

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Keep Out of Reach of Children

Sex Positivity in Theatre for Young Audiences

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Abstract

Within the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) sex positive performance remains on the fringes of programmed work. Dominant heteronormative culture is responsible for constituting human sexuality as essentially reproductive. I argue that this attitude negates a consideration of pleasure as a vital human experience. I will develop a research which validates and expands the notion of body experience through cultural discourse. Through this validation, it is possible to develop a societal attitude toward sex and sexuality which promotes non shameful, safe and varied sexual experiences. The development of sexual rhetoric relies upon arts and culture designed for young people to contribute to the development of a more progressive sexual landscape. I ask whether TYA is a useful art form in the development of a complex vocabulary regarding sex positivity. Throughout this exploration I will support my research through case studies of two performances which explore the complexities of sexual and gender identities through TYA. *Roze voor Meisjes & Blauw voor Jongens* uses choreographic material which challenges the notion of the normative body. I argue that this dance performance uses non improvised and improvised approaches to expand notions of the body and its agency. *Het Hamiltoncomplex* uses a cast of teenage girls, their performative techniques challenges the discomfort society has toward teenage expressions of sexuality. I use this performance to develop a richer understanding of positive ways for teenagers to express themselves sexually. I will call for the promotion of TYA as an art form, which can promote sex positivity in reaction to shameful notions of sexuality within Western culture.

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1 .Introduction

1.1 The Importance of Sex Positivity

Exploring one's sexuality is a crucial and wonderful aspect of a young person's development. Therefore, adults have a responsibility to young people that involves creating safe spaces that nurture and facilitate discussion around sexuality. In an ideal world, these safe spaces would act as a place in which young people fully explore their thoughts around the concept of sexuality and sex. Indeed, these safe spaces would not be hastily introduced at puberty; ideally they would exist throughout one's childhood. However, this is not the case in much of the Western world, despite sexual expression being as complex as any form of human expression beginning at a very early age. Sexual expression seems to be an 'adult's only club' and children are sheltered from its discussion from a young age. This is exemplified through the stringent censorship laws dictated by the British Board of Film Classification. On the age classification section of their website it is explicitly stated what types of sexual expression are appropriate for each age range. For twelve years and above it states "Sexual activity may be briefly and discreetly portrayed. Moderate sex references are permitted, but frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable." (*What Classification*, 2014) The use of 'discreetly' highlights that, within media's parameters, sexual expression is initially explored as something that is essentially shameful. It perpetuates the idea that amongst children, discussions surrounding sex must be discreet and cautionary. This classification ignores the complex ideas concerning sexuality, instead implying that the entire topic is essentially vulgar. The language of this classification perpetuates the notion that sexual expression is harmful and that children should not be involved in an open discussion on the topic.

However, young people are not sexless beings, they have their own sexuality which develops into and throughout adulthood. I argue that children's sexuality can be legitimized if they are permitted to explore what sex means to them without censorship. This attitude calls for an alternation of how we discuss sex across all ages, if a richer and more complex discourse is created then it is possible to move past such arbitrary rules and regulations in how sex is presented culturally. In elevating the topic to a status, whereby its inclusion in media must be censored in such explicit terms, exemplifies how society's vocabulary surrounding sexuality is still distressingly limited. Film censorship continues even after eighteen, only allowing certain

modes of discussions. Explicit expression of sex for educational rather than pleasurable reasons is granted authorization if it “genuinely seeks to inform and educate in matters such as human sexuality or safer sex and health, explicit images of sexual activity may be permitted.”(*What Classification 2014*) In contrast to R18 rated films which are not allowed to be shown in public cinemas “whose primary purpose is sexual arousal or stimulation.” (*What Classification 2014*) Even in adulthood, sex can only be expressed in media if it has educational purposes associated with health. On the other hand, sexual content, which focuses on arousing a sense of pleasure, is pushed outside of mainstream culture. This difference indicates that sexual education cannot be founded in experiencing pleasure. This example of how we discuss sexual expression in relation to children and culture unambiguously confirms mainstream rhetoric, which promotes a simplification of sexual expression and experience. These classifications highlight an important difference that implies that sex and sexual content/media can be separated into categories of educational and pleasurable.

This idea spreads across all arts, media and culture for young people. Like film, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) follows similar patterns albeit less overtly. Unlike film, the censorship present in theatre for the young is not outlined explicitly but can be seen in the trends in which mainstream theatre is programmed. I will use this thesis to endorse work that promotes sex positive attitudes; these performances challenge the self-censorship present in TYA¹. Currently, Europe’s political and social climate has been dominated by right wing populist parties; thus resulting in a stronger right wing political presence throughout Europe². Now more than ever it seems paramount to promote a sexual politic which encourages complex post-modernist thinking around sex and gender. As an advocate of TYA I call for a more complex approach toward sexual expression. How sex is discussed and presented to children, is fundamental in developing an understanding of the human condition in relation to senses of worth and pleasure.

¹ Formally discussed in conference at ASSITEJ Artist Gathering in Birmingham’s On The Edge Festival on the 7th of July 2016 in ASSITEJ ARTISTIC ENCOUNTER (1): Freedom of Speech in TYA. This discussion was led by the international ASSITEJ committee and included producers, makers, programmer and professionals in the international ASSITEJ community. The discussion description stated: “We will get impulses from artists from around the world that have either been subjected to censorship and/or feel they are not able to address some of the most important topics.” (*ASSITEJ Artistic Encounter, 2016*)

² As seen in the rise of right wing populism throughout 2016 with right wing in France with the rise in popularity in Front National (FN) and the rise of popularity for Austria’s Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Also seen in Britain’s exit from the European Union fuelled by a campaign led by right wing conservative and UKIP leaders. Right wing trends also extend outside the continent in America with Trump serving as Republican candidate for the 2016 presidential election. (Greven 2016)

Sex is a topic which ignites much debate within the TYA community. In a performance field which is so focused on the young person, TYA is also responsible for perpetuating certain troupes which mirror a larger societal attitude to protect young people from discussing sex openly. TYA can contribute to the idea that sex is not itself harmful but can be detrimental in certain circumstances. In what ways does this field develop a more complex attitude toward sexuality as an aspect of human experience, which is fundamentally positive? Understandably, if other people use sex for abusive purposes then this is discussed in a negative light. I argue that focusing on the progressive effects of positive sexual expression is beneficial and works to create a safer sexual climate. This calls for an attitude toward sexual expression that places bodily experience and pleasure at the forefront of society's consideration of sex. Sex positivity, as an ideological concept, is simply the idea that sex, as long as healthy, safe and explicitly consensual is beneficial for society³. This ideology considers that encouraging attitudes toward sexual expression, including healthy and pleasurable sexual experiences for all genders and safe sex education from young ages, as fundamentally positive for society. Why then, does so much of the theatre created for children avoid this topic completely and what companies are creating theatrical experiences which promote sex positive attitudes for young people?

I argue that the current socio-cultural landscape surrounding sex is dominated by social taboo. Taboos within TYA are a consequence of what can be considered appropriate for children within a specific cultural landscape. I argue that it is the discomfort felt by adults regarding sex positive rhetoric that drives taboo in TYA. This attitude does not stem from protection of children but is an excuse to sustain backward, outdated and non-progressive sexual politics. In an environment where the child is extremely susceptible to abuse it seems fitting that the automatic desire to protect drives what we consider appropriate for our children. However, I argue there must be a consideration of how a culture of censorship and taboo speaks to larger socio-cultural trends. Taboo ensures that subjectivities remain consistent despite the particularity of one's own experience. If taboo in TYA is to be acceptable then this is recurrently contributing to hegemonic social order. When deciding what kind of performance is appropriate for young people, there must be a consideration of what kind of

³ As defined by the sex positive feminist movement, "Feminism has always been vitally interested in sex. But there have been two strains of feminist thought on the subject. One tendency has criticized the restrictions on women's sexual behaviour and denounced the high cost imposed on woman for being sexually active. The tradition of feminist thought has called for sexual liberation that would work for both women as well as men" (Gayle 1984, 121) the sex positive movement is rooted in the equality of sex expression and activity for all genders.

subjectivities we are gifting the coming generation. Taboo works to combat sex positivity and functions alongside fear, shame and lack of empowerment to avoid exploring how we can gain more access to the complexities and multitude of sexual expressions. Furthermore, there must also be a consideration of how we view the agency young people have within society in developing sexual politics. Younger generation's relationship to sexual politics is particular to digitalization and post-modern subjectivity. The level in which young people already access sexual material online calls for a movement within TYA and other young art forms and platforms to offer contextualisation to the aggressive reality of modern pornography.

