“I AM A TEACHER, I THINK THE WORST”:

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES AND REGULATION OF STUDENT ROMANCE IN SCHOOLS IN MUMBAI

Introduction

Sexuality education exists in a school environment which is often hostile to any conversations on adolescent romance. Any conversation about love within sexuality education might also address the question about creating an enabling environment to talk about romance and love. This chapter discusses romance in school spaces. Consensual romance in schools presents a special kind of dilemma for teachers and school authorities. It marks the arrival of a form of sexuality which is perceived as risky since it can portend teenage pregnancy and diseases. I examine how teachers understand adolescent romance in schools. I uncover this through narratives by adolescents and teachers, narratives about romances that are accepted or regulated. These romances are also often explicitly frowned upon by parents who expect schools to police their children. Romance is an integral part of student sexuality. While student sexuality is regulated in a number of ways – through a regulation of uniforms and the body – I would like to concentrate on the challenge that romance poses in school spaces to teachers and school authorities alike. Romance amongst adults has been violently regulated – as in the case of inter-caste, inter religious and/or queer romance. Even when it doesn't fall under any of these objectionable categories, romance between adolescents in schools poses a particular challenge. It acts as a manifestation of autonomy and an exercise of sexual agency on the part of the adolescent and poses a significant challenge to teachers and school authorities. This romance needn't be inter-caste, inter religious or queer to be subversive. Consensual adolescent love – whether romantic or sexual – is challenging for adults. It is especially so for adults within schools: for both teachers and school authorities like principals.

1 I am looking only at consensual romance in schools. There have been studies of violence and sexual harassment in schools (see Anu Salelkar’s dissertation on sexual harassment in schools in Mumbai).

2 See some of the following news reports which narrate the violence and death that couples face when they fall in love outside the caste and religious community lines.


I borrow from Louisa Allen (2007b) in thinking about how the student subject position imagined within the sex education curriculum might be in contradiction with the student subject position present in school. Allen argues that sexuality education classes constitute students as sexual subjects who will presumably have unsafe sex and thus need to be taught about contraception and safe sex. Though this is done in an instrumental manner, it still presumes a sexual subject. The school on the other hand regulates student sexuality within its spaces, constructing students as “ideally non-sexual”. This contradiction between the ‘ideally non-sexual’ subject and the sexual subject doesn’t allow the adolescent any space to exercise sexual agency safely. Similarly, if a romantic subject is presumed within the sex education curriculum, it might be important to also allow the student to be a romantic subject within school spaces. This chapter will examine how teachers’ understanding of romance and school authorities’ regulation produces an understanding of an adolescent romantic subject. This subject is delayed, impossible, regulated, contested and unstable.

There is little scholarly engagement with romance in school spaces and how teachers and other staff negotiate with it. There have been various cinematic and television narratives which represent school-based romance and teacher negotiations with it. In the first section I engage with select representations – the fictional world of an independent film Rockford (1999) and Loya Agarwala’s (2013) experiences as a school counsellor in India. In the second section, I examine student narratives of regulation in school. In the third section I examine the contradictions and dilemmas that teachers in various schools in Mumbai face with regard to adolescent romance in school spaces and how they negotiate between freedom and safety, responsibility and student autonomy. Here, I reflect on the scholarship of Eva Illouz to think about the management of emotions in the school. In the concluding section I use Agamben’s (2005) concept of the ‘state of exception’ to think through adolescent romance in school spaces. I also reflect on teachers’ – and hence adult – dilemmas of adolescent romance in school. This furthers the discussion on the ‘missing discourse of love’ that I started in the third chapter. I draw on Jen Gilbert (2014) to think through the categories of adult and adolescent and how it can help us rethink ideas of adolescent romance and protection. The chapter also constantly returns to the figure of the gym instructor in Rockford and the school counsellor in Agarwala’s (2013) book. The intention is to read all these various narratives side by side, rather than to separate the fictional narratives from the ethnographic materials. This allows for a richer understanding of school romance and adult-adolescent relationships in school. The cinematic text is also used to build a context and substantiate the narratives from the teachers. There are ruptures between cinematic imaginations of romance in school and narratives of teachers in Mumbai.
Regulation has been theorised within the postmodern tradition in many ways. Following a Foucauldian analysis, regulation constitutes the subject; in other words, the subject comes into being through regulation. Judith Butler (2004: 41) elaborates: “It is important to remember at least two caveats on subjection and regulation derived from Foucaultian [sic] scholarship: (1) regulatory power not only acts upon a pre-existing subject but also shapes and forms that subject; moreover, every juridical form of power has its productive effect; and (2) to become subject to a regulation is also to become subjectivated by it, that is, to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated”. Foucault also examines how the body has been the site of regulation. Bodies, as Foucault (1977: 136) puts it, have been “the object and target of power… the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces… A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved”. This reading of docile bodies and regulation of the body has been effectively used to analyse the control of students’ bodies within schools, and how these are “perpetuated through curricula, rules and regulations, philosophies, policies, and pedagogical practices” (Robinson and Davies 2008: 225). The feminist reading to Foucault’s framework of ‘docile bodies’ and regulation is found in Bartky’s pioneering essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” where she examines the “disciplinary practices that engender the ‘docile bodies’ of women” (Bartky 1988: 95). Proposing a shift from Foucault’s understanding of disciplining, she shows how the “disciplinarian is everyone and no one in particular”. For Bartky, “discipline can be institutionally unbound as well as institutionally bound” (Emphasis original, Bartky 1988: 103). Bartky calls this regulation perpetual and exhaustive which also involves self-surveillance. Davies and Robinson (2008) also discuss the ways in which schools make it desirable for students to undertake self-surveillance. They write: “children are not just normalised through their subjection to daily judgements, surveillance and the scrutiny of other students and teachers, but individuals also became self-surveillant and self-scrutinising, thus normalising their own behaviours” (Robinson and Davies 2008: 228).

The disciplining and production of ‘docile bodies’ involves subtle coercion. Foucault argues that this disciplining is different from that used on slaves because it aims to produce in the bodies a semblance of utility (Foucault 1977: 137). This utility could be read as what Davies, Robinson and Bartky read as a kind of self-surveillance, ways in which children are made to take pride in their own surveillance. “Docile bodies” then, are produced in school spaces through rules, regulations and policies. At the same time, this disciplining is not institutionally bound, and depends on self-surveillance and self-scrutiny which becomes a
way of producing utility. Butler’s understanding of regulation is not just about discipline and power in the Foucauldian tradition, but also a process of normalization.

A regulation is that which makes regular, but it is also, following Foucault, a mode of discipline and surveillance within late modern forms of power; it does not merely constrict and negate and is, therefore, not merely a juridical form of power… regulation is bound up with the process of normalization. (Emphasis original, Butler 2004: 55-56)

One needs to understand regulation and the production of the docile body in a number of ways and examine the techniques which regulate, self regulate, normalise and ‘make regular’. This chapter will examine these through the regulation of consensual romance.

I plan to use a number of texts and narratives to think about romance in school spaces. I use only a few narratives from young men and women to think about romance in school. I use young women’s narratives only in this chapter because this allows me to make the case that for girls, regulation of the body, romance and mobility continues institutionally after school too. This is evidenced in the narratives and activism around the young women’s movement in Delhi colleges and universities called Pinjra Tod (break the cage)³. I primarily draw from narratives of seven adults who work in schools as teachers, sex educators and administrative staff in schools in Mumbai. I also use narratives from popular cinema to think about adolescent romance in school spaces. These are not intended to be representative samples of teachers or young people in Mumbai. The chapter aims to reflect on the concerns expressed by the interviewees and seeks to engage with questions of adolescent romance in schools in Mumbai.

