

Listening Part 6: Listening to Viewpoints – Transcript

You will hear a presentation about child performers.

Canadian actress Sarah Polley is perhaps best known for her role in the popular television series *Road to Avonlea*. She was 11 years of age at the time, but she had been acting since she was four. Although television is rife with such child actors, there is some debate as to the ethics of permitting children to be performers.

One concern is that the child's education may suffer, but it is possible to hire a personal tutor; in fact, for this reason, child performers may end up with a better education. Jodie Foster graduated with high marks from Yale University despite having been a child performer.

Another concern is the potential for exploitation. Children are not mature enough to make important decisions and must rely on their parents and agents to decide for them. Given the high stakes—child stars can make a lot of money—the child's advocates may make decisions that are not in the child's best interests.

The proportion of celebrity addiction is testament to the pressure of life in the limelight. "Children are even more emotionally vulnerable," says psychologist Martha Leverly, "and exposure to such pressure on a continuous basis can be damaging." Leverly goes on to describe the unique problems of child stars who, once they become adults, are not able to maintain their star status. Finding oneself a 'has-been' at the age of fifteen or twenty, she says, can be very difficult to handle.

One might point out that child athletes are similarly exposed to the pressures of performance. Female gymnasts and figure skaters in particular tend to be relatively young. But 'two wrongs don't make a right.' To mention just one problem, consider that child actors and athletes alike often develop eating disorders, likely from the pressure to stay thin.

Of course, some shows **require** child actors in order to achieve realism. So instead of a blanket prohibition of child actors, perhaps all we need is legislation that would ensure education, protect against exploitation, and minimize pressures. No doubt some would claim that to be undue interference: the government has no right to prevent people from leading the life they want. But we're talking about children, who may not know what they want. Surely the government has a responsibility to look after its vulnerable citizens. In any case, precedents have already been set, and justifiably so, by regulations about junk food and a minimum age for driving.