

Children and adolescents as sexual beings: a historical overview

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Throughout much of history, if children survived early childhood they were regarded as an economic asset. This is one of the few statement upon which most historians of the family can agree. Generally, Philip Ariès [1], who is regarded as the founder of modern studies on children, claimed that children joined the world of adults from the moment that they were weaned; no one made a fuss about how little and cute they were. He went so far as to argue that childhood was not a separate and distinct stage of development until the sixteenth and seventeenth century when it began to be so in the upper bourgeois and noble groups. Before that time, children were seen as little adults; maternal indifference to infants characterized traditional society. Edward Shorter [2] summed up this view, “Barely possessing souls of their own, they came at the Will of God, departed at his Behest, and in their brief mortal sojourn deserved little adult sympathy or compassion.” Shorter implied that at least among most of the people, parental indifference remained implanted until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Lawrence Stone [3] wrote that the conditions of premodern childhood created an adult world of emotional cripples, whose primary response to others, were, at best, a calculating indifference.

Other investigators, however, differed; increasingly, they have documented a recognition of childhood throughout much of history that, in many ways, foreshadows our own. They recognize the high mortality rate of infants and children, but indicate this was the result of limited medical skills and not of the absence of emotional involvement. Malnutrition was common and contagious diseases were always present. Despite these difficulties, most scholars now contend that there were prevailing norms as to the duties of parents toward their children, and that parents invested materially and emotionally in their children [4–6]. Parents also were concerned with their children’s sexuality.

Generally, most scholars would now argue that in medieval and early modern Europe, early childhood was regarded as period of purity, innocence, and faith. Boys and girls could sleep together if they were younger than 7 years of age. It

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was believed that beginning at 7 years of age, often called “the second phase of childhood” by historians, the child became aware of the profound realities of death and sex and the predilection to sin began. The second phase of childhood ended at puberty; puberty was set more or less universally as 12 years of age for girls and between 12 and 14 years of age for boys. After puberty, children entered a phase that is labeled “adolescence” in some sources [7]. Boys could work more independently and were given greater responsibilities, whereas girls often were controlled more carefully. It was during this third phase of childhood or development that sexuality was recognized clearly.

In the past, “manners,” particularly about bodily functions, such as belching, flatulence, urination, and bowel movements, differed from those of today. All were accepted as part of life; the first two were part of public behavior, although the last two might have been done more discretely. There is a general consensus among historians that although kings and powerful people might have had their privy chamber (or private room) for using the chamber pot, trusted retainers or privy counselors could attend them there. Privacy among the masses was almost nonexistent. Clothing was not particularly modest because young boys and girls wore shirts with little underneath them until they were toilet trained, after which they began to wear drawers that were held up with a string around the waist but were not particularly concealing. Several members of the family often slept naked in the same bed. Sexual differences and sexual activities, such as intercourse among parents in such crowded situations, were well-known to children and probably were imitated playfully at an early age. There was, however, emphasis on delaying sexual intercourse until marriage.

Because a child was considered to be capable of expressing himself/herself properly from the age of 7 years, s/he could be betrothed at this age. From the second half of the twelfth century in Europe, a betrothal that was arranged at this age was no longer considered a binding act of marriage unless it had been consummated by age 12 or before. If it had not been consummated, the girl or boy could refuse to accept the marriage and it could be annulled. It was not until age 14, however, that in the medieval and early modern Catholic Church, young people were expected to confess and do penance for sins of a sexual nature; however, the penance that was specified was lighter than that which was given to older persons for the same sin. Children who were younger than 14 years of age were not required to do penance, although they might have chosen to do so [7].

When we examine the sexual activity of children, we have to depend upon specific instances that somehow entered into the literature. Theoretically, the age of consent (12 to 14 years) was the age at which sexual relations could be accepted and had legal implications. This also was the permitted age of marriage, although traditionally the age for males has been older than that for females and this is still true. Sometimes, there is considerable difference within countries, as is the case of the United States where each state had its own laws. Marriage, at least for girls, often was entered into at a young age. As late as the 1950s, the age category that had the greatest number of brides was 17 years, whereas it was several years older for males. In this, the United States reflected a long tradition

of youthful marriages, a tradition that has been modified gradually over the course of the last part of the twentieth century. Such a change was abetted by many states that increased the age of consent.

