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'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

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ABSTRACT

Debate about pornography and minors has mainly centred on questions of control, regulation and media policy; the urge to protect children from dangers of sexually explicit content being the primary motivator of these conversations. Instead of discussing the use of pornography by minors in the light of relevant research findings, public discourse on these issues is more usually shaped by views of sexual cultures as inherently dangerous to minors, and young people as vulnerable, easily harmed, and endangered by the media. This paper builds on data consisting of 4212 questions about sexuality that were sent by young people in Finland to experts on sexual health. Only 64 (1.5%) of these contributions explicitly focused on pornography. The small number of porn-related submissions suggests that for young people there are other more important concerns in the field of sexuality than pornography, on which adult guidance is sought. This paper argues that young people's perceptions of pornography are more diverse than is typically assumed in public debate. Young people challenge risk talk by constantly referring to the vagueness of the alleged harm that characterises the discourse of danger that can be found in much public discussion. According to the findings of this study, blurry notions of harm bother young people more than the actual pornographic content they encounter.

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In Finland, as elsewhere in Western countries, public debate about the dangers of pornography and the sexual practices of adolescents has taken on new urgency due to wider Internet access and the development of smart phones. Over the past decade, there have been reports that Finnish young people are being harmed, traumatised and sexualised by the media. The consumption of pornography by minors has, for example, been associated with visual harassment and visual violence in terms of the harmful effects it is seen to engender (Martsola and Mäkelä-Rönholm 2006; Näre 2006; Niemi 2011).

Notions of risk and harm are often present in discussions about young people as consumers of pornography; risk being an issue of potential danger while harm signifies something that is experienced as damaging and unwanted (cf. Livingstone et al. 2011, 14–15). Press

coverage of the issue focuses public attention repeatedly on the risks. A quick glance at Finnish online news items about minors and pornography exemplifies the discourse used when debating the subject. According to these items, 'Finnish children are the risk users of the Internet' (Helsingin Sanomat 2013), they 'see pornography on their way to school' (Turun Sanomat 2013), they 'stare at Internet porn' (Hirvonen 2013) and become 'distressed' (Pelkonen 2013) and are 'shocked' (Kouvola Sanomat 2013) by it. What seems to worry the experts (i.e. educators, psychologists, health care professionals and so on) working with children most is that pornography will 'distort children's perception of sex' (Uusi Suomi 2012), 'encourage them to participate in risky sexual behaviour and cause lifelong inhibitions and problems of self-consciousness' (Rytkönen 2013). In addition, the news items describe 'a whole generation of porn-addicted boys growing in Finland' (Kammonen 2013), while children in elementary school are pondering 'whether to play catch or watch porn during breaks' (Merikallio 2014). Overall, the news items examined briefly above portray Finnish 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' (Uusi Suomi 2013) and 'firmer legislation for the Internet and social media' (Linnanmäki 2013).

The core of this debate is not new since the media has often been portrayed as a threat to those considered most vulnerable or impressionable (see, e.g. Postman [1982] 1994 on television and Douglas 1980 on romance). The presence of pornographic imagery in the media has, now and again, generated public concern specifically as regards their supposed ill effects on young audiences (Dines, Jensen, and Russo 1998; Paul 2005; Aucoin 2006; American Psychological Association 2007; Dines 2010; Papadopoulos 2010). Adolescents and their sexuality are subject to an intensive scrutiny that situates them in need of adults' protective intervention.

Interestingly, while media debate is mostly characterised in terms of pornography's potential harmful impact particularly on people under 18, it is still the case that empirical research on adolescents and pornography is relatively rare (Helsper 2005). For obvious ethical reasons, understanding of how minors themselves experience pornography is exceptionally poor. As Attwood and Smith (2011, 236) note: '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'.

Despite the clamour of public debate about minors and porn consumption, very little is known about the experiences and understandings of Finnish adolescents in relation to pornography (for notable exceptions, see Anttila 2012; Rinkinen et al. 2012). This paper builds on data consisting of 4212 questions about sexuality, sex and sexual health that were sent by Finnish adolescents to experts in sexual health between 2013 and 2014. These questions were submitted to four different online services targeted at teenagers and young people in their 20s that are well known and frequently visited by adolescents. Three of these services are maintained by non-governmental non-profit organisations working in the fields of family, youth and health¹ and one by a commercial actor in journalism.² The services in question offer inclusive and comprehensive health and sexuality information and 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. In addition, these services encourage young people to contact health care professionals anonymously if they have questions related to (sexual) health. Each

of these services operates moderated question and answer forums where young people's questions are published anonymously and answered by a trained sexual health counsellor.

