

THE SEXUALIZATION REPORT

2013

Feona Attwood, Clare Bale and Meg Barker

Contributors

Kath Albury, Journalism and Media Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Australia
Katherine Angel, Centre for the History of the Emotions, Queen Mary, University of London, UK
Feona Attwood, School of Media and Performing Arts, Middlesex University, UK
Clare Bale, The Clare Bale Consultancy Ltd, UK
Meg Barker, Faculty of Social Sciences, Open University, UK
Sara Bragg, Education Research Centre, University of Brighton, UK
Belinda Brooks-Gordon, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of London, UK
Despina Chronaki, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK
Robbie Duschinsky, Department of Social Work and Communities, Northumbria University, UK
R. Danielle Egan, Gender and Sexuality Studies, St. Lawrence University, US
Rosalind Gill, Centre for Cultural Policy and Management, City University London
Natalie Hammond, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, UK
Justin Hancock, BISH Training, Sex and Relationships Education, UK
Lesley Hoggart, Faculty of Health and Social Care, Open University, UK
Phil Hubbard, School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, UK
Jennie Kermode, Trans Media Watch, UK
Jason Lee, School of Humanities, University of Derby, UK
Ruth Lewis, Faculty of Public Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK
Ester McGeeney, School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex, UK
Alan McKee, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
John Mercer, Birmingham School of Media, Birmingham City University, UK
Marty Klein, Marriage & Family Therapist and Sex Therapist, US
Roshan das Nair, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK
Emma Renold, Childhood Research Group, Cardiff University, UK
Christina Richards, Nottinghamshire NHS Gender Clinic/West London NHS Gender Clinic, UK
Jessica Ringrose, Centre for Critical Education Policy Studies, University of London, UK
Katrina Roen, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Norway
Clarissa Smith, Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sunderland, UK
Leonore Tiefer, Department of Psychiatry, New York University Langone Medical Center, US
Lisa Tsaliki, Faculty of Communications, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece
Liesbet van Zoonen, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK
Ron Weitzer, Department of Sociology, The George Washington University, Washington DC, US

Introduction

People are worried about sexualization; about children becoming sexual at too young an age; about the ways in which women may be being defined by their sexuality; and about the availability and potential effects of online pornography, to name but a few of the often repeated concerns. The word 'sexualization' has been used to mean many things and to refer to a wide range of issues. This report aims to summarize what is known - and not yet known - on each of the main areas of concern.

The report addresses the wide range of issues relating to sex, sexuality and sexual health and wellbeing that seem to underpin public anxieties that are now commonly expressed as concerns about 'sexualization'. These include STIs, pregnancy, addiction, dysfunction, violence, abuse, sex work, sexual practices, different forms of sexuality, medicalization, commerce, media and popular culture.

Why did we write this report?:

The term 'sexualization' was virtually non-existent in news headlines in 2005, but since then it has been widely used. Sexualization has become a political and policy issue; the topic of several significant reports and of comment by leading politicians.

The contributors to this report are conscious of the inaccurate and sometimes sensationalist information that often circulates publicly about sexualization, not only in media and popular books, but also in policy reports, statements by politicians and other public figures, as well as in some academic work.

Our aim is to set out clearly what current good research tells us about these issues, and make clear what is known and what is not known or is unclear. Our focus is on the UK, although we have drawn on writings and research from a range of countries where appropriate and have invited experts from other countries to contribute. We have also drawn together experts from many disciplines, given that so many areas of research and practice are relevant to this topic. It is not enough simply to take, for example, a psychological or sociological perspective. Rather this area calls for an interdisciplinary approach.

How has the report been put together?

The report has been compiled by Feona Attwood, Clare Bale and Meg Barker based on contributions from over thirty academic experts, drawing on research from a wide range of subject areas, including medicine, health and social care, media and communication studies, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, education, and gender & sexuality studies.

The report was made possible by support from the Wellcome Trust, who funded a symposium, 'Public Engagement, Sexual Health and Sexualization' in 2012-2013, organized by Katherine Angel, Feona Attwood, Meg Barker and Petra Boynton. The symposium allowed us to explore different ways of making academic research on sexual health in the context of 'sexualized' culture more accessible. It brought together academics and journalists, broadcasters, sex educators and specialists in science, information and advice media to discuss practical and productive ways of disseminating robust research in this area. These discussions gave us space to think about how to develop this report.

Who is the report for?

The report has been written with a range of professionals in mind; people whose job it is to inform and advise others about sex, sexuality and sexual health and who need to draw on the best possible information. This includes journalists and broadcasters, policy makers, educators, therapists and other health professionals.

What next?

This is very much a *living* report, offering an overview of what research tells us at the moment. Our intention is to find ways of developing and expanding this, in order to offer professionals an up to date and reliable source of information about a wide range of issues relating to sex, sexuality and sexual health.

Who are we?

We work across the areas of teaching, research and public engagement in the fields of sex, sexuality and sexual health.

Feona Attwood is Professor of Cultural Studies, Communication and Media at Middlesex University. Her research focuses on the experience and significance of sex in contemporary culture; and in particular on obscenity and onscenity; sexual cultures; new technologies, identity and the body; and controversial media. She set up the international research network, Onscenity, in 2010 and has recently completed an AHRC fellowship on the public debates about the sexualization of culture. She is the editor of *Mainstreaming Sex* (2009), *porn. com: Making Sense of*

Online Pornography (2010), and (with Vincent Campbell, I.Q. Hunter and Sharon Lockyer) *Controversial Images* (2013). Her current projects focus on sexuality studies and public engagement, and pornographies and their audiences. She co-edits the sociological journal, *Sexualities*, and is the co-founder and editor of the journal, *Porn Studies*.

Clare Bale is a Registered General Nurse who has held a number of senior management positions in the NHS including Modernisation Manager (Derbyshire County) and Public Health Principal for Sexual Health (Nottinghamshire County). She is Managing Director of a consultancy business which supports all aspects of public health and specializes in activities to support vulnerable groups; notably children, young people and families (www.theclarebaleconsultancy.co.uk). Alongside this she is a 'public academic', contributing to national and international research, publications and media with a number of Universities and also contributes to critical commentaries on sexualization and sexual health.

Meg Barker is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the Open University and a registered psychotherapist, practicing in sexual and relationship therapy. Meg's research focuses on identities and relationships, and on the social norms and rules around sexuality and gender, particularly focusing on bisexuality, BDSM, and open non-monogamy and analyzing the understandings of sex present in sex therapy and sex advice. Meg co-organizes seminars for the Critical Sexology group, is a founding member of BiUK and author of *The Bisexuality Report*, and provides regular training sessions for various therapy organizations. Meg's books include *Mindful Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2013), *Sexuality and Gender for Mental Health Professionals* (2013), *Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships* (2013), *Understanding Non-Monogamies* (2010), and *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism* (2007). Meg co-edits the journal, *Psychology and Sexuality*.

CONTENTS

The Sexualization Report

Section 1: Sexuality

Sexuality

What is sexuality?

Normal sexuality

Causes of sexuality

Sexual identities

Sexual practices

Why people have sex

Bodies and sexuality

Gender and sexuality

Sexuality, race, and class

Sexuality and disability

Healthy sex

Communicating about sex

Section 2: Changing Society and Sex

Changing society and sex

Are views about sex and sexuality changing?

What types of sex are people having?

How is sex related to commerce?

Is there more sex work than before?

What about sex trafficking?

Sex work and migration

What do we know about sexual violence?

Are STIs on the increase?

Are people experiencing more sexual problems?

Can be people be addicted to sex and pornography?

Are people coming under pressure to modify their bodies because of sexualization?

Section 3: Sex, Gender and Media

Is popular culture becoming more sexual?

Representations of gender

Representations of women

Representations of men

Representations of trans* people

Are media becoming pornified?

Trends in pornography

Effects of pornography

Regulation and sexually explicit media

Section 4: Young people, Sex and Sexuality

Are young people becoming more sexual?

What do we know about children's sexuality?

Are teenage pregnancies rising?

Are STIs rising among young people?

Are abortion rates rising among young people?

Is pornography dangerous for young people?

Is sexting dangerous?

Is sexualization linked to the sexual abuse of young people?

Young people, media and sexualization

What do we know about the effectiveness of SRE?

Section 1

Sexuality

Sexuality

What is sexuality?

Normal sexuality

Causes of sexuality

Sexual Identities

Sexual practices

Why people have sex

Bodies and sexuality

Gender and sexuality

Sexuality, race, and class

Sexuality and disability

Healthy sex

Communicating about sex

Sexuality

One of the key concerns within the wider anxiety about sexualization is that deviant, or abnormal, forms of sexuality and sexual practice are becoming 'normalized'¹. Behind this concern presumably also lies a worry that such sexualities and practices are harmful in some way. In this section of the report we address the general points about what is meant by 'normal' and 'abnormal' sex, whether such normalization is occurring, and whether certain sexualities – or sexual practices – may be harmful if they are taken up more widely.

What is sexuality?

Sexuality is a broad term covering sexual desires (what people find sexually exciting and enjoyable), practices (what people actually do sexually), and identities (how people define themselves sexually).

The word 'sexuality' is often used in a more limited way just to refer to sexual identity (sometimes also called 'orientation'), for example, whether somebody identifies themselves as bisexual, lesbian, gay or heterosexual. Occasionally it is used to mean gender identity. But it should be remembered that there is a lot more to sexuality than a person's gender or the gender of people they are attracted to. Also, people's sexual identities often do not neatly map onto their sexual desires and practices, perhaps because they feel pressure to identify in ways that are most acceptable to others. For example, somebody may identify as gay or straight despite having attraction to more than one gender, or have more than one sexual relationship whilst still identifying as monogamous, due to social norms around these aspects of sexuality.

Normal sexuality

¹ Barker, M. & Duschinsky, R. (2012). Sexualisation's Four Faces: Sexualisation and Gender Stereotyping in the Bailey Review. *Gender & Education*, 24 (3), 303-310.

Perhaps the biggest cause of suffering in relation to human sexuality is the commonly held idea that there is a 'normal' form of sexuality, and that this is in some way more acceptable, natural or good than other forms².

Ideas of what this 'normal' sex and sexuality looks like differ over time and in different cultures and communities. For example, sex between men was expected in Ancient Greece and still is in many countries in the world, whilst being regarded as a criminal act and then as a psychological disorder up until the 1950s and the 1970s in the UK³. Similarly, solo sex (or masturbation) has been regarded as a mundane activity, a sin, a cause of illness, and the height of sexual pleasure, in different times and places⁴.

It is also difficult to determine what is 'normal' as in what is most common in our culture today, because answers to this question differ according to which tool is used to assess them. For example, if we consider how common it is to have 'same-gender' attractions, percentages vary dramatically depending on the ways in which questions are asked⁵. In the UK, the national treasury estimated that between 5% and 7% of the UK population were lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), whereas the International Household Survey found that 1.5% of people said they were LGB. However, a further 3.8% said that they were 'other', didn't respond, refused to respond, or reported that they didn't know⁶. Given high levels of stigma and prejudice we might well suggest that these surveys are actually measures of 'out' LGB people who are happy to identify with this terminology (which not all cultural groups use, for example). The NATSAL survey, which asks about 'sexual experiences' rather than sexual identities, found that 8-10% of people in the UK had had sexual experiences with a partner of the 'same sex' in 2000. This had gone up from 3-5% of people in 1990, so clearly experiences, or at least reporting of them, is not static over time⁷. The most recent NATSAL survey suggests that the percentage of men who have ever had same sex experiences had remained roughly the

² Barker, M. (2011). Existential Sex Therapy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 26(1), 33-47.

³ Weeks, J. (2003). *Sexuality*. London: Routledge.

⁴ Stenger, J. & Neck, A. (2001). *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror*. New York: Saint Martin's Press Inc: Laqueur, T.W. (2003). *Solitary sex: A cultural history of masturbation*. New York: Zone Books.

⁵ <http://www.avert.org/gay-people.htm>

⁶ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0AonYZs4MziZbdFVoZVV1NXZJanYzMjRuUIhmdktQMIE&hl=en#gid=0>

⁷ <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

same but the percentage of women who have ever had same sex experiences had risen from 10% to 16%⁸. This change in figures over the years could also be because more people feel comfortable responding honestly about these sexual experiences, and not that more people are now having same sex sexual experiences. These figures also highlight that people might identify in one way (heterosexual), but take part in activities that are not necessarily congruent with that identity. Furthermore, people may well answer differently to a postal survey (whether they answer at all, and whether they answer honestly) than to an in depth interview, for example. This could partially explain why Kinsey's famous study in the US found that over a third of men reported some 'homosexual' contact⁹.

When people talk about 'normal' sex, they often don't mean what is most common. If they did then they would need to include solo sex, bondage fantasies¹⁰, and sex outside a main relationship¹¹ as examples of normal sexual behaviour. 'Normal' is used rather to mean sex which the person speaking regards as good, right, acceptable or proper.

The problem with having such an idea of 'normal' sexuality is that those who fit into the norm become very scared of stepping outside it (and this may well lead to sexual problems). Think about the teenage girl trying to decide when to have sex so as not to be seen as too 'tight' or too 'easy'. Those who are already outside the perceived 'norm' are often treated as second class citizens, given fewer rights, and may even be seen as sick or criminal¹².

When educating and advising others about sex it is vital not to implicitly reinforce the importance of 'normal' sexuality. This can be achieved through using diverse examples of sexual identities, desires and practices throughout, and by reflecting on the problems with the idea of normal mentioned. It can be useful to encourage a discussion about which forms of sexuality are currently seen as most ideal, which less so, and what that

⁸ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013; see also <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

⁹ <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-data.html>

¹⁰ Renaud, C. A., & Byers, E. S. (1999). Exploring the Frequency, Diversity, and Context of University Students' Positive and Negative Sexual Cognitions. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 8, 17- 30.

¹¹ Duncombe, J., Harrison, K., Allan, G. & Marsden, D. (Eds.). (2004). *The State of Affairs: Explorations in Infidelity and Commitment*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

¹² Barker, M. (2013). *Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships*. London: Routledge.

is like for those involved. The heterosexuality questionnaire¹³ and straight privilege checklist¹⁴ are helpful tools for this.

It has also been suggested that, instead of focusing on what kinds of sexuality are normal or not normal, we focus on the distinction between coercive and mutually consensual sex¹⁵. It is never acceptable to engage in sex which is coercive (where somebody feels forced into it by another person's power, or because they feel it is expected of them, or because they aren't able to refuse). Any sex which is mutually consented to between the adults involved is acceptable regardless of how unusual it may be in this particular time and place¹⁶. Consent is also linked to legal norms, that is who is seen as a capable agent and able to legally make decisions about themselves. These norms vary across time and space (e.g. the age when a child becomes an adult; the definition of vulnerable adults), but alone they cannot constitute the full definition of consent, especially in a sexual context, given that power is also an important consideration. Therefore, being able to consent requires a good understanding of sexual possibilities, awareness of our own desires and any social and relational pressures upon us, and the confidence to communicate these and to accept, refuse or negotiate others' suggestions¹⁷.

Causes of sexuality

Sexuality is complex and ever-changing and everyone's is unique. People's sexualities are influenced by a complicated interaction of many things including: the culture they are born into which tells them what kinds of sex are more or less acceptable; biological processes such as the level of sex hormones which are present at different times; the relationships

¹³ <http://www.pinkpractice.co.uk/quaire.htm>

¹⁴ http://www.cs.earlham.edu/~hyrax/personal/files/student_res/straightprivilege.htm

¹⁵ Denman, C. (2004). *Sexuality: A Biopsychosocial Approach*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁶ Rubin, G. (1984). Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality, in Vance, C. S. (Ed.) *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. London: Pandora, 267-319.

¹⁷ See Barker, M. (2013). Consent is a Grey Area? A Comparison of Understandings of Consent in *50 Shades of Grey* and on the BDSM Blogosphere. *Sexualities* 16(8), 896-914.

which they see around them as they grow up; the ways in which their particular body works; the images and experiences which they personally link to sex as they grow up; and the decisions they themselves make about the sexual practices they do or do not engage in.

It doesn't make sense to ask whether a person's sexuality is 'caused' by 'nature or nurture', or whether it is 'chosen', because of this complex interaction, and because our bodies (including our brains) are always changing as a result of the experiences we have, and our experiences are impacted by our bodies. Some people have a strong sense of some aspects of their sexuality being there from before they were aware of them, and some feel that the same aspects were something they chose to pursue, or something which emerged later in life. It should not make a difference to how people treat each other whether our sexualities can be linked to biological and/or social factors, or whether they can be viewed as more determined by outside or internal forces or more personally chosen¹⁸.

Sexual Identities

When people think of sexual identities (sometimes called orientations), they often think first of those based around the gender of the people we are attracted to. It is often assumed that people are either heterosexual or gay/lesbian and that those are the only two possible sexual identities (it is better to use 'gay/lesbian' than 'homosexual' because in the past 'homosexuality' was used as a term for a psychological disorder).

However, many people are also bisexual. This means that they are attracted to more than one gender, or that gender isn't particularly important in determining who they are attracted to. The 'bi' in bisexual is often used to mean being attracted to both people of the same gender and people of other genders. Some also use the words 'queer', 'pansexual' or 'omnisexual' to capture this idea. Because of the either/or understanding people have of sexuality, such people are often invisible and subject to biphobia¹⁹.

¹⁸ Shaw, L., Butler, C., Langdrige, D., Gibson, S., Barker, M., Lenihan, P., das Nair, R. & Richards, C. (2012). Guidelines for Psychologists Working Therapeutically with Sexual and Gender Minority Clients. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

¹⁹ Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H. & Plowman, T. (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Milton Keynes: The Open University, Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance, <http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/ccig/The%20BisexualityReport%20Feb.2012.pdf>

Also, there are many different sexual identities within each of these big sexual identity categories. Think about all the different kinds of heterosexual men, for example, macho men, new men, old-fashioned gentlemen, geeks, hipsters, metrosexuals... Similarly there are different categories of lesbians, bisexual people, and gay men. For example, bears are burly and hairy, whilst twinkles are young and slender. Some may have identities which capture some elements of both their sexual and gender identity, such as butch dyke, drag queen, androgynous bi. And there are women who identify based on enjoying the idea of men being sexual with each other and men who identify based on enjoying the idea of women being sexual together, for example, some of the authors of slash fiction²⁰.

There are also sexual identities around the roles or positions that people enjoy taking sexually, for example whether they prefer to be giving or receiving in sex. The giving person is generally the one doing the penetrating or providing more of the stimulation to the receiving person. For example, in anal sex between men the giving person may be called the 'top' and the receiving person the 'bottom', and the same words are often used for the one who takes control and the one who is controlled in a kinky scene. There are many people who enjoy both topping and bottoming in their preferred kind of sex, and they may be called 'switch' or 'versatile'. Of course there are many kinds of sex where the giving/receiving distinction isn't relevant because both people are equally giving/receiving, just as there are many types of sex where the gender of the people involved isn't that important to what is happening.

There are other sexual identities for those who particularly enjoy power play in their sex (dominant and submissive or D/s), or sensations (sadist, masochist, or SM). Some identify as 'kinky' or 'BDSM' to demonstrate that they enjoy sex broadly which includes elements of bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism. Some identify as 'vanilla' if they particularly don't enjoy kinky sex. Others may use labels specific to a certain kind of kink (such as leather fetish or service sub)²¹. There are 'furry' and 'otherkin' identities for those who relate their sexuality to dressing up as – or being – an animal, although for some this identity is

²⁰ Hellekson, K. & Busse, K. (Eds.) (2006). *Fan fiction and fan communities in the age of the Internet: new essays*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slash_fiction

²¹ Langdridge, D. & Barker, M. (Eds.) (2007). *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

not related to sex²². There are also identities relating to having more than one sexual or love relationship (e.g. swinger or polyamorous)²³.

Finally, in recent years more and more people have identified as 'asexual' (ace) or non-sexual to indicate their lack of sexual attraction and desire²⁴. Again it is important to be aware that not all people are sexual, that most people will have periods where they don't experience sexual desire or choose not to act on it, and that some people never experience sexual attraction.

People may identify with more than one of these labels, they may stick to the same identities through their lives or they may change, or they may prefer not to label themselves in these ways.

Sexual practices

As with sexual identities there is often an assumption that 'sex' refers to a specific sexual practice: generally penis in vagina (PIV) intercourse or some other form of penetration (e.g. of mouth or anus). Actually sex can involve many practices: some are focused on genitals, some are not; some can be done alone, others require another person or people. All may or may not lead to orgasm. Given the risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) with forms of sex where bodily fluids are exchanged, and the sexual problems²⁵ which can result from continually having sex that a person does not enjoy, it is useful for people to be aware of the diversity of sexual practices that are possible. Just a few are listed here.

In relation to practices involving the genitals, as well as forms of anal and vaginal penetration, there is oral sex, manual sex, and also the practice of rubbing genitals against other parts of the body (for example, squeezing legs together, a thigh between another person's legs to stimulate their clitoris, or a penis between the breasts) or against an object (such as a

²² Richards, C. & Barker, M. (2013). *Sexuality and gender for counsellors, psychologists and health professionals: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

²³ Barker, M. & Langdridge, D. (Eds.) (2010). *Understanding Non-monogamies*. New York: Routledge.

²⁴ Carrigan, M., Morrison, T. & Gupta, K. (2013). Asexuality. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 4(2).

²⁵ Kleinplatz, P. (2012). *New Directions in Sex Therapy*. New York: Routledge.

pillow). Manual sex and genital rubbing can be done alone or with others, as can anal and vaginal penetration (using a dildo or vibrator). Also, erect penises are not necessary for penetration because fingers, dildos or strap-ons (a dildo which fits into a hip or thigh harness) can be used. These kind of sex can be done in a simultaneous way (two or more people stimulating each other at the same time), or with the focus on one person at a time. Whilst orgasm can be the aim, it is useful not to put too much pressure on this (as that can make it difficult to achieve) but rather to enjoy the whole experience. Lubrication of the genitals is often helpful to avoid any discomfort. Water-based lubricants will be safe with condoms, gloves and other barriers.

Practices which do not involve genitals directly can still lead to orgasms for some people (through other physical stimulation, such as the nipples, or through mental stimulation alone). Many people physically stimulate themselves, or are stimulated by another, during the practices listed below. For others, orgasm is not the main aim and there may be other forms of climax in sensation or excitement.

Other physical sexual practices include forms of erotic massage, tantric sex, kissing, stimulation of parts of the body other than the genitals (e.g. with feathers, water, candle-wax, or clothespegs). Particularly popular forms of 'kinky' activity are bondage (tying people up) and spanking (hitting the buttocks with a hand, crop or flogger). People may be turned on by particular parts of the body (e.g. feet), or bodily functions (e.g. urination), or materials (e.g. denim).

Some sexual practices are more about the roles of the people involved, such as dressing up, playing a character (e.g. nurse or teacher), or engaging in dominance and submission (telling someone what to do, or waiting on someone).

Some people find it particularly exciting to have sex with more than one person at a time (e.g. threesomes or orgies). Others particularly like to be watched whilst they are having sex with themselves, or another person, or to be the one doing the watching.

Many people enjoy sexual practices which involve looking at images, watching films or reading sexy stories: often called pornography or erotica. There are also more interactive forms of all these activities, including people putting images of themselves online, writing erotic 'fanfic' (fiction based on characters in television series or movies), and engaging in cybersex (in chatrooms, with online avatars in virtual worlds like Second Life or World of Warcraft, or using webcams).

Some of these sexual practices raise questions about where the line is drawn between sex and other activities, such as sport, play and leisure

(e.g. role-play scenes), art and creativity (e.g. writing erotic fiction or intricate rope bondage), spirituality and relaxation (e.g. massage)²⁶.

Why people have sex

It is important to remember that different people have sex for different reasons, and that reasons may vary at different times during a person's week, year or lifetime.

For example, there are many reasons that a person might rub their own genitals. It may be: a quick physical release, a relief of pain or stress, a way of being kind to their body, a highly pleasurable sensation, because they are bored or lonely, because it is taboo, to stop themselves wanting to urinate, as a threatening gesture towards someone else, or as a form of submission or humiliation.

All the sexual practices mentioned previously will have just as many potential reasons behind them, and these will vary over time.

Similarly, an orgasm can be experienced as: a mechanical release, a demonstration of one's gender expression, a loss of control, allowing someone to see you at your most vulnerable, a display of love and intimacy, the height of physical pleasure, a transcendent spiritual experience, a performance demonstrating prowess, a giving of power to another, the potential start of new life, an exerting of power over another, a form of creative self-expression, a humorous display of our rather-ridiculous humanity, an unleashing of something wild and animalistic, a deeply embodied experience, an escape from bodily sensations and pain, and/or a moment of complete aliveness or freedom.

This helps to explain why people feel very differently about sex. It can be anything from terrifying, to mundane, to ecstatic, to soothing, depending on who you are, what practice it is, and the context it takes place in. Many sexual problems happen because the people involved have different understandings and experiences of sex²⁷. For example, one person might

²⁶ All of the practices mentioned here are covered in more detail in Richards, C. & Barker, M. (2013). *Sexuality and Gender for Counsellors, Psychologists and Health Professionals: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

²⁷ Barker, M. (2011). Existential Sex Therapy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 26 (1), 33-47.

be looking to sex for reassurance that they are loved from the other person, whilst the other may feel this as a stressful pressure to perform well. Communicating about these differences can be extremely helpful.

Bodies and sexuality

There is a common assumption that people with certain kinds of bodies cannot be sexual, for example, those with older, larger, or disabled bodies, or bodies experiencing illness. This can mean that people with such bodies are stigmatized and struggle to access information about sex. Given the diversity of sexual practices there is no reason why people with diverse bodies cannot be sexual if they want to be, and recognition that sexual desires, practices and identities can shift over a lifetime is helpful here.

