

Children & the Politics of Sexuality

The Sexualization Of
Children Debate Revisited

LIZA TSALIKI



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For Antonis, who I cherish deeply and share a wonderful life with

For Eva, my beautiful daughter, who got everything started

For my beloved Dad (1924–2013) who is greatly missed

For my Mom, a proud and strong woman, who never gives up

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Introduction

This book comes as a result of a long gestation period. Watching my daughter play at dressing up online ‘scary vampire girls’ in 2011, I became intrigued by the visual narratives and interpretative repertoires she, and her friends, had to offer about the sartorial and make-up choices for their vampire models. It was the ambiguity afforded in the project of selfhood—what happens once young children make the transition from childhood to tweendom/pre-adolescence—and the identity play at work that caught my attention and paved the way towards this book.

For I see this as a personal journey in the understanding of children’s interactions with, and the significations of everyday culture, as well as of their practices of popular culture. It was something that was triggered by the need to better contextualize my daughter’s online make-over practices, and soon developed into something bigger, enveloping an intricate array of issues that bring together popular culture, consumption, sexuality, selfhood and childhood. While trying to give my daughter ‘holistic’ answers to her queries about fashion, taste, stars, sexuality, I kept pushing myself to go beyond the dominant—and fashionable—preconceptions about ‘the risks of childhood’ which I believe I had internalized myself at some point in time. The more I read, preparing for this book, the clearer became the way the entire debate about the sexualization of childhood is socially constructed, and that is the approach I have adopted throughout the book. In so doing, I found myself revisiting previous work of mine, related to the study of children and pornography, and repositioning myself

towards it in a way that reflects the social construction of childhood and sexuality. The ambiguity that surrounds age identity boundaries for children—girls especially—as seen, for example, in their styling, popular icons and overall media representations, ‘create a cultural space for their ensuing incessant sexualization, regardless of whether emphasizing sexuality is an intended outcome’ (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 223). Media concern and the moral turpitude that accompanies (female) sexuality trickle down and feed the public debate about the sexualization of young pre-adolescent (tween) girls. However, as the tween girl seems to:

encode anticipatory statuses and identities to be acted out in the present, while preparing the ground for entry into a particular articulation of heterosexual female culture [...] middle girlhood has increasingly become a favoured political site for the understanding of femininity, for discourses about vulnerability and ‘lost childhoods’ and for locating some of the evils of the consumer marketplace, all along renaturalizing and remoralizing middle childhood. (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 223)

In this context, the current burgeoning of the ‘sexualization of culture’ can be seen as the proliferation of control and surveillance mechanisms regarding what is considered as ‘normal’ and ‘socially acceptable’ behaviour and sexuality for young children, in the same way that nineteenth-century ‘sexology’ has been seen as a classification to control populations (Burr 1995, 67). Such norms of acceptability then become internalized by young children who discipline themselves in order to adhere to prevailing ideals of ‘normality’ and ‘morality’. Hence, sexualization and its effects, as discussed by numerous experts, become some kind of ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault 1979) through which children control themselves. In fact, Rose (1989/1999), who I discuss later on in this book, following Foucault, has presented a compelling argument about how psychology (littered with tests measuring masculinity, femininity, IQ, child development, attitudes, etc.) constitutes the production of a body of knowledge which is used to regulate people while making it appear as though it is in their interest, and carrying the stamp of ‘science’ all the while. Throughout this book, I try to uncover the variety of factors and conditions that allowed the sexualization discourse to emerge and become so powerful today. Through such ‘an archaeology of knowledge’ (Foucault 1972), it is possible to make sense of how current ‘truths’ have come to be and are maintained, and what power relations are carried by them (Burr 1995, 166).

A major role in this contextualization is played by the media, which never misses an opportunity to report, and frame as such, incidents of an overtly sexualizing culture, for example the media furor about Miley Cyrus's appearance on MTV's Video Music Awards (VMAs) 2015. The Parents Television Council (PTC)—an influential US lobby 'advocating responsible entertainment', with a mission 'to protect children and families from graphic sex, violence and profanity in the media, because of their proven long-term harmful effects'¹—was quick to denounce the awards ceremony. The PTC criticized MTV, asserting that it wants to 'stir up controversy without regard to its impact on an entertainment environment that is increasingly toxic for children'.² Commenting on Miley's 'wardrobe malfunction', after an accidental glimpse of her nipple backstage that was caught on camera, the PTC condemned the pop star, and MTV, as, instead of demonstrating 'her considerable talent as a performer [Miley chose to] rely on her own sexuality to entertain the audience'. The statement concluded: 'MTV and Cyrus could both be forces for something positive, but tonight's VMA partners relied on exposing millions of children to graphic, inappropriate and far-too-frequently offensive content.' The PTC also tweeted about the 'blatant sexualization' and celebration of illegal drugs at the VMAs, which was 'regrettably' deemed appropriate 'for a child as young as 14'³ (Fig. 1.1).

The PTC was already busy tweeting and lobbying against MTV's choice of Miley Cyrus as a host for the 2015 awards even before the actual ceremony which took place on 31 August 2015 (Fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.1 Parents TV Council on blatant sexualization

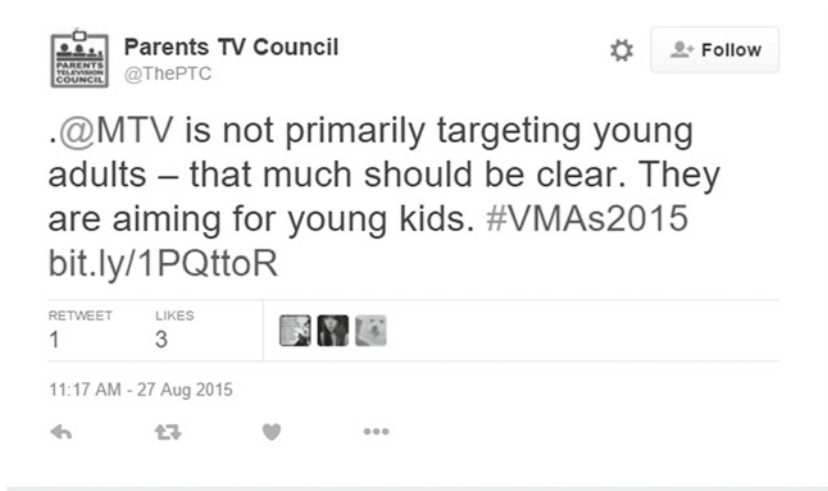


Fig. 1.2 Parents TV Council on young kids

In an exclusive interview with *Gossip Cop* (21 July 2015), PTC President Tim Winter said that Miley Cyrus was a “‘Profane, Sexually Explicit’ Choice For MTV VMAs Host”.⁴ The organizers choice ‘pretty much tell us what kind of program MTV intends to air’—a show that ‘It’s not going to be safe for children to watch [...]’.

In equal measure, the influential and popular *Huffington Post* runs the headline ‘How Excusing Tyga And Kylie Jenner’s Relationship Validates The Sexualization of Young Girls’.⁵ The reporter offers Khloe Kardashian’s view on her 17-year-old sister Kylie Jenner’s relationship with 25-year-old rapper Tyga: ‘Kylie is not a normal 17-year-old ... So let’s treat this as a special case.’ The elder Kardashian explains the ‘rare circumstances’ her younger sibling experiences: ‘Kylie is taking business meetings and bought her first house, or she’s going on a private plane with Karl Lagerfeld to take a meeting. That’s not even what people do in their 30s.’ This triggers the reporter’s strict comment: ‘Right there, in that simple, seemingly innocuous statement lies everything that is wrong with how we react to underaged girls dating older men. And it needs to stop.’ She follows up this comment with another, rejecting the way members of the Kardashian family approve this overtly sexual relationship while ignoring ‘the moral and ethical implications of [it]’.

This kind of reporting is representative of the intense moralizing that has become pervasive in recent times. The moral agenda usually revolves

around children's welfare, and focuses on (a) children themselves (how to make them better, more responsible: the notion of the innocent child means, inescapably, that children need protecting and fostering, as well as restraint and improvement); (b) those adults who, by means of their actions or the decisions they take, affect children's lives, such as parents and educators; and (c) the ways in which social institutions and processes, be it law, politics, medicine, education, the media, may work towards children's welfare. Here, agendas have a lobbying power 'urging those whom they see as able to affect children's well-being to take on board their particular image of the child' (King 1999, 12).

These moral values work on a public/private axis, for they have gradually become institutionalized in the form of policies on national, European and international levels, while being complemented by the self-disciplining mechanisms followed by individuals in order to realize the collective enterprise of constructing a secure world for children. Moral judgements about children's welfare are perhaps nowhere more fleeting and controversial than when it comes to children's sexuality. In fact, childhood sexuality is more often than not censored, since moralizers reject the idea that there is any form of sexual experience or knowledge that is indeed 'good' for children (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1999)—an idea that, as we shall see, has deep historical roots. It is within such a contextual framework that this book project has developed and unfolds, bringing together a historical contextualization of childhood, sexuality and pornography with contemporary empirical accounts regarding the 'presentation of the self' and self-management.

Chapter 1 introduces the debate about the sexualization of childhood as it presently stands by following the academic, policy and media discourses around it. It offers a rough timeline of how the debate evolved through a variety of policy documents and reports from Australia, caught media attention through the launch of public campaigns regarding the protection of children, and fired up similar discussions and policy recommendations in the USA and the UK, all of which were backed up by famous child psychologists. Academic discourse stirred the debate even further across the Anglophone world, with numerous publications on the repercussions of an overtly sexualizing culture for young minds which also spiralled into a media frenzy that has not yet run its course. Against this tidal wave of discussions about sexualization, however, a counter-discourse has emerged, challenging the dominant contextualizations of sexualization, and exposing the methodological and epistemological limitations of key texts and reports. This counter-discourse theorizes the notion of children's sexualization within the social construction of myths of childhood

innocence, while also taking into account the extent of young people's actual engagement with media and technology in contemporary Western societies. Chapter 1 paves the way for the unravelling of various 'histories of concern' (Buckingham 2000, 2005b) regarding children partaking of sexual knowledge and experiences in Chap. 2.

The historical trajectory of the debate on children's sexualization is presented in Chap. 2, offering various accounts of what is seen as the effects of a 'damaging' popular culture upon 'impressionable' youth. The chapter traces the historical development of childhood from pre-modern England and Europe, and Puritan America, to the 'black pedagogy' of nineteenth-century continental Europe and Victorian England, and the ascendancy of the 'private' family in the twentieth century. The chapter notes the emergence of a psychological discourse surrounding childhood, and the establishment of psychology as the primal source of scientific knowledge about the child. It sets present-day discussions (and moral panics) about children's popular culture practices and experiences (e.g. by means of various online technologies) and their effects within a Janus-faced, and self-contradictory, approach to childhood: a romantic one, viewing children as innocent, and a Puritan one (the child as wicked). Finally, it makes sense of contemporary child-protectionist policies as a way in which Western cultures try to transcend centuries of brutal corporal punishment which aimed to eradicate childhood sin. Such radical changes in parental culture across time have thus led to the normalization of a discourse about children's rights and protection, which serves as a substitute for previous 'moral' (i.e. abusive in today's terms) child-rearing practices.

Within a broader context of 'the politics of sexuality', Chap. 3 brings in discussions about pornography, as the debate about children's sexualization makes direct references to the effects of pornography and a 'pornified' culture. Policy documents, lobbying discourses, academic research and the media routinely link childhood sexualization with consumption of or exposure to pornography. This chapter, too, has a historical component, in that it offers an understanding of children's—and especially girls'—assumed sexualization as the outcome of nineteenth-century accounts of pornography, the rise of sexual science and the construction of the myths of childhood and womanhood in close proximity. Chapter 3, together with the first two theoretical chapters of this book, weaves a meta-narrative of children's sexualization that brings together the following discourses, which go back to the nineteenth century: a discussion of media effects, an elitist view of popular culture, a notion of childhood innocence and vulnerability, a notion of pornography as harmful and obscene, a psychological

discourse defining childhood, and a male scientific discourse that regulates female sexuality. It is this kind of interweaving of discourses that leads to the ‘risk talk’ that dominates our conceptualizations of children, sexuality, pornography and online practices (which are subsequently seen as conducive to children’s sexualization). This chapter concludes by accounting for the prevalence of risk assessment as a standard feature of child protection practices, as well for how individuals within neoliberalism are expected to become their own risk managers. Eventually, this protectionist culture and its governmentalizing effects become a commonly shared way in which we make sense of children’s experiences and practices, and one that drives policy making at a global level, with far-reaching consequences.

The next three chapters form the empirical part of this book, drawing from datasets of children’s accounts of their online practices. Chapter 4 presents one of the dominant and groundbreaking paradigms concerning children’s online media use and practices, the EU Kids Online project. Although giving voice to children, the EU Kids Online project (and, as I explain, my own work within it) positions experiences with sexual content as potentially both risky and harmful, especially when more ‘vulnerable’ children are concerned. The chapter focuses on a qualitative report by Smahel and Wright (2014), revolving around the accounts of children from nine European countries of their encounters with sexual content. It offers a brief overview of the report on ‘online problematic situations for children’, where sexual content is one of ‘problematic’ situations. It continues with a meta-analysis and recoding of children’s voices from Greece, the UK, Spain, Italy and Australia (using original interview material), offered as an alternative way to make sense of children’s experiences with sexual content. In its attempt to reconceptualize children’s accounts, Chap. 4 suggests we interpret children’s voices as (a) a form of cultural capital based on societal norms of morality and appropriateness and (b) a way of ‘doing’ ‘intimate citizenship’ (Plummer 1995, 2003) while constructing narratives of the self (Attwood 2006, 2011).

Chapters 5 and 6 draw from a qualitative dataset with youngpre-teen girls from Greece, and are offered as case studies in the revisiting of the sexualization-of-children debate from a social constructionist perspective. Chapter 5 challenges assumptions about the effects of commercialization and sexualization on youngpre-teen girls by viewing their consumption of popular culture as part of a broader identity work, involving self-governance, appropriateness, taste and aesthetics, and as a mechanism towards the management of an ethical self. Taking into account the market exigencies of childhood, and girlhood (Cook and Kaiser 2004), this

chapter discusses girls' accounts of stardom and celebrity culture in order to show the ambiguities embedded in the transition from girlhood to womanhood, the construction of a feminine self, as well as girls' diverse readings of, engagements with and practices of popular culture.

Chapter 6 continues the repositioning of the sexualization-of-children debate by looking into the maps of meanings and the interpretative repertoires regarding the child consumer as these derive from young girls' dress-up and make-over gaming practices. Drawing from this kind of consumption of popular culture by girls, the chapter extrapolates how they position themselves as consumers of fashion styles and, through that, how they negotiate the presentation of their selves (Goffman 1959). Here I want to make sense of how cultural consumption features in young children's lives, and explore the role and impact of clothing styles and accessories and of online gaming in virtual worlds in the making of young children's identities. In order to do so, I contextualize children's cultural consumption within a broader conceptual framework of consumption in modernity, which helps account for contemporary anxieties about children as 'flawed consumers'. Agreeing with those who suggest that, instead of talking about children as innocent beings susceptible to the allure of the culture industry or as creative agents able to resist market incursions, we should, instead, view consumption is part and parcel of the construction and make-up of childhood (Buckingham 2000, 2011), I adopt Cook's notion of 'commercial enculturation' (2010) in order to make room for the multiplicity of childhoods, the ways of behaving as a consumer, as well as children's various understandings of the social-commercial world.

NOTES

1. <http://w2.parentstv.org/Main/>, accessed 13 September 2015.
2. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3217340/Miley-Cyrus-MTV-blasted-parents-group-blatant-sexualization-celebration-drugs-VMAs.html>, accessed 13 September 2015.
3. See: <http://www.billboard.com/articles/events/vma/6678896/parents-television-council-slams-vm-as-for-blatant-sexualization-and>, accessed 13 September 2015.
4. See: <http://www.gossipcop.com/parents-television-council-miley-cyrus-vm-as-host-interview-mtv-video-music-awards/>, accessed 13 September 2015.
5. See: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kylie-jenner-tyga-sexism_55b6883ce4b0074ba5a595fe, accessed 13 September 2015.

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The Way We Are ...: The Reiteration of Sexualization in Academia, Policy and the Media

There are various definitions of sexualization that circulate in the public agenda, as the following three illustrate:

You don't have to be a feminist to believe that little girls shouldn't be told that a vital quality to cultivate is that of being attractive to boys. Nor do you have to be Mary Whitehouse to believe that it's not great for girls—or boys—to grow up thinking that being feminine is all about a pornography-inspired pastiche of female sexuality. The trend towards premature sexualization:

- introduces children to the world of adult sexuality, when elsewhere we are rightly encouraging them to resist the pressure to become sexually active at a young age
- tells girls in particular that the most important quality they need is 'sexiness', and not cleverness, sportiness, application or ambition
- tells girls and boys that female sexuality is all about pleasing others
- encourages a culture in which children are viewed as sexually available ...
- (Mumsnet, Let Girls Be Girls campaign)¹

Sexualization occurs when:

- a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics;

- a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy;
- a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
- sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person.

All four conditions need not be present; any one is an indication of sexualization. Much of the evidence that we evaluate in this report is specific to the third condition—sexual objectification. The fourth condition (the inappropriate imposition of sexuality) is especially relevant to children. Anyone (girls, boys, men, women) can be sexualized. But when children are imbued with adult sexuality, it is often imposed upon them rather than chosen by them. (APA 2007)

The definition of ‘sexualization’ seemingly incorporates everything from make-up and padded bras for girls aged 8 and under to lads’ mags, sexy music videos and erotic fiction. It even extends to hard-core pornography. Despite calls from children’s charity the NSPCC to develop a tighter definition, consensus has still not been reached. The result is a moral panic about children and young people being sexualized by the media, but without a clear definition of what sexualization actually is.²

As far as public anxieties go—at least in the Anglophone world—a barrage of think-tank, task-force and government reports, along with extensive news coverage both in the press and in broadcasting, as well as parenting manuals have inundated the public agenda since 2006 with discussions about the sexualization of young girls. The launch of the Australia Institute’s two reports, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualization of Children in the Media* (Rush and A. La Nauze 2006a) and *Letting Children Be Children: Stopping the Sexualisation of Children in Australia* (2006b), mark the orientation of the policy-related public debate on sexualization. The authors suggested that young children—girls especially—are faced with unprecedented sexualizing pressures, as they are bombarded with sexualized imagery in everyday culture. In fact, they talk about ‘the direct sexualization of children’, where ‘children are presented in images or directed to act in advertisements in ways modeled on adult sexual behaviour’ as ‘a new development’ (2006b, 1). Such premature exposure to sexually explicit material has dire consequences for youngsters, for they face increased risk

of suffering from eating disorders, poor body image, early sexual behaviour, as well ‘grooming’ from predator paedophiles (2006a).

Drawing from the arguments presented in these discussion papers, Julie Gale, a Melbourne mother and comedy writer, founded an online public lobby campaign called Kids Free 2B Kids (KF2BK) in February 2007. The Australian media bought into the debate, generating further publicity around the issue with ‘expert’ interviews on high-profile television shows and broadcasts such as ‘Bratz, bras and tweens’ in April 2007, and ‘Sex sells—but at what cost to our kids?’ in September 2007 (Taylor 2010). Growing public interest, as a result of the media debates and the KF2BK campaign, led to the report on the *Sexualization of Children in the Contemporary Media* for the Australian Parliament by a Senate Standing Committee³ (Australian Senate 2008), which was followed by more media turmoil, with a *Sixty Minutes* segment called ‘Little women’ (‘a 60 minutes episode exploring sex in advertising, the media, children’s marketing and its effects on our kids’),⁴ and a feature story called ‘Sexualization of children’ on its Sunday show on Channel Nine. KF2BK’s campaigner Julie Gale was hosted in several broadcasts, where she was invited to ‘set the record straight’ when it came to the issue of sexualization in high-profile morning magazines such as Sydney’s *9am with David and Kim* show.⁵ Next came the Australian Christian Lobby’s *Inquiry into the Australian film and literature classification scheme* (2011) submission to the Senate.

All these publications have been coupled with similar reports in the US and Britain. The American Psychological Association’s APA (2007) *Report on the Sexualization of Girls* was further updated in the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* in 2010, its argumentation becoming ‘doctrinal in discussions of sexualization, and its findings [...] often taken for granted as fact in popular and academic circles both within and outside the US’ (Egan 2013, 4). Overall, the APA research finds that early sexualization affects girls’ sexual development and their physical and mental health. More particularly, it links sexualization with three of the most common mental health problems linked with girls and women: eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression. The APA also sees sexualization behind a girl’s damaged cognitive and emotional development by affecting her confidence in, and comfort with, her own body, leading to self-image problems. Other effects on society may include an increase in sexism, increased rates of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and an increased demand for child pornography. The APA research finds evidence of sexualization in every form of media, as well as in goods marketed to children.

Similarly in Britain, in 2008 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned celebrity psychologist Tanya Byron to draft *Safer Children in a Digital World: the Byron Review*, a report updated two years later, in *Do We Have Safer Children in a Digital World? A Review of Progress since the 2008 Byron Review* (DCSF 2008, 2010). Children's digital safety has been routinely linked with various agendas, ranging from radicalization and terrorism, to intellectual property, commercialization and sexualization (DCSF 2010, 35), and the latest Byron Report is not immune to fears regarding the impact that children's exposure to pornography might have on their well-being. Based on that, Byron reiterates the view that accidental or involuntary exposure to pornography is disturbing for children and reinforces sexist or violent attitudes and behaviour (DCSF 2010, 36). In 2010 the UK Home Office commissioned another celebrity psychologist, Linda Papadopoulos, to write yet another review on the sexualization of young people:

as part of the government's strategy to tackle violence against women and girls. The review looks at how sexualized images and messages may be affecting the development of children and young people and influencing cultural norms. It also examines the evidence for a link between sexualization and violence.⁶

Apart from these findings and recommendations, the policy discussion on sexualization in the UK includes the evidence assessment on commercialization by an expert panel chaired by David Buckingham for DCSF (Buckingham 2009, *The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing*) and his research on sexualized goods aimed at children for the Scottish Parliament (Buckingham et al. 2010, *External research on sexualized goods aimed at children*).⁷ In 2010, Mumsnet, an influential parenting website, launched the Let Girls be Girls campaign,⁸ in order to 'curb the premature sexualization of children by asking retailers to commit not to sell products which play upon, emphasize or exploit their sexuality'. The campaign came in response to the perceived proliferation of toys, clothes and accessories aimed at children ("sexy" slogans on young girls' clothing, high heels for five-year-olds [...] Playboy-branded stationery sets? Good grief), which were seen 'to encourage children to enter the world of adult sexuality when they should still be—well, children'. Mumsnet was also responsible for the Lose the Lads' Mags campaign,⁹ to prevent 'lads' mags' being 'displayed in children's sight in shops'; both issues are

echoed in the 2011 Bailey Review, *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialization and Sexualization of Childhood* (Bailey 2011). The Bailey Review, commissioned by the Department of Education (DoE), proceeded with policy recommendations regarding the (perceived) sexualization and commercialization which surrounds children like ‘wallpaper’ (2011, 9), in order to assess how children are being pressured ‘to grow up too quickly’ (2011, 10). It was presented to Parliament and addressed

the pressure on children [...] to take part in a sexualized life before they are ready to do so; and the commercial pressure to consume the vast range of goods and services that are available to children and young people of all ages. (Bailey 2011, 6)

Interestingly, the DoE invited Reg Bailey, chief executive of the Mother’s Union—an international Christian charity that dates back to 1876, and whose mission is to ‘show [...] Christian faith [...] through the promotion of stable marriage, family life and the protection of children’¹⁰—to author the Independent Review.

The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre was commissioned in January 2011 to provide a review of recent literature for the Bailey Review on the commercialization and sexualization of childhood (Phoenix 2011). The literature review was conducted against the background of the earlier UK reviews: the DCSF/Byron reviews of 2008 and 2010; the DCSF/Buckingham (2009) review and the Papadopoulos review of 2010, as well as other, wide-ranging academic research. Among its key findings was that published literature includes evidence that the debate on ‘premature sexualization’ of children is highly polarized, though an increasing sexualization of society is widely accepted; that both parents and children make nuanced decisions about what they consume, on the basis of cost, educational value, peer group relations and other issues; that there is evidence to suggest that children and adults understand sexualization differently; and that children may be less skilled at understanding new methods of advertising than more traditional television advertising.¹¹

In 2013, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England required a critical overview of key findings regarding pornography and sexualized imagery in a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) as evidence for its policy making (Horvath et al. 2013). The REA identified that the proliferation of evidence referring to sexualized media, that may or may not include pornography, as well as the lack of consensus in the literature,

makes it difficult to compare across studies. It also acknowledged that many studies use ‘exposure’ as a catch-all term, and that there is a need for children and young people, and their definitions, to be included in this discussion. Yet, despite the variety of research presented in the REA, the predominant narrative remains that which propagates the idea that sexualized content does affect children, albeit differently, and their sexual behaviour:

Considering sexualized and violent imagery more broadly, we can conclude that exposure to sexualized and violent imagery affects children and young people; however, the ways in which they may be affected and how long-lasting the effects may be are debatable. There are links between violent attitudes and violent media; specifically, children and young people who hold more violent attitudes access more violent media. One study found that exposure to sexualized material was related to the likelihood of young people engaging in more sexualized behaviour because they perceived more social pressure to have sex [...]. (Horvath et al. 2013, 8)

The British media were engulfed in the sexualization debate from quite early on, often featuring academics and social stakeholders who have published relevant research that claims to prove its effects on the livelihood lives of young children. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* reported in 2007¹² on ‘the generation of “damaged” girls’ as a result of inappropriate ‘sexy’ clothing, toys (such as the ‘obscene’ and ‘tarty’ Bratz dolls) and media images ‘that are corrupting childhood’. In this, the newspaper was fully endorsing the 2007 APA report findings, while also hosting comments from Jean Kilbourne, co-author of *So Sexy, So Soon: The Sexualisation of Childhood* (2009), as well as from education consultant and author of *Toxic Childhood* (2006), Sue Palmer.

Similarly minded campaigns and evidence have consistently been featured in British newspapers, such as the consumer protection watchdog’s (at that time called Consumer Focus) condemnation of the ‘sexualization of young girls’ in the *Daily Mail* in 2009.¹³ The then chief executive of Consumer Focus, Ed Mayo, suggested that childhood innocence was lost to big business. That was why the watchdog was lobbying against any high street imagery and marketing of products (such as Playboy-themed merchandising for schoolgirls) that would:

help make sex and pornography normal. [...] This is a clear case of too much, too young. The effects of early sexualization for girls include emotional distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, eating disorders, disrupted school

life and depression. [...] Boys who are affected end up with an image of girls as sexual objects, which can jeopardise their ability to form and maintain intimate relationships.

Following the furore around sexualization, in January 2011 the tabloid *Sun* ran successfully the ‘paedo bikini’ campaign against Primark (‘PRIMARK have today stopped selling padded bikinis for seven-year-olds in a victory for The Sun’). A couple of months later, in April 2011, the *Mirror* ran its own ‘Stop Pimping our Kids’ campaign,¹⁴ which was also featured on Channel 4’s *The Sex Education Show* (19–21 April 2011). The *Mirror* campaign was ‘about the over sexualization of children, which is a huge issue and a massive concern for parents and experts alike. [...] They worry how it is affecting the psyche of children and their attitude towards sex and relationships’. ‘And they worry with reason’, the article went on. The *Mirror* reminisced about a long-lost childhood safe haven, when growing up was ‘about playing outside [...] and] having good clean fun’, which was then contrasted with contemporary practices, as a result of which, ‘sadly, today’s children aren’t enjoying the same childhoods we did’. Children ‘are going through’ rough times as a result of their internet practices, mainly social networking and online porn. The effects of such practices involves girl waxing from an early age, ‘some even having removed all their pubic hair by the age of 15’. Online pornography is blamed for engendering the idea that ‘girls should have big perfect breasts, tiny waists and no pubic hair and that they have to be sexual to be successful’; for creating aspirations to become a model or a pop star in order to gain financial success ‘and a man’; and for telling boys to trim their pubic hair and ‘that they need to be a rapper and rich to get the girl’.

At the same time, other social stakeholders became vocal about sexualization, oscillating between competing accounts of it. Community Care Inform, an online resource in the field of social care, discussed in 2009 how ‘Fears grow over the sexualization of young people’.¹⁵ Here, attention is paid to the Papadopoulos review, which aimed to ascertain ‘whether there is a link between sexualization and violence against women [...] because] [t]he concern is that these sexualized images objectify women, give girls the idea that looks are paramount and send worrying messages to boys and young men’. The APA research findings about the effects of early sexualization on young girls’ sexual development are also mentioned, and, although the article suggests that there are dissenting voices among experts about sexualization, it concludes by mentioning a range of, presumed, sexualized merchandising aimed at children.

Similarly, TES, an online community for resources for teachers and educators, opined in 2008 that ‘Teachers need to help young girls develop a healthy view of sexuality away from “porn” marketing aimed at them’, and warned against the ‘danger of the bunny syndrome’.¹⁶ Although the review for the Scottish Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee is referred to (which is, in effect, the Buckingham et al. 2010 report, *External research on sexualized goods aimed at children: a report to TES references the Scottish Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee* (Buckingham et al. 2010), yet it is predominantly influenced by the APA’s argument regarding children’s self-objectification; this, i believe, is a testament to the doctrinal status of the pro-effects ‘weight of evidence’ on sexualization. By 2013, commentary in the TES is more informed by those voices which suggest that research and evidence regarding the negative effects of sexualization on children and the young, and thus the threat of sexualization, may be over-hyped.¹⁷

UNPACKING THE DOMINANT PERCEPTION OF SEXUALIZATION

The latest addition in the long trail of reports and reviews on sexualization has been *The Sexualization Report*, by Attwood et al. (2013), with support from the Wellcome Trust. The authors remind us that although the term ‘sexualization’ was practically ‘non-existent’ prior to 2005, it has become ubiquitous since, coming across as a social, political and policy issue. Throughout this time, ‘sexualization’ has been employed to suggest, explain and account for many things related to sex, sexuality, and sexual health and well-being, including STIs (sexually transmitted infections), pregnancy, addiction, dysfunction, violence, abuse, sex work, sexual practices, different forms of sexuality, medicalization, commerce, media and popular culture. Taking into account the inaccurate and often sensationalist knowledge that is being disseminated and reiterated about sexualization publicly, in academia, the media, popular books, expert manuals, policy reports or public statements, the authors want to shed light on what we know, or do not know, about sexualization, drawing from a multidisciplinary expert knowledge, while distancing themselves from effects research and findings. In that respect, it is part of the criticism voiced against ‘the peril of sexualization’.

In fact, despite their visibility and popularity in the media, most of the reviews discussed previously have met with considerable criticism. For example, the Papadopoulos report, which surmised that ‘sexualization is the imposition of adult sexuality on to children and young people before they are capable of dealing with it (mentally, emotionally or physically’, was severely criticized for being one-sided and intellectually suspect, and for neither providing a robust discussion of its complexities, nor exploring its multiple uses to explain current media representations, practices and consumption (Smith 2010). Smith argues that Papadopoulos’ formulation of sexualization is overly simplistic, conflates textual forms, behaviours, interests and practices, and yet—in tandem with the litany of complaints and accusations about media effects presented by the 2007 APA report and the 2008 Australian Senate one—is ‘likely to become a standard citation for future work into the production and consumption of media with sexual themes’ (Smith 2010, 175). Emerging from within a particular strand of governmentality, the Papadopoulos review constructs children as ‘incomplete’ beings unable to resist media seduction, whose entitlement is ‘innocence’ and who therefore must be protected by a range of disciplinary and institutional interventions. Like similar research that adopts a pro-effects frame of mind, this report, according to Smith, takes the links between sexualization and normalization of violence against women for granted, instead of evaluating claims of increasing sexualization of culture and then trying to prove them (Smith 2010, 177).

Drawing from Butler’s (1990, 1993) concept of the performativity of gender—the process through which we come to actively produce and embody gender through repetitive speech acts or reiterations about what it means to be a man or a woman—Taylor (2010) revisits the Australia Institute’s (Rush and La Nauze 2006a, b) debate about the sexualization of children in the media. She takes the view that the repetitive speech acts through which we construct images of children as pornographic, and by default sexual, which we interpret ‘through the eyes of a paedophile’, have the performative effect of actively producing, enacting and embodying a sexualized way of looking at them. Paradoxically, Taylor argues, partaking in such talk makes us construct ourselves as the potential paedophilic viewers we abhor and wish to protect our children from (2010, 51).

Other criticism focuses on the methodological and epistemological limitations of the Papadopoulos (2010), APA (2007) and Australian Senate (2008) reports—and similarly minded research and policy documents. Such criticism revolves around the weakness, vagueness and inconsistency

of their key terms; the partial and simplistic analyses of media texts, which are usually premised on psychological studies to support—unfounded—claims about audiences; their failure to engage with the social and cultural context of sexuality, and the ways in which children and teenagers make sense of and use sexual content, or how sexual meanings are being set up and negotiated (Bragg et al. 2010, 2012). Further challenges to the evidence (or ‘evidence’) usually put forward about the ‘onslaught’ on children by ‘rampant media sexualization’ comes from the fact that a lot of previous work has focused on media and advertising (rather than sexualized goods), using US university students (rather than children), and discusses girls (rather than boys), which says a lot about the anxieties that surround girls’ sexuality within the public debate (Bragg et al. 2011, 281). This kind of critique is representative of the body of academic literature and research that exposes the weaknesses of the effects approach when it comes to issues such as media violence, pornography and sexualization, in that it attempts to analyse rather than moralize about the contemporary mainstreaming of sex (see, among others, Attwood 2006, 2009; Buckingham 2009; Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Duschinsky 2010; Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Egan and Hawkes 2008; Lumby and Albury 2010; Russell and Tyler 2005; Willett 2008).

More specifically, research on media effects is seen to work within a positivist frame, for it hypothesizes about the social world, and then applies scientific or mathematical tools to empirically test the validity of its hypotheses. It assumes that the inherent meanings and messages of media content can be measured quantitatively, as can audience responses. The two of them can then be correlated in order to assess media effects, and provide a basis of generalization. The validity of methods used within effects research, nevertheless, can be challenged on a number of counts. To begin with, there is the problem of artificiality, as children are exposed to unrepresentative ‘stimuli’ in unrepresentative conditions within laboratory experiments, which, at best, can be seen to indicate what might happen—rather than what actually did.¹⁸ Furthermore, effects research tends to confound correlations between variables with causal relationships, while ignoring wider contextualization (such as social class, family background, educational level and so on). Nevertheless, the most profound challenge to this school of thought comes from the notion of ‘effect’ itself, as the media effects approach perceives children’s relationship with the media in terms of cause and effect (Buckingham 2011). In this respect, children are seen as a *tabula rasa* whereon the media industry inscribes its

harmful messages. In so doing, argue effects critics, it sanctions simplistic responses to complex social problems and, instead of examining them in depth and then seeking to explain them, effects research starts the other way round—with the media, and then moves on to evidence their harmful impact on individuals. Although critics of the effects approach suggest that what is needed is a more holistic account of the role of the media in children's lives—so as to break away from the simplicity of effects—in no way do they imply that media have no effects whatsoever on people's lives. What they do argue is that 'the notion of cause-and-effect is itself a narrow and misleading way of conceiving of the role of social and cultural factors (and of media) in children's lives' (Buckingham 2011, 52).

Apart from the policy-related reports I have discussed, Sue Palmer's (2006) bestseller (*Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We can Do About It*), and its 2013 follow-up (*21st Century Girls: How Female Minds Develop, How to Raise Bright, Balanced Girls and Why Today's World Needs Them More Than Ever*), marked the start of a proliferation of similarly minded publications (e.g. Carey 2011; Durham 2008; Hamilton 2009; Levin and Kilbourne 2008; Mayo and Nairn 2008; Oppliger 2008; Tankard-Reist 2009; Warburton and Braunstein 2012), which have inundated the academic and public agenda. Invariably drawing from psychology, psychiatry, neuropsychology, law, feminism and ethics, such research usually discusses the effects of technological developments and their contents—or, in other words, the effects of popular media and culture—upon the lives of children and teenagers, and have become the 'dominant conceptual paradigm' when it comes to making sense of the sexual awakening of tweens, often culminating in significant legal and policy implications and recommendations. Such publications prompt considerable public debate among parents, academics, media and retail industry stakeholders. In so doing, they operate as cautionary tales about the damage inflicted on children as a result of sexualizing and commercializing media, which rob them of their 'childhood innocence', and make—girls especially—engage in self-destructive behaviour and an outlandish 'ladette culture'. Building 'resilient' children (DCSF 2008, 2010) is seen as paramount in order to overcome the 'syndrome' of a 'toxic childhood' and as synonymous with good parenting and good schooling, something that will help children cope with a variety of issues in their online and offline environments.

However, all these reviews, reports and publications are set against a background of an intense and highly polarized public debate about childhood,

where various commentators and stakeholders pontificate about the crisis in children's welfare. One of the principal causes for this heightened public anxiety is a rising tide of commercialism, which is seen to render children passive victims. At the same time, marketers tend to portray children as active agents, empowered through their commercial choices. Complex though such issues may be, the way they are understood and debated is also the result of the ways in which the media depict and construct children and young people—usually in a negative light and as 'at risk' (Buckingham 2009, 2011). Time and again conversations on sexualities in—either early or later—childhood are silenced in the name of childhood innocence and developmental appropriateness, and provisions are made so that discussion is turned to 'safe' or 'appropriate' issues—even more so when the sanctity of heteronormativity is breached and non-normalized sexualities are brought to the fore (Semann and William 2010). In this sense, any discussion relating to childhood sexuality is 'dangerous business' and, as such, it constitutes a 'call for action'¹⁹ in order to protect those 'at risk'. Hence, concomitant with the fear of rising commercialism is the fear of the loss of childhood innocence, as a result of the way in which the media precipitate the premature and inappropriate sexualization of children. Premised upon 'expert knowledge' about children, sexuality and popular culture, usually with psychological underpinnings (see, for example, Walkerdine 1997, 2001, 2009), these morally inflected adult concerns are channelled into fierce lobbying that calls for stricter intervention in media regulation and censorship. In this process, what goes amiss is the way in which discussions about adult protectionism and socially constructed notions of children's sexuality are framed as accounts of protecting innocent children from age-inappropriate sexuality (Taylor 2010).

What takes place here is what Philip Jenkins (1992) has called the 'politics of substitution', which happens when claims makers draw attention to a specific problem in part because it symbolizes another issue. In this case, the debate about imperilled childhood is used as a means to communicate and articulate broader concerns regarding societal change. Within a climate of growing uncertainty, as conceptualized in Beck's (1992) 'risk society', addressing children's well-being seems to work one way (no-one would challenge the notion of safeguarding children's safety, for they would be stigmatized as supporting child mental, physical, psychological or other abuse); but it also works to deflect attention from the growing moralization of childhood, and the concomitant call for intensified regulation of media content altogether. In this way, Buckingham and Chronaki (2014) argue, campaigns against homosexuality become campaigns against

paedophiles, campaigns against pornography are remodelled as campaigns against child pornography, and campaigns against immorality and Satanism are redefined as campaigns against ritualistic child abuse. As a result:

children's access to sexual knowledge is often regarded as part of a more general permissiveness, equated with a rise in violence, drug use and criminal activity amongst the young. From this perspective, sexual knowledge places children in danger; but it also makes them potentially dangerous. (Buckingham and Chronaki 2014, 304)

However, such a view on sexualization not only ignores the extent of young people's actual engagement with media and technology in contemporary Western societies, and the challenge to myths of childhood and sexuality they present, it also obscures the increasing importance of media and leisure in constructing sexual identities and lifestyles (Attwood 2011), as well as how the striptease culture²⁰ that this kind of expression represents makes sex a matter of more democratic public debate (McNair 2002), and leads to more diverse and liberating ideas about sex and sexuality. Similarly, Plummer accounts for sexualization by taking into consideration the way sexualities have become entrenched within diverse media forms, and how, within a 'mediated society', people have come to live their sexualities through, and with the aid of, television, press, film and the internet (2003, 275). He introduces storytelling to explain how people use their own stories and those of others to ethically 'construct' themselves. Taking a cue from Richard Rorty that 'the novel, the movie and the TV programme have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress' (1989, xvi), Plummer suggests that people tire quickly of academic philosophers' and social theorists' accounts of morality, and construct their own tales of morality, grounded in common-sense versions of everyday life (2001, 248). These stories of 'grounded everyday moralities' (2001, 247)—Plummer also calls them 'stories of intimate citizenship' or 'public identity narratives' (2003, 104)—are told in all kinds of texts: literary, visual and academic. They are told to family and friends, to audiences and researchers and comprise ways of 'doing' intimate citizenship. Plummer has coined the term 'intimate citizenship' (2003; see also 1995, 2001) to account for multifarious emerging concerns over the right of people to choose what to do with their lives, their bodies, identities, feelings, relationships and representations in late modernity. He sees:

intimate citizenship as a sensitising concept which sets about analysing a plurality of public discourses and stories about how to live the personal life in a late modern world where we are confronted by an escalating series of choices and difficulties around intimacies. (2001, 238)

In view of the new moral and political dilemmas people are confronted with in postmodern times, Plummer offers this kind of citizenship, which he views as being far broader than other conceptualizations, such as 'sexual' or 'feminist' citizenship, for he perceives it as being more inclusive of the whole of personal life, and less geared towards the sexual and gender. In fact, the notion of intimate citizenship signifies an intersection between the private and public realms of individual life, for it takes an interest in the proliferation of public debate across the personal life cycle, as well as the way in which personal decisions ooze into the public sphere. This is evidenced through a number of issues, such as the discussion of new forms of publicly recognized 'family life' (e.g. single parenthood; gay partnerships, marriage and child-rearing; voluntary childlessness); the growth of the new reproductive technologies; the use of medical, cosmetic, sexual and disciplining technologies that aim to transform the human body; or the public discussion (and private/public practice) of an array of non-procreative, non-penetrative coital sexualities (2001, 239–240), all of which flag up the practices of new intimacy as well as the debates around them.

