



# Bad education? Childhood recollections of pornography, sexual exploration, learning and agency in Finland

Childhood

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## Abstract

This article draws on a memory-work project on the childhood experiences and memories of pornography in Finland to argue that the autobiographical younger self used in these reminiscences is a creature distinct from the cultural figure of a child at risk, and that the forms of learning connected to pornography are more diverse and complex than those limited to sexual acts alone. The notion of an asexual child susceptible to media effects remains detached from people's accounts of their childhood activities, experiences and competences. By analyzing these, it is possible to critically reexamine the hyperbolic concerns over the pornification and sexualization of culture.

## Keywords

childhood, media, memory-work, pornography, sexualization

I first came across a porn magazine at my friend's place. I was on first grade and it was year 1974. [...] Pena's father had a few mags on the top shelf of his wardrobe. [...] There was something exciting about them since they were hidden but they didn't otherwise impress me much. Nothing negative in any case, even if we were little ignorant school kids. (Male, born 1967)

The quote above is from a contribution to the 2012 research project on memories of pornography, titled *Remembering sexual imageries: Pornography, memory-work and Finnish media history* (REXI). The contribution is from a 45-year-old man who, reflecting on his first encounters with pornography as a 7-year-old boy, concludes that flipping through porn magazines involved no specifically negative sensations. As if speaking

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back to current discourses of sexualization and pornification (American Psychological Association, 2007; Dines, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2010; Paul, 2005) that frame pornography as inherently dangerous for children, the respondent describes his early experiences as part of peer practice where the titillation of the forbidden was more crucial than any interest evoked by the pornographic content itself.

Public concerns over the pornification of culture fuel heated debates over childhood and sexuality. During the recent decade, digital media and smart phones have been identified with an increase in – either voluntary or accidental – early access to pornography (e.g. Flood, 2007; McKee, 2010; Owens et al., 2012; Papadopoulos, 2010; Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2005). In Finland, as well as in other Western societies, ubiquitously accessible pornography has been framed as a risk to young people's wellbeing and sexual development that encourages risky sexual behaviour and has a damaging impact on sexual repertoires (Aucoin, 2006; Dines, 2010; Flood, 2009; Martsola and Mäkelä-Rönholm, 2006; Näre, 2006; Niemi, 2011; Paul, 2005). The Finnish, and more broadly Nordic, context includes strong principles of gender equality connected to notions of sexual health. Pornographic representations are understood as contributing to the commodification of sexual intimacy and the objectification of women in particular in problematic ways (see Paasonen, 2009).

It is broadly argued that the current generation of young people, variously titled 'Generation P', 'Porn Generation' or 'Generation XXX' (Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2007; Shapiro, 2005) is much more likely to consume pornography than previous ones. These debates premised on the notion of cultural rupture often ignore the roles that pornography has played in adolescents' lives, sexual practices and experiences long before the era of smart phones and online access. The question therefore remains as to what transformations and continuities such early encounters with pornography may involve.

In order to examine this, the following article explores childhood and youth memories of encountering pornography. We draw on 45 written contributions submitted by 14 female and 31 male respondents for the REXI memory-work project examining the experiences and memories of pornography in Finland from the mid-1940s to the present day (for key findings of the project, see Paasonen et al., 2015). Launched in April 2012, the project collaborated with the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literary Society (*Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura* [SKS]). Established in 1831, SKS is an international research institute and a national memory organization. As one of its departments, The Folklore Archives collect and study folklore material, oral tradition, personal narratives and memories. They launch numerous memory collection campaigns annually with research groups, help to formulate the calls and advertise them and to collect and archive the data. In comparison to the enthusiastic media response and relatively high public visibility of REXI's call for contributions, the call produced fewer submissions than expected. These nevertheless encompassed a total of 853 pages of text, many of them involving thick personal reflections. The same trend of fewer yet richer responses applies also to other recent Folklore Archives' memory-work projects. While this material does not support generalization, it offers insightful accounts of memories and experiences of early porn encounters over several decades.

