

Sense about Sex: Media, Sex Advice, Education and Learning

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Abstract

The media are widely acknowledged as important in sex and relationship education, but they are usually associated with 'bad' effects on young people in contrast to the 'good' knowledge represented by more informational and educational formats. In this paper we look at sex advice giving in newspapers, magazines and television in the UK, in sex advice books and in online spaces for sexual learning. We examine some of the limitations of the information provided, consider the challenges for sex advice in the contemporary context, and outline some of the opportunities for academics, researchers, therapists, sex educators and activists to contribute productively to sex advice giving and sexual learning more generally.

Keywords: sex media advice givers, sex education, sexual learning, agony aunts, UK

Introduction

We are writing this article as members of Sense about Sex – an informal group of therapists, researchers, sex educators, academics and activists who are concerned with the accessibility of good quality information about sex and relationships, sexual health and sexual learning. Sense about Sex initially grew out of a Wellcome Trust funded project on sexualisation, sexual health and public engagement. This drew on various projects we as authors had been involved in – both individually and sometimes together – such as the Onscenity Research Network, Gender and Sexuality Talks in London, the Critical Sexology seminars¹, and work with groups such as Outsiders Trust, Brook, FPA, and the Department of Health.

We first used the name Sense about Sex for an event on sex, sexuality and sexualisation, which we organised for the UK Economic and Social Research Council's Social Science Festival in London 2012. Our projects have included The Sexualisation Report² and Bad Sex Media Bingo³ and those of our group who work as therapists have set up London Sex and Relationship Therapy⁴ as a subgroup seeing clients and providing training in that area. We are interested in public engagement and drawing academics and practitioners of various kinds together to talk critically about sex. We share a concern about common myths and moral panics around sex; we are committed to challenging these, providing information that is grounded in research and critical theory, and making interventions in sex advice and education.

The media are widely acknowledged as important in sex and relationships education, but they are usually associated with 'bad' effects on young people (see for example, Eyal and Kunkel 2008; Brown and Bobkowski 2011) in contrast to the 'good' knowledge represented by the more informational and educational formats used for giving advice. Yet we know that audiences may find depictions of sex and relationships in entertainment media engaging and useful (see Buckingham and Bragg 2004) and that some entertainment media present sex in ways that challenge conservative sexual norms (see Johnson et al. 2012; see McKee 2012 for a discussion about sexuality education and entertainment). We also know that audiences use media advice not only for information but for entertainment, to reassure themselves they are actually not as bad as the person they are reading about, or for help (either for themselves directly or to read about someone with problems like them) (Ehrenreich and English 2005; Boynton 2009; Kurtz 2014).

Our discussion seeks to move beyond the question of 'good' and 'bad' media and making distinctions between 'information' and 'entertainment' to examine media genres that offer sex advice and education, focusing on UK print and broadcast media, sex advice books and the use of online spaces for learning about sex. Our aim is to examine some of the patterns and limitations in contemporary provision and to consider the challenges and opportunities for using media for sex advice.

Sex advice across media

There is no consensus about when the first advice column appeared in a newspaper, but the 'problem page' as we know it has been well established within mainstream UK and US print media from the 19th century onwards (Bingham 2012). Media advice giving is important. It offers a space to offload, confess, or get a second opinion. It is a means of getting confidential help and a referral/signposting to other sources of help. It helps people practise for sharing and disclosing something to friends, family members or professionals. It offers a place to turn to for those who don't have support from friends and family, or have something taboo to share. It is especially important where health or therapeutic services are absent or have not helped (Smith 1983; Kurtz 1987; Boynton 2003; Ehrenreich and English 2005; Kurtz 2014).

Media advice givers have traditionally come from a writing or journalism background or from the caring professions. Those in the former group tend to prioritise audience comprehension and creating entertaining and engaging copy, while the latter favour information sharing and potential behaviour change. There are no set qualifications for media advice givers. Limited guidance on advice giving exists and there is a lack of training, support, supervision, and standards. Consequently the advice offered varies in tone, length, standard, accessibility and accuracy (Boynton 2009).