The Gym Instructor and the School Counsellor: Empathetic Adults within the School


³ Pinjra Tod describe themselves in the following manner on their facebook page: “(Break the cage) #pinjratod is a collective effort by women students and alumni across colleges and hostels in Delhi, that seeks to discuss, debate, share, mobilise and collectivise struggles against restrictive and regressive hostel regulations and moral policing by hostel authorities; and as well as demand access to safe and affordable hostel accommodation and pro-active functioning of Sexual Harassment Complaints Committee Cells.” While they are active in Delhi, their activism also extends itself to other cities and towns in India. https://www.facebook.com/pg/pinjratod/about/?ref=page_internal Accessed on 27-12-2016.

*Rockford* (1999), directed by Nagesh Kukunoor, narrates the story of Rajesh Naidu, a thirteen-year-old boy from Hyderabad who is sent to study in a Catholic all-boys boarding school called Rockford High School. The movie chronicles his settling in, his friendship with the other boys, his crushes and romances, and most importantly his deep friendship with the gym instructor Johnny Matthew. Miss Lilly Vegas is the pretty female teacher whom all the boys line up to watch arrive every morning. Naidu also joins them to look wistfully at Miss Vegas. In the dining hall, the other students talk about her with sexual overtones: “did you see Miss Vegas’ skirt? I swear I saw the panty line. Miss Vegas is so great”. Naidu even dreams of Miss Vegas at night. When Naidu fails his physical examination test, he meets the gym instructor Johnny Matthew who trains him to build up strength. He does well academically and beats the class topper Tony. At dinner, his friends ask him how many times he shags and unaware of the meaning of the word ‘shag’ he answers ‘everyday’ much to everyone’s appreciation. As his friendship with Matthew develops, he picks up the courage to ask him what shagging means. Matthew answers: “It is called masturbation⁴. When the man gets excited, certain things happen to him, how do you explain it…I will get you a book that explains everything.” Matthew gives Naidu a book which the former claims will ‘answer all his questions.’ Naidu is shown avidly reading the book taking great interest in the chapter on sexual development.

As Naidu’s feelings for Miss Vegas deepen, he writes her a love letter: “Dear Miss Vegas, roses are red, violets are blue, now I see you in everything I do.” Naidu day dreams that he is the popular film hero Dev Anand who is romancing a reticent Miss Vegas among stacks of hay. One day he decides to deliver his love letter to Miss Vegas. As he makes his way to Miss Vegas’ house, he finds her enjoying a cup of tea with Matthew. They are both laughing and appear to be very happy. This shatters Naidu’s world. Despondent and angry, he tears the

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⁴ This meaning of the word ‘shag’ as slang for masturbation is unique to India. In UK and Europe it refers to sexual intercourse. I thank Johann Salazar for pointing this out.
letter and visualises Matthew and Miss Vegas getting married in a church and having a child together. The dream ends with him killing Matthew with a gun.

After this incident, a heartbroken Naidu avoids Matthew. The latter catches him one day and asks “what happened”. Naidu replies, “you betrayed me, I love Miss Vegas.” Matthew laughs and says, “you can take her. So that is what the anger was all about. I like her, but I don’t love her.” Naidu unburdens himself to Matthew, confiding in him his love for Miss Vegas. The conversation unfolds in the following manner:

Naidu: But she loves you sir.
Matthew: And how do you know that young man?
Naidu: I don’t know I just feel it. I saw you enjoying tea at her house.
Matthew: Aha, spying on people is not good. Anyway we are just friends. Don’t you think she is a little too old for you? I mean you are thirteen, she is twenty seven. Not that it can’t happen but…
Naidu: Honestly sir do you think I stand a chance?
Matthew: No.
Naidu: Then you can take her.
Matthew: But I thought you love her.
Naidu: I do, but I will sacrifice this much for you.
Matthew: But I don’t want her.
Naidu: But you must sir. She really loves you.
Matthew: And how do you know that young man? It’s funny, I had a crush also when I was your age...these things are very normal...

Naidu eventually overcomes his anger towards Matthew. One day he spots Miss Vegas just as the end of her sari slips off her shoulder. Naidu catches a glimpse of her breasts in a blouse. This excites him and he masturbates for the first time, feeling triumphant. His relationship with Matthew deepens and the latter saves him from getting bullied by Raja and other boys at school. At the annual fete, he meets a girl named Malathi from a neighbouring school and falls in love with her. He writes long letters to her. Confiding in Matthew, he says: “You still think she likes me sir?” Matthew is encouraging and plans a surprise for Naidu on his birthday. He poses as Malathi’s uncle and takes her and her friends Shravya to meet Naidu at the lake. Matthew gives Naidu and Malathi some time together while he takes Shravya to have an ice cream. Naidu and Malathi talk about his love letters to her. Malathi recites them
back to Naidu: “she can kill with her smile, she can wound with her eyes”. Malathi reveals that she was impressed when she came to know that Naidu stood first in class. She asks him to kiss her and he does so furtively.

Raja, the school bully, who is looking for a chance to take revenge on Matthew, frames the latter in a false case of harassment. He claims that Matthew molested Shravya and the principal asks Matthew to leave. Naidu pursues the matter, unable to believe that Matthew would do such a thing. He receives a letter from Malathi where Shravya confesses to the lie she made up at Raja’s behest. Naidu confronts Raja, who breaks his arm. Once the ‘truth’ is out, Matthew is reinstated, Raja is expelled and Naidu becomes a hero. Malathi visits him in the hospital and kisses him while no one is looking. Matthew also comes in to thank Naidu for his help.

The film presents an interesting student teacher relationship between Naidu and Matthew. This relationship is reciprocal, where both help each other and Matthew becomes an adult confidante of Naidu’s crush and relationship. Unlike many narratives that follow in this chapter, Matthew is an empathetic adult in school and discusses masturbation, infatuation and love openly without any judgement. He also risks his own career by setting up a meeting between Malathi and Naidu. But Matthew is not a teacher in the classroom but a gym instructor. He can freely interact with Naidu and form a different relationship, one that would have been difficult for a teacher to have. This places him at the margins among the adults present in the school. While the principal occupies the top of the hierarchy in terms of authority, gym instructors, junior teachers and school counsellors are at the bottom and often closer to the students than the rest of the adults. The structure of the boarding school also allows for greater interaction between the teachers and students. Since Matthew stays in the staff quarters, he is able to spend more time with Naidu.