One of the project's key aims was to investigate transformations in the everyday role and status of pornography on a both individual and collective level, and respondents

were asked to write freely on their memories and views.<sup>1</sup> An additional series of specific questions was offered for reflection, including questions of childhood and youth memories of encountering, acquiring, consuming, experiencing and discussing pornography. The theme of childhood and youth memories was the most popular and frequently reminisced, perhaps since temporal distance facilitated a sense of detachment in autobiographical reflection. While we expected the call for contributions to attract narratives from people with strong views either for or against pornography, positive or somewhat neutral views prevailed in ways that are in line with the relatively positive views concerning pornography among Finns more generally (see Kontula, 2009; Paasonen, 2009). Nearly all contributors described early porn encounters and the excitement they involved. People wrote fondly, and with frequent nostalgic undertones, of finding, consuming, storing and hiding at an early age material that was understood as being off-limits for children.

The respondents were born between 1925 and 1994, they represented diverse sexual orientations, social, educational and professional backgrounds – from manual workers to researchers, journalists, cultural workers and the self-employed. It is crucial to note that no simple divisions could be made in respondents' attitudes towards pornography in terms of social categories such as gender, age, or profession. The respondents formulated their submissions as written responses to a particular call for contributions with an understanding of being informants in and for research. In sum, memory work generates stories concerning the past for researchers to analyse and compare.

The material demonstrates that pornography has, in its diverse forms and materializations, been a regular and common feature in Finnish children's and youth media culture since the World War II. It complicates public concerns on early access to pornography as being specific or characteristic to contemporary media culture (for similar findings, see Price et al., 2015; Wright, 2013). The contributions point to *continuities of practices of pornography use* across different decades, yet without ignoring the drastic shifts that have occurred in the mundane presence of pornography towards its currently abundant availability, volume and diversity.

This article examines how early encounters with pornography are recounted, what social interactions and possible tensions are recalled and how pornography is made sense of in the context of personal sexual histories. Our aim is to complicate understandings of the power and appeal of pornography among adolescents and the forms of learning and exploration that it has facilitated. In order to do this, we examine how the sexual agency of children, or the lack thereof, is conceptualized, reflected and narrated and how pornography is addressed as a site of learning. As we argue in more detail below, the autobiographical younger self that emerges in the memory-work material is a creature distinctly separate from the figure of a child at risk, and the forms of learning connected to pornography are more diverse and complex than those limited to sexual acts.

## The problem of a sexual child

Childhood has, since the late 18th century, been recurrently construed as time of innocence and inexperience. Despite the impact of paradigms such as Freud's notion of the polymorphously perverse child seeking sexual gratification wherever possible, conceptualizations

of the child as asexual, pure and incorrupt enjoy considerable longevity (see Carlson, 2012; Kincaid, 1998). In this framework, children's sexual activities emerge as problematic by default, and the child's sexual awakening is seen as dangerous, pathological and necessitating adult intervention (Egan and Hawkes, 2010; Jones, 2011). The notion of childhood innocence as in need of protection legitimizes protective adult interventions for sheltering children from the corrupting force of sexuality.

The affective charge of the figure of an innocent child is evident in current debates on sexualization. As Egan and Hawkes (2010) point out, such concerns are not solely characteristic to the contemporary moment. Panics, fears and anxieties regarding the sexual child have a notable history, and parallels can be drawn between current concerns and earlier attempts to discipline children's sexuality. Masturbation, for example, was compartmentalized as an autoerotic, pathological practice specific to minors in the 18th century. 'The little masturbator' became an object of cultural concern, and bourgeois parents were asked to vigilantly monitor the private activities of their children in order to steer them clear of abnormality (Foucault, 2003: 264; also Laqueur, 2003).

