

Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood

The contradictory nature of sexuality and censorship in
children's contemporary lives



KERRY H. ROBINSON

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Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood provides a critical examination of the way we regulate children's access to certain knowledge and explores how this regulation contributes to the construction of childhood, to children's vulnerability and to the constitution of the 'good' future citizen in developed countries.

Through this controversial analysis, Kerry H. Robinson critically engages with the relationships between childhood, sexuality, innocence, moral panic, censorship and notions of citizenship. This book highlights how the strict regulation of children's knowledge, often in the name of protection or in the child's best interest, can ironically, increase children's prejudice around difference, increase their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, and undermine their abilities to become competent adolescents and adults. Within her work Robinson draws upon empirical research to:

- provide an overview of the regulation and governance of children's access to 'difficult knowledge', particularly knowledge of sexuality;
- explore and develop Foucault's work on the relationship between childhood and sexuality;
- identify the impact of these discourses on adults' understanding of childhood, and the tension that exists between their own perceptions of sexual knowledge, and the perceptions of children;
- reconceptualize children's education around sexuality.

Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood is essential reading for both undergraduate and postgraduate students undertaking courses in education, particularly with a focus on early childhood or primary teaching, as well as in other disciplines such as sociology, gender and sexuality studies, and cultural studies.

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Foreword

This very important book opens up the paradoxical space in between our desire to maintain the innocence of childhood and the vital importance of giving children knowledge about sexuality.

It is in the nature of any paradox that we don't know how to make our way into it and we don't know how to resolve it – they appear to be intractable. This particular paradox may generate in us a sense of moral panic, or, perhaps less dramatically, avoidance and denial. We are so deeply immersed in contradictory discourses about children and sexuality and the associated anxieties that some readers may not even have been able to get past the front cover. Even reaching out to pick up this book may have seemed dangerous, revealing the potential reader, in that act, as willing to countenance the deeply forbidden – and as willing to think about that which has become unthinkable. Other readers, who have got this far, may nevertheless still be worrying about what dangerous knowledge this book is inviting them into.

Dear reader, this book will provoke you, it will sometimes even shock you, but it will also certainly open up new ways of thinking. Those of you who read this book will discover that what is dangerous, more than anything else, is the withholding of knowledge from children – the deliberate construction not of innocence but of ignorance.

In a very carefully argued and considered manner, Kerry H. Robinson lets you see how it came about that protection of children became the dominant motif in our dealings with children, to children's detriment. She will show you how the fears on which protectionism is based have been constructed out of phantasms like 'stranger danger', despite the fact that almost 90 per cent of sexual assaults on children come from people they know, most often members of their own family circle. Constructing the danger as coming from the unknown Other, the stranger, saves those who are closest to the children from thinking about what dangers they themselves, or their loved ones, might be exposing children to. It is a comfortable arrangement at a terrible cost: a kind of blindness and ignorance among adults and a profound lack of agency on the part of the children.

What Robinson makes absolutely clear throughout this book is that it is important to educate children, to give them both knowledge of sexuality and the critical literacy skills with which they can evaluate the normative and taken-for-granted knowledges through which their lives are being constructed, both by themselves and others.

The fear that knowledge about sex will lead to an increase in sexual promiscuity is not borne out by the research. Quite the reverse – it seems that knowledge opens up greater agency, and a capacity to choose not to be coerced into engaging in undesired sexual activity. Indeed, where school children are taught in an open and positive way about sex, there is more likely to be a delay in sexual activity. That which is taboo or secret has an added excitement attached to it just by virtue of its unspeakability. And where no options other than the normative appear to be available, it is difficult for anyone to resist taking up undesired activities. Learning how discourses work on us and through us, and learning counter-discourses through critical literacy is fundamental to personal agency.

But here we find ourselves caught in a quandary. Robinson's research shows that for many adults, speaking openly and frankly about sex is not an easy task. The paradoxical nature of the space marked by children and sexuality is such that responsible adults may find themselves afraid to be the one who speaks openly, even when they have a very strong belief that they should do so. This fear arises out of our own immersion in normative discourses, but also perhaps because 'knowledge about sex' is taken, in children, to be a tell-tale sign that the child is being sexually abused. Thus telling one's children about sex in an honest and open way may give them knowledge enabling them to make informed and safe choices, but it may also lead to charges of sexual abuse.

Children and sexuality is thus an impossibly complex and difficult space that we must urgently and responsibly open up, at every level of society, for some serious re-thinking. Current sex education curricula are not adequate to the challenge that Robinson's book so deftly sets out – and it seems adults are neither confident nor competent to enter this complex and fraught space without the advantage of an education programme that grants them critical literacy skills too.

How then are we to open up the serious re-thinking that is so evidently required?

First, we need to understand how is it that we have allowed ourselves to talk ourselves into a paradox where, in the name of protection, we fail to arm children with the knowledge they need to protect themselves. How have we bought so deeply into the model of the child as innocent – that is, asexual – when there is so much evidence in front of our eyes that maintaining this image is not about protecting the child at all, but rather about building a prudish society full of people with a false and misleading – even dangerous – sense of self-righteousness? Robinson helps us understand how

we got ourselves into this mess, and lays out a knowledge base with which to begin to think against the grain of normative taken-for-granted clichés and platitudes.

One of the most interesting aspects of Robinson's book is that it enables us to listen to children reflecting on the contradictions that we find between those powerful normative discourses (through which they construct their own identities and projected futures) and their first hand experiences of people who do not fit these normative models. Robinson invites us to listen carefully to the children, not dismissing them as cute and innocent, but learning to respect and admire them as they search for insights into the way the social world works, even while they find themselves trapped in normative versions of identity, gender and human relationships.

What becomes clear is that, if taught to these children, an ethics of commitment to openness to the Other and valuing of difference would enable them make their way through these thorny contradictions. The dominant images and storylines that children encounter in the media and at school are saturated with clichéd, binary thought, where difference is not a positive value, and openness to the Other, in their difference, is not encouraged. They deserve better than this.

Constructing difference as a positive value – not something merely to be tolerated – opens up the space of ethics for children and adults alike. Robinson carefully maps out this space of ethics, offering us a way out of the quagmire of contradiction and fear that lies at the heart of our current constructions of childhood.

Ethics is not just for adults, it is also for children. As Robinson points out, the possibility of ethical practice involves informed reflection, and a willingness to confront dilemmas and make informed choices based on sound knowledge. What we have instead – and what we need to unseat – is the substitution of surveillance for ethical thought and practice that currently pervades neoliberal societies.