There is also a strong cultural link between 'attractiveness' and sex, which puts pressure on people to appear in a certain way. This is related to sexual problems as people who are uncomfortable with their bodies, due to feeling that they do not fit the ideal, often struggle to relax and enjoy sex, or to tune into what they want sexually. Again, emphasis should be on the diversity of bodies and appearances there are, all of which can be sexual.

Specifically, in relation to sex, some may have concerns about genital appearance. For example, it is common to worry about having a small penis or an unattractive vulva, and some even resort to cosmetic surgery to address this. Again, it is helpful to be aware of the wide range of shapes and sizes which genitalia come in. For example, penises can vary in length from 2cm to 30cm long, and they also vary in thickness, similarly vaginas vary in length and width, and clitoris and labia vary in size and shape markedly²⁸.

Bodies also respond differently to sex itself. For example, different people require different stimulation in order to orgasm: most women require clitoral stimulation, so vaginal penetration alone will often not achieve this, and most people need to be psychologically excited in order to orgasm – physical stimulation alone might well not do it. People make a variety of faces and noises as they experience sexual pleasure and/or orgasm due to the muscles tensing, and they may twitch and/or feel physically tired afterwards. Bodies also make noises, particularly if they are penetrated and air is trapped and then escapes. There is often a lot of fluid released

²⁸ See <http://www.nerve.com/news/love-sex/man-creates-vagina-inspired-art-installation>

by both penises and vaginas either slowly or in a spurt on orgasm (known as 'squirting' when it occurs in vaginas)²⁹.

Of course bodies need not necessarily be involved in sex at all when it is over the phone, online messenger, text or email, or between avatars in cybersex.

Gender and sexuality

Along with bodies there are many assumptions about gender and sex. First, it is often assumed that certain genitals and other bodily features mean that someone is a man (e.g. penis and more bodily hair) or a woman (e.g. vulva and breasts). However, there is actually a massive variation in genital and body appearance. Around 1 in 100 people are 'intersex' meaning that their genitalia at birth aren't clearly a penis or a vulva. Some have surgery and some do not³⁰. Some people have physical accidents or illnesses which change their bodies or genitals (e.g. loss of penis or testicles due to accident; hysterectomy or mastectomy for cancer treatment or prevention; loss of head hair due to chemotherapy). Many men have breasts and many women have hairy bodies. Trans* people may (or may not) modify their genitalia and/or other bodily features over their lives. Generally it is worth challenging common assumptions that gender identity, outward appearance and genital appearance necessarily all go together. All bodies are different, so whatever someone's bodies and genitals appear like we will need to learn how they work for that particular person in order to have sex with them.

There are also strong cultural assumptions that certain sexual practices go with certain genders: notably that men will initiate sex, will be more dominant and active during sex, and that sex is not complete until a man has orgasmed; that women will be the ones who say 'yes' or 'no' to someone else's sexual advances, that they will be more submissive and passive during sex, and that their orgasm isn't necessary for sex to be complete. Generally speaking men who have a lot of sex with different people are viewed positively and women who do the same are viewed

²⁹ http://www.scarleteen.com/article/advice/squirt_on_female_ejaculation

³⁰ Blackless, M., Charuvastra, A., Derryc, A., Fausto-Sterling, A., Lauzanne, K. & Lee, E. (2000). How Sexually Dimorphic are we? Review and Synthesis. *American Journal of Human Biology*, 12, 151-166.

negatively (the sexual double standard)³¹. All of these assumptions are problematic. There are women who love sex and men who do not, women who dominate and men who submit, and active women and passive men. There are also many people who don't fit neatly into these boxes of 'man' and 'woman' (e.g. tomboys, metrosexuals, new men, drag kings and queens, genderqueer people, androgynous people, gender neutral people, femme men, butch women, etc.)

The pressures around gender and sex can mean that men feel very pressurized to perform (as if erections and orgasms prove their masculinity) and women feel that they must have sex in order to keep their relationships (often meaning that they are more concerned with what their partners wants than what they want). Such pressures can lead to sexual problems and distress.

Sexuality, race, and class

While sex can be considered a global phenomenon, sexual expression can be determined by factors such as culture, race, or social class. For instance, in some cultures, sex between men may not be considered sex at all (or considered as joshing or fun)³², whereas in other societies, men who have sex with men are not considered homosexual if they are the 'active' partner in sex³³. Therefore, what is considered sex in one society might not translate to others. We all have different identities and sometimes some of these identities appear not to fit together. For example, some people may find it difficult to reconcile their religious affiliations with their sexual preferences or practices. This may cause them psychological (or sexual) problems. The important issue for such individuals would not be to simply try to stop their desires or practices, but to find their own unique understanding of their religion and sexuality, or to learn from others who have been in their position.

³¹ Weatherall, A. (2002). *Gender, Language and Discourse*. London: Routledge.

³² das Nair, R. (in press). If Singularity is the Problem, could Intersectionality be the Solution? Exploring the Mediation of Sexuality on Masculinity in Dasgupta, R. & Gokulsing, M. (Eds.) *Perceptions of Masculinity: Challenges to the Indian Male*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers.

³³ Carrier J.M. (1995). *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Some people who are considered 'minorities' because of their sexuality (e.g. bisexual men) and also because of another identity, such as race (e.g. being Asian in the UK), may experience different types of challenges (e.g. racism and homophobia) because of being both Asian and bisexual, for example³⁴. Therefore, an 'intersectional' approach should be taken when understanding sex and sexuality³⁵, to appreciate how varied 'normal sex' can be.

As some forms of sex and sex venues become commercialized (e.g. with public spaces for people to meet for sex closing down, people have to resort to finding sexual partners online), poor people who do not have access to the internet may find it difficult to meet others, either online or in clubs/pubs. These are specific challenges to having sex that people with money may not experience.

Different cultures also have different ways of understanding genders. Some don't see people as simply men or women, but also regard a 'third sex'. People who may see themselves as belonging to this group might carve out their own gender and sexual expression, which may look 'abnormal' for those that don't belong to that community, but feel natural to those who live out those genders. In some cultures, men and women have very predefined roles and responsibilities, not only to themselves, but to their families and communities. For example, women may be forced to get married and have sex with their husbands to get pregnant. In such cases, 'normal' sex may be sex without the expectation of intimacy, which could be demonstrated in other (non-sexual) ways. Just as ideas of who is beautiful are culturally determined, beliefs about sex may also be culture-bound. There are, for instance, racial differences in terms of sexual desire. East Asian women, for example, report having lower sexual desire than women of European descent³⁶. This may be due to biological reasons, but also due to conservative sexual attitudes, lack of sexual knowledge and experience, or 'sex guilt'³⁷. Therefore, what is considered a 'normal amount' of sex is culturally determined.

³⁴ das Nair, R. & Thomas, S. (2012). Politics of Desire: Exploring the Ethnicity/ Sexuality Intersectionality in South Asian and East Asian Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM). *Psychology of Sexualities Review*, 3(1), 8-21.

³⁵ das Nair, R. & Butler, C. (2012). *Intersectionality, Sexuality, Psychological Therapies: Exploring Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Diversity*. London: Wiley Blackwell.

³⁶ Brotto, L.A., Chik, H.M., Ryder, A.G., Gorzalka, B.B. & Seal, B.N. (2005). Acculturation and Sexual Function in Asian Women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34, 613-626.

³⁷ Woo, J., Brotto, L.A. & Gorzalka, B.B. (2011). The role of Sex Guilt in the Relationship between Culture and Women's Sexual Desire. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(2), 385-394.

Sexuality and disability

People with disabilities often struggle with being seen as ‘ordinarily sexual’, that is spanning the range of human desires and behaviours. They might be seen as vulnerable, and therefore potential sexual victims, or as having ‘perverse’ sexualities. These images are not uncommon in media representations of people with disabilities, and are consistent with polarized portrayals of people with disabilities as either ‘angels’, rising above adversity, or as ‘villains’, embittered by their disabilities. Most often, in mainstream culture, people with disabilities are seen as simply asexual³⁸. This is further reinforced by the fact that often disability is collapsed with the phenomenon of aging. Older people and people with disabilities are often seen as somewhat akin, and both categories are seen as incongruent with sexuality, given that is the dominion of younger adults, and ‘able’ bodies. Medical and academic understandings also contribute to the idea that people with disabilities are asexual. There is little research on the sexuality of people with disabilities, and health practitioners rarely talk about sexuality with patients with disabilities, given that generally they are not educated on this issue during their training³⁹. The sexuality of people with disabilities is then invisible, unspoken, and unspeakable.

Even when mainstream cinema turns its attention to this issue, as it has recently done in a movie tackling the issue of using sexual surrogates, it does so by mostly representing people with disabilities as needing to pay to have access to sex⁴⁰. The assumption seems to be that for many people with disabilities this might be the only gateway into a sexual encounter, given that their bodies are not seen as congruous with mainstream understandings of desirability, and as having no erotic capital.

³⁸ Tepper, M. S. (2000). Sexuality and Disability: the Missing Discourse of Pleasure. *Sexuality and Disability*, 18(4), 283-290; Shakespeare, T., Gillespie-Sells, K. & Davies, D. (1996). *Untold Desires: The Sexual Politics of Disability*. New York: Cassell; Esmail, S., Darry, K., Walter, A. & Knupp, H. (2010). Attitudes and Perceptions towards Disability and Sexuality. *Disability Rehabilitation*, 32(14), 1148-1155.

³⁹ Haboubi, N. H. J. & Lincoln, N. (2003). Views of Health Professionals on Discussing Sexual Issues with Patients. *Disability Rehabilitation*, 25(6), 291-296; Coleman, E., Elders, J., Satcher, D., Shindel, A., Parish, S., Kenagy, G. & Light, A. (2013). Summit on Medical School Education in Sexual Health: Report of an Expert Consultation. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 10(4), 924-938.

⁴⁰ Samuels, E. (2013) ‘Sexy crips, or, achieving full penetration’. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 33(3), <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3785/3248>

In this context people with disabilities, whose gender or sexuality might not fall within the boundaries of what is considered good, normal, or acceptable, that is those who are trans*, non-heterosexual, or into kink, are often seen as deviating from normative sexuality because of their disabilities⁴¹. This not only invalidates those people who have disabilities and identify as gender and sexual minorities, but also reinforces narrow ideas of what constitutes good and legitimate sexual expressions. If people with disabilities are seen as taking refuge in identities and practices that are viewed as 'other' because mainstream identities and behaviours are precluded to them, then those identities and practices are also implicitly being defined as not only 'other' but also 'lesser than' mainstream identities and behaviours. This creates a cycle of continually placing outside the boundaries of 'normality' identities and behaviours that are seen as 'deviant'. Basically, only people who are seen as being somewhat lesser in mainstream society would identify with and engage in behaviours that are also seen as lesser.

People with disabilities continue to challenge such normative discourses by creating alternative representations of more authentic and inclusive sexualities through writing⁴², art and, of course, living their ordinary lives. 'Sins invalid'⁴³ is one of those representations, bringing together not only people with disabilities but also people of colour, trans* and queer people, claiming and challenging the status of 'other', through an intersectional lens that highlights the systemic nature of marginalization and oppression. Social media has been used to raise awareness through visual campaigns such as 'American Able', which used mainstream representations of sexuality in advertising to highlight, and challenge, what we implicitly define as beautiful, acceptable, good and therefore 'worthy' of being deemed sexy⁴⁴. People with disabilities are increasingly, and globally, talking about sexuality in ways that broaden mainstream discourses of sex and sexuality, inviting us to make room for all bodies.

⁴¹ Iantaffi, A. (2009). Disability and Polyamory: Exploring the Edges of Interdependence, Gender and Queer Issues in Non-monogamous Relationships in Barker, M. & Langdrige, D. (Eds.) *Understanding Non-Monogamies*. New York: Routledge, 160-165

⁴² McRuer, R. & Mollow, A. (Eds.) (2012). *Sex and Disability*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

⁴³ Berne, P. (2008). Disability, Dancing, and Claiming Beauty in Solinger, R., Fox, M. & Irani, K. (Eds.) *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*. New York: Routledge, 201-212.

⁴⁴ Olsson, M. (2012). The Digital Revolution: Disability and Social Media. *The McNair Scholars Journal*, 11, 179-202.

Healthy sex

When people talk about healthy sex they often assume that this just means sex that is not bad for their physical health (not putting them at risk of sexually transmitted infections or accidents). However, healthy sex is a lot broader than that. A group of experts on sex recently agreed that the following were key features of healthy sexual development⁴⁵:

- Freedom from unwanted activity.
- An understanding of consent, and ethical conduct more generally.
- Education about biological aspects of sexual practice.
- An understanding of safety.
- Relationship skills.
- Lifelong learning.
- Open communication.
- Sexual development should not be 'aggressive, coercive or joyless'.
- Agency (people should learn that they are in control of their own sexuality, and in control of who can take sexual pleasure from their bodies).
- Self-acceptance (of sexuality and of bodies).
- Resilience (to learn and go forward from bad sexual experiences).
- Awareness and acceptance that sex can be pleasurable.
- Values (people need to know their parents' and wider societal values in order to place their own decisions in a wider social context).
- Awareness of public/private boundaries.
- Mediation (people need to understand how media represent sexuality, and the relationship of that to their own experiences)

The idea of 'safer sex'⁴⁶ rather than 'safe sex' is useful because it recognizes that sex (like most human activities) is never completely risk free. Concerns often focus around risk-taking in sex, failing perhaps to recognize that some degree of risk is necessary when people are exploring what they enjoy sexually.

People can keep physically safer by understanding how to protect themselves from infections (condoms and dental dams for any penetrative or oral sex, not going from anal to oral/vaginal sex without washing), and

⁴⁵ McKee, A., Albury, K., Dunne, M., Grieshaber, S., Hartley, J., Lumby, C. & Mathews, B. (2010). Healthy Sexual Development: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Research. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 22 (1), 14-19.

⁴⁶ http://www.scarleteen.com/article/sexuality/safe_soundSexy_a_safer_sex_how_to

from injury during other forms of stimulation (being careful to avoid hitting people on their kidneys or any form of suffocation, not penetrating people with anything fragile or without the means to remove it again, and carefully checking the temperature of anything we are going to put against someone's skin, such as candle wax).

Emotionally safer sex involves all involved being clear from the start about what it means to those involved (e.g. does having sex mean other changes in the nature of their relationship from now on, if pregnancy is a possibility how would they respond to this). It also means ensuring that everyone involved is consenting and communicating about what each person likes and doesn't like before engaging in sex, and that there is awareness of any pressures that may be present⁴⁷. This may also involve checking during sex that it is still what everyone wants, and spending some time afterwards appreciating what has happened and checking that people are feeling alright.

Communicating about sex

There is generally a poor level of communication about sex between people to the extent that people who have been in relationships for over a decade still only understand about 60% of what their partners like sexually and only around 20% of what they don't like⁴⁸. It is often assumed that people will telepathically know what their partners will and will not enjoy. Clearly communication is not always verbal (we can demonstrate our enjoyment more physically), however it is important to let people know what one does and does not like in some way, and to make sure that they understand how to know when what they are doing is enjoyable and when it is not.

Communication with others about sex first requires communication with oneself. Many people are so worried about being normal or about whether their partner is enjoying themselves, or they are performing well, that they don't really think about what they themselves enjoy, or would like to try, sexually.

⁴⁷ See Barker, M. (2013). Consent is a Grey Area? A Comparison of Understandings of Consent in *50 Shades of Grey* and on the BDSM Blogosphere. *Sexualities*, 16(8), 896-914.

⁴⁸ Miller, S. A. & Byers, E. S. (2004). Actual and Desired Duration of Foreplay and Intercourse: Discordance and Misperceptions within Heterosexual Couples. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 301-309.

To communicate with oneself about sex it is useful to read about the different kinds of sex which are possible (for example, in collections of other people's sexual fantasies). It can be helpful to make a long list of all the sexual practices and situations which can be imagined (whether or not they would be enjoyable)⁴⁹. Once it is written prospective partners can go through the list writing 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe' to indicate how they feel about doing them, perhaps adding a bit more information (only with this person, or a 1-10 score of how much they would like to try it).

When suggesting something sexual to somebody else it is important to make sure that they could refuse it, accept it, or talk more about it to find a mutually agreed way of going ahead. The idea of 'yes, no, maybe' helps with this, as does emphasizing consent: making sure to check beforehand that both, or all, people definitely want to do this, and that there is an agreed way of pausing or stopping if anybody is not enjoying it (e.g. a specific 'safeword' you are going to say, or sign you are going to make). It is useful, in such conversations, to be aware of power imbalances between people, and social pressures that can make it more difficult to say 'no' or 'yes' to sexual activities (e.g. a big age difference between those involved, a difference in whether the bodies involved would be deemed 'conventionally attractive', or the social pressures on many men to be ever-ready for sex, or on many women to please their partners).

⁴⁹ For an example of such a list see http://www.scarleteen.com/article/advice/yes_no_maybe_so_a_sexual_inventory_stocklist

Section 2

Changing Society and Sex

Changing society and sex

Are views about sex and sexuality changing?

What types of sex are people having?

How is sex related to commerce?

Is there more sex work than before?

What about sex trafficking?

Sex work and migration

What do we know about sexual violence?

Are STIs on the increase?

Are people experiencing more sexual problems?

Can be people be addicted to sex and pornography?

Are people coming under pressure to modify their bodies because of sexualization?

Changing society and sex

Concerns about sexualization often depend on a sense that there have been significant changes in the way that sex is now experienced, understood and represented. The assumption is often that more sexual activity is taking place outside of long term relationships and that a greater variety of sexual practices are becoming common. Concerns often focus on teenage pregnancies, abortion and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Other worries are that the sexual exploitation and abuse of children is becoming more prevalent, that sexual violence against women is increasing, that large numbers of women and children are being trafficked for sexual purposes, that increasing numbers of people are involved in sex work, that people are suffering from more sexual problems such as sex addiction and difficulties with libido, or that people feel pressured to use drugs, surgery or new grooming procedures in order to feel sexually 'normal'.

Often, it is assumed that these perceived changes in sexual behaviour are caused by the way we use technology. Media appear to be more sexually explicit, more sexual products and services are available online, mobile technologies are used for cybersex, sexting, and hooking up, and medicine offers us Viagra and genital surgeries. Behind worries about these developments may be a general feeling that sex is becoming more commercial in all kinds of ways, and that the place of sex in people's private, intimate lives is under attack.

In this section of the report we address questions about the way sexual practices and experiences may be changing; about sexual commerce, sex work and trafficking; and about sexual problems that regularly hit the headlines.

Are views about sex and sexuality changing?

There is some evidence of broad changes in views about sex and sexuality in the UK. For example, there is greater acceptance of sexual relations outside of marriage and of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) sexualities, and

there has been a growth in the diversity of sexual communities⁵⁰.

In 1983, 28% of people in the UK thought sex before marriage was 'always' or 'mostly' wrong. In 2007 this had fallen to 11%. 62% thought sexual relations between adults of the same sex were wrong, compared to 36% in 2007. 37% agreed that a woman who decides that she does not want a child should be allowed to have an abortion compared to 60% in 2007⁵¹. The numbers of people living together and getting married have changed, with marriages declining and cohabiting couples increasing since the 1970s. Increasing numbers of people are living alone (29%, and more in urban areas)⁵², and there is increasing diversity in arrangements such as people living communally or couples 'living apart together'⁵³. Shifting views towards same sex relationships are reflected in the introduction of civil partnerships and same sex marriage.

What types of sex are people having?

Much of our information on the types of sex that people are having comes from public health literature and this tends to focus on groups that are perceived as being at high risk of negative sexual health outcomes. Commercially funded sex surveys⁵⁴ are widely quoted in media, but these are often problematic, especially when the results are cited as if they are nationally representative⁵⁵. There are, however, a few broad surveys of sexual behaviour among the general population⁵⁶ as well as information

⁵⁰ Jackson, S. & Scott, S. (2010). *Theorizing Sexuality*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

⁵¹ British Social Attitudes 28, http://ir2.flife.de/data/natcen-social-research/igb_html/index.php?bericht_id=1000001index=lang=ENG

⁵² Office for National Statistics (2012). *Families and Households*. London: ONS, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_284823.pdf

⁵³ Neustatter, A. (2012). *A Home for the Heart*. London: Gibson Square Books.

⁵⁴ For example, Durex (2012.) *First Sex*. THE FACE OF GLOBAL SEX 2012 - DurexHCP.co.uk

⁵⁵ See <http://www.drpetra.co.uk/blog/concerns-about-the-durex-global-sex-survey/> .

⁵⁶ For example, the *National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) I, II and III*, <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

from general health studies, which are informative about current sexual attitudes and experiences⁵⁷.

The information that we have suggests that what counts as ‘having sex’ changes over time⁵⁸. There has been a general increase in reported numbers of ‘opposite-sex’ partners, ‘same sex’ partnerships, concurrent partnerships, and ‘opposite-sex’ anal intercourse over time. However, sexual frequency has been found to be in decline in the most recent NATSAL survey, as has the number of ‘opposite sex’ partners for men, though the number of ‘opposite sex’ partners for women have risen⁵⁹. Open interest in kinky, or BDSM, practices has increased – as reflected in the open discussion around the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy. New online communities and events have sprung up around various specific kinds of sexual interest and around asexuality. Of course it is hard to determine whether these represent increases in the proportion of people who identify in these ways, or are interested in these practices, or simply in the number who are willing to be open about it now that there is appreciation and acceptance of greater sexual diversity.

Penis in Vagina (PIV) intercourse is seen by most people as ‘sex’ and in partnered sex it is the most common practice⁶⁰, though fewer men and women experience it in older age⁶¹. Increases in consistent condom use have been reported over time, and have appeared to be greatest for men with multiple partners in the past year. This suggests that sexual health promotion messages may be having some impact⁶². Sexual health clinic

⁵⁷ For example, Waylen, A. E., Ness, A., MCGovern, P., Wolke, D. & Low, N. (2010). Romantic and Sexual Behavior in Young Adolescents: Repeated Surveys in a Population-Based Cohort. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 30, 432-443.

⁵⁸ Sanders, S.A. & Reinisch, J.M. (1999). Would you say you ‘had sex’ if...? *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281(3), 275-7.

⁵⁹ Mercer, C. H., Tanton, C., Prah, P., Erens, B., Sonnenberg, P., Clifton, S. ... & Johnson, A. M. (2013). Changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain through the life course and over time: findings from the National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). *The Lancet*, 1781-1794.

⁶⁰ Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). Sexual Behavior in the United States: Results from a National Probability Sample of Men and Women Ages 14–94. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 255-265.

⁶¹ Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). An event-level analysis of the sexual characteristics and composition among adults ages 18 to 59: results from a national probability sample in the United States. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7(Supplement 5), 346-361.

⁶² Johnson, A. M., Mercer, C. H., Erens, B., Copas, A. J., McManus, S., Wellings, K., Fenton, K. A., Korovessis, C., Macdowall, W., Nanchahal, K., Purdon, S. & Field, J. (2001). Sexual behaviour in Britain: partnerships, practices, and HIV risk behaviours. *The Lancet*, 358, 1835-1842.

attendance and HIV testing have increased, particularly in groups of people who have more sexual partners⁶³.

In 2008/09, 75% of women under 50 were using at least one method of contraception. The contraceptive pill and the male condom were the most popular methods of contraception, with partner sterilization and self-sterilization the next most popular methods. Other methods of contraception included the intrauterine device (IUD) (6%), withdrawal (4%), hormonal injection (3%) and hormonal intrauterine system (IUS) (2%). 25% were not currently using a method of contraception - over half of these were not engaged in a sexual relationship with someone of the 'opposite sex'. These figures have shown little change over the last few years. There has been a small decrease in the numbers of women relying on sterilization (from 10% in 2005/06 to 6 % in 2008/09). The promotion of Long Acting Reversible Contraceptive methods has been a Public Health priority since 2005 because of its greater efficacy and value for money⁶⁴.

What counts as sex may vary by age and sexuality. US studies have found oral-genital contact is less likely to be considered 'sex' than in the 1990s, particularly among young people⁶⁵. Young women who identify as lesbian or bisexual may be more likely to consider a range of forms of genital stimulation as 'sex' than young women or men who identify as heterosexual⁶⁶. Women who include a greater variety of activities in a sexual encounter are more likely to experience orgasm⁶⁷. Meanings of 'virginity' and 'abstinence' also vary by gender, ethnicity and the extent of

⁶³ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013

⁶⁴ NICE (2005). Long acting reversible contraception, <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/10974/29909/29909.pdf>

⁶⁵ Hans, J. D., Gillen, M. & Akande, K. (2010). Sex Redefined: The Reclassification Of Oral-Genital Contact. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 42(2), 74-78.

⁶⁶ Horowitz, A. D. & Spicer, L. (2011). 'Having Sex' as a Graded and Hierarchical Construct: A Comparison of Sexual Definitions among Heterosexual and Lesbian Emerging Adults in the U.K. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50, 139-150.

⁶⁷ Richters, J., De Visser, R. O., Rissel, C. E. & Smith, A.M.A. (2006). Sexual practices at last heterosexual encounter and occurrence of orgasm in a national survey. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43, 217-226; Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). An event-level analysis of the sexual characteristics and composition among adults ages 18 to 59: results from a national probability sample in the United States. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7 (Supplement 5), 346-361.

people's sexual experience⁶⁸. Masturbation is more prevalent among men than women⁶⁹. Men and women with same sex partners are significantly more likely to report masturbation⁷⁰. In the most recent NATSAL survey those aged between 25 and 44 were most likely to have masturbated in the last four weeks⁷¹.

