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Doing the Möbius Strip: The Politics of the *Bailey Review*

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This paper argues that recent sexualisation discourses are problematic in several ways: they assume that all sexual materials are harmful, they smuggle in normative assumptions about good and bad sex, and they conflate sexism and sexuality in ways which function to restrict femininity. Through an analysis of the history of sexualisation discourses, and their recent deployment in the United Kingdom government's 2011 *Bailey Review*, we argue that it would be useful to unpack the concept of sexualisation into its earlier form: 'sexual socialisation'. This would shift the focus from individual girls, and the policing of their sexual behaviour, to wider societal forces, making space for exploration of the normativity and sexism operating within these. We draw on the image of the möbius strip to capture the subtle co-dependence of representations of young women as innocent, passive recipients of sexualisation, and as neoliberal choice-making subjects. On both sides of the strip oppression is something that is either simply present or absent for a particular subject. A turn to 'sexual socialisation' rather than 'sexualisation' could offer a way of escaping this möbius strip and moving towards an understanding of gendered relations of power as simultaneously enabling and limiting gendered subjectivity and agency.

Keywords: Bailey review, childhood, commercialisation, sexualisation, sexual socialisation.

Introduction

In their submissions to the *Bailey Review* consultation, the NSPCC (2011a, 2011b) expressed grave concerns that discourses on sexualisation are conflating sexualisation with sexuality, and facts with values. First on their list of policy priorities

was greater conceptual clarity regarding which processes within the rubric of 'sexualisation' will cause 'harm' and which ones 'are normal' (2011b: 10, 16): 'We need to differentiate between what may be harmful to children and young people, and what may be sexual, and perhaps even offensive, but does not cause harm. The definition of sexualisation should be based on a proper understanding of children and young people's development' (2011a: 1). In agreement with such concerns, we argue that that a turn to the investigation of 'sexual socialisation' would attend more precisely to the question of harm and suffering, separated from what is sexual but not harmful, or even beneficial. However, we would also like to separate out questions of harmful and non-harmful sexual socialisation from unhelpful divisions between 'normal' and 'abnormal' sex (Rubin, 1984): a conflation which is subtly smuggled into many discourses on sexualisation.

Assumptions underlying many feminist discourses on sexualisation in the United Kingdom have caused them to politically backfire, in a way which is reminiscent of the uneasy relationship between radical feminism and the Christian far right in the 'porn wars' of the 1980s (Vance, 1992). With the innocence of 'girls' situated as the object of sexualisation, these discourses have conflated *sexism* with *sexuality* in discussing media representations and social practices. This has facilitated the re-deployment of the issue of sexualisation by right-wing discursive actors to police young femininity. We are not opposed to intervention to address the threat posed to women, of any age, from misogyny. Sexualisation discourses, however, have come to focus on threats to a restrictive notion of decency. In this way, both feminist and right-wing discursive actors have mobilised and affirmed the sexist division between pure and impure, innocent and sexual, forms of female identity.

We shall begin with a brief account of the history of discourses on sexualisation in the United Kingdom since 1992, before moving on to an analysis of the 2011 *Bailey Review on the Sexualisation and Commercialisation of Childhood*.

The context of the *Bailey Review*

The term 'sexualisation' first appeared within UK public discourse in 1992-3 in a series of articles in *The Independent*, discussing adolescent sexuality and threats to childhood innocence. In an article of November 1992, entitled 'The Crisis of Teenage

Pregnancies', Dr. Fay Hutchinson of the London Brook Advisory Centre was cited as arguing for the need for more effective sex education, to protect girls from the pregnancies which follow from 'an explicit sexualisation of our young people. We allow them adult clothes and adult things' when, in fact, 'at 13 and 14 these girls are more at the stage of needing to love puppies and kittens. At this age girls like fluffy toys' (Hall, 1992).