In order to understand sex positivity it is necessary to uncover the dominant cultural and theoretical landscape of sexual politics. Foucault questions, "Are prohibition, censorship, and denial truly the forms through which power is exercised in a general way?" (1998, 10) Developing this notion of how power is exercised, I argue that this reflects a wider socio-cultural trend of the dominating modes in which sex is discussed. For example, Foucault's questioning of the functionality of censorship and denial within power dynamics reflects notions of bodily denial within sex politics. This is rooted in an understanding of sexual expression through socially constructed notions of power, which negate bodily pleasure and promote learned notions of appropriate sexual expression. Throughout my research, I wish to focus on how taboo in TYA reflects a wider socio-cultural notion that young people are to be protected from expressions of sexual identity. I am interested in exposing how different performances use taboo in order to expose and explore these assumptions and to place TYA at the forefront of a larger socio-cultural exploration. I will highlight what may be missing from the field, both academically and practically, and will focus on those creatives and academics who are contributing to the development of TYA upon reflection of Western society.

My research follows from the academic rhetoric of sex positive feminist theory with focus on Judith Levine's influential writings concerning the perils of protecting children from sex. She writes from an American socio-cultural perspective regarding the complexities of child sexuality and how this exploration can function to help develop the safer sexual experiences of children and adults. Her writing will aid my exploration of how we can develop realistic and optimistic ways to guide children toward sexual expression focused on pleasure and respect. I will question how her methods can be reflected within the TYA movement in order to assert arts and culture that promotes this significant concept. The culture of TYA has

its own discourse and nuance, which has developed through historical developments of how this genre can be understood, through examining this area I will argue why this landscape is so fertile in exploring sex politics.

1.2 Why TYA?

Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is a field of theatre making which focuses specifically on the age of their audiences. In doing so, this field of theatre concerns itself specifically in the politics of how young people are viewed on a societal level. When considering TYA, it seems necessary to consider what type of art is being made for young people and what types of expression is avoided. TYA is a growing field which is largely supported and propelled by the global organisation of Association International du Théâtre pour l' Enfant et la Jeunesse (ASSITEJ) which supports annual and tri-annual congresses and festivals which showcase work, symposia and discussions with all those in the field of TYA. The global ASSITEJ network comprises of each nation's own ASSITEJ headquarter which contributes to promoting arts and theatre for young people. As a global network, ASSITEJ can be seen as a way to unite theatres, organizations, and persons interested in theatre for children and young people. ASSITEJ aims to recognise the field of TYA and strives improve the access young people have to theatrical/artistic experiences. The organisation also aims to improve the common knowledge of theatre for young children worldwide by recognising that children and young people make up a large part of the world's population and that they represent the future. (General Assembly of ASSITEJ 2014) The community created by ASSITEJ is focused on developing TYA beyond a purpose that only sees theatre as an educational tool. ASSITEJ legitimises theatre making for young people, recognising it as valuable in and of itself. It also works as an inclusive organisation which supports different modes of artistic engagement: "No theatre, organization or individual can be refused admittance to membership of ASSITEJ on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or ability, sexual orientation, cultural identity, national origin, or political or religious conviction." (General Assembly of ASSITEJ 2014) This global network allows for makers who may not have the freedom to make work in their home countries in fear of political prosecution. As an organisation, they create a space for artists, programmers and thinkers to connect and develop an understanding of what it is to make work for young people.

Due to ASSITEJ and TYA's global community, much work uses similar globally recognizable tendencies such as standardized age recommendations. Unlike other fields with contemporary practice, makers within TYA must consider how appropriate their work is for their chosen age group. Within all branches of TYA, age limitations and suggestions of a piece are usually necessary for funding applications and grants. There is a growing amount of writing regarding TYA, and how we consider the child as a homogenous spectating group specifically in regards to their age. This attitude is challenged by thinkers such as Shifra Schonmann who asks:

From what age is a child considered able to enjoy a theatre performance? And until what age is he or she considered a child and not an adult? Can such boundaries help to advance our knowledge in the field? Are such boundaries necessary? Are they desirable? (Schonmann 2006, 9)

Schonmann highlights the dangers of acknowledging young people based entirely on their age and questions the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Can the precise moment when a child becomes an adult be identified? I argue that it is dangerous to consider spectators specifically by their age and it suggests that all young audiences can only access certain artistic material based on their age without other consideration of what makes up their subjectivity: factors such as cultural background, gender or sexuality. Similar to film's age classifications, this trend within TYA forces programmers and makers to create a system, albeit unofficially, which dictates what children at different stages of development can access. Intrinsic in the decision to make a performance specifically for a six year old is an assumption that we understand what a six year old should and can access. In *Theatre for Young Audiences* Maguire points out "it is clear that children do not go through these developmental stages at the same rate or the same chronological moments." (2012, 13) In separating children into age categories we assume we understand the capabilities of children of different ages. Furthermore, what exactly are we hiding our children from? Why is the entire topic of sex hidden from children? I argue for a reconsideration of children's relationship to sexual experience and an expansion of how we tackle this topic culturally with and for children. Through a sex positive approach there are makers within the TYA field who challenge the modes in which young people learn to express their sexualities.

I write this thesis from the specific notion of the young audience, despite considering this group as complex and flexuous, they remain specific. I do believe that making work for audiences contains its own nuance and discourse. However, I remain steadfast in my belief that much of the rhetoric regarding young audiences does sustain conservative notions of the inappropriate. The major difference between theatre for adults and young audiences is choice. Adult spectators can make decisions in the art they wish to access, whereas work made for young audiences must also consider the parents and educators of their chosen audience. Children, therefore, are subject to the artistic experiences allowed for them by adults. I argue that a blanket exclusion of children within the discussion regarding sex positivity amplifies a shameful attitude toward sexual expression. I do consider certain sexual exploration damaging and ethically wrong in the presence of children. These encounters usually take place when young people are included or forced in the presence of adult sexual expression. I focus my research on those makers who challenge any notion of the inappropriate in order to develop a theatre culture which proposes progressive attitudes toward sexuality.

1.3 Methodology

I will investigate the ways sex positive work in TYA can function to challenge shameful attitudes toward sex over three chapters. I will first unpack my understanding of taboo; I will examine how taboo has existed within psychoanalytic theory through analysing/referencing Freud. This chapter will aid in contextualising my use of taboo, which due to its etymology being linked to colonial theory, needs to be contextualised in terms of TYA and sex positivity. This exploration will aid in investigating how taboo functions on a socio-cultural level in regards to sexual politics. This chapter will be focused on expanding specifically on the developing mode of discussing sexuality with young people. I argue this mode is rooted in remaining ashamed of the body which can be supported by thinkers such as Judith Levine, who calls for a reconsideration of the methods in which sex is discussed with young people. Furthermore, I will look at a Foucauldian exploration of how the West has developed their mode of discussing sexuality.

In my second chapter I will focus on how TYA uses certain performative techniques in explorations of sex positivity. I will use Tabea Martin's performance *Roze voor Meisjes & Blauw voor Jongens* (*Pink for Girls & Blue for Boys*). This performance uses choreography to place the

body centre of how we understand the world, which can be conceptualised through the use of improvisation. This chapter will focus on how a specific performance and style challenges the rules and troupes of how representational performance can function in provoking a wider challenge to normative bodily expression and undermine the culture of sex shaming. This chapter will involve an in depth dramaturgical analysis of the piece which will focus on how this work uses its choreographic and dramaturgical approach to question the hierarchy of body expression. As I begin to call for sex positivity within TYA throughout my first and second chapters, it is important that I explore the idea of vulnerability in my third chapter. The role of considering vulnerability within this chapter will aid in deepening how I understand positive discussions surrounding sex in TYA. This chapter will be supported by a consideration of *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, a performance by HETPALEIS, directed by Lies Pauwels. The performance includes thirteen teenage performers and in many ways challenges the audience to consider the young teenagers as complicated sexual beings. Through a dramaturgical analysis of the performance and consideration of dramaturgical decisions, I aim to address how the teenage bodies on stage works to challenge certain notions of the appropriate. Through this methodology I will argue how sex positive TYA can work as a tool to expand socio-cultural notions of sexual identity. The expansion of this understanding works to develop space for young people to express themselves in safe and positive ways. My central question asks how sex positive TYA can function to develop richer and more complex discourse regarding children's sexuality.

2. The Birds and the Bees

This chapter aims to contextualise the climate in which young people have come to understand their sexual identities. I argue that the effect of notions of shame and taboo have come to dominate the contemporary landscape of sexual politics. In exploring the historical significance of taboo in determining how we discuss childhood sexuality I will consider how Freud's *Totem and Taboo* develops an understanding of taboo as a social construct. I will also explore Judith Levine's book *Harmful to Minors*, this text highlights the dangers of promoting taboo culture, by proposing that it worsens the potential for harmful sexual experiences. Alongside a consideration of the functionality of taboo, I will also explore how shame manifests itself through an exploration of Foucault and Butler. This chapter will aid in identifying how sex positivity works as an alternative to the prevalent taboo and shame based rhetoric used when discussing sexual expression.