Of the 4212 questions gathered through these services, it was a great surprise to discover that only 64 (merely 1, 5%) were explicitly related to pornography. The small number of submissions related to pornography indicate that for young people, there are other more important concerns in the field of sex and sexuality than pornography, for which they seek an adults' guidance. Indeed, physical changes in the body during puberty and what is considered 'normal' development in a physical and sexual context are the most frequently asked questions. Other topics of interest are sexual orientation, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and relationships (cf. Rinkinen 2012). Given the significantly low number of porn-related questions sent to the services, the public risk talk referred to above seems disproportionate.

Young people's questions about pornography generally took the form of elaborate discussion openers, which engaged with several, partly overlapping themes. Following a thematic analysis of these porn-related questions, it was possible to identify two themes that appeared throughout the data and which are the focus of this paper: (1) challenging risk talk and its notions of risk and harm associated with porn consumption by minors (55%), and (2) negotiation with the law and other set of rules governing sexuality (23%). Since the data were collected from online advice and support services on sexual health, it is important to bear in mind that the questions young people have sent in about pornography may represent more problem-oriented views than Finnish young people in general have with regard to porn. The data also do not support generalisation about young people and pornography in Finland, but rather provide snapshots of subjectively experienced early encounters with pornography in relation to public debate about minors as consumers of porn.

Contextual and ethical considerations

By way of context, some 89% of Finnish 12-year-olds use the Internet on a weekly basis via computers, smart phones or tablets (Suoninen 2013). The numbers are slightly higher among older age groups. Among the population aged 16–24 years, 99% use the Internet on a weekly basis and 89% are online several times a day (OSF 2014a). Globally favoured social media platforms (i.e. WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and Ask.fm) are frequently used by Finnish young people. In addition to this, young people spend time online using local video on-demand services, listening to music, gaming and talking with friends while also forming new acquaintances (Noppiari 2014).

According to OSF (2014b), 74% of the population aged 16–24 years report having used the Internet to access health information. Finnish young people aged 14 and older report engaging with sex information online as well. In addition to seeking out information targeted specifically at young people, they explore sexually explicit materials as well (THL 2014). In a sense, therefore, online resources function as extensions of the public sexual health care services offered to minors, informal modes of sexual education and sites to satisfy curiosity. As such, they may increase confidence in relation to sexual practices and sexual experiences, as well as facilitate masturbation (see also Attwood 2005; Bale 2011).

With regards to the ethics of the study, I personally contacted and met the representatives of Sexpo, the Family Federation of Finland, e-Talo and *Demi* magazine in order to obtain ethical clearance from each of the services to use the submissions sent in by young people

as data for my research. One of my aims was to create an open and fruitful partnership with the organisations in question, in order to make sure that the results of the study could be utilised, for example, in the development of new sex education materials and sexuality health services.

The data obtained from the services were fully anonymised. I did not have access to any personal information through which it might have been possible to identify the person who had sent a particular question. Furthermore, young people cannot be identified from the use of the citations in this paper e.g. via online searches due to lack of personal information and translation. The questions were originally submitted to be published online. Because of this and the lack of personal contact information, informed consent to participate in the study was not directly obtained. However, the use of the data in this paper has been approved by the organisations in question and by the University of Turku ethics board.

Besides anonymisation, the data were otherwise 'raw' and no other modifications (e.g. grammar corrections, edits or deletions) were made. Although something is always lost in translation, I have tried to respect the tone and nuances of each submission when translating the citations used in this paper. Since some of the services in question do not ask young people to provide any personal information when submitting questions to experts, several citations in this article do not contain background information of the questioner such as age and gender identification.