In the UK press, 'sexualisation' came increasingly to refer to a social and moral corruption of girls by impure sexual representations in the commercial media. Any girl showing signs of adult sexuality was situated as 'mainstreaming' the abnormal predilections of adult sexual predators, thereby making every child more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Hanson (1996) wrote the following in *The Independent* on the 'sexualisation of children's clothes':

> I loathe the sexualisation of children's clothes. I think it gives all sorts of strange messages. I hate seeing children done up in what are really caricatures of sexy adults' clothes suggesting an identity that isn't part of childhood - very tight, black and shimmery and glittery. I think mothers have a responsibility to ensure that children have a childhood. The younger the child is, the more complicated. There are people who have confused boundaries about sexuality and I don't think we should put opportunity in their way.

Innocent appearances are here assumed to protect girls from sexual threats, whereas sexualised attitudes, tastes and behaviours are seen as degrading girls and removing these protections. In this way, as Egan and Hawkes (2010) have pointed out, the innocent girl is always haunted by the possibility of the girl 'gone skank' (Oppliger, 2008), who is represented as dirty or trashy in a way which is often clearly classed and racialised (Ringrose, forthcoming 2012): as other commentators have pointed out, it is low-cost shops like Primark and R&B music videos which are most frequently the objects of concern. In the case of the innocent girl, blame and responsibility are located in popular culture and media which can easily 'get into' the girl – rather like the demons of previous eras (Barker, 2011). However, once she has been sexualised, all blame and responsibility rest with the individual herself. Blaming popular media and blaming the individual both draw attention away from wider social issues which, as Boynton (2011) points out, may be far more pressing in the lives of

young people and parents, such as poverty – with 3.5 million children in the UK living below the poverty line, social exclusion, and everyday bullying and violence.

This rhetoric depends upon two subtle discursive moves. The first is the identification of young women with little children, mobilising the semantic ambiguity of the term 'girls'. This move operates in both directions, with fears expressed over young girls growing up 'too fast' and over the sexual infantilisation of adult women (e.g. playboy bunnies, schoolgirl costumes and use of dummies). The second is the use of the term 'sexualisation' to refer not only to a progressive degradation, but also to a *developmental* degradation, beginning in youth.

These moves can both be seen in the 2010 Home Office report on sexualisation, the *Papadopoulos Review*. Papadopoulos asserts that 'young children do not have the cognitive skills to cope with persuasive media messages', which thus enter the subject on an 'emotional' rather than 'rational' level (2010: 6, 27), drawing on another problematically gendered binary. On the one hand, representations of vulnerability are extended from children to young women. For example, the text acknowledges that cultural objects 'will mean different things to a three-year-old, an eight-year-old and a 14-year-old' (2010: 25), but proposes that 'older children are just as susceptible' to the process of sexualisation as younger ones (2010: 39). On the other hand, representations of overt displays of sexuality and desire are extended back in time from older teenage girls to young children, as sexualisation is taken to be 'happening to younger and younger children' (2010: 6). This narrative is supported by an account of contemporary culture as 'promoting premature sexualisation', deferring into the future the proper site of female sexuality and desire (2010: 7). Rather than critically considering the relations of gender power that organise this differential allocation of adult sexual status between men and women, the *Papadopoulos Review* takes 'femininity' as a pure and vulnerable state, threatened by the intrusion of an unnatural (hetero)sexuality. Both women and children are constructed as innocent and passive recipients (of men, of media) until they transgress by being sexually active, at which point they are doubly deviant (Barker, 2002).

Looking back, Papadopoulos (2011) has remarked that 'since my review came out, the wrong things have been focused on', which run 'against the feminist' goals of the text. We would suggest that tacit assumptions made in the *Papadopoulos Review,* and in many feminist discourses on sexualisation, have *themselves* facilitated this focus. Discursive strategies which aim to change society through the regulation of social and sexual behaviour have long been mobilised by feminist actors in ways which have been open to appropriation by other discursive actors. This is not, in itself, problematic – which is why accusations of 'moral panic' regarding discourses on sexualisation lack analytical precision and, as a result, political acuity (Atmore, 1999; Bray, 2008). What *is* significant and troubling about feminist discourses on sexualisation such as the *Papadopoulos Review* is that they have instantiated, re-worked, and naturalised a division between pure and impure forms of femininity. In doing so, an uncritical discursive coalition has been forged which has facilitated the take-over of the issue of sexualisation by a right-wing social agenda.