The western use of taboo⁴ has come to encapsulate actions which are encoded socially as 'off limits', this reaction toward certain taboo is so culturally ingrained it is no longer recognised as culturally encoded but fundamental. The sex positive movement can *begin* the process of challenging how our society has come to promote a Foucauldian notion of shame culture which dominates the way in which we discuss sex. Through ideological and historical analysis, I will examine how shame and taboo have come to dominate western attitudes to sexual politics. This analysis will show the need for sex positive attitudes toward our consideration of sexual expression. I argue that there are developments which have come to promote sex positive expression within contemporary culture however there is still resistance toward discussing how young people express themselves sexually. I aim to explore how our conceptual attitudes toward children have developed and how this has contributed to a resistance in discussing sexuality and children.

The sexual development of children is still a topic which is considered highly taboo due to the fear surrounding children's vulnerability and protection. The idea of excluding

⁴ Etymologically, the term taboo comes from the South Pacific, in Māori language 'tapu' "in its primary meaning, tapu expresses the understanding that once a thing is, it has within itself a real potency, mana. Each being, material or nonmaterial, from its first moment of existence, has this potentiality and its own power and authority. Coupled with the potential for power is the idea of awe and sacredness, which commands respect and separateness. It is in this sense that tapu can mean restrictions and prohibitions. However, tapu, a core part of Pacific belief systems, was glossed as taboo by earlier Western observers and recognized largely in terms of restrictions or prohibitions. Unfortunately, it is the limited and negative understanding that is used to explain tapu, but this is only one aspect of its meaning." (Henare 2001, 207)

children from discussions of sex is relatively contemporary; the history of childhood has been a topic of interest in social history since the highly influential book *Centuries of Childhood*, published by French historian Philippe Ariès in 1960. He argued that "childhood" is a concept created by modern society. (1996, 125). Ariès argues that the consideration of the child has not been fixed throughout history, indicating that in medieval society a child may be working and providing income for a family, where in modern society the same child would just be considered transitioning between infancy and childhood. The contemporary idea of the child is solidified through the cultural reinforcement of the nuclear family, which is focused on the protection and upbringing of children. This has been aided by modern day educational systems and low child mortality rates. This does not mean that children were considered the same as adults but the experience of childhood may have been considered less meaningful. As people live longer and experience a different way of life, the child is considered differently. In contemporary thinking the image of the child is loaded with the idea of innocence, whose experience is separate and protected by and from adult behaviour including expressions of sexuality. Despite the image and idea of the child being relatively contemporary, society's concern for the innocence of the child negates all discussion surrounding the complexity of childhood sexuality.

I would argue that this attitude leaves little space to reflect on the reality of human sexuality and its manifestations in early development. The very concept of sex positivity calls for an expansion of vocabulary and rhetoric in how we understand the notion of sex. This image of the child means many young people do not have the agency or space to explore their sexuality without shame. By exploring the concept of taboo, within sexual politics, one can begin to understand the history of taboo functions on a socio-cultural level as a barrier for open dialogue surrounding young people's exploration of sexuality. Through exploring how shame and taboo limit progressive thinking toward sexual expression, I promote the development of expansive sex positive cultural experiences for young people.

2.1 Taboo

A Freudian approach to taboo can aid in understanding how this concept has developed socially into contemporary ideas surrounding sex. The focus of Freud's writing is

the examination of the connection between the psychological development of primitives⁵, savages⁶ and neurotic patients, particularly children. Freud uses this multilateral comparison to argue that primitive and savage societies have the same complex social structures and forms of social and religious organization. For Freud, he is most concerned with the forbidding of sexual relations between individuals sharing a totem, the western equivalent of incest. Freudian research is useful in unpacking the 'root' of incest as a way to develop an understanding of how taboo functions in culture. Freud defines taboo as a condition of being simultaneously sacred and impure. A taboo is something set apart from common activity and is thus prohibited to most individuals without their knowing or even questioning why the prohibition exists. Freud argues:

However, the term 'taboo' includes all persons, localities, objects and temporary conditions which are carriers or sources of this mysterious attribute. The prohibition derived from this attribute is also designated as taboo, and lastly taboo, in the literal sense, includes everything that is sacred, above the ordinary, and at the same time dangerous, unclean and mysterious. (1913, 21)

Taboo can only exist while there is desire for the action. Freud explores how illogical ritualistic fear of certain objects speaks to a historical tradition of the intrinsic rejection of certain behaviours despite not truly understanding the root of disgust or revulsion. This highlights how certain behaviours, which may be regarded as inappropriate, are based on learned behaviour toward what is acceptable and unacceptable in a societal context. Considering taboo in this way allows for a questioning of certain encoded beliefs regarding how we express ourselves. Within the feminist sex positive movement major writers such as Gayle S. Rubin laid down the groundwork for expanding the notion as sexuality as a political movement against the persecution of adults engaging in 'immoral' displays of sexual expression. Her writing calls for a consideration of why we reject such behaviour; she challenges the unstable notion of taboo. She argues:

A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression. Such a theory needs refined conceptual tools which can grasp the subject and hold it in view. It must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists, in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution. (Rubin 1984, 9)

⁵ Meaning the simplest and earliest forms of human society.

⁶ The outdated concept meaning contemporary human societies who lack any sense of modern culture and live under similarly simple forms of social organization.

I would argue that, since Rubin's call for denouncing erotic injustice in 1984, much has developed through the legalisation of same sex marriage⁷, higher LGBT representation in media with leading organisations such as GLAAD⁸ and the recognition and development of women's reproductive health and rights⁹. However, I argue that there is much to be done in terms of developing a rich and complex critical language which can appropriately articulate how taboo functions. This contributes to a culture that silences sex positive attitudes especially in the presence of children. I argue that one way to tackle taboo in the discussion of children's sexuality is focusing on pleasure based culture, which promotes the body as the root of how we understand and exhibit behaviour.

Judith Levine argues that taboo functions to ignore bodily and pleasure based learning and thus contributes to more dangerous and unsafe sexual experiences for young people. Levine argues for a more complex understanding of both children and their sexualities. In doing so, children have a safer environment to express themselves without fear of punishment. She firstly outlines the absurdity of considering children simply in terms of their age. The young person can be seen as innocent dependent on their age; however this innocence is then removed in passing an age threshold that "children are fragilely innocent until the moment they step over some line, at which point they become instantly, irredeemably wicked." (Levine 2002, xxxii) It seems illogical that children are innocent beings before suddenly passing a time barrier that allows them to understand their sexuality. Levine's use of "wicked" is also an interesting choice; it seems that with being included in adult sexuality the young person becomes somewhat dirtied. This alludes to the idea that sexual expression is in some intrinsically dirty and shameful. Levine calls for a more complex understanding of how young people express sexuality:

Harmful to Minors says sex is not in itself harmful to minors. Rather, the real potential for harm lies in the circumstances under which some children and teens have sex, circumstances that predispose them to what the public-health people call "unwanted outcomes," such as unwanted pregnancy and

⁷ The Netherlands was the first country to legalise same sex marriage in April 2001 (BBC, 2000)

⁸ "GLAAD works with print, broadcast and online news sources to bring people powerful stories from the LGBT community that build support for equality. And when news outlets get it wrong, GLAAD is there to respond and advocate for fairness and accuracy." (About GLAAD, 2016)

⁹ As seen in the UN's *Every Woman Every Child* campaign which states: "Today we have both the knowledge and the opportunity to end preventable deaths among all women, children and adolescents, to greatly improve their health and well-being and to bring about the transformative change needed to shape a more prosperous and sustainable future. That is the ambition of this global strategy for women's, children's and adolescents' health." (*The Global Strategy For Women's, Children's And Adolescents' Health*, 2016)

sexually transmitted diseases, not to mention what I'd also consider an unwanted outcome: plain old bad sex. (2002, Introduction xxxiii)

In her introduction Levine makes a striking observation that through the avoidance of including young people in a conversation surrounding sexual expression, leads to a risk of disappointing, non-pleasurable or even damaging sexual experiences. It is essential that we discuss sex explicitly and honestly, in order to work *against* an entire system based on shame and sex negativity, thus challenging the acceptance of gender normativity, hetero bias and less pleasurable sexual experiences. This approach to expressing sexuality in the presence of young people speaks to a wider understanding of Western socio-cultural position and power structures. Where does the taboo of children expressing their sexuality stem from? Is it based on the necessity to keep some part of society of human experience inherently pure and innocent? Despite this desire, there are still aspects of culture which use the image of the child for sexual gratification; the image of the 'sexy schoolgirl' dominates popular culture and pornography. In a consideration of Freud, this can be seen as act of protecting the image of the young person whilst simultaneously expressing a desire for it. This is at the core of how taboo functions in its essence.