Throughout history, regardless of whether one accepts the existence of childhood as a separate period, children have been recognized clearly as sexual beings who are capable of having sexual relations. In the homoerotic Greek society, when pubertal changes were first noted—in most cases by 12 years of age—it was customary for a youth to enter into a relationship with an older male, who usually was in his twenties [8]. The older male became involved deeply with the younger male until the youth reached 20 years of age; then the process was repeated by the young man choosing a youth for himself. In many of the Greek states, men did not get married until they were approximately 30 years of age, at which time they married a girl who was 12 or 14 years of age. The age disparity assured the patriarchal dominance of the man in the household.

In ancient Rome, the average age of marriage for girls was 14, whereas for boys it was older but they had the availability of prostitutes [9]. A good illustration of this is the case of St. Augustine, the theologic founder of the Western Catholic Church. Augustine, after living with a mistress who had given him a child, decided to legitimize his marital relationships. He expelled his mistress and child from his household and became betrothed to a prepubertal girl. Because Augustine was unwilling to have sex with her until she came of age, he turned to a prostitute, whereupon the recognition of his inability to control his sexuality resulted in a religious crisis. Augustine became a Christian, ended his betrothal, and adopted a celibate life [10]. Later, the medieval Catholic Church honored any vow that was made between a male and female as long as they were not related or already married, regardless of where the vows were made or in whose presence they were taken, provided that the participants were of age (ie, 12 or 14 years). If their consent was regarded as meaningful, the children could be as young as 7 years of age [11]. The age of consent also implied the ability to engage willingly in sexual intercourse, although it was emphasized that this was not to be done until marriage.

Marriage did not necessarily imply that sexual activity immediately took place, but it was assumed, except in the case of young children. In 1564, a 3-year-old was married to a 2-year-old in the Bishop's Court in Chester, England [12]. Such a marriage only could be ruled invalid if it had not been consummated by age 12. Although Shakespeare set *Romeo and Juliet* in Verona, Italy, the fact that Juliet was 13 years of age undoubtedly reflected the English reality of the sexuality of teenagers. Her mother, who was 26 years old when Juliet met Romeo, called her daughter almost an old maid.

English tradition carried over to the United States. The case of Mary Hathaway might serve as an example. In 1689, she was 9 years old when she married William Williams in Virginia. We know of her case only because 2 years later, she sued for divorce and was released from the covenant that she had made because the marriage had not been consummated. If, however, her husband, who was two years older than her, had raped her, she probably could not have been given the divorce [13]. Among the elite in Great Britain and in colonial America,

marriages that took place at young ages were common; although the children might have been given some choice, the marriages were brokered and negotiated by parents and usually involved complicated settlements [14]. Most of these marriages had to do with lineage, maintaining inherited status, and ideologies that underlie social stability, order, and monarchy; sexuality or even sexual attraction were secondary.

Were children capable of having sex? One view of children that became common in the early modern period sometimes has been called the “Puritan view.” This assumed that the child was naturally wicked; hence, the function of education was to teach him or her to modify and control sexual or erotic proclivities. Hannah More (1745–1843) [16] said that it was a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings whose little weaknesses may want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions of which it should be the great end of education to rectify [15].

One means of correcting children was by flogging which many regarded as permissible and essential to prevent straying. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, flogging was discouraged on the grounds that whipping brutalized children; other remedies, such as locking a child in his room or similar punishment, probably would work better. Education was based upon the idea of restraint and spontaneity was to be avoided. In the eighteenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau proclaimed the innocence of the child; however, the problem with innocence was that it could be destroyed [1]. Innocence had to be protected, inculcated, and enforced through education and discipline, although discipline had a different justification than Hannah Moore had given it. Ariès [1] claimed that before the eighteenth century no one worried about spoiling childish innocence because no one “thought such innocence really existed.” This simply is not true.

Even before Rousseau there were challenge by parents and others to the inherent evil of children. There was, however, a division of opinion on how to treat them. Edward (“Ned”) Ward (1667–1731) [16] complained of the way that fashionable mothers treated their children as pets by spoiling them with sweetmeats and showing them off to friends. He believed that this heavy feminine influence would be responsible for the effeminacy of boys in adult years. There is no doubt, however, that women became increasingly influential in challenging child rearing ideas during the course of the eighteenth century. One result of this was to challenge the dominance of the father in the family setting. One the growing literacy and education of women coincided with if it did not lead to an increasing emphasis on holding childhood to be a period of purity, innocence, and asexuality. Many objected to such changes because they believed that they were contrary to reality, as did Ward as well as other female critics. Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood (1775–1851), a popular author of children’s books, described the potential bad qualities in a child’s heart. “Though a child. . .knew no naughty words and naughty tricks; notwithstanding which, like all little children, who have not yet received new hearts, he was full of evil inclinations. . .Every child born of the family of Adam is utterly corrupt from his birth” [17].