In this respect, Feona Attwood (2011), while criticizing the 'behaviourist stance' of sexualization and its use of terms such as 'exposure' and 'effect', suggests an approach to sex that focuses on the way sexuality has been articulated and materialized 'within a whole range of social and cultural arenas and attempts to establish its socio-political significance' (2006). She argues that the notion of a culture that is 'sexualized' is an awkward attempt to describe a cornucopia of things and manifestations:

a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; our fondness for scandals, controversies and panics around sex. (2006, 78)

Instead, Attwood offers a much broader conceptualization of sexualization, compared to the hegemonic APA-like definitions already discussed. She draws from Giddens (1992) and his account of how, in late modern culture, sex has become domesticated and intimate relationships eroticized, while conceptualizing the erotic as a highly individualized form of hedonism (2006, 80); Bernstein's (2001) view that erotic life has been reconfigured to facilitate the pursuit of sexual intimacy through the rise of commercial sex services, such as escort agencies, lap dancing clubs and sex tours; Plummer (1995) and his notion of sexual storytelling as part of a therapeutic culture where we move away from the authority of experts towards 'participant stories' which cater for different taste cultures. As a result of the mediated society we live in, she continues, sexual representations, products and services become more accessible to a wider variety of consumers, and, through internet technologies, become part of people's everyday lives (2006, 81). This increased visibility of the iconography of pornography—Brian McNair's 'pornographication' (1996)—is part and parcel of sexualization, which is also inextricably tied to commodification, objectification and politics. Attwood's account of sexualization (2006, 85) is also premised on Jancovich's (2001) argument that late modern hedonistic sexuality can be associated with a new petite bourgeoisie, which is employed in marketing, advertising, fashion and the media, and views sex as an aesthetic rather than an ethical concern in an attempt to dissociate itself from a stiffer, older bourgeoisie. In this sense, the consumption of TV shows such as *Sex and the City* can be read not just in terms of sexual democratization or female objectification, but also in terms of a notion of 'liberated' sex undercut by class distinctions and the lifestyle preoccupations of consumer culture. Hence *Sex and the City* exudes a bourgeois sexual sensitivity which is clearly distinguished from the low-class sexuality of the 'white trash' figure; instead, it legitimizes the urbane, glamorous, classy, promiscuous, female consumer ideal which *Sex and the City* embodies, in which femininities and sexualities are perceived as style. Such a view of sexualization makes sense of:

sex as stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment [... and in this way] the claim to aesthetic value is combined with 'progressive sexual politics' [...] to create a set of texts that are fairly explicit, relatively progressive, and yet accessible to and popular with women. (Attwood 2006, 86)

Although it may seem that the public anxiety about childhood sexualization is a recent phenomenon, it is by no means a new issue. In fact, it represents an implicit fear about popular culture—and the ramifications of its increased availability and accessibility for young children—and a social construction of childhood as something natural and innocent. Such perceptions of the corrupting power of the media for vulnerable souls, and its contribution to a more general moral collapse, form the basis of obscenity regulation (Levine 2002). In addition, behind such recurring anxieties—‘histories of concern’ Buckingham calls them (2000, 2005)—lies an adult nostalgia for a ‘Golden Age’ of childhood innocence, now irrevocably lost to media corruption. From fears about Shakespeare’s plays corrupting young girls’ minds in the nineteenth century (Barker and Petley 1997/2005, 6), to print technology being accountable for the emergence of a distinct ‘youth culture’ in industrialized societies (Eisenstein 1979), to 1920s anxieties about the sexual appeal of silent movies stars Greta Garbo and Rudolph Valentino on American youth (Jowett et al. 1996), or television being described as responsible for the ‘disappearance of childhood’ (Postman 1982/1994) because it made sexual knowledge directly available to children and superseded books as the primary means of communication, the media have been consistently seen as having a pervasive and damaging effect on children. Such concerns about the objectification and commodification of children, and young girls especially, have a long history, as I will now discuss in the Chap. 2.

NOTES

1. <http://www.mumsnet.com/campaigns/let-girls-be-girls>, accessed January 2015.
2. <https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6287772>, accessed January 2015.
3. Hereafter, Australian Senate (2008).
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J7vKjR45OA>
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sne3oSACri0>
6. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130128103514/http://homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people.html>
7. Buckingham does not share the hegemonic perception of what constitutes a sexualized culture and its effect on children—a point I will return to later on. Here, I am offering a factual trajectory of the way the public debate has developed in the Anglo-Saxon world during the past few years.
8. <http://www.mumsnet.com/campaigns/let-girls-be-girls>

9. <http://www.mumsnet.com/campaigns/lads-mags>
10. <http://www.mothersunion.org/about-us/how-we-work/our-vision-mission-values>
11. <http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/projects/948.html>
12. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/1543203/The-generation-of-damaged-girls.html>
13. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1140136/Watchdog-attacks-store-bosses-sex-kitten-products-targeted-young-girls.html>
14. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/stop-pimping-our-kids-123564>
15. <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2009/04/17/fears-grow-over-the-sexualisation-of-young-people/>
16. <https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6006033>
17. <https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6287772>
18. The work of Patty Valkenburg, writing from a psychology background, is one of the rare contributions of effects research to problematize the use of experiments: 'The main problem is that, for ethical reasons, it is impossible to use experiments to determine the extent to which children experience fear from extreme types of violent entertainment' (2004, 65). Still, the assumptions, hypotheses and testing follow the usual effects pattern.
19. Aptly put by Foucault, 'My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do' (1983, 231–232).
20. Brian McNair (2002) explores in the book of that name, the contemporary fascination with pornography and the sexual imagery that engulfs all aspects of present-day life and culture.

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A Historical Contextualization of the Discussion About the Sexualization of Childhood

POPULAR CULTURE AND ‘YOUTH IN TROUBLE’

Fears about the impact of popular culture on the young abound, and have been well and critically discussed over the past years. Some accounts take a historical pitch and trace anxieties all the way back to the nineteenth century, whether to discuss the penny dreadfuls (comics), the romantic novel, the music hall, the telegraph and the telephone, and the early cinema (Boethius 1995; Buckingham 1993; Critcher 2008; Egan and Hawkes 2010; Marvin 1988; Springhall 1998). In this context, Higonnet (1998) analyses eroticized images of children in Romantic painting, book illustrations of the Victorian era, art photography and early advertising, as well as more contemporary material; similarly, Kincaid (1992, 1998) examines literature and film, from *Huckleberry Finn* and Lewis Carroll, through *Heidi* and Shirley Temple films, to Hollywood productions such as *Home Alone*, in his discussion of how children and young people have been represented as objects for erotic contemplation across time. Other accounts revolve around more contemporary times, focusing, for example, on 1920s–1930s Swedish jazz (Fornäs 2010), Britain’s 1950s ‘horror comics’ (Barker 1984a;

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Jensen 2012), television, the video ‘nasties’ (Barker 1984b; Critcher 2003), gangsta rap (Springhall 1998), cinema and online media after that (Buckingham and Jensen 2012). It is such ‘moral panics’ (Cohen 1972) that frame the public debate about children and their relationships with the media. The fact that most of this panic was tied to young boys (and much less to women) illustrates that children’s media consumption has been under scrutiny consistently since the nineteenth century; the absence of young girls in this early discourse of anxiety can be attributed to the social construction of women as pertinent to the private sphere, and consequently as not part of the public debate, something that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Inextricably linked with the notion of moral panics is an intrinsic fear of popular culture, as morally debasing, lacking in cultural status and massively produced, as well as a concern about leisure and culture. The Frankfurt School, temporarily exiled in the USA in the 1930s and 1940s, feared the soporific and depoliticizing effects of a hedonistic consumerism, fuelled by standardized mass entertainments in music, film and broadcasting—a legacy still prominent today and one that continues to shape contemporary understandings of media experiences (Bramham and Wagg 2011). Also discussed as ‘media panics’, to denote media influence, the concept of moral panics is seen as challenging ‘the elitism and cultural pessimism of much Anglo-American and Continental cultural debate with regard to the role and power of transnational media practices’ (Skovmand and Schröder 1992, iii).

Moral panics are symptoms of more general anxieties provoked by the rapid pace of social change, as this is effected by technological developments within modernity. A good way to illustrate this is the way in which the social construction of the sexual child evolved in the age of modernity. From the eighteenth-century discourse of ‘sensationalism’—a belief drawing from Enlightenment optimism that children, with proper education and training by means of adult guidance, would come to tame the inner savage and monitor the balance between the senses, the body and reason¹—to the nineteenth-century identification of masturbation as dangerous for the body and mind of the individual child and society, the sexual child came to be treated with extreme caution and was soon placed under expert scrutiny (Egan and Hawkes 2010; Buckingham and Chronaki 2014). The discourse of the ‘sentimentalization of childhood’² constructed the child as an idealized creature, deserving attention from parents, the government and social welfare associations, as well as leisure, play and freedom. At first this applied

to bourgeois children only, but by the end of the nineteenth century it would include poor and working-class children, too. Given that non-bourgeois families could not afford such luxuries, teachers, social reformers and medics were called in to intervene and survey the families of the poor under the guise of ‘child protection’. Alongside masturbation phobia, was the social purity movement, which advocated the end of sexual ignorance for children in order to counter and redeem the damage caused by solitary masturbatory activities. Social purity reformers believed innocence to be inherent in children, yet also a virtue that needed to be taught (Egan and Hawkes 2010, 37). Should parental instruction be curbed, corruption and vice was the result, and nowhere was this threat more prominent than within the new urban culture. Modern urban environments were considered hotbeds of contagious moral pollution, as the spread of print paved the way for mass access to pornographic writings and representations, as well as other kinds of popular culture. Kendrick (1996) was among the first to point out the class dimension of pornography; whereas its contents had been readily available to upper-class and educated men for some time, its consumption became something to be regulated (as obscene) once the spread of literacy—and, I would add, the proliferation of popular culture texts such as cards, books, photos—facilitated access to it by women, youth and the lower classes. Hence, modernization, as exemplified in the modern urban condition, challenged traditional norms and mechanisms of social control, while, at the same time, allowing for moral transformation. The child was the signifier of these contradictions of modern living, constructed as both full of potential vice as well as a site of transformation and hope. In this context, ‘the child functioned as a metaphor for modernity itself’ (Egan and Hawkes 2010, 40).

MODERN CHILDHOOD REVISITED

Childhood—the most intensively governed sector of personal existence—and the health, welfare and rearing of children have been linked, in different ways, at different times and societies, to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state (Rose 1989/1999). Overall, in modern societies the notion that children have yet to learn the skills and conventions of adulthood and have needs that set them apart from the rest, is deeply entrenched. Backed by the scientific rationale of ‘child psychology’, the assumption that children are different is now accepted as a universal human truth and shared by both conservative and progressive proponents of child-rearing (Jackson 1982, 24). This has not been always so, however.

Several accounts trace the historical development of childhood, where, for example in the Middle Ages, children were hardly treated with the sentimentality and protectiveness taken for granted today. Through the 1600s and 1700s, children may have been valued for their role in inheritance, but fatal diseases and high infant mortality rates meant that losing a child was not the emotional tragedy it currently is (Newman 2014). Appropriate sexuality for children in medieval Europe meant that sex was tied to reproduction within marriage. As a result, at the time, royal families married children as young as 12 and 13—though the rest of the population would wait until much later. That meant that young girls were expected to consummate their marriage and have children as a matter of course.³

Such examples show not only the social construction of ideas about sexuality but also ideas about childhood. As long as ideas about childhood are contested and changeable, then so too are ideas about sexuality. (Kehily and Montgomery 2009, 71)

In pre-modern societies, children were more integrated into adult social life, where they were allowed to build their expertise by participating in adult tasks. By the age of 7, they were considered legally responsible for their actions and expected to be making an economic contribution (Jackson 1982, 35). Teaching was not tailored to the needs of the children, who would use whatever manuscripts were available to adults. The notion of teaching specific skills at specific ages (the twentieth-century notion of grading) was also irrelevant, as people of varying ages were taught similar things. In fact, not only education, but work, leisure and entertainment were equally shared by children, youth and adults alike (1982, 37). Towards the end of the sixteenth century, in England, the ascendancy of the individualistic values of capitalism resulted in families closing in around their children and protecting family privacy, while relegating the domestic help to separate quarters. Changes in the nature of childhood started to make their presence felt in children's attire, which became differentiated from adults'. At the start, this applied to middle- and upper-class boys under 7, but by and by it would include girls and older children too. Soon afterwards, this change spread to games, rhymes and stories, in the sense that what was no longer enjoyed by adults was then bequeathed to children as either *passé* or too 'common' for adults. Other developments included extended education, with age-grading and

textbooks tailored to their needs for the children of the aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie, while lower-class children continued to share the working and social lives of adults (1982, 39–40).

The class-specific dimension of childhood has been also addressed by other researchers; for example Diana Gittins (2009) points out that the development of childhood as a concept reflected the values and practices of a rising European middle class that increasingly differentiated adults and children, girls and boys. The earliest books for children were produced for the middle classes and had a strong didactic purpose, providing (middle-class) children with moral and religious education. Bearing in mind that it is always adults who write and children who read the books, it is important to acknowledge the power struggles being played out within children's literature (Hunt 2009).

Looking into the social understandings of the relationship between children and adults in pre-modern America, Zornado (2001) argues that the English colonization of the New World meant that it was Puritan—predominantly Calvinist—ideology that shaped human experience in the 1630s. Human relations were ordained by God in a hierarchical patriarchy, at the bottom of which was the child, along with the apostate and the native. God's earthly agents—kings, ministers and adult males—were to be found at the top of this hierarchy, next to Him. In between lay finer distinctions, with the baptized male being closer to the top of the ideological hierarchy and the child nearer at the bottom. Central to the Puritan view of the world was the Calvinist notion of original sin, in which the child had to be indoctrinated—violently, more often than not—‘for their own good’. Within New World Protestantism, children were taught the institutional status quo in the family, the congregation and at school. One of the most influential colonial texts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America is a school text, the *New England Primer*, which:

remains representative of the way in which the dominant culture reproduced itself through a process that fused cognitive development and emotional trauma through institutionalized repression. As such, language exists primarily to remind the child that he is a sinner, for as the letter A teaches in the *New England Primer*'s alphabet, ‘In Adam's Fall we sinned all.’ The letter F reminds the child of the ambient nature of violence, punishment, and judgment, for ‘The Idle Fool is whipped at School.’ The letter H speaks unconsciously to the process taking place as the child experiences the fusion of pedagogy and ideology: ‘My Book and Heart Shall never part.’ The letter J reminds the child to accept his place no matter how unjust it might feel,

and to thank the one who whips him, for ‘Job feels the Rod, Yet blesses God.’ (Zornado 2001, 15)

The *Primer* would teach the child their right place in the world, which would be to obey and submit to all elders (mother, father, God and king). The child is interpellated by an ideology of subjugation and violence at the hands of adults—and sometimes at the hands of other children or other adolescents.

Rivalries of dominance and submission often manifest themselves in some children in the form of school yard violence. When the repressed rage demanded by the institution’s pedagogy is combined with the child’s emotional isolation from a supportive witness, and if the child has been trained at home to deny the body and the release of stored affect, violence will be the result. School yard violence becomes school yard massacre [...]. (Zornado 2001, 16)

Hence, the Puritan adult approach to children was that the latter came to this world as sinners and needed terror and traumatization before they could eventually live a happy and well-adjusted life. In order to become docile and obedient, and please God, children needed to be broken through the use of brutal and violent methods at the hands of the schoolmaster or the father. The strong (adult) belief that something lay in the child’s body that resisted dominant culture and ideology, was proof enough that the child should be broken in order to be reformed, and several pedagogies of submission and violence were enacted—repeatedly—upon the child’s body, whether at the workhouse, the farmhouse or the schoolhouse, to ensure this.⁴

‘BLACK PEDAGOGY’ AS A HOTBED OF CONTEMPORARY BULLYING

Indeed, corporal punishment as a way of regulating behaviour and as a tool for forming cultural identities has a long and contested history, spanning different periods and regions. ‘There has seldom been a period, society, or polity that, figuratively and often literally, spared the rod’ (Geltner 2014a, 12), and in this sense, the corporal penal act is a political one, since it buttresses claims of legitimacy and cohesiveness by indexing social others (2014a, 10). If we see the decline of bodily

punishment as both morally positive and as a linear process corresponding to a society's degree of complexity, then societies that 'still' employ corporal punishment are perceived as threatening cultural, religious or political others. Indeed, corporal punishment has acted across history as a tool of constructing selves and others, be they religious, socio-economic, sexual, cultural or political (2014a, 18). Yet, though we (the West) abhor the thought of Sharia law, and construct practising societies as backward and barbaric, we conveniently forget the contemporary cultural or religious conservatives who exhibit a similar attitude—for example, corporal punishment was banned in UK private schools as recently as 1998 (by a narrow majority), while in the US spanking is the default prerogative of schools in numerous states (Geltner 2014b). Furthermore, empirical research has shown that in the USA, the denominations which promulgate fundamentalist and conservative evangelical theology (such as various Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Jehovah's Witness groups) endorse corporal punishment because they adhere to biblical literalism and thus take seriously the doctrine of original sin (for which corporal punishment is appropriate and necessary) (Ellison and Sherkat 1993).

The idea that spiritual purgation involves the infliction of physical pain had a wide purchase throughout the Middle Ages, and so did the perceived causal link between sin and physical suffering. However, with the end of Roman Catholic hegemony in sixteenth-century Europe, different polities, occasionally conquering one another, operated under an array of penal traditions, ranging from monetary compensation according to rank and the damage inflicted to dismemberment and branding (Geltner 2014b). During the early modern period, revisionist views on punishment from the likes of Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) and Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) rejected physical suffering as a licit form of retribution or as a means to realize real behavioural change in favour of incarceration. Although imprisonment entailed (and still does entail) physical suffering (see Chap. 3, this volume), such reformist views reshaped the European penal landscape. Yet Western colonialism remained unmoved by the use of corporal punishment among indigenous populations in Africa, Asia and the Americas (the projection of social othering, among those less civilized who practised corporal punishment, was thus in place). However, all these conceptualizations and applications of physical disciplining are in stark contrast to the Protestant child-rearing ethics that shaped adult–child, and peer relations from the seventeenth century till the late twentieth century, for none of them constructed the child as inherently 'evil'.

It is here that I see the origins of today's bullying culture emerge—in the dominant Puritan ideology that condoned a culture of psychological and physical violence and terror 'for the child's own good'. Adults reproduced this cycle of 'poisonous ["black"] pedagogy', which was what they had been taught at school themselves, and passed it on to their children, along with the conviction that this is something normal, to be expected and to be passed on (Zornado 2001, 20).

This kind of 'black pedagogy' is to be found across nineteenth-century continental Europe (i.e. nineteenth century Germany), as well as Victorian England, argues Zornado (2001). The legacy of the Brothers Grimm storytelling is a quintessential example of a parenting and child-rearing culture extant in the tradition of black pedagogy—a legacy that grew directly out of the dominant culture of conquest, violence and nationalism in Europe at the time the Grimms produced the first edition of *Children's and Household Tales* in 1812. Hansel and Gretel, and the Little Red Riding Hood are just two of the Grimms' fairytales which, though not published with children specifically in mind (since they were stories of the common people, *das Volk*, published as a contribution to awakening of the German national spirit), always had children as part of their ideal audience. The cycle of children's emotional and physical traumatization in (and by) these cautionary tales was justified by the notion that the adult has the duty to introduce the child to the world's true hardships so that the latter may prepare for what is coming. In other words, emotional and physical insecurity as a child, leads to an emotionally and physically secure adult (Zornado 2001, 81–89). A common thread in all such fairytales of black pedagogy was the 'impossible pedagogical situation' the adult leads the child into, from which there is no escape—only extreme suffering and death ensues. The child thus learns a lesson in obedience and utter adult control in a pedagogical situation orchestrated by the adult to the extent it becomes naturalized. The end result is the breaking of the child's spirit—their 'wilfulness'. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Grimms' fairytales were incorporated in the Prussian and other German teaching curricula, and had spread across the Western world. By the time the National Socialists came into power in 1932, the Brothers Grimm were a popular literary staple of a people indoctrinated in the ideology of colonization and subjugation. The forging of Hitler's 'Teutonic Order' was all the more easier (Zornado 2001, 91–96).

Similarly, the Golden Age of children's literature in Victorian England (exemplified in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) was

also premised on a dominant ideology of obedience and control between the colonizer (the adult) and the colonized (the child) within a culture that ‘constructed rhetorically the “savage” in terms of the child, and the child in terms of the “savage”’ (2001, 97). Zornado sketches the relationship between parent and child in Victorian England on the basis of the relationship between the physically dominant and the physically dominated. Child-rearing pedagogy meant that the child, from very early on, was taught that those with physical and economic power were morally superior. This meant that moral degradation was associated with the weak, the poor and the child—something that most Victorians accepted as a natural given.

From the cradle, the child learned that the world was divided between those who physically dominate and those who were dominated. Moreover, power—as in adult power—was always allied with moral authority. The child’s power was allied with savagery, willfulness, indolence, wickedness, and immorality. Resistance to moral authority was a sign of one’s otherness, and therefore justified even sterner ‘civilizing’ measures. (Zornado 2001, 103)

Victorian child-rearing for the middle and upper classes employed an array of technologies and mechanisms to ensure the child’s proper enculturation—the nursery, the baby bottle, the rubber nipple, the crib, and the nanny allowed physical separation between mother and child and came to be understood as the hallmarks of a civilized race. Child obedience started at home, continued at church and was completed at the public school. In fact, the public school and its culture of violence and hierarchy reaffirmed what the child already knew about how the world worked—years of domination and colonization at home were re-enacted in the public school in the name of education, progress and moral superiority (Zornado 2001, 105). As the bourgeois adult culture in Victorian England perceived the child in a state of original sin, becoming a true Englishman required a process of ‘reform’ by the adult, for the child was savage while the adult was civilized. A secure means to maintain power and obedience to hierarchy in the public school was corporal punishment. In what I believe should also be seen as the precursor of present-day bullying, Zornado reports that:

Students—especially young students—were degraded and incomplete ‘savages’ who could be used as the senior classman or adult in authority saw fit. This included, apparently, sexual abuse, rape, and other forms of regular,

ritualized violence. The hierarchy of Victorian culture, Victorian civilization, and Victorian moral superiority found its expression in the culture of the public school. (2001, 106)

While all this was happening in Britain, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that protective legislation began to bar children from productive work, while compulsory comprehensive education did not apply until 1870. In fact, such was the anxiety about the moral decay of the urban poor, that the ban of child labour in the mines was a direct outcome of middle-class fears about the physical (to a small extent) and moral consequences (to a greater extent) of children working next to adults, all barely clad. Soon after, social concern shifted from anxieties about the moral-spiritual well-being of children to the psychological effects of early encounters with sex (Jackson 1982, 48). So, the fear of the working classes—‘the dangerous poor’—and the need to control working-class children and youth by instilling middle-class values in them, along with waning demand for child labour, triggered the deployment of the modern institution of childhood. As scientific rationalism rose in the nineteenth century, the new discipline of psychology brought with it new theories of child development which replaced previous views. Modern proponents of psychology redefined childhood as a set of ‘natural’ paths of development on the way to adulthood, and their theories have become entrenched in all our lives through ‘expert’ advice, child-rearing manuals, and the practices of teachers and welfare professionals ever since (Jackson 1982, 43).

All these changes in child-rearing practices and images of childhood have shaped our approaches towards children and sex, and towards children’s sexuality. Children were not sheltered from sexual acts, and the lack of any notion of privacy in everyday life during medieval times meant that up to the early seventeenth century, children of all social classes would be well aware of the physical facts of sex once they were past being toddlers. The seventeenth century was a turning point in relation to common habits such as multiple occupancy of beds and bedrooms, or lax attitudes towards children’s sex games. Therefore, whereas sexual references were common in the songs, jokes and stories children heard, and sexual humour was a matter of course during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many traditional texts—such as fairy tales—were subsequently withdrawn from the curriculum and resurfaced expurgated, as childish ‘innocence’ came to be equated with sexual ignorance. Gradually, the fear that any contact with sex sullies childhood innocence prevailed, and has lingered ever since,

and in Victorian times this was reinforced by severe physical punishment (Jackson 1982, 47). Following that, the modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that intend to safeguard it from physical, sexual or moral danger and ensure its 'normal' development.

From the nineteenth century to the present, child-centred anxieties moulded children's lives by shaping the petty details of the domestic, conjugal and sexual lives of parents. Over the twentieth century, a new visibility has been accorded to the child within and without the household, while the 'private' family has been opened up to social powers and scrutiny (Rose 1989/1999, 124). In fact, discussing the extension of the social rights of Marshallian citizenship to children (in the form of universal education and social services for every child), Rose points out how critiques of the welfare state since the 1960s have argued that, far from extending citizenship in any benign way, the policies and practices of welfare have served to maintain inequality and legitimate existing relations of power; in addition, extending social regulation to the lives of children was only marginally related to recognition of their rights. Instead, children came to the attention of authorities as delinquents threatening property and security, as future workers requiring moralization and skills, as future soldiers requiring a level of physical fitness—in short, on account of the (potential) threat they posed to the welfare of the state. And the benevolence of extending the protection of children in their homes in fact disguised the extension of surveillance and control over the family. Concern over the young, from juvenile delinquency in the nineteenth century to sexual abuse today, constitutes moral panics, where certain persons or phenomena came to symbolize a range of social anxieties regarding threats to the established order and social values, the decline of morality and social discipline, and the subsequent need to take steps to prevent the spiralling of disorder. Professional groups—doctors, psychologists, social workers—used and exacerbated moral panics so that they could establish and increase their authority. The inexorable growth of welfare surveillance over the families of the working class is the outcome of an alignment between the professionals, the political concerns of the authorities and the social anxieties of the powerful.

Through the work of Philippe Ariès (1962), which rose to prominence in the 1980s, childhood ceased to be naturalized and was depicted as a cultural phenomenon. Alanen (1992), points out the role of psychology since the nineteenth century in articulating a view of the child as sensitive, with special needs and powerful emotions, and delineating childhood

from adulthood. In doing so, psychology pathologized childhood and promoted the notion of children's incompetence and dependency, which, in turn, shaped childhood policy making and obscured the visibility of children's everyday reality for years to come. Seeing modern childhood, then, as a process of social construction that takes place within modernization, calls for a rethinking of psychology's developmental paradigm as one of the dominant ways to make sense of childhood (Alanen 1992, 10).⁵ However, by the time sociology entered academia, childhood was already psychologized and pedagogized, as psychology had firmly established itself as the principal source of scientific knowledge about the child for researchers, professionals and the lay public alike (1992, 13). The marginalization of children in sociological research was gradually reversed during the 1980s and 1990s, and a 'new sociology of childhood'⁶ emphasized its inventiveness and challenged psychological approaches by viewing children as competent social actors. However, the hegemony of the pro-effects conceptual paradigm means that, with regard to children, we find ourselves in the middle of:

a discussion about whether we should restrict or control children's access to media. [...] Framing the debate in these terms focuses attention on a narrow range of phenomena and largely forecloses what can possibly be said about them. Yet, the ways in which this agenda is set in the wider public domain inevitably exert a significant influence on the formation of policy and, by extension, on the funding of further research. Academics in the United Kingdom—and I suspect elsewhere—are increasingly urged to consider the question of impact. (Buckingham 2013, 52)

It transpires from the above that parental and social concerns over children's media consumption have a consistency over time and:

the perennial theme of the corruption of childhood innocence is continually rehearsed and reworked. Yet such panics are typically seen as involving a form of displacement: they are 'really' about something other than they at first appear to be. In the case of children and media, the panic is [...] in fact about much broader (and more nebulous) concerns about 'social change.' [...] [What] is at stake here is normally explained as a fear of technological and commercial innovation, or simply as a fear of modernity. (Buckingham and Jensen 2012, 417)

Within the context of a 'risk-averse' culture, any talk that brings together children and sexuality is bound to be explosive, for children are

constructed as being ‘at risk’ from all things sexual, whether that involves child pornography, sex education, children’s media encounters with sexual content or a so-called ‘sexualized’ popular culture. In fact, the degree of access to sexual information children have, and how or when it should be gained, is a contentious issue, as several instances that have grabbed public attention show. For example, the cross-world media hype about Miley Cyrus’s transformation from Disney star Hanna Montana to a crotch-grabbing, tongue-sticking, twerking performer at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2013, is the stuff of parents’ worst nightmares.⁷ In the meantime, the self-proclaimed ‘I’m-one-of-the-biggest-feminists-in-the-world’⁸ Miley has managed to infuriate every other feminist group along the way. Miley Cyrus also shows how central is the impact of popular and celebrity culture within the public debate about the sexualization of young girls, alerting various moral entrepreneurs to the need for more monitoring and regulation.

A QUESTION OF LEISURE ...

At this point, I would like to argue that the social and academic concern we experience today about the sexualizing impact of contemporary popular media and culture is related to public invocations of ‘youth’ and to how we perceive youth leisure. The politics of leisure, like many others aspects of this discussion, goes back to the nineteenth century and to the construction of youth leisure—particularly working-class youth leisure—as a social problem. ‘Unstructured leisure’ as a cause of juvenile deviance and the generation of social problems emerged during Victorian times, when the increase in the free time available for young people resulted in youth ‘with too much in their hands’, who ended up being intoxicated (Blackman 2011, 99). Alternatively, in the 1800s, there were ‘self-directed’ forms of leisure for young adolescents and apprentices, such as several ‘youth taverns’ in northern English towns, public houses (‘Singing Saloons’) and Penny Theatres (‘gaffs’) in London and major cities, as well as penny dreadfuls. All these offered a break from formalized education for young adolescents with burgeoning economic power—as a result of wages earned at the factories—and focused on popular working-class anti-heroes (e.g. Sweeney Todd).

As family life was taken to be unknown in city rookeries, nineteenth-century English and French philanthropists wished to organize the conjugal, domestic and parental relations of the poor in the form of the

domesticated family, for the family was seen to play a critical role in eliminating illegality, restricting promiscuity and inculcating morality in children. Domesticity was promoted to the working class at the expense of street life, public bawdiness and vice, thus becoming a form of social regulation (Rose 1989/1999, 129). In this context, the leisure-based popular culture activities of the working-class youth became a target for middle-class moral reform, which resulted, in turn, in further regulation of young people's leisure activities. Both 'unstructured' and 'self-directed' youth leisure are recognized at policy level as potential social problems, thus justifying, from the 1890s onwards, the call for scientific experts on young people's behaviour as a social problem for society and a pathological problem for the individual, and presenting the control of young people as a matter of common sense (Blackman 2011, 100–107). Following that, being 'at risk' has shaped the politics of youth policy as part of a new science of prevention of further harm to come, and is linked to initiatives against crime, drug consumption, teenage pregnancy, anti-social behaviour or network technologies.⁹ In place of either 'unstructured' or 'self-directed' youth leisure, effective parenting in the new millennium has been about organized and supervised children's activities, as demonstrated in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report, *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Disadvantaged Communities*:

Parents believed that promoting organized, supervised activities reduced the likelihood of their children coming into contact with risks, provided safe alternatives and offered opportunities for skill and social development. (JRF 2006)

What this means is that in an internet-saturated world, with all-in-one media devices, children's—almost banal—'natural' aptitude with digital technologies, through which youngsters participate, play and learn, sits uncomfortably with the standard model of childhood, where competing narratives clash: there is that powerful marketing narrative which constructs the child as demanding, competent, computer literate and in need of access to digital technologies in order to 'unleash' its 'natural' capabilities. Opposite stands the counter-narrative of the internet as a Wild West, where unsolicited encounters with pornography may maim young souls for life, or, worse, where rings of paedophiles and child pornographers await to groom unsuspecting youngsters (Facer 2014).

Furthermore, there are grounds for concern that the internet is becoming part of—even compounding—pre-existing harmful offline experiences

such as sexual exploitation, bullying or exposure to pornography [...]. (Livingstone 2014)

In any case, children's online practices (as part of popular culture) are met with considerable caution because they are seen as present-day versions of 'self-directed' youth leisure, and thus as potentially problem-ridden. In fact, so powerful is this narrative that the ongoing rise in very young children's internet use across Europe, the USA, South Korea and Australia (Holloway et al. 2013), has meant that the continuum of opportunities/risks associated with children's and adolescents' use of online technologies (Hasebrink et al. 2009) has now been extended to cover zero to 8-year-olds. It may be that very young children are now discussed as using their online skills and literacies to build individual identity-making, a sense of belonging and social connectedness through the development of digital social skills and digital citizenship (Holloway et al. 2013, 15), however, there is growing concern about their practices in video sharing sites—lest they come across content 'better suited for a more mature audience' (Dewey 2013)—or in virtual worlds (like Minecraft and Club Penguin), where they are seen to be lacking in resilience due to their young age.

Children's digital safety has been routinely linked with various agendas, ranging from radicalization and terrorism, to intellectual property, commercialization and sexualization (DCSF 2010, 35), and the latest Byron Report is not immune to fears regarding the impact that children's exposure to pornography might have on their well-being. Based on that, Byron reiterates views that regard accidental or involuntary exposure to pornography as disturbing for children and as reinforcing sexist or violent attitudes and behaviour (2010, 36).

What all these policy developments show is a dominant conceptualization of youth as being characterized by a 'political deficit', since they are not in the position to make the right call and consume 'the right kind of culture'. They need to employ an array of 'techniques of the self' (Foucault 1983, 203)—the ways in which we are enabled by means of the languages, criteria and techniques open to us, to act upon our bodies, souls, thoughts in order to achieve happiness wisdom, fulfilment—before they can train themselves, by internalizing dominant and embedded norms, to make the 'right' decision of their own accord. Through such 'technologies of subjectivity' as self-inspection, self-monitoring and self-discipline, we adjust and evaluate ourselves according to criteria provided by others, while thinking all along that 'we freely choose our own freedom' (Rose 1989/1999, 11).

This kind of governmentality¹⁰ shows how public policy, social stakeholders and experts promote conditions of consensus about what is ‘*risqué*’, while at the same time constructing young children’s leisure as ‘Other’. As a result, ‘what is normal is now defined as deviant for youth, [...] [and children] are defined as vulnerable and therefore require political intervention’ (Blackman 2011, 111). Concomitant with such an interventionist approach is the collapse of distinct issues—whether that might be child pornography, children being targeted by marketers, young people becoming sexually active, child sexual abuse or body image disorders—into one, that of the vulnerable and helpless child victim. And it seems that different ideological viewpoints converge into the same argument:

that the forms of culture they didn’t like [are] damaging children—[which] gives the impression that there is no element of culture today that isn’t (somebody claims) causing harm to children: everything is child abuse. The danger of such discourses is that they draw attention away from the real harm that is being caused to children by sexual and other forms of maltreatment—which overwhelmingly occur within families, and for reasons ignored in these debates. (McKee 2010, 131)

... AND A QUESTION OF REGULATION

Children’s regulation has become a major issue with the proliferation of online technologies (Ólafsson et al. 2014; Duerager and Livingstone 2012), yet, it is not a recent one. Nikolas Rose (1989/1999) offers a compelling argument, following Foucault’s concept of governmentality, as to how the private family emerged as a solution to the problem of regulating individuals and populations, especially so far as the working class is concerned, and of the role played by a variety of clinical experts. Nineteenth-century philanthropy, he says, found a significant ally in the process of normalization of the working-class family in medicine. Medical-hygienic expertise began to elaborate a set of doctrines on the rearing of healthy children and on issues of moral conduct (drunkenness, debauchery, viciousness, masturbation, insanity) in medical terms. Such conduct was seen to be the result of faulty government during childhood, which could then be passed down from parents to children. Relevant literature advised well-to-do mothers in their homes how to rear their offspring. In turn, hygienists and philanthropists disseminated this information to the homes

of the poor—thus reinforcing the demands of morality with the norms of medicine. In this way, a set of standards for family life were established and generalized that were not premised in political or religious authority; the norms of medicine appeared to emerge from life itself. By the start of the twentieth century, the family was constructed not by political forces but by moral principles and professional expertise which claimed true knowledge. The representations of motherhood, fatherhood, family life and parental conduct generated by experts, shaped the ways in which individuals formed and regulated their lives, actions and aspirations. ‘The family’ was invented as an ideological mechanism for reproducing a docile labour force while exploiting the domestic labour of women under the guise of love and duty. Familial ideology thus provided economic functions for capitalism: reproduction of the labour force, socialization of children, exploitation of the unpaid domestic labour of women and so on (Rose 1989/1999, 125–126). Developments within capitalism in the nineteenth century reworked the division between public and private to suit the interests of a ruling, property-owning male elite, leading to the emergence of the cult of domesticity with its idealization of motherhood. Women were allocated some power, but only as mothers confined to the private sphere; in this way, the patriarchal separation of realms remained unchallenged, as was the economic power of men over the family unit. In fact, the ideology of individual choice and personal freedom in the private sphere of the home legitimated a refusal by public authorities to intervene in the family; the designation of certain activities, relationships and feelings as personal and private made them impenetrable to state intervention, whereas non-intervention was a socially constructed, historically variable, political decision. The idea that the family was outside public regulation was a myth, since the state establishes the legal framework for legitimate sexual relations and procreation, for children’s welfare in cases of custody and care, or when family property and disputes are concerned (1989/1999, 126–127). In the early twentieth century, the ‘family’ and the relations within it were used as a social and socializing machine towards military, industrial and moral objectives—not through coercion and control, but through the construction of mothers who would be responsible for hygienic homes and healthy children. Thus the family served these social objectives as long as it operated as a voluntary and responsible machine for the rearing and moralizing of children (1989/1999, 130–133). Once this was accomplished, the images of normality constructed by expertise would serve as a yardstick by which individuals would measure and normalize their own

lives and those of their children. In this way, families would be immersed in correct socialization without direct intervention by political authorities into the household. The difficult task of producing normality within the family would guarantee the search for the help and guidance of experts. This serves to show how the incorporation of the expert doctrines for the government of children is practised with our own free will. Socialization, in this sense, is the historically specific outcome of technologies for the government of the subjectivity of citizens (1989/1999, 133).

The juvenile court and the child guidance clinic became crucial nodes in a network woven around the child and the family, training troublesome children in correct moral principles and getting them acclimatized to cleanliness, work and obedience (Rose 1989/1999, 155–156). At the same time, in the schools, a class of children who presented minor disturbances of behaviour arose, which were perceived as evidence of poor mental hygiene. Lack of mental hygiene was a recipe for future social distress, and the school was a vital site in such detection. Quarrelsome, lying, cheating, night terrors, being too much or too little extrovert, grieving or fearing too little or too much, were all indicators of troubles to come. The juvenile court was one key node bringing the penal system, the school, social assistance (in the forms of benefits), and psychological, medical and psychiatric expertise together in the same social network of normalization. The child guidance clinic was a second institutional domain where the troubles of childhood (backward children, nervous children, stammerers, liars, truants, the neglected, the delinquent) would be diagnosed and norms of adjustment would be disseminated into a web of child welfare, including the nursery, the home, the school, the playground and the courts. The ‘new psychology’ held that a child’s character was the outcome of the organization of instincts—a child reared in a normal family was a child adjusted to its social environment; a maladjusted child (from a bed-wetter to a delinquent) was the outcome of something gone wrong in the emotional economy of the family (1989/1999, 157–158). As a result, a constant scrutiny of the emotional interchanges of family life was required, in the name of individual and social mental hygiene. Adults were educated through manuals and radio talks that love could bolster children’s confidence, helpfulness and conscientiousness while averting fear, jealousy and cruelty. If parents had emotional problems, they would build them into their children. Hence love was no longer just a romantic ideal, but the element which produced normal or abnormal children (1989/1999, 160). To fulfil both their social obligations and personal wishes, parents

were advised to regulate their desires and emotions, and, if found wanting with regard to the family ideal, to seek anxiously for expert guidance.

In the two decades following the end of the First World War, the vision of the child and its family was generalized, and the group life of the family became the way to account for the troubles of childhood. This therapeutic familialism reinscribed the process of the emotional development of the child and elevated the mundane task of motherhood into a natural and essential state of love. Such a view about the naturalness of a bond of love between mother and infant provided the rationale for a wide-ranging strategy for minimizing social troubles and maximizing social efficiency in an attempt to govern the mental health of the population through the family, and the bonds of love between mother and child (Rose 1989/1999, 161–171). The child was a citizen of democracy, with rights, and as such it was entitled to family life. Authorities now had a moral and psychological obligation to try to avert family breakdown and reconstruct normal family life through adoption and fostering for those children deprived of their own. From the mid 1950s onwards, the government of children and parents was subjected to the normative scrutiny of expertise, while all citizens were educated in how best to conduct their lives in order to promote the psychological conditions for social harmony and tranquillity. The objective was to govern the family in such a way that it became an educative institution for the new generation in values, conducts and citizenship (1989/1999, 175–178).

The fact that most of this panic was tied to young boys (and less on women) illustrates that children's media consumption has been under scrutiny consistently since the nineteenth century; the absence of young girls in this early discourse of anxiety can be attributed to the social construction of women as pertinent only to the private sphere, and consequently as not part of the public debate.

POPULAR CULTURE AS SEX-ED?

In one sense, the caution with which the consumption of popular culture is met and regulated—especially insofar as the proliferation of online practices among young children is concerned—is reminiscent of Postman's argument regarding the role of television in the 'disappearance of childhood' (1982/1994). Only now it is not television that is perceived as being conducive to the destruction of childhood, but internet technologies, and the content made available to children through them. Within

Postman's context, children's social media practices 'banish shame', as they make adult sexual knowledge directly available to them (here comes a twerking Miley), and supersede literacy as the primary means of communication. In addition, in much the same way as television was seen some 20 years ago, social media have brought an end to the notion of age-related and gradual acquisition of (sexual) knowledge for children. Furthermore, the consumption of popular culture in the form of various online practices is constructed as a 'self-directed' leisure form and, as such, conducive to having a negative impact.

The availability of sexual information is hardly ever treated as a positive thing. Following the logic of a 'politics of substitution' (Jenkins 1992), Buckingham and Bragg (2004, 4) suggest that invoking fears about children's welfare provides a powerful means of manipulating public attention. In this way, campaigns against pornography become campaigns against child pornography and children's access to sexual knowledge, and that access is presented as evidence of a more general permissiveness exemplified by increased violence, drug use and criminal activity among the young.

