

Introduction

Emma Renold, R. Danielle Egan and Jessica Ringrose

The entry below from ‘the sex goddess blues’ offers sage advice about the trials and tribulations of sociocultural and interpersonal shame and its effects on sexual expression, sexual exploration and sexual consent:

Confidence in yourself is a lifelong process. It’s sometimes a long and winding road with potholes, roadblocks, and even massive collisions. The best place to start is to know that you, as a person, are worthwhile.... You’re worth fighting for; you deserve good things in your life. You deserve to set goals for yourself. You deserve healthy relationships that make you feel good. You deserve to have your voice heard. You deserve to physically present yourself however you want. You deserve to feel at peace with your body. And, if you’re interested in sex, be it by yourself or with partners, you deserve pleasure and joy.

‘The Sex Goddess Blues: Building Sexual Confidence and Busting Perfectionism’, 2014, www.scarleteen.org

What makes the post particularly important is that it is written for a tween and teenaged cis and trans-girl audience and manages to avoid the traps of heteronormative and white privilege. If one reads Scarleteen.org – the site where this post is featured – one finds numerous pieces on consent, physiology, condoms, pleasure, sexual violence and sexual politics.

Notwithstanding, one might be wondering, why start an edited volume on children’s sexuality and sexualization with a popular international sex education website? For us, [Scarleteen](http://Scarleteen.org) illuminates what can go missing in policy and popular debates on sexualization – an assumption that children and young people are complex sexual subjects who are actively negotiating sexuality in their everyday lives. Indeed, this volume responds to this gap. It seeks to provide an academically situated collection that complicates and speaks back to a ubiquitous media landscape where children and young people’s own experiences of doing, being and becoming sexual are often sensationalized, silenced, caricatured, pathologized and routinely undermined. Drawing together contributions from a range of disciplinary fields, across a wide breadth of regional, national and transnational contexts, the chapters offer compelling accounts of how children and young people are captured by and negotiate

ideological discursive formations (sexism, racism, homophobia, to name just a few) that shape their experiences, and which often operate at the intersection of curiosity, inequality, trauma, resilience, relationality, pressure, excitement, lack of interest, ambivalence and boredom.

We begin by orienting readers towards some of the key historical ideas about child sexuality and current debates on child sexualization before offering an overview of the contributions and sections that organize the book. We conclude by posing some questions about future research on children, sexuality and sexualization.

Historicizing child sexuality

The phenomenon of sexualisation phobia provides an excellent example of all that is irrational and ahistorical about the sexual child in our contemporary culture.

(Egan & Hawkes, 2010: 147)

The social construction of the child, during the modern epoch in the Anglophone West, was inextricably tied to the education, regulation and normalization of its sexuality (Egan & Hawkes, 2010). In his first volume on the history of sexuality in Western Europe, Foucault notes that the child's sex was the object of intense scrutiny and pivotal in the deployment of a shifting disciplinary apparatus which foregrounded the project of normalization and surveillance in the late 19th century (Foucault, 1980). As with most ideas on sexuality, cultural values ebb and flow at various periods, and ideas about the sexual child are no different. For example, the assumptions at work in the discursive production of the sexual child from the 1970s stand in stark contrast to most contemporary narratives on the child and its sexuality (Angelides, 2004).

Recent scholarship reveals the particularities of how the child's sexuality was always already imbued with a particular set of socio-epistemological assumptions in order to legitimate and propagate particular conceptions of the state, the colonial project, whiteness, the family and heteronormativity to name only a few (Bernstein, 2011; Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Romesberg 2008; Darby, 2005; Stoller, 1995). However, the modern history of ideas on childhood sexuality is distinct in that it is more often than not plagued by fear, projection, fascination and consternation (Fahs et al., 2013). As historians and childhood studies scholars

have illustrated, the history of the sexual child differs from other populations deemed sexually deviant or in need of sexual protection because of Anglophone conceptions of childhood (Faulkner, 2011; Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Romesberg, 2008; Darby, 2005; Angelides, 2004; Males, 1992). Most dominant discourses that have emerged within the Anglophone West have, on the surface, conceptualized childhood as antithetical to sexuality (however, this tends to primarily apply to white upper-middle-class children, Egan & Hawkes, 2010).

