

## **‘Old dirty pops and young hot chicks’: Age differences in pornographic fantasies**

Susanna Paasonen

In a media culture saturated with depictions of young, or at least youngish, fit and able bodies, the parameters of sexual desirability appear to be very narrowly drawn. For its part, pornography has been perennially accused of its narrow and stereotypical cast of body types, despite both the factual heterogeneity of sub-categories and fringes that make up the genre, or the high popularity of the search terms such as “mature”, “stepmom”, MILF (“mother I’d like to fuck”) or GILF (“grandma I’d like to fuck”) connected to female performers. Expanding the scope of inquiry, this chapter sets out to investigate the ageing, old male body as an ambivalent pornographic fantasy figure through a survey made by the Finnish public service broadcasting company YLE in 2017 to chart women’s pornographic preferences, likes, and dislikes. In what follows, I focus on one survey question in particular, “Is there a thing that turns you on, even if it feels confusing, gross or weird? Tell more!” Out of some 1,000 responses to the question, 81 specifically mentioned age differences, the overwhelming majority of them addressing the simultaneous attractiveness and repulsiveness of ageing male bodies. Drawing on these responses, this chapter then inquires after older male bodies as sexual fantasy figures, asking what they speak of the dynamics of pornographic representation more generally.

### **Found data (notes on method)**

The survey was set up for collecting background material for a pornography-themed episode of the Finnish lifestyle program *Jenny+* foregrounding body positivity with a feminist bent. The show’s first season run parallel with *Vaakakapina* (“Scale Revolt”), a 2017 online self-acceptance and wellbeing initiative by the same editorial team that made extensive use of

social media: vibrant web presence with podcasts, blogs, and information resources was complemented with a Facebook page allowing for peer participation. Targeted at female respondents, the questionnaire on porn preferences could be accessed on Vaakakapina's website where it attracted 2,438 responses, the majority (1,334) being from people aged 20 to 35. The survey consisted of both open-ended and multiple-choice questions charting preferences in body hair, close-ups of genitalia, blowjobs, sex toys, facial cumshots, and much more in the overall spectrum of "hot or not" (on the scale from 1 to 5). The open-ended questions inquired after the respondent's views of women and men in porn, the kinds of characters they would like to see, the things they would want to change, and the kinds of scenes that they would prefer to see in porn – and, moving into inquiring after experiences of sexuality more broadly, the contributors' perceptions of their own desirability and sex life. The survey was playful yet serious in its aim to chart Finnish women's views on porn performers, preferred scenes, likes and dislikes. Importantly, the volume of these voluntary responses was relatively large (considering the overall national population of 5,5 million).

I literally landed on this trove of data when the show's producer contacted me for a research-based commentary and interview. When reading through the survey, my interest soon clustered on the question cited above (*"Is there a thing that turns you on, even if it feels confusing, gross or weird? Tell more!"*), which inquired about porn consumption in connection with disgust and shame – partly since these had long been my own themes of scholarly interest, partly since the question was posed in a manner few scholars would or could phrase (McKee, 2009), framing porn use in terms of disgust, and partly since the responses were both rich and bountiful. When the producer asked what I found surprising in the material, I identified the responses connected to the pornographic appeal of older men in particular. This is also my focus here.

In the course of my interaction with the editors and producers of *Jenny+*, I was granted research access to the survey. The data was collected fully anonymously and made available to me in formats that did not allow for connecting individual replies to the only background information collected, namely the respondents' ages. The survey participants submitted their replies to be used for journalistic purposes, and to be cited in this context: the material was also in six podcasts enacting the contributors' preferred porn scenarios, available on the YLE website since 2017. While there was no informed consent for later scholarly uses, the degree of publicness involved in any academic publishing of much modest scale than that which the respondents knowingly prepared their replies to enter. Considered in terms of research ethics, it is unlikely that the respondents could be harmed by the fully anonymous data being repurposed for scholarly ends. Furthermore, academic insight was also part of the journalistic production process that this data was used for: drawing on it for scholarly purposes simply means adding finer granularity to analysis, contributing to existing knowledge formation on women's uses and experiences of pornography, and citing the data in a different context when doing so.

The data comes with obvious limitations in terms of research design, from what themes and questions were raised and how to how the data was technically collected and stored. I received the responses as PDF, Microsoft Excel and Word files where it is hard to tell where a singular contribution begins or ends. It is not always clear as to what lines are from the same respondent and, indeed, how many responses there are to any singular question. This makes quantitative analysis impossible as other than the simple identifying of terms. For this article, I searched for terms connected to age: "old" ("vanh\*") and age ("ikä"). This resulted in 81 responses mentioning age differences in the context of sexual and pornographic fantasy. In addition, one response specified older men as a turn-off (as "slimy and disgusting", "pitiful, desperate old geezer").