In adult-dominated culture that enforces sexual management, children's sexuality remains marginalized and ideologically dependent on what adults, especially professionals establishing themselves as advocates of children and young people, deem as acceptable (Egan and Hawkes, 2010; also Jones, 2011; Mulholland, 2013: 67; Vänskä, 2011). Contingent concerns over childhood sexuality frame it as 'the outcome of something done to children and not as something that can take place within a larger constellation of a child's sexuality' (Egan and Hawkes, 2009: 391). This again leaves 'no place for the sexual subjectivity of children, their agency or recognition of their rights as sexual citizens' (Egan and Hawkes, 2009: 393).

Edelman (2004) discusses the 'image of the Child' as an object of compulsory empathy since protecting the child involves the very futurity of culture (pp. 12–13). This is 'the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriate intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dangerous "lifestyles" on the Internet' (Edelman, 2004: 19). The figure of a Child as void of sexual or desire is, for Edelman, a creation and projection of adult desires that may be far detached indeed from the experiences and activities of empirical children. Such a figure looms large in debates on pornography and, as Kendrick (1996) points out, the impressionable young person susceptible to ill effects has been a key object of concern since the very invention of the term 'pornography' (p. 262). According to Kendrick, pornography is seen to place children at risk, defile their innocence and render their emergent sexuality corrupt, compulsive, destabilized and uncontrollable.

Rather than sharing such views, adolescents themselves highlight their motives of curiosity, diversion and exploration while also emphasizing their own sense of agency (Barker, 2014; Rinkinen et al., 2012; Smith et al., in press; Spišák, 2016). The retrospective children sketched out in the memory-work material are similarly described as actively looking for and collecting pornography at the age of 10 years, curious and resistant to parental regulation. As such, they have notably little in common with the figure of the child as impressionable or void of sexual desire:

I was less than ten when I discovered magazines from the big boys' stashes [...]. When I was ten I found porn magazines at my friend's home. I read stories and they felt exciting. (Male, n.d.)

I have pleasant memories of porn from my youth, especially since I was never caught masturbating. (Male, born 1985)

The contributors explicitly challenge claims of pornographic imagery as posing an immanent, corruptive risk for minors (cf. Flood, 2009; McKee et al., 2008: 159–160). This finding is in line with studies that question sexual media's inherent harmfulness to sexual learning (see Albury, 2013; Allen, 2005; Buckingham and Bragg, 2004; McKee, 2010). While some contributors were clearly critical of porn, there were no accounts of childhood trauma. In contrast, the respondents described their early experiences of searching and finding porn as exhilarating, fascinating and intriguing. This was especially, although not exclusively, the case with male contributors:

My experiences were always positive and I never morally questioned porn but considered it totally normal for a boy of my age to be interested in sex. And even if someone had remarked something I probably wouldn't have cared since [...] I was very enthusiastic about sex. (Male, born 1981)

I've once read porn magazines at a friend's place. [...] The magazines didn't really awake my interest; I mainly remember the comics. It was exciting to do something forbidden though. Then I've watched porn films on satellite TV a couple of times with my brother and this same friend. [...] I didn't consider the actual sharing of porn as significant to these experiences, we mainly had common curiosity and desire to break boundaries. (Male, born 1988)

I can't say that I ever had a negative approach to pornography. I've seen porn from an early age and the magazines, single images and later, c. 10–12 years old the first VHS copies were always something else. (Male, n.d.)

Autobiographical reflection generates and relies on continuities as contributors write of their early and current views and experiences, the self as it was then and as it is now. Contrary to the abstract figures of the child or the vulnerable young person, the autobiographical younger self is a 'mini-me', smaller version of the self, invested with considerable volition. Such mini-mes are firmly positioned as sexual agents – albeit occasionally a somewhat naïve and clueless ones – driven by curiosity, embedded in meaningful social ties and regularly indifferent towards the content of pornography.

