



The Problem of Modern Pederasty in Queer History

A Case Study of Norman Douglas

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Abstract • Intergenerational sex between children or youth and adults was historically common, but it is understudied within the historiography of sexuality. There are three reasons that historians of sexuality should pay greater attention to intergenerational sex. First, it was common; second, discourse around intergenerational sex has been a critical site for the production of power; and third, studying intergenerational sex illuminates how sexuality is historically constructed. However, studying intergenerational sex also raises thorny methodological problems around definitions of childhood and consent, the treatment of children's agency, and how to contextualize a practice that was once considered ordinary but is now taboo. Using examples from my research on the writer and notorious pederast Norman Douglas, I address each of these methodological concerns and suggest productive approaches.

Keywords • children, consent, intergenerational sex, methodology, pederasty, sexuality

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In a December 2018 state-of-the-field essay titled “The Power of Queer History,” Regina Kunzel itemizes all the ways in which recent scholarship has highlighted sexuality’s function as a conduit of power. Her survey, which focuses on US history, covers the intersections of queer history and the histories of policing, surveillance, incarceration, racialization, geopolitical relations, regulatory systems, and the state. Collectively, Kunzel argues, the scholarship demonstrates how “sexuality can exert and fortify power relations” both through “the imposition of binary and hierarchical oppositions, normal/abnormal and natural/unnatural key among them,” and through “more subtle and multidirectional ways.”¹ This through-line of power connecting decades of queer historiography owes a great debt to the influence of Gayle Rubin’s path-breaking 1984 article, “Thinking Sex,” as Kunzel acknowledges.² And yet a key building-block of Rubin’s argument, her observation that the demonization of intergenerational sexual relations during the 1980s was used to sharpen the boundaries of normative sexuality, is absent from Kunzel’s survey. Aside from a brief mention of the historiography of the rise of sexual psychopath laws during the 1940s and 1950s,



the history of sex between children or youth and adults seems to have little place in queer history.

This is through no fault of Kunzel's. The theorist Kadji Amin argues in his 2017 book *Disturbing Attachments* that "modern pederasty"—or age-structured sex—was a "dominant and a common" form of male same-sex practice throughout the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but after the 1970s it was discarded as "the detritus of Queer Studies' orientation toward political futurity."³ Kate Fisher and Jana Funke argue that the process of excising pederasty from homosexuality as a precondition of social acceptance began even earlier during the initial late-nineteenth-century construction of the category of the homosexual.⁴ Nonetheless, pederasty and homosexuality remained very much entangled until the rise of the gay rights movement, which provoked a powerful reaction among sexual conservatives, who tarred homosexuals as pedophiles and as threats to the nation's children. Gay rights activists responded by sharply differentiating between their own advocacy for the legitimization and legalization of sexual relations between consenting adults and any defense of intergenerational sexual relations. The line was drawn within internal debates over the 1977 publication of an essay on man-boy love in the Canadian magazine *The Body Politic*; in efforts during the 1980s by gay rights activists to ban the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) from Pride parades; and in the 1993 United Nations controversy that led the International Lesbian and Gay Association to expel NAMBLA from its umbrella organization.⁵ Queer history, which emerged as a subfield in tandem with the gay rights movement, likewise drew a line between the history of same-sex relations between adults and the history of intergenerational same-sex relations. Queer historians, for the most part, treated the history of modern pederasty as only relevant to queer history insofar as it signified a bogeyman that haunted the social acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults.

Sexuality studies scholar Steven Angelides argues that queer studies has at least done a better job historicizing pederasty than feminist studies, which is constrained by a modern discourse of child sexual abuse that stifles discussions of child sexuality and shoehorns power into a totalizing binary of adult dominance and child subordination.⁶ Queer theory's Foucauldian understanding of power allows for a more complicated rendering of age and consent as constructed categories that intersect with class, race, and gender. The work of queer historians of the Anglophone world, including Steven Maynard, Stephen Robertson, Don Romesburg, Chris Brickell, and Yorick Smaal, all of whom have described the nuanced power dynamics within sexual encounters between men and boys, supports Angelides's claim.⁷ Nonetheless, Kunzel's summary of queer historiography reveals how rare this scholarship has been.