Herbert Spencer [18], the sociologist and philosopher, echoed this. “Do not expect from a child any great amount of moral goodness. During early years every civilized man passes through that phase of character exhibited by the barbarous race from which we descended.”

Whether this meant that children were dangerously sexual is unclear at the beginning of the century, but the meaning of descriptive terms underwent a re-evaluation over the course of the century. Words like “vice, immorality, wickedness, corruption, evil and sin” acquired clear sexual connotations by the middle of the century; this may have emphasized a greater concern with youthful eroticism and sexuality [19]. This is expressed most openly by the massive fears of childhood masturbation, which increasingly came to dominate discussion of childhood over the course of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

The obvious interest of children, particularly pubertal youth, in sexual matters, whether innocent or not, clearly excited many adults, particularly males, who seemed to believe that prepubertal youth were ripe for initiation into the sex act. The most popular sex manual of the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth century as well, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* (1745), talks of the joys of older men having young virgins as sex partners. Although the author said that the ripe age for virgins is 14 or so, he does not use such sexual terms for boys. In his imaginary country, Campania, men in their eighties were allowed to marry and to seek out ever younger virgins with whom to have sex, and, perhaps, children [20].

Erotic (or pornographic) literature, which reappeared in the sixteenth century (it had existed in ancient Rome and Greece), is a rich source for documenting views toward adolescent sexuality. Particularly rich in this respect are the writings about prostitutes in eighteenth-century England. Girls as young as 12 years of age were recruited because of their sexual attractiveness. The memoirs of the “rake,” William Hickey (1749–1830), give considerable information on this [21]. He reported that when his brother observed a local bawd (the name often given to a proprietor of a house of prostitution) taking her 12- or 13-year-old daughter to a nunnery for schooling, he exclaimed that she should be made sexually available to him. He observed that her “young bosom had already too much swell for a nun, and that no canting hypocritical friar should have the fingering of those little plump globes.”

Hickey reported that when the bawd, Charlotte Hayes, spotted 12-year-old Emily Warren begging in London with her blind father, she immediately recruited her for her staff. Before Emily took her first customers, however, Hayes spent time training her in walking correctly, dressing properly, and speaking differently so that she could attract high-class Englishmen [21]. Fanny Hill, the temptress who is the heroine of an erotic novel by John Cleland [22], was 15 years old when she left for London to seek her fortune. Hickey, the memoirist, and Cleland, the novelist, reflected the reality of eighteenth-century England.

Young girls were so much in demand that a network of recruiters in London were looking for sexually attractive young pubescent girls to recruit to the trade. The more attractive of the girls usually were tutored in how to walk and to dress and in other “feminine” arts that were believed to make her more attractive to

rich gentleman. Girls who lacked the sexual attractiveness for which the recruiters were looking often went on the street on their own. After they were deemed available, the potential abilities of young girls were advertised. A girl known as Eleanor was listed in one of *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies*:

A plump little girl, with good eyes, and indifferent teeth, firm breasts, and fit for those who love a tight piece, having passed several times for a maidenhead, by the help of a little art of sex and acquainted with, such as alum water etc. She had sold this commodity a dozen times, within these five months, and has been well paid for the same. An old matron is her conductor and introduced her where she thinks the man can easily be duped. A practice very common in London, and as surprising that men are such fools [23].

The reference to the multiple use of her maidenhead refers, in part, to the widespread belief that having sex with a young girl virgin enabled those who were infected by a sexually transmitted disease to cure themselves by passing it on to her. It also refers to the great desirability that young virgin girls; the rights to first penetration of a young girl often was open to bidding and could cost several hundred pounds or more. Inevitably, many bawds claimed that her young prostitute was an innocent virgin for as long as she could. Young pubescent boys also were sought out; the records on such practices are just beginning to emerge. Both sexes could be, and, often were, sold into prostitution by their parents or guardians.

