



LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

“Why Internet Doesn't Necessarily Matter”: Constructing Sexual Citizenship through Pornographic Literacies

Author(s): Despina Chronaki

Source: *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Sexuality, politics and digital media infrastructures: Challenges for diversity (2019), pp. 61-74

Published by: Leuven University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.11116/digest.6.2.4>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.11116/digest.6.2.4?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Leuven University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*

“Why Internet Doesn’t Necessarily Matter”: Constructing Sexual Citizenship through Pornographic Literacies

Despina Chronaki

Abstract

Twenty years after their broad diffusion in most Western countries, digital technologies are still considered a media space that holds risks for users and primarily young users. Experiences with content considered potentially harmful such as mediated sexual content or sexting falls within a context of public and academic concerns but also within a context of moral panics about the ethical deprivation and loss of childhood. In this article I revisit data from a qualitative project undertaken between 2010–2012 addressing young people’s accounts of experiences with mediated sexual content. I attempt to provide a broader analytical framework for young people’s constructions of sexuality and mediated sexual content, one that acknowledges their agency to talk and negotiate the topic in social, cultural and ethical terms. My objective is to demonstrate that young people’s constructions of sexuality through accounts of mediated sexual content contribute through a development of sets of porn literacies to further negotiations of sexual citizenship.

Keywords

Youth, Sexuality, Media Literacies, Moral Panic, Sexual Citizenship

Assumptions about young people’s experiences with digital media include concerns about their potential exposure to sexual or sexualised content on a regular basis. Moral panics about how much children are exposed to mediated sexual content, to sexualised representations of the body, or how much they possibly engage with sexting, are fuelling policy, public discourses and effects-laden academic accounts. Such concerns draw upon assumptions about the lost innocence or death of childhood (Postman, 1992), about the need to ensure that children are ‘safe online’ and

protected from the corruptive force of digital media and not least media in general; in effect to be kept safe from the very *perversity* of online technologies (Chronaki, 2014). The coverage by sensationalist news media in most Western countries reveals an attempt to teach children about appropriate, thus self-governing forms of sexual expression. Allowing children to reflect critically upon well-established heteronormative or homonormative views, say via experiences with diverse types of knowledge about sex (i.e. sexual content, pornography, sexting, TV series, movies or music videos) is usually seen with fear and concern. In fact, it is seen as a risk to the development of a 'healthy sexuality'. An illustrative example is the recent title of Evening Edinburg News "*Sexting among Edinburg school children to blame for rise in crime*" (Shipley, 2019); as a typical example of discourses of moral anxieties, this article illustrates how children are denied any agency in engaging with sexting as a form of literacy, a form of sexual expression or sexual development. Instead, sexting is framed as dangerous and even criminal (e.g. teenage sexting is often seen as a form child pornography) and it is framed as how young people can stay safe from the corruptive nature of sexting. Other examples within the public discourse that concern the use of pornography or the sexualized products targeted at children (see Buckingham et al., 2009) move along the same lines, highlighting the potentially harmful nature of children's engagement with such practices. Young people's sexual citizenship and literacy are not seriously considered, neither within the mainstream academic discourse on media effects, nor within the public discourse. Furthermore, school curricula and most research about sexual education does not engage with any form of sexual information related to sexting, sexual content or other popular form of sexual expression (see Masanet & Buckingham, 2015).

In this article I discuss young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content through the perspective of literacy and citizenship, arguing that researchers as well as policy makers should be looking more extensively at how sexual knowledge is articulated, negotiated and used outside of the hegemonic, polarized frameworks of 'online versus offline' and 'risk versus safety'. In what follows I discuss existing literature on children's experiences with sexual content from the perspective of three paradigms, namely the media effects paradigm, the risk communication paradigm and the cultural studies approach. Next, I demonstrate how a number of researchers consider (young) people's engagement with sexuality as a claim to literacy and citizenship; within this analytical perspective I discuss data derived from my doctoral research project on young adults' constructions of sexual content during childhood and teenage life.