Media advice is popular with audiences (see Smith 1983; Boynton 2009) although its success is not usually measured in terms of helping audiences find solutions to their problems. Advice giving is viewed as 'entertainment' at editorial/production level, so incentives to ensure accuracy, compassion, and useable advice are absent. Much sex media advice across newspapers, magazines and books is often judgmental and shaming, narrow in scope and focus, lacking different options or perspectives, and fails to situate advice within the specific needs of the audience. It often adopts the aspirational and individualised focus of self-help, constructing people as a project of continual self-development (McLelland 2010). It frequently also depends on a dysfunction/disorder-based understanding of sex (Barker 2011).

The most popular sex advice books are predicated on the idea that it is vital to maintain sex in long-term relationships (Barker, Gill and Harvey forthcoming 2016a and 2016b). Sex is frequently presented as 'critical for marital health' and as the 'glue' that holds relationships together (see for example, Mintz 2009, 65). The sex advisor is often constructed as the translator who can explain the mysteries of the 'opposite sex' to the reader (see for example Gray 2003; Corn 2013). Readers, particularly women, are deemed responsible for ensuring that their relationships remain sexual through 'working at it' (see Potts 2002; Gupta and Cacchioni 2013). Happily asexual or celibate relationships are not considered, and there are only occasional tokenistic references to lesbian, gay or bisexual people, or to forms of open non-monogamy (see Barker and Langdrige 2010). Advice books also assume a coital imperative (Tyler 2008) whereby penis-in-vagina (PIV) sex is clearly assumed to constitute 'proper' sex. Other forms of sex are generally relegated to 'foreplay' or a chapter on 'spicy sex' towards the end of the book. Advice focuses mainly on varying positions, locations or outfits for PIV sex, and 'spicing up' one's sex life with tightly policed forays into erotica, kink or the use of sex toys. Books mainly focus on 'what' people do rather than 'how' they do it (Barker, Gill and Harvey forthcoming 2016b).

Across all forms of print and broadcast media the focus is increasingly on the advice giver, rather than the person with the problem and wider audience. This shift has coincided with the rise of the 'celebrity advice giver'. While in the past some media advice givers like Marje Proops, Anna Raeburn and Claire Rayner became famous for providing advice, more recently UK advice givers have been picked because they are already famous. Examples include Graham Norton (*Telegraph*), Jordan (*More!*), Jodie Marsh (*Zoo*), Abbie Titmus (*FHM*), Molly Ringwald (*Guardian*) and Julie Burchill (*Loaded*). Only one of the current *Guardian* newspaper relationships advisors (Pamela Stephenson-Connolly) has any kind of therapeutic qualification, and she is well-known partly due to her celebrity status as Billy Connolly's wife and as the therapist who counselled celebrities on the television programme, *Shrink Rap* (2007-2010). The advice of writers like Tracey Cox, Dr. Laura Berman, and John Gray is fixed and consistent across media; for example Tracey Cox is known for her 'golden rules' for avoiding a 'sex rut': always finish sex in a different position to which you started it, and never do the same position on two subsequent occasions (Gill 2009, 360; Cox 2011), while Dr. Laura Berman presents women as struggling to understand their own mysterious bodies or explain them to partners, whereas male bodies and sexualities are positioned as relatively simple. There is a lack of any sense that either the readers of this advice, or the experts themselves, might be able to grow, change, improve or develop their understanding of sex and relationships.

