



TURUN
YLIOPISTO

PORN AND NORMS

Pornography and normative notions
of gender, love, sex and relationships
in the sexual narratives of Finns
on their adolescent experiences

Sanna Spišák



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OF TURKU**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach to focus on 10–17-year-old Finns' engagement with and thoughts of pornography. The emotional debates – both public and academic – concerning the consumption of pornography among adolescents lack, for the most part, the perspective of the young. This shortcoming is notable, given how adolescents are considered to be at particular risk due to mobile media devices and pervasive online access. This dissertation sets out to bridge some of the current knowledge gaps among the discussions of sexual media, pornography in particular, and their alleged harmful impact. It does this by concentrating on the sexual narratives of Finns about their adolescent experiences of pornography and understanding them as particular investments to the ideals of gender, love, sex, and relationships.

I became interested in *how young people navigate pornographic representations of sex and what these mean to them* while I was searching for a more holistic account of the role of the media in adolescents' lives. I divided this formulation of a research problem into four more specific research questions: 1) What transformations and continuities might early encounters with pornography involve? 2) How do young Finns perceive pornographic representations? 3) How do young Finns recount what pornography does to its audiences? and 4) How is the sexual agency of girls featured in their personal accounts of pornography use?

My study falls within the field of media participation studies and adopts qualitative, participant-centred research methods on media audiences for an in-depth understanding of young Finns' experiences with and interpretations of pornographic content. The central emphasis of my study is on the social and interpersonal processes through which the meanings of pornographic representations are constructed and defined. I argue that acknowledging underlying social and cultural structures, sexual media are a site for developing diverse understandings of gender, sexual identities and relationships. This is the most essential delimitation for this work, which presents a significant departure from those accounts that concentrate solely on alleged harms of pornography consumption on young people.

I have built my dissertation with its four research articles around three pools of different material sets including over 4300 questions about sexuality, sex and sexual health that were sent by Finnish adolescents to experts in sexual health fields, 45

written contributions on the 2012 research project on memories of pornography and 98 contributions from young Finns aged 13–17 years to the online survey that was conducted as part of a media education awareness campaign of e-Talo (e-House), a Finnish online youth club. These three material sets form the empirical structure of my dissertation, drawing from personal accounts of adolescents' practices with pornographic representations in Finland from the mid-1940s to the present day. These material sets – both individually and together – are offered as context-sensitive case studies in the revisiting of the sexualisation debate from a social constructionist perspective. Throughout this thesis, I intentionally challenge this narrative of sexualisation that sees sexual media as inherently damaging for underaged people by presenting my empirical evidence. Instead of constructing underaged people as 'incomplete' beings impressionable by media influence, I see that young people are active, critical agents concerning media.

The analysis conducted in this research covers various subjects ranging from a) transformations and continuities of early encounters with pornography in the decades since World War II in Finland, b) questions about pornography that were sent by young people in Finland to experts on sexual health, c) forms of learning connected to pornography, d) girls' accounts of sexual exploration, learning, and the pursuit of pleasure through pornography and e) their conceptions of the difference between pornographic representations and "actual sex". Through these analyses, I challenge 'the Porn Generation' discourse by presenting empirical evidence on the roles that pornography has played in childhood media culture, sexual practices, and experiences long before the era of mobile media devices and online access. Furthermore, I argue that young people's perceptions of pornography are more diverse than typically assumed in both public and some academic debates. I additionally argue that the forms of learning connected to pornography are more varied and complex than those limited to sexual behaviour and sexual acts alone. As such, young people's engagement with and thoughts of sexually explicit media should be paramount when considering pornography's potential impact, particularly on underaged people.

To conclude, I present that risk- and harm-based discourses concerning underaged people's pornography consumption, heteronormativity, and the very ideals of romantic intimacies play a crucial role in defining relationships and sex in contrast to pornographic representations of sex. As such, these expose a considerable gap between the apparent notions of pornography's forceful and 'bad' pedagogy and youngsters' personal accounts in which practices of pornographic representations are, for the most part, detached from notions of personal, embodied sexual behaviour.

KEYWORDS: pornography, young people, norms, sex, sexualisation

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä moniaineistoinen, laadullinen ja poikkitieteinen väitöskirja tarkastelee 10–17-vuotiaiden suomalaisnuorten pornografiaan liittyviä käsityksiä ja tulkintoja. Pornografisten kuvastojen läpitukenavuus on herättänyt paikoin kiivaitakin keskusteluita pornografian asemasta yhteiskunnassamme. Vaikka keskusteluita on kauttaaltaan sävyttänyt huoli siitä, miten pornografinen kuvasto vaikuttaa lapsiin ja nuoriin, juuri tätä teemaa on tutkittu verrattain vähän. Tietopohja on erityisen hatara sen suhteen, miten lapset ja nuoret itse suhtautuvat pornografisiin sisältöihin. Tutkimukseni tuottaa uutta tietoa siitä, miten suomalaisnuoret tulkitsevat pornografisia kuvastoja osana seksuaalisuutta, seksiä, sukupuolta ja ihmissuhteita, koskevia näkemyksiä ja asenteita.

Yleisö- ja kulttuurintutkimuksen perinteisiin nojaten hyödynnän laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä voidakseni ymmärtää syvällisemmin, miten suomalaisnuoret tulkitsevat pornografisia sisältöjä ja mitä nämä sisällöt heille merkitsevät. Selvitän, 1) miten pornografinen kuvasto on ollut läsnä suomalaislasten ja -nuorten elämässä eri vuosikymmeninä, 2) millaisia ymmärryksiä suomalaisnuorilla on pornografiasta, 3) miten nuoret kuvaavat pornografian mahdollisia vaikutuksia ja 4) miten pornografinen mediakuvasto on läsnä tyttöjen identiteetti-, sukupuoli- ja seksuaalisuuskäsityksissä. Tutkimukseni keskiössä on ymmärrys merkitysten rakentumisesta osana kulttuurisia, yhteiskunnallisia ja sosiaalisia vuorovaikutussuhteita. Tämä katsantokanta on keskeisin ero niihin tutkimuksiin, jotka tarkastelevat alaikäisten pornografian kulutusta vain median mahdollisten haittavaikutusten näkökulmasta.

Tämä väitöskirja, joka sisältää johdanto-osion ja neljä itsenäistä tutkimusartikkelia, pohjautuu kolmeen laajaan tutkimusaineistoon: 1) yli 4300 suomalaisnuorten verkossa oleviin seksuaaliterveyspalveluihin lähettämää seksuaalisuuteen, seksiin ja seksuaaliterveyteen liittyvää kysymystä vuosilta 2013–2015, 2) Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran kansanrunousarkiston kanssa toteutetun pornografiaa käsittelevän muistitiedon keruuhankkeen vastaukset vuodelta 2012 (n=45) sekä 3) e-Talon kanssa vuonna 2015 yhteistyössä toteutetun verkkokyselyn alaikäisten vastaajien vastaukset (n=98). Nämä laadulliset aineistot muodostavat tutkimukseni empiirisen rakenteen.

Aineistojen rinnakkaisilla ja toisiaan täydentävillä analyysimenetelmillä oli mahdollista tarkastella syvemmin a) suomalaisnuorten pornografian kulutukseen liittyviä jatkumoa ja siirtymiä aina 1940-luvulta nykypäivään, b) nuorten pornografian kulutukseen liittyviä kysymyksiä seksuaaliterveyden ammattilaisille, c) pornografian kulutukseen mahdollisesti liittyviä oppisen muotoja ja teemoja, d) tyttöjen pornografiaan liittyviä käsityksiä ja toimintatapoja, sekä e) tyttöjen käsityksiä pornografiassa nähdyn seksin ja ns. oikean seksin välillä. Analysoimani aineistot ensinnäkin osoittavat, kuinka pornografiset sisällöt ovat olleet osa suomalaislasten ja -nuorten arkea jo aikaa ennen internetiä ja mobiililaitteita. Toiseksi väitän, että nuorten käsitykset pornografiasta ovat paljon monimuotoisempia, mutkikkaampia ja syvällisempiä kuin julkisessa keskustelussa annetaan ymmärtää. Aineistojeni nuoret korostavat käsittävänsä eron pornografisten representaatioiden ja ”oikean seksin” välillä. He pystyvät erittelemään kriittisesti fiktiivisiä, stereotyyppisiä tai sukupuolittuneita seksuaalisuuden ja seksin representaatioita sekä tekemään vastuullisia valintoja omiin seksuaalioikeuksiin liittyen.

Aineistoni eivät myöskään tue käsitystä pornografisten sisältöjen turmelemista nuorista. Aineistoni kiinnostavasti osoittavat, että alaikäisten pornografian kulutusta ruotiva aikuisten haittapuhe vaivaa nuoria enemmän kuin itse pornografiassa nähdyt sisällöt. Väitän myös, että pornografiaan liittyvä oppiminen on monimuotoista eikä rajoitu pelkästään seksuaalikäyttäytymiseen. Aineistoni perusteella pornografiaan liittyvä pedagogiikka on ennen kaikkea sukupuolisidonnaista ja normatiivista haittapuheeseen verhottua asennekasvatusta, kuinka pornografiin sisältöihin tulisi suhtautua. Tutkimukseni perusteella väitän, että nuorten omat käsitykset ja tulkinnat pornografiasta tulisi olla keskiössä, kun keskustellaan pornografian vaikutuksista alaikäisiin.

ASIASANAT: pornografia, nuoret, normit, seksi, seksualisaatio

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23.10.2019

Sanna Spišák

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications. Three of the four articles presented in this dissertation are published in academic peer-reviewed publications, and one is currently undergoing peer review in an academic journal, as indicated below. Please cite the original place of publication when referring to them.

The previously unpublished chapters (pages 13–65) can be read before, after, or even without the articles. The sequence in which the articles appear below follows the chronological timeline of the story I have narrated in this study, thus providing one path through.

- I Spišák S & Paasonen S. Bad education? Childhood recollections of pornography, sexual exploration, learning and agency in Finland. (2016) *Childhood* 24 (1): 99–112. DOI: 10.1177/0907568216646436
- II Spišák S. “Everywhere they say that it’s harmful but they don’t say how, so I’m asking here”: Young people, pornography and negotiations with notions of risk and harm. (2016) *Sex Education. Sexuality, Society and Learning* 16 (2): 130–142. DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2015.1080158
- III Spišák S. Negotiating norms: Girls, pornography and sexual scripts in Finnish question and answer forum. (2017) *Young* 25 (4): 1–16. DOI: 10.1177/1103308816660482
- IV Spišák S. The Intimacy Effect: Girls’ Reflections About Pornography and ‘Actual Sex’. (2019) Undergoing peer review in *Sexuality*.

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1. Rethinking Young People's Engagement with Pornography

At around ten years old, I once found an interesting-looking book on the bookshelf of my suburban childhood home. Its pink cover had an image of a young woman with a glimmer of a pearly smile, bare shoulders and a Farrah Fawcett-feathered shag hairstyle. The book was titled *Hollywood Wives*. As I flipped through the book, it soon became evident that reading this particular lewd tome was off limits for me. The novel had explicit language and graphic sequences I had never encountered before.

I recall not concentrating that much on the graphic descriptions of sex, as titillating and exciting as they were. I was more enthusiastic about having found an entirely new type of literature genre about the lives of adults. Furthermore, as I knew I should not be reading these kinds of books, the titillation of the forbidden became more of a thrill than any interest evoked by the sexually explicit content itself. At the time I was not a stranger to the deeply visceral feedback of my body as I enjoyed the thrill of reading juvenile mystery fiction such as *Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators*, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, or *The Dana Girls*. However, reading *Hollywood Wives* and the like from the top of our bookshelf was a different encounter than my earlier reading experiences.

I became an avid reader of my mother's books. I tried to hide all traces of my frequent visits to the top shelf where the raunchiest books were hidden, but of course, my mother soon caught on. She once asked me if I had read the books from the adults' bookshelf. I lied, saying that I had not. She then told me with a curious expression on her face that some of the books were for adults only and were not meant for my eyes.

Some weeks after this episode, my mother left a sexual instruction book on my desk with blunt descriptions of sexual development, illustrated pictures of male and female bodies, and sectional drawings of genitalia and penis-in-vagina intercourse positions. I was embarrassed for being caught doing something forbidden, and I felt mortified glancing through the sexual instruction book because *that book* as an illustrated nonfiction book seemed to contain too much information for my taste. Looking back, I remember having a firm idea that those books I had secretly read were just fiction, not true stories of real people. The sexual instruction book I received from my mother, on the other hand, represented things to be expected in the

future. My mother and I never discussed this episode further, which seemed very puzzling, given the fact that we used to talk about everything together. Clearly, this was an area of life that we would not discuss.

Fast forward 25 years. I was working for Finland's largest childhood welfare organisation as coordinator of media education. As an expert in this field, I was repeatedly asked by parents, educators, and journalists about the effects of online pornography on adolescents. I found myself resting my argument on the popular discourse of sexualisation of culture (Anttila 2004; Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Attwood 2006; 2009; APA 2007; Durham 2008; Levin & Kilbourne 2009) and reiterating notions of the dangers and ill effects of online pornography on children and young people (e.g. Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Flood, 2007; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007; Owens et al. 2012; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012; Hovarth et al. 2013). (I return to the discourse of sexualisation and effects studies in more detail in the next chapter). At the same time, as I frequently revisited my childhood memories, I realised that my own adolescent experiences with sexually explicit media were at odds with anxious generalisations of 'exposure and ill effects'. I did not recognise being somehow negatively affected by the pornographic representations of sex I had read about and seen throughout my later childhood and teenage years. The unaddressed sensations of curiosity mixed with embarrassment and shame and all those expectations of proper behaviour – both spoken and unspoken by my growing environment – had left more of a permanent mark on me (Lamb 2001; Kontula 2009). I noticed I was not alone in my experiences and thoughts when discussing these issues with my close friends and colleagues. So there I was, on the verge of a professional breakthrough, moving toward a significant turning point in my professional life.

Thus began my doctoral dissertation project in 2012, which concluded in 2019. When this project started, we Finns were in the midst of intense debates on questions of control, regulation, and media policy to protect children from the alleged dangers of media violence and portrayals of graphic sex (Anttila 2004; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Kupiainen, Sintonen & Suoranta 2007; Salokoski & Mustonen 2007; Kuukka 2008). In Finland, online safety activities and awareness campaigns started in schools in 2005 as part of the *Internet Safety for Youth* project funded by the EU. Along with the rise of video aggregator sites emulating the operating principles of YouTube (so-called tube sites), the easy access and consumption of pornography by adolescents was hastily associated with visual harassment and visual violence in terms of the harmful effects it is seen to hold (Näre 2006; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Niemi 2011). Digital media and mobile media devices were associated with an increase in – either accidental or voluntary – early access to pornography (e.g. Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Flood 2007; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; McKee 2010; Owens et al. 2012). In Finland,

along with other Western societies, ubiquitously accessible pornography was framed as a significant risk to young people's 'healthy' sexual development and wellbeing that encourages risky sexual behaviour and has a damaging impact on sexual repertoires (Dines, Jensen & Russo 1998; Tydén & Rogala 2004; Paul 2005; Shapiro 2005; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; APA 2007; Flood 2007; 2009; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Niemi 2011; Skrzydlewska 2012; Mattebo et al. 2014; Livingstone & Mason 2015).