Historically, Anglophone culture has been engrossed by the innocent or sexually endangered child and its socially pathologized counterpart, the erotic or sexually knowing child. Both operate as a barometer of social decay or progress, as a nostalgic longing for a pure past, a signal of impending societal doom or as a utopian possibility for reshaping the future as well as a site for social intervention. Nevertheless, both figures are, to use historian Robin Bernstein's term, 'imagined' children in that they are symbolic figures as opposed to material actors (Bernstein, 2011). Fears regarding sexual corruption from a variety of sexually salacious sources (comic books, television, rap music, the Internet, clothing, etc.) or deviant populations (immigrants, the poor, gays and lesbians or the paedophile) tend to gain momentum during times of social upheaval or crisis (Egan & Hawkes, 2010). To this end, the discourse on sexualization, which we outline in its contemporary shape and form below, is situated within a larger socio-historical context that has been strikingly persistent over the last two centuries (Bernstein, 2011; Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Faulkner, 2011; Mort, 2000; Hunt, 1999; Foucault, 1980).

Contemporary debates on sexualization

Sexuality and cultural scholars have used empirical and comparative studies, as well as history and critical sociology to argue that 'sexualization' is itself a constructed and unsubstantiated concept. (Hawkes & Dune, 2013: 623)

Since the early 2000s there has been increased public policy concern across the Anglophone West of how children and young people (particularly girls) are being 'sexualized' by the media and culture industries (APA, 2007; Rush & LaNauze, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2010; Bailey, 2011). We have seen a steady stream of sensationalist popular cultural texts purporting to illuminate the real problems of 'sexualization' as well as a range of policy and governmental responses (Egan, 2013). There has been a flurry of academic

research and writing based on ‘sexualization’, in which there is general agreement and a strong evidence base suggesting that sexual imagery has become more ubiquitous in society, including in media and material marketed at and consumed by children (Buckingham et al., 2010). However, while attention to how changes in the significance and representation of sexuality might be shaping children and young people’s sexual cultures is long overdue, the concept of ‘sexualization’ has been contested (see in particular Bragg et al., 2011; Lumby & Albury, 20010; Duschinsky, 2013; Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Atwood and Smith 2011).

Indeed, a consistent theme running through both historical and contemporary discourses about the child and its sexuality is that they are rarely, if ever, about children’s own social and cultural worlds. More often than not they represent adult preoccupations and anxieties about the nature, corruption and correction of the child’s sex as well as the nature of society. The voices of children and how they make sense of their own lives and bodies are conspicuously absent. Indeed, relying on dubious claims and little empirical research foregrounding children’s experiences of doing, being and becoming sexual, the outcomes predicted for children within the ‘sexualization’ literature are restrictive and frequently serve to moralize about and pathologize particular behaviours and particular children (Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Buckingham, 2009: 26). Evaluating the research evidence on the impact of ‘sexualized’ media and products on children, Buckingham et al. (2009: 26) summarize that ‘almost all of the research on the impact of these developments relates to adults rather than children; and, insofar as it addresses children at all, to girls rather than boys’ (see also Barker and Duschinsky 2012). The history of discourses on the child and its sexuality then is more accurately a narrative about adulthood (Egan & Hawkes, 2010). As such we must be careful to ground any analysis around specificities: what childhood is being addressed, who is absent and to what ends?

Renold and Ringrose have previously (2011, 2013) identified how these abstractions and generalities of child sexualization discourses have operated to define the objects and relations of scrutiny in particularly gendered ways. We draw out below what we identify as some of the problematic effects, from our own work and the wider literature on sexualization, which include:

- Measuring harms and risks of sexual media exposure to advance protectionist agendas (Egan, 2013) that lack analyses of how children, particularly girls, make meaning of, and negotiate media in their everyday lives

