginalization, skepticism exists to this day regarding the actual severity of the abuse that was carried out under the guise of education in residential schools. An entire generation of indigenous children, growing in the secluded dictatorship of white oppressors, can easily find themselves in more trauma and isolation after they survive and leave the residential system. A society that consistently casts doubt over their claims of abuse is a barrier, and so is the fact that this same society can request the survivors to repeat their stories as “evidence”. Even after finally gaining society’s approval to be a survivor of real abuse, the individual then moves on to the next phase of living with potential stigma the general public can have towards survivors of abuse.

All of these scenarios manifest from the censorship of graphic abuse in formal school textbooks. Essentially, the educator’s goal of not causing excessive trauma to students erects multiple systemic barriers to the successful recovery or rehabilitation of abused children who were able to leave the system alive.

The greatest injustice resulting from the censorship is that the perpetrators and abusers collectively are given the chance to walk away from the situation bearing no responsibility. If one creates a system that leads to abuse, one may have to admit this historical abuse in future textbooks. Yet if one creates a system that completely abuses and dehumanizes individuals to a horrific degree, one ironically gains public support to remove this history from future mentions. Via intensified abuse, history is set up to be repeated as it is deleted. This deletion, notably, is a deletion sanctioned by the public.

Developing the ability to confront severe injustices is no longer made an option for students in the classroom, because severe injustices are silenced or presented in less-severe forms. This creates an unrealistic version of reality, one that potentially even encourages students to emulate the behavior of trivializing injustices to acceptable levels before engaging with them. For the more perceptive

students, critical consciousness loses its appeal because all the injustices they are presented with in the classroom are not worth acting upon.

Specific Contribution to Critical Consciousness

Acknowledging the lived experience of children who are maimed is not valid simply because it represents severe injustice. Its validity in the critical consciousness discourse can be much greater; here, we propose three specific contributions to pedagogy which are directly linked to the nature of the issue.

Firstly, an in-depth understanding of the issue of child-maiming creates a fair and realistic conceptualization of a global community (Luke & Carpenter, 2003). The most high-profile cases of child-maiming, specifically in academia, are in India and Bangladesh. For a student who is exposed to this fact without dedicated guidance from the critical educator, the issue can easily be viewed as evidence of inferiority of other cultures. This view of inferiority may in fact be applied to the entire developing world by the student.

The most fundamental error is the student's association of lack of research with absence of the problem. The conceptualization of this paper was first prompted when the co-authors reflected on our own research experiences and realized identical practices of child-maiming are present in different countries. For one of these countries, a literature search cannot produce any scholarly sources on child-maiming. The fact that academia in India has begun to acknowledge and investigate the issue suggests not inferiority, but significant advances and openness in addressing inequalities. Countries which appear to be free from child-maiming cases may prove to possess this public image only due to severe censorship – or worse, due to severe social inequalities that localize these issues in marginalized communities. Having never heard of such an incident is not scholarly evidence for absence of a form of abuse, and students will benefit from understanding what constitutes scholarly evidence.

The analysis above is not included in order to accuse more countries of housing environments for child-maiming. In fact, the educator can guide students to consider more critical questions: why are we accusing? Why are we delineating an us-versus-them conceptualization of countries in the world? If indeed, our home country is free from cases of child-maiming, what difference does it make to the children who have been maimed miles away?

The nature of the issue can lead students to immediately delineate. It is tempting, or even instinctive to accuse, and cast other communities as inferior, almost as if the moral high ground can mentally protect ourselves from these risks