Naidu and Matthew also discuss the former’s crush on Miss Vegas. Miss Vegas comes across as a commodity to be traded between the boy and young man. Matthew has no romantic interest in her, while Naidu who proclaims his love for Miss Vegas is half her age and a minor. For a brief moment, Matthew considers this inter-generational romance a possibility. But this is just a conjecture and he quickly dismisses the thought. Naidu oscillates between his love for Miss Vegas and his friendship for Matthew. He is willing to ‘sacrifice’ his own

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5 This is a line from a Billy Joel song called *She’s Always a Woman to Me*. [http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/billyjoel/shesalwaysawoman.html](http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/billyjoel/shesalwaysawoman.html). Accessed 16th January 2017

I thank Johann Salazar for pointing it out.
love for Matthew’s sake. This puts them both on a par, making them equal competitors in their affections for Miss Vegas. Matthew changes the topic by reminiscing about his own adolescence and talking about a similar crush he had had at that age and that “these things are very normal”. This acts to break the subversiveness of the inter-generational love. Matthew’s reminiscence about his own adolescence allows him to briefly occupy the space of adolescent and not adult. It is from this space that Matthew can connect with Naidu and affirm the latter’s desire for Miss Vegas. Naidu also insists that Miss Vegas loves Matthew while the former keeps challenging his assumptions. Throughout the film, Miss Vegas is only seen and not heard, and one doesn’t really know what she feels. Adult female desire is interpreted by the boys and men, and remains unspoken by the women. Adolescent male and female desire though is voiced by the boys, by Naidu and Malathi who demands to be kissed and appears confident in expressing her desire. Heterosexual romance while regulated because it is an all boys’ school is nonetheless subverted and normalised thanks to the thoughtful Matthew. Matthew presents the figure of a particular teacher: flawed, open, supportive of the underdog, single, able to occupy the space of adolescence, thoughtful and willing to take risks. He alternates between being Naidu’s friend, confidante and sex educator. He juggles all this with ease and without appearing to preach. As mentioned earlier, this is easier to achieve since he is just a gym instructor and does not teach within the classroom.

The other adult who is able to reduce the gap between adult and adolescent is the school counsellor. I examine the figure of the school counsellor in relation to adolescent romance in school. Loya Agarwala (2013) is a psychologist and school counsellor who has been working in schools for over ten years now. She is based in Guwahati, Assam, and her book *A School Counsellor’s Diary* chronicles her experiences of counselling students in schools. She covers several topics: parenting styles, discipline, physical and sexual abuse, individuality, conflict in the home, romance and relationships, addictive behaviours, parent-child relationship and dealing with death. I chose to concentrate on the chapter titled “‘I’m in Love’: Teenage Romances and Relationships” where Agarwala discusses case studies of various students who either approach her themselves or are sent to her to discuss their romantic lives. This chapter discusses adolescent romance in school while the other chapters discuss other issues around adolescence and schooling. The chapter starts with the following statement: “Of all the teenage problems coming to me in the counselling room, ‘love’ issues are arguably the most common” (Agarwala, 2013: 113). Agarwala addresses her book to adults, especially parents

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6 It is not clear if there is a gay subtext in the film since it is an all-boys boarding school. But I haven’t examined that in the chapter and that would require a different research question altogether.

7 There is a vague reference to Matthew’s past with a female student.
and teachers, explaining to them adolescent lives. In doing so, she is seen to mediate between the adolescent and the adult. She clearly takes the side of the adolescent by telling parents that they have to accept the sexual agency of their children and their right to romance and sexuality. She goes on to present four case studies. The first deals with a girl Kaishori who is sent to her by the teacher for wearing a skirt which is way above her knees. Kaishori is comfortable with her body and sexuality but is ‘slut shamed’ by her peers as someone who is ‘easy’ and ‘available’. When she has sexual intercourse with her boyfriend, word gets out. Kaishori is distraught, and Agarwala comforts her. She also discusses contraception with the girl and age of consent and the law with the readers. Throughout this case study, she remains non-judgemental with the student as well as aware of the legal and medical implications of sexual activity.

In the second case study, she is visited by worried parents who have discovered that their daughter Ishani is in a relationship with a boy in school. The parents came to know by secretly reading their daughter’s diary and are worried that it is wrong and will affect her studies. Agarwala re-assures them that it is completely fine for Ishani to fall in love with a boy and healthy to write about it in her diary. She gently chides the parents for snooping, invading their daughter’s privacy and not giving her enough space. The following advice by Agarwala to the parents sums up ideas of ‘love’ and ‘protection’ that adults have for adolescents and even adult women: “I know you [love her], but that ‘love’ to protect her has suffocated you and her. She is growing up! You must accept that. Treat her more like a mini-adult!” (Agarwala, 2013: 125). This statement is interesting because it claims that the protectionist discourse not only suffocates the adolescent or the person in ‘need of protection’ but also the person who seeks to protect. This is an interesting addition to the existing radical discussion on protection and safety of women in public spaces. In addition to marking the boundaries of the protectionist discourse Agarwala’s statement also shows that it ‘suffocates’ both parties - the adult and the adolescent. Agarwala mentions how the parents’ ‘love’ to protect their daughter has suffocated them and their daughter.

The third case study is about Shibani who is infatuated with her male geography teacher and suffers from depression when he gets married. Agarwala treats this with sensitivity by telling the male teacher to keep some space from his student while remaining caring. Slowly Shibani gets over her feelings for her teacher and her affections shift towards a boy of her age. The protagonist Naidu in Kukunoor’s film Rockford (1999) also experiences a similar shift in

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8 See Phadke et al. 2011 for an overview of this discussion.
affection from his teacher Miss Vegas to a girl in the neighbouring school. The last case study is about Sadhika who tries to commit suicide when her boyfriend Arihant dumps her for another girl. Agarwala follows this case up after Sadhika recovers and works on her self-esteem and sense of self-respect. She ends this case study with the following lines which sum up part of what I have been trying to argue in the previous chapter on adolescent romance: “Today when I think back to Sadhika, I always get a little jolt in my system when I remember her reaction to what adults have proverbially termed ‘puppy love’. Perhaps it’s time we started to take the love teens feel in adolescence, and their reaction to rejection, a little more seriously” (Agarwala 2013: 133). Apart from the case studies, the chapter presents an empathetic understanding of adolescent romance. Agarwala presents the vision of an adult who recognises the agency of an adolescent and tries to bridge the gap between adult and adolescent. Both Loya Agarwala and the fictional Johnny Matthew present the vision of empathetic adults within schools and their engagements with adolescent romance. They are both able to occupy the space of the adolescent and rethink adolescent love. In the following sections I examine how teachers and students in schools in Mumbai negotiate the complex and difficult terrain of adolescent romance in school spaces.

Student Narratives of Regulation of Romance in Schools

In this section I examine young men and women’s narratives of regulation of romance in schools spaces. These narratives are retrospective in that they are recounted by adults who discuss their memories of romance in school. Consensual romantic encounters and interactions between the students are policed rigorously. Gender segregation is present in most co-educational schools where girls and boys are asked to sit separately, or boys are punished by being made to sit with girls. Pratik views this as being contradictory. If the school wants them to learn respect for each other, how does sitting with the girls become a form a punishment? Gender segregation in schools also manifests itself in the form of separate staircases, as seen in Antara’s school.

Apart from gender segregation, any form of romance is effectively policed and suppressed. Angela spoke about how the students’ bags were checked on Valentine’s day for gifts and how the gifts were confiscated. Smita, who studied in an all girls’ school, spoke about how the girls were brainwashed into believing that ‘arranged marriage’ was better than ‘love marriage’ (if there is such a binary) and that boys were all bad and it was better for the parents to decide for the girls what was best for them. This created the binary of woman as victim and man as predator.
Michelle Fine (1988), in her path breaking work on sexuality education in the United States, conducted an extensive ethnographic research and concluded that there is a missing discourse of desire within the sexuality education curricula. She argues that the onus is often on girls, youth of colour, disabled and LGBT youth. She examines the different discourses around sexuality not just in the classroom, but in other spaces in the school. One of the discourses is that of sexuality as victimization where the women are constantly portrayed as victims and the men as predators. In this discourse, sexuality education is premised around saying no to sexual intercourse, practicing abstinence and knowing all the ‘dangers’ associated with sexual activity. This discourse is problematic on various accounts, and as Fine points out, leaves out the agency of adolescent girls, and also leaves untouched the structures in which violence occurs.