While the survey design was beyond my influence or control, it also came with unsuspected benefits as journalists are able to pose the kinds of questions that scholars are trained to veer away from. This also results in replies that scholars most likely would not get. Consider, for example, the question central to this article (“*Is there a thing that turns you on, even if it feels confusing, gross or weird? Tell more!*”), which was instrumental in getting to the themes that the journalists wanted to address, and which directly lead the respondent on by by foregrounding the role of disgust, aversion, and shame (the file with the responses was titled “porn survey shame”, “pornokysely häpeä.doc”). While many respondents critically commented on, and rejected the association of pornographic and sexual fantasies with grossness, oddity, and shame, many more described the ambiguities they felt towards the imageries that aroused them.

*Jenny+* was voted the most popular Finnish lifestyle program in 2017. Its broad following lent the survey call particular visibility and public resonance as people are understandably, more willing to take time to respond to questionnaires set up by a show that they appreciate than those launched by academic institutions. The replies were often casual in their tone, as in confessional sentences decorated with emojis and, given the length of some responses, they had taken some time to compose. The data is, in short, rich inasmuch as it is scattered. It should also be noted that the feminist profile of *Jenny+* attracts an audience base well versed in issues of gender equality and social justice: the survey responses examine sexual tastes from a generally non-normative angle and often with considerable analytical skill. All the following translations from the material are mine and aim to communicate their original tone and style.

### **Fascination and contrast**

First of all, nine survey participants simply mentioned older men as turns-on, four others elaborating on their “unattractive” and “repugnant” qualities. For some, older men were fascinating and sexually attractive as such:

*Older man attract*

*Age difference. Older man. This has always been, and still remains a bizarre obsession. At the moment I have a sex relationship with a man who's almost 60 (we have a 10-year age difference) who's so hot that I can't keep his photo as my phone's wallpaper.*

Responses where ageing men were sexual fantasy objects in themselves – as preferred partners, non-normative objects of sexual desire and even possible sexual fetishes – were nevertheless few in comparison to the volume of accounts where titillation emerged from witnessing age differences in sexual scenes on-screen. Most responses merely mentioned “age differences” and the combinations of “old man and young woman” as fascinating yet possibly baffling pornographic preferences, without detailing what their appeal was or what affective dynamics they came wrapped in. Meanwhile, others elaborated on their preferred combinations of bodies and scenarios, highlighting the physical contrasts and relations of domination and control between the performers: *“Older men with younger women. Large differences in size (larger man and a small woman), being taken by force, domination.”*

Respondents routinely mapped drastic age differences onto a binary gender model and combined these with equally stark juxtapositions in body sizes and types, following the logic of dramatic contrast that clearly marked apart, and separated, the bodies displayed: *“anal sex,*

*much older man (40-65) and a younger woman (20-30). And differences in body types, e.g., muscular (man/woman) x fat (woman/man)*"; "*mismatch between the actors, older/rougher man with a younger/innocent woman*". Such juxtapositions are in line with how porn generically accentuates embodied differences and identity categories such as race, social class, nationality, gender and age so that the acts in which such boundaries are transgressed become more pronounced and elaborate. The play with compositions of hard and soft, large and small, dark and light, wrinkly, hairy and smooth cuts across all kinds of scenarios, holding allure and resulting in figures of sexual fantasy: "*Old and fat men with young girls*"; "*voyeurism, contrasts e.g. dark and blond or young girl and older man*". As porn tends to play out embodied differences in hyperbole, it is not surprising that the genre has regularly been identified as sexist, racist and ageist in the stereotypes and scenarios that it caters. Displays of embodied differences are regularly set in scenes of power play that draw their attraction from tenacious social hierarchies and power relations (Paasonen, 2010a). For half of the survey respondents, age differences mapped onto gender hierarchies in ways leaving older men firmly on top:

*Old men and young women together. Face-slapping. Breast sucking always works, enough for a film as such. A woman dominated, bound, imprisoned, forced, servicing a man. Bdsm*