of abuse. The important distinction that students may not directly grasp is the distinction between the individual versus the community. In fact, it is indeed a tremendously nuanced distinction, as the community here in question also deserves to be inspected. As a basic level of understanding, students aspiring to gain critical consciousness should understand that the individual abusers should be condemned and not accepted as part of our community. Yet, to condemn the entire community would also mean condemning many more who are victimized by the issue of child-maiming: parents spending everything they own trying to locate their child; grandparents; siblings, and other children who are also at risk of this abuse are all condemned when we condemn a community. Students should be encouraged to think critically about the community which allows this form of abuse to happen – as well as the community members who have been directly impacted and struggling to fight the issue. These inquiries clearly indicate that there is important nuance beyond a binary that separates the developed world from the developing world. Without engaging in these inquiries, a common outcome for young minds to gravitate to is more discrimination and stereotyping of developing countries whenever they are exposed to global inequalities, whether it be on the news, through their friends, or on social media. To these young minds, what happens in the developing world seems too barbaric, too severe, too out-of-the-ordinary, and too unacceptable – if only even to mention – and is entirely not related to their business in the developed world, even if their own communities have identical cases of inequality that the student does not know about. In this mindset, the global community becomes fractured. This destruction of the global community becomes more likely to happen if a topic related to injustice is the student's first introduction to a specific country, or their first introduction to the concept of developing countries in general. The issue of child-maiming, when included in pedagogy in a critical way, helps to introduce important concepts on both global inequalities and our shared global commonalities.

For the advanced learner, the absence of child-maiming in academic research creates opportunity to develop critical consciousness in relation to global differences in conceptualizing research. Like how the young learner can discriminate against developing countries, the advanced learner who claims to be non-racist can discriminate against research from developing countries. In-depth consideration of validity of research on child-maiming is beyond the scope of this paper, but preliminary contemplations can show that the issue requires a radical shift in perspectives of even the methodology itself. The value of quantitative research beyond providing a very rough estimation of the prevalence is questionable, as it is difficult to imagine how statistics alone can change the on-

the-ground realities that the children experience. With regards to qualitative research, in considering ethnographic observations, engagement via interviews or focus groups, one can clearly see that the current accepted paradigms of valid research are insufficient to addressing this social injustice. How can a researcher simply observe and interview, and not act? Furthermore are considerations of ethics in researching vulnerable populations; the complex ethics process does not necessarily aid in viewing our human responsibility to terminate child-maiming as an ethical act, but rather encourages diversion of attention and research-funding to less ethically-complex research matters. In a situation as such, research can seem futile in addressing the issue towards benefiting children who are maimed. Yet, this should not be used to justify the disqualification of child-maiming as a worthy research issue. Cultural and postcolonial research paradigms (Ryder et al., 2020) which do not fit the norm may need to be drawn upon to fill the void in this context of unavailable methodology. After the research is indeed performed using a cultural research practice, how we as researchers in settings of privilege view the validity of the research outputs also calls into question how we contribute to fragmentation of a global community.

Understanding Mass (Digital) Media Critically

This lack of research outputs essentially positions child-maiming as a sidelined and nearly-censored topic in academia. The responsibility of acknowledging the reality of child-maiming in our world is ironically taken up by digital media, which is not only often conceptualized as mere entertainment but is also open about the fictional nature of its content. Still, the value that research brings to advocacy and raising awareness of child-maiming has been minimal, especially in comparison to the tremendous impact associated with mass media. For example, *Slumdog Millionaire* (Koehler, 2009), as pop culture, as an unacademic source, has delivered the possibility of child-maiming to millions of viewers around the world.

Here we are reminded about the necessity of educators in incorporating child-maiming in pedagogy. Without educators, youth are still being exposed to difficult realities through mass media. The heightened accessibility of information with growing digitization exposes youth to new concepts regardless of whether they have received formal approval from their parents or teachers. It becomes apparent that in some cases, the formal education system is not truly concerned with youth being emotionally triggered by inequalities. Emotional triggers abound in society and in mass media, but what matters to us more is that we rid ourselves

of the responsibility of bringing that trigger. If a child sees triggering content, we can conveniently blame it on the state of the internet.