- Overemphasizing the victimization and objectification of girls, thereby reducing any sexual expression as evidence of ‘sexualization’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2011)
- Denying girls’ sexual agency, rights, pleasure and desires (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Tolman, 2012; Clark, 2013)
- Interpreting a range of commercial products for children as simply dangerous conduits for ‘child’ sexualization (Bragg et al., 2011, Kehily 2012)
- Ignoring how the eroticization of sexual objectification, including sexual innocence, features in girls’ own sexual subjectification practices (Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Lamb & Peterson, 2012)
- Creating enduring binaries of passive feminine sexuality versus active, predatory masculine sexuality (Renold, 2013)
- Encouraging ‘either/or’ and ‘polarized’ position-taking among stakeholders between sexual empowerment and pleasure versus sexual danger and risk (Tolman, 2013; Lamb et al, 2013; Duschinsky, 2013)
- Promoting a linear developmental yet delayed future trajectory of ‘healthy’ age-appropriate non-sexual, heteronormative gender identities (Epstein et al., 2012; Holford et al., 2013)
- Mobilizing a white middle-class panic over the loss of a raced and classed sexual innocence via the Othering of working-class/racialized cultures as evidence of hypersexuality (Egan, 2013; Ringrose, 2013)
- Neglecting the wealth of cross disciplinary, theoretical, empirical, clinical and practitioner-grounded research on children, sexuality and sexualization (Atwood et al., 2013)

The aims of the collection

All these discursive effects are, in different ways and to varying extents, taken up by the chapters in this collection, with the final point on the dearth of empirical research operating as an orienting catalyst for bringing the collection together.

Our aim for this collection was to go beyond these well-worn cleavages and polarizations in the sexualization debates and profile key interdisciplinary commentators, academics, researcher and activists working in the area of children’s sexuality and sexual cultures. It was imperative for us to draw together a collection that illuminates the diversity and complexity of children and young people’s everyday sexual cultures, relations and subjectivities.

We begin with an important range of disciplinary chapters that situate debates in the context of particular frames of reference and meaning, showing the rich diversity of

scholarship on children's sexuality. The next sections showcase a range of cutting-edge research from these various disciplinary domains that move far beyond simplistic 'telling it like it is' accounts of doing, being and becoming sexual to theoretically engaged and critical accounts of experiences and realities. The type of research we have purposefully chosen is that which is unsettling, challenging, moving beyond binaries and side-taking around a complex set of issues.

Navigating your way through the collection

Part I: Mapping the history of research and theory within the landscape of ideas

As we have noted, the child's sexuality has often served as a particularly dense site of cultural anxiety, confusion and projection. In response, a variety of disciplines have offered alternative discourses through the empirical study of the sexuality of children and its various cultural and individual manifestations. These disciplinary chapters offer unique and important contributions through an historical trajectory and assessment of ideas on children and sexuality in six different disciplinary contexts: anthropology, sociology, subcultural studies, social psychology, media studies and clinical psychoanalysis. The chapters raise questions about the impact of cultural diversity on the sexual cultures of children both within the West and outside and ask us to think about the phenomenological experience of sexuality in the lives of young people and the impact of ideological and cultural formations.

In Chapter 2 Diederik F. Janssen highlights how anthropological views on young sexualities illuminate what is specifically human, or rather culturally particular, about the induction of the young into existing mating patterns. Janssen's exhaustive review of the literature reveals a stark pattern – that children's own conceptions of intimacy remain significantly delimited by competition between and among the (adult) sexes. His contribution illustrates how young sexualities remain characteristically governed and administered as a symbolic façade of choice for important shifts in power and prestige, between the sexes but also between generations.

In Chapter 3 Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott give readers a reflexive and critical overview of the sociological research on the sexuality of children and young people. Scott and Jackson trace the theoretical and empirical trends in sociological literature from the 1970s to today to explore the continuities and discontinuities in both sociological and public

debates. They argue that adult anxieties around children and sex derive from constructions of sexuality as a special area of life and children as a special category of people, arguing against sex being seen as inevitably inimical to the well-being of children.

Mary Jane Kehily and Joseph De Lappe explore the links between youth subcultures and young people's sexual cultures in Chapter 4. Through a discussion of the concept and practice of youth subcultures, the chapter points to the continuing significance of this influential body of work on subsequent studies of young people's sexual culture. Drawing on example from pro-ana websites and Japanese Lolita fashion, the chapter demonstrates how the study of youth subcultures and girlhood studies is marked by a distinctive set of ideas and methods that have had a generative impact upon the reconceptualization of young women as agentic, gendered and sexual subjects.