I bring together Freud's analysis of the taboo, Levine's take upon childhood sexuality and Rubin's call for an expansive notion of sexuality, to outline the more progressive notion of sexuality works to accept sexuality within childhood instead of distorting the image of the sexualised young person as sexually passive. This image is constructed as a result of hierarchical patriarchal sexual expression which promotes heteronormative sexual experiences, negating the body as the root of sexual discovery. This mode of sexual expression is aided culturally in how we learn and discuss sexuality from educational and social standpoints. The sex positive movement works to address the functionality of taboo culture in order to create a rhetoric that asks society to tackle sexuality in its complexity. It is through the challenging of cultural taboo, which allows for the development of Rubin's call for a rich understanding of human sexuality. Outlined in Levine's introduction is her struggle to even publish her book, due to it not being parent friendly, editors even asked her to remove the word pleasure from the introduction (2002, Introduction xx). It proves how taboo functions to breed fear, fear of sexualisation as inherently damaging for young people. This culture leads to young people being shamed out of discussing their sexuality in an open and complex manner.

Shame functions to silence a sex positive attitude. A deeper analysis of the functionality of shame culture can be seen in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, "Scientia Sexualis" where he explores the development of the scientific study of sex.

2.2 Shame

Foucault argues the 'truth' of sex is particular to the west that can be compared to the *ars erotica* seen more widely in Ancient and Western societies. In his writing, he outlines that the truth of sex within *ars erotica* is pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, and its reverberations in the body and the soul as the fundamental consideration in truth making (1999, 57) Pleasure is not considered in relation to what is forbidden but in relation to itself as experience. In contrast, *scientia sexualis* resembles scientific knowledge, in that it contextualises both one's own sexual experience and the sexual experience of others. By relating sexual experience in direct contrast of the other, creates a practice of sexual expression through shame and confession. If we are to consider sex through a scientific consideration, and not through pleasure, much more modes of expression become forbidden from society (1998, 63). Foucault argues these 'forbidden' acts are learned and have led to the development of confessional practice, which focuses on instilling notions of shame onto sexual activity. Confessional activity also elevates a model of information sharing which favours knowledge from the novice to the master through shameful expressions rather than a structure of wisdom being drawn from master to novice. (1998, 67) Therefore, sexual expression is not routed in learning from our corporeal experience of pleasure, but from what is deemed appropriate. The confession thus allows for the power structure of taboo and censorship to exist. If we consider sex as a confession, through this Foucauldian lens, we must also consider the act of sex as shameful in some sense. The truth of sex can also be expressed through a network of power structures which result in any manifestations of expression of sexual desire as shameful. The truth of sex is caught up in this formation, expressed only through appropriation and mediation. Foucault argues, however, that this structure of truth-telling and confessions offers its own intrinsic pleasures, a pleasure in the truth of pleasure. (Foucault 1998, 72) Foucault calls for positive mechanisms which produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure and generate power. Fundamentally, he calls for a definition of the strategies of power that "attempt to constitute the 'political economy of a will to knowledge.'" (Foucault 1998, 73)

Through this consideration of Foucault, the reason behind such taboo in sexual politics is seen more clearly. It is in the feelings of shame induced from considering sex as pleasure rather than reproductive which is taboo. This speaks to a further consideration of not only pleasure being shameful, but also the body in general. For example, *The New York Times* published an article in August 2016 surrounding recent scientific research into why women orgasm, it reads:

The male orgasm has never caused much of a stir among evolutionary biologists. The pleasure is precisely linked to ejaculation, the most important step in passing on a male's genes to the next generation. That pleasure encourages men to deliver more sperm, which is evolutionarily advantageous. For women, the evolutionary path is harder to figure out. The muscle contractions that occur during an orgasm are not essential for a woman to become pregnant. And while most men can experience an orgasm during sex, it's less reliable for women (Zimmer 2016).

Despite Foucault's writings coming from the 1970s, we can see how even in present day our understanding of sexual expression is still rooted in reproductive and heteronormative experiences. In this article, Zimmer is exemplifying how the culturally assumed definition of sex is vaginal, heterosexual and reproductive. The idea of pleasure is secondary to the essential function of sex. He also highlights how we understand the female sexual experience as failing in comparison to the male in terms of pleasure. Orgasms during sex for women are not less 'reliable', women can and do orgasm consistently and regularly. The female experience of sex is not less or inconsistent compared to the male, it is just different. Pleasure is so complex and subjective; people receive pleasure from many different areas of the body than just the penis or vagina. If society is to only understand sexual experience from this standpoint there is no space to develop a complex and rich understanding of sexual expression. This article illuminates how Foucault's claims remain a contemporary issue, the entire article is reliant on an essentialist notion of sex as one action which is explained and explored through a single discourse. The very assumption that the female orgasm must be strange or peculiar because it differs from the male in its reproductive benefits highlights a structural and institutional notion of sexual rhetoric completely disconnected to complex notions of sexual experience.

Not only does this attitude diminish a fruitful and progressive notion of sex, it also contributes to preservation normative gender identities. Learning about sexual expression

from an engendered position leads to young people expressing their sexuality as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. The former is linked to being passive, silent and submissive. This leads to a culture of sexual expression which places the female body as receiver of sex rather than an active participant or instigator of sex. Decoding and exploring the idea of sexual expression with young children can lead to a more complex and non-assigned understanding of sex and gender. Looking at gender through Judith Butler's theories, that promote thinking about gender construction as performative acts rather than inherent,¹⁰ aids challenging the dominance of reproductive sexual activity. The physicality of the male is not important, it is only the meaning that we give to the male body which allows it to become more powerful than the female. A consideration of how gender is constructed aids in developing an understanding of sexual expression based entirely on bodily experience. For example, if we were to promote children's learning about sexuality and gender through what their bodies enjoy, then the idea of fixed genders and sexualities is challenged and even overturned. The development of sexuality within children is inherently focused on their sex and the power they gain from their gendered bodies, thus the destabilizing of gender as a form of sexual expression can function to challenge issues such as rape culture, male centred understanding of orgasm and damaging pornographic depictions of women as submissive.

Fundamentally, sexuality and expression is caught up in a complex hierarchical system, which is based on patriarchal structure and taboo. How can we begin to place the body at the source of how we understand the world around us, instead of the other way round? The avoidance of discussing sexual expression with young people does not protect them from abuse; it perpetuates a dangerous idea of sex that actually contributes to creating harmful sex experiences for all genders and ages.

Taboo functions to expose how society's relationship to sexual expression is rooted not in pleasure but in shame. A Freudian understanding of taboo explains how learned behaviour passed over time and generations is problematic. This notion does not allow for an

¹⁰ 'acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface of the body*....Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in that sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.' (Butler 1990, 139) This highlights how gender can only take place once the body acknowledges how they must behave i.e. the process of "girthing" begins in the moment of recognition after birth with the statement 'it's a girl'.

understanding of sexual experience as subjective but universal. A subjective consideration enables a deconstruction of the reasons to avoid the discussion of children's sexuality. Furthermore, it demonstrates how avoidance can lead to assumptions of sexual experience that are rooted in heteronormativity and male bias. This chapter outlines the problem of not promoting sex positive and pleasure-focused attitudes to experiences. The shame attached to how we express sexuality can function to develop expressions, which are fundamentally damaging to how we understand bodily experience. Expressions of sexuality based in shame and taboo are more susceptible to sexual experiences which are violent, non-pleasurable and de-humanising. It is through an exploration of taboo, through Freud, and its application to contemporary thinking such as Levine and Butler which allows for an expansive understanding of the importance sex positive thinking. Through an understanding of Foucault's writings surrounding confessional activity, and its relevance in discussing sex culturally, I can begin to underpin the modes in which TYA can aid in tackling these outdated assumptions of sex as solely reproductive. In my next chapter, I will focus on how performances within the TYA field challenge how we understand sexual expression and children. These performances are useful in exposing the different approaches which tackle the topic of sexual expression and young people through theatrical experiences. This will include a dramaturgical analysis of each performance and considering how their approach to dramaturgy contributes to challenge issues surrounding taboo and sex that I have outlined in this chapter.

