'Childness': An Alternative Approach to the Archaeology of Childhood through Cemetery Studies

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Abstract: Notions of childhood in colonial Australia were informed by a variety of social contexts that varied across time and space and were given material expression in the memorialization of children's burials. Using data drawn from two studies of nineteenth-century cemeteries in rural South Australia, in this paper, we suggest an alternative way to understand children archaeologically that avoids the trap of essentialism: the notion of 'childness'. Childness is defined as the multiple conceptions of being, and being labeled, a child. The concept of being a child may be instantiated in different ways according to particular social, cultural, chronological, and religious contexts; childness is the measure of this variation. In Western historical settings, the most likely causes for such variation are the social processes of class and status via the closely associated ideologies of gentility and respectability and their attendant expectations around labor, as well as the shifts they represent in the social ideology of the family. Exploring childness, rather than children, provides an alternative way to approach the histories of contemporary Western understandings of childhood, including when particular types of childhood began and ended, and according to what criteria in different contexts, as well as how boundaries between child and adult were continually being established and re-negotiated.

Keywords: cemeteries; children; childhood; archaeology; childness; material culture

1. Introduction

It is almost axiomatic that the archaeology of childhood should be far more than just documenting the presence or absence of children. Although archaeology is explicitly concerned with the material remains left by past people, it also demands a subtler means of understanding the concept of childhood than static correlations between sets of objects stereotypically associated with particular age brackets. From the outset, there is also a danger of lapsing into universal tendencies when considering childhood and of imposing dominant cultural norms on this state of being. In part, this is because assumptions about the universal nature of childhood and children's experiences have been problematic across the social sciences internationally (Jenkins 1998). To combat this, a variety of historical studies over the past half century have sought to re-evaluate the degree of change and continuity in the Western treatment and conceptualization of children and childhood from the fifteenth century to the present, focusing on a variety of specific and relevant social, cultural, and historical constructs (Cunningham 2005; DeMause 1974; Fox and Quitt 1980; Hendrick 1997; Pollock 1983; Shorter 1977; Stearns 2006; Stone 1977; Zornado 2001).

Over the past two decades, these and related issues have been taken up by archaeologists (Baxter 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2019; Chamberlain 1997; Crawford and Lewis 2008; Crawford et al. 2018; Derricourt 2018; Kamp 2001; Lally and Moore 2011; Lillehammer 1989, 2000, 2008, 2010, 2015; Moore and Scott 1997; Thomas 2005; Vlahos 2015; Wileman 2005). An increasing focus on identity as a social process since the 1990s (Chamberlain 1997, p. 250; James and Prout 2008, pp. 1–4; James et al. 1998, p. 217), drawing on perspectives from feminist and gender studies, as well as theories of socialization

and personhood, has driven more nuanced and agile interpretations of the archaeology of childhood (see, for example, Baxter and Ellis 2018; Crawford and Lewis 2008; Sofaer Derevenski 2000), although the social and demographic importance of children tends to remain understudied outside of a specific sub-disciplinary domain (Baxter and Ellis 2018; Coskunsu 2015; Derricourt 2018, p. 1).

In light of this body of work, in this paper, we consider the issues around the material expression of childhood in relation to memorialization practices on nineteenth-century Australian children's graves. In seeking to further explore the archaeological traces of children, the cemetery and churchyard as archaeological sites provide largely untapped potential. They also provide a particular context for understanding the child: on one level, they are unlikely to project the social agency of children directly given that all memorialization decisions are being made by adults, and on another level, they are culturally layered archaeological records that reveal both change and continuity in the thoughts and feelings of past lives through their material culture and landscape (Baugher and Veit 2014, p. 2; Rugg 2000, p. 264). As such, each cemetery is a product of both familial and local factors, as well as broader international (in our context, Western) socio-cultural ideologies and religious theologies that underlie choices in material culture type, style, and placement, along with the design of the overall landscape (Muller 2006; 2015, p. 15). In terms of understanding childhood, they often sit outside the mainstream concerns of the archaeology of childhood but are firmly located at the crossroads of a range of international, intercultural, and interfaith processes. We would note that, while there is now a growing and diverse interest in the archaeology of child burial in differing historical periods and geographic locations (see Murphy and Roy 2017), to date only a small number of archaeological studies have specifically focused on historical (and indeed more contemporary) children's gravestones and plots, although more general cemetery studies touch upon information relevant to the topic (e.g., Baugher and Veit 2014; Keister 2004; Veit and Nonestied 2008, pp. 127–32).

This paper focuses on two historical archaeological studies undertaken on predominantly Christian cemeteries in different parts of rural South Australia: an analysis of emotion and ideology in the general and Catholic cemeteries of Mintaro, north of the capital city, Adelaide (Farrell 2003), and an investigation of the commemoration of children in a variety of denominational cemeteries across the Fleurieu Peninsula, south of Adelaide (Figure 1) (Degner 2007). In both studies, the cemetery, as a product and reflection of familial, regional, and broader religious and socio-cultural ideologies, is used as a lens to view attitudes and beliefs about childhood through choices in grave design, placement, decoration, and arrangement.