What all this attests to is that, within the public debate about the sexualization of young girls, the potential of popular culture and media for sexual education and learning, or for the assertion of agency and the construction of identity, usually goes missing. As if it wasn't enough that sex education has always been contentious—with traditionalists usually claiming that it encourages young people to have sex 'before they are ready' and progressives responding by citing high levels of sexual information and low teenage pregnancies in countries like the Netherlands, in Britain and the US, sex education in the 1990s tended to concentrate on the protection angle—how not to get pregnant, how not to catch a sexually transmitted disease, how not to be sexually abused or raped (Mills 1992). Instilling normative heterosexuality, fear of disease or pregnancy, and presenting women as potential victims or men as sexually uncontrollable is what contemporary sexual education often amounts to. In fact, more often than not, the term conceals the specific social, educational and economic policies used, and the moral values secretly encouraged and discouraged. One thing that sex education largely ignores is the pleasurable side of sex—the fact that individuals engage in sexual activity in order to seek pleasure for themselves and their partners (Levine 2002). The dark suspicion of a direct link between knowing about sex and doing sex, has created over the years an enduring conundrum for sexual educators—how to inform about sex without flaming children's lust.

In this process, sex education communicates the assumption that sex is primarily heterosexual, reproductive and perilous, and is often used as an antidote to the ‘oversexualizing’ popular media and a coercive peer culture. However, having fallen prey to contemporary too-much-too-soon public anxieties about conveying too much knowledge to the ‘uninitiated’, and thus igniting curiosity about and inciting experimentation with sexual activity, conventional sex education misses out on the opportunities afforded by entertainment media that could lead to sexual development and knowledge. From such a perspective, sex education should be seen as something bigger than science or relational facts, and discussed from a broader perspective, one that brings together cultural capital, popular culture and the ethical self.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to contextualize historically a variety of cultural analyses regarding childhood, which shed light on how we have come to talk about children and the politics of sexuality the way we do today. These socio-political changes are also related to changes in the epistemology of childhood research, and both of these inform our understanding of childhood. Present-day discourses of child protectionism envelop the politics of sexuality, as I will show in the following chapter, whether they involve discussions of pornography, sexualization or any other sex-related agenda, and are situated within a notion of children as ‘unfinished adults’—or ‘adults-in-the-making’ at best. In this respect, I believe that, presently, we experience a conflated view of childhood, one that bridges the romantic discourse with the discourse of *tabula rasa* and the Puritan discourse.¹¹ This means that children are interpellated *simultaneously* as being innocent (the romantic approach)—actually, at risk of losing this inherent innocence—as well as in need of (expert) adult guidance and training in order to later evolve into responsible and mature selves (the *tabula rasa* approach), and as perpetrators¹² in cases of bullying (sometimes sexually related, as, potentially, in sexting) (the Puritan child-as-wicked approach).

What we forget, however, is that bullying—and other forms of child abuse (sexual or otherwise)—is hardly a twentieth- (or twenty-first-) century social ill, accentuated by the proliferation of online technologies, which is what most of us have come to believe on the basis of what the media and various pundits report. I see it more as a result of the changes in parental and child-rearing cultures that have taken place within late

modernity. Bullying, as part of what I see as an overall culture of children's abuse, involving humiliation, isolation, terror and pain in verbal, emotional and physical terms, is nothing more than a present-day manifestation of the kind of ritualized violence that children were subjected to and immersed in from the seventeenth century onwards in the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant worlds, in a manner and intensity that is very different from previous periods of child disciplining, as I am about to explain. In fact, I find it striking that among the academic scholars and educationalists who are so emphatically concerned with childhood vulnerability towards—and thus protection from—a variety of sex-related online 'risks' (sex-related bullying and, by association, all other sex-related 'threats' such as pornography, sexting, grooming by adult sexual predators, sexualization), no one, as yet, has made the connection between the legacy of black pedagogy of early nineteenth-century Germany and Victorian England, and the culture of power imbalance, dominance and subjugation it spread.¹³ Bullying among peers is what centuries of corporal punishment, particularly after the seventeenth century, has bequeathed us—a political and cultural education in non-public disciplinary actions in which younger generations have been embedded as a by-product of 'appropriate' child-rearing.

It is in this sense that I see contemporary bullying and other abusive practices as having been informed by a centuries-long culture of ritualized violence, which has been legitimized and sanctified in adult-minor and in peer relations—especially across the Anglophone and Protestant worlds, as I suggested earlier on.

in certain domains such as the home and the school and in the religious and professional spheres, disciplinary action reflects (and in the past has certainly informed) mechanisms, procedures, and power structures in the world outside. In this sense non-public disciplinary action, including the use of corporal punishment, offers a political education and helps shape new generations' ideas of licit and illicit penalties. (Geltner 2014b, 10)

Present-day anti-bullying, anti-abuse, child-protectionist policy making can be understood as the way in which the (civilized) West has transgressed against, and overcome, centuries of corporal disciplining which aimed to uproot childhood sin. The only difference is that 'back then', this kind of child-rearing was the only kind that was acceptable and expected, leading eventually to respectable, responsible and 'morally healthy' adults. In this sense, no one contested the repeated abuse, trauma and suffering that

children were inflicted at home and at school—confirmed in Sunday sermons—at the hands of the more powerful (and morally superior) adults or their more elder peers, for ‘tough love’ was normalized and self-justified as the only means that would secure deliverance of the child from cardinal sin while preparing prospective citizens for a life of hardship.

Thus what was once a dominant, acceptable, respectable, expected, responsible and ‘moral’ child-rearing practice has now become cruel, inhumane, unethical and downright abusive, for we experience parenting (as well as all relationships between elder and younger peers) from a totally different perspective. Today, we talk about children’s rights—we institutionalize them in the form of conventions, as in the case of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2014,¹⁴ and we even write them in ‘children-friendly’ language in order to make sure that children can make sense of them, stressing that ‘as you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights’.¹⁵ We talk about children’s agency and empowerment rights, and accept that they must have a voice of their own instead of relying on adults, a voice that is ‘absolutely important to listen to [...] first-hand, rather than assuming what is best for them’ (Third et al. 2014, 11).

NOTES

1. In seventeenth- to eighteenth-century colonial America, Calvinists feared that children—born with original sin—would endure eternal damnation if they died before they experienced Christian salvation. Within this context, infants were morally deprived, for they were inherently sinful and sexual—even more so than adults, who had learned, through rationality and self-discipline, how to control their damnable impulses. Later on, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this was succeeded by a competing doctrine according to which children were innocent: they were perceived as sinless, without sexual feelings, and oblivious to worldly concerns. The view of the innocent child was ever-shifting, from the Lockean *tabula rasa* to the Rousseauian youth who was, in essence, an uncorrupted element of nature. As the doctrine of original sin receded, it was replaced by that of original innocence. This innocence, however, was raced white and no one represented it better than Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the emblematic child-angel of the nineteenth century (Bernstein 2011).
2. This kind of sentimentality is evident throughout the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century, which was populated by the ‘child’s story’. This is

distinctly different from the eighteenth-century novel, where children are nowhere to be found (Alryes 2001).

3. The age of consent by common and Church law in the UK was set at 12 for girls and 14 for boys, based on the belief that boys matured later than girls. It remained thus until 1885, when Victorians started to idealize the sexual innocence of girls (Kehily and Montgomery 2009, 74).
4. Although corporal punishment holds a durable attractiveness throughout the centuries, its earlier practices served a different logic from the Protestant one. Jewish law espoused corporal punishment via the early adoption of the *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye). Under Roman law, similarly to ancient Greece, the corporal punishment of free citizens was considered particularly demeaning (especially flogging), and crystallized into a highly effective mechanism for social othering—suitable only for foreigners and slaves (Geltner 2014b). The Roman father held significant legal powers over those under his *patria potestas*, mainly his children and his slaves, including the right to inflict corporal punishment. Though by the fourth century the flogging of children (under the age of 25) by a parent was officially declared not a crime, the legal power of the father was restricted by the cultural association of flogging with the status of slaves, and the resulting social expectations of the ideal father. As a result, Roman parents were reluctant to use corporal punishment on their adult children (adolescents), for it would have affected the parents' honour. And whereas this disciplinary method was accepted in the Roman household, the social approval of beating children over a certain age in classical and early Christian contexts is debatable—despite the apparent straightforwardness of the scriptures. Hillner (2009) argues that in classical and late antiquity, the beating of children in puberty (12–14 years) became worrying—and when they were beaten, they were not flogged (as this was the cultural sign of servitude). Hence, children would be beaten at school throughout Roman antiquity, a practice that formed a culturally accepted classroom discipline—yet, such punishment was administered by a wooden stick rather than a whip, and was thus perceived as less shameful (Hillner 2009). Christian fathers in late antiquity held different views about the corporal punishment of children, some being against it (for blows should be reserved for slaves), while others suggested that both sons and slaves (as human sinners) could be punished equally. This view on the power of salvation through punishment fed into later Western monastic rules. Late antique monastic rules would distinguish between two interrelated views of corporal discipline—one that proposed graded disciplinary measures (whereby corporal punishment would be a last resort in the chain of disciplinary steps). Basil of Caesarea promoted another notion of punishment, as medication rather than retribution, and suggested that punishment has to fit the crime. In fact, the idea

of corporal punishment to be applied when everything else (all measures appealing to reason) has failed is well understood in both classical and Christian antiquity, and there were those who warned that excessive harshness, especially the beating of children, would backfire, for children would only learn to despise their punisher (Hillner 2009). In this context, Paul advises fathers to teach obedience, yet not to be too harsh, as this may be counter-productive, while John Chrysostom proposed a kind of graded punishment which would see blows as a last resort (ideally, just a possibility). Such views on punishment are of significance because they feed directly into the realm of child-rearing. Late antique monasteries would be responsible for many children in a variety of ways—as the younger relatives of adult members of the monastic community, as orphans requesting monastic care, as pupils entrusted to monasteries for educational reasons, or as apprentice monks (Hillner 2009, 779–780).

5. In fact, psychologists have been instrumental in providing the vocabulary with which to discuss and diagnose the troubles of children since the Second World War for mothers, fathers and professionals alike. Hence psychology, argues Rose (1989/1999), has played a key role in establishing the norms of childhood, in providing the language to talk about childhood subjectivity and its pathology, and invent technologies to cure and normalize it. The soul of the young citizen has become the object of government through psychological expertise. Children also became favoured objects and targets of programmes of individualization during the nineteenth century, when laborious projects were initiated that aimed to document the uniqueness of the criminal, the madman, the pauper and the defective, record and classify their characteristics, and then discipline their differences from the norm. Psychologists claimed a particular expertise in the disciplining and governing of the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of childhood. The consolidation of psychology into a discipline was tied to its capacity to produce the technical means of individualization, a new way of construing and recording human subjectivity. At the same time that the nineteenth century saw the organization of asylums, prisons, hospitals and schools, new systems were devised for documenting and registering information—files, records, case histories, dossiers, statistics. The sciences of individualization used these techniques of recording as devices for the inscription of identity, in this way translating human properties and capacities into pictures, charts, diagrams and measurements. The first contribution of psychology to the project of individualization was the psychological intelligence test, with the aim of addressing concerns regarding the feeble-minded child (Rose 1989/1999, 135–139). Feeble-mindedness was perceived as a major social threat by eugenicists, for it would lead to the degeneracy or deterioration of the race, and was seen as relevant to the prostitute, the tubercular,

the insane, the unemployable, the vagrant, and the libertine. The school-room was one way to identify the problem and produce its solution at the same time. Those children—other than the deaf or the blind—who could not benefit from instruction came to be known as educational imbeciles or the feeble-minded. They needed to be separated and segregated in specialized institutions that would seek to awaken their moral sensibilities, now dormant, and increase their resistance to vice and crime. Psychometrics (the IQ test), were soon coupled with other normalizing visions of childhood, such as the notion of child ‘development’ (1989/1999, 144). Developmental psychology was made possible by the clinic and the nursery school, which, by bringing together large numbers of children of the same age, enabled their study by psychological experts under controlled, almost laboratory conditions. In this way, standardization and normalization was made possible. The discourse of development construed children in terms of ‘advanced’ or ‘retarded’, constructed a normalizing vision of childhood, and provided new ways of thinking and talking about childhood that spread to teachers, health workers and parents through scientific literature and popular manuals (1989/1999, 152–153).

6. See for example, Jenks (1982), Qvortrup et al. (1994), Allison and Prout (1990), Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992), King (1999), Zornado (2001) and Kehily (2009), among many others.
7. In fact, it wasn’t long before twerking became a practice institutions found it imperative to regulate against, even in television fiction, as *Glee* viewers found out during the show’s season 5. In response to Principal Sue Sylvester’s banning of twerking at McKinley High for advertising ‘dance porn’, Will Schuester and his Glee club go down memory lane and present popular public anxieties regarding ‘incendiary’ dance routines: the waltz in late nineteenth century, the Charleston in the 1920s, Elvis-pelvis, the twist, and the mashed potato dance in the 1960s, as well as twerking in the 2010s (*Glee*, ‘End of Twerk’, episode 5, season 5, 2013).
8. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/14/miley-cyrus-feminist_n_4274194.html
9. See for example the 2006 Home Office report *Tackling Anti-social Behaviour*. <http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/12/060799es.pdf>, or DCSF’s *Safer Children in a Digital World: the Byron Review* (2008).
10. Foucault has developed the notion of governmentality in his discussion of power as knowledge. It is defined as the ‘techniques and procedures that govern people’s conduct’ (O’Farrell 2005, 106), or ‘the conduct of conduct’ (Rose 1989/1999, xxi). This appears to include not so much the authoritative regulation that characterizes the biopolitical society—a society that uses techniques, such as technologies of hygiene and sexual reproduction, to

manage and control its population—but rather how people learn to regulate themselves as individuals, within the family and within society at large (see Foucault 1986). The idea of governmentality also focuses attention on the ‘technologies’ through which government is realized: technologies are assumed to be the ‘technical assembly of means of judgment, the techniques of reformation and cure, and the apparatuses where intervention takes place’ (Rose 1989/1999, xi). Within this idea of how we govern ourselves, and of how family and society govern our construction of identities and production of the self, it is possible to develop an account of the production of sexual subjectivities through the role of discourse (see Chronaki 2013 for more on Foucault).

11. The romantic childhood discourse draws upon the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and claims a childhood innocence and purity that could be corrupted by the outside world. The child as *tabula rasa* draws upon the work of John Locke, and suggests that children come into this world as blank slates, and become rational, mature and responsible beings with appropriate adult guidance and training (the-adult-in-the-making). The Puritan view of children postulates that children are inherently wicked or evil (Kehily 2009; Egan and Hawkes 2010).
12. See, for example, the EU Kids Online categorization of children as recipients, participants and actors (perpetrators) (De Haan and Livingstone 2009, 4; Livingstone et al. 2012; Livingstone and Haddon 2009).
13. The impact of such a notion of parenting and child-rearing was far-reaching, to the extent that it spread to non-Protestant, non-Anglo-Saxon cultures. In Greece, the Grimms’ fairytales made their first appearance (in translation) in one of the most renowned and long-standing national children’s magazines—*Διάπλασις των Παίδων* [Diaplasis ton Pedon/Children’s Edification], which was produced from 1879 till 1948. The magazine’s scope was the forging of the future good citizen of the Greek state, by promoting proper upbringing and instilling the values of industriousness, obedience, morality, respect and duty in the young child (Patsiou 1987).
14. A Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 and later reviewed and adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and 1959. Such declarations focused mainly on protection and provision rights, addressing children’s ‘vulnerability’ by asserting their developmental needs for health and social care, education and protection from harm. Presently, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the concept of children as rights-holding individuals, with a voice in matters that concern them. In this way, participation rights are added to those of protection and provision.
15. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language, <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

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The Politics of Sexuality: The Intersection of Sexualization and Pornography

Although pornography is not the same as sexualization, the public debate about children's sexualization entails an inherent fear about the spread of pornographic culture and its consumption by young audiences. For we all have an opinion about pornography, whether we enjoy consuming it or not, and the ease and immediacy of access to pornographic content afforded by internet technologies has fuelled a new round of polarized and very heated arguments regarding its cultural, psychological and moral implications. Indeed, online pornography constitutes one of the most fiercely debated public issues, one that is widely considered as one of the 'major' threats that children and teenagers across the globe routinely face, and that we, as responsible parents and members of society, feel morally obliged to protect them from (Levine 2002). As a result, and within a broader context of 'the politics of sexuality', discussions of sexualization and discussions of porn are commonly collapsed in the public imagination, fuelled all the more by policy documents, which routinely bring up pornographic content when referring to sexualization (DCSF 2010, 36), the media¹ and academia.

As far as the latter is concerned, there is an overabundance of research that accounts for either the (usually negative) impact of pornographic content on children and teenagers (Greenfield 2004; Ybarra and Mitchell 2005; Malamuth and Huppin 2005; Flood 2007; Tsitsika et al. 2009), or for its cultivation of sexist and misogynistic stereotypes (Milburn et al. 2000; Tyden and Rogala 2004; Johansson and Hammarén 2007). It appears, then, that contemporary public debate about sexualization and

pornography is largely framed by a notion of the psychological effects that follow the consumption of pornography, using an ‘addiction’ discourse and hypothesizing about the adoption of violent behaviour (Flood 2009; Young 2008; Peter and Valkenburg 2007, 2008; Frangos et al. 2011). The preoccupation with violent behaviour is fairly common within the radical feminist agenda, where pornography is equated with objectification (Nussbaum 1999; MacKinnon 1993) and the demeaning of women, either in the way sexual activity is being represented or in the working conditions of its female protagonists (Dworkin 1981), and with communicating unrealistic body images and standards of sexual performance in relationships (Bridges et al. 2003; Manning 2006; Albright 2008). This kind of public debate is reignited time and again by the media, which cannot seem to resist any headline that puts ‘porn’, ‘harm’ and ‘children’ within the same sentence (Buckingham and Bragg 2004; Tsaliki and Chronaki 2008;² Haddon and Stald 2009; Chronaki 2013).

It is my view that the rhetorical move (or ‘jump’, should I say) from sexualization to pornography (and back) when it comes to children and adolescents needs to be contextualized within a nineteenth-century philosophy that expected women (and young girls for that matter) to be confined to the private sphere while abiding to a strictly regulated heteronormativity, and which interpreted pornography as obscene. Since the nineteenth century, those concerned with the growing immorality of the general public have considered the spread of pornography as a litmus test. By concentrating on the immorality and vulnerability of the masses and the weak, European states negotiated an increasing intervention into the private lives of people at a time when they guaranteed civic freedoms through an expanding liberalism; concurrently, recurrent panics about cultural decay viewed pornography as evidence of and responsible for the problems in modern society. I believe that in order to make sense of the debate about the sexualization of childhood, we first need to make sense of the way the culture of pornography developed across time and cultures.

This chapter will present a historical trajectory of sexuality and desire and the eroticization of Western culture—including its bias in favour of heterosexual sexuality—while also looking into the rise of sexual science in the late nineteenth century. In this way, it seeks to provide an overarching conceptual framework of the politics of sexuality, showing that the construction of childhood and womanhood in close proximity fed into a cultural linkage between physical pain and disciplining and sexual arousal through the rise of pornographic culture.

A QUICK LOOK INTO THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PORNOGRAPHY

Contemporary ambivalence towards pornographic culture is a concomitant side-effect of (among other things) the uneasy relationship between sexual desire and Christian religion. The early Christians had a heritage of denigrating sexual desire as polluting, and deemed celibacy as superior to marriage. However, if Christianity was to perpetuate itself, its believers could not stay celibate forever, which is why the Church fathers had affirmed marriage by the fourth and fifth century. Marital sex, though, was permissible for procreation only, and couples were admonished to refrain from the polluting power of sexual desire (Clark 2008, ch. 3). Here lies the contradiction surrounding pornography: Christianity was forced to accommodate sex within marriage in order to build an institutional Church, yet it continued to consider sexual desire as sinful and preferred celibacy and virginity instead. Since sex was only procreational, any other non-reproductive sexual activity (solitary³ or otherwise) was denigrated. During the seventeenth century, medical works started to downplay the necessity of female pleasure. Such works were usually published in Latin, thus few people could read them, and even when in English or French, they remained too expensive for mass consumption. Soon enough, plagiarized and inexpensive versions of the medical literature of the time were circulated either as wedding presents or passed between adolescent apprentices. These popular manuals resisted the Church's claim that sex was sinful and emphasized female desire as necessary for conception; some of them (e.g. *Aristotle's Masterpiece*) even instructed foreplay between husbands and wives and considered sexual delight as essential for the human condition (especially for women's health) (Clark 2008, 105–106).

The question, however, arises as to how we have ended up talking about pornography as 'toxic', especially when, initially, the culture of pornography was associated with political subversiveness and heresy. Lynn Hunt (1996) offers an invaluable account of the multifaceted and contradictory historical trajectory of Western pornography in early modern Europe (1500–1800), contextualizing contemporary understandings of pornography within a nineteenth-century setting. Hunt's work, together with that of the likes of Walter Kendrick (1996) and Egan and Hawkes (2010), points out that in the post-modern age we live in, most of what we assume we know as 'scientific facts' regarding the culture of pornography are, in fact, the outcome of an intricate process that was shaped during the age of modernity; and that the pornography discourse in modernity was very different from that of early modernity.

For pornography, as an artistic and legal category as we perceive it today (i.e. the explicit portrayal of sexual anatomy and activity in order to arouse), is a Western construction, inextricably tied to the project of modernity. Prior to that, early modern pornography between 1500 and 1800 was linked to free-thinking and heresy, science and natural philosophy, as well the cauterizing of political and religious authorities (Hunt 1996, 10–11). Hence the precursors of the genre are found in sixteenth-century Italy and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England and France.⁴ However, notwithstanding the portrayal of nudity in ancient Greece and Rome, the launch of the modern pornographic tradition (as something that needs to be regulated in the name of decency rather than religion or politics) is traced in the early nineteenth century, when the spread of print culture paved the way for mass access to pornographic writings and representations. Earlier (see Chap. 2) I discussed how Walter Kendrick (1996) pointed out the class dimension of pornography consumption. The subsequent need to monitor the public consumption of such ‘obscene’ content and representations led to the creation of ‘secret museums’ in the nineteenth century, where all ‘pornographic’ artifacts and contexts would be privately available to the audiences trained to use them—the upper classes. It thus transpires that the notion of the ‘obscene’ was dependent on the private/public axis.

Pornographic books were among the clandestine literature of the *livres philosophiques*—classified separately, ordered secretly and smuggled into eighteenth-century France after their pages had been ‘married’ (i.e. slipped between pages of inoffensive titles). In fact, the use of dialogue form in the French pornographic tradition was the preferred vehicle for a blend of philosophical and sexual subversiveness (DeJean 1996), very often employed by the most prevailing and political figure of all—the libertine whore (Norberg 1996). The pornographic genre was also closely associated with male libertinism—a philosophy practised as a religion by upper-class men in the seventeenth century as a way to justify sexual pleasure and desire in a world dominated by Christian asceticism. Using humour and satire to subvert the eroticism of its rituals and literature, male libertinism spread more broadly into the lower middle classes of England and France (Trumbach 1996), and transformed gender roles in relation to sexual behaviour: during the first half of the eighteenth century, the behaviour and status of women was being modified by the ideals of romantic love, conjugal companionship and parental child care. The male role was also transformed as previously accepted forms of male homosexual behaviour

gave way to a new standard and the status of masculinity was now derived only through desire for females. Sodomy was stigmatized as effeminate, and the audiences of pornography—whether the individual, the couple or the group—started to consume largely ‘heterosexual’ content (Trumbach 1996, 262).

In addition, Hunt argues for an inextricable link between pornography (as a politically oppositional genre) and democracy, locating the development of indigenous pornographic traditions across different European countries at the same time as the emergence of mass politics—in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century, that is. Even the production of novels was linked with pornography, in that countries with little indigenous pornography production, had limited novel production as well (1996, 23–24). The interdependence between pornography and the novel is hardly surprising, given that the latter was heavily criticized during the eighteenth century and deemed subversive.⁵ More particularly, the novel was construed as cementing women’s vulnerability to emotion while instigating secret thoughts and unknown desires which could, on occasion, lead to conjugal infidelity. In addition, the novel had considerable social and moral effects, for by allowing divorce to acquire moral legitimacy in the public mind (as in the case of George Sand, who glorified the love affairs between coachmen and ladies), it encouraged extra-marital affairs. In this sense, I suggest that the novel was seen as a move towards the overt sexualization of women in much the same way as present-day sexualizing popular culture is viewed in many accounts. As novelists were among those in favour of divorce, the novel itself was perceived by nineteenth-century moralists as promulgating self-independence and an immoderate search for carnal pleasure by supporting contraception. In that, it weakened the institution of marriage and paved the way for the childless family, as a result it was seen as a menace to political democracy, the workplace and the nation itself. Hence, overall, the novel was deemed ‘pornographic’ in nature, possessing an incendiary power and giving birth to a new mentality that was soaked with immorality (Stora-Lamarre 2005, 56–58).

THE ‘WOMAN QUESTION’ IN VICTORIAN TIMES

Also important for our understanding of present-day discussions of the politics of sexuality, where the perils of childhood sexualization have a prominent position, is the construction of women’s sexuality in Victorian times, for, more often than not, womanhood and childhood were conflated and

pathologized at that time by male scientific discourse. As I unravel Cynthia Eagle Russett's (1989) rich account of the development of sexual science in the nineteenth century, I hope to provide a mental bridge between modern perceptions of the impact of sexual content on children and adolescents and the attendant dominance of psychological discourses of media effects, as described in Chaps. 1 and 2, and the Anglo-American male scientific establishment of the later nineteenth century which cemented a kinship between women, children and the 'lesser races'.

In response to women's historical claim to a life beyond the domesticity, the late nineteenth century in Anglo-American science saw the rise of sexual science and the 'woman question'. Built upon knowledge from the life sciences and the new sciences of anthropology, psychology and sociology, sexual science also used the imperious authority of a new discipline in social as well as scientific matters—biology. Along with John Stuart's Mill treatise on *The Subjection of Women* (where Mills acknowledged the artificiality of the 'nature of women' and saw it as a result of forced repression, while also supporting nurture over nature in shaping character), Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (where Darwin stated that women's nature, like men's, was rooted in their biology, and that it was nature, not nurture, that mattered) delimited the controversial terrain of women's sexuality (Russett 1989). This was a time when scientists enjoyed an unprecedented prestige, accorded on the basis of the perceived connection between scientific knowledge and the great achievements of nineteenth-century technology, and of their promise of certain knowledge. While late eighteenth-century social theory stressed the commonalities shared by all human beings, and acknowledged the influence of the environment and social conditions, environmentalism lost momentum in the nineteenth century in favour of differentiation and hierarchy. The wave of exploratory travels between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century stimulated anthropological interest not only in race but also in sex, since it revealed sexual customs, cultural beliefs and labour patterns at variance with European expectations (1989, 7). Concurrently, the rise of feminism in Britain and the United States raised the subject of equality in personal and matrimonial relationships, bringing legal, political and social repercussions. Such assertiveness was unnerving (more than the racial issue), and scientists responded with a detailed and sustained examination of the differences between men and women that justified their differing social roles. Anatomy, physiology, evolutionary biology, physical anthropology, psychology and sociology developed comprehensive theories of sexual

difference, guided by theories of evolution. Scientific theorizing relied for the most part on common knowledge and the dicta of predecessors. The same names were cited over and over, solidifying their authority each time. In the evolutionary development of the human race, women lagged behind men, much as 'primitive people' lagged behind Europeans, and remained childlike even in adulthood (1989, 10–11). Darwinian sexual selection decreed that women could never expect to match the intellectual and artistic achievements of men, nor could they expect an equal share of power and authority, for Nature had reserved a secondary role for women—that of reproduction, while assigning men to the field of production. This was called complementarity. Feminists in the USA vehemently dismissed such claims, embracing the environmental argument (alleged sex differences were seen unlikely to be innate, and were probably the result of social factors) instead, in order to counter scientific anti-feminism. However, within an overall context of rampant change in the economy and social structure deriving from late nineteenth-century industrialism, and of concern about humanity's kinship with 'the brutes' and the relation of matter and spirit, scientists sought to offset at least one set of uncertainties by denying women a coequal role in society. By using women and the lesser races as a buffer zone against a too-threatening intimacy with the savages, Victorian gentlemen distanced themselves from the animality implied in Darwinism (1989, 14). Whether on the continent, in England or in the United States, physical anthropologists focused not on language and culture, but on physical characteristics (skeletal structure, hair texture, colour of skin and eyes, skull size) and asserted the inequality of man and the 'inferior character of the Negro'. Alongside blacks, Polynesians, Chinese, Celts and other races, women, too, were relegated.⁶ So, although the main object of inquiry of physical anthropology was the classification of races, the problem of the sexes was too similar to ignore (1989, 7), especially when mid-nineteenth-century women were challenging long-established social arrangements with respect to their rights and duties through feminism.

Scientists all over Europe and America joined leading French craniologist Paul Broca in a unanimous conclusion about the nature of the contrast between the sexes: women's brains were smaller and lighter than those of men. Men had an advantage of about 10 % in the volume and weight of their brains—what came to be known to the educated English-speaking public as the 'the missing five ounces of female brain' (Russett 1989, 35–36). As a result, men monopolized thought, for men exhibited

more developed frontal lobes (which is where thought takes place), while women had more developed occipital lobes (where emotions are felt). Such claims may appear dated and arcane today, but they were the stuff of heated controversy in the nineteenth-century scientific and popular press, and bore significant social implications, as they shaped social policy, especially with reference to women's education.⁷ Not for one moment were Victorian women permitted to forget that their essence was reproductive—in fact they were seen as the sex sacrificed to reproductive necessities, for maternity defined womanhood (1989, 43). Women's instinctive motherliness did not, however, presuppose an instinctive sexuality. Late nineteenth-century scientists and medics were uncertain about the existence and strength of the sexual instinct in women, but it was generally agreed that it was weaker than in men.

Recapitulation theory proved irresistible to the social sciences, offering anthropological understanding of all those groups outside the charmed circle of Caucasian male adulthood—children, women and the lower races. Recapitulation theory—encapsulated in the phrase 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'—argued that the embryonic development of an individual organism (its ontogeny) followed the same path as the evolutionary history of its species (its phylogeny). This implies that the ontogeny of an organism is similar to the phylogeny of its species. The theory was used as 'evidence' to conclude that white people were evolutionarily superior to people of other races (Russett 1989). In so doing, it became the thematic core of anthropology, psychology, and child study. That women, children and savages shared many traits in common, was a finding that appeared to emerge from the evidence of physical anthropologists and psychologists. Recapitulation shed light on why this might be so (1989, 51). Given the kinship of savage and child, each presumably had much to tell about the other.⁸ What was known about the psychology of childhood could shed light on the savage mind and, conversely, primitive behaviour could provide clues to understand the Caucasian child. Accounts of the psychological characteristics shared by children and savages, such as lack of will power, reflection and persistence, feeble attention span, imitativeness and lack of originality, impulsiveness and general emotionalism, fearfulness and a sense of dependence were popular.⁹

The child and the savage thus neatly counterpointed each other, both in developmental and evolutionary terms, yet it was the perceived childishness of women that was particularly abundantly commented on. Evidence could be found in her skeleton, as well as her skull and brain. Psychologically, too,

women remained like children, weak-willed, impulsive, perceptive, imitative, timid and dependent. This child-likeness of women was a mark of physical, mental and moral inferiority (Russett 1989, 53–55). The study of childhood and adolescence was markedly shaped by the legacy of one of the founding fathers of American psychology, advocate of evolutionary science G. Stanley Hall, who, from the late nineteenth century until 1920 forged the recapitulatory linkages among savages, children and women (1989, 57). Children represented the precious heritage of the race in a particularly accessible way, since they were open, direct, and spontaneous. Hall's romanticism extended to women, too, whom he depicted as perpetual adolescents. Hall had some very definite ideas about the intellectual aptitude of women and the education suited to them, and feared that the blind pursuit of intellectual training would rob the modern woman of all that was characteristically womanly. Instead, girls were seen as having to be primed for motherhood and having to avoid premature intellectual specialization. Seeing the two sexes as too different in nature, capacity and destiny to share a classroom, he was a vociferous opponent of coeducation. Women and savages, together with idiots, criminals and pathological monstrosities (and later on, children, too), were a constant source of anxiety to male intellectuals in the late nineteenth century for, as 'outcasts from evolution', they were a nagging reminder that nature sometimes miscarried without warning and without pity (1989, 63). In the late nineteenth century, the founder of criminal anthropology, trained surgeon and expert in the anatomy and physiology of the brain, Cesare Lombroso, listed the resemblances between criminal and child. The adult criminal in effect never outgrew his childhood. This meant that children were seen to possess a natural capacity for evil. Those of a Lombrosian persuasion saw the child born into the world egoistic, cruel and unscrupulous, a criminal in the cradle (1989, 72) and extended the recapitulatory parallel of criminality to women, too. The female criminal combined the worst of both sexes. Psychologically more male than female, she was depicted as 'excessively erotic, weak in maternal feeling, inclined to dissipation, astute and audacious' (1989, 73). Having said that, in England and the USA very few men of science were willing to view women as 'innocuous semi-criminals'. Instead, the Anglo-American scientific community preferred to continue paying conventional tribute to true womanhood, which saw women as a developmental anomaly, not evil, yet flawed. Like the Negro, women stopped growing too soon, for the woman was 'Undeveloped Man' (1989, 74–75), lacking individuality and resembling one another more than men did.

Alongside the anthropological interest in race and sex (where Caucasian men ranked significantly higher than women, children and people of colour), one of the more startling assertions of the time was the notion of woman's physical insensibility relative to man. In this, once again, women resembled primitive peoples who were insensitive to pain, as everybody knew (Russett 1989, 55). Within this context, I find the spread of English flagellation pornography, depicting the flogged slave woman, of particular interest, for, I believe, at a time when public punishment was becoming privatized, this modern 'pornography of pain' provided a cultural linkage between suffering and sexual arousal while also bringing the pornographic culture and sexualization together.

Already a widespread practice in the nineteenth-century English home, school, army and prison—for many, encountered via the privilege of public school education, through which the gentleman was formed—flagellation obscenity was a genre in itself that dominated English trade pornography and was already in vogue in the eighteenth century. Initially portraying a profoundly homoerotic pleasure, it soon expanded to include both sexes, and when it became too commonplace, flagellation narratives were spiced up with sodomy, tribadism, transvestism and interracial sex (Colligan 2005). The preoccupation of English politics and culture with transatlantic slavery and sexual violence, and the emergence of abolitionist discourses, brought with them humanitarian sympathy as well as a prurient gaze that fed on sexual fantasies of the flogged woman slave. Halttunen (1995) depicts the role of spectatorial sympathy in the shaping of the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility, through which a substantial body of English novels, drama and poetry popularized sentimental ethics and undertook to teach virtue by softening audiences' hearts. Passively suffering female victims were portrayed in a variety of pitiful scenes of imprisonment, destitution, slavery and war to evoke the readers' sympathetic response and enhance their virtue. Soon enough, though, by the end of the eighteenth century, sentimental literature was being criticized for its sadistic proclivities, for:

viewing the pain of another, [...] lent itself to an aggressive kind of voyeurism in which the spectator identified not just with the sufferings of the virtuous victim but with the cruelty of her or his tormentor. (1995, 309)

The literature that expressed the view of pain as loathsome and revolting, yet explored the bond between pleasure and suffering—included

Gothic fiction, English Romanticism, as well as non-fictional accounts of murder both in America and England. Sexual flagellation caught up with larger audiences just at the time the Marquis de Sade was producing his works associating torture and murder with sexual arousal. The spectacle of suffering, highly voyeuristic in nature, became the dominant convention of literary sexual pornography by the early nineteenth century. Hence, argues Halttunen, amid growing middle-class concerns regarding the affliction of pain in a variety of public spaces (e.g. the school, the army, the navy, the prison, the mental asylum, the medical clinic) and an increasing middle-class sensitivity to it, the popularity of sexual flagellation narratives—and the pleasure embodied in the pain inflicted in them—can be seen a way to break through these newly created boundaries and taboos:

If pornography is best defined as the representation of sexual behaviour *with a deliberate violation of moral and social taboos*, then the growing violence of pornography in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is attributable to the new shock value of pain within a culture redefining it as forbidden and therefore obscene. (1995, 318)

This heightened awareness of the close relationship between the revulsion towards pain and the excitement of it brought with it a fascination for scenarios of suffering that were not necessarily constrained by the eighteenth-century sentimental convention of spectatorial sympathy. Halttunen attributes the increasing popularity of sadistic heterosexuality in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century pornography to the emergent middle-class ideal of romantic love—‘cruel sex may have entered obscene literature in part because of the new normative requirement of tender sex within the companionate marriage’ (1995, 318).¹⁰

Flagellation obscenity in England did not flourish until the height of the abolition movement, where political action against slavery seems to inflame and racialize an already existent whipping fantasy—this time the erotic object is no longer the usual blushing white boy, but the slave black woman. Such fantasies were layered and complex and reveal competing influences of the ‘English vice’ and transatlantic slavery in the early history of England’s obscene print culture (Colligan 2005, 70–71). In the USA, flagellation narratives describe sexual domination in terms of the master/slave relationship; though such whipping fantasies draw from the history of slavery in the United States (picturing the white master flogging the black female slave), by the turn of the century, they were

supplemented by literary accounts of the white female slave. Clandestine catalogues visualizing ‘slave negresses’ as well as white female slaves were circulating in the obscene print cultures of England, France and the United States, even during the early twentieth century (2005, 88).¹¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, and as a result of the pressure of Anglo-American humanitarian reform to curb the infliction of pain in a variety of social practices (e.g. animal cruelty in blood sports, the treatment of the mentally insane, the punitive practices of the armed forces, the corporal punishment of children, the abolition of the public spectacle of capital punishment), public practices of suffering and restraint remained out of sight of the civilized classes and were made private in both England and the United States (as in the case of the privatization of executions). In this way:

the humanitarian sensibility fostered an imaginative cultural underground of the illicit and forbidden, accessible through the expanding cultural practice of solitary reading, at the center of which was a flogging scene. (Halttunen 1995, 334)

SO, WHAT INFORMS THE DEBATE?

In the light of what I have argued thus far from the start of this book, it is my view that present-day anxiety about children’s sexualization needs to be understood as a meta-narrative that comprises a number of complementary discourses, most of which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Such politics of sexuality bridge together a discourse of media effects, tied to an elitist view of popular culture (for being ‘low’ culture), with class undercurrents (regarding those who lack the critical insight to consume it, and are, thus, ‘at risk’ in its presence); a discourse about childhood innocence and vulnerability (which dictates distance from anything pertaining to sex and sexuality for it will rob children of their innate innocence); a discourse of pornography as threatening (also tied in with fears of media effects, especially when it comes to the working class, children and women) and obscene (because it transgresses ethical barriers and taboos, awakens desire and lust, and makes public what is meant to stay private); a psychological discourse (that reasserts ‘media effects’), rooted in the establishment of psychology as the principal scientific discourse about human development and behaviour, and thus childhood; a

male scientific discourse about womanhood (which saw women as being cognitively inferior to men, lacking in sexual desire, and relegated them to the same group as children and ‘savages’).

Insofar as contemporary accounts are concerned, feminist discourses regarding sexualization and pornography, advocating that they lead to the dehumanization of women, the objectification of the female body, violence against women, sexist stereotyping and unrealistic body expectations, or an inability to foster loving and intimate relationships, are usually devoid of the kind of socio-historical contextualization I discussed above (see for example, Bryson 1999; Dworkin 1981, 2004; MacKinnon 1984; Sarikakis 2008; Thornham 2006). Instead, such accounts show a bias towards media effects, and hence become consumed by what pornography ‘does’ to its audiences.¹²

The same, I suggest, applies to the ‘communication risk’ model, aptly named as such by Chronaki (2014), which has evolved into one of the dominant discourses of our time surrounding children’s and teenagers’ interactions with online technologies. Based on research findings from the cross-national, cross-cultural EU Kids Online network (eukidsonline.net), the ‘communication risk’ model offers a more nuanced picture of children’s experiences with sexual content when compared to that coming from an effects perspective. More specifically, Hasebrink et al. (2009, 2011) have provided a taxonomy of children’s patterns of online use and experiences in terms of risks and opportunities. Premised upon EU Kids Online evidence, it is suggested that there are many ways in which the internet and mobile technologies amplify or extend pre-existing (offline) risks of harm to children’s safety, well-being and development. Experiences with sexual content are among the practices considered as ‘risky’, along with bullying, sexting and meeting people online (or ‘stranger danger’). One of the major tenets of EU Kids Online research discourse is the recognition that online opportunities and risks tend to go hand in hand, for as children tend to encounter more opportunities, they also encounter more risk of harm. Moreover, children differ in the kind of activities they take up first, as well as in how these activities complement each other; this results in the so-called ‘ladder of opportunities’, of which few children reach the most advanced and creative step (Livingstone et al. 2011a, b; Livingstone and Helsper 2007). In this sense, EU Kids Online research, and my own work within it for that matter (Bauwens et al. 2009; De Haan and Livingstone 2009; Rovolis and Tsaliki 2012; d’Haenens and Tsaliki 2013), conceptualizes available findings on children’s experiences with sexual content

‘within a discursively constructed context of “risk”’ (Chronaki 2014, 12). Nonetheless, this line of thought serves to reify and affirm present-day anxiety surrounding children’s encounters with sexual content and their sexualization altogether, because it informs and shapes policy decision making and rhetoric regarding children’s online use and activities (see Buckingham 2011, 2013; see also Chap. 2, this volume, pp. 20–21 and 44 on this). Hence, although assumptions of *direct* effects are challenged by EU Kids Online research, this line of work is essentially imbued with an *underlying* ‘effects logic’ and, as a result, it assumes that such (‘risky’) content may provoke negative emotions for children (by making them feel ‘bothered’) and can potentially have a negative impact upon them (by ‘harming’ them) (de Haan and Livingstone 2009). The EU Kids Online network has had a paramount impact in shaping and developing evidence-based policy making and rhetoric beyond the European Union (EU)—seen, for example, in the way its research methodology was followed in partner projects in Russia (Soldatova and Zotova 2013), Australia (Green et al. 2011, 2012, 2013), and Brazil (TIC Kids Online Brazil 2012, 2013), and in how it informs Unicef policy initiatives (Unicef 2012). And it does this by offering a shared conceptual framework which contextualizes children’s online practices and experiences within conditions of vulnerability or resilience (Livingstone 2013; Livingstone and Palmer 2012; De Haan and Livingstone 2009; Lobe et al. 2011).