Findings

Challenging notions of risk and harm

Parents, as well as some professionals working with youth, health and educational agencies and law enforcement, have expressed concern based on the perceived increase in young people's engagement with pornography and sexual cultures online. Coming into contact with pornography is commonplace, one reason being that pornographic content is now more prominently available, not only in the minority media, but also in mainstream culture (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007; Attwood 2009). A recent Finnish School Health Promotion (SHP) study³ found that among 14–16-year-olds, 74% of boys and 22% of girls had watched pornography online (THL 2014).⁴ The EU Kids Online project found that 37% of Finnish children between the ages of 11 and 16 have seen sexually explicit material both online and offline; these figures being higher than average within the European Union (33%) (Kupiainen 2013). Ultimately, however, quantitative studies 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. It is still the case as Mulholland (2013, 9) argues that research on pornography and young people remains quantitative on the whole and focuses primarily on issues of exposure (for exceptions, see Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson, and Månsson 2007; Rinkinen et al. 2012; Mulholland 2013).

It is clear from the thematic analysis of data in this study that young people are not unaware of notions of risk and harm associated with early pornography consumption. In 55% ($n = 35$) 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. However, young people frequently describe the vagueness of the risk talk and alleged harm, as the citations below demonstrate:

I would like to know that is it normal to watch porn with my mates from time to time? Or do me and my mates have some sort of a problem? (Boy, 13)

Could porn cause physical damage to teenagers? And why are porn videos forbidden for minors? (Boy, 16)

How does porn negatively affect a young person? Or does it leave some sort of traces without one noticing them?

Hi! I'm a 13-year-old boy and I masturbate while watching porn online. So is this ok or is my behavior abnormal? And does masturbation have an effect to physical development? (Boy, 13)

Everywhere they say that it's harmful but they don't say how, so I'm asking about it here.

Young people seek to challenge such risk talk by constantly referring to the vagueness of the alleged harm that characterises the dominant discourse of danger in public discussion. The data demonstrates that young people insist on more detailed and case-sensitive comprehension of effects of porn consumption that are considered as harmful. Based on findings from this study, blurry notions of harm baffle young people more than the actual pornographic content they encounter. In other words, very few of the young people who contact sexual health experts experience porn itself as harmful. Rather, it is the risk talk that is experienced as unsettling. Such risk talk and notions of harm operate as lessons of '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.

I have again watched porn videos and I love to watch them. But after a while I feel ashamed.

Disproportionate and unperceptive risk talk that does not differentiate between short-term and lasting experiences of perceived inconvenience, such as feelings of disgust, guilt, being ashamed or depressed, remains blind both towards young people's ambivalent attitudes to sex and also their positive sexual experiences. It also 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.

In her work, Mulholland (2013, 67) has addressed 'the privileged expert voice', a small pool of professionals mainly from the child protection movement, who establish themselves as advocates of children and young people who stress the connection between pornification and harm (cf. Egan and Hawkes 2010). While there is a growing demand for participatory actions by young people in societal decision-making in Finland, young people's voice and experiences in sexual matters are largely effaced. The potential carried by young people's sexual agency, and the ways in which they negotiate the ever-shifting boundaries of sexuality and gender, tends to be bypassed unless these experiences fit within the narrative of 'harmed by porn'.

However, it is also important 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. Of the total of 4212 questions analysed, 64 submissions were strictly about pornography, and only 4 of these (less than 0.5%) explicitly described porn or acts seen in porn as disturbing and as having caused unwanted effects.

In sixth grade [i.e. at age 12], I saw animal porn for the first time in one movie about teen sex. I thought it was disgusting. I have an extremely vivid imagination. Once I was masturbating and this scene from the movie came to my mind. I didn't get off on the fact that there was an animal but from the fact that the situation itself was sexual. Similar occasions started to occur more and more ... I have cried myself to sleep every night, had nightmares etc. I told my parents about

it but they really didn't understand, but I have been talking about this. I'm still feeling anxious. Have I screwed up my whole life? What should I do? I hope you can answer quickly and thanks in advance! This is causing so much anxiety, guilt and self-loathing. (Girl, 13)

Hi! I'm a 13-year-old girl and I regret so terribly that I have watched porn. It turns me on and I like to watch it when I masturbate. Sometimes I get a feeling that I must relax and have an orgasm if I feel bad, and by watching porn this is achieved swiftly. Anyhow, I want to stop watching porn. I feel myself so filthy and abnormal and I think I'm ruining my future by doing so. I think I'm not anyhow traumatised by porn although I'm thinking about those things quite often. But what if my sexuality is already completely twisted? What if I can't have sex like a normal person? I would like to talk about so many things but I don't want to tell anyone because I feel myself so horrible person because of this. I'm so 'good' that none of my family members could ever think I have watched porn. I cry often because of this. And my question was that how can I stop watching porn and do I have to tell about this to somebody I know? (Girl, 13)

