2 Over-Sexed and Under Surveillance

Adolescent Sexualities, Cultural Anxieties, and Thick Desire

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we extend our earlier work on sexuality education in U.S. public schools in which we forwarded a theory of adolescent sexuality, which we called *thick desire* (Fine & McClelland, 2006). We chose the metaphor of *thickness* in order to evoke the multi-faceted 'nature' of sexual desire and to underline our reading of desire as a product of intimate and social negotiations. In contrast to contemporary theories that frame sexual desire as emerging solely from individual motivation, behaviour, or fantasy (within the person or the couple; see Basson 2000, 2001; Brotto, Bitzer, Laan, Leiblum, & Luria, 2010; Carvalho & Nobre, 2010; cf., Kaschak & Tiefer, 2001), *thick desire* invites a theoretical and methodological intervention. It reminds us that bodies adhere with connective tissue to economic, political, historic, and psychological landscapes—meaning that desire never stands on its own. It is a concept we placed into feminist discourse to signal how bodies are linked to social arrangements, politics, yearnings, deprivations, and betrayals in public settings and that these connections—both supportive and restrictive—inform how young people learn to develop a sense of desire. *Thick desire* encourages researchers and policy makers alike to situate desire as an 'entry point' (McClelland & Frost, 2014), a window through which we might begin to notice the extensive web of factors in a person's life, family, community, and nation when making evaluations and recommendations about how individuals can and should learn about, practice, and engage with sexuality.

Since 2006, we developed the concept of *thick desire* in a series of publications, pushing at its edges to help clarify how we understand the dynamics between desire and cultural anxieties that have mapped onto adolescent bodies, as enacted in policy and research. We have developed thick desire with several dimensions in mind, including: the legal sexual surveillance of adolescents (Fine & McClelland, 2007), the role of feminist research methods (McClelland & Fine, 2008a, 2008b), and the implicit characteristics of federally-funded evaluation research in the US (McClelland & Fine, 2008c). In writing and research we have done separately, we have explored

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how *thick desire* migrates into a number of allied areas, including research on sexual satisfaction (McClelland, 2010, 2011), the de-pathologizing of adolescent sexuality (Tolman & McClelland, 2011), and queries into the parameters of "age appropriate sexuality" (McClelland & Hunter, 2013). In addition, we have provisionally recruited a thick desire framework to understand how desire is embodied and enacted in the lives of immigrant women experiencing domestic violence seeking safety as they try to avoid the tentacles of incarceration and loss of their children and deportation; in the journeys of formerly incarcerated women and men struggling for a college education post-prison as they manoeuvre bureaucratic and structural obstacles including financial aid limitations; and in the bold social movements of youth who are undocumented and living in the US, seeking access to higher education. All of these projects and their developing coalitions can be found on the website for the Public Science Project (see www.publicscienceproject.com).

In this chapter, we trace the early genealogy of *thick desire* and its development. As we review our writing, you will notice, perhaps, that we have slipped desire into the space typically occupied by damage; we have situated young women's embodied experiences into history, politics, and economics to understand how bodies and movements sit in and shape circuits of dispossession and resistance (Fine, 2012). We have insisted that desires are multiple and not isolated. In other words, we have attended to a question not often enough asked: Wither goes desire when structural inequalities birth a generation surrounded by surveillance and on the brink of material and psychological precarity?

THICK DESIRE: A SUMMARY

Sexual desire provides a partial, but powerful, vantage point to assess the embodiment and enactment of power, experience, relationship, dispossession, and privilege. What is usually considered a 'private' space and 'personal' feeling opens an embodied and cultural window through which we can see how history echoes and bounces around bodies and relationships, how hierarchies operate and how power shrinks and expands—at both micro and macro levels—across intimate, social, and political environments. As MacKinnon (1987) explained, "Sexuality is the social process that creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire . . . [Desire] is taken for a natural essence or presocial impetus but is actually *created by* the social relations, the hierarchical relations, in question" (p. 49, emphasis in original). Fine's 'Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire' (1988) was an early articulation of how adolescent sexual desire stood at the intersection between school and home, public and private, language and silence, bodies and cultural anxieties. In this earlier essay, Fine pointed to the young woman learning to be silent about

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her sexual desire in school and insisted that this represented not only the systematic loss of personal pleasure, but the loss of her citizenry as well. Through the delicate unravelling of one thread of educational policy, Fine's analysis of sex education policies opened our understandings of classrooms and bodies and asked for a newly imagined alignment of feminist theory, adolescent health, and critical research methods. Her articulation of structured silences—what could not be said, and in part not known, because there were no words—is credited with igniting the field of adolescent sexuality research and bringing female sexuality out from the shadows as something that could be and must be studied.

Eighteen years later, we co-authored the follow up to Fine's 1988 article in which we examined another contemporary educational policy—Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Sex Education (AOUM; Fine & McClelland, 2006). In the years separating the original publication (1988) and the follow up piece (2006) in *Harvard Education Review*, the public policy environment in the US surrounding young people and their sexually developing bodies had grown increasingly restrictive, explicitly structured by religious ideology, and particularly ripe for scientific measurement. As cultural anxieties accumulated on and circulated around young women's bodies, particularly young women of colour and/or queer youth, the sexual and empirical surveillance of "suspect" bodies of all ages had become effectively normalized, creating a new environment in which it was again essential to examine the role of sex education in adolescents' lives.