Sexual appeal was not ignored by governmental and religious authorities, although usually they responded only after a large public scandal. It was through such scandals that the age of consent in English law was raised from 10 to 12 in 1861, to 13 in 1875, and to 16 in 1885, although marriage was allowed at younger ages with parental consent. In the United States, individual states kept the age of consent low until it began to increase in the last part of the twentieth century [7].

One effect of the belief in childhood innocence was the growth of efforts to preserve and protect them by keeping information about sex from them, especially girls and young women. The desire to protect innocence drove the censors in the United States and elsewhere to ban material that contained sexual information, including any discussion of contraception. The major exception to prohibiting sex information was the literature that emphasized the dangers of masturbation to the young. Anthony Comstock, the crusader for censorship in the last part of the nineteenth century, believed that childhood innocence needed to be protected at all costs. He wrote that

brutal assaults upon the native innocence of youth and children is laying burden upon the rising generations which will be grievous to their future welfare and heavy to be borne. . . The degrading of our youths is a crying evil to day. It is a seed sowing from which brothels, dives, prisons, penitentiaries, asylums and early grave are fast being recruited [17].

Comstock and his allies, with the fervor of dedicated believers, tried to censor or prevent any serious discussion of sexuality, except among physicians or

lawyers; however, these professionals also had to be cautious. Despite such rigid censorship, however, the child as a figure of fantasy, obsession, and suppressed desire is part of the writing of Lewis Carroll, who is best known for his classic, *Alice in Wonderland*. His obsession with prepubescent girls led many commentators to wonder whether he was a pedophile. The real-life mother of the girl who was fictionalized by him was moved to deny him access to her daughter. Equally ambivalent thoughts about sexuality were expressed by James Barrie in *Peter Pan*. The prepubescent Alice exists in a fantasy world where sex is never present, whereas Peter Pan is the boy who never grows up. The image of the child as pure, and, yet, strangely erotic, seemed to be a part of the belief system of Victorian culture. Even those who subscribed to the “chaste” view of children often feared childhood sexuality. William Acton, the Victorian physician who was concerned with childhood sexuality, wrote that childhood masturbation led a boy to become a dribbling idiot or a “peevisish valetudinarian.” Although others had pointed out to Acton that this could not be true because it had been reported that “one half of the boy population masturbated themselves more or less,” he did not retract [24]. He wanted to believe in childhood innocence. Girls’ masturbation aroused equal, if not greater, concern and there were no reality checks on the damage in which it could result.

Sexual innocence in children was something to which the newly developing field of sex research did not subscribe [25]. Richard von Krafft-Ebing [26] recounted the story of a girl who was 8 years of age and was “devoid of all child-like and moral feelings” who had masturbated from her fourth year. At the same time, she consorted with boys of the ages of 10 or 12. He also included the case of a girl who began to masturbate at 7 years of age, practiced lewdness with boys, and seduced her younger sister into masturbating as well. Applying a red hot iron to her clitoris did not stop her; she was so depraved that she masturbated with the cassock of a priest while he was exhorting her to reform [26]. Although Krafft-Ebing gradually modified his ideas about the dangers of masturbation, there is a real fear of overt childhood sexuality in his writing.

Sigmund Freud [27] gave the death knell to childhood innocence about sexuality. He wrote that the parent who did not credit his or her children with having sexual feelings and expressions was a parent who had taken “no trouble to observe any of such activity which might claim any of his attention.” Freud held that sexuality was a prime factor in human development and that sexual experiences during infancy influenced the development of the adult personality. He hypothesized that children competed with the parent of the same gender for a sexual relationship with the parent of the other gender, a competition that he named the Oedipus complex (for boys) and the Electra complex (for girls). He divided childhood sexuality into phases. The “oral stage” coincided with infancy to 18 months, sensuality was in sucking, touching, holding, bodily contact, and genital exploration. This was followed by the “anal stage” in early childhood up to 3 years where development of sphincter control, ability in males to produce erection, awareness of nongenital gender differences, and a developing gender identity took place. Next came the phallic or Oedipal/Electra complex that

took place between 3 and 5 years, and resulted in deliberate pleasurable self-stimulation, curiosity about sexual and productive process, and well-developed gender identity. The “latency period,” which Freud equated with children who were 5 to 11 years of age, involved active sexual exploration, active desire for sex information, prepubescent surge in hormones, and growth of internal and external sexual organs. The final phase was adolescence, which he carried from 12 to 20 years of age, and called the “genital stage”. This involved the development of capacities to ejaculate and to menstruate, sexual maturation, seeking questions of self-identity, and intense romantic attachments. Freud theorized that if such developments did not occur fully, psychotherapy could help a person to understand, but not necessarily to eliminate, the effects of destructive early experience.