3. Dancing Bodies

Tabea Martin's *Roze voor meisjes & blauw voor jongens* (*Pink is for girls & blue is for boys*) is a dance performance created for young people from the age of six and over. The performance, despite its low age rating, tackles different taboos within TYA by containing open expressions of sexuality. In its presentation at Utrecht's Tweetakt festival in 2016 it was met by strong reactions from both schools and parents, which deemed the content inappropriate for such a young audience. In their performance description seen on Tweetakt's website, the company says explicitly that they wish to challenge "differences between boys and girls. In various very funny and playful ways they make you think about identity. Toppling over every stereotype, and doing all they can to break the boundaries." (*Roze voor Meisjes, Blauw voor Jongens*, 2016) This attempt of breaking through gender stereotypes can be seen in their choreographies which, for the first half of the performance, invert and challenge categorized dance styles. The performance challenges how reactions toward heteronormative romantic couplings are greeted with more acceptance than any other presentation of romantic or sexual interaction. As this piece continues, the final fifteen minutes uses choreographic material which is task based, the audience watch as the performers play with materials and each other's bodies in what seems to be improvised.

This performance can be seen an example of TYA which explicitly tackles the idea of engendered sexual expression and questions how one relates to bodily experience. By using the example of a dance performance, I remain mindful of the specificities of dance as a kinetic bodily experience. In this particular performance, context is created through improvisation produced by the body, the work is not imposed on the body. Expanding this notion, I will argue that sexual expression is rooted within the body and not forced onto the body through systematic and socio-cultural obligation. This performance moves away from imposed forms and toward emergent or immanent forms of corporeal expression. The contrast between the first sections of the piece highlights this further, as the improvised section becomes more effective in revealing the potentiality of the body as instigator of experience rather than follower of prescribed movement. In this analysis I will argue that this piece works within the field of TYA to challenge the notion of prohibitive sexual/bodily expression for young people.

3.1 Subversion

Firstly, I will explore the first section of this performance, which focuses on the performers subverting the way one performs their gendered body. In the first moments of the performance, the dancers enter in nude underwear with a collection of household objects. Slowly they build the domestic set on stage including a sofa, microwave and table. The performers then remove the black scarfs on their heads and reveal them as black body suits. The moment when the performers change out of their underwear into their black body suits can be seen as an attempt to neutralize the bodies in some way; the bodies are simultaneously covered and also exposed to us. This dramaturgical decision is the first of many which tackles what is 'appropriate' for young people. The adult body is often hidden from the child as something shameful and even frightening. Fear of the adult body seems rooted in the idea that the adult body is inherently sexual. Alongside sexual expression, nudity is also actively censored across arts and media for young people. It is interesting that simply covering the naked body in a skin tight suit negates the idea of the body being revealed. You can still see the body and its specificity while it remains safe and non-frightening because it is covered. This speaks to wider cultural fascination of covering or altering the body to the extent that we have made nudity illegal in certain circumstances¹¹. What does policing the body do within the culture of sex positivity? In the West there are unwritten rules of which part of the body are private and public. The performers cover their entire bodies in a way that thematises the illogical hierarchical structure of the body. Why is the breast hidden while the stomach can be exposed? It seems like the body suits act as more of a challenge to why society does not accept certain aspects of the body to be shown publicly.

Furthermore, the use of suits neutralizes the performers' bodies and allows them to be less constricted to their gender; the body suit unites their bodies as one. At different stages of the performance, the dancers also add foam to expand areas of their bodies such as chest, crotch and arms. The adding of various materials, to alter their frames, also allows for their gender constructions to be thematised in a physical way. The act of adding material has the same amount of power in creating gender as anything else. This allows for a conversation

¹¹ As challenged by the Free the Nipple movement, which has sparked a global movement which challenges the reasons why women cannot be in public without a shirt and men can. The movement questions why legally society considers female nipple publically indecent. (Free The Nipple, 2016)

surrounding gender which is focused on its construction rather than its fundamentality. Judith Levine questions the severity of prescribing young people to fixed gender identities:

None of this is good for kids-or for sex. For while young people are doing their damndest to avoid rocking the boat of gender, there's evidence that gender is a sinking ship, with girls and boys clinging to the gunwales as it goes down. Interestingly, it's not just gendered behaviour (what cultural theories call the performance of gender) but even gendered *thought* that narrows the sexual experience, to individuals' detriment. (Levine 2002, 157)

As Levine outlines the perpetuation of gender roles to young people furthers the risk of reducing sexual experience as gendered. This performance draws attentions to the fragility of gender construction by reducing it to material additions or reductions to the body. As Levine points out, pleasure based sexual experience can be disrupted by a gendered understanding of sexual expression. For example, the feminine expression of sexuality can be seen as more passive than the masculine. By experimenting with changing the male and female bodies, the performers broaden our consideration of feminine sexuality vs masculine sexuality. The audience is forced to consider gender and sexuality as separate, each equally complex and subjective. As we learn about our sexualities in youth it is important not to prescribe young people to specific notions of fixed gender or sexuality. In creating a rulebook to how we understand pleasure appropriates the body to experience one type of sex. In order to develop into a society which does not designate fixed genders and sexual identities to young people we must root our understanding of sex as a subjective and personal experience. This development must be supported by cultural sectors specific for young people and for an expansion of the pornography industry with more makers focused in diverse explorations of sex.

Once the performers are changed into their black suits they begin to dance what seems to be traditional ballet choreography in partners (male and female) ending in a kiss. Despite the seemingly neutral dress of the body suit, the performers still remain in their assigned gender roles as they perform pre-determined and recognizable choreography. This can be seen to highlight the extent to which heteronormative representation is reconstructed within Western arts and culture. The couple's kiss is met with the delighted exclamations of joy which is usually reserved for heterosexual expressions of sexuality. This is then reversed to same sex coupling which is met by laughter and then shock when the same sex couple end their dance in the same fashion as before. This moment then changes as the two male performers continue to kiss, moving together more forcefully and lustfully. In this

performance, one sees how the performers do not play into a coded representation of sexuality or romance but instead present these moments explicitly. By doing so, the performance questions why their chosen audience of anyone over the age of six cannot be presented with bodies kissing, especially since the first kiss is met with no resistance. I would argue that by avoiding the topic of sexuality, in fear of the appropriate, children learn about sexual expression 'discreetly'. If adults are unable to discuss sex with children openly it perpetuates the idea that sex is unspeakable and shameful. In speaking about sexual expression frankly and openly means a consideration of other types of sexualities outside of heterosexuality. The shocking/exciting aspect of this performance is the fact that the performers do not hide from the fact they are being sexual. By placing the body and its immediate relationship to the other sexually, *Roze voor Meisjes, Blauw voor Jongens* acts as a performance which challenges the very essence of what the Western society deems most inappropriate for children. It positions the heterosexual relationship which is met with acceptance and celebration against the homosexual display of affection which is met with discomfort. The performance challenges the audience to question what types of romantic relationships we see appropriate for children to witness. It exposes *how* dominant images of heteronormative behaviour are within Western culture.

Within heteronormative discourse, as outlined by Foucault¹² in my second chapter, this mode describes sexuality in terms of its productive value. Value is instilled if sex produces children or is useful in maintaining traditional heterotopian notions of society. The discussion of sex is centred not in the pleasure of the sexual experience but in its societal effect. This distinction is fundamental in highlighting the type of sexual encounter that is appropriate for a young audience. Focusing on sexual expressions through the normative western method of scientific approach promotes the focus of sexual expression being intrinsically linked to reproduction. In focusing on this attitude, there is a fundamental neglect of sexual expression to be linked to a sense of self-worth, pleasure or excitement. This rejection influences the ways in which our media, arts and culture allows for children to be exposed to sex or even the naked body. There is a discomfort surrounding discussions of sexual practice outside the lens of marriage or the normative family unit. This Foucauldian notion

¹² As noted in *History of Sexuality Part 1*: "The object, in short, is to refine the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world." (Foucault 1998, 11) Foucault calls for a reconsideration of sexual politics rooted in pleasure based experience rather than reproduction.

leads to understanding the limitations present in media and culture and encourages alternative and challenging engagement toward the relationship between taboo and TYA. The combination of both the understanding of shame culture, the fear of the naked body and the preference of heteronormative expression acts to expose the two overarching themes which overlook the importance of sex positivity in TYA.

3.2 Improvisation

In the final moments of the performance, the dancers remove their black body suits and begin to break open the coach to reveal many different materials. In a lengthy final section, the performers use various materials such as foam, paint and clothing in groups or individually to dress their bodies. In comparison to the first section of the performance, this section can be seen as a movement away from the prescribed choreography. I will comment on the effectiveness of the contrast of the first section and the final fifteen minutes. This is led by an analysis of approaches to choreography which works in a more amorphous way. Throughout this section, the performers dress themselves in different ways, cover the floor and their bodies with blue and pink paint amongst other actions. In the performance I saw at Krokus Festival in Hasselt in 2016, the performers use foam and materials to create complex attachments to their bodies which hinders their ability to move freely. The section is reminiscent of improvisation exercise which promotes the experimentation of materials and movement. It is an approach to choreography which is focused on how the dancers interact with their surroundings rather than enacting predetermined movement. The focus of the piece seems to move from movement as representation to movement as experience. This section can be seen in direct contrast to the first fifteen minutes where the performers present themselves as gendered dancers challenging normative gender structures. By using both approaches to choreography, this piece highlights the authoritative nature of prescribed bodily movement.