In 2006, we argued that Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Sex education policies were evidence of how quickly and forcefully religious discourses were structuring federally-funded policies in the US We pressed on the articulation of how religious ideologies affected both *how* and *what* young people learned about their sexual bodies. Central to this argument was the discussion of how abstinence policies—specifically their form, content, and distribution—endangered and punished particular groups of young people, while inserting a naturalized protection for others. Thus, we wondered not only about institutional policies, structured silences, and the role of missing discourses, but about the cumulative consequences of a neo-liberal political context in which education, reproductive services, and sexual health research were being situated and marinated in conservative ideology and religion. In this original articulation of *thick desire*, we focused on, "young women's sexual encounters with the state—through law, policy, and public institutions—as 'the best hidden things in the social body'" (Foucault, 1990, p. 118) and made the case that young women's sexual relations with the state offered, "a window onto the intimate implications of neo-liberalism and fundamentalism" (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 299). Desire no longer missing but vilified.

Without a framework of *thick desire*, we argued that young people and young women of colour in particular, were systematically held accountable in law, popular media, and in empirical research, for so-called "bad

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Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 14 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

decisions" and poor moral judgment. They were (and are) held responsible for maintaining their own sexual health while growing up surrounded by racist, hetero-normative public policies which shape not only what others think of their bodies and what resources they have access to as they navigate treacherous social waters, but perhaps most importantly, what they think about their own bodies as well. It is this unique way that sexual desire weaves within and between the political sphere, the social environment, and the intimate body that has held our attention. This is also, perhaps, one reason feminist scholars have consistently turned to adolescent desire as a window into systematic injustices (Allen, 2004; Fields, 2008; Rasmussen, 2010).

In developing *thick desire*, we turned to several theorists who had developed relevant frameworks through which to examine our own articulation of the relationship between young sexual bodies and the State. Specifically, we turned to Nussbaum (2003), Sen (1992), and Appadurai (2004) to take up questions of how legal and political structures become absorbed and made into flesh, as well as the larger discussion in feminist literatures concerning human rights and the enabling conditions that are required for rights to flourish. We paired this with Brown's (2003) important critique of the neo-liberal state, and particular, Brown's articulation of its insistence that each individual bear the consequences of what come to be thought of as irrational ideas or bad decisions:

> [Neo-liberalism] also carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits. Correspondingly, a "mismanaged life" becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers. . . . (para. 3)

We turned to these scholars because we wanted to articulate a vision of desire broadly conceived rather than narrowly aligned with meritocratic notions of individual accomplishment and/or fantasies of mobility and success. While scholars have long debated the implications of setting any kind of benchmark for human thriving when that benchmark relies on state support (see Asad, 2003, for example), we see this issue somewhat differently. We see our job first as documenting the links that tie bodies to policies, and importantly, we see these ties as both punishing and supportive; the question is for whom are policies punishing and for whom do policies provide consistent support? Our second job is to theorize the implications of the loss of state support for people, their families, and their communities. To this end, we ask how relationships with policies and the state form (constrain, expand, inspire) the subjectivity of individuals—a task that differs somewhat from that of the philosopher, political

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Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 15 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

theorist, or anthropologist. With social psychological theory as our guide (Lewin, 1935), we look to the person as well as the environment to ask, *how do you know what you want?*

In addition, we see *thick desire* as rooted deeply in the work of postcolonial and feminist scholars who have long interrogated the colonizing of bodies, communities and identities, and have remained committed to how public spaces—including schools—can be sites in which information, dialogue, inquiry, critique, and engagement can be cultivated. The politics of *thick desire* come at the intersection of critical race and feminist theories, socialist and post-colonial understandings of history, current arrangements and social struggles. We are informed by struggles for educational justice (Freire, 1970), decolonizing women's bodies and bodies of colour (Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), and social movements that take seriously critical educational practice including freedom schools and critical participatory research (Davis, 1990; Martin-Baro, Aron, & Corne, 1994).

We theorized *thick desire* to interrupt visions of sexual desire that insisted on only locating desire in hearts, minds, and genitals. We placed it outside of the self and argued that without this perspective, desire would continue to function as a way to naturalize inequity in schools, in sex, in workplaces, in political demands. Desire is and remains a powerful construct in critical theory because of its dualistic nature of both literal manifestation and metaphor; it is always both indicative of embodied experiences directed towards specific objects or individuals—and simultaneously—an inclination towards all things, undirected want of all kinds (McClelland & Fine, 2008a). With this in mind, thick desire directs our attention to sites for educational praxis in which critical knowledges, dialogues, and inquiries are engaged; we use the idea of desire to do this work because it is capable of encompassing and contesting questions of power, gender, sexuality, bodies, violence, and what Appardurai (2004) would call aspirations. With this image in mind, we are not envisioning the ideal sexuality curriculum as a flat tablet of facts and rights. Rather, we imagine a variety of educational settings—in schools and out—in which questions of bodies, violence, definitions of health and well-being, analyses of power, and desire are taken up. We imagine a public space that is polyphonic and critically infused with questions of asymmetric power expressed, enacted, and contested through gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, immigration, class, and their intersections.