After Freud broke the taboo on full discussions of sexuality, others followed. Erik Erikson [28,29] accepted the stage for the development of sexuality but also believed that things often went awry. He postulated eight stages of life, each of which involved a crisis for the individual and in which negative developments in one phase could be overcome in others. He also held that negative effects later in the development stage could overwhelm earlier positive developments. He avoided describing them in sexual terms but rather in what might be called crises—those events that take place in infancy through adolescence: basic trusts versus mistrust (sensuality by way of suckling, touching, holding, bodily contact, and genital exploration); autonomy versus doubt or shame (awareness of nongenital differences and gender identity); initiative versus guilt (deliberate pleasurable self-stimulation, curiosity about sexual process, well-developed gender identity); industry versus inferiority (active sexual exploration, prepubescent surge in hormones, growth of sexual organs); and identity versus confusion (capacity to ejaculate and to menstruate, increasing romantic attachment, questions about self and identity).

As evolutionary and social biologists entered the discussion, they emphasized the differences between the sexes and held that the way children approached sex was a result of evolution that emerged over time from the reproductive success of individuals who had adaptive skills [30]. Well-developed gross motor skills and aggressiveness in males probably would have great value in ensuring evolutionary survival, whereas attachment bonds, sociability, and interpersonal sensitivity would have been favored in women [31]. Animal models also were used; from observing primates, it was emphasized that sexual behavior before puberty was common. Infant monkeys started engaging, presenting, and mounting behaviors almost as soon as they wandered away from their mothers. Such behavior did not result in actual copulation until later and presenting is done by both sexes. How much learning is involved in this behavior and how much is biologic also was debated. Social learning theorists, while accepting some evolutionary basis for sexual conduct, also attributed differences in gender roles, sexual attitudes, and sexual behavior to human learning in social contexts. We learn from our peers as well as our parents, relatives, siblings, and others.

The problem with the theorists was in demonstrating the phases of child sexual development. One way to get information is to ask adults to recall their

sexual feelings and sexual behavior during childhood. Another is to ask children about their sex lives and still another is to observe children's sexual behavior or to obtain observations from their parents or from those who take care of children. All four methods have been used but all have raised political controversy. Rather than encouraging research, legislation, particularly in the United States, has made serious research into the topic more difficult. Laws that are enacted to protect children often have been interpreted in ways to prevent any serious study of childhood sexuality that involved direct questioning of them.

Before the enactment of such laws, Alfred Kinsey and colleagues [32] had done some research; they provided the evidence for much of what Freud said about childhood sexual development. Kinsey et al asked adults, as well as a handful of children, about their youthful sexual activities. They found that 48% of the older males and 60% of the adolescent boys had engaged in homosexual activity; the mean age of contact was 9 years. They defined homosexual activities as exhibition of genitals, manual manipulation of genitalia, anal or oral contact with genitalia, and urethral insertions. Childhood heterosexual sex play (inspection of each sex by the other, finger insertions in the vagina, or handling of the penis by the opposite sex) began at a median age of 8 years and 10 months; genital insertions occurred slightly later. They also reported that orgasms had been reported by other observers occurring as early as five months for boys and four months for girls. Preadolescent boys could reach a climax much faster than adolescent boys.

In Kinsey et al's [33] study of females, approximately 4% reported that they had been responding sexually by 5 years of age, whereas nearly 16% recalled doing so by 10 years; a total of 27% responded sexually by the age of adolescence. Fourteen percent of these had achieved orgasm. Thirty percent reported preadolescent sexual play, much of the play was due to curiosity about their partner's anatomy.

Others followed in Kinsey et al's path. Robert Sorenson [34] did interviews and questioning about personal values and sexual behavior among American teenagers. He found that 33% of the boys and 12% of the girls had begun to masturbate before the age of 11. Boys had been told about or shown masturbation by their peers, whereas girls tended to learn about it through self-discovery. Rene Spitz [35] observed sexual and other behaviors in foundling home infants, and, later, compared infants who were reared in a prison nursery with community-reared infants. His studies associated genital play and masturbation with emotional health. In the 1970s, Eleanor Galenson [36], a child analyst, conducted detailed observational studies of 70 normal children from infancy through the preschool years. She described the time at which sexual interest and activities emerged and gender differences appeared; these events occurred regularly during healthy early development.