Parents have been addressed by right-wing narratives on sexualisation which have insisted upon the pressing need to protect and regulate their innocent children in the context of sexual threats from outside the home. Interestingly, it is generally female parents who are hailed in this way, with bodies such as Mumsnet and the Mother's Union frequently being consulted in these reports, just as it is girls who are perceived as 'at risk'. Mothers are hailed as the appropriate people to nurture and protect children, and girls are viewed as the potential victims. There is much less consideration of the role of fathers or boys, perhaps due to the lurking presence of the figure of the stranger male paedophile (Barker, 2002) and/or the sexually predatory boy in these debates. Needless to say, all of this takes place within a heterosexual matrix of opposite sex attraction and heterosexual parenting.

In one of the first such instances of this right-wing narrative, *The Daily Mail* mobilised the issue of 'sexualisation' to castigate the irresponsibility of those who would critically discuss representations of childhood innocence and purity. The editorial argued that 'in expressing this opinion publicly' a speaker is 'giving the green light to paedophiles', in the context of 'the 'sexualisation' of children and pre-pubescent girls' in contemporary 'consumer society' (*Daily Mail,* 1993). From the late 1990s, the issue of sexualisation came to be increasingly used within right-wing discourses to

suggest that the visibility of sexuality – especially marked, 'deviant' sexualities – within the mediated public sphere has served to express and further contribute to the destruction of public morality and decency (e.g. Appleyard, 1998; Shakinovsky, 2002). For example, Julian Brazier, the Conservative MP for Canterbury, placed 'sexualisation' as both the cause and consequence of a Parliamentary Bill lowering of the age of consent for homosexuals to match that of heterosexuals (Pierce, 1998). 'Sexualisation' was positioned in such discourses as closely tied to the contamination of moral values in society, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and the lack of adult 'responsibility' (Phillips, 2002; Poulter, 2010).

A significant actor in the shaping of this right-wing problematisation of 'sexualisation' has been David Cameron, now Prime Minister of the UK. Soon after his election to the role of Leader of the Opposition, he positioned the Conservative party against the 'harmful and creepy' sexualisation of young girls (Cameron, cited in Crerar, 2006). In the central speech of the 2009 Conservative Party conference, entitled 'Putting Britain back on her feet', Cameron mobilised the threat of the sexualisation of childhood as a legitimation strategy for financial measures to incentivise marriage and to radically scale back the welfare state. Only in this way would Britain be 'back on her feet', behaving responsibly – free of 'her' fiscal debt and of 'her' sexual/moral dissolution:

> Why do so many magazines and websites and music videos make children insecure about the way they look or the experiences they haven't even had? And it's about our society. We give our children more and more rights, and we trust our teachers less and less. We've got to stop treating children like adults and adults like children. It is about everyone taking responsibility. The more that we as a society do, the less we will need government to do. But you can't expect families to behave responsibly when the welfare system works in the opposite direction (Cameron 2009).

The issue of sexualisation was headlined as the core of the Coalition government policy on families and children. The Coalition's *Programme for Government*, issued by the Cabinet Office in May 2010, stated that since 'strong and stable families of all kinds are the bedrock of a strong and stable society', the Government must 'take action to protect children from excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation' (Cabinet Office, 2010: 19). An Early Day Motion was proposed by the

Conservative MP David Morris in November 2010, which praised the Mothers' Union for their campaign on the issue of the 'commercialisation of childhood' (see Mothers Union, 2010). In response, on the 6th of December 2010, the Coalition government commissioned a new report from the Mothers' Union on the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood to recommend practical changes in government legislation on the issue. This new inquiry was 'led by Reg Bailey, chief executive of Christian charity the Mothers' Union' (Carlin, 2010). The Coalition utilised the legitimacy given to the issue of sexualisation by the *Papadopoulos Review* to commission a further report with 'tough recommendations' in order to achieve 'a culture of responsibility in our country' (Cameron, 2011a).

