

Porn literacy as a tool for healthy sexual socialization

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Abstract

This thesis explores the complex intersection of porn literacy and sexual education, particularly focusing on discussing the debates around pornography's influence on sexual socialization of adolescents in Anglophone and Nordic countries, and is grounded in academic disciplines of sociology, media, gender and sexuality studies. The concept of porn literacy and its implementation into educational frameworks through various programs, frameworks and curriculums is analyzed. Particularly the various approaches to education about pornography suggested by sexuality scholars Rothman (2020), and Crabbe and Flood (2021) and feminist activists Dines (2016) and Lust (2024). Despite the differences of these programs such as the views of pornography from a public health perspective, the extent of inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the framework, implementation, and curriculum length their similarity lies within being based on media literacy principles and defining porn literacy as the ability to critically analyze pornography. The goal of this thesis is to explore the influences of pornography education particularly on sexual skills, knowledge, values and attitude acquisition of adolescents. With the conclusion that educational programs which aim to equip adolescents with the ability to understand and critique mediated representations of sexuality in pornography contribute to acquiring the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for sexual relationships and experiences to be positive, respectful, and free of coercion.

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Introduction

Most pornography is accessed through the Internet (Peter and Valkenburg 2011). Data from several international studies (Goldsmith 2017, Tsaliki 2011, Weber, Quiring and Daschmann 2012) shows that more than 90% of young individuals aged 9 to 24 years have engaged with online pornography in some form (Goldstein 2020). However, precise statistics vary on age, location, gender and whether exposure was intentional or accidental (Goldstein 2020). Given the acceleration of accessibility to online mainstream pornography the discussions concerning education about pornography are increasing in frequency and importance, in political, academic and public spheres (Albury 2014).

The feminist research focused on debates around sexuality are diverse and complex, encompassing various perspectives and standpoints regarding pornography and many other topics (Castillo and Pueyo 2023). The feminist insights on the topic of pornography can be viewed on a spectrum where on one side are scholars, who advocate for a *sex-positive* approach to understanding pornography (Heredia 2020). On the other side anti-pornography scholars who often advocate for the abolishment of pornography because of no-harm principle (Heredia 2020). The prior are people who generally understand pornography as an instrument which has ‘empowering capacity’ for sexual liberation which is a key goal of the sex-positive feminist movement (Heredia 2020). The latter are people who generally understand pornography as the visual representation of patriarchal values and violence against women which inherently and solely oppresses, degrades and exploits women (Heredia 2020, MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1988).

Conservative understandings of pornography reject pornography altogether because it is viewed as a moral issue which disturbs the notions of ‘good sex’ which is marital, heterosexual and procreative (Heredia 2020, Goldstein 2020, Rubin 1984). Additionally, discussions about pornography are also approached within the theoretical framework of intersectional feministic thought which discusses the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality within pornography. Pornography is a heavily debated topic in the feminist movement since the mid-1980s and the discussions remain ongoing (Heredia 2020) I will mainly be exploring *sex-positive* and *anti-pornography feminist* philosophies in relation to pornography.

These perspectives offer various understandings of sexuality and gender and influence the debate around sex education and the potential implementation of porn literacy programs within educational frameworks. This thesis will be exploring academic literature from United States, Australia, Ireland, United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden. I have chosen these countries because most peer-reviewed research on porn literacy originates from these regions and pornography education is becoming increasingly relevant in these cultural contexts, as mainstream pornography is widespread and easily accessible due to the rapid increase in internet access across almost all age groups (Adarsh and Sahoo 2023). I acknowledge that not exploring literature from broader cultural contexts is a limitation to my thesis.

Anti-pornography feminist activists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon which have operated under *Women Against Pornography (WAP)*, hold a position that pornography reinforces patriarchal gender dynamics and discrimination against women, and

therefore, “pornography is a central practice in the subordination of women: in the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women” (MacKinnon and Dworkin 1988 p. 25).

Consequently, they advocate for the abolition or strict regulation of pornography, viewing it as inherently exploitative suggests their response to pornography’s impact on adolescents to be situated on the restriction of pornography rather than education about it because they advocate for its abolition:

“We have to stop the trafficking and the profits in order to stop the whole system of abuse and exploitation called pornography”. (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1988 p.90).