Many readers, squeamish about the subject, might welcome this relative silence within the historiography. However, historians of sexuality should

put aside discomfort and engage robustly with the history of intergenerational sex for three reasons.

First, sex between men and children has been common throughout the history of sexuality.⁸ This is true broadly speaking. Sex between men and girls has been not just common but normative, often consecrated by marriage.⁹ In European history, the “consent” of girls or women to sex played no role in definitions of *raptus* (the predecessor of rape) until the thirteenth century. Only the consent of parents or guardians mattered.¹⁰ When concerns about consent did emerge in the thirteenth century, children were considered capable of consent as they reached early puberty. Chronological ages of consent were not instituted until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at which point they were set very low at between ten and twelve years old. Many countries only set ages of consent for girls, considering boys’ capacity to engage in sexual relations as *de facto* evidence of their responsibility for their actions and seeing no harm to boys in the loss of their virginity.¹¹ In certain times and places, sex between men and boys has been considered normative. The list includes ancient Greece, Renaissance Florence, the classical Ottoman Empire, and samurai-era Japan.¹² At other times and places, sex between men and boys has been disreputable but nonetheless common.

The second reason for studying intergenerational sex relates to Kunzel’s argument that “sexuality can exert and fortify power relations.” At present, this observation is nowhere more evident than in the moral panic over pedophilia. The heightened contemporary discourse about intergenerational sex has consequences far beyond the protection of children. Pedophilia discourse can be seen as an engine of production for the category of childhood. Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes have argued that “the social construction of the child, during the modern epoch in the Anglophone West, was inextricably tied to the education, regulation and normalization of its sexuality.”¹³ Today, the definition of childhood is being expanded through the discursive extension of the age range of people who are not considered sexually autonomous. Social norms increasingly question the ability of individuals between eighteen and their early twenties to consent to sex with adults in their thirties and forties, raising the question of whether people within this age range are full adults.¹⁴ If historians of sexuality are committed to illuminating how power is articulated, it is imperative to shine a critical light on what is inarguably one of the most fruitful sites of power in contemporary sexual discourse.

The third reason to study this topic is that the history of intergenerational sex offers perhaps the most striking example of the central tenet in the history of sexuality: the argument that sexual practices, desires, and identities, are historically constructed. Nothing brings that point home more surely than taking a close look at how attitudes toward sex between adults and children have changed over time. A sexual practice that is now regarded as contravening a universal moral taboo was regarded as normal within recent history. The conflict between contemporary assumptions and

past evidence makes the history of intergenerational sexuality a critical site for interrogation and inquiry.

Such inquiries, however, will soon lead historians of sexuality into methodological quandaries over context, consent, agency, and definitions of childhood. During an age in which pedophilia has become a third rail of contemporary culture, the risk of making a misstep while addressing such questions may feel grave. On the other hand, the knottiest methodological quandaries can provoke the deepest historical insights. At the very least, further inquiry into the history of intergenerational sexuality should not be hampered by procedural impasses. In the remainder of this article, I will use my own research into the early-twentieth-century British writer Norman Douglas, who was a notorious pederast, to explore the methodological challenges presented by the history of intergenerational sex and to tender my own answers. The geographical scope of this article is broad, drawing in the Anglosphere and Western Europe.

Norman Douglas and the Challenges of Writing Biography

When Constantine FitzGibbon attempted to write a biography of Norman Douglas, he threw up his hands in despair because he found it so impossible to “get around” the subject of Douglas’s pederasty. After accepting advances from two publishers (one American, one British), and spending nearly a year conducting interviews with Douglas, FitzGibbon gave up in defeat. The closest he came to publishing his research was a 1974 article in *Encounter* magazine, which was titled “Norman Douglas: An Unwritten Biography.”¹⁵ FitzGibbon was only one of many would-be biographers of the writer to fail at the task, which goes a long way to explaining why most readers will never have heard of Douglas before. He was a celebrity during the 1920s and 1930s, a central figure in British literary circles, and a friend to stars in the twentieth-century literary pantheon such as Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Graham Greene, but he is almost entirely forgotten today. One reason is that his sardonic and erudite writing style has gone out of style. Another reason is that his sexual predilections have made him impossible to memorialize.