How is sex related to commerce?

The increased visibility of commercial sex is often cited as a symptom and a cause of the sexualization of society. But commercial sex is not a new phenomenon; the exchange of sex for money was part of ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian societies, for example. However, forms of commercial sex are more diverse today than in the past and include a broad range of occupations. Some commercial sexual transactions do not involve sexual acts, and sexual transactions which take place online, for example cam site sex may not involve physical contact of any kind.

Commercial sex involves people who work in the sex industry (prostitutes, escorts), or in pornography (performers, directors, producers) and other kinds of performance (erotic dance, striptease), but a much wider range of workers are also involved in these industries, for example as accountants, designers, drivers, lawyers and so on. Commercial sex takes place in a wide range of sites including bars, restaurants, cabarets, sex shops, and hotels⁷². In addition, if we consider any form of sexual activity or interest that involves commerce to be commercial sex we should include a much

⁶⁸ Bersamin, M. M., Fisher, D. A., Walker, S., Hill, D. L. & Grube, J. (2007). Defining Virginity and Abstinence: Adolescents' Interpretations of Sexual Behaviors. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*, 182-188.

⁶⁹ Robbins, C. L., Schick, V., Reece, M., Herbenick, D., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J. D. (2011). Prevalence, Frequency, and Associations of Masturbation With Partnered Sexual Behaviors Among US Adolescents. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 165*, 1087-1093.

⁷⁰ Gerressu, M., Mercer, C., Graham, C., Wellings, K. & Johnson, A. (2008). Prevalence of Masturbation and Associated Factors in a British National Probability Survey. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 37*, 266-278.

⁷¹ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013; see also <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

⁷² Agustin, L. (2007). *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*. London & New York: Zed Books.

wider range of practices, including writing and reading erotica, running and participating in hen and stag parties, and manufacturing and using sex toys and so on.

Some kinds of commercial sex have become more socially visible. For example, glamorous sex boutiques for women and gentlemen's clubs like Spearmint Rhino are more visible on the high street, while women's sex toys are regularly discussed in the press. Other things are hidden away, for example street sex work is less visible than before in city centres. Sex work is more likely to take place indoors than outside in public space, and more likely to involve technology.

Commercial sex has long been regarded by some with suspicion, often depicted as immoral and unhealthy, and some feminists argue that sex work is always a form of violence against women, even where no material violence occurs and where sex work is clearly chosen. It has been argued that the presence of commercial sex makes women in general more vulnerable to violence but there is no evidence of this. For example, in two cases where it was claimed that the opening of lapdancing clubs in specific areas led to a rise in rape and assaults the statistics do not bear this out⁷³.

Sex work has been presented as an occupation where female workers are inevitably exploited by male clients and managers, or as work which promotes a form of sexual objectification that is harmful to women and is legitimized by a growing visibility. However, the understanding of sex work as exploitation has been demonstrated to be overgeneralized. From the perspective of sex workers' rights, sex work should be recognized as a job not wholly unlike other jobs. This perspective is increasingly being used around the world by sex workers and sex work organizations. They have argued that the diversity of sex workers' experiences and conditions are often ignored, with the consequence that sex workers are branded and stigmatized as 'Other'⁷⁴. Sex workers have developed networks to challenge intolerance, stigma, and discrimination and to challenge legislation and policies that affect them⁷⁵.

⁷³ Magnanti, B. (2012). *The Sex Myth: Why Everything We're Told is Wrong*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

⁷⁴ Pendleton, E. (1997). *Love For Sale; Queering Heterosexuality* in Nagle, J. (Ed.) *Whores and Other Feminists*. New York & London: Routledge, 73-82.

⁷⁵ Crago, A. L. (2008). *Our lives matter: sex workers unite for health and rights*. Open Society Foundation, www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/Our%2520Lives%2520Matter%2520%2520Sex%2520Workers%2520Unite%2520for%2520Health%2520and%2520Rights.pdf; Ditmore, M. H., Levy, A. & Willman, A. (Eds.) (2010). *Sex work matters*. London: Zed Books; Sanders, T., O'Neill, M. & Pitcher, J. (2009). *Prostitution Sex Work, Policy and Politics*. London: Sage.

Research suggests that the majority of sex workers practice safer sex in their commercial sexual encounters⁷⁶. Factors which increase the possibility of risky practices include the pressure to maximize earnings, problematic drug use, pressure from coercers, the need to pay debts or fines, lack of information about sexual health, physical and sexual assault, and criminalization and law enforcement practices. Indoor sex work is safer than street based sex work⁷⁷.

Is there more sex work than before?

It is difficult to estimate accurately the numbers of sex workers in the UK in the past. It is thought that numbers in the Victorian era were either over- or under-estimated depending on the agenda of the observer, and were often likely to include women who were simply living outside conventional moral frameworks. Much sex work has also been clandestine, casual or seasonal, complicating the picture further⁷⁸.

Similarly, it is difficult to estimate the numbers of sex workers in the UK today, partly because of the continuing stigma associated with this work, and partly because of the different ways in which people categorize sex work; for example, whether they include erotic dancers and porn performers or not. Women make up the overwhelming majority of sex workers⁷⁹, though men also perform sex work. Data on the number of trans* sex workers, a group that is particularly vulnerable to health

⁷⁶ Jeal, N. & Salisbury, C. (2007). Health needs and service use of parlour-based prostitutes compared with street-based prostitutes: a cross sectional survey. *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 114, 875-881; Sanders, T. (2008). *Paying for Pleasure: Men who Buy Sex*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan; Ward, H., Day, S., Green, K. & Weber, J. (2004). Declining Prevalence of STIs in the London sex industry 1985-2002. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 80(3), 374-376.

⁷⁷ Brents, B. & Hausbeck, K. (2005). Violence and Legalized Brothel Prostitution in Nevada: Examining Safety, Risk and Prostitution Policy. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(3), 270-295; Kinnell, H. (2008). *Violence and Sex Work in Britain*. Cullompton: Willan; Sanders, T. & Campbell, R. (2007). Designing Out Violence, Building in Respect: Violence, Safety and Sex Work Policy. *British Journal of Sociology*, 58(1), 1-18.

⁷⁸ Mason, M. (1994). *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also Victorian Sex Factoids, <http://www.lesleyahall.net/factoids.htm>

⁷⁹ Cusick, L., Kinnell, H., Brooks-Gordon, B. & Campbell, R. (2009). Wild Guesses and Conflated Meanings: Estimating the Size of the Sex Worker Population in Britain. *Journal of Critical Social Policy*, 29(4), 703-719.

problems and to violence, is especially sparse. It has been reported that there has been an increase in students involved in sex work, and that large sporting events lead to an increase in sex work, but neither of these claims is supported by evidence⁸⁰. There is some evidence to suggest a growth in online sex commerce as part of a more general growth in online commerce⁸¹.

What about sex trafficking?

Human trafficking is ‘the threat of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation’⁸². Trafficking does not only happen to foreign nationals: people may be trafficked within as well as across borders.

It has been claimed that sex trafficking is a mammoth problem with millions of victims worldwide, and that it is a steadily escalating problem⁸³. A growing body of research suggests, however, that the picture is much more varied⁸⁴. Many people who are labeled victims of sex trafficking - usually

⁸⁰ Ham, J. (2011). What’s the cost of a rumour?: A guide to sorting out the myths and the facts about sporting events and trafficking. Global Alliance Against the Traffic in Women, <http://www.gaatw.org>

⁸¹ Cunningham, S. & Kendall, T. D. (2011). Prostitution 2.0 The Changing Face of Sex Work. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 69(3), 273-87. Brooks-Gordon, B. M. (2010). Bellwether Citizens: The regulation of male clients of sex workers. *Journal of Law and Society*, 37(1), 145-170; Roberts, R. (2010). Researching students in sex work: Market values and academic freedom. *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 10(1), 12-17.

⁸² Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), <http://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>

⁸³ See for discussion, Agustin, L. (2007). *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*. London: Zed Books; Doezema, J. (2010). *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*. London: Zed Books.

⁸⁴ Weitzer, R. (2011). Sex Trafficking and the Sex Industry: The Need for Evidence-Based Theory and Legislation. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 101, 1337-1369. Investigations showed that one big UK police operation failed to find any traffickers who had forced people into prostitution, see <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/20/government-trafficking-enquiry-fails>

migrant sex workers - do not fit this model⁸⁵. Studies from all parts of the world show that, amongst migrants who work as sex workers, there are different degrees of agency, consent and intentionality.

Sex work and migration

A range of nationalities and a large proportion of migrant sex workers work in the London indoor sex industry. Outside London the proportion of migrant sex workers varies more widely but most sex workers are from the UK. It has been argued that migration may have increased numbers of sex workers but there is no evidence to support this. The proportion of migrants in the sex industry mirrors migration patterns in other service sector industries such as hospitality and food and drink, and varies according to geographical location.

Research with migrants working in the UK sex industry from South America, Eastern Europe, EU and South East Asia suggests that they come from a variety of backgrounds and that most migrate because of lack of opportunities at home, especially opportunities for education. Most are introduced to the possibility of working in the sex industry through friends and colleagues. Although some report problematic clients and employers, they generally describe relations with their employers and clients as characterized by mutual consent and respect. They report that the combination of the stigmatization of sex work and lack of legal immigration documentation makes them more vulnerable to violence and crime⁸⁶.

What do we know about sexual violence?

⁸⁵ Two good studies, both focusing on China, are Liu, M. (2011). *Migration, Prostitution, and Human Trafficking*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction and Ko-Lin Chin, K. & Finckenauer, F. (2012). *Selling Sex Overseas*. New York: New York University Press.

⁸⁶ Mai, N. (2011). *Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry; Final Report*, <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research-units/iset/projects/esrc-migrant-workers.cfm#report>

Generally speaking, groups in society who are more vulnerable are also at greater risk of violence. More than a third of all women worldwide - 35.6% - will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, usually from a male partner. The highest levels of violence against women are in Africa, where 45.6% of women will suffer physical or sexual violence. In low and middle income Europe, the proportion is 27.2%⁸⁷. LGBT people and young people are also at higher risk of violence and bullying⁸⁸.

The problem of violence receives more attention than it did in the past and many organizations now have policies on various forms of bullying and harassment. However, little attention has been paid to the wider context of power relations inside peer cultures and the communities in which those peer cultures are formed.

Along with other kinds of crime, the numbers of violent and sexual offences recorded by the police are falling. Police forces report fewer cases of rape, domestic violence and child abuse. The number of incidents of domestic violence referred to the CPS by police in 2013 to the end of March fell by 7,000, while 1,400 fewer rapes and 2,200 fewer cases alleging child abuse were referred. Sexual offences decreased by 3% whilst homicide offences fell by 4% and other violent offences fell by 6%⁸⁹. It is not known whether this means that these crimes are actually decreasing, and some suggest that the decreases show that police are not doing enough to bring cases to court. Conviction rates for domestic violence and rape have risen.

As with most crime, only a small proportion of rape is reported to the authorities, probably about 11%. Rape can occur in a range of circumstances. The type of rape that receives most publicity is stranger rape, but most rapes are carried out by someone the victim knows. Many of those who are particularly vulnerable - because of mental health problems, learning disabilities, or a history of being in abusive relationships - experience repeated rape and sexual assault, as do young people from

⁸⁷ WHO (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf

⁸⁸ McNamee, H., Lloyd, K. & Schubotz, D. (2008). Same sex attraction, homophobic bullying and mental health of young people in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11, 33-46; Warwick, I., Chase, E. & Aggleton, P. with Sanders, S. (2004). *Homophobia, sexual orientation and schools: A review and implications for action*. Nottingham: DfES. See also <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>

⁸⁹ Office for National Statistics (2012). Fall in Crime, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-december-2012/sty-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-december-2012.html>

troubled backgrounds, in care homes or involved in gang culture⁹⁰. The most recent NATSAL survey suggested that 1 in 10 women and 1 in 71 men had experienced sex against their will since the age of 13 and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men had experienced someone attempting to have sex with them against their will. In most cases the person responsible was someone known to them⁹¹.

Young people may regard relationship violence with resignation, with girls shouldering the burden of emotion work, taking on responsibility for both their own and their partners' emotions⁹². Recent research suggests that sexual coercion, control, harassment and violence is not confined to older teens. A survey into the prevalence and incidence of school bullying in Wales⁹³ indicated that Year 6 and Year 7 pupils reported the highest level of sexual bullying.

There are problems in how to define what constitutes sexual violence, bullying or harassment. It is important to consider children's accounts of what they consider to be unwanted, offensive and hurtful behaviour as constituting sexual violence. This is important given that a singular act or event or set of practices can have multiple meanings. For example 'bra pulling' may be experienced by girls both positively as a welcome sign of

⁹⁰ Stern, V. (2010). The Stern Review. Home Office, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110608160754/http://www.equalities.gov.uk/PDF/Stern_Review_acc_FINAL.pdf

⁹¹ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013; Macdowall, Wendy, et al. (2013). Lifetime prevalence, associated factors, and circumstances of non-volitional sex in women and men in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3). *The Lancet*, 1845-1855.

⁹² McCarry, M. (2010). Becoming a 'proper man': Young People's Attitudes about Interpersonal Violence and Perceptions of Gender. *Gender and Education*, 22(3), 17-30.

⁹³ Bowen, R. & Holtom, D. (2010). *A Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales*, <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/survey-prevalence-incidence-school-bullying/?lang=en>

another person's romantic or sexual interest and negatively as an invasive practice and humiliating recognition of a girls' sexual maturation⁹⁴.

Are STIs on the increase?

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are diseases that can be transmitted through unprotected sex. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in STI diagnosis in England. This is thought to be because of the rapid increase in sexual health screening and chlamydia tests, the increasing use of more sensitive diagnostic tests for gonorrhoea and genital herpes; as well as increased transmission through unsafe sexual behaviour, especially among men who have sex with men (MSM). Overall however, between 2009 and 2010, rates of diagnosis of acute STIs declined in 69% of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in England. During the period 2008-2010 numbers of new STI diagnoses in England fell by 1% with the greatest decline in young adults, however they rose again by 2% in 2011. In 2010, new diagnoses of genital Chlamydia did not rise, despite an increase in the number of tests performed⁹⁵.

The spread of infection varies across age groups and locations. As STIs are transmitted by sexual contact, infections can be seen to cluster alongside different social groupings. Young people under the age of 25 have the highest rates of STIs, although with changes in family structures and increased divorce, diagnosis in the older population has also been raised as a concern. It is argued that the impact of poor sexual health remains greatest in young heterosexual adults and in men who have sex with men. Health promotion and education remain the cornerstones of STI and HIV prevention through improving public awareness of STIs and HIV

⁹⁴ Renold, E. (2002). 'Presumed Innocence': (hetero)sexual, homophobic and heterosexist harassment amongst primary school girls and boys. *Childhood*, 9(4), 415-433; Barter, C. & Berridge, D. (Eds.) (2010). *Children Behaving Badly? Peer Violence between Children and Young People*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell; Barter, C. (2009). In the name of love: Partner abuse and violence in teenage relationships. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(2), 211-233; Barter, C. McCarry, M., Berridge, D & Evans, K. (2009). Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships. NSPCC, http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/partner_exploitation_and_violence_report_wdf70129.pdf; Rivers, I. & Duncan, N. (2013). *Bullying: Experiences and discourses of sexuality and gender*. London: Routledge.

⁹⁵ Health Protection Agency, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/NewsCentre/NationalPressReleases/2011PressReleases/110615STIsdeclinefirsttimein10yrs/>

and encouraging safer sexual behaviour such as consistent condom use⁹⁶ for penetrative practices, or increases in practices which do not spread STIs.

Are people experiencing more sexual problems?

Numbers of people reporting sexual problems appear to be high. For example, the 2000 UK national survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles (NATSAL) found that 35% of men and 54% of women reported some kind of sexual 'dysfunction'⁹⁷. In the most recent NATSAL survey 42% of men and 51% of women reported some kind of sexual difficulty lasting more than three months in the past year and 10% of men and 11% of women reported feeling distressed or worried about their sex lives⁹⁸. However it is important to remember that this is - at least partially - to do with the way that sexual problems or 'dysfunctions' are currently understood. The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM V) lists disorders relating to desire, arousal, and orgasm. This influences how sex therapists and popular media understand sexual problems. The model this is based on assumes that it is normal to experience sexual desire, to become aroused (gaining erections, for men), and to reach orgasm through penetrative sex (hence the disorders of premature ejaculation for men who orgasm quickly or prior to penetration, and vaginismus for women whose vaginas cannot easily be penetrated)⁹⁹. However, there are many asexual people who do not experience desire

⁹⁶ Health Protection Agency (2010). *Health Protection Report 4(34)*, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/archives/2010/hpr3410.pdf>; Health Protection Agency (2011). *Health Protection Report 5(24)*, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/archives/2011/hpr2411.pdf>; Health Protection Agency (2011). *Health Protection Report 6(22)*, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/archives/2012/hpr2212.pdf>

⁹⁷ Macdowall, W., Wellings, K., Nanchahal, K., Mercer, C. H., Erens, B., Fenton, K. A. & Johnson, A. M. (2002). Learning about sex: Results from Natsal 2000. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 56(Supplement 2), A1-A26.

⁹⁸ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013; see also <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

⁹⁹ Barker, M. (2011). Existential Sex Therapy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 26(1), 33-47.

and who are not disordered¹⁰⁰. Also, for many people and practices, sex does not require erections, penetration, or orgasm.

Understandings of what counts as a sexual problem are also related to ideas about appropriate gender roles and behaviour. For example some late 19th century writings claimed that respectable women naturally had no sexual desire, but today sexual function is often presented as essential to a satisfactory intimate relationship for women and men¹⁰¹.

Anxieties about sex are very common¹⁰². Boys and men tend to worry most about erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation, penis size and shape, sexual techniques, physical attractiveness, as well as dating and relationship problems. Girls and women also often express worries about physical appearance and fear that failing to be sexual in certain ways will mean failing to develop and maintain a romantic relationship¹⁰³. This is often bound up with wider pressures on women to define themselves around relationships with other people and to be viewed as desirable¹⁰⁴. All of these kinds of anxieties can themselves be detrimental to sexual and psychological wellbeing. It has been argued that the global pharmaceutical industry has played a role in generating anxiety as well as promoting drugs that are expensive, can have unpleasant side effects, and can be ineffective¹⁰⁵.

There is disagreement about the cause of sexual problems. The use of drugs like Viagra initially appeared to challenge earlier psychological theories about impotence. Many doctors, scientists, and journalists suggested that the success of the drug showed that sexual problems were primarily physical. However it is not clear that Viagra has been as

¹⁰⁰ Brotto, L. A., Knudson, G., Inskip, J., Rhodes, K. & Erskine, Y. (2010). Asexuality: A Mixed Methods Approach. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(3), 599-618.

¹⁰¹ Richards, C. & Barker, M. (2013). *Sexuality and gender for mental health professionals: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

¹⁰² Boynton, P. (2009). Whatever Happened to Cathy and Claire?: Sex, Advice and the Role of the Agony Aunt in Attwood, F. (Ed.) *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris, 94-111.

¹⁰³ Barker, M. (2011). De Beauvoir, Bridget Jones' Pants and Vaginismus. *Existential Analysis*, 22(2), 203-216.

¹⁰⁴ Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising. *Feminism & Psychology*, 18, 35-60; Harvey, L. & Gill, R. (2011). The Sex Inspectors: Self-help, Makeover and Mediated Sex in Ross, K. (Ed). *Handbook on Gender, Sexualities and Media*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 487-501.

¹⁰⁵ Irvine, J. M. (2005). *Disorders of Desire: sexuality and gender in modern American sexology*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Tiefer, L. (2004). *Sex is not a natural act, and other essays*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; see also <http://www.newviewcampaign.org/>

successful as has been claimed. Many prescriptions for Viagra are not reissued, suggesting that many patients do not persist with it, and that it is not quite addressing their difficulties in the right way¹⁰⁶. The popularity of Viagra may reinforce notions that men should always be ready for (a certain kind of) sex, increasing the kind of pressure and anxiety that is related to sexual problems, and perpetuating the link between masculinity and erections.

Women report low desire much more frequently than men; for example in one survey 40.6% of women aged 16-44 reported low desire of one month's duration over the previous year, in contrast to 17.1% of men¹⁰⁷. Again, we need to think about how 'normal' levels of desire are defined, and also address the fact that relatively rigid ideas about what constitutes 'proper' sex often discourage people from exploring and tuning into their sexual desires. This may be particularly the case for women due to the sexual double standard which requires them to police a fine line between being regarded as a 'slut' or 'tight'¹⁰⁸.

Since the release of Viagra, interest in 'Female Sexual Dysfunction' has also grown. But a focus on 'dysfunction' obscures the complex social aspects of sexuality and the role of issues such as fatigue, stress, inequalities in child-rearing and housework, lack of communication between partners, violence, body image and self-esteem problems, and misunderstandings of anatomy and function in people's sexual experience¹⁰⁹. For example, the continued lack of education about the need for clitoral stimulation for orgasm in the majority of women means that some women believe they require physical or pharmaceutical treatment for lack of orgasm when education in anatomy would suffice¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁶ Grace, V., Potts, A., Gavey, N. & Vares, T. (2006). The Discursive Condition of Viagra. *Sexualities*, 9(3), 295-314; Marshall, B. L. (2002). 'Hard Science': Gendered Constructions of Sexual Dysfunction in the 'Viagra' age. *Sexualities*, 5(2), 131-158.

¹⁰⁷ Macdowall, W., Wellings, K., Nanchahal, K., Mercer, C. H., Erens, B., Fenton, K. A. & Johnson, A. M. (2002). Learning about Sex: Results from Natsal 2000. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 56(Supplement 2), A1-A26.

¹⁰⁸ Barker, M. (2013). Consent is a grey area? A Comparison of Understandings of Consent in 50 Shades of Grey and on the BDSM Blogosphere. *Sexualities*, 16(8), 896-914.

¹⁰⁹ Tiefer, L. (1995). *Sex is Not a Natural Act*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Fishman, J. R. (2004). Manufacturing Desire: The Commodification of Female Sexual Dysfunction. *Social Studies of Science*, 34(2), 187-218.

¹¹⁰ Kleinplatz, P.J. (Ed.) (2013). *New Directions in Sex Therapy*. Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge.

Can be people be addicted to sex and pornography?

Sex and porn addiction are often claimed to be on the increase, with serious public health consequences such as 'marital discord, divorce, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV infection, substantial financial expenditures, job loss, and unplanned pregnancies'¹¹¹. However the idea of sex addiction has been strongly criticized. Sex addiction - or 'hypersexual disorder' - is not an official psychiatric disorder¹¹². The screening tests used for diagnosing sex addiction have been criticized for including indicators that would apply to many people growing up in Western Europe or America, such as feeling concerned about the normality or strength of one's desires, and engaging with pornography or BDSM. It has been argued that many of the behaviours classed as indicative of addiction can more appropriately be seen as sexual adventurousness¹¹³. For those who view themselves as addicted to sex, or who find their levels of desire to be problematic in some way, it may be important to consider wider social messages around sex, their own particular meanings, and what may be lost and gained by embracing the identity of 'addict'¹¹⁴.

Probably the commonest manifestation of 'sex addiction' reported to sex therapists takes the form of those who are troubled by the extent of their engagement with pornography, and/or the content of the pornography that they engage with. Most definitions view a person's perception of loss of control, and the continuation of particular behaviours despite significant negative consequences, as the symptoms of this disorder. However, like sex addiction, porn addiction is not recognized as a formal diagnosis¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ Reay, B., Attwood, N. & Gooder, C. (2013). Inventing Sex: The Short History of Sex Addiction. *Sexuality & Culture*, 17(1), 1-19.

¹¹² American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed)*. Washington, DC: APA; World Health Organisation. (1992). *ICD-10 Classifications of Mental and Behavioural Disorder: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

¹¹³ Klein, M. (2003). Sex Addiction: A Dangerous Clinical Concept. *SIECUS*, 31(5): 8-11.

¹¹⁴ Barker, M. (2013). Reflections: Towards a Mindful Sexual and Relationship Therapy. *Sexual Relationship Therapy*, 28(1-2), 148-152.

¹¹⁵ American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed)*. Washington, DC: APA; World Health Organisation. (1992). *ICD-10 Classifications of Mental and Behavioural Disorder: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines*. Geneva. World Health Organisation.

While there are claims that many people are becoming addicted to pornography there is no convincing evidence to support this. In a survey of over 1000 consumers of pornography in Australia only 0.5% felt they had a problem with addiction¹¹⁶.

The concept of pornography addiction has received much press coverage, but few psychiatrists accept that pornography is 'addictive' in the sense that heroin or nicotine, for example, is addictive. Instead pornography appears to be addictive in the same sense that gambling or shopping can be addictive: it is possible for individuals to become addicted, but this tells us little about the use of the object by the majority of the population. Some neuroscientists have recently claimed that consuming pornography changes the structure of the brain, causing, in effect, 'brain damage'¹¹⁷. However, this claim has been refuted in the strongest possible terms by other neuroscientists¹¹⁸ who point out that everything that we do shapes our neural connections and find no evidence that pornography is a special case.

People are sometimes treated for pornography addiction using a 12-step programme¹¹⁹ or antidepressants¹²⁰. The effectiveness of this kind of intervention has not been supported by controlled trials, nor have the possible long-term consequences been studied¹²¹.