Recent UK television which takes an advice-based stance towards sex has included magazine programmes such as *The Sex Education Show* (2008-2011) and *The Joy of Teen Sex* (2011), and reality shows such as *The Sex Inspectors* (2004-6)⁵. As in sex advice media elsewhere, they draw on both entertainment and informational formats and privilege celebrities as experts on sex and bodies. For example *Embarrassing Bodies* (2007-) is a reality medical series which was nominated for a National Television Award for Factual Entertainment in 2013, and whose advisers, such as 'TV's favourite doctor', Christian Jessen, have become well-known. However the reputation of these kinds of programmes is often contested. Talking about or representing bodies and sex runs the risk of being viewed as pornographic; *Embarrassing Bodies* has been described as 'medical porn' by some journalists 'because of the morbid and lascivious forms commentators imagine viewing engagement will take' (Hester 2013, 59).

A common theme across current sex education television is a concern about the effects that pornography may be having on people, as in Channel 4's 2013 Campaign for Real Sex programming which aimed to 'reclaim sex from porn'. This draws on a range of generic characteristics from drama and documentary. One of its shows, *Sex Box* (2013), is related to human affairs/science programming as well as the talk show and reality TV. It is hosted by *Observer* newspaper agony aunt, Mariella Frostrup, an arts journalist. In *Sex Box*, couples occupy a giant box on the studio stage while they have sex, and then talk to Mariella and a panel of experts. Another of its shows, *Porn on the Brain* (2013), draws on the conventions of a science/investigative programme in which 'journalist and father Martin Daubney investigates how teenagers' pornography habits have changed, and the effect today's pornography is having on their brains'.

The Campaign for Real Sex draws on the widely expressed view that involving media of any kind in sexual matters is dangerous, but presents some kinds of 'quality' media as recuperable. That these are associated with current affairs and arts presenters suggests expertise that is associated with a form of (middle class and respectable) culture and that functions to make them less visible as media. While pornography is treated as a form of consumption or 'use', programmes like *Sex Box* identify themselves as types of engaged and intelligent 'talk'.

Sex Box is interesting as an example of the way that this kind of respectable programming privileges talk about sex, making sexual activity both central and invisible - literally putting it inside a box within the studio setting. The kinds of expertise that are drawn on in these kinds of journalism and programming are also highly personalised - Mariella's advice columns typically draw on her own experiences while Martin Daubney's expertise is linked to his shifting attitudes on becoming a father. They are underpinned by a notion of 'media literacy' as something that can be used to 'inoculate' people against particular kinds of 'bad' media (Kellner and Share 2005; see Albury 2014 for a discussion), or to persuade them to disengage from these. They also rely on reasserting a hierarchy of 'good media' in which information media is better than entertainment, broadsheets are better than tabloids, television is better than the Internet, and all of these are better than pornography.

The emergence of sex advice and education online is the most recent development in sex advice media. It has particular importance for young people who routinely express unhappiness with the sex and relationships education that is offered in schools. Sex and relationships education (SRE) in UK schools remains patchy with only one quarter of young people saying their SRE was good or very good (Sex Education Forum 2014). Much of it relies on the same narrow interpretation of sex that is evident in advice columns, books and television programmes, and in addition it tends to be focused on risk, contraception, STIs and the 'dangers' of online porn and sexting; with an emphasis on information rather than on skills, values and emotions (see Allen 2005; Fine and McLelland 2006; Allen 2011).

Online, young people have a variety of resources available to them which provide opportunities to learn information and skills, to explore their values, to seek support services and guidance, to ask for advice, to hear other people's experiences, and to be peer sex and relationships educators themselves. However, comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships education websites are few and far between. Some grass-roots sites are widely respected; Scarleteen.com is visited by around three-quarters of a million people each month worldwide (Scarleteen 'About') and is the highest ranking sex education website online. Young people visit Scarleteen for its information about sex and relationships, for its advice columns, its forum, and its live support service.