The role of "The Child" or "The Young Person" as defined by Edelman (2004), Carlson (2012), Kincaid (1998) and Kendrick (1996) has always remained at the centre of these debates. Since the late 18th century, childhood has been recurrently framed as the time of innocence and inexperience (Kincaid 1998; Carlson 2012). Sexual activities of children emerge as problematic by default in this framework, and the sexual awakening of a child is seen as dangerous, pathological and necessitating adult intervention (Egan & Hawkes 2010; Jones 2011). The concept of childhood innocence as in need of protection legitimises protective adult interventions for sheltering children from the corrupting force of sexuality. In this framework, however, the role of "The Child" or "The Young Person" is relatively one-sided, as a passive victim of media.

When looking back at my adolescent experiences, I did not recognise myself as a passive victim of the media. Because of this realisation, I became interested in the thoughts present-day young people might have on pornography and the emotional debates¹ concerning it (Dines, Jensen & Russo 1998; Paul 2005; APA 2007; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010), because these debates – both public and academic – lack the perspective of the young, for the most part (Attwood 2005; Chronaki 2013; Buckingham & Chronaki 2014, 305; Mulholland 2013; Tsaliki 2016; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). This shortcoming is notable, given how adolescents are considered to be at particular risk due to mobile media devices and pervasive online access.

The premise of my work is to learn more about adolescents' experiences and views concerning pornography and sexuality to ground these debates (also Chronaki 2013; Barker 2014a, 143–144; Tsaliki 2016; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018) by *focusing on 10–17-year-old people's engagement with and thoughts of pornography*. This dissertation sets out to bridge some of the current knowledge gaps among the discussions of sexual media, pornography in particular, and its alleged harmful impact by concentrating on the sexual narratives (Plummer 1995; Allen 2005) of Finns about their adolescent experiences of pornography and understanding them as

¹ These debates often draw on views that pornography promotes sexual objectification and violence against women (for example Shapiro 2005; Dines, Jensen & Russo 1998; Dombrowski, Gischlar & Durst 2007; Hald, Malamuth & Yuen 2010; Dines 2010).

particular investments to the ideals of gender, love, sex, and relationships. Using young people's descriptions of their experiences concerning pornography as my springboard, I aimed to gather knowledge of how pornographic representations and discussions around those representations resonated for them.

But what exactly is pornography? At first, the question seems pointless, because the answer seems so obvious. However, as those young people who participated in this study in one way or another emphasised, just because an image or a representation is sexually explicit, that does not make it pornographic. Alternatively, as studies utilising retrospective materials show, cultural products might have pornographic modes of experiencing them, although these were not the intentions involved in their production and circulation (Paasonen et al. 2015).

The term 'pornography' was first used in its contemporary sense by nineteenth-century classical scholars to describe depictions of explicit sexual acts (for a fuller account of the history of pornography, see for example Kendrick 1996, also McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008, 3–23). Currently, pornography is an elusive concept (Amoroso & Brown 1973; Kohut 2014). A lack of clarity exists regarding whether the term pornography should entail only representations with explicit depictions of sexual acts (e.g. Hald & Malamuth 2008), should include any nudity and simulated sexual behaviour (e.g. Zillmann 2000) or should contain any materials that can result in sexual arousal (Malamuth & Huppín 2005). Kohut (2014, 1) has argued that the lack of clarity in the meaning of pornography is “impeding research in this field by hampering the integration of research findings, and undermining the reliability and potentially the validity of research in this area.” Much of the public but also academic debate on young people and pornography do not usually differentiate between different kinds of pornographies, different sets of sexual imageries and varieties of the generic convention. The inconsistency in conceptualisations of pornography is striking. What counts as pornography changes over time and varies among specific groups of people (Kendrick 1996; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008, 3–7; Kohut 2014). For example, pornography means different things for antiporn activists, religious conservatives, proporn feminists and free speech advocates (see Kohut 2014 for an extensive discussion about the concept of pornography).

My work strongly commits to listening to what young people have to say about this topic, so I am following the definition of pornography they have formulated in my research datasets. Young Finns say that they are aware of different pornographic subgenres, representational conventions and aesthetics (article II). They define the term explicitly as professionally produced or user-generated, graphic sexual representations. These representations contain graphic depictions of unsimulated sexual acts such as masturbation and oral sex, as well as vaginal and anal penetration, with full frontal nudity in close-up or extreme close-up shots focused on genitals. (article IV) Thus, this is the understanding I have adopted throughout this study when

talking about pornography (for discussion about Finnish and Nordic porn history and representations see Paasonen 2015).

The body of this work is in the peer-reviewed research articles, which can be read individually. However, together these articles form a more cohesive understanding of 'the young person at risk' as the most persistent rhetorical and tactical tool to legitimise the focus on harm in order to protect those who are considered being damaged by sexual material (Kendrick 1996) and the autobiographical, active and resourceful young agent emerging from my empirical research materials who is clearly distinguishable from the cultural figure of an innocent child at risk. Chapter 4 has a more extended discussion of the research articles, so I will briefly refer to their main themes.

The first article (*Bad education? Childhood recollections of pornography, sexual exploration, learning and agency in Finland*), which was co-authored with Susanna Paasonen, draws on a memory-work project on childhood experiences and memories of pornography in Finland. In this article, we challenge 'the Porn Generation' discourse by presenting empirical evidence of the roles that pornography has played in childhood media culture, sexual practices, and experiences long before the era of mobile media devices and online access. We also argue that the autobiographical younger self used in these reminiscences of the memory-work project is detached from the cultural figure of a child at risk.

The second article ("*Everywhere they say that it's harmful but they don't say how, so I'm asking here*": *Young people, pornography and negotiations with notions of risk and harm*) tackles the issues that present-day youngsters disclose as troubling in connection with pornography. Based on data consisting of 4212 questions about sexuality that were sent by young Finns to experts on sexual health, I argue that these young people challenge risk- and harm-based debates by continually referring to the vagueness of the alleged harm that characterises the discourse of danger found in much public discussion. According to the findings, blurry notions of harm bother young people more than the actual pornographic content they encounter.

The third article (*Negotiating norms: Girls, pornography and sexual scripts in Finnish question and answer forum*) explores the personal narratives of girls about pornography use to critically and more precisely investigate the widely circulated narratives on the sexualisation of adolescence. This article applies the framework of sexual scripts by focusing on these accounts of sexual exploration, learning, and the pursuit of pleasure to examine how girls' interests in pornographic representations can be understood in the context of everyday sexual practices that are already socially constructed and negotiated. According to the findings, Finnish girls project themselves as invested with substantial agency, skills and volition despite the sporadic gender-specific anxieties that their encounters with pornography have

created. Many girls also find normative and heterosexist norms troubling and distressing as per their queries connected to their sexuality.

The fourth and final article (*The Intimacy Effect: Girls' Reflections About Pornography and 'Actual Sex'*) draws on an online survey that was conducted as part of a media education awareness campaign by a Finnish online youth club. I explore girls' conceptions of the difference between pornographic representations and 'actual sex' and introduce the concept of 'the intimacy effect' as a forceful notion that regulates and manages girls' sexuality and the ideal for desired relationships, sexual encounters, and 'good sex'.

To conclude, I present that risk- and harm-based discourses concerning pornography consumption by underaged people, heteronormativity, and the very ideals of romantic intimacies play a crucial role in defining relationships and sex in contrast to pornographic representations of sex. As such, these expose a considerable gap between the apparent notions of pornography's forceful and 'bad' pedagogy (Flood 2009; Tydén & Rogala 2004; Rothman et al. 2015) and youngsters' personal accounts in which practices of pornographic representations are, for the most part, detached from notions of "personal, embodied sexual behaviour" (Jackson & Scott 2007).

2. Contextual Settings: Background and Research Environment

Finland is a technologically rich and Internet-intensive country with multiple online opportunities. Due to an Internet-intensive lifestyle, Finnish children's use of online media begins as early as infancy with read-aloud books and listening to music. Children develop more versatile media use as they grow older. Smartphone use among schoolchildren and teenagers is exceedingly common, and ubiquitous connectivity is already mundane for children in their early school years (Suoninen 2013, 2014; OSF 2018.) Young Finns frequently use globally favoured social media platforms (i.e., WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Spotify), global and local video-on-demand services, and gaming platforms (Ebrand Group Oy & Oulun kaupungin sivistys- ja kulttuuripalvelut 2019). These uses of network media facilitate interactions among friends and new people and finding new sources of entertainment and information (Suoninen 2013; Noppari 2014).

Finnish children and teenagers use the Web regularly, but this does not imply that they go online without parental surveillance. Parents do regulate adolescents' use of the Internet in various ways. Parents, for example, have specific rules and guidelines for Internet use, and they may restrict screen time. They also may use specific software or parental controls to filter or monitor younger children's Internet use or discuss proper online behaviour. (Kupiainen, Suoninen & Nikunen 2011, 53.) Parents in the Nordic countries generally wish to grant their children independence in Internet use, but they do not wish for them to encounter inappropriate sexual content (cf. Ólafsson, Livingstone & Haddon 2013). In Finland, pornographic texts (i.e., books) do not have an age limit classification, pornographic magazines sold in stores and kiosks are rated R 15, and pornographic audiovisual programmes are rated R 18. However, young Finns report engaging with sexual information online (THL 2014). In addition to seeking out information explicitly targeted toward young people, they explore sexually explicit materials (Anttila 2012; Rinkinen et al. 2012; THL 2014). Coming into contact with pornography is rather commonplace among young Finns (Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Kupiainen 2013; THL 2014), one reason being that pornographic content is now more prominently available, not only in the minority media but also in mainstream culture (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa 2007; Attwood 2009).

The Nordic Ministers of Equal Opportunities and the Nordic Council of Ministers performed a study of youth, gender and pornography in Nordic countries during 2004–2006. The study set out to gain understanding about adolescents' experiences with and attitudes towards pornography by analysing their views of pornographic representations and the ideals of gender and relationships. This study (Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007) shows that while the vast majority of young people in the Nordic countries consume porn in various degrees, they do not take the pornographic representations for granted (for similar findings, see articles II, III and IV). According to the findings, Nordic young people are familiar with numerous pornographic genres and appear to be critical and reflective concerning what they see (for similar findings, see article II). This study clearly illustrates that distinguishing between pornographic images and 'the real world' is something that young people are relatively explicit about (for similar findings, see articles III and IV). However, the study report also recognised the complexity and ambivalence of young people's experiences of pornography and its possible impact on their perceptions about gender, sexuality and relationships (for similar findings, see articles I, II, III, IV).

The *EU Kids Online* study found that 37% of Finnish children between the ages of 11 and 16 have seen sexual material both online and offline; these figures are higher than the average of the European Union as a whole (33%) (Kupiainen 2013).² Regardless, encountering sexual images is seldom perceived as harmful by Finnish adolescents when compared, for example, to adolescents in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Among Finnish children who had seen sexual images online, one-fifth of them reported being bothered or upset by this experience (Kupiainen, Suoninen & Nikunen 2011). It is also notable that the younger respondents, aged 9–10, were less

² The quantitative studies examining underaged people's encounters with pornography often start from the premise that such content is inherently damaging for adolescents. For example, the *EU Kids Online* study (Livingstone et al. 2011; 2013) defines sexual content online, in general, as risk (see Rovolis & Tsaliki 2012; Chronaki 2013; Tsaliki, Chronaki & Ólafsson 2014 and Tsaliki 2016 for discussion). However, although this study wanted to probe adolescents' experiences with pornography, they did not define study questions related to sexually explicit content precisely as pornographic, because they did not use the term 'pornography' at all when forming the data. Quite the opposite: questions about pornography in the *EU Kids Online* study were introduced to research participants in the following way: "In the past year, you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex." (Livingstone et al. 2011, 50) Such definition, obviously, contains a large number of images other than pornographic images *per se*. Thus, one has to critically deal with the initial findings of this study that are related to images defined as pornographic.

likely to have seen such images but were more likely to have been bothered or upset by them (Kupiainen 2013). What we do not know from this study is how intensely these feelings were felt and what were those things that made participants “uncomfortable” or “upset” (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte & Staksrud 2013).³ Also, the same *EU Kids Online* study revealed that Finnish adolescents possess the best digital skills in Europe, which enable them to deal with possible risks of online content, conduct and contact. Therefore, risks encountered by Finnish adolescents are rarely harmful, lasting experiences of perceived damage as argued by Kupiainen, Suoninen and Nikunen (2011, 55).

A study conducted by Rininen et al. (2012) in Finland shows that Finnish girls’ experiences and opinions of pornography are a complex and ambivalent mix of confusion, pleasure and loathing. A study conducted by Anttila (2012) shows that 13–16-year-old Finnish boys are eager to learn about sex and sexuality; they have several questions about sex and bodies, and they would also like to have visual aids in formal sex education. However, as the information they seek is missing from their formal school curricula, they turn to online pornography as the study explicates.

Another study that provided information on young Finns’ engagement with pornography is the *School Health Promotion* (SHP) study that monitors the health and wellbeing of Finnish 10–12-year-olds and 14–20-year-olds. Respondents to the SHP study in 2013 were also asked about their sexual behaviour online for the first time (THL 2014). Although young Finns do report engaging in various sexual practices online that can be framed as risky (for example, accessing sexual content, contact and conduct online), physical, sexual experiences have decreased during the 2000s (THL 2014; see also article III). Similar findings can also be found in other industrialised countries (for example, Puusniekka, Kivimäki & Jokela 2012; Best & Bogle 2014, 123–31). Additionally, the abortion rate among girls younger than 20 years old declined remarkably in Finland during the 2000s. Fewer abortions occurred among girls under 20 years of age in 2017, the lowest since the 1970 Abortion Act allowed abortions to be performed on social grounds alone (THL 2018).

Quantitative data on the sexual practices of the young are mostly collected on issues that are framed as problematic, risky and unwanted, as, for example, the SHP study previously discussed illustrates. These data are then used as direct but often unchallenged indicators of the sexual health and sexual attitudes of young people (Apter 2009; Fine & McClelland 2006), even if they tell very little about individual sexual experiences or subjectivities. This framework connects the sexuality of the young to social problems such as sexual harassment, teen pregnancy, abortion, and

³ The *EU Kids Online* study defined ‘bothered’ as “made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn’t have seen it.” (Livingstone et al. 2011, 45). One again must view these results critically as the definition of being bothered is ambiguous.

sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and the statistical information presents teen sexuality itself as a risk that has invidious consequences for girls in particular (see Best 2013 for discussion). Ultimately, however, in contrast to qualitative studies such as Sørensen and Knudsen (2007), Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson (2007), Rinkinen et al. (2012) and Anttila (2012), quantitative studies of young Finns experiences with pornography tell us very little about the meanings that online sexual practices carry and how viewers make sense of the online sexual activities with which they engage. Such crucial contextual distinctions disappear in the general classifications of quantitative studies. Quantitative studies, indeed, help to identify general trends (Attwood 2005). However, they are less helpful in tackling those various elements that shape the sexual subjectivities of adolescents.

2.1 Persuasive power of effects studies

Research findings that receive the most visibility in current public and policy spheres reflect a concern with the exposure to and effects of pornography (Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). A focus on exposure in these studies is almost always associated with a concern for the presumed adverse effects of pornography (e.g. Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007; Flood, 2009; Owens et al. 2012; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012; Hovarth et al. 2013; Tsaliki, Chronaki & Ólafsson 2014; Livingstone & Mason 2015). The approach adopted in these studies rests its argument on the assumption that porn negatively affects children and young people's developing sexual beliefs and that it is linked to their engagement in risky behaviours (for reflections on psychology and pornography, see Barker 2014b). Pornography is understood in this framework as a powerful corruptive force that causes wide-spread and far-reaching threats such as risky sexual behaviour, poor mental health with reduced self-esteem and self-objectification, degraded peer relationship functioning, restricted choice of professional aspirations, and increased sexual aggression (Tydén & Rogala 2004; Shapiro 2005; Flood 2009; Skrzydlewska 2012), which obviously pose risks to adolescents' wellbeing.