Mediated sexual content as an (online) risk

Most research on children and digital culture focuses on a rather polarised either/or debate, revolving around the extent to which the Internet might pose risks an harms to children, as well as the potential effects that exposure to such risks might have. Mainstream media effects research draws on psychological and psychoanalytical

frameworks, looking for cognitive, developmental or attitudinal effects of sexual content on children. Peter and Valkenburg (2007; 2008), for instance, have been concerned with whether online sexual content has an effect on children's attitudes on women, sex or relationships. Flood's (2007; 2009) work in Australia is concerned with the alleged harms that exposure to pornography might have on children, while Wolak, Mitchel and Finkelhor (2003; 2007) in the US follow a more policy-driven approach, looking at children's unwanted experiences with sex online. As cultural studies scholars have widely discussed, effects research appears to have a number of epistemological and methodological problems, including problems in assumptions about research. One problem concerns a monolithic attachment to psychological approaches to study childhood. They do not seem to consider recent advances in other epistemological paradigms, like the sociology of childhood, cultural studies or porn studies (e.g. Tsaliki & Chronaki, forthcoming). Another limitation concerns the methodological design of such studies. In most cases, this design includes quantitative research tools that do not offer participants a space for expression in their own words (e.g. Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). Moreover, given that in many instances research questions and assumptions about childhood, digital media or sexuality fall into predetermined categories that are largely defined by research funders or the approaches followed, there is no space for researchers to discuss their findings within a social, cultural or broadly political context (Tsaliki, 2016). The more robust and epistemologically broader 'communication risk' approach has shaped, for instance, the research activity of the EU Kids Online Network, a thematic network of 33 countries studying children experiences online since 2007. Although within this approach children 'have a voice' to a greater extent than in media effects research (Olafsson et al., 2013: p. 23), the predetermined categories of 'risk versus opportunity' hamper the possibility for children to formulate more agentic responses. Theoretically, the work of this paradigm draws upon different approaches to childhood and media, including media studies, cultural studies, sociology of childhood, and media education studies. Nevertheless, researchers' predisposition with risk and safety appear to create a polarised, policy-oriented discourse around childhood and the media. The network has conducted original and robust empirical research between 2009 and 2012 with children in 21 European countries (including Australia). Between 2009 and 2011, 1000 children and their parents have been interviewed, questioned about their online practices, through a fully structured questionnaire in each of the 21 countries participating at the EU Kids Online II project (Livingstone et al., 2011). In 2012, nine of the participating European countries¹ collected qualitative data on children's understanding of risk and harm (Smahel & Wright, 2014). They looked at:

what children perceive as being potentially negative or problematic while using the internet, what risks children are aware of when using

¹ Participating countries included: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

the internet, what consequences online negative experiences might have, how children react to negative experiences, what children do to avoid or prevent these problematic experiences, and why children perceive certain situations as negative. (Ibid., p. 8)

Given the policy-making nature of the research, but also its nature as an EU-funded project, it comes as no surprise that sexual content, sexting or any access to sexual information beyond the legitimate sources of sexual education were classified as 'risky' and potentially 'harmful' experiences (Hasebrink et al., 2009).

Within the perspective of "communication risk" research, the agentic child is merely the well-informed and self-regulated individual that is aware of what the risks are and how to avoid them. Agency does not seem to accord with children's need of sexual expression, or a desire to stand as legitimate negotiators of sexual/intimate citizenship within the public space (see Tsaliki et al., 2014). In classifying children's experiences online as either a 'risk' or an 'opportunity' (e.g. Hasebrink et al., 2009) and in framing the topic within a context of digital rights (Stoilova et al., 2016) implies a policy-driven rather than a child-centred approach. Nevertheless, the systematic approach to data and the methodologically robust and innovative ways of data collection within the EU Kids Online Projects offer researchers from different perspectives representative and big data sets of significant epistemological value to work with.