## **Ambivalent parental regulation**

The memory-work material illustrates general transformations in Finnish media culture from the gradual availability of softcore sex magazines to the increased visibility of hardcore pornography in print, film and video, and the radical increase in its availability, volume and range through online distribution (see Paasonen et al., 2015) and anchors these in lived everyday experiences. It also speaks of a range of media products and formats used for the purposes of sexual titillation, such as miscellaneous fiction and non-fiction titles, print advertisements, television programming, comics, short stories published in magazines for women, as well as their own published and unpublished attempts at amateur erotica writing. By doing so, the material broadens understandings of what has qualified as pornography, how and when.

In addition to finding porn in the woods or the trash during adolescence, the respondents describe discovering porn in their parents' and relatives' personal stashes. Albury (2003: 208) points out how online porn in particular is 'often represented as a perverse outsider, forcing its way into suburban homes' independent of the fact that porn consumption has, since the 1970s, been predominantly domestic (see Juffer, 1998). Magazines, videotapes and DVDs have been stored and hidden in domestic spaces while online access has rendered physical stashes unnecessary and further increased the privacy of porn consumption. Both female and male respondents write of looking for porn, owning, storing and consuming it across their lifespans. The more unsettling memories connected to domestic porn consumption have less to do with sexually explicit content as such than with unpleasant porn encounters not of their own choosing:

I remember feeling very awkward when visiting my cousins once on holiday at the age of junior high school some time in the late 80s. The adults of the family had lost it with alcohol. And to guarantee us teenagers surely staying in front of the TV so that the grown-ups can freely chug down beers, my aunt had loaned some adult movies for the pubescent. So there we sat in the living room, watching some soft-core porn in a state of confusion. (Female, born 1973)

This recollection is among those describing encounters with pornography as awkward and confusing, mainly due to context. In contrast to voluntary exploration alone or with peers, which was generally recollected with nostalgic warmth, unwanted encounters were described as distressing. Interestingly, protective adult intervention was, in its many forms, also recollected in a negative vein as upsetting, problematic and unwelcome. Adult reactions to children's sexual interests were described as 'disapproving', 'sheepish', 'negative', 'anxious', 'furious' and 'outraged' (cf. Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2003; Kontula, 2009; Lamb, 2001):

Sometime when I was a bit over twenty I rented *The Piano* from the library and watched it at home with my little brother without thinking too much about it. My mother was enraged that I wanted to damage my adolescent brother with dirty porn. If I was sick enough to want to watch it myself, I should make sure that my brother would never see anything like it. (Female, born 1973)

If you got caught with porn at school or at home, there was a penalty. You usually got a beating and awful reproaches and the material was destroyed unless the parents took it for their own use, as I've heard was sometimes the case. I guess someone who got caught was taken to a priest or a doctor for a talk-to. Usually these things weren't publicly discussed during my childhood and early youth in the 1950s and 60s. (Male, born 1955)

My parents [...] took my interest in porn negatively. But then again I noticed that they really didn't know how to take it. [...] It wasn't nice either that the adults tried to intervene in my interest in porn and really didn't approve of it. [...] I don't remember anything else from the sex ed at school except that some teachers talked of self-defilement and how it was really bad. We laughed at these teachers among friends, like what bloody morons. (Male, born 1970)

These recollections speak of adults' inability to address children's sexual interests. They might even be seen as indicative of a compulsory need to regulate children's sexuality.

Attempts at regulatory intervention rely on a set of normative social conventions that frame children's interest in sexual materials as negative or at least problematic. Looking back, the respondents nevertheless recall insensitive adult interventions as being more distressing and confusing than their encounters with pornographic materials as such.

The memory-work material reveals an obvious gap between the notion of the vulnerable child in need of protection and adult recollections of their own childhood experiences. The respondents address attempts at regulating their access to pornography mainly as limitations that they needed to overcome in order to access the materials that intrigued them. The achievement of overcoming these regulative confines is reminisced with warmth and some degree of pride. Rather than seeing adults as acting in the children's best interests, the respondents account for frictions and clashes with parents and other protective adults.