Experimental laboratory research has played a significant role in the debate over pornography's possible effects (see McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008, 75–79 for a more detailed discussion). The limits of experimental studies on pornography's effects become apparent in the following example: These studies usually explore the behavioural and perceptual effects of viewing pornographic material in artificial settings. A typical laboratory experiment exposes a group of research participants to different levels or types of pornographic material for comparison to a control group that is shown nonsexual material. Researchers look for behavioural or perceptual differences between the groups. These studies then aim to measure, for example, male attitudes toward the sexual assault of women. One such measure could be the

male research participants' assessments of the suffering experienced by these assault victims. From such controlled testing, measuring the effect of exposure to pornography on attitudes toward women in randomly selected groups, researchers make tentative claims about causal links between pornography and violence that reiterate the bipolar, heteronormative model that is often not even considered or challenged in these kinds of studies (see McKee 2015, 83).

Brown and L'Engle (2009) admit that very little is known about how sexually explicit material impacts the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents under 18 years of age. They do recognise that much of the concern over increased access to sexually explicit content online is based on *the assumption* that young people may develop "undesired" patterns of sexual behaviour from that exposure (ibid., 132). The authors also admit that most research on the impact of pornography has been conducted with adults. However, they state that "those studies as well as studies and theories of sexual effects of mainstream media sexual content can be drawn on to postulate that ideas about gender roles, sexual aggression, and specific sexual behaviors could be learned from exposure." (ibid.) This statement exemplifies how, for example, the results of experimental laboratory studies measuring non-consensual sexual behaviour, sexual and aggressive attitudes, and behaviour in relation with pornography use, become an interpretative frame used to universally explain what pornography does to people.

The study conducted by Häggström-Nordin, Hanson and Tydén (2005) illustrates the complications produced by the internalised assumptions of the effects of pornography use. They aimed to investigate sexual behaviour and consumption of pornography and explored the possible associations between sexual practices and pornography use among a randomly selected sample of third-year high school classes in Sweden. Using a classroom survey comprising 74 multiple-choice questions on demography, relationships with caretakers, experiences of pornography, and sexual behaviour, the study found that those male students who reported pornography consumption daily or weekly "reported feelings of sexual arousal from, fantasizing about doing things, or trying to realise activities seen on pornographic films" (ibid., 104). What is problematic in this study and the like is that, on the one hand, it frames some sexual behaviours as more "pornographic" than others without giving proper evidence to support such framing. For example, the study discussed here projects anal sex or sex with a friend, i.e., "someone with whom they were not having a loving relationship" (ibid.), as such. On the other hand, these kinds of studies often take the link of pornography use and reported sexual experiences as causal, although the study itself does not offer any evidence for such conclusions. Additionally, these kinds of studies view fantasising about doing things seen in pornography as problematic (Barker 2014a). Although the study may have found some correlations, it fails to explain in detail what these relationships might

be and how the survey participants live them. The study of third-year high school students in Sweden also found that 71% (n = 500) of the participants believed that pornography influenced other people's sexual behaviour, whereas 29% (n = 203) reported that they had been influenced themselves (Häggström-Nordin, Hanson & Tydén 2005, 104). However, the classroom survey did not give the participants freedom to articulate these experiences in their own words; instead, those experiences were reduced to a ranking scale of five alternatives (very positive, rather positive, neither/nor, rather negative, very negative). Thus, we are left with more questions than answers concerning the possible impact of pornography on Swedish high-school students.

Throughout the 2000s, several studies have been published investigating possible effects from the consumption of sexually explicit media, i.e., whether, or how much, the young are affected by pornography (Tsaliki, Chronaki & Ólafsson 2014). As Peter and Valkenburg (2016, 509) point out, several researchers have reviewed this field (Bloom & Hagedorn 2015; Dombrowski, Gischlar & Durst 2007; Owens et al. 2012; Springate & Omar 2013; Hovarth et al. 2013; Helsper 2005), but these reviews have come to equivocal or even contradictory conclusions, noticeably about whether pornography is related to the sexual attitudes and behaviours of the young. For example, Hovarth and colleagues' literature review in 2013 (Hovarth et al. 2013) suggests that adolescents' increased access to pornography is linked to, among other things, unrealistic sexual attitudes, risky sexual behaviour, more sexually permissive attitudes and, particularly, sexual objectification of women and girls. However, as noted by Peter and Valkenburg (2016) a few years later in their review of 20 years of research on adolescents and pornography, no evidence exists that more frequent pornography use is associated with more significant or harmful sexual experiences. Consistent evidence of a relationship between the pornography use of adolescents and sexual risk behaviour is missing.⁴ As Buckingham and Bragg (2004) note, research on the impact of different kinds of media content on young people is comparatively limited:

It focuses almost entirely on negative effects; it relies on simplistic assumptions about the relationships between media use, attitudes and behaviour; it fails to explain why effects arise in some cases and not others; it isolates media use from other social variables, or accounts for those variables in unduly simplistic ways; it does not adequately consider how people relate media to other sources of

⁴ McKee (2014, 58) notes how psychological research using statistical methods on the effects of pornography has consistently confused correlation with causality. He clarifies that there is a difference between the two as "correlation – two things happen at the same time – and causality – one thing causes the other to happen".

information; and it tends to oversimplify complex questions to do with the meanings and pleasures people derive from the media. (ibid., 10.)

Also, Bragg and Buckingham (2009) later argue that research in this field has focused on providing evidence about the harmful effects of media and consumer culture, implying that the causes of anxiety rest beyond and outside of young people's own choices and desires.

To conclude, research about the effects of pornography has been inconclusive in its findings. Attwood, Smith and Barker (2018, 3752–3753) sum up the work of Segal (1994), Owens et al. (2012) and Stoops (2017) like this: “the body of evidence itself is extremely inconsistent, with little replicability across studies and an overall ‘sense of ambiguity and profound confusion’”. Empirical research to date on the prevalence, predictors, and implications of adolescents' use of pornography involves several methodological and theoretical shortcomings. These limitations make it impossible to draw internally valid, linear and causal conclusions about the effects of pornography on adolescents. (Peter & Valkenburg 2016; Best & Bogle 2014.)

Instead of trying to find historical, local and context-sensitive snapshots of contemporary youths' relationship with pornography, however, there is one particular narrative that is widely used to generally explain what sexually explicit media do to young people universally. The fashionable narrative of the sexualisation of culture puts forward exaggerated claims of the harmful impact of sexual media.

2.2 The grand story of sexualisation

The intellectual history of the sexual child, for the most part, is grounded in knowledge production that privileges the child as asexual, pure, and innocent. Since the late 18th century, childhood has been recurrently framed as a time of innocence and inexperience (Carlson 2012; Kincaid 1998). Children's sexual activities and interests emerge as problematic by default in this framework, necessitating protective adult intervention for sheltering children from the corrupting force of sexuality (Egan & Hawkes 2010; Jones 2011). An adult-dominated culture enforces sexual management, so children's sexuality remains marginalised and ideologically dependent on what adults, principally professionals establishing themselves as advocates of children and young people, deem as acceptable (Egan & Hawkes 2010; also Jones 2011; Mulholland 2013, 67; Vänskä 2011). Premised upon expert knowledge about adolescents, sexuality and “healthy sexual development”, these morally inflected adult concerns are channelled into intense lobbying that portrays children as the traumatised victims of pornography who need special protection and whose access to the inappropriate content online must be prevented with the help of technical tools and firmer legislation for the Internet and social media for purposes

of safeguarding childhood innocence (Dines, Jensen & Russo 1998; Tydén & Rogala 2004; Paul 2005; Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Shapiro 2005; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; APA 2007; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007; Flood 2007; 2009; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Niemi 2011; Bailey 2011; Skrzydlewska 2012; Owens et al. 2012; Mattebo et al. 2014; Livingstone & Mason 2015).

The affective charge of the figure of an innocent child is apparent in present-day, highly publicly visible narratives on sexualisation (APA 2007; Durham 2008; Levin & Kilbourne 2009; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010) that frame sexual media as inherently dangerous for young audiences – especially for girls – with a damaging impact on their sexual repertoires. This narrative of sexualisation typically leans towards a heavily protective stance and describes adolescent sexuality in terms of the wide-ranging threats that can result in multiple forms of sexual exploitation and self-harm (for discussion, see Best & Bogle 2014; Hasinoff 2015; Nielsen, Paasonen & Spišák 2015; Tsaliki 2016). Sexualisation is understood in such a framing as both a social fact and a social problem, and adolescents' sexual interests are seen as inherently risky (for a critique, see for example Egan & Hawkes 2009; 2010; Jones 2011; Tsaliki 2016). A journalistic approach is used in public debate, in place of research findings, in which individual experiences are employed as if they were nationally or globally representative. This is particularly the case with the insights of health-care professionals who, naturally, are reporting on their interactions with people who clearly express traumatic experiences (McKee 2010, 11).

Tsaliki (2016) notes how the APA's *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls* (2007) became integral to its argumentation in shaping understandings and discussions of sexualisation:

Overall, the APA research finds that early sexualisation affects girls' sexual development and their physical and mental health. More particularly, it links sexualisation with three of the most common mental health problems linked with girls and women: eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression. The APA also sees sexualisation behind a girl's damaged cognitive and emotional development by affecting her confidence in, and comfort with, her own body, leading to self-image problems. Other effects on society may include an increase in sexism, increased rates of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and an increased demand for child pornography. The APA research finds evidence of sexualisation in every form of media, as well as in goods marketed to children. (Tsaliki 2016, 13.)

Egan (2013, 4) has argued that this report and its findings are often taken for granted in popular and academic fields. In addition to the APA report, there have also been

other similar reports conducted by celebrity psychologists or children's advocates (see, e.g., DCSF 2008; 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011; NSPCC 2017) as well as other, wide-ranging academic research studies (see, e.g., Hovarth et al. 2013) that reiterate the fears regarding the effect that adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit media might have on their wellbeing. These reports constantly repeat the view that exposure to pornography is disturbing and damaging for underaged people and that it reinforces sexist or violent attitudes and behaviours (see Barker 2014a and Attwood et al. 2012 for discussion). By privileging these narratives of sexualisation as explanations about how sexual media work, both academic and public debaters have enforced intellectual division and constitutive exclusion that have forcefully defined what is distinctive to the concept of young people and sexual media.

The term "sexualisation" has been linked to social, political and policy issues (see for example Anttila 2004; Karkulehto 2006) in Finland, and it has been used as a social fact to explain and account for many things related to sexual health and wellbeing, including mainly things that are viewed as social problems or that are sanctioned in the Finnish Criminal Code ("addiction", teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, unprotected sex, sexual harassment and violence, child sexual abuse, sex work, and so on) (Anttila 2004; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; Niemi 2011). Empirical research to date shows no consistent evidence of a relationship between pornography use and sexual risk behaviour (Peter & Valkenburg 2016; Best & Bogle 2014), yet this particular narrative of sexualisation has been dominant in Finland, especially at the NGO and public sector level, to explain sexually explicit media's damaging impact on children and young people (Salokoski & Mustonen 2007; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; Niemi 2011). Pornography, in particular, emerges as a central concern and a significant source of potential harm (Livingstone & Mason 2015; Rovolis & Tsaliki 2012; Tsaliki 2011; 2015; 2016). As Kendrick (1996) argues, pornography is seen to place children at considerable risk, defile their innocence and render their emergent sexuality corrupt. The claims of sexualisation and its impact have been severely criticised for being one-sided, overly simplistic, and intellectually suspect (see for example Smith 2010; Bragg 2012; Attwood, Bale & Barker 2013; Tsaliki 2016), but such a sexualisation narrative is still compelling today.⁵

⁵ Tsaliki (2016, 2) argues that a narrative of sexualisation of culture interweaves together "a discussion of media effects, an elitist view of popular culture, a notion of childhood innocence and vulnerability, a notion of pornography as harmful and obscene, a psychological discourse defining childhood, and a male scientific discourse that regulates female sexuality. In this context, as Tsaliki points out, "the current burgeoning of the 'sexualization of culture' can be seen as the proliferation of control and surveillance mechanisms regarding what is considered as 'normal' and 'socially acceptable' behaviour and sexuality for young children".

Tsaliki notes (2016, 17) that the current protectionist culture with its fixation on risk assessment and its governmentalising effects has become a commonly shared and frequently unchallenged way in which we distinguish and make sense of adolescents' experiences and practices in relation to media, particularly sexual media. The prevalence of risk assessment is a standard feature in many studies focusing on adolescents' use of networked media. The more I came to know the research underpinning debates about best practices, policy and public discussion (see, e.g., DCSF 2008; 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011; Skrzydlewska 2012; NSPCC 2017), the more I discovered that these are often conducted without any effort to explore young people's views about these issues and the complexity of these, although empirical research on adolescents' use of sexual media has increased in recent years (see, for example, Buckingham & Bragg 2004 on children and sexual media, Albury & Crawford 2013, Hasinoff 2014 and Albury 2016 on sexting, Martellozzo et al. 2017 on pornography, boyd 2014 and Ringrose & Harvey 2017 on teens and social media and Nielsen, Paasonen & Spišák 2015 on sexual messaging online).

I intentionally try throughout this thesis to challenge this narrative of sexualisation that sees sexual media as inherently damaging for underaged people, similar to works by Smith (2010), Attwood, Bale and Barker (2013) and Tsaliki (2016). I want to challenge the risk- and harm-based discourse that has become so authoritative today by presenting my empirical evidence. In doing so, I want to reveal the power relations that are carried by such incontestable claims. I see that young people are active, critical agents concerning media instead of constructing underaged people as "incomplete", impressionable beings influenced by media and who therefore must be protected by a range of disciplinary, regulatory and institutional interventions.

A specific gap exists in the debate over this sexualisation that dismisses the multiple sites and forms of agency, female agency, in particular. When describing media as an incontestable external force with a negative effect on the lives of adolescents, the narrative of sexualisation fails to recognise questions of choice, consent and agency when negotiating sexual practices, orientations and desires. I also find it curious that young people are often found to be skilled, critical and analytical media consumers (see, for example, Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007; Keller 2012; Mulholland 2013; Hasinoff 2014; boyd 2014; Nielsen, Paasonen & Spišák 2015; Tsaliki 2016; Albury 2016; Martellozzo et al. 2017; Ringrose & Harvey 2017) concerning sexual media, but the general debate over sexualisation and its alleged negative effects fails to recognise these positive attributes of young people. My research project shows that the aspects that puzzle girls about pornography are significantly more diverse and distinct than the concerns underscored in the public diagnoses of sexualisation.

3. Research Design: Rethinking the Agenda

Along with quantitative studies, there is a growing pool of comprehensive qualitative studies that take young people's opinions and thoughts about and interpretations of sexually explicit media into consideration (Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; Rinkinen et al. 2012; Anttila 2012; Mulholland 2013; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). These studies shed light on how young people navigate through the landscape of sexually explicit media and have been integral for me when formulating the focus of my research. These works have been helpful when thinking through sustainable research methods to work around some significant ethical, methodological, and theoretical issues research on young people and pornography poses.

Next, I will present my research design, research questions, research materials and the methodology that I utilise to form an informed analysis of young Finns' engagements with pornography. I discuss my research design to explain both the outcomes and the limitations of my findings presented in the subsequent chapters. Figure 1 (page 30) presents a summary of the peer-reviewed research articles with their respective research datasets, methods and research questions.