THICKENING THICK DESIRE

After the original piece on *thick desire* was published in 2006, we further developed the framework in a series of subsequent articles and chapters. While the original elaboration of *thick desire* set the stage for the argument that adolescent desire cannot and should not be imagined out of context and only in the body, in the articles and chapters that followed we explored

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how the theory of thick desire allowed us to see things that we hadn't seen before. We saw connections between policies aimed at adolescents that imposed and generated evidence of 'risk'; we saw the limitations of valorizing the role of 'voice' in feminist research; we saw potential limitations of theorizing desire as a framing device and explored additional terms; we saw, increasingly, how making the intimate profoundly social consistently encouraged us to take up questions differently. It is with these new insights in mind that we summarize the subsequent writings below so that readers can see the tapestry of writing in one place for the first time.

U.S. PUBLIC POLICIES & REGULATION OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY

Aimed at legal audiences and appearing in the *Emory Law Review*, in 2007 we published 'The Politics of Young Women's Sexuality: Public Policy and the Adolescent Female Body'. In this article we examined the conceptual and empirical assumptions underlying three legal policies: Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage education, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) refusal to deregulate emergency contraception for teen women, and the rapid proliferation of parental consent and notification mandates for abortion for teens under the age of 18 (Fine & McClelland, 2007). Overall, the analysis of these legal policies demonstrated that *thick desire* was not simply linked to sex education, but was, in fact, woven into a set of larger concerns and free floating anxieties about adolescent desire. We argued that adolescent sexuality was used as a lightning rod in public discourses: sanctioning 'appropriate' and 'healthy' forms of sexual expression only within heterosexual, monogamous marriages and vilifying other forms of sexual expression.

In our analysis of law, we could easily identify the traces of religious moralizing and reveal just how normalized this type of influence had become in U.S. politics:

> [This left] young women vulnerable to political whims, particularly those young women with the least political power by virtue of social class, race or ethnicity, immigration status, disability, and sexual orientation. These are not young women for whom privacy and liberty, alone, will suffice. They need and deserve what we consider *enabling contexts* for their economic, educational, health, and sexual well-being. (Fine & McClelland, 2007, p. 1026)

This essay echoed the chorus of scholars from across several disciplines who have articulated how certain bodies are registered as in danger or "at risk" through the implementation of policies embroidered with evangelical Christianity and racist tropes (Cohen, 2009; Fields, 2005, 2008; Willis, 2001). As

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Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 17 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

Waligora-Davis (2004) has argued, the rhetoric of U.S. policies (and in particular, those pertaining to the management of infectious disease) enforce, "representations of illness; representations that participate in the pathologization of blackness, and mobilize a cultural paranoia wherein extreme state practices are not only socially sanctioned but also appear morally just and, for our domestic policies, safe" (p. 183). Waligora-Davis reminds us how language, definitions, and assumptions made in public policies serve to confine specific bodies—both through the policy itself and through the public imagination—too easily equating black and brown bodies with suspicion, risk, contagion and, as you will see in a moment, excess.

ADOLESCENT FEMALE SEXUAL EXCESS: WANT & DESIRE

We followed up on this question of the influence of the cultural imagination concerning adolescent bodies, minds, desires, and sexualities in a chapter about the concept of "excess"—both adolescent and sexual—aimed at feminist educators, activists, and theorists. We examined how the idea of excess had grown attached to cultural representations of girls and young women who talk, eat, drink, diet, study, express anxiety, interrupt, cut, consume and have sex. They are too often seen as *just too much.* Girls of colour, in particular, are consistently imagined and described as too big, too loud, too sexual, and wasting too many public resources. The idea of excess has been strategically attached to bodies, thoughts, behaviours and relationships that hold and incite cultural anxieties.

As the welfare state was being systematically dismantled in low income communities over the last ten years, and the few remaining social programs were held accountable to regimes of measurement and metric madness (Fine, 2012), the U.S. public was being told that hard choices would be necessary; that public resources are scarce and austerity is essential; that excess would have to be cut (Fine, 2012). All of these imply an essential question: Whose life and desires were deemed excessive? Questions of need, want and desire grew more urgent. State-sponsored campaigns against excess could be seen widely—excess eating, smoking, health care demands, too many immigrants, too many people on public assistance, and too many workers with public pensions. During this time of massive accumulation of wealth by elites and corporations, campaigns were launched against poor people, immigrants, single mothers, Muslims, and others, who were stealing "our" money and social resources and threatening "our" human security (Fine, 2012).