As with sex addiction, those who are troubled by their engagement with pornography are often well-served by therapeutic approaches which enable them to consider, directly, what they find disturbing about it, without stigma and in the context of wider societal perceptions of pornography and sex. Slowing down and noticing how they engage with pornography can be

¹¹⁶ McKee, A., Albury, K. & Lumby, C. (2007). *The Porn Report*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

¹¹⁷ Hilton, D.L. & Watts, C. (2011). Pornography Addiction: a Neuroscience Perspective, *Surgical Neurology International*, 2(1), 19-22.

¹¹⁸ Reid, RC. Carpenter, B.N. & Fong, T.W. (2011). Neuroscience research fails to support claims that excessive pornography consumption causes brain damage. *Surgical Neurology International*, 2(1), 64-71.

¹¹⁹ Wright, P.J. (2010). Sexual Compulsivity and 12-Step Peer and Sponsor Supportive Communication: A Cross-Lagged Panel Analysis. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 17, 154-169.

¹²⁰ Kafka, M. & Hennen, J. (2000). Psychostimulant augmentation during treatment with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in men with paraphilias and paraphilia related disorders: a case series. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 61, 664-670.

¹²¹ Levine, M. & Troiden, R. (1988). The myth of sexual compulsivity. *Journal of Sex Research*, 25(3), 347-363; Gold, S.N. & Heffner CL. (1998). Sexual addiction: Many conceptions, minimal data. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 18(3), 367-381.

a useful step towards increased awareness and shifting patterns if these are felt to be problematic by the individual concerned¹²².

Are people coming under pressure to modify their bodies because of sexualization?

A number of claims have been made about growing pressures on people to modify their bodies because of sexualization. For example it is claimed that women are now removing pubic hair because of the influence of pornography. However, removing body hair including pubic hair was practiced in much earlier societies such as Rome and Egypt¹²³, and female bodies have often been depicted without pubic hair in art and literature of the past¹²⁴.

It may be that women have become more likely to remove hair since the 1990s when waxing services became more widespread, hairlessness became more fashionable in a range of media, and more revealing underwear and swimwear became available - hence the 'bikini wax'. Brazilian waxing which involves removing hair from the vulva, perineum, anus, buttocks and mons - originated on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro where very skimpy bikinis were worn. Brazilian waxing salons began to open outside of Brazil from the late 1980s onwards.

In countries such as the UK it appears that more than 80% of women may remove body hair. One study in the UK¹²⁵ found that over 90% of participants removed hair from their underarms and legs, and over 80% from their pubic area. The most common form of pubic grooming was the maintenance of a 'bikini line'.

Some researchers have speculated that there may be a correlation between removing body hair and media images, but have not been able to establish this. Most women who remove their body hair say they do so for

¹²² Barker, M. (2013). *Mindful Counselling Psychotherapy: Practising Mindfully across Approaches and Issues*. London: Sage.

¹²³ Basow, S.A. (1991). The Hairless Ideal: Women and their Body Hair. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 15, 83-96.

¹²⁴ Rosenthal, A. (2004). Raising Hair. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38, 1-16.

¹²⁵ Toerien, M., Wilkinson, S. & Choi, P. (2005). Body Hair Removal: The 'Mundane' Production of Normative Femininity. *Sex Roles*, 52, 399-406.

reasons of aesthetics and hygiene and do not identify social pressures as reasons for removing body hair¹²⁶. In America, studies are showing a trend towards body hair removal for gay, bisexual and heterosexual men¹²⁷.

Another claim is that women are seeking to have genital surgery such as labiaplasty because of the influence of pornography. This is a procedure in which the inner lips of the vulva are modified in order to 'improve' the appearance of the labia. It has been claimed that a 'tucked-in look'¹²⁸ achieved through labiaplasty is 'associated with, and derived from, the "unreal" vulvas displayed in heterosexual male-oriented pornography'¹²⁹. There is no clear evidence of a link with pornography; and indeed pornography is more likely to feature more variety in bodily aesthetics than other types of media. However it is believed that there have been increases in the number of labiaplasties being performed¹³⁰, and for some women surgery may be viewed as providing a way of appearing more 'feminine' and 'attractive'¹³¹. This suggests an involvement of cultural norms about gender and beauty.

As with other aspects of - particularly women's - body image, it is important to consider the wider cultural context within which pornography and other forms of 'sexualized media' exist. Narrow ideals of female attractiveness (mostly young, thin, white, middle class, etc.) can be found across advertising, fashion, women's and men's magazines, makeover television

¹²⁶ Tiggemann, M. & Hodgson, S. (2008). The Hairlessness Norm Extended: Reasons for and Predictors of Women's Body Hair Removal at Different Body Sites. *Sex Roles*, 59, 889-897; Toerien, M., Wilkinson, S. & Choi, P. (2005). Body Hair Removal: The 'Mundane' Production of Normative Femininity. *Sex Roles*, 52, 399-406.

¹²⁷ Martins, Y., Tiggemann, M. & Churchett, L. (2008). Hair today, gone tomorrow: A comparison of body hair removal practices in gay and heterosexual men. *Body Image*, 5, 312-316.

¹²⁸ Schick, V.R., Brandi, N.R. & Calabrese, S.K. (2011). Evulvalution: The Portrayal of Women's External Genitalia and Physique across Time and the Current Barbie Doll Ideals. *Journal of Sex Research*, 48(10), 74-81.

¹²⁹ Braun, V. (2005). In Search of (Better) Sexual Pleasure: Female Genital 'Cosmetic' Surgery. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 407-424.

¹³⁰ Liao L-M., Michala, L. & Creighton S. (2010). Labial surgery for well women: a review of the literature. *British Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 117, 20-25; Crouch, N., Deans, R., Michala L., Liao, L-M. & Creighton, S. (2011). Clinical characteristics of well women seeking labial reduction surgery: a prospective study. *British Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 118, 1507-1510.

¹³¹ Bramwell, R., Morland, C. & Garden, A. (2007). Expectations and Experience of Labial Reduction: A Qualitative Study. *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 114(12), 1493-9.

programmes, and Hollywood movies¹³², as well as in everyday conversation around dieting practices and parts of the body which are experienced as problematic¹³³. Some have argued that it is important to situate even this within the general (Western) tendency to separate ourselves from our bodies and to treat them as objects, for example to perform, to beautify, or to enable us to be productive¹³⁴.

Also many common types of body modification which are currently undertaken are not associated with sexualization - for example circumcision, surgery carried out on children who are born with intersex anatomies, and surgery which is undertaken by some trans* people¹³⁵. In such areas information on NHS diagnoses and operations are available¹³⁶ but we know very little about operations that are being carried out privately. In addition, it is impossible to know which of these operations are 'cosmetic', partly because they may be described as necessary or important for functional reasons and partly because it is not possible to distinguish between operations carried out for the sake of altering appearance and operations carried out for other reasons, for example to remove cancerous tissue.

Information about operations performed on the NHS on people aged 0-14 years suggests that there were 27 instances of clitoral surgery, mostly clitoral reduction, during 2011-2012 for this age group. It would be reasonable to assume that most of these would have been carried out in the first months of life and would have related to DSD (diversity of sex development, or disorders of sex development). It is also possible to see that 2283 children aged 0-14 years underwent 'hypospadias repair' operations on the NHS over the same time period. Some would describe this as cosmetic surgery to the penis, others would describe it as a necessary reconstructive intervention to allow the child to urinate in an optimal flow, direction, and position, and others still would describe it as a common form of surgery to alter intersex bodies.

¹³² Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011). *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹³³ Carey, R., Donaghue, N. & Broderick, P. (2011). 'What you look like is such a big factor': Girls' Own Reflections about the Appearance Culture in an All-girls' School. *Feminism & Psychology*, 21(3), 299-316.

¹³⁴ Barker, M. (2013). *Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships*. London: Routledge.

¹³⁵ See for example, Zeiler, K. (2013). Special Section on Sex and Surgery: Doing Sex and Feminist Theory, *Feminist Theory*, 14(1), 57-63.

¹³⁶ Hospital Episode Statistics, <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/hes>

Section 3

Sex, Gender and Media

Is popular culture becoming more sexual?

Representations of gender

Representations of women

Representations of men

Representations of trans* people

Are media becoming pornified?

Trends in pornography

Effects of pornography

Regulation and sexually explicit media

Is popular culture becoming more sexual?

Popular culture refers to the cultural practices of a society - to its way of life. This includes holidays and festivals, sports and leisure activities, and subcultures - as well as cultural representations - in television and cinema, literature, the press, and popular music¹³⁷. It is increasingly said that popular culture has become more sexual and that mainstream media are also sexualized. For example, burlesque has undergone a revival, while pole dancing has been taken up as a leisure activity and form of exercise. Sexual themes are widely explored in literature and in art. Music videos and fashion aimed at women and girls are claimed to be overtly sexy and have been described as part of a 'raunch culture'¹³⁸.

It feels to many that in Western societies like the UK, sex is now more visible. Sexual practices are often seen as matters of personal taste and individual choices about sex have become important in expressing a sense of identity and lifestyle¹³⁹. Sex is sometimes seen as a form of recreation which is linked to commercial products and services, or as something which we may need experts to advise us on, part of a broader therapeutic culture aimed at taking care of the self¹⁴⁰. This is not to say that sex is no longer related to relationships, or that it has lost the meanings that it had in earlier historical periods, but that it is taking on new kinds of significance alongside these.

Some of the most striking changes can be seen in the way that sex is associated with the idea of fun or personal liberation. This is often promoted by cultural intermediaries such as journalists, designers, PR

¹³⁷ Williams, R. (1961). *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto and Windus. For an overview of cultural studies work see Storey, J. (2010). *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods*, third edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

¹³⁸ See for example, Levy, A. (2005). *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. London: Simon and Schuster; Paul, P. (2005). *Pornified: How Pornography Is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and our Families*. New York: Times Books.

¹³⁹ Weeks, J. (2007). *The World We Have Won*. London & New York: Routledge.

¹⁴⁰ Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London & New York: Routledge; Attwood, F. (2010). Sex and the Citizens: Erotic Play and the New Leisure Culture in Bramham, P. & Wagg, S. (Eds.) (2010). *The New Politics of Leisure and Pleasure*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 82-96.

practitioners, advertisers, therapists and advice-givers¹⁴¹. Metrosexuality describes an idea of sexual identity which is not linked primarily to particular types of sexual practices or to sexual orientation, but to consumerism and the cultivation of image and stylishness¹⁴². In addition new terms 'bicurious', 'friends with benefits', 'MILF' and 'hot lesbian' suggest changes in the way sex and sexuality are perceived¹⁴³.

A range of technologies are also increasingly part of sex. There are bio-medical technologies, such as contraceptives or treatments for erectile dysfunction, recreational or erotic technologies such as vibrators, and mediated/representational technologies such as sex-advice manuals or pornographic photographs.

Yet visual representations of sex and sexuality are not new and it appears that other societies in the past have been much more open about sex than contemporary Britain is¹⁴⁴. However, new developments in technologies of visual representation and reproduction from paintings, to lithographs, to the printing press, and so on have made possible new forms of erotic imagery and pornography. Until the mid 20th century, only wealthy or elite individuals, mainly men, had access to their own means of producing sexual representations. But, as technologies such as polaroid cameras and super 8 film became more available, DIY representation became increasingly common. Home video technologies in the 1980s provided a tipping point in the production and consumption of sexually explicit media in ordinary domestic settings¹⁴⁵.

Increasing access to the internet in the 1990s made it possible for more and more people to produce, consume and distribute sexual images and texts. More recently, social networking sites and smart phones have radically boosted the capacity of individuals to reproduce and share sexual images. New types of sexual communication and encounter have become available such as cam sex and avatar sex. The circulation of images has become a significant part of other forms of sexual communication in the

¹⁴¹ Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011). *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴² Simpson, M. (1994). Here come the mirror men; Metrosexual men wear Paul Smith, use moisturizer, and know that vanity begins at home. *The Independent*, 15 November, 22.

¹⁴³ Attwood, F. (2010). Sex and the Citizens: Erotic Play and the New Leisure Culture in Bramham, P. & Wagg. S. (Eds.) *The New Politics of Leisure and Pleasure*. London: Palgrave, 82-96.

¹⁴⁴ Kendrick, W. (1987). *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

¹⁴⁵ McNair, B. (2002). *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire*. London & New York: Routledge.

practices of sexting, the use of display and 'rate me' sites and the creation of profiles in all kinds of swinger, dating and hookup sites and apps¹⁴⁶.

Representations of gender

Restrictive representations of gender (to narrow, or stereotypical, depictions) have been a source of concern for many years. It has been argued that depictions of women as wives and mothers in children's books, advertising and television drama makes it difficult for girls to imagine less traditional futures for themselves. Similarly it is claimed that stereotypes of men as strong providers limit the capacity of boys and men to develop a personality which includes soft and caring qualities. There are also concerns about the ways in which the constant reinforcement of a binary gender system (that people are either masculine men or feminine women) might impact on those who don't experience themselves as fitting easily within that binary¹⁴⁷.

From the research that has been conducted it is clear that narrow and negative stereotypes do impact on people in various ways - their self esteem and cognitive abilities, for example. Psychological research on gender stereotyping suggests that these are related to people's perceptions of themselves and other people, their confidence and ability, and their interest in certain activities over others¹⁴⁸. For example, young people inflate their perceptions of their ability in gender stereotyped subjects (maths for boys, arts for girls) after reading about gender

¹⁴⁶ See for example Mowlabocus, S. (2010) *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age*. Farnham: Ashgate; Rooke, A. & Moreno Figueroa, M. (2010). Beyond 'Key Parties' and 'Wife Swapping': The Visual Culture of Online Swinging in Attwood, F. (Ed.) *porn.com.Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang, 217-235; Radeloff, C.L. & Waskul, D.D. (2010). How Do I Rate?: Web Sites and Gendered Erotic Looking Glasses, in Attwood, F. (Ed.) *porn.com.Making Sense of Online Pornography*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 202-216.

¹⁴⁷ Richards, C. & Barker, M. (2013). *Sexuality and Gender for Mental Health Professionals: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

¹⁴⁸ Fine, C. (2010). *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*. London: Icon Books.

stereotypes or even just ticking a gender box¹⁴⁹. Exposure to gender stereotypes that disadvantage one's own gender diminishes confidence and interest¹⁵⁰ as well as actual performance on tasks¹⁵¹.

Given the gender segregation of clothing, toys, advertising, stories and television programmes from an early age, it has been argued that children are constantly primed regarding such stereotypes. As they learn gender labels and identities they shift into gender-stereotyped play and begin to police their own, and each others, behaviours¹⁵², developing conventionally gendered interests (technology and action for boys, care and beauty for girls¹⁵³). Counter-stereotyping through toys and stories, however, results in girls playing with more 'boyish toys' and vice versa¹⁵⁴, and such possibilities can be opened up in the early years when gendered toy and clothing choices are not so heavily policed, due to the fluidity of gender at this point¹⁵⁵.

There is evidence that the context of viewing stereotypical depictions influences how these are understood, as does the increasing existence of more diverse representations and counter-stereotypical possibilities. There are many examples of stereotypes being ridiculed and criticized by media at the same time that they are reproduced unquestioningly in other places. For example, Madonna and Lady Gaga demonstrate a mixture of feminine and masculine images in their public performances that make it difficult to pin them down as performing one particular gender stereotype. Television

¹⁴⁹ Chatard, A., Guimond, S. & Selimbegovic, L. (2007). 'How good are you in math?' The effect of gender stereotypes on students' recollections of their school marks. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(6), 1017-1024; Sinclair, S., Hardin, C. S., & Lowery, B. S. (2006). Self-stereotyping in the context of multiple social identities. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(4), 529-542.

¹⁵⁰ Correll, S. J. (2004). Constraints into preferences: Gender, status, and emerging career aspirations. *American Sociological Review*, 69(1), 93-113.

¹⁵¹ McGlone, M. S. & Aronson, J. (2006). Stereotype threat, identity salience, and spatial reasoning. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 27(5), 486-493.

¹⁵² Zosuls, K. M., Ruble, D. N., Tamis-Le Monda, C. S., Shrout, P. E., Bornstein, M. H. & Greulich, F. K. (2009). The acquisition of gender labels in infancy: Implications for sex-typed play. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 688-701.

¹⁵³ Francis, B. (2010). Gender, toys and learning. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36(3), 325-344.

¹⁵⁴ Green, V. A., Bigler, R. & Catherwood, D. (2004). The variability and flexibility of gender-typed toy play: A close look at children's behavioural responses to counterstereotypic models. *Sex Roles*, 51(7/8), 371-386.

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, A. & Richardson, C. (2005). Queering home corner. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(2), 163-173; Renold, E. (2008). Queering masculinity: Re-theorising contemporary tomboyism in the schizoid space of innocent/heterosexualized young femininities. *Girlhood Studies*, 1(2), 129-151.

drama shows numerous independent working women who don't comply to the stereotype of socially competent, 'nice' femininity.

The explosion of texts and images resulting from the widespread diffusion of the internet has made it possible to find all kinds of gender representations. Because of this it is difficult to know if the particular 'diet' of images that an individual consumes is stereotypical, how media are read by any particular individual, or to what extent that person sees and engages with other contradictory images as well¹⁵⁶.

In addition, people do not consume media in isolation as they do in experiments: they are part of real groups such as a family watching television, or an online fan club. These groups constitute a network of interpretation through which they make sense of images. The importance of context for the way people engage with media is confirmed by evidence that victims of online grooming often have a history of problems and abuse, either in the family or in the peer group. There are also particular problems for vulnerable groups like young people from socially and psychologically unstable backgrounds¹⁵⁷.

Media research has also cast doubt on the idea that images act as a kind of simple 'stimulus' that produces an effect on an individual. While short term 'effects' may be found in studies, these are usually small and it is unclear how long the effect lasts¹⁵⁸, especially in a visual culture where different images succeed each other at a rapid pace. A long tradition of research suggests that people are active recipients of culture, not only accepting images but also resisting them when they do not fit their own views and experiences. Fans, subcultures and a range of communities may be particularly active in creating their own media. With the development of new technologies a more participatory culture has emerged in which there is less distinction between those who produce and those who consume media, where user-generated content is increasingly

¹⁵⁶ Gill, R. (2006). *Gender and the Media*. London: Polity Press.

¹⁵⁷ Craven, S., Brown, S. & Gilchrist, E. (2006). Sexual Grooming of Children: Review of Literature and Theoretical Considerations. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 12(3), 287-299.

¹⁵⁸ Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

evident and where media are much more integrated into people's every day lives than in the past ¹⁵⁹.

Representations of women

Concern regarding representations of women in media have focused on the lack of representations in comparison to men and the narrowness of the representations, for example the ways in which women are often depicted in relation to other people - as wives, girlfriends, mothers, and so on. The focus on women's bodies and appearance and upon the pleasures to be found, by women, in being desirable to others have also been a subject of concern. In relation to sexualization there have been concerns that we have moved from a situation of women's bodies being 'objectified' to one where women are expected to want to be attractive and sexy 'for themselves', whilst still policing their appearances within narrow constraints.

Inequalities in representations of women

There has been a long history of interest in the portrayal of women in media. From the 1970s onwards this was conducted by media organizations concerned with ensuring fairness in representation, as well as by academics, citizens and activist groups. Early research often focused on advertising and revealed that women were frequently presented as being less intelligent than men¹⁶⁰. There were also clear patterns of exclusion with regard to older women, women of colour, and women living outside heterosexuality¹⁶¹. However, over the last few decades, as women's position in society has transformed, so too have representations,

¹⁵⁹ Moores, S. (1993). *Interpreting audiences: The ethnography of media consumption*. London: Sage; Gelder, K. & Thornton, S. (1997). *The subcultures reader*. London: Routledge; Abercrombie, N & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage; Barker, M. (1998). Critique: audiences R us in Dickinson, R., Linné, O. & Harindranath, R. (Eds.) *Approaches to audiences: a reader*. London: Arnold, 184-191; Buckingham, D. (2005). The media literacy of children and young people; a review of the research literature, <http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/145/1/Buckinghammedialiteracy.pdf>; Ruddock, A. (2007). *Investigating audiences*. London: Sage; Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press; Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage*. New York: Peter Lang; Deuze, M. (2012). *Media life*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁶⁰ 15 Sexist Vintage Ads, http://www.oddee.com/item_96674.aspx

¹⁶¹ Gill, R. (2006). *Gender and the Media*. London: Polity Press.

although arguably this has happened at a slower rate and in ways that still do not fully reflect the diversity of women in the population.

Examples of the continued inequalities between representations of women and men can be found, for example, in the fact that there is rarely more than one woman (and often not that many) on television comedy panel shows such as *Mock the Week*, *Have I Got News for You*, or *QI*. The Bechdel Test reveals the lack of women characters in film (a film only passes if it has at least two named female characters who have a conversation with each other at some point about something other than a man)¹⁶². Few mainstream movies pass the test. Social media have been key in pointing out continued microaggressions and acts of sexism in media and everyday life, for example the Everyday Sexism project and twitter hashtag has highlighted the focus on the appearance of female sports stars and politicians in comparison to men in equivalent professions¹⁶³.

Breadth of representations of women

There has certainly been an increase in the forms of femininity which are available in media over the last few decades, with - for example - women in the main roles of popular television series and films that are not just aimed at women, for example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Glee*, *The Hours*, *Juno*, and *Black Swan*. However, there remains a focus on women's relationships with others as a central concern. For example, media aimed at women such as women's magazines, 'chick flicks', 'chick lit', and popular television series like *Sex and The City* or *Girls* overwhelmingly focus on women's relationships with men. Their careers, and other aspects of their lives, are generally incidental¹⁶⁴. Common tropes in wider media also frequently represent women in relation to male protagonists rather than in their own right, for example as love interests, mothers, or sidekicks. One common recent example is the manic pixie dream girl, whose only purpose is to enable the brooding male hero to open up to life and love¹⁶⁵. Projects such as Miss.Representation have highlighted the low percentage of women across media industries, particularly in film direction (5%) and entertainment television (25%)¹⁶⁶, linking this to continued narrow representations.

Intersections with age, race, class, and sexuality

¹⁶² Grrlscientist (2010). The Bechdel test. *The Guardian*, 24 November 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/punctuated-equilibrium/2010/nov/24/2>

¹⁶³ <http://www.everydaysexism.com/>

¹⁶⁴ Gill, R. & Herdieckerhoff, E. (2006). Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in chick lit? *Feminist Media Studies*, 6(4): 487-50.

¹⁶⁵ TV Tropes, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ManicPixieDreamGirl>

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.missrepresentation.org/>

Those women who are represented in key roles such as film protagonists and television presenters are most likely to be white, middle class, young, 'able-bodied', heterosexual and slim. There are limited roles for older actresses and television presenters, and an emphasis on looking 'younger' in advertisements for beauty products and makeover shows¹⁶⁷. Talk shows have been one arena in which women of colour have been better represented, with major hosts such as Oprah Winfrey and Trisha Goddard. However, images of women in women's magazines remain overwhelmingly white, and in advertising and music videos women of colour are still often represented according to crude stereotypes of exotic animalistic hypersexuality (black women)¹⁶⁸ or sexual submissiveness (Asian women)¹⁶⁹.

Reality television has been one arena where working class women have been increasingly represented and some have reached celebrity status. However representations of such women - and news reporting about them - has frequently been stigmatizing and ridiculing, particularly in relation to their bodies, sexualities, and lack of 'feminine' behaviour¹⁷⁰. The 'overly sexual' working class young woman is demonized in representations of the dangers of sexualization, and held up as a cautionary tale: Young women who are viewed as being sexual at too young an age are frequently depicted as working class¹⁷¹.

Historically lesbian and bisexual women have largely been invisible in media, in comparison with heterosexual women and even with gay and bisexual men¹⁷². When they have been depicted it has generally been as either criminal and dangerous, or as tragic and doomed, hence the 'dead/evil lesbian cliché', which has persisted up until recent times, even in films and television series with generally positive depictions of gay characters¹⁷³. Lesbians have also often been depicted in stereotypical ways, for example as exclusively butch and masculine in appearance in film and television

¹⁶⁷ Gill, R. Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011). *New femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁶⁸ Miller-Young, M. (2007). Hip-Hop Honeys and Da Hustlaz: Black Sexualities in the New Hip-Hop Pornography. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 8(1), 261-29.

¹⁶⁹ Gill, R. (2006). *Gender and the Media*. London: Polity Press.

¹⁷⁰ Tyler, I. & Bennett, B. (2010). 'Celebrity chav': Fame, Femininity and Social Class. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(3), 375-393.

¹⁷¹ Egan, R. D. (2013). *Becoming Sexual: A Critical Appraisal of the Sexualization of Girls*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁷² Ciasullo, A. M. (2001). Making her (in) isible: Cultural representations of lesbianism and the lesbian body in the 1990s. *Feminist Studies*, 27(3), 577-608.

¹⁷³ Booth, S. (2008). The death of Tara, the fall of Willow and The Dead/Evil Lesbian Cliché FAQ, <http://www.stephenbooth.org/lesbiancliche.htm>.

comedy. However, recent television shows focusing on the lives of lesbian and bisexual women, such as *The L Word* and *Lip Service*, have provided a far more diverse range of representations in terms of gender presentation, race, class, and - to some extent - body type. In news, film and television aimed at a general audience, however, there is still a strong tendency to represent sexual contact between feminine women as aimed at the titillation of men¹⁷⁴, and this reinforces stereotypes of bisexuality as an inauthentic sexuality¹⁷⁵. As with lesbian and bisexual women, there are specific issues with the depiction of trans* women in media, whatever their sexuality.