Deborah L. Tolman, Christin P. Bowman and Jennifer F. Chmielewski offer a useful overview of psychological research on sexualization in Chapter 5. As Tolman was one of the original six authors of the American Psychological Association, *Task Force on the sexualisation of girls*, the chapter provides fascinating reflections on how the report has been used (and in some cases abused) in some research, media and popular cultural debates on sexualization. They also, however, argue that accounting for the negative effects of sexual objectification, for instance, has offered powerful tools for challenging sexism and holding various media outlets and corporations responsible for their content. The authors suggest that psychological research needs to more fully explore issues of girls and women's resistance and complex relationships to sexualization and point to the need for *research-led* activist collaborations such as the organization SPARK, which empowers girls to lead an agenda for social change and challenging sexualization that is youth-driven.

Sara Bragg's contribution in Chapter 6 is unique, in that she examines the landscape of ideas on boys, masculinity and sexualization – a topic often forgotten in political discourse. Bragg renders visible how ideology, affect and culture shape a contradictory sets of responses to the issue of boys and sexualization. While popular texts argue that boys are either outside the realm of danger and/or that the concerns should be conceptualized as completely distinct, Bragg demonstrates the models of culture, media influence, learning, agency and social change that underpin these responses. She contrasts a risk model with feminist film and cultural studies' theorizations, which take popular culture seriously,

emphasizing the indeterminacy of meaning, the multiple functions of fantasy genres and the fluidity of audience identifications.

In Chapter 7 R. Danielle Egan analyses the shift away from infantile sexuality in Anglophone psychoanalytical clinical literature. In the past, psychoanalysts provided a conception of the child's sexuality as active, complex and natural and offered a reasoned alternative to medico-moral perspectives. The turn toward object relations, although a welcome one in many ways, has left a blind spot in clinical literature and possibly in clinical practice. It has also meant that psychoanalysts have been absent in policy and political discussions in an increasingly anxious Anglophone discourse on girls and sexualization. This shift may have considerable implications for the ways in which diagnosis, symptom and recommendations happen in clinical work with young people.

Taken together, the disciplinary chapters offer a profound response to many of the polemical texts on child 'sexualization'. These models offer an alternative way of thinking about the child as an inherently sexual being as opposed to sexuality being a pathological outcome. In so doing, each of these literatures reviewed offer more reasoned approaches, thereby de-escalating the anxiety that can enter into conversations about the sexuality of children.

Part II: Pre-teen sexualities: Problematizing sexual agency and sexual innocence

Children's sexuality, in so many contexts, turns out to be 'more complicated than we supposed'. 'We might' – if we let ourselves explore these complications – 'find (new) stories that are not fueled by fear'.

(Kathryn Bond Stockton, 2009: 12, citing James Kincaid, 1998: 15)

The figuration of the child 'at risk' is a luminous discourse when it comes to discussing sex and sexuality in childhood. Often the only option available when it comes to sexuality and children is within the context of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Holford et al., 2013). As we have outlined above, the recent and emotive discourse of sexualization continues this theme, calling up enduring anxieties over 'the spectre of adults' own unconscious desire for children's bodies; transgressing the boundaries that define how adults are supposed to look at children' (Buckingham et al., 2009: 11; see also Kincaid, 1992; Egan, 2013). This first

section of empirical research chapters put children's own sexual cultures, and their messy and shifting meaning-making practices centre stage (Renold, 2005, 2013). Each chapter complicates and troubles what constitutes 'sexy' and 'sexual' in image, body, popular culture, everyday situated social practice, future imaginaries and fantasy.