In 'Rescuing a Theory of Adolescent Sexual Excess: Young Women and Wanting,' we used *thick desire* to help us think about this idea of whose body symbolizes, embodies, or expresses excess (McClelland & Fine, 2008a). We used the term "excess" as an organizing concept because it enabled us to think about cultural and individual assumptions about how

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Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 18 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

much desire was considered sufficient. We found that young female sexuality was always imagined as too big, too much, and always excessive: "Young women are fundamentally and inherently sexually excessive. Their sexuality captures cultural attention and collected cultural (and feminist) anxieties. Collectively, we seem to wonder, how much is enough?" (McClelland & Fine, 2008a, p. 89). We were beginning to see how young women's bodies and sexualities, their reproductive capacities but also their desires (for sex, pleasure, freedom, same-sex relationships, masturbation), emerged as a strategic platform for cultural anxieties released in the name of protection.

Using transcript data from a focus group with a diverse group of young women, we examined how young women talked about desire and paid particular attention to how they taught themselves how much was *enough* their own lives. We theorized a more inchoate version of desire in the form of wanting. Want, we argued, signalled that sexual desire, behaviour, and imagination could exceed the boundaries of protection discourses, risk, and danger.

> Wanting is wide and deep; it does not require an object. A theory of wanting allows the focus on other people, activities, outcomes, risks, and dangers to fall away for a moment. Wanting does not linger on the object of desire, but on the feeling in the mind or the body; therefore, it allows [sexual] identities and orientations to progress after the identification of want within the self. (McClelland & Fine, 2008a, p. 90)

In addition, we explored the uncomfortable hinge where feminist and cultural anxieties met, in the urge/desire to protect young women. We recognized an awkward union between our own concerns and those interested in limiting her access to contraception, sex education, and abortion in the name of protection:

> Those on the political Left and Right join in their fears for the sexually excessive young woman: both sides arguing for laws and policies aimed at restricting the harms young women face. She is indeed vulnerable; we all want to protect her. But how, in the process, have we become suspicious of her displays of excessiveness, just as we have learned to embrace our own? It seems we have restricted her access to expressions of excess. We ask her simply not to *want*. (McClelland & Fine, 2008a, p. 89)

Adding to the on-going and growing elaboration of desire in feminist scholarship (Allen, 2004, 2005; Bay-Cheng, Robinson, & Zucker, 2009; Diamond, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Fahs, 2011; Franke, 2001; Shalet 2010; Snitow, Stansell, & Thompson, 1983; Tolman, 2002, 2006), we offered the concept of "want" as a way to expand how feminists might tilt our methods to listen to young women. Perhaps, we wondered in this chapter,

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Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 19 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

we hadn't been listening carefully enough to hear the faint traces of want, which may be quieter and more ambivalent than desire. We worried that, perhaps young women's desire may have been rendered mute, in part, by our own collective anxieties about the dangers she faces. Instead of being missing, as Fine had originally argued, we wondered if it had also been snuffed out by our own desire not to hear.

By theorizing the presence and importance of want, we found that this shift in discourse also required a shift in methodological alignments. A focus on *want* requires research methods that can accommodate emergent and perhaps disguised utterances. In a subsequent chapter described below (McClelland & Fine, 2008b), we elaborated what these methodological release points might look like in research settings and discussed the implications of this theoretical work for feminists interested in collecting data about the sexual lives of young women.

THE SCIENCE OF ABSTINENCE RESEARCH

In 2008, we began to question a tension between *thick desire* and research methods. More to the point, we began to interrogate how state-funded science was being recruited as a tool in the campaign for abstinence, as it had been in climate change, abortion, and other areas of social contestation (Davidoff, 2006; Kempner, 2008; Steinbrook, 2012). In 'Embedded science: Critical Analysis of Abstinence-Only Evaluation Research' (McClelland & Fine, 2008c), we addressed two intertwined issues in research: The mobilization of funding for abstinence research and the stubborn particulars of survey design. Through an examination of a federally-funded study that had been commissioned to evaluate the impact of (also federally-funded) abstinence education in schools, we argued that this study was evidence of 'embedded science'. Embedded, we argued, because the funding and requirements placed on the study made it such that the design fore-closed some findings and ensured others. While the other writing we had done focused on how *thick desire* opened up ways of seeing adolescent sexuality from new perspectives, this article focused on the reverse: what perspectives were cut off as a result of not considering thick desire.

Addressing the funding of Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage (AOUM) programming in the US, we highlighted that between 2001 and 2006 nearly $800 million were allocated to AOUM programs (SIECUS, 2006). As funding allocations grew, so did the call for evaluation of the impact of AOUM programming on the sexual health of adolescents. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) commissioned a quasi-experimental, longitudinal evaluation of abstinence-only education by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., a highly regarded, nonpartisan, social science research institute. This evaluation was tasked with assessing the impact of AOUM curricula on the sexual attitudes and behaviours of young people.