One of the exciting developments of sexual learning online is that it is not simply one-way traffic as in print and broadcast media. Young people have the space to be critical⁶, to respond to content, and even to produce their own. There is scope for the information they access to be connected more intimately to their sexual cultures (Collins et al. 2011). Blogs and tumblrs give young people the opportunity to create or curate their own educational spaces around sex and relationships, describing personal experiences, creating and sharing memes featuring sexual and/or sex educational content, or building activism on sexuality and genders. SRE is also a topic for video bloggers such as Laci Green, a popular YouTube star who has over 1 million subscribers and over 86 million video views, and whose videos focus on sexuality and sexual health, covering topics that traditional SRE doesn't address⁷. Increasingly young people are moving towards using more private social media (such as BBM, WhatsApp and Snapchat) to talk about matters which they may want to keep hidden (Byron et al. 2013; see also boyd 2014). Online forums and communities are used to ask questions and share experiences. Scarleteen's forum is staffed and moderated by trained volunteers who engage in around 5000 direct conversations with users each year (see Scarleteen 'About'). Young people may also start conversations about sex and relationships on forums they already use, or they may like the relative anonymity of sites like Reddit, which has a number of moderated sub topics where users can ask questions, seek advice and share experiences. Crowdsourced responses mean that the reader is not being told one thing by one expert but has the opportunity to construct their own best answers from the rich and plentiful material presented to them by their peers.

New challenges for sex advice

As our brief examination of sex media advice here demonstrates it is important to move beyond the question of whether the relationship between media and sex is good or bad and beyond assuming there is a clear distinction between 'bad' entertainment and 'good' information. Instead, we need to be more attentive to different media genres and formats and their relation to sexual advice and education and more broadly to the construction of sexual knowledge. As we have shown, sex advice often presents very conservative views of sex and gender, in addition to drawing clear boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices (Rubin 1984). Advice is frequently dependent on a dysfunction/disorder-based understanding of sex and on assumptions of mononormativity and heteronormativity. It often presents male and female sexuality as radically different, addresses women as responsible for maintaining good sexual relationships with their partners, and constructs its audiences as responsible for maintaining 'great' or 'hot' sex in their relationships.

The use of celebrities - whose main concern must be with their own media reputations - to front sex advice media means that advice that challenges sexual norms is less likely to be offered. The fact that the 'success' of any form of media aimed at sexual learning will be measured in terms of shifting copy, attracting audiences and driving traffic makes it more likely that these will privilege the simplistic and the sensational. Media producers who want to be taken seriously

struggle to distinguish themselves from the kinds of media with poor reputations for sex education, especially pornography. In order to do this they often emphasise their place in a hierarchy of media genres, privilege talk about sex over sexual activity, and highlight a form of expertise which draws on respectable views of sex and on personal experience, rather than on expertise in the sphere of sex and relationships, on critically informed understandings of sexuality, and on the available evidence.

Media advice giving appears to be as popular as ever although formats for delivering advice are shifting. Western advice columnists (particularly in newspapers, magazines and radio) used to be reasonably well paid in secure jobs (Smith 1983), but media advice giving is expensive editorially. Radio in particular has seen widespread cancellations of popular advice giving phone-ins due to costs. Mainstream magazines are also closing in the UK - *She, More!, B, Loaded, Sugar, Nuts, Company* and *Zest* have all ceased publishing in the past five years (Sweney 2014), while others struggle to stay financially viable (Audit Bureau of Circulations 2015). Many established advice columns are being cut or are disappearing.

Financial cuts mean that media advice givers are often paid poorly or required to work for free in exchange for promoting a book or product. The opportunity to establish a dialogue with people seeking advice, following them up to ensure they are okay, and answering all questions that are submitted is now only a salaried standard practice in one newspaper (*The Sun*, which has Deidre Sanders assisted by six staff who answer all reader correspondence via the paper, email and Facebook group) and one programme (ITV's *This Morning*, where one Agony Aunt, Denise Robertson, and assistant, read and respond to all audience messages, regardless of whether their problems are aired or not).