*Old man dominates a young woman. Old pervy geezers with a young woman*

*Domination, young woman and an old uncle.*

Relations of control connected to age were described as titillating yet also something best kept to one's self for the sake of being potentially embarrassing or difficult to explain, possibly

even to one's self: *"I'm turned on by older men and authority. But the older man can't be old but older than myself. I'm also turned on by group sex and domination. I'm pretty open about sex but wouldn't perhaps outright admit what porn I watch."* Respondents repetitively associated age differences with the dynamics of domination and submission, yet 24 of them did not specify a preferred gender dynamic and three preferred women on top: *"For some reason, a large age difference between porn characters is sometimes attractive. A really old woman and a really young man, or vice versa. It's not disgusting but confusing. Double penetration is also a turn-on when watched, and the insertion of different objects into a vagina 'Teaching' and 'mentoring' is also a turn-on, so that one of the partners teaches or advises the other one on what to do."* Across age differences, the dominant partner could be male or female as the senior one in the position to teach: *"Teacher student, older man/woman and younger woman. 'Forbidden fruit'",* although older men remained in clear majority. As discussed below, such scenarios drew much of their attraction from taboos concerning intergenerational sex (combined with a taste for dominance and submission).

The excerpts cited here focus on age, yet many are taken from longer responses giving multiple examples of things that turned people on in porn, age differences being one variable among others. In some instances, this resulted in lengthy, disjointed listings of scenes, characters, motions, settings, and acts. Other listings outlined particular dynamics of interest connected to domination, manly masculinity, awkwardness, and vulnerability alike:

*Manly man smelling of testosterone, hairy and robust, with brisk moves and a strong will. In porn, an older man and a younger woman. Multiple cream pies and gangbang scene. Man watching his wife with another. Plumber, etc.*

*Just awkwardness. E.g., an old dude with the routine of experience caressing a young girl to climax, gruesomeness, ugly people, helpless people, perhaps a little pitiful but pretty people, a beautiful young man with a hand prosthesis and no woman. This is all strange but arousing...*

*Fisting, Japanese rape porn in public transport. Taking clothes off from another. Age differences.*

Older men were described as prop-like placeholders for dominance and authority, yet their desire and pleasure were also foregrounded – as in men using women for their own gratification to their guttural sounds conveying the enjoyment taken: “*A man older than myself 60-70 fucking a younger woman. Enforced sex. Bi-sex. Watching men masturbate. A man would look at me and masturbate. Men making sounds.*” In addition to contributing to the power dynamics of a scene, older men stood repeatedly for sexual seniority in the positive sense of experience, mastery, authority and knowledge. For some respondents, they equally stood for realness in ways that support the more general promise of hardcore video porn to authentically show, and to document, the sexual details that have taken place in front of the camera (e.g., Williams, 1989): “*Growling, animalism. Old people/oldsters. In these, the realness of the scenes*”; “*Older man, younger woman. Brisk, real action, no holding back or pretence*”.

Respondents nevertheless seldom elaborated as to why and how they saw older men as markers of realness, authenticity, or the lack of pretence. It can be that some older men perform in semi-amateur productions, or in ones with lower production values indicative of their not fully professional status. In this framework, pornographic displays may be identified as “labours of love” motivated by sexual pleasure rather than financial reward (Paasonen,



2010b). As non- or semiprofessional performers, older men stand out from the normative male bodies of commercial porn, which, in responses to another open-ended survey question, were described in negative terms as muscular, big, masculine, dominant, hairless, stiff, machine-like “fuck machines”. Such hegemonic porn bodies were, in fact, regularly described as “disgusting” for representing self-centred, sexist, and non-communicative masculinity. In this juxtaposition, older men then stood for something more real and relatable, less machine-like, and thereby more human (on porn bodies, see also Rooke and Figueroa 2010, 226; Tsaliki and Chronaki 2016, 178, 183). Additionally, respondents may consider older performers to be as if automatically attracted to younger partners, and for their scenes in question to mediate authentic sexual desire. This, again, entails an ageist norm positioning certain bodies as sexually desirable, and others much less so.