Here is a bit of brief background: Douglas was born in Austria in 1868 to a wealthy Scottish industrialist family that had built a textile mill in Vorarlberg along an Alpine waterway. After his mountaineer father died in a tragic climbing accident, Douglas and his older brother were sent to school in England. He finished his schooling at a gymnasium in Karlsruhe, Germany, and then joined the British Foreign Office and was posted by request to St. Petersburg. Douglas was a gentleman scholar and began to publish scientific essays during the mid-1890s. He left the Foreign Office and married his first cousin in 1898, moving to Naples, where they had two sons before the marriage ended in an acrimonious divorce. Douglas gained custody of the

boys but farmed them out to friends and schools. He transitioned to writing fiction and travel essays, and took a job as subeditor of *The English Review*, where he met many prominent figures in British letters. In 1916, Douglas was arrested for indecent assault on a male youth, and he fled England for the continent to avoid a prison sentence. He lived in Florence for the next twenty-odd years, publishing many books with the assistance of his friend Giuseppe “Pino” Orioli, the publisher of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Douglas was best known for *South Wind* (1917), a satirical novel about the immoralities of the cosmopolitan crowd who lived in Capri before World War I. In 1937, Douglas fled the threat of arrest for the rape of a girl in Florence. He lived in the south of France until 1941, when he fled to neutral Portugal, then back to England, with permission, in 1942. Immediately after the war, Douglas returned to Italy. He spent his final years in Capri, where he was named an honorary citizen. He died in 1952.¹⁶

For most of his life, including during his brief marriage, Norman Douglas was sexually fixated on prepubescent children as young as seven, but more typically between the ages of ten and fourteen. The majority of his sexual encounters with children were paid or transactional and ephemeral, but Douglas also had several long-lasting affairs with boys to whom he remained emotionally close throughout his and their lifetimes. From his mid-thirties onward, Douglas was primarily sexually focused on boys and he considered himself to be a pederast. Douglas’s sexual tastes shaped his writings, both fiction and nonfiction. He often rhapsodized about the beauty of boys and made allusions to his sexual desire for them in his writings. In his two-volume memoir *Looking Back*, published in 1933, Douglas wrote openly about paying families in Russia and Italy for sexual access to their children. His writings, combined with his arrests, made him synonymous with pederasty during his lifetime. Despite this notoriety, Douglas was not regarded as a monster by his friends or fans. Far from it, he was loved by many. In fact, his reputation for sexual license constituted a big part of his personal and authorial appeal. Douglas first gained fame with the publication of a stridently immoral book (*South Wind*) at a moment when the edifice of Victorian prudery was crumbling under the disillusioning impact of World War I. His willingness to flout sexual conventions made him a figure of admiration at a time when pederasty was not yet distinguished as a monstrous sexuality distinct from all other sexual immoralities.

The first challenge that I faced in writing about Douglas was how to contextualize his sexuality historically without giving the appearance of excusing it. Since his death, sex between men and boys or male youth has been recast from pederasty to pedophilia. Pederasty, a term derived from Classical history, had both positive associations and negative associations. Before the 1920s, the word *pederasty*, along with its French and Italian variants *pédérastie* and *pederastia*, was often used negatively to describe any same-sex encounter between males.¹⁷ But the word could also be used more positively to describe older men’s loving mentorship of boys or male youth.¹⁸ After 1920,

same-sex relations between adult males were increasingly described as homosexuality. Usage of the term “pederasty” for adult relations declined. In the 1950s, the term “pedophilia” began to replace pederasty as a descriptor for intergenerational sex between adults and children of either sex. Pedophilia had exclusively negative connotations, sharing none of the positive connotations of pederasty. Since the 1980s, pedophilia has been viewed as a monstrous sexual desire that breaks an absolute moral prohibition against sex between adults and children.¹⁹ The taboo is so powerful that the desire itself is considered to be monstrous, regardless of whether an adult engages in acts of child sexual abuse or not. This taboo formation poses a challenge to contextualizing the history of intergenerational sex, because belief in the transhistorical wrongness of intergenerational sex makes it offensive to discuss contexts in which such sexual encounters were viewed as more normal, such as during Douglas’s lifetime.