3.1 Objectives and scope

My work uses an interdisciplinary approach to examine 10–17-year-old Finns' engagement with and thoughts of pornography to ground debates on the possible impact of sexual media in empirical data. On a methodological level, this implies a social constructionist framework (Burr 2018), which requires the use of qualitative tools. These tools enable investigation of the strategies of language, discourse and social interaction that participants deploy in their accounts of pornography. The essential principle of social constructionist perspective, as Burr explains (2018, 2), is that “our knowledge of the world, including our understanding of human beings, is a product of human thought, language, and interaction rather than grounded in an observable and definable external reality.” Following the Foucauldian (Foucault

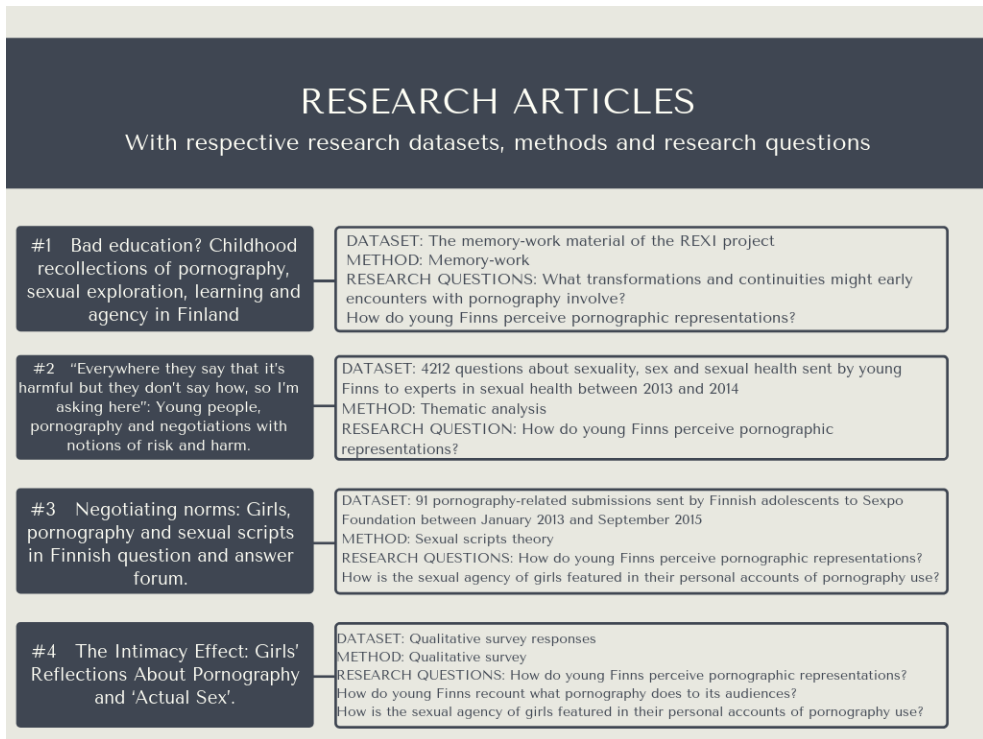


Figure 1. Summary of the peer-reviewed research articles with their respective research datasets, methods and research questions.

1979) way of thinking, I have adopted a critical stance toward taken-for-granted ways of understandings what sexual media does for adolescents. I view my research datasets (explained in detail in chapter 3.3) through the social constructionist lens, turning my attention to the constructive force of language, discourse and social interaction. This enables me to go beyond the simplistic and one-sided explanations of sexualisation and view the personal accounts of young Finns as “a fluid, fractured, and changeable assemblage, distributed across and produced through social interactions and relationships” (Burr 2018, 2). I aim to access theoretical questions about how childhood and children's sexuality, in particular, has come to be understood the way it is today. Thus, analysis of childhood and sexuality as social constructions (Egan & Hawkes 2009; 2010; Jones 2011) provide useful theoretical frameworks. I have also been inspired by Plummer’s (1995; 2003) work, which explores the rites of a sexual storytelling culture, examines the transformations taking place in the realm of intimacy and focuses primarily on the overlap of public and private.

My study falls within the field of media participation studies and adopts qualitative, participant-centred research methods on media audiences (Buckingham

2000) for an in-depth understanding of young Finns' experiences with and interpretations of pornographic content. The central emphasis of my study is on "the social and interpersonal processes" (ibid. 2000, viii) through which the meanings of pornographic representations are constructed and defined. Rather than trying to "fit" my datasets into a predetermined theoretical position, I have tried to use my research materials heuristically, explaining and interpreting the ways in which the young people represented in my research datasets give meanings to pornographic materials. Similar to the groundbreaking work of Buckingham and Bragg (2004), I also believe that more attention should be paid to the practice of interpretative work, especially with young people's interpretations of pornographic content. Devereux (2007) has argued that active audiences do not merely pick up messages or specific meanings "coded" to the media texts but are capable of arriving at their own conclusions, because "meaning does not reside within the text, or at least not exclusively so." (ibid., 10). My initial aim was to take young peoples' perspectives seriously and to understand the diverse ways in which pornographic representations might be significant for them.

Working within the scope of media participation studies means, first of all, that I do not understand media simply as a form of 'message' and its consumption causally as 'response' or 'effect', which is found in much public but also some academic discussion of media (see for example Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Bragg & Buckingham 2009; Attwood, Bale & Barker 2013; Barker 2014b; Buckingham & Chronaki 2014 and Tsaliki 2016 for discussion). I am not that interested in questions of exposure and the theoretical framing of media effects research, because I am well aware of the weaknesses of these approaches. Tsaliki (2016, 20) explains:

More specifically, research on media effects is seen to work within a positivist frame, for it hypothesises about the social world, and then applies scientific or mathematical tools to empirically test the validity of its hypotheses. It assumes that the inherent meanings and messages of media content can be measured quantitatively, as can audience responses. The two of them can then be correlated in order to assess media effects, and provide a basis of generalisation. The validity of methods used within effects research, nevertheless, can be challenged on a number of counts.

The way the media effects studies produce their research material in artificial, unrepresentative conditions, its tendency to ignore broader intersectional contextualisation to confound correlations between variables with causal relationships, and its notion of "effect" itself as causal response (Tsaliki 2016, 20–21; Buckingham & Bragg 2004, 10) means that it authorises overtly simplified responses to complex social problems. Tsaliki (2016, 21) argues that "instead of examining them in depth and then seeking to explain them, effects research starts the

other way round—with the media, and then moves on to evidence their harmful impact on individuals”.

I am critical of the explanations the media effects studies produce, but I am in no way suggesting that media would not have any impacts whatsoever on people. I am paying attention to the full range of experiences connected to pornographic representations portrayed in my datasets, whether those be positive, negative or something in between. However, I do not want to lose focus. I want to pay close attention to the narratives of young people about how pornographic representations have resonated for them, so I am not ignoring the possible negative accounts, but I do not want to overemphasise them either (see McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008, 74–97 on reporting the different effects of pornography).

Young people today do engage with a mass of sexual media content, so it is essential to dig deeper into those crucial contextual distinctions that young people address in the context of sexually explicit media, aiming to develop better policies that respect the rights of children and adolescents. As within media participation studies or cultural studies approaches, I see media texts and their consumption as complex, ambiguous, significant and, as such, deserving of proper, contextualised research (Buckingham & Bragg 2004; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; Mulholland 2013; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). I argue that, acknowledging underlying social and cultural structures, sexual media is a site for developing diverse understandings of gender, sexual identities and relationships. This is the most essential delimitation for this work, which presents a significant departure from those accounts that concentrate solely on alleged harms of pornography consumption on young people (Dines, Jensen & Russo 1998; Paul 2005; Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Shapiro 2005; Martsola & Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; APA 2007; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Niemi 2011; Bailey 2011; Owens et al. 2012). This approach necessitates that I put my thoughts on pornography on the map. My insights and values support the importance of sustainable and inclusive research-based knowledge that should be the foundation of public debate and policy in the field. As the research process progressed and as I became more acquainted with research done in this field, I found myself challenging internalised notions of the narrative of sexualisation and its harmful impact on underaged people. It is also important to state that my “hands-on” experiences in the field of child welfare organisations implied that the presence of online pornography was of more significant concern for adults than for adolescents who contacted our helpline for various reasons. This, too, was one of the reasons I was determined to find out the perspective of the young.

I aim to provide the debate about young people and pornography with the alternative scope and perspective it desperately needs in order to tackle the concerns over sexual media more precisely (see also McKee 2010; Chronaki 2013; Tsaliki 2016; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). This study allows young people to have a

channel for voicing their opinions in order to change course toward a more polyphonic debate. I understand that “giving a voice” is an elitist and even patronising formulation, and I am not claiming that this study alone would “give a voice to the voiceless” as the processes of marginalisation are far too complicated one study to change. However, this study was accomplished to be a resource to help academic and educational efforts find alternative ways to reduce the marginalisation of young people in debates on sexual media and its possible impact on minors. Furthermore, I aim to advance the professional qualifications of educators, policy-makers and experts on sexual health and media education in Finland.

3.2 Research questions

As I searched for a more holistic account of the role of the media in adolescents’ lives, I became interested in *how young people navigate pornographic representations of sex and what these mean to them*. I divided this formulation of a research problem into four more specific research questions to help me work through the “dominant conceptual paradigm” of sexualisation (Tsaliki 2016, 21) as figure 2 shows.

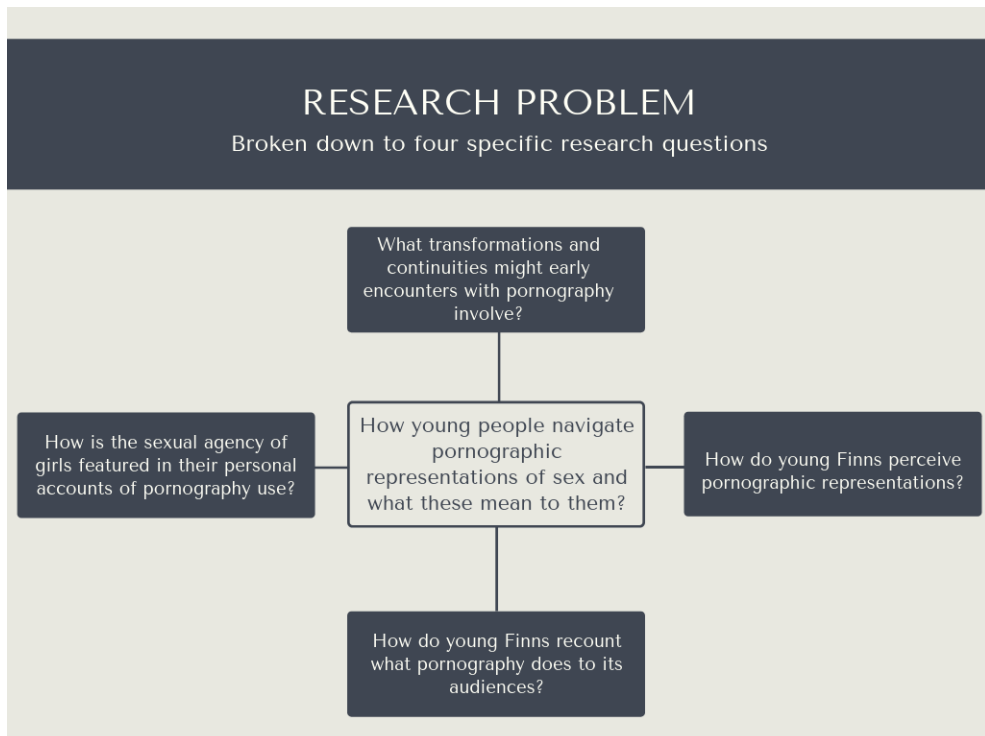


Figure 2. Research problem broken down to four specific research questions.

I argue that through these questions, I can trace young people's thoughts of how they experience talk, opinions and attitudes concerning pornography and how pornographic representations of sex are perceived in relation to the possibly more restrictive view of sexually explicit media expressed by parents, educators and public debaters, thus forming a three-dimensional analysis set within a broad context of how childhood and children's sexuality, in particular, has been constructed.

3.3 Research materials

I have built my dissertation with its four research articles around three pools of different material sets. When my doctoral project began in 2012, several online services were targeting young Finns with a specific emphasis on sexual health. These services offered inclusive and comprehensive health and sexuality information and the help of various kinds in the form of online static content such as sexuality, health and relationship articles, guides and factsheets, and interactive content such as message boards, chats and online sexual health clinics. These services also encouraged young people to contact health care professionals anonymously if they had questions related to sexual health.

Based on my professional contacts, I encouraged research cooperation with four of these services that operated moderated question and answer forums where young people's questions were published anonymously and answered by a trained sexual health counsellor. These online services, well known and frequently visited by adolescents in Finland, were targeted at preteens, teenagers and young people in their 20s. Three of these services were maintained by non-governmental, non-profit organisations working in the fields of family, youth and health and one by a commercial actor in journalism. From these forums, I gathered 4212 questions about sexuality, sex and sexual health that were sent by Finnish adolescents to experts in sexual health fields between 2013 and 2014. I also received 91 more submissions indexed under the pornography-related submissions category by one online platform of sexual health. Young Finns sent these submissions to the forum between January 2013 and September 2015. These submissions constitute one pool of material set (n = 4303).

The second set of research material was gathered from the contributions to the 2012 research project on memories of pornography, titled *Remembering sexual imageries: Pornography, memory work and Finnish media history* (REXI) (for key findings, see Paasonen et al. 2015). This memory-work project collaborated with the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literary Society (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura [SKS]), an international research institute and a national memory organisation. They launch memory collection campaigns annually with research groups, help to formulate and advertise the calls and collect and archive the data. The REXI project

encompassed 45 written contributions submitted by 14 female and 31 male respondents, with a total of 853 pages of text that involved thick personal reflections. One of the project's main aims was to explore transformations in the everyday role and status of pornography on both the individual and collective levels, and respondents were asked to write freely about their memories and views. An additional series of questions was offered for reflection. These included questions of childhood memories of encountering, acquiring, consuming, experiencing and discussing pornography. The topic of childhood and youth memories was the most frequently reminisced, perhaps since temporal distance enabled a sense of detachment in autobiographical reflection. These reminiscences of childhood and youth form the second material set for my doctoral dissertation. While this material does not support generalisation, it offers insightful accounts of memories and experiences of adolescence porn encounters over several decades.

The third and final set of research materials draws on an online survey that was conducted as part of a media education awareness campaign of e-Talo (e-House), a Finnish online youth club, in September 2015. e-Talo is a virtual space where adolescents and young adults can visit whenever they need adult support in issues around puberty, sexuality, relationships, and self-esteem. e-Talo follows gender-sensitive youth work methods. All communication between e-Talo workers and adolescents is anonymous. The media education awareness campaign aimed to inform young Finns that they can anonymously and in confidence contact trained youth workers in matters regarding pornographic representations of sex. By way of research cooperation, e-Talo staff wanted to gather information on how young people perceive pornography. The results of the survey have been utilised in media and sex education activities within the organisation. The survey was open from 7 September until 28 September 2015, and it elicited 167 contributions from young Finns aged 13 to 30 years. Of the respondents, 98 were minors, aged 13–17, and I analysed these contributions as part of my doctoral dissertation.

These three material sets form the empirical structure of my dissertation, drawing from personal accounts of adolescents' practices with sexually explicit media in Finland from the mid-1940s to the present day. These material sets – both individually and together – are offered as context-sensitive case studies in the revisiting of the sexualisation debate from a social constructionist perspective.

3.3.1. Reflection on the research materials

I am aware of the limitations that my research datasets themselves pose. I do acknowledge that those young individuals who contact various moderated question and answer forums about sex and sexuality may be those who are already sexually active online. They possess the skills and resources to seek answers for their

questions related to, for example, porn consumption. In addition, it is also important to note that those who voluntarily participate in sex-related surveys may be more sexually experienced, have better sexual esteem, and have more progressive sexual attitudes than their peers.