On the other hand, sex-positive feminist movement under the umbrella of *Feminist AntiCensorship Taskforce (FACT)* with feminists whose view is explored in this thesis are Emily Rothman, Kate Dawson, and Alanna Goldstein which have less traditional position on young people’s engagements with pornography and do not see it as solely negative. Indeed, they claim engaging with pornography in an educational context has positive aspects (Goldstein 2020). For example, pornography can be used for pleasure, entertainment and for some individuals can serve as a source of information about sexuality and sexual identities (Litsou 2021 pg. 236). This side of the discussion promotes a comprehensive sexual education and argues that the implementation of education about pornography that involves teaching the principles of porn literacy is crucial (Crabbe and Flood 2021). Some argue for a more nuanced way of teaching porn literacy that goes “beyond dismissing porn as ‘bad representation’” in order to learn about the varied experiences and consumption of pornography by adolescents (Byron 2021 pg. 797). Academics such as Rothman (2019),

Crabbe and Flood (2021) and others have developed frameworks and curricula designed to facilitate discussions about pornography and its effects within educational settings (Rothman 2019, Crabbe and Flood, 2021). Their arguments emphasize the importance of destigmatizing pornography consumption and eliminating related stereotypes, advocating for educational programs that foster critical thinking about pornography's impact on sexuality and gender.

There is an absence of an agreed upon definition of pornography as various academic disciplines conceptualize the nature of pornography in varied ways (McKee 2020). For example, on the anti-pornography side of the argument,

“Pornography is the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words.” (MacKinnon 1989 pg. 197).

This can be interpreted as an anti-pornographic conceptualization of pornography as it is based on the argument that it is a medium that perpetuates violence against women (MacKinnon 1989). On the other hand, a more recent definition:

“Pornography (or SEM) is seen as any kind of material intended to create or enhance sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient and at the same time containing explicit exposure and/or descriptions of genitals and sexual acts” (Hald & Malmuth 2008, pg. 616)

which can be seen as a broader interpretation of pornography. For this paper I choose to further understand pornography based on the second definition because it is a more recent definition which is often being used by researchers in the field however, I acknowledge that this situates my argument within the sphere of a less anti-pornographic and conservative

philosophies because it does not view pornography as inherently exploitative or as a moral issue.

This thesis will explore the relationship between the concepts of porn literacy and sexual socialization. I discuss the diverse debates surrounding the topic of education about pornography in Anglophone and Nordic countries and analyze several proposed porn literacy programs. These include Rothman's curricula, *"The Truth About Pornography"* (2019), Crabbe's and Flood's *"School-Based Education to Address Pornography's Influence on Young People"* (2021), online porn literacy educational resources by Dine's *"Culture Reframed"* (2024) and Lust *"The Porn Conversation"* (2024). Exploring whether porn literacy can be an effective tool in contributing to achieving healthy sexuality. The analysis is based on a literature review of these selected programs and other research in this field. I view pornography as an important topic of discussion because it is an ever-present medium that impacts various people in various ways, and it is becoming even more important to have the skills to acquire critical thinking skills about any medium in this digital age. As a result, I hypothesize that porn literacy programs which aim to teach critical thinking skills can contribute to healthy sexual socialization of adolescents. Although the programs differ on specific dimensions, such view of pornography from a public health perspective, the extent of inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the framework, implementation, and curriculum length, they all aim to equip adolescents with critical thinking skills and, therefore, I argue that the porn literacy programs explored in this thesis can contribute to the healthy sexual socialization of adolescents.

2. Sexual Socialization and Porn literacy

Graham B Spanier has argued that sexual socialization is based on the sociological and psychological concept of socialization which is described as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes and norms related to one's social experiences (Spanier 1977). He described five key components of sexual socialization, which he also referred to as sexualization, in his paper "Sexual Socialization: A Conceptual Review." The five major emphases are: the development of sex object preference, development of gender roles, development of gender identity, acquiring sexual skills, knowledge, values, and development of sexual attitudes (Spanier 1977). These are not mutually exclusive and collectively determine our sexual self-concept, values, attitudes, and behavior (Spanier 1977). This paper will focus on exploring the concepts of sexual skills, knowledge, values and attitude acquisition for adolescents as part of the sexual education discipline.