### **Disgusting!**

As the survey question inquired after preferences that were simultaneously arousing, confusing, and disgusting, responses came with an automatically negative framing. In addition, respondent specifically identified older men as dirty, lewd, ugly, fat, unattractive, slimy, and disgusting: “*The thought of old dirty pops and young hot chicks. :-O*”; “*Notably older and unattractive men*”; “*Old men. Like OLD. This confuses and disgusts*”. Here, ageing male bodies became sites of physical and symbolic, or moral, disgust. Scholars have associated sensations of disgust with embodiment of the excessive sort gesturing towards the materiality and mortality of human bodies (e.g., Kolnai, 2004, p. 2, 31–32; Miller, 1997, p. 19, 96–100). In addition to being attached to, and drawing boundaries around things or body parts that are considered materially filthy, such as rancid food evoking visceral physical responses of nausea, disgust equally involves the morally objectionable (Cohen, 2005, p. viii, xi; Tomkins, 2009, p. 413). Sexuality comprises a particular terrain of disgust,

from bodily fluids to the activities producing them, and to sexual preferences deemed “deviant” for being in conflict with moral (or moralistic) norms (Kelly, 2011, p. 31). A disgusting object may simply deviate from that which is socially appropriate, for as affect theorist Silvan S. Tomkins (2008, p. 416) suggests, “[d]epending upon what the society, the parent, peers, or the individual himself has come to regard as true, good, and beautiful, an endless variety of objects and behavior become capable of evoking disgust.”

Sensations of disgust are ones of undesired physical proximity where the offensive object comes too close for comfort, even as this proximity may well be exciting. In the survey responses, such proximities took place in relation to young female bodies “*Young woman and old/ugly man is a perennial favourite. And huge saggy balls*”. The bodies of older men in porn then became sites of nastiness as they entered into close contact with much younger bodies, breaking against cultural norms concerning intergenerational sex: “*Old, fat men fucking young girls. My own orgasm comes for sure if on the video you hear how the old man enjoys immensely and groans and makes sounds. Preferably also so that the girl doesn’t moan but perhaps resists, a little frightened by the new situation.*” It was both the bodies of older men (“huge saggy balls”) and their desires and actions towards younger women that were depicted as revolting yet titillating.

As I argue below, while not necessarily taboo as such, large age differences between sexual partners rub against normative assumptions concerning “good sex” (Rubin, 1989), namely sex that is deemed as being of the socially mandated and acceptable kind. Some respondents seemed to consider the bodies of older men as disgusting and nasty merely due to wrinkles, sagging skin, or body weight in a straightforward ageist manner. These unattractive bodies held considerable, albeit ambivalent appeal, as it is not uncommon for sexual desires to be oriented towards the disgusting or the shameful (Tomkins 1995, p. 401–402). Disgust can

well amplify sexual desire while the lack thereof can lead to lessened excitement, interest, and intensity. If a sense of shame haunts one's sexual explorations, then violations of the taboo involve a sense of power, and fantasies involving "the most flagrant indecencies or humiliations" may hold particular appeal (Tomkins, 2008, p. 183). In porn, that which disgusts then often also arouses, excites, and fascinates (see Paasonen, 2011). The figure of a disgusting old man encapsulates a broader dynamic where pornographic scenarios play with the forbidden, holding appeal for that reason. The intentionally "dirty, naughty, debasing and disgusting style or quality of porn" (Attwood, 2002, p. 96) affords particular kinds of affective resonance that can lend its products with magnetic, transgressive appeal. At the same time, disgust both links to and gives shape to boundaries and norms of acceptability, which, in the realm of sexual fantasy, are regularly tried and tested, stretched and exceeded. Fantasies similarly test and help to build hierarchies between different bodies.

In her analysis of Ron Jeremy's porn star image and subsequent semi-mainstream fame, Emily Shelton (2002, p. 199) argues that his popularity is rooted in flamboyant physical undesirability. Contrary to the body standards of contemporary mainstream porn where male performers are fit, muscular, groomed and shaved, Jeremy is "overweight, unkept, the antiaesthetic of the inferred pornographic fantasy, an atypical pornographic hyperbole that translates into none of the customary prototypes" (Shelton, 2002, p. 118). Shelton (2002, p. 132, 138) argues that the connection between disgust and desire explains much of Jeremy's cult status, defining him as an unattractive, "unthreatening everyman" for straight male viewers to comfortably identify with without the risk of homoerotic titillation. In other words, in categorizing Jeremy's body as unattractive, even disgusting, Shelton see him as both a less-than-physically-perfect straight proxy and a distancing device among his straight male fan base. Considered in the light of the survey material focusing on the preferences of female

porn consumers, the figure of an unattractive, older male body nevertheless entails more ambiguity and versatility in terms of sexual fantasies than this analysis allows for.