In this paper, we use the terms 'child' and 'children' to denote infants, young children, older children, and what society today would call adolescents—a developmental phase first conceptualized in 1904 (Morrow 2011, p. 12). These terms reflect contemporary, Western cultural understandings of children's developmental stages as formulated through psychology and pediatrics (McCartney and Phillips 2006; Newman and Newman 1975; Peterson 2014; Prendergast and Main 2017) and therefore should not be automatically imposed upon children in the past.

The starting point of this paper is to consider the 'child' in light of three major themes: capitalism—a particular set of economic relationships between capital and labor that also construct certain social relationships between owners and workers, adults and children, and men and women; socialization—the process by which cultural knowledge is transmitted within specific social contexts; and gender—the social expectations under capitalism that order various forms of constructed identity in life (Baxter 2005; 2008, pp. 171–72; Crawford and Lewis 2008, p. 8; Montgomery 2009; Vlahos 2014, p. 2). From this, we argue for an alternative concept through which to understand the archaeology of childhood. Rather than looking for children in the past, we suggest a focus on 'childness'—the potentially multiple and differing conceptions of the quality of being, and being labeled, a child. All childhoods are, by definition, both individual, through the child's personal experience, and contextualized by the levels of economic and social relationships that exist within them and the broader cultural principles that inform them. Consequently, there are different types of childhoods. Childness

is a measure of the variation arising from these complex interactions and, as such, and given its fluidity, can be used to interrogate the diversity of identity creation and association.
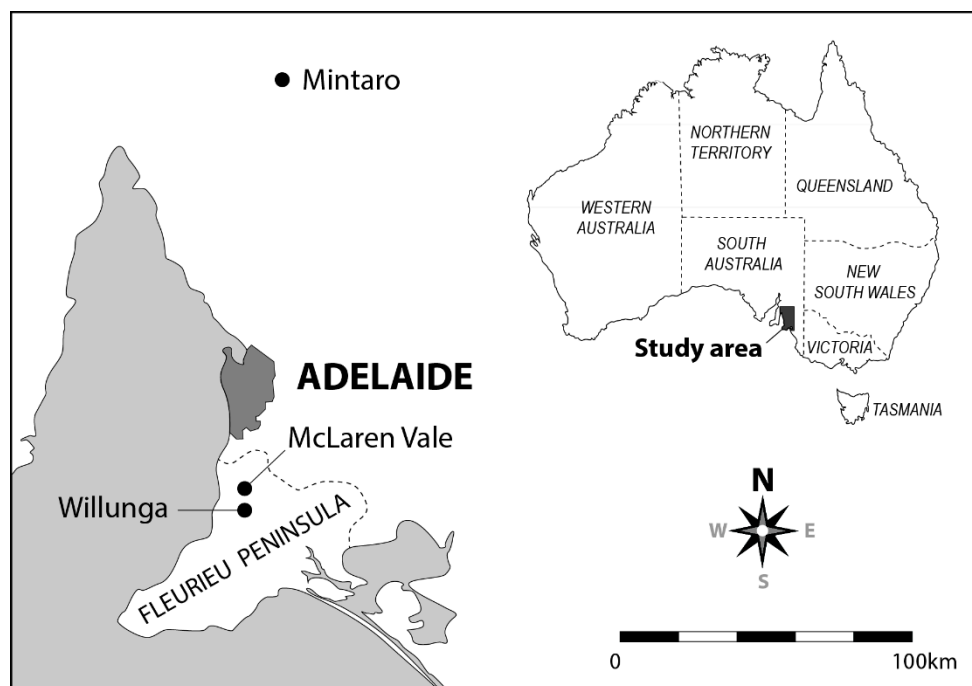

Figure 1. Places referred to in the text.

2. The Invisible Child

In 1989, Lillehammer (1989, p. 89) argued with respect to childhood that '[f]ew archaeologists have looked into the subject or given it attention, less ever thought of it as the main field of interest'. This was not to say that no archaeological work had ever been previously undertaken in relation to children but, rather, that such analyses mostly occurred within projects primarily focused and predicated upon the adult world (Lillehammer 1989, pp. 96–98). Greater archaeological interest was spurred by both the development of gender and feminist archaeology and a wider historical debate outside of archaeology by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers, each of whom brought their own theoretical and methodological influences to bear to create varying definitions of children and childhood (James and Prout 2008; James et al. 1998; Lesnik-Oberstein 1998; McCalman 2009; Montgomery 2009; Morrow 2011, p. 1; Oswell 2013; Thomas 2005).