For youth who first learn about child-maiming as an inequality through *Slumdog Millionaire*, they may draw fictional conclusions about this real inequality. They may consider the issue to be limited, once again, to the sphere of India. They may consider the issue to be a thing of the past, reinforced by the film's narrative format. Or, they may consider the issue to be fictional, just like how the rest of the story presents itself as fiction. Even educators who are not ready to fully explore the issue of child-maiming in pedagogy can provide essential information to these youth. More importantly, if educators are not ready to fill in the role of guiding youth in exploring digital media, other entities in society will. A social media influencer may discuss inequalities as an entertaining sample from the horror genre. Or, they may provide discussions of child-maiming accompanied by their own racist propaganda. In these cases, we may lament about how the education system has failed to move students away from racism. In reality, the education system did not fail because it did not teach anti-racism, but rather, it conceded territory to other sources of information in a student's life.

Of particular note, digital media not only has the potential to raise awareness at a population-level, but is also increasingly used in formal education. Paradoxically, one may find literature on digital media education – via films, animations, games – only in the highest levels of formal education (Darbyshire & Baker, 2012). The fact that digital media is being used for formal education in graduate school and professional medical training suggests that digital media is not simply entertainment. Valid learning can happen via digital media, as supported by multiple studies performed in higher education institutes (Baniasadi et al., 2020; Bracq et al., 2019; Law et al., 2015; Olszewski & Wolbrink, 2017). The existing state of research suggests there is limited rationale in invalidating digital media as a learning tool. As digital media has both the potential to engage audiences at the population-level and provide learning opportunities suitable for postgraduate degrees, how might educators apply digital media towards developing critical consciousness?

While academia has more or less sidelined child-maiming as an inequality in scholarly work, it is possible to identify academic sources on *Slumdog Millionaire*. Some of these papers directly discuss the film in the context of allowing audiences to be able to see inequality (Freire). The film, as a form of “multimediated communications”, is noted as a “response to the international inequalities laid bare and exposed to a growing critique” (Magala, 2010). Seeing the invisibilized is a common theme, as the film is also described as “inviting viewers to see the

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impoverished and therefore vulnerable child at its centre” (Snell, 2016). Acknowledging children who have been maimed in a lens of critical consciousness illustrates another important trend: digital media can allow invisibilized social inequalities to resurface, not just in public discourse but also in peer-reviewed research.

This calls upon educators to be reflexive about conceptualizations of valid learning. Youth who access *Slumdog Millionaire* and other films out of their own interest may learn about social inequalities, yet this learning can be dismissed by society due to the medium of film. At the same time, academia approves systematic reviews on medical students learning from the medium of film. In short, learning through digital media can be automatically invalidated unless the learner is privileged with access to formal educational settings. This in itself is a form of inequality that critical consciousness invites individuals to see and act upon.

Mass media can bring silenced perspectives to the masses – and just as easily, it can shape social constructs which lead to stereotyping and discrimination. As an example, Hooks writes that “Contemporary popular culture... rarely represents the poor in ways that display integrity and dignity” but rather portrayed as “consumed with longing to be rich, a longing so intense that it renders them dysfunctional” (Hooks, 1994). In conjunction with the fact that youth are exposed to a wide array of content including paid-advertisement content, helping youth to engage with digital media critically becomes an important task for educators. Critical consciousness can be developed and dismantled by digital media. In a landscape of capitalist influence in media as an industry, inequalities and representation of inequalities naturally become innate to public discourse on media pieces. In resistance to this capitalism, how youth can be guided to consume media in a way that leads to critical consciousness, or create youth-led media to share marginalized voices in society are worthwhile pedagogical inquiries. Considering the children who are maimed and their impact on *Slumdog Millionaire* leads students and educators to inquire about the emerging role of digital media in highlighting and addressing invisibilized inequalities.

Highlighting Our Own Tendencies

At first glance child-maiming may seem too horrific an act that is far away from our own realities. At the core of the issue, child-maiming is about dehumanizing and commodifying an individual – perhaps resulting in irreparable damage – for attention and subsequent profit. Digital media also brings an

important lesson here: individuals in so-called first world countries also perform the exact same act, and perhaps even to their own children. Netflix's *Gypsy* (Banjara, 2021) brought mass attention to a case of *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* (Abdurrachid & Marques, 2022), in which a specific individual not only fabricated medical conditions for her daughter, but also forced her daughter to undergo unnecessary surgery. The parent is assumed to have generated enough donations not just to cover living expenses but also multiple costly health care procedures which are not covered by a public health care system. Dehumanizing the daughter became a full-time job, and proved to be as lucrative as one.