### **Taboo!**

Many respondents directly associated the attraction of age differences with the lure of taboo and the forbidden fruit, framing them as markers of extremity in porn even comparable to rape, necrophilia, and zoophilia:

*Haha, should you ask! I don't like excrement or hurting but many taboo topics are really arousing in the sense of fantasy. With taboos I mean e.g., large age difference, family relations, other special relations of power, enforcing without physical violence, grannies, dwarfs, animals, whatnot. :D The strange and the forbidden are a turn-on!*

*Rape fantasies, real brutal almost "animal" sex, blood, necrophilia, psychological manipulation, age difference, most common "taboos" (e.g. teacher-student, cheating, voyeurism/public spaces)... and other stuff that I don't want to mention*

Here, age differences became equated with sexual extremity indicative of "far out" fetish preferences falling firmly outside the parameters of social acceptability, to the point that some respondents did not feel comfortable anonymously communicating them all. It should, however, be noted that these women involved did not necessarily identify their sexual fantasies as disgusting as such. Rather, the responses gesture toward boundary work in the realm of sexuality where the presumed bad is a turn-on and where the socially acceptable

blends into the kinky, yet where fantasies are recurrently plied apart from the physical fabrics of everyday life: “*Older men (know what they want). Strong men (know what they want). Also, the IDEA of sex with an animal or a relative is arousing (although I really wouldn't do that)*”.

In “Thinking Sex”, originally published in 1984, Gayle Rubin (1989, p. 281) outlined a sexual hierarchy separating “good, normal, natural, blessed sexuality” at its heart from the opposite, namely “bad, abnormal, unnatural, damned sexuality”. Visualised as a circle with inner and outer spheres, Rubin’s hierarchy is centred on the “charmed circle” of good sex involving heterosexual, married, monogamous, procreative, non-commercial exchanges that are practiced in pairs, in a relationship with members of the same generation, in private and without the aid of pornography, props toys or other paraphernalia. Meanwhile, the outer rim of “bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be masturbatory or take place in orgies, may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may take place in ‘public’, or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles.” (Rubin, 1989, p. 281.) Within this model, which has been influential in feminist and queer studies tracking the value mechanisms through which certain sexual likes are marginalised and others embraced and celebrated (e.g., Warner, 2000, p. 1–5, Kulick, p. 2005, 208), inter-generational sex, like pornography, falls to the terrain of “bad sex”. Inter-generational porn can then be seen as “doubly bad” in breaking against multiple norms, becoming comparable to incest in its taboo qualities: “*Sex between relatives, sex between young and a considerably older person*”; “*Forbidden relations and excitement. E.g., cheating, young&old, stepdad etc.*”; “*Porn with a young (“teen”) and a clearly older person. Incest porn*”.

The division of “good” and “less good” sex is firmly social, normative, and prescriptive, and its dynamics give rise to a range of fantasies and titillations precisely due to the constant boundary work that it entails. For Tomkins, divisions within sexuality as “split into a white, pure surface and a black, murky one” is due to the social, religious and private symbolism attached to it. It then follows that sexuality “becomes a bipolar magnet attracting to itself the wide-eyed wonder, excitement and joy” on the one hand, and “the equally exciting fusion of curiosity, fear and shame”, on the other. (Tomkins, 2008, p. 252.) In the realm of sexual fantasies, these two dimensions, or affective registers, fuse together for, despite the seeming clarity of the binary divide, sexual fantasies easily veer towards the taboo and refuse to settle on a singular object.

Ultimately such boundary work, and the affective complexity that it involves, helps to outline human sexuality as a system of norms and boundaries that hold magnetic appeal by holding things apart in hierarchical arrangements. Here, the taboo is appealing for the virtue of being forbidden: following Georges Bataille (1986, p. 48), it “is always a temptation to knock down a barrier; the forbidden action takes on a significance it lacks before fear widens the gap between us and it and invests it with an aura of excitement”. The play with taboo involves transgression which, in the realm of porn, allows for overcoming social convention but also for exceeding the boundaries of self-control and routine presentations of the self through the intensities of bodily sensation: “*(Imaginary) domination and precisely so that the man is clearly older. Confusingly many things. I’m attracted by situations where the other partner feels physical sensations so strongly that they lose control over their self and their body. This includes both uninhibited orgasmic moaning or not even being able to stand up, also different situations connected to vomiting, defecation, urination and childbirth.*” Taboo, then, calls for breaching of boundaries, or at least for experimenting with them in the realm of sexual fantasies: in the course of this, the boundaries become redrawn, and possibly reinforced.

