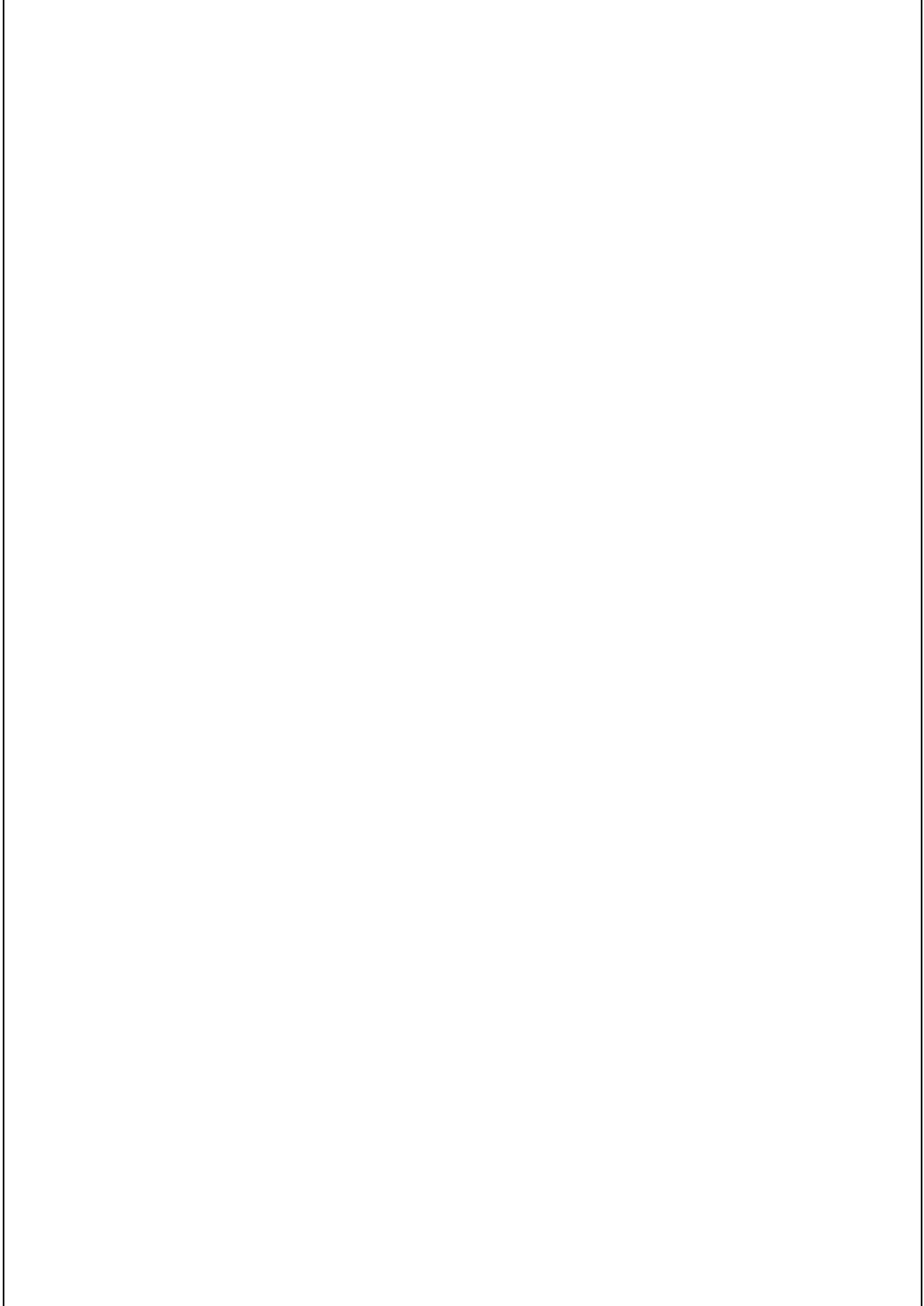


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THE INVISIBLE HISTORIES OF SEXUALITY AND THE MEDIA

The more ubiquitous sex became – in the media, on television and on the Internet – the less political power it seemed to carry. [...] it became less rather than more likely that a politician would address the issue of sexual pleasure to make a political point (Timm and Sanborn, 2016: 250).