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It was this appeal to science and research methodology that interested us. To examine this interrelationship between the federally-funded evaluation and the federally-funded abstinence policy it was tasked with evaluating, we looked closely at the survey items in the Mathematica instrument (Mathematica Policy Research, 2000). These data allowed us to assess the scope and parameters of the data collection tool, and ultimately, the ideological positions that were produced using this assessment tool. This close reading of the survey instrument revealed key moves or the 'micropractices' (Lather, 2005) of what we termed 'embedded science'. This was, of course, a time when embedded journalists were reporting to the U.S. public from behind the windshields of U.S. army tanks in Iraq (Farrell, 2010; Myers, 2010; Shadid, 2010; Sides, 2003) and our interested was piqued with respect to how the U.S. government manages information about its own decisions.

We used this image of embedded science as a way of critically reading the development and implementation of a study that was meant to evaluate the impact of abstinence-only education while also being funded by the U.S. government—a governing body that had a vested interest in results that would support AOUM funding allocations. The Mathematica evaluation sat at the politically charged intersection of national politics, conservative religious ideology, teen sexuality, and research science (see Sonfield, 2005).

In 2005, we had an opportunity to attend a conference and listen to a speech delivered by Wade Horn, who was at the time Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), where he elaborated what the government sought in publicly funded abstinence science:

> We don't need research to prove that abstinence works, we need evidence for how it works. Anyone who has taken 8th or 9th grade biology knows that abstinence works. *We already know the end game.* Our critics insist that research is on their side . . . it's not a question does abstinence work, but how to help young people make that choice. Evaluation is not a search for a new goal, but how to attain the goal. (Horn, personal communication, 2005; cited in McClelland & Fine, 2008c, p. 58)

We worried that U.S. officials who were the most vocal advocates for AOUM were also associated at high levels with the evaluation; em-bedded for sure. With a nod toward the critical sociology of science, we began to think about: what kind of data would be collected? What kinds of findings would be produced? These questions led us to examine the survey questions used in the AOUM evaluation study that was commissioned by the DHHS in 1998 (Devaney, Johnson, Maynard, & Trenholm, 2002; Maynard et al., 2005). Our micro-analysis of the survey questions revealed a set of

Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 21 T&F Proofs: Not For Distribution 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

methodological decisions which helped to shape the results in specific ways. These included setting up binaries between married and unmarried sex, wording questions such that they read all in the same direction, and the inclusion of questions that were drawn directly from AOUM curricula and worded consistently in the pro-abstinence direction. Our close reading of the items provided examples of these evaluation trends and how they might impact, or over-determine, the results of the study and would surely influence what would (not) be learned.

> For example, a full one third (28) of the 85 survey items explicitly link two ideas–unmarried sexual activity with risk and danger. To illustrate, participants were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: "*It is likely that teens who have sexual intercourse before they are married will get pregnant*" (Maynard et al., 2005, p. 139). They were also asked to respond to the following statement: "*Does having sexual intercourse before marriage make it harder for someone to have a good marriage and a good family life in the future?*" (Maynard et al., 2005, p. 143). Evident in these two examples are slippages and conflations of unmarried sex (of all ages), risk, danger, and lifelong adverse consequences. These consequences, notice, are not just for teen sex but for "unmarried teens" in the first example and premarital sex (for all ages) in the second example. This slippage from teen to all ages is significant and highlights the theme as sex as dangerous for all unmarried people. (Shorto, 2006; cited in McClelland & Fine, 2008c, p. 61)

Unfortunately, this lack of variability in the survey items left little independence or ability to reveal something new about young people's understandings of their sexual health, condom use, or STDs. Achieving sexual health was consistently aligned with avoiding STDs and was defined completely as an absence of sex, illness, and infection. Sexual health was collapsed into the avoidance of sexual injury, and with this collapse we lost the ability to examine young people's nuanced understandings of how they see the process of managing and protecting their own and others' experiences and bodies.

WRAPPED IN CELLOPHANE: SEXUALISATION, THE MARKET, AND PROTECTION

The same year that we were publishing on embedded science, we were also beginning to think about feminist embeddedness. That is, to what extent does feminist research impose, or even gather, an already scripted set of narratives about sexuality when studying adolescent girls and women? In a chapter self-reflexively aimed at feminist researchers, 'Writing on Cellophane: Studying Teen Women's Sexual Desires, Inventing Methodological Release Points' (McClelland & Fine, 2008b), we developed the metaphor

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of *cellophane* as a way of articulating the discursive muddles that accumulate in the midst of feminist research on sexuality and desire. While Tolman (2002, 2005, 2006) and others (Allen, 2005; Fields, 2008; Gill, 2008, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Scott, 2007) had already written eloquently on dilemmas of desire, we were increasingly concerned more broadly that the young women with whom we spoke were, straight out of a Bahktinian play book, speaking with hegemonic tongues heavy with language of public health, Girls Gone Wild, consumerism, religion, shame and/or neo-liberal clichés of 'freedom'. We began to worry that we were all embedded, not just the abstinence-funded researchers, in a discursive [think] tank that circulated a range of contradictory but reliable platitudes to young women (and men) about bodies and desire. Research, we feared, was simply vacuuming up the sound bites attached to distinct communities and zip codes and laminating sex talk in a kind of discursive girdle that kept the ambivalent, 'ugly' or confusing parts from leaking out. Wrapped in a 'collective discursive cellophane,' we argued that it may be difficult for young women to speak about their desires and offered the image of cellophane as a way to imagine how their tongues might be weighed down with dominant assumptions and panics, and similarly, our ears clogged with our own dominant feminist discourses for *their* desires.