In *Editorial on Choreography* Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki expand the idea of choreography, describing it “as a means of inscribing bodily, social, and non-human movement in cultural, social, political and personal space...” (Allsopp and Lepecki 2008, 4). One can see this performance as slowly liberating the performer from hegemonic representation to movement emerging from events, rather than being predetermined. As

Allsopp and Lepecki argue choreography can be opened up to any movement is it bodily or non-human in space. This opens up what we can consider dance and destabilizes the hierarchy of bodily movements. The focus on the improvised movement allows the body not to be constricted to a notion of functionality or even gendered expectation. Not only does this performance challenge taboo and elements of sexual expression, it's use of improvised choreography derails and transcends any consideration of the *normative*. The dramaturgical decision to move from traditional pre-determined choreographies into improvised movement expands the notion of presenting children with alternative representations of gender and sexuality. This performance explores the entire notion of representational performance. It begs the question, how can performances, experimenting with prescribed representational movement, speak to larger questions regarding modernist notions of subjectivity? A concern within this thesis is to uncover the ways sex positive TYA can act as a challenge to instilled notions of normative, conservative sexual and gender expressions on a larger socio-cultural scale. This performance can be seen as an example of contemporary TYA which promotes sex positivity through exploring contemporary approaches to choreography to explore the body is not subscribed to certain modes of moving.

Expanding notions of choreography operative capabilities on a socio-cultural level can be seen in Andrew Hewitt's *Social Choreography*. His writing demonstrates that models of choreography are not only are metaphorical but actively participating in creating an example of the reorganisation of social structure. He writes:

...social choreography is not a metaphor. I seek to counter the prevailing interpretation of a metaphor of dance within modernist poetics. The model of causality here is more structural. An aesthetic form could be judged ideologically not simply because it expresses a clear agenda or because we know its author or choreographer belonged to a certain class or party. Actions— not just representations—are ideological. (2005, 11)

Here Hewitt outlines how the aesthetic of choreography is not only metaphorical. It is also possible to develop an understanding of postmodernist thinking which promotes 'freedom' as action based without principal or goals through choreographic material. Goal led corporal movement perpetuates the idea that our physical existence is based in achievement rather than experience. Firstly, in order to achieve there must be set ideal to strive for, within Western society the ideal exists within heteronormative considerations of the successful. To consider bodily experience through accomplishment propagates heteronormative ideology.

The moment when the dancers begin to explore the space through improvised movement challenges how the audience understand desire as a culturally specific notion. Promoting action based movement and attitudes which do not lead to 'accomplishment' functions to expose the fragility of our current societal structures which are fundamentally limiting our bodily experience. This notion of success is reflected in the way we look at sex. Successful sex is reproductive. Successful sex does not include the female orgasm. Successful sex does not consider pleasure. Surpassing notions of successful movement contributes to expansive, inclusive and progressive sexual politics.

This performance uses the dancing body as a way to combat certain cultural taboos in how we make work for young people. The performers highlight how the body is not limited to prescribed movements using improvised movements furthermore they actualize and express their own personal power and agency. (Rapley 1999, 92) The activity of improvisation is not structured in a way to promote any sort of agenda onto the body. In a work of dance improvisation, the audience is exposed to the body as matter, the body as agent for experience rather than continuing to represent how the body should be functioning in space: "Improvisation is an innovative dance process that takes the dancer beyond habituated patterns of movement and modes of comportment into a realm of unknown possibilities where new ways of moving can be discovered and experienced" (Rapley 1999, 95) This performance promotes an attitude of body consciousness which celebrates the body in its complexity rather than its assumed purpose. The piece undoes and deconstructs notions of body normativity through its choice of both prescriptive and improvised choreography. As a piece of sex positive work, the piece functions as a dance choreography which challenges the very idea of what the body *should* do. Its use of improvisation works to promote the body as the mode in which we understand the world around us rather than the other way round. Placing the body at the centre of human experience is fundamental in challenging notions of socio-cultural heteronormativity. As I have outlined previously, a hetero- focused approach reduces sexual experience to its reproductive function. This performance promotes the body and its ability to challenge social structuring. In turn this challenges the audience to consider the body as capable of more than its predicted function and promotes the idea that the body is the root of experience and not the receiver of experience. It asks its audience to question why we move the way we do. In doing so, it allows for an expansive notion of bodily movement and

consecutively allows space for a multitude of subjectivities. It is through the consideration of alternative and numerous subjectivities that begin a process of challenging sanctioned displays of sexuality and gender.

Furthermore, I argue that this performance's use of improvisation also provides a framework for imagining alternative economies of touch. In Western culture our relationship to the touching of young people has been influenced by the idea that touching children is firstly as abusive action. For example, the 2012 British National Union of Teachers released their *Education, The Law and You* official guidance document with an entire section dedicated to physical contact with pupils. It reads:

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary: 1. Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly or when walking together around the school. 2. When comforting a distressed pupil. 3. When a pupil is being congratulated or praised. 3. To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument. 4. To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching and to give first aid. (*Education, The Law and You*, 2012)

This details list gives teachers across the U.K. the precise moments where touch is appropriate with children. As a society we associate touch as a fundamentally dangerous action in the presence of children. The moments we can allow ourselves physical contact is listed to us in legal documents. I do not argue that this does not serve as a protective, and I do value the intention to protect children from the dangers of abusive situations. However, this document outlines how disconnected our society has toward how our bodies relate to one another. These rules promote fear of the body instead of celebrating its potential. In this point, I do not intend to promote sexual contact with children, instead I question why we associate all contact with children as potentially harmful? As I continue with my consideration of sex positive theatre, I will move into an analysis of a performance which questions this notion. In my other example of TYA performance I will focus on how the use of the young body on stage can rouse stress within audiences regarding children's agency and vulnerability.

4. Screaming Girls

Furthering my argumentation surrounding improvisation and sex positivity, I will explore how the presence of the young body functions in TYA. As mentioned in my previous chapter the child's body is an ingrained site of tension in society. This is can be seen as reactionary to the assumption that the child needs to be protected. I argue that the fear of abuse, which is so prevalent when discussing the child, influences how we consider the young performer on stage. In this chapter I will use a performance with a cast made up of young people which promotes the young body as authoritative in expressing sexuality in a safe and shameless way. *Het Hamiltoncomplex* is a performance by young Belgian company Hetpaleis. The project was directed by Lies Pauwels, who worked with thirteen teenagers to create a performance in which they (alongside a male adult body builder) are the lead performers. The performance explores the moments in life when things begin to shift as the young women begin to transition between girlhood and womanhood. Throughout the piece the performers interact in a sequence of tableaux that challenge how we view the teenage body and its relationship to the adult man. The performance also questions how young teenage sexuality manifests and the discomfort it provokes in adults. The most intriguing aspect of this performance is its use of the young body. What does the presence of the 'real' teenage body do in this performance to heighten questions surrounding vulnerability, agency and sexual expression?

I saw this performance for the second time at the ASSITEJ Annual Artistic Gathering in Birmingham in July 2016. The reception from the delegates and young people was mostly positive but I was continually met with the same response, "Did those girls know what they were doing?" The one hundred minute performance includes a series of sections which confronted the audience into considering how we look at the teenage body. In one of the first sections, the performers change into school uniforms and then begin screaming and jumping at the audiences as they change. The moment is met with music, reminiscent of the 1960s Beatlemania phenomenon. This section continues for an extended period of time until the girls are lifted and moved by the bodybuilder who attempts to silence them with a whistle. The image sees the girls exploding with screams only to be restrained by the adult male. The adult performer represses the girl's screams and excitement as a way of appropriating their behaviour. As an audience, we are witness to the physicalisation of the trend to silence teenage expressions of sexuality and excitement. The moment is overwhelmingly sensorial as

all thirteen girls scream directly at the audience. There is a powerful characteristic of screaming; it is an act of losing all prescriptive notions of the appropriate:

To abandon control--to scream, faint, dash about in mobs--was, in form if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture. It was the first and most dramatic uprising of women's sexual revolution. (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 1986)

Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs argue for a consideration of the screaming teenage girl to be associated with the women's liberation movement. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, the abandonment of constrictive notions of bodily expression is at the forefront of the expansion of sex positive discourse with young people. Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs' 1986 essay "Screams Heard 'round The World" outlines how the Beatlemania movement of the 1960s can be seen as a cultural movement challenging the nature of the teenage girl as pure and innocent. They explain that through this movement society had to consider that young girls behaved in such a way in response to sexual repression. (1986) In doing so, the teenage girl must then be considered as sexual in the first place. Throughout this section of the performance, the audience is witness to this repression. The audience watches as the girls scream and giggle, just to be pulled away by the body builder. The girls then begin to lift their skirts to the audience. The image is both hilarious and frustrating. The performers expose the extent to which the female teenage body is sexualised that even the exposure of underwear is taboo. This performance challenges the audience to question why the young female body is viewed with such tension. Even at thirteen years old, young girls need to cover themselves because they are sexualised from such an early age. I would argue that the reaction of the audience in questioning the young girls' agency is rooted in their own discomfort. It is the audience which sexualises the performers, not the performance. It is for this reason why this performance is so powerful in challenging and expanding the idea of teenage sexuality.