The *Bailey Review*

Letting Children Be Children, was issued by Reg Bailey (2011a) on behalf of the Department for Education. This *Bailey Review* takes as its 'starting point' the work of previous reviews on sexualisation. It lauds the *Papadopoulos Review*, but notes that making policy recommendations on the basis of expert knowledge is difficult as this knowledge is 'contested', 'divided' and 'inconclusive'. In particular, Bailey rules out attending to the issue of what 'sexualisation' means. Instead, 'the conclusion of this Review is that parents are the experts in deciding whether something is appropriate for their child' (Bailey, 2011a: 7-8, 37). An appeal to parental authority, mediated through the 'measured approach' of Bailey himself (2011a: 45), will bypass the social scientific debate and focus instead on policing norms. This can be seen in Appendix 1 to the *Bailey Review*, which lists four objects of parental concerns which together comprise 'early sexualisation': content and practices which are 'sexually suggestive', which treat women as 'sexual only', which encourage 'children to think of themselves (or others to think of children) as adult or sexual', and which are 'glamorising or normalising 'deviant' behaviour' (2011b: 4). The second item on this list is a measure of sexism; the first and third together morally problematise teenage sexuality and desire by identifying true sexuality with adulthood; the fourth is quite explicitly conservative and normalising.

Bailey (2011a: 3) echoes and affirms David Cameron's mobilisation of the imputed truth of childhood as the constitutive outside of the responsible subject, stating that 'for children to be children, parents need to be parents... taking their responsibility for

their children upon themselves'. If parents act as they should, then the market will produce positive outcomes without the need for thoroughgoing state intervention: 'there is good reason to believe that the business community, supported by engaged and responsible parents, can show that it is capable of playing its part in putting the brakes on the unthinking drift towards an increasingly commercialised and sexualised world for children'. David Cameron (2011b), in his response to the *Bailey Review,* has expressed enthusiasm for the presumption that the market does not require state regulation in order to achieve moral outcomes: 'I note that many of the actions you suggest are for business and regulators to follow rather than for government. I support this emphasis, as it consistent with this government's overall approach and my long held belief that the leading force for progress should be social responsibility, not state control'.

Despite expressing reservations that parental concerns regarding 'sexualised clothing' may be 'unreasonable' (2011a: 45), the *Bailey Review* notes how concerned parents are about inappropriate clothing being sold to 'girls'. Bailey therefore suggests that clothes retailers should 'develop and comply with a voluntary code of good practice for all aspects of retailing to children' (2011a: 16, 42). He asserts that, whilst he wishes to make parenting easier by nudging the market in the right direction, this does not 'absolve any of us as responsible adults from creating the right sort of environment that allows our nation's children to be children' (2011a: 11-12). Whilst parental authority is the justification for Bailey's claims, 'parents can themselves be complicit' in processes of sexualisation and so require government 'support' for their parenting. For example, rather than recognising and feeling confident in the role they should take in combating sexualisation, the text notes that 92% of parents have never complained about sexual content in the media and that, of these, 43% of parents believe that they never have encountered sexual content worthy of complaint (2011a: 76-7). Appendix 1 to the *Bailey Review* states that 'pressure to consume is acknowledged as an irritation but is rationalised as acceptable - the sense of real personal harm is very low and irritation is traded off against the perceived benefits' (2011b: 2). The main text of the *Bailey Review*, however, argues that 'although we conclude that these concerns are not at the forefront of most parents' minds, we do not consider that this is a reason for

complacency' (2011a: 87), and the text can still deploy the authority of parents as a legitimation strategy for its own moral and policy claims.

Bailey expresses grave concern that 'we are all living in an increasingly sexual and sexualised culture' (2011a: 3, 9). The *Bailey Review* states that 'sexual images form a wallpaper to our lives, all-pervasive but hardly noticed. This background affects adults as well as children and is everywhere in society' (2011a: 41). The particular concern of the text is that there exists a 'pressure on children to grow up' which 'takes two different but related forms: the pressure to take part in a sexualised life before they are ready to do so; and the commercial pressure to consume the vast range of goods' (2011a: 4). As a result, parents informed the *Bailey Review* that they 'felt that there is 'no escape' and, for children, no 'clear space' where they can simply be themselves' (2011a: 23).