For the archaeologist, the fundamental methodological problem was the 'invisible' child', deriving from biases, both conscious and unconscious, arising from the discipline's androcentric origins in the late nineteenth century and much of its developing practice in the twentieth century (Conkey and Spector 1984; Conkey and Williams 1991; Gero 1996; Geller 2009; Nelson 2000; Wylie 1991). This perspective viewed the identification of children's actions archaeologically as problematic, based on the notion of their dependent social status and consequent limited social agency. Therefore, they were not thought to create distinctive archaeological signatures, other than through anomalies otherwise unattributable or via specific mediums, such as 'toys' (contra Baker 1997; Baxter and Ellis 2018; Callow 2006; Crawford and Lewis 2008; Sofaer Derevenski 1997, 2000; Finlay 1997; Politis 2005; Roveland 2000; Sillar 1994). Mizoguchi (2000, p. 141) described such thinking as circular, because the " . . . inability to distinguish child action within the archaeological record both reinforces, and is reinforced by, the modern idea that children cannot make any significant contribution to social life". Such a position portrays children as passive receivers of socialization, in thrall to parental and social control (Sofaer Derevenski 1997, p. 193; Lillehammer 2008, p. 100; Scott 1997, p. 6). It has also been argued that archaeologists were simply not interested in children as a subject of serious research or in

considering them as a separate category from women. The last is a problematic and ongoing issue, because women and children are routinely categorized in archaeological research as a singular entity (De Leiuen 2018; Roveland 2000).

In effect, children were often not accorded status and importance in archaeology and were therefore characterized as having little economic, political, or social influence and power (Kamp 2001, p. 2). Crawford and Lewis (2008, pp. 5–6) summarized this view, noting that "[f]ar from being fundamental to any discipline seeking to understand human societies, the study of childhood is usually at best marginalized or, at worst, overlooked completely." It is understandable, then, that this diminution of children's roles and actions led to allegations of distorted archaeological interpretation. This was seen as all the more concerning given that children constituted a significant, even dominant, proportion of historic populations, and consequently, any interpretations arising from this position were inherently incomplete (Baxter 2008, p. 160). Crawford and Lewis (2008, p. 13) further note that, given all adults have experienced 'childhoods', "[i]t is a supreme irony ... that such a universal experience should so often be relegated to the margins of academic consciousness".

Work over the last two decades has sought to address such lacunae, arguing the importance of considering the prevailing cultural, temporal, and economic contexts of the subject to avoid the trap of universalizing childhood into a natural biological state that is unchanging and divorced from cultural factors (Baxter 2008, pp. 160–61; Thomas 2005, p. 48). To some extent, these ideals were constructed as a result of several, interrelated, and fundamental shifts in the social order of the nineteenth century, which gave rise to particular sets of values that have had a lasting ideological effect on the way that we in the twenty-first century understand children and childhood. The construction of a middle class in the nineteenth-century Western world radically reshaped previous social systems as a new suite of values emerged attached to particular ideas (and ideals) of capitalism, labor, order, hierarchy, and power. This created a constellation of beliefs surrounding the nature of childhood, whereby children were viewed as increasingly precious and rendered dependent for longer, resulting in a reversal of the flow of wealth across generations, as they claimed more family resources instead of contributing towards them (Irwin 2003, p. 573). This was essentially a shift from children being viewed as an economic asset to being embraced as an economic cost, the emotional and material investment in which reconceptualized them as priceless moral and emotional assets residing under the authority of the patriarch and the daily care of an increasingly domesticated mother (Murdoch 2015; Paris 2003; Zelizer 1985).

The concept of a prolonged period of dependence on an adult is therefore very much a product of a modern Western perspective. There is a wealth of ethnographic evidence from both present and past societies that highlights children's participation in economic and social life, labor, subsistence strategies, and social rituals (see, for example, Ardren and Hudson 2006; Coskunsu 2015; Grimm 2000; Hildebrand 2012). Such work recognizes something that is, in fact, entirely obvious: children are both producers as well as consumers of material culture and are therefore fundamental to understanding societies and cultures (Baxter 2005, pp. 2–3; 2008, p. 162; Chamberlain 1997, p. 249; Crawford and Lewis 2008, p. 6; Kamp 2001, pp. 1–2; Lillehammer 2008, p. 101; 2010, p. 17; Thomas 2005, p. 41; Vlahos 2014, p. 1; Wileman 2005, p. 7). Vlahos (2014) argues that better theorizing and some reconceptualization will be essential if we are serious about increasing the archaeological visibility of children. Thomas (2005, p. 42) observes, "[o]nce archaeologists reposition study of children's worlds around the processes that link children and adults as active social agents, we can better explore the dynamic between societal influences, and their material and behavioral expressions". None of this, however, means that children do not face constraints arising from biology, adult influence, or social expectations and control (Baxter 2005, p. 13; Lillehammer 1989), and these factors too must be taken into account. In archaeology, embracing these concerns has led to the development of an archaeology of childhood, bolstered by the establishment of the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCIP) in 2007 and situated within a multi-disciplinary setting that considers the biological, cultural, and social aspects of children and childhood (Lillehammer 2015, pp. 80–81; see also Cannon and Cook

2015; Crawford et al. 2018; Derricourt 2018; Lally and Moore 2011; Montgomery 2009; Murphy and Roy 2017; Wileman 2005).