Smita also spoke about how the teachers would not allow them any interaction with boys of any other school. She recounts the instance where she was scolded and humiliated for talking to a boy during a sports meet. This kind of gender segregation is constituted by caste, class and community. Romances in school spaces also become the stuff of scandal and gossip. Pratik spoke about several ‘scandals’ in his school where romance was regulated.

This girl was supposedly seeing two guys at once. [But] it’s not just the boy and the girl who were involved- they had their own groups, I suppose strength in numbers or something like that. This was in the seventh standard. These two groups were meeting and they were trying to set these two individuals together- they had exchanged gifts- they had met outside- and this girl was supposedly interested in a friend of mine- so you had all those adolescent concerns about you know is it crush- is it love- just basically grappling with ideas that you don’t really understand. Frankly I didn’t get involved in it fully.

One day the teachers are very tense, very worked up, and you know the principal comes in and these six girls and seven-eight boys are called to the principal’s office and all the details start coming out slowly. It’s very difficult to separate the details from the rumour, fact from the rumour. But it didn’t work because everyone is indulging in it, including the management. Because for them it was a moral panic- they were trying to talk to the other students who were “fixing” it. They asked them are you trying to – if I remember correctly the word was ‘broker’- “are you a broker, are you trying to do this, are you trying to do that?” And everyone was complicit and the fact that this was seen as a natural phase in life for children (attraction) that was absolutely absent. The overtures were not coincidental. Of course it was a convent school- of course there was a morality that was invoked. And that was seen as a huge transgression, they had to be brought back to the “right path” or whatever. And, I’m not quite sure what happened to the parents. Did it lead to longer curfews? I’m pretty sure it must have- but then you also realise that it’s not possible, because you are in school till 2 pm and you are in classroom till 4-9 pm, it’s very difficult to control. It was important that this issue was highlighted and a lesson is made out of it for all people. Of course there were scandals that happened later on. In one case there was a guy from my batch and a senior. And both of them were interested in the same girl and both of them were called to the principal’s office.

Pratik’s narrative is telling in that it talks about accusing the students of ‘brokering’. Brokering, fixing, pimping: all these manifest a certain understanding of sex work and women’s sexuality in terms of morality, in terms of women as agency-less beings, sold into
certain ‘professions’ without any choice. I do not mean to devalue or ignore the violence of spaces such as these, but I also wish to point out that the discourse of sexuality that accuses students of ‘brokering’ is the same discourse that doesn’t allow women sex workers their rights and wants to ‘rescue’ them from their ‘plight’.

This anxiety around young people’s sexuality reaches a state of moral panic in the country in 2004, when two students from the Delhi Public School (DPS) consensually indulged in sexual activity. “The boy held the mobile phone camera and is not seen in the clip and he is urging the girl to remove her shirt and give him a blow job. They are still in school (wearing uniforms) and this obviously led to anxiety about sexual activity in schools and amongst teenagers, access to mobile phones which was discussed in various public forums including television and newspapers”. (Malhotra 2011: 47) The act was filmed on a mobile phone, leaked and illegally distributed on Bazee.com. Three and a half years after the incident, Avnish Bajaj, the CEO of Bazee.com was held responsible for the distribution of the video.

Namita Malhotra (2011) in her monograph talks at length about sex scandals and the ways in which technology intersects with it. She covers a whole range, from the DPS MMS scandal, to the Swami Nithyananda sex tapes, to Mysore Mallige to the Aligarh Muslim University Siras tapes. Analysing these from the perspective of the law, she examines how the obscene is equated with filth, dirt and desire. “Desire that falls outside or rather is in excess of the heteronormative familiar is treated like dirt that must be fastidiously cleaned away or separated and hidden. It is difficult to grasp… the humanness and desperate desire, indeed the vulnerability that is exposed in instances such as the DPS MMS clip or amateur pornography. The law deals with these vulnerabilities by sidestepping without looking, smelling or touching… [the law treats it] as if it is a flattened visual text with no human aspect and can be dealt with under the general norm of removing and expelling the filth” (Malhotra 2011: 63-64).

Technology, filth, desire, romance, sexuality: they all seem to exist in excess and outside the norms that the school sets. Most of the students interviewed did not remember the DPS scandal, but they said that the mobile phone was banned in their schools. One cannot infer that it has anything to do with the DPS scandal, but use of certain technology by young

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people is always seen as suspect and ‘dangerous’. Over the last few years, mobile phones have been banned in numerous schools across India.

The other thing which is always in excess and ‘outside’ is homosexual relationship/romances. Homosexual activity or even the capacity to imagine one was nipped in the bud in the different schools. Smita recounted how she was very thick with a female friend and they would eat together, sit together and travel home together. This led the teachers to separate the two since they didn’t want any ‘unnatural tendencies to develop’. On another occasion, two girls were also caught kissing, and this became a big issue. The principal said that it was against their ‘value system’. Nivedita Menon (2007b) argues how the equation between the ‘natural and the normal’ falls apart when we consider that we don’t really lead ‘natural’ lives and that sexuality, like a lot of other things, is not natural but constructed (Menon, 2007b: 339-341). The school discourse which talks about ‘unnatural tendencies’ approximates the language used by the religious right and those opposed to homosexuality and the repeal of Section 377.

Tarun (2007) discusses heteronormativity in educational institutions by saying that queer radical theories are often absent from the classroom. In his understanding, the classroom “needs to come out first as ‘sexual’ before it can become queer-friendly” (Tarun, 2007: 128).

The young men and women did not explicitly discuss at length the policing of homosexual activity by the authorities or teachers. They spoke about homosocial activity and homophobic jokes. There were jokes about being a fag, about being a chakka (colloquial, derogatory word

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10 See the following media reports on the banning of mobile phones in schools. All the web articles were accessed on 21st June 2014.


11 See the following newspaper article which discusses how in Delhi some students are coming out as lesbians and gays.

12 Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalises consensual homosexual activity. It notes that “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with 1[imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation,—Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.”
for eunuchs), about acting effeminate and so on. The emphasis on being a macho man was prevalent among boys. The young women didn’t discuss the emphasis on being feminine enough or the pressures of performing emphasised femininity. Nevertheless, post globalisation, there is an increasing pressure on young women to have male partners. Heteronormativity, romance and boyfriends are required and desirable (Gandhi, 2014; Phadke, 2005). There are also new private spaces such as coffee shops where romance seems acceptable and desirable (Phadke, 2007).

In my readings of the regulation of sexuality in schools, it is meanings around the sexual which are constantly suppressed, denied and put to shame. The queer in this space then doesn’t have a chance to exist. In order to even begin conversations about sexual orientation, queerness, and sexuality education, schools must first accept adolescents and children as sexual beings.

The romantic sexual subject is constantly policed by teachers and other school authorities. This does not mean that students don’t have relationships, or don’t feel any attraction towards one another but that the romantic sexual subject is not deemed legitimate enough. If romance and homosexual activity is policed effectively in school, how does one include conversations about relationships and more so healthy heterosexual or queer relationships within sexuality education without creating an obvious contradiction?

