

Pornography in Sex Education:
A Critical Analysis of Pre-Service Teachers' Perception of Pornography Literacy in Sexual
Education
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Table of Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	4
<i>Abstract</i>	5
<i>Résumé</i>	6
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	7
<i>Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background</i>	8
Background and context	8
What is Sex Education?	11
Geographical Context	13
Theoretical Framework	13
Positionality statement	14
Problem Statement/ Research Gaps	15
Research Questions and Objectives	15
Overview	16
<i>Chapter 2 – Literature Review</i>	17
Introduction	17
1 The 3 P's of Pornography (Prevalence, Patterns & Power)	17
2 Potential Effects of Pornography on Adolescents	20
3 Existing Sex Education Curricula and Policies in Relation to Pornography	24
4 Ethical Implications/ Considerations Surrounding Pornography	31
Summary	35
<i>Chapter 3 - Methodology</i>	37
Introduction	37
Research Paradigm	37
Arts Based Methodologies	38
Collage	39
Semi-Structured Interviews	41
Research Design	42
Data Collection	43
Data Analysis	47
Summary	49
Introducing the participants	50
How do participants define pornography?	52
1. Prevalence, Pattern & Power	53
2. Potential Effects of Pornography on Adolescents	60

3. Pornography in Sex Education? PORNOGRAPHY IS SEX EDUCATION!	67
4. Behind the scenes: Ethics behind Pornography	75
5. Piecing it all together	79
6. Discussion.....	91
Summary of findings	93
<i>Chapter 5 – Conclusion</i>	<i>94</i>
According to the preservice teachers, does pornography affect adolescent development?....	94
Should pornography be included in sex education curriculum?	95
Collage making to facilitate discussion about pornography	96
Limitations.....	97
Suggested future research	98
Final remarks.....	99
<i>References</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Appendix 1 – Participant Consent Form</i>	<i>111</i>

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Example of Coding Table

Figure 2 – Layla’s Collage

Figure 3 – Connie’s Collage

Figure 4 – Abbie’s Collage

Figure 5 – Roxy’s Collage

Figure 6 – Haleys Collage

Abstract

This thesis explores the complex issue of readily accessible pornography and its impact on young people, particularly given the lack of proper sex education. With studies showing children as young as 11-13 encountering pornography, which is often violent and unrealistic, the need for effective sex education is critical. This study utilizes collage as an arts-based methodology to investigate the attitudes and feelings of pre-service teachers in relation to discussing pornography in sex education classrooms. Collage, with its emphasis on intuitive thinking and diverse materials, offers a novel way to delve into this taboo subject, potentially revealing deeper understandings beyond traditional research methods. This approach aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of collage as a tool for exploring sensitive topics in educational settings. A key finding of this study is pre-service teachers believe that pornography affects adolescents' development in relation to healthy and respectful relationships and promotes unhealthy stereotypes and raises questions regarding consent. They believe pornography literacy should be included in the sex education curriculum at an age-appropriate level to help adolescents be critical about the media they are consuming.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore la problématique complexe de l'accessibilité de la pornographie et son impact sur des enfants, particulièrement en prenant en considération le manque d'éducation sexuelle. Les études récentes démontrent que des enfants aussi jeunes que 13 ans découvrant la pornographie, qui est souvent violente et irréaliste, le besoin d'éducation sexuelle efficace est primordiale. Cette étude utilise des collages comme méthodologie basé sur l'art afin d'examiner les positions et sentiments ressenties par les participants dans une discussion à propos de la pornographie dans les programmes d'éducation sexuelle à l'école. Le collage, grâce à son emphase sur la pensée intuitive et des matériaux divers et variés offre une nouvelle façon d'aborder ce sujet tabou, et peut potentiellement révéler une meilleure compréhension, au-delà des méthodes de recherches traditionnelles. Cette approche a pour but de démontrer l'efficacité du collage comme outil d'exploration de sujets sensible dans un cadre éducatif. Une découverte majeure de cette étude est que les futurs enseignants croient que la pornographie affecte le développement de relation saine et respectueuse chez les adolescents, perpétue des stéréotypes et soulève des questions autour du consentement. Les futurs enseignants pensent que l'inclusion de lecture sur la pornographie, adapté à l'âge, dans les programmes d'éducation sexuelle serait bénéfique et permettrait aux adolescents de développer un esprit critique face aux médias qu'ils consomment.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background

Background and context

Why porn?

Internet pornography has become the main source of pornography consumption in recent years (Hald et al., 2013) compared to pornographic magazines and film being more popular mediums in the early 2000's (Træen et al., 2004). Studies conducted in the early 2010's suggest that pornographic content accounts for 30% of all web traffic (Anthony, 2012; Pollard, 2020; Castleman, 2018). In 2017, Pornhub, one of thousands of pornographic websites available, claimed to have 28.5 billion views (Castleman, 2018). In 2018, Pornhub, XVideos, BongaCams, xMaster and xnxx – the five biggest mainstream porn sites – received a total of more than 6 billion views per month (Srinivassan, 2021). This figure is likely to have increased in recent years, due to increased accessibility through different technological devices, such as Apple watches (Pollard, 2020) and gaming consoles (PornHub, 2024). Pornhub insights (2024) state that the 18-24 age bracket make up the biggest portion of traffic on the site, with 27% of all traffic falling into this category. The average Canadian viewer will spend 10 minutes and 26 seconds per visit on Pornhub (PornHub, 2024).

Pornography consumption has also increased due to the impacts of global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Pornography viewership skyrocketed during this time. Pornhub was the most visited website during isolation periods (Lau et al., 2021), with porn viewership going up 24% on the first day alone (Irizarry, 2023). Pornhub offered free premium service to select European countries as they entered lockdown. Italy's porn viewership increased by 57%, Spain's viewership increased by 61.3% and France's viewership increased by 38.2% (PornHub, 2020). Canada and the US were not offered free premium service when they entered lockdown. However, viewership increased by 7.2% and 6.4% retrospectively (PornHub,

2020). Pornographic searches on PornHub tend to increase when people are facing hardships. In 2013, Alberta experienced extremely heavy rainfall which caused devastating floods, causing the first ever State of Provincial Emergency to be declared. During this time, pornography consumption across Alberta (excluding the High River region) increased significantly (PornHub, 2013).

Pornographic content is now a part of the daily lives of many people . This suggest that instead of trying to regulate or ostracise pornography, we should be educating young people about it and teaching them about the effects that pornography has on sexual development and relationships. The main purpose of this research is to explore how we can mindfully educate young adults about pornography, and of course to also address the question of why. Why should we educate young people on the effects of pornography? Pornography is readily available at the click of a button, on any medium, without any specific age restrictions put in place (Srinivassan, 2021). Studies have shown that on average, the first time a child watches pornographic content is between the ages of 11 – 13 (Children’s Commissioner, 2023). This is problematic, as these children have little to no education on sex and are exposed to a large variety of porn, some of which promotes violence towards women. Today, “almost every boy’s first sexual experience will be in front of a screen and almost every girl’s first sexual experience, if not in front of a screen, will be with a boy whose first sexual experience was in front of the screen – the screen instructing him what to do” (Srinivassan, 2021 p.41). This shows the huge influence that pornography has on young adults as they are likely to mirror actions they have seen on the screen and may have unrealistic expectations for sexual encounters based on what they have viewed. It also promotes violence and use of acts that could be deemed as non-consensual (Upton et al., 2021). These unrealistic expectations also extend to how female bodies should look, what sounds should be made, and what we should

anticipate (Wright et al., 2017). For instance, one of Srinivassan's (2021) university students describes how her boyfriend broke up with her because she was "doing [sex] wrong" (p.41) by not performing in the same manner women in pornography were.

Studies show adolescents don't only watch porn for entertainment purposes, but they also watch porn for education (Children's Commissioner, 2013; Srinivassan, 2021; Action Canada, 2020). One of Srinivassan's (2021, p.40)'s university students stated, "if it weren't for pornography, how would we ever learn to have sex?" Also, in a report commissioned for the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (2013), young adults discuss their purposes for watching porn as follows: "You learn how to have sex, you're learning new moves. You get to see the way it's done, and the way people do it . . . you have a kind of idea of how you might be able to do it." (p.43). Here, pornography is being seen to dictate how sexual acts are to be perceived and, in their view, is educating them where our sex education curriculum is severely lacking.

In an interview with James Deen, a porn star, he stated that "people need to realise that porn is not real [...] people should not be having sex the way people have sex in pornos" (Pollard, 2020). This is the difficulty when adolescents watch pornographic content, as they do not have the necessary education and sexual exposure to be able to differentiate sex depicted in pornography and sex that people engage in normally. Lisa Ann (another popular porn star) states that in the 1990's she was only recognised by adults, today however, she is being approached by young teens, coming up to her saying "Can we fuck?", to which she replies, "listen, what you see on those sites will probably never happen for you, so don't ask a girl to do it and don't think that's what sex is really about" (Ronson, 2017; Srinivassan, 2021 p.44).

This highlights the shift in porn viewership and the expectations that adolescents possess through pornographic consumption.

Peter and Valkenburg (2016) found that as consumption of sexualised media increased, so did permissive sexual attitudes. This shows how the increase in pornography consumption for adolescents is leading to an increase of sexual attitudes, which includes casual attitudes towards sex, which could be dangerous if these adolescents do not have access to comprehensive sex education as they are less likely to participate in safe sex, which could lead to diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV (Rusley et al., 2022).

What is Sex Education?

Sex education can be defined as any combination of learning experiences aimed at facilitating voluntary behaviour conducive to sexual health (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021). Sex education is taught in numerous different ways (abstinence only vs comprehensive education) and can be taught by numerous different people, such as teachers, parents, health professionals and community educators (Garcia & Fields, 2017). Abstinence only education is a method favoured by religious groups, which promotes the message of no sex before marriage, and withhold information on contraception and condom use, expect for information on failure rates (Ott & Santelli, 2007). Adolescents, however, interpret abstinence only education differently. They interpret it to mean “refraining from engaging in heterosexual vaginal intercourse” (Trimble, 2009 p.53). They believe that there are specific loopholes surrounding abstinence, meaning that participation in “fellatio or anal sex still leaves their chastity pledges intact” (p.53).

Conversely, comprehensive sexualities education (CSE) equips adolescents with accurate, age-appropriate information about sexualities and their asexual reproductive health

(WHO, 2023). The right to comprehensive sex education is protected by international human rights treaties, such as UNESCO, World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund. Comprehensive Sex Education is also inherently linked with UN Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular emphasis on Goal #3 (Good Health & Wellbeing), Goal #4 (Quality Education) and Goal #5 (Gender Equality). Human Rights treaties (as listed above) advocate for educators to teach CSE. They recommend that CSE programmes should be based on an established curriculum, scientifically accurate, and cover a range of topics on sexualities and sexual reproductive health, throughout adolescence (WHO, 2023). CSE has been shown to teach students about mutual respect, and encourages better decision making, communication and critical analysis (UNESCO, 2024), which in turn leads to “outcomes such as improved health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities” (Tohit & Haque, 2024). By not teaching sex education with a CSE approach, Trimble (2009) states that different sexualities and identities could become “unspoken”. These “unspoken” sexualities “soon become unthinkable, and the un-thought then struggles for recognition of its own existence in the public sphere” (p. 56). Trimble (2009) furthers this sentiment, by stating that “sexualities education has become one of the primary arenas where questions about body ownership, corporal intentionality, gender and reproduction get fought out” (p. 56-57). This is becoming increasingly true with the increase of ultra-right, conservative governments (Bialystock et al., 2020). This leads to educators reducing the amount of sex education they teach and also preferring to teach less ‘controversial’ topics within sex education, which Trimble (2009) believes is “doing an enormous disservice to older youth by denying them opportunity to make sense of their lived realities in relation to their sexual experiences”. (p.54) In order to fully achieve CSE, educators must put adolescent lived experiences at the forefront of sex education curriculums.

Geographical Context

Research for this thesis was conducted in the province of Québec, Canada. It is a secular province, meaning that there is less pushback for sex education curricula from religious groups, which is seen in different provinces in Canada and different countries across the world. Québec re-introduced a mandatory sex education curriculum in 2018, after scrapping it completely in 2005. Scrapping the sex education curriculum during the 2005 curriculum reform resulted in an increase in sexually transmitted diseases in Québec (Trimble, 2012). The new curriculum, which was added in 2018 was designed to enable students to better understand themselves, establish emotional relationships that show respect for themselves and others, and develop critical thinking and good judgment along with a sense of responsibility (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2018). As Québec is one of the largest provinces in Canada, the demand for comprehensive sexual education will vary depending on location. More urban areas, such as Montréal are likely to adopt a more comprehensive sex education framework than rural areas, as most services and resources for teacher training, specifically in relation to sex ed, are in urban areas (Action Canada, 2020). While Québec's current curriculum aligns with some principles of CSE, the material taught is not always evidence-based, intersectional, or comprehensive. Additionally, many teachers have the option to skip content they find uncomfortable (Action Canada, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts a postmodern feminist perspective to explore the diverse issue of pornography. Nickerson (2024 p.1) describes postmodern feminism as “a philosophical tendency within feminism that incorporates postmodern theory and thought into its analysis and critiques of gender, sexuality, culture, politics, power, identity, society and social relations, arguing that reality and power dynamics are socially constructed rather than innate or

essential.” Postmodern feminist epistemologies accept that “knowledge is provisional, open-ended and relational” (Wallin, 2001 p. 28). Postmodern feminism acknowledges the potential harm that pornography can bring, whilst also recognising the agency and empowerment pornography can possess for some women. Within postmodern feminist theory, pornography is regarded “as a catalyst for women’s self-actualisation and the free expression of their sexuality, thus representing a form of sexual liberation. However, as an industry, pornography can give rise to problems such as sex trafficking and exploitation, with women often being the victim” (Castillo and Pueyo, 2023 p.29). In essence, postmodern feminism questions traditional notions surrounding gender, identity and power whilst deconstructing binary thinking and promoting intersectionality and as such seems particularly relevant to this study.

Positionality statement

I am a white, cis-gender, heterosexual academic, conducting research on Kanien’kehá:ka Territory. My positionality significantly shapes the approach to this research as my own experiences in relation to navigating sexuality, relationships and education have instilled a deep commitment to foster comprehensive, inclusive and interactive sex education. I recognise the importance of challenging traditional notions and discourses surrounding heteronormative narratives around sex and gender. My identity as a woman has granted me privileges, whilst simultaneously exposing me to systemic inequalities and biases that impact women’s sexual and reproductive health, alongside the restriction in women’s sexual liberation. I aim to conduct research through a critical lens, that is grounded in feminist theories and contribute to the development of more equal and sustainable sex education practises.

Problem Statement/ Research Gaps

While studies have been conducted in relation to pornography consumption in adults, there is very limited research in relation to pornography consumption with adolescents. There is also a significant gap when situating pornography within the education scope. As adolescents are arguably the most impacted group when it comes to pornography consumption, it is likely that educators will have to combat stereotypes and problems that arise due to pornography consumption. It is also an educator's role to ensure that adolescents are receiving adequate sex education, and therefore it can be argued that pornography literacy should be added to the curriculum. This thesis investigates pre-service teachers' perceptions on the impacts they believe pornography has on adolescents, and if pornography literacy should be included in the sex education curriculum.

Research Questions and Objectives

My goal in conducting this research is to deepen our understandings on how pornography is impacting adolescents today, and how educators can help combat harmful ideals portrayed through online pornography. Therefore, I have formulated the following two research questions:

1. From the perspective of pre-service teachers, how does pornography affect adolescents' development
2. Should pornography be part of a sex education curriculum for adolescents and if so, what role could it play?

Firstly, this will investigate how and if pornography affects adolescents' development both mentally and sexually. Which will then lead to the formulation of data to answer the second question – is there a need for pornography literacy classes? These research questions guided the research process and provided a framework for analysis.

Overview

This introduction provided background on why research into adolescent pornography consumption is needed, specifically through an educational lens. It also looked at how this thesis is situated in geographical terms, in addition to researcher positionality and how this may influence results.

The second chapter will focus on review of current literature in relation to adolescent pornography consumption, effects of pornography on adolescents, sex education guidelines in relation to pornography and ethical considerations of pornography.

The third chapter will focus on the methodology for this study. It will explore the research paradigm, arts based methodologies - looking at collage in particular, semi-structured interviews, research design, data collection process, data generation process, procedures and data analysis.

The fourth chapter will analyse the findings of the research, specifically looking at data collected through interview questions and participant collages.

The final chapter of this thesis will offer conclusions and summaries to the research. It will also discuss limitations of the research and suggestions for future research on the topic of pornography and sex education.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

In this literature review I will be examining and critically evaluating research and studies surrounding multiple topics in relation to pornography. Through my literature review, I have discovered multiple themes. The first theme I will be discussing is the ‘3 P’s of Pornography’, which includes prevalence, patterns and power. This theme will be looking at the evolution of pornography, and pornography use among adolescents. The second theme I will be discussing is the ‘Potential Effects of Pornography on Adolescents’. This theme includes examining literature on sexual expectations pornography portrays, alongside perceptions of body image and self esteem, gender roles, stereotypes and racial stereotypes that pornography perpetuate. The third theme I will be discussing is ‘Existing Sex Education Curricula and Policies in Relation to Pornography’. This theme will analyse current sex education guidelines in relation to pornography in Canada and the United Kingdom. This will also include looking at resources available to educators to help equip them in teaching pornography literacy and when, how and why this should be taught in sex education classes. The final theme I will be discussing is the ‘Ethics behind Pornography’. This theme will look at the literature on ethical concerns surrounding pornography use as well as production, and how ethical porn has the potential to foster a safer and more inclusive environment for sexual exploration.