### **Sexual exploration, learning and agency**

A particular narrative frame emerges in childhood and youth memories of pornography. These recollections are mostly tender and early experiences of porn are described as 'exciting', 'normal' and 'titillating'. While some images are remembered as 'disgustingly slimy', others are described as intriguing, perhaps precisely by the very virtue of their disgustingness. The majority of respondents address porn as either positive or a fact of life. Those who describe porn in negative terms have formed this view later on in the course of life events such as addiction, religious conversion or encounters with disturbing content.

As Egan notes, adult memories and understandings of childhood are articulated 'through the lens of adult perception and/or fantasy' (Egan, 2013: 115; cf. Good, 1998). This is also the case with the memory-work material that facilitates no direct access to the respondents' memories or experiences as such. Rather, it is telling of how people retrospectively choose to make sense of their experiences and construct their understanding of the self in both the past and present (Haug, 1992: 20; Kuhn, 1995; Onyx and Small, 2001). In sum, the material conveys respondents' thoughts on pornography within particular narrative frames (see Paasonen et al., 2015 for a more extensive discussion on the method of memory work in studies of pornography). None of the respondents narrate their early encounters with pornography in terms of trauma, damage or harm in terms of their later sexual development. On the contrary, the material provides examples of pornography, and media more generally, as having positively supported the sexual desires of teenagers and their emergent sexual orientations:

As a teenager I came aware of being gay with a bent towards bisexuality. And I was interested in my big brother's hidden [...] magazines. (Male, born 1960)

When I was about 18 I cut out a picture of two gay men hugging each other. The article was about 'pink panthers', a gay community trying to fight violence against gay men. I found the picture truly arousing, even if the men were totally dressed. I found the gay men's hug more erotic than a similar picture with a woman and a man. I was generally pretty disappointed with boy calendars and posters. I felt uneasy watching images targeted at women. Men didn't really seem to know how to be relaxed objects of the gaze. (Female, born 1975)

Rather than being somehow ‘sexualized’ by the images they encountered, the respondents describe themselves as *already sexually attuned* to some images and not others and as able to draw distinctions between them. As young people, they may have been impressed by these images, but such impressions drew their force from having a specific power to titillate and arouse. Other images left them cold, uneasy or indifferent.

In the past decade, popular controversies have erupted in Finland, and elsewhere, around adolescents’ access to online pornography (Spišák, 2016) and their sexual practices online (Nielsen et al., 2015). ‘Exposure’ to sexual content online is seen to influence young Finns’ sexual learning and sexual practices in unprecedented ways. However, young Finns have obviously searched for, acquired, consumed and collected pornography well before the era of online distribution. The memory-work material opens up interesting vistas on these practices, as well as pornography’s role in sexual learning.

Both popular and academic debates of pornography have examined it as potential forms of pedagogy and sexual education (see Albury, 2014). In most instances, pornography has been considered a poor source of sexual information, a ‘bad’ educator for adolescents and a form of ‘bad education’ more generally (Flood, 2009; Tydén and Rogala, 2004). The forceful pedagogy of pornography is often seen to distort the fantasy worlds of children, their experiences and expectations towards sexuality and gender (cf. Chun, 2006. 87; also Kendrick, 1996). This is in sharp contrast with how the REXI respondents, while acknowledging the compelling and educational qualities of pornography, depicted their retrospective autobiographical ‘mini-mes’ as active sexual agents with competence to critically evaluate and interpret pornographic representations from an early age:

I was a smart teen and knew very well that porn is about arousal and not realism. Action films didn’t change my worldviews either, and so didn’t porn. It may mainly have shown all the things that can be included in the sexual. (Male, born 1986)

I knew already at a young age that basically everything in porn is fiction and shouldn’t be used as models in real life. I must’ve read this in some teenage guidebooks. [...] I took it pretty much as that which is intended to arouse and that’s it. (Male, born 1986)

Searching the stashes and getting to know the material was probably some kind of an end of childhood but I never felt it coming at a wrong time. (Male, born 1983)

Empirical studies of childhood sexual play point to the ubiquity of a range of activities among children, driven by the titillation of the forbidden, sexual pleasure and curiosity experimentation (Kontula, 2009; Lamb, 2001). Childhood and adolescence are rife with sexual curiosity and activity. Children learn through sexual play, accidental encounters with sexual practices and voluntary exploration of explicit content. Adult reactions to such incidents form a normative pedagogy of their own.