**Teacher Responsibilities and Abjection of Romance in School**

In this section I examine how six adults, including teachers and administrative staff, think about and handle adolescent romance in schools. I argue that most teachers walk the fine line between adult responsibility and giving students freedom, and negotiate pressures from the school authorities, parents, and their own sense of responsibility. In this tightrope walk, adolescent romance becomes abject in school spaces.

I met Ameena through one of the participants. Ameena is sixty-three years old and has been teaching in various schools in Mumbai for over thirty-five years. I interviewed Ameena in her spacious drawing room in South Mumbai. She is a Memon Gujurati Muslim and their family has been in Mumbai for a couple of generations and consider themselves Gujuratis. When I ask Ameena about romance in the schools in which she has taught – most of them being elite private schools – she recounts the following incident, with a smile.

Last year we took the tenth standard to Goa. This boy and girl were madly in love. They were caught by the master (male teacher). This boy turned around and told the master “well, I’m in
love with her”. The master couldn’t say anything. It is not the notorious boys, smart boys [who do this]. It’s those you would not expect. “It’s this way, what the hell, I can’t help it” the boy seemed to be saying. You won’t expect that fellow to challenge the teacher… [When] couples romance, we can only control in school. [We] can’t stop what is happening outside, it’s not within our purview; it’s the parents’ lookout. On trips we have to be extra careful.

In Ameena’s narrative the young boy in love challenges adults’ perceptions that only the notorious and smart boys – or the hegemonic boys and cool dudes – have relationships or fall in love. He asserts his right to love. But Ameena also clearly states that these romances need to be controlled in school and outside school by the parents. Her comment touches upon school trips and the difficulties that teachers face during those periods to watch over students. School trips always put student romance into sharp relief. They allow students to mingle more freely, to have increased interaction and to even meet each other at times when they are supposed to be indoors. They are the liminal space when students are away from the structures of home and school but are still monitored by teachers. This space, while fun for students, is especially trying for the teachers since they are responsible for anything that takes place during this time.

Kirti, who is in her late twenties, has been teaching in schools for over a few years now. At present she teaches in an elite co-educational school in the suburbs of Mumbai. She recounts how school trips expose the dilemmas of teachers:

[During trips, there is] regulation for both girls and boys. Particularly boys for alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, etc. For the girls, it is more to do with sneaking out at night, getting into each others' rooms that are not allocated to them. This is for both boys and girls. Any group activity of that kind is not appreciated. Whether it is a group of guys sitting in a room at night, [it] is not appreciated. It is pretty standardised and regulated. It is really the teacher's responsibility. For the kid it is an excursion but for the teacher it is her job.

This regulation is not restricted to romance but also to any form of unsupervised mingling. Even a group of boys sitting together spells trouble for the teacher in charge. Not only romance but extended periods of interaction between students are seen as dangerous. This logic extends itself to students in university spaces where student politics is seen as dangerous and taking away from the ‘seriousness’ of study. In school spaces, adolescent romance seems most abject. Sita, who is in her early sixties and has been teaching for a few decades in various elite schools in South Mumbai, also talks about the vigilance that teachers need to keep on school trips. Apart from that she also discusses how there is a fine line between romance in school and crossing the line. In her conversation, she makes constant references to

13 Over the last year many campuses such as JNU, HCU, FTII among others have seen many student protests. The popular response in the social media to these have been that students should not be engaged in ‘student politics’ but should concentrate on studies, effectively separating academic pursuit from political engagement.
some imaginary idea of harm and misbehaviour. She also re-iterates that it is the teacher’s responsibility to report these matters to the principal. In the hierarchy of authority within schools, teachers are directly responsible to report ‘misbehaviour’ to the principal or headmistress.

Sita: Romance and love, that is part of growing up. [They] experience it for the first time. And coming from the backgrounds they do and the families being very concerned about what their children do, [it is] unlikely that they would go astray. But when we see them, because of the way our rules and regulations are set, we make sure they don’t go astray. We don’t mind if a boy likes a girl, what is to stop them, and you do hear of childhood sweet hearts getting married. If anyone is caught misbehaving, they will be pulled up. Their parents will be informed. If it’s bad they could be suspended. We have not had any instance like that. That is what we are expected to do. It’s a teacher’s responsibility to be aware of these situations and inform the principal if something untoward happens...

Ketaki: How do you deal with it?

Sita: Hahaha, [it] never ruffled me. I have been very liberal. Why it hasn’t bothered me is because in the class they are very well behaved. They are always with other friends. No strange behaviour. They are very young. I don’t think they regard that relationship in the way we regard it. We tend to kind of magnify the whole thing. Probably they did not see it more than a platonic relationship. We feed their imagination. It can become un-necessarily unpleasant. If you see them getting serious we have counsellors in the school. We can speak to the counsellor... It doesn’t bother me at all.

Ketaki: What is ‘misbehaviour, or crossing the line’?

Sita: If they go off alone, miss class, or [are] caught kissing. Not that I think kissing is wrong, but when you are missing class for instance, and you don’t stay with your friends, and you are alone. More physical attachment, then I would intervene. I have not come across this situation... We have discussed this in school because we need to. A lot of us felt let them be as long as they are in the group and they are not getting physical, it is fine. When they leave the group, when they want to go off somewhere on their own, it is not healthy – we need to guide them.

The line that Sita refers to is very subtle. While it is clear that any sexual relationship – even kissing – poses a threat to the school spaces, it becomes worse when students play truant. The teacher’s responsibility, as underlined by Sita, is to see that students attend classes, study well, behave, and stay in groups. They are not allowed to ‘wander off’ on their own and are encouraged to play with everyone. Even if the school has not encountered any incident of ‘crossing the line’ they still discuss it should such a situation arise. Flirting and romance also raises the question of girls’ autonomy. Sita discusses how teachers gossip in the staff room about a girl who is openly expressing desire. She is constructed as loose. But there is no consensus since many teachers see this as ‘part of growing up’. But even here, Sita mentions, it should not be ‘harmful’. Throughout her narrative, there is the clear drawing of an arbitrary line of ‘harm’ and ‘crossing the line’. The responsibility of a teacher is clear: any subversion is to be reported to the principal. In the following quotes, Sita discusses flirting and imaginary lines of conduct for the romantic subject in school.
Ketaki: What about flirting in the classrooms?

Sita: Usually we find the boys don’t mature as quickly as the girls. [I have seen] a girl in a class above trying to befriend a boy in a class lower than hers. The girl is senior. She will try and come and chat him up and he is often innocent and naïve and I don’t think even his friends notice. Maybe that girl does that to all the boys. Not just with one, even in her class or class higher. Boys just accept her the way she is and don’t feed her whims. (laughter)

Ketaki: What about boys flirting?

Sita: To be honest, I have never seen boys flirting. Maybe once in grade ten I did see it happen; it was just a light flirtation. Nothing much happened of it. [There is] gossip in the staff room about the girl who flirts. Someone will be supportive – she is innocent, just gregarious – I believe it is. She is trying to feel her way, and trying to understand her sexuality you know, probably she just reached puberty she is aware of her bodily changes, she wants to feel accepted, who knows what goes on in their minds, as long as it’s not harmful.

Ketaki: How do you handle students not wandering off?