When Douglas went to boarding school in England during the 1870s and 1880s, sexual encounters between male teachers and students were illicit but not infrequent, judging by newspaper reportage, court records, memoirs, pornographic fiction, and other sources.²⁰ During the late nineteenth century, sex between adult men and young girls also figured prominently in the English cultural imagination.²¹ In the mid-1890s, when Douglas served in the British Foreign Office in St. Petersburg, he learned that child prostitution in Russia was a well-established practice.²² Likewise, child prostitution was extremely common in Naples, where he moved just before the turn of the century.²³ Capri, where he lived in the early 1900s, had been notorious for its child sex trade since the Roman era.²⁴ The child sex trade thrived in Florence, where he lived between the wars. And the child sex trade was so rampant in Naples when Douglas returned to the city after World War 2, that even Alfred Kinsey was astonished by its public nature when he visited the city.²⁵ In each of these locations, the child sex trade involved boys and girls as young as seven or eight, although adolescents may have been more typical.

Pointing to the normality of child prostitution during Douglas’s lifetime, however, causes discomfort because it gives the appearance of exculpating Douglas from moral judgment for a behavior that is considered inexcusable at present. The word “normal” seems to connote moral approbation, even if such judgments are not within its definition. Douglas himself made claims about the normalness of child prostitution to justify his actions. In *Looking Back*, Douglas described how he arranged with a widowed mother for sexual access first to her teenage daughter and later to her teenage son. In Naples, he wrote: “Contracts for girls, I may say, were quite a regular thing; they enabled them to gain a little money which afterwards constituted, or helped to constitute, their marriage portion. . . . The age of the girls was not taken into account; she might be a minor or even a child; she generally was.” Likewise, sexual relations between adult men and adolescent boys were considered “the most natural thing in the world.” The siblings’ mother, Douglas claimed, welcomed his role in awakening her son’s sexuality.²⁶

Not wanting to conflate context with justification, a historian might try to correct any potential misapprehension by stating outright that they stand morally opposed to intergenerational sex. This solution, while simple, is ineffective. I know, because I tried it. Readers objected. On the page, it read as virtue signaling rather than a meaningful intervention. Moreover, the declaration of adherence to transhistorical moral taboos undermines the interpretive goal of historicizing sexual practices. Historians of slavery, however motivated by moral repugnance, rarely feel the need to declare themselves so on the page. Historians of intergenerational sexuality, even if they are writing from a position of moral outrage (which may not be the case), should similarly be content to let the history speak for itself.

A more effective strategy for differentiating between context and moral judgment is to examine the ethical discourse concerning intergenerational sex specific to the given time period. For example, in my work on Douglas I have drawn on the scholarship of historians like Mario Bolognari and Chiara Beccalossi, who have examined how Italian families, communities, and authorities regarded intergenerational sex at the turn of the twentieth century. Bolognari argues that in Taormina, Sicily, community members regarded sexual encounters between foreign men and local boys as appropriate so long as they were temporary and exclusive. These encounters fit with traditional toleration for same-sex eroticism between pubescent boys as a means to prevent erotic encounters between boys and girls for the purpose of enforcing girls' sexual purity. Later, as adults, men could distance themselves from their adolescent sexual behavior by dismissing it as *cosa da ragazzi*, or kids' stuff. Sicilians, according to Bolognari, operated in a "double register of meanings," taking a functional approach that benefited the community.²⁷ By paying close attention to the historical production of sexual norms in the past, historians can counter the impression of making present judgments on past sexual norms.