The social sexualization of adolescents is influenced by socio-psychological and cultural factors (Spanier 1977). Adolescence is a crucial point as individuals undergo sexual adjustment and behaviors due to pressures from society and are exposed to various conflicting information about sexuality (Spanier 1977). Exposure to mainstream pornography which depicts sexual intercourse in ways that may not align with sex in real life as result, it is an important aspect of acquisition of sexual knowledge, values, and development of sexual attitudes as they increase their understanding of sexuality; however, they may experience confusion and misunderstanding due to various sources of information that may contradict one another (Spanier 1977). Adolescents are less influenced by the values of their parents, and more by their peers, and the mass media (Shtarkshall, Santelli, and Hirsch 2007). Due to

adolescence being a pivotal point in individuals' sexual socialization developmental process, this demographic was chosen for this thesis. Given that sexual socialization is influenced by mass media, which this paper argues pornography falls under, I will explore this concept in relation to the possible effect of porn literacy on the acquisition of skills and attitudes about sexuality as part of sexual socialization.

I will use The World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of sexual health to explore how healthy sexual socialization could be described. The WHO defines sexual health as:

“a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be reached and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (WHO, 2006a).

The concepts of sexual health, socialization, and development are interconnected. McKee's framework of healthy sexual development highlights 15 domains, including anatomy and physiology, reproductive health, gender identity, sexual orientation, and the importance of consent and boundaries, are often used to evaluate sexual development (McKee et al. 2010)

The framework highlights the need “develop skills in accessing, understanding, critiquing, and creating mediated representations of sexuality in verbal, visual, and performance media” as part of healthy sexual development (McKee 2010, pg. 18). Therefore, I will be using

McKee's framework of healthy sexual development for understating the concept of 'healthy' in sexual socialization.

These are important links for this paper as they help to understand whether porn literacy has the potential to be a tool for healthy sexual socialization. In order to evaluate if sexual socialization has been healthy concerning sexual skills and attitude acquisition, we must look at whether porn literacy helps in developing skills necessary for understanding mainstream pornography's representations of sexuality and promotes healthy sexual development and health. As a result, I will base what is meant by healthy sexual socialization on Spanier's (1977) five major emphasis of sexualization, WHO's (2006) definition of sexual health and McKee's (2010) framework of sexual development. Therefore, I argue that healthy sexual socialization involves the ability to understand and critique mediated representations of sexuality in pornography. It also requires acquiring the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for sexual relationships and experiences to be positive, respectful, and free of coercion (McKee 2010, Spanier 1977, WHO 2006). Hence, the research question for this thesis is whether porn literacy can be an effective tool in contributing to achieving healthy sexuality.

Scholars describe the link between pornography and sexual socialization. Given that many adolescents report the use of pornography, it is evident that it influences the sexual socialization of the individual (Dawson 2020). The paper states: "it is clear that engagement with pornography is now a critical influence on the sexual socialization of youth" (Dawson 2020, pg. 2). As a result of this, the paper highlights the importance of porn literacy incorporation into education. Arguing that to successfully provide young people with the

knowledge and skills necessary to critically assess media messages, educational initiatives should start before they begin to incorporate the sexual scripts they've learned from pornography into their own relationships (Dawson 2020). Equipping individuals with critical thinking about the portrayal of sexual relationships and values in mainstream pornography might prevent them from incorporating into their sexual socialization. Therefore, porn literacy could be a tool for healthy sexual socialization.

Porn literacy is founded on the concept of media literacy (Dawson 2020, p. 2). The term “media literacy” has more than four hundred definitional elements, suggesting its complex meaning that its diversity must be recognized, and scholars should present the meaning they are using in their publications (Potter 2022). This paper will use Aufderheide and Firestone's 1993 definition of media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate media. Additionally, the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy (1992) defines media literacy education as requiring active inquiry and critical thinking about the media messages we receive (Aufderheide 1993, Potter 2022). As porn literacy is becoming a more frequent topic in both popular and academic discussions concerning media literacy, the question of how to define porn literacy arises.

This paper will use the definition provided by one of the critical scholars in porn literacy education, Emily F. Rothman, described in her chapter on “Pornography Literacy” in the book *Pornography and Public Health*, published in 2021, because later her research into media literacy curriculum on pornography for adolescents will be explored. Rothman defines porn literacy based on media literacy as being the ability to evaluate how media messages shape society thus porn literacy critically involves.

“Teaching people to think critically about the messages about behavior that they receive from pornography and building their capacity to choose whether to internalize what is being imparted” (Rothman 2021).