In fact, child-focused policy making in recent years is geared towards ‘child empowerment’ and ‘protection’ in relation to internet and mobile technologies, and is premised on cross-national, comparative, evidence-based research produced by organizations such as the aforementioned EU Kids Online (Better Internet for Kids and London School of Economics), as well as the Berkman Center for Internet and Society (Harvard University), End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI), International Communications Union (ITU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Crimes Against Children Research Center (University of New Hampshire) and Plan International (Livingstone and Bulger 2013). The literature review that Livingstone and Bulger conducted for Unicef indicated that the work produced by the above organizations is among the most frequently cited—by academics, NGOs and various national governments alike.

EU Kids Online in particular, and its Europe-wide, comparable large dataset of children’s internet use, is cited paradigmatically by Unicef

experts regarding the latter's ambition to pioneer a *modular* approach to cross-national surveys of children's experiences of online technologies (Livingstone and Bulger 2013, 12, 5). Within an understanding that ICTs (information and communication technologies) are 'rapidly reshaping children's opportunities and risks worldwide', Livingstone and Bulger recommend that Unicef should develop:

A Global Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age [...] to ensure a robust evidence base regarding children's engagement with ICT, to guide policy and action worldwide. The proposed evidence-based Agenda needs to be grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which offers a framework and structure for addressing provision, protection and participation rights in relation to children's online as well as offline experiences. (2013, 5)

Part of the recommendations for developing Unicef's research strategy, is a discussion about 'risk' and 'harm', and although the authors acknowledge the 'confusion about what constitutes risk of harm in online (as well as in offline) contexts', and that 'risk [...] and harm are easily confused', the notion of risk is compounded with 'exposure to pornography', while harm is explained in terms of 'distorted sexual identity resulting from exposure to pornography' (Livingstone and Bulger 2013, 15). Thus, even when policy documents do make a (fleeting) statement about the perennial phenomenon of the spread of 'moral panics' regarding emerging technologies, and that '[c]autiousness is therefore necessary in response to concerns about risk in the merged online/ offline environment' (Unicef 2012, 11) for 'there is no single global experience' as to the contexts within which children engage in the online environment (2014, 10), they continue to perceive and construct children as vulnerable and in need of protection. In this particular case, *Child Safety Online*—a technical report developed by Unicef in partnership with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in order to address the issues of child sex abuse recorded in images, the grooming of young people for sex and cyberbullying (Unicef 2012, 1)—recommends that a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to children protection needs to 'empower children and enhance their resilience to harm'; 'reduce availability and access to harm' through children's exposure to inappropriate material; 'introduce legislation and law enforcement' measures to prosecute those who abuse the young; and 'promote recovery and rehabilitation' for those children exposed to harm

(Unicef 2012, 70). The report offers an exhaustive litany of potential online risks that revolve around sex, such as child pornography, sexual abuse, trafficking and sexual work, sexual exploitation and abuse, prostitution, grooming, alongside of which, ‘exposure to pornography’ is also added (2012, 31). I see the following issues being played out at this point. To begin with, it transpires that policy rhetoric, as part of the overall public agenda, conflates three quite distinct areas: child pornography (i.e. the depiction of children in sexually explicit contexts), grooming (i.e. adults trying to lure children into sexual activity online), and online porn (i.e. adult pornography that children and teens may access, unwittingly or not (McKee et al. 2008)). Inevitably, the message that comes across is that the consumption of pornography by young audiences is on a par with criminal activities such as child prostitution, child sex trafficking and abuse, or child sexual exploitation—no wonder, then, that pornography is characterized as ‘a corrupting flood’, from which we need to protect the youth (Maddison 2010). In addition, the social construction of children as essentially, and necessarily, *asexual* is beyond any challenge; the consumption of pornography is (re)presented, even within policy rhetoric, as a major threat to the very essence of childhood, synonymous with a ‘fall from grace’. Consider how such rhetoric brings together government departments and stakeholders from law enforcement, the industry, and the civic and public sectors across the world, and we can see how it is possible to talk about a globalized agenda of risk.¹³ The incorporation of and increasing reliance on various ‘child protection’ experts, consultants, specialists and centres, with a background in education, public health, criminology, social work, law, psychology, medicine or law enforcement in the overall discussion of children’s online experiences, gives the rhetoric a further slant towards risk management.

Here, the growing incredulity as to the existence of children’s sexuality (as exemplified in their consumption of sexually explicit content) which as we saw goes back to the late nineteenth century (see Chap. 2), feeds on a much broader risk-related agenda, one that started up with the fear of child abuse. It is not a coincidence, in my view, that most of the talk about children’s and teenagers’ consumption of pornography and of a sexualized media culture is framed within a context of abuse (that comes from ‘a nexus of risk’ which includes pornography-trafficking-prostitution-sexual harassment-sexual exploitation-sexual work and the like). Within this line of thought, the recommendation that, when it comes to the study of children’s online practices, Unicef should adopt epidemiological research,

measuring the prevalence of use, opportunities, risks and safety practices by means of a standardized, global, comparative approach over time and across cultures (of which the EU Kids Online project is the quintessential example), comes as no surprise (Livingstone and Bulger 2013, 43). More specifically, for Livingstone and Bulger (2013), a ‘succinct module’ for ‘epidemiological/survey’ research on children’s engagement with ICTs around the world, in order to have ‘cross-culturally comparative and locally applicable’ findings in the form that the EU Kids Online project worked out, is something that Unicef should opt for. In fact, it is suggested that a module on children’s engagement with online technologies might be introduced either in Unicef’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, where child protection, health, education and HIV/AIDS are examined, or in the Violence against Children Surveys (which, in certain African and Asian countries, are carried out through governmental bodies, with the aid of Unicef and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention) (Livingstone and Bulger 2013, 44). I will come back to the implications of such risk assessments in the pages that follow—yet I would like to draw attention to the surreptitious manner in which a pathologizing (scientific) agenda becomes the normative way to think, talk and take policy decisions about children’s online engagement.

CONCLUSIONS: RISKY TALK

At this point, I want to further unpack the prevailing narrative of ‘risk’ when it comes to the intersection of children, sexuality, pornography and online technologies, which are accountable for the emergence of a certain ‘social problem’ (that of children’s sexualization). Taking Herbert Blumer’s contention that ‘a social problem exists primarily in terms of how it is defined and conceived in society’ (1971, 300)—in the sense that social problems do not represent objective conditions in a society but rather project collective sentiments—Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) offer a useful conceptualization of social problems as products of a process of collective definition. They suggest that public attention is a scarce resource, allocated through competition in a system of public arenas, wherein social problem definitions evolve. On that basis, statements about social problems select a specific interpretation of reality from a plurality of possibilities. Which ‘reality’ comes to dominate public discourse has implications for the future of the social problem, the interest groups involved, and for policy, too (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 58). Competition among social

problems takes place at two levels. First, within each ‘problem’, different ways of framing the situation compete to be accepted as an authoritative version of reality (so, for example, in the case of online safety, claims about reckless youth may compete with claims about reckless parents or about reckless internet providers). Second, a large selection of problems compete for public attention (e.g. from teenage pregnancy, to overt sexualization, to occupational hazards or road safety), as a complex process of selection prioritizes which are the most important. We have to appreciate, though, that if a situation becomes defined as a social problem, it does not necessarily follow that objective conditions have deteriorated; nor, if a problem disappears from the public radar, that the situation has improved. Social problems are framed and grow within specific public arenas (such as the executive and legislative branches of government, the courts, cinema, the news media, political campaign organizations, books about social issues, social action groups, religious associations, academia, professional societies), each one of which has a limited carrying capacity—that is, it can entertain only a certain number of problems at any one time. In that respect, the size of the public space for addressing social problems is limited—if one problem is in the ascendancy, another has to decline in importance (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 59–60).

The way a certain situation will be defined as a problem also depends on a set of principles of selection which include the need for drama and novelty; the danger of saturation; cultural and political preoccupations (1988, 61). In that respect, the construction of children’s sexualization as a social problem (as a result of the consumption of a sexually saturated media and popular culture) is obvious: it calls for drama, by invoking officially certified ‘facts’ (through the entire body of effects research); and it is replenished with vivid emotional rhetoric which stresses the risk of saturation (in the way the media, politicians and other social and public stakeholders are preoccupied with the perils of pervasive sexualization and pornography). Looking at the interactions and feedback that take place among the various public arenas, Hilgartner and Bosk account for the processes of problem-amplifying and problem-dampening (1988, 66). Synergies across press and magazine journalists, news editors on television and web portals, politicians, child protection and clinical experts, representatives of parent and teachers associations, researchers, policy makers on a local, national and global level, educationalists and law enforcement officials, have been driving the growth of the discourse of sexualization as a social problem since the mid 2000s (see also Chap. 1).

However, the way we have come to regard sexualization as something sinister, for example, as a side-effect of the consumption of pornography and as a social problem against which policy precautions must be taken, is also tied to the way ‘risk’ has become a commonplace term in recent decades. Cradock (2004) was among the first to identify the insidious way ‘risk’ crept into child abuse and social work literature, and how ‘the apparently objective use of numeric values within risk assessments obscures the continuing role of *subjective moral values* in the practice of child protection’ (2004, 319, emphasis added). He identifies a discursive slippage in the child protection speech genre in the way the term ‘at risk’—a vague phrase used extensively in child welfare literature for a long time to describe populations (i.e. families subject to investigation), not individuals—became specified in the late 1990s. Although child welfare programmes target populations, once children or families take part in them, the risks associated with their populations become personalized within each specific participant (who then becomes a ‘risky person’ and ceases to be a member of a risk population). ‘In this way, the very programmes that are supposed to alleviate risk exposure, become the means by which danger is made explicit with the public profiles of private members of aggregate populations’ (2004, 319).

Moreover, the first risk assessment studies of child abuse were meant to identify risk populations and carried the caveat ‘that they should never be used in the context of particular assessments of particular situations [... That is] risk assessments were seen as a necessary source of data for the policy-making field, not guides for the practice of child protection workers’ (2004, 319), for such large-scale studies depended on a multitude of individual judgements which were then combined into a statistical whole. These local judgements did not derive from a single definition of child abuse. However, the prevalence of risk assessments as a standard feature of child protection practice can be attributed to the limitations of liberal governance, says Cradock. ‘Namely, the resistance to governing too much, [...] against the dangers of intervening too little’ (2004, 320). Overall, what underwrites trust in an auditing system is the trust in the transparency and objectivity of numbers. For risk assessment essentially translates qualitative principles into quantitative scales—seen, for example, in the way various questionnaires about children’s online patterns of practice and activities work, of which the EU Kids Online II questionnaires for children and parents are prime exemplars (Livingstone et al. 2011a). In this way, it becomes a defence against possible charges of incompetence or

individualized subjectivity from the point of view of government (i.e. the child protection system).

Also, this is directly linked with a notion of ‘responsibilization’ within neoliberalism, whereby the state is no longer responsible for direct service provision to citizens; instead, individuals become their own risk managers, by brokering the risk information made available by state and market agents. Thus, the neoliberal citizen is expected to develop a prudential subjectivity for which risk awareness determines decision making (Cradock 2004, 322). Rose (1989/1999) has extensively discussed how neoliberal governments have sought to return responsibility for risk management to their citizenry (see Chap. 2). Within this neoliberal risk management, child protection becomes an issue as those in need of protection (children) are not equipped to exercise prudential rationalism, hence their parents and their communities become responsible for their well-being. Such a Foucauldian notion of governance (Foucault 1991) is the outcome of the principle that liberal governance ultimately depends upon citizens governing themselves.

As government and its citizenry come to perceive society through the lens of risk assessment and risk management (as something natural to liberal order), this also becomes the architecture of self-governance in increasingly local sites until subjectivity itself comes to be defined within risk parameters. Hence, within the speech genre of child protection, each parent becomes a risk-assessing calculative machine in a world in which anything—and anyone—becomes a potential source of harm to children. The avalanche of reports of potential child abuse to child abuse agencies over the past several decades indicates the public has taken this lesson to heart. Moreover, public images of child disappearances and various accidents have become so endemic that it now inconceivable that children should be unsupervised at any time. (Cradock 2004, 324)

This kind of risk-talk has been driving policy making at a national, cross-national and global level for some time now. Unicef’s future research agenda, illustrated above, is one such example. In a world where ‘everything is child abuse’ (McKee 2010), there is a point to be raised about how ‘risk thinking’ reinforces the waning of inter-community trust, makes parents feel isolated and vulnerable, and cements a culture of suspicion and heightened risk assessment, thus leading to further social problems (Stokes 2009). ‘Paranoid parenting’ (Furedi 2001) envelops everything, from ‘stranger danger’, child abduction and child (sexual)

abuse to meeting with strangers (where children are lured by unknown adults they have met online, in an offline meeting), pornography (either in the form of child pornography or in terms of children's engagement with sexual content) and sexualization (as a result of an insipid, sexually saturated popular culture). Frank Furedi and Jennie Bristow (2008) are among the few academics who have been vocal about the way parents, and all adults interacting with children in the UK, have been transformed in the regulatory and public imagination into potential child abusers within the last decade, barred from any contact with children until cleared by a database. This development, they continue, means that adults working with children (other parents, teachers, sports coaches, scoutmasters, bus-drivers, Christmas Santas and other volunteers) are no longer trusted to engage with children on their own initiative—instead they are expected to be 'CRB-checked' (Criminal Records Bureau). Such vetting, however, not only encourages the cultural distancing of generations, but weakens the bonds of community life. Furedi is deemed controversial and his views are widely and publicly contested,¹⁴ yet I think the deeper implications of what he argues are worth considering.

Within this broad context of child protectionism, there is one more combination of forces that allowed for the sexual politics of fear to become cemented and naturalized in a way that is both forged deep into history—as the present chapter and Chap. 2 have argued—and also contemporary. The processes of problem-amplifying and problem-dampening that Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) account for (see in this chapter), can be illustrated in late-twentieth-century America (from the mid 1980s onwards), where a numbers of factors converge to collectively define a social problem: a (conservative) feminist discourse, which redefined explicit erotica as violence against women, leading to the adoption of violent and stereotypical behaviour against them; the religious Right, who saw as profane anything that had to do with abortion, divorce, homosexuality, pre-marital teen sex and sex education; a growing psychology-based culture, run by a variety of clinical 'pundits' (see Chap. 2, for a more contextualized discussion of clinical experts); a sensationalist media culture, which saw Satanists, pornographers, child molesters and paedophiles making use of internet technology; a professional and academic literature that addressed sex among young teenagers as a 'risk factor';¹⁵ and the increasing availability, spread and penetration of internet technologies, which brought sexual knowledge closer to everyone, regardless of age. All these helped reinforce the increasing hegemony and 'self-evidence' of the moral wisdom that

wants children and teenagers to be shielded from sexual material which is deemed as 'harmful to minors'.

In the USA, the 1985 Meese Commission on Pornography lent new legitimacy to the radical feminist notion that pornography causes harm, despite the fact that the Commission could not establish factual links between sexually explicit material and anti-social behaviour (Levine 2002). The Commission was dominated by fundamentalist preachers, Republican prosecutors, vice cops and anti-porn activists, who, after failing to find solid evidence of harm, pitched pro-restriction recommendations that resonated with popular concern about children. More specifically, Levine traces the emergence of the paedophile-sexual abuse discourse in late nineteenth-century Anglo-American 'white slavery' narratives. In such stories, English mothers sold their virgin daughters to neighbourhood procuresses who then pimped them out to male customers. Similar accounts are traced in the USA, where the alleged victims were of northern European descent, giving rise to moral panics in the respective countries. However, whereas these were stories of *adult* prostitution, narratives on children's abductions were fabricated within a culture of sensational journalism which wanted to capture the attention of a prurient Victorian audience (2002, 30). Some years later, in the early twentieth century, the Depression was marked by a renewed fear of the paedophile, in the form of a pathological 'hypermasculinity' preying on young bodies in order to compensate for financial failure. The spectre of the child molester returned after the end of the Second World War, when men had to resume their breadwinning role in the family, women had to return to the domesticity, and teenagers had to forgo the adult sexual agency they enjoyed during the war. By the mid 1950s, the hegemony of psychology in the management of social deviance had formulated the child molester in the form of the 'sexual psychopath'—stereotypically a homosexual. Later on, after the sexually liberated 1960s and 1970s ('if you are old enough to want to have sex, you're old enough to have it'), the ascendance of the feminist discourse in the 1980s threw sexual violence (in the form of pornography) against women and children into sharp relief, and increased suspicions that child sexual abuse was indeed endemic (2002, 32). By the mid 1990s, popular fears about child abuse in the USA were shaped by the political agenda of the religious Right, which was sponsored by conservative Republicans, Christian fundamentalists and anti-pornography feminists. As obscenity cases against pornography had fallen to constitutional challenge, right-wing organizations replaced 'decency' with the cause of 'the

protection of families and children’—and in the process the fight against ‘pornography’ became the fight against ‘child pornography’. The internet was soon deemed that dark space where adult sexual predators awaited their unsuspected young victims.

Having said that, let us ponder briefly on British Prime Minister David Cameron’s latest (2015) plans to tackle child sexual abuse—which he defined as existing on an ‘industrial scale’. Describing a ‘walk on by’ culture, which led to the sexual grooming of ‘as many as 373 children over the past sixteen years’, in fact, ‘young girls—and they are young girls—being abused over and over and over again’, the British Prime Minister announced at a summit at No.10 a series of measures aimed at addressing the ‘national threat’ that child sexual exploitation represents. ‘I am sending an unequivocal message that professionals who fail to protect children will be held properly accountable’, he said (BBC News 2015), while announcing that the new plans—under consultation—involve making it a criminal offence to wilfully neglect those at risk of, and victims of, child sexual abuse. Social workers, education practitioners and local councilors would be covered by the sanction (The Guardian 2015). It appears that the ‘flood of corruption’ is pervasive and spreads across cultures, for child (sexual) abuse—facilitated by internet technologies—is ‘public enemy number one’. Stokes (2009) discusses public anxieties about protection from child abduction and (sexual) abuse (i.e. ‘stranger danger’) as a socially constructed problem, drawing from Beck’s (2002) world risk theory. She uses empirical findings to argue that child abduction by strangers, in real terms, is much less frequent than is perceived by the public (Pain 2006; Sutton 2008), and usually mirror middle-class anxieties about child-rearing. Instead, in the context of risk society, the threat of ‘stranger danger’ is socially constructed and, apart from its disintegrating effect on contemporary urban communities (through the increase in distrust), it bears concrete implications for children’s autonomy and social interaction. Children, especially middle-class ones, become increasingly sheltered, ‘chaperoned’ and ‘infantilized’ with this drive for a ‘zero-risk’ society; their activities in public space are curtailed, while the general anxiety over abduction risks has tended to drive children indoors—despite indications that when abuse takes place, it is, in fact, most often in their own homes.

However, the end result of this culture of protectionism is that no-one is immune from its governmentalizing effects. Risk becomes a shared culture and a unifying speech genre within which to make sense of children’s

place in the world. Risk assessment—and the coping strategies for risky endeavours and experiences—becomes a value system in itself, and informs interviews with children and parents (or any other adult) alike. In what follows, I will offer a critical reading of the latest EU Kids Online qualitative findings on (what are constructed as) ‘*online problematic situations for children*’ (Smahel and Wright 2014).

NOTES

1. As reflected in the policy initiative by British Prime Minister David Cameron to ban access to ‘poisonous’ online pornography, seen to ‘corrode childhood’ (‘Family filters won’t block “soft” porn’, *The Independent*, 26 July 2013).
2. In a content analysis conducted within the EU Kids Online II project, Haddon and Stald (2009) found that media coverage focuses public attention disproportionately on internet risks. In Greece, pornography accounted for over half of the risks covered in the press. In a content analysis conducted in 2008, regarding the portrayal of online pornography and children in the Greek press, Tsaliki and Chronaki found that quite often newspapers in Greece confounded child pornography (pornography with children participants) with the consumption of pornography by them. When child pornography was the issue, it was largely linked to sexual harassment or trafficking, further reiterating the notion that the culture of pornography—and sexuality—is essentially ‘off limits’ for children. This media agenda serves to consolidate the public debate about children either ‘at risk’ or acting outside accepted social norms and values.
3. Interestingly, contrary to Christianity, not only was marital sex in early Judaism not considered evil, but marital sexual desire was sought for as something that bound couples together with affection while producing offspring at the same time. (Male) masturbation was considered a sin, as it represented wasted semen (Clark 2008, ch. 3). Marital procreative sexual pleasure was not celebrated until eighteenth-century radical Enlightenment philosophical discourses challenged the authority of the Church, celebrating sexual desire and advocating personal freedom, democracy, freedom of expression and sexual emancipation (2008, 103).
4. Clark (2008, ch. 7) discusses how female sexual desire became central in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Whereas austere religious thinkers of the seventeenth century accepted Nature as God’s handiwork and claimed that the Church’s moral precepts were defined by Natural Law, eighteenth-century philosophers argued for the authority of science and philosophy in interpreting Nature and the material world.

5. DeJean (1996) accounts for the relation between pornography and the flowering of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel in France by arguing that the latter's use of the first-person narrative encouraged a guilty eroticism; French pornography of the time also made use of the first-person narrative, as evidenced in *L'Ecole des filles*, a politically oppositionist pornographic work, arguably linked directly to the French Revolution (1996, 121).
6. In the 1860s, anthropologists argued that women were in some respects as inferior to men 'as Negroes are to Europeans' as a result of their swifter maturation and decay and their imperfect development (Russett 1989, 28).
7. Widely respected for his work on insanity and nervous diseases, William Hammond asserted often in the *Popular Science Monthly* that girls ought to be educated differently from boys on the basis of the structural differences in the brain (Russett 1989, 39).
8. Interestingly, the literary discourse through which the notion of the child was constructed in America bestowed innocence in the hands of the *white* child. In her discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Robin Bernstein (2011) argues that angelic Eva, with her golden locks around her face, has an innocence that is transferable to people around her. When little Eva is depicted, in book illustrations, dramatic stagings of the novel, games, advertisements and even handkerchiefs, cuddling Uncle Tom, 'the propinquity between the sentimental white child, foundationally defined by innocence, and the enslaved adult caused the white child's aura of innocence to extend to an African American' (2011, 6). In this way, innocence was transferred into political endeavours: campaigns for abolition or post-Reconstruction romanticization of slavery, respectively. In addition, the discourse of nineteenth-century childhood in America asserted a state of holy obliviousness on the part of children while also constructing and maintaining whiteness. Childhood innocence, continues Bernstein, was raced white, yet it managed: to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness. [...] What childhood innocence helped Americans to assert by forgetting, to think about by performing obliviousness, was not only whiteness but also racial difference constructed against whiteness. Racial binarism—understanding race in terms of white and nonwhite, or a 'black and white' polarization that erases nonblack people of color—gained legitimacy through nineteenth-century childhood. (2011, 8)
9. The black-white logic in American visions of nineteenth-century childhood is also evident in the depiction of the polarized dyad of Topsy and Eva—the black child, viciously beaten by her previous owners, and the cherubic child with a 'golden head'. Although both of them were children, the violence of slavery had robbed Topsy of her natural innocence, which

could be partially restored through the loving touch of a white child. Topsy, void of innocence, became the prototype for the pickaninny—an imagined dehumanized black juvenile, staple of US popular culture at the time was thus contrasted with the angelic white child, hinting at irreconcilable differences between black and white youth. In fact, pickaninnies were often so grotesquely depicted as to suggest that only white children were ‘children’. This means that even the notion of the ‘childlike Negro’ carried with it the exclusion of black youth from the category of childhood altogether (Bernstein 2011, 16).

10. See also Steven Marcus (1966/2009) *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*, New York: Basic Books.
11. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the image of the flogged female slave was transformed into the trope of master and slave. The insidious impact of this image underwrites almost every twentieth-century whipping fantasy as evidenced, for example, in the 1958 *Histoire d’O* (Colligan 2005, 90) or, more recently, E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*.
12. See Chronaki (2014), for a critical insight into feminist accounts of pornography.
13. Following rapid technological change and growing levels of engagement with online technologies among young children and teenagers, Insafe and INHOPE were set up under the framework of the European Commission’s Safer Internet Programme to ensure ‘a better and safer internet for young people’. Tasked with responding to the ‘growing global threat of child sexual abuse images and other illegal content on the internet’, INHOPE was formed in 1999 with just eight hotlines in five countries, but by 2015 had ‘more than 50 hotlines in 45 countries around the world’. Equally, the Insafe network, launched in 2004 by 11 European countries, ‘has grown to encompass national awareness centres, helplines and youth panels in 27 EU member states plus Iceland, Norway, Russia and Serbia’ by 2015. In addition, Safer Internet Day has grown from a modest 14-country event in 2004 to become ‘the joint network’s flagship event and a landmark in the global online safety calendar, [...] currently celebrated in more than 100 countries, reaching thousands of schools and securing the online involvement of over 50 million people worldwide’. Finally, since its inauguration in 2004, the annual Safer Internet Forum has evolved from a relatively small European event organized by the European Commission, for hotlines, industry, academics and government officials, to a large international gathering, attracting 250–350 participants from up to 65 different countries every year (INSAFE-INHOPE 2014, 5). Participation in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)—‘a coalition that brings people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, in discussions on public policy issues

relating to the Internet [... in order to] maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise’—has risen from 44 countries in 2006 at the first IGF in Athens, to 144 in the 2014 Forum in Istanbul (<http://www.intgovforum.org/>).

14. See for example the panel discussion on the waning of privacy in ‘The Battle of Ideas’ festival, on 19 October 2013, featuring Furedi and David Aaronovitch, columnist for *The Times*. Furedi asserts ‘that the destruction of the private sphere leads to the implosion of the public sphere. We know how to deal with the old forms of state interference and surveillance, he argues, but if it involves the private sphere—especially children—‘we roll over’. Everything in the public sphere is then blamed on the private, as UK Prime Minister David Cameron illustrates with his claim that ‘dysfunctional families’ apparently cause every social ill (http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/is_nothing_private_anymore/14563).
15. For example, sexual intercourse (among 15-year-olds) is among the risk factors considered when Unicef assesses young people’s behaviours and well-being, together with smoking cigarettes, using cannabis, having been drunk more than twice, used condoms (!) or having been pregnant (Unicef 2007, 26). The report brings together available OECD data on ‘obesity, substance abuse, violence, and sexual risk-taking’. This clearly indicates that, even now, sex is constructed as something ‘off limits’ and risky for young people (regardless of whether they take precautions).

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Children's Encounters with Sexual Content: Different Readings of Cross-Country Empirical Evidence

As I argued in the previous chapter, the EU Kids Online research follows the children-go-online mode of research, which focuses on children's voices—via their responses to survey questionnaires, interviews and focus groups—and provides contextualized discussions of children's reported experiences with sexual content (Tsaliki et al. 2014). To elaborate, Livingstone and Bober's (2005) work on UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) was the first study within this paradigm, while several similar studies followed (e.g. Net Children Go Mobile, 2013). UKCGO was first to systematize children's patterns of online use, as well as to attempt a first classification of children's experiences. In principle, projects taking the UKCGO approach—as for instance the Greek Children Go Online project (Tsaliki and Chronaki 2012)—have discussed their findings from the perspective of three major variables of online use: age, gender and class. Livingstone and Bober (2004, 29) found that more than half of the participants in the studies who go online at least once a week say that they have encountered sexual content. Some of them say they have found it accidentally, whereas only a handful say they have deliberately visited such a site. Age differences, especially between the youngest and the oldest age groups, are also reported, as, the older the children are, the more experiences with sexual content they have had. UKCGO also identified differences regarding the medium where content was encountered: more children report seeing such material online than in other media.

In its classification of children's experiences in terms of risks and opportunities along the lines of content, contact and conduct (Hasebrink et al. 2009), the EU Kids Online model considers encounters with sexual content as a potentially risky experience, with a concomitant probability of harm. Among the risks relating to children's internet use, pornography is seen as a sexual risk on account of 'content'; grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation are examples of 'contact' risks; while sexting—treated on a par with sexual harassment—is offered as an exemplar of 'conduct' sexual risks (Hasebrink et al. 2009). In this respect, the experience is examined in relation to where it took place, how many times, its actual nature (what exactly was depicted in the representation encountered) and whether the child felt harmed by it (Livingstone et al. 2011)—as evidenced in the questions addressed to children:

In the past year, you will have seen lots of different images—pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual—for example, showing people naked or people having sex.

Looking into the online activities and behaviour of representative samples of 1000 children per country aged 9–16, across 25 European countries, the EU Kids Online II network (2009–2011) found that less than a quarter (23 %) had encountered sexual images, online or offline. It is older children and teenagers who mainly have such experiences (compared to younger ones); 14% have encounters with sexual material online, mostly as a result of accidental pop-ups rather than deliberately, 12 % experience them on television, video or film, and 7 % did so in magazines.

To be more precise, Fig. 5.1 shows that most 9–16-year-olds in Europe say that they have not seen sexual images of any kind:

- One in five (23 %) say that they have seen obviously sexual images in the past 12 months, whether online or offline.
- Among the 23 % who have seen sexual images, online or offline, around half have seen them at least once or twice a month, while half have seen them less often.
- Seeing sexual images at all is related to age. One-third of 15–16-year-olds (36 %) have seen such images compared with just 11 % of 9–10-year-olds; teenagers also see such images more often.

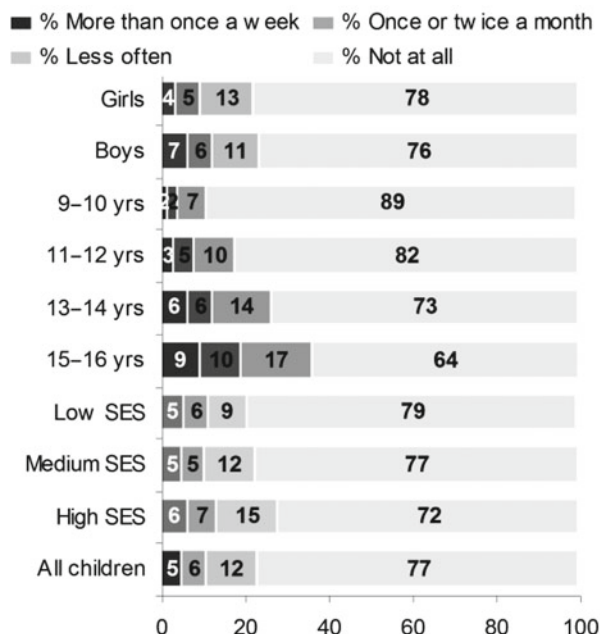


Figure 5.1 Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months. QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual] in the past 12 month? QC129: How often have you seen [images, photos, videos that are obviously sexual] in the past 12 months? Base: All children who use the internet. *Source:* Livingstone et al. (2011a, 49)

- There are few or no differences by gender or socioeconomic status (SES) (Livingstone et al. 2011a, 49).

Country variations in exposure to sexual images online are shown in Fig. 5.2, revealing interesting differences across Europe.

National variation in the incidence of exposure to sexual content online is considerable, as would be expected, ranging from 34 % of children in Norway, followed by Finland and Estonia (29 %), Denmark and the Czech Republic (28 %), Sweden (26 %), Latvia and Slovenia (25), and Italy (7 %).

In order to avoid presuming that all risks result in harm, EU Kids Online asked all those children who said they had seen sexual images online further questions. The purpose was to explore the relation between

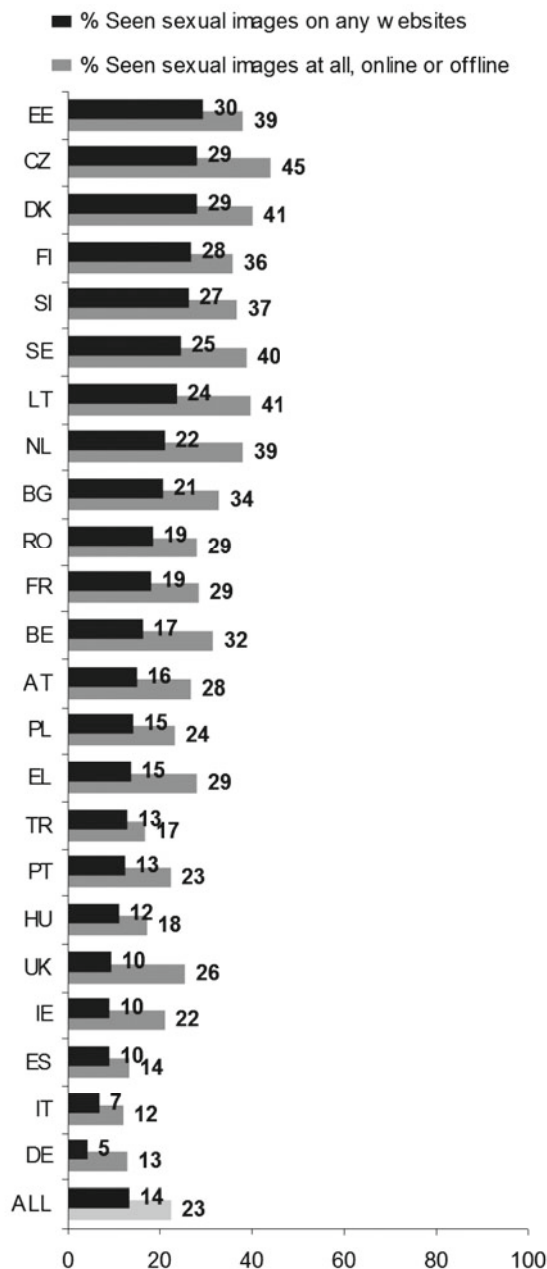


Figure 5.2 Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months, by country. QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual]? QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? Base: All children who use the internet. *Source:* Livingstone et al. (2011a, 51)

the prevalence of a risk factor (here, exposure to online pornography) and the degree of harm as subjectively perceived by the child. These questions were prefaced as follows:

Seeing sexual images on the internet may be fine or may not be fine. In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them.

Only a small minority of children in Europe who have encountered sexual content online were bothered by the experience (Table 5.1), with percentages of self-reported harm below 10 % in all the countries surveyed with the exception of Estonia (14 %) (Livingstone et al. 2011a).

Of all those exposed to sexual content online, about one-third (32 %) were bothered by it, which translates into only 4 % of the total population of children (Fig. 5.3):

In a later work, deriving from the EU Kids Online II survey, my findings about harm arising as a consequence of seeing sexual images online suggested caution when making sweeping claims regarding 'porn-related harm' (Rovolis and Tsaliki 2012). First, as far as the 'intensity of harm' (from seeing sexual images) was concerned, we found that the number of children and teenagers self-reporting being 'bothered' by sexual content is very low: only 870 youngsters reported having been upset, to various degrees, by online porn—with only 15 % of children who saw online porn (or less than 1 % of all the children in the survey) feeling 'very upset' by it; 57 % of children who saw porn on line (or 2.5 % of all children) were either 'not at all' or 'a bit' upset by the experience (Rovolis and Tsaliki 2012, 171). Then, looking into the 'duration of harm' (from seeing sexual images) we found that the majority of those who saw online porn (93 %) recovered either immediately or in a few days; only 7 % (or 52 out of all children) took longer to recover (2012, 172).

What I find problematic in such conceptualizations is the fact that, despite the child-centred approach, warranting children their 'voice', the EU Kids Online model remains essentially a 'communication risk' model (Chronaki 2014). And although it is largely seen as a response to the warnings of psychologists when it comes to children's experiences with online technologies, I argue that it actually serves to reify a media effects agenda where 'vulnerable' children need to build 'resilience' in the face of online adversity:

Table 5.1 Child has seen sexual images online and was bothered by this (%), by country

<i>All children who use the internet</i>		<i>Child bothered, of those who have seen sexual images online</i>
	<i>Child has seen sexual images online</i>	<i>Child bothered by seeing sexual images online</i>
AT	16	5
BE	17	6
BG	21	4
CZ	29	8
DE	5	3
DK	29	9
EE	30	16
EL	15	2
ES	10	3
FI	28	6
FR	19	7
HU	12	4
IE	10	5
IT	7	2
LT	24	7
NL	22	5
PL	15	6
PT	13	3
RO	19	9
SE	25	8
SI	27	4
TR	13	7
UK	10	3
ALL	14	5

QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? And QC134: In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them

Base: All children who use the internet. Only children who have seen sexual images online

Source: Livingstone et al. (2011a, 56)

Note: The 95 % confidence intervals for the numbers behind this graph are fairly high (+/- 5-10 %) or very high (+/- 10 %). So the numbers for individual countries should be considered as indicative only

EU Kids Online made it one of its objectives to provide systematic cross-national empirical evidence, showing that individual socio-demographic and socio-psychological factors determine a child's level of vulnerability. (d'Haenens and Tsaliki 2013, 259)

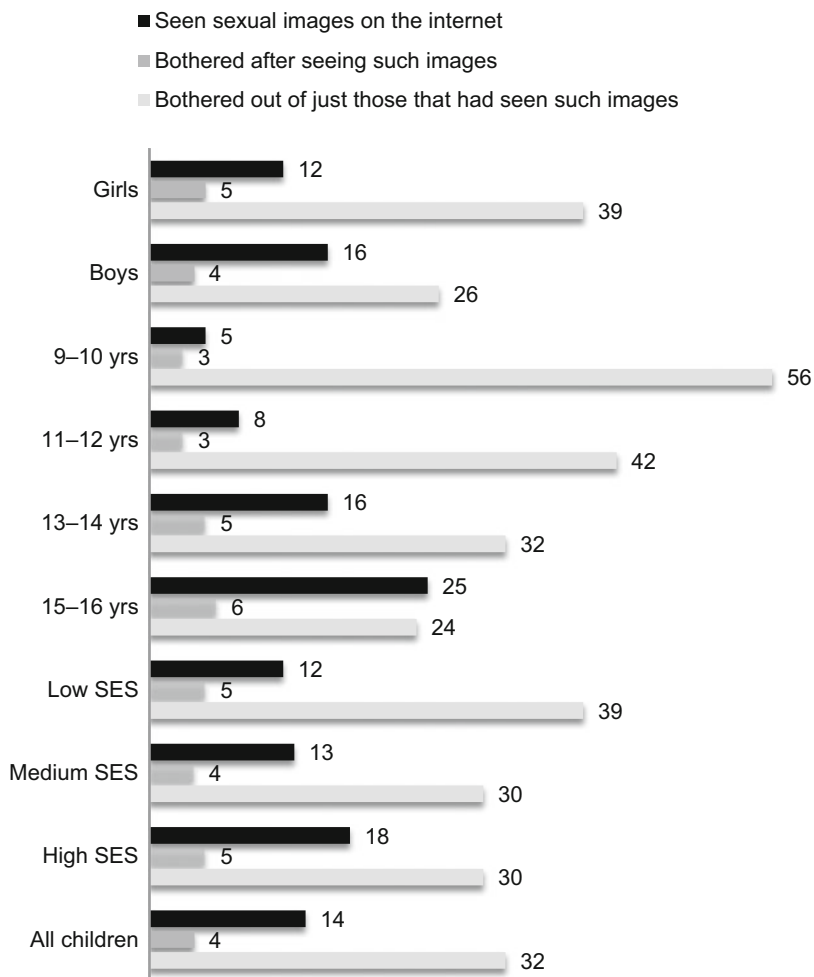


Figure 5.3 Child has seen sexual images online and was bothered by this. QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? And QC134: In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them. Base: All children who use the internet. Only children who have seen sexual images online. *Note:* 95 % confidence intervals for some of the breaks among 9–10-year-olds are fairly high at ± 5 –10 %. *Source:* Livingstone et al. (2011a, 57)

Encounters with sexual content (i.e. both sexually explicit images and sexting) are one such adversity that ‘media savvy’ children have to ‘cope’ with through the mediating role of parents, peers and teachers (d’Haenens and Tsaliki 2013, 259). The EU Kids Online discourse supports that exposure to online risks does not necessarily result in harm (Staksrud and Livingstone 2009), although some children prove to be more vulnerable than others as they experience more difficulties in adopting an appropriate coping response (e.g. Vandoninck et al., 2010). In this light, however, whether portrayed as an ‘online risk’ or a ‘risky opportunity’ (d’Haenens and Tsaliki 2013)—and as a result of the way childhood, and pornography, have been constructed and contextualized (as discussed in Chaps. 3 and 4)—seeing sexual content online is being construed as a ‘risk’, the policy implications of which drive discussions about what kind of mediation and coping strategies should be in place.

As can be seen from the data, children have not had so many experiences with sexual content as moralistic voices sounding the alarm have been arguing thus far. Yet experiences with sexual content appear to be a somewhat complex and controversial issue. EU Kids Online has provided the European Commission agenda with recent, robust and representative data about children’s experiences, offering a rigorous mapping of the phenomenon, and creating space for more research, primarily of qualitative nature, regarding questions of how and why different groups of children respond to experiences with sexual content (among other things) in particular ways (Tsaliki and Chronaki 2014). Having said that, adopting a mass communication approach means that EU Kids Online reads children’s voices within the dominant, hegemonic approach (as analysed in Chaps. 3 and 4), where children are seen facing a variety of risks.

In the rest of this chapter I will briefly present the qualitative work of Smahel and Wright (2014), focusing on children’s accounts of their encounters with sexual content, in order to highlight how a particular epistemology (in this case, an effects approach that contextualizes sexual content as ‘problematic’ for children) impacts upon the way in which we make sense of children and what is ‘appropriate’ (or ‘problematic’) for them. This will be followed by my own meta-analysis and recoding of children’s voices from Greece, the UK, Spain, Italy and Australia¹ regarding their perceptions of sexual content in an attempt to provide a different contextualization of the relationship of children with media representations of sex.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FROM EU KIDS ONLINE: THE MEANING OF ONLINE PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS FOR CHILDREN

Between February and September 2013, the EU Kids Online III survey (2011–2014) conducted a qualitative study on children aged 9–16 who used the internet² weekly. Interviews and focus groups with 378 children from nine countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the UK) provided insight into what children perceive as being potentially negative or problematic while using the internet; what risks children are aware of when using the internet; what consequences online negative experiences might have; how they react to negative experiences; what they do to avoid or prevent these problematic experiences; and why children perceive certain situations as negative (Smahel and Wright 2014).

In this report, sex-related content and communication are categorized among the ‘online problematic situations’ which create ‘feelings’ in children. ‘Online problematic situations’ include: the sending of violent, vulgar or sexual content; vulgar content displayed in dating site advertisements that ‘bothers’ many children; the posting of sexual content, usually in the form of pictures, to attract peers, or the sharing (predominantly by boys) of private, naked pictures of a person (predominantly girls) without the person’s permission. That sometimes older children intentionally search for sexual content is also perceived as ‘problematic’, as is, presumably, the fact that sometimes older children express positive feelings about sexual content, or that girls post ‘sexy’, provocative pictures to attract ‘likes’.

