

Where have all the children gone? The silencing and un-silencing of children in America's pandemic

Julie Spray and Jean Hunleth

Podcast abstract

As childhood medical anthropologists in America's pandemic, we see children's issues everywhere – school re-openings; mental health concerns; medical risks—but children themselves have been, to our ears, conspicuously silent. Instead, we encounter the taped-up playgrounds, street chalk drawings, and child-sized masks, the material evidence of childhood's social reconstruction and the unheard voices of children themselves. In an adult-centric society that constructs children as vulnerable or risky, we observe a systemic silencing of children's perspectives even in matters that directly affect them—contrary to the principle of participation core to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Through our research, we have learnt from children in New Zealand and Zambia that we cannot understand children's needs and account for them in policy if we haven't heard their perspectives. In this podcast, we bring together our respective perspectives as anthropologists of childhood and infectious disease and as people walking physically and metaphorically through this world. We ask: How are we thinking about childhood? What, and why, aren't we hearing from children? What can anthropological lenses help us to understand about how childhood is being reconstructed and experienced in the COVID-19 era? How can we hear and interpret children's perspectives?

We share how anthropologists are raising our voices to contend with children's media representations and shape the policies that affect them—and the responses to our efforts. And, we reflect on what anthropology as a discipline can learn from the anthropology of childhood's longstanding study of children's silencing and un-silencing.

Podcast access: <https://soundcloud.com/julie-spray/where-have-all-the-children-gone-the-silencing-and-un-silencing-of-children-in-americas-pandemic>