1 The 3 P’s of Pornography (Prevalence, Patterns & Power)

1.1 Evolution of pornography

Ancient Greece created the word pornography (Eko, 2016). The word “pornography” comes from the seventh century Greek words *prone*, which literally translates to “woman for

sale” or female prostitute, and pornos, which translates to “man for sale” or male prostitute, alongside the word graphos which translates to writing (Kapparis, 2011). These words together form the word pornography, which we still use today, originally meant writing about male and female prostitutes (Eko, 2016). The ancient Greeks and Romans also used art to depict pornography and sexual acts, including pornographic sculptures, paintings, and mosaics. This can be seen through the discoveries archaeologists made when uncovering the ruins of Pompeii. The ruins contained walls of explicit sexual acts, sex themed murals, sexual themed mosaics as well as sex toys and objects (Kammeyer, 2008). These discoveries were kept hidden from public knowledge for 200 years due to their extreme sexually graphic nature (Eko, 2016). Pornography was mainly for the elites of society, typically upper class, white men who were educated and economically powerful, and only “gentlemen of high moral character” could have access to these pornographic materials (Morton, 2014).

Fast forward to the 1960s and 70s’, pornographic films started appearing in movie theatres. These were specialty theatres, open only to adults and showing pornographic content only (Holliday 1999). Due to new technology being introduced in the following decades, in the late 1970’s early 1980’s pornography was now available on VHS and could be watched in the comfort of your own home instead of porn theatres (Simpson, 2004). These pornographic materials were more accessible to all members of society as they were available for purchase from typical “mom and pop stores”, convenience stores and bookstores (Kammeyer, 2008). A factor of this increase of availability of pornography is considered to be “pornocracy”, a term coined by Weeks (1985). “Pornocracy” implies that sexual and pornographic materials became available on demand due to our capitalist society (Weeks, 1985). Therefore, materials were now not being gatekept and available to the masses, including the lower classes and women. However, the conservative governments in the 1950’s and 60’s in the US tried to imprison people who sold pornographic content and many adult bookstores were closed (Kammeyer,

2008) which essentially meant that people were banned from selling pornographic content. This trend of banning pornography is still present to this day with increasingly conservative governments. However, this has become near impossible due to the introduction internet pornography. Internet pornography includes any pornographic content that is available digitally, for example videos and literature available online. Pornography is available on any device as long as there is internet connection (Srinivasan, 2021). Pornography is now available to everyone in society, at the click of a button, no matter their class or gender, and pursuing a total ban on pornography is near impossible. Internet pornography is now the most popular source for pornography consumption (Paul & Shim, 2008). As Kipnis (1996) states, “[Pornography] does exist, and it's not going to go away.” With the introduction of digital forms of pornography, consumption and engagement have increased exponentially (Potenza, 2018). This is specifically true when looking at porn habits of young adults.

1.2 Pornography use among adolescents

Exposure to pornographic material is expected to increase with age, due to societal pressures, sexual exploration and puberty (Rasmussen & Bierman, 2016). There are some limitations when examining studies that investigate adolescent pornography consumption. Most studies use self-report methods to collect their data, which means that researchers are relying on adolescents to provide honest answers (Behun & Owens, 2020). It is therefore to be assumed that there is an under representation in these figures as adolescents may under report their pornography use out of “embarrassment, judgement [and] legal concerns” (Behun & Owens, 2020 p. 8). Many adolescents believe the experience of consuming pornography to be a healthy and normal expression of sexuality (Hald & Malamuth, 2008). Pornography has also been reported as being utilized as a source for obtaining knowledge about sexual health, such as anatomy, physiology and human sexual behaviour (Farina, 2022). When comparing young

adolescent users who accidentally discover pornography, it has been reported that younger adolescents are less interested in pornography than their older peers as they have not matured to a place where they have any interest in sexuality (Tsaliki, 2011). There is also a high probability that these adolescents will in fact find the experience to be “disgusting or offensive” (Behun & Owens, 2020 p.76).

2 Potential Effects of Pornography on Adolescents

2.1 Sexual expectations

Gagnon and Simon’s Sexual script theory (1973) alludes to the idea that sexuality is learned from cultural and social scripts that define what counts as sex and how to recognise, react and engage in sexual encounters (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). Sexual scripts “acknowledge the social nature of sexuality and the developmental process of labelling, through which we commonly construct what we understand sex to be” (Thomson & Scott, 1990 p.5-6). Pornography has changed the sexual scripts and has shaped what viewers view as ‘normal’ during sex (Goldstein, 2020). Srinivassan (2021) discusses how “the psyches of [her university] students are products of pornography. In them, the warnings of the anti-porn feminists seem to have been belatedly realised: sex for my students is what porn says it is” (p.41). Studies have also shown concerns when looking at how pornography can impact sexual scripts, specifically the negative impacts that violent content can have on different aspects of sexuality, for example, the development of scripts with negative and sexist sexual attitudes (Hald et al., 2010; Rostad et al., 2019). Goldstein (2020) states that “pornography acts as a kind gateway object that has the power to engender a tendency towards more ‘extreme’ or ‘risky’ behaviour in viewers” (p.66). In Goldstein’s (2020) study on pornographic narratives with university aged students, they also discovered that young men are more concerned about the impact pornography might have on their own sexual experiences and understandings of “what

normative sex looks like and what good, hegemonic masculine sexuality should be, namely virile and always ready to go” (p.67). This is linked to the myth and sexual script that young women’s worth is tied to their sexual purity, and that women who participate in sex work or the porn industry are “damaged, disgusting, one-dimensional and worthless” (Goldstein, 2020 p.67). However, pornography is also a space for exploration of fantasies and desires, a tool to relieve boredom and stress and a way to find pleasure (Attwood et al., 2018). It can also be used as a tool for sexual exploration for LGBTQ+ youths who have been under-represented in main stream educational spaces (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015).

2.2 Body image and self esteem

Pornography, specifically internet pornography, portrays an ideal body type. The ideal female body type in internet pornography is “curvaceously thin with an average to large bust, a smaller waist and rounder hips” (Behun & Owens, 2020 p. 64). She also weighs roughly 117 pounds (53kg) and has a 34 inch bust, 24 inch waist and 34 inch hips (Millward, 2013). The ideal male body type in internet pornography is low body fat, muscular lean build and weighs 168 pounds (76kg) (Millward, 2013). These body types are not necessarily representative of the general population (Goldsmith et al., 2017; Millward, 2013). Studies have shown that it is often impossible to achieve these body types without surgical procedures (Vogels, 2019) and adolescent males may engage in dangerous regimes and unsafe uses of anabolic steroids to achieve the ideal male figure (Tylka, 2015). However, adolescents do not need to consume pornography to have a negative impact on body image (Behun & Owens, 2020) as traditional media outlets also perpetuate ideal body types. Appearance of genitalia can be a key concern for adolescents when engaging with pornography, as they are continuously on display and the focus of the sexual acts depicted (Goldsmith et al., 2017). Adolescents may compare their genitalia to what they see on screen, for example performers in pornography rarely have pubic

hair (Morrison et al., 2007) female actresses have smaller and tighter labia majora and minora, and male actors have larger penises (Behun & Owens, 2020). This could lead to adolescents becoming self-conscious and embarrassed to be seen naked (Behun & Owens, 2020). These feelings of self consciousness may lead adolescents to question their self worth, and may experience greater relationship anxiety (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2015). However, a study conducted by Vogels (2019) found that consuming internet pornography may empower adolescents to think, act and behave in a more sexually confident way, as exposure to sexually explicit material may improve self esteem. This increased self esteem may encourage some adolescents to “stop projecting sexual encounters online and start pursuing healthy romantic relationships in reality” (Behun & Owens, 2020 p. 69).

2.3 Gender roles and stereotypes

Portrayals of genders roles in pornography can potentially be internalized by young people (McCreary et al., 2005) and potentially projected onto others. The stereotypical male gender role portrayed in pornography is dominant, superior and in a position of power (Behun & Owens, 2020). Studies have shown pornography as favouring “re-enactment and aggravation” of gender power imbalances in sexual interactions (Yu et al., 2021 p.32) and indicate how increased pornography use is linked with stereotypical attitudes towards different attributes, roles, opportunities, and power of men and women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). These stereotypes are also linked with the sexual objectification of women, and more permissive sexual attitudes (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Yu et al, 2021). Brown and L’Engle (2009) also claim that adolescent girls who are exposed to pornography at early ages develop more stereotypical gendered attitudes. Additionally, pornography consumption correlates with “unequal gender norm perceptions, promoting male dominance and sexual readiness over female vulnerabilities and sexual self-restraint” (Yu et al., 2021 p. 37). Brown and L’Engle’s

(2009) study found a relationship between adolescent exposure to porn and “less progressive gender role attitudes for both males and females” (p.129) and that male dominance and female submission are gender roles that are reinforced through sexually explicit material such as pornography. Peter and Valkenburg (2009) also determined that viewing women as sex objects was related to increased frequency in the consumption of porn. Pornography consumption leads adolescents to accept traditional gender roles, such as male dominance and in a position of power and female submission to her male counterpart (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006). Häggström-Nordin et al’s (2006) study also discusses how pornography portrays a societal double standard in relation to gender norms, which is that women who engage in sexual acts with multiple partners are considered promiscuous, whilst men with multiple partners are revered. These stereotypes which favour men’s sexual pleasure and dominance contribute to gender power imbalances in sexual interactions (Yu et al., 2021).

Wright and Tokunaga (2015) have found that past exposure to pornography correlated to all elements of the “centrefold syndrome”. The centrefold syndrome is defined as “a set of psychosexual attitudes and behaviours that is characteristic of most heterosexual men (some more than others) as well as reflective of the many ways in which normative male sexuality is problematic” (Brooks, 1997 p.29). The five elements of the centrefold syndrome are voyeurism, sexual reductionism, masculinity validation, trophyism and nonrelational sex. Brooks notes that these elements may influence male behaviour towards women and impact the levels of respect and care within the relationship. There has been a progressive increase in violent content in pornographic materials from magazines to ‘digital pornography’ (Srinivasan, 2021). Popular internet searches now include “violent porn and brutal porn, which are subcategories of hardcore porn displaying videos of sexualised violence” (Pollard, 2020). However, Shor and Seida’s (2019) study indicate that violent pornographic searches are in decline, with videos containing aggression (nonconsensual aggression) receiving less views.

2.4 Racial stereotypes through pornography

The categorization of pornography contains an overwhelming amount of racial stereotypes. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) states “The treatment of Black women’s bodies in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States may be the foundation upon which contemporary pornography as the representation of women’s objectification, domination, and control is based” (p. 136). This is evident when analyzing the most viewed categories in the USA on PornHub - one of the most infamous tube sites. In 2024, the most popular categories were as follows: ‘Latina’, ‘Ebony’, ‘Asian’, ‘Big Black Dick’, ‘Anime’, ‘Ebony BBW’, ‘Native American’, ‘Cubana’ and ‘Ebony Homemade’ (PornHub, 2024). Smith and Luykx (2017) state that “racism is so normalized in our society that it often goes unrecognized; Whiteness is the de facto norm and only sex with racial minorities is considered ‘raced’ sex. This assumption, argues Weiss (2012), “marginalizes minority actors and reinforces White supremacy.” (p.434). This is also implied through the perceptions of Black women being seen promiscuous and hypersexual (Stacey & Forbes, 2021) and Black men perceived to be hypersexual, hypermasculine, virile and domineering (Hill Collins, 2004). These racial sexualized stereotypes can be traced back to settler colonialism (Smith, 2005) and have been further intensified due to the legacy colonialism has left behind. This also correlates with research done in relation to how Asian women are hyper-sexualized. These attitudes can be traced back to white heterosexual male presence in East Asian wars (Woan, 2008).

3 Existing Sex Education Curricula and Policies in Relation to Pornography

The level of sex education students receive varies in each country and in Canada even in each province. More liberal leaning political countries are likely to provide students with a more comprehensive sex education curriculum, where more conservative leaning political

countries are likely to provide students with little to no sex education. This is also true for provinces in Canada and states in the US. In this section of my literature review, I will be analysing existing sex education curricula and policies regarding pornography in Canada, as Canada is where the research is taking place, and the UK is where I have personal experience with the sex education curricula, as a teacher and student.

3.1 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, porn literacy is ‘mandatory’ to be taught to students in the Physical Social Health Education (PSHE) and Relationships Sex Education (RSE) curriculums (Department for Education, 2021). The government have provided teachers with a booklet (Hanson, 2021) which is available to teachers which includes the importance of teaching pornography, aims of teaching online pornography, harms of online pornography, what the difference is between ‘online and offline’ pornography, teaching strategies we should include, and teaching strategies to avoid. The emphasis here is that porn literacy should be embedded in multiple lessons and not a one off lesson. Although the booklet is helpful in gathering information for teachers and aids them with tools to be able to teach such a sensitive topic, PSHE is a non statutory subject (Department for Education, 2021) therefore teachers/schools have autonomy to choose what PSHE topics (if any) they want to teach. If you are in a religious school, you are unlikely to be taught any sex education and you are able to opt your child out of sex education as RSE is a non concurrent subject, or any education relating to sex and sexuality due to cultural and religious reasons (Department for Education, 2019). The booklet provides teachers with crucial tools in how to discuss the topic of pornography within a PSHE class, however it does not provide any alternatives for adolescents in relation to sexual exploration or provide adolescents with critical thinking skills on how to evaluate pornography (Hanson, 2021). The booklet discusses violent and extreme pornography being behind

paywalls and alludes to this type of pornography being the only one to exist behind a paywall, however ethically produced pornography is also kept behind paywalls (Scott, 2016).

3.2 Canada

Throughout my research for this literature review and beyond, I am yet to come across pornography as a standalone topic in the Canadian Sex Education curriculum. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights Sex Ed report (Action Canada, 2020) was created in collaboration with the Canadian Government to analyse and examine the sex education curriculum across Canada. Action Canada for Sexual Health & Human Rights is a “progressive, pro-choice organization committed to advancing and upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights in Canada and globally” (Action Canada, 2025). They advocate for comprehensive sexual education and work in collaboration with teachers and sexual health educators across Canada to understand the contexts in which they do their work and to better understand what is happening in Canadian classrooms. Sexual health educators have emphasised the need for cohesive lesson plans that include pornography as it has created a “challenging landscape for parents, educators and young people to navigate” (Action Canada, 2020 p.14). Each province has their own sex education curriculum. Most provinces work in an opt out basis, where parents are able to opt their children out of sex education lessons, however Alberta works on an opt in basis and Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have scaled back the content of sex education, which makes it difficult for teachers to teach the subject, if they are able to teach it at all (Action Canada, 2020). Action Canada’s report (2020) highlights how the current curriculum discusses media literacy in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador which can focus on porn literacy in later grades, however this is not explicit and up to the discretion of the teacher and school board. Educators may choose to teach under the media literacy rubric because it “seeks to make young people aware of how media is produced

and advertised, teaching them critical thinking skills with the hope that they will be less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours promoted by the media” (Braun-Courville and Rojas, 2009, 161). Northwestern Territories, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Nunavut may discuss media literacy, however porn literacy is not mentioned in any of these curriculums. Media literacy approaches rely on a “top-down model of education wherein the teacher passes their knowledge down to students, emphasising ‘correct’ readings or interpretations of porn and its practises” (Goldstein, 2020 p.61). This can pass on biases to students and may limit their ability to form their own opinions on pornography and may also limit their ability to develop the necessary critical thinking skills needed to address controversial topics, such as pornography. this approach also reflects a neo-liberal perspective and ignores “elements of engaging with porn that complicate any notion of educating young people straightforwardly around it” (Goldstein, 2020 p.61).

3.3 Pedagogical Approaches to Addressing Pornography in Educational Settings

3.3.1 Addressing pornography through PSHE booklet

In the Department for Education’s ‘Addressing Pornography Through PSHE’s (2021) booklet, distributed in the United Kingdom, a main theme is values and expectations and how to help students reflect on their own values and expectations of sexual encounters. Educators are encouraged to facilitate discussions around the features of a healthy and positive sexual experience and relationship. Some facilitation questions may include topics such as consent, pleasure, communication, wants and needs and pleasure (Hanson, 2021). Educators are also encouraged to move discussions away from the concepts of sex as ‘performative’ and focus on sex as an interaction between people who care for each other and should promote mutual enthusiasm, equality, boundaries without the fear of negative consequences, empathy and critical thinking (Hanson, 2021). The aims of these methods are to provide students with

knowledge about the harms of pornography, but also how to have a healthy and mutually respectful relationship. The booklet highlights how it is critical to explore viewpoints, attitudes, misconceptions and beliefs about pornography with young people to equip them to make informed choices on pornography based off their personal beliefs. Another key teaching point is ‘exploring influences’ when it comes to pornography (Hanson, 2021 p5.). This highlights technological algorithms, targeted content and persuasive design used by the porn industry to manipulate decisions for adolescents. Students can also be given scenario-based approaches to analyse pornography, where they can see how pornography exerts its impact on young people. Educators are also encouraged to ‘support and signpost’ (p.5) students and include activities that provide students with strategies they can employ if they are worried about their pornography use, which could include setting up goals to reduce the amount of pornography they consume, or writing lists of reasons why they do not want to look at pornography (Hanson, 2021). Educators can also provide students with different sources of support which students can then analyse and see which suits them best (Hansen, 2021). However, educators under no circumstance should show sexually explicit materials, including pornographic films in their lessons, they should also avoid approaches that normalise pornography and beware of approaches that reinforce gender norms and stereotypes (Hanson, 2021).