Inspired by Bragg and Buckingham's (2004) study on young people, sex and the media, in Chapter 8 Anna Sparrman shares her analysis of nine-year-old Swedish children's focus-group data and multimedia scrapbooks on love, sex and relationships in visual media (e.g. advertisements, films). She highlights the stark heterogendered polarization of how boys and girls consider what constitutes a 'sexy image', with boys selecting images of nude or semi-nude images that commodify women and men's bodies (to sell products), and girls creating visual collages of couples in love and sex in relationships. Foregrounding children's enactment of sexuality through some of the contemporary theorizing of decentered subjectivity and networked agency, Sparrman argues how, 'sexual agency is neither a fixed position nor a property of the individual but distributed across the material, immaterial, human and social'. This approach challenges the fixity of how sex and sexuality surfaces and mediates children's everyday social and cultural practices by making uncertain what counts as sex, sexual and sexy.

Working further with and developing the notion of sexual agency as produced in relational social-semiotic-material assemblages, in Chapter 9 Louisa Allen and Toni Ingraham examine the multiple ways in which 11–13 year old Australian girls make meaning of sexuality. Drawing on visual methods, interviews and focus groups, their chapter 'critically engages with discourses of childhood innocence and sexualization investigating whether these resonate with girls' talk about themselves as sexual subjects'. Allen and Ingraham's microsocial analysis complicates any binary reading of the regulatory gendered dichotomies of contemporary Anglophone girlhood as 'innocent' (unknowing) and 'pornified' (knowing). Rather, girls' constructions of their sexual subjectivities and their investment or rejection of romantic relationship cultures and/or sexual activity are multifaceted and in constant motion.

From focus group interviews to longitudinal ethnographic data on the sexual cultures of 10- and 11-year-olds living in New York City, Maria Kromidas powerfully illustrates in Chapter 10 the gendered entanglement of race, social class and sexuality and how anxieties surface in children's negotiation of a regulatory and racialized heterosexual matrix (Butler,

1990). She argues how ‘the entanglement of race and sexuality can not be understood without the notion of reproductive futurism and kids’ interpellation of themselves as proper heterosexualized subjects that will one day marry someone of the “right type” and reproduce kids of their own’. However, and significantly, she stresses that not all children deferred their desires to their imagined futures, and anxiety, pleasure and desire were creatively negotiated by children in ways that traversed their futures and the here and now.

Chapter 11, the final chapter in this section, explores how heteronormativity works to regulate very young children’s gender and sexual cultures. Drawing on focus group data with 3–11-year-olds, and working closely with data from 4-, 5- and 9-year-olds, Kerry H. Robinson and Cristyn Davies engage queer, feminist post-structural and post-developmental approaches to trouble the age-appropriate and heteronormative discourses embedded within many of the sexualization panics. They point to the ways in which ‘children are always already sexualized through the heterosexualization of children as gendered subjects’ and how for many children ritualized ‘life-markers’ including ‘first “special” relationships, marriage, kissing and having babies’ are fundamental heteronormative citizenship practices that mediate their everyday social and cultural worlds.

The policing, shaming, violence and contextual contingency for engaging in non-heterosexual cultures focuses the next section on the significance of place and space for young queer sexualities.

Part III: Queering young sexualities: Gender, place and history

The figure of the queer child is that which doesn’t quite conform to the wished-for way that children are supposed to be in terms of gender and sexual roles (...) The term queer derives also from its association with specifically sexual alterity. (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004: x)

Each of the chapters in the previous section documented the complex ways in which heteronormativity mediates pre-teen children’s peer cultures, from discourses of romance and making babies, to feeling ‘sexy’. Nowhere is this presumed heterosexuality more salient than in the sexualization debates where, as we argued above, protectionist discourses surface only in relation to premature heterosexualities. While discourses of ‘healthy’ heterosexualities and relationships are pervasive, healthy non-heterosexualities or healthy queer relationships are notably lacking. This section is inspired by Kathryn Bond Stockton’s (2009) figuration of the

always already 'queer child' and her evocation of 'growing sideways' to disrupt the assumed and 'wished-for' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004: x) heteronormative gender and sexual linearities. Such disruptions, however, are always located in place, history and space, constraining and regulating young people's capacities for any sustained rupture to heteronormative trajectories. Each chapter thus critically engages with and foregrounds the cultural and historical specificity of how queer sexualities emerge in and across gendered bodies in space and place and the everyday gender and sexual violence that permeates their lives.