3. Cemetery Studies and the Archaeology of Childhood

Internationally, McKerr et al. (2009) investigated the visibility of children in early modern burial grounds and the contrast between private grief and the increasingly public nature of the memorialization of death throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They found that children's burials became more visible in the cemetery landscape in the seventeenth century, reflecting their greater presence in public spaces generally, as the family's affection and grief for the child was increasingly seen as "a loss that was deemed worthy of public record and attention" (McKerr et al. 2009, pp. 128–29). Baxter (2013, 2015) taking this analysis further, looked at previous multidisciplinary work concerning children's gravestones and found two distinct themes. The first focused on the population as a whole and saw the gravesite as indicative of the family's social status and economic wealth; the second concerned itself more with individual action as the subjects of grief, mourning, and sentiment (Baxter 2013, p. 106). Baxter was concerned with understanding the impact these ideas had upon contemporary research and saw them as artificial divisions requiring reconciliation to understand commemorative choices. Baxter's own examination of nineteenth-century children's graves in Chicago focused on those gravestones specific to children as individuals rather than as part of a family grave, including those who had been relocated to a family plot developed after their death.

Her results did not fit easily with the traditional themes she had previously identified; instead, they suggested a much more diverse set of interactions. A comparison of recorded child deaths against their extant gravestones showed that those children awarded material commemoration were actually a small proportion overall (Baxter 2015, p. 11). In this sense, such children had already achieved a higher status in death than others, as they remained visible to the living and could therefore continue to exist in both personal and communal memory. This may reflect their families' economic standing but may also be the result of a willingness to expend scarce resources on commemoration as a means to express allegiance to other dominant nineteenth-century social constructs, such as respectability. Baxter also found individual children's gravestones to be small, lacking decoration, and with simple epitaphs, in contrast with the more elaborate motifs and verses found on adult gravestones. From a landscape perspective, this suggests that the commemoration of children in cemeteries tended to be far 'quieter', although, as with adult commemoration, there were large and decorative exceptions. Baxter also felt that only a small number of symbols were distinctive of children, such as lambs, beds, and pillows, even though these were only used in a small percentage of cases. She found no obvious gender differences in gravestone style and felt that this reflected a message of the child's importance to the family as part of a collective rather than as an individual (Baxter 2015, p. 11).

Scott (1999) looked at the social construction of infancy within the framework of infant death (including those who were stillborn) in more contemporary settings and commented on a perceived ambiguity and liminality in the choices employed in their memorialization and location in the cemetery. She argued that the spatial clustering of infant graves constituted a separate community within the cemetery landscape, although she also noted that there were outliers (Scott 1999, p. 25). She interpreted the profusion of material culture placed upon infants' graves as "[n]oise and spectacle" to provide sensory and tactile elements to visitation (Scott 1999, p. 27) and concluded that such burials displayed an enhanced contemporary conception of infant identity, which demanded commemoration in order to regulate powerful emotions.

Sørenson (2010, 2011) more recent study of infants' graves in Denmark noted a similar trend towards elaboration and activation through material culture. He noted that the reduction in infant and child mortality in the contemporary West has resulted in "the death of a child [being] widely considered an unquestionable tragedy" (Sørenson 2011, p. 161). At first glance, this concept may hardly seem new, but according to Sørenson, the difference between this and previous modes of commemoration is that "the bereaved have organized the grave to be an incitement to act and to engage corporeally,

rather than to constitute the traditional place of introvert commemoration or silent contemplation" (Sørenson 2011, p. 165). One young child's grave, for example, utilized granite paving stones as a train track upon which a movable toy train was located, holding flowers. Having revisited the grave over a number of years, Sørenson observed that the train was often moved into different positions, possibly by children visiting the grave. In this sense, visitors could engage in activities mirroring the 'proscribed futurity' of play that the buried child would have undertaken had they lived.

One of the most important insights to emerge from this body of work is that the symbolic representation of childhood in death, particularly in terms of gender constructions, does not necessarily parallel the social construction of childhood in life. Several researchers (e.g., Baxter 2013, p. 11; Rainville 1999; Smith 1987; Snyder 1992) have suggested that widely accepted (i.e., community-level) notions about death—which themselves have changed over time—were far more influential in determining mortuary practices than socioeconomic factors, pointing to more muted gender differentiation in death than the highly elaborated gender constructs of the late nineteenth century would lead one to suspect, especially amongst younger children. In Baxter's 2013 study, girls, boys, infants, and older children were all commemorated in similar ways, with gender nuances collapsed into the more generalized familial roles of daughter or son (Baxter 2013, p. 11).