3.3.2 MediaSmarts - The pornography debate: controversy in advertising

MediaSmarts is a Canadian non-profit and charity that focuses on digital and media literacy programmes and resources for teachers and parents. The resource created for aiding educators in discussing porn literacy in media literacy lessons is “The Pornography Debate: Controversy in Advertising” (MediaSmarts, 2016). This lesson plan provides students of grade 11-12 an introduction into pornography and understanding the difficulty in determining the very fine lines between erotica, freedom of expression and sexual exploration. (MediaSmarts,

2016). It provides some guidelines for making these distinctions, such as including the Criminal Code of Canada's pornography and child pornography definition. The lesson plan focuses more on media literacy with pornography literacy being embedded within the lesson, which compliments Action Canada's (2020) findings on teaching porn literacy in Canadian sex education classrooms. Students are given a case study where they analyse the sexualisation and mainstreaming of pornographic content through advertising, looking at American Apparel's provocative advertising techniques (MediaSmarts, 2016). Sexualised and borderline pornographic material is a common advertising technique, with companies such as Victoria's Secret and Abercrombie and Fitch contributing to the "domestication of pornography" (Kammeyer, 2008 p.2). While this lesson plan is useful in distinguishing the difference between erotica, freedom of expression and sexual exploration in relation to pornography, there is limited space for discussions around the accessibility, impacts and ethics of pornography and limited scope for encouraging critical thinking on the topic. Activities in the lesson plan include brainstorming definitions of pornography to gather differing perspectives in relation to what adolescents deem to be pornographic (MediaSmarts, 2016). The plan also discusses with educators how "experts" are concerned about adolescents' exposure to pornographic materials and how they may not recognise that pornography offers a script for how "sex and relationships work that is unrealistic and unhealthy" (p.2) and how pornographic materials provide misconceptions and mistaken information about relationships, sexual health and consent (MediaSmarts, 2016). Whilst these topics are backed up by numerous researchers and studies, the lesson plan promotes limited to no conversations about these topics with students.

3.3.3 PopPorn Program

The 'PopPorn program', founded by Megan Maas, began as a one hour lecture style talk regarding youth culture online (Maas et al., 2022). It is targeted towards teachers and

equips them with the skills and knowledge to educate their students and incorporating information into existing programmes such as bullying, internet safety and media literacy (Maas et al., 2022). The programme consists of four modules. The first module “The New Sexual Environment” (p.6) aims to teach educators on what adolescents are referring to when referencing sexualised media on Instagram, pornography on tube sites or celebrity culture (Maas et al., 2022). This module aims to increase awareness on the influence social media and celebrities have over adolescents and how pornography has drastically changed from 1980’s VHS to internet pornography today. The second module “Gendered Sexual Culture” (p.6) describes the gender differences in how adolescents are socialised to behave in different experiences. It aims to challenge double standards, gender norms highlighted by pornography, social media and romanticised problematic fiction (Maas et al., 2022). The third module “Teens’ Online Interactions” (p.7) encompasses review of research on adolescent social media use and sexual expressions and communication in online spaces (Maas et al., 2022). It aims to reduce victim blaming for distribution of nudes in schools and discussions around condom use and STBBIs (Maas et al., 2022). Finally, the last module “Sexual Violence and the Internet” (p.7) offers an overview of the role of the media in violence perpetration and victimization (Maas et al., 2022). It aims to provide strategies and resources to prevent violence through policy implementations and respond to victims in a way that focuses on their needs (Maas et al., 2022). This programme is an extremely useful resource for teachers, as no lengthy school board approval is needed, as it would be if it was being taught directly to adolescents (Kramer, 2019) and it also provides teachers with knowledge to enhance school climates and student experiences (Maas et al., 2022). It also helps combat the top-down approach common in neoliberal practises, as the educators are receiving knowledge to enhance their own understanding first, which will in turn benefit their students, as Foucault (1978) states “who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which

prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue . . . is the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse’ (p.11). This programme would help portray sex in a safe and informative discourse, with limited room for misinformation.

3.4 Porn in Sex Ed? Porn is Sex Ed

Many researchers believe that pornography education should be taught in secondary schools (Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Maas et al., 2022; Dawson et al., 2020). Studies have shown that sexualized media literacy and pornography specific media literacy have been the most appropriate response to the increase in adolescents’ access to pornography (Dawson et al., 2020). This type of education could be an extremely useful tool for preventing violence, specifically sexual and promoting safe sexual health (Maas et al., 2022). This is supported by Goldstein’s (2020) findings that pornography education is a common factor in sexual health promotion and violence prevention, and this education should be taught in secondary school (Maas et al., 2022). The best place for adolescents to learn about the impacts of pornography is in a school setting, where high quality content can be delivered (Crabbe & Flood, 2021). Like most initiatives to enhance our sex education curriculum to be more comprehensive and inclusive, there are barriers to including pornography literacy onto school curriculums (Maas et al., 2022). This includes, but is not limited to, lengthy board approvals, fears surrounding parent backlash and state level policies (Kramer, 2019).

4 Ethical Implications/ Considerations Surrounding Pornography

4.1 The porn wars & censorship

The ‘porn wars’ or ‘sex wars’ were debates amongst feminists on a range of issues relating to sexuality and sexual activity in the late 1970s early 1980s. the debates mainly revolved around pornography, erotica, sadomasochism, lesbianism and prostitution (Duggan

& Hunter, 1995). The effects of these debates can still be felt today, with feminist communities ‘fractured’ across countries, “creating deep divisions between those who appear to view pornography as inherently exploitative and harmful to women, and others perceived to embody a ‘post-feminist’ view of porn as an empowering tool for female sexual expression” (Macleod, 2021 p.387). Many governments have taken the ‘anti-porn’ stance, increasing censorship in relation to sexually explicit material, which they consider to be ‘pornographic’, for example, in 1968 Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart was asked what his definition of pornography is, to which he replied “I know it when I see it” which ultimately is up to the courts discretion and is difficult to dispute (Burke, 2023). Pornographic magazines in Australia were also subject to censorship laws, one magazine – Australian Women’s Forum (AWF) would have to use a protractor to measure the “angle of the dangle” (Lush, 2013 p. 72) to ensure compliance with censorship laws, as erect penises were not allowed to be shown (Lush, 2013). Government attempts to censor pornographic content have been seen as a representation of a “class related repressive trend” (Macleod, 2021 p.388).

4.2 Ethical Consumption? Production?

Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry (Dodson, 2013) with the estimated revenue from the porn industry being between \$5 and \$12 billion (Tarrant, 2016). This figure is likely to have gone up during and after the pandemic, where porn viewership went up by 24% in the first few days of isolation (Izrizarry et al., 2023). Although pornography is made all around the world, the San Fernando Valley is the place best known for legal (and illegal) porn production (Tarrant, 2016). Many porn actors and actresses, directors, script writers and set designers move to the San Fernando Valley to participate in this lucrative industry; porn was seen as a “gold mine offering easy cash and good times to anyone willing to learn the ropes” (Lush, 2013 p. 71). Most pornography production companies are based in the San

Fernando Valley and most American porn is made here because “the State Supreme Court decided in 1988 that getting paid to have sex on camera is legally protected speech and not prostitution” (Tarrant, 2016 p.39). New laws mandate that condoms must be worn in all porn shoots in Los Angeles County; therefore many production companies have relocated and are continuing to relocate to places where no such mandate is applicable (Tarrant, 2016). Bryce et al (2015) and Holt (2015) argue that sex workers need to be able to talk about their experiences more openly in relation to ethical standards and working conditions with particular companies, in order for consumers to make ethical decisions when choosing which pornography to consume. However, due to the notions of taboo and stigma surrounding pornography and the sex industry as a whole, it is difficult to have frank discussions surrounding pornography consumption and production (Macleod, 2021). The “secretive manner in which pornography must be consumed and produced” (p.388) furthers the lack of industry transparency, and users are less willing to “respond to calls for consumer behaviour change from porn performers – such as campaigns encouraging consumers to pay for their porn” (Lee, 2015; Macleod, 2021 p.389). Usually, ethical consumption trends and campaigns are successful through publicity and word of mouth (Bedford, 1999), however this is not the case with pornography.

4.3 Ethical (Feminist) Porn

Feminist porn is described to use “sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers” (Taormino et al., 2013 p.9). Pornography was always aimed at men and spoke to men, concentrating on sex acts only men liked and didn’t give equal pleasure to the woman, only making her an object for men’s desires (Lush, 2013). Conversely, feminist pornography explores “concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of

injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity” (Taormino et al., 2013 p.9-10) something that mainstream pornography and tube sites do not tend to do. Mainstream pornography included “little romance, foreplay or cunnilingus – things that I [a woman] wanted to see” (Lush, 2013 p.71). Lush (2013) goes on to describe how she wanted to create porn that she would enjoy and “share that porn with other horny women” (p.71). Access to this pornography genre is directly related to participation in feminist and queer communities (Lieberman, 2015). Feminist pornography directors tend to appropriate feminism throughout their work, through ethical production practises and representations of consent, communication and safety (Lieberman, 2015). Tristan Taormino (2013) a prominent sex educator and feminist film director, produced pornographic films that focused on high production values, romance, and female pleasure and deliberately excluded conventions of mainstream porn, including extreme genital close-ups, anal sex, and external cum shots. These types of videos are becoming increasingly popular with the female audience, with more production companies recreating these types of pornographic content and targeting it to women. Taormino (2013) describes how in the pornographic videos they produce they allow the actors and actresses to decide who they have sex with, when, where and what they do and to forget everything they know about porn. Feminist beliefs play a central role in both taste and development for feminist pornography (Lieberman, 2015), which allows more agency for the viewer and the actors participating.

In 2014, the UK government made the following acts of pornography produced in the UK illegal:

spanking, caning, aggressive whipping, penetration by any object ‘associated with violence’, physical or verbal abuse (regardless if consensual), urolagnia, role-playing as non adults, physical restraint, humiliation, female ejaculation, strangulation, facesitting & fisting (Srinivasan, 2021 p.57).

A lot of these acts are extremely prominent in mainstream pornography and some of these acts that are illegal relate to female pleasure. This is problematic not only because female pleasure is being disregarded in the production of these films, it also focuses and emphasises that sexual acts should be geared towards men and pornography is normalising the focus on male pleasure only, which feminist pornography tends to try and debunk.

Summary

This literature review presented various findings. Firstly, it discovered the prevalence of pornography in adolescents lives, and the patterns and habits that adolescents experience in relation to pornography consumption and the power pornography has in relation to their sexual scripts. This was also discovered and discussed when examining the potential effects of pornography in adolescents. Sex education curricula was also examined in relation to pornography literacy, which identified what education is available currently, however, research shows that it is severely lacking and any meaningful conversations surrounding porn literacy in sex education classes are few and far between. Finally, this literature review discussed ethical concerns of consumption and production of pornography, including government censorship and the subsequent porn wars in the 1980's. Research on certain topics within this literature review were limited to my knowledge, due to adolescent pornography consumption being a niche topic and the ethical issues that surround researching adolescent pornography consumption. There was also limited perspectives in relation to porn literacy from educators and learning about pornography in an educational setting. This area requires further investigation, potentially in different geographical contexts also. All studies to my knowledge were also conducted in western countries, which implies that the rest of the population outside of these countries may not be represented. This is in part due to different political and religious regimes and limited data being available in relation to adolescent pornography consumption.

In chapter 3, I will explore which methodologies I will use and why I feel they are appropriate for this thesis, which will help me investigate if we should be teaching our students porn literacy in sex education classes.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will look at the methodological choices I have chosen to answer the question: “Should Porn Literacy Be Taught in Sex Education Classes?”. I have chosen to use qualitative and arts based methodologies in order to conceptualise my research. These were the most appropriate methods as I wanted in-depth, concise and creative data, compared to quantitative data which is rigid and not subjective in nature. This chapter will delve into why I chose arts based methodologies – collage specifically, and why semi structured interviews were chosen. It will also reflect on the research design I have used for this thesis and the rationale behind choosing this design. This chapter will also examine the different research paradigms that have been used within this thesis, and how they inform data collection and analysis methods. It will also explore the various data collection methods implemented, as well as examining the data analysis methods employed. Finally, this chapter will finish discussing the limitations of methodologies chosen.

Research Paradigm

A paradigm can be defined as ‘the set of common beliefs and agreements’ that are shared through our research and assumptions that all researchers have in common regarding the nature and conduct of the research (Khun, 1977). For this thesis, I used the interpretivist research paradigm, alongside the performative research paradigm as I used both qualitative and arts based methodologies. The interpretivist paradigm is a “complex system that emphasises social reality with the ideology that the researcher possesses” and contains key theories about how we gain knowledge of the world (O’Reilly, 2009 p118). Semi-structured interviews fit into the interpretivist paradigm because “interpretation is always based upon presuppositions

and is always shaped by the particular socio-historic location of the interpreter” (Hammersley, 2012 pg 22). Therefore, as we infer the data collected, it is all based on the interviewer’s positionality and ideologies. Collage also fits into the interpretivist paradigm, as we are interpreting meanings behind images chosen, as well as placements of the images within the page. Each person will interpret the datasets differently, allowing for slightly different meanings to be made by each interpretation. As arts based methodologies are collaborative in nature, a performative paradigm is also appropriate. Performative paradigms produce space for artistic freedom, experimentation and inclusion (østern et al., 2021). It also challenges the notions of what research should be, and challenges distinguishes research from dominant knowledge models (Bolt, 2016). Performative paradigms are the most appropriate paradigm for all forms of artistic practise and is also used to create creative content across cultural industries (Haseman, 2006). Therefore, I believe that using the performative paradigm in conjunction with the interpretivist paradigm, we as researchers are able to collect rich datasets which will enhance meanings and allow for creative exploration of perceptions of pornography.

Arts Based Methodologies

Arts based methodologies “encompass a range of research approaches and strategies that utilize one or more of the arts in investigation” (Greenwood, 2019). Arts based methodologies also offer different ways of knowing and knowledge production (Leavy, 2020) allowing the researcher and participant to explore different meanings of representation and data analysis. Eisner (1997) and Leavy (2020) suggest that arts based research “advances critical conversations about the nature of social-scientific practise and expand the borders of our methods arsenal” (pg.12). Arts based methodologies disrupt the way we think, how we conduct research and changes assumptions of what constitutes research and knowledge (Leavy, 2020). Arts based methodologies are a feminist approach that challenge the dominant Western

positivist paradigm. According to Piantanida et al. (2003), researchers may employ art as a means of persuasion, particularly in the political sphere, as a method of self-exploration, as a teaching tool, a way of representing knowledge, and/or as a means of creating knowledge. Using arts based methodologies and participatory visual approaches give the participants a voice needed to address the power relations between researcher and participant (Mannay, 2015). These methodologies have also been “employed as a tool by marginalised and silenced communities” (Mannay, 2015 pg.47) which also shows how these methodologies go against the dominant Western positivist paradigm. It is also important to note, that “populations who are typically involved in participatory visual research occupy a marginal position and so their visual productions may also be marginalized” (Mitchell et al, 2017 pg. 20).

Collage

The participatory arts based methodology I utilized in this thesis was collage. Collage making is the “practise of gathering fragments and then cutting, tearing, folding or crumpling these remnants taken from preexisting pictures, found objects or fabrics, or a mixture of these, and gluing them onto a flat surface to communicate a visual message” (Butler-Kisber, 2019). Collage incorporates working knowledge and allows for a “deep understanding of materials and reliance on intuitive and imaginative thinking” (Harper, 1987). Collage as an arts based methodology can be used as an effective and intuitive research method when investigating attitudes and perceptions towards discussing particularly sensitive and taboo topics, such as pornography in a classroom setting. Similarly, collage also allows for visual thinking (Culshaw, 2018) and adds meaning in a way spoken word cannot, which is beneficial when discussing these topics. Collage also offers participants a more personal connection with the research and encourages participants to create art that serves both as data and also represents data (Leavy, 2020) strengthening the relationship that the participant has with the data. Using collage also

helps break down barriers, counter power inequalities between the researcher and participants (Butler-Kisber, 2019) and encourages participants to think and see differently, allowing connections that may not have been initially prominent, leading the participant to infer new associations or refining and enhancing meanings (Chilton & Scotti, 2013). Collage allows for multiple ways of looking at and analysing phenomena (Butler-Kisber et al., 2003) and allows us to “tell stories through a direct visual connection to the real world of lived experience” (Klorer, 2014 pg. 147). It allows a level of self-representation, which is “particularly valuable when narrating experiences where an ability to express agency has been lacking” (Gorman et al., 2023 pg. 288). Collage can also be used as a “visual reflective memo”, which allow participants to reflect and share their perceptions and feelings which may have remained “hidden or implicit” (Butler-Kisber, 2010 pg 110). Collage is also a very sustainable methodology, it allows for the renewal of resources, such as magazines, which otherwise might have been disposed of. The renewal of these resources creates an aesthetically pleasing project in which researchers and participants are able to reflect and facilitate conversations around the artwork and the thought process behind it. Collage is recognized as a method for enhancing educational research (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999), presenting the researcher as an artist or the artist as a researcher (Finley and Knowles, 1995). Eisner (2002 p 7) describes the collage making process, piecing theory, practise, research and creativity as

the process of working with the material, the work itself secures its own voice and helps set the direction. The maker is guided and, in fact, at times surrenders to the demands of the emerging forms. Opportunities in the process of working are encountered that were not envisioned when work began, but that speak so eloquently about the promise of emerging possibilities that new options are pursued. Put succinctly, surprise, a fundamental reward of all creative work, is bestowed by the work on its maker.