Porn literacy aims to be a tool that equips individuals with critical thinking skills that enhances their understanding of the effects of sexually explicit material (SEM) on their attitudes and views (Goldstein 2020). Educators advocate for a nuanced approach that recognizes all the potential effects of pornography, the negative, neutral, and positive dimensions of pornography (Dawson 2020). This critical and inclusive perspective is essential in this digital age in which adolescents are exposed to SEM, which can shape their understanding of sexuality. Rothman (2019) highlight that the aim of porn literacy education is not to regulate behavior but rather to provide tools for critical analysis, allowing individuals to make informed choices that align with their values (Rothman 2019).

Some researchers highlight the necessity of removing stigma associated with pornography as central for porn literacy to be effective (Planting-Bergloo 2024). Arguing to address often unrealistic representations of sexuality in pornography the discussions must be nonjudgmental and open in order to effectively promote healthy sexual socialization (Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2017). This is because such discussions can emphasize a more informed and balanced perspective among adolescents as it promotes an open space which is free of shame (Vandenbosch and van Oosten 2017, pg. 1029).

There is an acceleration of international discussion about pornography and education, especially in Anglophone countries like the United Kingdom and Australia, regarding the inclusion of porn literacy into school curricula (Haste 2013). In this some educators and scholars advocate for a porn literacy to be implemented as part of school curricula.

Scholars such as Byron (2021) describe the approach to porn literacy as enabling young people to critically "read" pornography, identifying and questioning the unrealistic portrayals of sex it often promotes (Byron 2021). This aligns with the broader goals of media literacy, which aim to not limit media consumption but enhance media fluency and empower adolescents to engage with media in a more informed and reflective manner (Boyd and Dobrow 2011). Therefore, porn literacy could be a potential tool for healthy sexual socialization. Its implementation into education may be a beneficial and progressive step towards empowering adolescents to navigate the complex and controversial representations of sexuality in pornography.

However, as porn literacy is debatably a new concept, especially in the context of education, it is vital to highlight the lack of universal understanding of what porn literacy means and what are the most effective ways in which it can be implemented into education.

Accordingly, in the upcoming chapters, the implementation of porn literacy into education and its potential impacts on sexual socialization will be explored.

3. Pornography Education, Education about Pornography

Whether sexual education should be taught in a school-based setting is a widely debated and complex topic; however, many countries have implemented sexual education as a part of their school curriculum (Aggleton and Crewe 2005) some of which include some sort of conversations about pornography while others have it as a mandatory part of the curriculum (Planting-Bergloo 2024) Countries within Anglophone and Nordic context which I will discuss involve: United Kingdom, Australia, United States, Ireland, Canada and Sweden. I have chosen the above-mentioned countries because most of the peer-reviewed research on porn literacy currently originates from these regions. Additionally, the field of pornography education is becoming increasingly relevant in these cultural contexts, as mainstream pornography is widespread and accessible due to the accelerated internet access across almost all age groups (Adarsh and Sahoo, 2023). This leads to both academic and popular discussions about whether pornography should be integrated into sexual education programs and, if so, how. In this chapter, I will explore the discussions around education about pornography, particularly the concept of porn literacy in sexual educational programs in various contexts of implementation.

Educating about pornography is particularly important for adolescents, as they are often exposed to it and are especially vulnerable to its effects arguing that increased exposure is partly due to the peak development of sexuality during adolescence and the lack of formal sexual education (Adarsh and Sahoo, 2023). Some argue that adolescents are often viewed as lacking critical thinking skills, and consequently, pornography is likely to shape their

behavior and acquisition of sexual knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (McKee 2009, Peter and Valkenburg 2016). This suggests that pornography can impact adolescent's sexual socialization as sexual knowledge, beliefs and attitudes are one of its five key emphases (Spanier 1977). As a result, one of the proposed ways to make adolescents less vulnerable to the effects of pornography is to educate them about it and provide them with porn literacy tools (Rothman 2020, Goldstein 2020, Dawson 2020, Byron 2021). While others seek to limit the exposure and access to pornography through regulatory approaches often of legislative or technological measures (Crabbe and Flood 2021 pg.11). I will only focus on exploring the educational approaches.

Most of pornography research focuses on mainstream pornography which often depicts sex as aggressive, violent and degrading mostly towards females while males are being depicted as dominant and in power (Bridges 2023). Research found that exposure to violent pornography is associated with an increase in likelihood of later sexual violence among American adolescents (Ybarra and Thompson 2018). This can be further explored by the 3A Model (Acquisition, Activation and Application) developed by Wright (2011) by which he argues voluntary exposure to pornography can lead to acquisition of behavior presented in pornography that is being consumed which then becomes activated in social contexts and applied to social settings such as sexual encounter (Wright 2011).