Since the Sorenson study, the questioning of students has become a more difficult process in the United States because of changes in laws and the growing influence of human use committees. It is possible to question teenagers but there are limits about what can be asked; there also is a reluctance of

researchers to be involved for fear of being charged with committing a sex crime. It is much more difficult in the United States to study younger children, even through carefully-controlled observational studies [37]. As a result, some American researchers, such as June Reinisch, have turned to researching childhood sexual development in other countries where restrictions are not defined so narrowly.

One of the first comprehensive examinations of child sexual development was performed by the Austrian, Ernest Borneman [38], who set forth precise ages and stages at which particular sexual developments and understandings occurred. He believed that the retroactive method that was used by Kinsey and others was not valid for early childhood and that direct observation and questioning of children was essential. Borneman found that the sex life of children is more complicated in earlier phases of development than in later ones; it has much in common with the adult sex life than with that of any animal model; that childhood sex is more than coitus; that actual sex contacts make up only a small part of the life of the child; and that no aspect of adult sexual life can be understood without understanding that of the child. Still Borneman, even in Austria, was denounced for doing such research and was accused of pedophilia, an accusation that is often used against those who are involved in researching sexual activities of children. Often, publishers were reluctant to publish such studies. Floyd Martinson [39], an American researcher into childhood sexuality in a period before human subject committees, combined retrospective interviews with some observational data, and arrived at many of the same conclusions that Borneman later did. Martinson found that publishing such information met resistance; to get the information out, he had to publish it himself.

Martinson and Borneman, despite their difficulties, had a much easier time in conducting their studies than did Ronald and Juliette Goldman [40]. The Goldmans interviewed children's thinking about sexuality at ages 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15, in Australia, Britain, Canada, Sweden, and the United States. Although their questions were designed carefully to avoid offending parents and school boards, they had great difficulties in obtaining subjects in the United States, and to some extent in Canada, compared with Britain, Australia, or Sweden. They persevered and found that the children in the four English-speaking countries became aware of genital differences at an older age than did children in Sweden. Sweden, incidentally, had the most well-developed sex education program.

Whatever difficulties researchers might have, and even with federally-sponsored abstinence-only sex programs handicapping sex education, young people learn about sex. Research has shown consistently that by age 18, most young males and females in the United States and Canada have engaged in coitus and a variety of other sexual activities [41]. According to reports of parents, children's overt sexual activities are most frequent around the ages of 3 or 4 and decrease in frequency gradually until the age of 12 [42].

Perhaps surprisingly, research studies that were performed by the University of California—Los Angeles Family Life Styles Project tend to contradict some long-held assumptions. Children who saw their parents naked or engaging in sex were

not more likely to experience psychologic problems in later childhood or adolescence than children [43]. There was a tendency for them to have fewer problems—a result that corresponds with another retrospective study [44], and, as history would indicate, the common experience of the past.

Recent research also has focused on social influences, particularly on teens, and its effect on sexual behavior. Sexual activities tend to start earlier among children who are from lower socioeconomic levels, probably because this is the norm in the community in which they live [45]. Sexual behavior tends to start later among children who are religiously observant and of higher intelligence [46,47]. Whether it is the religion or higher intelligence that is influential is debatable because the effect of intelligence is marked in sexual behaviors that range from kissing to coitus. Initiation into sexual activity is more likely to occur earlier if the person has a significantly older boyfriend or girlfriend than their peers [48]. Age discrepancy in marriage mates has been common throughout much of history; this practice reinforced the patriarchal tradition and which allowed a less restrictive sex life for boys than girls.

One of the changes in the focus of childhood sexuality research since Richard Green's [49] study of feminine boys is the recognition of the existence of homosexuality and gender-nonconforming behavior in childhood. This is part of a new frontier of research into childhood sexuality; it is hoped that this is symbolic of the changing public attitudes on the topic which might allow researchers to explore the complex subject of childhood sexuality more deeply.

Despite difficulties, the history of such research only can document what Freud finally put into writing, namely that children are sexual creatures. Some elements in American society have been reluctant to accept this observation; it is hoped that, despite many obstacles, it will be possible to add to our knowledge about this subject.

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