Methodologically, we wondered, what are we hearing when we ask young women about desire? What happens to young women who grow up and develop with the constant din of alarms in their ears when we publicly and privately imagine them and their bodies as portals to danger? We imagined young women wrapped in layers of cellophane and us, the researchers, busily scribbling our notes on the cellophane, wondering why all our smart words and keen observations were sliding off and disappearing as soon as we wrote them. This metaphor of cellophane emerged from rearticulating the range of historical and contemporary processes that are part of a young woman's personal and social narrative by the time we talk to her. These layers were built up by a market economy that commodifies young female bodies; socio-political, moral, and hetero-normative panics that obsess over her sexualities; racist imagery and institutional practices that vilify the sexualities of women of colour; and by schools increasingly kidnapped by the policy of teaching Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage curricula.

We did not invoke this metaphor of cellophane as a way to encourage researchers to 'peel back the layers' or unwrap participants to get to the 'real' stories, their 'real' voices. Rather, we invoked this metaphor to remind us that young women, like the rest of us, are *always already* speaking through these layers; they are and have always been a part of the story. Like many other critical feminist researchers (Fields, 2008; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997; Morawski, 1997; Renold & Ringrose, 2011: Quinlivan, 2006), we wondered about the process of researching with/on/through a subject that is continually objectified and distorted through public and private scrutiny and regulation.

Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan 1st pages.indd 23 T&F Proofs: Not For Distribution 9/10/2013 4:01:51 PM

This attention to the mediated nature of research on sexual desire shifted our interest away from the young woman, and placed it more squarely on the political and cultural brakes that impress on young women and on those of us listening. This is a distinct shift in the tapestry of writing—cellophane acknowledged the *politics of listening* (Chun, 1999; McLeod, 2011) in a way that thick desire had not taken up. The question, therefore, became one of crafting research methods that acknowledge these political and discursive contexts and still manages to understand something about what it means to be a young woman living and developing sexually in the early decades of the 21st century.

As a provisional intervention, we developed *methodological release points*—a term meant to capture our interest in methods that help us critically engage topics that have become spaces of personal and political chaos. We proposed a series of methodological release points as ways to make potential openings in the 'assumed' and the 'common sense'—even that of feminist research. These ranged from theoretical interventions such as *thick desire* in framing the questions that researchers ask, to the role of focus groups in allowing danger and discomfort to float above individual bodies, to asking young people to reflect on the data that are collected and circulated about adolescent sexual outcomes, and finally, to participatory research methods which aim to disrupt the traditional power dynamics in the research relationship and turns those who are studied into experts on their own conditions. Ultimately, our hope was that *release points* would allow researchers to keep wanting and desire from being extinguished before being swallowed up by prevention and safety discourses. That is, we were at once trying to signal that discourses are already surrounding, internalized, rejected, negotiated, and translated by young women—and that research is a relational and performative practice in which discovery and critical engagement with dominant narratives and questioning narratives might be sought (Clegg, 2011).

SUMMARY

In the four pieces written after the original proposal of thick desire in 2006, we added several additional layers to our argument. We looked across several domains that are integral to the development and critical analysis of pleasure as it lives and breathes in young bodies. We focused on policy environments, research environments, and the nested quality of sexual desire in the ever-increasing folds of social and political environments.

Fine's original premise in the 1988 paper proposed a missing discourse of desire "inside the official work of U.S. public schools" (p. 33). This original framework, expanded in the 2006 piece, is not merely about the missing discourse of an *individual*, however, this is often how the piece has been interpreted. In addition to the person-level, the missing discourse

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framework encourages us to turn our gaze upwards and outwards, towards the *policies, relationships, ideologies,* and *institutions* which house these bodies. While discourse circulates within multiple levels (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1990), this multi-level approach has often been missing in research on and about adolescent sexual desire (for exceptions, see Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Diamond, 2005b; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). This inter-locked nature of discourse offers a broader view of how persons and environments merge and swim together in a sea of varied axes of power inequities (Lewin, 1935; Opotow & McClelland, 2011). We sought to bring this perspective more fully into research with young people about their increasingly socially and politically managed desires.

In 2006, we began with sex education as a starting point and as a way to illustrate the relationship between sexuality policies, the role of evangelical religion in American politics, and the consequences of both of these for the sexual health of young people. In subsequent writing, we stretched this analysis to include additional policies including abortion rights for minors and access to emergency contraception and presented evidence across these policy domains. More recently, McClelland & Frost (2014) have developed an analysis of additional social policies aimed at regulating sexual knowledge, behaviour, bodies, and desire. Their analysis of *entry points* through which policies which enter the body (politic) provides a framework for examining how politics becomes embodied, shaping what people know, how they behave, how/if they are allowed to form families, what their sexual body looks and feels like, and providing or stripping away resources from infrastructures that support sexuality development. Policy analysis reveals the mechanisms by which individuals are at once policed and made to appear as if they have invited their own policing. Importantly, policies reinscribe, provoke and then provide evidence of the specific ways that racism, homophobia, and sexism operate in a daily and chronic fashion, making some healthy and some sick (Cohen, 2008; Dailard, 2006).