However, some research argues pornography's impacts are mediated by certain factors such as the characteristics of the context of exposure and of the viewer (Flood 2010, G.M. Hald 2014). As a result, the evidence of what is precisely the impact and the extend of pornography is varied, and there is no universal consensus on what pornography teaches, but it is widely

argued that media literacy skills would benefit adolescents to think critically about pornography (Albury, 2014, Rothman 2020). As a result, the content of education about pornography has often been developed based on media literacy principles perpetuating critical analysis in reference to pornographic content (Albury 2014, Rothman 2018, Vandenbosch and van Oosten 2017). Therefore, I view the concept of porn literacy as part of education about pornography because of this I will continue using the term porn literacy for the rest of the paper.

There is no universal consensus on the approach or content for a porn literacy curriculum, nor the definition of pornography (Goldstein 2020, McKee 2020). As mentioned before, the spectrum of the debate is reflected in the type of different approaches where on one hand some argue for the abolition of pornography and others for educating about it to address the potential negative effects (MacKinnon and Dworkin 1988, Rothman 2019, Dawson 2020, Goldstein 2020). The sexual educational frameworks which will be discussed in the chapter on the approaches are different in various dimensions such as the places of implementation, length of the courses, theoretical frameworks based upon which they were developed and who receives and delivers the programs and others. I will explore their implementation in context of both proposed and existing frameworks which aim to deliver pornography education to adolescents.

The topic of pornography became mandatory for school-based education in Sweden in 2022 (Planting-Bergloo 2024) and is being discussed to become in UK and Australia (Hancock and Barker 2018, Ollis 2016). Research on the future of pornography education in Sweden suggests that pornography topics should be integrated into broader sexuality education rather

than being taught separately as it would provide teachers with more opportunities to address the subject more effectively (Planting-Bergloo 2024). Additionally, there are online resources and non-school-based frameworks available (The Porn Conversation 2024, Culture Reframed 2024, Rothman 2019).

Scholars that explore existing frameworks often suggest a comprehensive sexual education approach. Comprehensive sex education acknowledges the diverse experiences and types of exposure that adolescents may have with pornography, that go beyond the traditional views of it and emphasizing the importance of teaching adolescents to approach it from a critical perspective (Goldstein 2020, Byron 2021). Goldstein in her research "Beyond Porn literacy" advocates for a holistic approach to sexual education which includes porn literacy as part of a broader curriculum (Goldstein 2020)—highlighting the importance of the curriculum to teach adolescents critical thinking skills that allow them to address power dynamics, gender relations, ethical considerations, and beyond in the pornographic content they consume (Goldstein 2020). Therefore, Goldstein argues that the incorporation of porn literacy into comprehensive sexual education fosters healthy sexual socialization as adolescents view pornographic content critically, aware of its influences on their sexual attitudes.

While some countries have incorporated pornography into their curricula, there are opposing views on the matter as some scholars argue that education about porn could lead to increased interest in the engagement with pornography for adolescents. Within academia, this argument is discussed by Dines (2010), whose criticism of pornography suggests that even the implementation of porn literacy into education to foster critical thinking can lead to an increase in its consumption. She emphasizes that adolescents may become more curious to

explore pornographic content can be due to it being part of classroom discussions (Dines 2010). However, the findings on the feasibility and efficacy pilot study of porn literacy class by Rothman (2018) suggests that it did not encourage adolescents to seek out pornography after the class (Rothman 2018). While it is important to recognize the potential implications of possibly legitimizing pornography for adolescents by incorporating discussions about it into the classroom (Dawson 2020) many remain to argue that it is crucial to implement education about pornography into school-based curriculum (Crabbe and Flood 2021).

There is evidence of gendered differences in engagement with pornography (Sinković 2012). Young males are likely to have more experience with consuming pornography due to earlier exposure than young females (Sinković 2012). As well as that mainstream heterosexual pornography often depicts males dominating females which may advance the gendered differences in the experience with consuming pornography (Bridges 2023). Discussions as a result, may involve various levels and types of experiences with the consumption of pornographic content which can be one of the challenging aspects of porn literacy education (Dawson 2020).