Young people's constructions of mediated sexual content from a cultural studies perspective

A third paradigmatic approach engages with a broader contextualisation of children's sexuality in historical terms and argues that if researchers wish to address public and policy agendas more effectively, they need to consider the cultural studies approach as well. Cultural studies scholars such as Buckingham and Bragg (2004), Egan and Hawkes (2010), Jackson (1982), Hunt (2009) and Tsaliki (2015; 2016) conceptualise children's experiences with sexual content within the context of "eighteenth and nineteenth century anxieties about childhood that emerged and keep evolving hand in hand with anxieties and concerns about sexuality" (Tsaliki & Chronaki, forthcoming).

It is not a coincidence that most studies within this approach do not necessarily focus on digital culture. Rather, researchers of this tradition underscore the need to talk more broadly about children's sexuality and their accounts of sex and relationships, and aptly argue that this begs for a conceptualization of the topic within historical, cultural and political developments in late modernity (Tsaliki, 2016). For example, Allen (2006) discusses teenage boys' critical reflections on pornography and their constructions of such content within the context of sex education. Along similar lines, Bale (2012) discusses pornography as a peripheral issue in young people's discussions of sexualised media and its relationship to sexual health, drawing on sociological theories of sexuality and risk. Mulholland (2013) applies a constructionist approach to young people's accounts of discourses of 'pornification', and

the ways in which they reflect upon terms such as the 'normal', the 'perverse' and the 'illicit'. From a much broader perspective, Tsaliki (2016) offers a historical and cultural conceptualization of sexuality through an exploration of girls' discursive constructions of sexualisation in digital contexts, focusing mostly on how taste, agency and literacy are articulated at the level of the political and the ethical. Last but not least, Berg (2007) explores the ethical and cultural dimensions of girls' accounts of their bodily reactions to pornography through a social constructionist approach.

Other important contributions like Attwood, Smith and Barker's (2018) work, Scarcelli's (2015) study and Fox and Bale's (2018) materialist study draw on feminist and post-feminist approaches to understand young people's self-explorations with pornography.

What most of the aforementioned studies share is an understanding of childhood and sexuality beyond the context of media. Taking into account the historical and cultural dimensions in which childhood and young people's sexuality is understood, allows researchers to move towards a more effective and holistic approach to children and young people's negotiations of sexual content in terms of agency and intimate and sexual citizenship. In effect, the kind of data analysis I will shortly engage with draws upon a social constructionist, poststructuralist, postfeminist perspective, one that offers an analytical framework to think more fully about the social category of childhood within a Western cultural context.

Research methodology

In this article I revisit data gathered between 2010 and 2012 for a doctoral research study on the topic of young adults' constructions of experiences with mediated sexual content during childhood and teenage life (Chronaki, 2013). Thirty interviews have been conducted with young people between 18–22 years old from Denmark, Greece and the UK.² They were asked about their experiences with content they define as 'sexual' as well as how they articulate the sexual self. Precisely because this study does not start from an interest into digital culture only, it welcomes participants' constructions of sexuality and of the sexual self in a media-free context. Situated within cultural studies and informed by constructionist, poststructuralist and post-feminist approaches to childhood but also to sexuality, this study explores approaches young people's constructions of sexual content through ethical, political and cosmopolitan discourses. In this context, the work of Foucault (1978) on self-governmentality and the work of Rose (1990) that draws upon the same context to discuss governing practices of the self in different historical and social contexts, may prove fruitful and valuable for the kind of analysis I engage with.

Within such an epistemological framework I employ analytical strategies that prioritise the discursive ways participants use to shape themselves as sexual agents and to reflect upon issues related to sexuality (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014). To make sense

² The participants' names are anonymized. Some quotes in this article are translated.

of these strategies, I rely on thematic and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is used to map their experiences with sexual content. Discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) is used to reveal the discourses people employ in talking about a topic and the identity work they do in this process. For the purpose of this article, I only use a small sample of responses that came out of the dataset. I consider this sample illustrative to demonstrate a different reading of young people's constructions of sexual content online. I argue that such experiences should be seen in a larger socio-historical perspective where (digital) media may be seen as cultural and social knowledge and civic participation and not just a vehicle of risk and harm.