Body image and sexualization in representations of women

Research on the representation of women in the last decade has focused particularly upon the twin concerns of 'body image' and the 'sexualization' of women's and girls bodies. There have been numerous attempts to persuade companies and media organizations to move away from the use of very thin, waif-like models in adverts and magazines, and to embrace a wider diversity of body shapes¹⁷⁶. After the Labour government's Body Image Summit in 2000, several media organizations signed up to voluntary codes of practice in this regard¹⁷⁷, and there have been further summits in recent years¹⁷⁸.

Discussions of body image more generally have also been challenged by the proliferation of 'Love your body' messages and advertising campaigns circulating in the wake of the famous Dove commercials of the early 2000s¹⁷⁹. These purport to show 'ordinary' women and to celebrate messages such as 'beauty at every size', though it is clear that they generally focus on slim and conventionally attractive women. The impact of these new messages remain, as yet, underexplored.

In relation to 'sexualization', one of the earliest charges leveled at mainstream media was that it objectified girls and women, portraying them as sex objects to be consumed by audiences. However, recent research

¹⁷⁴ Diamond, L. M. (2005). 'I'm Straight, but I Kissed a Girl!': The Trouble with American Media Representations of Female-Female Sexuality. *Feminism & Psychology*. 15(1), 104-110.

¹⁷⁵ Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H. & Plowman, T. (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Milton Keynes: The Open University, Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance.

¹⁷⁶ British Medical Association (2000). *Eating Disorders, Body Image and the Media*. London: British Medical Association.

¹⁷⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/799629.stm>

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/un-summit-to-discuss-body-image-in-media>

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.dove.us/social-mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx>

presents a more complex picture, arguing that women are rarely presented as docile, passive, sex objects, but are more frequently shown as active, desiring sexual subjects, who hold and return the viewer's gaze, and are portrayed as powerful agents expressing their own sexualities¹⁸⁰. This shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification has been much discussed in the last decade. Some argue that it represents a step forward in portrayals of women, whilst others suggest that it makes critical engagement more difficult because the 'objectification' is shown as self chosen rather than as imposed by others. There is speculation that a new form of 'up for it' sexiness is becoming compulsory for young women, replacing the earlier cultural valuation of sexual innocence for women, and leading to new - as yet unexplored - pressures and opportunities¹⁸¹.

Another area of development in this field of research is the increasingly common sexualized representation of men's bodies too, as eroticized depictions move out of gay media and into the mainstream. There remains considerable discussion in academic literature about whether the idealized sexualized representation of women's and men's bodies holds different meanings, rather than contributing to an egalitarian visual culture in which we are all 'equally objectified'.

Representations of men

When Arthur Schlesinger wrote the essay *The Crisis of American Masculinity* in 1958 he articulated a set of concerns about what masculinity is which ushered in a way of thinking about masculinity that has informed debate since then¹⁸². This is the idea that masculinity is in 'crisis' because perceived 'traditional' male roles are no longer respected or required. The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is a key idea in this area. This is the notion that gender inequality is maintained through ideals of a culturally dominant (hegemonic) form of masculinity: the strong, brave, aggressive,

¹⁸⁰ Gill, R. (2003). From sexual objectification to sexual subjectification: The resexualisation of women's bodies in the media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 3(1), 99-106.

¹⁸¹ Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011). *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸² Schlesinger Jr, A. (1958). The Crisis of American Masculinity. *Esquire*, November, 63-65.

rational man¹⁸³. In addition heterosexual masculinity is defined in opposition to both femininity and gay masculinity¹⁸⁴. Concerns in this area have focused on the potential impact of a 'crisis' of masculinity on men; upon perceived increasing sexualization of men's bodies and pressures around body image for men; and on continued sexism in media aimed at men, for example in 'lads mags'.

Hegemonic representations of men

Although masculinity is a complicated concept bound up in questions of power, privilege, and the political and social organization of society, the representations of masculinity that are most often visible express fairly stereotypical masculine tropes. In media representations we see regular returns to hegemonic masculinity in the form of superheroes, or action movie stars, for example, alongside the increasing availability of representations of other forms of masculinity, such as the 'new man', the 'metrosexual', the bumbling dad, and the man child who resists the responsibilities of adulthood¹⁸⁵. Some of these are in less sharp contrast to femininity and gay masculinity than hegemonic masculinity. Representations of masculinity are increasingly ambivalent and contradictory, and this becomes particularly apparent when we consider the ways in which representations vary across social role, class, race, generation, and sexuality.

The post-war era and the 1950s saw the growth of the office worker and a diminishing of the perceived value of 'traditional' masculine traits such as physical strength, stoicism, heroism, and aggression¹⁸⁶. Concerns around the 'crisis of masculinity' focus around the fact that stereotypes of strong, hard men who provide for their families persist despite the decline in traditional male jobs and roles which would allow them to do this. This has been linked, for example, to the high rates of suicide amongst men¹⁸⁷, although causal links are extremely difficult to determine in such areas. Academics working in the field of men's studies argue that patriarchy is just as oppressive to men as it is to women and that masculinity as an ideological concept restricts and structures male experience.

Masculinity is often associated, across media and cultural representations, with authority. So authority figures like doctors, policemen, politicians,

¹⁸³ Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859.

¹⁸⁴ Gough, B., & Edwards, G. (1998), The beer talking: four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities. *The Sociological Review*, 46(3), 409-435.

¹⁸⁵ <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ManChild>

¹⁸⁶ Kimmel, M. S. (1996). *Manhood in America*. New York: Free Press.

¹⁸⁷ Mind (2007). *Men's Mental Health*, http://www.mind.org.uk/help/people_groups_and_communities/mens_mental_health_on_14/112011

scientists, and lawyers tend to be represented as men. Masculinity also tends to be associated with labour and the workplace¹⁸⁸. A fundamental representational trope is that of the father figure. Representations of fatherhood have their origins in Victorian sentimental literature and tend to present a binary between the wise and nurturing father who is an admirable figure and the authoritarian brute. We see in both these examples how dichotomies are often set up between socially sanctioned 'appropriate' modes of masculinity (the domesticated male, the hard working industrious male) and inappropriate masculinities (the seducer, the drunk, the criminal)¹⁸⁹.

Intersections with class, race, age and sexuality

Normative masculinity is often presented as middle class and class differences are often exaggerated. For example, upper class masculinity is often seen as compromised (the effete toff), comical (the upper class twit) or decadent (as seen in the popular ITV series *Downton Abbey*, for example). Working class masculinity is often seen as threatening, as in documentary series on working class people, the mass media obsession with the football hooligan, and depictions of the white supremacist and the 'chav'¹⁹⁰. In cinema the gangster was a working class hero in the 1930s but by the 1940s, with the introduction of the production code and film censorship, he became a villain and the hero became the policeman.

Race and ethnicity are complex issues in and of themselves. Non white masculinities are almost always 'othered' across media, drawing on stereotypes that are linked to colonial ideas about the Orient and assumptions about other continents. Common examples include the hyperpotent black male as represented in popular music culture, the athletic black men, the black man as a comedy figure who is presented as an 'acceptable' face of black masculinity for white audiences, and the wise black man who exists in films to help the white male protagonist on his journey¹⁹¹. There is also the Latin lover, a form of a masculinity that is usually depicted as highly sexualized (and therefore threatening) but also as suspect in that it is effete, narcissistic and ultimately self serving. This is also usually seen as a form of sexual threat because it responds to female desire and thereby acknowledges the existence of female desire. Representations of 'Eastern' masculinity, whether that be Central and

¹⁸⁸ Willis, P. E. (1977). *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹⁸⁹ Sweetman, C. (Ed.) (1997). *Men and Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxfam.

¹⁹⁰ Timmins, A. (2012). Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 20(1), 116-117; Jones, O. (2012). *Chav: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso.

¹⁹¹ Glenn, C. L. & Cunningham, L. J. (2009). The Power of Black Magic; The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(2), 135-152.

Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or the Far East) have in common the fact that masculinity is often tied into a threatening and avowedly 'alien' sexuality¹⁹².

Representations that link masculinity to life stages tend to be structured around a trajectory moving from rebellion to crisis to resignation. In the 1940s and 1950s representations of youthful rebellion often romanticized the potential threat of juvenile delinquency - for example, in *Rebel Without a Cause*. In more recent times this 'rebellion' has been linked to notions of ethnicity and religion, resulting in stereotypes of religious fundamentalists (usually Islamic); almost always a young Asian male who struggles to reconcile himself with 'Western' (secular and consumerist) values. Middle aged masculinity is represented as linked to being bored or sexually frustrated, and coming to terms with youth being at an end. Older men tend to be associated with wisdom if this crisis has been negotiated¹⁹³.

Gay masculinity has tended to be represented in problematic ways with being gay depicted as the antithesis of being a 'real' man. There is an assumed association of gayness with femininity and an idea of 'authentic' masculinity in opposition to the 'artifice' of femininity¹⁹⁴. Gay men have often been stereotyped as effeminate, inadequate men. In the 1970s the gay liberation movements made an active move to reject negative stereotypes and to celebrate the signs of macho masculinity. However this resulted in something of a dichotomy between representations of macho gay men (for example 'clones') and representations of 'queens' as effeminate figures. Recent years have seen increased diversity in depictions of gay masculinity. For example, in the fight for same sex marriage gay couples are often presented as being like heterosexual men, television programmes include more than one gay character, and 'bear culture' celebrates hirsute, larger men who reject the body consciousness and its focus on muscles, waxing, and tanning of the commercial gay 'scene'¹⁹⁵.

Despite the increasing representation of diverse gay men in media, bisexual men have tended to be invisible, with bisexuality either presented as a 'phase' on the way to gay or straight masculinity, or doubt being cast

¹⁹² Powrie, P., Davies, A., & Babington, B. (Eds.) (2004). *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London & New York: Wallflower Press.

¹⁹³ Pomerance, M. & Gateward, F. K. (Eds.) (2005). *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

¹⁹⁴ Gough, B. & Edwards, G. (1998), The beer talking: Four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities. *The Sociological Review*, 46 (3), 409-435.

¹⁹⁵ Edwards, T. (2002). *Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

over the very existence of bisexual men in high profile news stories¹⁹⁶. One notable exception to this is the character of Captain Jack Harkness in the television series *Torchwood*¹⁹⁷. Jack - whilst still conforming to the stereotypes of bisexual promiscuity and moral dubiousness at times - is a positive lead character.

Sexualization of men

Since the 1980s there has been an increased diversity of available masculinities in media and cultural representations. For example this included representations of the 'new man', who is interested in grooming and fashion. Naked men's bodies were increasingly used in marketing, and by the 1990s the sexualization of the signs of masculinity had become commonplace, as in *The Chippendales* and Calvin Klein advertisements¹⁹⁸. Gay visibility and a new climate of gay acceptance, coupled with the notion of the 'new man', gave rise to the idea of metrosexuality¹⁹⁹, in which masculine identity wasn't defined by being homophobic or anti-feminine (as with David Beckham). Metrosexuality is linked to consumerism and bodily displays²⁰⁰. It has been argued that the increasing visibility of the male body and on improving the body means that men may increasingly feel similar pressures to women to be concerned about their appearance²⁰¹.

Breadth of representations of men

Despite the availability of new man and metrosexual masculinities, heterosexual masculinity is still represented in ways which are wary of intimacy with other men and where women are considered largely as objects of sexual desire. For example, the recent wave of 'bromance' movies²⁰² suggest that despite having, and desiring, close friendships with

¹⁹⁶ Barker, M., Richards, C., Jones, R., Bowes-Catton, H. & Plowman, T. (2012). *The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual inclusion in LGBT equality and diversity*. Milton Keynes: The Open University, Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance.

¹⁹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Harkness

¹⁹⁸ Nixon, S. (1996). *Hard Looks: Masculinities, spectatorship and contemporary consumption*. London. UCL Press.

¹⁹⁹ Simpson, M. (1994). Here come the mirror men; Metrosexual men wear Paul Smith, use moisturizer, and know that vanity begins at home. *The Independent*, 15 November, 22.

²⁰⁰ Ervin, M. C. (2011). The Might of the Metrosexual: How a Mere Marketing Tool Challenges Hegemonic Masculinity in Watson, E. & Shaw, M.E. (Eds.) *Performing American Masculinities: The Twenty-first-century Man in Popular Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 58-75.

²⁰¹ Pronger, B. (2002). *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

²⁰² Alberti, J. (2013). 'I Love You, Man': Bromances, the Construction of Masculinity, and the Continuing Evolution of the Romantic Comedy. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 30(2), 159-172.

other men, the heterosexual male protagonists often end up choosing a sexual relationship with an attractive woman - with whom they have little in common - over their friendships.

Research with men about how they see themselves in relation to media finds that some project a stereotypical hard, strong, 'real man' persona while others draw on a kind of 'everyday bloke', nothing special, masculinity, akin to Homer Simpson²⁰³. Others present themselves as more alternative, for example being comfortable enough in their masculinity to show their feelings or paint their nails²⁰⁴. Whilst challenging hegemonic masculinity in some respects, these 'alternatives' still retain the notion that this is the norm, as well as suggesting that men are free agents who are able to make independent choices, whereas women are often depicted as more dependent on the relationships in their lives for their identities.

Sexism in media aimed at men

There has been continued attention paid to the role of sexism in media aimed at men. One key focus for this has been on 'lad's mags', with high profile campaigns to ban these from high street shops due to the depictions of naked and scantily-clad women on their front covers²⁰⁵. These magazines generally represent gender in binary ways, and women as very different to men in a 'battle of the sexes' where they require figuring out and manipulating in order for men to get what they want from them (i.e. sex)²⁰⁶.

Some research has drawn attention to the sexist comments and depictions of women within the magazines, which are indistinguishable in places from the ways in which convicted rapists refer to women²⁰⁷. Some researchers have argued that lad's mags are a form of backlash against feminism, and that the 'ironic' tone of the magazines makes accusations of sexism difficult because it can be argued that it was not serious and was meant to be

²⁰³ <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BumblingDad>

²⁰⁴ Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imagery positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & Psychology*, 9(3): 335-356.

²⁰⁵ <http://www.losetheladsmags.org.uk/>

²⁰⁶ Barker, M. (2013). *Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships*. London: Routledge.

²⁰⁷ Horvath, M. A., Hegarty, P., Tyler, S. & Mansfield, S. (2012). 'Lights on at the end of the party': Are lad's mags mainstreaming dangerous sexism? *British Journal of Psychology*, 103(4), 454-471.

regarded as ridiculous²⁰⁸. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that many magazines celebrate a kind of heroic, often xenophobic, white working class masculinity (involving beer, football and hetero sex), imagined by middle class editors and writers and bearing little resemblance to the reality of working class men's lives.

However, other researchers have argued that the irony in lad's mags is a form of 'sweetening the pill' because it is difficult for men to seek advice and they feel threatened by shifts in relationships with women. Pointing to the contradictions in the magazines and in the talk of their readers, they argue that the ironic tone represents an acknowledgement that sexist depictions are ridiculous and not based in reality, as well as an insecurity on the part of men that they might conform to bumbling or 'man child' stereotypes²⁰⁹. Others have argued that problematic depictions of women's bodies and femininity are just as prevalent in women's magazines as they are in those aimed at men²¹⁰.

Representations of trans* people

Many of the debates about representations of women and men in media applies to trans* people just as it does to cisgender people (those who remain in the gender they were assigned at birth), given that the majority of trans* people are men or women and, as such, are subject to the same cultural pressures as anyone else. However, there are specific issues regarding how trans* people have been represented in media, and in pornography in particular, which are worth attending to separately. Generally speaking such representations are problematic in the way that they present trans* people, particularly women, in a sexual context, and often cast doubt over the gender of trans* people through ridicule or misrepresentation.

²⁰⁸ Gill, R. (2006). *Gender and the Media*. London: Polity Press; For more on men's magazines see Gill, R. (2003). Power and the production of subjects: a genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad in Benwell, B. (Ed). *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*. Oxford & Malden: Blackwell, 34-56 and Attwood, F. (2005). 'Tits and ass and porn and fighting': male heterosexuality in magazines for men'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(1), 87-104.

²⁰⁹ Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

²¹⁰ Scott, C. (2013). Get real, banning lads' mags would patronise women. *The Telegraph*, 13 June 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10117714/Get-real-banning-lads-mags-would-patronise-women.html>

Trans* people are broadly those people who are not content to remain the gender they were assigned at birth, whether occasionally or permanently. Some trans* people opt to have physiological interventions to align their bodies more closely with their identity, and/or choose to live permanently in a gender role other than that assigned at birth. This group of people are sometimes referred to, when pertinent, as *transsexual* and generally do not have a sexual motivation for their transition. Another group of people, sometimes (and again when pertinent) referred to as people who engage with *transvestitism* or *sexualized cross dressing*, may have sexual motivations for wearing clothing or presenting in a way not normally associated with their birth assigned sex²¹¹. There are many other people who do not fulfil the societal role associated with their birth assigned sex, or who identify in some way outside of this, including genderqueer, neutrois, or non-binary people²¹². However, to date most representation of trans* people in mainstream media and in pornography have focused on the previous two groups.

There is a dearth of research literature specifically relating to the sexualization of trans* people, however it is clear that there is sexualization of trans* people by wider cultures and by people who don't identify as trans* themselves, including cisgender people. This may include a focus on genitalia and trans* sex workers, as well as the sexual objectification of transitioning gender²¹³. The sexualization of trans* people for their trans* status is evident within telephone sex line advertisements²¹⁴ as well as in online pornography. Some writers suggest that this sexualization is more biased towards trans* women than trans* men²¹⁵, which is perhaps reflective of the sexualization of women within wider society.

It is important for people working on trans* matters, whether they themselves are trans* or not, to recognize the diversity of trans* people and trans* practices and identities. While some people, trans* and cisgender, may sexualize being trans*, for many it is unrelated to sexuality, or is only tangentially related, in that sexuality is tangentially related to many aspects of identity and culture.

²¹¹ Barrett, J. (Ed.) (2007). *Transsexual and other Disorders of Gender Identity*. Oxford: Radcliffe.

²¹² Richards, C. Barker, M. (2013). *Sexuality and Gender for Mental Health Professionals: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

²¹³ Serano, J. (2008). A Matter of Perspective: A Transsexual Woman-centric Critique of Dreger's 'Scholarly History' of the Bailey Controversy. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 37, 491-494.

²¹⁴ Richards, C. (forthcoming). On the line: Representations of trans* people within phone sex line advertisements.

²¹⁵ Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping Girl*. Emeryville: Seal Press.

Outside of pornography, in particular, trans* people are disproportionately represented in mainstream media in a sexual context. This may involve the confusion of transgender identification with sexual fetishism, sexual orientation or predatory sexual behaviour. Many trans* people perceive such representations as increasing their vulnerability to sexual harassment and social stigma. Others find it harder to come to terms with being trans* due to a lack of visible, positive role models.

As a rule, trans* men are at risk of being depicted as sexual predators, especially in relation to young women, whilst trans* women and male crossdressers are represented as sexually deceptive or as sexually comic figures²¹⁶. There is an assumption that trans* men are attracted to women and trans* women are attracted to men (when, of course, they have a range of sexualities like cisgender people). Trans* people across the spectrum are frequently linked with paedophilia or represented in a context that implies they represent a moral risk to children²¹⁷.

Media images of trans* women and male crossdressers frequently depict them in sexually suggestive poses²¹⁸ or clothing²¹⁹. Language relating to these images falls into three categories. It may present them as glamorous and be broadly accepting (but often still othering in treating trans* people as exotically different to cisgender people); it may present trans* people as tragically misguided (often involving ridicule); or it may present them as deceptive. Celebrities and ordinary women who are discussing their transition experiences with media outlets tend to fall into the former group. People who do not 'pass' well as female fall into the second group²²⁰; and people who pass very well, especially if they are also conventionally beautiful, fall into the third. Humour or outrage is often present in related language which excuses the presumed male reader for making the error of feeling sexually attracted to a 'deceptive' person.

Trans* people are routinely represented as having an obligation to declare their gender history before becoming involved in relationships or casual

²¹⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2179631/Toxic-tush-nurse-Oneal-Morris-charged-manslaughter-patient-DIES.html>

²¹⁷ <http://www.metro.co.uk/news/777280-transsexual-lessons-for-5-year-olds>

²¹⁸ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/transsexual-reality-star-miriam-rivera-195335>

²¹⁹ <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4575814/Sex-swap-dad-Gary-Norton-wants-to-be-a-man-again-regret-operation-reversed-RAF-veteran.html>

²²⁰ <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/damianthompson/100139495/are-you-a-gas-engineer-who-yearns-to-slip-into-a-cocktail-frock-help-is-at-hand/>

sexual encounters²²¹, especially if those encounters are with groups stereotyped as sexually vulnerable, such as women and young people, with the implication that they must be sexual predators if they fail to do so.

Trans* woman and male crossdressers are frequently associated with the sex industry. References to transness are also used to 'spice up' media items about sex workers²²² and to eroticize celebrities²²³.

The representation of trans* women and male cross dressers as desirous of male sexual attention contributes to a wider depiction of trans* people generally as primarily motivated by a desire for attention, which in turn contributes to the idea that they are mentally ill. The association of trans* people and sex also serves to trivialize transness and contributes to the notion that it is a lifestyle choice.

As with all depictions of gender, the important thing is to represent the full range of trans* experience, rather than focusing on specific versions of trans*, and to avoid representations which ridicule, stigmatize, or present experiences in limiting ways.

Are media becoming pornified?

A range of terms are used to mark the differences between media texts that depict sex; hardcore/softcore, porn/erotica, porn/art, mainstream/independent, kink/vanilla and so on. There are genres that have a particular concern with sex and a set of conventions for representing it; for example, the erotic thriller, sexploitation movie, sex comedy, or slash

²²¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2095885/Crystal-Warren-Sex-addict-slept-1-000-men-used-MAN-herself.html>

²²² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2069748/Dominique-Strauss-Kahn-stopped-police-Paris-transvestite-prostitute-park.html?ITO=socialnet-twitter-mailonline>

²²³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2218069/X-Factor-2012-Rylan-Clark-kisses-transvestite-model.html>

fiction²²⁴. And of course there is pornography - the media genre most clearly devoted to sex. Within this genre are a range of pornographic sub-genres or pornographies²²⁵.

While the new visibility of sex in mainstream culture is sometimes described as 'pornographic', it usually relies on a fairly non-explicit form of representation, drawing on the style of the pin-up²²⁶ or on a glossy 'porno-chic' style with high production qualities²²⁷. The terms 'pornification' and 'porno-chic' have been used to describe the way in which mainstream media texts 'borrow from, refer to, or pastiche the styles and iconography of the pornographic'²²⁸.

Ann Summers parties are often seen as an example of the way sex is now marketed to women, associated with a healthy, fun femininity²²⁹. The success of bestselling *Fifty Shades of Grey* also suggests that women make up a considerable market for sexual representations and the numbers of women who consume pornography also appears to be growing²³⁰.

All of these practices and representations, like most of those in mainstream culture more generally, are more likely to depict heterosexuality than other

²²⁴ Williams, L. (1989). *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*. London: Pandora; Hunt, L. (1998). *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation*. London & New York: Routledge; Schaefer, E. (1999). *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. Durham: Duke University Press; Hellekson, K. & Busse, K. (2002). *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge. Williams, L.R. (2005). *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Mendik, X. (Ed.) (2012). *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic*. London & New York: Alterimage/ Wallflower Press; Hunter, I.Q. (2013). *British Trash Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.

²²⁵ Paasonen, S. (2007). 'Porn Futures' in Paasonen, S., Nikunen, K. & Saarenmaa, L. (Eds.) *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*. Oxford: Berg, 161-170; Paasonen, S. (2011). *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

²²⁶ Attwood, F. (2013). Art School Sluts: Art, Porn and Aesthetics, in Kerr, D & Hines, C. (Eds.) *Hard To Swallow: Reading Pornography On Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press, 42-56; Buszek, M.E. (2006). *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

²²⁷ McNair, B. (2002). *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire*. London & New York: Routledge.

²²⁸ McNair, B. (2013). *Porno? Chic! How Pornography Changed the World and Made it a Better Place*. London: Routledge.

²²⁹ Storr, M. (2003) *Latex and Lingerie: Shopping for Pleasure at Ann Summers Parties*. Oxford: Berg.

²³⁰ see Deller, R.A., Harman, S. & Jones, B. (2013). Reading the Fifty Shades Phenomenon. *Sexualities*, 16(8).

forms of sexual identity or community. While the amount of discussion they have attracted suggests that they are very widespread, their visibility has tended to be exaggerated. For example, researchers have found that sexy clothes and accessories for children are not easy to find in shops²³¹, engagement with erotic performances remains relatively hidden²³², and the vast majority of popular culture representations are neither explicit nor raunchy. In addition the press frequently present sex as something that is dangerous, risky and harmful, and it is far from clear that increased visibility means that society is more comfortable with sexual issues than in the past²³³.

Trends in pornography

Although pornography is often referred to as though it is a singular thing there are many diverse styles and forms of pornography. A wide range of styles can be traced in pornographic material produced between the 1970s and the early 21st century. These include parodies and adaptations of mainstream genres, the use of comedy, fantasy and camp, sensitive dramas, gothic horror, and social commentary. Niche films focus on particular themes such as bondage. In addition there are 'all sex' (or 'wall to wall') films, often using the gonzo style of the 'talking camera' and vignettes that string sex scenes together without a plot²³⁴. Gonzo porn uses a documentary style filmed in real time, focused on 'live' performance

²³¹ Buckingham, D., Willett, R., Bragg, S. & Russell, R. (2010). *Sexualised goods aimed at children: a report to the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee*. Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee, Edinburgh, UK, http://oro.open.ac.uk/25843/2/sexualised_goods_report.pdf

²³² Hubbard, Phil (2001). Sex Zones: Intimacy, Citizenship and Public Space. *Sexualities*, 4(1), 51-71; Bernstein, E. (2007). *Temporarily Yours: Sexual Commerce in Post-industrial Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hubbard, P. (2011). *Cities and Sexualities*. London: Routledge.