One of the most jarring images was when all thirteen performers dress in Lolita style school girl costumes with bright coloured wigs and repeat their names to the audience. This image is continued throughout the performance, all thirteen girls in four separate occasions tell the audience their names which include: Chastity, Prudence, Beauty and Precious amongst others. This particular moment is joined with the performers curling their hair and speaking in a giggly yet uncomfortably seductive manner. The moment is both sexual but also highly innocent. The audience is challenged to question how they will process this image: it develops

the image of the 'sexy schoolgirl' by using actual schoolgirls. It humanizes the caricature of teenage sexuality by confronting the audience with real bodies and real voices. The question of agency, which was at the forefront of much of the reactions during the festival, demonstrates the common assumption that teenagers are not aware of how their bodies are seen in media and society. It seems impossible to many spectators that these girls would have any understanding of what these images do in sexualizing them. I argue the performers, more than anyone, are most aware of their sexuality. It seems unreasonable that young women would not be aware of something which is so heightened within contemporary culture. Pauwels, having being met with this reaction, said this to the British Guardian:

I have to let it go," says Pauwels. "It has been such a wonderful experience, so deep and meaningful. When we came together, most of these girls had never been on stage before. Now they own it, and they are so lovely with each other. We talk about a lot of very hard and difficult things in the performance, but they do it with love and tenderness, and they are so responsible. People talk about it being my show, but it's really their show. It belongs to them. We made it together. Everything in it came from them. (Gardner 2016)

Here Pauwels explicitly highlights that it is the performers who are in control of the images they present on stage. Despite the assumption that the performers do not understand the images they create, it is clear that the process Pauwels has created has asked them to think and act on what are the associations attached to their bodies. The assumption that the young girls did not understand the impact of their own bodies highlights a more grave assumption that it is adults who are in control of teenage sexuality. This proposes that if an adult feels provoked or uncomfortable by a teenager expressing their sexuality, the young person is automatically victimized by the experience. In this understanding, there is no consideration of questioning the adult's fears of such an image and why it should rouse so much fear and concern. I argue this performance heightens the teenage experience so highly that adults cannot deal with the confrontation. This is due open expressions of young female sexuality being so culturally hidden. It is paramount that one begins a process of allowing young girls the space for complex considerations of their sexuality. If not the teenager is grievously powerless in expressing themselves in distress of disturbing contemporary instilled notions of silenced sexual expression. The inappropriate in this performance is not for the young audience but for the adult audience.

4.1 Vulnerability

Uncovering the notion of the sexual teenage body requires a consideration of vulnerability and agency. In Lee Edelman's "The Future is Kid's Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification and the Death Drive" he argues against children being placed solely within the realm of protection and vulnerability, only to be exposed to society within the traditional family unit. Of course, this allows for types of exposure to complex and potentially harmful themes which may be confusing and damaging to a child whilst in the process of attempting to categorise how they understand the world around them. However, this consideration also neglects other non-harmful expressions, such as queer sexuality and sex positivity. Furthering this line of thinking, he explores how normative attitudes toward the child as a member of society position the young person as evocative of hope. Within *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, the presence of the thirteen young female performers dressed in school uniform may be an image evocative of innocence. However, the performance develops this image by having the young women continually challenge the way in which we perceive how their bodies are categorized. The performance complicates the girlish body, presenting it rather as capable of complex and overlapping identities. This complication interferes with the way in which we position the child in our society. The idea of the innocent child, Edelman argues, perpetuates a tradition of heteronormative politics which affirms the heterosexual relationship and the family at the core of societal structure. This ordering silences other ways of sexual expression even those of the teenage girl whose expression is not like that of adults. The performance explores how teenage and adult sexuality should be considered in the same complexity.

In Edelman's refusal to 'fight for the children', he insists the rhetoric of protection places queer voices outside what is considered the most fundamental aspect of our societal order. Arguably, the resistance to this stance allows for more complex expressions of the sexual, which resists the hierarchical heteronormative structure. He argues that in order to participate in mainstream western politics there persists certain essentialism with regards to how we include and discuss children within our society. In regards to this one sidedness within political rhetoric, Edelman notes:

And while such apparently self-evident one-sidedness - the affirmation of so uncontested, because so uncontroversial, a cultural value as that condensed in the figure of child whose innocence

cries out for defence - is precisely what ought to distinguish the public service spots from the more volatile discourse of political persuasion. (1998, 19)

The call that Edelman makes through this paper is for a challenge to the unwavering notion that children are simply there to be protected. He is challenging the very sense of fundamentality which strengthens heteronormative conservatism. This approach is useful in analysing how the *fundamental* functions at a societal level. In Edelman's case, his call for resistance exposes the larger political effect of such fundamentalist stances; he argues that nothing can be truly fundamental but active within a causal structure. If we extend this thinking within a Foucauldian methodology, Edelman is exposing how taboo can function to speak to a larger power structure at hand. Edelman argues that it is the fantasy of such fundamental structures that order, organise, and assure the stability of our identities. This maintains the consistency of the cultural structures and how they are reflected back to us in recognizable form. (1998, 19) By challenging such fundamentalist structures, we can begin to consider more deeply the fragility of heteronormative patriarchy and create spaces for progressive notions of sexuality and gender.

It seems that much of our consideration of how to express sexuality in the presence of the child is wrapped in the fear of the inappropriate. This understanding is fundamental in how the inappropriate functions in a wider social context. It could be argued that, through the lens of how we consider censorship, speaks to a larger issue of the discomfort of sexual positivity in general. As Catriona Mackenzie argues:

Theorists of vulnerability need to be alert to the danger that notions of vulnerability and protection can be, and historically have been, used to justify coercive or objectionably paternalistic social relations, policies, and institutions, which often function to compound rather than ameliorate the vulnerability of the persons or groups they are designed to assist. (Mackenzie 2014, 34)

Mackenzie points out the potential risk of not contextualizing and complicating our understanding of vulnerability. It can be argued that notions of vulnerability and protection toward young audiences can lead to a culture which is controlled by censorship and taboo and which is complicit in their perpetuation. Appropriateness highlights the way children are acculturated not only by their nuclear family but by the social sphere more broadly. I do not call for an abandonment of protecting young people from damaging and abusive sexual

experience. I instead warn against the unconditional assumption that discussions of sex with children should always be avoided in favour of protecting their 'innocence'. Within this analysis of how children, sex and society function I am exposing the societal discomfort surrounding non-normative identities and sex positivity. Within this performance, the performers challenge notions of the inappropriate by presenting aspects of teenage sexuality which are often hidden. Firstly, the performance presents images of the teenage girl which can be seen as an attempt give space for young girls to express their sexuality openly. Secondly, it challenges the notion that sex is inherently shameful or dirty through use of humour and skilful performance techniques. Thirdly, it functions to challenge patriarchal attitude to societal order which silences the teenage female voice to preserve her innocence and purity. How can we look at vulnerability and sex positivity in TYA and shift away from conservatism and taboo and in light of the consideration that *all* are vulnerable? *Het Hamiltoncomplex* can be seen as a performance which places the teenage experience at the forefront of the performance. Instead of feeling uncomfortable about the teenagers exploring their sexualities, it may be more useful to question where this discomfort stems from. It is clear the images Pauwels and the performers create do rouse very strong reactions within audiences and so it is more interesting to ask whether we can tackle issues surrounding teenage sexuality with teenagers themselves. This performance can be seen as an example of TYA which promotes teenagers having agency in understanding how their bodies are viewed by society and becoming active in how they are represented.