This suggests quite strongly that children's identities were (and are) as fluid as those of adults and therefore need to be approached with this in mind. If, however, "children's age-related identities . . . [represent] a fluid and dynamic aspect of social identity" (Crawford and Lewis 2008, p. 10), then some individuals might be symbolically or otherwise prevented from growing up or being given adult social identity at certain times for certain reasons (see also Lillehammer 2010). To explore this adequately requires the development of new interpretative frameworks to accommodate the "diverse social attributes that children may possess on the basis of their age, gender, ethnicity, disability and birth rank within the family" (Buckham 2003, p. 171). For us, this framework is the notion of 'childness'.

4. Toward an Archaeology of Childness

This paper deliberately adopts the term 'childness' and suggests that it should become the focus of archaeological attention rather than 'childhood' or 'children'. We argue that, while the concept may be implicit in other studies, particularly those that depend on a rigorous analysis of context, it has not been codified or explored explicitly. 'Childness', as we use it here, is the relational quality of 'being' a child. This is more than just a semantic suggestion and more than just a reworking of the truism that social identity is always nuanced. We do not intend childness to be a synonym for child or childhood; rather, it is an explicit measure of the variation that exists between the entities of 'child' and 'childhood', including between individuals in the same age bracket and cultural context (and, perhaps, particularly so, given that these will be the subtlest variations and, therefore, the most difficult to detect).

In the context of children's gravestones and plots, where we are interpreting adult agency, childness ties to the manner in which childlike characteristics are conceptualized and attributed to the deceased using material culture. Similar to other forms of identity construction, childness is therefore a measure of a process rather than an end-product and, in an archaeological sense, keys into various subjective qualities that archaeologists should be able to identify in order to understand how children might be constructed differently by different groups at different times. When and why does a child cease to be thought of as such? How does this alter according to whether, for example, that child is Western or non-Western, working or middle class, male or female, or middle or late Victorian?

We wish to make it clear that we do not intend childness to speak to the presumed 'value' of children, even if we do potentially connect it to measures of social variability and capitalist concepts of value as understood through labor. We assume, based on previous research, that children have always been highly valued and loved, contra both Ariès (1962) and Stone (1977) now outdated arguments (see, for example, Baxter 2013, 2015; Haveman 1999; McKerr et al. 2009). Regardless, a childhood in life might have been conceptualized as beginning and ending at different points in different settings for

different groups as a result of wider social processes linked to the fundamental changes wrought by capitalism and the closely intertwined ideologies of class, status, and gender.

To illustrate the potential of childness as an interpretive framework, we draw on two interconnected, historical archaeological projects previously carried out in South Australian cemeteries (Table 1). Farrell (2003) regional study of the general and Roman Catholic cemeteries in Mintaro, South Australia (see Figure 1), which analyzed over 160 gravestones dating from 1850 to 1950 using both historical documents and oral histories to identify the relationships of the people interred and their social, economic, and religious backgrounds (Farrell 2003, p. 19). Degner (2007) study of children's gravestones from 1849 to 1901 across the Fleurieu Peninsula (see Figure 1) used census data, legislation, and ships' passenger lists to investigate definitions of childhood according to age (Degner 2007, pp. 12–14).

Table 1. Research samples.

Study	Farrell	Degner
Date range	1850–1950	1836–1901
Number of sites	2	24
Denominations	General and Roman Catholic	General, Wesleyan Methodist, Congregational, Anglican, Bible Christian, and Roman Catholic
Total no. of gravestones	160	217
Total no. of children	44 *	304 **
Total no. of children-only gravestones	23	Not comparable due to different recording methods
Total % of male children	6%	56%
Total % of female children	5%	40%
Total % unknown	0%	4%
% Adolescent male	5% ***	
% Adolescent female	8%	
% Adolescent unknown	0%	

* Defined as 0–12 years old; ** Defined as up to 21 years old; *** Defined as 13–27 years old.

Farrell was predominantly interested in exploring the general expression of emotion within her data in a study modeled on Tarlow (1999) work. Her research defined a child as aged between birth and 12 years and an adolescent as between 13 and 27 years of age (Farrell 2003, p. 83). Farrell found that the majority of children were interred within family plots with their inscriptions incorporated on headstones erected for adults. This was not an uncommon practice in the nineteenth century, particularly given the costs of erecting a gravestone. Only eight gravestones in the Catholic cemetery (11%) and 15 in the public cemetery (17%) represented primary children's graves, i.e., graves for which the child was the first named person on the headstone and for whom it can be assumed that the choices in style and form were made (Farrell 2003, p. 47). Primary and secondary children's burials (where the child was added to a headstone originally erected for someone else) made up 11% of the sample (Farrell 2003, p. 50).