This shows how intricate and nuanced the collage making process is, and how the researcher and the collage become intertwined. Collage "embraces multiple unique understandings from

diverse cultures and intentionally integrates alternative ways of knowing and knowledge systems" (Harding, 1996). Collage goes against the white, western paradigm of academic research. It allows for a greater role for participants in the research process and participants feel as if their voice matters to the study. They also have greater flexibility and reflexivity when it comes to analysing the collages as they are able to voice their opinions, thoughts, emotions and feelings from the outset.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with my participants were used as they provide flexible technique for small-scale research (Drever, 1995) and allows thematic analysis of the qualitative data (Alvarez & Urla, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are also used when "more useful information can be obtained from focused yet conversational two-way communication with participants" and hopefully "specific questions would emerge as a matter of course during the exploration of topics and sub-topics" (Pathak, 2015). This leads to the interviewer having "more freedom to explore issues as a matter of course, rather than pre-empting the issues" (Pathak, 2015). Semi-structured interviews also produce rapport-building, thought provoking interjections, and critical event analysis (Pathak, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are also used to better understand participants unique perspectives, rather than a generalised understanding of a phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019). I decided that semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate qualitative data collection method as it allowed me to have autonomy in what I was asking my participants, allowing rich conversation following on from my indicative questions. It also allowed me to build a relationship with my participants as we were having a discussion, which allowed them to feel more comfortable and express their feelings on pornography more freely.

Research Design

I have chosen to approach this study using a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is used to understand human experience (van Manen, 1997) and has evolved to make sense of the lived experience (Wilson, 2015). Phenomenological research emphasises the connection between philosophical origins and practical research applications. Phenomenological design is useful when researching perceptions of pornography as it is able to challenge pre-determined assumptions. People interact with pornography in various different ways and each persons 'lived experience' with pornography is different. By using phenomenological research, I was able to see the meanings people associated with pornography and the impact it has had on their lives and their perceptions on the impact pornography has on adolescents lives. Phenomenological research also uses 'bracketing' where the researcher sets aside any preconceived knowledge or beliefs they have on the phenomena being studied (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). I used 'bracketing' while conducting my research in order to hear my participants experiences in an openminded manner. By using phenomenological research, it provided me with a deeper understanding of my participants lived experiences with pornography, which in turn can help inform the development of policies that can be used to help educate and inform adolescents. It is also important to acknowledge that phenomenological research can also have limitations. Firstly, it is very time consuming. As phenomenology "intrudes into people's private worlds" (Wilson, 2015) it is important to build trust between the researcher and participants. Additionally, the "subjectivity of the information gathered from people limits the generalizability of conclusions in phenomenological research" (Gagura, 2024). The results of phenomenological research is also dependant on the researcher's interpretations, which may sometimes be unreliable. Phenomenological research is also limited by small sample sizes and the "absence of experimental controls, which might make it difficult to establish a casual link between variables" (Gagura, 2024).

Data Collection

Participants

For this study, I wanted to interview and work with pre-service teachers, as they have first-hand experience working in a classroom and they have recently graduated from high school. I also chose to work with pre-service teachers instead of qualified teachers as pre-service teachers were more accessible to me at McGill. To select my participants, I posted flyers with the study information and details all over the Department of Education at McGill. The flyer had a QR code where interested participants could scan. The QR code would lead participants to a Microsoft form, where they would be asked if they meet the study requirements, which were that they are enrolled in B.Ed or MATL¹ programmes at McGill, and that they are likely to teach sex education at high school level once they finish their degree. I decided to use purposive sampling as I wanted to hear first-hand experiences of how pornography has affected our classrooms, therefore I had to recruit pre-service teachers who have completed placements and were experienced, knowledgeable and willing to participate.

The flyers were posted in the Education Department for 2 months, in that time I received 6 responses. Five participants fit the criteria (n=5). Of my five participants, all of them identified as female. All participants were undergraduates, between the ages of 20 – 25. They all had completed at least 2 semesters of placement, some having more teaching experience than others. Of the 5 participants, 3 identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community and 2 identified as heterosexual. Of the 5 participants, 4 identified as Canadian and 1 identified as Canadian and Indian.

¹ B.Ed is the Bachelor of Education. MATL is the Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning

To conduct this study and begin participation selection, I gained REB approval from the McGill Ethics Committee. All participants were given a consent form to sign and return to me once they were contacted from the survey. No participants were interviewed without a complete consent form. The consent form went into detail about the process of the interview and collage making session and discussed in detail the informed consent procedures. Participants could pull out of the study at any time and had until February 2025 to request that any data collected from the interviews and collage making session be deleted from my thesis and destroyed. Any later than February 2025 would not be feasible as all data would have been analysed and submitted for examination. All data collected has been anonymised. Participants were given a code and pseudonym once selected and were referred to by their code throughout the entire process². The codes are on a excel spreadsheet on my McGill OneDrive, which only I have access to. All recordings from the interviews and collage making sessions and communication with participants have been confidential. The study may carry a potential for social harm, as pornography is a taboo subject, and some participants had very strong opinions in regards to pornography, so I have placed the utmost importance in ensuring that all identifying data has been kept confidential and will continue to be kept confidential once this thesis has been disseminated.

Data Generation

This thesis used semi-structured interviews and collage making. My interview protocol consisted of introducing myself and giving a brief overview of the topics we were going to discuss within the interview. To ensure that all participants were given the same information at the start of their interviews, I created a script. I then asked for consent to have the interviews audio recorded. All interview questions were well researched, by analysing existing studies

² Pseudonyms were chosen using a random name generator.

around pornography consumption and analysing the rationale behind these studies. This allowed me to hone in on areas I believed were most important in researching, being adolescent pornography consumption and pornography in relation to sex education.

Interview questions were approved by McGill's ethics committee. If participants were stuck answering a question, or did not fully understand the question, I provided them with a prompt (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) such as asking them to think back to their own schooling experience and if they can relate to any of the themes that are being discussed. Once the interview portion of the session was complete, I reminded my participants that they can withdraw at any time and verified that they were okay to continue to the collage making portion.

I used a similar protocol for the collage making portion of my session. I explained the purpose of the collage, and how it will be used to accompany the interview responses. I also explained to participants that they were co-creating in meaning making by participating in a/r/tography (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019). Materials were provided and participants were able to choose what they resonated with and that explained their experiences and emotions well. There were no prompts given during the session, participants were encouraged to choose what spoke to them and what created meaning for them, which pushed for creativity and freedom of expression. These sessions unveiled deeper insights into discussions around pornography. Once the collages were complete I recorded a very short interview to allow for participant reflection and analysis.

Procedures

I used the same procedure for all of my interviews. I met participants in the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL), where we had our own private room to allow my participants to feel comfortable discussing this particularly sensitive topic.

The whole data collection process took 2 months, due to participant availability as both portions of my data collection protocol were quite lengthy, with each interview and collage making session lasting around 2 hours.

I began by asking for consent to have the interview audio recorded, and once consent was given I began recording on my phone. Participants were then asked the following 10 questions:

1. What is pornography?
2. How accessible is porn to young people?
3. What are the potential effects of pornography on young people?
4. Is pornography an accurate depiction of real-life sexual experiences?
5. How does pornography influence gender roles and stereotypes?
6. What are the ethical concerns surrounding pornography?
7. How can young people critically evaluate pornography?
8. What are ethical alternatives to pornography for sexual exploration and education?
9. How can educators address porn with young people?
10. What role can sex education play in mitigating the effects of pornography?

These questions focused on their experiences with teaching sex education and their own sex education, if they felt that pornography literacy belongs in the sex education curriculum and how we as educators can execute teaching pornography literacy in an age-appropriate manner. Once all questions had been answered and the semi-structured interview process had concluded, I laid out 5 magazines, newspapers, coloured paper, glitter, 3 different types of adhesives (glue stick, glue and tape), coloured pens, scissors, exacto knife, cutting board, and ruler onto the table and handed participants a sheet of paper. When selecting which magazines to use, I went to my local newsagents and picked the 5 most popular magazine brands that were

available (Cosmopolitan, Elle, GQ, People, Woman's Health). I chose these magazines also because their combined target audience covers a large age-range, which I thought was appropriate when looking at attitudes towards pornography, as they may vary depending on the target demographic. The newspapers used were obtained from McGill Library (McGill Daily, The Tribune & Le Délit). I chose these newspapers as they are reporting on what is relevant to McGill students, which I believed to be beneficial in order to provide materials that relate to my participants. Participants were then given 45 minutes to an hour to create a collage based off the discussions we had during the interview and their own experiences with pornography and sex education. The participants went through the materials and picked what spoke to them. They then arranged the images and materials on the piece of paper I provided them. During this process, I observed their body language and their interactions with the materials and made notes. Once participants completed their collage, I turned on the recording app and asked them to briefly describe their collage and how it linked to our previous discussion. I also asked them questions about the actual process itself and asked them to reflect on using collage as a data collection and analysis tool. Once they finished telling me about their collage, I stopped the recording and scanned the collages. I then imported all recordings onto my McGill OneDrive and deleted them from my phone.

Data Analysis

To analyse all data collected in this thesis, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis allows for flexibility and can be used to identify patterns across all data collected (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis has been used across all my data sets, from my semi-structured interviews

to analysis of the collages and observation of body language during the collage making sessions.

Transcribing and coding

The conversations I had with Layla, Connie, Abbie, Roxy and Haley were audio recorded and later transcribed. There was a total of ten transcripts, which include our conversations from the semi-structured interviews and the collage making reflection. I transcribed each interview using Microsoft Teams. I then put each transcription into LibreQDA, a qualitative analysis software, where I then began the coding process. The coding process began by reading through each transcript and coding instances that related to my research question and themes found from my literature review, using the ‘highlight’ and ‘code’ functions. Codes are useful when analysing qualitative data, as they represent “the salient features of a main idea put forth by subjects through their responses in a qualitative study” (Coates et al., 2021). Once the coding process was complete, I transferred the codes into a separate document (see Figure 1) and grouped them together under themes I discovered through my literature review. Once all data was coded and grouped together, I interpreted meanings and came to a conceptual understanding (Naeem et al., 2023). Thematic analysis was chosen as my data analysis technique as the data collected was quite diverse, so grouping and coding the datasets into themes was appropriate to connect with my research question, and the phenomenological research design.

Prevalence, Pattern & Power		
Sub-Theme Codes	Description	Relevant Quotes
1.1 Accessibility to pornography	Describing how accessible pornography is to adolescents – both accidental and intentional	<p>“I think it's really accessible. Nowadays. There's a lot of ways to access to it, so I don't think it's out of reach, not unless you're living in a place that there's no wifi or you, or you're like, in a very close knit community, then, yeah, you don't have access to it, but technically it's accessible, yeah?” (Layla)</p> <p>“I think it's very accessible. It's right at their fingertips. All they have to do is click a button and they see it.” (Connie)</p> <p>“they don't even have to click a button, sometimes you're just walking down the street and you'll pass like, a porn theater with like, huge ads. So it's also unavoidable. They don't even have to search for it. It's just there everywhere. [...] the porn theater example I gave is because I live right next to one. So every time I go out my house, there's just, like, these, like, huge ads of, like, naked women, and it's quite makes me uncomfortable [...] I mean, there's a tiny star on the nipples, but you can see everything really, yeah, it's not. You don't really have to use your imagination.” (Connie)</p> <p>“I'll be watching a show on a website and, like, it pops up, you know, naked lady or things like that.” (Connie)</p> <p>“But the guys, however, were like, Yeah, I remember them watching it a lot, talking about it. They would sometimes, like, send really disgusting memes or videos in group chats, you know. So again, you can't avoid it, like not looking for it, but bam, yeah.” (Connie)</p> <p>“I think it is very accessible. I mean, the only thing stopping a child or teenager, I'm just gonna say child, like, for anyone under 18 years old, going forth, but yeah, for a child to access a pornography website specifically is very easy. They only ask, like, are you 18 and above? And then you can click Yes. And there's no like, firewall or anything, unless you have parents that are very strict on, like, parental control for online, then it might be more difficult, but generally that's like, yeah. And then there's always google images, which, again, Google has been better at, like, censoring, but you could still be like, I'm an adult, and then see yeah for let's say, like, more I want to say retro things, like playboys and, you know, like books, those might be more difficult to acquire because there's that kind of like, there's an adult present, and so, like, buying a pornographic magazine, let's say they're gonna be like, I'm not gonna sell you.” (Abbie)</p> <p>“pornography spreads like fire, because it's like, oh, did you see this? And then, like, a kid who might have never even thought about it all of a sudden hears about it.” (Abbie)</p> <p>“I remember, like, I was in high school, and we came back from like, a prom, and like, you know, somebody put pornography on the TV, and it's like, whatever, you know, that's just normal, I guess.” (Abbie)</p>

Figure 1 – Example of Grouped Codes

Summary

This chapter discussed why collage and semi structured interviews were chosen to collect my data, and why I decided to design my research in a phenomenological manner, and how that impacted the way meanings were made in relation to attitudes and perceptions about pornography. This chapter also explored how interpretivist and performative paradigms were used to inform my data collection and analysis and the rationale behind using these two paradigms. The data collection section explored my recruitment strategy, demographics of participants and ethical considerations taken into account while conducting the research. I also discussed the instruments used and the development of these instruments. Data collection procedures were set out in a step by step description. Finally, this chapter then explored the data analysis methods, looking at how thematic analysis was an appropriate method to use to analyse my data, and how my themes were identified.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Findings

In this chapter, I outline the findings gathered from my semi structured interviews and collage making sessions. I have organised the findings into five sections that successfully answer the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of pre-service teachers, how does pornography affect adolescents' development
2. Should pornography be part of a sex education curriculum for adolescents and if so, what role could it play?

In the first section, I introduce the participants and show how participants define pornography. In the next section, I will present the findings of this study into 4 categories: “prevalence, pattern & power, potential effects of pornography on adolescents, pornography in sex education and the ethics behind pornography”. Additionally, I will be analysing data surrounding the use of collage as an arts based educational research method, and how collages helped uncover additional thoughts and perspectives that the interviews did not. This data will form the basis of my fifth and final category: “piecing it all together”. Then, I will provide a discussion section where I will discuss the data collected. Finally, I will provide a summary of the findings and discussion points.

Introducing the participants

To situate the findings of this study, an overview of participants is needed to better understand their positionality and perspectives when discussing the impacts of pornography on adolescents.

Layla

Layla is a first-year undergraduate student at McGill university in the Department of Education. She has participated in her first field experience in the Fall 2024 semester and observed a grade eight English class. She has no prior experience making collages.

Connie

Connie is a second-year undergraduate student at McGill university in the Department of Education. She has participated in two field experiences since she has been at McGill and has worked with grade nine students in a Montreal school. She has limited experience making collages, only making personal collages.

Roxy

Roxy is a final year undergraduate student at McGill University in the Department of Education. She has completed multiple internships and stages in various high schools across Montreal. She volunteers at a violence against women's centre as an extracurricular. She has limited experience making collages, only making them in art classes in high school.

Abbie

Abbie is a final year undergraduate student at McGill University in the Department of Education. She has completed multiple internships and stages in various high schools across Montreal. She volunteers at a violence prevention society as an extracurricular. She has experience making collages. She produces collages for zines that she makes with her friends to promote violence prevention.

Haley

Haley is a graduate student at McGill university and has been teaching in Elementary schools for the past year alongside graduate studies. She graduated McGill University with a B.Ed and has experience teaching sex education to adolescents. She has limited experience making collages, however she tries to incorporate them in her teaching methods.

How do participants define pornography?

Merriam-Webster (n.d) defines pornography as “the depiction of erotic behaviour (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement “or “the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction”. While both definitions do satisfy the purpose of pornography, it does not define what constitutes as being explicitly pornographic. As discussed in chapter 2, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s definition of pornography was “I know it when I see it” (Burke, 2023). This makes it very difficult to dispute what is pornographic, as people’s perceptions will differ based on their cultural, societal and religious beliefs. Participants also did not explicitly define what acts constitute as pornographic, however they were more succinct in nature. Abbie defined pornography as:

pornography [...] it's like, wildly exaggerated, I will say, I mean, I already said it was fiction, but it's very much scripted. And, you know, it's about fantasy and erotica, which is something that often is like, meant to poke the imagination. So it's not a good platform to, first, like children and teenagers to learn, even adults to learn about what sex is, yeah, like, it's not a platform for sexual education.

She explains that “pornography can be filmed. It can be like literature, [...] like graphic novel or books, [...] it could be podcast, it could be phone like sex, you know, there's, there's really, like, it's actually quite impressive. The amount of media there is out there”. Here Abbie defines pornography as being a multi-media phenomenon that extends beyond pictures and writing as traditional definitions imply. Roxy supports this consensus, stating that she defines pornography as “any produced content. It can be audio, it can be visual, it can be written word, that, like someone engages with to, I think, like, achieve arousal or sexual gratification”. She proceeds to explain that pornography “can be up to the individual” in what they consider is pornographic. This accompanies the notion that pornographic perceptions will differ based on your cultural, societal and religious beliefs. Haley, Connie and Layla all described pornography in a similar manner, believing that pornography takes up many forms and is related to any

media surrounding sex, sexual acts and sexual gratification. Layla and Abbie also included in their definition that pornographic material should be made and distributed to people above the age of 18. This highlights the issue of adolescents accessing materials that were not created or intended for their use and how internet pornography is not monitored or moderated.