The second challenge that I faced in writing about Norman Douglas was how to treat sources in which children expressed love for him. The absence of sources by children is *the* granddaddy issue in the history of childhood, according to Peter Stearns, and historians of childhood are always on the lookout for evidence that shows children as more than the passive subjects of adult actions.²⁸ The Douglas archive includes such evidence. Among his papers are numerous letters addressed to Douglas from the children with whom he had sexual encounters, many of them affectionate and longing.

Take for example the letters of Eric Wolton. Douglas picked up Wolton at a 1910 Guy Fawkes celebration at Crystal Palace in southeast London. Douglas was forty-one, soon to be forty-two. Wolton was twelve. Judging from the contents of Douglas's pocket diaries, the relationship was sexual, and likely transactional, from the outset. Sex work was not an unusual means of making money for working-class London boys before the 1920s, and "certain relationships were accepted in working-class neighborhoods," according to Matt Houlbrook.²⁹ Douglas and Wolton's relationship swiftly developed

beyond an ephemeral encounter into an affective companionship. Douglas sought the permission of Wolton's parents to take the boy on a walking tour through southern Italy. They had been intending to send Wolton to reform school, and gladly accepted Douglas's offer of private tutelage instead. After the two returned from the trip, both sick with malaria, Douglas delivered Wolton to his parents and then went to recuperate at the house of his friend Joseph Conrad. But Wolton wrote to Douglas that he was "longing to see your old dear face again." Soon the pair were reunited. They lived together and traveled together intermittently during the next couple of years. When World War I broke out, Wolton enlisted. Douglas's sexual attentions by then had moved on to younger subjects, but the two remained close throughout their lives.

A decade after they first met, Wolton, who was then in his early twenties, wrote to Douglas reminiscing about their former times together: "Doug, I have wanted Italy and you as bad as anything last week. All the old times flash back in my memory." Wolton refused to disavow his childhood sexual relationship with Douglas, writing:

They were happy times too Doug were'nt [sic] they, I have no evil thoughts about them although I am different today than I was then. You were my tin god and even now you are. I do really love you as a great friend and even now I know that if I live to be a million never shall I harbour the same feeling that I have for you. . . . I am afraid I have expressed myself very badly but I want you to understand Doug that you are more to me than ever you were. The difference is now that I am old enough to realise it.³⁰

As an adult, Wolton pursued sexual encounters with women. He was "different" than he had been as a boy, but he felt positively about his youthful sexual encounters with Douglas nonetheless.

Letters like Wolton's pose a methodological challenge because such avowals of love and appreciation by boys for their adult male lovers contradict the current dominant model of child sexual abuse, which rests on the assumption that intergenerational sexual encounters are inherently traumatic for children. This assumption of harm is the rationale for the taboo on intergenerational sex. However, neither the letters nor the actions of Douglas's long-term child sexual partners indicate that they regarded their relationships with him through the framework of trauma. How can historians handle such evidence that flies in the face of current moral sensibilities? This is a widespread concern that extends beyond the Douglas archive. As Peter Stearns wrote, when historians are able to find sources written by children, they often reveal "features of childhoods past" that "seem unpleasant or bizarre." This disjuncture, Stearns advises, should lead historians to reexamine their own assumptions.³¹

Historian Nicholas Syrett, coeditor and contributor to this special issue, faced this problem in his own research into the history of child marriage in the United States. Confronting evidence that girls showed willingness, or

even eagerness, to enter into marriages with adult men, Syrett made the methodological choice that “absent specific evidence to the contrary . . . I have taken children at their word when they have consented to become married. . . . Children themselves had agency, even when they made terrible decisions.”³² Can historians take children at their word even when they expressed positive feelings about adults who had sex with them? This is a problem faced by contemporary social scientists and counselors as well, who have characterized children’s claims of consent and affection for adult sexual partners as “Stockholm Syndrome,” or “Child Abuse Accommodation Syndrome.”³³ While these may be effective models for discussion of the present, imposing contemporary psychological models on past historical subjects raises concerns of anachronism.