### **Porn taxonomies and boundary work**

Many survey respondents connected the attractions of age differences and the bodies of older men to long listings of highly specific preferences in pornographic scenes and sub-genres, as in “*Dog/animal licks something from skin or crotch. Teenage + 30+ sex together. Watching animals have sex. Mild domination. Young girl forces a boy or someone older to lick. Face-sitting. Anime: aliens, tentacles, furry, bara, yuri, yuki. Porn fan fiction. In anime and comics also (step)mom/aunt/cousin + a lonely teenage girl/boy. Blowjob among men and fucking/chaining a ‘tough guy’.*”

Such listings speak of extensive literacy and cultural capital concerning contemporary pornography of the kind that scholars have associated with young adults (cf. Albury 2014; Dawson, Gabhainn and MacNeela 2020). They are endemic of a context where the pornographic sub-genres seem to be forever diversifying and multiplying on online platforms. This is partly due the centrality of contextual metadata (such as tags, categories and content descriptions) in and for the searchability of audiovisual content on platforms where porn the distribution and consumption of porn is centralized. Users are able to search for highly specific terms and markers, many of which might not have been recognizable only two decades ago. The diversification of categories is further fuelled by the imperative of offering clearly recognizable novelties and specialities – from BDSM niches to animated 3D bodies, and beyond – with the aim of reaching new consumers and sparking the curiosity of regular visitors, as it is by the push to incorporate performers of different ages and body types. (See Paasonen 2011, 38–40, 69–70.) Within this framework, age differences feature as specialities and novelties among others.

While the combination of performers of different ages is hardly novel in either heterosexual or gay porn, the category of “old and young” has gained specific recognizability on video aggregator platforms catering to a mass porn audiences (rather than focusing on target groups with niche interests). At the time of this writing, a search for “old and young” produced some 181,000 hits on both Pornhub and xHamster, and 558,000 on Xvideos, variations of older women with younger women and men, older men with younger men and women, transgender performers, and group sex (a.k.a. gangbang) scenes being in ample supply. In the pairing of older men and younger women, video brands such as “Blue Pill Men” and “Oldje” feature a homosocial male ensembles enjoying advances in erectile dysfunction medication in order to engage in sex with women 30 to 50 years their junior. All this results in hyperbolic juxtapositions of age, body type and skin texture.

This line of production, or subgenre, may seem targeted at ageing heterosexual male audiences attracted to the spectacle of extended potency and the availability of much younger female partners, yet the survey complicates such assumptions by offering old men as objects of younger female fascination, aversion, disgust and arousal – often simultaneously so: *“I find a slimy slightly dumpy older man with a young woman disgusting but for some reason it’s quite a turn-on”*. I argue that the survey helps to complicate understandings of pornographic attraction as being based on similarity, proximity, and identification with the characters and acts depicted on the screen. According to such a line of thinking, a preference for certain kinds of pornographic sub-genres or sexual fantasies is indicative of a sexual preference, or identity that one may or may not be willing or able to act out (see Paasonen 2011, 181–182). This somewhat causal and narrow view is premised on a continuity, or at least contiguity, between sexual interests and desires from scenes watched on a screen to those acted out with partners. The survey responses, again, point to women frequently enjoying scenes premised



on distance and detachment. It would be an unwarranted stretch of imagination to argue, for example, that preferences for scenes with older men and teenage women involve identification with any of the characters as such. Rather, their attractions seem to lie in the overall dynamics of the scenes, their power differentials, displays of bodily differences, relations of control, and depictions of desire. Many respondents in fact identified scenes and acts that they would most definitely *not* want to act out themselves, or which differed drastically from their own self-understandings as ones that attracted them on the level of fantasy:

*As a straight woman I'm turned on by lesbians in porn, older men.*

*Old/young coupling. Does not fascinate me personally but on the screen yes.*

*Age difference stuff (young & old) although in real life I'm not turned on by very old men*

Such listed scenarios extended from fisting to extreme humiliation, rape, watersports, anal, lesbian and gay male sex. Respondents emphasized the differences, or indeed the gaps, between their pornographic turn-ons and the kinds of acts and partners they preferred in their sexual relationships. In some cases, this perceived gap in preferences expanded to values and politics underpinning one's very notion of the self:

*Unequal power relations, i.e. young-old, teacher-student, doctor-patient, etc.*

*Especially ones that would be morally dubious in real life.*

*Politically completely incorrect and repulsive setting of a young beautiful virgin girl and a lewd 50+ uncle-person that the girl wants to surrender to. Also, a religiously strict frame is arousing – sexual abstinence and saving it for the marital bed, also copious breeding. Really anything that’s against all my feminist values in real life.*