At the same time as government has stepped up strategies of surveillance over children (and the adults who share their lives) so much of the violence that is perpetrated against children – including sexual violence – has been normalized. That is, it is no longer visible as something we should be concerned about. Sexual harassment in schools is violent and shocking if we pay attention to it, instead of turning a blind eye to it as current systems of thought and practice enable us to do. The need for ethical sex education for children of all ages is made starkly evident in this book, particularly in the face of the current pervasive reliance on surveillance, and government through fear of risk. What we need is the education of responsible citizens capable of engaging in responsible decision-making that takes into account the effects of those decisions on the well-being of both self and Other.

The courage to open up the conversation about children and sexuality is vital. This book is an excellent place to begin – to find the courage, the

knowledge, and the know-how to de-mythologize children's innocence, to see it rather as an undesirable, imposed ignorance. Robinson provides an important and timely knowledge base with which adults – both parents and teachers – can work toward giving children the skills of critical literacy and a positive appreciation of difference. Children are entitled to the critical literacy skills that would enable them to make informed decisions, and to resist normative pressures where these are unethical and where they undermine the valuing of difference. Ethical practice is not the mindless following of rules, or even obedience to authority, but the continual evaluation of each decision that is made, recognizing that each decision makes a difference.

We are each responsible for the differences we make in the world – none of our actions is without effect on others. We must constantly ask what those effects are. When we support the normative order and uphold the innocence and ignorance of children, we must ask what effects do we have on children's lives? And what effect might we have if we behaved differently?

Robinson will help you to answer these questions.

Bronwyn Davies
University of Melbourne

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children, educators and parents who have offered their time and perspectives which have been foundational to my thinking – the inclusion of their voices grounds many of these ideas. Finally, but certainly not least, my great appreciation goes to Cristyn Davies, for her continued support and encouragement, critical editorial advice, exceptional thinking, care and patience daily.

The contradictory nature of children's contemporary lives

Writing this book and overview of the research

My interest in writing this book has developed over many years and has arisen from my professional experiences in several different and complementary contexts. It is based largely on a body of research I have undertaken over the past 15 years or so that has focused on children and sexuality issues. This body of work has involved multiple projects conducted either individually or collaboratively with colleagues, and has examined the various discourses, practices and policies associated with childhood, childhood and sexuality, childhood innocence, the sexualization of childhood, children's access to sexual knowledge, and children's early education around diversity and difference more generally. Each of these research projects was conducted in Australia, in regional, rural and metropolitan contexts, and included numerous interviews, focus groups and surveys with early childhood educators, parents, youth and children from a broad range of cultural, linguistic and socio-economic class backgrounds. The research projects can be grouped around three main foci. The first was an examination of early childhood educators' perspectives, pedagogical practices, workplace policies and curricula which regulate children's access to knowledge associated with diversity and difference, including a focus on sexuality and the inclusion of same-sex families. This research was conducted with my colleague Criss Jones Díaz (Robinson and Jones Díaz 2000, 2006). The second area of research involved a New South Wales state-wide survey of early childhood educators' perspectives, pedagogical practices, workplace policies and curricula specifically focusing on children and sexuality issues that I conducted with a colleague, Anthony Semann. The third research focus explored the socio-cultural construction of childhood and its intersection with sexuality through identifying the historical, socio-cultural and political discourses that operate in relation to children and sexuality, and children's access to sexual knowledge and sexuality education, as well as exploring children's perspectives and knowledge of sexuality and relationships. This research was conducted with my colleague, Cristyn Davies (Robinson and Davies 2008b; Davies and Robinson 2010).

Currently, as I write this book, I am leading a research team (including Moira Carmody from the University of Western Sydney, Australia, and Sue Dyson from the Australian Research Centre of Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, Australia) on an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant project which explores building ethical relationships in young children's lives. This project is being conducted in two Australian states, New South Wales and Victoria, and involves interviewing primary school teachers, parents of primary school children (5–11-year-olds), and the parents' primary-aged children. The first year of this three-year project was completed at the end of 2011. Many of the issues around childhood, sexuality and sexual knowledge that I have explored with young children in early childhood education in the past are taken up with teachers, parents and children in primary schooling contexts in this larger study. Additional foci in this study include examining sex education curricula in primary schools in New South Wales and Victoria, and investigating parents', children's and teachers' perceptions of ethical and respectful behaviours; how each group practices ethical behaviours; and what strategies parents and teachers use to build children's understandings of ethical behaviours and encourage children's engagement in ethical practices with others. Although the project is not yet complete, the research to date has reconfirmed the findings of my earlier research upon which this book is primarily based.

This book also touches on issues that have been the central focus of my earlier research around sexual harassment in schooling (Robinson 2000, 2005d, 2012a). In this empirical research, I investigated students' and teachers' experiences and perspectives of sexual harassment occurring in schooling contexts. What was eye-opening in this research was just how normalized sexual harassment was in young people's everyday lives, and how integral such practices were to many male students' and teachers' identities, especially to their performance of hegemonic masculinity. For many female teachers (and some male teachers who did not fit dominant representations of masculinity), sexual harassment from male students and peers was also a common experience. What was particularly significant in these cases was how sexual harassment is used as a technology of power to discipline subjects into conforming to hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality, as well as to institutional practices of power. This research, which was conducted in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, pre-empts many of the concerns that were recently raised in the UK report titled *The Sexualization of Young People (Review)* by Linda Papadopoulos (2011). The practices identified in this report are not new. Young children learn to engage in hegemonic practices very early in life, but much of this behaviour is so normalized in the construction of hetero-gendered relationships that it is rendered invisible through the discourse of childhood innocence, often being referred to euphemistically as 'child's play' or 'children being children'.

In addition to this body of research, the development of the ideas and arguments I outline has also been informed by my experience over many years in the area of child protection. As an academic I have taught child protection issues at university to teacher trainees, and I have also been invited to conduct workshops for early childhood educators working in the field. My expertise in this area was primarily informed by my experience as a community crisis worker, working with homeless young women in a refuge for more than five years. As a crisis worker, I undertook training in the area of sexual assault and child sexual abuse, run by the Adelaide Rape Crisis Centre in South Australia. Many of the young women who stayed in the refuge had been sexually abused as children, and the consequences of this abuse had played out in their lives in highly destructive ways. It was during this time that I became acutely aware of the *vulnerabilities* of young women to sexual abuse, especially in their family homes, and the contradictions inherent in 'stranger danger' campaigns. These campaigns take the focus off the fact that in a large proportion of sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is someone the child knows – often a family member. Many of these young women continued to experience exploitation as gendered and sexual subjects throughout their early adult lives. What was equally concerning was their lack of knowledge about their bodies, of sexuality, and their lack of skills and confidence around negotiating intimate relationships in their lives. I also became critically aware of how these young women were often viewed by the community at large. They carried a stigma that stemmed from a perceived *loss of innocence*, which was often exploited again by others. These young women continued to experience the impact of prevailing discourses of childhood innocence. What I found particularly telling was that many of the young women declared that more knowledge of sexual matters at a younger age, and more options to talk openly about these issues as children and young people, would have made a considerable difference to their early lives.