I also acknowledge the specific nature of my datasets and the Nordic voices they may depict. The contemporary discourses around sexuality, gender equality, health and development in the Nordic countries are similar, if not identical (Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007). It is, therefore, understandable that my initial findings connect to broader Nordic discourses about sexuality and gender (Niskanen 2011; Åseskog 2018). As such, my findings, in general, can be interpreted as a part of a specific Nordic voice typical for the Nordic countries, although the Nordics are not one homogenous group of people.

Some scholars, as Dockett and Perry (2007) argued, might be critical of the reliability, validity and generalisability of children's and young people's research input. I regard adolescent research participants "as competent, capable, and effective reporters of their own experiences", similar to Dockett and Perry (*ibid.*, 60). I also regard them as valuable and trustworthy informants for my research. I acknowledge the importance of context in understanding my research participants' narratives of their lived experience and recognise their capabilities to reflect their social and cultural contexts.

I realise that my data-gathering methods, complete anonymisation and absence of contributors' more extensive background information could be criticised, because this decision obviously makes it impossible to offer insights into how interpretations of pornographic representations intersect with, for example, young people's age, class, ethnicity, gender identification, and sexual identification. However, at the same time, the datasets I have formed to be utilised in this study offer novel insights of young Finns' personal accounts about how pornographic materials resonate for them.

The research materials provide a coherent set of data for understanding young peoples' different levels of engagement in pornographic representations firmly placed within the Finnish context. I systematically explored and organised the datasets individually and together in order to examine both the microcosm of individual experience and its connections to the macrocosm of global, cultural, social and technological power structures (Saukko 2003). I systematically structured my analysis of the datasets around a three-dimensional interest in lived experiences, discourses or texts and the social context in order to bring together the different methodological approaches I explain in this chapter. I was able to illuminate the specifically social and cultural characteristics of young Finns' thoughts of pornographic representations by paying attention to the cultural and social nature of lived realities and acknowledging that lived experiences are always thoroughly

interlaced and mediated by social, institutional and popular discourses (Saukko 2003, 58). Furthermore, a firm focus on the cultural and social nature of lived realities helped me to examine temporal and historical, pedagogical and protectionist discourses in large-scale empirical data.

3.4 Research methods

I wanted to engage with the social and cultural context of adolescent sexuality and with how young Finns make sense of and use sexually explicit content, both online and offline. I concentrated on observing the various ways that sexual meanings were being set up and negotiated in my research materials (Attwood & Smith 2011; Mulholland 2013; Albury 2013; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018) through “engaged listening” (Dockett & Perry 2007; Forsey 2010) and by paying attention to how young people navigate through pornographic representations of sex.

3.4.1. Memory-work and autobiographical reflection as the construction of the self

I turned to the REXI memory-work project that examined the memories and experiences of pornography in Finland from the mid-1940s to the present day (Paasonen et al. 2015; article I) to gain a more informed understanding of what transformations and continuities early encounters with pornography may involve. Memory-work is a social constructionist research method developed by Frigga Haug and her colleagues with and for the feminist movement explicitly to bridge the gap between theory and experience. Haug (2008) explains that to use memory-work as a research method is to work with the experience.

The memory-work method generates stories concerning the past for researchers to analyse and compare as the respondents who choose to participate to the research formulate their memories in written responses to a particular call for contributions. The participants of the memory-work project are aware that they are informants in and for research. Therefore, the children and childhood experiences sketched out in the memory-work material are about things and events people retrospectively choose to disclose with the intention of making sense of their experiences (Haug 1992, 20; Kuhn 1995). Egan notes that adult memories and understandings of childhood are articulated “through the lens of adult perception and/or fantasy” (Egan 2013, 115). This is also the case with the memory-work dataset that facilitates no direct access to the respondents’ childhood experiences as such.

To summarise, the memory-work material conveys respondents’ thoughts on pornography within particular narrative frames that generate and rely on continuities as participants write of their early and current views and experiences, the self as it

was thought to be then and as it is now (see Paasonen et al. 2015 for a more detailed discussion on the method of memory-work in studies of pornography).

I reviewed and analysed all the childhood- and youth-related contributions of the REXI memory-work material and produced an article (article I) that reported the key findings of this part of the study with co-author Susanna Paasonen. Through the analysis, it was possible to find answers to two specific research questions that I formulated at the beginning of my research process: “What transformations and continuities might early encounters with pornography involve?” and “How are pornographic representations perceived by young Finns?”. I will return to our findings of the memory-work material in more detail in Chapter 4 Findings.

3.4.2. Thematic analysis

I utilised thematic analysis to gain a more informed understanding of what young Finns are asking about pornography on the online sexual health services targeted to young people. Thematic analysis is a qualitative content analytic method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.”, as Braun and Clarke (2006, 79) explain. Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in the researcher’s choice of a theoretical framework, because it is not closely tied to specific theories. Thematic analysis allows for a rich, nuanced and heterogenous description of the material through this flexibility.

I indexed the material set that comprised 4212 questions about sexuality, sex and sexual health, submitted by Finnish adolescents to experts in sexual health between 2013 and 2014 to different categories, to classify submissions that were explicitly related to pornography from other submissions. It was a great surprise to discover that only 64 (merely 1, 5%) explicitly focused on pornography. These porn-related submissions then become the category for my analysis. I used thematic analysis to identify, distinguish and examine themes that appeared within the material set. While searching for patterns that constitute a theme, I was looking for recurrent features that capture how young Finns perceive pornographic representations. Furthermore, it was important to me that these themes represent some level of patterned submission within the material set (see also Braun & Clarke 2006, 82).

I searched for common themes among these submissions, reviewed, defined and named those themes, and produced an article (article II) that reported the key findings of this part of the study. Following a thematic analysis of these porn-related questions, it was possible to identify two main themes that appeared throughout the material set in a coherent, consistent and distinctive way. I consider that these reappearing themes across the material are essential for being able to answer a

specific research question: How do the young Finns perceive the pornographic representations? Instead of just describing those central themes, I was careful to maintain a balance between my analytic narrative claims and my extracts from the material. I will return to these themes and my main findings of the material set in Chapter 4 Findings.

3.4.3. The theory of sexual scripts

My research horizon was framed by my understanding that the debates about sexualisation and childhood and sexuality were socially constructed conceptions that forcefully impact girls, in particular; thus, I wanted to critically explore the personal narratives of Finnish girls on their pornography use. I aimed to address the widely circulated narratives on the sexualisation of girls more precisely. I wanted to critically examine the premises and possible impacts of these diagnoses of sexualisation in connection with context-specific empirical research, so I focused on the particular concerns that Finnish girls express about pornography and its connections to sexuality via a moderated question and answer forum operated by the Sexpo foundation. The service in question encourages young Finns to anonymously contact sexual health care professionals for answers to their questions related to sexuality. The submissions are published online with a response from a trained sexuality health counsellor.

I examined those 91 pornography-related submissions that I received from Sexpo through the context of everyday sexual practices that are always already cut through by social assumptions, norms and codes (see Jackson & Scott 2007). I wanted to move beyond the debate over the supposed ill effects of sexualisation by returning to Gagnon and Simon's (1974) sexual script theory. I applied the theory of sexual scripts as a manner of interpretation to examine the processes of negotiation that girls work through vis-à-vis cultural imagery, gendered social assumptions, norms and expectations. My aim was to complicate the understanding of the appeal of pornography among girls and the forms of exploration, learning and pleasure that it affords.

The theory of sexual scripts allow for an analysis of how specific gendered ideas are possible and appear within a given historical, social and cultural context, as well as how these viewpoints work; that is, how girls experience their positions in relation to diverse, sometimes contradictory, ways of talking about female adolescent sexuality (cf. Driscoll 2002). I found the theory of sexual scripts exceptionally useful for finding a more informed understanding of some of my research questions: 1) How do young Finns perceive pornographic representations? and 2) How is the sexual agency of girls featured in their personal accounts of pornography use?

Following an analysis of these porn-related submissions sent by Finnish girls, it was possible to identify four main sexual scripts that appeared throughout the material set in a coherent, consistent and distinctive way. The four sexual scripts appearing in the girls' submissions included (a) the script of harm, (b) the script of gendered double standards in relation to pornography, (c) the script of the good girl and (d) the script about pleasure technology. In Chapter 4 Findings, I will return to these sexual scripts and my main findings of the material set of concerns that Finnish girls express about pornography and its connections to sexuality.

3.4.4. Qualitative Survey

I chose to utilise the qualitative survey method when I wanted to probe how young Finns perceive pornographic representations and how they recount what pornography does to its audiences, because I wanted to respect the contributors' right to anonymity. According to Fink (2003, 61), qualitative surveys are useful for the exploration of meanings and experiences with detailed information in the respondent's own words. Qualitative surveys may also work well when one wants to access only small samples. Large samples do not necessarily improve the quality or credibility of the results, because the increases in sample size will complicate the data formation, management and analysis (*ibid.*, 67).

I am mindful that online surveys lack close contact and interaction between interviewer and respondent, limiting the possibilities for in-depth probing and follow-up questions. At the same time, however, the dataset offers insightful personal accounts of girls' experiences of sexually explicit media of the kind that could have been difficult to disclose in an interview. Because of the online environment, respondents may have felt safer providing honest answers.

However, I am aware that survey participants may deliberately report misinformation on a survey for many different reasons. In the case of an online survey that is connected with pornography, adolescents may formulate their answers to fit the social norm for the situation. The respondents may also offer opinions simply because they are asked for an opinion, not because they really have one. Sue and Ritter (2012, 53) pointed out that “[s]ocial desirability and political correctness can often lead respondents to give the ‘right’ answer rather than the real or valid answer to a survey question. The desire to conform to social norms can be powerful.” This can be considered as a respondent-centred challenge to validity and reliability. I have, therefore, utilised some techniques for reducing social desirability bias (*ibid.*, 51–56). For example, I have repeated the promise of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the survey. When informing respondents about the aims of the survey, I emphasised the need to listen to what young Finns have to say about the survey topic,

which is impregnated with adult-dominated views. This, I believe, reduced possible pressure to respond to the survey questions in socially desirable ways.

The survey was carefully designed so that the participants with no recent experiences on pornography only saw the first three demographic questions (Q1: Age, Q2: Gender identity and Q3: Sexual identity) and two or three multiple-choice questions depending on their answers⁶, because the overall principle was to not introduce them to anything they did not disclose themselves to start with. Those respondents who reported having seen portrayals of sex within the recent month and who selected pornography as being one of the media sources were introduced to additional questions about pornography.⁷ Thus, the number of questions shown in the survey depended on the answers given by the respondent, with the maximum number of questions being 11.

The call for survey participation was shared in the news section of the e-Talo website and its social media channels (Facebook, Twitter), and it included a brief description of the purpose and aims of the study, emphasising the participants' anonymity. The survey aimed to help the e-Talo staff to be better informed about how young people make sense of sexually explicit media content. The survey was open from 7 September until 28 September 2015, and it elicited 167 contributions from young Finns aged 13 to 30 years.

3.5 Epistemological reflections

Saukko's (2003) work on the qualitative methodology in cultural studies has provided me with the idea that research or research methodologies are "always located, informed by particular social positions and historical moments and their agendas" (ibid., 2–3). I had to work off my frustration with knowledge "exposure and effects studies" and sexualisation debate produce so I developed a framework for studying the historical, social, lived and discursive dimensions of pornographic representations and for shifting between different methods and analytical perspectives that complement one another in order to stitch together a perhaps more

⁶ Q4: Within the recent month, have you seen portrayals of sex in the media? Please tick a suitable box (Yes/No). Those who answered Yes to Q4 saw Q5: You mentioned that you had seen portrayals of sex in the media within the recent month. Could you please tick all the suitable media sources where you saw portrayals of sex. Q6: Could you please tick all the suitable sources where you have received sexual information?

⁷ Open-end questions varied from what pornography is (Q7), what kind of pornography the respondent consumes (Q8) and does not like to consume (Q9), whether the respondent finds differences between pornographic representations of sex and embodied sexual encounters (Q10), and whether the respondent finds some benefits or positive and/or negative outcomes to pornography use (Q11).

nuanced and complex, albeit never complete, analysis of the phenomenon my work focuses on. The question at the heart of my quest was that of epistemology: How do we know what we know? I borrowed Saukko's (2003, 74–94) idea, that discourses, such as the discourse on sexualisation and its harmful effect on adolescents, are useful when seen as 'material-semiotic' forces. These forces emerge from a specific historical context and produce changes that could be both symbolic and very concrete. Thus, the discourse on sexualisation and the alleged ill impact on adolescents shapes our understanding of childhood sexuality, how we define "healthy sexual development" and what kind of sexual practices are framed as "risky", "corrupt" and "harmful".

The methodology I have utilised in my work consists of a more extensive package of research methods and a philosophical and political commitment that come with my research approach. My approach aims to gain a 'thick' understanding of young people's engagement with and thoughts of pornography, so I understand that the same methods I have used can also support different methodological commitments (Saukko 2003, 8–10). As I aimed to explore the interpretative potential of young people's lived experiences concerning pornographic representations, I soon began to realise that instead of investigating things young people reported seeing in pornography, their personal accounts were saturated with concepts of social norms that guided their perceptions and understandings (similarly, see for example Scarcelli 2015). Thus, I am accepting that instead of finding a "truth" about the phenomena I am investigating, the "truth" is complicated, fluid, contradictory and multifaceted, dependent on the scholars' historical, political and theoretical investments whereby the object of study ends up changing from one angle to another.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Broadly speaking, this field of research is ethically constrained by the protected status of its focal group, adolescents, and is practically complicated by the sensitive character of its topic, pornography. Attwood and Smith (2011, 236) have noted that "Research in this area is fraught with difficulties because of entrenched cultural taboos on speaking about sex that feel particularly intense in the current context of fear and anxiety."

My study, too, poses several ethical considerations I want to disclose regarding the ethical decisions I made, such as declining to collect written, informed consent to participate in research. Regarding the ethics of the study, I contacted and met the representatives of my research partners to obtain ethical clearance from each of them to use the submissions sent in by young people as data for my research. One of my aims was to create a fruitful partnership with the organisations in question to ensure

that the results of this study could be utilised, for example, in the development of new sex education materials and sexuality health services.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, which aims to examine how young Finns make sense of pornography, several ethical considerations need to be acknowledged. I have carefully consulted the available ethical guidelines (e.g. Livingstone, Ólafsson & Haddon 2013; Laaksonen, Matikainen & Tikka 2013; Buchanan 2004), but I decided not to directly obtain informed consent to participate in the study or parental research permits. The contributions I received from my research partners were submitted and were to be published anonymously online. None of the research partners collect or archive any personal data to respect the contributors' right to anonymity. Therefore, it would have been impossible to contact any contributors writing their questions to the moderated question and answer forums (see chapter 3.4 Research materials). I ensured that it is impossible to identify the particular people sending particular submissions, and it is impossible to identify individuals by the citations used in my research articles (e.g., via online searches).

Regarding the memory-work dataset, the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literary Society (SKS) have their own established privacy policies, working, research and archival practices (SKS 2019). They process personal data as required in the EU GDPR and other legislation. The SKS does not disclose any registered data to third parties. As a memory institution, the SKS collects background information of the research project's participants, but my research project used the dataset of memories of pornography anonymously.