Hi! I'm a 16-years-old gay guy. I'm watching porn from time to time, but recently I've been watching it every second day. I fear that I am getting addicted to it and that my impression of sex is getting twisted or something. I feel so guilty and I have a bad conscience after watching it. I'm afraid that my personality is changing and that my way of thinking is getting harmful for myself. I'm aware that the things I see on porn sites are not true and some of the stuff is making me feel disgusted, but I'm scared, nevertheless. I promise myself every time that I won't watch porn ever again but then I slip again and again. I should stop watching it, since I'm not completely satisfied with watching those images, but it's so hard. (Boy, 16)

The citations above demonstrate how the risk talk materialises in young people's thoughts. Feelings of 'filthiness' and 'abnormality', 'twisted impressions of sex', 'changes in personality', and 'harmful ways of thinking' are all familiar and widely circulated concepts in risk talk with regards to pornography consumption. Without denying the feelings of the young people themselves, one might ask to what extent has the narrative of 'harmed by porn' been adopted from public risk talk. It is important to note, however, that the young people cited above adopt a highly analytic and intellectual attitude towards pornography when evaluating the relationship between representation and reality. They have also had skills and resources to seek help for their problems in relation to porn consumption they feel has got out of hand.

When addressing risks and harm in relation to pornography consumption, it is important to bear in mind that risks do not automatically materialise themselves as harm, as shown in EU Kids Online study (Livingstone et al. 2013, 2), which found that among Finnish children who had seen sexual images online, 20% of them reported they were bothered or upset by this experience. 9–10-year-olds were less likely to have seen such images but more likely to have been bothered or upset by them. (Kupiainen 2013) What we do not know from this study is the intensity of the feelings of being bothered or upset by the experience of seeing sexual images online. As Sonia Livingstone (2003, 157) explains:

Link between risks, incidents and actual harm is genuinely tenuous: not all risks taken result in worrying incidents, not all worrying incidents result in actual or lasting harm. – Hence, while remaining critical of the ways in which questions of harm are framed in public and policy discourses, this issue must be reframed so as to remain firmly on the research agenda.

Moreover, young people's own accounts of pornography challenge unbalanced and one-sided risk talk by referring to diverse scenarios that are experienced as unsettling by minors themselves in relation to porn consumption:

Hi, I'm a 12-year-old girl and I have been wondering a couple of things. Does vaginal sex hurt as I have gotten this kind of impression from porn? – And when I was caught masturbating by my mother, she called me a perv. (Girl, 12)

I know this is off topic, but how can I clear the site history from porn sites? It so wouldn't be fun if my dad found out where I have visited.

I'm a boy, 14-years old, and I found porn on my mum's phone. What should I do???? (Boy, 14)

And then there's another thing I wanted to ask and what concerns me a great deal. When I had been in a relationship with my boyfriend a couple of months I told him I don't like porn at all and he swore he hadn't been watching it for few months. I left it to it. When the half-a-year anniversary came I found out that all that time he had been watching porn because of those women. I really don't feel myself as pretty and sexy with him, compared to those perfect women in porn. Every image or tv programme that shows some female nudity feels offensive to me. I think that he watches other women all the time although in reality he doesn't do that and otherwise he is so cute < 3. (Girl, 14)

As the citations above demonstrate, context definitely matters as porn may be experienced as 'disturbing' when it infiltrates into a young person's life in an unwanted manner, for example, through personal relationships.

From pornography to pornographies

In addition to being interested in the impacts of pornography, young people report experiences with a wide variety of pornography. They also make sense of different generic and representational conventions, as the following citations demonstrate:

What is ruled in as porn? Is, for example, stripping porn? (Boy, 14)

What does soft-core porn mean and is it harmful?