Bailey discerns two broad responses to this pressure. The first suggests 'that we can try to keep children wholly innocent and unknowing until they are adults. The world is a nasty place and children should be unsullied by it.' The second approach argues that 'we should accept the world for what it is and simply give children the tools to understand it and navigate their way through it better... to do anything more than raise the ability of children to understand the commercial and sexual world around them, and especially their view of it through the various media, is to create a moral panic' (2011a: 10). The *Bailey Review* therefore makes a partial departure from the narrative presented by the *Papadopoulos Review* in taking a degree of critical distance from the narrative of sexualisation as a destruction of childhood innocence. A critical point that the text makes is that such narratives profit from representations of innocence themselves, 'sensationalis[ing] the issue, fanning a prurient interest in cases where a sexual dimension can be put into a headline' (2011a: 45).

Bailey expresses particular concern regarding the second response to the issue of sexualisation. The problem with the second approach is that, afraid 'that we would infantilise adults if we make the world more benign for children', it instead permits processes which ''adultify' children' (2011a: 10). Furthermore, this second narrative has meant that parents 'lack the confidence to speak out on sexualisation and commercialisation issues for fear of being labelled a prude or out of touch' (2011a:

18). Bailey concludes that 'neither' of the two responses to sexualisation 'can be effective on its own'. Children must not be 'wholly innocent and unknowing', because 'we do not want to cut children off from the commercial world'; children need to learn how to become consumers in a way that is 'manage[d]' by their parents (2011a: 52; cf. Department for Business 2011: 37). However, he cites parental views that 'There's a concern about them knowing too much at their age. You want to protect their innocence'. Whilst a 'wholly innocent' childhood is therefore ruled out by Bailey, he authorises parental concerns that sexualisation is making children appear like adults, thereby making them vulnerable to sexual attack. Another parental perspective cited by the *Bailey Review* states that 'She wants to wear make-up and short skirts because she wants to look like [a celebrity] but it's too much. It's not innocent – well it is, but it might look provoking to the wrong people.'

The gender of the 'sexualised child' is generally not addressed by the *Bailey Review*, despite discussing 'girls' in nearly every example and quotation pertaining to sexuality. Sometimes 'gender stereotyped' content is taken as an aspect of 'sexualisation'. On other occasions, however, they are discursively separated. For example, of 873 parents surveyed '73 felt that there were inappropriate slogans on children's clothing – either of a sexualised nature or slogans that were gender–stereotyped' (2011c: 7; see also 2011a: 26). The tensions in the text associated with this simultaneous presence and absence of gender come to a head in a section entitled 'Gender Stereotyping'. Bailey states that his consultation with parents has led to the conclusion that 'there is often an overlap between the toys of a highly gendered nature and, especially for girls, a sexualised content' (2011a: 48). However, Bailey goes on to argue that 'we also note that the 'pink for girls' approach can have a positive side', as will be visible from a case study. The case study is a quotation from Bob Paton, Interplay UK, the toy manufacturer, which describes how, 'unfortunately, 'science' still appeals to boys more than girls. Once we changed to predominantly pink packaging [in marketing 'bath bombs'] and marketed it as a craft activity, we were shocked to see consistent sales'. The 'positive side' of 'pink for girls' for Bailey is that such gendered symbolism is good for sales! He concludes that 'there is greater evidence now of there being innate gender differences so that a desire to play with one kind of toy over another is at least as much about biological drivers as with socialisation and has to do with a normal, healthy development of

gender identity' (2011a: 49). Attention to gender and the issue of sexism are embedded in biology, folding them back out of Bailey's narrative on the dangers of sexualisation (see Barker & Duschinsky, forthcoming 2012, for more on the differential treatment of sexualisation and of gender stereotyping in the *Bailey Review*).