In terms of iconography, Farrell found that 'adolescent' headstones recorded the most frequent use of flower motifs (Farrell 2003, p. 86). When examined according to sex, the frequency of flower motifs on adult and adolescent women's headstones closely paralleled each other (featuring on 10% of graves of adult women and 18% of those of adolescents). In contrast, the choices for adult and adolescent males diverged considerably. Compared with adult men, for whom the most common motif was foliage, adolescent males were predominantly symbolized with more flower motifs (32% as opposed to 11% for adult males) (Farrell 2003, p. 85). Farrell proposed that this signified a greater expression of commonality between the adolescents of both sexes and adult females, all of whom

were somehow considered socially different from adult males as the dominant social group and who therefore exhibited the greatest range of motifs overall.

Degner was aware of Farrell's work and, as part of her study, sought to test the Mintaro findings further. However, Degner was critical of Farrell's use of the term adolescent for a mostly nineteenth-century sample given the current use of the term and its attached developmental connotations (Degner 2007, pp. 25–27). Degner instead chose to define children as all individuals aged 21 years and under based on the assumption that this age range would encompass all those likely to be affected by some aspect of a culturally constructed notion of childhood or at least a pre-adulthood status within the nineteenth-century context of her research. Degner's sample was derived from Wesleyan Methodist, Congregational, Anglican, Bible Christian, and Roman Catholic denominations, as well as two multi-denominational general cemeteries. In total, 304 children were commemorated on 217 gravestones. These burials were further divided into primary children's burials (39%, *n* = 118); secondary children's burials, which she defined as another child inscribed on the same gravestone as a primary child (16%, *n* = 50); and those children recorded as secondary to adults on the same gravestone (45%, *n* = 136) (Degner 2007, p. 37).

Degner argued that children were observable in limited ways. She found that the headstones of children from birth to two years of age recorded the highest use of motifs (12%), suggesting that pictorial forms were an important feature of infant commemoration (Degner 2007, p. 90). Smith's study of children's graves in Delaware in the United States (US) similarly found that parents preferred visual motifs as a way of communicating sentiments around the very young, although in her study, it occurred within the age range from birth to six years and, particularly, in the time period between 1850 and 1879 (Smith 1987, p. 94; Table 3). Sørenson (2011, p. 167) has suggested that such iconography in contemporary practice substitutes for a biography for a very young or stillborn child who dies before specific narratives can be built around them as a person.

In addition, Degner noted that the graves of children who died between birth and four years of age were the most likely to exhibit symbolic motifs associated with innocence, such as angels and lambs, as well as flower types with coded references to the personality traits of the deceased (10% of primary child burials), suggesting that this age group was more closely associated with the suite of nineteenth-century middle class ideals of the child (Degner 2007, pp. 89, 92). In the context of burials of the very young, Degner also noted a concomitant absence of name, sex, or age (Degner 2007, p. 57), leaving them to be memorialized only as unidentified infants interred as secondary burials to adults and/or other children. More generally, the date of death did not appear to be important in such commemoration given that this was omitted from the burials of 38 children commemorated on 17 gravestones (constituting 3% of primary and 13% of secondary children's burials). She linked these trends to high mortality rates and suggested that parental emotional detachment may have played a part (Degner 2007, p. 58), although this idea of parental indifference has received significant critique since first raised by Ariès in 1962 (see Pollock 1983, p. 25; Strange 2002).

Degner found that, after infants, the gravestones of 17–18-year-olds showed the highest frequency of motif use (10%). Gender appears to have played a role in this, with a significantly higher use of all types of motifs on male graves (66%, *n* = 21) compared with female graves (31%, *n* = 10) (Degner 2007, pp. 86, 94). Similar to Farrell, she noted a greater frequency of floral motifs on the headstones of male child burials (66%, the majority of whom were aged over 17 years) compared with the headstones of female child burials (31%).

Degner (2007, p. 75) also found a relationship between the type of epitaph chosen and the age of the deceased. In seeking to understand when childhood, in a broad sense, ended and some form of adulthood began, Degner found that the graves of 14–18-year-olds were more likely to have epitaphs that reflected adult themes relating to the end of life, most notably as memento mori exhorting the reader to prepare for death through references to worms, death, bones, and sinners. Such themes were closely linked to Evangelical Protestantism, which advocated the overt recognition of death and decay as one way to prepare for a 'good death' (Jalland 1996, p. 51). Degner found this theme

in both male and female burials across three denominations—Anglican, Wesleyan Methodist, and Non-conformist—from 1855 to 1899 but only in a very small sample (3% of the total) and in a particular geographic area (Willunga and McLaren Vale (see Figure 1)) (Degner 2007, p. 93). Only one example from Farrell's study—the grave of an 18-year-old—contained such a theme (Farrell 2003, p. 80). Degner argued that this may be indicative of a symbolic ending to childhood taking place between 14 and 18 years, at least within these specific regional, and possibly denominational, communities.