Theoretical frameworks relevant to this book

My discussions around childhood, childhood and sexuality, and knowledge are framed within a post-developmental perspective, and are informed by feminist poststructuralism, queer and postcolonial theories. Through feminist poststructuralism, we are reminded that knowledge is constituted through discourse, is only ever partial, and is political – shifting and changing according to relations of power (Robinson and Jones Díaz 2006). Michel Foucault's notion of discourse is foundational to this perspective. Foucault (1974, 1978, 1980) argued that meaning is not a given, but is socially constructed across different institutional sites and practices. What becomes important to understanding knowledge are the multiple positions and viewpoints from which subjects speak, and the power relations these positions allow and presume. There are multiple discourses or 'truths' that construct the objects of which

they speak, vying for a position of power in the production of meaning. Poststructuralism is concerned with language, signs, images, codes and signifying systems, which organize the psyche, society and everyday social life, and are linked to broader social, political and economic institutions that make up the social body (Robinson and Jones Díaz 2006; Foucault 1980; Sawicki 1991). Viewing childhood within this framework – as discursively constructed – allows for critical multiple readings of what it means to be a child, and opens up different and new understandings of the historically-shifting socio-cultural, political and economic functions that childhood performs in society.

The construction of subjectivity, or of the self, is constituted in the discourses made available to the subject and is always a relational process, involving the negotiation of power (Ball 1990; Burr 1995; Foucault 1974; Robinson and Jones Díaz 2006). Subjectivity is complex, shifting and contradictory, and in this process of negotiation, individuals assess – often unconsciously – the investments of being located in one discourse rather than the others that are available to them (Hollway 1984). Central to the subject within a feminist poststructuralist perspective, regardless of whether the subject is a child, adolescent or adult, is agency: that is, the ability to act with intent and awareness. The child, like the adult, is instrumental in the construction of their own subjectivity and that of others around them, rather than being a passive and powerless victim of socialization as is often assumed (Davies 1994). Stuart Hall (2004: 127) points out that ‘we are subject to discourse, not simply subjects through discourse, with the ability to turn around, contemplate, and rework our subjectivity at will’. Children are capable of critical reflection around the choices that they take up; I have seen them work through this process based on the knowledge they hold and the way that they view the world. In debates around the ‘disappearance of childhood’ (Postman 1982), anxieties arise when the production of subjectivity brings attention to its own construction – in this case, the production of gender and sexual subjectivities. The fluid, unstable and changing nature of subjectivity is brought to the fore, highlighting its inherent openness to new possibilities and definitions (Butler 1990).

Postcolonial theory is also useful in appreciating the ways in which understandings of childhood have been colonized through Western hegemonic modernist discourses. It provides important insights into the socio-cultural construction of discourses of childhood and the adult/child dualism that underpins Western relationships between adults and children. Additionally, it provides a critical framework for demonstrating how the life experiences, voices and knowledge associated with non-heterosexual subjects – constituted as the *Other* in the heterosexual/homosexual binary – have been disqualified and subjugated through colonizing practices. The term *Other* relates to groups that have been marginalized, silenced, denigrated or violated; defined in opposition to, and seen as other than, the privileged and powerful groups that are identified as representing the idealized, mythical norm in society

(Robinson and Jones Díaz 2006). Hegemonic discourses of the child and childhood innocence have been mobilized to support the othering process experienced by non-heterosexual subjects. Power – and how it is used to define and control the lives and silence the voices of the Other – is central to postcolonial perspectives.

Queer theory, stemming from poststructuralist theoretical frameworks, is important in reinforcing understandings of childhood as fluid and unstable, and in reminding us of the socially-constructed nature of the relationship between childhood and sexuality – and equally, between adults and the child (Robinson 2005c; Bruhm and Hurley 2004). Queer theory views all aspects of subjectivity as performance and challenges normalizing practices, especially in terms of sexuality and heteronormative constructions of gender. Within this perspective, the dualistic relationships of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual are destabilized through acknowledging a plurality of sexualities and a multiplicity of genders. This perspective is important for understanding the fluidity of gender and the ways in which young children – as epitomized in the performances of gender represented in ‘princess boys’ – can take up non-conforming performances of gender which most often lead to parental, community and societal concerns and fears (Kilodavis 2010). The concept of queer encompasses those who feel marginalized by hegemonic discourses of heterosexuality (Morris 2000), and queer perspectives operate to question the privilege afforded to heterosexuality as the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ sexuality by which all other sexualities are othered and subjugated. These theories inform my discussion of contemporary childhood.

The rest of this introductory chapter provides an overview of the critical issues relevant to the discussions throughout the book.

The politics and contradictions of children's sexual subjectivities

In Western societies, contemporary childhood has become the most intensely governed period of personal existence. It is a period of extreme surveillance in which the child has become the target of social, political, educational and legal regulations that constitute children as the powerless and dependent Other in relation to adults in society (Rose 1999). Parents have also been subjected to a similar regime of governance in relation to the child. This surveillance has been primarily constituted in the name of *protection* – largely of the *innocence* of childhood – but it has also been instrumental in constituting, regulating and maintaining adult/child and broader socio-cultural relations of power in society. The discourse of protection, often framed as being *in the best interests* of the child, is perpetuated not just through social practices, but also through government policies and legislation that impact on the way that children are viewed and treated in the family, in schools, and in society more broadly. This process of governance acts as a powerful social

control, establishing commanding 'regimes of truth' that act to classify, discipline, normalize and produce what it means to be a child, and, in addition, what it means to be an adult, a good parent, and a good normative adult citizen-subject (Foucault 1977, 1978). Although it is important to have effective social and legal regulations in place to protect children from harm and exploitation, the ways in which this process of governing the child frequently loses sight of children's realities and best interests is explored. What is considered as being in the best interests of the child is often in conflict with those of adults and of the state, and with what is generally considered the natural order of things in society.