Concerning the qualitative survey, I decided not to directly obtain either informed consent for participating in the study or parental research permits, because the survey was conducted entirely anonymously with no personal data archived. The decision to not collect documentation of parental research permits was further motivated by the aim of respecting the adolescents' rights to privacy. Parents knowing that their offspring wished to contribute to a survey on sexual media could have caused unwanted consequences by compromising the privacy of the participants' Internet use (cf. Nielsen, Paasonen & Spišák 2015). The survey has been conducted with full ethical clearance from the research partner, the e-Talo staff. Their guidelines for responsible research conduct were carefully followed throughout. I was also careful when designing the survey questions so that the participants with no recent experiences with pornography did not see pornography-related questions because the overall principle was to not introduce them to anything they did not disclose themselves to start with. I also carefully formulated the questions about pornography to be general in nature and avoided any moralistic or otherwise adult-leading language so as to not cause distress or anxiety through the survey questions. The participants were offered a possibility to contact a sexual health expert anonymously via e-Talo's chat services in case they wanted to discuss

the issues covered in the survey with an adult. E-Talo reported that no such requests were made during our research collaboration. The research design and the uses of all the research datasets have been approved by the University of Turku ethics board.

4. Findings

The analysis conducted in this research covers various subjects ranging from:

- Transformations and continuities of early encounters with pornography in the decades since World War II in Finland (article I),
- Questions about pornography that were sent by young people in Finland to experts on sexual health (articles II, III),
- Forms of learning connected to pornography (articles I, III, IV),
- Girls' accounts of sexual exploration, learning, and the pursuit of pleasure through pornography (articles II, IV) and their conceptions of the difference between pornographic representations and 'actual sex' (article IV).

Through these analyses, I argue that young people's perceptions of pornography are more diverse than typically assumed in both public and some academic debates. Similar to the works of Buckingham and Bragg (2004), Allen (2005), Attwood (2005), McKee, Albury and Lumby (2008), Bragg and Buckingham (2009), Albury (2013), Scarcelli (2015), Martellozzo et al. (2017) and Attwood, Smith and Barker (2018), I argue that the forms of learning connected to pornography are more varied and complex than those limited solely to sexual behaviour and sexual acts. As such, young people's engagement with and thoughts of sexually explicit media should be paramount when considering pornography's potential impact, particularly on underaged people. Furthermore, I argue that the notion of an asexual child vulnerable to media effects remains detached from people's personal accounts of their childhood activities, experiences, and competences.

4.1 Pornography as part of young Finns' media culture since World War II

During the recent decade, digital media and smartphones have been identified as a reason for early and easy access to pornography (e.g. Flood 2007; Owens et al. 2012; Papadopoulos 2010; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007). Therefore, in Finland, as elsewhere in Western societies, public debate about the alleged dangers of pornography and the sexual practices of adolescents has taken on a fresh urgency.

What is often forgotten, however, is that the core of this debate enjoys notable longevity, since the media have often been portrayed as a threat to those considered the most vulnerable (see for example Postman [1982] 1994 on television and Douglas 1980 on romance). I consulted a rich dataset -- the 2012 research project on memories of pornography (see section 3.3 Research materials for a more extensive description of the dataset) -- to investigate the first research question, “*What transformations and continuities might early encounters with pornography involve?*”.

The 45 respondents of the memory-work project were born between 1925 and 1994. They represented various sexual orientations, social, educational and professional backgrounds. It is vital to note that no simple divisions could be made in contributors’ attitudes towards pornography in terms of social categories. Nearly all respondents wrote of early porn encounters and the excitement they involved. They reminisce fondly, and with recurrent nostalgic undertones, of finding, consuming, storing and hiding at an early age material that was understood as forbidden for children.

The memory-work material demonstrates that pornography has, in its diverse forms and materialisations, been a regular and standard feature in Finnish children’s and youth media culture since World War II. This finding complicates public concerns about early access to pornography as being specific to the present (for similar findings, see Wright 2013; Price et al. 2015). The contributions of the memory-work dataset indicate *continuities of practices of pornography use across the decades*. However, these contributions do not ignore the drastic shifts that have occurred in the mundane presence of pornography, its currently abundant availability, diversity and volume.

Both female and male contributors describe experiences of looking for porn, owning, storing and consuming it across their lifespans during several decades. In addition to finding pornographic materials in the woods or the trash during adolescence, the respondents of the memory-work project describe discovering porn in their parents’ and relatives’ personal stashes (Kyrölä & Paasonen 2016; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008). Albury (2003, 208) reminds how online pornography, in particular, is ‘often represented as a perverse outsider, forcing its way into suburban homes’ even though consumption of pornography has, since the 1970s, been primarily domestic (see Juffer 1998). Pornographic magazines, videotapes and DVDs have been hidden and stored in domestic spaces. Nowadays, online access has rendered physical stashes unnecessary and increased the privacy of porn consumption.

It is broadly argued that the current population of young people, diversely titled the “Porn Generation,” “Generation P,” or “Generation XXX” (Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007; Shapiro 2005), is much more likely to consume

pornography than previous generations. I argue that these debates are premised on the notion of cultural rupture, and they generally disregard the roles that pornography has played in adolescents' lives, sexual practices, and experiences long before the era of mobile media devices and online access. Price et al. (2015) have argued that the present-day association of the Internet with a perceived increase in adolescents' consumption of pornography is ahistorical. It does not recognise how past shifts in media technology have brought forth similar concerns (p. 2). These findings of my research project, like some other recent work (e.g. Wright 2013; Mascheroni & Ólafsson 2014, 72–74; Price et al. 2015), complicate the conventional notion of adolescents' consumption of pornography as having recently grown more pervasive, given its presence in adolescents' lives and sexual experiences long before the era of digital media.

It is also challenging to make comparisons between generations because of the lack of comparable data. The perspective of young Finns as porn consumers has, due to obvious ethical concerns, been mostly absent in earlier studies (for exceptions, see Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007; Anttila 2012; Rinkinen et al. 2012). Nationwide surveys and studies on Finnish sex lives (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula 2003; Kontula 2009) have addressed Finns' views on and experiences related to pornography, but these have not been the key focus of research, as noted by Paasonen and colleagues (2015). Existing research on pornography in Finland has primarily focused on media texts and images, representations and media policy (Kalha 2007; Nikunen, Paasonen & Saarenmaa 2005; Paasonen 2015) rather than on consumer experiences with pornography – let alone the consumer experiences of young Finns.

The method of memory-work utilised in research article I, connected to the broader conventions of sexual storytelling (Plummer 1995), accentuates personal agency over more abstract figures of childhood (Paasonen et al. 2015). In this respect, it makes retrospectively evident children's awareness of sex, sexual feelings and desires (cf. Kontula 2009; Lamb 2001) and challenges the notion of childhood sexual innocence and ignorance.

4.2 Challenging the figure of a child at risk

As my research project progressed and I became more aware of the fact that pornographic representations have been a part of young Finns' media culture for decades, I became more interested in how young people in the past and today navigate through the pornographic representations of sex and what these mean to them. I explored the memory-work material further with my co-author Paasonen to gain insight into how young Finns perceived pornographic representations during the past decades (article I). We aimed to complicate the understandings of the power

and appeal of pornography among young people and the forms of learning that it has facilitated throughout decades. Thus, we examined how the sexual agency of children, or the lack thereof, is conceptualised, reflected and narrated in the memory-work material. The material reveals an apparent gap between the notion of the vulnerable child and adult recollections of their own childhood experiences, similar to what I have identified from my personal history with graphic depictions of sex (see Introduction).

The affective charge of the image of an innocent child at risk is evident in current debates on adolescents and sexual media. Egan and Hawkes (2010) note that such concerns are not uniquely characteristic of the contemporary moment. Fears, anxieties and panic concerning the sexual child have a notable history, and parallels can be found between current concerns and earlier attempts to discipline and manage children's sexuality. Contingent concerns over children's sexuality frame it as "the outcome of something done to children and not as something that can take place within a larger constellation of a child's sexuality" (Egan & Hawkes 2009, 391). This again leaves "no place for the sexual subjectivity of children, their agency or recognition of their rights as sexual citizens" (Egan & Hawkes 2009, 393).

Edelman (2004) examines the 'image of the Child' and the kind of values that are invested in it in contemporary culture. Edelman argues that the very notion of social viability and continuity resides in the untouchable Child: "the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dangerous 'lifestyles' on the internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library" (ibid., 21). The idea of a Child as void of sexual desire is, for Edelman, a creation and projection of adult desires. This idea may be far detached from the activities and experiences of empirical children. Such an idea of an innocent child looms large in debates on pornography (Kendrick 1996). According to Kendrick (1996), pornography is seen to place children at risk, defile their innocence and render their emergent sexuality corrupt, compulsive, destabilised, and uncontrollable.

Rather than conforming to the cultural figures Edelman (2004) and Kendrick (1996) analyse, adolescents themselves underline their motives of exploration, curiosity and diversion while also emphasizing their own sense of sexual agency (Rinkinen et al. 2012; Barker 2014a; Chronaki 2013; Martellozzo et al. 2017; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). The retrospective children outlined in the memory-work dataset are similarly described as curious, actively looking for and collecting pornography and resistant to regulatory parenting practices. As such, these retrospective children have notably little in common with the figure of the impressionable child as one void of sexual desire. The memory-work dataset points out the profound analytical shortcomings of this abstract, cultural figure that

persistently resurfaces in contemporary concerns and panics over the sexualisation of childhood discussed in chapter 2.2.

The participants of the memory-work project who recollect puzzling, intriguing and pleasurable engagement with images and texts of sexual acts describe their autobiographical younger selves as capable of critical disengagement from them and as astute observers of adult reactions towards sexually titillating media materials (also Barker 2014a). The autobiographical younger self is invested with considerable volition and firmly positioned as sexual agents – albeit occasionally naïve and clueless ones – driven by curiosity, embedded in meaningful social ties and indifferent towards the content of pornographic materials. Some contributors were critical of porn, yet there were no accounts of childhood trauma. In contrast, the contributors explicitly challenge claims of pornographic imagery as posing an essential, corruptive risk for minors (cf. McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008, 159–160; Flood 2009). This finding is in line with studies that challenge sexual media’s inherent harmfulness to sexual learning (see for example Albury 2013; Allen 2005; Buckingham & Bragg 2004; McKee 2010).

4.2.1. Discourse of harm bothers more than actual pornographic content

I was able to investigate current-day adolescents’ views on the idea of a child at risk more closely through the dataset acquired from my research partners who operate moderated question and answer forums for young Finns. Of the total of 4212 helpline questions analysed, 64 submissions were strictly about pornography. The small number of submissions related to pornography indicates that for young people, there are other, more critical, concerns in the field of sex and sexuality than pornography, for which they seek an adults’ guidance. What was more surprising, only 4 of the porn-related questions (less than 0.5%) explicitly described porn or acts seen in porn as disturbing and as having caused unwanted effects. Given the significantly low number of porn-related questions sent to these helpline services, the public risk talk seems disproportionate.

It is clear from the thematic analysis of the helpline dataset that young people are not unaware of notions of risk and harm associated with early pornography consumption. In 55% (n = 35) of porn-related submissions, young people express concern about the role of pornography as something that can – judged by comments made by parents, educators, and other experts – potentially cause harm and damage. In the research dataset of girls’ questions about pornography, similarly, the script of harm as described in the debates on the sexualisation of girls was featured in a majority of submissions. The script of harm in connection with adolescent porn use

is an essential framework for influencing how girls think about their position as sexual agents and sexual citizens.

However, although the datasets analysed suggest that young Finns are aware of the notions of harm associated with early uses of pornography, they are also actively and critically challenging that risk talk by continually referring to the vagueness of the alleged harm that characterises public discussion. Young people seek to challenge such risk talk all the time by referring to the vagueness of the alleged harm that characterises the dominant discourse of danger in public discussion. The data demonstrate that young people insist on a more detailed and case-sensitive comprehension of the effects of porn consumption that are considered harmful.

According to my findings, blurry notions of harm bother young people more than the actual pornographic content they encounter. In other words, very few of the young people who contacted sexual health experts experienced porn itself as harmful. Instead, it was the risk talk that was experienced as unsettling. Such risk talk and notions of harm operate as lessons of an ‘appropriate’ attitude towards pornography, requiring that young people acquire the position of ‘victim’ or ‘damaged’, even if this does not fit with their own experiences. However, it is also vital to note that some young people are clearly disturbed by pornographic content encountered online – although rather than being ‘exposed’ to it, they have often sought it out intentionally.

Disproportionate and unperceptive risk talk is often out of context. It usually does not differentiate between short-term and lasting experiences of perceived inconvenience, such as feelings of disgust, guilt, or being ashamed or depressed. It also remains blind not only towards young people’s ambivalent and complex attitudes to sex but also towards their positive sexual experiences. Concerning the general debate about young people and their use of sexually explicit media, disproportionate and imprecise risk talk is inaccurate that excludes the voices of adolescents by only referencing professionals working with youth, health and educational agencies and law enforcement as authorities of young people’s sexual cultures. It gives a misinformed understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

The fact that my research datasets do not foreground negative childhood experiences connected to pornography hardly gives reason to dismiss contemporary attempts at media policy or regulation. For, as Buckingham and Chronaki (2014) suggest, dismissing recent concerns about children and (online) pornography as merely another moral panic is misleading in the sense that these are responses ‘to social, cultural and technological change’ (ibid., 305). My datasets do, however, support the importance of learning more about adolescents’ experiences and views concerning pornography and sexuality in order to better ground these debates (also Barker 2014a, 143–144).

4.3 Challenging the notions of pornography’s “bad pedagogy”

Both popular and academic debates about pornography have examined it as potential forms of pedagogy and sexual education (see Albury 2014). In most instances, pornography has been considered a poor source of sexual information, a ‘bad’ educator for adolescents and a form of ‘bad education’ more generally (Flood 2009; Tydén & Rogala 2004). The forceful pedagogy of pornography is often seen to distort the fantasy worlds of children, their experiences and expectations towards sexuality and gender (cf. Chun 2006, 87; also Kendrick 1996) in damaging ways. This debate often dismisses young people’s ability to negotiate, question, challenge and resist sexually explicit representations. These debates also disregard the complexities of the interactions between representations and the relationships that young people are working through. It seems that concerns over the sexual lives of the young are more based on the premise of harm connected to the idea of the sexualisation of culture than on empirical evidence.

All the datasets I have analysed as part of my doctoral dissertation study show that the respondents do not treat pornographic representations as indisputable guides to sexual behaviour, undermining concerns that adolescents use pornography straightforwardly as a ‘sex manual’ (Rothman et al. 2015). As if resisting highly visible narratives that depict adolescents as incapable of distinguishing pornographic representations from ‘actual sex’ (see for example Paul 2005; Dines 2010), the respondents throughout my datasets underline the notion of sex being in many ways different from sexual practises seen in pornography. The analysed datasets point to an intriguing gap between highly visible notions of sexually corruptible and impressionable teenagers (see for example APA 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012) who are incontestably seduced by the images they are consuming (cf. Paasonen 2009, 218–219; Best & Bogle 2014) and respondents’ personal accounts in which mediated practices of bodily display are, for the most part, detached from their own embodied sexual experiences.

4.3.1. The diverse forms of learning connected to pornography

The memory-work project respondents, while acknowledging the compelling and educational qualities of pornography, depict their retrospective autobiographical ‘mini-mes’ as active sexual agents with competence to critically evaluate and interpret pornographic representations from an early age. Empirical studies of childhood sexual play point to the ubiquity of a range of activities among children, driven by the titillation of the forbidden, sexual pleasure and curious experimentation (Kontula 2009; Lamb 2001). Children learn through sexual play, random encounters

with sexual practices and voluntary exploration of explicit content (McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008). Adult reactions to such incidents form a normative pedagogy of their own.