Among the recommendations made by the *Bailey Review* is a ban on 'peer-to-peer marketing', in which those 'under the age of 16' act as 'ambassadors' for particular brands and earn money for encouraging their friends to buy them (2011a: 65-7). The *Bailey Review* also instructs the Advertising Standards Authority to avoid the 'placement of advertisements with sexualised imagery near schools'. Though less than 13% of parents expressed concern about 'sexualised nature of on-street advertising such as billboards and posters in bus shelters' (2011c: 7), for Bailey the issue is one of consent, since 'there is no option to 'switch off' on-street advertisements' (2011a: 26). In response to parental concerns regarding the 'the sexualised and gender stereotyped' content of music videos, Bailey also proposes the introduction of age ratings for music videos, to bring them in line with other film content which is mandated to have such ratings under the Video Recordings Act 1984.

One of the central recommendations of the *Bailey Review* is that, 'as a matter of urgency, the internet industry should ensure that customers must make an active choice over what sort of content they want to allow their children to access. To facilitate this, the internet industry must act decisively to develop and introduce effective parental controls' (2011a: 15-16). A means through which parents can block inappropriate content and monitor their child's media consumption should automatically be enabled on mobile phones and computers. The text also recommends a further review in the winter of 2012, in which further market regulation should be recommended if the degree of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood has not improved (2011a: 88). Like the *Papadopoulos Review*, the *Bailey Review* recommends the creation of a website for parents to air their concerns regarding sexualisation. Cameron (2011b) has stated that every recommendation in the *Bailey Review* will be implemented, and that work on the website will begin immediately. With the creation of a website to facilitate complaints about

sexualisation, and the recommendation of a further review, the incitement to media and policy discourses on sexualisation looks set to continue.

Conclusion: Beyond 'sexualisation'

The term 'sexualisation' emerged in its contemporary usage in America in the mid-1970s as a portmanteau of the words 'sexual socialization' (e.g. Spanier, 1975). If the notion of 'socialisation' can be acknowledged to mean a dynamic process of subjectivation both actively and passively inflected by the production, reproduction and transformation of wider societal forces, then we would recommend unpacking the concept again. In this we are in agreement with recent work in this journal by Jackson and Westrupp (2010: 374), which recommends that 'shifting the focus from girls to cultural production would not only avoid moralizing notions of the 'sexualized girl' but potentially open up new understandings'. The UK feminist grass-roots activist group OBJECT have also proposed that the term 'sexualisation' has misdirected public discussions, framing debates in a way that is not helpful for feminist goals (Long 2011). Moving the terms of the debate from 'sexualisation' to the construction and stabilisation of 'social' behaviour would have the advantage of directing attention explicitly, rather than covertly, to the role played by both particular forms of cultural consumption and sexual practices and desires in the formation of adult subjectivity, agency and citizenship.

There is potential, also, for an examination of 'sexual socialisation' to explore the (hetero)normativity of these societal forces and the ways that they are taken up and/or resisted by young people themselves. This could include, for example, the issues of gender stereotyping and body image which Bailey's respondents were so concerned with, but which he largely dismissed in his report (Barker & Duschinsky, forthcoming 2012), along with exclusions around race, class, gender and sexuality, including the demonisation of racialised and classed 'others' (Ringrose, forthcoming 2012) and of sexual practices commonly associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer communities (McKee, Albury, Dunne, et al., 2010).

In a profoundly sexist culture, in which commercial interests are playing an important role in structuring the discursive, material and affective agency of social actors, there is a need for research and social policy that addresses the interconnections between

the lives of young people, heteronormative and gendered relations of power, and consumer cultures. Yet more careful narratives are needed, which recognise like Gill (2008: 54-5) that 'a new version of female sexual agency is on offer that breaks in important ways with the sexual objectification and silencing of female desire' but that 'in refiguring female sexual agency in these particular ways, it raises new problems and challenges'. Where research has avoided the dehumanising narrative of 'sexualisation' as degradation in exploring this issue, the result has been a subtle analysis with great critical power (e.g. Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Pascoe, 2011). Although there are notable exceptions such as these, the framework of 'sexualisation' does not predispose researchers towards such sensitivity; discourses on 'sexualisation' have tended to facilitate tendentious social science, and to support sexist social policy.