Nowhere has the governance of childhood and adults – and the use of 'the child' as a technology of power – been more obvious than in the area of sexuality. This governance, especially in relation to children's sexual subjectivity and the construction of children's knowledge of sexuality, is central to the focus of discussion in this book. Over time, children's sexual subjectivities have been constituted through a range of competing and contradictory discourses in Western societies. These discourses ('children are asexual and innocent'; 'children's sexuality is dangerous to society and needs to be regulated'; 'children's sexuality is normal and critical for the development of a creative and vibrant society'; 'sexuality is dangerous to the moral development of the child'; and 'children are vulnerable to abuses and exploitation by adult sexuality and need to be protected') have all impacted the ways in which children have been and continue to be viewed and treated as sexual subjects. An additional discourse around children's sexual subjectivity that is critical to processes of regulation is that children are *naturally* heterosexual. The 'queer' child, 'whose play confirms neither the comfortable stories of child (a)sexuality nor the supposedly blissful promises of adult heteronormativity' (Bruhm and Hurley 2004: ix), often manifests in social panic. The discussions in this book are primarily concerned with the politics of children's sexual subjectivities and the power relationships that operate around these competing discourses. Also of concern are the contradictions that prevail around childhood and sexuality – contradictions that are often rendered invisible through processes of normalization, and operate not just to regulate the child and the adult but also the dominant relations of power in society.

Since the 1980s, adults' fears and anxieties around potential threats to the child and to the nature of childhood itself have intensified. This is reflected in the media and in an increase in government and community organizations and events that focus on protecting the child. For example, in Australia, organizations such as The Child Protection Society and the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) actively campaign to increase awareness of children's vulnerabilities and need for protection. These fears and anxieties have been linked to a range of factors. First, there has been an increased awareness of the extensiveness of child sexual abuse in the home since the 1980s, largely as a result of feminist agitation in

this area. However, community and media focus on child abuse has been primarily on 'stranger danger', or the paedophile, as the central threat to the safety and wellbeing of children. Second, adult fears and anxieties have intensified due to children's increased access to information and communication technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones. This uneasiness is linked to concerns about children having unlimited and easy access to 'inappropriate' adult information; to parental concerns about children's increased vulnerabilities to paedophiles through the Internet; and to the perception that children are easily exploitable targets of unscrupulous advertisers. Anxieties and fears have also intensified as a result of what has commonly become termed the 'sexualization' and 'adultification' of representations of children (Postman 1982; Rush and La Nauze 2006; Levin 2009; Olfman 2009), especially girls, in popular culture, media and advertising. All of these issues are central to current social and political debates in countries such as Australia, the USA and the UK, and are perceived by many to be placing Western children 'at risk' and destroying what is popularly understood as childhood. Many parents also feel that they are being left behind in terms of technological advancements and new media, which have become so much part of the everyday lives of their tech-savvy children. Concerns about the 'disappearance of childhood' through its increasing commodification and the breakdown of traditional characteristics that have distinguished childhood from adulthood, such as children's access to adult 'secrets' or knowledge (e.g. sexuality) and to adult language (e.g. 'dirty' words), have resulted in the widespread perception that childhood is in crisis (Postman 1982; Winn 1984; Rush and La Nauze 2006; Levin and Kilbourne 2008). Catch-cries of 'Let children be children' ring loud in these debates, as do calls for increased regulation of media and popular culture, reflecting parents increasing concerns about how best to 'protect' their children in a changing world where they themselves often feel they are losing control.

This book offers a contribution to these international debates, critiquing among other issues the lack of children's and youths' voices, the dismissal of children's agency as sexual subjects, and the inadequate analysis of the broader discursive relationships between childhood and sexuality that significantly influence the ways in which discussions around this subject have played out. Fear and anxiety about children's and youths' sexual agency, particularly the sexual agency of girls, continues to prevail in these debates: dominant discourses around childhood and children's relationships with sexuality assert that sexuality lies – or should lie – inherently outside of the child's domain, resulting in practices such as censorship and policing of children's environments by adults in order to protect children. However, this logic and behaviour is in fact *counter-productive* to the protection of children. Rather than sheltering children, I argue that developing their critical literacy and fostering their competencies, knowledge and agency will do far more to support their health and wellbeing. Agency, understood here as the

power of an individual to actively engage in the construction of their self (or *subjectivity*), is not inherent in the subject but is an element of signification and repetition. Individuals do not entirely devise their own subjectivity, as agency is always constrained by discourses such as cultural norms, taboos, conventions, laws, age and social class that 'invest our bodies with meaning' (Lloyd 2007: 58). Judith Butler (1990, 2004), taking up a Foucauldian framework, points out that the socio-cultural and political practices that produce gendered subjects (or other aspects of subjectivity) are also the sites where critical agency is possible: they become spaces of potential transformation through resistance.

Childhood innocence as a regulatory tool

The primary influence on the precarious relationship between childhood and sexuality has been the humanist concept of childhood innocence – the most important signifier of the socio-culturally-constructed differences between adulthood and childhood in Western societies. Childhood innocence has been historically manufactured as a means of regulating the lives of both children and adults. It continues to be a major force – albeit in the name of protection – in the subjugation of children's lives, and underpins the dualistic relationships of *the world of adults* and *the world of children*, and of *adults' knowledge* and *children's knowledge*, which function to maintain relations of power in Western society (Meyer 2007). The regulation of children's access to what has become *adults-only* knowledge stems largely from adult fears of children's perceived loss of innocence. The justification for this regulation has been linked to the perception that accessing this knowledge too early may impact on children's normal and healthy emotional and physical development, scarring them for life.

In the context of sexuality, the use of childhood innocence as a tool of censorship has done little to help protect children. Rather, I argue, it has contributed significantly to children's vulnerability in several ways. First, childhood innocence has been mobilized to justify the regulation of children's access to important knowledge, which has undermined their development as competent, well-informed, critical-thinking and ethical young citizens. Second, it has been employed to deny children's sexual subjectivities and desires – that is, their sense of self as sexual beings. The perception that sexuality is irrelevant to young children dismisses a core component of what makes up their subjectivities, or selves. Young children are engaged on a daily basis in constituting their subjectivities and negotiating the discourses of ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality and so on that are available to them across the different social fields in which they operate (Davies 1989, 1993). They are given little critical guidance in negotiating the various and contradictory discourses they encounter, particularly in relation to sexuality. Third, childhood innocence has been deployed in the censorship and regulation of

sexuality, with the result that sexuality has become a taboo subject, particularly for children. This has contributed to the fetishization of the child and of childhood innocence as a focus of desire for some adults (Kincaid 1998). Socio-cultural taboos around sexuality have resulted in its being viewed as *difficult knowledge* – that is, knowledge that many adults find challenging to address in their own lives, but especially with children. Childhood innocence can function as a convenient excuse for adults/parents not to address sexual knowledge with children. Children learn early that you do not talk about these issues with adults, or even parents.