In more detail, Smahel and Wright (2014) discuss how children and teenagers themselves consider sexual content as just a part of a pool of unwanted content that can be encountered online, as for example in gaming and video-streaming sites (which usually have commercial pop-ups, viruses and embedded sexual videos). Since such online activities are more common among younger children, who tend to have less literacy skills due to their age, there is a popular discourse among children that younger ones are more exposed and vulnerable to unwanted—and thus sexual—content, too. Such contextualization of sexual communication³ as potentially risky, the report goes on, is the result of several sources of awareness raising, including the media, peers, parents and teachers, all of whom usually construct experiences with sexual content as problematic. Although first-hand experience often suggests that these representations

are ‘part of the experience of going online’, several children’s accounts resonate with stereotypical portrayals of pornography as ‘bad for your eyes’ or ‘getting you addicted’ (2014, 52). Furthermore, sometimes there is an overlap with communication from/with strangers (aka ‘stranger danger’) in the sense that in many children’s minds sexual communication (e.g. sexting) is confounded with meeting new people online (where the risk of faked identity is lurking) as a result of sensationalist media coverage and peer accounts (2014, 53). Similarly, sexting sometimes overlaps with bullying in children’s accounts, as in the cases where children discuss how sharing nude and sexy pictures could expose them to threats and harassment (2014, 54).

In children’s discourses about sexual communication, the report signals that young people negotiate what is playful and funny to do among friends, as part of children’s cultures. Sexual communication involves experimenting with gender and sex, with boys (usually) sending sexual content to girls to see their reaction, and girls making a point that it is ‘stupid’ and risky to expose oneself by sending sexy pictures to others (2014, 53–54).

So far as photo and video sharing practices are concerned, many children pointed out the non-consensual and unwanted re-use and editing of (usually) girls’ photos—featuring ‘sexy’ poses or selfies—by peers or third parties. In an attempt to secure peer attention, respondents continued, younger girls are likely to post inappropriate photos of themselves and thus find themselves in an awkward situation (2014, 61). In these discourses, children reiterated parental beliefs associating personal data misuse with ‘stranger danger’ (2014, 63). Such lay discourses inform the gendered perception of specific risks (i.e. meeting strangers) and are the result of sexual double standards adopted by young people when they construct their gender identities (see Ringrose et al. (2012) for more detail); in some national contexts—Italy, Spain and Greece—girls who engage online in personal contact with strangers are portrayed both as victims and as ‘inviting trouble’ when posting provocative content on Facebook (2014, 71).

Overall, concludes the report, risk awareness varies in terms of age, gender and source of information, in the sense that ‘younger children are more likely to incorporate vocabularies and frames from the media and parents’ discourses’. In fact, the media play a significant role in risk awareness for the younger ages, where children cannot draw from own or peer experiences, as is the case with the older ones, and recycle media stories

within their internet cultures (2014, 72). In this respect, exploring children's awareness of online problematic situations:

mirrors the development of the so-called 'i-pistemology' (van Zoonen 2012), whereby lay discourses around specific issues combine personal and peers' experiences—recognized as the most authoritative sources—with information gathered from the media or other 'expert knowledge'—in this case, advice from school, in the form of eSafety programmes, and from parents. (Smahel and Wright 2014, 72)

Despite the above theorizing, what I believe is lacking from the EU Kids Online perspective in this report is a social constructionist-cum-cultural studies contextualization of childhood and children's sexuality. This would have allowed for a more rounded and nuanced understanding of the social representation of children's encounters and experiences with sexual content and communication than as 'problematic online situations'. As it happens, the entire discussion about 'proactive problem-preventing strategies'—critical thinking, strategizing and suggesting ('cognitive strategies'); seeking and providing information and support ('communicative strategies'); 'disengagement' from talking about sexual content and communication (2014, 83–85)—relies on a(n established) notion of child sexuality as inherently problematic. To illustrate, when it comes to children's reporting of 'responsibility for sexting incidents', accountability is placed on girls who take sexy pictures of themselves:

Taking sexy pictures and sending them to a boy was very likely to end up in a problematic situation, so it was felt that these girls should not be surprised when they were suddenly ridiculed. According to the participants, it was normal that people (especially boys) shared these pictures, so it was up to the girls to say no and to refrain from these practices. (Smahel and Wright 2014, 85)

In this respect, the EU Kids Online rhetoric only marginally addresses the broader contextual framework regarding children's and women's sexuality, and their interaction with popular culture. Furthermore, it only fleetingly touches upon how children find it much more straightforward to enunciate the risks and challenges associated with their digital media practices (following the way popular culture is being theorized, as explained in Chap. 3), quite possibly because their schooling in online practice has been dominated by the risk narrative (as explained at the end of Chap. 4).

RECONCEPTUALIZING CHILDREN’S ACCOUNTS
OF SEXUAL CONTENT

In the remainder of this chapter, I will offer a re-reading of the EU Kids Online III study of ‘risks and online problematic situations from children’s perspectives’. The original interview material from five countries that conducted the qualitative study (Greece, the UK, Spain, Italy and, at a later phase, Australia) was used. Excerpts pertaining to sexuality and sexual content were then recoded along the thematic axes presented in Table 5.2. I should point out here that the recoded five-country dataset on sexual content is much larger than what is presented below; I tried, however, to mine an illustrative sample of accounts from children from all five countries, of both genders and of different age groups, in order to present a few of the underlying discourses within children’s talk from a cultural studies approach.

My reading of children’s accounts of sexual content is premised upon a Foucauldian notion of governing of the self, according to which individuals engage in self-conscious practices that contribute to a formation of the self through existing rules and norms of conduct. In his approach to the ‘abnormal’, Foucault (2003) discusses how sexuality is understood within what is thought as normal, socially appropriate or legitimate, and that such a notion could be an effective conceptual framework to understand these assumptions. Sexuality becomes problematic and deviant when moving from private to public, when performed within non-legitimate, socially unacceptable relationships or when it crosses culturally established boundaries—in

**Table 5.2 Children’s
accounts of sexual content**

The innocent child and the social construction of sex as inappropriate for children
Sexual knowledge and the need for self-regulation
The role of mediation and (in) self-regulation
More self-regulation
Safety discourses and the mature self
Responses to sexual content and the hegemony of an effects discourse
The sexual child and the contextualization of nudity

this case, insofar it concerns the sexual child (Foucault 1986). It is also founded upon a social constructionist understanding of children and their sexuality (as discussed earlier in this book).

While working with children's responses from the five countries, it became evident that some country interviews offered more material for analysis than others. In fact, interviews from Greece, the UK and Australia provided rich data for a cultural analysis of children's positioning towards experiences with sexual content. Spain followed, with a narrower basis to work from, while relevant excerpts from Italy were rare. What this shows, in my view, is that very often it is the way some (sensitive) issues are being put and framed by the (adult) researcher that impacts upon how and to what extent these issues will be taken up next by the interviewees.

THE INNOCENT CHILD AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEX AS INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN

The social construction of childhood innocence (associated with shunning sex) is ubiquitous, across ages and national contexts. Here, 9–10-year-old girls from Italy discuss how the internet may result in some form of 'disappearance of childhood' through the 'inappropriate' knowledge it imparts. One of them says:

well, I have never seen any [sexual content] accidentally, but I think that if it should happen, it would be somewhat bad because maybe I'll get to know something that I don't yet, but I shouldn't know it now—instead I should get to know it when I grow up—I think it's ok to get to know things at the right age [...]

In this way, she positions herself towards the 'right age' of getting to know about 'something you shouldn't' prior to this age; in so doing, she becomes the 'iconic' child, fully in line with societal and parental expectations of 'goodness', 'morality' and 'innocence', while also internalizing a hegemonic view with respect to child sexuality.⁴

Similarly, when 9–10-year-olds from Spain discuss accidental experiences of sexual content (through spamming), they point out that this is generally not very common. In some cases, older siblings intervene (protective mediation) and inform younger children of sex-related spam so that they can avoid it. When confronted with the question 'Do you feel ashamed [*avergonzadas*] when you receive such content?', one of the girls

is quick to clarify that she can't possibly comment because 'I have never received any' (Girl1). Girl2 also responds emphatically 'me neither', and further contextualizes her answer by saying.

if I saw something, which I haven't, because I'm not looking or anything.... If perhaps sex stuff comes up [*cosas de sexo*] and naked girls [*chicas desnudas*], I must not look at them because afterwards this will leave me with bad memories and I don't like it.

Both cases could be seen as either sincere responses (of absence of encounters with sexual content), or, more probably in my view, as another example of over-performance (the 'iconic' child again, performing in front of the disempowering adult interviewer).⁵ Girl2 is especially quick to shake off any suggestions that she might have had such encounters on account of their not age-appropriate content, and of their negative effects (bad memories).

Older teens have also internalized into the dominant understanding of childhood (as an 'innocent', asexual state), hence the reiteration of child protection discourses from exposure to online sexual content:

It's too easy for kids to access this kind of stuff, like, for example, like, you can hear a seven-year-old child who doesn't know the meaning of the word sex, if he heard it on a bus would be curious about it, he would go home, he would type up and then it just comes up and everything's there. (Boy3, 13–14, UK)

Yet, since sex is everywhere, even 'on the bus', younger kids, who are not supposed to be 'watching stuff that's inappropriate for their age', should be introduced to sexual learning so that they don't learn false information about sex from their peers: 'sooner or later they're going to have to know what stuff means because they're going to be influenced by a lot of kids around them' (Boy4, 13–14, UK). In a matter-of-fact tone, young teenage boys also acknowledge the pervasiveness and inescapability of peer culture. Here, they discuss swearing, yet the same applies for any kind of 'inappropriate' content: 'It's hard to protect [them] from [it] because they go to school and the other kids there already know the stuff' (Boy3, 13–14, UK).

At times, the way an issue or a question is set, frames children's responses. In the following excerpt, I think we can detect a self-positioning as the 'iconic' child, as mentioned above. To this positioning is added the internalization of a hegemonic discourse regarding childhood innocence and the long lasting effects of exposure to pornography:

I think pornography's the one big thing because I mean in our age we can see violence and kind of films which come up to a 15 maybe and, but then pornography I mean, well, hopefully none of us at school will have sex before a good age so we shouldn't really, no one should really be seeing pornography yet but then there probably are those odd one or two people who are watching it and while getting kind of ideas or something in their heads which will then kind of ruin the rest of their lives. (Boy, 13–14, UK)

What we see here is how the discourse of morality and a-sexuality ('hopefully none of us at school will have sex before a good age'), is confounded with the experience of pornography 'if you see it, you'll want it'; those who consume it are portrayed as 'odd' and run the risk of having their lives ruined for good.

SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE NEED FOR SELF-REGULATION

The distinction between 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' content for children is clear to these 10-year-old girls from Greece, who discuss different versions of popular culture:

Girl1: Well ... take stripping ... sometimes there are songs with that sort of video clips ... [young] women in their underwear and silly stuff... [...] it's not appropriate.

Interviewer: Do *you* think it's not appropriate or did you pick that up?

Girl1: Well, broadly speaking, it's not for children to watch.

And here comes self-governance according to an age-appropriate notion of sexual knowledge.

Interviewer: Why is not meant for children? How do you know?

Girl2: Because it's not for our age ... it's not ... we shouldn't be aware of such things from this early on.

Interviewer: Well, how can you tell it's not for your age? Did someone tell you so?

Girl2's account illustrates the social construction of sexual learning as unsuitable for young minds, through 'responsible' parental mediation:

Girl2: My mum has told me ... my dad ... well everybody ... besides, we don't care about that ...

Interviewer: So, it's of no interest to you ...

Girl2 emphatically signals that children her age take no interest in sexual content in any form (because they shouldn't), and it's only later—'when we're older'—that such knowledge is acceptable: 'Yes, we don't have such things in mind! We care about homework and doing well at school!! When we're older, then, it'll be ok!!!'

Girl3 takes the point a bit further, and differentiates between sexy female models—'in their underwear'—and porn: 'This is not something to feel embarrassed about [she means seeing lingerie models] ... they are just Victoria's girls on Mad TV [Greek music video channel] ... in their underwear...' She offers an example of proactive parental mediation, where the parent has forewarned her about online explicit sexual content: 'My mum's told me not to watch other stuff [...] where they are all naked and kissing and that.... I leave this site straight away ...', though it seems that Girl3 hasn't actually come across such context so far:

Interviewer: Have you actually seen such ...

Girl3: Me, ah, no!!

Responses to sexual content are also dependent upon what children may think adult reactions would be when children have experiences of this nature.

Girl4: I was playing games and there was a pop-up, where a man and a woman were kissing and I shut it down immediately ... 'cause if anyone would see ... my mum has already told me about it ... that we are too young to be thinking about it. My dad hasn't told me anything [about sex] ... if he saw me ... he'd kill me!

Interviewer: And why is that?

Girl4: Because he would think I'm watching this stuff always.

Watching sexual content for someone her age would obviously be something unacceptable, hence the paternal wrath. Though exaggerated—'he'd kill me'—this utterance echoes adult and societal perceptions of child sexuality (and of children's nature at large) of much earlier times (see Chap. 3). In this sense, children learn they need to steer way from

sexual content, especially in the form of pornography which they can identify: 'I mean naked men and women ... no underwear, no nothing ... they start up fully clothed, and they lose it along the way ... (Girl4). What they (usually) don't learn about is sex itself (mechanics, dynamics, feelings, roles and so on, as Levine (2002) has so aptly put it [see Chap. 3]).

Girl1: No, never [have my parents talked to me about sex] ... they just tell me to keep my eyes shut [when naked scenes come up] ... and that the channel has accidentally crashed ... and to shut my eyes while my dad fixes it ...

THE ROLE OF MEDIATION AND (IN) SELF-REGULATION

When it comes to self-positioning towards sexual content, (*Interviewer*: Some people might be online with less or no clothes and act like kissing ...), 11-year-old boys from Greece are quick to show their interests and self-governance along the lines shaped by parental regulation:

Boy1: Yeah ... [we know] there must be movies like that, but we don't watch them ... we don't really talk about such stuff, we talk instead about football, for example. *Interviewer*: So you haven't discussed this with your friends ...

Boy2: Well, my parents will tell me from the start that this movie is not for me and that I shouldn't watch it [...]

Interviewer: So you have your own ...

Boy2: ... boundaries, yeah.

When they grow up a little more, young teenagers offer a critical appraisal of parental mediation at an earlier age. Asked why parents and grown-ups regulate children's experiences with sexual content, some just say they can't figure out the reasons why: 'I've thought about it too a lot, but I haven't ended up with an answer, I'm a bit confused, I don't know why' (*Boy1*, 16ys). Others justify parental decisions on the grounds of 'age-appropriate' content for younger children; however, they claim a higher status for themselves which makes room for sexual knowledge, something adults do not always agree with: 'I understand the need to ban us from such content when we're younger.... We're not ready for this kind of knowledge, but even [now] at this age, I don't think they'll approve ... and I don't see why [not] ...' (*Boy2*, 16ys). They also echo already ingrained views about the negative effects of pornography: 'Grown-ups are afraid we won't learn

about sex properly ... that we won't take precautions and that we will be taught the wrong stuff' (Boy3, 16ys) (Boys, 16, Greece).

Another example of how pervasive the children-at-risk discourse is can be seen in the way parenting becomes entangled with media effects. To illustrate: 'for some [children], part of good parenting is concomitant with mediation, since 'some children are influenced by what they're seeing in games'. Younger children seem to be more at risk than those in the know: 'If I play a game, say I've got a little brother and they see me shooting everything, it depends on the child as well.' However, it's down to the parents to put things straight and shield [children] from abusive content: 'Say your parents don't care about you and they let you play these types of games and they don't care if you become a murderer or whatever [...].' Being a good parent means that 'if you see your child being addicted to the game and you see them pretending to shoot, bam, bam, and then stop, your mum should take it seriously and say you're not going to be playing this game any more' (Boy, 11–12, UK).

Risk perception drives children's positioning towards parental and sibling mediation, as with this 11–12-year-old girl from the UK:

when they're [parents] proper mature, they know what films they [children] should be watching. [...] My older sister ... because she's over 20, she knows [...] where it comes to these bits, where they're inappropriate for my brother. She changes the channel or she ask us to go upstairs.... 'Go get ...', or 'Go to the kitchen', or make me something for her. So when it's done.... When the inappropriate part is over, [we] can come back and ... carry on watching.

In this case, she acknowledges that (a) parents, providing they are *mature*, are aware of what constitutes appropriate material for their offspring, and (b) older siblings may also share similar perceptions of *appropriate content for younger children*—seen as a kind of literacy—and proceed towards applying various forms of mediation till *the inappropriate part is over*.

MORE SELF-REGULATION

There are cases where accounts of social media activities are driven by a code of self-regulation, which is the outcome of a hegemonic notion of young female sexuality. In an example from Spain, a 15-year-old girl offers the view that when she was younger (11) and used Tuenti (a popular social media platform in Spain), she only uploaded landscape photos, or quotes. Today, however, there are plenty of young pre-teens, as well as

peers, who upload selfies in bikinis. And although she allows young girls a certain agency, for 'they are the ones who decide', she actually rebukes them: 'if they want to upload photos in bikini, it's their problem.[...] But then, like, [to] upload a photo on the beach is not normal, either.' And the chastising goes further, for it is early female sexuality that is (morally) problematic: '[they upload them] to get noticed! There are people, for example the girls I know have uploaded the photos so the guys look at them. To me that does not seem very good.' The very fact that it wasn't the boyfriends who asked for such photos, 'Did their boyfriends ask them to?', but it was the girls' sexual agency that took over, 'No, it's because they want to show themselves; it's a way to flirt', is presented as something to be admonished.

The self-regulatory code of reference of the female respondent shapes her overall frame of mind regarding online communication, and is accentuated further by the (adult) interviewer's self-positioning:

Yes, there is a case, Amanda Todd, who used the cam to make videos and show her breasts to others [...] that does not seem normal to [me]. To [use the internet in order to] speak to your family members and friends [who] are far away, yes, but otherwise no ...

Interviewer: You seem very responsible to me, but not everyone is as responsible as you are.

Taking her cue from the interviewer, the young Spanish respondent continues by accounting for the 'morally responsible and safety-aware child':

No. But there are people who are aware of such things [i.e. that revealing your breasts online for everyone to see is irresponsible] and others who don't give a damn about what other might think [i.e. that someone who reveals her breasts online will be probably seen as a 'tart'].... I'm aware of such things because I was told about online risks ... what could happen ... from a young age ... my internet use was regulated ... and now I'm more responsible.... I never fell for webcams, or for chats and the like ...

In this account, the young teenager shows how the hegemonic ideology regarding 'appropriate girlhood' works and becomes internalized—what she's saying is that child sexuality (especially of girls) is problematic and full of risks. Her risk awareness is the result of parental mediation when younger, and the aftermath of such instruction is her becoming 'responsible' and 'not being lured' by interactive online technologies.

SAFETY DISCOURSES AND THE MATURE SELF

Older teenagers assume a moral responsibility over the younger kids—‘it’s our responsibility’ (Boy1)—and recycle the well-established safety discourse of parental guidance:

They should enforce parental kind of guidance so that they have, they can see what their child is actually typing on the computer or what they’re watching because on BBC iPlayer it is as easy as just clicking and you can see Russell Howards’ Good News and you can hear him swear at something which the young ones aren’t really allowed to hear that? (Boy2) (Boys, 13–14, UK)

Within an overarching frame of child protection, even 9-year-olds assume a protective role for those younger than them:

sometimes I watch what my father is watching, they should ban [such] broadcasts because if there is a little girl watching [like me, with my dad], she could suffer. And it is not pleasant. (Girl1)

Yes, they should have them [pages of nasty content] in a page where [only] people who want to see them go. (Girl2)

As a safety precaution, Girl3 offers a regulatory policy tip: ‘There should be a specific page to see nasty content, a page for those who want to see such ... where you can see everything if you are so inclined’ (Spain).

RESPONSES TO SEXUAL CONTENT AND THE HEGEMONY OF AN EFFECTS DISCOURSE

Reactions to explicit content vary from seeing naked protesters on TV and magazines:

One day I saw on TV some guys protesting in a street ... naked!! Even women with kids!! ... all naked, holding a sign about some work issue. I was stunned because it’s not normal to see naked people protesting on the street [...] (Girl1, 9–10, Spain)

I saw it on the newspaper, or something similar, it was naked and you could see everything. (Girl2, 9–10, Spain)

... to accidental exposure to pornography while gaming:

I wanted to log in a dressing-up site I used to play in the past, boys and girls, girls in wedding gowns and when I typed 'boys' 'cause I wanted to dress up boys, this weird photo came up ... a naked man ... (Girl1, 10, Greece)

However, sometimes responses to such experiences—'I was scared' (Girl1, 10, Greece)—correspond only to technical anxieties, 'My computer might crash, and such ...', which are shared with peers with similar experiences: 'I told Girl3 about it, 'cause she'd told me that, once, she'd come across similar photos by chance and her PC crashed' (Girl1, 10, Greece).

Asked about the things she's careful about when using the internet (apart from who she befriends, or giving out personal details), a young girl from the UK offers:

Girl: There are lots of videos that are inappropriate [...] don't click on it, because it could get you thinking about all these things.

Interviewer: Could you clarify?

Girl: Things that you don't really want to know because I'm 12. I wouldn't want to know about inappropriate things.

She's then prompted to suggest what is inappropriate in her opinion, to which she responds:

Girl: If there was a particular video about sex, for example, then I'd find that inappropriate, because I'm at the age, where I know what sex is, but if I want to find information, I'd probably ask my mum for starters. I don't know what these people are going to say, they could put the wrong ideas in my head.

Interviewer: Wrong ideas about how to behave sexually?

Girl: Yes. (Girl, 12, UK)

In this case, the 12-year-old positions herself as being old enough to know what sex is—'I'm at the age, where I know what sex is—yet she constructs such sexual knowledge as inappropriate for her: 'Things that you don't really want to know because I'm 12'. However, if she wants more inside knowledge, she'll revert to her mother, where she expects to get the right kind of sexual knowledge. Porn videos may communicate the wrong ideas about sex—'they could put the wrong ideas in my head'—something consistent with the dominant effects discourse (Girl, 12, UK).

Similar stereotypical approaches to pornography circulate among older children, who confound sexually explicit content with child pornography (see Chap. 4):

Boy1: I don't understand how they make child pornography, like, how they get child...

Boy2: They drug them I think because then if you take them [overtalking] [...]

Boy3: Well, either they force them, or they can drug them or, you know, can blackmail them or something like that.

Boy1: And also if people come across like these pictures then, like, it's just, it leaves a bad influence and especially, like, school people because then it gives them ideas to, like, send pictures or something and it's just inappropriate. (Boys, 13–14, UK)

The effects discourse (regarding the internet as an environment full of risks when it comes to children, especially insofar as sexual content is concerned) is visible among younger children as well, as the following example from Spain illustrates:

Boy1: [there are] nasty things [on the internet].

Interviewer: Is there a lot of nasty content online?

Boy2: I guess there must be ...

Interviewer: Ok, you think there is, but you don't really know [from personal experience she means]. And when we say 'nasty things' what do we mean? [giggles; silence]

Interviewer: Well, I think it's pretty clear what we mean ... and why do you think you shouldn't see such things?

Boy1: Because it's bad for the eyes ...

[Laughter]

Boy1: ... which is why Jose wears glasses ...

These young boys (9–10 years old) reiterate the popular discourse about 'nasty things' on the internet, equating sexual content with 'nastiness' impinging on one's health. Such discourses abound and come as a result of media constructions of the internet as a dangerous place for children, for the fear of 'lurking sexual predators':

Boy1: There was a programme about how there was a man and there was a little girl and the man sent a picture of himself to her because they were talking on it [Club Penguin]—and it was a picture of a teenage boy and she was 12, or something [the point made here is about the adult predator who poses as a peer]. And he said he'd got tickets to some sort of band or play or something. And then she got there with her mum [...] and it was a fully grown man [...]

Interviewer: This was on a TV programme ...

Boy1: A TV programme, yes. Just about the dangers of the internet [...] like that you've got to be careful that you're not talking to any strangers. (9–10, UK)

At other times these discourses are the outcome of adult constructions of sex as rude and disgusting for children:

Boy2: They [his parents] say like you shouldn't ... if you go online, do not like go on anything rude and stuff. So I say ok and then I just play with my friends online.

Interviewer: What do they mean rude?

Boy2: Like these disgusting things.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example? I mean, is it violent things or is it nude things or ...?

Boy2: Yes, nude. (9–10, UK)

Having said that, not everyone adheres to a harmful notion of sexual content experiences, though they self-regulate according to 'age-appropriate' content, like these boys (11 years old) from Greece, who discuss access to sexual and violent content:

Boy1: There are some scenes with such [sexual content]... you don't get harmed by them... but they are not for my age.

Interviewer: Do you have in mind what kind of movies these might be?

Boy1: A movie that has inappropriate scenes, now an appropriate movie might have these in a softer version, it might have a few ...

Boy2: In some movies there's really extreme violence.

And when asked how do they know the movie is 'inappropriate' for them, they refer to the movie classification code:

Boy3: The sign at the top right of the screen.

Boy4: I sometimes use the remote control to check what's the age limit [he actually refers to teletext information], or it says on the top [of the screen] 10, 15, 3 ...

THE SEXUAL CHILD AND THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF NUDITY

The very notion of self-promotion (through sexy or naked selfies) feels strange to these young teenage boys from Greece:

Boy2: I don't think it's that normal for someone to upload his body naked or in a somewhat more provocative posture because he/she might get some very wrong responses than those he/she might expect.

Interviewer: Such as?

And here comes the frustrating realization of how things work in real life:

Boy1: She might want to post it alongside her boyfriend [only] for everybody to see and think that it's something different, that she's a slut,

Boy3: You have to be really stupid to upload a naked photo. Why would you do it at this age?

What is compromising is when 'people may think of creating a video with their girlfriend because there are so many such [porn videos he means] online' (Boy1); 'or he may decide to do what he sees [on the porn videos he means] without the girl he's with liking it' (Boy2). The strategy is to apply self-regulation, common sense and open discussion: 'not to do it. You must have limits ... or to ask her first' (Boy1), because there are personal repercussions: 'his parents might see it and punish him' (Boy3), as well as social ones; some are health-related, 'if he doesn't take the right precautions, he might infect someone; AIDS has increased 200 % in Greece' (Boy3) (see how the clinical account of sex has proliferated and caught up with young teenagers; see also that young boys project their gender identity by referring only to male sexual partners). There is also the social construction of female (girls') sexuality as something vulgar in a way that it is never for boys:

with boys it's different, nobody will go and say 'slut' to a boy, whereas with girls, they will make fun of them and start talking ... if a boy says [he's had sex], they'll say 'well done', but they'll call a girl a 'slut'. (Boy1)

The teen boys from Greece elaborate critically on the naked body in art and performance: 'It depends ... if someone is an artist and makes a painting ... and there are several plays with naked protagonists as well' (Boy1); 'Yes, there are several paintings showing a scene with a naked girl, and it's neither offensive nor extreme' (Boy2); and voluntary self-presentation and exposure: 'it's different when someone ... [a girl] ... how to put it ... if she's a sex maniac and uploads her photos, saying in a way "come to my place"' (Boy1). Notwithstanding the construction of early female sexuality in moral and clinical terms as pathological ('she's a sex maniac') because she posts sexy selfies, the boys in this case make sense of the different contextualizations of sexuality and nudity (Boys, 13, Greece).

There are several degrees of separation between 'an artistic representation of nudity ... but that's a work of art because this is how the artist sees it, or in a play' (Boy1), and someone who wants 'to provoke', with 'a naked pose ... it depends' (Boy2). Drawing from popular discourses about misuse of personal data and sexualization, Boy1 remarks how young teenage girls, 'if she's underage', are enveloped within a culture that interpellates them to be sexy (hence the provocative naked pose), yet doesn't prepare them about what follows: 'and she cannot deal with it afterwards'; for example, 'someone sees it, you never know what he could do and you don't know how to deal with it yourself'. This is further contextualized by Boy2 who specifies that:

the cases where a girl posts a naked selfie on FB [Facebook] are rare ... [it's more likely] they were in a relationship with someone older [here he means an older teenager, not an adult], they gave him the photo because they were intimate, and he went on FB and uploaded it... (Boys, 13, Greece)

Everything comes down to age, as with it comes the privilege of 'being sexual':

Boy3: If there is a girl in our school [he means in junior high, so another 13-year-old], and you see her every day and at some point she uploads a naked photo, it will look odd. It's a different thing with 16–17 [-year-olds], which is an age where they may be more mature.

Interviewer: So you are saying that when you are 16–17 you might be in a sexual relationship ...

Boy2: If they want to. They might want to have sex and they might want to upload provocative pictures ...

In other cases, it is the private/public axis that defines the context of the naked body: 'You may feel fine with your body. There are nudists' beaches for example, but it's not so normal that complete strangers see your naked pictures' (Boy1). And he continues his account of the social construction of nudity: 'If we were all living in a world where everybody was naked, and someone uploaded on FB a photo with clothes then this would be very odd ... (Boys, 13, Greece).

Contextualizing sexuality and violence, the UK researcher enquires whether people distinguish between media when it comes to such content: 'Look at page three of *The Sun* and you can see a topless woman but don't look on the internet because it's something special, is it the same logic?' Young respondents suggest that certain issues are policy-related, as is for example the regulation of the *Grand Theft Auto* gaming series:

They make it 18 because they have to say a lot of things because the government wouldn't approve of it if they said 12, if they put age 12 and it said sexual content strong, partial nudity. But they have to say those things so that it can sound 18, but I know some people who have played the game and they said it only rarely shows it a little bit. When they rarely show it, it depends because sometimes you have to look close up to see what they are wearing. (Boy1, 11–12, UK)

However, it's the overall relationship between children and sex, constructed as problematic and unhealthy, that quite often engulfs and shapes children's positioning towards any notion of sexuality, whether on the internet or elsewhere. This group of 9–10-year-old girls in Spain offer us an overview of the naked body (as a testimony of sexuality) in different contexts, all of which are problematic and give rise to feelings of shame and embarrassment.

In one instance, where they discuss 'rare, unpleasant things that can happen on the internet' (Interviewer), Girl1 makes a statement about personal repercussions in the case of personal data misuse. She recounts how, though nothing has happened to her, it is easy for someone to:

edit one of your photos, leave the head but add a naked body ... they leave enough of you ... it's your face and it looks as if it's really you; or they take your photo and stick somebody else's face on it, and then they post it anywhere ... Tuenti, FB ... all your friends can see it.... It's bad and it stays on. I would die of shame if it happened to me ...

In another discussion, the girls take a moral stance regarding those peers—boys and especially girls—who take pleasure in watching porn, in experimenting with sex and in talking about their endeavours:

Girl1: There are some boys who like nasty things [sex, porn], and there are some girls who talk a lot about it.

Girl3: In my class, they are vocal about it, because they want to do it because they're bad [girls], they want to have sex, and they talk about this girl who has done this thing and she likes it and sometimes she watches [porn] at home.

Girl1: I think that [porn] is a bad influence ... and if girls our age like [porn], so be it, [but] they shouldn't talk about it.... I mean if you fancy it, you shouldn't pass it on to another person and make them curious to see something that shouldn't be seen ... (Girls, 9–10, Spain)

In this last excerpt we see an ethical self-positioning with regard to sexuality and pornography, premised upon an effects discourse. It transpires that sex and porn is something bad and immoral, as is talk about sex, especially when it comes from a young child. Watching porn is linked to raising sexual desire and, as a result, porn is a 'bad influence'. Porn is also contagious and can be 'passed on' from one another.

REACTIONS TO PORNOGRAPHY AND SEXUAL CONTENT— GENDER TALK

Once access to and availability of pornography is being discussed, 13–14-year-old boys from the UK put forward issues of age-appropriateness: 'at this age it's just not right because everyone's too young' (Boy1); of regulation of access to online pornography: 'Well, I think there should be like no free pornography sites because ... or like easily accessible ones because then it's just way too easy for, like, 8-year-olds to stumble across one' (Boy2); of access to pornography: 'You can't [have in magazines in news agents] the kind of porn available on the internet, a kid can't buy a

magazine with porn in it' (Boy3), though some teens interpret any sexually explicit content as pornographic: 'there's already, I know in *The Star* there's images of women with less clothes on than they should have on, like, page three' (Boy1). Such sexually explicit content can put a young boy in an embarrassing situation, since many adults think that children and sex do not mix:

when I was little I was, like, opening the paper and I saw this, like, woman, like, sort of on the page and I didn't really know what was happening. My mum walked in so I was kind of embarrassed and she thought I was, like, watching it but I was only just turning over the paper so I think from then on, like, my mum started judging me. (Boy1)

Girls acknowledge how it is boys, predominantly, who engage in sex-related content:

Sure! Every day! [giggles] ... They watch videos with naked girls—stark naked—and they're like, 'God she's hot!' and they tell each other, 'Go on, check on that' and stuff. [...] For instance, when we have a break at school, we girls talk about stuff, fashion, for example, and boys talk about sex, women. (Girl, 14, Greece)

When the respondent points out that one of her schoolmates used the picture of a naked woman as a screen saver on his mobile, she explains how it's not on to sport such a screensaver, for aesthetic reasons: 'Well yes ... it's not nice to get [somebody's] mobe and be confronted with such photos'. She specifies that she's not embarrassed to be confronted with such context, conversely: 'Ha! It's him who should feel embarrassed, not me!' It transpires that it's a partial let-down, because you least expect from a 'nice' guy to flaunt a phone sex model (because that was what it was about):

Girl: You know, it might be a cool, calm guy, a nice guy and you might not expect to see such images on his mobe screen ...

Interviewer: And what kind of guys would use such screen savers?

Girl: You know, those guys that walk around and keep saying 'Oh look at her', 'She's hhhhhot!' [...]. I think no girl would like something like that—to have a boyfriend that keeps such photos on his mobe, to her face ... (Girl, 14, Greece)

Still in Greece, some older boys suggest that girls won't admit they consume porn out of shame (self-regulation) and because of the fear of being stigmatized (social regulation) 'because we are in Greece' (Boy1), where 'we're way back in the past' (Boy2) and 'for boys, it sounds more normal, while for girls it seems more corrupt, more perverse ...' (Boy3). The boys acknowledge the social construction of porn consumption as something morally sinister: 'We're [not] saying it's not normal for girls to watch [porn]—that's what people, society say' (Boy3). They suggest that 'in principle' girls are ensconced in that perception and 'don't like to watch porn ... except for those who look for it and want to pleasure themselves' (Boy2). As a result, quite often girls are driven towards performing the role of the 'modest child', so when, for example, a sex video surfaces on a mobile, 'some [girls] pretend to hide and not want to watch, while others [who] are more liberated, simply watch it with everybody else' (Boy2) (Boys, 17, Greece).

Elsewhere, others internalize an effects-based approach to pornography. This teenage boy from Australia constructs personal knowledge about porn consumption on the basis of the hegemonic effects discourse which foresees clinical (pathological) consequences for the individual: 'I guess it can cause problems [...] as in you have an expectation and you develop an unhealthy, like, addiction [...].' Porn also impacts upon your sex life:

I know they've done studies on it about how people have watched it and done it so much the only way they can get ... the only way they be attracted is if they have ... they have this certain expectation of something and then when they don't get that ... I guess they don't get off [.... It] also leads to people not being able to get erections in the first place ...

Finally, it cultivates a stereotypical self- and body-image which is detrimental for teenagers:

I think it's quite damaging to the younger boys. They feel insecure about their bodies, definitely from what you see and especially if girls watched as well, which I'm sure they do. [...] There's like a certain expectation of what you should be like and how you should act. [...] The men are all like muscly and big and then the people, I guess my age or younger, they will see it and then they will expect to be like that and then they will have small penis syndrome [...] which] can lead to depression and anxiety about it. (Boy, 14–16, Australia)

The Australian teenager follows up the effects rhetoric by contemplating the social construction of body perceptions as a result of the media, and pornography more specifically:

media in general. Like in Vietnam, all the advertising is white women dressed, or not even dressed, just wearing skimpy clothing. And then I guess they have an expectation of what they should be. [...] in regards to pornography, it goes ... it delves deeper into the physical aspects of like the penis and the boobs and everything, they expect their body to look like that.

The hegemonic rhetoric about the sexualization of culture is pervasive and shapes young teenage minds, too. Here, the Australian teenager acknowledges certain benefits to pornography: 'I mean, there's benefits I guess [...] guess if you're lonely or if that's the only way you can get your release or whatever, I guess then in that case it's normal', yet he views the link between sexual release and porn as inherently problematic: 'I think masturbation itself is perfectly normal and ok thing to do, but I don't see why it has to be done with pornography.' He quickly reverts to an idealized Golden Age where, presumably, the world was better: 'I think this society has become really sexualized in compared to what it used to be. I don't have first-hand experience what it used to be like 'cause I'm only 15 [...].'

Within the same conceptual framework, of a bygone era, he broadens the discussion of the internet as something 'really cool ... and the opportunities are really good', to include a lamentation about moral degradation because of it:

people are exposed at an earlier and earlier age. I remember the talk about how ages ago [people] were old when they were exposed to pornography. And then I was about 10 when I was exposed to it and I know kids that are 6 and like [...] I remember seeing, at my last school, kids in kindergarten talking about 69-ing each other. I was, how do you even know that, you're not meant to ... it's just ... it's really bad.

The Australian teenager is an illustrative example of the pervasiveness of the discourse of the innocent, asexual and moral child across ages and cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

While the creative, informative, interactive and participatory features of the digital environment for children are widely recognized, and children's digital access and literacy is growing apace, alongside the acknowledgement that in lower-income countries and among socially excluded children such features remain underused, the discussion on children's rights in the digital age continues to address exposure to pornography, along with 'unwanted sexual solicitation, bullying and harassment [...] and other potentially harmful materials', as an ICT-associated harm that needs to be minimized (*A Global Research Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age*, Livingstone and Bulger 2013, 15). In official policy discourse, children's sexuality remains a risk, for it is set within a sexual health frame of mind, addressing sex as a risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or pregnancy. And despite the recommendation of 'early implementation of comprehensive education on sex and relationships' by the *Social Determinants of Health and Well-being Among Young People* study of the World Health Organization (Currie et al. 2012, 182), children's engagement with sex at large is seen either as penetrative sex (hence the need for contraception and protection from STDs) or as consumption of and/or exposure to porn (also perceived as damaging). Actually, much of the scientific discussion concerns 'adolescent sexual intercourse' and is driven by 'its serious consequences, which include STIs [sexually transmitted infections], unwanted pregnancy, abortion and negative psychosocial outcomes', while one of the policy reflections is making sure that 'young people do not engage in sexual relationships before they are developmentally ready to do so' (Currie et al. 2012, 182). What does this say? That although we talk a lot about children's rights to protection, provision and participation, as global research on children and young people's digital use draws extensively from the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) (*Researching children's rights globally in the digital age* 2015, 5), scientific discourse and policy making practically exclude children from the right to participate in 'intimate citizenship' (Plummer 1995, 2003; see also Chap. 2).⁶ Yet, given the way public talk about our most intimate and personal lives proliferates, becomes diversified and goes global (Plummer 2001, 255), it is strange to think that children could (or should) be excluded from this trend.⁷

All the children's accounts presented in this chapter could be seen as a form of digital literacy, where children have become aware of the 'risk' of

sexual content and are careful to stay away from it through different forms of strategizing (Smahel and Wright 2014). This comes as a result of carefully planned awareness raising policies through schooling, internet safety nodes and other stakeholders. However, instead of reading these accounts as expressions of digital literacy in risk awareness, I suggest reading them as (a) a kind of cultural capital consisting of societal norms of morality and appropriateness. These norms come from a popular moralizing about children:

[set] in the context of a social world where the terms ‘morals’ and ‘morality’ are freely and openly tossed around as if everyone knew exactly what they meant by them [for] [e]veryone seems to know what morality is and where to find it. (King 1999, 2)

Children are interpellated by the dominant popular discourse of the child-at-risk, hence they give currency to the follow-up discourse, of the child-in-need-of-protection and reiterate it through their performance of the ‘iconic’ child.

They can also be read (b) as an expression of ‘intimate citizenship’, as discussed above. To this goal, we should start thinking about the ‘sexualization of culture’ the way Feona Attwood (2006, 2011) has suggested. I refer to her notion of seeing sexuality assuming ‘a central yet nebulous role’ (2006, 89) in how we (adults and children alike) articulate our bodies, pleasures, individuality and status in the world, and where sex and sexuality are understood as ‘experience and sensibility’, as well as ways ‘to construct narratives of the self’ (2006, 91). In this way, we would make room for children ‘telling their own sexual stories’ (Plummer 1995) as citizens.

Having positioned myself within the state-of-the-art research about children’s experiences with sexual content and sexuality at large, the next two chapters present my approach regarding the overall debate on the sexualization of children by focusing on qualitative work with young girls from a cultural studies perspective.

NOTES

1. As already explained (in Chap. 4, pp. 77–81), the EU Kids Online model has been exported to other countries, such as Australia, Brazil and Russia, and global organizations such as Unicef. Here, I have chosen to include data from the Australian interviews as well, since my

theorizing of sexualization is premised upon the public debate in Britain, the US and Australia. In this way, readers will have a better grasp of how young teens have been seen to discuss sexualization across Europe, Britain and Australia.

2. Internet usage refers to a variety of activities across various platforms, which can be accessed anywhere, alone or with others (Smahel and Wright 2014).
3. 'Sexual communication can therefore go from seeing sexy pictures or videos from peers, to having conversations on webcam or chat rooms about sex, being asked on the webcam to take off their clothes, or having their pictures in sexy poses that are shared with others' (Smahel and Wright 2014, 53).
4. Sometimes children feel the need to perform in a certain way when engaging with an adult interviewer (children wishing to please, says Buckingham 1993, 2011), even more so when it comes to sex-related issues. See Chap. 6 for a more elaborated discussion.
5. For more nuanced analysis of the power relations that take place in adult-child interviews, see Chap. 6.
6. Given that 'most research and policy has focused on the global North, as for example in the EU Kids Online project', now that the internet is '[...] rapidly spreading through much of the global South' (*Researching children's rights globally in the digital age* 2015, 6) means that such a contextualization of children's experiences with the world and the cultures of sex will become ubiquitous.
7. Plummer suggests we talk of 'a *globalization and glocalization of intimacies*—processes through which local cultures pick up, and usually transform, many features of the personal life displayed across the globe. I suggest too that we can speak of [...] a simultaneous *Hybridization of Intimacies*, in which the personal life often becomes more diversified' (Plummer 2001, 249).