The different age definitions adopted by Farrell and Degner are the most problematic issue when attempting to generate comparisons between them. The results are also constrained by a lack of differentiation between specific forms of motifs (for example, neither study recorded the types of flowers but merely whether motifs were 'floral'); therefore, it is not possible to determine whether or not subtler signals were being used to construct meanings or boundaries for childness. Despite this, intriguing preliminary trends emerge. At one end of the age spectrum, the deaths of very young children (between 0 and 2 years of age) were more highly visually symbolic and more clearly constructed in the Victorian mold of innocence and 'natural' purity. At the other, male and female children aged 14 years and above, until at least the age of 17–18 years, were more likely to be symbolically associated with adult females—and presumably particular kinds of gender constructs—before further differentiation signaled a shift into adulthood. Individuals in this older age range were also more likely to be associated with connotations of potential sinfulness and, therefore, spiritual exhortations to live a good life in the hope of salvation, although possibly only within communities with specific religious orientations. Several researchers have suggested that an elision of childhood and innocence in the nineteenth century was constructed "as the antithesis of the morally ambiguous adult ... workplace" (Buckham 2003, p. 170), which was quite clearly gendered as male as opposed to the female, domesticated home (Baker 1997, p. 183; Kociumbas 1997, p. 91; Snyder 1992, p. 12; Wilkie 2000, p. 107; Zelizer 1985, pp. 9–11). An increase in ambiguity (both gender and moral) around the status of those individuals transitioning between childhood and adulthood, however, suggests that this situation may be more complex. Together, these trends suggest a potentially more fruitful way of investigating children archaeologically: using the notion of 'childness' to explore the qualities of being a child projected by the cemetery and contextualized within the social, cultural, and religious milieu rather than a 'hard' focus on the deceased individual.

5. The Potential of Childness in Cemetery Studies

To further explore the notion of childness in cemetery studies, the next step is to carry out directed and rigorous testing of this idea. Farrell and Degner used small populations and relied on descriptive statistics; thus, conducting a larger, more thorough and analytical statistical study on children's burials from a range of carefully chosen contexts may illustrate more clearly the possibilities for childness. It is hypothesized that the category of child may well vary according to criteria other than age—for example, a 14-year-old in one situation may well still be defined as a child, whereas another may not. The most likely causes for variation in Western historical archaeological settings are the social processes of class and status via the closely associated ideologies of gentility and respectability and their attendant expectations around labor, as well as the shifts they represent in the social ideology of the family and the moral construction of danger and risk. Buckham (2003) findings in York in the United Kingdom (UK), for example, suggest that the Victorian ideology of gentility was not always realized in practice, creating alternative narratives of childhood and the family that need to be teased out from the mainstream. Similarly, Strange (2002, 2003, 2005) work has pointed to the alternative ways in which the working class redefined respectability and expressed grief within the cemetery, where the avoidance of a pauper's burial was paramount. In this context, the ownership of a burial plot was a form of real estate that could be made available to other family members or associates to provide status through autonomy (Strange 2003, pp. 146–47). Cannon and Cook (2015) work on infant burials posits class as one creator of separate "emotional communities" within the larger social construct of Western society, arguing that mortuary variability may, in part, reflect differing social collectivities

constructed around foci, such as families, neighborhoods, or parish churches, expressing their grief in diverse ways. The influence of denominational differences with respect to childness within this context is unclear, although the Christian concept of the 'good death' was closely intertwined with the construction of gentility and respectability amongst the middle and working classes in the nineteenth century (Jalland 2002).

Glimpses of childness in the cemetery might also be visible in ways other than the symbolism or wording on headstones. Buckham's work (Buckham 2003, pp. 169–70) highlights how the location of graves for individuals aged under 14 years shifted from one of close proximity to their adult relations to dedicated spaces specifically set aside for them after the 1880s. Even though some of these choices were affected by the availability of space (splitting plots into smaller graves to accommodate a greater number of child-sized burials), they created new and different landscapes of interaction that could be explored further through phenomenological principles to see how this influenced, or was influenced by, differing constructions of childness (but see (Cannon and Cook 2015) for an alternative perspective on the placement of infants' graves). By adopting a phenomenological approach to examine the broader cultural landscape of the cemetery as a place of commemoration, memorialization, emotional interaction/visitation, and social advertisement, the reduced size of markers on children's graves, for example, may suggest a symbolic reference to the premature nature of the deceased and create a point of difference when compared with the larger 'adult' headstones. The increased development of defined communal children's spaces within the cemetery landscape in the late twentieth century forms a useful comparison (although there are some earlier historical examples; see Nolin 2018). Such an arrangement effectively separated the deceased spatially from other members of their family who were interred in the adult sections. Instead, the association of children together generates a different kind of space—one that is comforting for the parents and family, because the child is with other children, mirroring other dedicated children's spaces in life, such as playgrounds (Buckham 2003, p. 170). It is no wonder, then, that there is often an expressed desire to develop a different atmosphere in such places through the use of both grave goods (such as brightly colored toys, balloons, and whirligigs) and public art, as a demonstration of the characteristics of childness that connect the deceased together and distinguish them from others in the cemetery landscape (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Demarcations of children's cemetery spaces: (**left**) The children's section in Centennial Park Cemetery, Adelaide; (**right**) symbolic figure situated adjacent to the children's section in Enfield Memorial Park, Adelaide. Photographs: S. Muller 2016.