More than a mere gap, such distinctions between fantasy and real-life cast that which one finds dubious and opposes to on moral and/or political grounds as key pornographic titillations. Given the feminist bent of *Jenny+*, it was not surprising for survey participants to elaborate on disconnections between their personal politics and pornographic likes: this was a recurrent theme in responses addressing scenes of non-consent in particular. The survey question did not specify whether the arousing yet confusing, gross or disgusting preferences addressed were pornographic ones, or ones otherwise connected to one’s sexual likes, hence conflating the two. It then follows that some respondents focused on their sexual dreams and intentional daydreams, which they described as being more extreme, bizarre, or taboo than the pornography they consume: *“I have lots of sex dreams. In dreams I can be with a woman, with the old gramps next door and sometimes even with my sister. Such things feel disgusting when awake. In dreams they work and usually even get multiple orgasms during one dream. In porn I don’t like anything special, I’m pretty boring with that.”*

Notably many respondents juxtaposed their sexual fantasies and lived experiences, interests, attachments, and identifications (that is, “real life”). Scenes of incest and rape, for example, were marked out as ones which, experienced in real life, are purely the stuff of trauma while nevertheless holding strong appeal as fantasies. This also meant that their audiovisual depiction in porn could be experienced as too literal, ethically problematic, or otherwise “off” in its point of view: *“Slight domination is arousing, perhaps also acted non-consent. I often*

*dream of teenage girls (when hormones rage and desires are easily awoken) with older men in a higher position (teacher). But I don't like seeing that in porn, it's disgusting depicted through someone else's eyes."* Here, pornography is not positioned as a cultural template for extreme sexual fantasies inasmuch as a dissatisfactory rendition thereof. While some respondents described discrepancies between their sexual fantasies and real-life preferences as disconcerting, others highlighted differences between the two, positioning fantasies as sources of self-pleasure, as in this excerpt listing scenarios of non-consent, nonhuman partners, and unattractive sexual partners, some of these too extreme to really even fantasize about: *"Sex in public is factually so lewd that one wouldn't quite dare to fantasize about it... Also, animalistic characters are surprisingly hot (i.e. the bear in the fairy tale, Snow-white and Rose-red) and I'm embarrassed to admit to being turned on by e.g. manga where insects and rodents with large cocks fuck tiny fairy girls. Also, repulsive male characters (too old, so-called fat, stupid, too young) are a turn-on. Why? I often see bloody arousing dreams of fucking really horrible types."*

Gaps between sexual fantasies, porn use, and other sexual preferences are no novelty in scholarship on the topic. Existing studies have shown that women and men both straight and queer consume gay male pornography (Neville, 2018; Robards, 2018), and that people describe watching things in porn that they like or would want to do, those that they do not want or cannot do, as well as coming across things without much planning or premeditation involved, possibly in search of serendipitous thrills, or merely to alleviate boredom (e.g., McKee et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2015; Paasonen et al., 2015). It follows that no direct correlations should be presumed between a person's sense of sexual identity and her/his/their pornographic preferences. This certainly does not mean that sexual-pornographic fantasies would not matter, or that they would be somehow external to the self: rather, they are spaces for exploration, juxtaposition, play, and reflection that animate one's body through positions

of proximity and distance alike. Sexual fantasies can simply remain disconnected from practices involving other people, their allure owing precisely to their spectral nature.

### **Ambivalent disgust**

As a sexual and pornographic preference connected to disgust, older male bodies emerged in the survey as objects of desire, aversion, and titillation; as figures of sexual seniority and dominance; and as guarantees of representational authenticity and realness. For some respondents, they added to the overall hyperbolic aesthetics of porn where embodied differences are highlighted, exaggerated, and juxtaposed; for others, these bodies were extreme in themselves as deviations from generic male porn embodiment. In yet other responses, older bodies were simply marked out as disgusting without further explanation in ways indicative of firmly ageist norms of attractiveness and acceptability. Across the responses, older male bodies in porn were addressed as objects, rather than associated with the personal attributes of any particular performer, role, or character. As objects, these representational bodies then held instrumental value in aiding sexual arousal and masturbatory pleasure.