Sita: [We have] one teacher for about seven-eight students. They have to be with that group. Even when they are eating they have got one eye there. They take a head count. Take a check if you want to be safe. Children are well disciplined. [They are from] conservative homes: Gujarati and Marwari families… They are conservative because the extended family [is] living near them, they can’t go astray…

Throughout Sita’s narrative one also notes how she weaves in questions of communities and families. While it is the teacher’s responsibility to keep adolescent romance under check, Sita also thinks that children from a certain socio-cultural background will be more ‘disciplined’ and are less likely to assert their autonomy and choice when it comes to romantic love. She assumes that those from more ‘conservative’ families might be less likely to chose their own partner or have a relationship in school. This is important for her as a teacher since it makes her task of regulation at school easier.

The task of regulation is very evident in Gaurav’s narratives. Gaurav is in his early thirties and taught in an international school in the suburbs of Mumbai between 2006 and 2013. He started as the IT in charge of the school but ended up teaching ‘everything’.

Gaurav: From grade one to ten, they [the students] were used to being physical. At that time they didn’t understand much what physical means. It was very common with the age group and crowd. For normal people like us, for us it was a cultural shock... We [the school management] were in a state of shock, the way a girl and boy needs to behave in school, that was not followed according to them. That is when they thought they need professional help. To tell the kids how to eat, dress, sit, behave etc.

Ketaki: How did the management think they should behave?

Gaurav: ... We didn’t have any rules and regulations regarding the clothes, [but they should] not sit anywhere, not just hug the guy, not kiss the guy.

Ketaki: Who was brought in?

Gaurav: The management had a talk with the teachers, [they] were used to seeing all this (hugging, kissing). If the teachers were suddenly telling the kids this, the kids would not take it that seriously obviously. They were used to what was happening. Teachers didn’t have any
issue with this. [The] management then got some parents who could talk about this in class... It worked to a certain level. We wanted to be very strict. They (the students) used to be very casual with the way they used to greet and meet. The management wanted to get strict rules. Initially we didn’t have rules. Over a period it started happening and straightaway having rules would go against the International Baccalaureate curriculum [which] is supposed to be open, and have respect for all cultures... it would be a slap on our face. So we didn’t have to have rules and regulations in place... Different placards were put in different places, [for instance] this is a zone where boys are not supposed to talk loudly or rag. We involved the kids in that when we were putting rules in place, but with their consensus. It was like rules, but obviously [they would] have a different effect. [We could say to the students] ‘Boss this has been told to you. We have spoken about it, we have discussed about it. We have come up with a regular consensus, after that also if you don’t behave, there will be strict action taken against you’. When teachers or parents were not present they used to be their normal self, in front of teachers and adults they had the sense that they are not supposed to do it. Outside [the classroom] to be very frank, it didn’t affect them...

For Gaurav and the management sexual relationships and displays of affection like hugging and kissing are shocking in school. This ‘depraved’ elite urban adolescent is sought to be controlled, not through sovereign power but through governmentality, that is through the consensus of adolescents themselves. Adolescents are called upon to regulate themselves. In other schools, power and authority is clearly defined in the figure of the teacher and principal. In an elite school like this where there are not supposed to be any rules, power is more insidious and less direct. It aims to create consensus rather than dominate, interpellating students to govern themselves.

In the following narratives by Gaurav, one notes how the management of his school puts the school’s reputation, the school calendar and academic life at the centre of schooling, putting any form of adolescent romance, intimacy at the peripheries of education. Parents also collude in this vision of education and schooling, and leave no space for any agency on the student’s part.

Ketaki: What were the conversations about students in the staff room?

Gaurav: About how two of them are dating and how that is affecting their studies; [that] their parents should be called and something needs to be done. Many times the parents of both parties were called. They were spoken to with respect to their affairs and how it was affecting [their studies]... When [the student affairs were] affecting ethics of [the] school they were worried. It was very difficult for school to take care of everything the student was doing. We were having a controlled environment in school, we could put placards... We used to talk to their parents, ‘this is what we have seen, we can't change them, outside they are [an] altogether different personality, we have them only for eight hours, so unless something is going to be done from outside as well, sorry to say we can't do much’...The school wanted them to be good individuals also.

The parents are also called to ‘manage’ and ‘control’ students, whose lives are directly monitored by two different sets of adults: those inside school, and those outside school. The school’s reputation takes precedence over the autonomy of students when they are seen wearing their uniforms in spaces like coffee shops, malls, or driving cars. Many of these are
punishable offences according to the school since you could be ‘suspended if you flout the rules’. Other rules are also put in place in school: like length of skirt, hairstyles, not sitting on the floor, not sitting with legs crossed, buttoning and tucking in one’s shirt, no hugging, no kissing and no sitting on each other’s laps. Most of these rules are pre-emptive measures. They are put in place to avoid any untoward incident.

Similarly, Kirti discusses how teachers and school authorities intervene in a student romance. The line seems to be drawn at kissing and truancy. The moment student romances result in truancy or go beyond kissing, the matter is dealt with by either counsellors or teachers. The key to handling this is ‘sensitivity’. Like Gaurav, Kirti also discusses ethics of the school and the ‘reputation’ of the school. Since Gaurav and Kirti are both young teachers, the students confide in them. Kirti also discusses how the students would not just have a crush on her and ask her out for coffee but also confided in her about their drug or alcohol consumption. In the following quote, Kirti thinks aloud about teenage pregnancy and the dilemmas of the teacher. She raises the important question of teacher responsibility and the kind of relationship they have with students.

Since I am a teacher I need to see what works in their best interest, keeping personal views aside. That level of objectivity is extremely important. I am still a young teacher. Do you adopt these kids as your own kids and treat them like that? It is a very fine line, the call the teacher makes personally...

In my conversation with Kirti, I also discuss with her the contradictions of teaching about sex education but also regulating sexuality within school spaces. To this she maintains that while one may talk about the body and sexuality and contraception, the school assumes that this is just knowledge for later, that ‘you will practice it later’. It becomes obvious that the adolescent is not a sexual subject, and only partly romantic. As we talk about romances, Kirti also constantly brings up the dilemmas and difficulties of teenage pregnancies which make me ask her: but all romances don't always lead to pregnancies? In her response, Kirti lays down her imagination of the worst-case scenario and her responsibilities as a teacher.

I am a teacher, I think the worst. I think of what is the worst that can happen to the student and I go backwards. This is [the] worst you can get, now let's go [to] where you stand in the scale of bad to worse. There is a lot laid down for the teacher, of what she should do and not.

From this narrative, it seems clear that a lot of regulation around student romance in schools – and outside school spaces by parents – is often from the imagination of this worst-case scenario. Not only is regulation anticipatory, the idea of romance is also conceived from the space of the worst-case scenario. Adolescent romance is regulated because it has the ‘potential’ to lead to unwanted pregnancies and STDs/STIs.
But not all adults manifest this paranoia in schools. In a school in the northern suburbs of Mumbai, Nilima, psychologist and head of Human Resources and Binsu, a senior teacher manifest a larger vision of adolescence and romance in school spaces. Nilima and Binsu have been involved in creating a sex education curriculum for their school despite the ban on sex education in schools in Maharashtra. When I met them at their school they seem positive, curious and ever ready to learn and unlearn ideas about adolescent sexuality. They discuss how their ideas of sexuality, sexual identity and romance have undergone a radical change over the years and that they constantly update their knowledge about sexuality education. Binsu and Nilima, along with their team, have roped in their head mistress, other teachers, counsellors and even parents to teach sex education in schools. Binsu and Nilima talk about teachers’ and their own understandings of student romance. In the following quote they note how teachers react to student romance. They also discuss how students deal with rejection, which they maintain has changed over the years. Binsu also maintains that students can handle rejections and break ups more easily today than they did earlier.