At the same time, the opportunities to give advice via social media, blogs and websites have grown and new spaces for sexual learning have emerged. Grass roots sites offer a different experience, both in terms of the kinds of information they provide and the tone in which it is delivered. Other spaces such as tumblr, blogs, YouTube, forums and private social media offer the opportunity for radically different kinds of advice giving and sexual learning, including peer learning and the crowdsourcing of responses.

In this context, the challenge for individuals and organisations wishing to deliver valuable and accessible sex advice is to create engaging, open and credible resources that people want to engage with. bishUK.com (created by one of the authors, Justin), has around 140,000 page views per month (Bish 'About'). The tone of sites like Scarleteen and bishUK contrasts with the often didactic and 'finger wagging' tone of SRE in school or in other media. It aims instead to make the needs of young people central and to present them with options about what kind of sex they may want to have (if any). Young people like the humour, the 'no bullshit' approach, and the openness, friendliness and credibility of these kinds of sites, all aspects which they report to be important in online sex and relationships resources (see McCarthy et al. 2012; Evers et al. 2013).

But while sex and relationships education websites have great potential for giving information and advice (Bailey et al. 2014), they are unlikely to be as beneficial as sex and relationships education conducted 'in real life.' The most recent UK National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (2013) examined the sources of sex and relationships information that young people aged 16-24 use and found that school was the most common (39.4% for men, 41.3% for women) compared with the internet (4.1%/1.9%). Although most young people reported unmet information needs before their first sexual experiences, those that reported school as their main source were less likely to do so (Tanton et al. 2015). They also reported fewer sexual health risk behaviours and outcomes (Macdowall et al. 2015).

As sex and relationships education websites become more popular and access to them broadens they may become more successful in meeting unmet information needs. However it is clear that there are limitations to online learning. Learning from websites is usually a private

experience which is very different to classroom based SRE. High quality SRE uses methods that are experiential and participatory to help young people to learn information and skills (Sex Education Forum 2014). For example, websites can demonstrate how to use condoms and can encourage readers to practice using them, but this is more effectively done in a lesson where condoms and demonstrators are available. If delivered effectively, school-based SRE can provide a safe enough space for people to learn how to communicate and negotiate with each other. They are also vital for participants to explore their values, listen to each other and learn to respect the values of others. Participants are not able to pick and choose bits of an SRE programme as they can on a website, and even the shortest SRE lesson may engage a young person for a longer period of time than the most engaging website. However, there is scope for offline and online models of SRE to work together effectively. Increasingly teachers use online SRE in classrooms and can use them to keep up to date about various topics as well as signposting young people to further information.

In addition to the problems of online sex education, issues around the misuse and abuse of social media, particularly regarding the targeting of marginalised and already vulnerable groups, raise questions about how advice can be ethically and accurately delivered via new media formats. The format of person with a problem seeking help from a columnist is being transferred into new media without the structure of salaried support staff to offer individualised responses to those in crisis. While advice columns have always served the purpose of drawing in audiences, the pressure to sell copy and promote content means controversial problems are now being used as 'clickbait'. Unmoderated audience comments may compound shaming and judgmental attitudes expressed by agony aunts, who in turn may be enabled to act unprofessionally or even unethically in a further drive to generate audience numbers. If the problem itself does not draw in audiences for disapprobation and blame, then bad advice (and those who give it) may give a secondary opportunity for advice columns to be promoted and talked about. We are now in a situation where those who are asking for advice could be trolled by wider audiences - or agony aunts themselves.

Many of the current changes in advice giving are being driven by commercial pressures to save money on content while increasing revenue via sales or advertising. Within a climate of austerity and cuts, static websites are replacing helplines and interactive messageboards and forums. The quality of service has been cut while the use of lurid problems to drive audiences remains. There are also fewer public resources to refer to due to financial cuts and governmental policies and a greater demand on advice givers because people are unable to get help from existing services. Indeed some advice giving, particularly on television, has shifted to belittling those in need of help and perpetuating narratives of those needing benefits or other forms of support as being scroungers (Wood and Skeggs 2011; Hill 2015; Boynton 2015).