All this points to the multi-faceted nature of sexual fantasies, actions, preferences, and interests that comprise one's sense of sexual self, as it self emerges in encounters in the flesh, through screens, and in combinations thereof. The survey responses indicate the tendency of sexual and pornographic fantasies to amalgamate: even while clear distinctions are drawn between what one is (desires and does) and what else turns one on (as in dreams and fantasies), the pornographic cannot easily be plied apart from the broader realm of turn-ons and taboos contributing to sexual desires, pleasures, and attachments. Within these, age is merely one axis of difference through which bodies are brought together in hierarchical

arrangements, juxtaposed, and enjoyed. From the position of the respondents, the majority of them women in their 20 and 30s, older men – in frequent combination with female teen bodies – stood for familiar otherness encapsulating social relations of power, forms of gendered agency, and norms of physical desirability, yet in ways exceeding any singular dynamic or hierarchy. Disgust, the affect inquired after in the survey question, carved out spaces for uneasy enjoyment taken in a hyperbolic theatre of difference and control which, while positioned as belonging to the realm of fantasy, drew its force from social hierarchies and the breeching of norms concerning sexual acceptability and normalcy. Within this realm, the very bad can be very good – or at least very hot.

## References

- Albury, K. (2014) 'Porn and sex education, porn as sex education,' *Porn Studies 1* ,(1–2), 172–81.
- Attwood, F. (2002) 'Reading porn: The paradigmatic shift in pornography research', *Sexualities 5*(1), pp. 91–105.
- Bataille, G. (1986) *Erotism: Death & sensuality*. M. Dalwood (trans.). San Francisco: City Lights.
- Cohen, W.A. (2005) 'Introduction: Locating filth', in W.A. Cohen and R. Johnson (ed.), *Filth: Dirt, disgust, and modern life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii–xxxviii.
- Dawson, K. Gabhainn, S. N. and MacNeela, P. (2020) 'Toward a model of porn literacy: Core concepts, rationales, and approaches, *The Journal of Sex Research 57* (1), 1–15.
- Kelly, D. (2011) *Yuck! The nature and moral significance of disgust*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kolnai, A. (2004) *On disgust*. B. Smith and C. Korsmeyer (ed. and transl.). Chicago: Open Court.

- Kulick, D. (2005) 'Four hundred thousand Swedish perverts', *GLQ: A journal of lesbian and gay studies* 1(2), pp. 205–235.
- McKee, A., Albury, K. and Lumby, C. (2008) *The porn report*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- McKee, A. (2009). Social scientists don't say 'Titwank'. *Sexualities*, 12(5), 629-646.
- Miller, W.I. (1997) *The anatomy of disgust*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Neville, L. (2018) *Girls who like boys who like boys: Women and gay male pornography and erotica*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paasonen, S. (2010a) 'Repetition and hyperbole: The gendered choreographies of heteroporn', in K. Boyle (ed.), *Everyday pornography*. London: Routledge, pp. 63–76.
- Paasonen, S. (2010b) 'Labors of love: Netporn, Web 2.0, and the meanings of amateurism', *New media and society* 12(8), pp. 1297–1312.
- Paasonen, S. (2011) *Carnal resonance: Affect and online pornography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Paasonen, S., Kyrölä, K., Nikunen, K. and Saarenmaa, L. (2015) "'We hid porn magazines in the woods": Memory-work and pornography consumption in Finland', *Sexualities* 18(4), pp. 394–412.
- Robards, B. (2018) "'Totally straight": Contested sexual identities on social media site Reddit', *Sexualities* 21(1–2), pp. 49–67.
- Rooke, A. and Moreno Figueroa, M. G. (2010) 'Beyond "key parties" and "wife swapping": The visual culture of online swinging', in F. Attwood (ed.), *Porn.com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 217–235.
- Rubin, G. 1989. 'Thinking sex', In C. S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and danger: Exploring female sexuality*. London: Pandora, pp. 267–319.
- Shelton, E. (2002) 'A star is porn: Corpulence, comedy, and the homosocial cult of adult film star Ron Jeremy', *Camera Obscura* 17(3), pp. 115–146.

Smith, C., Attwood, A. and Barker, M. (2015) 'Figuring the porn audience', in L. Comella and S. Tarrant (ed.) *New views on pornography: Sexuality, politics and the law*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, pp. 267–285.

Tomkins, S. S. (1995) *Exploring affect: The selected writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*. E. V. Demos (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tomkins, S. S. (2008) *Affect imaginary consciousness: The complete edition*. New York: Springer.

Tsaliki, L. and Chronaki, D. (2016) 'Producing the porn self: an introspection of the mainstream Greek porn industry', *Porn Studies* 3(2): 175-186.

Warner, M. (2000) *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Williams, L. (1989) *Hard core: Power, pleasure, and the 'frenzy of the visible'*. Berkeley: University of California Press.