²³³ Arthurs, J. (2004). *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

²³⁴ Tibbals, C.A. (2010). From The Devil in Miss Jones to DMJ6 - power, inequality, and consistency in the content of US adult films. *Sexualities* 13(5), 625-644.

and using point of view shots and handheld cameras to emphasize the 'realness' of the sex, with little apparent editing or cutting²³⁵.

The distinctive styles of particular porn studios, directors and performers attract strong followings. Pornographies can be categorized in a variety of other ways - for example in terms of their target audiences which might be straight men, lesbians or people with an interest in a particular kind of kink. They can also be distinguished by other characteristics - such as the apparent age of performers (barely legal, teen, mature, MILF, Daddy), or their ethnicity (Asian, Latina, interracial), nationality (British, German, Brazilian), or body type (BBW, twink, bear). Other types of pornography may focus on particular bodily functions (watersports, squirting), specific practices or communities (fisting, femdom, spanking, bareback), sexual communities (BDSM, furry), combinations of performers (solo, threesome, gang bang), or situations and characters (teacher and student, jail, police, medical).

A number of new developments in porn can also be noted. These include the development of porn for women and the appearance of feminist and alternative/indie porn²³⁶. Undoubtedly the biggest change has been the huge growth in amateur porn performance²³⁷. It has become much easier to set up as a producer of porn, especially given the increasing availability of digital photography, free web space, cams and tube sites. Slash communities have produced 'transformative works' since the 1960s, writing stories drawing on elements of erotica and porn to portray homoerotic encounters between characters from TV shows, literary fictions, and

²³⁵ Biasin, E., & Zecca, F. (2009). Contemporary Audiovisual Pornography: Branding Strategy and Gonzo Film Style. *Cinema Et Cie: International Film Studies Journal*, 9(12), 133-50; Smith, C. (2012). Reel Intercourse: Doing Sex on Camera in Kerr, D. & Hines, C. (Eds.) *Hard to Swallow: Hard-Core Pornography on Screen*. New York; Columbia University Press, 194-214.

²³⁶ Sabo, A. (2012). *After Pornified: How Women are Transforming Pornography and Why it Matters*. Winchester & Washington: Zero Books; Taormino, T., Parreñas Shimizu, C., Penley, C. & Miller-Young, M. (Eds.) (2013). *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*. New York: The Feminist Press.

²³⁷ Paasonen, S. (2010). Labors of Love: Netporn, Web 2.0, and the Meanings of Amateurism', *New Media & Society* 12(8): 1297-1312.

films²³⁸. These are now joined by other sites of amateur erotica online²³⁹. Tube sites provide a place where professionally produced and amateur offerings can be shared. Tumblr sites and image-boards are also used to share porn.

A current trend in media commentaries about pornography is that contemporary pornography is more 'extreme', that it features outrageous practices and is more 'body-punishing' than ever before²⁴⁰. For some, practices such as anal sex or performance styles that are rough and athletic are seen as indications of increasing violence. Studies that claim that contemporary porn is more violent generally count a range of behaviours such as pinching, biting, slapping, spanking, and hair pulling as 'violent', along with bondage and sadomasochism, even when these are clearly consensual²⁴¹. There is little research in this area but recent studies suggest that acts that have been coded as extremely violent (for example torture, weapons, attempted murder, punching, kicking, fighting, beating mutilating, dismemberment, kicking, biting) are rare and that they have not increased in a decade²⁴². While the internet is blamed for circulating ever more violent pornography it would be more accurate to say that it has made pornographies of all kinds more visible.

Effects of pornography

- ²³⁸ Esch, K. & Mayer, V. (2007). How Unprofessional; The Profitable Partnership of Amateur Porn and Celebrity Culture in Paasonen, S., Nikunen, K. & Saarenmaa, L. (Eds.) *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*. Oxford: Berg, 99-114; Mowlabocus, S. (2010). Porn 2.0?: Technology, Social Practice, and the New Online Porn Industry in Attwood, F. (Ed.) *porn.com.Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang, 69-87; Attwood, F. The Politics of Amateurism in Online Pornography, <http://eitherand.org/exhibitionism/homemade-nudity-politics-amateurism-online-pornogr/>
- ²³⁹ Paasonen, S. (2010). Good Amateurs: Erotica Writing and Notions of Quality in Attwood, F. (Ed.) *porn. com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang, 142-158.
- ²⁴⁰ See for example Dines, G. (2010). *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon.
- ²⁴¹ See Weitzer, R. (2011). Pornography's Effects: The Need for Solid Evidence - A Review Essay of Everyday Pornography, edited by Karen Boyle (New York: Routledge, 2010) and *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, by Gail Dines (Boston: Beacon, 2010). *Violence Against Women* 17(5), 666-675.
- ²⁴² Bridges, A.J. (2010). Methodological considerations in mapping pornography in Boyle, K. (Ed.) *Everyday Pornography*. London: Routledge, 34-49; Tyler, M. (2010). 'Now, that's pornography!': violence and domination in Adult Video News in Boyle, K. (Ed.) *Everyday Pornography*. London: Routledge, 50-62.

Social scientists since the 1970s have been interested in the possible negative effects of pornography, particularly whether pornography causes rape, or causes its users to have negative attitudes towards women.

Some researchers have compared how much pornography is available in a given country with its reported levels of sex crimes - particularly rape - to see if there are correlations. Most have given up doing these kind of studies because of confusion over what they do or do not prove. Some studies suggest that there is a correlation between the availability of pornography and increased rape rates²⁴³ while others suggest that in societies where pornographic material is more readily available, rates of reported rape drop or rise less quickly than other forms of crime²⁴⁴. There are problems with the basic assumption of this research: that the people consuming pornography are the same people as those committing sex crimes. Additionally it is likely that other factors are responsible for any changes in pornography consumption and crime rates.

Researchers have also interviewed subjects who have committed sex crimes to find out about their exposure to pornographic materials. These studies have consistently shown that rapists tend to use less pornography than control groups, and that, on average, they come from more sexually repressed backgrounds and are exposed to pornography at a later age²⁴⁵.

Most researchers agree that viewing non-violent pornography does not produce negative effects, although a couple disagree about this²⁴⁶. In experimental studies, researchers expose subjects in a laboratory to violent pornography and then measure changes in their aggressiveness and attitudes towards women. Some studies suggest that these changes

²⁴³ Baron, L & Straus, M.A. (1989). *Four Theories of Rape in American Society*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

²⁴⁴ Abramson, P.R. & Hayashi, H. (1984). Pornography in Japan: cross-cultural and theoretical considerations in Malamuth, N.M. & Donnerstein, E. (Eds.) *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, 173-183; Kutchinsky, B. (1991). Pornography and rape: theory and practice? Evidence from crime data in four countries where pornography is easily available. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14(1-2), 47-64; Kimmel, M. & Linders, A. (1996) Does censorship make a difference? An aggregate empirical analysis of pornography and rape. *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*, 8, 1-20.

²⁴⁵ Gebhard, P., Gagnon, J.H. Pomeroy, W.B. & Christenson, C.V. (1965). *Sex Offenders*. New York: Harper and Row; Goldstein, M.J. & Kant, H. (1973). *Pornography and Sexual Deviance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁴⁶ Zillmann, D. & Weaver, J.B. (1989). Pornography and men's sexual callousness toward women in Zillmann, D. & Bryant, J. (Eds.) *Pornography: research advances and policy considerations*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 95-125.

include increased tendencies to aggression against women; an increased acceptance of violence against women, especially rape; an acceptance of 'rape myths'; the production of rape fantasies; an increase in self-nominated likelihood to commit rape; and decreased support for women's rights²⁴⁷. But other researchers have found that when they show the same kinds of pornography to the same kinds of people, they have not produced the same negative effects²⁴⁸.

There are problems with the way that this kind of research is carried out²⁴⁹. In laboratory experiments the participants who are shown pornography are not necessarily consumers of pornography. They do not watch it as people do in everyday life, but instead are shown, without knowing what they are going to see, material that they have not chosen and that some of them may find upsetting. They watch this in public, surrounded by other test subjects. They may have to watch it for extended periods, up to an hour sometimes. They are not allowed to masturbate. In the real world, consumers of pornography choose what kinds of pornography they are going to watch and research suggests that they do not enjoy violent pornography²⁵⁰. They tend to watch pornography in situations where they

²⁴⁷ Donnerstein, E. & Berkowitz, L. (1981). Victim reactions in aggressive erotic films as a factor in violence against women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41, 710-724; Malamuth, N.M. (1981). Rape fantasies as a function of exposure to violent sexual stimuli. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 10, 33-47; Zillman, D. & Bryant, J. (1984). Effects of massive exposure to pornography in Malamuth, N.M. & Donnerstein, E. (Eds.) *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*. New York: Academic Press, 115-138.

²⁴⁸ Fisher, W.A. & Grenier, G. (1994). Violent pornography, anti-woman thoughts, and anti-woman acts: in search of reliable effects. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 31, 23-38; Malamuth, N.M. & Centi, J. (1986). Repeated exposure to violent and non-violent pornography. Likelihood of raping ratings and laboratory aggression against women. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 12, 129-137; Padgett, V.R., Brislin Slutz, J. & Neal, J.A. (1989) Pornography, erotica and attitudes towards women: the effects of repeated exposure. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 26, 479-491. Donnerstein, E. Linz, D. & Penrod, S. (1987). *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications*. New York: Macmillan; Ferguson, C. J. & Hartley, R. D. (2009). The pleasure is momentary...the expense damnable? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14(5), 323-329.

²⁴⁹ See for example Fisher, W.A & Barak, A. (1991). Pornography, erotica and behaviour: more questions than answers. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14, 65-83; Brannigan, A. (1991). Obscenity and social harm: a contested terrain. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14, 1-12; Segal, L. (1990). Pornography and Violence: What the 'Experts' Really Say. *Feminist Review*, 36, 29-41.

²⁵⁰ McKee, A. (2006). Censorship of sexually explicit materials in Australia: what do consumers of pornography have to say about it? *Media International Australia*, 120, 35-50; Zillmann, D. (2000). Influence of unrestrained access to erotica on adolescents' and young adults' dispositions toward sexuality, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 27, 41-42.

are either alone, or with people they feel comfortable with. They may 'fast forward' to the bits they like, and only watch short segments and they may masturbate. Even the researchers who have managed to produce negative effects from exposure to pornography say that this only works with people who don't usually watch pornography. People who are familiar with and enjoy pornography do not get upset or aggressive when they are exposed to it²⁵¹.

It has been argued that there is a correlation between people consuming pornography and having liberal sexual attitudes. There are two key problems with this work. The first is that it establishes correlation - not causality. Saying that two things happen at the same time is not the same as saying that one causes the other. It would be more reasonable to conclude that the kinds of people who like pornography are also the kinds of people who have more liberal attitudes towards sexual practices.

Surveys of consumers of pornography suggest that people who consume more pornography are more sexually adventurous than non-consumers - they are interested in less heteronormative forms of sex, including casual sex and anal sex²⁵². They also tend to have attitudes towards women that are the same as - or better than - the population generally²⁵³. They report that pornography can be valuable in promoting some of these aspects of healthy sexual development²⁵⁴. For example, pornography consumers report that pornography helps them to learn about what they might enjoy, to communicate openly with partners ('I saw this and thought I'd like to try it...'), and to feel that sex can be pleasurable and should be joyful rather than aggressive and coercive.

²⁵¹ Effects of massive exposure to pornography in Malamuth, N.M. & Donnerstein, E. (Eds.) *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*. New York: Academic Press, 115-138; Donnerstein, E. (1984). Pornography: its effect on violence against women in Malamuth N. M. & Donnerstein, E. (Eds.) *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*. New York: Academic Press, 53-84.

²⁵² See Zillmann, D. (2000). Influence of unrestrained access to erotica on adolescents' and young adults' dispositions toward sexuality, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 27, 41-44.

²⁵³ Davies, K.A. (1997). Voluntary exposure to pornography and men's attitudes towards feminism and rape. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 34, 131-138; Malamuth, N.M., Addison, T. & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: are there reliable effects and can we understand them?, *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26-91.

²⁵⁴ McKee, A., Albury, K., Dunne, M., Grieshaber, S., Hartley, J., Lumby, C. & Mathews, B. (2010). Healthy Sexual Development: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Research. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 22(1), 14-19.

Regulation and sexually explicit media

In the UK the notion of 'obscenity' has played a central role in deciding what kinds of sexual representations are permissible and the 'obscenity test', where the jury is asked to decide whether an image or text is likely to 'deprave and corrupt' viewers²⁵⁵, has been used to determine standards of sexual decency, morality, and taste.

Under the Obscene Publication Acts of 1857 and 1959 books such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) have been prosecuted, but increasingly juries have acquitted publishers accused of obscenity. The purpose of the obscenity act has been repeatedly debated in relation to shifting sexual norms and following the outcomes of some court cases prosecuted under the Act, there have been claims that it is out of date and irrelevant²⁵⁶.

Newer legislation - section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008) - focuses on 'extreme' material that 'appears to have been produced solely or principally for the purpose of sexual arousal'. This legal provision identifies material as 'extreme' if it is 'grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character' and, subject to prosecution, if it represents in 'an explicit and realistic way' an activity that could threaten the person's life, or be 'likely to result in serious injury to a person's anus, breasts or genitals'²⁵⁷.

As with the Obscene Publications Act, a number of cases have led to debate about the legislation on extreme pornography. Criticisms of the

²⁵⁵ Obscene Publications Act 1959, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/section/1>

²⁵⁶ Nelson Jones, 'Defending Obscenity', *Heresy Corner*, <http://heresycorner.blogspot.com/2012/01/defending-obscenity.html>

²⁵⁷ CJIA (2008) Criminal Justice and Immigration Act. Section 63, Possession of extreme pornographic images, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/section/63>; For discussions, see Murray, A.D. (2009). The reclassification of extreme pornographic images. *The Modern Law Review*, 72(1), 73-90; Wilkinson, E. (2009). Perverting visual pleasure: Representing sadomasochism. *Sexualities*, 12(2), 181-198; Petley, J. (2009). Pornography, Panopticism and the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008. *Sociology Compass*, 3(3), 417-432; Attwood, F. & Smith, C. (2010). Extreme concern: regulating 'dangerous pictures' in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Law and Society*, 37(1), 171-188; Carline, A. (2011). Criminal justice, extreme pornography and prostitution: Protecting women or promoting morality? *Sexualities*, 14(3), 312-333; For an overview of recent shifts in regulation see Attwood, F. & Walters, C. (2013). Fifty Shades and the law: Regulating sex and sex media in the UK, *Sexualities*, 16(8), 974-979.

legislation note that it allows for the criminalization of the depiction of sexual practices that are legal to perform, such as fisting. It also criminalizes depictions of consensual BDSM²⁵⁸. This is particularly problematic given that BDSM is still often misunderstood and pathologized²⁵⁹, and that BDSM representations may be an important aspect of the BDSM community and a useful way of learning to conduct BDSM practices safely²⁶⁰.

More recently it has been argued that legislation around extreme pornography should focus on images which portray staged or simulated consensual adult rape-fantasies. However, there is no evidence of a causal link between viewing consensual adult rape-fantasies and non-consensual sexual offences such as rape. It has been argued that such images may cause 'cultural harm', defined as a change in public opinion, contributing to a climate in which violence is condoned. Yet there is no evidence of a change in public opinion or of cultural harm. Images of actual rape remain evidence of an offence under the Sexual Offences Act²⁶¹.

There has also been a more general move away from the regulation of sexual images of children as a record of abuse to focus on images of fictional minors²⁶². In a number of countries what can be prosecuted under anti-child pornography laws has expanded to include pseudo and virtual pornography²⁶³. In the UK the Coroners and Justice Act of 2009 has criminalized a wide number of images, including Japanese comic books and animated films that depict 'grossly offensive' images of fictional minors²⁶⁴.

²⁵⁸ See Backlash for an overview of the debates, <http://www.backlash-uk.org.uk/wp/>

²⁵⁹ Langdrige, D. & Barker, M. (Eds.) (2007). *Safe, Sane and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadoomasochism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁶⁰ Wilkinson, E. (2011). 'Extreme pornography' and the contested spaces of virtual citizenship, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(5), 493-508.

²⁶¹ See Obscenity Lawyer for an overview, <http://obscenitylawyer.blogspot.co.uk/>

²⁶² Stapleton, A. (2012) 'Border Patrol: Trevor Brown, Aesthetics and the Protection of Fictitious Children' in Attwood, F., Campbell, V., Hunter, I.Q. & Lockyer, S. (Eds.) *Controversial Images; Media Representations on the Edge*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 115-130.

²⁶³ McLelland, M. (2012). Australia's 'child-abuse material' legislation, internet regulation and the juridification of the imagination. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(5), 467-483.

²⁶⁴ Petley, J. (2012). Punishing the Peep Show: Carnality and the Dangerous Images Act in Mendix, X. (Ed.) *Peep Shows: Cult Film and the Cine-Erotic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 251-263.

Section 4

Young People, Sex and Sexuality

Are young people becoming more sexual?

What do we know about children's sexuality?

Are teenage pregnancies rising?

Are STIs rising among young people?

Are abortion rates rising among young people?

Is pornography dangerous for young people?

Is sexting dangerous?

Is sexualization linked to the sexual abuse of young people?

Young people, media and sexualization

What do we know about the effectiveness of SRE?

Are young people becoming more sexual?

A key concern for many over the last decade has been the extent to which media negatively impact on children and young people. For example, a common assumption is that media produce a compulsion in young girls to mimic the attitudes, beliefs, and sexual actions of celebrities.

It has been argued that 'sexualization' has produced a rise in risky or undesirable sexual behaviours ranging from exhibitionist games and lap dancing to increases in teenage pregnancy and sexual exchanges such as sexting²⁶⁵. It has also been claimed that sexualization fosters an inability to engage in loving relationships and restricts girls' aspirations. Fears have been expressed about a range of issues - from addiction to online porn, the presence of paedophiles on social networking sites, and the influence of 'extreme' images.

A range of media texts - notably pornography but also music videos, lad mags and celebrity magazines, goods such as toys, clothes and accessories, and leisure practices such as pole exercise and 'sexy' dancing have come under scrutiny. It has been argued that children are becoming too sexy too soon and that this places them at risk of sexual abuse. These concerns are often gathered together as examples of 'sexualization', but there is widespread agreement that sexualization is an imprecise and unhelpful term²⁶⁶.

²⁶⁵ See Rush, E. & LaNauze, A. (2006). *Corporate Paedophilia*. Discussion Paper 90. The Australia Institute; American Psychological Association (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls*. Washington: American Psychological Association; M.T. Reist (Ed.) *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press; Papadopoulos, L. (2010). *Sexualisation of Young People Review*; Bailey, R. (2011). *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood*. London: The Stationery Office.

²⁶⁶ see Phoenix, A. (2011). *Review of recent literature for the Bailey Review of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood*, http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/projects/documents/CWRC_commercialisationsexualisation_review_final_WP_No_2.pdf

Ideas about normal childhood have changed dramatically over time and the idea that children are naturally innocent is a modern one²⁶⁷. The age of consent for heterosexual acts in England was 12 in the 13th century, becoming 13 and then 16 in the 19th century. Ages of consent also vary dramatically even within contemporary Europe; they are 13 in Spain and 14 in Germany for example. It is also well documented that concerns about media influence on children are far from a modern phenomenon. These have historically focused on everything from popular songs, novels, and Shakespeare's plays, to comic books, popular music, television and video, and more recently the internet and social media²⁶⁸.

Whilst sexualization is presented as a force 'unlike anything faced by children in the past'²⁶⁹, most public discussions about childhood sexuality since the late eighteenth century have taken this concerned form, stressing the corruption of childhood innocence and the need to protect young people by regulating their access to sex and to media²⁷⁰. What is particularly notable about the current set of concerns about children and young people is that these focus almost entirely on girls.

What do we know about children's sexuality?

²⁶⁷ Jenks, C. (1996). *Childhood*. London: Routledge; Higonnet, A. (1998). *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*. New York: Thames & Hudson; Kincaid, J.R. (1998). *Erotic innocence: The culture of child molesting*. Durham: Duke University Press; Jackson, S. & Scott, S. (2010) *Theorizing Sexuality*. Maidenhead: Open University Press; Egan, R. D. & Hawkes, G. (2010). *Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁶⁸ Barker, M. & Petley, J. (Eds.). (1997, 2005). *III Effects: The Media Violence Debate*. London: Routledge; McNair, B. (2002). *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire*, London: Routledge.

²⁶⁹ Rush, E. (2009). What are the risks of premature sexualization for children? in Reist, M.T. (Ed). *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

²⁷⁰ Egan, R.D. & Hawkes, G. (2007). Producing the Prurient through the Pedagogy of Purity: Childhood Sexuality and the Social Purity Movement. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 20(4), 443-61; Egan, R.D. & Hawkes, G. (2008). Endangered Girls and Incendiary Objects: Unpicking the Discourse on Sexualisation. *Sexuality and Culture*, 12, 291-311; Egan, R.D. & Hawkes, G. (2010). *Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Egan, R.D. & Hawkes, G. (2012). Sexuality, Youth and the Perils of Endangered Innocence: How History Can Help us Get Past the Panic. *Gender and Education*, 24(3), 269-84; Dyhouse, C. (2013). *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*. London: Zed Books.

Most research on the development of children's sexuality and sexual behaviours is conducted after puberty. There is very little research on pre-teens, and, most of what there is focuses on children in the context of sexual abuse. We know very little about children's sexuality in other settings and in everyday lives²⁷¹.

How children become sexual is a complex process²⁷². The model of a natural, staged progression towards sexual adulthood is no longer thought to be as helpful as it once was²⁷³, and, there is no universal agreement about what constitutes adulthood and childhood. Because sexuality is more than just sex acts (i.e. it encompasses identity, social interaction and culture) it is dependent upon a range of factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity, as well as children's own understandings of their sexual cultures. For example, while a developmentalist model might interpret young children's boyfriend/girlfriend cultures as a rehearsal for adult roles, an approach that generates understandings from children's own meanings and values suggests that boys and girls are just using the available positions of 'girlfriend and boyfriend' to sustain their close friendships²⁷⁴.

What we do know about children's sexuality, sexual experience and behaviours suggests variation across countries. Research on the health behaviour of school-aged children in 42 countries in and beyond Europe suggests that experience of sexual intercourse as reported by 15-year-olds varies considerably across countries, from 12% in Slovakia to 38% in Bulgaria and Denmark²⁷⁵. Among 15-year-olds, a third or more have experienced sexual intercourse in England, Scotland and Ukraine,

²⁷¹ James, A. & Prout, A. (Eds). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Construction of Childhood*. London: Routledge; Sandfort, T. & Rademakers, R. (Eds.) (2000). *Childhood Sexuality: Normal Sexual Behaviour and Development*. New York. Haworth Press; Goldman, R. & Goldman, J. (1982). *Children's Sexual Thinking: A Comparative Study of Children aged 5 to 15 years in Australia, North America, Britain, and Sweden*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

²⁷² Walkerdine, V. (2004). Developmental Psychology and the Study of Childhood in Kehily, M.J. (Ed). *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 96-107.

²⁷³ Thorne, B. (1987). Re-visioning Women and Social Change: Where are the Children? *Gender and Society*, 1(1), 85-109.

²⁷⁴ Renold, E. (2006). 'They won't let us play unless you're going out with one of them': Girls, Boys and Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' in the Primary Years, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 489-509.

²⁷⁵ WHO (2009). *A Snapshot of the Health of Young People in Europe*, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/Life-stages/child-and-adolescent-health/publications/2009/a-snapshot-of-young-peoples-health-in-europe>

compared to about a fifth in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Spain. The gender gap between age at first sexual intercourse is narrowing in the European Union with rates of first sexual intercourse for girls highest in Northern Europe, and relatively low in Southern and Western Europe.

In nations where data is collected, a steep decrease in age at first intercourse among women up to and including the 1970s is shown. However, in many countries (including the UK), there is evidence of subsequent stabilization. In several European countries this stabilization occurred in the early 1980s. In the USA, it occurred in the late 1980s. In Britain and New Zealand, heterosexual intercourse continued to occur at earlier ages throughout the 1980s, but recent comparisons suggest a convergence of behaviour among young men and women in the mid to late 1980s, and what seems to be a stabilization of age at first intercourse among young women in the 1990s. The average age for first intercourse in males and females in England, Scotland and Wales is 16, and slightly lower (15.9) in Northern Ireland²⁷⁶.

Penis in vagina (PIV) intercourse is consistently defined by the vast majority of people as 'sex', but US studies have found that oral-genital contact is less likely to be considered 'sex' than in the 1990s, particularly among young people²⁷⁷. Relatively small scale research in the UK found that young women identifying as lesbian were more likely to consider a range of forms of genital stimulation as 'sex' than young women or men identifying as heterosexual²⁷⁸. Meanings of 'virginity' and 'abstinence' also vary by gender, ethnicity and extent of sexual experience²⁷⁹. There is minimal evidence to support the claim that young people substitute anal intercourse for vaginal intercourse on a widespread scale as a way of 'maintaining virginity'. Investigating the meanings of virginity and abstinence has been a stronger focus in US studies than those in the UK, probably due to the political and moral climate around abstinence-only sex education.