This case would only appear before public scrutiny when the child murdered the parent and left the murder scene, causing many to search for a potentially abducted victim with multiple reported serious health conditions. The incident became widely known after the release of an entire television series dedicated to the multi-year abuse. Through a media comparison between *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Gypsy*, youth can begin to see that child-maiming is not a problem of the "other". The much-needed representation of invisibilized victims raises self-awareness, and calls into question our assumed moral superiority over other global communities. Including child-maiming in pedagogy allows youth to think about the parallel evils in our own communities, and how much effort it takes for certain tragedies to be seen by the public. Youth should be encouraged to prevent and condemn these tragedies no matter how invisibilized they may be; one cannot prevent nor condemn if one does not first acknowledge.

Understanding child-maiming in light of how our own communities participate in equivalent acts of cruelty can bring further insight into what it means to be critically conscious. The perceived differences between *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* and child-maiming creates an opportunity for youth to understand the impacts of colonialism and the longstanding inequalities it introduces to a society. If child-maiming or child-beggars is related in part due to poverty, the privileged youth should acknowledge our direct role in causing this poverty. Fanon writes that our "opulence is... built on the backs of slaves, it fed on the blood of slaves". For all youth in developed cities, Fanon's (2004) message to them is clear:

You know full well we are exploiters. You know full well we have taken the gold and minerals and then oil from the "new continents," and shipped them back to the old metropolises. Not without excellent results in the shape of palaces, cathedrals, and centers of industry. (p. lviii)

These are not simply generalizations. Specifically with regards to India and precious metals, Pomeranz and Topik discuss colonialism as strategic economic

warfare. Their book *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present* details a distressing narrative: centuries of trade through the Silk Road in combination with European tastes for the oriental resulted in more than “one-third” of Europe’s gold and silver – directly taken from the Americas – flowing to Asia due to European consumption alone. To recuperate these spendings from Asia, imperialist powers were not interested in increasing the competitiveness of European products among Asia consumers to balance trade, but rather, war and colonialism would be the preferred response. India was strategically taken first for its suitability for growing opium, which then could be used to take down a second major oriental vendor: China. India was a stepping stone in order to grow and use drugs for systematically redirecting oriental wealth back to the west. In relation to child-maiming, the widespread poverty which provides fundamental context for these phenomena is inseparable from centuries of western activities in the region. As members of the developed world, youth should understand that we all continue to benefit from this global plunder.

Whereas severe poverty can be seen as the driver for child-maiming in colonized countries, the rationale for Munchausen syndrome by proxy is more difficult to comprehend in comparison. Certainly, individuals in the west have greater access to economic opportunities that could replace commodification of one’s own children as a means of living. Diving deeper into the issue of child-maiming using a critical lens helps privileged youth understand that we have contributed to the poverty of colonized countries; we continue to benefit from this poverty of colonized countries; and still, members of our own community perform the same act in this situation of massive privilege. Without active participation in restorative justice to remove the economic damage performed by colonialism, we cannot claim any superiority over communities with higher-profile cases of child-maiming. In fact, we should perhaps shift to consider viewing ourselves in the developed world as members who contributed to child-maiming.

Addressing economic inequality which has persisted for centuries is a challenging task. There can be a tendency to link an on-the-ground tragedy to a systemic cause simply too grand for one individual to tackle – such as capitalism – and then settle on inaction. In honesty, addressing child-maiming is not difficult at the ground-level: if every individual who walked by a child beggar did not spend money, but rather spent time to guide the child to an orphanage, a school, or any institution that naturally is created to be concerned with welfare of children, there would be no profit for the maimers. Similarly, if all individuals who walked by a child-beggar were simply not bothered enough to spare any coins, there would also be no profit for the maimers. In other words, the behind-the-scenes abusers and

perpetrators take advantage of not societal indifference, but rather, convenient charity.

Here, the community must be inspected for this culture of convenient charity to persist. In any community, there can exist individuals who are interested in helping, but oftentimes, only on their own terms. The ultimate safety and welfare of the child-beggars are not their concern. When the child is in sight, putting down some cash makes it easier to walk past the child. Once the child is behind them, life carries on. This in itself is not reprehensible behavior, but it nonetheless is what contributes to sustained income for those who abuse children. Convenient charity at a population level – which we all participate in – encourages continued abuse because it presents to abusers a reliable source of income. Here, youth may see once again how we contribute to child-maiming as a reality. Those who choose to transgress and be radical in their charitable acts towards child-beggars are few and far between. This is inherently linked to the state of critical consciousness of our society.

Similarly, abusers who profit from *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* also understand how to perfectly exploit convenient charity. Individuals are concerned enough to share a social media post and make a donation if a payment link is conveniently located; few are truly interested in helping the child-victim reach long-term wellbeing. Not only so, every single health professional who has interacted with the child-victim, despite their medical expertise, has also exhibited this same prioritization of convenience. Making a difference in the lives of their patients is desirable, but only if it is convenient or perhaps extremely lucrative. Some of these health professionals in the Gypsy-Rose Blanchard case are so concerned with their own terms of patient-engagement that some have been fooled or talked into performing unnecessary surgeries on the child-victim. As a society, we continue to place faith in the same health professionals, their regulating bodies, as well as the medical education system which grants them the platform to practice. Likewise, individuals in the general public are not fully invested in the wellbeing of child-victims, but rather lean towards using blind faith to remove the issue from their sight – as some trustworthy health professionals should be paid somewhere to help the victim. Even when we do commit financial resources, our fundamental motivation for convenient charity might not be significantly different from an impulse buy.

All of these individuals discussed are among the more laudable cases who participate in charity. Others who lack critical consciousness to truly grasp the severity of inequality may choose to participate in not just convenient charity, but rather performative charity for attention. Whether it is to generate evidence for

self-assumed moral superiority, or to exert upon power structures within their social circle, charity can be employed as a tool for personal gain. Individuals who engage in performative charity use victims as their vehicle; attention and personal gain are their desired outcomes. Here, the act of charity shares similarities with the horrendous deeds of the abuser.

Without critical consciousness, convenient charity and performative charity can become the norm. The psychological framework behind society's lesser acts of charity might not be complex: convenient charity and performative charity can easily stem from a common human motive to invest less but gain more – in everything in life, even in charity.

Balancing existing perspectives

If actual elimination of severe abuse and commodification of children is a goal of educators concerned with critical consciousness, we contend that critical pedagogy should be inclusive of lived experiences of all victims. Not all youth should be taught to prioritize their own mental health over the actual life-and-death of thousands of victims around the world; we believe there is a segment of the student population who are ready to be guided towards acknowledgment and action. The tendency to silence what is deemed inappropriate for young minds here may prove to be futile, as the digital world presents massive, uncontrolled information that youth can access at their fingertips. What is necessary is not trigger warnings, but rather pedagogy that arms youth with the emotional capacity to accept severe inequalities as actionable reality in our world. When educators and youth collectively set boundaries on what should be excluded from critical pedagogy based on our emotions, censorship becomes justified. Critical consciousness may be trivialized to whatever we are already willing to accept. Whatever inequality that is actually critical for us to accept is stripped of its relevance and removed entirely under a population-level movement towards a superficial model of mental health. We are left with a host of issues that we are comfortable to confront, and that make us feel powerful because anything beyond our power has already been censored.

It is our hope that one day, youth can tackle issues like child-maiming with a pure intent of removing inequality just as Freire had imagined. Youth will be able to look upon any form of injustice in any community around the world, and declare: “your problem is my problem, I am not coming in to help as a member of a superior community, but rather from a community that exhibits the exact same motives and tendencies in all our privilege.”

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