Discourses of childhood and childhood innocence have constituted and regulated the normative adult citizen-subject in Western contexts. This normative adult citizen has historically been represented as white, middle-class, heterosexual, and upholding of Christian family morals and values (Berlant 1997; Bell and Binnie 2000; Richardson 1998). Politicians and ‘moral entrepreneurs’ (Becker 1963) have successfully utilized fears of the perceived disappearance of childhood to rally public sentiment and support for largely conservative social, political and economic policies and reforms. But the governance of children, their sexual subjectivities and knowledge of sexuality is not just about maintaining the discourse of childhood innocence or hegemonic understandings of childhood. Rather, this governance, I argue, is also about constructing children as heteronormative citizen-subjects. Discourses of childhood and childhood innocence underpin everyday technologies of power, and regulate children’s early educational experiences in order to maintain the hegemony of heteronormative subjects. The production of the ‘good’, normative adult citizen-subject has important implications for what is considered appropriate education for children and their constitution as *future* heteronormative citizens. Thus, while the discourse of childhood innocence constructs children as asexual subjects and positions knowledge of sexuality as developmentally inappropriate, it is not utilized in the same manner to disrupt and intervene in the construction of children as heterosexual subjects. Contrary to the position of sexual knowledge as detrimental to children, the heteronormalization of children is not viewed as problematic and is a process that is largely rendered invisible through the ubiquity of heteronormative models in children’s literature, play, early educational curricula and discourses of child development (Robinson 2005c).

The changing nature of children’s lives

It seems that one of the greatest reasons for adults’ fears and anxieties around childhood is that children *are* changing. Childhood has changed – indeed, is ever-changing – and children on the whole seem to adapt more successfully to these changes than adults. Like adulthood, childhood changes in response to shifts in socio-cultural, political and economic conditions over time. The reality for many children is that they are living in a world that is

increasingly different from that of their parents and grandparents. It is a world in which parents, grandparents and other generations of adults cling to a nostalgia that idealizes and romanticizes a perception of childhood as happy, carefree, naïve and innocent. In reality, this perspective rarely reflects their own, or their child's, experiences – or those of most children in non-Western cultures. Western 'tween' culture (ages 8–12) for example, is a representation of socio-cultural and economic changes in children's lives, especially in the lives of girls. Tween girls' interactions with popular culture and consumerism, and their quests for agency, raise adults' concerns and anxieties. The construction of 'the teenager' decades prior roused similar adult concerns, anxieties and calls for censorship in popular culture – especially surrounding music, which was viewed as potentially dangerous and corrupting of girls' 'innocence' and 'virtue', as well as to the morals of society more generally (Austin and Willard 1997). The construction of the teenager was as much a representation of historical socio-cultural changes such as transformations in economies, consumerism, family structures and childhood as it was of popular culture (Jackson 2006).

More recently, changes in socio-cultural and political discourses around diverse sexualities, same-sex relationships and families in some Western countries, for instance, have meant that many children and young people are increasingly experiencing different views, choices and options about sexuality than those experienced by previous generations. These changes are also an indication that more are openly living in same-sex families. In addition to these socio-cultural and political changes, scientific progress in reproductive technologies is now challenging normative narratives of sexual reproduction. Many children, regardless of the gender and sexuality of their parents, are increasingly born through supported reproductive technologies. Against this background, current understandings of children's sexual subjectivities and approaches to children's sexuality education are out of step with the reality of many children's lives.

The importance of children's voices in current debates and in constructing knowledge of children's sexual subjectivities

Significantly, this book contributes to filling a critical gap that exists in relation to the inclusion of children's perspectives and voices around sexuality, relationships and their own sexual subjectivities. Understanding and perceiving children as active knowing agents in the construction of their own – and the policing of others' – sexual subjectivities is a controversial subject. The controversial nature of this topic contributes to the limited research in this area (Jackson 1982; Renold 2005; Blaise 2010; Robinson and Davies 2010; Davies and Robinson 2010; Robinson 2012a). The discourse of child protection has intensified the cautiousness and regulation associated

with children's participation in research, especially research of this kind. There are also fears about the vulnerability of children to exploitation in the research process, which rightly results in strict ethical and legal regulations governing researchers. Ken Plummer, a US sociologist, pointed out more than 20 years ago that there is a lack of information and understanding around children's perceptions of sexuality. This is still the case today. Plummer comments:

What is important is the mode of approach: looking at sexuality through the child's eyes to grasp how [the child] actively has to construct a sexual world. What matters is how the child interprets sexuality. Of this we know very little.

(Plummer 1990: 240)

The vulnerability of researchers in this area to becoming personal targets of moral panic initiated by conservative and right-wing individuals and groups is a further issue impacting on the lack of children's voices and perspectives on this topic. It is not uncommon for academics and other professionals to self-regulate and move away from doing this research out of fear of the technologies of power that they can be subjected to, particularly through the media.

Constructing the vulnerable child

The constitution of innocence, pivotal in the hegemonic definition of childhood, along with the moral panic often associated with children and sexuality, increases children's vulnerabilities to exploitation and abuse. This occurs primarily through the way these discourses contribute to children's lack of language, knowledge, voice and agency to negotiate more effectively the experiences, situations and incidences they encounter in their early lives (Corteen and Scraton 1997; Kitzinger 1990; Plummer 1990; Robinson 2005b, 2005c, 2008; Hawkes and Egan 2008). Children are rarely given the vocabulary to talk about their sexual bodies, or the permission to talk about sexual matters (Gittins 1998; Robinson 2005b; Robinson and Jones Díaz 2006; Egan and Hawkes 2008, 2010). Denying children access to knowledge – and to frank and open discussions around the questions they have in relation to their bodies, sexuality and relationships – leave children 'to sort out their scripts with peers, media or alone in secretive and dark corners' (Plummer 1990: 239). To increase children's resilience, it is critical that children are given the appropriate tools – including knowledge, critical thinking skills and language – to become competent individuals and negotiate more effectively and ethically their everyday interactions, relationships and experiences with peers and adults (Robinson 2005a).