²⁷⁶ Wellings, K., Nanchahal, K., Macdowall, W., McManus, S., Erens, B., Mercer, C. H. & Field, J. (2001). Sexual behaviour in Britain: early heterosexual experience. *The Lancet*, 358,(9296), 1843-1850; FPA, <http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/teenagers-sexual-health-and-behaviour-factsheet-january-2011.pdf>

²⁷⁷ Hans, J. D., Gillen, M. & Akande, K. (2010). Sex Redefined: The Reclassification Of Oral-Genital Contact. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 42(2), 74-78.

²⁷⁸ Horowitz, A. D. & Spicer, L. (2013). 'Having sex' as a graded and hierarchical construct: a comparison of sexual definitions among heterosexual and lesbian emerging adults in the UK. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50(2), 139-150.

²⁷⁹ Bersamin, M.M., Bourdeau, B., Fisher, D.A. & Grube, J.W. (2010). Television use, sexual behaviour, and relationship status at last oral sex and vaginal intercourse. *Sexuality & Culture*, 14 (2), 157-68.

Evidence suggests that the conceivable sexual repertoire of genital contact for young people includes hand-genital contact, oral sex (mouth-penis, mouth-vulva, and 69ers), vaginal intercourse and anal intercourse²⁸⁰. Non-coital sex tends to be imagined in terms of heterosexual norms. For example hand jobs, vaginal fingering, and oral sex are often seen as preparation for vaginal intercourse²⁸¹. In partnered sex, PIV intercourse continues to predominate as the most common practice in most sexual interactions²⁸². US data from 2010 found that only 12% of boys and 10% of girls claimed to have received oral sex from an opposite gender sex partner with only 1% from a same sex partner. The response rate for vaginal and anal intercourse was equally low; 9% of boys and 11% of girls had had vaginal intercourse in the last twelve months while 1% of boys and 4% of girls engaged in anal sex²⁸³. In the most recent NATSAL survey 74% of men and 71% of women aged 16-24 had had vaginal sex in the last year, 71% of both men and women aged 16-24 had had oral sex in the last year, and 19% of men and 17% of women aged 16-24 had had anal sex in the last year²⁸⁴.

US data shows that masturbation rather than penetrative sex is the most common sexual practice among 14-15 year olds; with 62% of boys and 40% of girls engaging in this form of sexual practice. Young women's experiences of masturbation may be related to positive early childhood communication and positive views of their sexual identity and their

²⁸⁰ Halpern, C. T. & Haydon, A. A. (2012). Sexual timetables for oral-genital, vaginal, and anal intercourse: Sociodemographic comparisons in a nationally representative sample of adolescents. *American Journal of Public Health, 102*(6), 1221-8.

²⁸¹ Lewis, R., Marston, C. & Wellings, K. (2013). Bases, Stages and 'Working Your Way Up': Young People's Talk About Non-Coital Practices and 'Normal' Sexual Trajectories. *Sociological Research Online, 18*(1), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/1/1.html>

²⁸² Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S.A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J.D (2010). Sexual Behavior in the United States: Results from a national probability sample of men and women ages 14-94. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, Oct 7*, Suppl 5, 255-65.

²⁸³ Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S.A., Dodge, B. & Fortenberry, J.D (2010). Sexual Behavior in the United States: Results from a national probability sample of men and women ages 14-94. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, Oct 7*, Supplement 5, 255-65.

²⁸⁴ NATSAL (2013). *Sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain: Highlights from Natsal-3*, http://www.natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf?utm_source=2013%20Findings&utm_medium=Download&utm_campaign=Infographic%20findings%202013; see also <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>

subsequent sexual activity²⁸⁵.

US data also suggests that when young people between the ages of 14-17 have vaginal intercourse they engage in safer sex practices; 79.1% of males and 58.1% of females used a condom in their last ten acts of intercourse. It suggests downward trends in the onset of first sex and an increase in condom use²⁸⁶. In England 80% of young people (16-24) use a condom at first sex and less than 1 in ten use no contraception²⁸⁷. It is worth noting that these figures are lower in Northern Ireland (63.8% and over a quarter), which may be related to religious views and subsequent access to services²⁸⁸.

13-16 year olds' reports of their experiences of heterosexual relationships in Scotland and England show that most evaluate their early sexual experiences positively, but that greater proportions of young women than men felt pressure at first sexual intercourse (19% vs. 10%), regretted their first time (38% vs. 20%) and did not enjoy their most recent sex (12% vs. 5%). The psychology of sexual regret suggests that these feelings are shaped by commonly understood sex/gender differences; i.e. males are active and females passive²⁸⁹. Regret is often judged against a perceived failure to save sex for the 'right person' or the 'right' time²⁹⁰ and argued to relate to a sense of failure to conform to dominant ideas about normal and appropriate sexual norms²⁹¹.

²⁸⁵ Hogarth, H. & Ingham, R. (2009). Masturbation among young women and associations with sexual health: An exploratory study. *Journal of Sex Research*, 46(6), 558-567.

²⁸⁶ Eaton, D. K., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Shanklin, S., Flint, K. H., Hawkins, J. & Lim, C. (2012). Youth risk behavior surveillance - United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summaries*, 61(4), 1-162.

²⁸⁷ Hatherall, B., Ingham, R., Stone, N. & McEachran, J. (2007). How, not just if, condoms are used: the timing of condom application and removal during vaginal sex among young people in England. *Sexually transmitted infections*, 83(1), 68-70.

²⁸⁸ FPA Sexual behaviour factsheet, <http://www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/sexual-behaviour>

²⁸⁹ Galperin, A., Haselton, M. G., Frederick, D. A., Poore, J., von Hippel, W., Buss, D. M. & Gonzaga, G. C. (2013). Sexual Regret: Evidence for Evolved Sex Differences. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Oct 42(7), 1145-61.

²⁹⁰ Holland, J. & Ramazamoglu, C. (1992). Risk, power and the possibility of pleasure: Young women and safer sex. *Aids Care*, 43, 273-284; Holland, J., Ramazamoglu, C., Sharpe, S. & Thomson, R. (1998.) *The Male in the Head: young people, heterosexuality and power*. London, Tuffnell Press.

²⁹¹ Ingham, R. (2005). 'We didn't cover that at school': Education against pleasure or education for pleasure? *Sex Education*, 5(4), 375-388.

Are teenage pregnancies rising?

Teenage pregnancy rates among young women vary widely. The Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland have the lowest rates of teenage births (below 5 per 1,000) while figures in Romania, the UK and the US are higher (above 29 per 1,000)²⁹². The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy suggests a number of reasons for sexual initiation (and as a consequence, pregnancy) including curiosity, opportunity, real or imagined peer pressure, the wish not to be left behind, being in a relationship, fear of losing a boy or girlfriend, the need to be loved or the belief that sex equals love, and media influences that glamorize sex, and alcohol²⁹³.

Reducing teenage pregnancy has been a major Public Health priority in the UK since 1997. It is reported to present a cost to the NHS and beyond and lead to a number of poor physical and social outcomes such as social deprivation, low breast feeding rates, and mental ill-health. Groups who are more vulnerable to becoming teenage parents include young people who are in or leaving care, homeless, underachieving at school, children of teenage parents, members of some ethnic groups, involved in crime, and/or living in areas with higher social deprivation²⁹⁴.

Between 1998 and 2008, the teenage conception rate in England and Wales fell by 13.3% for under 18s, although rates still remain similar to those in the 1950s and 60s. Some critics have argued against the validity of making national comparisons and have disputed whether teenage pregnancy is a problem, challenging the belief that it a health problem or

²⁹² Ranging from about a rate of 12 per 1000 women aged 15-19 in Italy to about 59 in Bulgaria. WHO (2009) *A snapshot of the health of young people in Europe*, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/Life-stages/child-and-adolescent-health/publications/2009/a-snapshot-of-young-peoples-health-in-europe>

²⁹³ SEU (1999) *The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy*. Social Exclusion Unit. HMSO.

²⁹⁴ SEU (1999) *The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy*. Social Exclusion Unit. HMSO.

produces poorer outcomes for young parents and children²⁹⁵. It has been argued that evidence indicating poor outcomes for teenage parents is selective and fails to report positive outcomes such as protection from diabetes and breast cancer, together with better obstetric outcomes²⁹⁶. These tangible health outcomes are complemented by the positive experiences of young parenthood found among many teenage parents and challenge the pessimistic account provided in policy making²⁹⁷ which has been described as demonizing young motherhood²⁹⁸.

Are STIs rising among young people?

Whilst teenage conception rates have declined due to a range of interventions, most notably access to contraception services²⁹⁹, rising rates

-
- ²⁹⁵ Arai, L. (2000). British policy on teenage pregnancy and childbearing; the limitations of comparisons with other European countries. *Critical Social Policy*, 23, 89-102; Arai, L. (2003). Low expectations, sexual attitudes and knowledge: explaining teenage pregnancy and fertility in English communities. Insights from qualitative research. *Sociological Review*, 51, 199-217; Arai, L. (2009). *Teenage pregnancy: the making and unmaking of a problem*. Bristol, Polity Press; Duncan, S. (2007). What's the problem with teenage parents? And what's the problem with policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 27, 307-334; Seamark, C. J. & Lings, P. (2004). Positive experiences of teenage motherhood: a qualitative study. *The British Journal of General Practice*, 54(508), 813-818; Lawlor, D. A., & Shaw, M. (2002). Too much too young? Teenage pregnancy is not a public health problem. *International journal of Epidemiology*, 31(3), 552-553.
- ²⁹⁶ Quinlivan, J. A., Tan, L. H., Steele, A. & Black, K. (2004). Impact of demographic factors, early family relationships and depressive symptomatology in teenage pregnancy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 38(4), 197-203; Bingley, P. J., Douek, I. F., Rogers, C. A. & Gale, E. A. (2000). Influence of maternal age at delivery and birth order on risk of type 1 diabetes in childhood: prospective population based family study. *British Medical Journal*, 321(7258), 420-424; McPherson, K., Steel, C. & Dixon, J. M. (2000). ABC of breast diseases: breast cancer - epidemiology, risk factors, and genetics. *British Medical Journal*, 321(7261), 624-8.
- ²⁹⁷ Macvarish, J. (2010). The effect of 'risk-thinking' on the contemporary construction of teenage motherhood. *Health, risk & society*, 12(4), 313-322.
- ²⁹⁸ Duncan, S. (2007) What's the problem with teenage parents? And what's the problem with policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 27, 307-334.
- ²⁹⁹ Santelli, J. S., Lindberg, L. D., Finer, L. B. & Singh, S. (2007). Explaining recent declines in adolescent pregnancy in the United States: the contribution of abstinence and improved contraceptive use. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(1), 150-156.

of sexually transmitted infections in the under 25s are a major public health concern in the UK.

Young people under the age of 25 experience the highest rates of STIs although concern is also expressed about the rising rates in adults. Of those diagnosed in GUM clinics in England in 2010, 63% with chlamydia, 54% with genital warts, 47% with gonorrhoea, and 41% with genital herpes were under 25 years. Among women in 2010, rates of diagnosis of chlamydia, genital warts and gonorrhoea peaked in those aged 19 while those of genital herpes peaked in 20 year olds. The peak in men occurred in slightly older men and was more attenuated. Rates of chlamydia and genital warts peaked in those aged 21, while those of gonorrhoea and genital herpes peaked in those aged 22 and 23 years respectively. Although overall numbers of diagnoses in those under 25 have risen considerably in the last 10 years, there has been a notable decline in some STIs in younger adults in recent years: between 2008 and 2010 diagnoses of genital warts cases in women and men aged 15-19 fell by 13% and 8% respectively while those of gonorrhoea fell by 13% and 14% respectively³⁰⁰.

Are abortion rates rising among young people?

In the past 10 years the abortion rate has remained relatively stable in England and Wales³⁰¹. For younger women the rate has declined slightly. In 2011 the abortion rate was highest for women aged 20, the same as in 2010 and in 2001. The under 16 abortion rate was 3.4 per 1,000 women and the under 18 rate was 15.0 per 1,000 women, both lower than in 2010 and 2001³⁰². The proportion of abortions taking place early in pregnancy has increased significantly over the last ten years because there have been significant improvements in access to abortion. Recent research however has suggested that 'abortion negativity' may make it difficult for pregnant teenagers to have an abortion, even when they are certain that

³⁰⁰ Public Health England Sexual Health Profiles and Index, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/sexualhealthprofiles>

³⁰¹ Department of Health (2012). *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2011*, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/213386/Commentary1.pdf

³⁰² Public Health England Sexual Health Profiles and Index, <http://www.hpa.org.uk/sexualhealthprofiles>

they do not want to become mothers³⁰³. In some minority ethnic communities abortion may be seen as preferable to unmarried motherhood³⁰⁴. Teenagers from socially deprived backgrounds are more likely to become pregnant and less likely to terminate pregnancies than those who are more privileged³⁰⁵.

Is pornography dangerous for young people?

According to recent European research, 93% of 9-16 year old users go online at least weekly and 60% go online everyday or almost every day. 14% of young people have experienced sexual content online; 23% have encountered sexual content online or offline³⁰⁶.

There has been considerable interest in the kinds of effects pornography

-
- ³⁰³ Hoggart, L. (2012). 'I'm pregnant... what am I going to do?': An examination of value judgements and moral frameworks in teenage pregnancy decision making. *Health, Risk & Society*, 14(6), 533-549.
- ³⁰⁴ French, R. S., Joyce, L., Fenton, K., Kingori, P., Griffiths, C., Stone, V. & Stephenson, J. (2005). *Exploring the attitudes and behaviours of Bangladeshi, Indian and Jamaican young people in relation to reproductive and sexual health. A report for the Teenage Pregnancy Unit*. London: Centre for Sexually Transmitted Infections/Health Protection Agency; Higginbottom, G.M.A., Serrant-Green, L., Mathers, N., Marsh, P., Kirkham, M. & Owen, J. (2008). 'I didn't do it cause I wanted a baby': sexual decision making, roles and choices in relation to early parenthood amongst black and minority ethnic young parents in England. *Diversity in Health and Social Care*, 5(2), 89-99; Higginbottom, G. M. A., Mathers, N., Marsh, P., Kirkham, M., Owen, J. M. & Serrant-Green, L. (2006). Young people of minority ethnic origin in England and early parenthood: views from young parents and service providers. *Social science & medicine*, 63(4), 858-870.
- ³⁰⁵ Smith, T. (1993). Influence of socioeconomic factors on attaining targets for reducing teenage pregnancies. *British Medical Journal*, 306(6887), 1232-1235; Lee, E., Clements, S., Ingham, R. & Stone, N. (2004). A matter of choice? Explaining national variation in teenage abortion and motherhood. York: University of Southampton/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- ³⁰⁶ Livingstone, S (2011). Key Findings, EU Kids Online, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20\(2009-11\)/EUKidsExecSummary/IrelandExecSum.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20(2009-11)/EUKidsExecSummary/IrelandExecSum.pdf); Livingstone, S. Haddon, L., Görzig, A. & Ólafsson, K. (2011). Risk and Safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings. EU Kids Online <http://www.eukidsgreece.gr/158/>; Hasebrink, U., Görzig, A., Haddon, L., Kalmus, V. & Livingstone, S. (2011). In-depth analyses from the EU Kids Online survey of 9-to-16-year-olds and their parents in 25 European countries. EU Kids Online, www.eukidsonline.net.

might have on children³⁰⁷. There are also concerns regarding young people's overall use of online technologies³⁰⁸, based on the observation that children appear to be learning how to use the internet even more quickly and at a younger age³⁰⁹. Concerns about pornography focus on whether it influences young people, whether they might get addicted to it, and how they may be harmed³¹⁰. In public debates about pornography, the focus is often on the 'exposure' of young people to sexual media by accident, because of popups, inadequate methods of searching, or weak safety measures³¹¹. But older children also seek out sexual media online and engaging with these becomes part of the way they work out their understandings of sex and sexuality³¹².

Studies suggest that engagement with online pornography is less prevalent than many people think. The majority takes place in the older age groups. In the UK research suggests that 21% of 9-11 year olds who use the internet at least once a week have come into contact with porn, along with 58% of 12-15 year olds, 76% of 16-17 year olds and 80% of 18-19 year

³⁰⁷ Wang, L., Luo, J., Luo, J., Gao, W. & Kong, J. (2012). The effect of Internet use on adolescents' lifestyles: A national survey. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 28(6), 2007-2013; Shen, C.-X., Liu, R. & Wang, D. (2012). Why are children attracted to the internet? The role of need satisfaction perceived online and perceived in daily real life. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 29(1), 185-192.

³⁰⁸ Buckingham, D. & Willett, R. (Eds.) (2006). *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

³⁰⁹ Livingstone, S. Haddon, L., Görizig, A. & Ólafsson, K. (2011). Risk and Safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings. EU Kids Online <http://www.eukidsgreece.gr/158/>;

³¹⁰ Tsaliki, L. (2011). Playing with porn: Greek children's explorations in pornography. *Sex and Education*, 11(3): 293-302; Smith, C. & Attwood, F. (2011). Lamenting sexualization: research, rhetoric and the story of young people's 'sexualization' in the UK Home Office review. *Sex Education*, 11(3), 327-337; McKee, A. (2010) Does pornography harm young people? *Australian Journal of Communication*, 37(1), 17-36; Livingstone, S. & Haddon, L. (Eds.) (2009). *Kids Online: Opportunities and risks for children*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

³¹¹ Livingstone, S. & Haddon, L. (2009). *EU Kids Online: Final report*. LSE, London, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20%20\(2006-9\)/EU%20Kids%20Online%20I%20Reports/EUKidsOnlineFinalReport.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20%20(2006-9)/EU%20Kids%20Online%20I%20Reports/EUKidsOnlineFinalReport.pdf)

³¹² Bale, C. (2011). Raunch or romance? Framing and interpreting the relationship between sexualized culture and young people's sexual health. *Sex Education*, 11(3): 303-13.

olds³¹³.

The extent and ease with which the term 'risk' is used in policy, research and practice in relation to young people's encounters with pornography would suggest its meaning is obvious. But little work has been carried out on the nature of young people's experiences and their understanding of pornography and its place in their lives. What research exists suggests that young people seek out sexual material out for a variety of reasons: curiosity, entertainment, facilitating masturbation, relieving boredom, increasing sexual knowledge, skills and confidence, to be transgressive, for the 'yuck' factor, and to develop opinions and capabilities³¹⁴.

A recent UK Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) on the effects of pornography states that it affects children and young people's sexual beliefs and is linked to children and young peoples' engagement in risky behaviours³¹⁵. However this review relies heavily on studies that have been criticized, and on a tradition of research that suggests a correlation between young people's consumption of pornography and a series of 'negative' effects around sexual permissiveness. This tradition is underpinned by a moralistic view of sex that suggests that the acceptance of premarital sex, casual sex, and being sexually experimental is a problem³¹⁶, despite the fact that none of these activities are illegal or necessarily undesirable.

One particular claim highlighted in the REA is that young people who

³¹³ Livingstone, S. & M. Bober (2005). *UK Children Go Online: Final report of key project findings*, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/395/1/UKCGOsurveyreport.pdf>; See Rovolis, A. & Tsaliki, L. (2012), Pornography in Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. & Goriz, A. (Eds.) *Children, risk and safety online: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective*. Policy Press: London, 165-176 for a critical discussion of the findings.

³¹⁴ Bale, C. (2011). Raunch or romance? Framing and interpreting the relationship between sexualized culture and young people's sexual health. *Sex Education*, 11(3): 303-13; Bale, C. (2012). *Exploring the relationship between sexualized media, young people and sexual health: A Qualitative Study*, PhD Thesis, Sheffield: University of Sheffield; Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2004). *Young People, Sex and the Media: The facts of life?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Tsaliki, L. (2011). Playing with porn: Greek children's explorations in pornography. *Sex Education*, 11(3), 293-302; Chronaki, D. (forthcoming). *Young People's accounts of experiences with sexual content*, PhD thesis, Loughborough: Loughborough University.

³¹⁵ Horvath, M., A H, Alys, L., Massey, K., Pina, A., Scally, M. & Adler, J. R. (2013). *Basically ... porn is everywhere. A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

³¹⁶ Haagstrom-Nordin, E., Sandberg, J., Hanson, U. & Tyden, T. (2006). 'It's everywhere!': young Swedish people's thoughts and reflections on pornography. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 20(4), 386-393.

consume pornography have higher levels of 'notions of women as sex objects'. It is important to note that studies claiming this included questions such as 'sexually active girls are more attractive partners'. Translating this as a form of sexual objectification is problematic. Similarly, the correlations between adolescents who use sexually explicit material and having 'sexual preoccupation' or 'sexual uncertainty' is framed as undesirable³¹⁷. However, there is nothing inherently bad about having a strong engagement with sexual issues, or not being sure about one's sexuality or preferences. These studies present sexual permissiveness, sexual experimentation (particularly anal sex), and even an interest in sex as 'negative'. Although this makes sense within a psychological tradition which often presents monogamous, relationship-oriented sex as the only 'mature' form of sexual practice, such value judgements have been challenged by many critical health researchers.

Several researchers have found a set of correlations for young people among consuming pornography and smoking, drinking, arson, lying, cheating and poorer psychosocial adjustment. Several of these studies focus on pornography as a key issue, which may give the impression that pornography is 'causing' these behaviours. But none of the studies explicitly make this claim. Indeed, it would be difficult to see how such a claim could be justified - no mechanism has been suggested by which consuming pornography would lead people to start smoking, commit arson or lie to people. However it is possible to see an explanation for this constellation of behaviours by understanding the consumption of pornography as a rebellious act. We know that some teachers and other authority figures see the consumption of pornography as a conduct problem. From this perspective it would not be surprising if young people who exhibit a range of rebellious behaviours would also engage in the consumption of pornography, at least in part as a sign of rebellion.

None of the studies discussed in the REA prove causality. As correlation studies they demonstrate that young people who consume pornography are also more likely to have approving attitudes about casual and extra-marital sex, to experiment sexually, and to have an interest in sex. It is possible therefore that an interest in sex precedes the consumption of pornography, or that a third variable - such as sexual adventurousness - predicts both an interest in pornography and an interest in sex.

Although all researchers are careful to point out that they cannot prove causality, the language they use in presenting their results commonly assumes it. Therefore, despite this explicit acknowledgement, there is

³¹⁷ See for example, Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2007). Adolescents' exposure to a sexualized media environment and their notions of women as sex objects. *Sex Roles*, 56, 381-395; Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2008). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual preoccupation: a three-wave panel study. *Media Psychology*, 11(2), 207-234.

often an assumption in the reports that it is pornography that is causing the other sexual behaviours. This perhaps explains why, despite the explicit disavowals of the researchers about proving causality, many read the articles as though they prove causality.

Is sexting dangerous?

Sexting is the term given by journalists, academics and policy makers to describe the exchange of sexual messages or images using mobile phones and the internet³¹⁸, but it is not a term that young people themselves use³¹⁹. It refers to a range of activities typically motivated by sexual pleasure, flirting and fun, such as posting photos of body parts, broadcasting sexual messages, and asking and being asked for revealing photos. It has given rise to widespread public and policy concern, often focused on legislation³²⁰. Minors have been charged with the production of sexually explicit underage materials which has sometimes been classed as 'child pornography'. Anti-sexting and e-safety campaigns have tended to suggest that girls put themselves at risk and are to be blamed for engaging in sexting³²¹.

Research on young people and social networking has shown that young people are deeply attached to digital communication technologies and find digital flirtation and sexual communication pleasurable, exciting and fun³²². While a survey in 2008 suggested that nearly 20% of teens were

³¹⁸ Lenhart, A. (2009). *Teens and Sexting*, Pew Internet Research, http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Teens_and_Sexting.pdf

³¹⁹ Albury, K. & Crawford, K. (2012). Sexting, Consent and Young People's Ethics: Beyond Megan's Story, *Continuum*, 26(3), 463-473.

³²⁰ Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., Jones, L. M., & Wolak, J. (2012). Prevalence and characteristics of youth sexting: a national study. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 13-20; Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D. & Mitchell, K. J. (2012). How often are teens arrested for sexting? Data from a national sample of police cases. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 4-12.

³²¹ Albury, K. & Crawford, K. (2012). Sexting, Consent and Young People's Ethics: Beyond Megan's Story, *Continuum*, 26(3), 463-473; Karaian, L. (2012). Lolita Speaks: 'Sexting' Teenage Girls and the Law. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 8(1), 57-73; Hasinoff, A.A. (2012). Sexting as Media Production: Rethinking Social Media and Sexuality. *New Media & Society*, 5(4), 449-465.

³²² boyd, d. (2007). Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life in Buckingham, D. (Ed.) *Digital Learning: Youth, Identity and Digital Media*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 119-124

sexting³²³, more recent research has found much lower numbers. A US study in 2009 found that 4% of young people aged 12-17 had sent sexually suggestive texts and 15% had received them³²⁴ and another US study in 2011 found that 1% of 10-17 year olds had appeared in or created sexually explicit images while 5.9% had received them³²⁵. A study in Australia in 2011 found that amongst young people over 18³²⁶ the majority of participants had never sent or received sexually explicit pictures of themselves. A European study found that 15% of 11-16 year olds had received and 3% had sent such images³²⁷.

Research suggests that most sexting occurs within relationships, or between people where one hopes to be in a relationship with the other³²⁸. Sexting may also occur between friends, as a joke or during a moment of bonding³²⁹. It generally only becomes a problem if people feel pressured into it or if the images that are shared go on to be shared with others without consent. There is a difference between 'experimental' sexting which involves romantic or sexual attention-seeking incidents and 'aggravated' sexting between adults and young people, or criminal or abusive behaviour between young people³³⁰. Problematic forms of sexting include 'harassment', for example, non-consensual images, 'at-risk', for example, a young person seeking 'hook-ups' with adults, and exploitation ,

³²³ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008). *Sex and Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults*, http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/pdf/sextech_summary.pdf

³²⁴ Lenhart, A.(2009). *Teens and Sexting*, Pew Internet Research, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Teens-and-Sexting.aspx>;

³²⁵ Mitchell, K.J., Finkelhor, D., Jones, L.M. & Wolak, J. (2012). Prevalence and Characteristics of Youth Sexting: A National Study. *Pediatrics*, 129,(1), 13-20.