Developing sexual citizenship in the context of porn literacies

I aim to discuss young people's experiences with mediated sexual content to formulate three arguments that – as equally argued by other cultural studies scholars – have not received much attention yet. First, when talking about sexual content (e.g. pornography, sexting, or sexualised representations of the body), young people do not necessarily talk about the Internet. Jonas (19, DK) for example explains how he begun engaging with sexual knowledge via short stories:

Well, yeah, but that was more the novels or the short stories, I definitely used it to learn something about sex [...] most of the things that I have learned, I've learned them from girls I have had, so even though I had an idea I didn't want to test it because I was still very critical about the information given to me.

Although many effects and risk communication scholars argue that children first access sexual knowledge online (e.g. Horvath et al., 2013) or via friends who have seen something online, it seems that this is not the case for everyone. In the same context Elisabeth (19, DK) argues that erotic short stories offer narratives and ideas for role playing and other fantasy-related practices when it comes to sex:

Short stories, I think they sometimes give you an idea or role play or something like that. And that I think is funny sometimes. When I find someone I've been with for a longer time, [...] two months or so [...] it's fun, this role play. And to be someone else that maybe is more open for other things than your regular self would be.

Erotica is assumed to have potential effects on its audiences (see Perse, 1994). However, it is nonetheless a different source of knowledge and resource of sexual repertoires than the Internet. In fact, both Jonas and Elisabeth are assuming a critical position towards the banality of the internet when it comes to sexual content, a similar argument made by Ellie (17, UK):

Ellie: *You know what it is, if that makes sense, without actually watching, I know what it is, so I know I 'm not curious to see at all. Maybe in the future I will be, but currently no.*

Researcher: *And why do you think you are not even curious to explore it?*

Ellie: *I think it's because I've no interest in watching other people have sex or doing, performing oral sex and things, I 'm just like 'yeah ok it's their body, it's not of interest to me.*

Apart from the ethical judgement on the explicitness of representations of sexual content, as well as showing discomfort with sex moving from private to public, Ellie takes a political position towards sexuality. She shows knowledge on sexual practices but takes a political position regarding people's agency to do with their body as they wish (actors in this particular case). Again, this point is not related to the explicitness of the internet, or its perversity, but with how the practice itself (i.e. sex, sex in public) is negotiated at the social and cultural level.

What I consider significant to stress at this point is that in talking about sexual content, diverse sets of knowledge intersect and are projected in the process of building either a desired self (both for the researcher who is the participant's audience at the time of the interview and for someone's self in terms of self-governmentality) or the ethical well-regulated individual. In this process, gender performance, ethical discourses, class judgements arise as a reflection of social and cultural literacy (Chronaki, 2014), which guarantees someone's agency to stand as a legitimate participant in the public discourse on sexuality. When this position is claimed by young people, then we can safely argue that it is a claim to participate in adult's negotiations of sexuality and of young people's sexuality in particular (see Albury's (2017) discussion about children's sexual rights in mediated spaces in this respect).

Eva: *Yes I think in my case it begun as a consideration, then I linked that to myself, that I grow up that I'm gonna have period, I mean I saw porn and I knew pretty much what was happening even before I had period.*

Researcher: *Oh, okay.*

Eva: *this was also a motive to understand, meaning about what I should understand about myself because in a while I would get involved in that phase too, so I had to understand why I would get in that phase, what is happening with this part of my life. (Eva, 22, EL)*

Eva is one of the few participants who positioned towards sexual content via a personal sexual trajectory. In deploying knowledge about the social and cultural constructions of female sexuality, Eva (22, EL) positioned openly towards pornography and female sexual satisfaction:

And this I think happens because we are not so comfortable with it. I mean, I believe that women think a bit in terms of morality too, that masturbation “is not for me” or “what, by myself?”, or “what am I? Desperate?”. As if feeling sexually aroused is something bad. [They think] that you shouldn’t be thought of as uncontrollable, that, I don’t know, that you have to control your sexual instinct.