Building ethical relationships around diversity and difference early in children's lives

It is also important that young children (and adults) are aware of and able to build a critical understanding of diverse sexed bodies, sexualities and genders. Some people are born as intersex – that is, with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person may be born with genitals that seem to be in-between the usual male and female bodies. Decisions by doctors and parents are made at birth about the construction of the child's sex. Others can experience changes in their sexual anatomy at puberty which impact on their assumed gender identities at birth and can have serious implications for the child and their families (Intersex Society of North America 2012). The constitution of the sexed body as fixed in the male and female binary marginalizes those who have different experiences of their sex. It is also important for children and adults to understand the fluidity of gender; that is, that performances of masculinity and femininity are not always aligned with constructed male/female norms (Butler 1990; Halberstam 2005). Some females take up masculinity as their preferred expression of gender subjectivity. Equally, some males' performances of gender are not aligned with hegemonic masculinity, but are instead infused with characteristics that have been constituted as feminine. In both instances, such non-conformance is generally met with adult concerns, anxieties and the regulation of children's behaviours to adhere to gender norms. Children need to be aware that sexuality is not fixed, but fluid. For many young people, negotiating desires for another person outside the boundaries of heteronormativity can be extremely difficult, and can have dire consequences if they have to do this negotiating alone. Children's critical awareness of sexuality is important in order to foster ethical relationships around diversity and difference early in life, and to counteract, for example, the homophobia and heterosexism encountered by non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming subjects. The stark realities of homophobia and heterosexism in children's and young people's lives are reflected in the high rates of suicide and suicide ideation amongst gay and lesbian youth who grapple with discrimination (Denborough 1996; Mac An Ghaill 1994). This is not just an issue faced by young people who identify as non-heterosexual, but is also faced by all children and adults who are perceived by others to be transgressing normalized, heterosexualized gendered identities, regardless of their actual sexualities. A large percentage of hate crimes perpetrated against gays, lesbians and those perceived to be non-heterosexual as a result of their gender non-conformance are enacted by male youth (Mason and Tomsen 1997; Chasnoff and Cohen 1997). Such fear and hatred does not just happen one day at puberty, but is formed through the construction of children's gendered and sexual subjectivities, framed and policed within the rigid boundaries of historically, socially and politically specific practices (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Renold 2006).

The social construction of childhood

Understanding childhood as a social construction which is fluid and changing across time and space is foundational to the arguments presented in this book. Children are not inherently innocent and unknowledgeable, but rather are engaged in making meaning in their everyday lives and, as mentioned earlier, actively negotiate competing discourses that they encounter in order to constitute themselves as intelligible subjects (Davies 1989, 1993). Children make choices in their lives, but these are always limited by their knowledge and by the specific socio-cultural relations of power that constrain their possibilities, options and agency. These understandings of childhood – theoretically located within poststructuralist frameworks – are in stark contrast to traditional humanist perspectives of childhood, which emerged within the Western historical context of the Enlightenment and positioned adulthood and childhood as oppositional entities.

Normative narratives of time and space are constituted within universalized Western Enlightenment discourses of what it means to be human. The Enlightenment fostered the notion of a universal human history united by the common ideals of human reason and rationality, and progress and perfection – all reinforced by and founded on scientific ‘truths’ and Western philosophical ideals (Erickson and Murphy 2003). Western psychological discourses of human development emerged from these humanist, modernist perspectives, constructing childhood, adolescence and adulthood as linear and framed by categorical biological markers of human maturation. Within humanist frameworks, these life stages are rigidly separated from each other according to age and stages in cognitive and physical development, which inflexibly define what it means to be a child, adolescent or adult (Piaget 1973 [1929], 1959; Durkheim 1956). Overlapping this process of development are other biological and cultural life markers that also operate as signifiers of maturation along this linear pathway to adulthood, such as schooling, sexual maturity, starting work, voting, marriage, reproduction and retirement. Simultaneously, these markers not only constitute and reinforce culturally-defined boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood, but also function as hegemonic socio-cultural, political and economic organizing principles of human relations in society.

In discourses of human development, the adult/child binary constitutes childhood in opposition to adulthood, with the child viewed as inherently different from adults. Binary relationships are representative of hierarchical power relationships: in this case, the child is subordinate to the adult, and becomes the Other in the adult/child relationship. As Elliott (2010: 196) aptly points out, ‘binaries provide ideological justification for social inequality’. Within this culturally constructed adult/child relationship, the differences between adults and children are perceived as logical and natural, and children’s dependence and powerlessness is assumed. This ‘common-sense’ knowledge about adults and children prevails, and the differences are

regulated in daily interactions and in language. For example, the practice of chastising adults with phrases such as 'Don't act like a child', or disciplining children for behaving like adults and acting beyond their age, operate to maintain the binary relationship between adults and children.

Despite the critiques and shifts to post-developmental perspectives in studies of childhood internationally, the discourse of developmentally-appropriate practice continues to dominate rationales for increased regulations and censorship around children's learning, access to knowledge and popular culture, and for dismissing and/or trivializing children's active involvement in decision-making in both their own lives and in broader socio-cultural political arenas in many Western countries. As is demonstrated throughout this book, children at very young ages are already actively making decisions about their identities, and engaging in behaviours, processes and practices that many adults consider developmentally inappropriate or irrelevant to children's lives, especially with regard to politics, gendered relationships and sexuality.

Defining sexuality

From feminist poststructuralist and queer perspectives, sexuality is a socio-cultural construction that intersects with the body. Sexuality is viewed as being a fluid, non-linear, multifaceted, complex, contradictory and unstable aspect of human subjectivity that varies across cultures and over historical periods of time (Britzman 1997; Foucault 1977; Weeks 1986). These theoretical frameworks are in contrast with more traditional humanist perspectives, which consider sexuality to be a fixed, biologically inherent aspect of the human subject that largely emerges at puberty as part of the process of human development. Biologically determinist readings of sexuality produced by the humanist school have been challenged in recent times by critical social theorists, who have argued that sexuality and sexual desire are discursively constituted and are the result of social relations of power (Foucault 1977; Weeks 1986; Butler 1990). Jeffrey Weeks, a UK sociologist points out that sexuality exists through social forms and social organization, and this perspective influences the way that sexuality is viewed in this book. Weeks argues:

Sexuality is something which society produces in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate, and those who resist. Sexuality is not a given, it is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency.