The general presumption of what porn ‘teaches’ its under-aged consumers differs significantly from the views articulated in the memory-work material. In contrast to the view of pornography as pedagogy that teaches adolescents to ‘eroticize’ gender inequality and encourages risky sexual behaviour (McKee, 2010), the contributors focus less on the content of pornography than the contexts and sensations it has involved. These have



facilitated learning about bodies and sexual acts but, perhaps even more centrally, about moral values and social norms concerning sex and sexuality:

My sister and I were still quite small, perhaps in comprehensive school. We tried to watch a movie on VHS [...]. As we inserted the tape in the player, a very loud and intense banging scene appeared on the screen from some other movie instead. It wasn't porn exactly since the scene in question was clearly from a fiction film of some other genre, but the imagery was close to it. My sister and I mainly stared at the screen in confusion until mother came into the room angry, ejected the tape and threw it in the rubbish. She muttered something about our father, apparently daddy had recorded something else on the tape. (Female, n.d.)

I read really lots during childhood and youth. I remember one visit to my granny's as involving a terrible fight between her and my mom. I was maybe 15 and reading the Angelique series, a historical romantic series that does include strong sexual tension between the main characters but that doesn't progress very far in describing things. My granny got furious at my mom for her letting me read these novels. She was really angry, no doubt that these books represented porn for her. (Female, born 1973)

Adult reactions such as those described above revolve around shame and discomfort. In her work on women's memories of childhood sexual play, Lamb (2001: 4, 47) notes the subtle and gradual ways in which norms and conventions concerning appropriate sexual demeanour are learned through adult reactions and cultural representations alike (also Kontula, 2009: 81). One important aspect of learning from pornography therefore involves things that are *not* proper, ways in which one is not supposed to behave, what one is not supposed to express an interest in, consume or enjoy. The number of contributions describing negative adult reactions to their early experimentation with sexual materials is in itself telling of the centrality of normative governance in learning about sexuality and gender. Through this, adult definition of sexual practices, identities and expression considered as either appropriate or inappropriate knowledge for adolescents become tangible and perhaps also articulate (see also Albury, 2014: 177–178).

While the respondents recollect puzzling, intriguing and pleasurable engagement with images and texts of sexual acts, they describe their autobiographical younger selves as capable of critical disengagement from them and as astute observers of adult reactions towards sexually titillating media materials (also Barker, 2014; Spišák, 2016). Despite their descriptions of being largely unaffected by pornography, some respondents address current concerns about early exposure to online pornography as a separate issue:

When my oldest child was ten I once noticed him/her as having search online for 'porn'. I took up the topic without a row, I only said that I can see what's being done on the computer and that there may be stuff online not nice to see and that once you've seen it that can't be made unseen. In this sense my own youth was safer, there was really no harmful material in magazines in my view, but online you can encounter whatever. (Male, born 1969)

It is a standard finding in studies of pornography that people see others, centrally children, as susceptible to its impact while being far less concerned about pornography's effects on themselves (on third-person effect, see Andsanger and White, 2007). It seems that the respondents' former childhood selves are similarly excluded from the

influence of pornography's 'bad pedagogy'. These very people may nevertheless describe their own children as susceptible to harmful effects, and therefore in need of protection. On one hand, the forms and contents of available pornography have changed in ways that make children's encounters with them difficult to foresee and possibly even for adults to explain. On the other hand, a glaring gap remains between the two figures of childhood deployed. Contrary to the retrospective, resourceful 'mini-me', a contemporary child – be this one's own child or a more abstract figure – is seen as lacking in similar tenacity, analytical capacity and sexual negotiation skills. The image of the child at risk, as discussed by Edelman and Kendrick alike, hence re-emerges as a figure of concern.