An interesting point of comparison for contemporary sexualisation discourses in the UK is the work of Cocca (2004), who indicates that, during the 1990s, feminists in America generally decided not to actively campaign in favour of the intensification of statutory rape legislation, as it was proposed by conservative legislators with the often-explicit goal of controlling the sexuality of young women. However, neither did they campaign against it because it could also protect young women from sexual violence. Where a discursive frame exists, as it does in the case of 'sexualisation', in which oppression and empowerment are positioned as opposites, the image of the 'möbius strip' captures the strange complicities and coalitions associated with discourses on gender, sexuality and protection.

The gendered dichotomy between innocent and sexual which we have seen in feminist discourses on sexualisation such as the *Papadopoulos Review* dovetails with perhaps the central division underpinning contemporary neo-liberal discourse: between innocent childhood, and the naturally autonomous and responsible subject of economic, civil and sexual life. In this way it provides discursive support for discourses that code embedded cultural, material and sexual inequalities as individual pathology and irresponsibility – or else the actions of a child: 'We've got to stop treating children like adults and adults like children. It is about everyone taking responsibility. The more that we as a society do, the less we will need government to do.' (Cameron 2009). In a society comprised solely of responsible adults and the

(middle-class, white, female, soon to become heterosexual) children of discourses on sexualisation, what need is there for a welfare state? The invocation of the innocent girl in discourses on sexualisation does not serve to attack but precisely to support the right-wing agenda which has come to dominate the issue of sexualisation and contemporary UK politics. The image of innocent childhood – of sexual, social and legal minority – serves as a *constitutive outside* to the responsible subject; it manages the tension caused by the way that this responsible subject is taken by neo-liberal politics to be both then natural state of human beings and as a moral ideal.

The 'obverse' (that is to say, the same) side of the möbius strip can be seen in Hakim's (2010) work on 'erotic capital'. Erotic capital is theorised by Hakim as a particular form of power, disproportionately available to women compared to men due to biological disparities in their level of desire. She valorises the process of 'sexualisation', which she situates as breaking down the conventions which have stopped women from using their sexuality as a source of agency in the same manner as their economic or social capital. Yet just as much as media and policy discourses problematising sexualisation, Hakim's position re-codes gendered relations of power in terms of individual, essential traits. In discourses on sexualisation, the consumption and sexual choices of young women have tended to be assessed in relation to the pure and impure discursive figures of the vulnerable child or the girl 'gone skank' (Oppliger, 2008), since the possibility of meaningful agency is foreclosed for subjects classified as 'girls', *as minors*. Hakim, by contrast, situates all young women precisely as neoliberal subjects, operating as the natural entrepreneurs of their own desirability, extracting them from the social conditions of possibility of such entrepreneurs and consumers of 'sexuality'. Whereas, for example, in the *Papadopolous Review* these relations of power are constructed as individual psychological and moral pathology, in Hakim, the same relations are situated as a spectrum of degrees of sexual agency, ranging from personal sexiness to undesirability.

Discourses on sexuality tend to 'do the möbius strip' where they depend upon an inadequate account of choice, as either simply present or absent: feminist discourses on sexualisation such as the *Papadopoulos Review* have tended to

situate the figure of the innocent girl as a minor, outside of responsible choice-making subjectivity, whereas Hakim's work takes all but young children to already be such neoliberal subjects. ==The *Bailey Review* identifies and straddles this division without addressing the gendered relations of power that would allow a move outside the möbius strip constituted by a division between innocence and responsibility. Its discourse is continually forced to manage the tensions associated with presenting both arguments at once – such that children can stand as both innocent minors and active consumers without letting the gendering that constitutes these subject-positions become apparent.== Offering a way of escaping the möbius strip, we contend that a concern with sexual subjectivation would permit the analysis and evaluation of the dynamic capacity of gendered relations of power both to enable and to limit particular forms of choice, pleasure and suffering. Attending to 'sexual socialisation' rather than 'sexualisation' would facilitate the consideration of agency as immanent to the organisation of domains of social practice rather than either free from, or a mere effect of, power.

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