This literature reviews some of the research which provides important insights into the debate around pornography and education about pornography they do not distinguish the differences between mainstream (“hetero-patriarchal”) and alternative pornography (“feminist- porn”) (Goldstein 2020. Heredia 2022). These are two distinct approaches to pornography as mainstream pornography “advocates for patriarchal model of sexuality” (Heredia 2022) while alternative pornography which focuses on female pleasure (Taormino et al 2016). Queer and feminist porn is a growing genre of pornography which often involves consent talk,

nonstereotypical female and queer bodies of all ages and promotes sex positivity by emphasizing the educational uses of pornography (Heredia 2022). However, this distinction of these varied types of pornography is being ignored by many researchers in the field resulting in conflating all pornography with mainstream pornography (Goldstein 2020). I view this as problematic because being porn literate should involve knowing about the different approaches to pornography and that when it comes to research which argues that pornography has adverse effects on individuals it should be explicitly made clear which pornography is it being referred to. Due to lack of research attention paid to the discipline of feministic porn in relation to pornography education it will not be explored further however, I view it as important to mention within this thesis because it could be argued that feministic educational porn could be a content which promotes non-violent and non-gendered sexual violence and exploitation and provide information about sexuality in artistic expression. Therefore, future research should focus on exploring alternatives forms of pornography which promote healthy approach to sexuality as that is a research gap.

5. Approaches to porn literacy education

Pornography education is a new field in both academic research and education with various approaches to its implementation. Regardless of their differences, most frameworks, programs and curriculums involve porn literacy which is aimed at equipping individuals with the skills to navigate and critically analyze pornography based on the principles of media literacy (Dawson 2020). Despite that scholars often argue about the significant need for such education, there is no universal consensus on the approach or content for a porn literacy curriculum (Goldstein 2020). As a result, there are various approaches and contents proposed by scholars and organizations from various academic backgrounds and viewpoints. Outlining their similarities and differences will enable a better understanding of their view on pornography. Within this chapter, I will analyze four significant academic literatures and two non-governmental organization's approaches to pornography education coming from Australia, USA, Ireland and Canada. I will show that, these porn literacy frameworks contribute to healthy sexual socialization by teaching adolescents to understand and critique representations of sexuality pornography, and by helping them acquire the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for sexual relationships to be positive, respectful, and free of coercion.

One of the key research-based curricula that is available predominantly in the USA is developed by Rothman, Daley and Adler as a response to the concerns about the effects of pornography on adolescents coming from the public health sphere (Rothman 2020). The relevance and importance of this program is because it provides a detailed and practical nine-session media literacy curriculum that covers nine main topics including for example the history of obscenity regulations, social norms related to gender and violence, pornography

addiction, healthy relationships, sexual exploitation and sexting laws (Rothman 2020). Its main aims are to reduce sexual and dating violence among high school students and improve knowledge about the reconstruction of gender norms and dynamics through pornography (Rothman 2020).

Their work is often being cited in reference to the findings from their pilot study (2019) that indicated positive changes in adolescents' sexual attitudes and knowledge related to the impacts of pornography on their social sexualization and demonstrating the feasibility of implementation of porn literacy curriculum in non-school settings and that implementing porn literacy programs does not lead to encouraging adolescents to seek out pornography if they haven't come across it (Rothman 2019 pg.14). Regardless, of the limited sample size of the pilot study Rothman's framework ("The Truth About Pornography") is a valuable template for porn literacy education because it aims to teach adolescents critically thinking skills about pornographic content and promotes respectful relationships free of coercion thus contributes to healthy sexual socialization.

A different place of implementation is a school-based approach advocated by Crabbe and Flood (2021). Australian based research which argues for a whole-school comprehensive framework that incorporates a positive approach to sexuality (Crabbe and Flood 2021). They advocate that "porn education is a necessary inclusion into school curricula" (Crabbe and Flood 2021, pg. 37). With the emphasis that effective implementation involves: a robust conceptual foundation tailored to community and context, participatory teaching methods, skilled staff, and a safe and inclusive environment with a particular need for sensitivity concerning gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity (Crabbe and Flood 2021).

Given that the aim of this proposed framework is to destigmatize discussions around pornography and promote a positive comprehensive approach to sexuality education I would position their work on the more sex-positive feminist theory spectrum of the debate. They acknowledge the possible limitation to their suggestion which is related to the likely resistance to the school-based implementation coming from both parents and the institutions which are more on the socio-political conservatism side of the argument (Crabbe and Flood 2021 pg. 16). Despite these widely present challenges, the proposed framework is crucial for the field. Because of their emphasis on effective implementation and preparing adolescents for “relationships and sexuality that are safe, respectful, mutually pleasurable, and consenting” (Crabbe and Flood, p. 11) demonstrates that porn literacy education contributes to healthy sexual socialization by promoting respectful relationships free of coercion.