The general presumption of what porn ‘teaches’ its underaged consumers differs significantly from the views articulated in the memory-work material. The contributors focus less on the content of pornography than the contexts and sensations it has involved, in contrast to the view that pornography teaches adolescents to ‘eroticise’ gender inequality and encourages risky sexual behaviour (e.g., Ybarra & Mitchell 2005; Flood 2007; 2009; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor 2007; Owens et al. 2012; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012; Hovarth et al. 2013). These have facilitated learning about bodies and sexual acts but, perhaps even more centrally, about moral values and social norms concerning sex and sexuality.

The memory-work material portrays how methods of parental control and adult reactions revolve around shame and discomfort. Lamb’s (2001, 4; 47) work on women’s memories of childhood sexual play notes the subtle and gradual ways in which norms and conventions concerning appropriate sexual demeanour are learned through adult reactions and cultural representations alike (also Kontula 2009, 81). A critical aspect of learning from pornography, therefore, involves things that are not proper, ways in which one is not supposed to behave, what one is not supposed to express an interest in, consume or enjoy. The number of contributions describing adverse adult reactions to their early experimentation with sexual materials is, in itself, telling of the centrality of normative governance in learning about sexuality and gender. Through this, adult definitions of sexual practices, identities and expressions considered as either appropriate or inappropriate knowledge for adolescents become tangible and, perhaps, also articulate (see also Albury 2014, 177–178).

In all the datasets, pornography has allowed adolescents to satisfy their sexual curiosity, to explore different practices and to negotiate normative expectations concerning sexuality and gender. The respondents in the memory-work project describe porn as being part of peer relationships driven by the titillation of the illicit and the amusing. They recall learning about moral values and social norms concerning proper and improper sexual behaviour, in addition to writing of pornography as a site of sexual learning.

4.3.2. Girls and the lessons of propriety, normalcy and heteronormativity

I also gained information on how the sexual agency of girls is featured in their accounts of porn use by focusing on accounts of sexual exploration and learning. The focus on the girls’ accounts is justified, given that the public debates about

sexualisation focus specifically on the harm that sexually explicit media do to girls (APA 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012). To account for these girls' perspectives is also to account for their desire to have pleasurable sexual experiences and also their active choices as consumers of sexually explicit media (see Nielsen, Paasonen & Spišák 2015).

First, rather than being exposed to pornography, my research datasets show that girls have actively sought out pornography in various ways and for reasons that range from satisfying one's curiosity to increasing one's sexual knowledge, skill, and confidence and facilitating masturbation. Second, instead of narrating their experiences in terms of trauma and damage, these girls reflect on the ideas – that is, the broader cultural notions – concerning what is considered 'normal', 'proper' or harmful behaviour for a teen girl (see also Barker 2014a; Boynton 2009, 115).

The girls reflected on their gendered cultural expectations and conceptualised the traditional notion of being a 'good girl'. Lamb (2001, 4) has argued that the term 'good', when associated with girls, has much to do with social norms and the certain gendered boundaries of acceptable behaviour. When connected to broader cultural assumptions, such normative notions are influencing how girls think about their position as sexual subjects. My research material shows that although girls acknowledge the pleasurable sexual stimulation that pornography may offer, they strive to restrict their personal porn use, as it clashes with the accepted cultural *script of being 'a good girl'*. According to the dataset, awareness of these cultural scripts causes more distress to some girls than the actual pornographic content they consume, given that they do not usually mention any of the content as being disturbing. Similar to Lamb's (2001) findings, the cultural image of the good girl and the rules of 'niceness' connected to that image are restricting and burdening girls as they grow up, producing guilt and shame for them.

Girls' highly complex and nuanced accounts on the topic exemplify the gendered parameters of porn use by pointing out the double standards and also the normative gender expectations. Some girls view themselves as 'filthy' and 'abnormal', which points to strong self-regulation within the highly limited, dualistic definition of a good/bad girl and the perceived negative consequences of socially veering towards the latter. These submissions pinpoint the control that is often exercised over girls regarding sexual matters (Lamb 2001, 1–9), including the recent debates on the sexualisation of girls (APA 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012). This indicates the predominance of the script of harm in connection with cultural understandings of female adolescent sexuality versus the more holistic approach that respects adolescents' positive rights for having sexual information, exploring sexual expression and the freedom to have the full range of sexual participation.

My research materials show that the cultural understandings regarding female sexuality are underpinned by normative notions of normalcy and gendered notions

of sexual desire that result in occasional anxiety connected to encounters with and uses of pornography. *The script for gendered double standards* concerning pornography, thus, emerges as a central concern of the girls. Reviewing the girls' accounts, one sees that they are familiar with typical cultural scripts, according to which sexual desire is higher and somehow more natural and acceptable among men. My material suggests that porn use and feeling 'horny' are framed as 'male' activities and, therefore, activities that girls are expected to hide away. The script for such gendered double standards is noticeable when analyzing and comparing girls' and boys' porn-related views (cf. Scarcelli 2015; Wilson- Kovacs 2009). The boys' contributions seem to suggest they take active pleasure in seeking pornography and see that activity as natural and taken for granted as part of their healthy sexual identities, whereas the girls' submissions offer highly ambivalent reflections on pornography as a problematic source of pleasure and new sexual information (articles III, IV).

Both gendered expectations concerning the sexual activities of adolescents and the narratives of sexualisation view girls as particularly vulnerable and, as such, in need of special protection. These concerns, together with the potential regulatory interventions connected to porn use, work to narrow the sexual agency of girls while disregarding boys' accounts of visiting sexual media. As such, these narratives and diagnoses of sexualisation need to be examined closely and critically in order to address the contextual specificities of young people's encounters with pornography and make sense of adolescent porn use that is indeed connected to the known gendered cultural assumptions and accepted cultural and social practices (Attwood 2005; Scarcelli 2015).

One of my aims was to move beyond a one-sided understanding of sexualisation as being intrinsically harmful, so I explored the opportunities for sexual expression and exploration that the visibility of sexual cultures and the increasing sources of sexual information provide girls today (see also Livingstone and Mason 2015). The research material, then, depicts sexually explicit imagery as a source of possible pleasure. The accounts of girls in my research material challenge the public discussions of pornography that tend to dismiss female sexual desire and any pleasure connected to its use. As if speaking back to the discourses that portrayed women solely as victims of pornography (see, e.g., Hald, Malamuth & Yuen 2010), rather than as porn consumers, the girls suggest that they are consuming and enjoying pornography on their own terms.

Pornography is often perceived as a 'pressure technology' for girls and seen to cause performance anxiety, low self-confidence, distress over body image and increasing pressure to have sex earlier than they would like to and in ways they necessarily would not want (Boynnton 2009, 122–125; Livingstone & Mason 2015, 23). The empirical evidence does not straightforwardly support this argument, which

several studies (e.g., Best & Bogle 2014, 123–131; Puusniekka, Kivimäki & Jokela 2012; THL 2014), including my work, demonstrate.

The girls' submissions describe ample pleasurable engagements with sexually explicit media. Some respondents' descriptions of porn consumption can be interpreted through *the script of a 'pleasure technology'* — of pornography functioning as a tool for their exploration of sexual fantasy and pleasure. It seems that some of them are interested in developing the skills for sexually pleasing themselves with the help of sexually explicit media, although the material does not allow for any generalisation concerning Finnish girls. This finding sharply contrasts with Boynton's (2009) findings, in which the questions submitted to problem pages by girls and women focused on how best to pleasure a (male) partner. Girls' active choices, as depicted in the research material, to consume sexually explicit media questioned the framing of adolescents' encounters with pornography and other online sexual practices in terms of being solely a damaging 'exposure' (Barker 2014a). Rather than feeling pressured by the range of practices routinely practised in pornography, these girls seem to be interested in developing their full range of auto-sexuality, sexual imagination and self-exploration. The respondents think that pornography may offer valuable sexuality information and support that can increase their self-knowledge in ways that formal sex education has been unable to achieve. Some respondents also reflected on porn's possible beneficial impact in becoming acquainted with one's sexual desires and as a pleasurable tool for exploring sexual fantasies. This suggests that the respondents think that pornographic representations can offer the possibility to become savvier about sex and different kind of bodies and to develop and improve understanding of self, sex and relationships (McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; McKee 2010; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018).

Ambivalences and complexities in interpreting pornographic images are nevertheless apparent. Mainly older respondents describe porn as beneficial material for solo sex and as possibly affording more fulfilling sexual experiences while simultaneously reiterating the dominant notion that porn consumption can harm relationships. Thus, sexual practises seen in pornography are certainly seen as affording specific kinds of information on anatomy, sexual techniques and positions, as well as on the possible ways of behaving during sex. At the same time, the respondents acknowledge the undesired impact that pornographic representations may have on some individuals and do not consider pornography as an unchallenged guide for sex.

The girls' accounts of pornography make very evident the active role of normative cultural conventions in depicting female adolescence, sexuality and desire. Driscoll (2002) has argued that girls can recognise themselves in connection with the idea of girlhood through culturally produced images, texts and representations of female adolescents. Through these representations, girls become

socially invested in the notion of girlhood, even when these representations do not bear any relation to the girls' embodied experiences of sexual desire (cf. Jackson & Scott 2007, 103–104). Hammarén and Johansson (2007, 38) argue: “[W]e cannot understand young people’s reactions to pornographic material outside the context of a specific society where certain normative views and controls on sexuality prevail”. My research materials point to a set of definitions about what is considered ‘appropriate’ for Finnish girls in sexual matters. The girls themselves widely acknowledge the normative notions that underpin them, but these normative notions can also be questioned, challenged and opened up to renegotiation and improvisation.

These girls’ accounts show that interrogations of normalcy occur not only as they relate to gendered expectations – such as the scripts of the good girl or gendered double standards – but also in connection with heteronormativity (cf. Warner 2000). Buckingham and Bragg (2003, 43) have argued that girls’ responses to sexual representations and sexually explicit media ‘conform...to a powerfully heterosexual “logic”’. Heteronormativity and the construction of heterosexual subjectivity among girls were strikingly present in these submissions as they related to pornography and sexual experiences. The girls in my research material worry about behaviours and pleasures connected to pornography that somehow go against the more socially accepted heteronormative logic.

Boynton’s (2009, 120) study of sex, advice and problem pages found that girls perceive themselves as being unnatural if their desires do not revolve around boys. My research material similarly elucidates that heteronormative expectations do emerge as a central focus of concern and reflection, while patterns of porn use that break from heteronormativity are articulated as sources of personal anxiety. Reiterations of the hegemonic views of heterosexual normalcy were striking in the research material. The visibility of non-heterosexual and non-binary gender identities has increased in the media, yet heteronormativity still prevails in most interpretations of proper versus less proper forms of sexual orientation and desire. As such, heteronormativity forcefully contributes to the production of sexual scripts that regulate and manage the sexuality of girls and leaves them but a narrow space to develop their sexual competencies and experience.

Based on these girls’ submissions, it can then be argued that in the research material, at least, the broader normative cultural assumptions concerning normalcy, gender expectations and heterosexuality are seen as more puzzling and troubling than any of the specific sexual acts or practices seen in most pornographic material. The girls, in general, do not address pornography itself or the acts that are seen in it as disturbing. Only one of the analysed submissions concentrated on a specific sexual act that the contributor experienced as being ‘disgusting’ and ‘confusing’.

The research material reveals that the notions of normalcy – those that are intimately connected with gendered sexual scripts and are cut through with heteronormative logic – operate as tools to think with. They suggest individual ways of interpreting perceptions of the self, sexual practices and behaviours (cf. Lamb 2001; Warner 2000). Such scripts and their broader cultural notions operate as the lessons of ‘appropriate’ gendered attitudes towards pornography and sexual practices; but as Jackson and Scott (2007, 109) argued, rather than determining the sexual experiences of girls, they function instead as resources through and against which these girls make sense of their own embodied sexuality.

4.4 The pervasive influence of “the intimacy effect”

Drawing on an online survey that was conducted as part of a media education awareness campaign for a Finnish online youth club, I explored Finnish girls’ conceptions of the difference between pornographic representations and ‘actual sex’. The survey material points to an intriguing gap between the highly visible notions of sexually corruptible and impressionable teenagers (APA 2007; Papadopoulos 2010; Skrzydlewska 2012) who are incontestably seduced by the images they are consuming (cf. Paasonen 2009: 218–219; Best & Bogle 2014) and girls’ personal accounts in which practices of bodily display are mostly detached from personal, embodied sexual behaviour. A result of the survey analysis is that the most significant detachment between pornographic representations and personal sexual encounters occurs in relation to the notion of intimacy.

The essential research concept applied in this part of the research process emerged from the dataset itself, because the notion of intimacy was regularly mentioned in the majority of open-ended responses of underaged participants. I understand ‘intimacy’ as a publicly mediated concept repeatedly defined by practices assumed to generate affective and binding qualities of a relationship (Berlant & Warner 1998; Jamieson 2012, 291). Jamieson (2012, 291–292) refers to Simmel, who defined intimacy as ‘voluntary, mutual and exclusive participation what each shows or gives *only to the other*.’ The notion of exclusiveness is at the heart of the notion of intimacy (Berlant 1998; Berlant & Warner 1998), as the survey responses widely reiterated.

I developed the concept of ‘the intimacy effect’ to describe how perceptions of intimacy emerge from and work in the dataset as an orientation that foregrounds specific modes of relationships and sexual encounters over others (cf. Kasulis 2002). ‘The intimacy effect’ is then descriptive of processes of negotiation vis-à-vis cultural imagery, gendered social assumptions, norms and expectations. The sexual narratives within the dataset are socially mediated, reflexively constructed and connected to cultural scenarios that are reworked in everyday sexual practices as

forms of ‘doing intimacy’. As such, ‘the intimacy effect’ is tightly bound to normative notions of gender, love, sex and relationships, and the ways of doing them (see Plummer 2003, 12–13).

I argue that the pervasive influence of the notion of romantic intimacy provides the ideal for ‘normal’ relationships and ‘good sex’ (Rubin 1984; Jamieson 1998; Petersen 2004). Proceeding from an understanding of pornography as being part of ‘business’ and ‘consumerism’ and, as such, ‘produced’, ‘fake’ and ‘exaggerated’, the underaged female survey respondents highlight elements that they see as fundamental differences between sexual practises in pornography and ‘actual sex’. Sexual practises seen in pornography become conceptualised as commercial, promiscuous and fake forms of sexuality. In contrast, the ideals of ‘actual sex’ are strongly associated with non-commercial and committed couple sex. When asked whether the survey respondents found differences between pornographic representations of sex and embodied sexual encounters, they firmly juxtaposed sex as something that happens between people who have tender feelings towards one another and with pornography as a product of the commercial media industry. This resulted in normative and stereotypical conceptions of both pornography and ‘actual sex’.

I interpret the notions of intimacy within the dataset as products of a mediated world-making project. The survey compellingly demonstrates how intimacy becomes publicly framed by emphasizing a particular form of closeness, committed couple sex and strong, positive emotional attachment. As such, intimacy becomes a normative framework deeply bound to the respondents’ conventional notions of love, relationships and sexuality (see for example Jamieson 1998, 106–135; Berlant 1998, 281–282; Petersen 2004, 91–100). Given the widespread concern over promiscuous youth devouring ubiquitous pornographic representations (see, for example, Best & Bogle 2014), it is fascinating that the survey respondents connect sex exclusively with intimate, long-term relationships. The dataset suggests that *the very idea of intimacy* plays a crucial role in defining ‘good’ relationships and sex in contrast to graphic representations of sex. The contributors reiterate normative views of sex as part of romantic and affectionate relationships and, as such, expose a considerable gap between pornography’s presumably forceful and ‘bad’ pedagogy (Flood 2009; Tydén & Rogala 2004; see also chapter 4.3) and youngsters’ personal accounts in which pornographic representations are mostly detached from notions of ‘actual sex’.