Chapter 12 offers a powerful account of how the terms 'istabane' ('gay') and 'inkonkoni' ('freak of nature') travel across the everyday social and cultural worlds of young people living and growing up in the eastern Kwa-zulu-Natal province of South Africa. Deevia Bhana contextualizes young people's homophobic violence within current and historical legacies of structural inequalities and gendered poverty. Analysing teenagers' (aged 16) talk on gender and sexual cultures she illustrates how male heterosexual power is valorized and gay sexuality is rendered highly visible and admonished. Indeed, publicly overt displays and/or celebrations of gay and lesbian sexualities, including non-normative gender performances, are frequently interpreted as a direct threat to the very fabric of South African society.

In Chapter 13 Jón Ingvar Kjaran takes forward the ways in which historical legacies meet and mesh with contemporary representations of Icelandic masculinities, focusing on the cultures of young men who identify as gay and bisexual. His chapter explores how male Viking culture intersects with media portrayals of young entrepreneurial bourgeois masculinities (e.g. bankers as 'Viking raiders'). Kjaran illustrates how contemporary and historical masculinities permeate boys' own accounts of how they see-saw between being 'queer' and 'real men', where hegemonic heterosexuality assumed and privileged.

Tensions between gender, sexuality and class play out in complex ways for the young lesbian women in Elizabeth Payne's research on the experiences of white middle-class teenage lesbian-identifying young women in a major metropolitan area in Texas, USA. In Chapter 14 Payne explores the life history narratives of her participants in which they grapple with the punishing dichotomies of 'slut' and 'good girl'. Central to Payne's argument is how her participants reasserted their white middle-class privilege as a way of distancing themselves from 'the raw sexuality associated with working- and lower-class female sexualities, masculinized sexualities and the taint of lesbian desire'.

In Chapter 15 Emma Renold and Gabrielle Ivinson foreground the role of place, history, affect and culture to explore how gendered and sexual legacies of an ex-mining community surface in two teen girls' experiences of everyday gender and sexual violence. Drawing on post-queer and feminist posthuman theorizing, sexuality is opened up beyond identity and orientation, towards the more-than-human. Working creatively with interview data and historical archive, the chapter explores how the vibrancy of matter, from mud to mermaids, emerges in talk about memory books, dreams, gaming and outdoor play, and in ways that seemed to enable girls to survive and queer the often violent patriarchal forces of the social. Indeed, the materiality of culture and the significance of the cultural imaginary is the focus of the next section.

Part IV: Young sexualities and the cultural imaginary

Negotiating sexualized culture for *both girls and boys* is rarely straightforward; it is deeply complex and beset by pleasures, confusion, interest, rejection, curiosity and banality. It is an engagement that extends far beyond the narrow address of many popular texts on the topic. Another important factor to consider is the cultural context within which sexualized material culture is produced and how such products might be potent sites for a socio-historical analysis, as detailed in the previous section. More specifically, and focusing this section, is whether and to what extent sexualized material culture changes with the breeching of cultural boundaries via global consumption; how such material may be a representation and/or re-inscription of a particular set of complex conflicts within a cultural imaginary, and to what extent a set of seemingly contradictory political agendas may be constructed and deconstructed through the rhetorical and symbolic nature of documentaries of harm. Each chapter in this section complicates politico-epistemological assumptions through an analysis of popular cultural and political messages directed toward young people in three different cultural contexts.

The section begins with a psychoanalytically informed post-colonial analysis by Diego Costa. In Chapter 16 Costa's analysis focuses on Xuxa, a larger-than-life Brazilian icon in children's television between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. Costa offers a layered account of Xuxa and her place within the socio-historical imagination of Brazil in the 1990s. For Costa, Xuxa represents a national screen memory of the (colonial) primal scene as well as a site of queer identification for one young boy. In his queering of the historical discourse of recapitulation, Costa renders Xuxa as both a failed attempt at race and class erasure as well as

an evocative symbol of ambivalence in sexual(ized) identification. Xuxa is unable to upend or appease colonial legacies via displacement, but she is, nevertheless, a rich symbol, in the Brazilian cultural imaginary during a particularly important historical moment, which has since faded away.