1. Prevalence, Pattern & Power

1.1 Pornography in ‘traditional’ media

As we see from the definitions participants gave when in relation to pornography, all participants agreed that it is not limited to just one form of media. Here, participants talk in more detail about how pornography is prevalent throughout all forms of media that adolescents consume, not just limited to internet pornography. Abbie and Roxy both discuss how pornographic content is prevalent in literature and is gaining increased popularity due to social media applications such as TikTok. Abbie discusses how when she was an adolescent, her peers would visit sites such as Wattpad to read “smut” and “fan fiction”. Roxy also discusses how AO3 and Tumblr were both popular sites for adolescents to read smut. AO3, Tumblr and Wattpad also allow their users to publish their own content, so adolescents could write their own pornographic content and share it amongst their peers within these online spaces. Whilst these sites still exist today, fiction novels are gaining traction due to the BookTok community on TikTok. Users are able to join these communities which provide reviews and recommendations of books. A lot of books that have gained popularity through BookTok have been romance fiction and fantasy romance. Roxy and Abbie both discuss books from BookTok which can be considered problematic due to their content and the audience that has been targeted. Abbie provides “A Court of Thorn and Roses” as an example of this. She explains that this series of fantasy romance books (she calls fairy porn) is categorised as young adult literature on BookTok, encouraging adolescents to read this series when it is not appropriate

for them and should not be targeted towards them. Roxy shares this sentiment, using “Ice Breaker” as an example. She mentions that the use of cartoon covers misleads adolescents and their parents about the contents of these types of books, which contain a large amount of smut. She also talks about the discourse on BookTok surrounding “spice levels” and adolescents not reading books if there is no “spice”. Connie also discusses pornographic content in literature but in the form of manga. Mangas are Japanese graphic novels aimed at adults and adolescents. Connie has witnessed students reading “gay porn in the form of manga” at her internship in school. This can be problematic as pornographic materials should not be consumed in school as it is inappropriate and may encourage other students to seek out pornographic materials themselves.

Another form of media that participants discussed in relation to exposure to pornography is television. Layla discusses a situation where a child can be exposed to a sex scene whilst watching a movie on TV. She hypothesises that children are thinking “why is the guy doing this? why is he molesting that woman? [...] Is this normal?” This last sentiment “is this normal?” may lead adolescents to investigate further and may bring them down a rabbit hole of internet pornography. Roxy describes sex scenes on TV as “not necessary” and how people wanting to see sex on TV is “like an itch”. Sex does have an impact on storylines and is a natural part of life, so we should not be censoring it completely from TV and movies, specifically if it is rated 18 +, which most TV shows and movies that depict sexual acts are.

1.2 Access to Pornography

Throughout the interviews, key subthemes were identified that fall under the ‘Prevalence, Pattern & Power’ umbrella. First, the accessibility to pornographic materials in recent years has increased exponentially. Layla discusses how there are numerous ways to access pornographic content, the only thing stopping them is no sufficient Wi-Fi connection. The

theme of ease of access through technology was prevalent throughout all interviews, suggesting that the increased availability of technology, the easier adolescents can access pornography.

Haley supports this notion as she explains:

I think that kids are able to find it really easily now, and since they have so much access to phones, iPads, technology, social media, they're coming across it without even recognizing it, and then they kind of like, I said, they go down that rabbit hole of then exploring what's out there and not even realizing what they're viewing.

Here, she suggests that adolescents can make the most innocent of searches and it lead to something pornographic and not even realise it. This proves the notion that adolescents are likely to access pornographic material for the first time accidentally (Henry & Talbot, 2019). Adolescents were also exposed to pornography by being sent unsolicited pornographic messages. Connie describes that seeing pornographic content was unavoidable as the boys in her high school class would send “disgusting memes or videos in group chats”. This theme of unsolicited pornographic content being shared by classmates was also discussed by Abbie who reminisces that after a party on her prom night “somebody put pornography on the TV”; her and her peers were indifferent to the situation, describing it as “normal”. This view of pornographic material being ‘normalised’ is also supported by Connie, who discussed her experience with exposure to pornography:

Sometimes you're just walking down the street and you'll pass like, a porn theatre with like, huge ads. So it's also unavoidable. They don't even have to search for it. It's just there everywhere. [...] the porn theatre example I gave is because I live right next to one. So every time I go out my house, there's just, like, these, like, huge ads of, like, naked women, and it's quite, makes me uncomfortable [...] I mean, there's a tiny star on the nipples, but you can see everything really, yeah, it's not... you don't really have to use your imagination.

People are exposed to pornographic or sexually suggestive materials just by leaving their houses. This further supports the discourse that the ease of access to pornography is

exponentially high, even if you are not actively searching for it. Haley believes this to be almost a rush of excitement for adolescents, as “they know they shouldn’t necessarily be viewing” this content and that they know “it’s not appropriate for them, and that what makes it more exciting [...] because they kind of feel like they’re doing something wrong and rebelling”. These themes of excitement and rebelling are not limited to adolescent pornographic consumption, but pornographic consumption in general.

1.3 Attitudes towards Pornography

Participants attitudes towards pornography varied. Abbie tended to have the most liberal view towards pornography out of all participants. She believed that sex, in general, should be normalised, and that “societal attitudes need to shift about when children and teenagers are allowed to have sex” as it is within human nature to “release, have orgasms, have sex” due to our hormones and biology. Abbie further explains that she would rather “have pornographic literature or [...] feminist like pornography available to my child if I know that they’re watching pornography, rather than have them go on PornHub” citing an openness towards adolescent pornographic consumption, just perhaps trying to find a more ethical alternative to PornHub.

PornHub was mentioned frequently throughout all interviews with all participants, almost always with negative connotations attached. When speaking about PornHub, Roxy states:

I don't really like the today's porn. I think it's can be really harmful to women, and I think especially on unmonitored sites like Pornhub, where there can be non consensual content and it stays up there for five, six months, and the producers are, like, getting popular, whatever, and the contents getting to, like the number one video. I think it makes people just be not mindful about the content they're consuming.

This was a general consensus amongst all participants when it came to ‘mainstream’ (anything that is not considered ‘indie’ or ‘feminist’ porn) pornography. Haley describes

pornography “treating people as objects” and that pornography depicts that “your partner is just this object for you to receive pleasure”. It can be argued that pornography takes the intimacy and individual away from sex and creates this performance of what sex is. Haley discloses that pornography should not be used as a tutorial, it should be used for entertainment. This discourse is prominent with pro-porn feminists and the arguments used for feminist porn (see Taormino et al., 2013 p.9-10) and aiding in women’s sexual liberation. However, we must be mindful that the probability of adolescents watching pornography for women’s sexual liberation and freedom may be slim.

Roxy proclaims that she knows adolescents are “watching and engaging” with pornographic material and she describes an instance where she had “teenage boys doing this thing where they like, moan in class, and they make these, like, really sexual sounds, and it gets to a point where it's sexual harassment”. She believes that pornography consumption had a major role in these behaviours and encouraging sexual harassment. Roxy tended to have the most negative associations towards pornography, believing that pornography influences violence, such as stated here:

What I've seen, or what I've like researched, it's, I'm gonna say like 98% of the time, it's the guy taking on the, quote, unquote, like, aggressor role. Yeah, and he's more active, and he's, he's cho-, the word choking. Yeah, it's not choking. Choking is when something's stuck in your throat. It's, it's strangulation.

“Choking” a common action portrayed in pornography is defined by Roxy here as strangulation. Strangulation is vehemently associated with violence and is defined as “the action of killing someone by pressing their throat so that they cannot breathe” (Cambridge, n.d). When the action of “choking” is put into this context, it is inherently violent. Layla, Connie and Haley also discussed issues of violence in pornography, however not as explicitly. Layla describes how “pornography involves a lot of illegal matters”, which explains further by

discussing the discourses surrounding sex trafficking, issues with coercion and lack of consent within the porn industry. Haley also shares this concern of a lack of consent within pornography and mentions how there is “no foreplay, no aftercare, no nothing”. Issues surrounding consent and pornography will be discussed and analysed in section 4.2.

1.4 Is porn an accurate depiction of real life experiences?

All participants agreed that pornography is not an accurate depiction of real life sexual experiences. Layla audibly laughs when she is asked the question, she then answers:

No way. If it was, I would be like, damn what kind of word Are we living in? But no, like, I mentioned, really, like, a guy going, like, for six hours or more, like, really? Oh, wow, that would be amazing. No, like, stamina and everything that the real life stamina, actually, it's only some kind of animals on here that can go on for that long.

Obviously there is an exaggeration when she mentions sex lasting for 6 hours or more, however this fits with the notion that pornography depicts sex to last longer than it does and the stereotype that males do not ejaculate quickly. It is interesting to note she compares pornographic sex to sex we can sometimes see in relation to animals. This suggests that pornography can be seen as almost animalistic in nature and not a normal human experience. Layla also comments how it “would be amazing” if the guy lasted longer. This I believe is a direct consequence that mainstream pornography has had in terms of sexual expectations as it is very rare that actual sex people engage in lasts as long as it does in pornos, and it is meant to be an exaggeration for entertainment. Abbie agrees with this discourse, stating how she believes “it's entertainment, so it's not supposed to be [an accurate depiction of real life experiences].” She comments that “there are some [types of pornography] that are closer to what it might be, especially when you talk about, like feminist pornography. But overall, it's, fiction, and that is what is fun and entertaining about it. But it's not an educational tool.” The

conception that pornography is fiction must be stressed, specifically in relation to adolescents. This is supported by Srinivasan (2021) discussing how pornography is fiction not fact, and it is difficult for adolescents to distinguish this themselves without having any prior or limited sexual experiences. Haley believes that “addiction” to the “dramatized portrayal of sex” seen in pornos can distort perceptions when having sex with a partner. She believes that people “may be disappointed by how it's playing out, because it's not matching their unrealistic expectation that they've watched so many times online”. These concerns about dramatization and distorted views of sex are also shared by Roxy, who shares:

I don't think it's real. I think it's all very, of course, like, a lot of it's staged, but I think a lot of it from, like, the sounds that are produced it. I think, essentially, when women watch porn, they feel like a pressure to replicate what they view in porn to make it more satisfying for the other party. And a lot of it is exaggerated. It's overly, like, focused on the guy's pleasure. And it's, it's very violent, like, a lot of what I see.

Roxy describes how women may feel the need to exaggerate their experiences in order to satisfy their partner because that is what porn is telling them to do. She also discusses how a lot of porn is mainly focused on male pleasure, which is a view that is supported by feminist pornographers (Lush, 2013) and a main reason in producing feminist pornographic content.

1.5 Language derived from pornography

A couple participants discussed the impact they believe pornography has in terms of language, particularly looking at how men speak to women. Roxy specifically discusses how pornography impacts the way adolescents engage with the opposite sex, stating how “you hear in porn men like calling the women bitches, sluts and whores, and wow, everyone's doing it on porn. So of course, that's gonna translate to how they how they relate to women and young men”. Here, she talks about the normalization of sexual slurs within pornography. “Bitches, sluts & whores” all have negative connotations and are solely targeted towards women, with

mainly men directing these insults towards women in pornography. Haley also discusses the impact that phrases such as “dirty little slut” and “dirty little bitch” have on relationships. She acknowledges that some people may enjoy being called these phrases, and some people may enjoy partaking in ‘dirty talk’ and that is okay, however, “normalising some language and behaviour is just putting the other person down in the relationship”. Roxy describes these sentiments as a lack of respect, stating “you would never call your mom that, you would never call your sister that. You don’t have to be related to men to you know, deserve respect”.

Roxy also mentions the impact pornography has had on how we actively describe sexual activity. Sex to Roxy, is described as “fucking, smashing, banging” which she states are all action words. This could be a consequence of pornographic consumption, as a large range of pornographic videos are titled using action words and carry sexist and misogynistic connotations (Crespo-Fernández, 2023). Roxy furthers this sentiment, by stating “who's doing the sex? it's the guy to the girl”, which she implies here that sex is something that one party does to the other, not something that is a mutual activity.

2. Potential Effects of Pornography on Adolescents

2.1 Benefits

Abbie and Layla were the only participants to discuss the potential benefits that pornography may have on adolescents. This may be in part due to the societal stigma surrounding pornography consumption in adolescents being inherently negative. However, there are benefits that pornography consumption may present to adolescents. Abbie discusses pornography as being a benefit for queer and LGBTQ+ adolescents as there are sexual representations of different sexualities and genders that you would not see in films. She also discusses the benefits of anime porn as a “great tool for people who have been sexually

assaulted because it's not a human person". This allows people to still experience self-pleasure and still experience pornography.

Abbie also discusses the normality of adolescents "exploring themselves" and the importance of being able to explore your own body as a teenager. She believes that pornography is "an assistive masturbatory tool" and enables adolescents to explore their bodies and their sexual preferences. Layla also shares this belief to a certain extent, stating that pornography allows adolescents to learn more about themselves, such as discovering kinks, discovering if they want to be monogamous or polyamorous and if they want these things romantically or just sexually. These are all valid thoughts adolescents may experience, and pornography can assist in developing their sexual identity.

2.2 How pornography can affect adolescents

2.2.1 Unrealistic Expectations

Participants have discussed how pornography can affect adolescents in numerous ways. This is seen through social, emotional and physical factors of their development. The first factor that was discussed by participants was how pornography portrays unrealistic expectations to adolescents of what "normal" sex is, which in turn can increase their feelings of self-consciousness when encountering sexual relationships. Layla describes the following:

In pornography, you can see that the guy can come, like, multiple times, yeah, like, multiple hours and everything. Young kids who see this, they gonna feel, well, how the heck I'm gonna do this? I'm gonna disappoint the person I'm with, [...], Oh my god, 30 minutes, and that's done. Like, 15 minutes, you're done. That's totally not what I expected. And then, boom, yeah, ego crash. You don't have any self-confidence. [...] But the truth is, is that actually 30 minutes is actually quite high.

Here Layla describes a potential inner monologue an adolescent may experience and how pornography can affect their self-confidence and make them feel self-conscious in regards to sexual activity. Abbie also believes that pornography can “lead to self esteem issues” and pornography can “lead to a lot of like misunderstanding and, you know, like issues with self worth and how you view yourself and relationships, and, of course, sometimes like danger in terms of, like sexual assault”. This consensus of unrealistic expectations was shared across all participants, Haley thinks pornography “places an unrealistic standard and expectation on what sex is. And so, when children and young adults are coming across porn as their first forms of being exposed to sex, they're seeing this really dramatized version of it”. This impacts both young men and women as they can “both get unrealistic expectations from porn” with young girls believing “that they have to perform in a way that they see girls online performing” such as “excessive moaning” or “putting on a big show when the other person orgasms” and that these are done in order to mimic the performances seen in pornography. Haley and Abbie both discuss the extreme acts sometimes portrayed in pornography and how this also sets unrealistic expectations of what sex is. Haley mentions how adolescents see these “really dirty acts, almost violent” and then believe “I guess this is what I should be doing”. Abbie explicitly mentions “fist fucking” and “threesomes” and how “13 year olds” are mentioning these things in her classroom. It can be assumed that adolescents are learning these phrases from pornography consumption and believe them to be regular sexual acts. Haley also describes how adolescents may feel “uncomfortable by it [pornography they are consuming]” and she believes “they also realize that they shouldn't be viewing that kind of material once they see it, and then they're sitting with the fact that they've seen now this kind of video, and they don't know what to do with that uncomfortability.” Adolescents may experience feelings of shame, guilt and uncomfortableness after they have viewed some types of pornography. Due to stigmas

surrounding pornography consumption, they are unlikely to speak up about these feelings and internalise them. This in turn may affect their future relationships.

2.2.2 Not equipping adolescents for meaningful relationships

Participants also discussed the effects pornography had on how adolescents are likely to view relationships. Connie states that adolescents “lack of experience” is likely to push them towards viewing pornographic content. Their perceptions of what a healthy relationship is meant to look like will be “distorted” due to pornography being the only exposure adolescents are likely to have in relation to sexual relationships. Roxy supports this, explaining:

I think someone who is, you know, engaging with sex and porn for the first time, having that be their first exposure, it can really warp their mind of what healthy sex looks like, what respectful sex looks like. And I think it leads to a culture where women don't get any satisfaction, any pleasure. Their needs aren't considered, and the guy, it's a very possessive and like violent way that sex is portrayed in porn.

Here, she showcases that porn portrays sexual relationships in a specific manner, that they are violent, and women do not get their wants and needs met. This can impact how adolescent boys may treat their future partners because they are using these pornographic videos as reference points. Connie describes how boys in her high school would treat her and her girlfriends, making “inappropriate jokes” and “harass [them]”. She believes that pornography definitely played a part in why her and her girlfriends were treated that way, explaining “it is because of what they were seeing and how it was normalized for them, and they thought it was okay to treat us that way.” This is a sentiment many young women will share, having sexual innuendos thrown at them and lewd comments being directed towards them because it is normalised, partly due to the stereotypes and misogynistic views that pornography perpetuates.

Roxy also discusses how pornography can distort views of what constitutes as a healthy sexual relationship by how quickly people discard pornography once they have consumed it. She describes the following:

The guy will, like, climax or whatever, and then immediately he has no interest in the woman he was having sex with. Because when a guy's finished watching porn, he can just turn his phone off, he can just close the app. So it's a very like one and done type deal, yeah, and I think it's how accessible it is, and just the content that's produced from porn. It doesn't equip people to have meaningful, thoughtful and respectful sexual actions.