## Conclusions: Exploration and resilience

As Price et al. (2015) argue, contemporary association of the Internet with a perceived increase in adolescents' porn consumption tends to be ahistorical and bypass how past shifts in media technology (including video cassette recording (VCR), cable and satellite television) have brought forth similar concerns (p. 2). Our findings, like some other recent work (see Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014: 72–74; Price et al., 2015; Wright, 2013), complicate the common notion of young people's porn consumption as having recently grown more prevalent, given its presence in adolescents' lives and sexual experiences long before the era of digital media. The REXI memory-work material speaks of not only the common exploration of pornographic texts and images during childhood but also of titillating uses of media materials not conventionally understood as pornography.

Pornography has allowed adolescents to satisfy their sexual curiosity, to explore different practices and to negotiate normative expectations concerning sexuality and gender. The respondents describe porn as being part of peer relationships driven by the titillation of the illicit and the amusing. In addition to writing of pornography as site of sexual learning, they recall learning about moral values and social norms concerning proper and improper sexual behaviour. As we have argued, these childhood recollections challenge the abstract cultural figure of a vulnerable child void of sexual interest and susceptible to media effects. The respondents emphasize their early competence as selective and even critical porn consumers in ways that point out the severe analytical shortcomings of this figure that stubbornly resurfaces in contemporary concerns and panics over the sexualization of childhood.

The method of memory-work, connected to the broader conventions of sexual storytelling (Plummer, 1995), foregrounds personal agency over more abstracted figures of childhood (Paasonen et al., 2015). In this sense, it makes retrospectively evident children's awareness of sex, sexual feelings and desires (cf. Kontula, 2009; Lamb, 2001). It remains important to apply and develop research methods for examining children's experiences of and their resilience to pornography outside the kind of moralistic and restriction-based frames that may more typically be deployed.

The fact that the REXI memory-work material does not foreground negative childhood experiences connected to pornography hardly gives reason to dismiss contemporary attempts at media policy or regulation. For, as Buckingham and Chronaki (2014)

suggest, dismissing recent concerns about children and (online) pornography as merely another moral panic is misleading in the sense that these are responses ‘to social, cultural and technological change’ (p. 305). The material does, however, support the importance of learning more about adolescents’ experiences and views concerning pornography and sexuality in order to better ground these debates (also Barker, 2014: 143–144).

While most commentators discuss porn in terms of risk and harm, research to date has found no conclusive evidence of sexually explicit media’s inherently harmfulness for the development of minors (see, for example, Hovarth et al., 2013; Livingstone et al., 2011; Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014: 58; Helsper 2005). It therefore remains important to critically examine the hyperbolic concerns over pornification (Attwood and Smith, 2011; Buckingham and Bragg, 2004; Rovolis and Tsaliki, 2012) by including ‘more rigorous definition of the issues and a hard look at the evidence’ (Buckingham and Chronaki, 2014: 305) as well as children’s own voices into the debate (Allen, 2005; Egan and Hawkes, 2010; Jones, 2011). The retrospective childhood reflections collected within REXI contribute towards this by providing rich, small, historical vignettes into encounters with pornography, as seen through the lens of later life experiences and sexual identifications. Taken seriously, these accounts help to both historicize current debates connected to pornography and childhood and to provide more nuanced accounts of the role that pornography plays in sexual learning.

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### Note

1. The perspective of Finnish adolescents as porn consumers has, due to obvious ethical concerns, been largely absent in earlier studies (for notable exceptions, see Anttila, 2012; Rinkinen et al., 2012; Spišák, 2016). While nation-wide surveys and studies on Finnish sex lives (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula, 2003; Kontula, 2009) have addressed views on and experiences related to pornography, these have not been the key focus of research. Existing research of porn in Finland has mainly primarily on media texts and images, representations and media policy (e.g. Kalha, 2007; Nikunen et al., 2005) rather than consumer experiences – not to mention the consumer experiences of young people.

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