Eva worked a lot on reflecting critically upon well-established constructions of female sexuality, including female sexual arousal and masturbation over sexual content. It was of particular significance to her to deconstruct the ethical packaging of female sexuality, a long-standing perception of the 18th century when, according to thinkers like Foucault (2012), the discursivity of sex as something private and reproductive, excluded women’s sexual satisfaction as a form of hysteria. And more importantly, this self-reflection was part of the identity work she did to rationalize what was happening to her and to define herself as a person with sexual agency. However, according to other participants, masturbation is by default a problematic practice, denoting someone as socially excluded and sexually problematic:

It’s just for basic wanking, you can’t put it differently, it’s for lonely people who can’t get sex really, it gives them pleasure (John, 18, UK)

The stereotypical representation of the sleazy, lonely and therefore socially deprived, isolated and problematic individual (see the critique of McKee et al., 2008 on this matter) appears in John’s account of what it means to watch sexual content for sexual pleasure. John and other participants draw a lot upon the differences and the significance of having real sex or having a relationship instead of watching ‘porn’, which several respondents consider practices of people who have are assumed to have a rather pathetic status in one’s life. As already stressed, this stereotypical perception is a reflection of a mainstream argument appearing in media effects discourse about the fear of social isolation from watching pornography (Voder et al., 2005). In any case, both perceptions about masturbation as they appear through this dataset, offer an ethical positioning towards sexuality, but also a demonstration of an ethical social standing; one is ‘normal’ when they have a boyfriend/girlfriend; girls are not supposed to be sexually aroused and masturbate.

My second argument concerns the presence of a third kind of knowledge of literacy, namely pornographic literacy. The respondents demonstrate to have a conceptual knowledge of the conventions of the pornographic genre, in terms of aesthetics, culture and ethics. In fact, as Buckingham & Chronaki (2014, p. 314) state:

young people’s interpretations of pornography (and sexuality), and their judgements about it, entail several kinds of knowledge or literacy. There are forms of socio-cultural literacy that help to define what is sexual in

the first place, what counts as an appropriate form of sexuality and what constitutes an appropriate sexual relationship.

The participants in this study appear to have engaged with such literacy practices to build a more concrete profile of intimate citizenship:

The first time is always difficult because you actually don't know what to do, so yeah, kind of you can learn some things from porn but all these things that they do you can't do them the first time. (Rasmus, 18, DK)

Most of the participants have stressed the unrealistic nature of sexual content, albeit admitting that it offers some sort of information for those who have not had sex before or to those who want to spice up their sex lives. Apart from being able to define which parts of the content are different from real life and why, they use this knowledge of the conventions of the pornographic genre to elaborate further on how it could serve as sex education:

I think, the first experiences with pornographic content is purely to get a meaning, WHAT they are doing at the time. It's a lot about the technique and I think this was the thing not just for me but for all of us. What's really happening and how, because you know you're getting ready for later on. (Eva, 22, EL)

Allen (2006) discussed male teenagers' accounts of pornography as a form of sex education and their critical reflections on the content as potential material of the sex education at school. Her objective was not so much to open the public debate about what or how children should be taught about sex at school. Rather, she attempted to broaden the academic and policy discussion around young people's agency to talk about how they learn about sex and how they negotiate gender identity when it comes to becoming sexual.

Similarly, young people know that different contexts (e.g. school, family) imply different modalities to talk about sex. In the fragment below, participant Elisabeth shares her experience on talking about sex with her parents:

Elisabeth: *I have talked about it with my parents when I was younger, when we had that, 'obviously we need to talk to you before you get to bed with anybody', a talk about the flower and the bee, what you call it, (laughs) and everything they taught me I learnt in this sex education week we had at school. It's just to, it's just maybe for my parents to have confidence in my knowledge and that I am prepared to do it.*

Researcher: *What's their opinion about porn? Is it positive negative?*

Elisabeth: *I think it is neutral positive, I don't think they are negative about it because they have porn themselves so, so, so, yeah. [laughs]. But they have porn videos themselves so, maybe they talked about, before, about spicing up the sexual life. So, when it's for education and learning and not to rush, and just for fun, they are okay.* (Elisabeth, 19, DK)

The otherwise awkward realization that one's parents are actually having sex or even using sexual content themselves is being negotiated by Elisabeth as part of how she positions herself towards sexual content as a form of sex education. She differentiates between the formal sources of sex education (e.g. school and family) and sexual content as something fun and enjoyable, something reiterated and legitimized further by her own parents. It demonstrates that Elisabeth and her parents are on par when it comes to talking about sex. In fact, it brings into question assumptions about childhood innocence, crystallized in the iconic, desirable romantic image of 'childhood' (Fischel, 2013).