Engaging with sex advice

Given this changing context, we are particularly concerned about the quality of some sex media advice and have made attempts to challenge poor media practice online and in private to editors, commissioners, and programme makers. However, this has met with little success. Although guidance for advice columnists and editors does not exist, were it to be offered, it is unclear whether it would be accepted or how it might be enforced. Greater standardisation, training and regulation of advice columns is an option but one that is likely to be highly resisted by editors, producers and media advisers who, when praised, tend to represent the advice column as a source of help and care led by experienced journalists or experts, but when criticised, claim that it is not intended to be expert driven and is primarily for entertainment. The fluidity of definition of what columns are for and who they serve makes it difficult to address quality standards or even to

pin down what media advice giving is about. We are currently reflecting on how best to move forward in challenging poor practice.

One strategy that we are pursuing is to find ways of critiquing poor media advice that move beyond simply complaining to and about media producers. For example, we created a Bad Sex Media Bingo card to draw attention to the typical and often problematic ways in which sex is represented in media. The bingo card lists common characteristics of media representation - for example 'Only penis in vagina is proper sex', 'everyone is gay or straight', 'dodgy stats and bad science' and 'porn rewires your brain' for players to spot in examples of sex advice, and also explains why these are a problem and what better ways of presenting sex there are. We have used this as an ice-breaker activity at a few events and for live-tweeting when programmes like *Sex Box* are aired.

It is debatable whether the self-help format can produce a sustained social or radical challenge to wider cultural assumptions about sex, and sex advice based on this format is likely to always be limited. Self-help of any kind risks lapsing into individualistic projects of self-transformation (Illouz 2008). It is extremely difficult for the reader not to come away with the sense that they - as an individual - need to improve some aspect of themselves, rather than the problem being located - and best tackled - at the level of structural inequalities. It is also difficult, in a single book, for an advisor to reflect the multiplicity of sexual practices and understandings of sex, without defaulting to one approach or narrative at the expense of others. Even books that have explicitly aimed to challenge 'sex myths' have ended up perpetuating and reinforcing problematic messages (Barker, Gill and Harvey forthcoming 2016b), perhaps because the 'myth-busting' approach always risks challenging the myths, but not the underlying assumptions on which they are based (Eisner 2013). It may be necessary for people to read across multiple texts to enable them to see, for example, the diversity of practices that are considered under 'sex' and the diversity of contexts in which sex can take place. Such a reading-across also highlights the contradictory 'solutions' that are proposed in different books, such as women being advocated to become *more* dominant and assertive in some books, and *less* so in others.

Perhaps this is where online forums have more to offer than books in the arena of sex advice, given their capacity to display multiple different, often contradictory, 'solutions' alongside each other. Yet it is also possible to incorporate multiple views in more traditional forms of advice giving. Those of us who are involved in advice giving ask others to give feedback and criticism on the media we create; an approach that contrasts starkly with most advice giving that takes place in print and broadcast media. For example, one of us (Petra) works as *The Telegraph's* sex and relationships expert⁸, and addresses the reader's problems by researching the topic herself, reaching out to researchers and practitioners who focus on that area, presenting a diversity of possibilities in her column, and inviting feedback so that she can correct any errors and improve on advice in that area over time. Another of us (Meg John) has written their own advice book (Barker 2013a) and another (Justin) is able to revisit 'static posts' at bishUK to rewrite and improve the information as they continue to learn from colleagues, young people and other sources of sex education.

The continued popularity of self-help and the sex advice book format suggests that at least some readers do appreciate having information collected together in one text. Two of the authors (Meg John and Justin) are currently writing their own sex advice book which foregrounds issues neglected in other literature such as diversity (of bodies, relationships, and practices), consent, and the role of wider cultural messages. They are building on Meg John's analysis of existing sex advice media (Barker, Gill and Harvey forthcoming 2016b) and the feedback that Justin has received over the years on their sex advice website and training. This book also takes the approach of focusing more on 'how' people engage with sex (tuning into desires, communicating these consensually, diverse ways of dealing with discrepancies, and questioning restrictive social norms).