(Weeks 1986: 25)

Foucault points out that sexuality is the 'precise point where the disciplinary and the regulatory, the body and the population, are articulated'

(Foucault 1997: 252). Sexuality not only operates as a regulatory and disciplinary technology of the self, but is also a critical point through which the 'massifying' of power is articulated – that is, the process through which technologies of power are extended to the social body, regulating and governing populations. This is what Foucault terms biopower, or the 'biopolitics of the human race' (1997: 243). Biopolitics deals with the population as a political problem and as 'power's problem' (1997: 245). It incorporates the use of regulatory State mechanisms (e.g. forecasts, statistical estimates, overall measures) that counteract and control the randomness of populations in order to 'optimize a state of life' (1997: 246). Foucault argues that sexuality in the nineteenth century became a field of vital strategic importance for two main reasons: first, for the purposes of social sanitization. The undisciplined sexual body, according to Foucault's analysis, is open to disease and degeneracy; this link historically precipitated the regulation and disciplining of individuals' sexual behaviours through constant surveillance. Second, the field of sexuality was strategically important in order to regulate and discipline the biological processes of procreation in populations, with a particular focus on hygiene and the medicalization of reproduction. The mass perpetuation and regulation of the heteronormative sexual subject and the good citizen-subject is dependent on the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses of childhood and childhood innocence.

Sexuality has been primarily constituted and regulated within the context of a heterosexual/homosexual binary relationship, in which heterosexuality is considered the norm and a natural expression of sexuality, while all non-heterosexual identities are defined as deviant and unnatural. The privilege and power associated with heterosexual relationships is perpetuated both systemically (for example in legal, medical and education systems, as well as across various religious faiths) and through the micro-relationships of everyday interactions between individuals. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) subjects have had to struggle for recognition and access to civil and human rights, and to resist the marginalization imposed on them. The critical socio-cultural and political recognition of same-sex relationships and rights to marriage achieved by gays and lesbians in recent times in many Western countries has challenged the marginalization produced by this binary relationship of power, but inequities and experiences of violence still persist. The construction of the homosexual subject in relation to the child continues to be fraught, as conservative moral entrepreneurs and politicians mobilize myths about paedophilia and 'folk devils' (Cohen 1972) to undermine the gains made by non-heterosexual subjects. This moral panic is explored in Chapter 3. I share Canadian educationalist Deborah Britzman's (2000: 37) view of sexuality as 'a human right of free association' and as a *force* that is vital to human passion, interest, explorations and disappointments. As I point out in this book, children, in their own ways, share in experiencing this force in their early lives. However, this force

is undermined and contained through strict regulatory practices that have not only operated to construct the sexual child, but have significantly defined the 'good' adult sexual citizen and the 'good' parent. These regulatory practices have not only defined what children should or should not be, or should or should not know, but they have also defined what adults should/should not be, and what, when and how they should or should not educate children about sexuality and other difficult knowledge.

Pepper Schwartz and Dominic Cappello (2001) define sexuality in broad terms, referring to the sum total of our sexual desire, behaviour and self-identity. It is this perception of sexuality that is encompassed in this book. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in multiple ways, and our emotions, desires and relationships are constructed by the cultures in which we live. This approach contrasts with reductive views, which narrowly define sexuality by the physical sexual act, thus contributing to the perception that sexuality is irrelevant to children (Robinson 2005a, 2005b). Sexuality does not only relate to the physical embodiment of sexual feelings and who one chooses to do what with, but it is also about one's subjectivity and how one performs being a sexualized subject. Sexuality is equally as important to children's subjectivity as other components such as ethnicity, gender and social class. Sexuality is not the exclusive realm of adults, but also belongs to children's experience: like adults, children constantly negotiate the discourses of sexuality available to them, and constantly try to understand themselves as sexual beings (Blaise 2010; Jackson 1982; Goldman and Goldman 1982; Renold 2006; Davies and Robinson 2010). Children's understandings and emotional and physical experiences of sexuality may be different from those of adults, but they nonetheless engage in the construction of their sexuality and sexual desire early in life, as is demonstrated in Chapter 5. It is in this context of the social construction of sexuality and childhood that we can view the ways in which sexuality has been culturally and historically defined as adults-only, and children have been largely excluded from this knowledge. Developmentalist discourses have constituted children as too young to have an understanding of 'adult' concepts such as sexuality. This perception is intimately linked with and reinforced by dominant religious and moral values (Gittins 1998).

The social construction of the relationship between childhood and sexuality

Within humanist discourses of sexuality, physiological sexual maturity has represented the boundary between adulthood and childhood (Gittins 1998). Sexuality is generally considered to begin at puberty and mature in adulthood, and children's sexuality within this discourse is considered immature or non-existent. Childhood innocence is most frequently equated to purity and naïvety, which is positioned in contrast to sexual knowledge. This innocence

is perceived as natural and normal in the child, who is essentially constructed as asexual – which is ironic considering the great lengths adults have historically gone to in order to curb the sexual tendencies of young children (Wolfenstein 1998). Sigmund Freud was one of the first to offer a different perspective from the humanist construction of children's sexuality when he argued that sexuality is an active and normal part of children's lives. Freud believed that children's initial feelings connecting them to the world (especially to the mother) were sexual in nature, and upheld that the repression of children's sexuality could result in various psychoses in adulthood. Despite the critiques of Freud's theory of children's sexuality (e.g. lack of empirical evidence; feminist concerns around the seductive child; and sexual abuse that perpetuated 'blaming the victim'), his perspective provided a counter-discourse to children as asexual or as dormant sexual subjects, and offered an alternate perspective of children as engaged sexual beings with desire. Still, children's sexuality has remained taboo in Western culture. Expressions of children's physical sexual desires are highly regulated and hidden away, especially from public display: they are rarely spoken about in public; they are under-researched, as I pointed out earlier; and have largely been repressed and rendered invisible through the discourse of childhood innocence and regulations stemming from cultural values, morals and taboos. Through this regulation, sexuality has become constituted as an exclusive realm – a world in which children have been constituted as vulnerable and in need of protection from predatory adults.