Why do I seem to get off on porn with real people in it more than when watching some *anime/hentai* porn? Another question is that why doesn't *anime/hentai* porn feel as 'bad' as porn with real people? (Girl, 15)

There's one thing I wonder. I have thought that I like girls, but then I went on the Internet and saw Japanese comic gay porn (*yaoi*) and I suddenly I got a hard-on. Why?! (Boy, 13)

Pornography itself remains an elusive concept (Amoroso and Brown 1973; Kohut 2014). There is a lack of clarity whether the term 'pornography' should entail only representations with explicit depictions of sexual acts (e.g. Hald and Malamuth 2008), should include any nudity and simulated sexual behaviour (e.g. Zillmann 2000) or should any materials that have a capacity to result in sexual arousal (Malamuth and Huppin 2005). Public debate on young people and pornography does not usually differentiate between different kinds of pornographies, different sets of sexual imageries and varieties of generic convention. The inconsistency in conceptualisations of pornography is striking. What counts as pornography changes over time and varies among specific groups of people. According to the data, young people seem aware of different pornographic subgenres, representational conventions and aesthetics. Consequently, it is important to examine the kinds of pornographies minors consume and the feelings and experiences they link to encounters with different representational conventions.

The data demonstrate that young people understand that pornographic material has been classified as inappropriate for minors. In Finland, pornographic texts 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. Contemporary media and sex

education underline age limits in tandem with other laws and regulations governing sexuality, and young people engage with these sets of rules in their questions about pornography:

I read that the age limit of porn magazines is 15 in Finland. I turned fifteen 17 days ago and I was wondering if this is true. I'm not sure if I'm going to buy but I'm just asking. (Boy, 15)

Why are porn magazines sold to minors (15-year olds) because it's to the same degree porn as the videos? (Girl, 16)

If one is 15, can one watch porn pictures from the web because one can buy and read porn magazines in that age?

It seems that the different age limits for materials considered pornographic are confusing to young people. Unlike the Act on Audiovisual Programmes, young people do not seem to draw distinctions between textual, visual or audiovisual pornographic material. For them, porn is porn, independent of the media format. The criteria and grounds behind age limit classifications could usefully be clarified for young people. The criteria, for example, could function as a tool for generating discussion in classroom concerning the grounds for different age limits with regards to sexual content.

Young people reflect on the age limits of pornography also in relation to other regulations and restrictions concerning sexuality, such as the age of consent, which is 16 in Finland. They are also concerned whether their consumption of sexual content online is breaking the criminal code:

Hi! I wanna ask why is not allowed to watch porn when one is over 16 when you can have sex with anybody you want (except with teachers or coaches). And is it then so that if one is recording oneself having sex when 16, one can watch that video when one is 18? (Girl, 16) Is it illegal to engage in (video) sex chats where one is also giving a tip? Help! Does one dare to do anything online anymore? Where should one draw the line?

In the above accounts, young people endeavour to negotiate with different laws and regulations concerning sexuality. They also try to make sense of these different sets of rules, weighing them up critically, seeking grounds for them, arguing against them and resisting them by intentionally going against the regulations. Thus, young people's lived often ambiguous and contradictory experiences and thoughts about sexual content, and the laws and regulations concerning sexuality and sexual content in the media, function as a rich resource for contemporary sex education, both in school and at home. In the context of formal sex education, experiences of pornographic content provide possibilities for discussion, and the classroom can offer a forum for debate. This is not to say that pornographic representations per se should be used as a tool in media and sex education but that young people's understandings of porn can be a rich resource for creating new material and improving existing educational materials to better respond to young people's needs when navigating sexual content online.

Conclusion

Because of the Internet, young people's sexuality and their access to sexual content have become visible to adults in a way that was not so in the recent past. This has, among other things, generated panic around young people's sexual practices and sexual cultures. Kendrick (1996) identifies 'the young person' as the most persistent rhetorical and tactical tool to legitimise the focus on harm in order to protect those who are considered damaged by exposure to sexual material. Panic about minors as audiences and consumers of pornography appears

to reflect broader anxieties about the changing nature of childhood and sexuality. As argued by Egan and Hawkes (2010) and also by Vänskä (2011), the connection between childhood and conception of sexual dormancy is a historical construction that portrays children as 'asexual' and 'innocent' until they reach a developmentally appropriate age of sexual maturity. However, as Buckingham and Bragg (2004, 4) reason, it is not so much that minors have suddenly become sexual because of the sexualised contemporary culture. Rather, adults are forced to recognise the fact that minors always have been sexual and that it is impossible to insulate them against things sexual.