Sexualization is often a political metonym for pornification, anti-pornography movements and sex trafficking of women and girls (Lerum, 2014; Egan, 2013). In Chapter 17 Anna Madill discusses the consumption of Shotocon-inspired Japanese manga and its classification within English obscenity law, which serves as a compelling case study for how globalization renders these associations even more complex. Madill offers a queer reading of this genre which often features erotic and relational exchanges between boys, as well as boys (boy-loving or BL) and non-human animals and other non-human figures. Madill shows how a paedophilic interpretation (its dominant reading under English law) ignores the transgressive ways in which these texts can be read and raises some key challenges and questions for the Anglophone West of ‘how intelligible, meaningful, non-paedophilic frames are available for reading non-realistic, erotic texts involving visually young characters’.

Deconstructing the gendered and sexual messages at work in North American documentaries aimed at eradicating the sexualization of girls is the focus of Chapter 18, by Lindsey Herriot and Lara E. Hiseler. The authors demonstrate the dominant discourses of childism, historical revisionism, heterosexism and slut-shaming in the films which produce moralizing responses to the ‘problem’ of girl sexting by focusing on what girls should do to shield and protect themselves from digital visibility and exploitation. The dominant focus on risk for girls thus has a paradoxical effect of re-regulating girls’ sexuality, rather than offering any critical intervention. The authors suggest an alternative to the tenor of moral panic in the anti-sexualization films can be found in Jessica Valenti’s documentary of the same name as her book *The purity myth*, which disrupts the naturalization of girls sexual innocence, via an intersectional discussion of how prolonging virginity is a particular problem of middle-class heterosexual normativity in Western cultures.

Ultimately all the chapters in this section highlight the limits of a monolithic reading of sexualized popular cultural materials as shaping cultural imaginaries.

Part V: New media, digital technology and young sexual cultures

The final section documents the special place that digital media has occupied in relation to sexualization debates often reductively blamed for a range of ill effects in youth gender and sexual relations. Early on, Livingstone (2002) described the research field around new media and young people as a polarization between optimists who see new opportunities for creativity, community and learning and pessimists who construct media in relation to risks about the end of childhood innocence; but this is particularly heightened in relation to sexualization (Bragg et al., 2011). Rather than seeing technology as a mediator of existing social relations and cultures in contextually and historically located ways there have been repeated calls to more heavily regulate young people's exposure to and use of sexual media imagery such as pornography, and uses of new media such as social networking. The chapters in this section all explore the representational and interpretive dilemmas of studying youth sexuality in the context of these rapidly changing media cultures and the new affordances of digital technologies.

In Chapter 19 Sue Jackson and Tina Vares explore the difficulty of adequately 'capturing' the sexual cultures of pre-teen girls in their New Zealand study, given that research encounters are weighed down with dominant discourses of girls as at risk of 'sexualized' media discourses. Although highly reflexive about the conditions of the 'male gaze' and the objectification of femininity and sexuality, the authors suggest that the video diary production offers an important range of data, including talk, gesture, movement and performance. These data offer insights into girls' everyday lives, which move in, around and beyond the assumptions of sex-saturated pre-teen media cultures. Perhaps most importantly the methodology allowed a medium for girls to create parodies of sexualized, girly femininity in ways that disrupt notions of pre-teen girls as passive recipients of sexualized media cultures.

In Chapter 20 Monique Mulholland takes a different tack on a similar problem, foregrounding the more specific notion of 'pornification'. Presenting research from 12–16-year-olds in South Australia, she argues that whilst young people do report on the commonplaceness of explicit representation in public spaces, they also have complex critiques, which include strategies of dealing with explicit content through humour and caricature, much like the girls in Jackson and Vares. And yet, dominant constructions of female sexual respectability and shaming of sluttiness shore up the limited range of positions

and discourses available to girls to navigate the public norms of doing and living youth sexuality.