According to Berlant (1998, 282), ‘intimacy builds worlds’. Intimacy qualifies in the dataset as an essential element in shaping the understanding of relationships. As such, it becomes a normative framework for comprehending and organising views about sex and relationships. Looking at the particular impact on ‘the intimacy effect’ emerging from the survey, I argue, similarly to Berlant (1998) and Shumway

(2003), that intimacy, as a publicly shared narrative, shapes personal experiences and ideas of desired relationships. The discourse of intimacy, spread around sex and relationship education, self-help books about relationships, and popular media products, describes how relationships work. The conceptions of ‘real life’ sex feature pronounced elements of traditional intimacies (Plummer 2003, 9) as one dominant plot in the dataset. Romantic love and committed couple relationships also count as a ‘life’ (Berlant 1998, 286) among young people identifying as ‘queer’.

The dataset shows that dominant notions of intimacy reveal and reinforce gender-specific ‘emotional work’ (Duncombe & Marsden 1993), or intimate labour. The intimacy effect impacts the way the respondents invest in hegemonic ideas of what desired relationships are and how certain cultural norms materialise and operate in these girls’ everyday lives (Petersen, 2004; Driscoll, 2002; Jamieson, 1998; Plummer, 1995; 2003).

Tsaliki (2016, 125–128) shows that young people’s talk about pornography is fundamentally gender talk about pornography and its relation to intimacy. The intimacy effect is tightly bound with the role of gendered ideologies of love and intimacy in coupledom. The survey responses reveal that the reiteration of intimacy as a central principle to ‘actual sex’ creates a sense of detachment and distance toward pornography. Girls marked themselves as clearly separate from the images they reported to have recently encountered and consumed by reiterating notions of intimacy. At the same time, however, when asked whether they find some benefits or positive and/or negative outcomes to pornography use, they described pornography as a useful source of frank sexual information that can improve sexual functioning and reduce anxiety associated with sex (McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). Intriguingly, the respondents detached representations of sex seen in pornography from the concept of intimacy while nevertheless considering pornographic representations as useful tools to *do intimacies with*.

5. Discussion

Social norms are powerful influences on behaviour,
and they are classic excuses.
–Andrew Lansley

My research process was one of trial, error and making a new attempt. Having only a little experience researching young people's everyday lives, I often found myself navigating around to find the most ethical and youth-centred way to approach the research problem and questions I had set at the beginning of the research process. One of the central challenges I found myself stumbling upon quite often was how to produce an ethically sustainable research design when the topic itself is highly charged with massive protectionism, moral views, panics and populist knowledge. What I wanted to achieve was accessible research with a multi-sited account of diversified knowledge that would expand sensible perspectives of young people's experiences with pornographic representations. Also, I wanted to be careful not to conduct my data gathering with adult-leading language or implied moral views of the topic.

I realised at the end of my research project how intimidating it is to master a set of diverse research datasets and research approaches and to combine them. Saukko (2003, 7) argues that “[t]he success of any research project depends on a difficult balancing act between being both ambitious and doable.” At times this project felt too ambitious, so I would not suggest all research projects combine several approaches, especially not in the apprentice phase. However, the driving force of my work has been a firm belief that the issues raised by sexual media are essential. I believe that both academic and public debate, alongside legal and political decision-making, need to be grounded on sustainable and inclusive research, not just on ideological premises. I recognise that the sexual media are a subject on which people will always hold strong emotional, moral, ideological, political or religious opinions. The purpose of my work was not to call these opinions into question but to provide factual information about young Finns' experiences with, opinions of, and attitudes toward pornography. Achieving this meant I needed to work from a multi-sited framework (Saukko 2003, 25, 177, 192, 196) that shows that the phenomena of

adolescents accessing pornographic content do not stay constant, and the findings differ or are even contradictory when the researcher applies different epistemological perspectives and methodological choices.

Furthermore, I tried to work across and beyond the clearly dichotomous attitude towards pornography as either negative/positive, risk/opportunity, pleasure/pain by exploring ambivalence and complexity instead. It remains vital to apply and develop research methods for examining children's experiences of and their resilience to pornography outside the kind of moralistic and restriction-based frames that may more typically be deployed (Buckingham & Bragg 2004; Allen 2005; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; Bragg & Buckingham 2009; Chronaki 2013; Albury 2013; Scarcelli 2015; Tsaliki 2016; Martellozzo et al. 2017; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018).

Throughout this thesis, I have consciously been distancing my work from media effects research and its findings, because I feel this field is not context-sensitive enough to shed light on what young people do with pornography, how they experience pornographic representations of sex and how they navigate through the landscape of sexually explicit media. I do recognise that a particular need exists for groundwork that offers insights into how interpretations of pornographic representations intersect with, for example, young people's age, class, ethnicity, gender identification and sexual identification. It is also essential to find out how these interpretations operate within peer groups, across generations and within specific groups of people. It is essential, too, to analyse the contextual specificities of young people's encounters with pornography to make greater sense of their lived experiences. This is a topic I will address in future work.

5.1 Questions of generalisation and validity

Given the limited size of the datasets I analysed for this research, none of the samples are representative. As such, my results provide snapshots of subjectively experienced early encounters with pornography concerning the public debate about minors as consumers of porn. I have not aimed for representative or generalisable results, nor did I aspire to provide information on the "typical" or "average" young Finn (see Fink 2003, 68). My purpose is to provide depth and specific meaning rather than breadth and representation to the research questions I formulated at the beginning of my research project. My aim was to conduct research that is logical, well-documented and well-argued rather than seek generalisable results. My aim was to deliver research that is accessible and open to a range of interpretations (Dockett & Perry 2007, 50). In this way, the focus of my study is the comparability of research so that others can understand the results and the theoretical constructs as well as the research methodology underpinning my research.

The research datasets analysed for this study portray specific groups of young people and how the sexual lives of those particular groups are lived out. Since the majority of the data was collected from online advice and support services on sexual health, it is crucial to bear in mind that the questions that young people have sent in about pornography may represent more problem-oriented views than Finnish young people, in general, have concerning porn.

Despite a limited sample size and the specific limitations the material itself posed, all of the datasets include rich, small, insightful and historical vignettes into early porn encounters. As such, these materials shed light on young voices and opinions that should be recognised in the debates about young people and pornography (see also Rinkinen et al. 2012; Chronaki 2013; Scarcelli 2015; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). Taken seriously, these accounts help to both historicise current debates connected to pornography and childhood and to provide more nuanced accounts of the role that pornography plays in sexual learning.

I have used Saukko's (2003, 15–23) work to consider the validity of my work. Saukko talks about validities (plural) to draw criteria for proper research:

First, it [validities instead of validity] draws attention to the fact that the theories, methods and modes of writing that underpin our research open up different and always partial and political views on reality. Instead of considering this an outrage, scholarship suggesting multiple validities ask us to be more critically aware of what drives our research. Second, acknowledging that there is more than one way of making sense of social phenomena, asks one to come up with a more multidimensional, nuanced, and tentative way of understanding one's object of study. --- The notion of multiple validities does not mean that there are no rules for conducting research. It simply means that rather than one universal rule that applies everywhere there are different rules, and we need to be aware how they make us relate to reality differently. (ibid., 18–19.)

I believe I have successfully met the criteria of dialogic validity (Saukko 2003, 19–20), because I believe I have done justice to the perspectives of the young people's perceptions of pornography (*Truthfulness*). I do believe that young Finns can, in the main, agree with my work and the ways in which they are studied and represented. I also believe that I have been aware of the cultural baggage that mediates my and others' understandings of the object of this study (*Self-reflexivity*). I have been reflexive about the personal, social, and paradigmatic discourses that guide the ways in which the object of this study is perceived. Furthermore, I have been aware that I am not exploring a one lived reality but many. I have included the voices of major 'stakeholders', trying to be true and just not only to their diversity but also to the tensions and relations between them (*Polyvocality*). Saukko (ibid., 20) has argued

that “[t]he main criteria of validity of this approach then is how well the researcher fulfils the ethical imperative to be true to, and to respect, other people's lived worlds and realities.”

Saukko (*ibid.*, 20–22) also talks about deconstructive validity that “evaluates research in terms of how well it manages to unravel social tropes and discourses that, over time, have come to pass for a ‘truth’ about the world” and about contextual validity that “refer[s] to the capability of research to locate the phenomenon it is studying within the wider social, political, and even global, context.” I leave it to the readers of this work to judge whether my work exposes “the historicity, political investments, omissions and blind spots of social ‘truths’” and is “aware of its own historical, political and social investments, continuously reflecting back on its own commitments”.

5.2 Sexualisation revisited: Prospects for the future

Young people’s sexuality and their access to sexually explicit content have become visible to adults in a way that was not so in the recent past because of the Internet and mobile media devices. This has, among other things, generated panic around young people’s sexual practices and sexual cultures. However, Buckingham and Bragg (2004, 4) have reasoned that it is not so much that minors have suddenly become sexual because of the sexualised contemporary culture. Instead, adults are forced to recognise the fact that minors always have been sexual and that it is impossible to insulate them against things sexual. Therefore, panic about minors as audiences and consumers of pornography appears to reflect broader anxieties about the changing nature of understandings of childhood and sexuality (Egan & Hawkes 2010).

There is a particular need for qualitative research that offers insights into the personal experiences of pornography use among minors. Such research helps to critically revisit and evaluate diagnoses of sexualisation as they are deployed in academic, public and policy discourses (see chapters 4.2 and 4.3). My work that examines the patterns of personal porn use as canvassed in the research datasets is one step in this direction.

The questions and research perspective guiding my study are grounded in the recognition that we need to form a more informed and contextualised understanding of how young people develop their sexual identities and how this intersects with experiences of sexual media. My premise is that more information on young people’s preferences for sources, contexts and contents of sexual information and guidance will benefit research, education programmes and policy interventions. I have explored young Finns’ experiences and concerns connected to pornography, including particular views that the public debate often tends to silence. Some

researchers suggest that the more recent reports on youth and sexuality advance the voices of adults at the expense of recognizing young people's rights to sexual information, expression and participation (e.g., Bragg 2012; Mulholland 2013; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018).

Young people today do engage with a mass of sexual media content; thus, it is essential to dig deeper into those crucial contextual distinctions that young people address in the context of sexually explicit media, aiming to develop better policies that respect the rights of children and adolescents. My dissertation work contributes to research on sexuality and adolescents' uses of sexually explicit media, pornography in particular, in order to better understand the meanings that online sexual practices carry, and how young audiences perceive the online sexual activities with which they engage. More specifically, my work generates new knowledge about how Finnish preteens and teenagers make sense of pornographic content. Additionally, my work sheds light on the diverse and complex forms of learning connected to pornography by turning the focus from the persuasive power of numbers and the narrative of sexualisation's certain ill effects toward the personal accounts of adolescents' experiences with pornography. This, I argue, helps to trace connections between the personal and the societal, draws attention to the ties between social relations and the cultural forms that mediate how these relations are set in motion, and explores how certain cultural norms are forcefully influencing adolescents' everyday lives.

One important outcome of my study concerns the necessity of placing more analytical significance on advancing the understanding of different possible sexual and gender identities. This focus would help to achieve a more multifaceted and diverse view of adolescence vis-à-vis merely generalising about the discourses on sexualisation. Using the qualitative survey, I decided to collect data about the respondents' sexual identities via an open-end question (How would you describe your sexual identity?). The diversity and openness of the sexual identities articulated in the responses were stunning. The underaged respondents defined themselves through nine different categories (heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, asexual, polysexual, non-defined) instead of sticking with the options of hetero/homo/bi/other that are commonly used in surveys conducted among the young in Finland. A full exploration of the ramifications of the multiplicity of identity positions expressed in the dataset is beyond the scope of this thesis— and indeed requires further empirical inquiry – but some notes on the significance of this finding are in order.

On the one hand, the finding calls for more sensitive research methods to map out the research participants' sexual identities and contextualise their responses. On the other hand, the finding challenges the premise of debates on sexual orientation that typically lean on predefined, mutually exclusive categories, such as

heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual. It is not typically acknowledged that adolescents might experience sexual identities as complex, diverse and multifaceted. Young people's sexual identifications through nonbinary categories suggest their sophistication concerning sexuality and sexual identities requires further research (see Paasonen & Spišák 2018, also Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson 2018). Given this diversity, it was surprising that the respondents nevertheless outlined the notion of 'actual sex' in normative and stereotypical ways.

The material explored in this study reveals that young Finns actively negotiate with both the sexually explicit representations they encounter and the normative notions of the culture in which they live (similarly, see Sørensen & Knudsen 2007; Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson 2007; Rinkinen et al., 2012 and Anttila 2012. Also, ; Buckingham & Bragg 2004; McKee, Albury & Lumby 2008; Mulholland 2013; Tsaliki 2016; Attwood, Smith & Barker 2018). For those young people represented in my research datasets, pornographic content functions in a range of ways, namely as a site for satisfying curiosity, as an educational resource for the information it provides on anatomy, sex and sexual techniques, and as a pleasure technology that facilitates masturbation and sexual pleasure. Similar to the findings of Bragg and Buckingham (2009), these adolescents do not simply "pick up" supposedly negative messages from pornographic content. They are actively playing with and negotiating with various sexual scripts and reworking them in their everyday sexual practices. Young Finn's accounts also highlight the processes of normalisation as ones of negotiation in which the competing definitions of sexual identity, desire and orientation are constructed, questioned, resisted and eventually defined.

We need to focus on consent and adolescents' experiences in order to critically rethink the knowledge produced and disseminated around the youth. Concerns over the sexual practices of girls, in particular, do illustrate that the core of the debate is about much more than just sex. The continuing process of normalisation is essential in the management and regulation of young people's sexuality. The relationship between young people, the power and appeal of sexual representations, and the role of pornography in particular 'reside in an anxiety [that is] attached to the ideas of what is "normal"' (Mulholland 2013, 3). Indeed, a critical re-evaluation of the gendered strategies of language, discourse and social interaction and of notions of sexual media and its impact explored in this study in connection with broader cultural notions of normalcy and heteronormativity calls for developing a more informed understanding of contemporary youth's understanding of what sex is and also the role that media may play in developing the skills so elementary to sexual subjectivity. This, I argue, requires sensibility to youth-centred methods, along with attentiveness and intellectual imagination outside the privileged knowledge production.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Statement of the doctoral candidate's individual input in co-authored journal article to be included in an article-based dissertation

Statement of the doctoral candidate's individual input in co-authored journal article to be included in an article-based dissertation

Article: Spišák, Sanna and Susanna Paasonen (2017). Bad education? Childhood recollections of pornography, sexual exploration, learning and agency in Finland. *Childhood* 24 (1): 99–112. DOI: 10.1177/0907568216646436.

The undersigned jointly acknowledge Sanna Spišák as the first author of the co-authored article, published in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Childhood* (first online before print on 13 May, 2016). Spišák's individual input is as follows:

- indexing the REXI memory-work dataset (designed and collected by a research team led by Paasonen in 2012 collaboration with the Finnish Literature Society) consisting of 45 contributions, 853 pages of text
- conducting contextual literature review and further developing the contextual argument made in Paasonen et al. 2015 on the continuities in practices of pornography use and on sexual learning connected to pornography through international comparisons
- qualitative content analysis of memory-work material to identify ways of speaking back to discourses of sexualisation and pornification; contextualisation of these discourses through academic literature
- percentual breakdown of Spišák's total authorial responsibility: 60 percent

Inkoo & Helsinki, 7.6.2019



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