Finally, my third argument is that in talking about sexual content and sexuality more broadly, young people are interested not just in demonstrating how self-regulated they are in ethical or other ways, but they also position themselves within the public debate on sexuality. Plummer (1995) has provided us with the key concept of intimate citizenship as:

... new emerging rights and responsibilities come to the forefront in making decisions about controlling and accessing such intimate self-representations, but also making choices about how to give shape to eroticisms, sexual and gender identities in these specific mediated places (Ibid., p. 151)

In this respect, regulatory practices and ethical, feminist or cultural judgements take the form of defining one's space of identity formation and intimate and sexual citizenship. See for example George (17, UK) and his positioning as a 'healthy' heterosexual man towards sexual content:

Basically, you get a girlfriend and that's the only way to make it pleasurable, having sex with your girlfriend. Not watching it on the Internet.

Besides emphasizing his performance as a heterosexual male, his discourse allows to see his negotiation of intimate and sexual citizenship:

Sex is a natural thing, porn is not so much natural; basically it's better going out with a girl and having natural sex, than watching it on the Internet, because it doesn't prove that you're having sex on the screen, is just better to go off with a girl and have sex, because at least you've

proven you had sex, with a proper girl, face to face, instead of just watching it on screen.

This self-governance allows George to engage with an almost political definition of what it means to be sexually active, and at the same time fulfil the expectations within the context of the socially acceptable politics of sexuality. This boundary setting appears elsewhere in the accounts I collected, such as in Trine's (18, DK). She hates that "more and more people are getting breast augmentations and breast implants" and argues that the porn industry is partly to blame. By stressing that natural bodies are already beautiful, she articulates her own understanding of sexiness, albeit through a reflection of the assumed effect of porn representations on the rise of aesthetic surgeries. No matter the nature of the information here, Trine engages with feminism, in effect making a political statement through which she articulates her position on female sexuality, femininity and sexiness. This agentic claim to citizenship cannot go unnoticed in a context where knowledge (e.g. rise in breast implants) is combined with a political statement, being the assumed unnaturalness of modifying bodies.

In another context, the social and cultural dynamics of one's upbringing play a role in how young adults position themselves in ethical ways:

My parents are Christian and they were like, brought up in a relatively kind of, formal Christian environment; [...] they got married when they were quite young, they met when they were 15, married at 18 and didn't have sex until they were married. And so it's kind of the that you don't have sex before marriage, and it's like something between married people, so to have it popping up on your computer is like weird. (Leah, 20, UK)

Leah and a couple of other participants with Catholic upbringing have spent much time relating the discussion about sexual content and in effect sexuality to their respective cultural contexts. Although, positioning via a more cosmopolitan perspective, one that does not impose a Catholic perception about sex and female sexuality, Leah put her engagement with sexuality (and not with sexual content necessarily) in the cultural context of her Catholic upbringing. This is not a surprise, given our well-established understanding of sex overall, through its 18th century constructions within the context of Catholic confession (Foucault, 2012) and the 19th century constructions in the Protestant context of purification (Tsaliki, 2016).

To sum up, this brief analysis has been an attempt to offer a different conceptualisation of young people's constructions of sexual content via discourses about literacy and citizenship. In demonstrating that in many instances young people's knowledge of sexuality does not necessarily go through digital media, I aimed to illustrate that their experiences with sexual content include identity work. They make claims that legitimate them as participants in an adults' dialogue on childhood sexuality. Moreover, my findings highlight the need to turn to a more contextualized

approach to childhood and sexuality than the often polarising conceptualisations that understand the Internet as a corruptive force for youth's sexualities.