Roxy is describing how the act of watching pornography almost becomes transactional, the viewer is watching pornography (which was created for pleasure) then once they receive that pleasure they discard the material they were consuming by closing down the browser. Roxy is suggesting here that these principles are then carried over to real sexual experiences, where they may discard their partner after they received what they were after, which is pleasure. This in turn effects adolescents ability to form impactful relationships and can contribute to the psychological harms that pornography can produce.

2.3 Stereotypes

Participants discussed the stereotypes that derive from pornography and pornography consumption. Participants identified 3 different categories of stereotypes, gender, racial and LGBTQ+.

2.3.1 Gender Stereotypes

Haley begins by describing that “children already have an idea of gender roles and stereotypes and it comes from their families [...] their backgrounds and how they’ve learned to treat other people”. This is extremely important as these familial and cultural beliefs are the

basis of what they grow up on, pornography has the ability to further warp children's ideas of gender roles and stereotypes. Haley also notes that she sees kids aged 11-12 "starting to make comments about the girls in their class and their physique" stating "oh my god she's getting boobs". This is not a direct consequence of pornography consumption, however it highlights society's obsession with commenting and almost policing women's bodies, which pornography also fuels. Specifically relating to how pornography depicts women's bodies, Abbie and Haley discuss how porn has an obsession with a woman being "perfectly groomed" and "having a small pink, shaven vulva. Haley goes further and claims that pornography places an emphasis that a woman's body is just used for sex, and that women should be okay with everything that happens to them in sex. These thoughts are supported by Roxy, who claims that:

I think when you have like, the woman, she's like, very often, very submissive position, and the guy is like, the giver, the taking more control. And the woman's kind of just there. She's kind of just accepting it, yeah? And it does a lot of times. Doesn't look like she's like an active participant, is she like, really having fun? And I think a lot of people forget that it's supposed to be like an activity you enjoy, not something you endure.

This supports the notions that women are viewed as passive participants in porn. It is interesting that Roxy says sex is supposed to be an activity you enjoy, not endure as if you are enduring sexual activity then consent is questionable. People should be able to express discomfort without fear of rejection and malice. Porn does not show these types of conversations happening between participants, which normalises the passive label applied. Connie, Roxy and Haley all discuss how women are traditionally viewed as submissive, men are viewed as dominant and this is accentuated through pornography. all participants mentioned that women "take it" in sexual activities on internet pornography. In relation to patriarchal and misogynistic ideals portrayed through pornography, specifically looking at power play, Roxy claims that it is "an anomaly when it's a woman who's a dominatrix, she's got her whip and

dressed in latex”. This is also a stereotype and maintained through pornography. A woman can be a dominant in a sexual situation without having to have “her whip and dressed in latex”. These discourses further perpetuate the gender stereotypes sexually dominant women receive.

2.3.2 Racial Stereotypes

Abbie was the only participant to mention the impact pornography has on racial stereotypes and the fetishization that occurs due to these stereotypes. She discusses “major racial stereotypes, especially when you get into the kinks like the slave kinks and such”. These kinks can become extremely harmful if someone is consuming this type of pornography without having any knowledge on the kink community and can eroticize racial oppression. Adolescents are very unlikely to have any knowledge surrounding kinks such as these, and replicating these behaviours can be extremely problematic. Abbie discusses other racial stereotypes outside the kink community, such as “black racial stereotypes, you know, BBC, big black cock, really big”. This stereotype particularly is usually paired with “teen girl annihilated by BBC” or “petite woman gets pounded by BBC”. Tags like these maintain the connotation that black people are seen as the aggressor, as the action words used are usually related to violence. Also, the infantilization of women in these tags further these ideals. The use of “BBC” supports Hill Collins (2004) discourse that Black men are perceived to be hypersexual, hypermasculine, virile and domineering. Interestingly, no participant mentioned any other form of stereotypes from other races mentioned in chapter 2.

2.3.3 LGBTQ+ Stereotypes

Layla and Haley discuss the impact pornography has on the fetishization and stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people. Haley acknowledges that she “is not too well versed in queer pornography” but she “knows from what [she’s] heard, the easily accessible queer pornography

just does not depict realistic, healthy, safe practices or standards, [...] from what I've seen, a lot of people use queer porn as like a fetish, where they just want to watch maybe two guys having sex, or two girls having sex". Lesbian sex is one of the most viewed categories on Pornhub (PornHub, 2024) and is extremely fetishised and over exaggerated for entertainment purposes. Haley continues stating "a lot of the more appropriate, consenting, safer, proper depictions of queer pornography, then isn't accessible, maybe it's you have to pay a fee for it". Which essentially is the barrier to accessing feminist/queer pornography. LGBTQ+ individuals who may watch queer pornography on mainstream pornography sites may not get the representation they desire because this content is not being catered to them. Layla describes the following:

If it's two guys, obviously there's also some kind of stereotype. That if some guy looks too feminine, it's obviously him that's gonna be on the bottom. [...] and like woman, like the woman cannot be on the top, but also like, [...] taking a fake dick, [...], but she can also be the power bottom by being on the top of the other person. So yeah, it kind of stigmatises when they don't show really in detail, all the possible options.

Layla describes how having feminine features automatically makes you seen as a 'bottom' in pornography. She also discusses other power dynamics in play in relation to sexual activities within pornography, but how it shows no detail on what they are or what they entail. This supports the notion that pornography should not be used as a reference point for sexual exploration as it does not show the whole picture on what these options entail.

3. Pornography in Sex Education? PORNOGRAPHY IS SEX EDUCATION!

3.1 Personal Experience of Sex Ed

Participants all experienced high school in different parts of Canada. As discussed in chapter 2, each province sets out their own sex ed curriculum, ranging in terms of content. Roxy did not receive any sex education at all during her schooling. Connie and Layla both

described as receiving “the basics”, with Connie describing her the material taught as very limited. She “got the basic facts, biology [...] beware of STIs and contraception, and you should stay abstinent”. This is a similar level of education that Layla received, she was taught that “you need a condom when you want to partake in sexual intercourse, and you can get STD if you don't like, check each other's background”. Both Connie and Layla were taught about contraception and STBBI prevention, which is a positive. However, both girls discussed that there was no further exploration on subjects such as “pleasure and gender”. Abbie has positive recollections of the sex education she received in high school, stating:

I remember, like, back from high school and elementary school is very scientifically informative. There was nothing like, you know, like, if you get pregnant, you'll die, or if you have sex, you'll get, you know, you'll die, or whatever. So it's none of that, it's very informative. You know, we looked at contraception, condoms, like, you know, sexually transmitted diseases. I think there might have been one mention about, like pornography not being like real sex, and then, of course, talking about consent. So it was pretty inclusive. It was taught by the science teacher. So that was also helpful, I think, to take a really, like scientific approach to it.

Abbie's sex education experience is comprehensive, inclusive and informative. It is a basic level of what every student should be taught. Haley remembers being shown “old grainy videos” being used for her sex education classes. She was taught by her gym teacher and she describes the material being taught “almost with this fear behind it, like if you have sex here are all the bad things that are going to happen”. Haley also brings up a memory of one of her classmates, who identified as a lesbian, being forced to put condoms on a banana as part of the requirements for the class. Her classmate said she did not want to participate and the teacher responded that she had to, to which her classmate responded “I am a lesbian woman, and I will be having sex with women. How can I even how can I protect myself then? Because I will never have to put a condom on a penis. What am I supposed to be doing then?” The teacher

did not know what to respond, showing the lack of awareness around non-heterosexual sex within sex education available to students.

3.2 Experience teaching sex ed

Abbie, Layla and Connie have not had any first hand experience teaching a sex education class from their stages. Roxy observed a sex education class for grade eight students, where they were discussing menstruation. She described how at this school, the boys and girls were split up for sex education classes. Haley has experience teaching sex education to grade five students, where they begin to discuss puberty, their own bodies and the opposite sex's bodies. She provides her classes with her own resources, as there are none being shared within the school that addresses bodies.

3.3 Views on Sex Education

Each participant believed that sex education should be accessible and comprehensive for every student. Layla however discusses the difficulties that might arise in relation to teaching sex education, with pushback from parents and the school board. She also discusses how other teachers “may judge you or discriminate against you and it's gonna make your work [...] environment very toxic”. While teachers may receive comments from their co-workers in relation to teaching sex ed classes, discrimination is very unlikely to happen in places where sex education is apart of the curriculum. Layla also expressed her fear of “being fired” for teaching sex education. Layla believes that it is possible to teach sex education in and around Montreal, however in rural parts of Quebec the topic would not come up, even if it is mandatory. Sex education is likely to be foregone in favour of other topics, especially with curriculums getting larger. Abbie also discusses how even though it is a mandatory subject and should be taught at every level as part of the curriculum, “nobody [is] checking that somebody

actually does it". Connie mentions additional pushback from parents in relation to teaching sex education. She believes that "religious families that have very specific outlooks on what sex should be" can cause problems when trying to teach sex education. Sex education does not teach adolescents solely about sex, as Abbie states, it teaches "media literacy, respect, community" and safety in general. Abbie believes that even if it's just one sex education class "you can change a child's life". Connie agrees with this sentiment, stating that sex education gives students the tools to "navigate sex [...] in the world safely". Roxy believes that more sex education should be taught as social media is increasing the spread of harmful misinformation in relation to sex and our bodily autonomy. She states:

As a woman, as a student and as a pre service teacher, I think it's absolutely educators responsibility to empower students to understand their bodies, understand consent, understand that sex isn't some big bad thing. There's a lot of responsibility attached to it, which is why I think you should, you know, be a mature mindset [...] I think the first step is using anatomically correct language, yeah, like, it goes a long way, and reducing, like, shame in conversations about sex and sexuality. And, you know, it's a part of your body, like your kidney or your liver. It's not some big bad thing.

It is interesting that Roxy specifically mentions the importance of empowering students about these topics. Women's bodies have always been scrutinized, and in recent times, more and more women are being denied their bodily autonomy (see Baker et al., 2021) and being denied their human rights. By using anatomically correct language it can promote and foster body positivity in adolescents and increase comfort in talking about these topics in sex education. Similarly, Haley identifies the importance of keeping the class together and not splitting them up (as was done in her experience) to ensure that both boys and girls are able to learn about each other's anatomy and experiences through puberty, to decrease risks of stigmas and shame. She believes it is "really important to discuss it all together, to kind of embrace a bit of the awkwardness and embrace that it might feel a bit uncomfortable, but this is something that affects all of us, and I think that and keeping the classes together made it a bit more

normal”. As Abbie states, “sex is a biological fact of life”, as is puberty. It is important to have these conversations and normalise them to decrease the risk of stigmas and shame.

3.4 Sex education mitigating the effects of pornography

Participants were asked if they believed that comprehensive sex education could mitigate the effects pornography influences on adolescents. All participants agreed that sex education plays a huge role in demonstrating the way healthy romantic relationships and healthy relationships to sex should be portrayed. Haley states:

Sex education is so important to teach students that porn is a performance, and that it's not education, and that they have to be very careful when seeking out materials online, and just be aware and critical of the material that's out there, and be able to reflect on what they're watching and understand that there is so much more to sex than what is being portrayed in a pornographic material.

Here, Haley discusses the importance that sex education has in terms of critical thinking in relation to media literacy and evaluating online sources. She stresses that pornography is a performance and not education, and adolescents should be aware of this fact. Connie believes that the key to mitigating the effects of pornography is sex education. She believes that adolescents should:

Learn about all these different notions before they're exposed to sex, I think it can completely change their outlook. If they know the risks of for example, like porn addiction, maybe they can also be more careful and conscientious of their decisions and what to watch and where to get it and how to relate to it. I also think that part of the reason there are so many issues with porn is that it's not discussed. It's like taboo, hidden. So you know, if you have a problem, if you have questions, if you're confused about what you're seeing, it's like wrong to bring it up with people. But if we have, like, a solid sex education program, and these are things that you know are discussed and are talked about, and you can ask questions without feeling stupid and all of these different things, I think it can really help youth understand what they're seeing.

This is extremely important. Connie discusses the impacts that porn being considered as taboo possesses. It decreases the probability of adolescents seeking help for addictions and also increases the stigma surrounding pornography consumption. Furthermore, the more this stigma is embedded, the more likely adolescents are going to continue to go on these sites and consume more hardcore materials. Sex education can normalise these conversations and equip adolescents with the tools necessary to evaluate the material they are consuming and how to do it in a safe way.

However, Layla believes that educators must be careful in the delivery of their lessons, as “some teachers could actually just help reinforce the stereotypes and everything, it depends, really on the teacher and the way that is broached in the classroom. It could have the good effect or the opposite effect”. This stresses the importance of providing evidence based lessons and ensuring that teachers deliver materials in the most unbiased way possible.

3.5 When should we teach pornography?

Participants were asked what age would be the most appropriate to deliver pornography literacy classes, to which responses varied. Pornography literacy should be taught at an age appropriate level to ensure adolescents are mature enough to understand the materials and tools they are being given to help them navigate pornography safely. Abbie believes that pornography literacy should be taught in grade ten classes. Layla believes that it should be taught a year earlier, in grade nine, but would not be opposed to pornography literacy being taught in grade seven, where adolescents are beginning to go through puberty. This correlates with when children begin to consume pornographic content, as discussed in chapter two. Haley believes that pornography literacy should be taught in “high school for sure” as that is when adolescents begin to explore their sexuality and romantic and sexual relationships with other

people. The general consensus within the group is to teach it to adolescents who are fourteen to fifteen years old.

3.6 Who should teach?

Participants were asked who should teach pornography literacy to adolescents within sex education classes. Abbie believes that it should “definitely be taught in sex education in schools” and that parents should also have access to “information on how to give [...] an ethical and diversified sexual talk”. Layla and Abbie both believe that pornography literacy would be best being taught by a specialist, such as a third-party sexual educator. Connie believes it is the responsibility of numerous different sources, such as “educators, parents, caregivers, society and governments with information campaigns for youths”. Haley acknowledges that adolescents might not be learning about porn literacy at home, so it is her job as an educator to “provide information and save them from having to do Google searches that could potentially lead to some slippery slopes of an internet rabbit hole”. Abbie also discusses how young female teachers would have to be careful in the manner they teach porn literacy, as she has “already been viewed as a sexual object by high school boys specifically [...] they are very confused hormonal little people”. Ensuring maturity levels are paramount.

3.7 Educators teaching pornography

Participants discussed the how educators could teach pornography literacy in a sex education setting, Abbie discusses potential techniques she could employ, stating:

If a child brings up the question, I I feel like I would show that video, okay, so that it doesn't like come from my lips, I would say, or I would kind of have like a, kind of like suggestion box, and then I would post the resources online. And potentially I would also perhaps reach out to the parent of that child and ask if that is something that they would rather I teach, or if they would rather have their own conversation and send them

the resources. Sadly, it's just not something that we're there yet. So I think it's something that we have to, like tread very carefully, especially if I'm not a tenured teacher.

Here she discusses different methods of teaching porn literacy in a non-biased way so adolescents are able to make decisions for themselves that align with their beliefs. She is also creating a safe space where adolescents are able to ask questions anonymously through a question box to eliminate any feelings of shame or embarrassment. Abbie also discusses the very real fear that teachers may have (as discussed in 3.3 by Layla) in relation to job security and teaching sex education. Layla states she would approach the topic of pornography literacy in a debate format. She would slowly introduce the topic across multiple classes to ease students into it and reduce discomfort, then encourage discussion and debate amongst students in a safe environment. Connie states that she would include pornography literacy using an activity based approach, such as a writing reflection or interactive group discussion. She would provide them with information from reputable sources and ensure that students have a solid foundation in their understandings on what consent, healthy sex and safety are. She would encourage students to do their own research from reputable sources, which would go in tandem with media literacy components. Haley would teach pornography literacy by teaching adolescents how to be critical with the materials they are consuming. she would take on a fact based approach, where students discuss the “unrealistic expectations that come with it, and that it is not a real moment of sex between two people, it's just a dramatization”. She believes that by not talking about pornography literacy, we are doing “more harm than good”. She also believes that third party organisations could help deliver reputable information to students to help the students feel more comfortable about talking in relation to pornography with their teacher.

4. Behind the scenes: Ethics behind Pornography

4.1 Should we even teach about pornography?

All participants believed pornography literacy should be taught as part of the sex education curriculum. There are very real concerns surrounding parental pushback and a risk of parental upset. As stated in chapter two, sex education curriculums do allow parents to opt their children out if they do not want them to be taught about topics surrounding sex and sexual health and wellbeing. Connie, Roxy and Abbie discuss the concerns of pushback from parents and the difficulty educators may face in navigating how to teach pornography literacy in sex education classes. Connie believes that this parental pushback would come from “a lack of understanding”. She goes on to state:

Really, what we're teaching them, I mean, we're not demonizing porn, but we are teaching them that it can be dangerous. It is not real what they're seeing. It can cause addiction, you know, like some cause harm to women and people that are in the videos and there might not be consent. So, I mean, we're not really encouraging them to watch porn by saying all of those things. We're not really putting it on a pedestal. We're just giving them information.

Connie believes that there is “always going to be complaints” when teaching anything in sex education, however she believes it is important to give parents perspective of why it is important to inform adolescents about pornography’s effects without “demonizing” it. She believes that adolescents “should understand what they are looking at, where it comes from, the industry behind it, the effects it can have on their brain and future sexual development and all these important notions that they might not be aware of, because it's not something that is talked about openly”. Which is why she stresses that parents should be informed on why we are teaching pornography literacy, because otherwise there is a risk of “feeding into the ignorance” around adolescent pornography consumption.