Rather than apply a transhistorical psychological model, historians should attempt to make sense of how people in the past “construed the world, invested it with meaning, and infused it with emotion.”³⁴ Sources like Wolton’s letters that upset our sensibilities by demonstrating a boy’s affection for his adult male sexual partner should not be dismissed as false consciousness; rather, they are indicators of the existence of a different system of meaning and emotion in the past that requires investigation. In the case of Wolton, his declarations of love for Douglas are evidence that he made sense of their erotic relationship through the older framework of pederasty, rather than through the modern framework of pedophilia. This shift in terms, rather than being merely a case of “old wine in new bottles,” signified a profound transformation in the social meaning of sex between men and boys that took place during the mid-twentieth century. In other words, we should take Wolton at his word, not because his word is synonymous with the truth, but because his word is a reflection of a historical set of norms.

The third methodological challenge facing historians of intergenerational sex is how to make sense of the topic in light of the contingency of the categories of childhood and consent, which are interlocking categories, since the inability to define consent is a modern marker of the category of childhood.³⁵ The history of childhood was launched as a field by Philippe Ariès’s influential 1962 book arguing that childhood was a modern invention.³⁶ While Ariès’s arguments have been challenged and refined over time, historians remain in agreement that the category of childhood is historically constructed and has different delineations at different times and in different places.³⁷ Broadly speaking, over the past couple centuries of Western history, there has been a shift from biological markers to chronological markers of childhood, which has been accompanied by the lengthening of childhood as a category and the emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of new categories of childhood: the adolescent and, later, the teenager.³⁸ The blurry and shifting boundaries of childhood create obvious challenges for defining the category of intergenerational sex. A fourteen-year-old might be constituted as a child within a sexual context at present, but might have been seen as a mature subject within a sexual context in the past. Applying

present standards, then, does little to inform us about the meaning of that fourteen-year-old's experience in their own time.

Likewise, historians of sexuality argue that current views of consent as dependent on equal power relations are of recent vintage. Age of consent laws were a late-nineteenth-century development in Western Europe and North America. Their underlying logic, that gross power differentials between children and adults made meaningful sexual consent by children impossible, was predicated on the assumption that power was distributed along an axis of age, as opposed to other possible axes, such as gender and class. In fact, gross power differentials have defined adult manhood from adult womanhood throughout much of Western history, raising the question of whether any historical sexual relations between men and women could be seen as conforming to present standards for consent. The same could be said for cross-class relations, which were historically common. And obviously, the most recent refashioning of sexual consent as predicated not only on equal power relations but on verbal affirmation would be an absurd standard for judging historical sexual encounters.³⁹

However, consent is the primary discursive framework for sex between children or youth and adults at present, which makes it impossible for the historian to avoid.⁴⁰ Even positing the existence of a history of "sex between children or youth and adults" runs afoul of contemporary consent discourse, under which all such encounters are, by definition, rape. Feminist discourse, which differentiates sharply between sex and rape, militates against the application of the word "sex" for nonconsensual encounters.⁴¹ As a political stance, excluding rape from the category of sex might be instrumental in promoting more egalitarian and positive erotic futures. From a historical perspective, it does not work. As Estelle Freedman explains, the meaning of rape is "fluid, rather than transhistorical or static." Freedman argues in her survey of rape in American history that until the twentieth century boys were not regarded as potential victims of the crime. Prosecutions of sexual assaults on boys, which were almost always committed by men, fell under sodomy statutes rather than rape statutes. That only changed during the Progressive Era.⁴²

These methodological challenges have shaped my Douglas project in various ways. First of all, I chose Douglas as a subject in part because the subjects of his sexual desires were children both according to past standards and present standards. The fact that Douglas was drawn to children between the ages of ten and fourteen, primarily boys but also at times girls, made it easier to establish the subject of my study as sex between adults and children. If Douglas, like his friend Pino Orioli, had been primarily drawn to older teens, sixteen to nineteen, the project would have posed more definitional challenges. Chronological age, however, is an uncertain standard for assessing sexual maturity, and the correlation between age and physical development might shift over time according to diet, labor practices, and chemical stimuli. I dealt with this methodological challenge by noting the physical markers

that Douglas used to describe the subjects of his interest. Douglas admired boys in the early stages of sexual maturation, after their penises had begun to grow, but before they had developed armpit hair. This level of physical detail is sure to upset readers, but historians must treat intergenerational sex as they treat other ugly histories, not by closing their eyes but by looking sharply, analyzing details, and making meaning. Douglas's rhapsodies about boys' milky armpits are important evidence for how boyhood was eroticized within turn-of-the-century pederasty.