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Revisiting the Sexualization-of-Young-Girls Debate, Case Study One: Discourses of Stardom and Femininity Among Greek Tween Girls

Following the discussion of popular culture and moral panics (Chap. 3), and of the way the entertainment media are seen to promote the sexualization of young girls (Chap. 2), I wish to challenge the prevailing views and assumptions about the incendiary effects of sexualized and commercialized culture on young pre-teen girls. In that sense, I argue, young girls' consumption of popular culture illustrates how the entertainment media, rather than being construed as risk-laden, 'self-directed' leisure (Chap. 3), can be used towards the management of an ethical self, and as part of a broader identity work where issues of self-governance, appropriateness, taste and aesthetics are raised. In so doing, they offer us a nuanced insight in the ambiguities embedded in the transition from girlhood to womanhood and the construction of a feminine self. To this goal, and premised within a social constructionist perspective, this chapter and the next will draw from a series of interviews conducted with tween girls from different class backgrounds in Greece as case studies on the debate of the sexualization of young children, for I am interested in:

the performance of social acts through language, and the identification of the discourses and interpretative repertoires which we draw upon [...] and which also may have identity implications. (Burr 1995, 164)

This chapter is derived in part from an article published in *Sex Education* (Liza Tsaliki 2015, 'Popular culture and moral panics about "children at risk": revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate', *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 15(5): 500–514), copyright Taylor & Francis.

In my discussion of tween girls' consumption of popular culture (stardom and celebrity culture in Chap. 6, and make-over gaming practices in Chap. 7), I follow Cook and Kaiser's (2004) view that we cannot make sense of contemporary views of the 'tween' unless we take into account its articulation with the market exigencies of childhood, and girlhood in particular.

ADOLESCENTS, TEENAGERS AND TWEENS

Ariès (1962) suggested that 'adolescence' was invented as a breathing space between childhood and adulthood in the early eighteenth century by middle-class parents who wanted to provide better education to their offspring. With the middle classes becoming increasingly preoccupied about how to control 'working-class' youth as well as their own (the 'youth as trouble' notion, as discussed in Chap. 3), this transitional space was prolonged and young people became more separated from the adult world during the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, psychologists had already named this phase 'adolescence', a term that has repeatedly fed public anxieties about the undisciplined and unruly nature of young people. The relative affluence of the 1950s was translated into the construction of the 'teenager' and an entire range of market goods and services aimed at them as a new niche (magazines, records, clothes, dances and the like)—the notion of 'youth-as-fun' (Hebdige 1988). However, the concept of youth—either as 'adolescents' or 'teenagers'—is a slippery one, wedged between adulthood and childhood. And since what it means to be a 'child' varies considerably across time and cultures, adolescence becomes an ambiguous zone, marked more by exclusion (from adult spaces and practices) rather than inclusion. The ambiguity becomes more pronounced as adolescents wish to distance themselves from children—while still being excluded from the adult world (Sibley 1995). In addition, the distinction between childhood and adulthood is not clear-cut, and neither is crossing the boundary between the two a one-off or a one-way process. For example, the interconnections between different life stages that demarcate the transition from childhood to adulthood—leaving home, leaving education, getting a job, getting access to particular forms of public space,¹ becoming a parent—may be connected (or not), may occur simultaneously, serially, with breaks and regressions, or not at all (Valentine 2003; Skelton and Valentine 1998).

In this discussion we should not forget how the market itself provides definitions and accounts of what it means to be a child (of a certain age and gender)—definitions which children, and their parents, take into account when constructing their sense of self-identity. The market, says Buckingham (2011, 62), has historically functioned by creating age-based distinctions and gradations, seen, for example, in the construction of the ‘tween’. Such marketized constructions of childhood also inform parental and teacher conceptions of childhood, for they cut across ideologies of good parenting and pedagogy, and in a similar way to children, parents and teachers, too, negotiate with marketized conceptualizations.

Children therefore ‘perform’ as children [...] in a situation where the market offers several potential definitions of childhood identities, alongside other definitions that derive from the home, the peer group, the school and so on. (Buckingham 2011, 62)

Insofar the category ‘tween’ is concerned, Cook and Kaiser (2004) suggest that the term ‘subteen/pre-teen’ is the precursor of the tween, and was originally constructed to define white, middle-class, heterosexual girls aged between 9 or 10 and 12. The ‘tween’, on the other hand, is seen to occupy a wider age range—7 or 8 to 13 or 14—yet is the object of similar public anxieties about female sexuality and self-representation as the ‘subteen’. More specifically, they distinguish between the ‘subteen/pre-teen’—a term reflecting the trade use of an age-based marketing invention from the 1940s to the 1970s—and the ‘Tween’ (with a capital ‘T’)—a term they use to describe the emergence of the persona and market of that name in the 1990s. They use ‘tween’ to refer to the age range and market overall. The term has gained credit and popularity ever since, and by now (2015) is used generically when talking about pre-adolescent and early adolescent girls, which is how I am using it myself. In this, I see the tween carrying extensive social ambiguity and fluidity:

regarding maturity, sexuality and gender as to when a girl ceases to be a tween physically or culturally.... [As a result] the tween girl [...] resides in an unstable cultural space where ambiguities of social identity invite, even tolerate, polysemous and polyvalent renderings of who ‘she’ is. (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 205)

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Interdisciplinary research has shown how crucial are peer group cultures and relations within the school to young people's sense of identity, self-esteem and security. In fact, the school has been studied as a significant space of identity construction where the young negotiate their gender identities and sexual morality. As a result, the school is a place where children and teenagers learn how to articulate their individuality while conforming to and negotiating peer norms that connote adult normative understandings of heterosexuality (Chronaki 2014; Valentine 2003; Hyams 2000; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Blackman 1998; Hey 1997). Within such a context, in 2012, I worked with girls aged 10–12, in 16 different focus groups (of 4 to 5 girls, each) in 3 primary schools in inner Athens:

1. one state school (School 1), from the Grava school complex (characterized by low socio-economic status [SES]: the majority of students are economic immigrants; food rations are distributed daily, which is a rarity in Greece since schools are not designed to provide lunches; for the majority of students, immigrants and Greeks alike, these meals constitute their main daily intake).
2. one private school, with a French background (School 2) (middle-class, predominantly Greek populated)
3. A foreign-language school (School 3) (middle-class; funded by the foreign government; most students are nationals of the foreign country, though there are some Albanian pupils, children of Albanian government officials working in Greece).

Schools from different social backgrounds were chosen within an overarching ambition to explore the extent to which class undercuts the construction of subjectivities. All names are fictitious. Discussions were convened by myself and another female researcher.

In an attempt to straddle the divide between the worlds of adults and children, and negotiate rank differences between the interviewers and them, I followed Haudrup-Christensen's (2004) approach, which recommends that, when doing research into childhood, adults should perform as an 'unusual type of adult', being interested in making sense of how the social world looks from a child's perspective, without patronizing them by pretending to be one of them (2004, 174). In addition, following Buckingham (1993), the social context of the interview was considered,

for the latter is seen as ‘a social event’ (1993, 42–45). When adults ask children questions in a school context—in this case, about popular culture—certain kinds of responses are invited because the subject position we occupy as adults is inevitably predefined as a position of power in relation to children (1993, 63). This suggests that children as participants enjoy a range of discursive possibilities, sometimes seeking to please by employing a ‘critical’, ‘adult’ discourse, and sometimes not.

Out of a variety of themes that emerged during the focus group interviews, this chapter discusses the consumption of popular culture through pre-teen girls’ discursive accounts of stardom and identity work. By looking into how girls read and talk about popular culture, multiple subject positions, maps of meanings and interpretative repertoires emerge about body aesthetics, appropriateness, taste, media literacy, the ethical self, and the construction of an attractive and sexual self. The chapter has two sections. The first revolves around girls’ talk and commentary about Rihanna (and some of their favourite pop stars). Having sought my young pre-tween (at that time) daughter’s advice as to which female artist to use, Rihanna emerged as the obvious face of stardom, a face that everyone has an opinion about, which they want to share. The girls were then shown some publicly available photos of Rihanna to comment upon. Photo #1 shows Rihanna in a 2011 concert in Belfast, wearing a multi-coloured, embellished, high-waisted bikini and pink peep-toe ankle booties. In Photo #2, she sports an all-white Max Azria pants suit at the 2011 Billboard Music Awards. Photo #3 comes from the 2011 Met Gala, where she wears a lace Stella McCartney one-sleeve dress with a transparent side, a long side-swept braid, Wilfredo Rosado earrings and Christian Louboutin heels.²

The second part draws from the discussion of stardom and celebrity culture and sheds light on how tween girls employ an array of ‘technologies of sexiness’ (Evans et al. 2010) in order to negotiate consumption and personal display on the way towards personhood and ideal femininity.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF STARDOM BY PRE-TEEN GIRLS: RIHANNA AND OTHER POP STARS

Girls take up different subject positions regarding body aesthetics. Some girls adhere to dominant notions of the ‘slim body’ and find Rihanna on the chubbier end, as these 12-year-olds (sixth graders) from the predominantly low-SES state school Grava (School 1) do (Photo #1):

Interviewer: Does she look fat or slim here??

Eva: Fat

Anna: Fat ...—her thighs are ceww!!!! [disapprovingly]

Eleni: I don't like her ... her legs ... I don't like them, they are fat ... the upper torso is ok ... (excerpt 1)

Some within the same group disagree. Despina thinks she looks just fine weightwise—it's her outfit she disapproves of—and comments on how body appearance makes no difference when it comes to real talent:

Despina: Well, I like her here.... I don't think any woman ... artist ... should be either skinny or fat.... I like her body ... eh, now the bottom she's wearing—what is it? a swim suit?—I don't fancy that ...

... nobody says that Adele looks fat....

Anna: ... yet Adele is bigger ... (excerpt 2)

Not everyone adheres to such notions of body weight, though. In some cases, there's critical awareness of the impact certain popular culture icons have on young fans. Eleven-year-old Sofia says:

when little girls watch [female] singers and [fashion] models on TV, they go, like, oh-they-look-so-good and stuff ... and then they see themselves as fat, because they see these [women] who are so slim ... and some may go off eating, they may get sick or die ... (excerpt 3)

Sofia is showing significant media literacy, being aware of the pressure young girls find themselves under in order to look thin—just like some of their role models. Sofia is also aware of the—sometimes fatal—repercussions of such pressure. What we also see is congruence between feminist and effects discourses: women perceiving themselves as fat, reflects a feminist conceptualization of the dominant zero-size ideal body, whereas the idea that girls will go off eating as a result of copying celebrity behaviour, reflects a media effects approach. This kind of literacy, filtered through participant discourses, leads to particular kinds of regulation and management of the self, and identity construction.

When these 11-year-olds (fifth graders) in Grava (School 1) were asked whether they fashion themselves after their favourite pop star, respondents showed diverse practices and subject positions, ruled by a notion of self-governance.

Interviewer: Do you follow how your favourite star is dressed in order to determine your own dress style ... at school, for a walk, at a party?

Nena: No!

Jenny: Well, it depends.... If it's decent enough.... If it's too short why put them [clothes] on in the first place??

Katerina: I don't want to sport a style similar to a singer's.... I want to have my own style ...

Zina: I don't want to look like everyone else—I want to have my own style ... so, look at Rihanna here [#3], I'd never want to look like that.... I'll follow my own style ... that suits me best ... (excerpt 4)

At a first level, their responses (in excerpt 4) suggest agency in terms of how these 11-year-olds resist the dominant feminist and pro-effects agenda about the sexualizing impact of celebrity culture on young girls; instead, they argue in favour of a personalized style. On a second level, the way they self-regulate in terms of appropriateness and decency, calls for the internalization of dominant tropes of ideal femininity and iconic childhood.

Rihanna's controversial Stella McCartney gown, showing off sidecheek, stirred up discussion among a group of 10-year-olds, also from School 1 (Grava) (Photo#3):

Asia: Here, look ... it's see-through on top, and [there's] fabric underneath ... [they all laugh]

Nana: Yeah, it's dead sexy ... her hair looks su-perb ...

Asia: She still looks as if she is naked, though ...

Lila: I don't like clothes like that ... there's one long sleeve and then none at all ...

Interviewer: Ok, but she's not compromised, really ... you can't really tell what it is you see ...

Laoura: Well, I don't like the fact that you can't actually wear this dress and go out ...

Interviewer: Well, this is an official event, after all ... and a Stella McCartney gown you know ...

Lila: So what?? It's still see-through ... (excerpt 5)

Appropriateness, it seems, is related to public perceptions. Being sexy isn't always 'appropriate'. It doesn't matter whether you show the 'full monty' for an outfit to be perceived as 'inappropriate'—what is important is how other people perceive it. In this sense, the tropes of 'appropriate femininity', dictate that you don't show too much skin, for this is seen as too provocative. At the same time, there are parallel comments about the gown's style (differences in sleeve length) and usefulness (you can't go out dressed like that), or about Rihanna's hair styling (the braid looks 'superb').

Looking at the predominantly middle-class School 3, the discussions with 10-year-olds (fourth graders) reveal an intricate subject positioning which brings together fandom, perceptions of body aesthetics and showing skin, personal ethics and issues of performance (excerpt 6).

Francesca and Giovanna start by talking about Shakira. Francesca thinks she shows too much skin in her videos, which works against her. Giovanna finds her too thin, hence not beautiful, and a bit presumptuous.

Francesca: [I don't like Shakira] because she shows too much of her body ...

Giovanna: Yeah ... and because she's too thin.... She's not beautiful ...

Francesca: No, she's beautiful—she has a great body ...

Giovanna: Well, yes, but she's too thin.... I don't like that ...

Francesca: I don't like that she takes her clothes off in public and lies down [referring to Shakira's videos].

Giovanna: ... and plays at being beautiful ... (excerpt 6)

This is a particularly interesting conceptualization of the body in relation to nudity. Showing too much skin or taking positions that exude sexuality, are perceived as undermining the beauty of the body. In this context, the girls seem to have internalized contemporary (adult) rules of appropriateness, which construct nudity and sexual innuendo as something negative, and their management of the self projects that.

Given the chance to comment on Rihanna's Photo#1, Leena finds the outfit 'shocking':

Leena: I find this shocking ... 'cause this is not right.... The overall style is not working ... in the sense, if you were at the beach, in the afternoon, it would've been ok, but at a concert ... in a city ... well, I don't think so ...

Interviewer: But ... aren't you supposed to be dressed up [extravagantly] at a concert??

Leena: Yeah, but put on a nice dress or something ... not this [outfit] ... (excerpt 7)

Leena makes a sophisticated argument here (excerpt 7), engaging in conventions of appropriateness ('this is not right'), self-regulation and style in order to assert respectable, acceptable and 'stylish' femininity (some things look nice at the beach but they are not concert material). Such observations indicate that young pre-teens bridge their cultural capital based on celebrityhood and attire with social conventions about iconic femininity. At the same time, it is worth considering that children are already familiar with 'adult' discourses about harmful media effects. As a result, 'critical' responses may be an attempt for them to present themselves as 'grown-ups' in front of each other and the interviewer (Buckingham's (1993) notion of the interview as 'a social event', discussed earlier in this chapter) or, as well as an attempt to refute any adult conceptions of possible media influence upon them.

Statements about stardom and the construction of an ethical self in School 3, continue with a different photo (Rihanna's #2), where showing skin is constructed as 'slutty' and is being tutted over (excerpt 8):

Katerina: This is slutty ...

Varvara: Yeah, me too, I think she looks slutty in this photo ... her breasts are showing ... it would have been better if she didn't [show them] ...

Interviewer: Slutty?? She's wearing an off-white suit, and beige high-heeled shoes ...

Milena: Yes, and her breast is showing ...

Varvara: I think she would've looked better without this ...

Interviewer: Without what?

Varvara: Without showing her breast ...

Yet when asked why Rihanna wears such gear, participants offer critical insight in the construction of stardom (excerpt 9):

Interviewer: Why is she doing that?

Cecilia: For the photo-shoot...

Varvara: To be provocative ... 'cause she wants everyone to be talking about her... 'cause she's a bit full of herself ...

Nonie: No, I think it's part of her job ... to be in magazines and such ...

Marion: For their career ...

Later on in the interview, the constructedness of stardom is further emphasized through various discursive accounts of rationalizing cosmetic surgery (excerpt 10):

Leena: [Giovanna] doesn't like that celebrities have plastic surgery to look younger!!!

Francesca: No, Shakira is NOT into cosmetic surgery!!!!

Focus group in unison: Jessie J., Eve Adamou, Kate Perry ... are thin!!!!

Sofia: Stick-thin ...

Giovanna: Well, they take care of themselves [what they eat] ...

Sofia: Yeah, they practice a lot to stay fit ...

Leena: ... ehh, I think that sometimes we need to accept the way we are ... no need for [cosmetic] surgery ...

Giovanna: Well, stars have surgery in order to stay young!!!

Leena: Hah!! Only to look worse off afterwards!!!!

There is an array of interpretative repertoires on offer here (excerpt 10). The girls engage with feminist discourses of cosmetic surgery and seem to understand the thin body as a set of healthy choices and body regulation. In terms of media literacy, then, some of my youngest participants discuss various technologies of self-moderation and governance that popstars employ to control their bodies (proper dietary practices; staying fit; cosmetic interventions). The girls also reflect on the pressure exerted on female stars to look youthful, and the reverse effects sometimes this has. In this, not only do we see the underlying modality of self-regulation the girls themselves adhere to. We also see how they use the cultural capital derived from consuming popular culture to make sense of sexualization and sexuality in a critical and complex way, along which a girl becomes a woman (thin, fat, sexy, romantic and so on).

So far, there is no differentiation in the way participants position themselves in terms of social class. Hence, in the middle-class private school (School 2) too, 10-year-olds (fourth graders), equally employ an array of frames of interpretation when accounting for the construction of stardom, personal ethics and body aesthetics. When discussing Rihanna #1, some of the girls in this group either find her too chubby or they disapprove of the outfit as distasteful (excerpt 11):

Tania: She's a bit on the chubby side ...

Zoi: No, she's all right [weightwise]—it's the outfit that doesn't work ...

Tania: And it doesn't match the shoes ...

Though it seems that here, too, participants are familiar with the tropes of stardom and female sexuality (excerpt 12):

Kiki: This is not too provocative for a singer.... Sometimes, they go on stage [dressed] like that ...

Interviewer: Why is she doing that?

Kalia: So as to attract men's attention ...

Drawing from their cultural capital in popular stardom, girls differentiate between the professional and the casual self, and between stars and their fans (excerpt 12). Rihanna, being a star, is expected to dress up in a particular way when in a live gig, which would have been inappropriate for the lay woman. Implied is the notion that this outfit is 'professional gear' for a star, though inappropriate for a casual appearance. At this point, the girls not only identify Rihanna's role as a performer, but also cast her appearance in marketing terms—as a way to attract audiences, that is (Lemish 2003). Furthermore, the girls show increased literacy in how women use their sexuality in order to attract men's attention.

Participants take diverse subject positions when making sense of body aesthetics (weight) and suggest there is more to being attractive than having the 'right' body shape (excerpt 13):

Interviewer: [while still talking about Rihanna] Does being chubbier mean being less attractive?

Kiki: Definitely not! Facial features count, too!! If a woman was stick-thin but ugly, who would you'd rather most? Someone of a fuller shape but attractive, or someone thin but gross?

Rihanna's extravagant gown (#3) and hair-do draw different kinds of subject positions from another group of 10-year-olds from School 2 (excerpt 14):

Katerina: I like how she looks here ...

Nassia: What, the dress?? Nah ... too provocative ... too slutty ... the hair is nice though ...

Marialena: That's right, the dress is too provocative ... her hair is ... wow ... awe-some ... the earrings are irrelevant ...

Eva: eeh, I like her hair veery much ... her outfit ... yeah, it's provocative ... veery much so.... I don't like it at all.... The shoes—I like them ... earrings? Yeah, like Marialena said, totally irrelevant ... overall, I don't like this outfit with those earrings ...

Some of the girls don't like her dress because they find it 'too provocative', 'too slutty', on the basis of a code of 'appropriateness' about how much skin one reveals. Derogatory comments about the dress, and a dismissal of the matching earrings, are compensated for by praise about the hair-do or her shoes (excerpt 14). The girls' discursive accounts show an intricate pattern wherein they construct their fandom of Rihanna on the basis of ideal femininity (and Rihanna is found wanting in terms of 'decency'), while drawing from their popular culture repositories about style and fashion (shoes, hair, earrings).

Sixth graders (12-year-olds) in the private school (School 2) draw from their own cultural capital on popular stardom to discuss celebrity attire and ethical selfhood (excerpt 15):

Roina: None of them [celebrities] dresses 'decently' ...

Liana: Come on now, not all of them ...

Roina: I mean they [stars] all want to look beautiful [in music videos] ...

Liana: Yeah, [so] they show off their 'stronger' body parts ...

Roina: ... aha, like their legs, their eyes ... face ... their lips ... their hair ... their back ... [so] they put on some slutty outfit ... for the needs of the video clip though ... they stress what they consider their 'strong' asset ...

Roina makes the point that, in order to look beautiful for their music videos, female stars need to 'put on some slutty outfit' and 'stress their

“strong” asset’, because, it is implied, this is how the industry works—women artists have to play ‘sexy’ in order to stay marketable (excerpt 15).

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMININE SELF: TECHNOLOGIES OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND SEXINESS, SELF-GOVERNANCE AND SUBJECT POSITIONING AMONG TWEEN GIRLS

Pre-teen girls had already encroached upon and appropriated the styles of older teenage girls in the 1950s and 1960s in order to distinguish themselves from younger girls (Cook and Kaiser 2004). Although pre-teens were not catered for as a separate age/size retail category till the mid 1950s, and despite parental attempts to downplay pre-teen girls’ stylistic decisions by considering them more as children than as teenagers, middle-class girls’ desire to look ‘grown up’ was indulged by the availability of lipsticks and cosmetics for 6–14-year-olds, and bras, since the mid to late 1940s. In the 1960s, pre-teen and teen fashion styling became blurred. This resulted in an irrevocable age slippage, where the pre-teen girl would fashion and position herself as a teenager. Rising public concern about the blurring between biological and social maturity was curbed with the popularization of t-shirts and jeans in the late 1960s and early 1970s (2004, 208–214), only to become exacerbated from the mid 1990s to date (see also Chap. 2).

Girls can vary quite dramatically in size and maturity at this age. As a result, the variations of physicality feed the ambiguity of social identity and rank among tween peers, as in the case of these fifth graders from Grava (excerpt 16):

Aristea: The sixth graders think of themselves as better ... ‘cause they’re older ... and have bigger boobs ... so they think they are more feminine, that they are the best at school, the most beautiful ...

Eleana: And because they are more developed [they have larger chests], they look down on us fifth graders ...

The way ‘tweenhood’ encodes cultural ambivalence about girls’ sexuality while simultaneously reinforcing girls’ bodies as the cultural site of display and sexualization (Cook and Kaiser 2004), is reflected in the visual distinctions over dress styles girls make in order to demarcate age boundaries (fifth graders from School 3) (excerpt 17):

Maro: This girl from senior high [second grade] ... she used to wear these one-shoulder tops ... from here to there [shows how revelatory they were] ... with a very deep cut ... her bra was showing ...

Interviewer: How would you describe this girl?

Maro: [embarrassed] ...

Malena: [whispering] She's like a ... whore [*poutana*].

[laughter]

Malena: I don't like the word ... but she's a bit of it ...

Girls derive pleasure and empowerment through 'ageing up' routines (Hockey and James 1993) (through the use of heels or make-up, by dressing up in 'trendy' clothing, or by wearing a bra), some of which involve an 'acting out' indoors, while others are reserved for 'going out' (parties, birthdays, christenings and other social occasions which require special attire). It seems, however, that the girls have internalized the dominant 'tropes' of appropriate femininity, which dictate that young tweens do not exhibit a sexual self—otherwise they are looked down upon, and people (peers, that is) think of them as 'tarts' or 'sluts' (excerpt 17). In this light, the girls reflect critically on 'what not to wear' (Pilcher 2010) by positioning themselves, and others, 'according to their age'. Contrary to other qualitative work with young tween girls (where it is suggested that the girls did not fully articulate the sexual value of clothing; see, for example, Pilcher (2010, 468)), the girls in my study identified the specifically sexual character of revealing clothing and were fully aware of who the showing of the body was directed at ('the boys', 'men'—see also above, excerpt 12). Hence the girls 'knowingly' interpret clothing and fashion styles (their own as well as those of others) and position themselves towards such styles in moral terms. In so doing, I argue that the girls engage with fashion styling as 'trappings' of femininity,³ yet at the same time they are able to discern the moral discourses that undercut acceptable adult femininity and self-regulate accordingly. For example, while elaborating on how stars are dressed, new discursive possibilities open up regarding revealing clothes. Here is how a group of sixth graders from the low-SES school position themselves (excerpt 18):

Interviewer: So, how short a mini skirt?

Anna: Up to here [shows half-way up her thigh].

Eleni: Yes, any shorter is out of the question ...

Anna: Yeah, because afterwards people talk and they say things you don't want to hear ... demeaning stuff ...

Throughout history, clothes have had a symbolic role in defining peoples' roles, status and gender. Used to differentiate between the respectable and the non-respectable woman, the married and the single female, or the high-class lady and lower-class woman, clothing fashions also convey the centrality of the 'look' in female identity (Lemish 2003). In a world where girls are surrounded by conflicting messages—'you need to look sexy to be noticed, to be worthwhile and appreciated, yet you must not act upon that sexiness lest you become the disrespected "slut"' (Lemish 2003, 23)—twins apply personal regulatory codes which work in conjunction with, and are being shaped by, what peers consider as age-appropriate (excerpt 18). For those who do not conform to such norms of respectability and social control, there are always judgements reflected in their looks (i.e. people gossip), as the same group of 12-year-olds shows (excerpt 19).

Interviewer: What would you call such a girl [who wears revealing clothing]?

Elena: Strutting her stuff?? *Psonio* [someone who thinks they are all that, and then some more; a conceited person].

Katerina: *Psonio*.

Dora: *Psonio*.

Elena: Common.

Interviewer: What?

Elena: Common ... a tart ... *poutana* [prostitute].... If she's first grade [junior high] and she's already strutting her stuff ... wearing a really short skirt ...

Interviewer: What is a 'really short skirt'?

Elena: Up to here [showing just underneath her underwear].

Girls press for a sense of autonomy and personhood encoded in looking 'older', yet the end result may be compromised if not executed correctly. These 10-year-olds from the Grava compound account for over-ambition (excerpt 20):

Interviewer: What do you call those girls who end up looking older because of the way they dress?

Lila: Super-*psonia* [cocky].

Laura: Replicas ... like they don't have any self-confidence [and think they can acquire some by dressing up].

Meni: They want to look like somebody else [so they copy their style] ... they don't have their own style ...

Asia: They look down on everybody else, they're conceited ... *psonia* [cocky] ...

And this group of 10-year-olds from School 3 (the foreign-language one) position themselves in a similarly punitive manner (excerpt 21):

Vassia: There's this girl [sixth grader] who wears loads of make-up ... she puts on some fur stuff ... and revealing tops ...

Interviewer: Do people gossip about her?

Jojo: Sometimes ... some boys take the piss ...

Interviewer: And what do you call this girl?

Giovanna: *Psonara* [really conceited].... She's putting up this act ... like she's the class's top model or something ...

Stella: ... like she wants to be a grown-up—really quickly ...

Interviewer: So, how would you describe her?

Stella: *Mikromegali* ['little grown-up'; someone young who tries too hard to look like a grown-up].

Giovanna: I would call her irresponsible ... people like her are messed up ...

In the last quote (excerpt 21), Giovanna personifies the moral turpitude that accompanies female sexuality, echoing discourses about vulnerability and 'lost childhoods', all along 'renaturalizing and remoralizing middle childhood' (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 223).

While negotiating and regulating their ethical self, the girls draw from cultural capital accumulated through the media, celebrity culture and common knowledge regarding the blurring of public/private—as suggested in the next two excerpts from fifth graders from Grava and the private school:

Jenny: I've got a friend from sixth grade who's posted some FB [Facebook] photos where she's making out [kissing] ... and this is not a good thing ... to show this in public ... and she poses ... like the famous on TV.

Jenny: They pout as if they're giving kisses away ...

Nena: Yeah ... some girls do this.... They wear very short stuff.... I don't like it at all ... strutting a skirt that looks more like a belt.... And then acting like a tart ... like she's all that!!

Interviewer: What does this mean?

Nena: Posing as if she's kissing somebody, like a star, a goddess ... what's the point in going out naked, or half naked ... to show off??? What?? Everyone carries their treasure on the inside, not on the outside [she means, it's what's inside that matters, not how you look or how you show off].... I don't condone such stuff ...

Aristea: Yeah ... [some girls] pose like stars ...

Interviewer: Well, how do they do it, can someone show me??

Eleana: [strikes some poses] Like that ... [laughter] ... they twerk, they pout, they put their hands on their waists, they wear red lipstick ... really provocative ... (excerpt 22)

Similarly, what follows is informed by the ways in which 11-year-olds in School 2 use celebrity gossip to 'read' Lady Gaga and discuss different taste cultures (excerpt 23):

Interviewer: What do you think of Lady Gaga's dress style?

Kelly: Basically weird.... She's too much for my taste.... I think she dresses up in order to make an impression, and she acts as if she's all that ... [but] going to extremes is not necessarily beautiful nor acceptable.... I mean, you can put on a [Christmas] tree with its lights on and still not get it right ... whereas [if you] put on a long top and you can go a long way....

Eva: She's too much, she wears these shiny clothes ... really shiny ... and they don't look good.

Kelly: Well, what I *really* didn't like—at all—it was gross!!, was this dress made of raw meat...

Eva: Me too. I remember seeing her in some weird heels ... such stuff can ruin your feet ...

Marina: Not just that ... her face, too ... she's messed it up ... she's put on silicone or something ... she's had cosmetic surgery I think ...

Two issues emerge at this point from the accounts of the groups from Grava (excerpt 22) and the private school (excerpt 23). One relates to the use of gossip as a strategy through which individuals learn social cues and preferred behaviour through the information gathered about others—what de Backer et al. (2007) call ‘strategy learning gossip’. This is counterposed to ‘reputation gossip’—the mechanism which affects a person’s status on the basis of the information about the said person that circulates in the community. It has been argued that celebrity gossip is a way of approaching the production of the self, through the opportunity for social learning that celebrities offer to younger people—how to dress, act, engage (de Backer et al. 2007). Celebrity gossip, then, extends the uses of gossip in a community as a form of social control. However, by dealing with issues that are seen to pertain to the personal and private realm, celebrity gossip moves intimate information (about how people should conduct themselves) into the public arena; in this way, it shows how the intersection of the public and the private worlds can relate to the production of the self (Marshall 2010, 38).

The other concerns the pedagogical role of stars and celebrities in educating audiences worldwide not merely in the discourse of the self but also in how to engage in and use consumer culture in order to ‘make’ oneself—what Marshall discusses as the ‘celebrities’ [...] capacity to embody the transformative power writ large of consumer culture’ (2010, 36). In that sense, instead of reading ‘media effects’ in the discourse of children’s sexualization (as a result of the popular appeal of celebrity culture upon ‘impressionable’ young minds), I suggest we read instead ‘the pedagogy of celebrity’, whereby the transformation of the individual into a consumer entails not just the shift from production to consumption, but a shift to a ‘wider production of the self’ built from an array of possible forms of consumption and expression. Celebrities have also been known to teach the world the narratives of divorce, drunkenness, sexual affairs, violence and debauchery (Marshall 2010, 36–37)—all of which served to articulate a different public sphere, one in which children now take part. It is this kind of boundary transgression (between the public/private) that the discussion about sexualization finds problematic: by carrying out their pedagogical role, celebrities and stars bring to the public domain a knowledge about sexuality (e.g. in the fashion and cultures they consume and through their relationships and interactions with others) that is meant to remain hidden from children (see Chap. 3).

Part of the ceaseless public discussion about how to live one's life in the late modern world (Beck 2000) is that television, the press and websites are packed with debate and public talk about the personal life.

Here is the 'mediation' of personal life, where the media become a pervasive influence through which we conduct our talk in everyday life. (Plummer 2001, 244)

In fact, part of our 'intimate citizenship' (Plummer 1995, 2001) is structured around questions about how we should lead our lives on a daily basis—and the media play a significant part in the construction of maps of meaning with a moral significance. Such a 'grounded everyday moralities' approach, says Plummer, entails 'the presence of many voices [...] containing their own contradictions and tensions' (2001, 248), as this group of 12-year-olds from Grava suggests (excerpt 24):

Interviewer: Do you think that newspapers, magazines, websites promote good role models for someone your age?

Maria: Well, I think that magazines offer a kind of advice.... They give us tips about how to create such and such an appearance.... Sometimes if we don't like ... if we don't agree with something ... well, we don't have to follow the tip ... and then, when we do like something, we can follow it, like when we see one of these one-shoulder tops which are now in fashion ...

Eva: U-huh, and you can put on a tight-fitting sleeveless top underneath if you want ... or what about those rubber bracelets that are now in fashion ... if you fancy them, you buy them.... Most girls wear them ...

The same group from Grava continues to offer an insight into how the girls develop their subject positions towards what is seen as 'age-appropriate'. The role they ascribe to the media is significant—something that I read as having internalized the hegemonic discourse of media effects. The girls construct their webs of knowledge about what is 'age-appropriate' on the basis of what is publicly known—and mediated—about childhood innocence (excerpt 25).

Despina: What you said about the telly ... or about magazines.... There are things [that are] ok, but for younger children ... I don't think it's ok for a young child, don't know ... let's say 8 years old ... to watch *Patty* ... [she refers to the Argentinian telenovela *Patito feo/Ugly Duckling*, aired in Greece between 2010 and 2012 and extremely popular with teenagers] ... She's making out with different guys, and she's a cheater and a liar.... This is not a proper role model for young children ...

Eleni: I think that there's a different age for each magazine.... So ... there are some [magazines], like *Super Katerina* [magazine for teenage girls] which is out of reach for a kid, 'cause the kid won't make sense of what it says ...

Anna: I agree with Despina ... especially when it comes to [characters like] Patty or Antonella and such.... If young kids pick up the habit of wearing make-up at their age ... at 6 or 7 ... what's gonna happen when they get older? ... They start off from early on ...

Katerina: I don't agree.... I think young girls dress appropriately for their age ... they've been taught well by their teachers ...

The girls construct a feminine self by taking up variable subject positions regarding what constitutes feminine appearance. Their positioning is premised upon a code of personal ethics, which revolves around an acting-your-age understanding and an array of 'technologies of sexiness' (Evans et al. 2010). This group of fourth graders from Grava cast a critical eye upon those peers who go to school in inappropriate attire, both for their age and for the occasion (excerpt 26):

Victoria: [...] too short tops ... showing their midriffs

Zaira: ... her belly is showing ...

Interviewer: And is this a bad thing?

Natalia: No, it's nice and cool, but it's not for our age.

Irini and Anna-Maria (in unison): Yes ...

Interviewer: So how do you describe these girls who don't dress their age?

Anna-Maria: Conceited ...

Victoria: Cool

Irini: Weird ...

Zaira: Crazy.... It's not on to dress like that ... especially when they're wearing tight-fitting clothes ...

Interviewer: Why do you think they're wearing such tight-fitting outfits?

Victoria: To look more beautiful ...

Anna-Maria: ... for the guys ...

The ethics of the self shape the level of outfit appropriateness in conjunction with taste cultures for these 12-year-olds from the private

school. Two participants suggest where certain ‘looks’ would be suitable—for example, ‘clubbing’—while taking a distance from such ‘looks’ themselves, either emphatically (‘nope’) or by adjusting the ‘look’ (‘I’d put on [a pair of] jeans, the top and a long cardigan’) (excerpt 27):

Interviewer: Are there any girls at school who come in dressed ...

Roina: Provocatively?

Interviewer: Yes, I guess ... how do you talk about them?

Liana: [We say that] this is not the proper way [to get dressed] for school ... we talk about how this is out of a school context ...

Interviewer: Could you give an example?

Liana: There was this girl who had this really hot pair of shorts ... huge fuxia hoops ... heavy mascara ... and a cropped top with a cardigan ...

Interviewer: Aha ... so this is not school material ... what is this good for?

Liana: For clubbing.

Interviewer: Would you sport such attire?

Chryssa: Nope!

Liana: If I were to put on any of that ... I’d put on [a pair of] jeans, the top and a long cardigan ...

Interviewer: So, if she were a bit older, it would be ok to wear this?

Liana: Not in a school context, it wouldn’t ...

Chryssa: [It would look better in] a club ...

Liana: Yes ... it would have to fit the occasion ...

Chryssa and Liana touch upon the morality of the feminine self, claiming that girls who ‘over-dress’ are not ‘good girls’; meanwhile, they are quick to cast the blame for such lack of self-regulation on ‘bad parenting’ (excerpt 28):

Interviewer: And how would you describe those girls who do not dress according to their age or the occasion?

Chryssa: They’re not good [girls] ... [but] it’s not their fault.... It’s their parents’ [fault] ...

Liana: Their parents don’t object ... they don’t say anything, so they [the girls] think it’s ok ... [but it’s not].

Given how participants from the three different schools accounted for their feminine subject positions, it would seem that some of them have internalized hegemonic (middle-class) accounts of decency and decorum that prescribe what a pre-teen girl should look like. This goes against other readings of exaggerated codes of feminine appearance, where it is suggested that sexual display should be read as a form of self-presentation. For example, while in Madonna's case, sexual provocation has been seen by postmodern, post-feminist accounts as a mockery of patriarchal constructions of the slut/virgin polarity, or as a challenge to dominant definitions of femininity (Lemish 2003), such mockeries and challenges elude tween girls in this study.

Originally introduced by Radner (1999) and Gill (2007), the concept of 'technologies of sexiness' is elaborated by Evans et al. in order to

theorize women's engagement in the sexualization of culture in a way that engages with the complexity of choice and agency within the context of post-feminism, consumer culture and disciplinary discourses of neo-liberalism. (2010, 118)

They draw from Foucault's notion of technologies of the self and Butler's notion of performativity to account for women's agency. The authors use pole dancing to exemplify the inherently contradictory nature of consumer culture discourses and argue that, despite the disciplinary neoliberal frame they are immersed in, such discourses hold the potential for unpredictable subversions, slippages, resistances and multiple readings within them. They view agency as the ways in which we work on ourselves and our bodies in order to reproduce ourselves through discourses of sexual liberation (as the available discourse provided through neoliberalism and consumerism). Informed by Butler's performativity, they deepen this agency by providing for alterations of these discourses while seeing them as echoing existing power structures (Evans et al. 2010, 121).

In the light of the above, the girls present a number of interpretative repertoires regarding the construction of sexual attractiveness through the use of various 'technologies of sexiness' (excerpt 29). When asked whether they are using make-up,⁴ these 10-year-olds from School 3 contextualize the application of make-up technologies in terms of parental mediation ('My mom doesn't let me'), health concerns (there are 'chemicals in eye shadows') and the 'right' age ('I'm too young for it'); and they identify the alternative technologies of attractiveness that are 'right' for them (e.g. lip gloss, and pierced earrings):

Sofia: I'm using lip gloss ... it shines. If I can't find it ... let's say I've lost it, then I use my mom's ...

Interviewer: Do you wear lip gloss at parties?

Sofia: Yes ...

Interviewer: What about you, Vassia?

Vassia: Aahh, my mom doesn't let me put on any make-up ... 'cause this is not good ... especially eye shadow ... it has chemicals ... but I'm allowed to put on earrings.... I've got my ears pierced ...

Francesca: I don't like putting on make-up.... I've got lip gloss and Lipozan, but no make-up, 'cause I don't like it.... I'm too young [for this] ...

Similarly, the following group of 10-year-olds, also from School 3, position themselves towards 'making oneself presentable'. It appears there is a time (when you've reached 14), and a place (a party) to apply different technologies of sexiness (e.g. fixing your hair)—yet, above all regimes of self-regulation, 'it's who you are that counts' (excerpt 30):

Interviewer: At what age do you think it's ok to fix your hair?

Maria: (not very certain) Fourteen?

Manina: Fourteen, onwards, yeah ... but if you're going to a party ... not on a daily basis [so she defines the exceptional circumstances when this would be allowed].

Interviewer: Is it cool to go to school with your hair done?

Venia: Look, I don't like it at all when people come all made up at school.... You don't have to go to great pains [in order for your hair to look good] at school.... There are some girls who waste a lot of time to do their hair in order to go to school ...

Maria: Mind you, I don't think you should be friends with someone just because they're having a good hair day ...

Venia: Right ... 'cause it's who you are that counts ... not looks ...

In the same self-disciplinary regime, these fourth graders (foreign-language school) show the contradictory subject positioning implied in piercing technologies; though multiple ear piercing is deemed acceptable, navel piercing is a technology reserved for those who have moved up the age ladder, while its 'sexiness' is negotiable ('It doesn't even look nice') (excerpt 31):

Interviewer: What do you think about a second ear piercing?

All [in unison] [That's] ... just fine ...

Interviewer: What about navel piercing?

Noni: You need to be older to have this done. I'd never do it ...

Interviewer: Does piercing make you look 'hot'?

Milena: No! ... besides, it doesn't even look nice ...

The construction of sexiness is something that young tweens negotiate carefully, for it looks like a prerogative of a more mature self. For these 10-year-olds from School 2, 'looking good' at their age does not involve 'looking sexy'. 'Sexy' is what grown-up women do, and it includes different levels of 'sexual entrepreneurship' (Harvey and Gill 2011), such as showing skin and shaking the body, like Shakira in 'Loca' (excerpt 32):

Interviewer: When you're out shopping, how do you choose your clothes?

Kiki: Ahh, we look how they look on us.

Tania: Yeah ... if they make us look fat, we don't buy it ... if it makes us look stick-thin, we still don't buy it... [We just want them clothes] to look good ...

Interviewer: Do you buy sexy stuff?

All (in unison): No!!! (emphatically)

Interviewer: What does 'sexy' mean for you?

[embarrassed laughter]

Tania: Take this [sexy] away from me ...

Interviewer: Why do you say that? Are you saying that 'sexy' is not for you?

Tania: Yep!!

Interviewer: Who would you characterize as 'sexy'?