Children's desire for knowledge of sexuality

Children become frustrated when they do not get information or find a meaning through which they can come to terms with and understand their sexuality. Ron Goldman and Juliette Goldman (1982) argue that adults must be honest when discussing sex with children. Schwartz and Cappello (2001) also point out that it is necessary for adults to discuss sexuality with children in order to deconstruct and reconstruct children's understandings around the difficulties often encountered surrounding their sexuality. Goldman and Goldman (1982) conducted two major studies on children's sexual thinking and experiences. Based on their findings, they recommended that the subject of sexuality should be introduced to children early in their lives. They argue that if this information is not made available to children early, they tend to complete the picture of sex differences, sexual relations and other sexuality information from their imagination or by shared ignorance with friends (see also Davies and Robinson 2010). Goldman and Goldman (1982) also point out that as children get older and become more aware of the socio-cultural values that predominate around sexuality, it becomes more difficult for adults to introduce and discuss sexuality with children. In their study, teenagers reported that they wished they had had access to sexual knowledge much

earlier in their lives. This way, they would have avoided the bewilderment surrounding their sexuality, especially due to the changes which occur during puberty. This desire for knowledge around sexuality was reiterated in research conducted with children by Chasnoff and Cohen (1997). However, in this later research, children extended this desire for knowledge to include information around differences in sexual orientation. It is important to include children's voices and perspectives on sexuality (Rademakers *et al.* 2000) in order to understand more about children's sexual subjectivities and to provide more effective sexuality education for all children. Children's voices are rarely part of such discussions, largely as a result of the regulatory practices that this book addresses. The inclusion of children's voices, as well as those of their parents, can offer valuable insight into how children view sexuality, construct their own sexual subjectivities, and regulate those of other children.

Key arguments in this book

To conclude this introductory discussion, I want to reiterate the arguments that are key to this book. The social construction of childhood innocence which prevails in Western countries, and in some developing countries, is detrimental to children's wellbeing and their development as competent, responsible, resilient, critical-thinking subjects with agency in their lives. Childhood innocence is mobilized to regulate children's access to certain knowledge constituted as adults-only, with sexual knowledge the most controversial of these areas of regulation. Through the denial of accurate information and open discussions in the area of sexuality, often in the name of protecting children's innocence, adults have intensified children's vulnerability to exploitation and abuse and to the undermining of their health and wellbeing more generally in the area of sexuality. In light of the changing nature of childhood in the twenty-first century, it is critical to find ways to work with children that provide them with the skills and agency to negotiate the broad socio-cultural changes occurring in their lives. However, normative representations of the child and childhood innocence have a broader role in society in that they have been utilized to regulate dominant relations of power and constitute the heteronormative adult citizen-subject. The child is used as a powerful tool for perpetuating particular political agendas that maintain certain social inequalities.

Chapter overviews

The chapters in this book constitute an in-depth exploration of the relationship between childhood and sexuality; of children's sexual subjectivities; of the mobilization of childhood innocence as a regulatory tool; of knowledge and power; and of the debates that prevail around censorship and contemporary childhood. Following is a brief overview of the focus of each chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a discussion of 'difficult knowledge', 'subjugated knowledge' and a *hierarchy of difference*, examining the relevance of these concepts to the construction of knowledge in childhood and to the maintenance of the Western binary relationship of adult/child. This binary is crucial to the regulation of children's participation in society and the transfer of knowledge across generations, as well as to how children's production of knowledge is subjugated in Western societies. This chapter also examines children's relationships with discourses of citizenship in Western societies, particularly sexual citizenship. Children's relationship to sexual citizenship is explored in two main ways: first through the ways in which the concepts of *childhood* and *innocence* have been utilized to regulate children's access to knowledge of sexuality and to deny their relevance and access to sexual citizenship; and second through the ways in which these two concepts are intimately connected as a means of constituting and governing the 'good' normative adult citizen-subject. I propose that the constitution of the heteronormative adult citizen-subject has critical implications for what is considered appropriate education for young children, who are constituted as *future* heteronormative citizens.

Chapter 3 provides a brief historical overview of the construction of children's sexuality and the constitution of sexuality as dangerous to children. This discussion incorporates how innocence has become discursively synonymous with childhood, contributing to the discourse of sexuality as dangerous and to the construction of children as vulnerable subjects. It explores how society's endeavours to protect children's innocence by operating 'in the best interests of the child' have ironically made children far more vulnerable through the regulation of children's knowledge, especially sexual knowledge. Childhood innocence is examined as a social construction defined within the binary relationship of adult/child and regulated by broad socio-cultural and political practices. In addition, the chapter explores how childhood innocence is employed by politicians and social conservatives to instigate moral panic in order to maintain the hegemonic discourses of childhood and the normative social order in societies. The discussion includes a focus on moral panic and censorship relating to children and sexuality, and an overview and critique of the contemporary international debates about the sexualization of childhood in the media, advertising and the arts which have called for increased censorship. A critical consequence of censorship – the repression of children's sexuality over the centuries and the insistence of childhood innocence – has been the commodification and fetishization of the child and of childhood innocence.

Chapter 4 examines the technologies of power operating in schools that regulate children's access to knowledge of sexuality and also regulate the behaviours of teachers. The constitution of the child as a heteronormative subject is central to this regulation. Foucault's knowledge/power nexus is used to frame how schooling policies, practices and curricula maintain binary

relationships between adults and children, and between heterosexual and homosexual subjects, in order to maintain hegemonic, heteronormative power relations. In this chapter, I provide an overview of such regulation in selected Western countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, and demonstrate how discourses of risk and moral panic constitute and instil understandings of the heteronormative citizen-subject early in children's lives.

Chapter 5 includes an exploration, based on qualitative research with children (and their parents), of the construction of children's sexual subjectivities and of their desires. The hegemonic discourses which children mobilize in this process of subjectification are examined, as are the discourses they utilize to construct their knowledge of relationships, intimacy, love and sexual subjectivity. A particular focus is given to the ways in which children often construct themselves as heteronormative subjects and how they police the normative construction of gender and sexuality in the lives of their peers. However, childhood as a counter-public, or a space in which non-normative performances of childhood and gender are possible, are also discussed.

Chapter 6, based on qualitative research with parents, explores the construction of parents' sexual subjectivities in childhood, and how their experiences as children and young adults have impacted on their perspectives of their children's sexual subjectivities and their approaches to educating their children about sexuality. The anxieties that many adults experience around their children's sexual subjectivities and with talking about sexuality with their children are examined. Through their inability and/or discomfort in dealing with sexuality issues with children, many parents reinforce social taboos associated with speaking about sexuality. Many adults are highly anxious about addressing sexuality with children and often struggle to know when and how to approach this subject. Despite many parents' negative childhood experiences surrounding sex education and their aims to do it differently with their own children, many parents are unskilled and lack the confidence to educate their children effectively in this area. The chapter also examines the tensions between normative narratives of gender and sexuality that prevail in children's lives and the alternative narratives that some parents wish to convey to their children.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, is a summation of the central issues raised and of the main arguments in the book. This chapter provides practical strategies for approaching children's sexual subjectivity and sexuality education, based on the issues and arguments raised throughout the book. These strategies are intended to support educators and other professionals working with children – as well as parents – in their efforts to deal with children's sexuality education more productively.

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