Roxy shares a similar viewpoint, believing that pornography needs to be discussed as “it's everywhere and a lot of young people have seen porn, and they don’t really know what to

make of it". She discusses how it may be difficult for her to teach pornography literacy in a nuanced and non-biased way, stating "I don't know how to approach it from a position where I'm not, kind of not forcing my opinions, but like, really making my opinion clear about how I feel about porn". She believes that parental pushback is almost guaranteed, and she does not know how to navigate discussions surrounding pornography literacy "without parents getting mad". Roxy also mentions that if she were to teach pornography literacy, she would have to consult with one of her colleagues who has been teaching for longer, as she would not want to cross any professional lines. She goes on to say that she doesn't know how to ethically discuss pornography with minors, that she would engage in conversations as students brought it up to her.

Abbie also believes that pornography would be a difficult discourse to navigate due to parental concern, stating "it would be something that, like, right off the bat, I'd be like, yes, I want to do but I think if there's, like, a parent concern already, sexual education is something that parents are allowed to pull their kids from which I don't think should be a thing." Here she suggests that parents may be more inclined to pull their children out of sex ed classes if pornography literacy would be introduced to the curriculum. She also mentions that she does not want pornography "to be that thing where I start talking about pornography and then kids are, like, interested to check it out". However, Abbie also states that as much as she wishes children did not watch porn or were not aware of what pornography is, she acknowledges "they have sex, they watch porn, they do drugs, they drink, you know, it's like, it's normal. So, I think the best method is, like, prevention and education". By educating adolescents and allowing them to make informed and balanced decisions based on their beliefs, educators are enabling them to critically think and evaluate for themselves, which will help them in numerous other aspects of their lives and give adolescents the tools necessary to navigate potentially difficult situations, such as drinking and drug taking.

Haley also believes that education is the best method to tackle adolescent pornography consumption, stating that adolescents should “learn how to be able to critically evaluate the pornographic material they are seeing”. She stresses that this does not mean educators should show pornographic material and sexually explicit content in classes, but just informing them and making them “aware of the tropes, of the stereotypes, [and] the behaviours that play out in pornographic materials”. There can be extremely harmful consequences if adolescents are not made aware of stereotypes that pornography entails (as discussed in section 2.2 and 2.3). Haley suggests that the best way to combat these problems is to equip adolescents to “make sure that whatever they're watching is ethical, or so that when they're watching it, they can reflect and recognize maybe that it's not the most realistic representation of sex”, which is one of the main objectives of including pornography literacy on the sex education curriculum.

4.2 Ethical considerations

Participants were asked what the ethical considerations in relation to pornography are. This question was not limited to adolescent pornography consumption and participants talked about issues within the industry. Two key themes came from these discussions, which are: consent and exploitation in the nature of the industry. These themes can be interlinked, however participants discussed them as separate issues.

4.2.1 Consent

Layla, Roxy and Haley all discuss issues with consent that arise from pornography. Pornography is not likely to show the consent process that people engage in before participating in sexual acts. Haley believes this is due to the nature of pornography being for entertainment purposes and producers not wanting to show “the nitty grittiness of maybe fumbling around at the beginning, making sure the condom is on properly” and wanting to go straight into the

action. This can be problematic, as adolescents may copy the actions they are seeing in these videos and not realise that their partner has not consented to these actions taking place. Haley believes that this can lead people to question the situation and adolescents “don't really know what to do to address what's happened or even why you did that in the first place”. Layla comments that it is crucial for pornographic content to have a disclosure to inform viewers that consent was given during the making of these pornographic films. She also states that even with this disclosure, you cannot be sure that the actors involved consented to it. Roxy states that she does not know how “genuine the consent is” in relation to women in pornography. She views this as “paid rape” and “financial coercion”. She furthers this sentiment by stating: “I could not consume pornography knowing that like she's only doing this because she's getting paid. And I know you could say this for like any profession, but there's a big difference between, like, being penetrated and just like scanning groceries at like, the grocery store”. However, as discussed in chapter two, some women do partake in pornographic activity as part of their sexual liberation, not for monetary rewards.

4.2.2 Exploitation and the Nature of the industry

Another key ethical consideration discussed in relation to pornography was exploitation, specifically looking through the lens of legality. Layla, Connie, Haley and Abbie discuss discourses surrounding child pornography, paedophilia, sex trafficking and pornography that depicts rape. Abbie states “there's a lot, like, definitely, underage, you know, like consent, enslavement, like trafficking, like human trafficking”. Layla believes that these videos are mainly available on the “dark side of the internet” (the dark web), however this material has found its way onto mainstream pornography sites, such as Pornhub. It is very difficult to remove videos from Pornhub, even if they are reported multiple times (Lenhart, 2016). Connie discussed her concerns surrounding adolescent consumption of this type of

pornography and the normalisation of this illegal content. She believes that it is educators' job to

Warn them against or at least have them be aware that, you know, there is, like, real cases of rape and people being like, assaulted, and all these horrible things and minors and like child pornography and like, really scary, disturbing things on the internet, so to be aware of where they're going and like what they're looking at.

Haley believes that underage pornography consumption is a problem in and of itself, because the content was not intended for their viewing. There are also no proper age verifications and restrictions put in place (Srinivasan, 2021) on mainstream tube sites, such as Pornhub. Haley does not believe that easily accessible pornography was made ethically, stating “who knows the standards that were set were placed on the set? Who knows if the parties, the actors involved, were fully comfortable and consenting to everything going on? Who knows if they were even paid properly for the work that they were doing”. Similarly, Abbie believes that free, accessible porn is unethical, for as “it largely relies on, like, people of all ages, like visiting and there's no way to know, like, who the actors are, like, what their backgrounds are, how old they are, you know, like, these kind of things”. However, Abbie also mentions that ethical pornography does exist, and that feminist and erotica sites are likely to be more forthcoming with what goes on behind the scenes and transparent about their industry practises.

5. Piecing it all together

This section of the discussion chapter will focus on the collage making aspect of the interview sessions as introduced earlier in this chapter, discussing and analysing the benefits of using collage to discuss sensitive topics. As discussed in chapter three, all participants knew of the collage making aspect of this session and consented to their collages being disseminated.

5.1 Format

All participants were given a 152mm x 229mm piece of card to create their collage. Layla was the only participant to go beyond the measurements of the card. She described her reasoning behind her choice as “feeling the need to express bigger”. She was not bound to any specific size, like the other participants may have felt.

5.2 Colour Association

Haley, Connie and Layla discussed the association of colours in relation to their collage and images chosen. When looking at colour and psychological functioning (Elliot, 2015) the use of specific colours can indicate a persons internal thoughts and feelings unconsciously. Different colours are associated with different emotions. Connie describes how she went with a “red orange theme [as] a warning sign to personally acknowledge”. She also states that “when you look at the colour red, it activates something kind of like aggression”. Here, she is discussing the association of red with aggression and how she wants her collage to depict internal feelings of anger and aggression. However, she balances these associations of anger and aggression by using blue, which she believes represents and associates with hope. She states that she has hope “that maybe, you know, with sex education, with like, teaching youth about what's happening and everything that we can kind of mitigate all of this”. It is interesting to note that Connie’s collage is mainly composed of red and orange, which are the colours mainly used on mainstream tube sites logos (PornHub is orange and black, RedTube is red and black). Haley discusses how she put “red glitter” around her collage to “make it sparkly and show that it's this exciting, thralling experience” and that she chose red as the colour of her glitter because she finds “red very passionate, so that’s why I wanted it as the base of the porn”. Here, she contrasts with Connie’s association of what red means, but both are correct in their interpretations. It is also interesting to see how Haley made her collage focus on the passionate

aspects of pornography, whereas in her interview portion she did not portray pornography as a passionate experience. Haley also discusses the use of “blue and darker colours” in her collage, as she was drawn to these colours because she appeared them to be “sexy”. This correlates with the associations of sex and being sexy as raunchy, darker colours (i.e black and dark red). Layla also discusses the use of the colours red and orange in her collage, associating them with danger, as she describes the fire, and “going out of your mind”.

5.3 Collage Interpretations

This section will focus on analysis of each collage in relation to the discussions of pornography that occurred in the first part of the session. Each collage will be analysed individually.



Figure 2 – Layla's Collage

Layla's collage is interesting for many reasons. She did not limit herself to the set piece of card. She had these big ideas and wanted the space to express them. She also chose celebrities that are big in popular culture at the moment and surrounded them with buzzwords that she associated with pornography. She decided to put the Notre-Dame on fire at the top of her collage as she felt it was reflective of "everything going up in flames". She stated that all the photos she picked spoke to her and related to the theme of ethics and sex in some way. This collage portrays the impact of celebrities and popular culture have on influencing adolescents in the choices they make.



Figure 3 – Connie's Collage

Connie's collage depicts different parts of women's bodies. When asked about why she chose these images, Connie responded: "a lot of them, I didn't even cut off their faces. There were no faces whatsoever. It was just the body, which kind of reminded me of, you know how, like, sometimes people in porn are dehumanized, and we don't really see them as individuals, but just like as bodies". This fits with the sentiment Connie possessed during the interview session and her attitudes and beliefs towards pornography being depicted as dehumanising. She indicates these notions of pornography being dehumanising by using the image of the slab on meat on a plate. She believes that in pornography, "what's important isn't your person, it's your body, what you give which kind of reminded me of, like, meat industry". These connotations of women being viewed as a piece of meat are very common. She used the photo of Beyonce's

cleavage and necklace as it reminded her “about like, how sometimes, especially in the porn industry, women are kind of commodified, where they're a product, you know, a luxury that you can pay for”. She analyses further stating “it made me think about how sex and porn also shows unrealistic standards for like bodies and what women should look like and what they should enjoy”. Connie also links her collage to previous discussions, using the photo of the magnifying glass and underwear to invoke thoughts about “how like women can be more self conscious about themselves, and like are like looking at themselves more negatively and judging every little thing about themselves”.

When asked why she chose the phrases that are scattered around her collage, Connie believed that these were phrases that resounded with the narratives that were discussed in the interview session that are prominent in sex and pornography. These phrases used match the narrative that she is depicting through the use of her images.

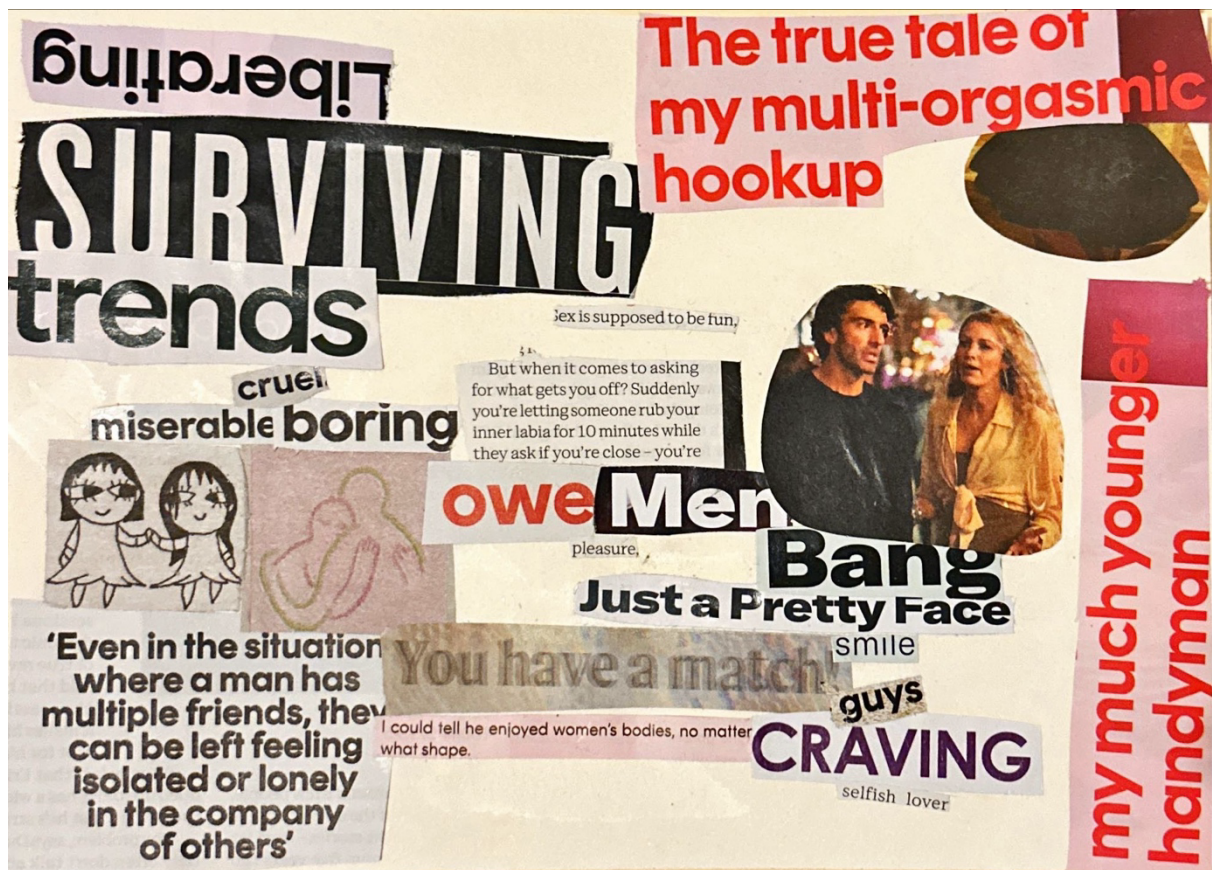


Figure 4 – Roxy’s Collage

Roxy’s collage is more simplistic, focusing on words rather than the use of images. She picked phrases and quotes that she believed resonated with her perceptions and beliefs of pornography. She states that she went “heavy with the language and the words, because just a lot of words stood out to me and could, like, connect to, like, the discussion of sex and pornography”.

Roxy chose a quote that discusses women’s anatomy (labia) as she wanted to link it to what she stated previously in the interview portion of the session. She believes that this phrase tells her “that the person doesn't really care about the woman's pleasure. It's kind of just

something that they they're expected to do, like if you actually cared about pleasing your partner, you would take it upon yourself to at least learn a little bit about like, what makes them feel good". She chose to include the words 'cruel, miserable and boring' as that how she views a lot of pornographic content. She also states that "miserable and boring is like how a lot of people view, quote, unquote missionary vanilla sex, and that we equate a lack of like, BDSM kink with boring and miserable sex". She also added the quote 'sex is supposed to be fun' as she believes that sex should be a fun and pleasurable activity for all parties involved. She also included the word 'pleasure' in her collage, but she "really had to hunt for the word". She believes this correlates with having to find pleasurable content in pornography, as she believes a lot of pornography is "just people enduring it and tolerating it". The placement of the word pleasure underneath the 'owe men' symbolises Roxy's belief that pornography creates a narrative that implies "you should be doing whatever you can to, like, have like, the guy you're having sex with, like, feel pleasure". Roxy also included a quote regarding "the male loneliness epidemic". She believes that this is due to pornographic consumption and how men are socialised to treat women.

The images that she chose juxtapose each other. On the left hand side of the collage there are two drawings depicting care and love. On the right hand side of the collage, the image Roxy chosen represents domestic violence and sexual harassment³.

³ This image shows Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni on the set of 'It Ends with Us' a popular book, turned movie in 2024 that showcases a domestic violence relationship. Since the movie has come out, Blake Lively has filed a lawsuit on Justin Baldoni, citing sexual harassment. Justin Baldoni has countersued.



Figure 5 – Abbie's Collage

Abbie's collage focuses a lot on men's eyes being present and women's eyes being covered. Abbie states that she purposefully included these eyes as she believes pornography to be "a voyeur's pastime". She attributes this practise of voyeurism to be mainly associated with

men. She also adds that she added the photo of a man whose face is censored because she finds that in pornography, a lot of the men are censored, but not the women". Abbie also included a piece of meat in her collage, citing similar reasons as Connie for including it. She states that the piece of meat implies that women are seen as marketable in pornography. Another food connotation she has on her collage is "fish fingers" she says that she added that phrase to depict the stereotype of vaginas having fishy smells. When asked about the phrase "young women" and why she decided to include that in her collage, she states that it is meant to represent young women within the porn industry and the blurred lines of them being underage. A lot of popular pornographic tags hone in and promote their video showing 'barely eighteen' actresses. Abbie also discusses pornographic tags in relation to black women, which she portrays through Beyonce's cleavage. She also mentions how the rest of the white "audience" in her collage contributes to racial stereotypes portrayed through pornography, as she also mentioned in section 2.3. Abbie chose phrases to surround her collage that she believes pins a false narrative for adolescents who are having sex, such as the use of the "yes daddy" phrase. She explains this phrase to be an almost cultural phenomenon that possesses incestuous undertones, which she believes derive from the porn industry. Abbie also included queer elements to her collage. She states that she took "a picture of like a man and a woman, but then I added to like tops of women. But then, you know that even then, if there's a representation, there's still like women being treated like animals". This inference can support the notion that LGBTQ+ people are fetishized and almost dehumanised throughout pornographic content. Abbie also discusses how pornography can also make people feel self-conscious about potential health issues they may possess. She indicates this through the phrase "tight pussy" and discusses the struggles that some people face due to vaginismus. She states "It's very difficult to have sex when you have vaginismus so there's that kind of like, Oh, you have a tight pussy, but it's like, oh, is the other person like, actually enjoying".