³²⁶ Goggin, G. & Crawford, K. (2011). Moveable types: Youth and the Emergence of Mobile Social Media in Australia. *Media Asia Journal*, 37(4), 224-32.

³²⁷ Haddon, L. & Livingstone, S. (2012). *EU Kids Online: National Perspectives*, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II/Reports/PerspectivesReport.pdf>; Livingstone, S. & Görzig, A. (2012). 'Sexting': the exchange of sexual messages online among European youth in Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. & Görzig, A. (Eds.) *Children, Risk and Safety on the Internet: Kids online in comparative perspective*. Bristol: The Policy Press, 151-164.

³²⁸ Lenhart, A.(2009). *Teens and Sexting*, Pew Internet Research,http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Teens_and_Sexting.pdf

³²⁹ Goggin, G. & Crawford, K. (2011). Moveable types: Youth and the Emergence of Mobile Social Media in Australia. *Media Asia Journal*, 37(4), 224-32.

³³⁰ Wolak, J. & Finkelhor, D. (2011). *Sexting: A Typology*. Durham, NH: Crimes Against Children Research Center.

for example, images documenting sexual abuse, or distributed for the purposes of revenge or blackmail³³¹.

There is sometimes a blurring between pleasurable and coercive dimensions of digital sexual communication, where flirtation can lead to requests for photos from girls with threatening messages if these are not sent. Girls may be sexually shamed for posting or sending 'slaggy' images of their bodies. Both girls and boys can face difficulties in actively challenging this, with girls concerned about reprisals from boys, and boys running the risk of being deemed 'gay' (a still prevalent form of homophobic bullying which impacts on gay, bisexual and heterosexual young people). Research suggests that young people need help in managing *everyday* uses of technology rather than worst case scenarios, as well as a clear understanding of when sexual communication becomes coercive³³² and how online practices relate to existing power relations in peer relationship and sexual cultures offline³³³.

Is sexualization linked to the sexual abuse of young people?

Paedophilia and child sexual abuse are phenomena that are not well understood, despite the level of concern that they elicit. Sexual victimization is considered to take place when there is a sexual encounter between children under the age of 13 with a person at least five years their senior, and encounters of children aged between 13 and 16 with persons at least 10 years older³³⁴.

³³¹ Albury, K. & Crawford, K. (2012). Sexting, Consent and Young People's Ethics: Beyond Megan's Story, *Continuum*, 26(3), 463-473.

³³² Hasinoff, A.A. (2013). Sexting as media production: Rethinking social media and sexuality. *New Media & Society*, 15(4), 449-465.

³³³ Marwick, A.E. and boyd, d. (2011). The Drama! Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked Publics. A Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society, SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1926349>; Ringrose, J., Gill, R., Livingstone, S. & Harvey, L. (2012). *A Qualitative Study of Children, Young People and 'Sexting'*. London: NSPCC; Ringrose, J., Harvey, L., Gill, R. & Livingstone, S. (2013). Teen girls, sexual double standards and 'sexting': Gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory*, 14(3), 305-323.

³³⁴ Glaser, D. & S. Frosh, S. (1988). *Child Sexual Abuse*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

The NSPCC describes abuse and neglect collectively as forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child either directly by inflicting harm, or indirectly, by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them; or, more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children³³⁵.

UK policy identifies 4 types of child abuse³³⁶; physical, emotional, sexual and neglect. Much of the emphasis in research, policy and guidance is on more vulnerable and marginalized groups of children and young people and in terms of sexual violence focuses on sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse, with more recent attention to intimate partner violence³³⁷ and to gangs and groups³³⁸.

Any estimates of abuse and exploitation are problematic. There are wide variations in reporting due to lack of standard definitions of abuse or what counts as an upper age limit, lack of agreement over the age difference between abuser and abused, different sample selections, and different forms of data collection. For example, in 1998 the number of incidents in England and Wales was placed at between 3,500 to 72,600³³⁹. A study in 1994 that examined 21 countries in 1994 suggested that between 7 and 36% of women and between 3 and 29% of men had suffered sexual abuse during childhood³⁴⁰.

Until the 1970s professionals did not consider child sexual abuse a significant social problem. In 1984 the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) noted a 90% increase in reported cases of child sexual abuse. Concern has developed in the following ways during

³³⁵ The definitions and signs of child abuse. (2010). NSPCC, http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/trainingandconsultancy/consultancy/helpandadvice/definitions_and_signs_of_child_abuse_pdf_wdf65412.pdf

³³⁶ DCSF (2010). *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.PDF>

³³⁷ DfE (2013). *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>

³³⁸ Children's Commissioner (2013). *'If only someone had listened': Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Final Report*, http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_743

³³⁹ Grubin, D. (1998). *Sex offending against children: Understanding the risk* (No. 99). Home Office, Policing and Reducing Crime Unit, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

³⁴⁰ Finkelhor, D. (1994). The international epidemiology of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 18(5), 409-417

different historical periods;

1985-1987: a focus on abuse within the family

1987-1989: a focus on paedophile rings

1986-1990: a focus on child murder cases

1990-2000: a focus on doubting cases, especially from 1994 with discussion taking place around 'false memory syndrome'.

2000-2013: cases of 'celebrity abuse', for example, by Michael Jackson, Gary Glitter, Jimmy Saville, and abuse in the Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church³⁴¹.

The common media representation of a paedophile is of an anti-social drifter who lives on the fringe of society but abuse is much more likely from someone that the child knows³⁴². The vast majority of sexual abuse cases involve family members or acquaintances rather than strangers³⁴³. Focusing on abuse by strangers may distract attention from the key problems young people face in relation to abuse. Concerns about sexual abuse and sexualization also often focus on the appearance of young girls as sexually available³⁴⁴ but the relationship of appearance and sexual offending is difficult to determine³⁴⁵. The idea that sexualized media or

³⁴¹ For discussions see See La Fontaine, J. (1990). *Child Sexual Abuse*. London: Polity Press; Nava, M. (1992). *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London: Sage; Nava, M. (1988). Cleveland and the Press: Outrage and Anxiety in the Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse. *Feminist Review*, 28, 103-121; Jenkins, P. (2001). *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crises*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Levine, S. B., & Risen, C. B. (2004). The crisis in the church: dealing with the many faces of cultural hysteria. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 1(4), 364-370; Lee, J. (2005). *Pervasive Perversions: Pedophilia and Child Sexual Abuse in Media/Cultures*. London: Free Association Books; Lee, J. (2010). *Celebrity, Pedophilia and Ideology*. New York: Cambria; Berkowitz, E. (2012). *Sex and Punishment – 4000 Years of Judging Desire*. London: The Westbourne Press.

³⁴² Jackson, S., & Scott, S. (1999). Risk anxiety and the social construction of childhood in Lupton, D. (Ed.) *Risk and Sociocultural Theory: New Directions and Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 86-107; Kitzinger, J. (2004). *Framing Abuse: Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children*. London: Pluto Press.

³⁴³ Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N. & Collishaw, S. (2011). Child abuse and neglect in the UK today, http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/child_abuse_neglect_research_PDF_wdf84181.pdf

³⁴⁴ See for example the 2007 APA report <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx> which states 'Younger girls imbued with adult sexuality may seem sexually appealing, and this may suggest their sexual availability and status as appropriate sexual objects' (APA, 2007, 3).

³⁴⁵ Howitt, D., & Sheldon, K. (2007). The role of cognitive distortions in paedophilic offending: Internet and contact offenders compared. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 13(5), 469-486.

goods have the capacity to 'condition' an individual to develop paedophilia is not supported by evidence. Research suggests that paedophiles' attraction to young people is based upon their perception of the psychological and social qualities of children rather than their anatomical properties³⁴⁶. Treating 'sexualized' media may distract from a recognition of the factors that are known to be connected to child sexual abuse and focusing on children's appearance may become a form of blaming them, rather than focusing on the perpetrators of the abuse.

Rates of child sexual abuse appear to be either remaining constant or declining. UK research has suggested a decline in serious forms of contact sexual abuse³⁴⁷. However, the most recent NATSAL survey suggests that non-volitional sex where people experience having had sex against their will is not uncommon and experienced particularly by young women aged 18 and young men aged 16³⁴⁸. This is an essential area of enquiry which warrants further research.

Young people, media and sexualization

There have been two major reports in England on sexualization - the first overseen by Linda Papadopoulos, a popular psychologist, and the second by Reg Bailey, the leader of the Mother's Union. Both have been heavily criticized³⁴⁹. The evidence that has been drawn on in these kinds of reports to make a case for sexualization is often not robust, some of it is not relevant, and it is often discussed in inaccurate or muddled ways. Many of the studies were carried out with adults rather than children, and most of them were carried out before the period during which the 'sexualization of culture' is thought to have accelerated. A report for the Scottish Parliament,

³⁴⁶ Goode, S.D. (2010). *Understanding and Addressing Sexual Attraction to Children: A Study of Paedophiles in Contemporary Society*. London: Routledge.

³⁴⁷ Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N. & Collishaw, S. (2011). *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today*. London: NSPCC.

³⁴⁸ Macdowall, Wendy, et al. (2013). Lifetime prevalence, associated factors, and circumstances of non-volitional sex in women and men in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3). *The Lancet*, 1845-1855.

³⁴⁹ Papadopoulos, L. (2010). *Sexualisation of Young People Review*; Bailey, R. (2011). *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood*. London: The Stationery Office.

led by David Buckingham³⁵⁰ - an expert on children, young people and media - was received more positively by researchers in the field³⁵¹.

Research which focuses on young people's engagement with sexual representations in media suggests that young people often begin their discussions with researchers by reproducing a 'public account' of sex and media as risky and harmful. Usually these focus on the dangers for *other* - particularly younger - children³⁵². But their accounts of their *own* experiences, feelings and practices are different. Young people say that they encounter a diverse range of non-explicit sexual material in mainstream media. They also say that media contain very mixed messages about sex. Sex is presented as desirable *and* dangerous and finding out about sex is 'surrounded by shame, embarrassment and ambivalence'³⁵³. While they may be aware of the pressures and influences on them, they are not completely free to express themselves in whatever way they wish³⁵⁴.

Despite this, young people value media as a source of sexual information, and what they say about it suggests that they are literate and critical consumers of media³⁵⁵. They focus their attention on media that relates to the preoccupations they already have. They can be sceptical, moralistic or indifferent about the way sex is represented in media. They use media as a resource as part of the way they develop their sexual identities, looking to media for languages to speak with and a 'place to speak from'³⁵⁶. This can

³⁵⁰ Buckingham, D., Bragg, S., Russell, R. & Willett, R. (2010). *Sexualised Goods Aimed at Children Research Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.

³⁵¹ see Phoenix, A. (2011). *Review of recent literature for the Bailey Review of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood*, http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/projects/documents/CWRC_commercialisationsexualisation_review_final_WP_No_2.pdf

³⁵² Bale, C. (2011). Raunch or romance? Framing and interpreting the relationship between sexualized culture and young people's sexual health. *Sex Education*, 11(3): 303-13.

³⁵³ Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2004). *Young people, Sex and the Media: The Facts of Life?* London: Palgrave Macmillan

³⁵⁴ Willett, R. (2008). 'What you wear tells a lot about you': Girls dress up online. *Gender and Education*, 20(5), 421-434.

³⁵⁵ Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2003). *Young People, Media and Personal Relationships*, <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/research/young-people.pdf>; Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2004); *Young people, Sex and the Media: The Facts of Life?* London: Palgrave Macmillan; Duits, L. & van Zoonen, L. (2011). Coming to terms with sexualization. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 491-506.

³⁵⁶ Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2004). *Young people, Sex and the Media: The Facts of Life?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

provide them with adult-free zones in which they can ‘collectively negotiate what is acceptable, desirable and what is “too much”³⁵⁷.

One of the key things that is suggested by research is that young people’s experiences with sexual media are very much dependent on their family life and sociocultural environment. The place of media in their lives depends on their ‘age, individual preferences, peer networks, parental guidance and restrictions, familial relations, access to particular technologies and texts ... hobbies and sporting activities’. Their responses to media are also diverse³⁵⁸. Those young people who struggle with aspects of popular media and culture tend to be in vulnerable positions already because of social or family problems³⁵⁹.

Yet both girls and boys are much more accepting of sexualized images of women than they are of sexualized images of men. Young people’s accounts also often ‘conform...to a powerfully heterosexual “logic”³⁶⁰. What is central here is the presence of a double standard around sexual behaviour. For girls the key pressure is not to be sexy, but to be sexy *and* take responsibility in sexual encounters with boys *and* maintain much more respectability than boys do³⁶¹. Girls are concerned about being labeled as slags and wish they were more confident about their bodies and appearance³⁶². Pre-teen girls are especially concerned with ideas about ‘appropriate sexuality’ for their age group³⁶³. For example, while they may see dressing in fashionable clothing as a way of moving towards adulthood, they also disapprove of clothes that are too ‘revealing’³⁶⁴. Being

³⁵⁷ Kehily, M.J. (2002). *Sexuality, Gender and Schooling: Shifting Agendas in Social Learning*. London: Routledge.

³⁵⁸ Gill, R. (2012). Media, Empowerment and the ‘Sexualization of Culture’ Debates. *Sex Roles*, 66, 736-745.

³⁵⁹ Duits, L. & van Zoonen, L.(2011). Coming to terms with sexualization. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 491-506.

³⁶⁰ Buckingham, D. & Bragg, S. (2003). *Young People, Media and Personal Relationships*, <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/research/young-people.pdf>

³⁶¹ Kehily, M.J. (2012). Contextualising the Sexualisation of Girls Debate: Innocence, Experience and Young Female Sexuality. *Gender and Education*, 24(3), 255-268.

³⁶² Bale, C. (2011). Raunch or romance? Framing and interpreting the relationship between Sexualized Culture and Young People’s Sexual Health. *Sex Education*, 11(3): 303-13.

³⁶³ Jackson, S., Vares, T. & Gill, R. (2013). The Whole Playboy Mansion Image: Girls’ Fashioning and Fashioned Selves within a Postfeminist Culture. *Feminism & Psychology*, 23(2), 143-162.

³⁶⁴ Pilcher, J. (2010). What Not to Wear? Girls, Clothing and Showing the Body. *Children and Society*, 24(6), 461-470.

a young person involves a balancing act of trying to be similar enough to their peers and distant enough from 'others' who are understood socially as 'undesirable'³⁶⁵.

There is no convincing evidence of young people's lives becoming harder either because of sexualization, or for other reasons. Between 2000 and 2009/10, there has been widespread improvement in most indicators of children's wellbeing. For example, an overview of child wellbeing in 29 of the world's most advanced economies shows that:

- 99% of girls do not get pregnant while still a teenager
- 92% do not smoke cigarettes
- 85% are not overweight
- 86% do not use cannabis
- 85% do not get drunk
- About two thirds are neither bullied nor involved in fighting³⁶⁶.

However there are wide national and regional variations in these figures, with poverty being the key factor for the wellbeing of young people. In 2007, the UK came bottom of the child wellbeing league table but has since moved up the league table in overall wellbeing. 86% of UK children report a high level of life satisfaction. There have been improvements in some outcomes such as teenage pregnancy and suicide rates in young men, smoking and cannabis use, but declines in others including long term conditions, obesity, some STIs and certain forms of alcohol abuse. The UK also has high numbers of young people out of education, employment and training, and one of the highest alcohol abuse rates among 11-15 year olds. It is in the bottom third of the infant mortality league table. UNICEF suggests the downgrading of youth policy and cuts to local government services are also having a profound negative effect on young people age 15-19³⁶⁷.

What do we know about the effectiveness of SRE?

³⁶⁵ Bragg, S., Buckingham, D., Russell, R. & Willett, R. (2011). Too much, too soon? Children, 'sexualization' and consumer culture. *Sex Education*, 11(3), 279-292.

³⁶⁶ UNICEF (2013). *Child Well-Being in Rich Countries; A Comparative Overview*, http://www.unicef.org.uk/Images/Campaigns/FINAL_RC11-ENG-LORES-fnl2.pdf

³⁶⁷ UNICEF (2013). *Child Well-Being in Rich Countries; A Comparative Overview*, http://www.unicef.org.uk/Images/Campaigns/FINAL_RC11-ENG-LORES-fnl2.pdf

SRE stands for sex and relationships education, which - along with sex education - are commonly used terms in the UK. The term 'sexuality education' is more likely to be used in international literature. Some European countries have mandatory sex education which is frequently taught as part of a biology or science curriculum, but there is a lot of variety in what is provided within individual countries. For example, in Holland, biological aspects of sex education are mandatory but wider aspects (including relationships) are not³⁶⁸. The UK does not have a mandatory programme and there have been recent calls for this to be addressed, although a number of faith groups have opposed this.

It has been argued that sex education in schools in the UK is inconsistent, too little, too late and too biologically focused³⁶⁹. It is also highly heteronormative with little or no consideration of other sexualities³⁷⁰. LGB young people report feeling excluded by language and a focus on sexual activities that render same sex activities invisible³⁷¹.

Some researchers suggest that schools regulate sexuality through the promotion of dominant sexual cultures which undermine young people's sexual agency and limit sex education's effectiveness³⁷². Current UK guidelines on SRE have been criticized for being paradoxical: alluding to a discourse of empowerment and young people's rights to make informed choices, but implying what these choices should be - delaying sexual intercourse, avoiding pregnancy and STIs. It has been argued that this

³⁶⁸ Sex Education Forum Evidence briefing, <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/evidence.aspx>

³⁶⁹ Blake, S. (2008). There's a hole in the bucket: the politics, policy and practice of sex and relationships education. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(1), 33-41.

³⁷⁰ Forrest, S., Strange, V., Oakley, A. & The RIPPLE Study Team. (2004). What do young people want from sex education? The results of a needs assessment from a peer-led sex education programme. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 6(4), 337-354; Martinez, A. & Emmerson, L. (2008). *Key Findings: Teachers' Survey on Sex and Relationships Education*, Sex Education Forum Briefing, http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/333329/teachers_survey_on_sex_relationships_education.pdf

³⁷¹ Buston, K. & Wight, D. (2004). Pupils' participation in sex education lessons: understanding variation across classes. *Sex Education*, 4(3), 285-301; Formby, E. (2011). Sex and relationships education, sexual health, and lesbian, gay and bisexual sexual cultures: Views from young people. *Sex Education*, 11(3), 255-266.

³⁷² Allen, L. (2004). Beyond the birds and the bees: constituting a discourse of erotics in sexuality education. *Gender and Education*, 16(2), 151-167; Fine, M. (1988). Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(1), 29-54.

constitutes a morally informed public health agenda³⁷³. Sex and relationships education is limited to particular sexual practices and conception. This contrasts with the more extensive sexual repertoires disclosed by young people themselves³⁷⁴.

Young people cite media as an important source of information about sex and relationships and increasingly use media, including pornography, to access alternative information about sex, especially information about pleasure and desire that is missing from SRE³⁷⁵. Indeed analysis of SRE programme outcomes demonstrate a focus on STIs and pregnancy risks and an absence of discussion of issues such as oral and anal sex, mutual and solo masturbation³⁷⁶. Yet although SRE provision is often criticized for being too biological, young people are anxious to know about the biological aspects of sex such as sexual organs and sexual function, for example what an erect penis looks like and how to ensure sufficient lubrication to alleviate discomfort on penetration³⁷⁷.

34% of young people rate their SRE as bad or very bad³⁷⁸ and there has been repeated concern about inconsistencies in SRE provision and quality, particularly where teachers have not received training and SRE is not given adequate space in the timetable³⁷⁹. Yet despite some negative experiences in sex education, young people desire the affirmation and support of adults and recommend SRE as the most appropriate vehicle for

³⁷³ Spencer, G., Maxwell, C. & Aggleton, P. (2008). What does 'empowerment' mean in school-based sex and relationships education? *Sex Education*, 8(3), 345-356.

³⁷⁴ Formby, E., Hirst, J., Owen, J., Hayter, M. & Stapleton, H. (2010). 'Selling it as a holistic health provision and not just about condoms...': Sexual health services in school settings: current models and their relationship with sex and relationships education policy and provision. *Sex Education*, 10(4), 423-435.

³⁷⁵ Aapola, S., Gonick, M. & Harris, A. (2005). *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change*. Hampshire UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

³⁷⁶ Ingham, R. (2005). 'We didn't cover that at school': education against pleasure or education for pleasure? *Sex Education*, 5(4), 375-388; Hirst, J. (2008). Developing sexual competence? Exploring strategies for the provision of effective sexualities and relationships education. *Sex Education*, 8 (4), 401-415.

³⁷⁷ Bale, C. (2012). *Exploring the relationship between sexualized media, young people and sexual health: A Qualitative Study*, PhD Thesis, Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

³⁷⁸ Sex Education Forum Evidence briefing, <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/evidence.aspx>

³⁷⁹ See OFSTED reports 2007 and 2010, <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/sex-and-relationships-education-schools>

providing this³⁸⁰. Many young people lack adequate sexual health knowledge. 32% of young people find the information they have received sex and relationships unhelpful, or say they have received no information at all³⁸¹. Levels of knowledge about STIs are generally poor. In research carried out with over 1900 young people 31% of year 10 pupils did not correctly identify Chlamydia as an STI and 56% did not know that syphilis is an STI³⁸².

In the US many schools have adopted 'abstinence-only' programmes. These teach abstinence as the only option for unmarried people of any age, with no discussion about contraception unless it is in the context of failure rates. It is underpinned by the belief that providing information about contraception may encourage young people to have sex³⁸³. Some programmes require young people to take pledges to remain virgins until they are married. Despite nearly two decades of abstinence education, there have been few rigorous evaluations. There is no evidence that 'abstinence-only' education reduces teenage pregnancy or improves sexual health³⁸⁴. There is also no evidence to support the claims that the teaching of contraception leads to increased sexual activity³⁸⁵. Research suggests that education and strategies that promote abstinence but withhold information about contraception and the diversity of possible sexual practices can actually place young people at higher risk of

³⁸⁰ Formby, E., Hirst, J., Owen, J., Hayter, M. & Stapleton, H. (2010). 'Selling it as a holistic health provision and not just about condoms...': Sexual health services in school settings: current models and their relationship with sex and relationships education policy and provision. *Sex Education*, 10(4), 423-435.

³⁸¹ National Foundation for Education Research (2010). *Sex education - all you ever wanted to know about how it's taught in other countries*, <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/about-nfer/press/releases/sex-education-all-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-how-its-taught-in-other-countries.cfm>

³⁸² Westwood, J. & Mullan, B. (2006). Knowledge of secondary school pupils regarding sexual health education. *Sex Education*, 6(2), 151-162.

³⁸³ Sex Education Forum (2004). 'Abstinence only' Education, http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/494613/forum_briefing_-_abstinence.pdf

³⁸⁴ See Kirby, D. (2002). Effective approaches to reducing adolescent unprotected sex, pregnancy, and childbearing. *Journal of Sex Research*, 39(1), 51-57; Kirby, D. B. (2008). The impact of abstinence and comprehensive sex and STD/HIV education programs on adolescent sexual behavior. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 5(3), 18-27; Swann, C., Bowe, K., Kosmin, M. & McCormick, G. (2003). *Teenage pregnancy and parenthood: a review of reviews. Evidence briefing*. London: Health Development Agency.

³⁸⁵ Swann, C., Bowe, K., Kosmin, M. & McCormick, G. (2003). *Teenage pregnancy and parenthood: a review of reviews: Evidence briefing*. London: Health Development Agency.

pregnancy and STIs³⁸⁶.

Researchers have identified that the characteristics of effective SRE programmes include³⁸⁷:

- The contribution of both school and home to SRE
- The use of trained educators
- The address of a comprehensive range of topics including the 'psychosocial' factors that affect behaviour, such as values, norms and self-efficacy
- Using participatory learning methods and small group work.

Evidence shows that SRE works best if it starts before a young person has their first experience of sex and if it responds to the needs of young people as they mature. SRE should start in primary school and be taught in an age-appropriate manner, starting with topics such as personal safety and friendships. Both primary and secondary school pupils, particularly girls, have said they need SRE to start earlier³⁸⁸. Some researchers argue that education should be based on a framework of ethical sexual decision-making, because promoting safer, consensual sexual decision making is an important aspect of advancing mutual sexual pleasure and challenges the universalized assumptions about male and female sexuality which predominate in much current SRE³⁸⁹.

³⁸⁶ Bearman, P. S. & Brückner, H. (2001). Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(4), 859-912; Jemmott III, J. B., Jemmott, L. S. & Fong, G. T. (1998). Abstinence and safer sex HIV risk-reduction interventions for African American adolescents. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 279(19), 1529-1536; Dailard, C. (2002). Abstinence promotion and teen family planning: the misguided drive for equal funding. *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 5(1), 1-3.

³⁸⁷ Kirby, D. B., Laris, B. A. & Roller, L. A. (2007). Sex and HIV education programs: their impact on sexual behaviors of young people throughout the world. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 40(3), 206-217.

³⁸⁸ See OFSTED report 2010, <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/sex-and-relationships-education-schools>

³⁸⁹ See for example Carmody, M. (2005). Ethical Erotics: Reconceptualizing Anti-Rape Education. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 465-480; Carmody, M. (2009). *Sex & Ethics: young people and ethical sex*. South Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan