BOYS AND GIRLS SPEAK OUT

A Qualitative Study of Children's Gender and Sexual Cultures (age 10-12)

An exploratory research project to inform the National Assembly for Wales Cross-Party Group on Children, Sexualities, 'Sexualisation' and Equalities.

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Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

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Background and Scope

In January 2012, Jocelyn Davies AM set up the National Assembly for Wales Cross-Party Group on Children, Sexuality, 'Sexualisation' and Equalities. The launch of the Cross-Party Group stressed how equalities, social justice issues and children's own experiences have been largely absent from media debates and government research reviews on what is often referred to as 'the sexualisation of children'.

Following the launch, the Welsh Government and Cardiff University sponsored a one-day conference, 'Children, Sexuality and Sexualisation: A Matter of Equalities, Rights and Voice' (30 March 2012). This event brought secondary school age children, academics, Assembly Members, policy makers and professionals into dialogue with one another through presentations and workshops. Responding to children's own feedback from the conference – which expressed a desire to become more directly involved in research that informs and shapes policy, to 'be listened to' and to 'speak freely' " about sexuality issues – a sub-committee of the Cross-Party Group raised a modest budget to conduct an original and exploratory qualitative research project into pre-teen children's sexual cultures, in which children's own views and experiences took centre stage.

Research Overview

The research used participatory methods to generate qualitative data on how diverse groups of pre-teen children (age 10-12, n=125) understand their own and other's gender and sexual identities, relationships and cultures. Its core aims were three-fold: to address the lack of knowledge about children's own sexual cultures in the context of their everyday lives; to foreground equality and diversity (Public Sector Equality Duty, 2012); and to enable children's own views and experiences to inform and shape future research, policies and practice (Article 12, UNCRC).

The Research Team

The research was designed, conducted, analysed and written up by Professor Emma Renold (Cardiff University). Sion Tetlow (MSc Student, Cardiff University) assisted with 10 of the boys' group interviews. Audio data was transcribed by Sion Tetlow, Margaret Leggett, Sarah Simons, Manasi Dutt, Helen Sivey, Jo Wilkes and Helen Marsden.

The research was supported by Sara Jermin and Rebecca Griffiths (CCOfW), and Vivienne Laing and Cecile Gwlym (NSPCC) from the Cross-Party Group sub-committee. Comments, guidance and advice was sought at various stages of the research from an expert panel, including: Hannah Austin (Welsh Women's Aid), Dr. Clare Bale, Dr. Sara Bragg (University of Brighton), Jan Pickles (NSPCC Wales), Professor Ann Phoenix (Institute of Education, London) and Professor. Jessica Ringrose (Institute of Education, London).

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1. Executive Summary

Silence, denial, sensationalism and anxiety dominate media debates on young children and sexuality. This is particularly evident in recent concerns over what is commonly referred to as the 'sexualisation of children' which is predicated on fears of corrupted childhood innocence. However, the majority of these debates tell us more about adult concerns, than children's own views and experiences of what they might or might not perceive as sexual or sexualis-ing.

In sum, children's views have either been absent, sidelined, ignored, simplified or sensationalized in the 'sexualisation' debates. Moreover, issues of equalities, rights and social justice rarely surface in ways that attend to the complexity of boys and girls being and becoming sexual.

Moving beyond the ill-defined and over-inclusive concept of 'sexualisation' that assumes a passive child who is made sexual, this research adopted a broadly socio-cultural approach to sexuality. Sexuality' is used in this report to capture a wide range of social, material, cultural and bodily practices. It prioritizes the different ways in which children themselves understand how language, image, and physical, emotional and social relations and relationships can be imbued with sexual meaning in the context of their everyday lives.

Children's *own* views and experiences is emphasized in this research so that our (adult) understandings of children's gender and sexual cultures are located in (and challenged by) the rich and diverse views of boys and girls themselves.

The research sought to address a significant knowledge gap in our understanding of how pre-teen (age 10-12) children are negotiating their own and other's gender and sexual identities, relationships and cultures. It foregrounds the diversity of children's views and experiences (Meyer 2010), and emphasises equality, well-being, power, 'voice' and agency.

Research questions:

1. What are pre-teen boys' and girls' views on the public debates of 'premature commercial sexualisation' and living in increasingly 'sex-saturated' societies?

2. In what ways and in what contexts do pre-teen boys and girls experience their bodies as fun, pleasurable, safe, risky and dangerous?

3. What kinds of peer cultures (e.g. close friendships, boyfriends and girlfriends etc.) shape the everyday social worlds of pre-teen boys and girls?

4. How are pre-teen boys and girls negotiating gender and sexual cultures in locally and culturally specific ways?

Methods

To address the under-researched area of pre-teen (10-12) sexual cultures, an exploratory qualitative research design, using participatory methods was created. 125 children, from urban and rural south wales took part in the research. Follow up individual and paired interviews were also offered to a smaller number of children (n=21) to further contextualize their experience within individual biographies and to create a more private space than the semi-public forum of a friendship group.

The research activities and follow up interviews generated rich in-depth narrative data with children from diverse and contrasting socio-economic locales on the situated and embodied experience of what it meant for them to navigate their own and wider gender cultures, social relations and identities.

KEY FINDINGS

Sexuality and sexual learning is part of children's everyday lives
Children are actively negotiating and learning about the contradictory ways in which sexuality shapes who they are, how they feel in their bodies, what they can do, where they can go, how they relate to others and how others relate to them.

Looking older isn't necessarily about wanting to be 'sexy'
Adult's fears of children "growing up too soon" are disconnected from children's own experiences. Boys and girls talked about "looking older" or "looking sexy" in very different ways.

Putting up with everyday sexism [1]

The pressures to conform to gender norms are pervasive in children's lives. Girls in particular talked about the difficulty of "being yourself" and "fitting in".

Boyfriend and girlfriend cultures are prevalent in children's social worlds, but experienced in diverse ways.

Many children talked about the pressure to participate in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in school, making boy-girl friendships almost impossible. These pressures were particularly acute for girls.

Young children do experience sexual harassment[2]

Verbal sexual harassment was not uncommon but few children can talk about it with a parent or teacher and were ill equipped to know how to deal with harassing comments.

Children are critical of sexually explicit media.

What children found offensive or 'risky' differed for boys and girls. Children were more worried about scary images than 'sexually explicit' images. What children perceived as harmful often depended upon the specific social contexts and wider risks in their everyday lives.

Many children were angry about having to live in a sexist peer culture and society.

While some children found creative ways of managing and/or challenging gender and sexual stereotypes, mostly they were despairing at the futility of their own individual attempts at addressing everyday sexisms and verbal sexual harassment.

Policy and practice needs to be informed by children's own experiences

Only by developing policies and practices which speak to children's own gender and sexual cultures can practitioners and policy makers fully support girls' and boys' own

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[1] The term 'everyday sexism' is shorthand for capturing the normalized and routinized ways in which practices of sexist discrimination and harassment are a daily feature of children's lives. It derives from, and its use here is inspired by, the international "Everyday Sexism Project" where thousands of girls and women have uploaded their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment (http://everydaysexism.com). In this report, however, the term refers to girls' *and* boys' experiences.

[2] The concept of **harassment,** rather than **bullying**, is used to conceptualise the verbal, physical, material, emotional and psychological sexual and gendered abuses of power in children's everyday peer cultures and social worlds. Harassment is used because it can better capture not only the individual and peer group practices that children described as unwanted, hurtful and disturbing, but also the more routine and normalised everyday sexisms circulating in peer culture and wider media representations.

understanding and experiences of why they feel the way they do, what it means for the way they act, and how things can change.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL LEARNING IS PART OF CHILDREN'S EVERYDAY LIVES

Children are actively negotiating and learning about the contradictory ways in which sexuality shapes who they are, how they feel in their bodies, what they can do, where they can go, how they relate to others and how others relate to them.

Children's own accounts powerfully illustrate how sexuality is often simultaneously and unevenly experienced as a mixture of fun, power, powerlessness, anxiety, danger and risk.

The ways in which their bodies, social interactions, objects and language are charged with sexual meaning is experienced by children in contradictory ways. Meanings, norms, values and experiences shift and change as children move between different contexts (e.g. schools, parks, homes) which is why this research focuses on gender and sexual *cultures*.

Many children are aware of how sexuality is highly gendered, and exists in a local and global culture that either demands, or presumes a hetero-sexuality.

It is imperative to consider the ways in which age, gender, social class, race, religion, dis/ability and locale shape and regulate how children are learning about sexuality.

LOOKING OLDER ISN'T NECESSARILY ABOUT WANTING TO BE 'SEXY'

Adult's fears of children "growing up too soon" are disconnected from children's own experiences. Boys and girls talked about "looking older" or "looking sexy" in very different ways.

'Looking older ' (e.g. wearing high heels or cultivating 'six packs') was rarely about 'being sexy'. For some children, particularly girls, ageing up was a bid for social autonomy and a desire to be given more freedom by other adults in their lives. For others, looking young was risky and looking older was about protecting themselves from peer violence in their community.

Whilst the term 'sexy' carried many different meanings, it almost always referred to a normative heterosexual 'sexy'. For many boys being (hetero)'sexy' could be something that they could take or leave. Rarely was 'sexy' perceived by boys as risky or dangerous.

For girls being 'sexy' was an ambivalent experience. It could be used as an insult and a compliment and could create harsh social and cultural hierarchies between girls.

Many girls were aware and highly critical of heterosexual double standards and girls of all ages talked about their bodies as being constantly judged and valued.

Indeed, many girls suffered from verbal sexual harassment from within their own peer culture (boys and girls) and from older boys, and more so in public places than online.

PUTTING UP WITH EVERYDAY SEXISM

The pressure to conform to gender norms is pervasive in children's lives. Girls in particular talked about the difficulty of "being yourself" and "fitting in". Indeed many older girls had given up on the active pursuits they enjoyed when they were younger because sporty bodies clashed with their 'femininity'.

Girls of all ages talked about their bodies almost wholly in relation to their appearance and the considerable effort that went into producing a recognizable and socially acceptable 'girl' body. In contrast, boys talked less about their appearance and what a body looked like (e.g. muscularity, fashion) and more about what a body did (e.g. sporting achievement).

Bodily anxiety and bodily dissatisfaction dominated girls' talk about their bodies and was much less present in boys' talk. Many girls preferred comfy clothes, like tracksuit

bottoms and hoodies, and clothes that covered rather than revealed the contours of their body.

Many girls (especially Year 8's) talked about giving up on the physically active pursuits they enjoyed as younger girls, such as sports, dance, den-building, horse-riding and biking because of the clash between a sporty body (e.g. muscular or sweaty) dominant expectations of 'femininity'.

Girls also talked about struggling with media messages to 'be yourself' and social pressures to 'be like everyone else' and conform to narrow notions of heterosexual attractiveness. Some boys talked about not being 'fussed on fashion', and "not caring as much as girls". Those who did invest a lot in fashion, talked about wanting to 'look tidy' and not 'scruffy' or 'poor'.

Many boys and some girls considered girls' interest in fashion and cosmetic culture as 'over the top', and as a sign of girls' heterosexual availability (e.g. "to get a boyfriend"). Girls also talked about the practices of social exclusion and sexist and verbal sexual harassment for **not** investing in high street fashion and cosmetic culture. Some girls talked about parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, with parents paying girls who identified as tomboys to wear dresses to school discos and proms (see NUT 2013).

> **BOYFRIEND-GIRLFRIEND CULTURES ARE PREVALENT IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORLDS, BUT ARE EXPERIENCED IN DIVERSE WAYS.**
>
> *Many children talked about the pressure to participate in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in school, making boy-girl friendships almost impossible. These pressures are particularly acute for girls.*

Many boys and girls had little choice but to participate in or witness a variety of practices such as 'fancying', 'dating' and 'dumping', for example, who 'liked', 'loved', or was 'hot' for who. This was particularly the case in children's talk about their final year of primary school.

While the degree to which girls and boys participated in these practices varied considerably across the sample, most children could name and discuss them at length. In some schools, children described their participation as compulsory and as a cycle of endless 'going out and dumping' that was subject to constant peer scrutiny

and evaluation. The pressure to turn a boy-girl friendship into a boyfriend girlfriend 'relationship' in primary school was pervasive.

For some boys, simply 'having a girlfriend', 'any girl' was enough to secure social status and popularity. In contrast, many girls highlighted the ways in which their status as 'girlfriends' objectified them, particularly when girls' attractiveness was rated and ranked. Many girls also resented how they were 'passed around' and 'fought over' by boys who wanted to claim them as 'theirs'.

Being a girlfriend for girls was talked about as an inevitable part of being a normal girl and variously described as an identity that was older, scary, constraining, powerful, and something that had to be endured and got used to. Resisting or rejecting the world of girlfriends and boyfriends was difficult for girls, particularly in schools and communities where early boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were strong.

Being a boyfriend for boys was not a defining feature of pre-teen boyhood. Many boys did not want a girlfriend. For younger boys, being a boyfriend was a precarious role that aligned them with femininity (which could be shaming) and heterosexuality (which could bolster their 'masculinity'). Boys seemed more able to resist participation in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures than girls.

Deep investment in being a boyfriend or girlfriend was highly classed, raced and gendered, and drawn upon in a range of ways. One boy talked about how his primary school girlfriend helped him cope with the death of his father. Another boy explained how he had to pretend that his best friend Alice was his cousin for an entire school year, so that they could hang out free from heterosexual innuendo. Girls who they witnessed domestic violence talked about finding a boyfriend who could protect them.

> **YOUNG CHILDREN DO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL HARASSMENT**
>
> *Verbal sexual harassment was not uncommon in children's boyfriend-girlfriend cultures, but few children felt comfortable talking about these issues with parents or teachers.*

Boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were frequently talked about as compulsory, scrutinized, collective and highly public practices. Many children talked about these practices as contradictory, hierarchical and rarely consensual.

Some girls talked about going out with boys they didn't want to and some avoided dumping them so as to not to hurt their feelings. Many children also witnessed coercive sexual practices, such as being "forced to kiss" in the playground, which urges us to shift our understandings of consent between two individuals, to consent as a social process negotiated in peer group cultures.

Girls with deep investments in 'being a girlfriend', talked about going out with boys they didn't like or who were verbally abusive to them, with some girls interpreting their abusive behavior as a sign of flirtation. Some girls refused to delete "nasty" texts because they were "in love".

Boys with deep investments in 'being a boyfriend' and boys positioned low down the gendered and sexual peer group hierarchies were also described as the same boys who would engage in harassing behavior such as repeatedly asking girls out, or sending abusive texts to girls who refused to go out with them, or ended the relationship.

Children who talked about receiving sexually harassing texts and emails also talked about how they could be deleted or blocked, and almost all of the children described in detail exactly how to achieve this. However, they were much less confident and felt more vulnerable about how to deal with on-going 'romantic' advances (e.g. repeatedly being 'asked out') or sexually harassing comments from boys in school and in their community, with one girl hiding in her house, refusing to open the door.

Only a minority of girls talked about feeling resigned to the fact that relationships might entail some form of harassment because 'some boys are just nasty'. Some girls and boys resorted to physical and verbal harassment as a response to coercive, controlling or abusive behaviours and a compulsory boyfriend-girlfriend culture.

Children were ill-equipped with knowing how to deal with gender and sexual harassment and very few children felt comfortable talking about these issues with parents or teachers.

CHILDREN ARE CRITICAL OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MEDIA.

What children found offensive or 'risky' differed for boys and girls. Children were more worried about scary images than 'sexually explicit' images. What children perceived as harmful often depended upon the specific social contexts and wider risks in their everyday lives.

Many children offered powerful critical commentaries from nudity on MTV to air-brushed images of models in magazines. Many girls also drew a clear boundary between what their favourite celebrities would say wear or do and their own lives.

Many children talked about blocking, deleting or changing channels that were broadcasting sexually explicit content that they found offensive. However, what children found offensive was culturally specific and highly gendered. Some 10 year olds thought "kissing on East Enders" was "disgusting", others thought that "Playboy TV" was "disgusting".

Many girls talked about receiving unsolicited sexually explicit 'pop-ups' (e.g. adverts for sex dating websites) from free downloading music sites as "something we shouldn't have to face". Some girls talked about how offensive these popups were in similar ways to the kinds of inter-personal verbal sexual harassment they were subject to in school and on the street. Boys did not talk about these pop-ups as offensive or upsetting.

The perceived harm of being confronted with sexually explicit images (e.g. partial nudity, erotic dancing) depended greatly upon social context and other risk factors, such as whether such practices were part of other forms of sexual/gender-based violence.

Children reported receiving more 'scary' than 'sexually explicit' unsolicited images and texts. No child disclosed sending a sexually explicit image of themselves.

MANY CHILDREN WERE ANGRY ABOUT HAVING TO LIVE IN A SEXIST PEER CULTURE AND SOCIETY.

While some children found creative ways of managing and/or challenging gender and sexual stereotypes, mostly they were despairing at the futility of their own individual attempts at addressing everyday sexisms and verbal sexual harassment.

Many children were highly articulate about having to put up with a range of sexist and heterosexist practices inside their own peer cultures, communities and in wider society.

The majority of children expressed how they wished they could talk freely about gender and sexuality issues and in ways that were more connected to their own lives and experiences (and not just their futures).

Some children were very vocal in wanting to actively change what they talked about as constraining and punishing gender and sexual norms. However, many struggled with knowing how their views could change practice.

Children most vocal were often those living in families and communities where gender and sexual violence (e.g. domestic violence) was present. However, for these children in particular, challenging gender discriminations was difficult and could lead to social exclusion.

Some children used on-line games as safe spaces to access and experiment with different identities and behaviours, particularly those that subverted cultural norms of age, religion and heterosexuality or a socially acceptable 'femininity' (e.g. aggression).

For policy and practice recommendations, see Section 6, page 129.

2. Researching children's gender and sexual cultures

2.1 Introduction

To address the under-researched area of pre-teen (10-12) gender and sexual cultures, an exploratory qualitative research design was created with the key aim of generating rich in-depth narrative data with 125 children (51 boys, 74 girls). Participants were invited to take part from diverse and contrasting socio-economic locales on the situated and embodied experience of what it meant for them to navigate their own and wider gender and sexual cultures, social relations and identities.

While a comprehensive research review was beyond the scope and budget of this research, a brief summary of relevant peer reviewed published research is outlined below and a rationale for a focus on 'children's gender and sexual cultures' and a critical and socio-cultural approach to 'sexuality' is provided. The key aim of this section of the report is on providing full details of the research design, including the participatory methodology used and the centrality of ethics and ethical relations to the research process.

2.2 The problem of 'sexualisation'

Over the last six years, there has been increased public policy concern across the Anglophone West of how children and young people (particularly girls) are being 'sexualised' by the media and culture industries (APA 2007; Rush and LaNauze 2006; Papadopolous 2010; Bailey 2011). For a comprehensive overview of how these debates have been played out across different cultural contexts, see Buckingham et al. (2009) and Phoenix (2011). Both overviews outline research and commentary that has sought to untangle the assumptions and empirical claims of the effects of 'sexualisation', which can range from premature interest in sex to unsafe sexual practices and child sexual abuse (Buckingham et al., 2009:11). See also Buckingham and Bragg 2009; Albury and Lumby 2010; Bale 2010; Lerum and Dworkin 2010; Attwood and Smith 2011; Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Bragg et al. 2011; Bragg 2012; Gill 2012; Barker and Duschinsky 2012; Renold et al. 2012

Duschinsky 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Egan 2013 and Attwood et al. 2013 for extensive critical engagements with the phenomenon of 'sexualisation'.

There is general agreement and a strong evidence base that sexual imagery has become more ubiquitous in society, including in media and material marketed at and consumed by children (Buckingham et al. 2009). However, while attention to *how* changes in the significance and representation of sexuality might be shaping children and young people's sexual cultures is long overdue, the concept of 'sexualisation' is reported as being ill equipped for this task and inconsistently defined and applied in the literature (see, e.g. Bragg et al. 2011; Duschinsky 2013a). For example, 'sexualisation' is frequently described as something that happens *to* children, rendering them passive victims and denying their role as active and critical meaning-makers (Bragg et al. 2011 Duschinsky 2013a). Moreover, such is the culture of denial over children's sexual agency that *any* knowledge or expression of 'sexuality' in childhood is treated with suspicion and becomes evidence of 'sexualisation' (Egan and Hawkes 2008a, b, 2012; Egan 2013).

A useful and concise critical summary of the research evidence on children and sexualized media has been produced by Buckingham et al. below (2009:26):

"There is fairly good evidence that sexual imagery has become more widely available within the culture as a whole, including in material that is targeted at, or frequently consumed by, children. However, the evidence about the effects of this – whether positive or negative - is limited and inconclusive. These limitations are partly to do with the scope of the research:

Most of the research has focused on adults, rather than children; and there are good reasons for suggesting that there will be significant differences between children's and adults' interpretations of such material.

Most of it has considered effects on girls/women, only looking at indirect effects on boys/men. This in turn begs broader questions about gender differences, which have barely been addressed.

Most of the research relates to media: although there has been work on advertising, there has been relatively little on marketing more broadly or on 'sexualised' goods or products themselves

There is a lack of consistency and clarity about the meaning of 'sexualisation', and the crucial distinction between 'sexual' and 'sexualised': other related terms (such as 'objectification') remain poorly defined and theorised.

There are also limitations to do with theory and methodology, which might be briefly summarised as follows:

Much of the research suffers from methodological limitations that are characteristic of media effects research more broadly.

Much of the research rests on moral assumptions – for example about 'healthy' sexuality, about 'decency' or about material that is 'inappropriate' for children - that are not adequately explained or justified".

Buckingham et al. (2009:26)

Relying on dubious claims and often little to no data, the outcomes predicted for children within the 'sexualisation' literature are restrictive and frequently serve to moralize about and pathologise particular behaviors and particular children (Egan and Hawkes 2012). Indeed, much of the literature unwittingly reproduces ageism, sexism, classism, racism and heteronormativity in its calls for protection and sexual innocence (Egan 2013; Renold and Ringrose 2013; Clark 2013).

Evaluating the research evidence on the impact of 'sexualised' media and products on children, Buckingham et al. (2009:26) summarise that 'almost all of the research on the impact of these developments relates to adults rather than children; and, insofar as it addresses children at all, to girls rather than boys'.

Indeed, the original research conducted by Buckingham et al. (2009) for the Scottish Parliament, in which 57 students (39 girls, 18 boys) aged between 12-14 years old and 35 parents were interviewed (via focus groups and a range of classroom-based activities) found that children did identify and interpret 'sexualised goods' in different ways from adults, and provided nuanced and contextually contingent understandings of how, when and why they consume particular brands. Moreover, in a recent 3-year Australian study of how girls aged 10-13 (n=71) are making sense of 'sexualised media', the authors found 'little evidence that girls are eagerly seeking maturity through emulating sexiness' (Jackson and Vares 2012:198). In contrast to adult fears of girls becoming 'too sexy too soon', they found the majority of girls were wearing

'concealing not revealing' clothes (see also Kehily 2012). Nevertheless, their research did point to the challenges girls face in 'managing contradictory calls to agency in postfeminist terms as a consumer of "sexy fashion" on the one hand, and the call to the moral preservation of the "good" asexual girl-child on the other' (Jackson and Vares 2012: 208).

To address these gendered and aged dynamics and to counter the universalising claims of 'sexualisation', this research is informed by social justice and equalities frameworks (see Fine and McClelland 2006), and feminist and queer scholarship to understanding young sexualities (see, for example, Jackson 1982, 1990; Steinberg et al. 1997; Epstein 1997; Fine 1988; Alldred and David 1999; Sears 1999; Skelton 2001; Blaise 2005; Allen 2011, Allen et al. 2013, 2014; Rasmussen et al. 2004; Connolly 1998; Epstein et al. 2001a, 2001b; Epstein et al. 2003; Bruhm and Hurley 2004; Taylor and Richardson 2005; Tolman 2005a; Renold 2005; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005; Youdell 2006; Alldred and David 2007; Skelton and Francis 2009; De Palma and Atkinson 2009; Jackson et al. 2012; Ringrose 2012; Kehily and Nayak 2013; Meyer and Carlson 2013; Quinliven 2013; Robinson 2013; Rodriguez and Mayo 2013; Payne and Smith 2014). It also pays particular attention to the local and cultural specificities of children's lives (see Bragg and Kehily 2013) and uses participatory methods which foreground ethics and prioritize ethical relations as central to the research process and the production of new knowledge on potentially sensitive and emotive areas (Flanagan 2012).

2.3 Research on children's own gender and sexual cultures
There is a growing body of recent empirical research[3] exploring teen sexual cultures, identities and social and cyber relations living in increasingly sex-saturated societies. This includes research on 'sexting' (e.g. Ringrose et al. 2012), sexual bullying (e.g. Rivers and Duncan 2013) and intimate partner sexual violence (e.g. Barter et al. 2010) to broader explorations of young people's negotiation of 'sexualised media' (Buckingham and Bragg 2009) and use of pornography (e.g. Livingstone et al. 2012; OFCOM 2011; Flood 2007, 2009) and wider projects on sexualities in cyber-culture (e.g. Driver 2006; Hillier and Harrison 2007; Subrahmanyam and Šmahel 2011;). However, the focus of these studies is youth and adolescence, with much more emphasis on the late teens than younger teens. Jackson and Vares (2012: 196) point

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[3] For a comprehensive account of research into young people's gender and sexual cultures, see Kehily and Nayak (2013). For a full and recently commissioned research review of children and young people, sexuality and sexual health and wellbeing, see Attwood et al. (2013).

to a pressing need for research that not only captures pre-teen's views and experiences, but that does so in ways that can address the complex and contradictory social and cultural messages with which girls and boys are confronted (see also Baker 2011).

2.3.1 Gender cultures

This research specifically approaches children's culture as 'everyday social practice' that can be 'observed and studied in day to day engagements with the social world' (Bragg and Kehily, 2013: viii). While empirical research on pre-teen sexual cultures is rare (Plummer 1990), there has been a long standing tradition of ethnographic and in-depth qualitative research which provides a glimpse into how sexuality emerges in children's gender cultures (see for example Best 1983; Davies 1993; Thorne, 1993; Adler and Adler, 1998; Fine 1988; for a general overview of research documenting boys' and girls' social and cultural worlds, see Jenkins 1998; Lesnik-Oberstein 1998; Kehily and Swann 2003; Paechter 2007; Redman 2009; Duits and van Zoonen 2009, and the journals 'Girlhood Studies' and 'Thymos: Boyhood Studies').

Indeed, this research is part of a community of research that locate children not as passive recipients imprinted upon or 'socialised' by 'society', but as *active agents* fully involved in the construction of their own social and cultural worlds (Davies 1989). Attributing greater agency and self-knowledge to children's 'doing' of gender is particularly important given the historical denial of children as active constructors and mediators of their identities and social worlds more widely (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Feminist research into children's gender relations has always been concerned with integrating and exploring the relationship between the 'being' (via child-centered methodologies), 'becoming' (self in process) and 'doing' (child as active and agentic) of gender. The idea that 'gender' is not something that you 'have' but something that you 'do' and continually 're-do' through everyday social and cultural practices is becoming increasingly acknowledged. This way of thinking about gender has also been instrumental in recognising the 'doing' and 'living' of gender as much more contradictory, much more of a struggle, than other studies on children's gender relations would have us believe.

However, as research consistently points out, the rigidity of the male (masculinity)/female (femininity) binary is strongly felt in childhood, and 'doing gender' differently –that is, in non-normative ways – is not simply a matter of choice, but involves grappling with the power relations of socio-historical gendered legacies,

all of which will be experienced differently when other socio-economic, social-cultural and other markers of difference come into play. Moreover, 'doing boy' and 'doing girl' can be both constraining and empowering in different contexts.

2.3.2 Sexual cultures

When it comes to researching sexuality as everyday social practice (i.e. beyond recognisable sexual acts), research is very thin on the ground. This is true of adulthood, where sex and sexuality continues to be bracketed off as a special area of human life (Jackson and Scott 2004), but especially so when it comes to children and childhood (Jackson 1982; Plummer 1990; Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers 1992; Jackson and Scott 2004; Kehily and Montgomery 2004; Faulkner 2010a; Egan and Hawkes 2010; Kehily et al. 2013). This is because one of the fundamental ways in which we understand the categories 'child' and 'childhood' is through the historical separation of children from the adult world. Nowhere is this more dominant than in relation to sexuality and the asexual child/sexual adult. Although Freud drew our attention to children as sexual beings: 'it was concepts of repression and adult interference and intrusion rather than any notion of sexuality in children as a given or natural phenomenon' (Walkerdine 1999:05; see also Kehily et al. 2013) that have focused research into children, childhood and sex/uality. Often the only option available when discussing sexuality and children is within the context of abuse and exploitation. The recent and highly emotive discourse of 'sexualisation' continues this theme, speaking to enduring anxieties over 'the spectre of adults' own unconscious desire for children's bodies; transgressing the boundaries that define how adults are supposed to look at children' (Buckingham et al. 2009: 11; see also Kincaid 1994; Egan 2013). Indeed, calls for childhood innocence are particularly troubling given the ways in which innocence is eroticised and commodified. In sum, when it comes to girls' and boys' sexual cultures, children live under the burden of adult projections and desires (Rose 1994; Bruhm and Hurley 2004; Bond-Stockton 2009).

Furthermore, and commented upon by an increasing number of scholars in relation to 'sexualisation' (Egan and Hawkes 2008; Renold and Ringrose 2011; Duschinsky 2013b; Egan 2013; Clark 2013), the normalising influence of heterosexuality is rarely remarked upon, yet remains an invisible yet powerful force.

2.3.3 The Gendering of Sexuality and the Sexualising of Gender

Children's presumed innocence, sexuality as everyday social practice and institutionalised heterosexuality are key themes that punctuate children's own gendered accounts of learning to be 'girls' and 'boys' (Renold 2005). Indeed, research in the early years and primary years illustrates how sexuality is firmly embedded within children's gendered childhoods and how children make sense of their gender and sexual identities within a local and global culture that expects nothing less than a compulsory heterosexuality. In sum, pre-teen children's gendered sexual cultures are produced in a variety of ways and governed by an assumption that heterosexuality is the norm (Thorne 1993; Davies 1993; Connolly 1994; Redman 1996; Epstein 1999; Swain 2000, 2002; Epstein et al. 2003; Renold 2005, 2006, 2008; Taylor and Richardson 2005; Boldt 1996; Mellor 2007; Allan 2009; Cullen and Allen 2009; Haugea 2009; Rysst 2010a 2010b; Jackson and Vares 2010, 2012; Kehily 2012; Afra 2013; Blaise 2005, 2013; Robinson 2013). This research has explored the heterosexualising of children's peer cultures through a range of practices, including:

- Children's traditional games, rhymes and engagement with popular culture
- Children's own body projects (e.g. from popular fashion and cosmetics, to body image and body comportment)
- Children's relationship cultures (e.g. 'going out', 'dating' 'two-timing' and 'dumping')
- Children's anticipated or imagined heterosexual futures (e.g. heterosexual marriage)
- Heterosexual, heterosexist and gendered harassment (e.g. from anti-girl and anti-gay talk to symbolic and physical gender and sexual harassment and violence)

There is a wealth of evidence that foregrounds the girl-child, rather than the boy-child, whose innocence is eroticised and that it is the eroticisation of girls that provokes anxiety, concern and calls for protection (Jackson 1982; Higonnet 1998; Walkerdine 1999; Bellous 2002; Renold 2005; Jackson and Vares 2012; Egan 2013). However, the feminisation of erotic innocence and sexuality more widely has, historically, resulted in an underdeveloped theorisation and dearth of research into boys' everyday sexual cultures beyond a discussion of 'dirty talk' or 'dirty play', and that is usually discussed in terms of normal and maturing masculinities (Fine 1987; Dennis 2002). Indeed, concerns over boys' sexualities often only surface in

discussions of boys as sexual abusers, concern over boys' future (homo)sexual orientation if they deviate from (hetero)masculine norms, or more recently boys' use of or exposure to pornography. While it is possible to argue that (hetero)sexuality is acutely salient in how 'girlhood' is both defined and experienced, given how the erotic girl-child certainly makes more visible the heterosexualising processes embedded in constructions of femininity, boys are also subject to and agents of the heterosexual 'male gaze' (Holland et al. 1998), although perhaps with a different set of pressures and social and emotional costs and consequences to girls. Boys' engagement with 'masculinity' and 'heterosexuality' throw up a number of contradictions and challenges (see Renold 2003; 2004). While boys are rarely subject to adult fears of accelerated gender identities, they are subject to age-appropriate gender norms that mediate how they might learn about sexuality and gender. For example, a boy wearing make-up, a dress or nail varnish may be tolerated in pre-school but strongly discouraged in the junior years (Blaise 2005). Renold (2005) shows how children themselves also invest in and draw upon developmental discourses and age-appropriate behaviours/activities to make sense of their emerging sexualities. In short, girls and boys regularly take up and shake up childhood (sexual) innocent discourses and older 'adolescence/adult' discourses of sexuality.

In summary, there is a small but steadily growing body of research that is beginning to explore not only the social, discursive, semiotic and material construction of age, gender and sexuality but also how children aged 10-12 negotiate issues and relations of gender and sexuality in different spaces and across diverse social and cultural communities and environments (e.g. including postfeminist contexts and increasingly sexualised media scapes). It is this research that the current research is in dialogue with and builds upon[4].

2.4 Sexuality and sexual cultures: some working definitions

This report takes a socio-cultural approach to '**sexuality'** to capture a wide range of social, material, cultural and embodied practices. In doing so, it prioritises the different ways in which children themselves understand how language, image, and physical, emotional and social relations and relationships can be imbued with sexual meaning in the context and practices of their everyday lives.

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[4] For a collection of contemporary international research specifically addressing empirical research on children, sexuality and 'sexualisation of culture' see Renold, Ringrose and Egan (forthcoming, 2014). For a relatively recent and extensive bibliography of international research focusing on children and sexuality from a variety of disciplines, see Janssen 2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b.

For the reasons outlined above, the term 'sexualisation' is not used in this report because it is not considered a productive or meaningful concept through which to explore the complex ways in which children are making meaning of sexuality. Instead the report draws upon the broader idea notion of '**sexual cultures**' to refer to the situated meanings, values, norms and experiences that are part of children's everyday lives and actively negotiated, reproduced, subverted and challenged.

When the analysis refers to how bodies or everyday objects and practices are being imbued with sexual meaning, the concept of '**sexualising'**, rather than 'sexualisation', is sometimes used to emphasise the dynamic ways in which meaning-making occurs (Gill 2012).

To address the ways in which gender norms are inextricably connected to a presumed heterosexuality (e.g. to be a 'normal' girl or boy is to claim or project a recognisable 'heterosexuality', Renold 2005, Butler 1993) and to render visible the **heteronormativity**[5] of children's gender and sexual cultures, 'hetero' is sometimes inserted before 'sexual' and 'gender' (i.e. '**heterogender**') or masculine and feminine (e.g. hetero-femininity, hetero-masculinity).

The ways in which any sexually explicit material is often referred to as pornography is not unusual in media debates when children's exposure to sex is under discussion. Given the non-directive focus of the research, the term 'pornography' is only used when children and young people themselves draw upon this term to refer to sexually explicit material. In all other instances, the term '**sexually explicit**' is used to refer to video, image, text or talk where sexual content is presented without censorship. When this is reported by children as unwanted and upsetting, it is referred to as '**sexual harassment**'.

The concept of **harassment,** rather than **bullying**, is used in this report to conceptualise the verbal, physical, material, emotional and psychological sexual and gendered abuses of power in children's everyday peer cultures and social worlds. Harassment is used because it can often better capture not only the individual and peer group practices that children described as unwanted, hurtful and disturbing, but also the more routine and normalised everyday sexisms and heterosexisms that circulate in peer culture and in wider social and cultural discourses and media

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[5] Heteronormativity is a term that is used to raise awareness of and challenge the assumption that heterosexuality is the default and 'normal' sexuality, and that anything other than heterosexuality is abnormal or deviant.

representations. The inter-personal and individualising logic of 'bullying', with its psychological categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander, struggle to address the social and cultural power relations that children are caught up in and negotiate on a daily basis (see Ringrose and Renold 2009, Meyer 2009, 2010; Gådin 2012; Charmaraman et al. 2013).

When children do talk directly and indirectly about oppressive and subordinating symbolic and structural gender and sexual power relations (e.g. 'I feel pushed to be a girl') the more sociological concept of symbolic and structural violence is sometimes used. It is worth noting that none of the children referred to the practices above as 'bullying', 'violence' or 'harassment'. They did however sometimes use the concept **sexism** ('that's so sexist') to name gender discrimination and injustice.

2.5 Research aims

"Research with girls (and boys) to examine how they make their way through the complexities embedded in contemporary versions of sexuality is sparse. Not only is such research pressing but it also requires exercising a creative research 'imaginary' to design approaches attuned both to girls' (and boys') experiences and to the complex, contradictory, socio-political contexts within which those experiences may be understood" (Jackson forthcoming 2014b, p.2).

This research builds on many of the findings and approaches in the studies cited above (2.3). It prioritizes children's views in all their difference and diversity in order to understand and learn from children what new challenges and contradictions they are facing as they negotiate their own and others' sexual identities, relationships and cultures. Indeed, putting voice, critical agency, and equalities centre stage were key areas identified by the Scottish Review (Buckingham et al. 2009) as needing further scrutiny. Building specifically on research which focuses on the neglected area of children's gendered and sexual cultures in the transitional 'tweenage years' of middle childhood (10-12) the research aimed to address the following three core aims:

1. To understand the 'sexualisation of culture' from children's own perspectives and experiences and in the context of their everyday lives

2. To foreground equalities and explore how age, social class, gender, ethnicity and religion interact and shape children's views and experiences

3. To enable children to identify what kinds of knowledge and support they need in negotiating their own social, emotional and physical sexual health and well-being.

These aims not only reflect the equalities and rights based approaches to sexuality education in Wales, they also reflect and take forward the commitment for dialogue, inclusion and participation in Wales's sexual health and wellbeing action plan (2010-2015). Indeed, while a focus on children and young people's own perspectives and experiences is challenging in a contemporary (and historical) climate of fear and anxiety around children and sexuality, Wales is at the forefront of tackling such challenges head on. In the first of four action areas, the plan states that to address the complexities of 'sexualisation' we need to 'shift towards a culture that is more comfortable talking about these issues' (p10). This research project is one small step towards that process.

2.6 Research questions

The research questions below set out the five areas under investigation: 'the sexualisation of culture' (RQ1); 'body cultures' (RQ2); 'relationship cultures' (RQ3); 'equalities' (RQ4), and 'change' (RQ5):

RQ1 What are pre-teen boys' and girls' views on the public debates of 'premature commercial sexualisation' and the reported risks of living in increasingly 'sex-saturated' societies?

RQ2 In what ways and in what contexts do pre-teen boys and girls experience their bodies as fun, pleasurable, safe, risky and dangerous?

RQ3 What kinds of peer relationship cultures (e.g. close friendships, boyfriends and girlfriends etc.) shape the everyday social worlds of pre-teen boys and girls?

RQ4 How are pre-teen boys and girls negotiating sexual cultures in locally and culturally specific ways?

RQ5

i) What messages do pre-teens think the Welsh Government and other agencies dedicated to promoting social, emotional and physical sexual health and wellbeing need to hear and action?

ii) What kinds of knowledge and support do pre-teens think other children their age need as they negotiate their own sexual identities, cultures and relations?

2.7 Towards a participatory methodology

2.7.1 Seen but not heard

Historically, children's accounts of social reality have rarely been taken as competent portrayals of their experiences (Hutchby and Morran-Ellis 1998, Christensen and James 2008). Research was (and still is) often conducted 'on' children as research objects, rather than 'with' children as research subjects and participants (Woodhead and Faulkner 2000). While there has been an exponential increase since the 1970s of designing and doing research which foregrounds children's own experiences, very rarely have participatory methodologies, which enable children to wield some control over the research process, been applied to the sensitive and emotionally charged area of young children's sexual cultures (Flanagan 2013). This research begins to address this gap, and builds upon a minority of studies, located within a wider tradition of critical feminist qualitative inquiry, where research environments and methodologies are created to maximise the opportunities through which children can communicate experiences that are not only important to them, but are frequently silenced, undermined, marginalised and exploited.

2.7.2 Foregrounding ethics

Ethics and ethical relations have been an essential and core part of the research focus and research design. In relation to 'research focus', creating methods to generate qualitative data on what children had to say about their own gendered and sexual peer group cultures, identities and relations was an ethical and political intervention into the frequently moralising, adult-centric and anxiety-fuelled debates on the 'premature sexualisation of children' (Faulkner 2010a). Here, children's own views and experiences have either been largely absent, minimised or simplified (Epstein et al. 2012) and issues of equalities and social justice, or what McClelland (2010) call 'intimate justice', rarely surface in ways that attend to the complexity of being, doing and becoming young gendered and sexual subjects. Moving towards an understanding of children's gender and sexual cultures which can get at the

complexity of lived everyday experience, and in which children are understood as actively navigating some complex gender and sexual power relations, was thus both a political and ethical decision.

2.7.3 Research activities: open-ended and exploratory

The research employed a range of open-ended participatory group activities and children chose how they wanted to form their group. All chose friendship clusters, from friendship dyads to small friendship groups (of no more than five; see table below). All were single-sex (children's choice). Where possible, children were offered a follow-up unstructured individual interview and a minority of children took this up (some opted for a follow-up or extended group or paired interview).

The research activities below were designed specifically in relation to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic under investigation and the ethical imperative to create a research environment conducive to communicating and sharing views and experiences in ways that were not felt as 'personally intrusive or morally judgemental' (Buckingham et al. 2009: 59). They were designed to create a safe space through which children could introduce their own personal experience in their own time. For example, the research activities were designed explicitly to shift the emphasis away from the personal in the first instance, through using key directives that encouraged children to consider each task in relation to 'children your age'. While communicating their own experience dominated much of their talk, children were more able to choose when to relate the discussion to (and thus draw upon) their own lives and particular experiences and many were keen to do so. The follow-up individual/paired interviews were also purposefully unstructured so that children could direct the flow of the conversation and focus on their own views and experiences of relevance to them and their everyday lives. They also provided children with a more private space to reflect upon and discuss views that are, for reasons of confidentiality, more difficult to express in the semi-public forum of a group.

Choosing not to use a structured interview schedule, and instead using strategic openers to each task (detailed below) and the thematic topics visually presented in the information leaflet (see image 1 below), enabled children to direct the flow and focus of the conversation and pause on key issues or areas of experience that were meaningful for them. While this did mean that some areas were under-explored in some cases, and a minority of tasks went unfinished or were not deployed, the

ethical imperative driving the methodological strategy to 'give voice' to previously under-researched (and thus unknown) experience far outweighed prematurely imposing a rigid interview schedule or inflexible structure on the research activities. The strengths and limitations of this approach for qualitative analysis and representation of findings are explored briefly below.

Image 1: Thematic areas that the research could address (taken from children's consent form)
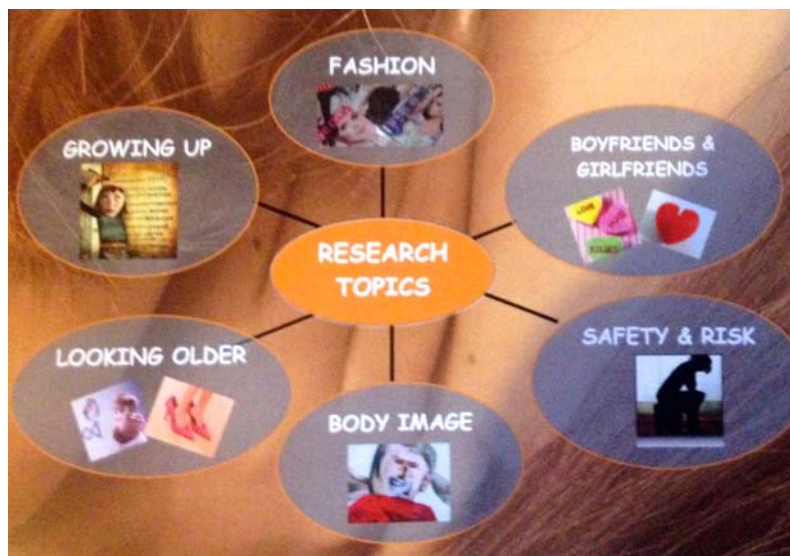
2.7.4 Friendship group interviews
N=125 (41 group interviews)

Children were invited to participate in three tasks, each designed to generate discussion in relation to the core research questions. Groups were no bigger than five children, and the majority were conducted with between two and four participants. All children opted to be interviewed in their friendship clusters or best friend dyads. Interviewing children in their friendship groups (where children will already have shared knowledge and interests) went some way to ensuring that discussions were experience-appropriate (as opposed to age-appropriate). This was important, given the diversity of experience even within each year group (see Renold 2005; Duits and Van Zoonen 2009, 2011; Rysst 2011b). The group interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two hours, with the majority lasting approximately one hour. As outlined above, the tasks were engaged with in diverse ways, with some groups spending a long time on one task over another task depending upon the nature of discussion generated. These narrative contingencies are highlighted further in the description and evaluation of each task.

Task 1: 'Prom night'
[designed specifically to explore research questions 2 and 3]
This task began with a collection of photos (Appendix A) with the aim of representing the growing phenomenon of prom nights in primary schools (Buckingham et al. 2009). Building upon the research findings of both the Scottish commissioned research (Buckingham et al. 2009) and research with 10-12 year olds regarding the risk, pleasure and anxiety that girls (and some boys) report in producing their bodies as (hetero)sexually desirable commodities (Duits and Van Zoonen 2009; Jackson 2014a), the aim of the visual stimuli was to trigger discussion of the phenomenon, whilst enabling the researcher to introduce the 'prom night' task and wider debates around the making of young gendered bodies and relationship cultures.

Following this photo-elicitation task, the groups were asked to draw an outline of a girl figure and a boy figure on a large A3 sheet of paper. They were then asked to use 'post-its' and note down how boys and girls their age might prepare for the prom night (or school disco), drawing the final outfit onto the outline if they wished. This task worked as an excellent 'ice-breaker', introducing the materiality of the body in a fun creative way. It generated some rich and diverse narratives on institutionalised hetero-romantic cultures and in-depth accounts on the social and emotional labour of how children (and their peer groups and families) differently invest in, feel the pressure of and thus manage the commodification and performance of appropriately gendered 'girl' and 'boy' bodies. It was also a task that enabled some children to discuss and represent the transgression of normative gender and sexual boundaries.

Task 2: In, Out and About
[designed specifically to explore research questions 2 and 3]
The second task was designed to follow immediately from the first. Here, the group were shown photographs of different spaces and places to encourage children to reflect upon and explore the production of the gendered body (e.g. how it feels, how it moves, what it wears, etc.) in different contexts including at school, on the street, online (including mobile phones), at a leisure centre, in the bedroom, at the shopping mall (see Appendix B). This task was aimed to generate discussion on the what, where, how, why, when and who of boy-body and girl-body cultures. What is fun, risky, pleasurable, safe and unsafe was explored in-depth during this task and the key topics were used as a reference point both by the researcher and by the children.

On reflection, this task was the most productive in generating rich narratives of the everyday practices of navigating complex gender and sexual cultures and relations. It drew attention to the significance of how meanings and embodied experiences were contextually contingent. In sum, place and space had a huge impact on how a body was looked at, commented upon and touched and what a body could do, how it felt, what it could wear and how much it could bear as it traversed different sites and spaces, such as local and virtual spaces. The gendering and sexualising of bodies across space and place thus feature strongly in the analysis and presentation of research findings.

Task 3: 'Too much too soon?'
[designed to specifically explore research question 1]
This task was a sorting activity adapted (with permission) from one of the research tasks used in the Scottish commissioned research (Buckingham et al. 2009). This activity was designed to generate talk on what children thought about the statements frequently reported in the media around 'premature sexualisation' and what they themselves consider 'sexy' to mean in relation to commercial products, girl and boy bodies, age-appropriateness and risk and regulation (see Appendix C)

This task was particularly productive in its elicitation of in-depth accounts of the diverse ways in which 'sexy' was taken up in culturally specific and highly gendered ways – with many children struggling to identify 'sexy' and sexual risk in relation to boy-bodies. The analysis of how children rated each statement in terms of a sliding scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' was less illuminating than the debates and multiple meanings that each statement generated. The analysis pays particular attention to these multiple meanings in the section on 'body cultures'.

Task 4: "So what!: messages for other kids and adults"
[designed to explore research question 5]
The final task was designed to facilitate a general discussion in which children were asked to highlight what they considered to be the 'key messages' that they would like to share with teachers, parents, government, NGOs and other children their age on any of the issues raised in the group interview. This task was less successful, predominantly because it came at the end of the session and was often squeezed for time, and also because many children wanted to talk more about specific areas that were triggered by the tasks above. However, some children, either during this task or earlier in the interview, indicated which aspects of their lives they wanted more support with and some children took the opportunity to consider the relative

significance of sex/uality in the wider context of what else was going on for them in their lives. On reflection, a follow up study would be needed to work with children more closely to explore research question 5.

2.7.5 Individual/paired interviews: biographical narratives
N=19

Nineteen children took the opportunity for a follow-up individual interview (n=13) or an extended paired interview (n=6). These were largely unstructured, and lasted between 30-60 minutes. The aim of these interviews was for the conversation to be much more child-led with a wider aim to situate children's views and experiences inside their individual biographies and in the context of their everyday lives. As stated above, these interviews also provided children with a more private space to share views that were perhaps more difficult to express in the more public forum of a group. Four groups (n=15) opted for a follow-up group interview.

2.8 Sample

All of the child participants were recruited through existing research and/or working relationships with five secondary schools and three primary schools in two discrete regions of South Wales (Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff). The schools were located in urban, sub-urban and semi-rural locales and each school was selected to ensure a mix of cultural and socio-economic diversity, serving areas from the most prosperous to the most economically disadvantaged. All schools were state-funded and one school was Welsh-medium[6]. Key demographics and summary statistics for each school and the locality are provided below.

School 1 (n=16) is a secondary school located in a semi-rural ex-mining community in the Rhondda Cynon Taf and serves an area of high social and economic deprivation and is a designated Communities First area. 30% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and 20% of pupils have additional special educational support. 2% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Key Stage 3 results are below the national average.

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[6] The Welsh Medium school has not been identified in the descriptions of the schools above to protect the school's identity.

School 2 (**n=17**) is a secondary school also located in a semi-rural ex-mining community in Rhondda Cynon Taf and serves an area of high social and economic deprivation and is a designated Communities First area. 30% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and 15% of pupils have additional special educational support. 2% of pupils come from minority ethnic communities. Key Stage 3 results are similar to the national average.

School 3 (n=16) is a secondary school situated on the outskirts of Cardiff. The school serves a catchment area of economic disadvantage and with high levels of unemployment. Two thirds of the pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is around 40% and over 25% of pupils are identified as needing special educational support. Just under 10% of the school's population come from minority ethnic communities. Key Stage 3 results are well below the national average.

School 4 (n=18) is a secondary school located in central Cardiff. Approximately 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Over half of the students are categorised as pupils with English as an additional language and 37% of pupils come from minority ethnic communities. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 10%. Key stage 3 results are well above the national average.

School 5 (n=19) is a secondary school located on the outskirts of Cardiff with a quarter of the pupils coming from the most economically deprived area of Cardiff and further quarter coming from some of the most prosperous residential areas of Cardiff. Around 10% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and around 20% of students have been identified as needing additional special educational support. Approximately 10% of pupils come from minority ethnic communities. Key Stage 3 results are well above the national average.

School 6 (n=11) is a primary school situated on the outskirts of Cardiff in a mixed residential area that is neither economically advantaged or disadvantaged. Over 40% of pupils come from minority ethnic communities and have support in English as an additional language. Around 15% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 24% have additional learning needs. Key Stage 2 results are broadly on par with the national average, with some children far exceeding the national average. This school is one of the feeder primaries for Schools 3 and 4.

School 7 (**n=14)** is a community primary school located in semi-rural ex-mining community in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The school serves an area of high social and economic deprivation and is a designated Communities First area. Over 55% of pupils are entitled to free school meals and over 60% have additional learning needs. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic communities. Key Stage 2 results are well below the national average. This school is one of the feeder primaries for Schools 1 and 2.

School 8 (n= 14) is a primary school located on the outskirts of Cardiff and serves a catchment area of economic disadvantage and is designated as a Communities First area. 50% of pupils are entitled to free schools meals. Approximately15% of pupils are from minority ethnic communities and 10% have English as an additional language. Around 35% of pupils have additional learning needs. Key Stage 3 results are well below the national average. This school is one of the feeder primaries for School 5.

The table below sets out key demographics by age, gender and ethnicity. In addition, three children were in foster and kinship care and four children were known to be on the child protection register. Twenty-five children also self-identified with a specific religion or faith (including Christian, Hindu and Muslim) and two children self-disclosed a physical disability. When verbatim quotes are drawn upon in the analysis they are attributed to individual children (via pseudonyms), their year group and the school they attended (e.g. Sadie, Y6, S5).

Table 1: Sample by age, gender and ethnicity

	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Total [N=125]
Ethnicity	35 White Welsh 5 Minority ethnicity	30 White Welsh 10 Minority ethnicity	40 White Welsh 6 Minority ethnicity	104 White Welsh 21 Minority ethnicity
Gender	26 girls 13 boys	23 girls 17 boys	25 girls 21 boys	74 Girls 51 Boys

2.9 Access

Numerous visits were made to each school to negotiate access. Many of the schools had registered their interest in participating in the research, either through existing

informal networks or through their attendance at the 'Young Sexualities, Equalities and Well-being' conference in Cardiff University on March 30th 2012. Child participants in Years 7 and 8 were selected in relation to ensuring a diversity of experience across the year group. The lead researcher (Renold) met with all the participants and spent an hour discussing the project, distributing the project leaflets and consent forms and answering any questions about the research process. Returning the next day and each day until all the consent forms had been signed by parents/legal guardians and the children themselves, we then met with the children again to arrange the friendship groups and set up a timetable of which lessons they (and their teachers) were able and happy to absent themselves from. In relation to the primary school access, and due to the nature of Year 6 group often being close-knit and distributed across one or two classes, the ethical decision was made to offer all children an opportunity to participate. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Science, Cardiff University, in the summer of 2012. Appendix D provides examples of the child and parent information leaflets and consent forms, and details of the ethical framework employed in the research. All participant's names, place names and any further identifying characteristics have been changed and/or anonymised in the report.

2.10 Analysing children's 'talk'

To get beyond the hollow and caricature ways in which children's 'voice' and 'experience' get represented in media debates of 'sexualisation' (Epstein et al. 2012), the process of data analysis was informed by feminist methodology and scholarship. Key here was to recognise the situatedness of children's accounts and to focus on children as narrators, rather than reporters of their experience (Tolman 2005b). Recognising children as narrators enables a more complex relationship to the data, allowing children's talk to be investigated not only at the level of what is said, but also considering the social conditions of what can be said, with whom, and in what context, including what cannot be spoken about. After all, the research environment is not a pure space or social vacuum where children can simply 'tell it like it is'. Children's talk does not represent the 'real' or an authenticity outside culture, but is formed 'within and through the networks of meanings made available to them, including where they resist the dominant meanings ascribed to them' (Alldred 1998: 161). The interview setting is thus a key social site, like any other, infused with power relations, in which children are engaged in a considerable amount of identity work. Nevertheless, using participatory methods can go some way to create a place where

children can feel freer to voice experiences previously undisclosed (at least to another adult). It can also provide the researcher with an insight into 'how different stories are constructed, expressed, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction' (Kitzinger 1994:159).

Crucially, the analysis of the qualitative data generated in an exploratory and interpretive research project of this kind is focused much more on the rich and diverse meaning-making of participants, where views and experiences are explored inductively and discursively, than through numbers. While it would be problematic to represent the data quantitatively, given the non-directive focus of the methodology, it is possible to gesture towards over-arching patterns and themes. With that caveat in mind, and where meaningful, the analysis does highlight (through the use of terms 'most' or 'majority' (two thirds), 'many' (roughly half), 'some' or 'minority' (roughly one third) and 'few' (under one quarter) the extent to which views and experiences were expressed across the sample or participants. However, it is the different meanings individual children and groups of children attached to particular experiences that is foregrounded. Take, for example, the contrasting narratives of why some girls wore high heels and make-up, why some boys cultivated 'six packs' and started weight-training, or why some children invested or refused to participate in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures.

The research findings presented in this report have been selected to invite the reader to consider some of the meaning-making practices from the standpoint of children themselves. It invites us to think differently about and perhaps in some cases re-examine the dynamic, diverse and complex performance of gender and sexuality in pre-teen children's childhoods. The findings are structured into three categories to emphasise the different ways in which children talked about their gendered and sexual peer group cultures: 1) children, sexuality and body cultures; 2) children, sexuality and relationship cultures; and 3) children, sexuality and media cultures. While these categories and indeed the sub-themes structuring each section are by no means exhaustive given the vast data set of over 60 interviews (approx. 1500 pages of interview transcripts), they proved to be the most productive in the early stages of analysis in terms of navigating a complex and intersecting data set on a vast array of views and experiences. Future publications will be able to address and analyse the data in all its complexity in subsequent years.

3   Children, Sexuality and Body Cultures

3.1 Introduction

Being a child is a profoundly embodied experience: children's bodies are a target for social regulation from both other children and adults, and children are active in the construction of their own bodies and bodily experience (Prout 2000). The body is also a key site through which gender and sexuality are made meaningful (Burman 1995; Grosz 1998; Butler 2003; Connell 2005) and expressed and negotiated in children's social worlds (Paechter 2011; 2012).

This section focuses on children's talk about producing girl and boy bodies at a time when their bodies are in physiological flux entering, or located in, sexual puberty. It will explore the rich and diverse ways in which boys and girls learn about and experience their bodies and how their gendered bodies are charged with contradictory sexual meanings over which children feel they have very little control. Drawing on approaches which foreground body cultures and the complex discursive-material ways in which bodies become meaningful (e.g. McRobbie's 'cult of the body' (1984), Lesko's (1998) 'curriculum of the body', Bartky's (1988) 'body projects' and Connell's (2005) 'body reflexive practices'), this research explores how the body forms a crucial part of children's gender and sexual cultures, and identity work more widely, where 'to look is to be' (Skeggs 1997).

There is a growing body of research that is beginning to explore how pre-teen girls 'speak through their clothes' in the 'accents of gender' (McRobbie 1978) and how 'clothing emerges as a key signifier of sexual meaning' (Jackson and Vares 2012:196; see also Ali 2003; Bloustein 2003; Renold 2005; Mellor 2007; Allan 2009; Read 2010; Pilcher 2010; Rysst 2010a; Kehily 2012; Haines 2012; Afra 2013). In contrast, there is a dearth of contemporary qualitative research on how boys make meaning of their own sartorial practices (for exceptions see Swain 2002; Renold 2005; Pilcher 2011, 2013) and a relative paucity of ethnographic research exploring children's own understandings and experiences of how the body, and what goes on the body, can be charged with sexual meaning across different spaces, places and cultures (see Thorne 1993; Renold 2004; Rysst 2010a, 2010b; Afra 2013).

The analysis in this section focuses on the different ways in which boys and girls living and growing up in different cultures and locales talked about how sexuality infused their bodily practices: that is, how they perceived how sexual and gendered meanings infused what the body does, how it looks, what it wears, how it acts, how it is looked at, and how it is acted upon.

3.2 Key themes

Reported fears of children "growing up too soon" are not only unfounded but disconnected from the very different ways boys and girls talk about "looking older" or "looking sexy".

'Looking older ' (e.g. wearing high heels or cultivating 'six packs') was rarely about 'being sexy'. For some children, particularly girls, ageing up was a bid for social autonomy and a desire to be given more freedom by adults. For others, looking young was risky and looking older was about protecting themselves from peer harassment in their community.

Whilst the term 'sexy' carried many different meanings, it almost always referred to a normative heterosexual 'sexy'. For many boys being (hetero)'sexy' could be something that they could take or leave. Rarely was 'sexy' perceived by boys as risky or dangerous. In contrast, 'sexy' for girls could be both risky to take-up (e.g. being called a 'slut') and risky to resist (e.g. being called a 'fridge', a 'lesbian', a 'man', a 'granny').

For girls, being 'sexy' was an ambivalent experience. It was frequently used as form of sexual harassment, and created harsh social and cultural hierarchies between girls. Many girls were also aware and highly critical of heterosexual double standards and girls of all ages talked about their bodies as being constantly judged and valued.

While online cultures were a key site of bodily scrutiny, it was public spaces (e.g. parks, streets etc.) that girls identified feeling most self-conscious and exposed, with many girls reporting sexual harassment from peers and older boys and men. Boys in contrast expressed their fears of bodily vulnerability through physical rather than sexual objectification or sexual harassment.

Everyday sexism[7] and the pressure to conform to gender norms are pervasive in children's lives. Girls in particular talked about the difficulty of 'being yourself' and 'fitting in'.

Girls of all ages talked about their bodies almost wholly in relation to their appearance and the considerable effort that went into producing a recognisable and socially acceptable 'girl' body. In contrast, boys talked less about their appearance and what a body looked like (e.g. muscularity, fashion) and more about what a body did (e.g. sporting achievement).

Bodily anxiety and bodily dissatisfaction dominated girls' talk about their bodies and was much less present in boys' talk. Many girls preferred comfy clothes, like tracksuit bottoms and hoodies, and clothes that covered rather than revealed the contours of their body.

Girls also talked about struggling with media messages to 'be yourself' and social pressures to 'be like everyone else' and conform to narrow notions of heterosexual attractiveness. Some boys talked about not being 'fussed on fashion', and 'not caring as much as girls'. Those who did invest a lot in fashion, talked about wanting to 'look tidy' and not 'scruffy' or 'poor'.

Many boys and some girls considered girls' interest in fashion and cosmetic culture as 'over the top', and as a sign of girls' heterosexual availability (e.g. 'to get a boyfriend'). Girls also talked about the practices of social exclusion and sexist and sexual verbal harassment for not investing in high street fashion and cosmetic culture. Some girls talked about parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, with parents paying girls (who identified as tomboys) money to wear dresses to school discos and proms.

3.3 'Girls care about how they look, boys don't *have* to': (hetero)sexualising the gendered body

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[7] The term 'everyday sexism' is shorthand for capturing the normalized and routinized ways in which practices of sexist discrimination and harassment are a daily feature of children's lives. It derives from, and its use here is inspired by, the international "Everyday Sexism Project" where thousands of girls and women have uploaded their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment (http://everydaysexism.com). In this report, however, the term refers to girls' *and* boys' experiences.

An important starting point for this section is to acknowledge that few children talked about feeling comfortable or at ease in their own bodies. Many children articulated personal struggles and peer, parent and ideological pressures to conform to and express a socially acceptable gendered body (Grogan 1988). Some girls and boys were very vocal about societal and cultural pressures of 'being pushed' into being a particular kind of 'girl' or 'boy'. As the data illustrates below, many children reported being subject to gendered and sexual harassment for stepping outside of or failing to project appropriate, culturally specific 'masculinities' or 'femininities'.

3.3.1 Fit Boys: (hetero)sexualising the boy body

A significant pattern in boys' and girls' talk about their own and each other's embodiment practices was an acknowledgement of the everyday labour involved in 'being a girl':

Kathy: She takes two hours to do anything!
Hannah: Like I take ages to do my hair … I'm really self-conscious [Y7, S1]

Tessa: Like Maya, after we have games, she will take out her foundation and put the whole thing on her face, and if it rains, she will like put it on … like I say, 'you don't need it' and she was like, 'I know, but when you wear it, as soon as you buy it you have to wear it everyday'. And I was like, 'Well you don't have to', and she was like 'well you do'. [Y7, S5]

May: I feel pushed to be a girl [Y6, S6]

Michael: My sister Carol (age 13) puts make-up on … two hours! … and when she comes back from meeting her boyfriend she wipes it all off with a tissue [Y7, S3]

Hasan: In my [primary] school they used to go OTT … really bad [Y7, S1]
Kayden: I think the girls take much much longer [to get ready] [Y7 S1]

Sion: Girls are always like, their life is about fashion [Y8 S1]

INT: How important is it to you, how you look?
Gerry: At this age, not vey much, but when I'm older, like 16, or 20 [Y7, S4]

Jared: If you take too much time getting ready, you're gonna have less time having fun [Y8, S2]

Kayden: I'm not too fussed on fashion
Hasan: I dress like, it's the way I dress, nobody else dresses the way I dress [Y7, S1]

Cal: I just chuck something on that is in my cupboard [Y8, S5]

Boys did talk about their own bodily practices such as their struggle to attain a six-pack and perform 'tough' and 'hard' masculinities, training their hair to perform a Justin Bieber 'flick' and to generally look 'tidy', which involved buying the latest fashions (Swain 2002). As Todd says: *'Even though we're last minute, we still want to look tidy like' [Y8, S1].*

There was also a minority of older boys who invested in athletic and toned bodies, with some boys beginning weight training and body-building:

Jahmir: I try and look like, healthy [Y8, S4]

Mahmud: I go boxing … and me and him are learning like cage fighting [Y8, S4]

Eason: I don't want to be fat … I want to be fit [Y7, S4]

Gerry: Everyone says that want a body like David Hey … he is a boxer [Y7, S4]

Jahmir: I like going on the weights … it feels good afterwards because your arms feel really light after [Y8 S4]

Connor: I want a six-pack … I go to the gym, sometimes … not every single day [Y8 S3]

Leo: I want to be muscly and strong … but not too muscly so you can see your veins, like [Y8, S3]

As research on boys and masculinities demonstrates (Connolly 1998; Frosh et al. 2002; Swain 2002; Renold 2005), and the quotes above go some way to illustrate, these embodied practices connected to boys' own fears and anxieties around 'older'

bodily ideals, and their struggle at being or at least performing 'tough' (discussed further in the section on 'looking older' below).

Some boys considered how being 'fit' (e.g. strong and muscular) or 'tidy' was about presenting a heterosexually desirable body:

Lee: Sometimes boys dress up … go to the gym … so girls could like them [Y7, S1]

Billy: Well, boys do care about what they look like because they wanna get a girlfriend … if you're gonna look ugly, don't dress tidy, then you're not gonna get anyone when you're older [Y8, S5]

Some boys just couldn't see why girls would 'hide themselves with make up' or follow a fashion, but nevertheless empathised with girls:

Kayden: I don't care what anybody else thinks … if people don't like you for you are, then they're never gonna know you for who you are …
Hasan: What's the point in hiding yourself with make-up and stuff … covered in make-up?
Kayden: And if some girls, if one boy says they're fat, they might not be, and they take that really deep and try and change themselves
INT: And do boys have that?/
Kayden: Not so much boys … I don't think boys care as much [Y7, S1]

In sum, most boys' talk did not seem to carry the same levels of anxiety over and desire for bodily perfection or the intense hyper-regulation that girls invested in scrutinising their own bodies and the bodies of other girls. Although some boys were very articulate and forthcoming in talking about their bodies and bodily concerns, other boys may have been more reluctant to share their bodily anxieties with the researcher and with each other.

3.3.2 Looking 'hot': (hetero)sexualising the girl body
Girls' discussion of bodily practices included everything from full-body make-overs on nights out (e.g. applying fake tan, hair extensions, false eyelashes, eyebrow threading and shaving forearms in addition to legs and armpits) to rich and sensuous discussions of their favourite lip-gloss or laughter at failed make-overs with face

packs which 'started to burn', and fake tan that 'turned me orange'. While there was much delight to be had in engaging in cosmetic cultures and fashion, conversations often moved swiftly to bodily dissatisfaction:

Leona: I don't like [cropped tops]. I like my stomach covered [Y6, S6]

Stephanie: If I don't feel good about myself then the last thing I want to do is draw attention to myself by wearing rude stuff [discussion on short skirts] [Y8, S5]

Kelsey: I don't wear a dress for sure, even though I want to, but I don't like my legs … they're fat … they are! Look at them! [Y8, S3]

Sadie: I'm really self-conscious … I hate my legs [Y6, S7]

Aneria: I wear make up because I don't like my face/
Becky: Yeah, I hate my spots … so I can't be seen [Y8, S2]

Tonia: I don't like the way I look
Emma: I am flat chested and I got hips
Tonia: I've got massive hips
Becky: Me too, I am soooo self-conscious
Alise: We've not been out in aaaaaages! [Y8, S2]

Teagan: You have to be acceptable. You cannot, you just can't just heap on make-up and then later on go out, that is embarrassing … If I go out and I look a mess then someone is looking over and I'm thinking 'oh no I should have changed and all' [Y6, S7]

Ashleigh: I am embarrassed about my bum … it's big and bumpy [Y6, S7]

Girls talked about the compulsory nature and routinisation of beautification practices in relation to 'looking nice' and 'attractive' to 'fit in' and 'belong' and in some cases to be recognised as a 'girl'. They talked critically about these desires and regularly scrutinised their arms, legs, hips, thighs, hair, neck, noses and faces for being too big, too small, too fat or too thin. A small minority of girls reported posting pictures online in which their bodies and faces could be rated by others through harsh binaries of 'likes' and 'dislikes':

Shannon: If I dress up nice I may put it on Facebook on my profile picture

INT: and what comments would you get?

Shannon: I get like 70 likes and I just leave it at that/

Chrissy: I like it when people do it like as well, because in my last profile I had 24 likes [Y8, S2]

Tessa: There is a girl on Facebook (age 12) her profile picture is like in her bikini

Myra: Everyone calls her like things

INT: Like what?

Tessa: Slut and stuff/

Hannah: Just because she dresses … in all the small stuff, the really tight stuff [Y8, S1]

Cal: If she puts a nice picture on there [Facebook] or something they [other girls] can comment on it and say … well like sometimes, whore and slag and stuff [Y8, S5]

Bodily dissatisfaction was a recurring theme in many of the girls' interviews with the majority of girls subjecting themselves and being subject to a daily tyranny of gender-based harassment from boys and girls for not conforming to, or exceeding appropriate and normative bodily ideals of heterosexual 'attractiveness' and in some cases gender identity:

Meleri: You have to make sure you shave your legs when you wear a dress [Y8, S5]

Kelsey: I have it [eyebrow] threaded now and again

Carrie: Cos it looks nice

Kelsey: No! 'cause I got a monobrow … like my dad [Y8, S3]

Maria: Like Jake, if you are not [going out] with him he calls you names and stuff

Karina: A gorilla, he calls you

Maria: He calls me a gorilla

Karina: And he goes Maria, roll to the office

Maria: And when he keeps saying gorilla, it makes me really like upset and angry, and when the [teacher] said 'Maria come to the office', he said 'Maria roll to the office, roll, saying I was fat. [Y6, S8]

Tonia: I get the mickey taken constantly because of my voice, because it is too deep.

Becky: She apparently sounds like a man!

Either directly or indirectly girls and boys connected girls' investment in fashion and cosmetic culture as a sign of heterosexual desirability and in many cases heterosexual availability. The latter was a view held by some girls, and many boys agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'girls our age wear sexy clothes because they want boys to like them'.

Lori: I used to be a tomboy, but now because we are hanging around with boys more, I want to wear like nice clothes around them [Y8 S2]

Thea: I always dress pretty when boys come over [Y6 S7]

Jared: My sister used to do that [wear lots of make-up] all the time … cause she wanted boys /to like her

Sion: A girl who had a crush on a boy asked, 'do you like what I'm wearing?' [Y8 S2]

Evan: But it is like most of them who [wear 'sexy' clothes] just want to go out with boys [Y6 S8]

Cal: Some girls that I know, they want to look good because like … they want, they get all these nice clothes and all this make-up just because they want boys to like them, because they never had boys liking them before [Y8 S5]

Some girls clearly stated that they would tailor their 'look' depending upon the presence of boys. This could involve 'dressing up' to 'attract the boys' or 'dressing down' to avoid 'looking attractive'. Either way, as Skeggs notes, 'femininity becomes the ultimate legitimator of masculinity ... it offers to masculinity the power to impose standards, make evaluations and confirm validity' (Skeggs 1997: 113).

3.4 'Be yourself' and 'be like everyone else': managing contradictory gender messages

The following comments point to the ways in which girls are aware of being caught up in a neo-liberal post-feminist society which promotes individuality and presumes

gender equality has been achieved (McRobbie 2008; Gill 2007; Jackson et al. 2012). In this context, girl power discourses of 'be who you want to be' are drawn upon and media and peer cultures often demand conformity and punish those who deviate from, challenge or reject gendered bodily ideals (Ringrose 2012; Gill 2012; Jackson and Vares 2010). Conversations frequently saw girls in particular articulate an acute awareness of being caught between conflicting messages in which they must 'be themselves' *and* 'be like everyone else':

Zainab: You should be yourself and not try to be like somebody who you want to be
INT: And can you do that?
Zainab: Sometimes
Shabeela: (avid cricket player): Sometimes I can do it. But not most of the time …
because if I be myself it leads to me not having ... like you are scared of losing
people [Y7, S4]

Teagan: You just want to be skinny so that boys would go out with you, but you don't
have to be skinny [Y6, S7]

Hayley: I think natural is best. Natural
All: Yeah.
[earlier in the interview]
Hayley: [Make-up] makes you feel prettier, like if you have a skin condition, it makes
you feel prettier
Mia: More confident
Hayley: But you cannot go to school without make-up [Y7 S3]

Very few girls sustained a critical view or rejection of make-up and/or contemporary fashion in the interview. Those who did, like Sarah and Fay, were ostracised and verbally bullied by their year group. Nevertheless they both expressed strong views on not 'following the crowd' and 'being different' - views which were supported by their families. Christine's dad was a surgeon, her mum a solicitor and her Bulgarian-American roots and her relationship with her grandmother were a strong part of her sartorial identity. Fay's parents were both science teachers and fully supported her love of 'all things scientific' and her right to 'be a nerd':

Sarah: They called me anti-social last year. I'm not into those things [fashion brands].
I focus on my education … I like wearing my grandma's sweaters, she knitted them.

Hand-knitted them … so I'd wear that because it feels comfortable number one, and number two I can see my grandma in it and I know she doesn't have long to live Sarah: [talking about 'popular girls' who wear 'loads of foundation']: They just want to look cool and I am like, 'Oh my god, you look like a total clown with that on' [Y8 S4]

Fay: I quite like wearing dresses because they are problem-free. You just put them on and then you have not got to bother about how your trousers go with your top and this and that […] I like to think that there is a whole galaxy and the universe and I am actually a really small part of it so it doesn't matter which colour shoes I wear today, which is quite lucky seeing as I only have two pairs.

Fay: I am a nerd fighter. Yes. I fight for nerds. [Y6, S6]

In contrast, while pre-teen boys were subject to class-based peer pressure to 'look tidy' ('like nice, not scruffy and poor') or fashionable (sport the latest designer brands), they seemed to have more opportunities to take up a position of 'not caring' so much about how they looked and what they did with their bodies:

Leo: I don't really care about being sexy … girls are the ones who care [Y8, S3]
Jason: At our age, we want to look attractive, but not sexy … but girls want to look sexy [Y8 S3]

It is perhaps not surprising that faced with such daily bodily scrutiny, girls talk about their bodies in relation to cosmetics and fashion focused on covering up and concealing their bodies and faces (see also Jackson and Vares 2012: 212). Make-up in particular was discussed much more in terms of something to hide behind because 'I don't like my face' or because 'I have awful acne' or 'tired eyes' and most significantly because 'it makes you feel more confident'. Perhaps it offered symbolic protection from the harsh glare of others in a social and virtual world of constantly being 'looked at', judged and objectified, as Vicky (Y7, S3) sums up: 'people criticise how you look and who you are'.

3.5 The (hetero)sexualising of gendered bodies in place and space

It was in the photo-elicitation task where girls and boys were encouraged to consider their favourite places to be and hang out that some of the starkest gendered patterns

emerged. While many girls were critical of the ways in which they or their friends were being commented on and rated in virtual spaces (discussed more below), their annoyance, anxiety and fear of having their real (as opposed to their digitally represented) bodies being 'looked at' and sexually 'checked out' as they moved across different public places was, for many, unbearable:

Shabeela: [discussing why she doesn't like wearing 'sexy' clothes out] Like other people like might be attracted to you and you don't like them [Y7, S4]

Stephanie: Sometimes you worry if like what you are wearing is too short or something in case people are going to check you out, because that is what happens A LOT
Hazel: Yeah … people check you out and it is kind of scary because you don't know what might happen
INT: What kinds of people?
Hazel: Men, it is usually men. Sometimes it is like younger, and others it is older […]
INT: Is being checked out ever a nice feeling, is it always/
All: NO
Myra: Danger
Hazel: I don't like it
INT: Even boys your age?
Hazel: I don't like it, oh my god ... if people keep staring at you/
Stephanie: You just walk away and don't know what to do/
Hazel: You try not to look scared because you don't know what is going to happen and then you start like imagining what would happen and then you really freak yourself out [Y8, S4]

Faiza: I like the park, but I don't like it when the attention is on me … I get really embarrassed … I'm really worried that they are going to find fault in me and like sort of talk about it [Y8, S4]

Some girls refused to go to school or their local park without make-up on, or nice ('tidy') clothes, whereas many boys would 'chuck anything on'. Often the same girls, particularly those in Years 7 and 8 focused in on the private space of their bedrooms or their gardens as places to avoid being watched and judged:

Rowan: Like in your bedroom it's different

Cassy: No one's going to see what you're wearing unless you show out of the window [Y7 S2]

Liza: [chooses the picture of the bedroom as her favourite space] because like, you can watch the telly and phone someone and something like that, just wear what you want and they are not judging you, they are not there to judge you, in your pyjamas, they can't judge you because they can't see what you are wearing if you are on the phone. [Y7, S5]

Aneria: I hardly go out anymore. I just stay in my PJ's … I am so self-conscious [Y8, S2]

Lori: Yesterday me and Rach went out and when we came back from town it was really dark. It was like 7 o clock and there were teenagers in the bus stop and I just didn't want to go there because I did not want to go past guys

Aneria: I don't like to walk past guys because I just don't like people talking about you. I just feel that when I walk past people they are going to talk about me or they will judge me/

Lori: Like 'look at her hair', 'what is she wearing' and things like that

[Y8, S2]

While girls' talk focused upon how they *looked* in public places, boys' talk overwhelmingly focused on stories about what they *did* in public space. Indeed, many boys appeared to negotiate and experience place differently to their girl peers. Boys' annoyance seemed to be about not being able to do what they wanted to, at home, or in the street (e.g. from playing football outside their house to avoiding intoxicated adults). Indeed, boys' fear and anxiety emerged in relation to real and imagined physical violence:

Alun: There's no chance of going out, like, all the drug – there's like druggies and all that … people getting really drunk and that, would chase you and everything … so it's not safe [Y8, S1]

Miles: I like going down the park … but [the older kids] they might do like/

Evan: Bully you and/

Oliver: Smoke [Y6 S8]

Billy: Most skate parks I think a lot of illegal things are happening like, a lot of underage smoking, a lot of this, a lot of like anti-social behavior. Loads of all this everytime you go to the skatepark, like me and David were there and loads of kids were smoking and we just wanted to have fun and people were like you know smoking and pushing and stuff [Y8 S5]

In contrast to many of the boys who talked about their extensive involvement in organised or informal leisure and sporting activities, many girls, particularly those in Year 8, talked about giving up and no longer doing the kinds of activities they used to do, such as building dens, riding-bikes, or doing sports (see also Tucker and Matthews 2001; Ivinson and Renold 2013a). Girls were working hard at constructing or managing the construction of their bodies as heterosexually desirable commodities, but many were no longer doing the active pursuits which they enjoyed as younger girls:

Tonia: I used to play football … don't play it any more
Chrissy: I used to play touch rugby but not anymore. Now we have football but I don't play it anymore. I used to play with my dad.
INT: Why not?
Chrissy: I don't get on with the boys here as much
Nikki: I used to go swimming. I don't do it anymore. I don't like going anymore.
Tonia: I don't like going with boys, swimming … I don't like the way I look
[Y8, S2]

For those girls who continued to take up and invest in their active and sporting bodies, the pressure to project an ideal heterosexual femininity still had to be negotiated, as 12-year-old Faiza and 11-year-old Zainab who regularly played competitive cricket and football; Hannah who was a long distance runner; Kelsey who was national street dance champion; and Sadie who loved diving and aspired to be a formula one racing driver, all raised:

Zainab: My coach said she wants me to get a six-pack … so she keeps me an extra half hour and then she gives my like exercises … but my mum, she really isn't happy about it
INT: How do you feel about it?
Zainab: Excited

INT: And what's it feel like to have a muscly body?

Zainab: Okay, but not too muscly [Y7, S4]

Hannah: I love running … I love it … I started running when I was six … it's part of my life now and I'm really competitive, I love competing […]

Kathy: Do you think about your body when you're running?

Hannah: I like, I think I'm really fat … so when I'm going running, I like wear like my knee highs …and I like take ages to do my hair

[…]

INT: You do your hair before you go running?

Hannah: Yeah … it takes two hours, an hour and a half … I'm really self conscious when I go, because I think about everywhere, I know my mam says this is ridiculous but I think everywhere I go I think everybody's looking at me ... and everybody's saying I'm fat … it's cos I got bullied for being fat […] by Drew and James […] my mum had to like force me to put my dress on to go to prom, I didn't really want to because I felt like the boys looking at me [Y7, S1]

Nabila: I don't like showing the shape of my legs because they look really fat. Though this is muscle, because I run a lot [Y6, S6]

Context was crucial here. For example, wearing shorts on the football pitch or on the running track seemed to minimise feelings of sexual objectification, whereas running through the park or wearing football shorts on the walk to the leisure centre created an ambivalent space in which girls' bodies felt more exposed and subject to gendered and sexual scrutiny and regulation. Rowan talks about how wearing shorts to a birthday party was charged with sexual meaning, as she and her friends were called 'slags' outside of the context of the party:

Rowan: This girl called me a naughty word didn't she Lizzy, because me and her were going out in our shorts weren't we because we had to go to Shannon's party … we had to go with the theme

Lizzy: She called us slags like [Y7, S2]

Despite experiencing bodily vulnerability, many girls spoke about creating and seeking out spaces where their bodies were not so immediately charged with sexual meaning and where the pressures to perform heterosexy could be minimised (see also Jackson and Vares 2012). In the words of one of the girls, 'we can be free'. Liza

hid under the duvet and enjoyed her own private space, Hannah and Vicky spent a lot of time in their attic and Zainab felt she could only 'be myself when I am on the football pitch'. In the examples below, Carrie and Hayley found solace riding their horses and being on the farm (see also Ivinson and Renold 2013a, 2013b; Renold and Ivinson, forthcoming):

Carrie: Cause if I like went to the farm, I can wear anything to the farm cause obviously it's like old clothes and stuff and nobody's going to see … I just love old and baggy clothes and stuff [Y8, S3]

…

Hayley: It is like, in most spaces people just stare at you […] I like to be quiet, on my own … I spend a lot of time at the stables

INT: When was the last time you did that?

Hayley: It was Thursday … the Caerphilly mountains …

INT: And how does that make you feel?

Hayley: Comfortable, because I do not feel like peer pressured by anyone […] when you are on your own, you relax, be yourself … all swept up [Y7, S3]

…

Ffion: I don't like my body … but when I'm playing tennis it just, I forget about everything else and just have fun [Y7, S4]

The significance of place and space in sexualising girls' bodies and the ways girls accessed or created safe spaces to enjoy their bodies free from public scrutiny and harassment is returned to in a later section. It is the ambivalence of 'sexy' and the sexual subjectification and objectification of girls and boys bodies as negotiated daily in their social and cultural worlds that the next section explores.

3.6 What does doing and being (hetero)'sexy' mean for pre-teen girls and boys?

The sorting task in which children were asked to reflect upon dominant assumptions about 'sexy' products or behaviours was illuminating. It captured the complex and multiple meanings of how children understood and defined 'sexy' from their own perspective and in the context of their own local cultures, and also confirmed recent academic arguments about the sexual commodification of everyday objects and how bodies and objects are imbued with sexual meaning.

Guided by the statements of the sorting task, children tended to differentiate between products and behaviour. Sexy products could be defined as anything that was 'cool', such as an iPhone or perfume, to more stereotypically gendered items, such as a push-up bra or high heels. In a few cases, 'sexy' was more explicitly defined by some participants as a dildo or a sexually explicit image or film. 'Sexy' behavior also generated diverse examples, such as a casual greeting between girls ('hi sexy') to provocative poses and actions (e.g. 'thrusting hips' for boys, 'sticking her bum in the air' for girls) or in one case, the sexualising of food (e.g. a 'sexy salad' or 'sexy pizza'). In most cases, as illustrated below, sexy referred to heterosexiness. No participants discussed 'sexy' in ways in which suggested a positive desire for non-heterosexualities. Given the heteronormativity of peer culture (elaborated in Part Two), this latter finding is not surprising.

3.6.1 'Hey, sexy lady': boys and (hetero)sexiness
In contrast to the girls, many boys struggled to define 'sexy' in the context of their own everyday lives. This finding perhaps confirms the ways in which the compulsory (hetero)sexiness and (hetero)sexualizing of girls' bodies was not a defining feature for boys' bodies and their masculinities at this age. Their heterosexuality could be actively performed through participating in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures (see Part Two) and/or wearing products, such as branded body sprays or boxer shorts, which connected to wider media representations of an older 'heterosexuality'. In some cases boys' heterosexuality was implied by sporting prowess (where 'fit' bodies were heterosexual bodies and unfit, non-sporting bodies could be rendered 'feminine' and 'gay'). At other times, heterosexuality was defined in opposition to being 'not gay'. A couple of boys in the 'dress up' task made sure that the boy had a date for the prom, or at least didn't look 'too gay'.

Most boys positioned 'sexy' as a 'girl thing' or for older teenagers. The statement, 'boys don't care much about being sexy' was predominantly agreed with by most boys and girls. For the minority of boys and girls who argued that boys did indeed care greatly about being 'sexy', their understandings of what constituted 'sexy' behavior was diverse. It included overt displays of embodied 'sexy' moves (such as 'thrusting hips', particularly to the global YouTube hit 'Gangham Style'); (hetero)sexualising talk (such as wolf whistling at girls, or giving sexual meanings to everyday non-sexual objects, such as chairs or drinks); sexy clothing (such as low-slung jeans which revealed a boys' boxer shorts, or a low-cut t-shirt that revealed

boys' chests, or bare chests); muscularity (such as defined six-packs and biceps), and smell (such as the wearing of particular branded aftershaves, such as Adidas or Lynx - both of which connected to media representations sporting and heterosexually desirable bodies). Girls also considered boys who were 'confident', or boys who 'punched the air' or had a 'swagger' or who slouched, legs wide in their chairs, as 'sexy'.

Some boys, however, were ridiculed by girls as immature or positioned as sexist for overt, excessive or disgusting 'sexy' behavior:

INT: Why don't you think girls do that? [show classmates the page 3 pictures of semi-naked women when they walk by]
Sadie: Because we are three years (more) mature [Y6 S7]

Ankika: I went up to Sammy and I said, 'I can see your underwear', and he was like, 'so it is cool and sexy'. I said like 'no it isn't, you are embarrassing yourself' [Y6 S6]

Boys, however, were not subject to the enduring legacies of slut-shaming practices (Cowie and Lees 1981; Ringrose and Renold 2012; Ringrose 2012; Jackson forthcoming 2014b;) that almost always accompanied girls who invested in the erotic capital of their bodies as 'sexy'. Boys who 'went over the top' and who were perceived to overly invest in girls as girlfriends, or in the beautification of their bodies, such as indulging in fake-tan or uploading carefully posed magazine-style profiles of their faces or bodies (e.g. topless torsos), were subject to anti-gay and anti-girl abuse (see Ringrose et al. 2012):

Nathan: Well I don't really [care about being sexy]
Rhydian: Some drama-queens do … boys that are like, trying to impress, you know, have girls go out with them… like Liam, like when he had a row with them he'd go mad and then go like (makes a high squeal and makes a limp wrist) and like girlish, like something a girl would do [Y7, S1]

Tessa: This boy called Caden, his profile pictures him like/
Myra: Oh yeah, with a massive six-pack
INT: Is he your age?
Tessa: Yeah … boys are like called gay if they do that [Y8, S4]

This positioning of Caden as 'gay' not only reconfirms the previous section's findings of how rare it was for pre-teen boys to actively engage in embodied beautification practices, but how those practices are associated as something which 'girls' do, and are thus feminised and consequently homosexualised.

3.6.2 'Bit sexy, but not too sexy': girls and the ambivalence of heterosexy femininities

In contrast to the boys, 'sexy' for girls was a wholly ambivalent experience in which girls negotiated a fine line between being a 'bit sexy' and 'too sexy'. Being a 'bit sexy' was, for many, a compulsory practice because it was a key part of being 'attractive' and heterosexually desirable. Being 'too sexy' however incurred routinised slut-shaming practices:

INT: So what does sexy mean to you, at your age?

Maria: Really pretty

All: Yeah

Karina: Some people think they are sexy but they are like really tarted up too much

INT: So is sexy a good thing or/

All: Sometimes

Maria: Sometimes, but not hardly much

Karina: Because sometimes it is like tarty [Y6, S8]

The ultimate goal was to avoid the latter whilst trying to secure the former in a continuous daily battle to project a heterosexually desirable body – a battle and a practice perhaps complicated and intensified by increasingly sexualising media representations of girls' and women's bodies (discussed in Part 3). Despite the general recognition that 'you don't need to be sexy to be awesome' (Libby, Y7), doing and being a 'bit sexy' for girls was an important part of being 'a girl', yet a contradictory process which few girls could agree on (Jackson and Vares 2012, Jackson forthcoming 2014b).

Whilst clothes, such as short skirts, tight tops, push up bras, high heels and an excessive use of make-up ('plastered') could all be positioned as 'too sexy', just how short a skirt should be, or how tight a top could be, or how much make-up was too much before it exceeded an appropriate 'sexiness' was culturally specific and

disagreed upon within girls' own friendship groups. For Nabila, below, attention was focused on how opaque her tights were, for Reshmi, wearing an off-the-shoulder top was inappropriate and for Aamina it was about where the hemline on her skirt rested (above, on, or below the knee):

Aamina: We are Muslims so we can't show our legs

Alani: She is allowed to wear dresses like up to here (below the knee) not here (above the knee)

Aamina: And this one came up to my knees … but not really short

INT: So that one was a little bit shorter than you would normally be allowed to wear?

Aamina: Yeah (…) but when I go to university I am allowed to wear dresses like up to here (above the knee).

[…]

Aamina: I have a style that I like but I'm not allowed to wear. It is when you put your shirt down and it shows your shoulder … I really like that but I'm not allowed

Nabila: Me neither

INT: Why not?

Aamina: Because we are not supposed to show/

Nabila: Yeah, and it is our religion

Aamina: I can show my arms like up to here or here but I can't show my shoulders and I never wore them

INT: could you wear them at home?

Aamina: Yeah, probably in bed (laughs)

[…]

Ayesha: Our friend Nabila yeah she brings it [skirt] up to here, and she is a Muslim and we told her … she should be taking more care

Alani: Yeah, on the school trip she wore a skirt that was up to here [above the knee] ... and then she kept her hair out and wore such see-through tights and it was creepy and then all the boys started calling her for her sexy dress … she used to smile and didn't try to hide from them [Y6, S6]

In a dominant culture which demands girls be 'sexy' but not 'too sexy', many girls struggled with and constantly feared being slut-shamed by other girls and boys, particularly when being 'sexy' could render them attractive and popular and simultaneously be thrown at them as an insult:

Anwyn: I've got a friend, Alice, and I go 'hi sexy' and she says 'hi sexy', like today she went, 'oh you look really sexy today' and I was like 'oh thanks same to you'.

INT: and what if a boy came up and said that to you?

Anwyn: I'd feel a bit different, I'd feel weird

Fflur: I'd be massively shocked

Travis: I'd be like, quick, get me a jumper

[…]

INT: Could it ever feel nice if it came from a boy?

Anwyn: you can take it as a compliment, or you can take it as, 'do I look tarty?'

[Y8, S5]

Seren: Sexy can be good and bad

Meleri: Yeah, it can be good

Seren: But if you're ugly, and people say you are sexy, then that is bad [Y8, S5]

Whilst the talk about boys thrusting their hips and showing off their muscles generated giggles or at worse rolled eyes, comments on girls using their erotic capital were met with unambiguous denigration. One Year 8 girl was described as 'slutty' and 'trashy' 'because she rubs her bum in front of the boys' faces and then sits down' (Ringrose 2008). Indeed, older girls who enjoyed or garnered social power and status from sexual displays were often rendered 'slags' and younger girls were positioned outside the purview of 'nice' femininity and 'childhood', alongside other educational markers of difference (see Alani's comments below):

Leona: [describing the girls who play the game: 'sexy legs, muscly boys']: They act like they're five years older than us! [Y6, S6]

Alani: We are like quite brainy, and they are like, 'aaah, how do you do this' [Y6, S6]

Indeed, while girls reported on the ways in which boys were engaged in slut-shaming, particularly on social networking sites which allow anonymous comments to be posted (e.g. Ask.fm[8]), it was girls themselves were their own harshest critics both through self-surveillance and surveillance of others' sexual displays:

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[8] Ask.fm was launched in June 2010 and is a platform-based website that connects to Facebook and Twitter. It allows users to post comments and questions anonymously to a person's profile.

Stephanie: Like Michelle, she's got a lot of stick for that, like being called a slut and nasty names like that

Myra: Just because she like dresses a bit old for her age

[…]

Stephanie: And they are all in these tight tops, and they are all like showing off/

Myra: Because they all like pose and like bend over and stuff …. so you can see stuff … so you can see, you know

INT: What happens when they post one of these pics?

Myra: Friends can go, 'oh you are so pretty … stunner'

[…]

Stephanie: but on Ask FM you can like ask private questions and all the comments are like slut slut slut sort of stuff [Y8 S4]

Given the ways in which 'sexy' clothes or looks could immediately render a girl a 'slag' or 'slut' and given how almost all of the girls reported bodily dissatisfaction, where covering up almost always trumped wearing revealing clothing, it was not surprising to discover that many girls, like the majority of boys, much preferred what they described as a 'tomboy' look, sporting jeans, trainers, t-shirts and generally choosing 'comfy' clothes over fashions which revealed or marked out the shape of their bodies (see also Jackson and Vares 2012: 207, who also found that girls preferred 'concealing not revealing' clothes).

However, for some girls, particularly during organised parties or school discos, there was significant pressure to ditch their tomboyism for a more 'girly' femininity, including reports of some mothers paying their daughters to wear a dress for the prom:

Ria: This one girl, she is a tomboy, and her mum paid her a hundred pounds to come to the prom night. She did not want to wear a dress because she is a tomboy

Izzy: Yeah, she was paid a hundred pounds to wear a dress all night [Y7, S3]

Seren: I love my joggers because I'm a kind of tomboy and a girl

INT: And at the prom you wore a dress?

Seren: My mum forced me to wear it, she said she'd give me thirty quid if I wear it, so I wore it [Y8 S5]

Those who did enjoy clothes that hugged the contours of their bodies, or wore padded or push-up bras, were, however, not always intentionally about performing 'sexy' – rather sexual meanings were often imposed upon particular items of clothing and, as illustrated above, contextually contingent. For example, for some girls the padded bra could be protecting sore growing nipples or enhancing a flat chest. For many girls, padded bras did both:

Maria: In Year 4 we used to stick like tissue down there into it
Ashlee: We would get them about this big and then go [sticks chest out] I'm BIIIIG [laughter]
[…]
Karina: I wear padded like you said
Maria: I don't like padding … I can wear the vest ones
Karina: They get too tight and they (nipples) like poke out, urgh, and it makes you look even more/
Maria: Padded ones may hurt me
Karina: I think they are more comfortable [Y6 S8]

Izzy: [dressing up the girl figure, Task 1] she needs a padded bra so that people can look at her boobs (giggles)
Ria: She needs one to hide them [Y7, S3]

It is also important to note however that amidst this intense bodily regulation and control, girls created private spaces through which they could enjoy trying on the very same 'sexy' or fashionable body practices that they were policing each other with on a daily basis. Nabila and Maria a enjoyed wearing 'short stuff' in the privacy of their family home, Ayesha styled her hair with fashion beads under her hijab and Tessa liked wearing heels and short skirts in her house, with 'close friends', and away from what she saw as a predatory sexual male gaze:

Maria: I don't like wearing shorts like without anything under. In front of my family it is okay but if you are out and stuff I don't like it. [Y6 S8]

Karina: I would only wear stuff like that if I was going to a party where no like strangers could come and I am with my mum and dad:

Ashlee: Yeah … as long as I have my brothers [Y6 S8]

Nabila: At home I wear whatever I want, I wear short stuff, but when people come I just put something on

[…]

Ayesha: When you go to mosque sometimes I actually do a style underneath the scarf, I put my hair up like this (describes little fashion clips) and then it shows

INT: So you can have the fashion stuff you like underneath?

Ayesha: Yeah yeah I put those on which shows at the top, that is like a fashion everywhere

Tessa: Like really short shorts, I like them, I like wearing them in the house but I don't like wearing them outside … with close friends … like a man might look at you and think you are older and then like want to go out with you or something [Y7 S4]

Doing and being 'heterosexy' was central to the production of girls' femininity (Renold 2005; Haugea 2009). It was a discourse and performance taken up by girls in ways that created harsh social and cultural divisions. It was also a personal practice experienced sometimes as a source of pleasure, but most often it was experienced as almost always risky, shameful and dangerous. The gendered dynamics of 'sexy as risky' are explored further below.

3.7   Doing and being 'sexy': contexualising sexual risks for girls

Many girls expressed with resignation and sadness how they experienced their bodies as increasingly more vulnerable as they transitioned into adolescence. Some of their comments point to the ways in which girls were experiencing their bodies as sexual objects that were done to, acted upon, dissected and dispersed often against their will. Some of these practices were overt, such as being 'wolf whistled' at, or being asked to be seen naked. Some were the fears of being asked to 'have sex' or 'being raped' when they thought they were being followed:

Rowan: Some boys whistle at you ... if they think you're hot they'll whistle at you and

Lyn: Yeah

Lizzy: Yeah but why do they have to whistle at you anyway

Kathy: Why can't they just/

Lyn: Yeah girls like us … like 11 year olds and they're like teenage boys whistling at us

[…]

Rowan: When boys whistle at me I feel like, maybe I dressed too fancy or too [inaudible] to go out somewhere … it makes me feel like I need to change my clothes

[…]

Lyn: Yeah, and you can just wear trousers or joggers and it's no different

[Y7, S2]

Thea: Yeah, were playing I-spy and he (older cousin) was running around with his top off/

Teagan: Yeah, running around hiding behind cars, and he said 'I'd love to see you naked' [Y6 S7]

Meleri: [discussing the statement, 'sexy clothes and make up put some children at risk'] Some boys could try and have sex with her if she looks really sexy

Seren: Like you get, because I live in [name of town], you get like boys that comes up to you yeah, and goes 'you're fit' and everything, 'come with me'

INT: Have you ever had those comments?

Seren: Sometimes/

Meleri: You get boys looking at you, in [name of town], they will talk *to you [Y8, S5]*

Myra: We went to the rec [park] and we were all there and then there was this guy and because it was the summer and we were all wearing shorts and like they weren't ridiculously short but they were still like, short, and we were walking along and there was this guy (about 40) and he starts looking at them [shorts] proper checking us out, and I thought he is a bit dodgy and then like because we were going this way and he was going this way he kind of followed behind us […] so we went back to the rec and he was standing staring at us so we ran to Georgia's and he was like coming after us and Jack was going, 'he's going to rape us' … 'he's going to rape you' [Y7, S4]

Other sexualising practices were more subtle, such as the ways in which the boys Kayleigh and her friends regularly hung out with routinely heterosexualised their

everyday interactions. The dialogue below also indicates just how subtle this form of heterosexual harassment can be:

Tonia: The boys say things, like 'giggidy', that are really disturbing
INT: And just that one word changes the meaning into a sexual meaning?
All: YEAH
Lori: Like the boys we hang out with on the weekends they are constantly saying 'giggidy'
Aneria: Like in the shop, I said 'I really like that' and one of the boys said, 'giggidy'
INT: Can it be funny?
Chrissy: Sometimes it can be, but it can be stupid like, 'why did you do that'?
Tonia: Everything we say is turned into a sexual way and you think we are/
Chrissy: What is embarrassing is they try to act like that/
Lori: They are really sick-minded
Becky: It really gets into my head [Y8 S2]

'Giggidy[9]' relates to a character called 'Quagmire' in the US animation 'Family Guy'. He frequently uses this word 'when something hot or sexy has been done or said' (Urban Dictionary) and is known in the series for his obsession with sex and pornography. While these kind of comments could be humorous and playful, they also need to be placed in a wider social context. These were the very same boys who had sexually explicit images on their phones, and led many of the girls to despair at what seemed to be boys' obsession with all things sexual, as Lori declares when she says 'they are really sick-minded'.

Many girls, either implicitly or explicitly, talked about how it was risky to be 'sexy' and risky not to be 'sexy';

Ffion: They [girls her age] should have the choice of wearing like make-up and sexy clothes, but then they can put themselves at risk, but then if they don't wear it maybe they will feel left out or something like that (Y7 S4]

The ways in which girls defined and managed sexual risks seemed to relate to the presence and prevalence of sexual harassment in their everyday lives. For example, Ffion and her friends understand that not investing in a 'sexy' body runs the risk of

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[9] Giggidy.com is also a website advertising "Free Porn Tube videos and streaming Sex Movies categorized by niche from Amateur Porn Tube to Voyeur Porn and everything in between".

social exclusion and also potential heterosexualised abuse (the 'slut-shaming' outlined above). Later in the interview Ffion talks about how 'sexy' for her is dangerous. Here she connects her fears to the media reporting of Jimmy Saville and wider peer knowledge about local girls being kidnapped by 'white van men' and raped.

Some girls, like Abby's friendship group, took up girl power discourses (Haines 2012) and tomboyism (Renold 2009; Renold and Ringrose 2008) as a socially acceptable alternative, although for the majority of participants, tomboyism was difficult to sustain in a climate of increasingly heterosexualised femininity, particularly in secondary school:

Abby: You used to be a tomboy
Robyn: I used to be a very big tomboy
Abby: And now you've completely switched!
Robyn: I'm more about make-up and dresses. I wear dresses quite casually, quite often now
INT: So what happened to change/
Robyn: I think it's just that I saw a lot of different styles because I'm in comprehensive school now, and because all our styles have changed recently so … I don't know [Y7 S4]

Not performing or playing at 'heterosexy' were practices only available it seemed by girls who were encouraged and supported by families and communities in which discourses of gender equality were both strongly invested in, and where girls felt comfortable to take them up as their own.

INT: Do you think much about how you look, and body image?
Robyn: No I don't really care to be honest. I don't care what people think. That is what my mum says, you know, it doesn't matter what others think, it matters what you think … I'm a sci-fi person … I like boyish sort of programmes … I'm more boyish … a sort of tomboy [Y7, S4]

In contrast, for Tonia, transgressing normative femininity was an abject identity very difficult to sustain living in an ex-mining community with strongly demarcated and traditional gender roles (Ivinson and Renold 2013a). She had given up on 'wearing loads of make-up' and now wore dark 'goth' clothes and 'just eyeliner'. Not 'caring

what others think' and challenging gender norms by not participating in the cosmetic culture and fashion of her peer culture rendered her highly visible in her local community where she was routinely subject to harsh gender-based harassment because of her 'deep voice' and alternative gender appearance:

Tonia: They pick on me because of my voice … because it is too deep. Some of them are my friends. One of them is my cousin … and my friends' friends take the mick out of me constantly, they call me batman. And when I have my hood up, they shove my hood down over my face and when I speak they say I am Batman because I talk too deep
INT: And what do you do about that?
Tonia: I just take it and then I take it to heart sometimes and I just stand there like, you know. And then sometimes they ask me what is the matter and I tell them that, like what they said offended me and they say sorry, but they continue to do it [Y8, S2]

For other girls where gender and sexual harassment was part of their everyday lives, either on the street, or in their family, the gendered and sexual harassment they incurred for rejecting heterosexy femininities was endured because 'sexy' was far too risky and dangerous. Rowan and Lizzy are 'scared' about boys 'hurting them' when they are being whistled at because of their own experiences of physical violence in their locality:

Rowan: Yeah and we're like really scared … thinking
Lizzy: Thinking … because they are older than us
Rowan: Because they might like like
Lizzy: Might like/ hurt us
Rowan: They might hurt us … cos like the other day we were walking around and people were chucking stones at us … and I felt like saying 'you need to wise up and stop chucking like'
INT: And did you?
Rowan: No, I wanted to, but I just couldn't/
Lyn: Yeah … they might come on to you like [Y7, S2]

Jessie gets called 'lesbian' by the boys in her class for not showing interest in boys as boyfriends or expressing a heterosexualised femininity. Jessie, however, refuses

to change. She is acutely aware that 'boys can hurt you' and connects being a girlfriend with the intimate partner-based violence experienced by her sister:

Jessie: I enjoy not having a boyfriend … especially when you go out with the wrong boy … like my sister has … where your boyfriends are hitting your girlfriends [Y6 S8]

In brief, the ways in which girls defined 'sexy' as 'risky' and the ways in which 'sexy' was reported as something girls could take up, challenge, reject and parody was intimately connected to the patterning of local and wider gender relations and the presence and prevalence of sexual violence in the communities in which they lived.

3.8   Boys' perceptions of sexual harassment and 'sexy as risky'

So far this section on the risks and dangers of 'heterosexy' has focused upon girls' accounts. This is to some extent a reflection of the data in terms of how risk and danger frequently mediated girls' reported experiences of being, doing or becoming 'sexy'. Only one boy in the research was reported (by girls) to have been fearful of the kinds of sexual danger girls reported. Like many of the girls' accounts, this fear seemed also to connect with his own experience of being 'stalked' by an older man who eventually stopped him and asked if he could take a photo of him.

The sorting task in which boys were asked whether 'sexy clothes or products put some children at risk' generated discussions which illuminated the very different ways in which boys thought about the relationship between girls, bodies, sexuality and risk. For some boys, particularly those boys who were younger and/or those who reported disinterest in fashion, and who tended to hang out in primarily boy-only friendship groups, risk was defined not in terms of sexual harassment, but in terms of products such as make-up ('the mascara might get in your eyes') or high heels (which could 'make you fall over'). Some boys didn't understand or didn't agree with the statement.

In contrast boys who had sisters, older brothers with girlfriends and/or who did invest in their own bodies as heterosexually desirable, were very quick to jump to defining risk as potential sexual harassment. Indeed many of these comments normalised the practice that sexualising comments and sexual harassment was to be expected if

girls wore 'sexy' clothes, which was often defined as 'short skirts' and 'tight' or revealing tops:

Hasan: They might be at risk because they might not know what they are doing … the girl could only be 11 and she's dressing all up and putting loads of make-up on, and like older boys, thinking she's their age, and that and then … its going too far ahead [Y7, S2]

Liam: Yeah, it might [put girls at risk] for people like trying to pick them up [Y7, S1]

INT: (reading statement) 'Sexy clothes and make up put children our age at risk'
Alun: Yeah! Strongly agree!

A minority of boys, however, were vocal in expressing their concern for the ways in which girls and women were subject to sexual harassment (verbal, physical and virtual). As the following quote illustrates, these comments were from boys who had direct experience of witnessing intimate partner violence in their community and the ways in which some of the older teenage boys talked about and treated girls and girlfriends:

Alun: One day, now right, I remember well, um, this boy, this girl went 'Im dumping you' and this boy [age 16-18] went 'why?', and she went 'cause I think you're too nasty to me' and all that, so he starts pushing her into a wall, and then she goes to the hospital … she like sliced like all her head and everything [Y8, S1]

Ed: It's like where I live, there's always people drinking and people getting drunk and falling over … there was one time, uh, a guy broke up with his girlfriend, girlfriend said 'why' and he started F-ing/
Alun: F-ing and blinding all the time/
Ed: And then he, he just pushed her into a wall and walked off, and she had a cut on her arm and she had to go to hospital because it was dripping like mad [Y8, S1]

Indeed, Ed, Alun and his friends agreed with the girls that they needed a sex and relationship education that dealt specifically with domestic and intimate partner violence both within their communities and in their own and older relationship cultures. Ed and Alun just couldn't understand 'why would someone do that!'

3.9 'I wish I was five'/'It's scary being young': what pre-teen children have to say about 'looking older'

Children are frequently subject to a range of developmental and age-appropriate discourses and draw upon these discourses in their own social and cultural worlds (Thorne 1993; Renold 2006). For example, in this research children drew upon notions of sexual innocence to resist engaging in sexual activity (e.g. 'too young to kiss'), or as a form of sexual harassment (e.g. calling girl a 'fridge' or rendering a child sexually illiterate and ignorant). They could also be used to undermine children's experiences of heterosexual and homophobic harassment (e.g. 'just mucking about', 'only joking'). Similarly, discourses of 'sexuality as older' were drawn upon by children to shame and pathologise overt sexual behaviours (such as the slut-shaming above) or positioned children outside the domain of childhood, as one girl said about an entire peer group who invested strongly in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures: 'they're acting like 16-year-olds'.

This section focuses on how the social construction of age shapes children's understanding of their bodies and how the fear and desire to 'look older' was experienced and made meaningful when children's everyday lives and local gender/sexual cultures came into view.

Contrary to media panics about hurried childhoods, and in particular accelerated femininities, many girls and boys were keen to stress their anxiety about growing up:

Chelsey: I know we are growing up fast … but I don't want to change … I want to stay normal … I like being a tomboy [Y8, S1]

Amjad: I want to stay young forever … because my sister has like done a degree and she hasn't found a job, and she gets sad and stuff [Y8 S4]

Evan: I don't want to grow up … I want to stay young … I don't want to go to high school [Y6, S8]

These anxieties were highly gendered and classed with some boys connecting their fears to their immediate futures and the wider knowledge and experience of being pulled into doing 'bad things', such as drinking, smoking, stealing and doing drugs.

Other boys were concerned about more distant futures such as government tax, the recession and the closure of youth clubs:

Mahmud: I think the government spends money on unnecessary stuff. Some youth clubs are closing down and sometimes I feel like I have got nowhere else to go [Y8 S4]

Amjad: Safety is important, but it's like getting a job, getting a job and that kind of thing [Y8, S4]

Jahmir: Like VAT they take 20% on every single thing you buy. If you think about how much money they get, like what do they spend it on? [Y8 S4]

Cal: I have friend older than me, but I wouldn't go with like 18-year-olds and stuff like that, you might want to try different things [Y8 S5]

Some of the most vociferous examples of boys' describing the 'terrifying' nature of getting older were from boys who lived in communities where violence amongst older teenage boys was commonplace:

Sion: Some people say you have to go outside, be with your friends […] but I never go out, cause I get bullied outside [Y8, S2]

Dafydd: I don't want to get old … [in the park area] it just feels like we are […] we might get bullied [Y6, S8]

Liam: They burnt the climbing frame down, the council put it up the same day they burnt it down – there's nothing in the park now [Y7, S1]

Alun: There's no chance of going out, like, all the druggie, there's like druggies and all that, the people in … getting drunk and all that, chasing you and everything.
INT: So for your age, growing up/
Ed: Oh it's terrifying
Alun: YEAH! [Y8, S1]

In contrast, girls' talk about the fear of growing up focused predominantly upon their sexual bodies. While many girls, particularly those in areas of high teenage

pregnancy, expressed concern about becoming (young) mothers, the majority of talk pivoted around their ambivalent feelings of how their pubertal bodies were increasingly being charged with sexual meaning.

Many girls struggled with fashion that positioned their bodies as 'too old' or 'too young', and whatever they wore they seemed to be subject to sexualising comments or perceived sexualising glares. Caren for example described how her small and pre-pubertal frame betrayed her age (11) and she felt subject to the 'too much too soon' discourse so prevalent in UK media reporting of 'premature sexualisation':

Caren: I said to my mum, that I needed to get, find a new look because my clothes are a bit babyish now … so I went back to town and I bought a new top, I wore it when I was going around the shops, and then I saw teenagers and I felt a bit embarrassed because I'm shorter than, I'm shorter than what I look so they think like I'm still in primary school and I dress up like a teenager. So I feel like 'ok, I'm a bit embarrassed now' … I felt my heart go really fast … because they are all like really tall and kind of going around me and looking at me [Y7, S5]

Zoe, in contrast was particularly anxious that her tall height marked her out as a teenager, when she is 'only 10'.

Zoe: I would like to change myself to being smaller. I don't like being tall, it makes me stand out a bit too much [Y6, S6]

Few girls reported any sense of power and pleasure from the ways in which their bodies were sexualised, confirming Jackson and Vares' (2012) finding that few girls were 'actively seeking maturity through emulating sexiness'. Rather, they mourned the loss of their young pre-pubertal bodies, which were free from the sexualising comments they were now often subject to. Some girls, like Erin above, expressed regret that it was harder to wear her 'comfy' tomboy clothes 'all the time'. Maisy (below) fantasises about being in Year 1 again to fend off the demand to 'act older' and Kathy actively makes herself look younger so as not to attract the attention of 'older' boys:

Maisy: Sometimes I like to pretend like I'm in Year 1 again, I go to the shop with my dad, skip and hold his hands, it just brings memories back and like then I'll put my hair in a plait […] when you get like bunches there and then plaits I feel like younger

… it's a nice feeling too, to feel young […] because on Saturday I had it in plaits and then I looked in the mirror and I felt, I'm in Year 7 I can't wear this anymore … because when you were younger you didn't have any pressure on you, nobody expected you to do anything because you are still quite young. If I do my hair like I did when I was young I feel, I don't have really, nobody expects me to … to have to act like I'm older. [Y7 S5]

Kathy: I don't like looking older because like, if someone 14 or 15 asked you out and … like … you said yes because they thought you, you were their age, something bad could happen [Y7, S2]

For many girls, their physical bodies betrayed their biological age. This was especially the case beyond the school gates where, in the absence of primary school uniforms that can overtly signify age categories, boundaries between pre-teen and teen were blurred.

'Looking older' and/or the desire to 'be older', however, was embraced by some girls and boys, but in strikingly different ways and contingent upon their particular socio-cultural circumstances. The following comments highlight boys' desires for muscularity:

Jason: [going to the gym] makes you feel stronger/
Connor: Feel healthier
INT: Why?
Connor: Because I'll be looking good/
Jason: So you can be stronger too … I want to box when I'm older [Y8, S3]

Jahmir: I'd like to look like Cristiano Ronaldo … he gives loads of money to charity and gets loads of girls [Y8, S4]

Rhydian: I don't really feel safe […] Y'know if someone asks me (to fight) I just show them I'm not scared, 'hit me then' and I'll just you know, lose it […] I ended up fighting when this boy kept calling my ex-girlfriend fat and ugly and all that like ... it wasn't fair, so I just told him to stop it and then he hit me, so I hit him, and we started fighting … and he had the detention cause I was sticking up for her and like he was bullying her […] and after that day when the dog attacked me, that's why I really go to the gym […] my grampy used to say to me, if anybody's bullying you and there's

nobody to tell, and you think you're gonna get hurt, just show them your strength […]
my mother said that I should go for this club, it's called stick fighting, and it like
teaches you how to disarm people, or say, like if someone had a knife [Y7, S1]

Jahmir, Connor and Jason's desire for healthy, strong 'fit' bodies seemed to connect
to their future vocational aspirations to 'be a boxer' or to achieve the toned physique
of their role model Ronaldo, which included getting 'loads of girls' and donating to
charity. However, Rhydian's trips to the gym to body-build seemed to be about
protecting his girlfriend from the physical violence of other older girls and ex-
boyfriends in the locality. With Rhydian, we come to understand how cultivating
strength and fighting skills are not just about mimicking or conforming to ideological
pressures of embodying a decontexualised image of 'macho masculinity'. They are
perhaps invested in to survive the harsh conditions of living in areas where conflict
and violence mediates everyday peer culture and the social fabric of wider
community relations.

Girls' desires for 'older' femininities were also connected to the ways in which
'innocence' and 'looking young' was socially constructed and embodied in the
context of their everyday lives. For May, her longing to be a teenager was embedded
in the ambivalent way she felt about her 'childish' body and what it meant to 'act
older', her longing for independence, and her resistance to her dad's fears of her
desire to 'grow up':

May: We feel like 12-year-olds and sometimes we do try and look older … I just want
to be a teenager […] I really want to be old […] I just want to experience being older
and growing more and just not being a little primary school person
INT: What would you like to do that you can't do now?
May: I don't know […] my dad is like, he doesn't want me to be like, he is like 'no
short shorts!' … he just wants me, he is afraid of me growing up into an adult too
soon. He just wants me, like how I am. But I don't like how I am. I am just too childish
… but I don't know how I'm meant to act if I am not going to be a child […] I think I
look much younger than I am. It was so embarrassing, we went to the park and
someone said 'are you a 9-yearold?" and I'm like 'NO'. So horrible. It is just so
annoying [….] When you are older you have more independence. [Y7, S6]

May's strong feelings to 'grow up' seemed to be a bid for social power and agency and reconciling what she saw as a mismatch between her 'young' body and 'mature' mind. Wearing 'short shorts' was perhaps one way in which she could achieve this.

In contrast, the girls in the following extract illustrate how their love for high heels is not purely the shoes' aesthetic appeal, but wearing them also seems to connect them to an 'older' femininity that they invest in to protect them from hierarchical peer cultures. For these girls, innocence and 'looking young' is harmful, they are 'made fun of' and 'treated like dirt' by older teenagers in the locality:

Maria: I like high heels because I am quite small

INT: How high? [she shows me - approx. 4-5 inches]

Ashlee: I have them that big and I have a little bit at the bottom that makes it taller

Kelsie: I have three pairs of boots that are high heels

INT: So where do you wear these shoes and boots with heels?

Maria: Everywhere

Kelsie: Out to play

[…]

INT: When did you start wearing heels?

Maria and Ashlee: Seven/

Karina and Kayleigh: Eight, about eight

[…]

Ashlee: I like them because adults wear them

Maria: And you look older

Ashlee: My sister is really taller than me and I like looking like the same size as her

Maria: Yeah, I'm really short compared to everyone else

INT: So what is it about looking older that you like? Can you tell me more about that?

Ashlee: People treat you with respect I think because because/

Maria: Like when you are older, people no longer treat you like dirt

INT: So what does being treated like dirt mean?

Maria: Like rubbish

Ashlee: Like they make fun of you and/

INT: Who would?

Ashlee: All the older children in [name of locality]

All: Yeah

[…]

INT: So what does it feel like when you are wearing them? Close your eyes and imagine you are wearing your heels
Ashlee: Really excited and cheerful
Maria: Yeah, happy and cheerful

Wanting to be 'older' and drawing on consumer cultures or bodily practices to project 'older' identities was not necessarily about intentionally trying on or projecting a sexual or 'sexy' body. Rather, 'older' identities were sometimes invested in by children as a bid for social autonomy or as a strategy for protection from verbal and physical harm. In sum, 11-year-old boys cultivating six-packs and 10-year-old girls wearing 5-inch high heels may indeed be a cause for concern, but perhaps only insofar as they point to enduring gendered, generational and socio-structural inequalities.

4 Children, Sexuality and Relationship Cultures

4.1 Introduction

There is a growing body of qualitative research that has explored children's own romantic relationship cultures, particularly children's investment in being a 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' (Best 1983; Thorne & Luria 1986; Hatcher 1995; Connolly 1998; Epstein 1999; Epstein et al. 2001, 2003; Blaise 2005; Renold 2005; Swain 2002; Allan 2009; Rysst 2010a; Afra 2013; Renold and Mellor 2012; Holford et al. 2013). This research has shown how children in pre-school and primary school actively participate and/or are positioned in relation to boyfriend-girlfriend cultures, and the language of 'dating' and 'dumping'.

A distinguishing feature of this research is the developmental reference to children's active engagement with boyfriend-girlfriend cultures as a rehearsal or transition to an older adolescent or young adult sexual identity. Terms that commonly crop up include references to children's sexuality as 'induction', 'graduation', 'preparation', and so on. While locating children's sexuality as emergent enables us to explore how children are indeed trying on sexual subject positions, there is a tendency to view these relationship cultures as children 'playing at' or 'mimicking' older sexualities and thus only understood as a form of induction 'into the meanings of heterosexuality in anticipation of their practice' (Kehily et al. 2002: 174). This perspective tends to treat children's relationship cultures only in relation to their potential gendered and sexual futures rather than exploring and taking seriously the tensions and contradictions of children as both sexual beings and becomings (see Epstein 1997). It also overlooks the ways in which children's relationships are tightly regulated within a heteronormative framework.

Research into children's own romantic cultures has highlighted the multiple and contradictory ways in which children engage with their local school-based boyfriend-girlfriend culture and discourses of heterosexual romance. To varying degrees and emphases, feminist research has highlighted the gendered power relations at play in the production of heterosexual hierarchies (Thorne & Luria 1986; Adler & Adler 1998; Thorne 1993; Epstein et al. 2001a, 2001b; Renold 2006; Afra 2013). In their analysis of 552 stories by children aged 9–10 years, Walton et al. (2001) found that romance and boyfriend-girlfriend cultures could be trivial, important and grown up. Renold's (2006) ethnographic school-based research with 10-11 year olds also illustrated how

dominant notions of heterosexuality heavily regulated boy-girl friendships and interactions. Much less research has explored the ways in which socio-cultural differences (e.g. social class or religion) feature in pre-teen relationship cultures; how children explore same-sex intimacies and desires (although see Redman 1996; 2001) or cope, resist and/or challenge dominant heterosexual storylines (Davies 1993; Epstein et al. 2001a, 2001b; Renold 2005, 2006, 2009; Renold and Ringrose 2008; or how sexual harassment mediates young boyfriend-girlfriend cultures (see Pelligrini 2001, 2002; Renold 2002, 2005; Gådin 2012; Afra 2013) .

Problematising the myth that heterosexual relations symbolise entry into 'adolescence', this research confirms many of the findings above regarding the multiple ways in which pre-teen children invest in or are positioned in relation to their local boyfriend-girlfriend culture. It also provides one of the few investigations into how pre-teen children living in diverse socio-economic locales across rural and urban south Wales talk about how they negotiate young relationship cultures. Key findings strongly suggest the need to take seriously how local and cultural contexts, alongside wider ideological pressures of gendered and sexual norms, impact differently upon different groups of children.

4.2   Key themes

Many children talked about the pressure to participate in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in school, making boy-girl friendships almost impossible.

Many boys and girls had little choice but to participate in or witness the heterosexualising practices of fancying, dating and dumping, such as who 'liked', 'loved', or was 'hot' for who. This was particularly the case in children's talk about their final year of primary school.

While the degree to which girls and boys participated in these heterosexualising practices varied considerably across the sample, most children could name and discuss them at length. In some schools, children described their participation as compulsory and as a cycle of endless 'going out and dumping' that was subject to constant peer scrutiny and evaluation. The pressure to turn a boy-girl friendship into a boyfriend-girlfriend 'relationship' in primary school was pervasive.

For some boys, simply 'having a girlfriend', 'any girl' was enough to secure social status and popularity. In contrast, many girls highlighted the ways in which their status as 'girlfriends' objectified them, particularly when girls' attractiveness was rated and ranked. Many girls also resented how they were 'passed around' and 'fought over' by boys who wanted to claim them as 'theirs'.

For girls, being a girlfriend was talked about as an inevitable part of being a normal girl and variously described as an identity that was older, scary, constraining, powerful, and something that had to be endured and got used to. Resisting or rejecting the world of girlfriends and boyfriends was difficult for girls, particularly in schools and communities where early boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were strong.

For boys, being a boyfriend was not a defining feature of pre-teen boyhood. Many boys did not want a girlfriend. For younger boys, being a boyfriend was a precarious role that aligned them with femininity (which could be shaming) and heterosexuality (which could bolster their 'masculinity'). Boys were more able to resist participation in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures than girls.

Deep investment in being a boyfriend or girlfriend was highly classed, raced and gendered, and drawn upon in a range of ways. One boy talked about how his primary school girlfriend helped him cope with the death of his father. Another boy explained how he had to pretend that his best friend Alice was his cousin for an entire school year, so that they could hang out free from heterosexual innuendo. Girls living in communities where they witnessed domestic violence talked about finding a boyfriend who could protect them.

Coercion and harassment is a key part of many boyfriend-girlfriend cultures, but few children can talk about it with a parent or teacher.

Boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were frequently talked about as compulsory, scrutinised, collective and highly public practices. Many children talked about these practices as contradictory, hierarchical and rarely consensual.

Some girls talked about going out with boys they didn't want to and some avoided dumping them so as to not to hurt their feelings. Many children also witnessed coercive sexual practices, such as being 'forced to kiss' in the playground, which urges us to shift our understandings from consent as a process between two individuals to consent as a social process negotiated in peer group cultures.

Girls with deep investments in 'being a girlfriend', talked about going out with boys they didn't like or who were abusive to them, with some girls interpreting their abusive behavior as a sign of flirtation. Some girls refused to delete 'nasty' texts because they were 'in love'.

Boys with deep investments in 'being a boyfriend' and boys positioned low down the gendered and sexual peer group hierarchies were also described as the same boys who would engage in harassing behavior such as repeatedly asking girls out, or sending abusive texts to girls who refused to go out with them, or ended the relationship.

Children who talked about receiving sexually abusive texts and emails also talked about how they could be deleted or blocked, and almost all of the children described in detail exactly how to achieve this. However, they were much less confident and felt more vulnerable about how to deal with ongoing 'romantic' advances (e.g. repeatedly being 'asked out') or sexually harassing comments from boys in school and in their community, with one girl hiding in her house, refusing to open the door.

Only a minority of girls talked about feeling resigned to the fact that relationships might entail some form of bullying because 'some boys are just

nasty'. Some girls and boys resorted to physical and verbal bullying as a response to coercive, controlling or abusive behaviours and a compulsory boyfriend-girlfriend culture.

Very few children felt comfortable talking about the abusive power plays in boyfriend and girlfriend cultures with parents or teachers.

4.3 'My mum forced me to wear a dress to the prom': compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexism at home and at school

During the prom/disco task, many children began to talk about whether the fictional boy or girl needed a 'date'. Indeed, 'having a date' accompanied the list of 'must have' commodities for the majority of boys and girls. Some drew love hearts between the two figures and said they were 'going out'. As they talked about their own Year 6 leaving discos or prom nights, some children reported being given gender-coded tickets by teachers which matched them to the opposite gender, thus democratising, yet simultaneously enforcing, a compulsory coupledom. Others talked about how they had picked their 'date' a year in advance. Some children refused to attend, because of the narrow and constraining gender normative performances that their own prom demanded. Some girls were paid to wear dresses for the prom, which conflicted with their tomboy selves. One Year 7 boy was close to tears as he retold his own experience of how he stayed off school for a full week, missing his end of year celebrations because he couldn't face the dating culture. While this task opened up rich insights and a veritable Pandora's box of how schools and parents institutionalise compulsory heterosexuality (Renold 2005), it also generated a wealth of data on children's own understandings and experiences of boyfriend-girlfriend cultures inside and beyond the school gates and the different ways in which boys and girls participated and were positioned within these cultures.

4.4 'We're single Pringles, not taken bacon': the social world of boyfriends and girlfriends.

Talk of erotic and romantic attachments and speculation over who 'liked', 'loved', or was 'hot' for who were observed and/or experienced by children as thoroughly social and public practices. As one boy said: 'there's always someone who likes someone'. Some of the heterosexual practices that constituted the majority of boyfriend-girlfriend cultures included:

- Hugging, holding hands and kissing

- Matchmaking and dumping

- Playing sexual games (e.g. such as 'who is the best kisser?' and 'truth or dare')

- Creating virtual romantic relationships (e.g. on SIMS)

- Rating real or imagined sexual intimacies (e.g. 'Love Tester', a smartphone app)

- Buying gifts

- Going out on 'dates' (e.g. to the cinema)

- Generally avoiding each other.

All were subject to harsh peer scrutiny and constant evaluation, leading one 12-year-old girl comparing the public spectacle of the 'boyfriend-girlfriend culture' in her Year 6 class to *The Jeremy Kyle Show*.

While the degree to which girls and boys participated in these heterosexualising practices varied considerably across the sample, most children could name and discuss them at length. Indeed, so pervasive was the boyfriend-girlfriend culture in some schools that children described their participation as compulsory and as a cycle of endless 'going out and dumping':

Nico: At my school you just had to [go out with someone], it was a virtual rule [Y7, S4]

Rhydian: I had mostly every girl in my year [Year 5], and every girl in the year above me mostly [Y7, S1]

Gerry: It was strong [in my school], there was lots of girl-boy love-ins [Y7, S4]

Kelsey: Shannon would go out with him … Vicky and Izzy would go out with him, then I would go out with him, then Shannon. So whenever he split up with one of us, one of us would go to him, and ask him out again [Y8, S3]

Cal: In [name of old primary school] people go out there every like minute, there's

always a new person going out with someone [Y8, S5]

Darryn: I remember Jack and Jade, everyone thought they were in love … and then everyone was pushing them together [Y7, S5]

Girls in particular were more likely to define themselves in relation to their relationship status, as either 'girlfriends' or 'single', as one 10-year-old put it, *'We're single Pringles, not taken bacon'.*

It was not unusual for girls and boys to rate each other's heterosexual desirability:

Sadie: There is this thing in this school where people, if a boy says no [to being her boyfriend] you have got to say like, people have got to name three words about me then I name three words about them

INT: [discussing one boy] So what three words came back?

Sadie: What was it, hyper, sexy and pretty … and then I gave him three words

Kayley: Fit!

Sadie: No, pretty, funny and joyful [Y6, S7]

As previous research has suggested, girls were the protagonists here in both the production and maintenance of school-based boyfriend girlfriend cultures (Renold 2006). Some of their talk prioritised physical attractiveness or 'hotness';

Shauna: We like go to the gym to see fit boys [Y8, S2]

Nikki: Boys smell lush [Y8, S2]

Lizzy: Gio, Gio!! He's half Italian and he's just lovely

Rowan: Yeah he's just beautiful … I love his hair

Lizzy: He treats you nicely [Y7, S2]

However, the majority of comments on who constituted 'boyfriend material' focused mostly on who would be 'nice not nasty', who 'wouldn't change you', who 'wouldn't tell your secrets' or 'make you do things you didn't want to do', which could range from 'doing the washing up' to 'kissing'. In sum, talk about safety, respect, privacy

and personality was more prevalent than talk about who they 'fancied' or who was 'hot' or 'lush':

Staci: I think a good boyfriend would be like, I don't know, if you're unwell they come over [Y6, S7]

Tilly: If he was kind and had a nice personality [Y6, S7]

Maisy: It's a bit of the looks, [but] it's about love … it's how much heart they've got

Veronique: [I want a boy] who won't cheat on you

Jessie: Who won't raise a hand to you [Y6, S8]

In boys' talk about girls as potential girlfriends, their comments rarely focused on safety, privacy, respect or personality. While some boys did focus on wanting girlfriends for emotional support ('someone to talk to'), most comments centered on physical attributes such as how 'pretty' or 'hot' she is, or if she's a 'good kisser':

Ria: Girls take boys by their personality, boys take girls by their looks, they don't want to go out with mingin' girls like me [Y7, S3]

Chelsey: Some boys spread stuff [online] like' she's a good meeter' ['meeting' is 'kissing with tongues'], 'she's a good neck' ['kissing for ages'] [Y8, S1]

Kayley: They say, change your ways and if you look prettier then we will go out with you [Y6, S7]

Sadie: One of the boys in our class said the one with the best hair tomorrow, I will go out with them [Y6, S7]

In School 3, some of the boys talked about apps and online games in which they could select a girl they fancied and choose a drop down menu of things that they could do together which would then be publicly broadcast via Blackberry Messenger (BBM) for boys and girls to watch and comment on. He describes a 'really cool' game which begins: 'If you're locked in a room together with a girl you like, what would you do?' Activities included everything from 'watching a movie' to touching different parts of the body like 'your chest, your waist or my whatever [laughs]' [Y7, S3]

Michael: The one I got starts off with smoking together and gets worse to the part where you are like woah! [Y7, S3]

For some boys simply 'having a girlfriend', 'any girl', was enough, especially for the younger boys. Many girls also highlighted the ways in which their status as 'girlfriends' or 'potential girlfriends' objectified them, with some girls resenting how girls get 'passed around' and 'fought over' by boys who wanted to claim them as 'theirs':

Robyn: They ask someone to ask the same girl out again and again, they like pass you around [Y7, S4]

Maisy: Some girls find it nice that all the boys wanna, wanna go out with them, but then she's put in a position of which one she wants to go out with and then the boys are like ohhh, and they get into fights with the other boys because they like the same girl … mostly it's about two boys fighting over one girl [Y6, S8]

Thea: This boys said, I'd love to see Thea in a bikini/

Teagan: Then Kal went like leave her alone she is mine [Y6, S7]

Rowan: Some boys just use you, they use you to like make them look hard and all that because they got a girlfriend … then they dump you to get a nicer one [Y7, S2]]

Veronique: Some boys, like, if there's a girl, and there's two boys, the other boy might say to the other boys, 'oh you're not strong, you don't deserve to have her, I do, because I'm strong enough' [Y6, S8]

In some primary schools children talked about how the boyfriend-culture was limited to one or two couples who had been 'going out' for months or years, or one or two individuals (usually boys) who had become renowned for 'going out with nearly every girl in the class' with 'some boys asking like five girls out in two hours*'*. In other primary schools, children described entire year groups or classes who all seemed to be 'going out with each other'.

While many boys and girls were critical of and often crushed by the volatile and changeable nature of young relationships, (with some lasting anything from one minute to six years), they understood the high social status and popularity that being a boyfriend or girlfriend could bring (Thorne 1993; Renold 2005):

Robyn: If you go out with someone everyone will be talking about it, and like everyone knows your name and you are popular [Y7, S4]

Nico: If you had a girlfriend you were marked out as cool … if you didn't you were a chav (Y7 S4)

Where boys might be lightly mocked as a 'bit of a lad' or labelled as 'immature' or a 'loser' for having multiple girlfriends or continuously asking girls out, they were not confronted with the enduring sexual double standard and barrage of slut-shaming attacks that often awaited girls who did the same. However, what constituted the tipping point of respectable girlfriend was significantly raced and classed from articulating that they 'fancy' a boy, through to denigrating girls who 'would do anything to get a boyfriend':

Reshmi: There are Muslims in there (other class) and some of the Muslims wear that [short skirts] as well

Ayesha: Well Muslims are kind of meant to cover their body, that is why if I do wear a skirt I either wear leggings or tights with them

Reshmi: But Sabrina is a Muslim!

Ayesha: we went up to them and said 'isn't that a little short?' because we could see their underwear and they were like 'no because we want the boys to like us, obviously!'

[…]

Ayesha: She had a crush on him. Everybody knows but then she still carries on! Her and Nabila had a fight over Isaac, they had a fight! [Y6, S6]

Lyn: Cally … she'd do anything to get a boyfriend

Lizzy: She'd wear like really short skirts, she would roll them all the way up

Lyn: She would wear smaller dresses, really tight, really short shorts,

Lizzy: Shorts that she, that didn't fit her

Rowan: And they'd look horrible

[…]

Lyn: And she always talked dirty didn't she, Cally

Lizzy: Yeah, yeah dirty

[…]

Rowan: When Mia was in our school it's all she ever did … take boys off people [Y7, S2]

While individual children could be targeted, children also reported entire peer groups or whole classes who were derogatively positioned as not desirable enough to 'go out with', as Nico's comments on 'chavs' and Kelsey's comments on boys calling girls 'tramps' below illustrates. In sum, boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were not only experienced in multiple and contradictory ways, but as previous research has shown, created and sustained some harsh gendered, raced and classed peer group hierarchies.

4.5 'Boys are extra time I don't want to give': daring to say no to increasingly dominant boyfriend-girlfriend cultures?

This research confirms previous findings of how girls are often central to the production and maintenance of local boyfriend-girlfriend cultures and participation was, for many, an increasingly compulsory component of 'being a girl'. Being or becoming a girlfriend was variously constructed as inevitable, immature, older, scary, constraining or just something that had to be endured and got used to. Moreover, the girls who expressed a sustained refusal to take part in the heterosexualised practices of boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were the same girls who articulated strong visions of educational aspiration and autonomy (middle and working class):

Shabeela: Some girls in our form think they have to have a boyfriend. So like they get with a boy but then when it doesn't work out they go 'oh will you go out with me' and like jump from boy to boy
INT: And you said you don't like boys as boyfriends?
Shabeela: Not until I'm older … I want to finish my career [Y7, S4]

Maisy: I'm not bothering, until I've … got a job … until I've got a house and a good job [Y6, S8]

Veronique: I have to finish college, finish university, and then I have to get a good job, my own house, and then that's when I can get a boyfriend and get married [Y6, S8]

Sarah: I don't find the point in it … boys are extra time that I don't want to give [Y8, S4]

In addition, girls who had direct or indirect experience of living in households with intimate partner violence, like Maisy, also rejected school-based boyfriend-girlfriend cultures. She told me she was 'done with boys' because they won't leave her alone, and Jessie and Maisy said they wanted nothing to do with boys because 'you can go with the wrong one' and 'they can hurt you':

Jessie: I wanna have a good life and I don't wanna go through things that some girls go through/
Maisy: Like boys that gang up on 'em and abuse 'em
Jessie: Where your boyfriends are hitting the, your girlfriends
[…]
Jessie: I don't like boys liking me/
INT: You don't like them liking you?
Karina: Yeah, because you are free then [when you're not going out with a boy]
Maisy: Yeah then you are free and you are allowed to do whatever you want
Jessie: I feel bad when they are controlling you
[Y6 S8]

However, girls who resisted or rejected the world of boyfriends and girlfriends, or just ended the relationship to 'be single' or 'to go out with someone else', could each be subject to a range of sexualised and gendered insults:

Jessie: I get called lesbian a lot … cause when I play with all girls and they're always saying that I do stuff like that [Y6, S8]

Fay: [Boys say it] only to me in that I kind of look and act like a granny and I don't like it … like in my other school they weren't particularly nice to me. So I have just learned to ignore it to be honest
Kelsey: They call all the girls [who don't go out boys] tramps [Y8, S3]

Carrie: Everyone would make you hug and kiss, I wouldn't, I wouldn't

Kelsey: If [we] wouldn't do that, they'd call us a fridge [Y8 S3]

Kayden: And when she broke up with them, the boy was calling the girl all nasty names and all that, just because they broke up [Y7, S1]

Rhydian: Yeah, like this one time, when I was in Year 6, a girl broke up with him, and then, she was going out with my other friend, and he started calling her names and all that … he was standing on a bank and calling her names [Y7, S1]

Alun: [If a girl breaks off a relationship with a boy] they slag her off like, innit … they get really angry … the older you get the more serious it gets [Y8 S1]

These insults seemed to be more prevalent, severe and sustained in schools where girlfriend-boyfriend cultures were felt as a compulsory feature of children's everyday peer networks.

In contrast, being a boyfriend, especially for boys in primary school, whilst not felt to be such a compulsory part of being a boy, was nevertheless a precarious position to occupy; particularly because, as illustrated below, many boys did not want a girlfriend. Boys' talk threw up an embodied paradox of how being emotionally and physically intimate with girls could both bolster and undermine their 'masculinity'. Research has suggested that being a 'boyfriend' can provide status and accrue sexual capital through shoring up an ideal heterosexual masculinity, yet it can also threaten that masculinity because physical proximity to girls aligns boys with 'femininity' (see Renold 2005).

However, in contrast to most girls' experiences, many boys could opt out of the local heterosexualised world of boyfriends and girlfriends by drawing upon developmental discourses of child/ boyhood innocence, sexual immaturity, sport, gaming cultures and representing 'older' sexualities as 'proper' sexualities and 'young' sexualities as immature and silly.

Travis: I'm not worrying about girls until like the sixth form. Because right now you go out with a girl and they just dump you straight away, so there's no point [Y8, S5]

Nathan: I'm not really, you know, fussy about girlfriends, I'm not a, I'm not a girl

person [the conversation moves into his passion for animals and horses] [Y7, S1]

In sum, not participating in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures (e.g. to focus on educational futures, or for fear of abuse and violence) is particularly punishing for girls, especially where boyfriend-girlfriend cultures are strong.

4.6 Thinking again about what boyfriend-girlfriend cultures mean to pre-teens: belonging, friendship, protection

In children's extended talk about what being a boyfriend and girlfriend meant to them in the wider context of their lives beyond the school gates, it was possible to get a glimpse of the multiple ways in which deep investment in boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were inextricably connected to other relationship cultures, in the family and in the wider community. For example, Rhydian (Year 7) talked emotionally about how his primary school girlfriend of five years supported him emotionally as he coped with the sudden death of his father:

Rhydian: When my father died, when I was six, like, if I talked to boys I thought they would make fun of me, but her … talking to her, she didn't.

INT: She was someone you could talk to? Share things with?

Rhydian: Yeah … yeah [Y7, S1]

For Hannah, she connected her experience of living with long term domestic violence and physical abuse as part of her strong desire and active pursuit to find a 'nice boy', someone 'who didn't hurt you', 'cheat on you' or 'hit you' like her dad did. As Lizzy says, who also witnessed the domestic violence experienced by her mother:

Lizzy: It doesn't matter what they look like as long as they're not nasty (Y7, S2)

Tilly lived with her grandparents after her mum died when she was in pre-school. She talked ambivalently about being 'too young' for boyfriends yet had 'asked out' three boys in her class to secure a date for the Year 6 prom the following year:

Tilly: People shouldn't go out with each other in Year 6

[…]

Tilly: I'm looking for one, for the prom. I've asked somebody and they said they are thinking about it [because] … Harri dumped me today so now I am looking out for another one

[…]

INT: So what's it like to have a boyfriend at this age?

Tilly: It's OK, but don't think it's suitable […] I don't get why people who wants a boyfriend now instead of just waiting … I don't get it!

Some girls, like, Sadie below, who talked about 'really really really wanting' a boyfriend, were also girls managing their feelings of low self esteem in relation to their body size and/or appearance more widely:

Sadie: Sometimes the [clothes I like] don't fit me enough, they go like tight […] this year I am trying to keep fit and so … I think that is why some of the boys don't want to go out with me […] I would love to be that person with people asking me out all the time, I would love it. I have only been asked out once [Y6, S7]

Girls living in communities where they regularly witnessed physical or sexual violence on the streets also talked about finding a boyfriend who could protect them. Karina, for example, talks about going out with a boy from her class because he stopped other boys who she refused to go out with from calling her 'fat':

Karina: They kept bullying us … calling me fat and all that

INT: Because you wouldn't go out with them?

Karina: Yeah … but when I went back out with Jack, I felt better because he stopped like everybody calling me fat and that [Y6 S8]

In sum, many boys and girls had little choice but to negotiate boyfriend-girlfriend cultures in school. For those who participated directly in being a girlfriend or boyfriend, this was often experienced as a source of anxiety, powerlessness and pain *as well as* a source of power and pleasure. Moreover, as this last section illustrates, deep investment in 'boyfriend-girlfriend' identities was not only a specifically gendered practice that positioned most girls and some boys as heterosexually desirable objects and subjects, but also connects to enduring historical legacies of girls and women as emotional nurturers and boys and men as

physical protectors in complicated ways and often specific to the patterning of gendered power relations inside each community.

4.7 'I got called strange': Why can't boys and girls be friends?

Research has long pointed out the ways in which boy-girl interactions are frequently heterosexualised, where even 'borrowing a pen is construed as having sexual meaning' and 'only those in committed relationships can talk to each other without fear of being teased' (Davies 1993, p. 127). Many children in this research complained bitterly how boys and girls couldn't sit together, play together or even complete a learning task together without someone heterosexualising their interaction:

Aron: Darryn was just talking to a girl … and then all the girls went, 'oh they're flirting, oooo aaaah'
INT: The girls are doing that?
Aron: Yeah. Talking is not the same … as flirting, and that happens quite a lot
INT: And is that/
Darryn: It's annoying … cause word gets around … cause we were learning partners, because you know, if you're learning partners, you have to talk, but you can't without/
Aron: YEAH! [Y7, S5]

Shabeela: And you get quite annoyed because they keep on saying 'ooooh you love them' … a girl I know who hangs around with a boy in this school, everyone spreads rumours about them, saying that they like go out and stuff [Y7, S4]

Faiza: Sometimes they try to make you like pair up with someone and you don't get really happy with it, and if it gets really serious then it gets really hard to try and convince them that you really don't want to go out with them [Y8, S4]

Renold defines these unwanted comments as 'heterosexist harassment' (Renold 2002), a form of sexual bullying rarely commented upon in the bullying literature. In the wider context of often compulsory participation in local boyfriend-girlfriend cultures, children talked about how difficult it was in years 5 and 6, and in Year 7 particularly, to cultivate and maintain a boy-girl friendship free from heterosexual

innuendo or outside of a dating discourse in which they are positioned as 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' for hanging out with the opposite gender:

Kelsey: We used to be best friends, we used to go and make dens together/
Carrie: But people would comment wouldn't they
Kelsey: Yeah
INT: What would they say?
Kelsey: They'd say me and Jarek was/
Carrie: That you fancied him
Kelsey: I know and stuff like that
INT: And that stopped you from hanging out together?
Kelsey: Yeah [Y8, S3]

Nico: Eason and Ellie are friends, really good friends
Gerry: They play together but people make the/
Nico: They say that Ellie loves Eason
Eason: She's a tomboy … and she's really small
INT: Are you good friends with her Eason?
Eason: [Nods] She's funny
Nico: But people pick on them [in school] [Y7, S4]

Such was the difficulty of striking up boy-girl friendships free from heterosexual innuendo that some boys and girls reported pretending that they were going out with each other so as to minimise the heterosexist harassment, or seeking out places free from the public scrutiny of their peers:

Kelsey: We go and sit over the field then and tell jokes. And I'm normally in his house all the time playing on his X-Box [Y8, S3]

In communities and schools where boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were strong, some children resorted to pretending they were cousins. In one case this necessitated buying each other 'Happy Birthday Cousin' cards and continued for over a year:

Jared: I got called strange, by boys
INT: Because you were friends with the girls?

Jared: Most, most girls, yeah … in the old [primary] school, me and this girl named Alice used to always hang out … so in the end … we made up a lie that we were cousins, and that lasted for like a year before we told anyone
INT: So people wouldn't think you were going out?
Jared: Yeah, so then to make it even more obvious, when it was her birthday, I'd get like Happy Birthday Cousin, and then I'd give it to her in school [Y8, S2]

The ways in which boys and girls were strategically drawing upon boyfriend-girlfriend identities to legitimately hang out together, or to sustain close boy-girl friendships, challenges a number of presumptions that children are just practicing or mimicking a version of 'older' relationship cultures (Thorne 1993), or that strong boyfriend-girlfriend cultures are a sign of premature sexualisation. Not only do such interpretations render invisible an everyday heterosexism that infuses young children's gendered worlds, but they also underestimate children's creative capacity to find ways of manipulating and re-writing the existing rules that regulate gender relations.

However, such creative solutions were more difficult to sustain as children transitioned from primary to secondary school where children were increasingly required to demonstrate their commitment to coupledom in sexually physical ways:

Lloyd: Tommy and Alice are going out at the moment and they don't even TALK to each other
Aron: They don't even LOOK at each other [Y7, S5]

Chelsey: Like with Shan, he was 15 years old and he was like staring and I went to talk to him and we would kiss and stuff, but he wanted more, do you know what I mean … that is why I broke up with him [Y8, S1]

Jessie: Yeah, someone would find out [they were going out] and they would keep on telling him to go and kiss her, go and kiss her [Y6, S8]

Consequently, some girls and boys in Year 8 talked reluctantly about ending their friendships, with some girls highlighting how boys who used to be friends were now interacting in ways that they never would have done in the past:

Kelsey: I was best friends with a boy called Jay. And that's just changed now, When I seen him he'll talk to me but then, if he's with the boys he'll like call me names, like tramp and stuff like that [Y8, S3]

The impact of the increasing and simultaneous gendered separation and heterosexualising of girls' and boys' social worlds and the ways children talked about having to manage and negotiate an ambivalent and volatile hetero-relationship culture is a much under-researched area. However, further research may help us understand the kinds of gendered and sexual coercion, control and violence reported at this age, as the next section explores further.

4.8   Punishing sexualities: sexual coercion and harassment

When sexual harassment in peer cultures has been the focus of research, the site of investigation has been the secondary school and usually the lives of teenagers. However, as recent research into intimate partner violence and 'sexting' is increasingly demonstrating, sexual coercion and harassment are not confined to older teens, but emerging in the everyday lives of pre-teen children (Pelligrini 2001, 2002; Renold 2002; Stein 1996, 2007, 2013; Gådin 2012; Afra 2013; Holford et al. 2013).

A survey into the prevalence and incidence of school bullying in Wales (WAG 2010) indicated that Year 6 and Year 7 pupils reported the highest level of 'sexual bullying'. However, despite isolated incidents within the media and references within broader projects on the gendered worlds of primary school children, there are very few detailed accounts that focus on the experience of how verbal, digital, physical and emotional harassment mediates children's sexual relationship cultures (Gådin 2012). This is partly due to the ethical sensitivities of researching sexuality in young childhood and partly a reluctance to acknowledge children's own sexual cultures and/or undermine (through developmental discourses of 'play') the role that conflict, power and abuses that can play here. As outlined in Section 2, this research prioritised children's own reporting of what they considered to be unwanted, offensive and hurtful behavior as constituting sexual harassment. This was important given how a singular act or event or set of practices can have multiple meanings. For example, as Renold (2002: 418) found, 'bra pulling' could be experienced by girls both positively (e.g. a welcome sign of a boy or girl's romantic or sexual interest) and negatively (e.g. an invasive practice and humiliating recognition of a girls' sexual

maturation).

While most children reported either experiencing direct or indirect incidents of sexual harassment, from slut-shaming to anti-gay talk, much of this occurred in and across the gendered and sexual dynamics of children's everyday peer cultures (see Section 3). However, as this section has begun to illustrate, young boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were a volatile mix of anxiety, pain, pleasure and power with many girls and boys talking about a range of unwanted, offensive and hurtful sexual behaviours.

4.8.1 'Everyone was like pushing him and trying to get her to kiss him': Non-consensual boyfriend-girlfriend cultures and group-based sexual harassment

Perhaps one of the most significant findings foregrounding children's own interpretations of their hetero-relationship cultures was discovering how 'going out' and becoming 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' was a thoroughly social event, and experienced by the majority of children as something over which they had little control. Below are comments from children who found themselves in relationships and given the status of someone's 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend' without their knowledge or consent:

Cal: Like in some schools, like in our [primary] school, like um … some people have forced each other to do it, but sometimes they wouldn't want to [Y8, S5]

Cai: When we were in Year 6, Alun Jones, he asked about 13 girls out for me when I didn't like one of them!
INT: And did you like that or/
Cia: Well the thing is, she replied yes, and I was just like and I was just like no no NO NO [Y8, S5]

Darryn: Maisy sort of loved you at the time and then just everyone knew, but she didn't
Aron: Everyone knew that Maisy loved Darryn
Darryn: Yeah, everyone said she asked me out, but she didn't … she NEVER asked me out [Y7, S5]

Daman: In primary school they push them and they wouldn't want to go out [Y8 S5]

Dafydd: They always used to wind him up saying, 'oh you go out with her' and he did but he just didn't want to.

INT: Why did you go out with her if you didn't want to?

Daman: They all dared me to

Dafydd: They all dared him to, they threatened him

INT: Who does, the boys?

Dafydd and Daman: Yeah [Y6, S8]

Hayley: Oh, the peer pressure

Vicky: Like people asking you to go out who I [don't want to] go out with … it really takes away a lot of your energy … like I get really tired and cry and cry about it [Y7, S3]

James: People wind you up saying, you go out with someone

INT: And do you have friend that are girls?

Dafydd: Yes I have … Maisy's my friend

James: My dad says they are all my girlfriends. If I have a friend what is a girl, he says they are my girlfriends and winds my up about it [Y6, S8]

Given the power dynamics in dumping and being dumped and the social punishments incurred by girls in particular (see above), some girls talked about going out with boys they didn't want to and some avoided dumping them so as to not to hurt their feelings:

INT: Does a girl ever go out with a boy when she doesn't really want to?

Karina: Because their friends force them sometimes

Sadie: […] Sometimes you don't like them

Karina: You end up giving in sometimes

Sadie: You give up because they keep nagging [Y6, S7]

Tessa: People try and push you together […]

Myra: And I think that the only reason I went out with this person because it was like on text, and I felt really bad about saying no. You can't like say no. So you are like, 'okay'

INT: Do you find it hard to say no to someone when they ask you out?

Myra: Yes, because it takes a lot of courage

Tessa: And now it's like really awkward and I like I didn't want it, I didn't want to go out with him in the first place, it was just so awkward [Y8, S4]

Maria: I have gone out with him ten times
Kayleigh: Yeah, cos he goes in a mood if you don't say 'yeah' [Y6, S8]

Given the collective ways in which boyfriend-girlfriend couples were established, with entire classes sometimes being involved in the process, the conflicts that did occur had ramifications for many children, and not just for the for the 'couple' involved:

Tilly: Sally went to ask Harri out for me again
Ashleigh: And he said the F word
Tilly: At you?
Ashleigh: No at Sally! [Y6, S7]

Some of the pressures and/or expectations to engage in sexual activity were raised in the context of individual interactions between girlfriends and boyfriends:

INT: So you bought your girlfriend's dress for £59?
Rhydian: Yeah
INT: Did she pay you back?
Rhydian: In kisses … I expected a lot more like [Y7, S1]

Nikki: Like with Shane, he was 15 years old, he was like, I thought we would just kiss, but he wanted more, you know what I mean … that is why I broke up with him [Y8, S2]

Teagan: I was with my boyfriend, and they were with their boyfriends, and he said 'will you kiss me?' and I said 'no' and then he went 'why?' and then I said 'because I don't want to and I'm not ready for things like that' … I told him 'I don't mind if you want to dump me because you cannot force me if I don't want to kiss you' [Y6, S7]

Many children also disclosed coercive sexual practices, which extended beyond the consent of the individual couple and incorporated wider peer group pressures and dynamics:

Kelsey: [Talking about a couple who had been going out for two years in primary school] Everyone used to go 'kiss kiss kiss kiss kiss'

Carrie: Yeah and everyone would make you hug … peer pressure! [Y8, S3]

Aron: Everyone was like pushing him and trying to get her to kiss him

Darryn: The boys were all pushing David and the girls were all pushing Sadie, and they didn't want to do anything

Aron: Yeah that happened to me [in Year 2], even worse was my sister was pushing

INT: Did you enjoy it or was it/

Darryn: No, no I did not enjoy it, no

INT: Was there anything you could do about it?

Darryn: No not really no, well no, no [Y7, S5]

Daman: Taylor who used to go out with someone

Cal: They were all like shouting at him, 'kiss her', and stuff

INT: So it's not private then, it's like everyone getting involved?

Daman: Everyone is crowding around him

Cal: Like we used to have a wheelchair alley thing to go down for kids, and then my friend was dragged into there with this girl and they said 'go on kiss' and all this

Daman: This group was pushing him

INT: And what do you think the girl was feeling at that time?

Cal: The girl was probably feeling very uncomfortable like 'I want to go' and … she would either dump you, or wouldn't have a friend, relationships, or friend relationship or anything like that

INT: And are those things that happen, can you tell the teacher or is something you would keep/

Daman: Keep to ourselves, because in our school teachers wouldn't know about it because/

Cal: It would make it awkward/

Daman: I don't think that person who goes out with whoever would want us to tell the teacher [Y7, S5]

Dafydd: Some people write rumours on there [Facebook]

Steffan: Like if you want to go out with someone [Y6, S8]

Sadie: If a girl is asking them out and they ask them out too many times, they go to their friend and say, 'if she is going to ask me out again, it's your decision' and so the boys make up the other boy's mind for them
INT: So you could end up going out with a boy because another boy said yes?
Sadie: Yeah [Y6, S7]

Shifting our understanding from 'going out' as a dyadic process where consent is negotiated between two people, to exploring consent as a social process negotiated in peer group cultures, goes some way to understand the power dynamics in these descriptions of enforced public displays of sexual physical intimacy and other forms of online sexual harassment (e.g. through image or text). They also push us to consider how sexual consent, sexual coercion and sexual harassment are rarely experienced as something which individual children have control over and which some children feel 'too awkward' to disclose to their teachers or parents.

4.8.2 Negotiating abusive relationships: resignation and resistance

Girls with deep investments in 'being a girlfriend' talked about going out with boys they didn't like or who were abusive to them, with some girls interpreting their abusive behavior as a sign of flirtation or refusing to delete 'nasty' text messages because they are 'in love':

Kayley: They [staff on dinner duty] go 'the more the boys hit and chase you the more they love you' [Y6, S7]

Aneria: Some boys just pick on girls because they like them … I don't know where they get that from [Y8, S2]

INT: So what happens when you do get these nasty text messages [from your boyfriend]?
Maria: You don't talk to them
Kayleigh: You don't talk to them for about a month
Ashlee: I delete them if they do that to me. I say 'shut up I don't like you'
Kayleigh: Generally I block them
Maria: I don't know because I know in, I don't delete or block them, because I know I still want to talk to them
Karina: I don't block them because I know I still love him
All: Ah yeah true yeah

Maria: Yeah in my heart [Y6, S8]

Boys with deep investments in 'being a boyfriend' and boys positioned low down the gendered and sexual peer group hierarchies were also described as the same boys who would engage in harassing behavior such as repeatedly asking girls out, or sending abusive texts to girls who refused to go out with them or girls who ended the relationship:

Veronique: He just wants to go out with every girls he sees, it's like, it's basically like, if he wants to go out with one girl, he'll ask and ask and ask and ask until that girl says yes and then she'll break up with him as soon as she/
Maisy: Yeah the girls go 'yeah I will go out with you' and then after a couple of minutes, 'I've dumped you'
INT: So why do you think/
Jessie: Because they're just being pestered
Veronique: And they just want him to stop
[…]
Maisy: and they (the boys] would usually like talk about planning, like tomorrow I am going to go up to whoever and ask her out. Stuff like that.
Veronique: And then if she says no, 'I'm going to beat her up'.
INT: 'If she says no I'm going to beat her up'?
Maisy: Yeah you see stuff like that … they will say, 'Blah blah will you go out with me, blah blah blah' and if they [girls] say 'no' they won't actually do it, but they will say 'well go out with me or I will hate you' or something like that. And then the girls will get scared and they will go with them.
Maria: Yeah my cousin got beaten up and a broken nose by a boy because she said no.
INT: How old was your cousin?
Maria: My cousin is only eight years old.
[…]
Veronique: They chat about it like - 'Have you heard what happened' and 'Last night I was on Facebook and I was chatting to a boy who said he has got a girlfriend who/
Maisy: Has got a girlfriend who has – or he is going to try and get a girlfriend and if she says no I'm going to beat her up
[…]
Maisy [who is on the school council]: Everyone comes to me and tells me their problems, I have had a lot who have said like, 'Oh what shall I do, they say they are

going to beat me up if I don't go out with him'.
INT: What do you do?
Veronique: Tell the head teacher [Y6, S8]

Rhydian: As children get older, like as we get older, ten or twelve or thirteen we start getting nastier to each other and to our girlfriends [Y7, S1]

Those children who talked about receiving sexually abusive texts and emails also talked about how they could be deleted or blocked, and almost all of the children described in detail exactly how to achieve this. However, they were much less confident and felt more vulnerable about how to deal with ongoing 'romantic' advances or sexually harassing comments from boys in school and in their community, with one girl hiding in her house, refusing to open the door:

Maisy: A lot of the boys like, were ganging up on me, cause I wouldn't go out with them … and then he found out, the group found out where I lived and they like, used to go in and like walk up and down my street/
Jessie: Staring
INT: Because they want to go out with you and you didn't/
Maisy: Yeah, and I said no … but it's just like, you get that exasperated, 'why are you following me?', you don't feel safe where you live, 'cause they all know where you live

With the exception of the more extreme forms of online text- or image-based sexual harassment (described in Part 3), girls were far more likely than boys to describe 'pestering' behaviours and abusive texts as upsetting. While some girls withdrew from the social world, like Maisy, other girls were swift to end the relationship if they felt pressured to engage in sexual activity they were not ready for, or dump a 'nasty boy' and 'find a nice one'.

Only some girls talked about feeling resigned to the fact that relationships might entail some form of abuse because 'some boys are just nasty'. A number of girls were both critical and angry, and resorted to both physical violence and gendered bullying:

Maria: When he keeps saying gorilla it makes me really like upset and angry, but when he said 'Maria come to the office', no 'Maria roll to the office', roll, he was

saying that I am fat … and I took that really offensive.

INT: What do you do when that happens?

Maria: I sometimes go in a strop and I like/

Karina: Yeah get angry.

Maria: I get angry and I like kick tables

Karina: You are the worst out of all of us [Y6, S8]

Gerry: Girls are just evil

Nico: Especially Janine

Gerry: My friend Ellis he got rejected by Janine

Nico: He got slapped

Gerry: Yes, he asked her out and she went 'whack'

Liam: She went 'NO' and smack on the face [Y7, S4]

In ways similar to boys' reactions at being dumped by their girlfriends or rejected by potential girlfriends, some girls were also using the power of gender and sexual norms to directly fight against gendered and sexual forms of harassment and violence (e.g. Maria) or physically reacting to and fighting back against compulsory boyfriend-girlfriend cultures (e.g. Janine).

For children who found the real world of boyfriends and girlfriends disappointing, volatile, embarrassing, confusing or forbidden, some escaped into the world of virtual communities (e.g. SIMS) or constructed their own fantasy future romances which didn't end in divorce, conflict or violence (discussed further in Section 5).

4.9 'Some girls like other girls and … you might enjoy it': What about non-heterosexualities and same-sex relationship cultures?

Many children feel the pressure of and struggle to conform to gender norms and some children seek out safe or creative spaces to express their gender in ways that trouble the binary logic that only girls can be feminine and boys can be masculine (Renold 2004; 2009). We have seen in this section how some girls and boys were drawing on boyfriend-girlfriend identities not only to legitimately maintain close friendships with children of the opposite sex but also because it enabled them access to gender cultures and social interactions that were closer to their own ways of doing gender. Just as gender is heavily regulated through compulsory heterosexuality,

where to be a 'proper' girl or boy is to identify or perform as straight, any sexuality that deviates from the straight and narrow is equally policed and regulated, as we have seen via earlier comments of boys overly investing in their appearance and 'six packs' generating anti-gay comments and girls' refusal to go out with boys incurring anti-lesbian comments. However, was it possible for some children to talk about non-heterosexualities free from ridicule, shame or pathology, and what happens to children they express non-heterosexual desires?

Just as the 'dressing up' task enabled children to get creative with gender expression, from girls wearing a suit to boys wearing make-up, some children challenged the heterosexual presumption of needing 'a date' for the prom because they 'might be gay'. Admittedly, it was only the boy figure whose heterosexuality was called into question. The girl figure's challenge to heterosexuality emerged because she 'could be a tomboy' with speculation that she might not be 'into boys' as boyfriends. Nevertheless, there was a minority of children who opened up discussions in which queer or non-heterosexualities and transgender identities were discussed without denigration or ridicule:

Izzy: She needs one of them [draws a penis onto the girl figure]
INT: Why does she need one?
Izzy: Because she's a girl! [Y7,S3]

Taylor: I do like some people like the man off 'I'm A Celebrity…'
INT: Okay which one?
Taylor: The gay one
Harri: The gay one, which is that?
Taylor: The gay one whatever his name is
Harri: What colour skin did he have?
Taylor: A peachy tanned
Harri: Oh was he gay?
Taylor: I think he was
[…]
INT: So he had a good look did he, what was it you liked about him?
Taylor: His fake tan [Y6 S7]
[…]
INT: And what about hair and makeup? So you have got a little bit on the boy and what are you drawing there on the girl?

Harri: Ginger

Taylor: No blonde

Harri: Eye shadow.

Taylor: Yeah that's what girls wear. I wish I was a girl [Y6, S7]

Alun: [Discussing fashion and boys] It depends what kind of boy he is … boys that are like, gay, they care more about fashion than like going out and playing rugby … they care more about their boyfriends [Y8, S1]

Cal: with boys and boys, it's what they want to do like. I'm ok with what they want to be. It's their decision [Y8, S5]

Some children openly talked about brothers, sisters, uncles and aunties who identified as gay or lesbian, and some children suggested that as long as you were 'out', it was possible to claim a non-heterosexual identity at school. However, these identities seemed only possible for older teenagers (sixth formers) and, as the following quote also illustrates, the journey to identifying as LGBT was not only long and painful, but also existed alongside everyday heterosexism and homophobia:

Cal: I know some people in this school who don't like people being like that [gay]

Ellis: Yeah

Cal [discussing older boys]: I think it's a lot, you get a lot of teasing until you actually say you are [gay]. If you say you aren't you get teased but I think once you say, you admit to it, people like get it in a way. They understand and they just lay off a bit [Y8 S5]

As other studies have suggested, heterosexism and homophobia are a powerful combination and are a big part of how gender and sexual norms are created and sustained (Steinberg et al. 1997; Epstein et al. 2003; Martinsson and Reimers 2010; Rivers and Duncan 2012). Thus, it wasn't surprising to find very few children who could openly share their same-sex desires or consider non-heterosexual lives, now or in the future:

Maisy: I'm done with boys

Veronique: We just like girlfriends

Maisy: Oh yeah we can't say that, the boys in our class you can't say, you know, you know when you say to someone

Jessie: I got a girlfriend

INT: Yeah

Jessie: But it's not like a lesbian thing [Y6, S8]

[Responding to statement: 'Children should have the opportunity to make their own decisions and try things out']:

Mia: Just like sex, you have got to try it to know whether you like it or not. Just like people say you're fussy you don't like that food. You say no, try it, you will find out if you like it or not then

Hayley: Like some girls like other girls and … you might enjoy it/

[…]

Mia: Like my sister, she has one friend who is a lesbian and she would like to be a midwife and she has never had a boyfriend [Y7, S3]

As the next section illustrates, the ways in which queer sexualities are represented through popular culture and the media provided an important alternative cultural space for exploring and experimenting with more fluid sexual identities and expressions that were often too risky to express and quickly closed down in children's own everyday gendered and sexual worlds.

5   Children, sexuality and media cultures

5.1   Introduction

As outlined in Section 2, the past decade has witnessed an undeniable increase in the visibility of sexual imagery in society and the commodification of sexuality and sexual subjectivity more widely (see for example, Gill 2003; Attwood 2006; Paasonen et al. 2007). There has also been much concern over how widespread and available sexually explicit 'adult' content has become, to which many children now have easy access (see Phoenix 2011, Attwood 2013). Much of the governmental and media debates construct children as passive victims and cultural dupes of an all-consuming media and in some cases suggest children are being prematurely induced into inappropriate sexual conduct. While it is reasonable to conclude the media does impact upon and shape children's understanding of their sexualities, the research findings are often mixed, ambiguous, inconclusive and tend to focus on young adults or teenagers.

For example, examining the evidence on the relationship between 'sexualisation, body image and gender', the DfCSF/DfCSM (2009) commissioned report 'The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing' argued that the role of the media can be both positive and negative. The report notes, as do other subsequent reports and scholarly articles, that very little research focuses on how children themselves understand their exposure to sexually explicit media and how media representations of sex and sexuality play out in the context of their everyday social worlds (Vares et al. 2011; Ofcom 2011; Jackson and Vares 2012). This is particularly the case for the age group that this research focuses on (see Ofcom 2011; Ringrose et al. 2012; Phippen 2012). However, it is important to note that this research design did not set out to systematically generate data on, if, and how children access sexually explicit material.

The findings of this research confirm previous research evidence which suggests that the relationship between sexuality and the media is a complex process in which children actively negotiate how the media plays a part in their lives (Kehily 2002; Baker 2003, 2011; Willet 2005, 2009, 2011; Duits 2008, 2010; Duits and Van Zoonen 2009, 2011; Bragg et al. 2012; Buckingham 2012). Indeed, in the 'so sexy so soon' task (Appendix C), when it came to their own experiences many children passionately and critically engaged with the statement, 'celebrities, fashion and the media are to blame for children wanting to buy sexy products and look older'. Boys

were more likely to agree with the statement in relation to girls, and girls were more likely to agree with the statement in relation to other girls, especially younger children and sometimes themselves:

Daman: I strongly disagree

INT: Are you saying this for yourselves?

Daman Yeah. Strongly disagree

Cal: They don't influence boys so much but I think they do influence girls [Y8 S5]

Sion: Girls are always, like, their life is about fashion, so they try to look up to like someone who's doing that [Y8, S2]

Kathy: [Girls] are just, they are just copying celebrities

Hannah: And then the girls want to look older or something

INT: And do you feel like that?

Kathy: No! I want to look younger [Y7, S2]

Lizzy and Rowan: Yeah agree agree

Lizzy: We wear the clothes they make [Y7, S2]

Vicky: If you have a role model, you will do anything they do

INT: Do you feel like that?

Mia: Sometimes, it depends

Vicky: Not really [Y7, S3]

This task not only enabled children to talk at length about the ways in which they 'have to find their own way through a diverse range of potentially contradictory or inconsistent messages, deriving both from the media and from other sources' (DfSCF/DfCMS 2009: 122, para 14.29), it also provided a conduit for children to share their stories about how sex and sexuality mediated their own use of online and virtual media, from YouTube and Facebook to family TV viewing.

5.2   Key themes

Many children offered powerful critical commentaries from nudity on MTV to airbrushed images of models in magazines. Many girls also drew a clear

boundary between what their favourite celebrities would say wear or do and their own lives.

Many children talked about blocking, deleting or changing channels that were broadcasting sexually explicit content that they found offensive. However, what children found offensive was culturally specific and highly gendered. Some 10-year-olds thought 'kissing on Eastenders' was 'disgusting', others thought that Playboy TV was 'disgusting'.

Many girls talked about receiving unsolicited sexually explicit 'pop-ups' (e.g. adverts for sex dating websites) from free downloading music sites as 'something we shouldn't have to face'. Some girls talked about how offensive these pop-ups were in similar ways to the kinds of interpersonal verbal sexual harassment they were subject to in school and on the street. Boys did not talk about these pop-ups as offensive or upsetting.

The perceived harm of being confronted with sexually explicit images (e.g. partial nudity, erotic dancing) depended greatly upon social context and other risk factors, such as whether such practices were part of other forms of sexual or gender-based violence.

Children reported receiving more 'scary' than 'sexually explicit' unsolicited images and texts. No child disclosed sending a sexually explicit image of themselves.

5.3 'I just block it if it gets nasty or disgusting': Children as critical and selective consumers of sexuality explicit media

There is limited research on pre-teen children's own responses to, understandings of and learning about sex and sexuality from the media (for exceptions see Walkerdine 1997; Kelley et al. 1999; Buckingham and Bragg 2003; Willet and Burn 2005; Jackson and Vares 2012; Jackson and Westrupp 2010; Baker 2011; Phippen 2012). In one of the most comprehensive studies (UK), Buckingham and Bragg (2003) found that children frequently came across a variety of sexual material in the media with many making sophisticated and critical judgments about what they viewed. Indeed, boys and girls in this research talked about how normal it was to come

across sexual lyrics in music and sexual content on regular pre-watershed TV, as May and Zoe stated at the beginning of the 'so sexy so soon' task: 'we're just so used to it' (Y6, S6). In the context of the normalising presence of sexual content in the media, many children offered powerful critical commentaries, from representations of nudity on MTV to the impact of airbrushed images of the models in magazines:

Abby: Lots of celebrities dress … they have the same look and they Photoshop you

Lizbeth: They change it. If someone has a big nose, they make it smaller [celebrities] they have been Photoshopped to make them look like really thin

[…]

Robyn: We know that it is not real, the photo isn't real. But it is the person who has just been changed … so it is not exactly a real person, but it is [Y7, S4]

Ayesha: Yes you know Nicki Minaj she wears clothes that you can see her breasts and stuff. I like her music but/

Leona: I don't like dresses that are really low because they kind of seem to be accepted now, but I look at that person and think, 'I don't want to be looking at you because it is kind of embarrassing/

Reshmi: Yes because they wear like dresses like just above like …

INT: And you don't like that at all?

Reshmi: No because I can see their breasts and bras.

Leona: And children are watching as well.

[…]

INT: So do you like certain celebrities?

Ayesha: I like celebrities but I don't/

Reshmi: Selena Gomez

INT: You like Selena Gomez?

Ayesha: I like Nicki Minaj and all that but I don't like how they look

INT: Yeah a lot of people have said that. You like Nicki Minaj but not how she looks, so can you explain/

Ayesha: Depending on what she wears, like Rihanna she sometimes wears really nice clothes … but you know when she is like in her music videos, I'm not allowed to watch them because they are rude, she wears like really inappropriate clothes like, this part is kind of where you can see her whole breast on the other side [Y6, S6]

Tilly: Like Katie Price, she wears something but her boobs they are sticking out every second. I won't buy that. But the only thing is, only buy that if your boobs won't be hanging out!

Ashleigh: Yeah, that's like Nicki Minaj

INT: And do these celebrities influence you or/

All: No!

Ashleigh: Well my auntie, she buys a nice dress, but it's short and I like the dress, but when she bends over you can see her bum!

Tilly: You shouldn't wear stuff that shows your [bum] you should at least wear some tights [Y6, S7]

Tessa: But I wouldn't want to dress like them [celebrities] like showy and stuff. I just don't like it [Y7, S4]

Almost all of the critiques focused upon the ways in which girls and women's sexuality (not boys or young men) were represented in the media. While both girls and boys offered examples over what constituted 'a bad influence' (often citing celebrities like Niki Minaj or Katie Price), most of the extended critiques around the ambivalance of the role of sexualising media and celebrity culture came from girls themselves (see Duits and Romondt Vis 2009; Jackson and Vares 2010; Baker 2011; Jackson forthcoming 2014b). One of the most entertaining and critical insights contextualising contemporary panics over sexually explicit content or as one girl put it, the 'dirty dancing on MTV', came from a lengthy and vociferous account of a group of Year 6 girls describing the sexual acts and nudity in a *Macbeth* DVD that they viewed in class:

Ashleigh: Do you remember when Jesse J went, 'do it like you do' and she wore that thing and I was like [shocked face] yeah of course, and celebrities wear them [videos] but that's just part of nature … and like me and Staci were watching Macbeth and […] there was this scene with the witches where/

Tilly: Oh yeah the witches!

Ashleigh: Where the witch put Macbeth in a ????(inaudible) naked!

[They act out the scene where they, as the witches, are dancing around Macbeth, thrusting their hips back and forth. They then whip a piece of imaginary clothing from between their legs]

Ashleigh: And she pulled it [piece of clothing] out

Tilly: Voom [does the action again]

INT: Did they have anything on underneath?
All: No!
INT: And could you see everything?
All: Yes! [laughter]
Ashliegh: And Lady Macbeth … she was all naked as well
Tilly: Walking around naked [Y6, S7]

Many girls drew a clear boundary between what their favourite celebrities would say, wear or do and their own lives. Mimicking a look or style was no straightforward copy, but a negotiated process in which girls reported being both critical and selective over what they could adapt and integrate into their own social worlds and body cultures (Baker 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2011; Duits 2008, 2010; Duits and van Romondt Vis 2009; Kearney 2011; Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Jackson et al. 2012; Jackson and Vares 2012; Jackson forthcoming 2014b). For many girls, as we glimpsed in Section 3, much of the clothing worn by their favourite role-model or celebrity was far too revealing and, as Hayley (Y7, S3) states, 'we could never wear that … too much on show … too risky … we wouldn't be allowed to anyway'. Indeed, contrary to popular speculation, not one girl selected the role of celebrity when they were asked to think about future jobs. Rather, self-censorship was the central way in which girls (and boys) regulated their viewing habits by turning off, switching channels or using software to block sexually explicit content which they found offensive and/or 'too old' for them:

[Discussing erotic dancing on music videos]
Hannah: I feel like … if [Rihanna] wears something that's like nice, I'd be like, 'oh mum I really want this' but if she did like … the [erotic] dancing like I wouldn't be like/
Kathy: Change channels
Hannah: Yeah, turn it over … if there's something on the TV that's like more for adults I just turn over
Kathy: Turn it off [Y7, S1]

INT: What do you think about some of the music videos you see?
Nabila: Rude. The thing is that all this pop music we usually listen to, it's not for teenagers, actually it's more of kids now listening to pop and they make really rude videos and it is getting annoying, so I always search lyrics
INT: You search lyrics?

Nabila: I search lyrics but I only see the music videos that are suitable for children, I don't see the rude ones [Y6, S6]

INT: And what do you do when you come across stuff that is sexually explicit [referring to Facebook and email]?
Hayley: The boys record it and show it to everyone
Vicky: There is this cool stuff called [inaudible] that can be used to remove the content you don't want to see [Y7, S3]

Becky: [Discussing messaging on Facebook] I just block it if it gets nasty or disgusting [Y8, S2]

Many of the younger girls talked about how they 'just like the tune' and had little idea what some of the lyrics even meant beyond being 'rude' (Buckingham and Bragg 2003:

Rowan: Sometimes like if you're watching a song you like, you just wanna like listen to a song, like instead of just watching the video that's rude, got rude stuff in it [Y7, S2]

What some children found 'too old' for them regarding sexual content, and what constituted 'sexually explicit' content, differed greatly across the sample. For some, stumbling across the Sky Playboy channel by accidentally sitting on the remote control was described as 'disgusting'. For others, any sexual activity such as 'kissing on Eastenders' was described as 'disgusting'.

5.4 'I want to, but I don't want to': gendered patterns of regulation and consumption of sexual content

Some girls also talked about the ways in which parental censorship (both imposed and sought out) regulated their viewing practices. Nabila routinely asked her teenage sister to vet what she watched, Rameen's older brother and Maisy's mum regulated what they could watch and Leona was so 'embarrassed' at watching 'rude things' in the presence of her family that she self-censored her own viewing habits to avoid anything 'rude' at home (Baker 2004b):

Nabila: Usually my sister knows all of them [music videos with sexual content in

them], she does and she tells me if they are bad … or good

[…]

Leona: I really am embarrassed by that kind of thing (sexual content on TV) to the point of my mum and sister teasing me about it. So I wouldn't watch rude things even if they did let me [Y6, S6]

Maisy: Say I wanted like to watch the movie, Hunger Games, my mum actually watched it first before I watched it [Y6, S8]

Ayesha: Well my brothers usually have already watched it, because my brother has got like a whole collection on Blu Ray so he has got literally every movie that you can get. So he watches it in his bedroom when he has got a day off and it is like, 'okay you can watch it'. I was watching Spider-Man and he was like, wait. He makes me wait outside the door for at least two hours and then he is like, 'okay you can watch it' [Y6, S6]

Moreover, what was considered age-appropriate differed significantly across the sample with children describing how parents or older siblings drew the line at kissing scenes in *Spider-Man* or *Dr. Who* and others 'not minding' them watching *The Only Way is Essex* and trusting their own children to self-censor. Of significance is that very few boys discussed parental censorship of their viewing habits. Those that did talked about how their mums didn't like them downloading music with sexual swear words.

When girls and boys reported coming across sexually explicit content in the media that they did not find offensive, some boys talked about how they might watch for a while and then sometimes turn it off or over if they didn't like what they saw:

INT: [Discussing sexual 'pop-ups' they don't like] And what do you do when you come across stuff like that?

Jahmir: Close it down

Amjad: Watch for a few seconds and then I close it [Y8, S4]

A group of Year 6 boys stated that the internet was a significant part of their sexual learning, as well as magazines marketed at girls and women:

Dafydd: You can find out what sexual intercourse means in the dictionary

INT: OK. And how else do you find things out that you want to know?

James: Sometimes YouTube on some videos

Dafydd: There was one you watched yesterday, [name of someone] having sex. That was exciting

James: I typed in 'men wrestling' and when I typed it in it came up with that

[…]

INT: And is that how you are learning about/

Dafydd: Yes that's how we are learning via the Internet/

James: And books as well

Steffan: Yeah and books

Dafydd: And magazines

INT: What kinds of magazines?

Dafydd: Girl magazines, fashion magazines

James: Read your auntie's magazines or something [Y6, S8]

Girls, in contrast, were more ambivalent and conflicted about how they viewed sexual content in the media, with some girls hinting at how they would 'like to watch' but were hesitant and self-regulating. Again, girls' sexual learning and sexual desires were culturally specific and local to their own everyday sexual cultures (Baker 2003):

[Discussing sexually explicit content on TV]

Kathy: Yeah I turn it off

INT: And do you think boys do the same?

Kathy: No no

Hannah: No way [Y7, S1]

Nabila: There is a song called 'Moves Like Jagger' and she [older sister] said not to look at the music video

INT: Do you want to look at it?

Nabila: Yeah, but I don't want to look at it because there is a history thing. A history thing, so you have to delete it [Y6, S6]

Sylvie: [Discussing sexual scenes on TV] If my mum's in the room it's a bit awkward

INT: what about if they [parents] weren't in the room would that be OK?

Sylvie: I really want to, but then I would just skip through it [Y7, S4]

Ayesha: And on your emails one like popped up, 'Two love messages for you'. I'm like, ooooh, but you can't click it, I'm not allowed … I want to but I don't want to ... I want to know what it says
Reshmi: But you're not allowed [Y6, S6]

When girls did talk about their ambivalence towards watching sexually explicit content in which women's naked breasts or buttocks were on display, the social context in which the viewing was taking place was crucial. Below are two examples of how girls felt about boys and boyfriends watching erotic dancing in music videos. Hannah describes the gendered binary of pleasure and disgust:

Hannah: So if it's something like Rihanna or something and she's like dancing like that, like you know, sexy, they/
Kathy: They would be like oh my god [happy face] and girls would be like, no just NO [scrunches up her face]
INT: And how do you feel about boys watching it and liking it
Kathy: It's disgusting … your boyfriend could be watching it! [Y7, S1]

Vicky describes her unease and discomfort at the thought of watching a music video with the presence of her boyfriend in the room:

Vicky: Like you could be watching a [music] video with women in it and that … and he [boyfriend] comes into the room …. and he might be thinking something else … like there are some things, there are some comments boys our age make and you take it seriously … like they're so sexist [Y7, S3]

Indeed, Vicky's concern about the 'something else' that her boyfriend could be thinking goes some way to illustrate how sexually objectifying visual images are not only always part of the social world, but in this imagined scenario, Vicky connects her boyfriend's viewing to sexual comments in wider sexist peer cultures. Both examples also perhaps highlight girls' emerging awareness of the relationship between boys' consumption of sexually explicit images, their own relationship cultures and their own bodies as charged with sexual meaning and feeling (Jackson and Vares 2012).

Some girls, like Cassy below, did not express the same critical views as their peers and described the 'rude' dancing as 'nothing you know too bad', 'it's just a video':

[Discussing Rihanna's music videos]

Rowan: Disgusting and a bit rude

Cassy: Yeah but, you know that's not too bad like and you know, your parents always want to stop you from watching things but you just gotta say … like it's nothing TOO bad, it's just a video [Y7, S2]

However, Cassy's comments might be better understood when placed in the context of having lived with domestic violence for many years and the trauma of not being allowed contact with her violent father, who still lived in the local community. Cassy was thus keen to point out the relative harm of sexually explicit visual representations when faced with the very real and present gendered and sexual violence in her own life.

In sum, boys and girls were critical and selective in their consumption of sexually explicit media, with most children reporting the ways in which they block, delete or physically move away from sexual content that they find offensive. However, what children reported finding offensive and pleasurable and how they view and desire sexual content in the media is culturally specific and highly gendered with greater restrictions and regulatory practices placed upon girls' consumption of sexuality in the media (either self-imposed, or imposed by others).

5.5   'We shouldn't have to face it': coping with unwanted sexually explicit images, text and talk

Sexually explicit talk and seeing sexually explicit imagery was not regarded by children (who did report such practices) as unusual inside their own peer cultures (see also Renold 2006; Afra 2013). Parts 1 and 2 reported how boys and girls used sexually explicit language as a form of verbal sexual harassment. This section focuses on the reports from a minority of children who explicitly referred to sexually explicit talk, images or video and described these experiences as unwanted and harmful using words such as 'disgusting', 'sickening', 'horrible' and 'gross'. Many children also talked about receiving routine unsolicited sexually explicit 'pop-ups' that accompanied the digital downloading of music or video.

This section thus also focuses on the how sexually explicit images were experienced by some children as a form of sexual harassment, that is, the ways in which children

talked about sexually explicit pop-ups as unwanted and upsetting and something 'we shouldn't have to face'. Indeed, a key finding of this research in relation to mediated and interpersonal sexual harassment is that it was almost exclusively girls who reported unsolicited sexually explicit talk, image or video as harmful and offensive.

Boys and girls revealed a normative virtual culture in which they routinely received unsolicited texts and images in their use of free music or game downloading sites and occasionally on social networking sites. However, as Jarek states, both boys and girls talked about receiving more 'scary' than 'sexual' pop-ups:

Jarek: We get more like murder ones than sexual ones … it says 'ha! ha! you have read this … if you do not BC [broadcast a particular message] your mum will die' or something like this [Y8, S3]

When children did report receiving unsolicited 'sexual' messages or images accompanying the adverts of links to sex websites when downloading music, boys reported either ignoring them, some said they weren't bothered by them – or if they did click on them, found these sites entertaining; as Amjad says earlier, 'I might watch for a few seconds, then I close it'. In contrast, almost all girls described how sexual pop-ups were both offensive and upsetting and were angry about being confronted with them every time they downloaded a new tune or game or when on Facebook:

Teagan: Like I was playing a game and it popped up and said 'you got two messages' and I opened it and I did not know this person and they said, 'hello sexy lady' and I don't download games anymore because people are messaging you [Y6, S7]

Izzy: I get it on Facebook
INT: What do you do?
Izzy: I just close them
[…]
Izzy: On facebook it has this type thing Amiga is it?
Betsan: Yeah like this lesbian/
Izzy: Tagged love site
INT: And what is that about?

Izzy: That's all, I don't really know, I don't know what goes on in there it is like/
Betsan: It says to meet me
INT: And what do you think about those/
Izzy: They're disgusting [Y7, S3]

INT: And what do you think of those sexual pop-ups when you are downloading music?
Vicky: Disgusting
Mia: On the music site where us kids like should not be having to/
Hayley and Vicky: Yeah
Vicky: Like if you are downloading music you should not have to be facing those as well!
Hayley and Vicky: Yeah! [Y7, S3]

The ways in which sexually explicit images indirectly mediated girls' everyday lives were also reported through girls' perception and, for some, direct experience of knowing that 'most boys have porn on their phones'. In one Year 8 group interview, girls reported how normalised this practice was. Lorri talked about how one boy thought nothing of using his girlfriend's phone to download pornography:

Lorri: I left my phone [at his house], and the boy I was seeing downloaded stuff he was seeing on my phone! When I saw it, I was like, Oh my god, what is this in my phone, it was so embarrassing. I keep my phone to myself now [Y8, S2]

Some girls talked about feeling they can't 'do anything' about boys viewing pornography on their phones, with some girls stating 'it's their choice … we can't help them, it's up to them what they watch' (Sarah, Y7). Other girls were learning from older sisters how humour could be used to express their anger. Erin's (Y8) older sister for example 'gave her boyfriend a condom to put on his phone and calm him down'. This simple action, whilst having little effect in terms of preventing the downloading of pornography, did open up a space and create a visual statement suggesting perhaps that she, he and the phone needed some protection.

Some girls pointed to the relationship between how boys' increased engagement with porn in Year 8 connected to their own sexual objectification. Becky, for example, relates how a boy who she was good friends with in Year 3 now no longer talks to

her and his most recent interaction was to ask for a photo of her breasts, which she refused:

Aneria: I was talking to this boy [age 14] on Facebook. I hadn't heard from him for six years and two months ago we met on Facebook. He was so different […] just at the start of our conversation he asked me if I was seeing anyone and he was like 'I'm on the lookout' [for a girlfriend] and then he asked for a photo, you know of … [looks down at her breasts] [Y8, S2]

No girls reported downloading sexually explicit media on their phone, although many had pictures of their favourite celebrities or pop idols. Indeed, girls didn't engage in the explicit sex talk (Renold 2005; Kelley et al. 1999; Fine 1986; Afra 2013) that some of the boys described, like Dafydd below:

Dafydd: All the girls think I'm really disgusting like when I say that Justin Bieber has had sex with Rihana [laughs]
James: You are disgusting Dafydd, most of the boys in our class are disgusting [laughs] (Y6, S8)

Girls would however comment upon the ways in which boys' sex-talk permeated even classroom relations, such as boys' interactions with the Page 3 pictures of semi-naked women used in an art class:

Kayley: And there was like a naked woman in there
Sadie: And like all the boys were laughing
Kayley: Yeah, and the boys used to open the page and when people used to walk past they would laugh
Sadie: Sometimes they were drawing on it
Kayley: Tristan was going like that [stroking the page]
INT: And what did you think about the pictures and/
Sadie: Disgusting!
INT: Do you?
Sadie: People were like drawing tongues by it and all that
INT: Do the girls do this for fun?
Sadie: No [Y6, S7]

Maria described a more serious incident of online sexual harassment. They describe how a 'really nice' and 'sensitive' boy in their class had his Facebook account hacked into by another boy and he unknowingly sent an abusive pornographic message to her:

Maria: Nicholas one of the boys in our class, his Facebook got hacked and some boy was like saying to me/
Karina: He loves you, would you go out with me, I want to like/
Maria: Marry you and … I ain't saying the other stuff what he said because it is disgusting
Karina: Really disgusting
INT: You don't have to be specific it's OK
Maria: He was like can I like, you know what
Karina: Do it to you
[…]
Maria: So Nicholas the next day he was like crying and all that because people …
the boys on there were like, the boy who hacked into my Facebook was like talking to people like saying that I fancy them and I want to like do it to them
Karina: But Nicholas is like really really sensitive and he/
Kayleigh: He's really nice
Maria: He is really nice, like a really good friend
Karina: Sometimes he, they/
Kayleigh: They act a bit weird
Ashlee: They act as if they are two years old
Karina: They run around like [the girls make aeroplane and emergency vehicle siren noises]
INT: They like being younger do they?
All: Yeah [Y6, S8]

Nicholas's disinterest in and refusal to participate in the strong boyfriend-girlfriend culture operating in his school was widely known. While the girls described him as 'nice', 'sensitive' and a 'really good friend', his refusal to participate in gendered and age-appropriate playground games positioned him as immature and 'weird'. The kind of online sexual harassment he was subject to thus illustrates how 'older' sexual knowledge can be drawn upon to create and consolidate age-appropriate gendered and heterosexual hierarchies. We also see, in Karina's comment 'but Nicholas is like

really really sensitive' how Maria's experience is normalised as something that happens to girls (see Renold 2002).

In sum, many children talked about receiving unsolicited sexually explicit images or texts (e.g. by downloading music on their phones) and girls in particular found these images and texts almost always offensive, sexually objectifying and described this form of digitally mediated sexual harassment in very similar ways to their experience of interpersonal sexual harassment. Moreover, the perceived harm of being confronted with or sharing sexually explicit images depended greatly upon social context and other risk factors, such as whether such practices were part of other forms of sexual/gender-based violence and in schools where boyfriend-girlfriend cultures were strong and seemingly compulsory.

5.6 'You can change sex, run around naked, anything': using popular culture and online communities to escape constraining gender and sexual norms

In Section 3 we saw how some children, especially girls, were creatively engaging with and seeking out physical spaces in which they could 'feel free' in their bodies, less constrained by the (hetero)sexualising norms of a normative male and female gaze. This section explores how some girls and boys also drew upon and connected with popular culture (e.g. music videos/artists) and online communities (e.g. SIMS) or games (e.g. Black Ops and Grand Theft Auto) as cultural resources through which they could express themselves in ways less available or perceived as too risky and dangerous in offline contexts. It continues the theme of how children interact and critically engage with consumer and media cultures and subcultures in ways that not only constrain but also open up spaces for resistance and empowerment, including learning about and experimenting with non-normative gender and sexual identities.

5.6.1 'Hey, sexy lady': negotiating sex and sexuality in music cultures

While musical tastes were highly gendered, with few boys, for example, choosing Nicki Minaj, Sheryl Cole or One Direction as their favourite artist or band, children's relationship to music was both eclectic and complex and provided boys and girls with opportunities for individual expression and local and global cultural belonging (Baker 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2011; Ali 2002; Renold 2005; ; Duits and van Romondt Vis 2009; Renold and Ringrose 2010; Reed 2011; Duits and van Zoonen 2011; Kehily 2012). Many children talked about enjoying contemporary chart topping or YouTube

hits alongside alternative music or music which either connected them to their immediate or extended family and wider cultural history or provided avenues for alternative expression. Sometimes it connected them to subcultural musical communities outside their local peer cultures. Zainab (Y7, S4], for example, enjoyed Maroon 5, Nicki Minaj and 'traditional (indian) songs'. Aaeron shared his dad's love of 1960s rock'n'roll and the Stereophonics, and also NDubz and DJ Carney for his street dance. Tonia loved 'Green Day' and 'most metal or goth music' which she was introduced to from an older teenage 'tomboy' in the community.

One of the most talked about tunes, especially by the Year 6 girls and boys and Year 7 girls, was 'Gangnam Style':

Bryan: I like animated music, like the Gorillas/
Gareth: One of my favourite tunes is Gangnam Style
Bryan: Yeah, I like the dance.
Gareth: I like the dance [they get up from their chairs and both perform the dance] [Y7, S5]

INT: What kinds of songs are played [at school disco]?
Ayesha: Sexy Lady and Gangnam stuff
Reshmi: Yes they really like that song
Ayesha: We all love the song we just sing it/
INT: So what happens when you get to 'sexy lady' do you sing that bit?
Reshmi: Yes
Ayesha: Yes we just sing, that is the part we start singing. That is the only part we understand [Y6, S6]

[Discussing music videos with 'sexy' dancing and semi-naked women]
Lizzy: I block out all the dancing, I just sing to it
Rowan: Sometimes like if you're watching a song you like, you just wanna like listen to a song, like instead of just watching the video that's rude, got rude stuff in it
Lizzy: And the lyrics
Cassy: My mum says you can watch music videos as long as if they swear you don't copy it
INT: And do you like doing the dances?
Lyn and Rowan: Yeah
Lizzy: No I don't

Cassy: Sometimes I try making up my own

ALL: Gangnam style!

[All sing: 'Hey, sexy lady, oo oo oo oo oo Gangnam style!']

INT: What is that song about?

Lizzy: I don't know

Rowan: It's a racehorse

Lyn: Yeah it's a racehorse

Rowan: And when you like whip someone

Lizzy: I don't get what the sexy lady part is for

Lyn: Oh cos it's a girl in it?

Lizzy: Oh she's stunning, she's really pretty

Cassy: He goes like like that [she jumps from side to side and whips an imaginary horse]

Rowan: It's on the girl, the girl is the one on the horse next to him, and like the boy goes 'hey sexy lady' when they're riding the horses

[they all get up, sing, and do the dance]

(Y7, S2)

The intense pleasure some girls derived from dancing and singing along to 'Gangnam Style' becomes meaningful when placed in the wider context of girls' critiques and disapproval of the 'sexy' dancing in music videos that accompanied many of their favourite contemporary artists, like Nicki Minaj or Rihanna (see also Jackson forthcoming 2014b). For the Year 7 girls above in particular, the stylised dancing in the music video seemed to offer them a fun and safe space to connect with being 'sexy' (in the repetitive lyric about 'sexy ladies'), whilst also offering an accompanying dance routine which involved a combination of vigorous jumping from side to side and riding and whipping an imaginary horse. This was particularly the case for Cassy and Rowan, who were critical and angry throughout the interview about the ways their bodies were experienced as vulnerable, unsafe and charged with sexual meaning in ways they disliked.

While some music videos, like Gangnam Style, subverted and severed the connection between sexual lyrics and 'sexy' dancing, at other times song lyrics offered a powerful conduit to uplift and empower girls and boys. Sometimes they were consciously listened to 'over and over' when children were 'feeling down' or going through a 'tough time'. Sometimes they were called upon spontaneously in the moment. Indeed, towards the end of the interview with Cassy, Rowan, Lizzy and Lyn,

and after a long discussion of how the girls felt routinely sexually scrutinised in their bodies, they burst into song with Bruno Mars's verse, 'you're beautiful … just the way you are':

Cassy: Enough talking! [laughter] … cos you're amazing, just the way you are … and when you smile
All (singing): the whole world stops and stares for a while … cos you're amazing … just the way you are [Y7, S2]

The lyrics and the video to Bruno Mars' song can easily be interpreted to show how it is a 'boyfriend' who confers whether or not the 'girlfriend' is 'beautiful'. It can thus be criticised for glossing the labour involved in producing the girlfriend's natural 'just the way she is' look (Buckley 2011; Jackson and Westrupp 2010). However, in this moment, and in the context of the interview discussion on bodily dissatisfaction and constraining body-beautiful norms, this utopian message sung by girls to each other loudly and without hesitation or self-consciousness, creates a moment of pure joy where for a split second they are in the song and they can be, to each other, 'beautiful just the way they are'.

In other moments, children talked explicitly about how particular artists open up other ways of being and doing gender. In this extract below, May, talks about how much she 'loves Katy Perry' because she was someone who 'stood up for' and celebrated difference and diversity, including bodily and sexual diversity:

May: I like Katy Perry.
INT: Do you?
May: She is my favourite. She is my role model.
INT: Okay tell me about that.
May: I like Katy Perry because she is kind of different from everyone else and it is okay to stand out. Which I think is quite a nice thing
INT: Her music, her lyrics?
May: It is more about when she sings, most of it is just trying – she's always making people happy about what they are and who they are
INT: Do you have a favourite song that speaks to you?
May: 'Firework'
INT: Why do you like that one?
May: Because it is about not mattering about … who you are you can just make the

most of what you are … it is everything from fat to like –

[…]

May: Like if you like someone, kind of like you [looking at Zoe], you know what I mean?

Zoe: No.

May: God I know what I mean

Zoe: Well I don't

[…]

May: Liking …

INT: Boys?

May: No

INT: Do you mean girls liking girls?

May: Yeah

The songs 'Firework' and 'I Kissed a Girl' resonate strongly with May who was particularly vocal about challenging gender stereotyping in everyday peer culture and was one of the few girls who openly questioned (hetero)sexual norms and identities.

There were also a couple of occasions when boys and girls shared their own song lyrics, or in the case of one boy, James's rap about local street violence:

Still looking at me
Still looking at me
He is clocking me
Mocking me
I think he wants to fight me
I tried to hit the man
But he bit my hand
And then he ran
It is a very very …
DAMN!
There he is again [James, Y6, S8]

At these moments, either in children's own reflections of their relationship to music or when music entered the interview space directly, it was possible to get a glimpse into the ways in which musical cultures were being drawn upon, adapted and created as

a way of managing and surviving everyday gendered and sexual norms and in some cases, physical (James) and domestic (Cassy) violence.

5.6.2 'You can do what you want': negotiating online communities and gaming

There has been much concern, debate and controversy surrounding children's digital and online gaming cultures, particularly in relation to the normalisation of physical and sexual violence, death and destruction, gender and sexual stereotyping and pornographic representations of women in some video games (see Ofcom 2011 for research overview). Indeed, many children reported playing (often communally) games in which one or all of the above were present, such as Black Ops, Grand Theft Auto, Modern Warfare Three, etc. However, while it is indisputable that the content and action is racist, sexist, heterosexist and overwhelmingly violent, children's own accounts of how they interacted with the different features of the games (e.g. from racing cars and going on killing sprees to choosing online adult identities) provided a window onto how gaming cultures may provide some children with a space through which they can express everyday, often taboo, desires, fears and anger and how online gaming cultures were intricately connected to their everyday lives (see chapters in Weber and Dixon 2010; Walkerdine 2007)

For example, a group boys discuss their love for Battlefield Three, and their passion for guns emerges clearly as they talk:

Tomos: I like the army games, like modern warfare three
Jared: Battlefield three, Black Ops
Tomos: It's coz when I was born my father was in the army for like three years running, so I didn't see him a lot, but then I started to become addicted to the army like … It's like my life [Y8, S2]

Jared: [Talking about his cousins] Cause right now they're like twelve and thirteen and one of them's ten and five as well, but their father takes them out shooting, they shoot squirrels up like a park or something and they cook the squirrel and eat it … my cousin who's ten and my cousin who's thirteen said they were gonna go halvesies [with me] on a shotgun [Y8, S2]

The boys' interest in war games and guns was not an arbitrary passion for violence, but connected to their interest in, and family history of, army life. It also connected to their knowledge and experience of hunting for squirrels, which they shared with their dads and granddads, and the historical skills and practices of the wider community. Moreover, while they often played individually alone in their bedrooms or in living rooms, they were intimately connected by their wireless headsets across cyberspace. Sharing their gaming practices enabled boys who lived at some distance from each other to play together. It also enabled them to exercise autonomy and belonging that they rarely experienced in their school, with Jared and Tomos both disclosing how they had been bullied and socially excluded for their 'immaturity', their disinterest in popular culture and 'rugby', and being called 'strange' for preferring the company and friendship of girls.

There were some girls in Year 7 and 8 from schools 2 and 3 who spoke about their enjoyment in playing Grand Theft Auto. This 18-rated controversial 'game', dubbed by some as 'Grand Theft Misogyny', allows players to rise through the ranks of organised crime by stealing cars and beating people up to steal their money. Players can also visit lap dancing clubs and kill sex workers. However, while the misogyny may have unconsciously connected with the girls' own experiences of living in bodies which they felt were sexually objectified, particularly in public spaces, their talk focused exclusively on being able to 'steal cars' and 'drive fast':

Becky: It's fun. You can do what you like. You can crash everywhere … you can steal people's cars right, you can drive them out, shoot them in the head and get the money and then you can take their cars and take them to your garage and they stores them and repairs them automatically and everything. I got one of the best cars there, one of the fastest ones … I had this car, I just had a massive obsession for it. I did not know what it was called, I don't know the names of any cars, but I just loved that car … when you go really fast, it is AMAZING! [Y8, S2]

Kelsey: Grand Theft Auto! That's amazing!
Carrie: Grand Theft Auto?
Kelsey: Yeah
Carrie: That's 18 innit
Kelsey: It's a car game, vroom vroom [acts driving fast round corners]
Carrie: You can steal people's cars and stuff though
Kelsey: Yeah, that's the whole point!

[…]
Kelsey: When I'm over my nans he [Jarek] will knock on my door and […] I'm
normally in his house all the time playing on his X-Box

Many girls, including Kelsey and Becky, talked about having given up on leisure
pursuits, such as biking, skateboarding, streetdance and sporting activities in which
their bodies were moving and active. For Becky and Kelsey, games like Grand Theft
Auto seemed to act as a direct conduit through which they could momentarily feel the
thrill and excitement of 'stealing people's cars', 'rolling cars' and going 'really fast'.
For Becky, like Jared, it also offered her a significant space through which she
shared and connected with her dad, who she only saw on weekends. For Kelsey, this
was one of the activities that she and her best friend, Jarek, could do together, free
from heterosexual innuendo.

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) and other online games, like Saints Row 2, also seemed to
provide a space in which aggressive fantasies could be realised:

INT: So what can you do (in GTA)?
Tonia: Well I could go to a park and kill people and take their money, that would be
amazing … but I would get done for murder [laughter from the group] I'm not a
violent person! [Y8, S2]

Becky: I go on a, what's it called, Saints Row – and I have like one of the fastest cars
and motorbikes on there … and you can go so fast, and jump and speeding all
through the cars … and you have missions and enemies … and you can punch
people in the streets and like they attack you … I had this lighthouse crib … and a
gang kind of thing, and my gang lived with me … we were like the purple people [Y8,
S2]

Here, Tonia's desire to steal cars and kill people and Becky's Saints Row
experiences of being part of a gang, through which she can attack and defend her
'crib', seemed to somehow connect to their own real life experiences of violence and
death. Both girls could perhaps relate directly to the sexual and physical violence and
wider patriarchal narratives inside the games. They talked in their interviews about
'knowing too much … at our age' and the futility of change or escape. Perhaps the
destructive features of Grand Theft Auto and Saints Row tapped into wider fantasies
through which they could virtually embody fearlessness and power, get angry and

attack, destroy or flee the range of violence in their own lives and communities (see also Carr 2010; Giddings 2010).

The final example illustrates how some girls were using the online communities, like SIMS, to experiment with 'older' identities and create an alternative fantasy world in which 'you can do what you want' (Shade 2010; Hillier and Harrison 2007):

Zoe: I like, I love Sims 3

May: Yeah we love the Sims. The Sims is the best game ever

INT: And why is that so good?

May: Because it is like real life

Zoe: But you can do what you want

May: It is just so cool

[…]

May: Well, you just play life

Zoe: Yeah you can be married … you can be from as small as newborn to as old as/

May: Like 80

Zoe: We go in as teens

May: Because I would like to be older

INT: Can you have boyfriends?

Zoe: Yeah

[…]

INT: Do you enjoy that?

May: [giggles]

Both: Yeah

[…]

May: And when you get those [special powers on zombie SIMS] you can make yourself naked in the middle of town where people are watching or you could just do as little as make it rain

INT: Have you done that?

May: Yeah lots of times

INT: What happens when you are naked in the middle of town?

Zoe: People go 'Oooh!' [laughter]

[Y6, S6]

Both Zoe and May talked about how they felt they were 'over-protected'. They explained how their parents (especially their dads) were keen to 'keep us young' and

would regulate their behavior in ways which ensured 'not acting like I am older than I am'. They wished for lives that were not so 'childish, sad and boring'. For them, SIMS was 'the best game ever' because they could try on identities and engage in behaviours that were unavailable or too risky in their own lives. In SIMS, they could be boys or girls, or zombies. They could be a baby or 80 years old. For May and Zoe, this was the one space where they felt the 'freedom' in their (virtual) bodies that they craved in their own lives. They 'could be naked' and 'definitely' enjoy 'kissing' their virtual boyfriends, which Zoe said she was 'too scared' and 'embarrassed' to initiate in real life with real boys. It was also one space where May didn't feel the narrow and constraining ways in which she felt 'pushed to be a girl' in her 'real life'. In SIMS she could 'do stuff that makes you happy".

While it is important to address the sexual and violent patriarchal ideologies that form much of the content of some games and online communities, it is just as important to understand how girls and boys talk about their complex interaction in these online communities and gaming cultures (Buckingham and Willet 2009; Weber and Dixon 2010; Dixon and Weber 2010). For some children they offered a medium through which children could experiment with and/or escape from the constraining gender and sexual norms that circumscribed their everyday lives.

6 Implications of research for policy and practice

The key aim of this project was to address the lack of research regarding pre-teen children's gender and sexual cultures in the context of their everyday lives. Central to this aim was to foreground equality and diversity issues (Public Sector Equality Duty, 2012) and enable children's own views and experiences to inform and shape future research, policy and practice (Article 12, UNCRC).

As an exploratory study, findings ranged widely across diverse and overlapping areas, many of which connect to numerous and progressive Welsh policy and guidance on bullying, sexual health, equalities, well-being and Sex and Relationships Education. They include:

The Sexual Health and Well-being in Wales Action Plan (2010-2015)

Public Sector Equality Duty (2012)

Respecting Others: Sexist, Sexual and Transphobic Bullying (2011)

Respecting Others: Homophobic Bullying (2010)

Sex and Relationships Education in Schools (2010)

Personal and Social Education Framework for 7-19 Year Olds in Wales (2008)

Children and Young People: Rights to Action (2004)

As research consistently points out, however, policies, guidance and duties do not necessarily translate into practice. While there is much good practice about, it can vary considerably across local authorities, individual schools and third sector organisations.

Pertinent to the findings of this research is how existing guidance which has the potential to directly address children's experiences, for example, of 'coercive sexual

behaviour' (WAG 2011: 7) may be considered 'inappropriate' to discuss and/or raise with primary school aged children, and younger pre-teens.

For teachers who do recognise and want to address some of the everyday sexisms or gendered and sexual harassment within and across boys' and girls' peer group cultures, many lack the training and confidence that such training can often foster, or may be unsupported by senior management. Indeed, given that providing sex and relationships education in Welsh primary schools is not mandatory but left to the discretion of each individual school (section 101 (1) of the Education Act 2002), some teachers may find both time and resources for training in the area of sex and relationships hard to negotiate.

While additional research needs to be undertaken with children to identify and explore what kinds of knowledge, support and action they think they need as they negotiate their own sexual identities, cultures and relations, the following summary provides a glimpse into the strength of feeling regarding not only how many children were angry about having to live in a sexist and heterosexist peer culture and society, but also how some children found creative ways of managing and/or challenging these cultures.

Many children were very articulate about having to put up with a range of sexist and heterosexist practices inside their own peer cultures, communities and in wider society.

The majority of children expressed how they wished they could talk freely about gender and sexuality issues and in ways that were more connected to their own lives and experiences (and not just their futures).

Some children were very vocal in wanting to actively change what they talked about as constraining and punishing gender and sexual norms. However, many struggled with knowing how their views could change practice.

Children most vocal were often those living in families and communities where gender and sexual violence (e.g. domestic violence) was present. However, for these children in particular, challenging gender and sexual discriminations was difficult and could lead to social exclusion.

Some children used online games as safe spaces to access and experiment with different identities and behaviours, particularly those which subverted cultural norms of age, religion and heterosexuality or a socially acceptable 'femininity' (e.g. aggression).

Findings from this research suggest that 'starting from where children are at' is essential in meeting and supporting children's needs and experiences and the everyday realities of children's gendered and sexual cultures (online and offline). This will involve challenging many of the assumptions adults bring to children's social worlds: for example, that boyfriend-girlfriend cultures might be drawn upon by children to 'just be friends' rather than evidence of 'premature sexualisation' or mimicking 'older' relationships.

While many of the key findings will be addressed by the Cross-Party Group over the coming year in terms of how they might inform and shape future policy, practice and pedagogy, there are some key recommendations that have be drawn. The following recommendations have been identified by the NSPCC and CCOfW.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Sex and Relationships Education: Welsh Government should respond to the evidence presented here and by the Task and Finish Group[10] that reported to them in 2012 on the need to improve education and awareness raising in relation to sex and relationship education (SRE)**.** The evidence provided in this research strongly suggests that children in primary school need access to an age appropriate SRE curriculum and that the contents of such a curriculum should be informed by and be able to respond to the reality of their day to day experiences.

A rights-based approach to Sex and Relationships Education: the development of appropriate SRE material for children should aim to promote an understanding of every child's right to be safe (Article 19, UNCRC) and promote cultural change that challenges gender stereotypes and prejudice and practices in line with a human rights approach[11] and the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

Supporting children's well-being: There is a need for strong national leadership on supporting children's well-being within and beyond schools. Actions to address the issues highlighted through this research should form part of a robust framework of work in schools to promote equality and diversity and to support the social and emotional needs of children. This should include a consideration of the benefits of offering school counseling services in primary schools. Reforms being considered in relation to improving classroom teaching and learning, strengthening school leadership, organising school improvement and promoting best practice must include

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[10] Task and Finish Group report, (2012) *The Welsh Government's proposed 'Ending Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse (Wales) Bill' Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group,* Cardiff: Welsh Government

[11] General obligation contained in Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in terms of (1. Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men).

a clear focus on measures to support pupil well-being, children's rights, equality and diversity issues and sexual health and well-being.

Assessing children's well-being: A consistent and robust approach to measuring well-being should be developed that includes measures for self-reporting in line with Welsh Government commitments to pupil voice and article 12 of the UNCRC. Inspection processes should ensure that education providers are held to account in relation to measures of children's well-being.

Supporting parents and carers: parenting and family information and support services should provide parent/carers with clear and informed guidance on how to talk to their children about sex, relationship and gender issues.

Information and advice for children and young people: children and young people should be provided with clear information about equality and diversity issues, relationships and where they can go for advice and support about worries and concerns on these issues, including sexual harassment. The Welsh Government should work with children and young people to design a media campaign and virtual resources in order to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues, including gender and sexuality inside and outside school, and of where they can find advice and support.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has been exploratory, opening up many more issues that need further investigation. These could include further examination of:

- comprehensive all Wales survey to examine the prevalence of key aspects of the findings regarding young relationship cultures, and the complexities and impact of gender and sexual harassment inside and outside of school.

- how the power relations in young relationship cultures (age 9-12), intersect with relationship cultures of older siblings, families and the wider community (online and offline).

- the gender and sexual cultures of children in the early years

- the ways in which gender and sexuality mediate the peer cultures of children with physical and intellectual learning disabilities.

- physical feminism: investigating the relationship between gender identity, physical activity and locale

- learning from children about safe spaces to experiment with and challenge, sexual/gender norms and inequalities (online and offline)

- longtidunal research to follow diverse groups of children from this cohort as they transition into Key Stage 4 (particularly exploring the intersection of gender, race and religion).

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Appendices

Task 1: Display the photos on the desk (example below):

Prompts:

1) Did you have a prom or farewell party at the end of Year 6?

2) What was it like?

Task 2:

Place the flip-chart paper and felt-tips on the desk and introduce the drawing/post-it task. Explain that the first task is for them to draw two body outlines of a girl and a boy. They can give them names if they like. When they have completed this task, ask them to use the post-its and write down ideas of what kinds of preparations the 'girl' and the 'boy' would do in getting ready to go to the prom/disco.

Introduce activity:
So you've talked a bit about what you would look like/what you might wear to go to a school disco/prom. Would you wear this outfit to go to some of these places? [display photos on desk]

Follow up question: Ask participants to choose one photo that represents their favourite place to be. Or, talk about a favourite place which isn't represented.

Prompts: Ask what they would do in their favourite place, who would they be with, what would they might wear, how they feel about their bodies in this place. Repeat the task with places they like and dislike, feel safe and less safe in.

Appendix C   Too sexy too soon?: Statement sorting task[12].

Ask children to sort the statements from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'

Adults make too much fuss about sexy products. Children our age know they're just for fun and shouldn't be taken seriously.

Children our age should have opportunities to make their own decisions and try things out, even if the things make them look sexy or older.

Sexy clothes and makeup put children our age at risk.

Celebrities, fashion and the media are to blame for children wanting to buy sexy products and look older.

Children our age feel we need to buy sexy things to be cool and fit in with our peers.

When boys and girls wear sexy clothes it reinforces stereotypes.

Girls our age wear sexy clothes because they don't feel good about themselves and
they want boys to like them.

Boys our age don't care much about being sexy.

Children our age should not be allowed to have sexy things, because we don't always understand their real meaning (they just like the colours and pictures)

Prompt questions:

1. How did you find the sorting task? Was it easy to find statements you agreed and disagreed with?

4. Explain your choices to me – why did you put some things at the top and bottom?

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[12] This participatory research method for children has been adapted, with permission, from the Buckingham, D., R. Willett, S. Bragg and R. Russell (2009) 'Sexualised Goods Aimed at Children'. Scottish Parliament Review.

Children's information and consent Leaflet

too much too soon?

girls and boys speak out

A Research Project with Cardiff University, the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner's Office for Wales.

NSPCC
Dim mwy o greulondeb i blant. DIM. Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

WHO ARE WE?

Our names are Emma Renold and Sion Tetlow. We are childhood researchers, based at Cardiff University. Emma is a university professor and Sion is a PhD student.

WHAT'S THE PROJECT ABOUT?

We would like to know what children, age between 10 and 13, think about media reports on 'growing up too fast' and the pressures (from peers and popular culture) to look and act 'older'. We are especially interested in what issues and experiences you think are important to you at your age.

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

There are a lots of books and reports about children (especially girls) 'growing up too fast'. But, very few reports or studies have asked children themselves what they think, from their own experience. Topics are rarely chosen by children themselves or understood from the child's own view point. What adults may find 'too old' or 'too young' may be different from what you consider 'too old' or 'too young'.

This project is informed by article 12 of the 'United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child' which is about respecting YOUR views and taking YOUR opinion into account when making decisions that may affect your life.

If you choose to be part of the research, we hope that what you share with us will help other children, parents and adults working with children understand some of the good and bad things that affect you as you grow up.

WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

We would like you to take part in one friendship group interview and one individual interview (where you can speak more privately) about areas of 'growing up' that are important to you. With your permission, these interviews will be audio recorded. We will also change your name in anything that we write to protect your identity. Here are some possible topics we could talk about:

FASHION

GROWING UP

BOYFRIENDS & GIRLFRIENDS

RESEARCH TOPICS

LOOKING OLDER

SAFETY & RISK

BODY IMAGE

WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH BE USED FOR?

Cardiff University is working with the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner's Office for Wales. What you tell us will be written up as a report and presented to the National Assembly for Wales (July 2013). It will also be published in a booklet for other children, parents and adults working with children.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Not at all! Anyone who takes part will be a volunteer and you can change your mind at any time.

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

Safety and well-being are very important in this research. If you or another young person becomes upset, a nominated person (e.g. a teacher you can talk to) will be told and support will be put in place. Also, anything you say that suggests you or another young person might be at risk will be referred to an appropriate adult.

✂ -

YOUR CONSENT

I have read and understood the information leaflet.
I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.
I know what the research is about and how I can be involved.
I know that this project will help the researchers learn more about what children think about media reports on 'growing up too fast' and what children themselves consider as important to them as young pre-teen girls and boys.
I am happy to have what I say audio recorded
I understand that my name and the school name will be changed.
If the research team become aware of any information that suggests that I might be at risk, the school's child protection procedures will be followed and the appropriate support put in place.
I know that I can decide not to continue with the research at any time without giving a reason.

Your name: _____

Your signature (and date): _____

Parent's information and consent leaflet

too much too soon?

girls and boys speak out

A Research Project with Cardiff University, the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner's Office for Wales.

NSPCC
Dim mwy o greulondeb i blant. DIM. Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY
PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

THE RESEARCH TEAM

Our names are Emma Renold and Sion Tetlow. We are childhood researchers, based at Cardiff University. Emma is a university professor and Sion is a PhD student.

WHAT'S THE PROJECT ABOUT?

We would like to know what children, age between 10 and 13, think about media reports on 'growing up too fast' and the pressures (from peers, and popular culture) to look and act 'older'. We are especially interested in what issues and experiences girls and boys consider are important them as 10, 11, 12 & 13 year olds.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH?

There are a numerous media reports and official inquiries about children (especially girls) 'growing up too fast'. Yet, very few reports or studies have asked children themselves what they think from their own experience. What concerns do boys and girls share? How different are the experiences of children living in different areas and different cultures?

Research shows that what gets written about children is often done so from an adult perspective. Topics under investigation are rarely chosen by children themselves or understood from the child's viewpoint. What adults may find 'too old' or 'too young' may be different from what children consider 'too old' or 'too young'.

This project is informed by article 12 of the 'United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child' which respects the views of the child and takes their opinions into account when making decisions about them.

We hope that what children choose to share with us and with others will help other children, parents and adults working with children understand some of the old and new pressures facing boys and girls as they transition into the teenage years.

What will the research involve?

We would like to carry out some friendship group interviews which aim to provide girls and boys with the opportunity to respond to some of the reported concerns of children their age 'growing up too fast'. Children are also invited to take part in one individual interview to talk about areas of 'growing up' that are important to them in the context of their everyday lives.

What kinds of research activities will be used?

The group interviews will use three child-friendly tasks each designed to enable children to shape the focus of the discussion. Topics may include talk on: fashion, body image, relationship cultures (e.g. friendship and bullying, boyfriends and girlfriends); safety and risk in different contexts (e.g. online, in school, at the park) and children's thoughts on 'growing up' more widely. Copies of each task are available on request.

What will the research be used for?

Cardiff University is working in collaboration with the NSPCC and the Children's Commissioner's office for Wales. Findings from the project will be reported to the National Assembly for Wales (July 2013) and at a young people's conference later in the year. The aim is for the research to directly shape future policy, practice and resources for children's personal, social and health education across Wales. An accessible booklet designed by children, for children and their parents is also planned. Any reports or publications arising from this research will keep the names of the children and their school anonymous.

Does my son/daughter have to take part?

Not at all! Anyone who takes part will be a volunteer and he/she can change her mind at any time.

Safety and well-being

Safety and well-being are core priorities for this research. If any young person becomes unduly distressed, a nominated person (e.g. a teacher they can confide in) will be notified and the appropriate support put in place. All research will adhere with the school's own child protection procedures and all children will be made aware that matters involving risk to themselves or others will be referred to an appropriate person.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project you can ring Dr. Emma Renold on 029 20876139 or email on renolde@cf.ac.uk

HOW DOES MY CHILD GET INVOLVED?

If, after reading this leaflet, you are happy for your child to be involved then simply read and sign the consent form below and return to the school receptionist.

✂ -

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT

☐ I have read and understood the information leaflet.
☐ I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.
☐ I know what the research is about and how my child can be involved.
☐ I know that this project will help the researchers learn more about what children think about media reports on 'growing up too fast' and what children themselves consider as important to them as young pre-teen girls and boys.
☐ I am happy for my child to have what he/she says recorded
☐ I understand that my child's name and the school name will be anonymised in any reports or publications arising from the research.
☐ If the research team become aware of any information that suggests that a child might be at risk, the school's own child protection procedures will be followed and the appropriate support put in place.
☐ I know that my child can decide not to continue with the research at any time without giving a reason.

Name of Child:

Your signature (and date):

Ethical framework

Safeguarding children: All research will adhere with the school's own child protection procedures. This will include a clear understanding of procedures to follow when a child protection issue comes to light and a discussion with the appropriate staff member of any safeguarding issues that the research team need to be aware of <u>before</u> conducting the research. The research team (Renold and Tetlow) will have up to date and enhanced CRB checks. Children will be made aware that matters involving risk to themselves or others will be referred to the appropriate person.

Informed consent: Children and their parents/guardians will be provided with full information about the nature of the project and that they can refuse to take part, or withdraw their involvement at any time. All participants will be asked to sign written consent or provide verbally recorded consent before and after data collection (i.e. after each focus group and each individual interview participants will be asked if they are still happy for the researcher to transcribe the data).

Confidentiality and anonymity: While confidentiality can be guaranteed in the one-to-one interviews (with the exception of the safeguarding issues outlined above), confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the more public forum of a group or in the paired interviews. The researchers will draw attention to the limits of confidentiality at the outset, and where appropriate, during the group and paired interviews.

All data generated will be fully anonymised. The Data Protection Act will be fully adhered to. Any doubts about data storage will be referred to the university's data protection advisor. All research materials (e.g. transcripts, audio files, fieldnotes) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or password protected computer and access will be restricted to Professor Renold.

Including young people who may have a learning or communication difficulty or for whom English or Welsh is not a first language

We will not exclude any children who wish to take part on the grounds that they have a moderate learning or communication difficulty. However, it is beyond the scope and funding of the project to include children with severe learning or communication difficulties. Our local knowledge of the research sites suggests to us that all young people can communicate through the medium of English.

Possible involvement of young people in illegal activities

While our sample may include young people involved in illegal activities, this is not a focus of the research. However, where activities come to light that may cause harm to participants or others then child protection procedures will be followed (see above).

Potential negative impact on young people

As in previous research and workshops exploring issues of sexualities and sexualisation, it is hoped that involvement in this research project will be a positive benefit, providing children with the opportunities to exercise a 'critical voice' (Bragg 2007, p.23) on issues often silenced or sensationalised by the media. The methodology employed has been designed specifically to invite children to shape a range of agendas, from further research to future policy and practice. However, like all research on sensitive topics (such as gender and sexuality issues) it should be recognised that some topics raised or reflected upon may cause distress (e.g. experiences of sexual harassment). If any young people become distressed or upset during the fieldwork, a nominated person (e.g. a teacher they can confide in) will be notified and the appropriate support put in place.