As the data from this study illustrates, it would seem appropriate for young people to be offered a basic understanding of the research to date on the impact of pornography on minors instead of providing them with disproportionate speculation and blurry notions of harm. As Tsaliki (2011) points out, the evidence to date is inconclusive and research tends not to find conclusive evidence of harm in relation to young people's encounters with pornography. Moreover, as Buckingham and Bragg (2004, 10) argue, 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 information; and it tends to oversimplify complex questions to do with the meanings and pleasures people derive from the media.

As several studies (Flood 2007; Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor 2007; Brown and L'Engle 2009; Livingstone et al. 2011) indicate, contemporary youth are well acquainted with pornography. Young people live in a world where pornography and a commercial market organised around sexuality hold sway (Johansson and Hammarén 2007, 58). Thus, concern with respect to the media's role as a powerful sexual educator is not completely unjustified. The crucial question, as Mulholland (2013) argues, at the core of the debate on pornography and youth is what happens to sexuality when things deemed obscene and illicit are so effortlessly and abundantly accessible. What is often forgotten, though, is that young people are active and critical agents in relation to media (see Buckingham and Bragg 2004).

Broadly speaking, the data demonstrate that young people understand that sexually explicit images they are consuming may potentially hold harmful consequences. They are aware of media regulation in relation to pornography such as audiovisual classification, but reserve the right to make their own judgement as 'competent' consumers (see also Staksrud and Livingstone 2009). They also challenge risk talk by addressing blurry notions of harm that characterise the discourse of danger in public discussion. According to the data from studies such as this, risk talk puzzles young people more than the actual pornographic content they have encountered. In addition, things that baffle young people in porn are significantly more diverse than those highlighted in public risk talk.

As this paper argues, young people's perceptions of pornography are more complex and nuanced than public debates typically assume. Research on young people and pornography would benefit from a more context-sensitive approach, in which the risks and potential harm are more carefully examined. There is a particular need for groundwork that offers insights into how interpretations of sexually explicit media and pornography intersect with, for example, young people's age, class, ethnicity, gender identification, and sexual identification, and how these interpretations operate within peer groups, across generations and

within specific groups of people. It is important too to analyse the contextual specificities of young people's encounters with pornography in order to make greater sense of their lived experiences. Such contextualisation will also help in the analysis of existing data on minors and pornography. The trends and relationships found in quantitative research to date help in identifying general trends but are less helpful in tackling individual choices and experiences connected to porn consumption.

This paper has aimed at opening a fruitful new perspectives on discussion connected to porn consumption among minors – a topic often impregnated with a discourse of danger and notions of risk and harm. It has offered insights into how young people negotiate pornography and the public debate about minors as the audiences and consumers of porn. Acknowledging young people's own accounts of their sexual experiences is important in creating a cultural space in which to explore the sexual agency of adolescents. It is justified to prevent small children from being exposed to pornography. However, older children, who already understand what sex is and who receive sex education, need diversity-embracing, safe environments in which to discuss sex, sexuality and pornography. This will provide them with a sound foundation when experimenting with media and sexual practices online, in order to develop their own sexuality as a rich and rewarding part of life.

Notes

1. Sexpo organisation's website for young people <http://www.sexpo.fi/nuorille/>, the Family Federation of Finland's website for young people <http://www.vaestoliitto.fi/nuoret/> and E-talo website for girls and boys <http://www.e-talo.fi/>.
2. *Demi* magazine's 'Ask The Expert' website for young people <http://www.demi.fi/apua>.
3. The SHP study is carried out nationwide every second year. It monitors the health and well-being of Finnish 14–20-year-olds. The study reaches 80% of the age group in comprehensive schools and 70% in upper secondary schools. Data are gathered by means of an anonymous and voluntary online questionnaire.
4. In 2013, the respondents of the SHP study were for the first time also asked about their sexual behaviour online. According to the study, 14% of pupils in comprehensive schools^a had used a webcam for filming or viewing intimate body parts or masturbation. 3% of pupils had posted intimate photos of themselves online for others to see, and 3% of pupils had posted intimate photos of someone else online for others to see (THL 2014).

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