Exploring the recent history of sexuality is crucial to understanding the social construction of sexuality and current sexual politics (Seidman, 2010). A crucial moment for the history of sexuality and media can be situated from the 1970s onwards, as historians began to argue that sexuality is 'socially constructed' (Weeks, 2016). The argument developed here

pointed to the negative consequences of the recent 'resexualization', especially of young girls' bodies, and a 'resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference' (Gill and Scharff, 2011: 4) in contemporary digital culture. Recent research focusing on analyzing the internet and sexuality inquires into sexual representations as *self-*

popular culture have become related to our identities in more nuanced ways; audiences in particular are thought of as active players, negotiating with the products of the cultural

The incorporation/resistance paradigm has a history of being

media as infrastructures are visible, such as the artifacts and devices people use for communication, it is much more difficult to see practices as related to media and 'the social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices' (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006: 2). Exploring the mediation of sexuality then, is to precisely expose what role media are playing in the background. Within such moments of

By showing in the first part of this working paper how the histories of sexuality and media have remained largely invisible, I critiqued what kind of sexualities we have been studying in relation to the media and media history. A better understanding of such recent histories and current histories in the making is crucial, as media are playing a significant role in the social construction of sexual realities. Moreover, media contributes to the current state of sexuality in the world and to sexuality as an object of study; *sexuality has become a global and multifaceted part of humanity*. The study of sexuality has become associated with citizenship questions, ethics, rights and responsibilities (Weeks, 1998; Plummer, 2003). To support such a democratic global project, I see it as crucial that we understand why media matters to people's sexualities and how people value their sexual lives with media. While listening to people's values, we should not see them as opposed to rationalities or facts (Sayer, 2011). However, values are open to *evaluation*, which means they are open to an ideological and/or ethical critique when they are being researched. Values matter in understanding how people live together with a plurality of sexualities and genders in, through or around media. It is crucial to critique how such values are made and contested in people's media-related practices and through media's institutional, technological and symbolic powers. Supporting a democratic sexual politics

Regulating media, regulating sexualities

A concern with communicative sexualities brings forward questions on sexual well-being and the presence of media. Sexual well-being encompasses many aspects, such as recognizing that sexualities are playful, fun and experimental, including the senses and imagination, while it is also about caring for people's bodies, integrity and dealing with vulnerable and violent aspects of sexualities. However, the many systems regulating sexuality do not always show an interest in preserving this careful balance, a balance that embraces sexual plurality and diversity while also finding some common

self-management (De Ridder, 2014). As such, we become aware in this particular example that the politics of intimate media cultures, as intimate media cultures of mediatization, have introduced a cultural shift towards more control, regulation and management of sexualities. Young people are patronized by pundits, teaching them how to behave the right way online. When there is no dialogue with young people themselves, this means good communications are lost. Such insights help to make clear that, in order for a democratic project for sexual politics to proliferate, communicative sexualities should be supported by questioning how young people's experiences and practices of intimacy and sexuality through

An awareness of the global and cosmopolitan conditions in which sexualities are lived deserves to be taken into account when studying media, communication and sexuality. Good communicative sexualities can only be maintained through sensitivity toward global sexual conflicts and cosmopolitan realities and politics. One example of how media operate in global sexual conflicts may be found by looking at the popular American television teen series *Glee*. *Glee* is seen as authoritative in its unapologetic representation of gay teenagers (Dhaenens, 2013). Therefore, *Glee* is often seen as representing a celebration of progressive queerness and social change (Johnson and Faill, 2015); the show's representations create identifications with LGBT 2 (T (e) -3 3 -2 (,) 1 (0.67992 591.21cm BT 0.0136 TcQr) 1 (T 0.011) 0.24 521.5) 3 (.21cm Ba-1

politics inside media travel far. Taking this for granted may naturalize the increased homogeneity and inequality media can produce. Those who are studying media and changing sexual life-worlds, should be vigilant for both the relations between mediatization and

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