In addition, previous work has suggested that the cemetery landscape deliberately speaks to both the past and the future through the medium of the present in different ways. For example,

Sørenson (2010, 2011) work on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Danish children's commemoration noted a move from traditionally minimalist and austere expression to a more elaborate and interactive commemorative space, including the provision of artifacts, such as toys and flowers, with which the visitor can interact as a form of extended engagement with the deceased. He interprets this as a reflection of both the representation of memory and the 'presencing' of the emotional trauma resulting from a child's death. The use of material culture at the gravesite, some of which may have belonged to the deceased and which therefore reflects an autobiographical element through the agency of the bereaved, is seen as a process of 'proscribed futurity', which anticipates and facilitates the perpetuation of the living's relationship with the dead, despite the fact that this continuity may, in one sense, appear frozen as a moment in time, with artifacts serving as temporal markers (Sørenson 2010, p. 116; 2011, p. 163). In this way the grave "does not simply point towards the deceased child, but instead addresses . . . imagined future relations with the child, stimulated by an atmosphere of the affective presence of the dead child that radiates from the material culture of the grave plot" (Sørenson 2011, p. 165; Garatini 2007; see also Silvén 2018).

More generally, a third thread would be to generate better comparative datasets overall. More fine-grained archaeological studies of children could provide more nuanced analyses of the contexts of variation in the ideal. This may identify other ways to conceptualize both the presence and the absence of expected versions of childness in different places, times, and contexts and would extend the quest beyond cemetery studies to childness as instantiated through other forms of material culture. What this would require, however, are datasets derived from research questions that specifically investigate childness as a form of identity construction rather than the more general datasets currently available that tend to be limited to the recognition of the presence or absence of children. Ideally, archaeologists would also devise ways to look at the emergence of childness, rather than situations of its full-blown instantiation, because the borders of its rises and falls will speak more to the processes behind its construction.

6. Conclusions

We have argued here that, while 'a child' might be constituted as a concept sharing certain sets of socially agreed-upon attributes at specific times, the concept itself will vary, such that particular types of child will be constructed within that matrix according to other social parameters, similar to gender, class, religion, or status. We have used the term 'childness' to try and capture this relational and variable quality. Exploring childness, rather than children, provides an alternative way for archaeologists to approach the histories of contemporary Western understandings of childhood, including when particular types of childhood began and ended (and according to what criteria in different contexts) and how boundaries between child and adult were continually being established and renegotiated. Children are not just part of society but, in many respects, inform it and are at the core of it, reflecting the adult gaze and constituting the aspirations and beliefs of society. The notion of what constitutes a 'child', the relative notion of childness, and ultimately, the space we call childhood are critical to understanding not just past societies but also our own.

This is a particularly important and timely exercise as Western culture has begun to re-engage itself with questions of mortality after a long period of post-war denial (Jalland 2002). Improvements in medical care and living standards in the West have seen a sustained reduction in infant and child mortality rates generally, notwithstanding socio-economic and cultural variance, making for a very different worldview of expectations for both children and adults. Nevertheless, children still die from disease, accident, and abuse, and their parents, families, and communities seek meaning and consolation through their commemoration. We must also recognize that definitions of when life is seen to begin and an individual is ascribed social identity are, today, being re-evaluated, resulting in, among other things, new commemoration and memorialization practices for peri-natal babies (Darian-Smith and Pascoe 2013, p. 25; Peelen 2009; Sørenson 2011, pp. 168–69). It is important to remember that, regardless of the time period, the creation of the identity of 'child', in any capacity, is as much about

the creation of the identity of 'parent', as it is a vehicle for inter-generational meaning. How might childness be attributed to such individuals for whom life as we conceptualize it was so fleeting?

Today's archaeology demands that true understanding of societies and their cultures includes the study of children, regardless of the methodological difficulties inherent in identifying or understanding them archaeologically. This applies to all potential archaeological contexts, including death and burial. At such a critical moment for those left behind, the adult actions of commemoration and memorialization, in seeking to make sense of such an event, create a text for the ages. The material culture created from this moment of rupture deserves our attention and interest.

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