As for consent, finding it an anachronistic category to apply to sexual encounters that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I have opted instead to write about whether Douglas's partners willingly agreed to their relations with him. The archive of Douglas's life reveals that the young people he approached responded in diverse ways. For example, Orioli's diaries of his and Douglas's travels throughout Italy and Austria during the 1930s record a range of encounters with boys and youths. Some accepted the men's gifts of chocolates, cigarettes, or money, then refused to engage in sexual encounters in return. Douglas and Orioli called them "shits." The fact that the young people had the ability to refuse the men's sexual overtures indicates that the balance of power was not quite so uneven as we might imagine. Some boys and youth, in fact, not only refused sexual encounters, they also blackmailed the men, demanding more money under threat of exposure. Since sex work by boys and youth may have been accepted, but was not welcomed, that threat carried the potential for retributive violence against Douglas and Orioli. Another subset of boys and youth aggressively pursued Douglas and Orioli for both sex and favors, even to the point of fighting off rivals for the men's affections. These young people can certainly be said to have willingly agreed to relations with Douglas and Orioli, although it is impossible to know whether their motivations were solely financial, or whether they might have desired the sex as well. Methodologically, I think it is vital to dispense with a universalizing definition of consent that defines all historical sexual encounters between young people and adults as rape, because such broad definitions make impossible a more granular approach to the history of intergenerational sex that acknowledges the range of possibilities from violent coercion to enthusiastic mutuality. In short, I think it is vital for historians of intergenerational sex to work within a framework that acknowledges the possibility of "sex" between adults and children.

Beginning with Regina Kunzel, this article has focused for the most part on the history of male same-sex encounters. I have limited my examples from Douglas's life to encounters he had with boys, even though he had many encounters with girls and female youth throughout his lifetime as well. Douglas once boasted that he had had sex with eleven hundred virgins, and I think he was referring only to the girls.⁴³ This limited scope leaves many unanswered questions. For example, what specific methodological challenges confront historians of sex between men and girls? How do the

historical operations of patriarchy produce different sets of questions and concerns? There are certain to be distinctive methodological challenges facing historians of sex between women and girls or female youth as well. For example, which forms of physical intimacy between women and girls historically constituted sex? Since Western definitions of sex focus so persistently on the operations of the penis, the question of whether or not something counts as sex rarely arises in the history of males. With no penis at play, historians have had a more difficult time defining which same-sex relations between females are sexual. There are similar methodological challenges unique to the history of sex between children, which is rarely if ever discussed in the sources. When is genital touching between children play and when is it sex? How do gendered power imbalances between males and females play into questions of consent and agency in sexual encounters between boys and girls? When is age difference a meaningful or not a meaningful axis of power within encounters between children?

Perhaps the greatest methodological challenge for all historians of intergenerational sex is how to deal with the subject of children's sexual pleasure. No topic is more taboo. How might historians negotiate that taboo when asking questions like "How has the growing taboo against intergenerational sex changed children and youth's experiences of sexuality desire and identity?" "Are there differences between the impacts of this strengthening taboo on queer and straight youth?" "Are there variations according to gender, race, and class?" Addressing these questions will lead historians of sexuality into sticky methodological challenges. But we need to press forward. There are costs to not engaging more robustly with the history of intergenerational sex. Some of those costs are to the sexual autonomy of children and youth today. I have heard from a lot of friends who teach the history of sexuality who use Gayle Rubin's "Making Sex" but cut out the passages on adult-child sex. It is time to fold that history back into the mix.

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Notes

1. Regina Kunzel, "The Power of Queer History," *American Historical Review* 123, no. 5 (2018): 1560–1582, here 1567, doi:10.1093/ahr/rhy202.
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