Tania: Shakira, when doing 'Loca' ... she's shaking her body ... wearing a pair of shorts ... and a tiny top and her moves ...

Interviewer: So it's her moves that make her sexy?

Tania: [her moves] and her hair when wet. [...] When I saw her turn around [she refers to the video], her swimsuit was plucked in [her bum] ...

Interviewer: So, she was showing some skin ... and that's part of being sexy?

All (in unison): Yees!!

More elaborate technologies of sexiness, such as walking in a 'feminine' way ('shaking their bum'), applying make-up and exhibiting budding bosoms (through the technology of the underwired bras), tummies and behinds (through knotted-up tops and cropped shorts) do not escape 11-year-olds from Grava, either (excerpt 33). However, it is suggested that such technologies are best reserved for older girls and women who can 'perform' sexiness (Butler 1990) without being scrutinized the way young tweens are.

Aristea: Sometimes I see girls wearing over-the-top clothes ... say ripped jeans.

Irini: Come on, this is not 'over-the-top' ...

Aristea: They wear make-up, they shake their bum ... to make sure the boys notice ...

Maria: And sometimes they show some tit...

[laughter]

Interviewer: How is that?

Aristea: ... Yeah, they wear underwired bras ...

Sofia: What's an underwired bra?

Aristea: You don't know what an underwired bra is?

Irini: Yeah, go on, I've no idea either ...

Aristea: It's something you put on to show you've got larger breasts.

Sofia: Aahh ... [knowingly now]

Eleana: Yes, and Ms, they wear [booty] shorts and tie their tops in a knot [to reveal their belly button].

Interviewer: And why do you think they do that?

Eleana: So that they look like divas ... like stars ... like she's the 'it' girl and all the boys queue up ...

It appears that tween girls, during their long-lasting transition from childhood to adulthood—and regardless of social background—construct a notion of iconic femininity that largely conforms to the ideal of the 'moral' child.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has contextualized the debate of the sexualization of culture within the discursive accounts of tween girls concerning their engagement with popular media and culture. Premised within the market exigencies of childhood, and girlhood more particularly, tween consumption of popular culture illustrates how the entertainment media can be used towards the management of an ethical self, and as part of a broader identity work. Following Buckingham (2011), children ‘perform’ childhood in a way that is congruent with the dominant definitions of what it means to be a child (boy or girl). Such accounts are shaped by the market, to a large extent, and inform how children—and parents—construct their sense of self-identity. In conjunction with the view that the tween carries extensive social ambiguity and fluidity (Cook and Kaiser 2004), this chapter has shown that young tweens exhibit a variety of diverse engagements with, and readings and practices of popular culture—contrary to prevailing moral panics about viral sexualization. And while I agree that the notion of agentic pre-teens needs to be applied with ‘a pinch of salt’—for the social context of the interview, conducted by adults, at school (where tweens negotiate peer codes that echo normative heterosexuality), determines the kinds of answers children give (Buckingham 1993)—I argue that talking to pre-teen girls reveals a variety of interpretative repertoires and the intricate ways in which they make sense of stardom, discuss taste, fashion, body aesthetics and technologies of sexiness, and construct a notion of appropriateness and feminine selfhood, irrespective of age and social class. In that process, the role of stardom and celebrityhood is paramount, for celebrities and stars carry out their pedagogical task and teach tweens the narratives of sexual attractiveness, femininity and the ethical self (through their consumption of popular culture). The very fact that all this is now taking place within a broadened public sphere, where children are visible and play a part, signals a boundary transgression between public and private which becomes problematic—and thus raises public concern about the sexual knowledge children have access to. The next chapter elaborates the present analysis of how young girls publicly discuss stardom and identity among their peers by looking how Greek tweens discursively account for the tropes of femininity, and its contradictions, through the virtual worlds of dress-up and make-over sites.

NOTES

1. For example, the ‘street’ (along with parks and shopping malls) has been discussed as an autonomous public space where teens can hang around and carve out space for themselves—away from (or against) adult power (Corrigan 1979; Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000). At the same time, the presence of teenagers on the (urban) street (or the shopping mall) is seen as a potential threat to public order, ‘othering’ public space, and leading to various adult regulatory regimes of surveillance and policing (Valentine 1996a). Such concerns coexist with popular anxiety about young children’s vulnerability to stranger-danger in urban public space (Valentine 1996b), and mobilize popular imaginings of the rural idyll as a safe haven for children (Valentine 1997).
2. #1 <http://www.gotceleb.com/rihanna-concert-in-belfast-northern-ireland-sept-30th-2011-2011-10-02.html/rihanna-concert-in-belfast-02>
#2 <http://fashionbombdaily.com/2011/05/23/look-for-less-rihannas-2011-billboard-awards-max-azria-white-suit/>
#3 <http://www.redcarpet-fashionawards.com/2011/05/03/rihanna-in-stella-mccartney-2011-met-gala/>
3. See also McRobbie (1996), McRobbie and Nava (1984), and Russell and Tyler (2002), in relation to this.
4. By ‘make-up’, I mean all kinds of *maquillage* available (lipstick, eyeshadow, foundation, blusher, mascara etc.).

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Revisiting the Sexualization-of-Young-Girls Debate, Case Study Two: Self-Presentation in Girls' Dress-Up and Make-Over Online Gaming Practices in Greece

In the first two chapters of this book I discussed how the media, academic and public debates offer stereotypical perceptions of young children as a unified community who share similar interests. As a result, and due to the popular culture they consume and practise, children are seen to be at risk of losing their innate innocence. Against such a conceptualization, and following Chap. 6, this chapter considers how young girls locate themselves within particular narratives of identity and produce fluid, flexible and, quite often, contradictory cultural meanings and spaces through their consumption of dress-up and make-over sites.

Children's leisure is not necessarily a free space where they make their own choices about how to spend their time. Instead, it is usually subjected to different constraints, whether that involves time, money, cultural values or various sorts of parental mediation. The choices they make about what kind of culture to consume, and when, much depend upon other's (adult, peer, self) approval or disapproval. Hence, for example, the consumption of popular culture may be seen as antagonistic to other 'worthier', endeavours (such as reading 'good fiction' or playing the piano, for example). In this case, too, my Greek participants reported different kinds—and levels—of parental mediation, where parents would regulate their time online as well as the sites they would visit (and in this way, parents would regulate the girls' consumption of popular culture). This is one way to look at the consumption of popular culture.

In this chapter, however, I want to explore the maps of meanings and the interpretative repertoires regarding the child consumer as these derive from young tween girls' online gaming practices. In other words, I want to use the girls' consumption of popular culture (dress-up and make-over gaming sites, that is) in order to extrapolate about how they position themselves as consumers of fashion styles, and through that how they negotiate the presentation of their selves (Goffman 1959). Scholars discussing the sexualization of young girls, have already contextualized it within a broader framework—for example, Buckingham takes into account the public debate about the impact of commercialization on children's well-being, the growth of the children's market and of integrated marketing (which employs digital technologies to extend its reach and sell what some consider 'sexualized' products to children), the role played by children when decisions about family spending are made (which involves the notion of 'pester power') as well as by peers (peer pressure for a particular kind of 'look') in his analysis (Buckingham et al. 2010; Buckingham 2009b). I situate my own analysis within such a broader frame and discuss sexualization as part of a broader identity work that pertains to and derives from consumption patterns and practices. In order to draw the wider picture, I will now turn to discuss the notion of 'consumption' before I proceed with the qualitative study of Greek tween girls' dress-up and make-over gaming practices.

CONSUMPTION IN LATE MODERNITY

The transition from industrial to post-industrial economy has been characterized as a period of rapid economic, social and cultural change in which there has been a process of de-traditionalization of older patterns of life, a rise in the significance of consumption and the proliferation of lifestyles (Valentine 2003; Skelton and Valentine 1998). In his discussion of the historical transformation from the industrial era to that of a new modernity, Beck (1992) talks about the 'risk society', wherein previous loyalties, of class, gender and nation have been eroded, and in their place, we see the rise of identity politics (e.g. greens, anti-racism, lesbian and gay politics).¹ Concurrently, with the demise of the nuclear family, school, church and so on, as the traditional agencies of social reproduction, channelling individuals into set roles, young people are placed in a state of ambivalence, says Beck, where they can only blame themselves if they end up on society's margins due their choices. Furthermore, as the life course is

no longer organized around employment history (hence production), it is consumption that defines self-identity in late modernity—you are what you consume, not what you produce.

The significance of consumption in the construction of identity may not be new,² yet still ‘recent decades may be understood in terms of a significant shift which has served to accord consumption an increasingly dominant role in the production of social distinctions and classifications’ (Hayward and Yar 2006, 13). Actually, the discussion about youth consumption has been spearheaded by two opposing views. On the one hand, there is the postmodern, post-subcultural perspective that considers young consumers (i.e. like all consumers) as having the power to shape and construct new identities, unfettered by restraints of class and social structure (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004). Instead, consumerism entails an emancipatory potential through the ‘lifestyle choices’ it offers (Chaney 2004). The fluidity embedded in these late modern lifestyles and identities is best captured by Maffesoli’s concept of ‘neo-tribes’—perceived as ephemeral groups formed in the flux of contemporary consumer societies, replacing the earlier collectivities of class, gender and race (1995)—rather than that of ‘subculture’ (Bennett 1999). Against this perspective comes a view which dismisses post-subcultural theory for being ‘blithely postmodern’ and unashamedly celebratory of ‘multi-ethnic’ diversity and consumer creativity (Gelder 2007, 104), thus bolstering capitalism’s ideological fantasy of individual freedom of choice (Martin 2009). Postmodern theorizing, especially the notion of neo-tribes, has been heavily criticized for being immune to various forms of youth marginality and structural inequality as a result of its close link to theories of consumption and lifestyle which posit choice and individualism as key factors in identity formation (Blackman 2005). Similar criticism is echoed by Hesmondhalgh (2005), who argues that attention to ‘lifestyles’ perceives individuals as active consumers with choices that reflect a self-constructed notion of identity; however, such theorizing celebrates consumerism because it fails to take into account structural factors that limit choice. In his turn, Bennett (2005) addresses such critique, arguing not only that young people creatively resist the circumstances of their everyday lives but also that a broad range of youth activities do not necessitate high levels of disposable income (for example, dancing, listening to radio, watching TV, reading magazines).

However, living in a ‘society of consumers’ where the ‘aesthetics of consumption’ and ‘consumer choice’ prevail (Bauman 1998), means that

the use and display of symbolic cultural goods (consumption) displaces work (production) as the site of identity construction, belonging and expression. Individuals come to recognize themselves, and *are recognized by others* (Hayward and Yar 2006, emphasis in original) through their consumption choices—and it is here that the foundations for class and social ranking boundaries are being laid. For some, like Bauman (1998), it is the inability to take part in consumer society that marks the pathology of consumption (the poor as ‘flawed consumers’). For others it is *excessive* participation in consumption in ways that are considered *aesthetically impoverished* (Hayward and Yar 2006, emphasis in original) that makes for pathological (vulgar) consumption. In their discussion of the chavs as the new underclass, Hayward and Yar posit that participation in consumer society becomes pathological if associated with a (perceived) lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). As a result, those who practise it—the chavs—become marginalized due to their ‘tasteless’ and less ‘refined’ consumption choices.

Here lies, I believe, one of the broader issues at work when discussing the sexualization of young children. We are caught up in a loop where we view sexualization as the result of certain consumption practices—fashion, stardom, music and their modes of representation (broadcast, print and online media). While we expect children to be part of consumer society, at the same time we treat consumption with suspicion; the fact that children (at least in the West) are no longer part of productive labour, means that the sphere of consumption is their *only* outlet for identity construction and expression. That may be so, yet there is the added risk that children (perceived as inherently innocent, naïve and lacking in experience) may make the wrong consumption choices, and as a result deviate and end up being marginalized. Hence, we view them as ‘flawed consumers’ not on the grounds of their lack of economic capital,³ but because we tend to pathologize their consumption as a matter of principle. In this sense, excessive participation in an ‘overtly sexualized’ popular culture (i.e. the fashion industry, advertising, video clips, pop idols and so on) may yield aesthetically impoverished—and socially reprimandable—results for those concerned. In this regard, we fall back into a notion of youth ‘as a problem’ (Pearson 1983) (see Chap. 3 on Miley Cyrus and the question of leisure, pp. 45–48).

Drawing from Bennett, I, too, adhere to an analytical framework which views contemporary youth identities being organized around:

a reflexive interplay of local experience (home, school, work, friendship, peer group, language, dialect and so on) together with cultural resources drawn from a trans-local sphere of youth cultural practice—music, clothing, literature, TV, cinema, Internet, dance, sport and physical exercise, etc. (Bennett 2011, 502)

More particularly, I am interested in making sense of how cultural consumption features in young children's lives, and in examining the role and impact of consumer goods (e.g. clothing styles and accessories) and different forms of new media (online gaming in virtual worlds) in the making of young children's identities. By addressing the significance of cultural consumption in the lives of young children, I also hope to shed some light on the interplay between structural experience (class) and the formation of local instances of youth cultural practice (Bennett 2011). My interest in class does not stem from structural inequalities in inclusion in the culture of online gaming, for I would include gaming on Bennett's (2005) list of youth cultural activities which do not demand a high-level income. In fact, given that (a) children's online gaming in virtual worlds carries a significant social networking component⁴ (Holloway et al. 2013), (b) that cross-national, cross-cultural research has already shown that youth participation (ages 9–16) in social networking sites (SNSs) cuts across class barriers (Livingstone et al. 2011a, 36),⁵ (c) that despite the considerable differences that exist between and within European Union countries, research and surveys both at European and national levels indicate that children are using the internet at younger and younger ages (Holloway et al. 2013), (d) that an increasing number of children are accessing virtual worlds, with the most significant growth expected in pre-teen users aged 3–11 ('Teen, Preteen' 2009; 'Young Children Consuming More Digital Media' 2011), and (e) that such increase in online usage patterns reflect a worldwide trend, especially in developed countries such as the US, Australia and Singapore (Gutnick et al. 2011; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011; Goh et al. 2015), we could assume that tweens do indeed engage with online gaming and take advantage of its social networking affordances, irrespective of social class. In that respect, I am drawn to class by the need to make sense of how tween girls from different class backgrounds position themselves as consumers of fashion and style and negotiate the presentation of their selves.

CONSUMPTION IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S LIVES

Consumption is regarded as crucial in the construction of young people's identities. Sociological and geographical work has established that material goods are not only things in their own right but that they also convey meanings (e.g. about style, class and so on) and that consumption rituals mark social relationships of inclusion and exclusion (friendship, family ties and so on) (Miles 1995). As Holbrook and Jackson (1996, 1914) argue, consumption, rather than being a simple momentary act of purchase, 'is a social process whereby people relate to goods and artefacts in complex ways, transforming their meanings as they incorporate them into their lives'. Thus goods are consumed for what they signify and for differentiating the self as well as for their use value. Young people, in particular, are active agents in the production of youth styles and identities (although Nava (1992) points out that these styles are also often appropriated by commercial organizations) (Skelton and Valentine 1998).

Despite the establishment of children's citizenship and participation rights (Willow et al. 2004), it seems that active citizenship for children does not include consumption rights—particularly when consumption is linked with sexual knowledge or learning, or when it is seen to lead to unwarranted commercialization (through fashion or advertising for example). In this sense, children are treated as 'semi-citizens', for they are not granted full citizenship rights in case they fall short of them. I believe that this is a clash that forms 'a contest of representations' (Hetherington 1998). Inasmuch as New Age travellers are caught between English middle-class representations of the countryside as picturesque and pastoral (the 'rural idyll') (Hetherington 1998), children are also 'trapped' within a similar contest of representations, as either 'innocent' and 'malleable' (in the face of consumption, for example of goods, services, content) or as 'agentive' civic actors. The present analysis, based on discursive accounts of girls' clothing and related accessory options, and the ambiguities of sexuality and identity embedded in them, needs to be contextualized within the overall discussion of children's consumption culture, which has been building up since the early 1990s.

With the exception of the likes of Buckingham (2000, 2011), McKendrick et al. (2000), and Zelizer (2002)—a point I will return to in due course—most sociological and anthropological scholarship on childhood discusses children as agentive and *already* complete social actors (Cook 2002; Corsaro 1997; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Jenks 1996;

Mayall and Zeiher 2003; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Stephens 1995), and thus bypass the more psychology-oriented notion of children as persons 'in the making' who will 'become' complete in the future. Although such scholarship sees children appropriate culture in a creative way, rather than having it imposed upon them, it rarely examines children's consumption per se (Cook 2004). To elaborate further, the field of 'childhood studies' has tended to marginalize the material and commercial aspects of children's lives. The reason for this is that the hallmark of childhood studies, the agentive, active child that is, is also central to marketers' and advertisers' constructions of the child consumer. This, however, sits uncomfortably with the liberal agenda of childhood studies, for the meaning-making child resembles too closely the marketers' child. On the other hand, most mainstream 'consumption theory' and studies of consumer culture tend to ignore children, or treat them as appendages to the central problems of the field of study at best. In addition, although many researchers in the field make sure they do not conceptualize children in derivative terms when talking about them as meaning-making beings (for example, Seiter 1999; Pugh 2009; Zelizer 2002), there is still a key area within children's consumer studies which remains out of sync with the tenets of childhood studies theory, and that is the notion of 'consumer socialization' (Cook 2010).

Consumer socialization posits a view of the 'child' that is in conflict with that developed in childhood studies, for it presents a narrow view of the 'child', 'development', 'market' behaviour and 'consumption'. First coined in 1974, the term carries the implicit psychological assumption that the 'child' is following a linear, Piagetian trajectory, moving from a state of an 'unknowing' to that of a 'knowing' being. Along this developmental journey, the 'child', who is perceived as a 'pre-social', passive being, acquires cognitive capacities on its way towards adulthood (seen as a static endpoint of rationality), whereas childhood is a mere apprenticeship phase. In that respect, research within 'consumer socialization' remains untouched by understandings of childhood studies scholars (who understand children as actors in their own right), as the former is premised upon the underlying conception of the 'incomplete' child. The majority of work in this field articulates a singular narrative, one of cognitive development, where developmentalism is brought together with consumer behaviour and used to explain the linear development from the pre-social child to 'mature' adulthood. Though the roles of parents, media exposure, peers and consumer experiences are increasingly recognized as modifying factors of the cognitive process of consumption (see, for example, Dotson

and Hyatt 2005), and some examine the role of national or ethnic culture on acquisition and content of consumer knowledge (see McNeal et al. 1993), the fact remains that consumer socialization is dominated by normative and teleological assumptions which do not leave any room to see the child as an active and meaning-making being (Cook 2010, 65–67).

In tandem with this approach stands a view of children's consumption culture that emanates from a moral anxiety about the impact of marketing on children's life-worlds—and in that sense, is not interested in conceptualizing and analysing children's consumption, but only wishes to protect them from it. The need to protect minors from marketing incursions comes from a moral perspective which posits children as essentially sacred beings at risk of pollution from corporate manipulation and influence (Buckingham 2000). However, whether we are talking about children as innocent beings susceptible to the allure of the culture industry or as creative agents who are able to resist market incursions:

[we] tend to substitute one kind of moral position for another. Childhood sacredness here emerges not from innocence, but is based on another kind of sanctity (i.e. that of a knowing choosing self). It is the sanctity of personhood that serves as a counterweight against the overdetermined influence of the market. (Cook 2004, 149)

In this, it is assumed that there is something innate to the condition of childhood (that makes children either more vulnerable or spontaneously sophisticated and wise), and thus childhood is placed outside or beyond the social and the commercial world. As a way out of this simplified polarization (Buckingham 2011), comes the view arguing that consumption is part and parcel of the construction and make-up of childhood, rather than an add-on or an imposition on it. Hence, researchers need to contextualize childhood alongside consumption culture and focus upon newer commercial strategies, such as product placement, peer-to-peer marketing, cross-promotion and viral marketing (Buckingham 2007, 2011). For the 'battles over and around' children's consumption are nothing more than 'battles over the nature of the person and the scope of personhood'—in other words:

[t]he public battles over children's consumption (violent video games, sexy clothes, fatty foods, and so on) are, at base, battles over which *model of the child*—which *model of the person*—will prevail. (Cook 2004, 149; emphasis added)

However, if we are, indeed, to think in terms of consumer culture (rather than consumer behaviour) when it comes to children, we need to break away from the notion of consumer socialization, and its background of developmental and cognitive psychology. Instead, if we want to take into account the multiplicity of childhoods, the ways of behaving as a consumer, as well as children's various understandings of the social-commercial world, the notion of 'commercial enculturation' (Cook 2010)—as the variety of ways children come to 'know' of and participate in commercial life—is much more accommodating. Cook's concept pays attention to culture as multiple, layered and overlapping webs of meaning, and assumes that consumption and meaning cannot be separated from one another, but arise through processes of parenting and socializing with others (2010, 70). The term 'enculturation' makes room for a multiplicity of understandings of how every child relates to consumer life through social relations (parents, peers, siblings and so on). In this, Cook is in line with the approach that views consumer culture as socially and historically identifiable, something that is variable and experienced in different ways (Miller 1987; Slater 1997). Similarly, Buckingham (2011) argues for an understanding of consumption as a cultural phenomenon, though not an isolated (i.e. individualistic) one—quite the contrary, he discusses consumption as being inevitably embedded within everyday life and interpersonal relationships, as well as in wider socio-cultural processes. Furthermore, Buckingham understands consumption as not something merely *instrumental* (what we need to survive and function), but as something that is also *expressive* (how we communicate with others and how we construct selfhood, how we attribute meaning to people and events through our consumption patterns). He overcomes the either/or dichotomy (the mindless consumer seeking for pleasure, easily manipulated by market forces versus the rational, sophisticated, sovereign, agentive consumer) by looking at consumption as something that exceeds individual free choice, and encompasses the shared construction of social practices and social mores in a complex, ongoing social negotiation.

To this extent, this approach seems to provide a productive alternative both to the very abstract ways in which the political dimensions of consumption are typically addressed, and to the moralistic terms in which children's consumption in particular is generally framed. (Buckingham 2011, 40–41)

In the light of the above discussion, I will now continue with the second case study, on the Greek tween girls and their dress-up and make-over practices.

TWEEN SARTORIAL DECISIONS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SELF

As with similar qualitative studies in children's consumption practices, and especially of girls' constructions of fashion (Pilcher 2010), and the way these are linked with the reconstruction of childhood, this chapter hardly aspires to offer a generalized account of girls' experiences of 'doing fashion' that would apply equally to all girls; nor does it wish to develop an all-encompassing theory of gendered childhood, clothing and consumption. Instead, by using the discursive accounts of the girls in my study, and drawing from the literature of clothing consumption and the sociology of childhood, I wish to contribute to the current understanding of the symbolic character of clothing and fashion as a means towards the articulation of young girls' feminine self and body. In other words, I am interested in how young tweens use popular culture (i.e. dress-up and make-over sites) in the contextual performance of the self (Goffman 1959) and the regulation of femininity. These sites can be perceived as present-day embodiments of the material culture of dolls and, as such, are part of a performative culture of femininity. Dolls are crucial props within the performance of childhood, through which adults and children have historically played innocent. For more than two centuries, dolls have been understood as the defining feature of girls' culture—'a metonym for girlhood itself' (Bernstein 2011, 19)—and in this sense, online models can be seen as props in the performance of contemporary femininity through the consumption of material culture.

More specifically, in the work I conducted in 2012 with girls from three primary schools in inner Athens (see Chap. 6), my participants were also asked to log into their favourite make-over site and offer examples of dressed-up models. Drawing from Goffman (1959), their model designs were understood as a form of self-presentation within an ongoing process of social performance. For this part of the interview, girls would work in the school's designated computer rooms, where they were given time to elaborate their models. Afterwards, participants would discuss and comment upon their sartorial choices. Among the popular

choices of the time was Stardoll (www.stardoll.com) and Monster High (from the namesake Mattel dolls and animation series) (www.monster-high.com)⁶—though there are Barbie examples, too. Both Stardoll and Monster High represent examples of virtual worlds which offer users various textual resources for self-presentation (photos, music, video clips, animation, elements of social networking such as instant messaging and chat communication); commercial resources for customizing models and their spaces, branded or not, ranging from clothing styles to accessories and accoutrements, as well as interior and garden design and pets; and personal resources (e.g. different facial features, hairstyles, complexions and body shapes). Monster High allows some level of browsing, but once you wish to take part in the gaming interactive community, you need to subscribe as a member (though membership is free). Stardoll also requires subscription to the website, though here too membership is free. Players get around by acquiring ‘starcoins’—some of which are freely accessible, some earned competitively, and some which can be purchased. Purchasing starcoins considerably speeds up the player’s ability to interact with the gaming platforms (for example, you have access to a wider range of brands, accoutrements and decorations if you purchase starcoins than if you waited to earn them). The present study revolves around the commercial (sometimes around the personal, too) features of the virtual worlds, and not on the phatic communication that takes place within the girls’ social networking (where girls comment on each other’s ‘dolls’ and their spaces).

The girls showed critical ability to reflect upon various styles of adult femininity, sometimes incorporating the mythical dimension (princesses) with constructions of ‘real’ women. A group of fifth graders (11-year-olds) from the middle-class foreign-language school discusses their options below.⁷ Vasso presents a Barbie princess dressed in pink, with high hair and a tiara, off to ‘some ball’.

Interviewer: Vasso, tell us what you’ve got for us ...

Vasso: Ahhh, I’ve made a very beautiful princess ... with very beautiful pink clothes.... I’ve put on a small bracelet—with a diamond—and a very nice tiara ... and earrings ...

Interviewer: That’s great!!! Where is she going to, now?

Vasso: Ahhh ... don’t know.... I guess [she’s going] to some ball ...



Image 7.1 Vasso's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

This is juxtaposed with the image of a 'young girl' who is ready for a 'night out' (Image 7.2). Nora depicts her model as going off to have fun, which is why she has put on a 'beautiful', 'sexy' black dress, wears make-up, and has a nice hairdo. The self-projection of sexiness comes here in different forms, for example the low (strapless) cleavage, the tight-fitting shape of the dress and the well-groomed hair.

Interviewer: Ok, what about you, Nora?

Nora: Well, here's a young girl with a beautiful dress ... she's wearing make-up ...

Interviewer: Where is she headed to?



Image 7.2 Nora's first model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

Nora: She's off to a night out ...

Interviewer: Do you like her style?

Nora: Yes! I like her hair a lot ...

Interviewer: What about her dress style?

Nora: Ahhh, nice, really nice ... sexy ...

Interviewer: What is about it that makes it sexy?

Nora: Ahhh ... [it's] the little black dress ...

Lia: It's not just the [short] dress ... [it's] the small cleavage ... the nicely done hair ...

Interviewer: What is it about the dress that makes it sexy? The hemline?

Nora: No, not the hemline ... it's the colour ... [and] what she said about the low cleavage ... and more [than that] ... it's close fitting ...

Nora offers a second model (Image 7.3), in which a ‘normal’ girl is ready to go out in a style that all girls in the group find ‘simple’. Nora teases the interviewer that the girl could be going to the supermarket dressed like this, though immediately afterwards she offers a possible venue—‘coffee with the girlfriends’. She admits that this is an outfit she would wear herself to go out; this is echoed by another fifth grader, Katerina, who distances herself from wearing boots unless they’re flat. Here we see how girls’ everyday practices of clothing consumption (Pilcher 2010) inform the way they perform the self through their made-over models. Girls not only appropriate market trends to fit their own sartorial tastes (as in the case of Katerina), but are savvy consumers of style who distinguish between venues—the fairy tale princess (Image 7.1), as opposed to the young woman on a night out (Image 7.2) or off to grab a coffee in more casual attire (Image 7.3). The girls produce different subjectivities of the child consumer here, moving in and out of fashion styles to fit the occasion.



Image 7.3 Nora’s second model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

Interviewer: Ok, let's see the next model, Nora ...

Nora: Here's a normal girl, on her way out ...

Interviewer: Oh, so, she's dressed to go out.... Would you wear this to go out?

Nora: Yes, I would.

Interviewer: Are the boots high-heeled?

Nora: No they are not ... not particularly anyway ...

Interviewer: I see ... and she's off to where? Off to a party?

Nora: She's off to the supermarket, hahhahhaa ... [perhaps] going for a coffee with her girlfriends.

Interviewer: What would you call this style?

Sofia: Simple.

Nora: Yeah, me too ... simple ...

Katerina: I'd wear the whole outfit, but for the boots.... [I'd wear them] only if they were flat ...

The following model is an instance of the imaginary scenarios girls situate themselves in when constructing the self in a virtual world. Katerina, although apologetic for not having succeeded in creating her model the way she intended to, has a ready-made context for her avatar (Image 7.4):

Interviewer: Ok Katerina, show us what you've got.

Katerina: Well, it hasn't come out alright ... but still.... This girl has swimwear on 'cause she was going to the beach.... However, she was spotted by accident by some people who were shooting a film, and they thought she looks really nice, so they've asked her to play a part ...

Then, quite interestingly, she qualifies her choice of swimwear initially on the grounds of item availability, and only secondarily in terms of personal taste:

Interviewer: So why did you choose this swimsuit over ... let's say, a bikini?

Katerina: Well, first of all there was nothing else available [they all laugh] Secondly, I actually like this outfit ...

Interaction within this peer group shows that for some of the 11-year-olds in this foreign-language middle-class school the problem with this



Image 7.4 Katerina's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

swimsuit lies in how revealing it is. As the previous chapter, and other research (Pilcher 2010), has shown, girls find baring skin immodest—the swimsuit is described as ‘plunging’—and in the interview present a self that is imbued in middle-class respectability. In this respect, concerns about how suggestive clothing damages children’s sense of morality (as these are articulated in public debates regarding the erosion of childhood), are largely overrated.

Interviewer: How does this swimsuit look in your opinion?

Sofia: I find it very sexy.

Nora: Ahh ... me too, [I find it] sexy ... (with some hesitation).

Interviewer: Is there's something else you wanted to say ...???

Nora: Well ... it seems a bit too much 'cause it's plunging [she refers to the cleavage] ...

Sofia: I think it's a bit tacky ...

Nora: That's right ... it's provocative ...

Sofia: Absolutely! [with emphasis]

Still in the foreign-language, middle-class school, decisions on models are made on the basis of personal dress style and taste (Image 7.5). Fashionable



Image 7.5 Elena's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

clothing is meaningful in relation to being ‘trendy’ within the peer group, so the emphasis is put upon the garment itself—its styling and embellishment:

Interviewer: Why did you dress her like that?

Elena: Well, first of all I like dressing like that myself—simply; secondly, I think the colours match All Stars, and her blouse too ... the green goes well with the black... and I wanted her to wear sunglasses, too.

Interviewer: Why does she have brown hair?

Elena: Well, I don’t like the other hair [that’s available].... I quite fancy her having brown hair, tucked in bit on the side, like that

Interviewer: And I see she sports big hoops ...

Elena: I fancy them ...

Interviewer: Do you have such big hoops?

Elena: I do ... in pink ...

Interviewer: And do you wear them?

Elena: I do ... at parties only ...

Interviewer: What else do you wear at parties?

Elena: The hoops, pair of denim shorts [she indicates just above the knee] and a simple top in the summer; pair of jeans, and some top at wintertime ...

Below, Marena (Image 7.6) projects personhood though her platinum blonde model—born out of necessity (‘that that was all the hair I could find’, that she actually liked). The model is dressed in a fashion Marena herself would actually wear, ‘but for the earrings’, which are deemed as befitting someone older.

Interviewer: Why is she dressed like that? Where’s she going?

Marena: Ehh, she could be going to many places like that ... shopping, at the supermarket, to a café ...

Interviewer: Ehh, I see that you made her a blonde—platinum blonde to be precise ...

Marena: Well, that was all the hair I could find!!!

Interviewer: So there was no other hair?



Image 7.6 Marena's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

Marena: Oh no, there was plenty more.... I just didn't like it, so I made her like that ...

Interviewer: Would you wear this outfit?

Marena: Probably ... but for the earrings ...

Interviewer: Why? What's wrong with them?

Marena: Ok, they're too big ...

Interviewer: Too big for you or just about everyone?

Marena: For me ...

Interviewer: Which means they would look ok on someone older?

Marena: Probably ...

Given the opportunity, a commentary ensues regarding age- and venue-appropriate embellishments:

Interviewer: Are there girls at school who wear such these sorts of earrings?

Marena: Yes, there are some.... When [you're] a bit older, it's ok to wear them, even at school ...

Elena: If you ask me, I think it's not ok to wear them at school.

Appropriate attire is context-dependent, it seems (Image 7.7). There are clothing styles suitable for a coffee, shopping or the movies, and there are party styles—and 11-year-old girls are literate enough fashion consumers to distinguish between different styling requirements. At a second level, we see how an 11-year-old has internalized the (socially imposed) codes of decorum for someone 'her age', and though she owns up to her model's dress style, she 'postpones' the use of heels and long earrings for an older version of herself. To paraphrase Cook then (2004, 149, as above, this chapter), in the battle over consumption, it is the model of the *moral* child that prevails here.

Interviewer: Why is she dressed like that?

Ninon: Well, she's quite casual.... She could go for a walk looking like that.... Ehh, for shopping, at a café. [...] She'd be ok for a movie ... [but] she'd be better off with some skirt or a dress if she was going at a party ...

Interviewer: Would you go out in this outfit?



Image 7.7 Ninon's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

Ninon: Yes, though I'd leave out the heels and the earrings ... they're too long ... that's all ...

Interviewer: Would you dress like this if you were older?

Ninon: Yes! It's trendy ...

The next photo gave the girls the opportunity to air their thoughts about a different kind of self-regulation—wearing make-up and hair removal in the form of plucking your eyebrows. Manina, while talking about her model (Image 7.8), ready to ‘go to the beach’, reveals a reflexive engagement with gendered fashion (McRobbie and Nava 1984). Self-regulation in terms of applying ‘technologies of beautification’—to paraphrase Evans et al.’s (2010) notion of ‘technologies of sexiness’—(e.g. applying make-up, trimming eyebrows, removing pimples) is a rite of passage that states you are close to adulthood—‘from 18 onwards’—



Image 7.8 Manina's model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

unless, of course, there are intervening factors, such as ‘bad skin’ (Maria, commenting on Manina, ‘If you’ve already got bad skin, you need to start early before it gets any worse’). Self-regulation also extends to a different level—going to the beach should not be about ‘showing off’, says Venia, so wearing lipstick and accessories may look alright during role playing (models on a gaming site), but not in reality.

Interviewer: What have you got for us?

Manina: I’ve dressed up a girl who’s off to the beach, so I’ve picked her hair, her front bang ... but before all that, I applied facial make-up ...

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Manina: There’s a load of make-up stuff ... you can add things, or take them off.... You can remove pimples for example.... I’ve chosen a front bang and a braid at the back.... Afterwards, I’ve given her a hat because she looks better with it ... and then I’ve put a swimsuit on her ... and I gave her a facial [to remove the pimples], and trimmed her eyebrows ...

Interviewer: I see ... so a young girl needs to take care for herself, doesn’t she? At what age?

Manina: From 18 onwards ...

Interviewer: You mean you are not supposed to have this done when you’re 17 or 15?

Manina: [she gives it some thought]... Well, she shouldn’t overdo it ...

Maria: It depends, really.... If you’ve already got bad skin, you need to start early before it gets any worse ...

Interviewer: What about eyebrow plucking?

Maria, Manina: Eyebrows? Oh, no ... not until later ...

Manina: Then I put on earrings and a necklace ... not too loud, mind you ...

Interviewer: So, is this a nice look for the beach?

Manina: Yes.

Venia: I don’t really fancy it.... I’d never wear earrings and a necklace at the beach ... nor lipstick [...] because when you go to the beach you don’t go to show off ...

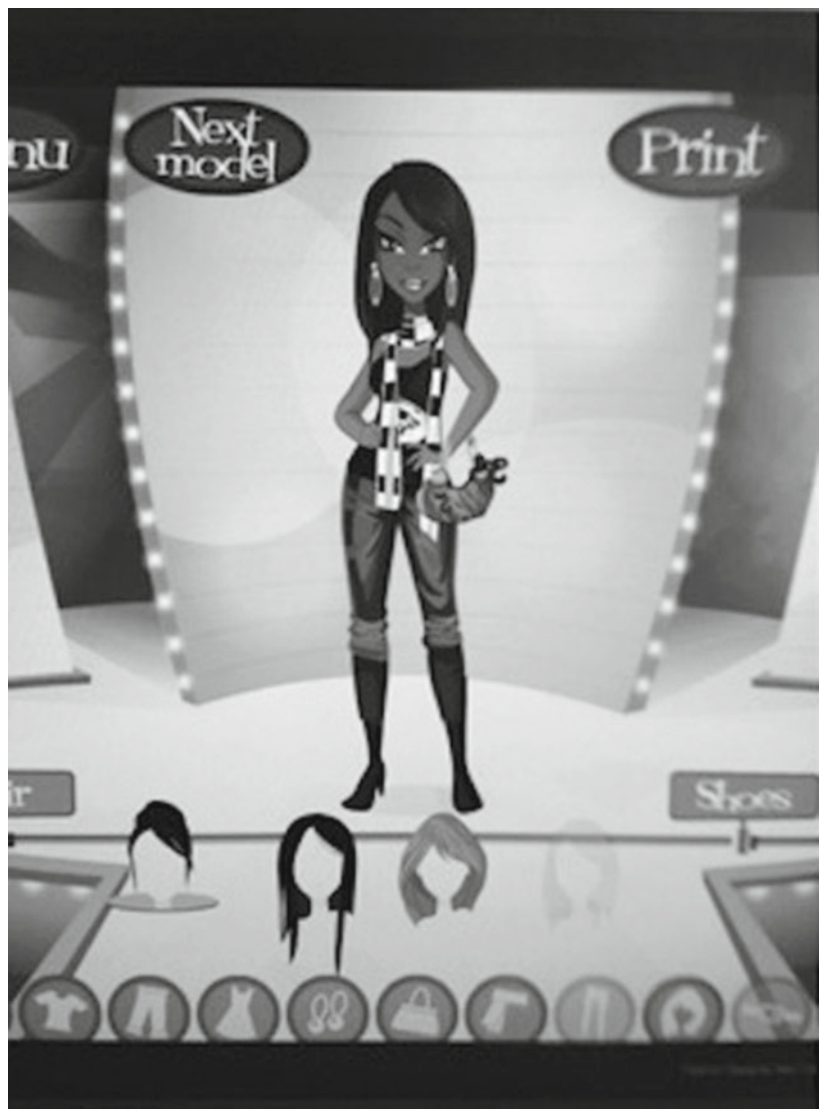


Image 7.9 Paola’s first model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

The multicultural facet of contemporary Greek society, where, since 2010, there is a surge of economic immigrants and refugees from a variety of non-Western European cultures (from sub-Saharan Africa to Syria and Tunisia, Afghanistan, India and more), is being represented in the following model (Image 7.9). Among a wide variety of models, Paola has simply selected a black one to dress up. In this, I read a gradual acceptance and incorporation of the ‘Other’ (the ‘exotic’ Other, not just the Caucasian one) within Greek national culture, especially among the youngest generations of Greeks, who grow up and are schooled alongside their peers of a non-Western origin. Paola goes to the Grava compound (state schools, predominantly low SES), which receives a large number of immigrant schoolchildren—quite a few of her peers are black. She, too, offers a variety of context-appropriate scenarios as to where her model would be going—which include leisure activities (movies, a drink). An inner code of self-regulation dictates that this kind of outfit may not be well received within an employment or school context. In addition, she positions herself against her made-over model, constructing a subjectivity which is ‘more sporty and athletic’, as a result of which this outfit ‘would not suit her style’. It seems then that some clothing fashions may look ‘cool’ or ‘good’ on some people and on certain occasions, but they are not necessarily representative of a personal fashion style—and this 11-year-old has already carved out a social persona for herself.

Interviewer: Paola, what a nice model!! Why is she black?

Paola: ‘Cause she was already black ...

Interviewer: Oh, I see ... you just picked a black model ...

Paola: yeah ... she looks cool.... She wears long jeans, tucked into her boots ...

Interviewer: Why did you have her wear a scarf and long earrings?

Paola: I just did.... I fancied them.... The scarf... it looked nice,I think she looks good with it...

Interviewer: She’s not wearing any jacket or something ... just a fitted top with spaghetti straps ... where is she off to?

Paola: Well, she could be off to the movies or for a drink ... she’s casual-smart.

Interviewer: Would she go to work like that?

Paola: No!



Image 7.10 Paola's second model (fifth grade, 11yrs)

Interviewer: Would you go to school in this outfit?

Paola: Not with that handbag, I wouldn't ...

Interviewer: Why? You are too young for it?

Paola: That, and also cause it's not the best outfit to go to school in.... That's not my style ... I don't fancy boots ...

Interviewer: What's your style then?

Paola: A bit more sporty ... and athletic ...

Paola follows up her 'casual-smart' black model with a blonde in a party dress—a sartorial decision fit for 'someone older—around 17–18' (Image 7.10). Asked whether she could picture herself in such a clothing style at that age, she concedes. Here we see that when it comes to their

appearance, tween girls are faced with a complex set of mixed reactions about gender, age and race. The notion of ‘anticipatory enculturation’ (Cook and Kaiser 2004) seems befitting here—the term negotiates the relationship between the control girls have over media representations and the agency they exercise in the representations they create themselves when making sartorial decisions.

Through their everyday stylings, and in their interactions with peers and the offerings of marketplace identities, girls articulate these cultural ambivalences and anxieties, especially those surrounding female socialization and sexualization. (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 205)

Through her consumption of marketplace fashion styles, Paola constructs fluid narratives of the self (black, then blonde), and positions herself accordingly as befits her status (younger or older) and context (school, party, workplace), internalizing all along an embedded culture of middle-class respectability.

Interviewer: Is this your party outfit?

Paola: Yes ... she has light blue beaded earrings ...

Interviewer: Would you wear this outfit to a party?

Paola: Don’t know ... not sure, because ... ok, it’s nice yet it’s for someone a bit older ...

Interviewer: Who would wear this, then?

Paola: Ahhh, someone around 17–18 ...

Interviewer: Does this mean that you would see yourself wearing something like this at that age?

Paola: Yes ...