Figure 6 – Haley’s Collage

Haley decided to depict her collage as an art exhibit. She chose to showcase her collage this way as she wanted to position the viewer of the collage as the viewer of pornography where the viewer is “looking at porn, consuming porn”. Similar to Abbie, Haley also included eyes in her collage, gazing at this exhibit, emphasising how “everyone and anyone can be looking at it online”. She chose a lot of images that invoke a sensual feeling in the viewer, such as hands touching bodies and fingers on lips. This creates almost a provocative “erotic” reaction, similar to pornographic content. Haley put ‘seeing is believing’ in the top left corner. She wanted to “bring it back to what we were discussing earlier, that a lot of people look at sex and believe it to be or look at porn and believe it to be an accurate depiction of sex”. She also placed the words ‘the big moment’, ‘explicit sex’ and ‘erotic’ to imply what she believes porn

to be. She also states that she thinks “porn shouldn’t be a scary thing” and that a lot of people enjoy pornography and it is okay to watch pornography “as long as there are ethics behind it”. This links with the phrase she put in the bottom right, ‘sex doesn’t have to be totally traumatizing’. Haley agrees, stating that pornography “may be violent and might have depictions of sex you may not feel comfortable with. So even though you may not like it, it doesn't have to be totally traumatizing, there are other types of porn.” The use of glitter in this collage can also infer that sex can be quite messy, it is not this perfect production that is portrayed in pornographic film.

5.4 Collage making process

Participants discussed their processes for choosing what images, phrases and materials to use in their collages. Connie recounts that she “wasn't sure what [she] was gonna find, but then [she] realized that there was like, so many pictures of half naked women, so it really wasn't that difficult”. The process of flipping through the magazines and finding pictures of women’s bodies inspired her to showcase half naked bodies in her collage and find connotations relating to the emotions that these pictures invoked in her. Haley also describes her process of choosing images, stating that once she found her base picture, she had a whole idea of what she was looking for. She also talks about how she dissected images to get the complete image she was looking for, such as taking the eyes from one picture and sticking them on a different photo completely and how that process was very interesting to her. She claims that she was surprised how easily images taken out of context could look very sexual to her. Roxy mentions how she was going on “hunts for specific words” that would fit her narrative and supplement this picture she was trying to build. Roxy also talks about placing the words in different ways, such as flipping them upside down or constructing new sentences all together. This is done to manipulate the viewer into seeing the narrative that she was building, to understand what stance

she was taking in regard to pornography consumption and the pornography industry in general. Roxy also mentions how the process of flipping through the magazines, and seeing holes where previous participants had cut out images encouraged her to think about other people's narratives and how they are constructing their ideas, which she thought was really interesting and cool.

5.5 Reflection on collage making

All participants thoroughly enjoyed the collage making session and were surprised at how thought invoking the process and curation of their collages were. All participants found the session to be reflective and would incorporate collage into their teaching practises. Abbie states that she would collage as a research tool and as a project in her classroom to help encourage students to be creative. She believes that collage making is “great for educational diversification in the classroom”. Roxy liked the creativity aspect of collage making and liked how she could reflect on the words and images she chosen to help her construct her narrative. Connie also mentions how the session allowed her to reflect, stating “I did find myself, like, while I was doing thinking, like, well, what is the message I want to give? What do I think, you know, like, kind of thinking a little more critically about these issues and exploring them”. Abbie also supports this notion, stating that it “forced [her] to choose what she felt what resonated with [her]”, which is a reflective process in and of itself.

6. Discussion

The interviews and collage making sessions proved invaluable when analysing pre-service teachers' perceptions of the affects of pornographic consumption in relation to adolescents. The semi-structured interviews highlight how pre-service teachers can see the effects - for example increased misogynistic language and actions from adolescents - in a short

amount of time as they are only in one school for a maximum of 15 weeks. These pre-service teachers also believe that the implications of pornographic consumption are being seen more in adolescents due to the exposure and accessibility to pornographic content becoming increasingly easier. Adolescents do not have to rent or buy pornographic DVDs, they are able to access it at a click of a button, 24/7. The pre-service teachers also highlighted the ethical issues surrounding adolescent pornographic consumption and how this can negatively impact their development. Harmful gender roles and stereotypes, alongside racial and LGBTQ+ stereotypes were highlighted as main concerns in relation to adolescent pornography consumption. Participants believed that the way to combat these issues is to include pornography literacy into the sex education curriculum. They believed that comprehensive sex education can educate adolescents on the implications of pornography to their development, however they question the execution of pornography literacy due to societal stigmas and parental pushback, especially due to the re-emergence of conservative values in broader culture, in an increasingly polarised political landscape.

It became apparent that the collages supplemented the discussions had during the semi-structured interview process. Participants expressed their perceptions on pornography in general through the collages and went into further detail on how the images chosen supported their narrative and allowed them to discuss pornography more freely through images. This can be seen from the use of bodies in each collage. Each participant highlighted how bodies, specifically women's bodies, have become almost commodified through pornography. This notion was not discussed during the semi-structured interview process; however, it was very prominent in the collages. The collages also portrayed the different dynamics shown in pornography through the placement of images chosen.

Summary of findings

This chapter focused on answering the research questions: ‘from the perspective of pre-service teachers, how does pornography affect adolescents’ development?’ and ‘should pornography be part of a sex education curriculum for adolescents and if so, what role could it play?’ All participants were knowledgeable and provided significant data surrounding how pornography can distort adolescents’ perceptions of what makes a healthy sexual relationship and how to navigate sexuality in a safe and respectful way. Participants also discussed how pornography can affect adolescents’ mental health by depicting unrealistic expectations of what sex is and promoting harmful stereotypes. Participants also agreed that pornography literacy should be taught in schools as they feel it is an important issue that should be addressed. They acknowledge pushback from parents as pornography is a taboo and stigmatised topic, however they feel teaching pornography literacy would be to the benefit of adolescents, to help equip them to make healthy and safe choices and to critically think about the media they are consuming.

The findings of this chapter lay the groundwork for discussions surrounding including pornography literacy in the sex education curriculum in order to make adolescents more aware of the content they are consuming, allowing them to critically evaluate their pornography consumption habits and align them to their beliefs.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate pre-service teachers perceptions of the implications of pornography on adolescents, and if they believed that pornography literacy was needed in the curriculum. This study has uncovered many differing perceptions in relation to pornography, highlighting some benefits pornography possess to adolescents, such as being a space for sexual exploration and an assistive masturbatory tool. Overwhelmingly however, participants tended to have a negative view of the impacts of pornography on adolescents and believed that education and prevention methods were needed. Below I will discuss conclusions for each research question individually, however I would like to begin by discussing the definitions of pornography my participants provided. Firstly, participants believed pornography to be a multimedia phenomenon, extending beyond online pornography. However, discussions surrounding the harms of pornography seemed to hone in on internet pornography. They agreed that pornographic content is subjective, and influenced by cultural, societal and religious beliefs.

According to the preservice teachers, does pornography affect adolescent development?

Through examination and analysis of existing literature, alongside teacher perceptions as discovered in chapter four, pornography has been shown to have a significant impact on adolescent development. This can be broken down into two categories, impacts on mental development and impacts on the development of relationships. Pornography can impact adolescents mental development by increasing feelings of shame, guilt, self-consciousness and lowering self-esteem. Participants believe this is due to the pressure that pornography puts on adolescents, for example showing that men are supposed to last for a long period of time, or that women's bodies are supposed to look a certain way. Participants also believed that

pornography can pressure adolescents to act in certain ways and increase harmful gender and racial stereotypes, which can increase misogyny. Participants also highlighted that adolescent pornography consumption can lead to increased misogynistic behaviours, which can be seen by the use of derogatory language that adolescents use to refer to women. Participants unanimously agreed that pornographic content portrays unrealistic and exaggerated depictions of sex, which leads adolescents to develop distorted views on sex, sexuality and intimacy. These distorted views can also contribute to violence, and further misconceptions of marginalised groups. They also believed that this unrealistic view of sex portrayed in pornography can increase the mentality of sex being seen as transactional and limit the number of meaningful connections adolescents are able to make.

Should pornography be included in sex education curriculum?

All my participants believed that pornography literacy should be included in the sex education curriculum in some manner. Participants believed that it should be delivered in an age appropriate, respectful and mature manner. Participants believed that the ideal age that students should receive formal education on pornography literacy was fourteen to fifteen years old. They believed that an evidence based approach would be most useful in educating students about the implications of pornography and reducing harmful stereotypes that pornography portrays. Whilst no exact teaching method was discussed, participants believed that it would be best taught using a dialogue approach, as it would encourage students to engage more with the materials and encourage critical thinking and evaluation of the media that they are consuming. Participants were wary however of parental pushback on introducing pornography literacy into the sex education curriculum and believed that pornography literacy education may be better suited being taught by a third-party educator. This notion of community based sexual health educators teaching topics such as sex education (in this case, pornography

literacy) is supported by numerous scholars, such as Trimble (2012) who uncovered that students welcome the idea of schools incorporating teaching strategies of community-based educators. This would decrease teacher discomfort in teaching pornography literacy and has the potential to increase student engagement.

Collage making to facilitate discussion about pornography

Collage making was an integral part of this thesis. Participants enjoyed working with and expressing their perceptions through art. They all believed that collage making is a very reflective practise and stated that they wanted to incorporate collage making into their teaching methods. Participants collages helped uncover subliminal messages and subconscious thoughts that were not discussed or alluded to during the interview portion of the session. I found the collage making portion of my data collection very useful for numerous reasons. It allowed me and my participants to make inferences using images that may not necessarily allude to anything on their own, which increased participants voice and reflexivity within the research process (Vaikla-Poldoma, 2003). It also allowed me to interact with the research in a more artistic way, which was extremely important to me. The use of collage allowed myself and participants to create meanings in ways that may not have been obvious to begin with and allowed my participants to become more involved and break down the participant researcher barrier, countering the hegemonic and linear thinking associated with traditional research (Butler-Kisber, 2008). The use of collage in this thesis also allowed participants to express meanings and provide deeper and meaningful insights, which they may have had reluctance to articulate verbally due to social stigmas. Culshaw (2018) describes collage as adding meaning in a way spoken word cannot, which this thesis supports. Participants also engaged in metaphor elicitation throughout the collage making process, such as the using meat to discuss how pornography commodifies women's bodies. The power of collage and metaphor elicitation in

this instance highlight participants unconscious thoughts in relation to pornography (Nardon & Hari, 2021).

Limitations

This thesis carries a few limitations. First limitation is sample size. Due to accessibility, I was only able to interview pre-service teachers from McGill University. This is a limitation both demographically and geographically. As McGill is situated in Montreal, which is a vibrant, open-minded and secular city, participants perceptions on pornography in sex education may be more positively biased, compared to if these interviews were conducted in a religious location where sex education is frowned upon. My participants were also all female under the age of 25, which could also be a limitation as females tend to be victimised due to pornography and most pornography is targeted to men, so men may have different opinions on the effects and implications of pornography on adolescents. Also, these participants are likely the first generation growing up with internet pornography so readily accessible, so their perceptions may differ from someone who grew up a couple generations earlier, where pornography was not as easily accessible. Another limitation in relation to recruiting participants to discuss perceptions of pornography is the taboo and stigma attached to it. People who are willing to discuss pornography consumption openly are more likely to be open to promote discussions around pornography consumption to adolescents. When recruiting participants for this study, only five people (n=5) applied and were interested in participating, which shows the resistance and reluctance some people have in relation to discussing pornography. The second main limitation this thesis carries is time constraints. As I used arts-based methodologies in conjunction with semi-structured interviews, my sessions were quite time consuming. Collage making is also a particularly lengthy process when done correctly, so I wanted to ensure that participants had ample time to complete their collages to a satisfactory

standard. Also, due to cost limitations, participants could only chose between 5 magazines which were targeted more towards women, which could have influenced the way the collages were made. As art is subjective, and the interpretivist paradigm is being used, what meanings I may make from these collages may be vastly different from what another researcher may interpret. The potential impacts of these limitations on my findings are minimal, as the data collected was diverse and rich.

Suggested future research

Future directions for this research can include bringing adolescents into the conversation. Research can be conducted in relation to adolescents' perceptions on the implication that pornography has on their development and their interactions with relationships. This supports the notion of bringing youth as an equal partner in conversations (Trimble, 2012) which is severely lacking from research to do with sex education.

Future research could also focus on the pornography literacy curriculum in sex education and what material should be included. This could be executed using a larger participant pool and focusing solely on the pornography literacy curriculum. Sex education educators should also be consulted when developing pornography literacy curriculum.

This research could also be conducted using qualified teachers who teach sex education as part of their duties. Research could be conducted focusing on experiences observed within a sex education classroom. Their input towards developing a comprehensive sex education curriculum including pornography literacy would be invaluable.

Finally, research could be conducted investigating the use of community-based educators in teaching taboo and stigmatised topics such as pornography literacy. This research could focus on specific teaching methods these educators employ and how it could be of benefit to students.

Final remarks

This research highlighted the gaps in our sex education system that need addressing. More and more adolescents are turning to pornography as a source of sexual education, which can be extremely detrimental to their mental development and the development of relationships. I see this increasingly happen on social media, where gender stereotypes are being reinforced due to pornographic consumption. I believe it is imperative to include pornography literacy in the sex education curriculum to inform and educate adolescents on the implications that pornography has. I believe that if we continue to stigmatise pornography, there will be a generation that cannot form meaningful connections, and misogyny will continue to rise. I believe that we can change the narrative surrounding pornography and educate adolescents to know that these relationships portrayed in pornography are not normal and they are dramatized for entertainment purposes. By not discussing pornography literacy, we are contributing to the stigmatisation and misogyny perpetuated through pornography.

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Appendix 1 – Participant Consent Form



Faculty of Education
Faculté d'éducation

Consent Form for Participants

Pornography in Sex Education

Researchers: Arianna Politi, Master's Student, Department of Education, McGill University.

Supervisor: Claudia Mitchell, Distinguished James McGill Professor, Faculty of Education, McGill University.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of my research is to study ways of educating children about the implications and effects of pornography on their sexual development and gender relations. I aim to do this by finding a suitable way to integrate pornography into sex education classes at an appropriate age for students.

Study Procedures:

You will participate in a 45-minute interview at the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL) on McGill campus, which will be voice recorded. Questions are designed to gain an insight on your experiences in relation to adolescent pornography use and your perceptions on how this pornography use affects them. Alongside this interview, you will then participate in a 45 minute collage making session, where you will create a collage based on the topic of pornography and sex education. In January 2025, once all collages have been made and interviews collected, you will participate in a 1 hour facilitation session, also at the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL), where all participants will discuss the experiences with the collage making process and discuss our collages. The facilitation session will also be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be captured on my phone and directly sent to McGill's Microsoft 365 Platform. All audio recordings will only be used for the purpose of analysis and transcribed by myself.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any point for any reason. If you chose to withdraw during or right after the data has been collected, all information collected up until that point will be destroyed unless specified otherwise. You will have until February 2025 to request for the disposal of your collages, recordings and semi-structured interviews, as this is when the data will be de-identified. Due to the nature of focus groups, any contributions will still be included, however they will remain anonymous. Following the completion of my thesis, your data will only be able to be removed from further analysis and future publications.

Potential Risks:

We will be discussing topics that can be sensitive and distressing and for some people may be triggering. These topics may include sexual assault, gender based violence and non consensual sexual activity. The collage making process may also trigger some unwanted memories or experiences. At any point during the data collection process you may skip a question, pause or end the study at any time.

Potential Benefits:

Version May 2024
1 of 3

Participation in this study may have no direct benefit for you but hopefully it will contribute towards a reform in sex education policy and advocate for a comprehensive sex education curriculum.

Compensation:.

There will be a \$25 Amazon gift card provided as compensation for the interview and collage making process. There will also be free pizza at the facilitation workshop.

Confidentiality:

Every participant will be assigned a number and all data collected for that participant will be coded against that number. All identifiable data, including audio recordings, digitalized copies of the collages and coding keys will be kept securely on my McGill OneDrive until I graduate in June 2025, after which all data will be transferred to my supervisor, Dr Claudia Mitchell for a retention period. I will be using cloud platforms which means that data may be communicated outside Quebec. Physical copies of the collages will be kept in a locked drawer at the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL) on McGill campus until after the facilitation session, when they will then be digitalised and shredded. These collages will be used and published in my thesis. Only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Claudia Mitchell will have access to these files and hard copies. Confidentiality can not be guaranteed in the facilitation session. All participants will be asked to respect everyone's confidentiality and not share anything that was said outside the group. All signed consent forms will be scanned to me via email and saved immediately to my OneDrive account. All physical copies of the collages will be shredded after the completion of my thesis. No identifiable information will be disseminated in my thesis.

Data collected from the eligibility form from participants that are not selected will be deleted once recruitment is complete and not used for research.

You have the right to consult any of your personal information gathered for the purpose of this study and to have it corrected, if necessary, by contacting a member of the research team.

Dissemination of Results:

Results of the study will be published in my master's thesis, estimated completion of which will be June 2025.

Questions:

If you have any questions in relation to any aspect of this research, please do not hesitate to contact me. Contact details are listed below:

Arianna Politi

Arianna.politi@mail.mcgill.ca

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Claudia Mitchell:

Claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or daniel.tesolin@mcgill.ca citing REB file number 24-03-070

For written consent

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

__ I understand that my collages will be used and published in this thesis

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____