[Earlier] teachers [were] getting upset if the girls and boys held hands, even till the early 2000s... [But] dating is part of growing up, these are not things you get annoyed about... now it sounds foolish, at that time it was not... Earlier kids were steady, now they break up more often, move in and out of relationships. How do you deal with break ups, rejection? How do you deal with the peer pressure that involved having a boyfriend, having a girlfriend? Even if you ask someone and they say no, handling rejection... Fifteen years back kids in love [would] break up and [cut their] wrists; now not as much. [They are] learning to handle[e] emotions and dealing with break ups better. [Dealing] with break ups are much safer, it is not as fatal as [it] used to be...

Binsu goes on to talk about multiple relationships, without any tone of judgement: “[We often get questions like]: why is it wrong to have two boyfriends, can you be in love with two people at the same time? A lot of them are in multiple relationships.” Nilima chips in by explaining how they discuss multiple relationships with students in the classroom. She says,

You can be in love with two people at the same time and it's... what we are doing is defining what love is. We love many people in our lives and this is love in friendships. So it is really in the same level so if you say you can love two people at the same time there is nothing wrong with it. But if you feel the need to hide something then you should figure out that there is something going wrong. [We talk about] handling jealousy, they see jealousy as a proof of love, as a sign of love. That was something that we had to reverse for them, that if it is love it doesn't need proof.

Nilima also discusses in detail equality in heterosexual relationships, what a relationship involves, taking the conversation beyond panic or paranoia to thinking about what it might mean to have a romantic relationship. She mentions that romance is more than just consumption- watching movies or eating out together. She marks a shift in gender relations, mentioning how girls are more assertive and boys more understanding. It is also obvious that
many of her ideas about relationships are coming from her training as a psychologist; for instance, the idea about being a ‘complete’ person to be in a relationship.

We talk to them about relationships, love is one part, but trust, care, respect these are equal parts of relationships. We talk to them about equality in relationships because with boys and girls there is a cultural model that we have, the man is the more superior person, he is the more dominant factor and we need to bring gender equality into relationships...sure it means adjustment, fifty percent from girl's side fifty percent from the boy's side, it cannot be eighty-twenty.

There is one activity we do, relationship pizza. We ask them what ingredients are required to put into a pizza and they tell you...then we say make a recipe for a relationship that is when the kids realise the relationship is not just about love. It is not just about going out for a movie together, there are various elements involved. Nowadays girls are also getting more assertive and boys are becoming more understanding, accepting of this equality thing, [the] ability to give space to [a] partner. It is only two complete individuals who can form a complete relationship. Children have this thing [from] Hindi movies, we are both incomplete. [I tell them] you are a complete person who is looking for a complete person and together you can have a beautiful relationship.

Binsu discusses how adults and adolescents define adolescent romance differently. In the previous chapter on adolescent romance I have noted how most adolescent romance is seen by adults as puppy love and infatuation. I have also noted earlier how Loya Agarwala rethinks the category of adolescent romance as infatuation. In the following quote Binsu, like Agarwala, rethinks her notions of adolescent love and admits to having changed her opinion with time.

Now you have a child who will say ‘Miss for you it is infatuation for me it is love’, and you cannot stand there and reject that. You have to accept that for him it is love, you have to rework it for the child to believe it is love. You don't have to push him. We have changed over a period of time.

Binsu also discusses student crushes on teachers and advises teachers to handle their emotions better by relaxing and by being emotionally in control of the situation. Binsu says:

A child falls in love with a teacher. What is your response? We took these current issues and we looked at training teachers to handle [it] ... if a child says ‘can I have coffee with you’ what you can answer. This is all new to them (teachers). Teachers [are] in denial, avoidance. [Instead they should tell the child] 'Ok I understand this is what you are feeling'. Manage your emotions, you relax, [the] kid will relax. [The] best way to respond [is by] using we statements instead of I and you.

Margarita Gerouki (2011) similarly discusses how teachers deal with student flirtations with them. She narrates three incidents where male students expressed their feelings for their female teachers by either telling them ‘I love you’ or ‘will you marry’ me. Gerouki notes that the teachers tend to desexualise themselves, trying to steer the conversation towards humour or academics (Gerouki 2011: 9). Gerouki, citing Epstein and Johnson (1998:122), also notes that “the asexual teacher or the desexualisation of the teacher contributes to an asexual school environment. The preservation of such an asexual environment is the target of the system”
Gerouki further comments on how teachers’ bodies while sexualised by their students (especially female bodies sexualised by male pupils) are desexualised by the teachers themselves and the school as well. “Teachers are clearly sexual beings, but teacher culture has evolved in a desexed way. As such, Melina [a female teacher] could not consider, or admit, herself as being the cause of the attraction, because this would conflict with the public demand that teachers be parental substitutes outside the home, but also because that would challenge public expectations of teachers to be exemplars of morality as well as moral guardians of those in their care” (Gerouki 2011: 6). Binsu’s advice on handling student crushes is rooted in psychology and the managing of emotions. I will return to this later.

Nilima also discusses an instance where a headmistress confides in her that a student is pregnant and is at a loss about what to do. Like Loya Agarwala, Nilima plays the role of the empathetic HR head and psychologist. Her reaction to student pregnancy is unusual in a school space. Not only does she normalise the student’s pregnancy, but she also works towards getting the headmistress to be less judgemental and think in the interest of the student rather than the school. She walks the thin line between keeping in mind the student’s interest, the headmistress’ responsibility and her own need to know more about how to deal with a pregnant student.

One of my headmistress, she was very disturbed. [She said] ‘I have to talk to you privately; one of the students has told me she is pregnant and I don't know what to do and I have told her we have to immediately talk to your mother about it.’ For me it was ‘it’s ok Ma’am, she is pregnant; so what is the problem? And she could not believe it. ‘She is pregnant isn't that a problem,’ [the headmistress said]. See the whole approach was coming from this moral social [position]. For me the only thought was biological, ok I need to read up about what happens if a sixteen year old gets pregnant... Educators are a different type of people they need to believe in right [and] wrong. I had to validate my headmistress’ perspective, I also had to get the judgement out of her. I asked her ‘what would you like to do’? She said ‘if I tell her mother, her mother will get very upset she will beat the child. The child told me, don't tell my mother whatever happens.’ I was like ‘ok Ma’am in that situation what can you do? The child is already pregnant, you have to speak to the mother. You cannot do anything without talking to the mother. You can talk to the child so that the child talks to the mother which is the best scenario’ … In my head I was not sure if it was pregnancy, kids think if a boy kisses me I am pregnant...

Like the fictional Matthew and the school counsellor Loya Agarwala, Nilima presents the vision of the empathetic adult within a school. In the following quote too, she challenges normative understandings of adolescent sexuality. Nilima’s idea of adolescent sexuality emerges in relation to the adult; the teacher is to act according to what is right for herself and the student.

The counsellor says she is dating that boy, they shouldn't go out. I said what is wrong with dating? We have to study life we can't live it without having thought about it… you have sex. What is the big deal the whole country is having it the kids are seeing it everywhere... don't
want the teacher to condemn or condone the kids. We have to strike that balance where the teacher can do what she thinks is right but in a way that is right for the kid.