In Chapter 21 Lara Karaian documents how the sexualization and pornification panics dovetail in particularly negative ways in the Canadian legal system. She explores how youth sexters are constructed as sexually self-exploiting in Canadian legal discourses, which constructs young people (particularly girls) who create or share nude or sexually explicit images as unable to actively consent to these acts. What is critical in Karaian's exploration is the detailed mapping of how the legal discourse is connected to other neo-liberal right-wing reform in a constellation of discourses that undermine capacity to see girls as making legitimate choices or having complex sexual desires. Thus Karaian's chapter raises a whole set of important questions about what consent, exploitation and objectification mean in contemporary cultural contexts of new digital technology.

Where Karaian focuses on how girls' agency is reduced in relation to dominant sexting discourses, in Chapter 22 Laura Harvey and Jessica Ringrose seek to address the dominant constructions of masculinity and sexting. Drawing on the experience of young people from a qualitative research study in London, UK, they address the dominant international narrative of boy sexters as sexual perpetrators who pass around images to gain social currency. They situate these new media practices within a politics of recognition in performing forms of high-status masculinities within specific communities of practice, including local cultures of physical violence, ethnic conflict and school surveillance. Thus, by taking account of the complexities and nuances derived from the lived experiences of boys from their qualitative research project, the chapter serves as an important disruption of the many simplistic and common-sense notions about teen boys' sexuality in contexts of new digital technologies.

Taken together, therefore, the chapters in this section move beyond any simplistic media effects perspectives, and challenge reductive concerns about young people as the audience of risky sexual media content, by documenting what young people are actively doing to manage, create and in some cases trouble and transform their own digital media consumption and production.

What next for the field of children's sexuality studies in the social sciences?

We wish to conclude this introduction by noting what an honour it has been to work with some amazing childhood sexuality researchers in bringing together this timely collection. Their research consistently troubles our taken-for-granted ideas about children, sexuality and sexualization, offering new ways to make sense of children's sexual cultures across some complex political, social and cultural terrains. We have learned so much from each chapter and our own research practices about what it means to be doing sexuality research with children/on childhood, and at a time of ubiquitous youth sex panics and high-profile sexual abuse scandals. While problematic in their effects, the ways in which discourses of sexualization weave and weft with the rise and rise of queer and feminist activism seems to have created small spaces for research scholarship to make some inroads, both in the academy and beyond. Engaging directly and critically with policy and practice, however, is never straightforward or without risk. Rather, these processes are fraught, messy and sometimes dangerous (see Phipps, 2014), yet nonetheless vital. Creating ways to shift and resituate key research messages that flatten out complex intersectional power relations or braving the backlash when we endeavour to introduce notions of sexual pleasure, sexual rights or sexual citizenship is critical to the future of how critical childhood sexuality scholarship makes and creates impact.

Before we draw this introduction to a close, we would like to engage further with the problematics and challenges that this volume has raised for us, both theoretically and substantively and also methodologically. What follows are a series of questions that we might want to consider in our current and future practices when researching young sexualities. For us, each of these areas are ripe for how they might envision some of the ways in which the field of childhood sexuality research in the social sciences might twist, turn and evolve:

- <list>
- What are the challenges of working within and beyond the social sciences for researching children, childhood and sexualities?
- How do the specificities of sociopolitical and cultural histories mediate how we come to understand and research young sexualities?
- How might we hold on to the unknown as children be and become sexual?
- What are the risks and affordances of post-developmental and non-linear approaches to researching children's sexual subjectivities?
- How might post-queer and posthuman approaches unsettle what counts as sex and sexuality?

- Which theoretical approaches enable researchers to better understand the contemporary and ever-changing landscape of digital sexual practices?
- How might inventive and creative methodologies enable us to explore what else childhood sexuality research can be and become?
- How might we create transformative, safe spaces for radical and critical sexuality pedagogy and practice?
- How can our research practices dovetail with our activisms and engagements with policy processes in ways that are sustainable and ethically viable?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for involving children and young people more directly in research, activism, practice and policy formation?

Finally, we thank all the contributors once again and hope that this book might inspire the next generation of childhood sexuality scholars to continue to ask questions that challenge and subvert what we think we know about children, childhood and sexuality, and collaborate on research projects which foreground children's own sexual experiences in all their diversity and complexity.

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