Conclusions

This article aimed to demonstrate the importance of shifting the interest towards a different understanding of young people's experiences with mediated sexual content. I intended to address some significant matters that concern their lives as sexual citizens. First, data shows that young people are interested in sharing their sexual stories or social and cultural knowledge about sexuality in a lot more depth than researchers usually ask them too. Moreover, they share detailed accounts of sexuality that go beyond their experiences with online sexual content by means of limited categories. Not least, they demonstrate a willingness to position themselves in ethical discourses on sex and sexual content and co-construct the discourses that shape contemporary politics of sexuality.

In this context they assume various subject positions that allow them to engage with political matters (e.g. articulating feminist arguments), cultural matters (e.g. regarding aesthetics and art) or class matters (e.g. perceptions and views about sexuality as a matter of upbringing). Without wanting to over-celebrate young people's sexual agency, I merely stress a fact that cannot go unnoticed: young people appear to be well-informed about the conventions and perceptions of sexual content and have strong opinions about sex, sexualities and relationships in general. As many cultural studies scholars have argued so far, acknowledging their agency and the claims to citizenship they make, means acknowledging what they are willing to share as a result of certain cultural, social and broader political trajectories that might bring adults in uncomfortable positions. Nevertheless, acknowledging that, on the one side, the way 'adults' have thought about childhood and young people is a historical construction and, on the other, that young people have divergent yet rich understandings of sex and sexuality, will allow future research to construct a more effective analytical and policy framework to approach young people and sexuality.

References

- Albury, K. (2017). 'Just because it's public doesn't mean it's any of your business: Adults' and children's sexual rights in digitally mediated spaces. *New Media & Society*, 19(5), 713–725.
- Allen, L., (2006). Looking at the real thing: Young men, pornography, and sexuality Education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 27(1), 69–83.
- Attwood, F., Smith, C. & Barker, M. (2018). 'I'm just curious and still exploring myself': Young people and pornography. *New media and Society*, 20(10), 3738–3759.
- Bale, C. (2012). *Exploring young people's perceptions of the impact of sexualized media on their sexual health: A qualitative study*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Sheffield.
- Berg, L., (2007). Turned on by pornography: Still a respectable girl? In: S.V. Knudsen, L. Löfgren-Mårtenson & S.-A. Månsson (Eds.) *Generation P? Youth, gender and pornography* (pp. 293–307). Copenhagen: Danish School of Education Press.

- Buckingham, D. and Bragg, S. (2004). *Young people, sex and the media: The facts of life*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Buckingham, D., R. Willett, S. Bragg, and R. Russell (2009). Sexualized Goods Aimed at Children, Final report. *Research Conducted for the Scottish Parliament, June-December 2009*. Retrieved from: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/equal/reports-10/eor10-02.htm#2>
- Buckingham, D. & Chronaki, D. (2014). Saving the Children? Pornography, Childhood and the Internet. In S. Wagg & J. Pilcher (Eds.) *Thatchers' Grandchildren* (pp. 301-317). Basing-stoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chronaki, D. (2013). Young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content during childhood and teenage life. *The Communication Review* 16(1-2): 61-9.
- Chronaki, D. (2014). *Young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content during childhood and teenage life* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/2134/15928/3/Thesis-2014-Chronaki.pdf>
- Egan, D. & Hawkes, G.L. (2010). *Theorizing the sexual child in modernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fischel, J. (2016). Pornographic protections? Itineraries of Childhood Innocence. *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 12(2): 206-220.
- Flood, M. (2007). Exposure to Pornography among youth in Australia. *Journal of Sociology* 43(1), 45-60.
- Flood, M. (2009). The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. *Child Abuse Review* 18(6), 384-400.
- Foucault, M. (2012). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 3: The care of the self*. New York: Vintage.
- Fox, N. & Bale, C. (2018). Bodies, pornography and the circumscription of sexuality: A new materialist study of young people's sexual practices. *Sexualities*, 21(3): 393-409.
- Hasebrink, U., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Ólafsson, K. (2009). *Comparing children's online opportunities and risks across Europe: cross-national comparisons for EU Kids Online, 2nd edition*. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24368/1/D3.2_Report-Cross_national_comparisons-2nd-edition.pdf
- Horvath, M., Alys L. & Massey, K. et al. (2013). *Basically porn is everywhere*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner. Retrieved from https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Basically_-_Porn_is_everywhere_-_The_Appendices.pdf
- Hunt, P. (2009). Children's literature and childhood. In M.J. Kehily (Ed.), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies* (pp. 50-69). Maidenhead: Open University Press-McGraw-Hill.
- Jackson, S. (1982). *Childhood and sexuality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., Ólafsson, K. & Haddon, L. (2014). *Children's online risks and opportunities: Comparative findings from EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile*. Retrieved from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/60513/>
- Masanet, M-J. & Buckingham, D. (2015). Advice on life? Online fan forums as a space from peer-to-peer sex and relationships education. *Sex Education*, 15(5): 486-499.
- McKee, A., Albury, K. and Lumby, C. (2008). *The porn report*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. London: Sage.
- Mitchell, K., Finkelhor, D., Wolak, J. (2003). Exposure of youth to unwanted sexual material on the internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention. *Youth Society* 34(3), 330-358.
- Mulholland, M. (2013). *Young people and pornography: Negotiation and pornification*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Haddon, L. (2013). *Children's use of online technologies in Europe. A review of the European evidence base*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.