The contextual performance of the self as someone sporty, with a clear-cut understanding of what kind of accoutrements look nice on her—as the person she really is—can be evidenced in the case of Artemis, another 11-year-old from Grava (Image 7.11). Artemis elaborates with great detail upon her sartorial selection—her model is off on a ‘school trip’, which is why she is dressed ‘casually’, because that is what Artemis ‘wears herself’—hoodies, sneakers, necklace. She then takes some distance from certain accessories that look nice on the model but wouldn’t wear herself



Image 7.11 Artemis’ model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

(belt, bracelets). She rationalizes this decision on the grounds that she's either too young to appreciate them or they are not her style. When it is suggested that she might go out in a pink puffy dress (like the Cinderella princess in Image 7.1), she emphatically takes a distance from such a styling appearance—'No way!' In this way, Artemis not only shows she makes full sense of the symbolic value of fashion clothing, but, through the description of clothes she offers, she makes sure that she stays trendy within her peer group (see also Pilcher 2010, 464 on this). This is hardly the case of a 'flawed consumer', who, due to her class background, is lacking with regard to her cultural capital of taste. Instead, in her, I see a self-reflexive child consumer—a 'bricoleuse' (to borrow from Russell and Tyler 2005)—who uses consumption expressively in an ongoing social negotiation.

Interviewer: Let's see what Artemis has got in store for us ... aha! I see yours is the sporty type ... and she blinks, hahaha, that's funny ... [they all laugh]. Where is she off to, then?

Artemis: She's off to a school trip. I like dressing my models casually, with a cap and a hoodie ... 'cause that's what I usually wear myself.... Mind you, not the belt, though I thought it looked nice on her as it is ... ditto for the bracelets.... They looked nice on her but not on me ...

Interviewer: Because you think they're not for your age?

Artemis: Well that, and also because I don't really fancy them ...

Interviewer: Tell me more about your choice of style here ...

Artemis: Well, I gave her sunglasses 'cause I like them ... and I prefer this shade instead of something else.... I gave her a necklace 'cause I fancy necklaces with a splash of colour ... and the hoodie 'cause I always wear a hoodie myself.... Her tee is short-sleeved and black ... her trousers are short ... her sneakers look like mine—that's the kind of sneakers I usually have on, 'cause I'm not really into heels or flats ...

Interviewer: Where would you wear this outfit? At school? At a party? To the movies?

Artemis: Actually, anywhere.... I like this style ...

Interviewer: If you had to smarten up, what would you wear?

Artemis: Same outfit.... I'd lose the cap, the belt and the bracelets ...

Interviewer: So, you wouldn't go in the pink outfit [she is referring to Image 7.1]

Artemis: No way!!



Image 7.12 Despina's first model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

A further understanding of how tweens make sense of the contextual nuances of clothing fashions is offered by Despina, also from Grava school. She first presents a model of 'adult femininity' in a professional outfit—she particularly stresses that this is a style fit for 'a company', thus showing an elaborate knowledge of sartorial requirements in the workplace (Image 7.12). In addition to distinguishing between dressing up for 'going out' and 'going to work in a company', she clearly demarcates how 'grown-ups' and 'girls' dress.

Interviewer: This is very nice. Talk us through, please ...

Despina: Yes, this is nice but it's not [appropriate] for school ... [yet] the colours are dark and it would be ok ... if I was working for a company, let's say ...

Interviewer: I see.... You mean this is formal enough for a working environment but not school material.... Why not, then?

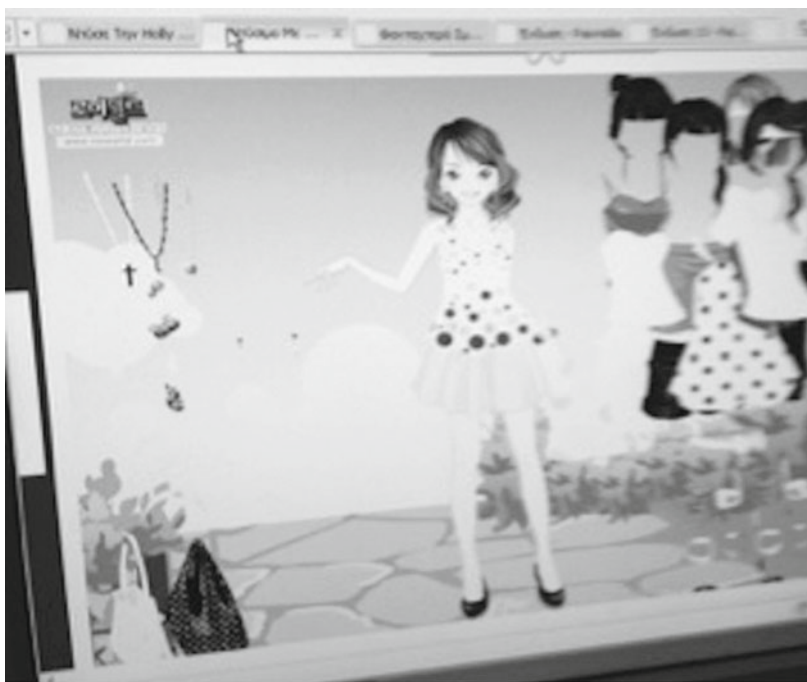


Image 7.13 Despina's second model (fifth grade, 11 yrs)

Despina: Ohhh ... 'cause most [girls] wouldn't dress like that ... most would put on jeans and a top ... whereas I've put them together so that they look like a dress.... I think this is how grown-ups dress, and I like it.... I think it's smart enough to go out [dressed like this].... It's fine ...

The desire to accessorize can be seen as another rehearsal of adult femininity, and associated with the need to 'age up', especially when 'going out' (Hockey and James 1993). Despina continues with another model, this time dressed up for a social occasion, and offers a detailed justification of her choice of accessories in relation to the colour and style of the outfit (Image 7.13). Once it comes to whether or not she would actually wear it herself, she immediately defines suitable contexts for such an outfit: it would be appropriate to visit relatives (an adult environment), but wrong among peers (a party).



Image 7.14 Dimitra's model (sixth grade, 12 yrs)

Interviewer: where is this girl going?

Despina: Ahhh ... to some meeting ... or [to meet] some relative [she means a social visit].... I think it's a nice combination, with the skirt ... and the heels ... and green looks good with black.... I gave her a small bracelet, too, 'cause I think brown [she refers to the colour of the bracelet] matches her top, and blends well with green—like with trees ... and I gave her some earrings, and I find her hair really nice ... light brown.... I don't think she's over-dressed, let's say with too many bracelets and accessories ...

Interviewer: Would you wear this outfit? Where to?

Despina: Ahhh ... to see relatives [again, she means this as a social event] ... at a café ...



Image 7.15 Eleftheria's model (sixth grade, 12 yrs)

Interviewer: To go to a party?

Despina: No ... I'd much rather put on some jeans myself ... [at a party]

The following models have been created by tweens in the middle-class private school. High heels play a significant role in the role playing of adult femininity, either in the case of Dimitra, whose model has 'a rock profile' (Image 7.14), Eleftheria (Image 7.15), who tries out different styles as 'she's not sure what she wants', or Annie (Image 7.16), who has dressed up a model 'sexy-yet-cool', taking cue from celebrity culture. What these three sixth graders share in common is a quest for a style that brings together feminine elegance with coolness and sexiness without alluding to 'tartiness'; outfits need to exude some kind of edge (such as 'a rock profile') but they still need to remain 'context-appropriate' (i.e. some outfits look right for a social occasion, but not for school, as in Image 7.16).



Image 7.16 Annie's model (sixth grade, 12 yrs)

Dimitra: She wears a jacket ... dark blue going black ... a scarf, pair of jeans and high-heeled sandals ...

Interviewer: Why the high heels?

Dimitra: Ahhh, don't know ... they give her a rock profile ...

Interviewer: Tell us about your model ...

Eleftheria: She has fishnet elbow-high gloves, wears high-heeled sandals, leggings and a dress [tunic] ...

Interviewer: What did you have in mind when you were looking around for accessories? Because this is how you decided to dress her ...

Eleftheria: Ooohh, I was after some tight leggings and a long top—up to here ... [shows length].

Interviewer: Previously, you've tried on a very different outfit [one-shoulder short dress with high-heeled sandals] ...

Eleftheria: I was testing out different styles ... wasn't sure what I wanted ...

Annie: I've chosen this outfit cause I really like this style ... [just] a skirt and a top.... I've seen it on many a celebrity ... sexy yet cool.... She's quite elegant ...

Interviewer: What about her shoes?

Annie: They match her outfit ...

Interviewer: They're high-heeled.

Annie: That's right ... not appropriate for school, but they do just fine on this occasion ...

In the last three examples, tweens show literacy in what is trendy, in how to be elegant, and how to be 'rock'. Indeed, the latter represents an always acceptable fashion statement and identity among young people, and in that respect, being fashionable is translated into an iconic female profile for these tweens.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has drawn the maps of meanings and the interpretative repertoires of the child consumer based on tween girls' discursive accounts and made-over models in virtual worlds. It aimed at articulating the role of cultural consumption in young children's lives and in the social performance of the self. Premised within a contextual framework of childhood studies and theories of consumption, it discusses sexualization as part of a broader identity work that pertains to and derives from consumption patterns and practices, within which the question of class is also addressed. In other words, based on an understanding that gender and consumer culture are related (Lury 1995; McRobbie 1994, 1996; Radner 1995), as well as an interest in the role of consumer culture in shaping social relations and identities (e.g. those of tweens), here I also wanted to explore whether differences in socio-economic background (class) account for how tween girls negotiate the presentation of their selves (i.e. class matters not as a determinant of tween's participation in virtual worlds, but rather as a definer of style and performance). By asking the girls to describe and present their models, I wanted to give them the time and space to reflect upon their experiences and interpretations of the social world. Thus the girls' 'visual narratives' (Russell and Tyler 2005) offer us an insight into

the ways tweens enable impression management through their choices of varied cultural resources.

Around the turn of the millennium, research in childhood studies started to view children (human beings) all the more as ‘becomings’, constantly transforming and developing (Prout 2005), their subjectivities connected situationally and dependent on ‘extensions’ in the shape of others, on artefacts, technology and texts (Johansson 2010). Within this frame, and despite the multiple possibilities in terms of resources afforded in virtual worlds, the tweens in this study (as elsewhere, see Skaar 2010) sometimes present a tendency towards uniformity in the subjectivities they create. For instance, girls from different social backgrounds and different schools end up ‘playing’ with similar dolls, as shown in Images 7.2, 7.4, 7.8, 7.12, 7.15, and 7.16. Skaar (2010) suggests that this kind of uniformity may be the result of social competition for coolness among peers in the process of the construction of the most popular (i.e. best-selling, coolest) self—in the sense that tweens competing against and interacting with others (distant or not) across virtual worlds, sometimes end up with convergent notions of personhood. Through the fashion they consume, the girls produce fluid self-presentations which oscillate between tweenhood and womanhood. Meanwhile, they exercise agency in the representations they create in the process of contemplating and dressing their ‘dolls’. Ultimately, this agency cannot be separated from the marketplace and the cultural spaces it generates. Tweenhood, by definition, is an aspirational social identity, and girls seek to move out of it and up the age prestige ladder (Cook and Kaiser 2004)—and they do so in ambiguous and ambivalent ways, in the performance of the self they offer within their peer group. Their make-over gaming practices are testimony to the fluid identity project they are engaged in, and of which consumption culture is an intrinsic part. Put differently, the transition away from childhood entails a perpetual process of ‘becoming’ which is performed, mediated and negotiated against a backdrop of contemporary consumer culture (Russell and Tyler 2005). Despite social commentators openly disparaging the way commercial culture and the fashion world steal childhood innocence (Giroux 2000), through their stylings and interactions with peers, and the marketplace identities they are offered, girls articulate the cultural ambivalences and anxieties that surround female socialization and sexualization (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 205). This visualization of the girls’ commodity-based expressions of selfhood is indicative of the kind of ‘anticipatory enculturation’ elaborated by Cook and Kaiser—a term ‘meant to capture the forward looking element

of sartorial and bodily practices of young girls', while 'also intended to recognize the complex negotiation that occurs between capital interests and girls' agency in their articulations of gender and sexuality' (2004, 206).

Therefore, despite concerns on the part of postmodern subcultural theorists that the potential influence of class on youth cultural identities and practices goes missing (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006), my research with young Greek tween girls from different social backgrounds suggests that the girls engage in make-over practices and construct a consuming self *beyond* class. Instead, their participation in dress-up and make-over gaming practices, and the narratives of personal consumption and styling such practices reveal, suggest there are other forces at work which shape the project and the performance of the self: gender norms about socially accepted (i.e. middle-class) femininity and sexiness, as these are negotiated by 'technologically mediated consumer-oriented subjectivities' (Evans et al. 2010, 118).

In other words, tween girls regulate themselves and their 'dolls', to a certain extent, on the basis of hegemonic adult femininity, as we saw in Chap. 6—therefore this is a case of 'gender enculturation' cutting across class. Young girls acknowledge and internalize dominant norms of femininity and consumption in the process of the construction of self-identity, based on the 'natural state of things' and 'common sense', both of which are socially constructed, and thereby carry meanings that vary culturally and temporally (Giddens 1991). Such constructions offer social normality and predictability in everyday interactions and imbue them with a sense of 'ontological security', allowing children to create their own personal narratives and situational accounts of who they are and why they behave the way they do within an 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' framework (36–37).

At the same time though, the micro-narratives and practices discussed here (and in Chap. 6) suggest that girls are both learning about and acting out the contradictions of femininity. Their make-over practices provide a space for play and for the performance of femininity as a process of *constant negotiation*. They negotiate the tropes of dominant femininity with the culture of 'girly'—where the use of the tabooed symbols of women's enculturation (Barbies, make-up, fashion tips, high heels) are not seen as signing up to the marketplace and the male gaze. Instead:

it can be [seen as] sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues. (Baumgardner and Richards 2004, 60)

Rather than thinking, then, in terms of a homogenization of codes of representation—so that all women who want to have the ‘look’ end up looking the same (Gill 2007a, b; McRobbie 2009), the girls’ virtual worlds point towards the diversity of forms of self-presentation (Duits and van Zoonen 2006; McNair 2009). In fact, I see the girls’ make-over practices as adding to the theorizing of women’s engagement in the sexualization of culture in a way that allows for a complexity of choice and agency within a broader context of postmodern, post-feminist consumer culture and disciplinary neoliberal discourses (Evans et al. 2010, 118). Stardoll, and other make-over sites, are thus seen as playgrounds within which mundane consumer goods and services become transitional objects (Winnicott 1971) for young tween girls (Russell and Tyler 2005, 226). The transition from childhood to adulthood, already blurry and fragmented, making it hard for young people to be sure about their adult roles, comes on top of such negotiations, which are embedded within the transition to late modernity and its consumer ethos, and the changing status of youth within it.

NOTES

1. In a similar mode, Giddens (1991) argues that in late modernity we witness ‘emancipatory politics’ (which are based on class, gender, etc.) having been replaced by ‘life politics’ (where the self is enhanced rather than collective control).
2. The discussion about the role of consumption patterns and practices in the construction of self and social identities is long-standing, whether it refers to consumption in eighteenth-century England and the negotiation of social standing and self realization (McKendrick et al. 1982; Campbell 1989); the emergence of ‘conspicuous consumption’ in early twentieth century as a means for the upper classes to consolidate their social excellence (Veblen 1925); the consolidation of a new youth culture among working-class youngsters, drawing from ‘Americanized’ styles of leisure, hair and decorum (Hoggart 1958); or the ways in which youth subcultures, like punk, functioned as forms of resistance to the marginalization of the working classes in the 1970s and 1980s (Hebdige 1979).
3. There are, of course, many children who are disadvantaged and thus unable to join in the ‘society of consumption’, as there are many others who have disposable income and exert considerable ‘pester power’. See for example, Woerdahl (2010) and Nairn et al. (2010).
4. It is accepted that virtual worlds are simulated internet environments in which children play and interact with each other via avatars, where they

merge social network functions with game playing (Holloway et al. 2013). Virtual worlds are defined as:

three dimensional environments in which you can interact with others and create objects as part of that interaction [...]. You appear as an avatar [...] [that] is a virtual representation of you (a ‘virtual ego’) which can take on any shape or form as you so wish [...]. Whatever you choose the aim is to socially interact with other people in new and exciting ways. This all adds to the experience. You can communicate with another person using text, sound, graphical images and gesture. [...] The common theme with many of these worlds is the ability to meet, chat and interact with other people.[...] Games are an obvious use of these environments but they are not limited to this (<http://www.vrs.org.uk/virtual-reality-games/what-are-virtual-worlds.html>).

5. For example, the EU Kids Online survey found that social networking among European children varied very little by SES in 2011, ranging from 57 % for children from low-income homes to 59 % for those from medium-income and 61 % for those from high-income homes (Livingstone et al. 2011a). What differentiated children’s SNS practices was not gender, for social networking hardly varied for boys and girls (with 58 % of boys and 60 % of girls having their own profile). Rather it was age that made a difference, with 38 % of 9–12-year-olds and 77 % of 13–16-year-olds having their own profile (Livingstone et al. 2011c).
6. As the design of the sites has changed since 2012 when the fieldwork was done, the photos of girls’ models offered here look ‘dated’ when compared to the look of the sites presently (2016).
7. Images 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, and 7.9 come from focus groups from the low SES school at the Grava compound; Image 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.13, and 7.14 from the middle-class foreign-language school, and Images 7.15 and 7.16 from the middle-class private school.

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Conclusions

This book has been intended as a revisiting of the debate on children's sexualization. Throughout, I have argued how I see sexualization enveloping an intricate array of issues that bring together popular culture, consumption, sexuality, selfhood and childhood. In this endeavour, I want to push beyond the dominant—and fashionable—preconceptions about 'the risks of childhood', which trickle down and feed the public debate about sexualization. Utilizing a Foucauldian understanding of the debate, I have tried to uncover the variety of factors and conditions that allowed the sexualization discourse to emerge and become so powerful today. In this way, I have tried to make sense of how current moralizing 'truths' have come to be and are maintained, and what power relations are carried by them.

The first chapter presents a concise overview of numerous social stakeholders who have been vocal about the sexualization of young children—girls more specifically—such as think-tank, task-force and government reports. Parenting and teaching manuals, as well as extensive news coverage in the press and in broadcasting, are also examined. This kind of documentation and reporting has flooded the public agenda from 2006 to date across the UK, the USA and Australia alike. I then unpack the dominant perception of sexualization by focusing on the criticism voiced against 'the peril of sexualization'. The second chapter offers a variety of accounts regarding the impact of popular culture on the young. Linking the notion of moral panics with an intrinsic fear of popular culture, I discussed modern childhood—and the idea of child sexuality—as something that has evolved since the Middle Ages. Drawing from Puritan

American ideologies as well as the ‘black pedagogy’ of Lewis Carroll and the Grimms’ fairy tales, I view contemporary social and academic concern about the sexualizing impact of contemporary popular media as being related to the construction of youth leisure as a social problem. Finally, I suggest that changes in child-rearing practices and images of childhood—whereby the link between spiritual purgation and the infliction of physical pain has been broken—as having shaped our approaches towards children and sex. In fact, I argue that present-day anti-bullying, anti-abuse, child-protectionist policy making can be understood as the way in which the West (which considers itself civilized) has transgressed against and overcome centuries of corporal disciplining which aimed to uproot childhood sin. Chapter 4 shows how the public debate about children’s sexualization entails an inherent fear about the spread of pornographic culture and its consumption by young audiences. I argue that the rhetorical move from sexualization to pornography (and back) when it comes to children and adolescents needs to be contextualized within a nineteenth-century philosophy that expected women (and young girls) to be confined to the private sphere while abiding to a strictly regulated heteronormativity, and which interpreted pornography as obscene. Therefore, I suggest that in order to make sense of the debate about the sexualization of childhood, we first need to make sense of the way the culture of pornography developed across time and cultures.

Chapter 5 offers an alternative reading of children’s voices when it comes to their experiences with sexual content. Instead of following the normative conceptualization of such experiences as ‘risky’, I discuss how a particular epistemology (in this case, the EU Kids Online approach that contextualizes sexual content as ‘problematic’ for children) impacts upon the way in which we make sense of children and what is ‘appropriate’ (or ‘problematic’) for them. This is followed by a meta-analysis and recoding of children’s voices from Greece, the UK, Spain, Italy and Australia regarding their perceptions of sexual content in an attempt to provide a different contextualization of the relationship of children with media representations of sex. In Chap. 6, I draw from a series of interviews conducted with tween girls from different class backgrounds in Greece as a case study on the debate of the sexualization of young children. Premised upon the view that we cannot make sense of the ‘tween’ unless we take into account its articulation with the market exigencies of childhood, and girlhood in particular, I wish to challenge the prevailing views and assumptions about the incendiary effects of sexualized and commercialized culture on

young pre-teen girls. I argue that young girls' consumption of popular culture (in the form of stardom and celebrity culture) illustrates how the entertainment media, rather than being construed as risk-laden, can be used towards the management of an ethical self, and as part of a broader identity work where issues of self-governance, appropriateness, taste and aesthetics are carefully raised. Finally, in Chap. 7, I explore the maps of meanings and the interpretative repertoires regarding the child consumer as these derive from young tween girls' online gaming practices. I make use of the girls' consumption of popular culture (dress-up and make-over gaming sites) in order to extrapolate about how they position themselves as consumers of fashion styles, and through that, how they negotiate the presentation of their selves. In this, I adopt a broader framework to contextualize sexualization, which I discuss as part of an identity work that pertains to and derives from consumption patterns and practices.

So, where does all this leave the debate about sexualization?

With an ever-growing industry of self-help and self-improvement literature revolving around effective time management to allow self-invention and growth (McGee 2005), children's and teenagers' consumption of popular culture is constituted as 'problematic leisure'. For, instead of occupying themselves with worthy endeavours (e.g. reading books, playing chess, playing the piano, doing sports), children increasingly become enmeshed in various aspects of popular culture (smartphones, social media, online gaming), and in this way not only 'waste their time' but also engage in problem-laden practices. Children are construed as innocent and without experience of the social world,¹ impressionable and susceptible to the sexualizing effects of 'permissive' popular media (Eyal and Kunkel 2008). Such innocence and inexperience fully justifies 'mother-knows-best' approaches to parenting and schooling, for parents (Collins et al. 2004) as well as teachers (Fisher and Barak 1989) are framed as positive 'correctives' (McKee et al. 2015) to the supposedly negative messages of popular culture about sex. The prevalence of middle-class discourses of child development (in the West) can be traced back to the nineteenth century (see Chap. 3), and account for the dangers associated with children's 'unstructured leisure' which persist to the present. The popular discourse on sexualization, however, is far more telling of adult disquiet (about transgression of moral, gender and class norms) than of the lives and practices of children and teenagers (Egan 2013). Such concerns about pleasure without purpose emerge in the form of fears of 'permissive populism' (Hunt 1998)—it's the 1970s all over again. Unlike the spread of

sexual content in popular culture in the 1970s, which meant that even the consuming working classes could not be denied their momentary pleasures of ‘Soho permissiveness’ and the newly founded hedonism of tabloid populism, sex education guides, light entertainment and sexploitation films (Hunt 1998, 19), this time the trickling down of ‘permissiveness’ raised concerns around children’s and teenagers’ consumption of popular culture.² Contemporary pontification about and moral campaigning against sexualization and its effects (see Chap. 2) is, in fact, not very remote from the 1971 Festival of Light ‘Rally Against Permissiveness’, serving as an imaginary unification of the voices of various moral stakeholders and advocates who lambast the ills of sexualization and wish for—yet again—a return to ‘family values’.

Two things are taking place here at once. First, there is the underlying preconception of the ‘lower classes’ as childlike and childish (Hayward and Yar 2006). It is because working-class consumption is usually seen as being flawed and vulgar that sexual permissiveness (whether exercised through fashion or mediated through cultural products and content) is so severely rebuked in public discourse. Then, there is also the ambivalence surrounding the construction of young people’s self-identity around the sphere of consumption (rather than of production). And although the role of consumption practices in the construction of self- and social identities has a long history (see Chap. 7), the way in which consumption is now at the heart of producing social distinctions and classifications renders it even more significant (Hayward and Yar 2006). Hence, not only is children’s and teenagers’ consumption (of fashion, clothing, popular culture at large, of sexuality) found wanting—because of their lack of cultural capital, in itself due to young age and inexperience—but at the same time children and teenagers are expected (in the advanced West) to construct their identities through their consumption choices (since productive labour no longer accommodates children). This is a harsh tackle for children, then, because, while we expect them to take part in consumer society, we treat their consumption choices and practices with derision as well as fearing the spectre of sexualization (see Chap. 7)—and parents, educators and other experts are expected to stand as ‘correctives’. To complicate things further, all of the above brings forward the issue of children’s citizenship and rights, for the way we construct children’s sexuality and children’s consumption impacts heavily upon the former.

Our understanding of children in the Western world is largely informed by a ‘needs’ discourse, applied both to adolescents and younger children;

being profoundly influenced by various strands of psychology (hence the slant on ‘adolescents’ rather than ‘teenagers’), it construes children as inherently ‘problematic’, and thus ‘in need’ of adult surveillance, mediation and control. In this sense, although the ‘children’s needs’ discourse means well and is motivated by the desire to improve children’s welfare, by positioning children in term of their needs, it sets up an expectation that adults should view them in terms of these needs and try to meet them. As a result, such a discourse demands that we must provide ‘solutions’ for the ‘problems’ posed by children’s needs, and children themselves are turned into ‘problems’ that need ‘solving’ (Buckingham 2009). Concurrently though, a ‘harm warranting’ is implied here since adult intervention is premised upon the precondition that it is necessary in order to protect a child from harm. On the upside, children’s worlds have changed profoundly as a result of this ‘harm warrant’, as the ‘children’s needs’ discourse can orient policy measures towards specific needs only (such as the prevention of encounters with sexual content) to the exclusion of others (e.g. access to information). On top of that, conceptualizing childhood in terms of ‘needs’ reflects a predominantly Western view of children, enmeshed within developmental psychology.

Harm warranting predicated upon a developmental perspective of childhood thus imposes a particularly Western world view on how we construe children’s needs. Crucially, it adopts the Western prioritization of the individual self, and of individual autonomy and freedom. Viewing the child as in transit towards becoming an autonomous, independent individual focuses our attention on what children ‘need’ in order to achieve this goal. But what if a different sort of adulthood is aspired to—one that values connectedness, mutuality and interdependence? (Stainton Rogers 2009, 148)

The needs discourse was countered by a move towards a ‘children’s rights’ one that was prevalent in the 1970s, whereby children were treated as social actors in their own right, capable of and entitled to have a say about what is done to and for them (James and Prout 1997; James et al. 1998; Woodhead 1997). According to this discourse, children cannot be treated as ‘lesser mortals’, not deserving the same rights and respect as adults, simply because they are not adults. However, this discourse is not immune to being appropriated by adults for their own purposes, while claiming they serve ‘the child’s best interests’. As a result, when talking about children’s rights and policy initiatives to safeguard them, we need to

bear in mind that adults do not always know best and may not always act in the most honourable ways (Stainton Rogers 2009).

As a way out of the polarity of ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ discourses, Stainton Rogers has offered the ‘children’s quality of life’ alternative. This allows for a contextual understanding of children’s welfare as it acknowledges that the latter must take into account the concerns, values, resources and limitations of the families and societies in which children are reared and cared for. The ‘children’s quality of life’ alternative, says Stainton Rogers, dictates that we turn away from what harms children and focus on what we can do to help them overcome difficulties and thrive in adversity—‘resilience’ being the key concept here. Crucially, by focusing on the notion of the quality of life, we steer away from ‘problematizing’ children. Instead, looking at a child’s life experience, circumstances, values and priorities as a whole, we recognize that there is considerable variation in what is important to a particular child (as well as the families and cultures within which they live in) and we are thus more respectful of social, cultural and religious variation (Stainton Rogers 2004, 155).³ However, although the discourse of children’s quality of life is potentially useful, I adhere to a rights discourse for it is closely related to the realm of citizenship—and the appeal of the rights discourse can be evidenced in the proliferation of various charters of children’s rights over the years (see Chap. 3). This brings me to my next point.

Similar to the way teenage magazines were identified in 1990s Britain as the source of a perceived problem—the availability of ‘too much sexual knowledge’ among young women—popular culture at large and its online practices continue to reinforce ‘conventional wisdoms’ which argue that (young) women’s access to sexual knowledge is socially problematic. And, although a lot is being said about the ‘sexualization of childhood’, it is the sexualization of young girls, rather than of young boys, that evokes social anxieties and struggles over socio-sexual identity. The discourses of morality and social and sexual agency offered to young girls are highly gendered and, as a result, impact upon ‘the acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2008) afforded by them. Isin posits that ‘deeds by which actors constitute themselves (and others) as subjects of rights’ constitute acts of citizenship. He notes the emergence of new actors who, instead of being defined by what they possess, they are defined by what they lack—‘strangers, outsiders and aliens [...] become claimants to citizenship’, and hence ‘the right to claim rights’ (Isin 2009, 375). In that respect, it transpires that time and again children, young girls particularly, are denied their ostensible rights to *sexual*

citizenship—even better, to *intimate* citizenship (Plummer 1995, 2001)—as a result of the moral turpitude that accompanies the notion of the ‘sexual child’, regardless of the recent rhetoric about ‘children’s rights’. This means that while, in terms of ‘rights’, we are very ‘twenty-first-century’,⁴ when it comes to sexual rights, we sound very much ‘nineteenth-century’.

To extrapolate, in order to stress how different the discursive construction of the sexual child in the 1970s is from contemporary constructions, Egan (2013) accounts for the fear surrounding the modern history of childhood sexuality through the dominance of Anglophone conceptions of childhood. In the Anglophone West, argues Egan, (white, upper middle-class) childhood has been conceptualized as incongruent with sexual emergence, for ‘to be sexual is to be adult’. Any sign of eroticism was perceived as evidence of medical, moral or psychological pathology, or of outside adult intervention. Such a view strips the child of any notion of sexual citizenship, and reiterates discourses about the asexual and innocent child, while justifying the need for measures that make sure it stays this way. In this sense, the innocent or sexually endangered child is socially constructed against its counterpart, the erotic or sexually knowing child. This binary of the sexually corrupted or the innocent child works as a barometer of social decay or nostalgia for a pure past (Egan 2013, 140–141). At the same time, whether we accept or condemn childhood sexuality, what we perceive as sexually abusive is culturally and historically dependent, as various anthropological and ethnographic studies have shown (Kehily and Montgomery 2009). The moral compass is set by adults who determine children’s sexual maturity, and, in cases of immaturity, project the need to protect them.

So terrifying is the notion of child sexuality that anxieties over female child and teenage sexuality hide a class bias that it eventually castigates young working-class female sexual agency—look at the figure of the teenage mother, working-class more often than not, and the butt of sanctimonious commentary in the British press in the late 1990s and early 2000s regarding the ‘traditional’ family and its demise, as well their over-dependence on state benefits (Tyler 2008). The very idea that working-class girls (and boys for that matter) might construct themselves as ‘sexual citizens’, with control over their bodies, has been perceived as a social threat (Ticknell et al. 2003). In more ways than one, this is a remnant of a Victorian idealization of girls’ sexual innocence, for whether in the form of the pure, unsullied girl or the ‘fallen’ woman (the child prostitute), the Victorians implicitly acknowledged children’s sexuality (Kehily and

Montgomery 2009). However, instead of looking into the material conditions that drove many poor girls to prostitution (in order to escape from poverty), moral late nineteenth-century campaigners concentrated on a narrative of abduction and white slavery from which young working-class girls needed to be rescued (see Chap. 4). The class distinction between upper-class and middle-class girls, who were sexually innocent, and those from the lower classes, who were expected to be sexually active and available to men of higher social standing, became clearly pronounced and accounts for present-day preconceptions about ‘flawed’ sexuality. This is how ideas about children’s sexuality become intertwined with ideas about gender, class and social status.

Similarly to what took place at the end of the nineteenth century in Britain (see Chap. 3), presently we bear witness to a burgeoning social anxiety about the effects of early encounters with sexuality on working-class children and youth—‘the dangerous poor’ all over again. Perhaps the main difference with previous times is that social concern in the nineteenth century revolved around the cultural practices and experiences of young boys, for young girls (women at large) were socially constructed as pertinent to domesticity and hence were not part of the public debate (see Chap. 3). On the contrary, contemporary discussions of the sexualization of childhood focus disproportionately on young girls, whose femininity is both revoked and repudiated—Angela McRobbie’s ‘double entanglement’ (2009) seen from a different angle.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s brought about a modernization of femininity that has reconfigured women as individuals entitled to a set of ‘rights’, wherein sexual self-expression plays a crucial role. However, this claim to sexual rights is predominantly afforded by middle-class femininity, as access to education and economic and social status extends sexual autonomy and empowerment to middle-class women (Ticknell et al. 2003; McRobbie 1996). And while the trope of ‘girl power’ arose in the 1990s, this ‘new femininity’—featuring sexual and social confidence, aspiration and ambition—was inherently middle class, thus constructing the claim to sexual rights on the part of working-class women as socially destructive and morally depraving. In addition, although the rise of sexual hedonism and sexual agency in various texts of popular culture from the 1990s onwards has already been acknowledged (Attwood 2006, 2011), it is precisely this kind of a cultural shift in our understanding of young female sexuality—along with the proliferation of public ‘talk about sex’ (Plummer 1995, 2001)—that facilitates

the attendant moral and media panics about ‘the sexualization of childhood’. Hence young girls who transcend age categories in various ways (e.g. by reading magazines targeting twenty-somethings, as in the case of the 1990s *Heat*, *More* and *Minx* in the study of Ticknell et al. 2003) are caught in ambivalence between a ‘ladette’ culture, with its sexually assertive mode of femininity and changed attitudes towards morality, and the social anxiety it creates about the legitimacy of young female sexual agency. Fears of the kind of ‘permissive populism’ discussed above are smoothed out by the ‘obvious’ solution to the conundrum of childhood sexuality: the articulation of a middle-class femininity, guided by the moral compass of middle-class respectability, appropriateness and self-regulation, leads to the reiteration of heteronormativity. Not only that, but social inclusion is dependent on girls’ continuous sexual regulation and moral policing in line with such long-established middle-class norms (see Chaps. 6 and 7). What this tells us is that, although sexuality is considered intimate and private, its regulation and normalization is highly public. Hence, girlhood sexuality is problematized once it becomes public. One of the reasons popular culture is perceived as such a threat for young girls is that ‘impressionable’ minds may be easily lured by the sexual appeal of a variety of Mileys—while the moral (and physical) repercussions of such sexually loaded experiences and knowledge are bound to follow close behind. This is the ‘too much, too soon’ conception of girlhood sexuality (Bragg et al. 2011; Lumby and Albury 2010). The parallels with nineteenth-century perceptions of women’s consumption of popular culture are striking. Only today it is not the consumption of the novel that paves the way towards the overt sexualization of women (by encouraging sexual agency and an immoderate search for carnal pleasure), while undermining ‘family values’ (the institution of marriage) and the nation at large (see Chap. 4), rather, it is the consumption of popular culture by young girls that lies at the heart of the issue, and makes their ‘bodies become sites of contestation for citizenship’ (Isin 2009, 372).

Following the above, a new research philosophy has emerged in the last few years, arguing for the pedagogical and educational possibilities embedded in sexual talk and knowledge—a discourse of ‘sexual knowledge as media literacy’. The media are regarded as key contemporary means of cultural expression and communication (Buckingham 2003), which means that it is essential for audiences to have greater control over media messages and interpretations (Potter 1998). The current media-saturated, constantly connected society has brought increasing focus on

the need for media literacy and, implicitly, media literacy research (Hobbs 2011). Convergence of media texts, the diversification of media and communication technologies, interactivity and intertextuality have all led to important changes in media consumption (O'Neill and Barnes 2008), new opportunities across all life domains (Buckingham 2003), but also new risks of exclusion (Livingstone and Wang 2013). In this context, media literacy has gained increasing prominence in a variety of disciplines, in an attempt to promote audiences' capacity to safely consume, critically evaluate and engage with media in all its forms (Buckingham 2003; Hobbs 2011; Potter 1998). Technological developments and media convergence have changed consumption patterns and brought an increasing need for empowerment over protection (Buckingham 2003; O'Neill and Barnes 2008). However, alongside the discussion of the need for European policy to reflect developments that demand increasing deregulation, a flexible co- and self-regulatory regime (Lunt and Livingstone 2012), and increased responsibility for media industries (Buckingham 2005; Livingstone and Wang 2013), I argue that we should turn this debate round in order to account for the educational and emancipatory potential of sexual knowledge as this is portrayed in the entertainment media (popular culture).

Rather than thinking along the lines of 'sexualization of children' (i.e. 'media effects') as a result of the consumption of different aspects of popular culture, I would suggest moving towards the notion of 'media literacy' and starting to think of the educational potential of popular culture, and the entertainment media, for sexual education. This would serve the increasing need for critical thinking and autonomy to become alternatives to censorship and media regulation (Hobbs and Jensen 2009), in conjunction with a rethinking of regulation (as protective measures are becoming obsolete with the proliferation of technological developments) and the requirement for emancipatory initiatives (Buckingham 2003). As the Western world has moved towards an economy of participation (Frau-Meigs 2012), where 'media civics' depends on media literacy as a crucial element of the twenty-first century, I suggest that our understanding of the 'sexualization of culture' should move away from a discourse of media effects and its moral implications, and head in the direction of media literacy as a way to nuance the 'journey to empowerment' (Hobbs and Jensen 2009, 4).

Such change of focus from censorship and user safety to the promotion of emancipation through the development of critical skills and

participation, will, hopefully, enhance the notion of media literacy by expanding its reach and ‘charter’ (instead of simply promoting a neoliberal policy for media markets (Lunt and Livingstone 2012, 118) and, by extension, benefit children’s citizenship rights. Although a few theoreticians have supported the idea that the use of popular culture texts can add value to media literacy development (Hobbs 2011; Potter 1998), overall popular culture, as I have shown throughout this book, has conventionally been treated with derision and suspicion. However, looking into sexual learning from popular culture as part of a broader notion of media literacy is in accordance with recent revisionary accounts of the latter in terms of plural literacies (Livingstone 2004), ‘transliteracy’ (Frau-Meigs 2012) or ‘social literacy’ (Nielsen et al. 2015), claiming that audiences need to develop different sets of skills and competencies for the different types of media in use today, particularly due to the emergence of digital and multimedia platforms, and media convergence (Tornerio and Varis 2010). Furthermore, new developments in ICTs have blurred the distinction between ‘readers’ and ‘writers’, and arguably have enriched the the potential of creative ways to ensure inclusion in citizenship and the public sphere (Buckingham 2003, 2005b; Hobbs and Jensen 2009; Livingstone 2004).

Taking a cue from the way digital media have given rise to such prod-user cultures, McKee et al. (2015) point out in their special issue on ‘The entertainment media’s evolving role in sex education’, that the entertainment media include a wide variety of texts that teach implicitly and explicitly about sex, and in very different ways. Whether from the sex advice columns of newspapers and magazines, or from social media platforms, users are invited to create their own shared entertainment about sex; television programmes tell stories about characters’ sex lives while the internet offers possibilities for everything from fun entertainment sites provided by formal educational institutions to pornography with an educational message. In fact, in relation to pornography, there are several voices which—contrary to those who view pornography as a continuum with other mediated representations leading to the ‘sexualization of culture’ (Flood 2009; and for a nuanced view, McKee 2010; McNair 2012)—argue in favour of its pedagogical role for the young in terms of sexual learning, sexual identities (both same-sex and heterosexual), sexual negotiation skills, gender relations and power (Albury 2013, 2014; Haste 2013).

The relationship between the entertainment media and sex education has never been so multifaceted, so contradictory, so vibrant [...]. These technologies create the capacity for new kinds of sexualities and sexual practices, with interactivity and reciprocity at their core. Online spaces [...] are being used in multiple ways by young people in their sexual practices and cultures, even if the Internet expands the space available for misogynistic, sex-negative and homophobic discourses to spread and be heard as well. (McKee et al. 2015, 453)

By developing such ‘intimate literacies’ we may turn around the notion of ‘sexualization’, reminding ourselves that those warranting the sexualization of children as a result of their popular culture practices ignore the fact that sexuality is a matter of interpretation. After all, sexual acts and sexuality-infused activities do not carry universal social meanings. Instead, the sexual meaning ascribed to them is not fixed and is projected from the observer’s time and place (Vance 1991). Once again, it is the public/private axis that weighs upon our discussions of children’s sexuality as problematic or not. As we have seen, there were times and societies where privacy was not an issue, and where children grew up amid ‘sex talk’ or watching adults having sex. Within contemporary Western constructions of childhood, however, adults generally assume that children know nothing about sex, and that if they do, then something is wrong (Kehily and Montgomery 2009, 83). In this way, the notion of childhood innocence is closely related to sexual ignorance and, by extension, to morality, and becomes an end in itself. This shows not only that ideas about children’s sexuality are culturally sanctioned, but also that the privileging of innocence as a central childhood tenet augurs a regression to Victorian times.

NOTES

1. As noted earlier (Chap. 3, footnote 2), childhood innocence dates back to the nineteenth century, and for some parts of the Anglo-Saxon world—the USA—was raced white. The white child was innocent, and ‘[t]o be innocent was to be innocent of something, to achieve obliviousness. This obliviousness was not merely an absence of knowledge, but an active state of repelling knowledge—the child’s “holy ignorance”’ (Bernstein 2011, 6).
2. Leon Hunt suggests that whereas the ‘permissive’ 1960s were made possible by a proliferation of liberalizing legal reforms, the early 1970s saw a

law-and-order package, intended to deal with an ‘ungovernable Britain’. Hence the campaign for the return to ‘family values’ in the 1970s was supposed to tackle the trickling down of the 1960s sexual revolution to a wider audience which consumed *The Sun*, sexploitation films and the products of the porn industries in Soho and the provinces (Hunt 1998, 16–33).

3. The ‘quality of life’ discourse is premised upon the understanding that policy initiatives based on children’s rights may be an improvement upon those based on children’s needs, though it is still preoccupied with problems children face in adverse circumstances. Inevitably, it leads to an approach of identifying ‘risk factors’ (a situation wherein children need adults to intervene and redress the disadvantages they face, and protect them from harm). By nurturing children’s resilience, we go beyond merely meeting their (developmental) ‘needs’ and fostering their ‘rights’—we help them flourish and achieve their life goals. In order to do so, we have to consult them and involve them in the plans and decisions to be made (Stainton Rogers 2009).
4. Here I am referring to the institutionalization of children’s rights in the form of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, or Unicef’s *Children’s Rights in the Digital Age: A download from children around the world* (see also Chap. 3).

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