There is a spectrum of conceptual approaches to education about pornography that provide their educational resources online. On one side of the spectrum is a non-governmental organization Culture Reframed, founded by Gail Dines, which I would interpret as based on more anti-pornography feminist theoretical views. Their anti-exploitative courses are designed based on peer-reviewed evidence for educators and consists of eight training modules, six anti-exploitation and relationship education lessons and digital media literacy sessions (Culture Reframed 2024). One of their aims is to build resilience and resistance hypersexualized media to protect children from the harms of pornography (Culture Reframed 2024).

This curriculum is free to access online which is beneficial as it is available for anyone. While it highlights the important issues regarding the exploitative side of pornography and gendered

violence representations it views pornography as solely negative which is often argued by research as problematic (Rothman 2020, Goldstein 2020, Dawson 2020, PlantingBergloo 2024). They argue that effective porn literacy education must go beyond viewing pornography's effects as solely negative. While I support this argument, as evidence shows that pornography can have some positive effects (Litsou 2021, p. 236), I view that porn literacy courses provided by Culture Reframed remain as a contribution to healthy sexual socialization. Because these courses teach essential skills to differentiate between healthy intimacy and the exploitative portrayals of sexuality in pornography, which is crucial for fostering safe and respectful relationships.

One of the dimensions based on which these can be compared is how they view pornography from a public health perspective. Culture Reframed has constructed adolescents use of pornography as deeply problematic, as a 'public health crisis of the digital age' arguing that porn undermines their sexual health development (Culture Reframed 2024). Based on their understanding of pornography as a crisis I argue that the prevention and reduction of pornography consumption is viewed as central to promoting healthy sexual attitudes.

Whereas Rothman holds a perspective that pornography itself is not a public health crisis and constructing it that way is problematic (Nelson and Rothman 2020 pg. 151). They argue that it does not meet the criteria of public health crisis because it is "not an acute event that requires an immediate response, does not directly or imminently lead to death and does not overwhelm the capacity of local systems to do the job of maintaining a community's health" (Nelson and Rothman 2020 pg. 151) based on definition of public health crisis by Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice. For Rothman, I argue, healthy sexual socialization can be achieved without abstaining from the consumption of pornography because of their claim

that interventions which promote porn literacy rather than aiming to stop individuals from all use are beneficial (Nelson and Rothman 2020).

Arguably, on the other side of the spectrum of online accessible educational resources of education about pornography is Erika Lust's non-profit project, "The Porn Conversation," which is based on sex-positive principles as Erika Lust is an indie feminist pornography director who promotes the ethical consumption of pornography (The porn conversation 2024). The project provides accessible sex-positive tools for families and educators to discuss sexuality and porn literacy with young people (The Porn Conversation 2024) in which the lessons about porn literacy are based on media literacy principles, namely the media literacy lesson plan by Share (2005) for Center for Media Literacy (CML MediaLit Kit TM). This framework employs five key questions of media literacy which aims to foster critical thinking about media messages.

Who created this message? What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? How might different people understand this message differently? What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented or omitted? Why is this message being sent?

(Share 2005 pg. 7).

While The Porn Conversation is the only framework which pays deliberate attention to the differentiating mainstream and alternative pornography and delivering comprehensive and inclusive education for all the curriculum is vastly based on the principles of media literacy which has been argued that there is a need for moving beyond traditional media literacy for increased effectiveness of the program (Goldstein 2020). As a result, The Porn Conversation

provides tools for porn literacy however, it requires further adjustments which should be reflective of up-to-date academic research to increase the effectiveness of the curriculum. However, I argue its inclusive, non-shaming approach which is deeply focused on delivering skills necessary for understanding and critiquing mediated representations of sexuality in pornography makes it a tool for contributing to healthy sexual socialization.

Another dimension I will use to analyze these is their view on inclusivity and comprehensiveness. As mentioned, The Porn Conversation specifically pays attention to making their courses accessible and inclusive to marginalized communities such as BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities through criticizing the heteronormative and ableist representations of sexuality in mainstream pornography. Similarly, Dawson (2020) makes a specific contribution to the development of inclusive and comprehensive sexual education by addressing the sexualization and fetishizing of LGBTQ+ individuals along eight other core concepts necessary for comprehensive education about pornography (Dawson 2020 pg. 10) . I argue that inclusive and comprehensive approach is central to pornography education to be the most effective. I base this argument on the common pattern in the research which highlights the need for overall more comprehensive, nuanced, non-cis-heteronormative and positive understandings of sexuality to be embedded in the foundations of porn literacy programs in order to be effective (Rothman 2020, Goldstein 2020, Dawson 2020, Byron 2021, Planting-Bergloo 2024).