As such it hopefully does not set up the need for further advice as the aim is to provide an ongoing set of tools that will apply to all kinds of bodies and forms of sex (see Friedman 2011, Barker 2013a, and Hancock 2013 for existing examples of this kind of approach). In addition to putting out alternative *content* in this format, we are considering locating our own book within a range of linked sex advice media, including a regular podcast, and online blogs and discussions. Hopefully this will enable a more fluid and plural approach to accompany the inevitably more fixed and singular approach of a single text.

Our aim as a group is to continue to promote critical and open access information to the public on sex and relationships, to support colleagues to work within the media, to enable advocacy and activism across disciplines, for example uniting agony aunts with therapists and mental health service users (see Boynton 2015), and to highlight diverse ways of engaging with and analyzing media advice giving, for example Petra's project 'No Star To Guide Me' that reflects on media advice giving while offering free resources to anyone wanting to offer media advice worldwide.

Our work also includes continuing to analyse the ways in which sex and sexual health are conceptualised in policy (see for example, Smith and Attwood, 2011; Barker and Duschinsky, 2012; Duschinsky and Barker, 2013) and legislation (see for example, Attwood and Smith, 2010), as well as current mediated sex education (see for example, Barker, Gill and Harvey, forthcoming 2016b), and the broader study of mediated sex and sexuality (see for example, Smith, Attwood, Egan and McNair, forthcoming 2016). Some of us have been active in blogging on these issues (see for example, Petra's 'Dr Petra' and Meg John's 'Rewriting the Rules'), on writing about formats like blogging and how academics might use these (Attwood et al. 2012), and on helping to shape research and professional practice (see for example, Boynton, 2005; Richards and Barker, 2013; Richards and Barker, 2015).

Much more research is needed to develop our understanding of all these areas and their relation to sex advice giving, yet the low reputation of advice giving and sexual learning - and research that investigates both of these - makes obtaining funding difficult. Resources are not the only issue either. We would do well to expand on existing approaches to analysis which remain limited by a focus on mainstream Western women's media framed by largely feminist readings of texts, or theoretical discussions of media advice giving which provide useful commentaries but little in the way of empirical analysis. Research from within media, such as evaluations of advice giving particularly on radio, are invaluable yet tend to remain within the media industry. Research that does not simply comment on media from the outside but begins to look at how it is built, made and recreated by journalists and audiences is vital. Studies that look at a wide range of media, diverse audiences (including those that are men, LGBT, and in the Global South) and include economic, social and health issues as lenses for analysis would also be helpful. Building a productive perspective on the relation of sex and media also needs to go much further in understanding how audiences engage with media whether it is informational, educational or a mixture of these. Understanding the gaps between formal sex education, the kinds of advice giving we have described here, and the kinds of learning that can take place by consuming or producing various kinds of sex media remains an important goal. Going forward, it would also be helpful to see more public conversations about what makes for good sex advice and good sexual learning, wherever it appears.

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¹ For information on the Onscenity Research Network see <http://www.onscenity.org/>, on Critical Sexology see <http://www.criticalsexology.org.uk/wp/>, and on Gender and Sexuality Talks see <https://www.facebook.com/gendersexldn>.

² See <https://thesexualizationreport.wordpress.com/>

³ See <http://badsexmediabingo.com/>

⁴ See <http://www.londonsexrelationshiptherapy.com/sense-about-sex/>

⁵ See Arthurs (2004) for a useful overview of the treatment of sexuality on television.

⁶ See for example, Agnes Tan's open letter to her principal criticising sex education in her school, <https://www.facebook.com/agathatheslowtortoise/posts/741950835884958>

⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/user/lacigreen>

⁸ See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/petra-boynton/>