I now come to the discourse that Nilima and Binsu have regarding adolescent sexuality and dealing with romance in school spaces. In Binsu and Nilima’s narratives one notes how control and governance is not at the level of the body but at the affective level of emotions. Teachers as well as students are taught how to manage emotions, be they in the case of love rejections, or students’ crushes on teachers. Since Nilima is a psychologist, there is a predominant idea of managing the self when it comes to managing sexuality or dealing with gender. Eva Illouz has written extensively on the use of emotions in the workplace. In Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism (2007), Illouz makes a compelling argument that since the twentieth century, affect has been at the centre of economic sphere and capitalism, while intimate relationships “increasingly put at their centre a political and economic model of bargaining and exchange” (Illouz 2007: 37) She discusses how the management of emotions is at the centre of a formation of the self in the twentieth century and that therapy has played a part in shaping that language. In her following book Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help (2008), Eva Illouz examines how the therapy discourse is pervasive to twentieth century’s formation of the self. She understands the necessity of emotional control in the workplace as a form of social competence rather than a commodification of emotion (Illouz 2008: 62-63). Emotional control, as espoused by psychologists, she argues, “combined two attributes: the capacity to be rational in the pursuit of one’s self-interest and the capacity to defuse conflict and to create friendly relationships” (Illouz 2008: 80). One notices how Nilima’s advice as a psychologist and head of the Human Resources in the school also aims to control the emotional responses of the teachers to romantic relationships and crushes.

Eva Illouz’s work also allows me think about the relationship between the therapy discourse and sexuality education in urban spaces in India: counsellors and psychologists have been key to conceptualising sex education in India. As seen in the earlier chapters, organisational work on adolescent sexuality and sex education cannot really be divorced from the therapy discourse since most of those invested in sexuality education speak a language of therapy. As seen in the first chapter, the feminists speak a language of rights, the sexologists speak a medical language of pleasure and the Christians one of abstinence and love, but psychologists permeate all these three discourses. TARSHI started out as a counselling help line and the books have an unmistakable touch of therapy speak; the sexologist Rajan Bhonsle has trained many psychologists who teach sexuality education and Anne Braganca de Cunha and other Christian writers are also psychologists and talk about emotions and feelings. One cannot
escape the therapeutic discourse when we talk about sexuality education and adolescent sexuality in urban spaces in India.

This section has examined how teachers walk the tightrope between students and school authorities. They are answerable to both parents and the principal. Student romances throw into sharp relief the difficult roles that teachers play in school. Romances are subversive, but they also play on the vulnerabilities of teachers. Nilima, and to a certain extent Agarwala and Matthew, can discuss student sexuality because they are outside the structures of responsibility. Teachers are in constant crisis management mode and at the bottom of a hierarchy which is hard to break from. The teachers who ostensibly ‘regulate’ student romance are themselves caught in a bind. Conversations about romance in sexuality education must include thinking about student romances in school spaces. But as this chapter has pointed out, the latter might be impossible without understanding the role of teachers and the tightropes they walk in school.

**Concluding Remarks**

I would like to think about the regulation of romance in school spaces through Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) concept of ‘state of exception’ which is a ‘permanent state of emergency’ in response to any conflict. He elaborates on this through examples from the Third Reich which he “considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years” and Bush’s response to September 11, 2001 when “the emergency becomes the rule” (Agamben 2005: 22). Agamben notes that ‘the state of exception’ became “one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones” and that “the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics”. He continues that “one of the elements that make the state of exception so difficult to define is certainly its close relationship to civil war, insurrection, and resistance. Because civil war is the opposite of normal conditions, it lies in a zone of undecidability with respect to the state of exception, which is state power’s immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts…” (Agamben 2005: 2). While Agamben employs this term specifically to think about governmentality, sovereignty and state rule, it would still be interesting to think about the regulation of romance in school spaces through the concept of ‘state of exception’. Many of the teacher and student narratives have spoken about how any heterosexual consensual romance was regulated because it could spiral into a sexual relationship which could lead to pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases. Sexual relationships, pregnancies, STDs/STIs and HIV/AIDS become the ‘opposite of normal conditions’ as Agamben puts it. ‘Normal
conditions’ refers to not being in a relationship and/or not being sexually active. When heterosexual romances are regulated because they have the ‘potential’ to lead to ‘unwanted pregnancies’ or what Kirti mentions as the ‘worst-case scenario’ then a state of emergency is created. The ‘state of exception’ is the state of the ‘worst-case scenario’ and it is from this state that any adolescent romance is perceived and regulated. All adolescent romance becomes suspect because of this ‘state of exception’. Other kinds of regulation of adolescents also take place because of other ‘states of exception’ which include drugs, alcohol, partying, clubbing and malling. Gaurav’s narrative of the elite private schools indicates how a blanket rule on not being seen in school uniforms in public spaces is a ‘state of exception’. It is meant to avoid situations where the public might be shocked if students ‘misbehave’ and spoil the ‘reputation’ of the school. If we look closely enough, most rules in schools are ‘states of exception’ since they are formed by scandals or conflicts over uniform, student conduct, appearance, curriculum, peer interaction and student-teacher interaction.

But mapping the regulation of student sexuality in school spaces and understanding these as ‘states of exception’ is a good project and does not take us too far. In response to this, proposing de-regulation of student sexuality and asking teachers and schools to accord more ‘freedom’ also seems inadequate and simplistic. The teachers’ narratives about responsibilities and dilemmas emanate from an adult sense of separation from the adolescent which cements both as separate categories; as Jen Gilbert (2014: 25) puts it “sex education rests on a distinction between adults and adolescents”. The idea is to rethink the boundaries between adulthood and adolescence and render them porous: to let adolescence leak into adulthood and adulthood leak into adolescence; or as Julia Kristeva puts it, to allow adolescence to be “an open psychic structure”. This means that adolescence is not an age category but a space which can be occupied by anybody at any point of time. Quoting DW Winnicott, Gilbert (2014) thinks through this distinction between adults and adolescents in the following manner: “If we are talking about adolescence, we are talking about adults, because no adults are all the time adult. This is because people are not just their own age; they are to some extent every age, or no age” (Gilbert 2014: 26).

The question that follows this is: what if adults occupied adolescence from time to time? Or to be more honest, what if adults owned up to occupying it as much as adolescents do? What if adolescents were understood as occupying adulthood too? How then would we- as adults-think of protection, responsibility, safety and freedom? Or, how would the idea of adult responsibility and protection change? As Gilbert (2014: 27) points out, the adolescent is “either a problem of social convention or an effect of an unruly physiology and psychology, and the adult escapes unscathed”. The power relations between adults and adolescents is
sought to be balanced by talking about agency and resistance of the adolescents; the adult goes scot free, theoretically speaking. If we can talk about how the adulthood of agency and resistance is allowed to seep into adolescents, why not discuss how dreams, desires, and the energies of adolescence are constantly seeping into adults? Adulthood is inhabited by the memories of adolescence. And if the latter happens, how does the adult then rethink adolescent romance and sexuality in schools as well as her/his own sense of responsibility? That is one way of sharing and redistributing power. But more importantly that is a way to undo the developmental categories of adult and adolescent. This undoing also unravels the knots of the so-called ‘dangers’ of adolescent sexuality and romance more gently and surely.