EXTENSIONS & CHALLENGES TO THICK DESIRE

Since its publication, researchers, legal scholars, educators, and feminist theorists have taken up *thick desire* in their own work and pressed it forward in ways that have been thrilling to watch. The dialogue that has emerged in the seven short years since its publication is tremendous and an excellent example of how theoretical frameworks that are developed in one field or with one group in mind, often find traction in unexpected places and with unexpected impact.

Thick desire has been elaborated by researchers working in several disciplines: psychologists examining articulations of sexual pleasure and unwanted sex in undergraduate students in the US (Bay-Cheng

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& Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Bay-Cheng et al., 2009), sociologists examining abstinence-only policies in diverse socioeconomic schools in the US (Fields, 2008), and educators examining the effects of abstinence-only and comprehensive curriculum on young people (Lesko, 2010) and making arguments for the inclusion of human sexuality in youth programming (Romeo & Kelley, 2009). In addition to these scholars, *thick desire* has moved into disciplines which have relied on the theory's implications for health and well-being in contexts such as family law (Appleton, 2008) and paediatric medicine (Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr, 2008). This small sampling of how scholars have taken up the theory of thick desire—highlighting mechanisms of influence and clinical implications along the way—demonstrates how important inter-disciplinary work is in this field and beyond.

In addition, feminist researchers have also highlighted qualities of *thick desire* that are less well developed. For example, some have argued that thick desire does not sufficiently acknowledge the role of moralizing within comprehensive sex education (Lamb, 2010a; Rasmussen, 2010). These scholars argue that in a move to disentangle sex education from religious ideology, *thick desire* does not take a nuanced perspective on the important role of morals and morality as potentially useful guideposts in young people's lives. For example, Lamb (2010a) argued, "Fine and McClelland caution that these curricula frame sexuality as moral choices while ignoring moral questions about access to information and education" (p. 86). Other arguments have highlighted assumed and problematic links that are made between sexual pleasure, health, and freedoms implied in the thick desire framework. For example, Rasmussen (2010) presents us with an important challenge to recognize unstated assumptions within feminist social sexual justice arguments ("Whose construction of social sexual justice and what does this leave out?"). Lamb (2010b) has also argued that by "connecting all kinds of freedoms to sexual freedom" (p. 301) feminist projects like *thick desire* which endorse naturally desirous young women, may implicitly create a new norm, what Lamb calls a "natural girl" who chooses an "inner sexuality . . . as opposed to a packaged one" and by extension, sets up this feminist ideal of the natural girl who is always preferable to the "dupe" (p. 302).

These examples, and others not included here, represent provocative places where feminist scholars have pushed back on *thick desire*. These contributions have pushed us to think more carefully about its moral implications. And with respect and appreciation for these commentaries, we want to reiterate that *thick desire* is a line of analysis, and while the tithing to the religious Right may have been too knotty in our first essay, we seek to advance the framework which centers desire over damage; which places sexual bodies into a geographic and political matrix of history, economics, sexual-gender-racialized politics; a framework that contests the hypersurveillance of bodies.

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GROWING THICK DESIRE & LOOKING AHEAD

As in the past, today young women's sexualities emerge as a rich, contentious platform where dominant political tensions fester; where the filaments of cultural influence can be heard most vocally; where the stakes are high first for youth of colour, immigrants and queer youth, but/and like the canary in the mine, these "first responders" allow us to know the kinds of policy assaults coming our [collective] way. We turn now to think about the edges of the theoretical framework in order to address emergent ideas, under-explored aspects of the theory, and propose new sets of research ideas that we see emerging from the work in the current era of securitization, criminalization, and surveillance.

Consider, for example, a recent example of how desire—when it emerges in an era of racialized and sexualized surveillance and criminalization—takes on specific characteristics and an odor of distain for certain bodies and certain desires. In 2009, Antjuanece Brown, a 19 year old young woman, met Jolene Jenkins, a 16 year old young woman, and the two fell in love. When Ms. Jenkins' mother found photos and flirtatious text messages of the two women, her mother turned the cell phone into the local police. Ms. Brown, who was three years older than Ms. Jenkins, was charged with sex abuse, creating child pornography, and luring a minor; all felony offenses that carried the risk of five years imprisonment. While the two young women had not engaged in any sexual conduct, the images and text messages were used as evidence to suggest several sexually-based crimes. "[P]olice arrested Brown on suspicion of creating child porn, for 'knowingly subjecting' Jenkins to sexual intercourse and for 'luring a minor' by 'arousing and satisfying' Jenkins' 'sexual desires'" (Slovic, 2010).