- Rose, N. (1990). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*. London: Taylor & Francis/Routledge.
- Perse, E. M. (1994). Uses of erotica and acceptance of rape myths. *Communication Research*, 21(4), 488–515.
- Peter, J. and Valkenburg, P. M. (2007). Adolescents' exposure to a sexualized media environment and their notions of women as sex objects. *Sex Roles* 56(5–6), 381–395.
- Peter, J. and Valkenburg, P. M. (2008). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material, sexual uncertainty, and attitudes toward uncommitted sexual exploration: Is There a Link? *Communication Research* 35(5), 579–60.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Postman, N. (2011). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*. Vintage.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London: Sage
- Scarcelli, M. (2015). 'It's disgusting, but...': adolescent girls' relationship to internet pornography as gender performance. *Porn Studies*, 2(2–3): 237–249.
- Shipley, A. (2019). Sexting among Edinburgh school children to blame for rise in crime. *Evening Edinburgh News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/crime/sexting-among-edinburgh-schoolchildren-blamed-for-rise-in-crime-1-4990132>
- Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2016). Global Kids Online: Researching children's rights globally in the digital age. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 6(4): 455–466.
- Tsaliki, L. (2015). Popular culture and moral panics about 'children at risk': revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate. *Sex Education*, 15(5):500–514.
- Tsaliki, L. (2016). *Children and the politics of sexuality: The Sexualization of children debate revisited*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsaliki, L. & Chronaki, D. (forthcoming). Children's sexuality in the context of digital media: Sexualisation, sexting and experiences with sexual content in research perspective. In D. Holloway, L. Haddon & L. Green (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children*, London: Routledge.
- Yoder, V. C., Viridin, T. B., & Amin, K. (2005). Internet pornography and loneliness: An association? *Sexual addiction & compulsivity*, 12(1), 19–44.
- Wolak, J., Mitchell, K. and Finkelhor, D. (2007). Unwanted and wanted exposure to online pornography in a national sample of youth internet users. *Pediatrics*, 119(2), 247–258.

About the author

Despina Chronaki (PhD) is an adjunct lecturer at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Hellenic Open University. Her research focuses on audiences of popular culture, media ethics, porn studies, sexuality and children's experiences with media. Most of her publications focus on audiences' constructions of popular culture, including children's experiences as audiences of sexual content, media literacy and ethics. Since 2007 she is collaborating with media scholars from around the world in a number of EU-funded European, National (Greek) and International projects and has been invited to present her work in domestic, European and International conferences and meetings (<https://en-uoa-gr.academia.edu/DespinaChronaki> for a detailed record).