However, I view that much of the research on pornography consumption is often inclusive enough of the experiences of people with disabilities. This exclusion leads to raising questions about the effectiveness of the proposed porn literacy education programs for these groups as they are likely designed with attention paid to heterosexual and abled individuals.

For individuals with disabilities, porn literacy education needs to address specific challenges such as disability pornography which is a representation of fetishization of disabled bodies (Ebrahim 2019). As a result, I believe that porn literacy which is truly inclusive recognizes ableist stereotypes and provides resources that are accessible and relevant to everyone's experiences regardless of their abilities. Without this consideration, I view that porn literacy programs may fail to contribute to the healthy sexual socialization of people with disabilities.

As mentioned, the frameworks currently in place or proposed share certain similarities and differences. Regarding the similarities, all these frameworks aim to foster critical thinking to tackle the potential negative effects of pornography. They are all primarily focused on equipping adolescents with porn literacy skills which are predominantly based on media literacy principles (Goldstein 2020). Additionally, I argue that they are situated within the spectrum on advocating for education about pornography rather than for its abolishment because they provide these frameworks.

However, these frameworks differ in two main dimensions: the proposed implementation place and the curriculum's length. Rothman's framework is not implemented within schoolbased education; instead, it offers courses aimed at equipping educators, parents, and young individuals outside of state-funded educational institutions. In contrast, Crabbe and Flood propose a whole-school approach, advocating for porn literacy education to be integrated into school curricula. Culture Reframed and The Porn Conversation provide free online accessible tools for educating about pornography. The key difference among all these frameworks lies in the length of the curriculum they propose. Rothman suggests nine sessions, each sixty minutes long; Culture Reframed offers six sessions; The Porn

Conversation provides a onehour seminar on porn literacy; and Dawson, along with Crabbe and Flood, does not specifically establish the length of their proposed curricula. I view these differences to primarily be due to no universal consensus on what pornography should contain (Goldstein 2020, McKee 2020)

Overall, while existing porn literacy frameworks which are explored in this thesis are similar along certain dimensions based on which they can compered such as sharing common aims and primarily being based on media literacy principles, they are different on others. These dimensions include view of pornography from a public health perspective, extend of inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the framework, implementation and curriculum length. However, I view that these frameworks and pornography research in general does not pay enough attention to the varied experiences with pornography experienced by people with disabilities. As a result, I suggest on expanding the scope of research to address the diverse experiences of all individuals to increase the effectiveness and relevance of porn literacy programs to all people regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race and abilities. I argue that these frameworks serve as tool for contributing to healthy sexual socialization because they aim to teaching adolescents to understand and critique representations of sexuality pornography which helps them to acquire the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for sexual relationships to be positive, respectful, and free of coercion.

Conclusion

The field of pornography education is expanding and is likely to continue evolving. Despite the challenges brought by various factors, including the ongoing feminist debates that have been active since the mid-1980s, developing a universal definition of pornography and a consensus on the content of pornography education could be beneficial for porn literacy education. I have explored the topic of pornography education, precisely the concept of porn literacy programs, as one side of the responses to the widespread accessibility to pornography, which adolescents can easily access in the context of the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, Ireland, Canada, and Sweden. Four programs that were addressed are different among the dimensions, such as the view of pornography from a public health perspective, the extent of inclusivity and comprehensiveness of the framework, implementation, and curriculum length, are similar in their aim, which is to equip adolescents with the ability to understand and critique mediated representations of sexuality in pornography. Moreover, it teaches them the skills, knowledge, and values necessary for sexual relationships and experiences to be positive, respectful, and free of coercion. Therefore, I argue that porn literacy can be an effective tool in contributing to achieving healthy sexual socialization. Future research could focus on how to make sexual education which includes conversations about pornography, more inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities, as this is a gap in both research into porn literacy in general and thus this thesis. In addition, attention could be paid to the distinction between mainstream and alternative pornography as they vary in their core values and could, as a result, have varied impacts on adolescent's sexual socialization.

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