This story is more than teens and the dangers of "sexting". Rather, this story draws our attention to the use of punishment and surveillance as tools to control desire, especially desire that appears in young, same-sex desiring, African-American bodies. It is about the ways that governing bodies intervene in young bodies and, importantly, the use of desire to control how young bodies come to imagine themselves as wanting, as citizens, and as full participants in the nation consumed with protection as punishment and the sniffing out of desire as a threat to national security.

> [Ms. Brown] left with a felony conviction that will make her dream of becoming a children's social worker much harder, if not impossible. In the meantime, that strike against her also cost her job at the call center, which does not employ felons (Slovic, 2012).

In 1959, C. Wright Mills wrote *The Sociological Imagination* in which he argued that the task of social science is to "translate private troubles into public issues". Today we are witnessing an odd recasting of 'private troubles'. On the one hand, the neo-liberal paradigm is shedding responsibility

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for public issues, stuffing them back into the family and private sphere. What were once considered essential to maintaining social welfare—public housing, education, health care, state assistance for domestic violence—are now considered excessive and one's own responsibility. The welfare state has been dismantled, replaced by the market where 'choice' is conflated with freedom (Fine, 2012). In this way, public issues are being re-presented as private troubles, the responsibility disproportionately of poor people, immigrant women and women of colour. The dismantling of the welfare state is the standard progressive critique of neo-liberalism and calls for small government (see Fine, 2012).

And yet those of us attentive to issues of sexuality, securitization, and politics recognize that all these calls for 'small government' doth protest too much. Some of the very same people calling for shrinking the welfare state and reducing the size of government are recommending that a widened set of personal/private issues be recast as 'State concerns', in need of surveillance, censorship, and/or criminalization. As the story of Antjuanece Brown told above reveals, those who are targeted tend to be youth of 'suspect' racial, ethnic, and sexual identifications. And the desires for which they are being punished range from the desire to be sexual, to walk freely in one's low income neighbourhood without police interference (Stoudt, Fox, & Fine, 2012); to read Paolo Friere in the Tucson Arizona public schools (Alcoff, 2012; Mackey, 2010); to send loving text messages to a girlfriend (Slovic, 2010), or to go on a rafting trip with the Muslim Student Association of City College (NYPD monitored Muslim students all over Northeast, 2012).

These seemingly personal desires are now under State surveillance in the name of human security, terrorism watch, policing for patriotism—particularly for youth of colour, queer youth, immigrant youth, those living in poverty, and/or in Muslim/Arab communities. Thus it seems especially significant now to begin to think through how intense surveillance into/on the very personal lives of youth alters the contours of what constitutes sexuality, desire, and, of course, danger. And then, what are the implications for our teaching, organizing and, for the moment, our research? We need political strategies and organizing, but also critical methods to understand the landscape of politics and the policies that drip feed into lives in communities.

In a recent essay in the *Harvard Education Review*, Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2012) called for an explicit turn in epistemology and research design, advancing what they call a *critical bifocality* as an ambitious but essential framework for studying at once the radical shifts in global and local political economics, the attendant realignments of State functions, the leakage of privatization into state matters, the racialized and classed redesign of opportunity structures and the serious implications for lives, especially lives of youth of poverty and colour. Concerned with the splitting of studies of structures from studies of lives, Weis and Fine (2012) write:

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> Through what we call methodological bifocality, we can begin to document the implications of far away policies and up close decisions by, for and against the interests of privileged and marginalized youth in terms of the kinds of curricular knowledge to which they are exposed, their real and imagined short and long term educational and material options, and the subjectivities they embody over time in relation to education, economics and trust in the fabric of multi-racial democracy. (p. 196)

Borrowing from Weis and Fine, we recognize that research focused on the intimate must be linked theoretically and also empirically to the larger structural and social shifts. There are no free floating bodies. Questions of desire, justice, and structural betrayal deserve the kind of bifocality that Weis and Fine sketch.

CONCLUSION

Sexuality remains an exceptionally powerful tool due to its unique characteristic as simultaneously imagined as the ultimate natural and the ultimate social act. As a result, individuals are defined as "not in control" of themselves (nature) or "at the whim" of their environment (social). Both the nature and social argument, importantly, explain that specific bodies will inevitably receive less.

Feminist investments in the pursuit of pleasure and desire have grown quickly over the past few decades. Implicit in this scholarship has been an imagined and powerful relationship between pleasure, agency, and justice—a triad that has come to undergird a good deal of feminist research, especially in sexuality contexts. The presence of sexual desire is increasingly read as evidence of freedom, agency, health, and happiness and critics have rightly begun to question this growing string of imagined associations and implied outcomes (Lamb, 2010a, 2010b). While desire in feminist scholarship has come to symbolize young (female) sexual subjectivity, desire can also be read as indicative of that which is imagined and *imaginable*. It is in this space of desire that the young person strains to develop a language to name aspirations, wants, and urges—both in one's sexual life and in life more generally. We are a nation awash with thick desire: desire away from structural violence, debt and inequality; desire for justice and human(e) security; and desire to join with allies to contest what is and fight for what could be.

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T&F Proofs: Not For Distribution