In order to elaborate upon the idea of controlling the image of one's own sexuality, I will consider how the teenage body relates to the adult body. It is essential to understand the complex social structure in place which conserves teenagers' sexual identity as shameful and dangerous. In Butler's *Precarious Life* she calls for a consideration of vulnerability rooted in the body. If one is to consider how vulnerability is an essential aspect for everyone, a process of equal consideration can be introduced. For example, if one is to consider all bodies as vulnerable, all people are given the same agency in the way they express themselves. Everyone is susceptible to the potential of abusive or violent experiences; it is not only women or children who we should consider vulnerable when expressing their sexuality. If all bodies are vulnerable vessels then the discussion is no longer focused weakness and strength but how we can look at vulnerability as an essential human condition. There is major concern with TYA

regarding how vulnerable young people are within society, in regards to *Het Hamiltoncomplex*, the performers are exposed and it creates discomfort in the adult audience. However, if we are to accept vulnerability as subjective it is possible to expand the agency the performers have in presenting their own experience. As Butler argues, “As a mode of relation, neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather, is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being for another or by virtue of another.” (2004, 23) The young performers do possess agency in exploring their own sexualities, of course there should be a consideration of their vulnerability in the performative situation however this should not be the only way we discuss the performances. The young people in the performance are empowered and in a safe position to discuss their experience which is important in developing a better understanding of the complexities of sexual expression.

Het Hamiltoncomplex is a performance which positions teenage experience at the forefront of its thematic exploration. It complicates the teenage body as having its own agency outside what is understood by adults. My reading of Butler expands the notion of the vulnerable and places body in the prominent position of consideration which aids in how we can empathise and contextualise our relationship to the *other*. This opens us an understanding of how the adult body relates to the child in a less dominating way and instead promotes an empathetic approach. This considers vulnerability as universal affected only by circumstance not by the essentiality of one’s age or sex. Edelman deepens this understanding by exposing how vulnerability functions to silence queer experience and perpetuates normative organisational structures which favour heteronormative experience. This performance uses the teenage body to develop a wider and more complex sexual rhetoric to the benefit of both adults and children.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued for a reconsideration of how sexuality is explored within TYA. In doing so, I have examined performances which I feel suggest ways to transcend a normative model of sexual expression. The inclusion of TYA which discusses and explores how we can begin to understand sexuality through bodily expression in mainstream is fundamental in the development of sex positivity in arts for young people. This is instrumental in creating an environment for young people which might not be tainted by the assumption their bodies are sexless. This process, in turn, creates spaces for sexual expression based on bodily experience, which is not rooted in a normative understanding of sexuality or gender identity. This creates spaces in which young people can express sexual expression in a safe way, instead of being ashamed of expressions which arguably allow for adults to take advantage of confusion and sexual desire. The fear of having young people involved in discussions surrounding sex is based in the idea that they are vulnerable to those who will take advantage of them. By empowering young people to understand their own sexual identities, there is a possibility that they might have an outlet for such confusion, which is in the presence of those who can offer the safe tools and space for such expression. Sex positivity can be seen as a movement which de-shames the body and its enjoyment of sex. Bodily expression works in opposition to learned behaviour which advances ideas of obedience, silence and shame. It is in the marginalization of bodily expression which leads to misinformation, miscommunication and misguided understanding of sexual experience. For example, if we are to consider the female anatomy, in a solely reproductive understanding of female sexuality the clitoris can be negated as unnecessary as it does not function to reproduce. However, the consideration of sexual expression led by bodily pleasure places areas such as the clitoris as fundamental to fulfilling and pleasurable sexual experience. How much more do we lose when we deny body-based learning? If we are to further this, it is similar to considering eating in a gourmet restaurant as a shameful act because it exceeds a necessary experience of food for survival. Clitoral stimulation is the gourmet restaurant, which posits sexual pleasure as more fulfilling than simply reproductive survival. The body is the way we should learn about sexual expression.

Judith Levine highlights the hypocrisy of warning children away from sex and how that makes children more vulnerable to abuse. It also talks about the way we deny children the

right to be real citizens in the world so we neither listen to their voice nor empower them to use their voice. In she outlines:

An education in the body's physical responses can and should be mostly autodidactic, but adults play a crucial role. That role consists of two parts. The first, active, part is to touch children lovingly, though never intrusively, throughout their childhoods, including adolescence, and to transmit in a word and deed the messages that pleasure is a good thing but that touching others must be done with their consent. The second, perhaps more difficult job involves restraint – stepping back and 'making a place' for children's autonomous sensual and sexual pleasure. (2002, 183)

Sex is complicated. The body is complicated. As medicine continues to develop, society can begin to consider their relationship to sex outside of reproduction. This development must encourage an alteration and expansion of the way sexual experience in education is presented to children? Perpetuating sex as 'a man and woman having vaginal intercourse to reproduce' ignores the plethora of ways to express one's sexuality. It is an area in which children should be allowed to contribute and explore without risk of punishment or disapproval. It is the responsibility of artists and adults to create spaces for young people to discuss their sexual identities and experiences safely and openly without fear of judgement. It is the responsibility for adults to make sure that sex is understood as a positive experience. Sex in itself is not a dangerous thing, the danger lies in the way we express our sexuality: "Sex is not harmful to children. It is a vehicle to self-knowledge, love, healing, creativity, adventure and intense feelings of aliveness."(Levine 2002, 225) As we continue into the 21st Century, we continue to move past outdated conservative notions of sexuality and gender. The rise in communication and rapid development of digitalisation mean our sexual and interpersonal relationships continue to become more and more complex. As adults, we must help navigate the modes in which we discuss sex with younger people in order to combat the dangerous and harmful realities of unsafe, dangerous and damaging sexual experiences young people are faced with.

I have highlighted the need and call for sex positive TYA through examples of cultural and societal circumstances and regulations which continue to perpetuate outdated notions of sex. Through an exploration of the field of TYA, I have been able to argue TYA's suitability for such work to develop. This is shown in the landscape's international recognition and focus on the continued development of how society approaches the idea of the child. In TYA, the idea

of age categories, the homogenous notion of childhood and the way children access arts is continually developing through organisations such as ASSITEJ and ITYARN. Not only does this landscape aim to be recognised more globally and seriously within the arts sector, it also supports young makers of TYA to become part of a global network of supporters of TYA as a genre. My intention was to contribute to this field of research by outlining the way taboo has been constructed in culture and society. I have been able to unearth the way sex positivity is able to promote an alternative attitude to sex. I have placed this aspect of my research in relationship to theorists such as Freud, Foucault, Butler and Levine. This has allowed me to discuss the idea of shame and taboo in line with contemporary writing surrounding the developing field of sex and gender politics. This aspect of my research aided in rooting my thesis in a developing theoretical landscape. I have also remained considerate of writers such as Rubin, who leads in the development of feminist sex positivity in the 1980s. This has been supported by looking at examples of TYA performance which can be seen to exemplify and develop my research in how sex positivity functions. The two performances I have chosen allowed me to develop my research within other performance studies fields such as dance theory and queer theory. Through dramaturgical analyses of both works, I have argued how these works can be seen to exemplify how sex positivity in TYA can lead to more complex and further researching discourse in regards to sexuality.

Throughout this thesis, I have called for looking at TYA as a rich field for the expansion of how sex positive discourse is explored in the presence of young people. I have intentionally remained ambiguous in regards to specific age groups in which I refer in order to remain subjective in my consideration of the young experience. Expanding notions of sex positivity also expands notions of the child. In this research, I position myself with the support of thinkers such as Foucault, Lepecki, Freud, Rubin, Butler, Levine and Edelman to expand notions of how we consider the child and their sexualities. I also recognise how the limitations of my research which can be seen in my limited variety of work. I have chosen one Dutch and one Flemish performance, which reflect a very specific cultural landscape. In an expanded version of this research, I would consider how sex positive work varies across Europe and the West with examples from different countries. I also recognise my standpoint as a heterosexual woman; I think my research would benefit from the inclusion of perspectives of other genders and sexualities.

The TYA field is clearly a useful art form in promoting the idea of sex positivity. Through an analysis of work which promotes this objective I have proven to the degree in which TYA can function as a plenteous form in which to, not only promote sex positivity, but to analyse how it functions within a wider socio-cultural context. I call for an expansion across other arts and culture designed for young people to promote such ideas in order to develop a richer, more diverse and safer landscape to which we navigate sexual experience and relationships.

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Performances

Roze voor Meisjes Blauw voor Jongens. Feb 8, 2016. Choreographed by Tabea Martin. Hasselt Cultuurcentrum, Hasselt Belgium.

Roze voor Meisjes Blauw voor Jongens. April 6, 2016. Choreographed by Tabea Martin. Theatre Kikker, Utrecht The Netherlands.

Het Hamiltoncomplex. April 10, 2016. Directed by Lies Pauwels. Stadsschouwburg Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Het Hamiltoncomplex. July 5, 2016. Directed by Lies Pauwels. Birmingham Rep Theatre, Birmingham U.K.